

# **SONGLINES AND FAULT LINES**

## **Six walks that shaped a nation**

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*In memory of Booper (1936-2014)*

## Abstract

In a recent essay, literary editor Julianne Schultz suggests the challenge for Australian writers and journalists is to find ways to allow the various histories of their country to percolate together and inform each other. The purpose is to ‘foster a rich, informed hybrid culture that is not subsumed by myth’ (Schultz 2014). In central Australia, a region often linked to the nation’s identity, one thing stands in the way of such an aim: the hegemonic metaphor of frontier. Curiously, it is this very metaphor that underscores many of the stories defining a popular imagining of ‘what it means to be Australian’.

In this thesis I argue that persistently representing Central Australia as a frontier prevents Australians from reimagining it as home. Reading for representations of frontier and home, I undertake a critical analysis of six regional walking narratives that together model place as a palimpsest, thereby articulating a discontinuous history of the Centre’s contested spaces since the precolonial era. For the first time, prominent recounted journeys by settler journalists, travel writers and anthropologists are examined alongside an Aboriginal Dreamtime journey along a songline. The comparative and cross-cultural analysis of the texts draws on their shared foundation of walking and writing as means of place-making.

From the six essays emerge a variety of representations for the Centre which, while dominated by the frontier metaphor, betray a distinctive cultural hybridity in the contact zone between settler and Aboriginal Australians. Frontier, the research suggests, is no longer a suitable term to describe Central Australia, and the songlines — long trivialised by settler Australians’ use of the pejorative *Walkabout* — are potentially an important contributor to Australian discourses of hybridity, settler belonging and home. In this way, the work brings a new approach to an ecopoetics of Central Australia. The research advances the underreported role of walking in Australian history and literature, the fledgling writing of Australian places, and builds on recent interest in walking as a critical tool and reading strategy for postcolonial geographies.



**Candidate statement: Glenn Andrew Morrison**

This work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. It was researched solely by the candidate, using written, audio and visual sources. No Ethics Committee approval was required.

Signed:

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When we look at a landscape, we do not see what is there, but largely what we think is there. We attribute qualities to a landscape which it does not intrinsically possess — savageness, for example, or bleakness — and we value it accordingly. We *read* landscapes, in other words, we interpret their forms in the light of our own experience and memory, and that of our shared cultural memory.

Robert Macfarlane (2008:18)



## Preface

When I arrived in Alice Springs for the first time in 1998, I felt I had come home. Walking the hills that so warmly embrace the town only served to cement this strange notion, until, as I climbed to the top of a giant slab of quartzite I later learned was called the Heavitree Range, I wondered why on earth a working-class white man from Sydney might get such a strong and inexplicable sense of homecoming. Seemed to me Aboriginal people had walked these hills for generations before I had: surely it was *their* home.

I first imagined this research project some time later as a newspaper editor in the town, where I often sought peace of mind in those same hills on long desert walks. Like Henry David Thoreau, I needed my ‘tonic of wildness.’ I wanted to explore the relationship between humans and landscape, to ask: What is home? I wondered why this town, perhaps above all others, figured so strongly in the imaginations of Australians? And why was my feeling of home so out of kilter with literary and media portrayals of Central Australia as a frontier? Reading the texts of those who had walked Central Australia before me soon sparked an interest in Aboriginal ways of seeing this place. That’s when I discovered *The Songlines* (1987) by Bruce Chatwin. Walking took on a whole new range of meanings thanks to the somewhat pretentious British travel writer, who visited Central Australia for just nine weeks during two trips in the 1980s. More than a simple path to reverie, walking, I came to see, was a cultural, even political act.

My project became one of literary research, which some might think means hiding from your fellow human beings in a dusty corner of a university library. Nothing could be farther from the truth. On the contrary, many lively conversations about the work were conducted on walks of the hills surrounding Alice Springs, in cafes, at libraries, while camping in Central Australia, on the phone, Skype or around dinner tables. And while I certainly did a great deal of solitary reading, many spirited fellow travellers guided and encouraged me during the project.

For helping bring the project to completion thanks is due to many. Without the good humour and critical eye of my supervisor Dr Ian Collinson, all would surely have been lost: Many thanks, my friend. So too, my original supervisor and

discerning reader of a late draft Dr Willa McDonald, as well as Drs Kate Rossmannith and Peter Doyle and my friend and colleague Dr Tony Davis. In Alice Springs, many conversations were enjoyed with Doris Kngwarraye Stuart, Patricia Perrurlye Ansell-Dodd, Leni Shilton, Dave Richards and Jane Munday. From time to time I sought sage advice from anthropologists, historians, geographers and others who gave generously of their knowledge and time, including Dick Kimber, Adam McFie, Dr Melinda Hinkson, Dr Mickey Dewar, Prof David Carment, Megg Kelham, and Prof Rolf Gerritsen; thanks also to Professors Bill Boyd and Alan Mayne for their initial words of encouragement. I acknowledge the generous assistance of the Australian Postgraduate Award for a commonwealth scholarship, Macquarie University, the Australasian Association of Writing Programs, Macquarie Pen Lit, ArtsNT, Varuna: The Writers House, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, *Territory Quarterly Magazine*, *Al Jazeera* and the *Sunday Territorian*. Furthermore, the commentary and evaluation of the work by examiners Dr Robert McFacfarlane, Dr Rune Graulund and Prof Nigel Krauth were both generous and meticulous, and contributed greatly to finalising the research. Last but not least, without my family whom I love dearly, the work would not have stood a chance.

Some sections of this thesis appear elsewhere. Parts of Chapter 7 appear as *Songlines 25 Years on: Encounter, Context and Walking in a Postcolonial Landscape* (2012a), published by AAWP. Parts of Chapters 3 and 8 appear as *A Flâneur in the Outback: Walking and Writing Frontier in Central Australia* (2014c), published in peer-reviewed journal *New Scholar*. Several chapters draw on *In the Footsteps of the Ancestors: Oral Fixations and Ethical Walking on the Last Great Songline* (Morrison 2014b). I also draw from an early paper on the thesis for online journal *Neo*, called 'In Search of Alice Springs' (2011). Other sections draw on magazine articles and essays published in *Territory Quarterly*, book reviews published by the newspaper *Sunday Territorian*, various news reports and two award-winning personal essays kindly published by the Northern Territory Library.

Finally, I have endeavoured patiently to render this thesis free from errors; nevertheless, they will appear, and responsibility for them lies entirely with me.

## 1. Introduction: More than a walk in the park

Only a week or two ago the retiring Canadian High Commissioner described the lands from Alice Springs northward as a land of opportunity comparable with the formerly virgin west of Canada and the United States. It is the Commonwealth's duty to treat it as such.

Former NT Administrator C.L.A. Abbott  
'Australia's Frontier Province'  
*Sydney Morning Herald* Tues 28 May 1946

### 1.1 Overview

Writers and journalists have long characterised Mparntwe (or Alice Springs) and Central Australia as a frontier, the supposed divide between black and white, ancient and modern.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Richard Davis calls the frontier 'one of the most pervasive, evocative tropes underlying the production of national identity in Australia' (2005:7). While the term has commonly characterised the Centre, continuing to represent it in this way defies evidence of the intercultural exchange apparent from a contemporary lived experience of the region (see Myers 1986; Merlan 1998; Ottosson 2010, 2014).

In this thesis I argue that persistently representing Central Australia as a frontier prevents Australians from reimagining it as home. I make the argument through a critical reading of six regional walking narratives, which together span a discontinuous history of place in Central Australia from the precolonial era to the second decade of the twenty-first century. My method ranks ancestral journeys of the Dreaming tracks alongside western walking narratives to argue that walking forms an unbroken trope in the narrative representation of Central Australia since before colonisation. The work builds upon a small body of criticism investigating the literature of Central Australia (Dewar 1997, 2008; Lynch 2007, Haynes 1998; Griffiths 1996) and an even smaller critical literature of an Australian peripatetic (see Harper 2007; Kerwin 2012; Carter 1996a).

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<sup>1</sup> Mparntwe is the accepted name for country around Alice Springs in the language of its original inhabitants, the Arrernte. For convenience and consistency with the literature, I refer to Mparntwe by its settler name of Alice Springs throughout the remainder of the thesis.

As anthropologist Fred Myers notes, landscape in Central Australia is ‘not a neutral terrain politically or ontologically’ (2012:3). Each of the six walking narratives represents place and identity from one era of Central Australian history; together they explore what has been called the contact zone, that place where ‘cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power’ (Pratt 1991:34; see also Bishop 2011:26; Fanon 1967:168). Critical theorist Homi Bhabha describes this zone as ‘alien territory’ or ‘split-space’ where ‘meanings and values are (mis)read or signs are misappropriated’, and where might be found the ‘assimilation of contraries’ (2003:209). Such assimilation is evident in recent critical and creative responses to place in Central Australia, which reveal substantial cultural exchange between Aboriginal and settler groups (Merlan 2005; Bishop 2011; Finnane 2014; Ottoson 2014). Indeed, while close readings of the six narratives find frontier to be pervasive in representations of the Centre since colonisation, they also reveal this insistent hybridity.

Walking — and perhaps more generally the journey per se — has played a significant role in the production of literature since Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and earlier (Krauth 2010:6). Chaucer’s is a pilgrimage narrative, a form arising from the ancient cultural practice of undertaking pilgrimage to holy places at certain times of the year. In precolonial Central Australia Aboriginal people followed this same practice, by:

travelling along pathways of particular ancestors, [where they] undertook ceremonies that reaffirmed and committed them to the faith of that Dreaming story. European settlers believed these journeys to be aimless wanderings and called them by the derisory term, ‘walkabout’ (Donovan and Wall 2004:4).

European settlers knew the arid inland of their adopted home through journey, often as not a walking journey. Retold and published as walking narratives, stories of the journey on foot provide a convenient platform from which to contrast acts of place-making between cultures. For at the heart of this thesis is the nexus between human restlessness and the desire to make a home, between the urge to go and the desire to stay. In his analysis of the walking habits and poetry of

Edward Thomas, Robert Macfarlane observes this same tension — between mobility and displacement — as ‘one of modernity’s most distinctive’ (Macfarlane 2013:323). Richard White identifies the same dialectic in his analysis of factors shaping Australian travel writing (2007:1), for there are a great many of these recounted journeys. Indeed, as poet and biographer Barry Hill remarks of a contemporary journey to Uluru, ‘Travelling here today, one is obliged to move through the previous literature of the Centre [and] . . . there is . . . a vast account of interpretation and re-interpretation to be traversed before arriving at the present’ (Hill 1994:2). Reading and critiquing the walking narratives of the Centre, I argue, allows exploration not only of the potential of walking and writing as acts of place-making, but also their ability to act counter-discursively with respect to frontier. Walking emerges as a way to map the inadequacies of frontier, to better understand its limitations, and to trace the power and reach of its rhetoric. Together the six texts model a palimpsest of the Centre, and articulate a fresh ecopoetics for the region based on a discourse of home rather than frontier.

The texts to be examined embrace some of Australia’s iconic walkers, both black and white. The analysis comprises something of a biography of the songlines and a journalism and literary criticism of their cultural and political fracture under European settlement. Drawing on anthropology, cultural theory, journalism, politics and philosophy, the research traces perceptions of place and space through a Red Centre peripatetic. In doing so, it makes a significant contribution to a number of important areas of research. In this introduction I provide context for the research, examine its aims and method, the significance of the project, and explain the structure of the thesis.

## **1.2 The research in context**

At the centenary of Australian federation in 2001, Darwin-based journalist Paul Toohey writing for *The Australian* newspaper, suggested that Alice Springs was less important to Australia than it had been a century earlier (2001:4). At federation, he noted, the town was the main link in the Overland Telegraph Line, which ran from Adelaide to Darwin and on to England via Singapore. Australia’s

population would have felt less secure without the line and the town, not being privy to what was happening elsewhere on the domestic front, yet alone in the rest of the world. Now the town performs no such central communicative role. And yet, while tourist numbers have certainly declined significantly since the 1980s (Carson et al 2012), domestic and international tourists still arrive in number: more than 300,000 overnighted at Alice Springs during 2012/13 and more than a quarter million made pilgrimage to Uluru (Tourism Research Australia [TRA] 2014).

Toohey's description neglects the mythic elements colouring perceptions of the Centre, the imagined dimensions of place so attractive to tourists. For as historian Peter Donovan notes there has always been 'a certain romanticism about Alice Springs' (1988:9). Moreover, the town's character is a complex interaction of many factors. As I argue elsewhere, Alice Springs might be thought of as a 'litmus test' for Australia's efforts toward reconciliation, a place where 'white and black must forge a life on the same red dirt' (Morrison 2010:94). As Toohey notes, for Europeans Alice Springs began as a node in an international communications network, the Overland Telegraph Line. For centuries prior however, the location had been a crossroads for Aborigines, a convergence of ancient walking paths, Dreaming tracks and trade routes winding across the Australian deserts and outwards to the edges of the continent. Now this network is overlain by highways, rail and airline routes criss-crossing the same terrain.

Not surprisingly, the mythology of a romantic Centre has been widely co-opted as part of a dominant national story and its telling reaches beyond Australia to an international audience. The tourism industry markets central Australia as a 'Timeless Land' (see Elder 2008), a 'Land of the Dreaming', where, or so it is imagined, lies a secret, behind a door closed to modern humanity but for which Aborigines still hold a key. At the region's centre is the town of Alice Springs, home to approximately 27,500 people about one quarter of whom are Aborigines, with up to two thousand living in 18 fringe camps at the edges of the town (ABS 2011). Alice Springs' perceived place at the heart of Australian culture defies its diminutive stature (Donovan 1988:9); it is popularly considered a spiritual place,

plainly evident from travel brochures, popular fiction and non-fiction, from Nevil Shute's *A Town Like Alice* (1950) to television series *The Alice* (2005). In spite of such popularity, Central Australian texts from authors such as Shute, Ernestine Hill, Frank Clune and others are often scorned and neglected by critics. Christina Twomey argues in a re-evaluation of *A Town Like Alice*, that:

On one hand, it is often viewed as replicating outdated racist attitudes to the Japanese. On the other, it is dismissed all too readily as popular romantic fiction, puerile in its boy-meets-girl frustrations and resolution (2006:86).

Anna Johnston concludes nevertheless, that such 'middlebrow writers' were 'very influential cultural brokers who mediated debates about place, race, and culture for the interested general reader'. Furthermore,

Their magazine articles and books provided many Australians with an opportunity to grapple with stories and ideas about the modern nation and . . . national identities. The enormous sales figures of their books prove just how interested that public was in ideas about modern Australia (2014: par 10).

Some writers were prolific, for example adventurer and journalist Michael Terry, who travelled the region from the 1920s. Terry once estimated he had sold some 2,000,000 words including short stories, articles, fiction and seven travel books (Dewar 2009:54). For the most part, Central Australia emerged from such depictions as imbued with mystery and a staggering geography that now attracts domestic and international tourists to swim its gorges, walk its trails, marvel at its Aboriginal arts, traditions and history, and to visit the nearby well-known landmark of Uluru. Many claim to experience a strong place 'affect' in the desert; for instance, poet Barry Hill describes the 'lure' of Uluru: which he writes is 'a good word – it expresses the pull of the Rock, the logic of compulsive pilgrimage' (1994:4).<sup>2</sup> This same pull is evident from early in the colonial era: Among the MacDonnell Ranges nineteenth century Australian explorer Ernest Favenc writes similarly of a 'strong loneliness' and a 'hidden mystery' (Favenc 1905:xii). In a contemporary memoir, Kim Mahood returns to her childhood home in the Tanami desert where she describes how the external world fuses with her mind on a walk:

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<sup>2</sup> Place affect describes the emotional bonds individuals share with settings (Ramkissoon, Smith and Weiler, 2012).

My pulse rate is up, everything takes on a hallucinatory clarity. I sit first, breathing deeply, then stretch full length, inhaling the smell of dry grass and earth, feeling the texture of grains of dirt along my bare arms. It is almost too much, this sense of belonging, of coming home (Mahood 2000:35).

Such passages speak to a strong sense of place for each writer. Yet in this same landscape, widespread alcohol abuse and violence, as well as poorly directed government policy over 150 years, has left the region with third world rates of disease, disadvantage and violent social dysfunction among certain Aboriginal groups (Neill 2002; Hogan 2013; Hughes 2007). In 2002, Alice Springs was dubbed Australia's Outback Capital, and selected teenagers travelled to Sydney to spread the good word about the town (Morrison 2002). Six years later the town was rechristened the world's stabbing capital owing to widespread violence and anti-social behaviour (Robinson 2008).<sup>3</sup> Aboriginal people themselves are well aware of the chaos, and many live it every day. In a speech to Australian lawyers, Warlpiri woman and Northern Territory conservative politician Bess Price says:

My people are confused. If they go the blackfella way they break whitefella law, if they go whitefella way they break blackfella law. Our young men are caught in the middle, they are still initiated into the old Law but they live in a world run by the new law, that's why they fill up the jails (2010).

Arts researcher Anita Angel captures the confusion that can result when she suggests the Northern Territory gets 'too much attention for the wrong reasons . . . the rest of the country does not seem to know what to do with us' (2006).

Reactions to the many unfolding crises at Australia's heart have not always been carefully planned. In 2007, the Australian army was sent in to restore order in the Northern Territory after the release of a Government report into child sexual abuse on remote communities (Wild and Anderson 2007).<sup>4</sup> Known officially as the Northern Territory Emergency Response (or NTER), but widely dubbed 'The Federal Intervention', the military-backed action by then Prime Minister John Howard was continued under incoming Prime Minister Kevin Rudd from 2007,

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'stabbing capital' arose after a 2007 report by local physician Dr Abraham Jacob revealed the number of presentations at the Alice Springs Hospital for stab wounds—390 incidents for every 10,000 people. (see Jacob AO, F Boseto and J Ollapallil 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Although military personnel in this 'invasion' were greatly outnumbered by health workers.



and made international headlines. Attitudes on the intervention remain mixed and volatile, and lie at the heart of much discontent in Northern Territory politics (Cresswell 2011; Morrison 2013b).

Such divergent representations underscore and reinforce the persistent portrayal of Central Australia as a frontier. Perhaps because of this, across its history, landscape and literature, the Red Centre is synonymous with what many perceive to be a more 'authentic' Australia. Many travel to the Centre in a search for meaning and identity; others are moved to settle there. In the Australian imaginary however, such settlers are 'outsiders' to an Australian 'real' that is defined largely by its coastal cities. This regional struggle for cultural equilibrium echoes a broader settler Australian struggle to belong, which since the 1990s has emerged as a matter of deepest concern to some Australians (Bongiorno and Eklund 2014; McDonald 2007). Central Australia is imagined as core to this 'Outback' or 'Bush' mythology of Australian identity. Yet conflict and violence between and within Central Australian settler and Aboriginal groups is consistently emphasised in media reportage and recent literary portrayals as part of a broader politics of difference. There is evidence of an increased politicisation of the Centre's literature in recent times, accompanied by a heightened tension nationally over who may speak or write for their other. A lived experience of the town reveals much richer, nuanced and creative lifeworlds than such media representations and divisive debates might suggest.

### **1.3 Aims, method and significance**

This thesis examines the walking and writing of place using prominent texts from Australian settler and Aboriginal cultures. It breaks new ground across a number of areas of cultural and literary research, which I now describe.

Journeys across the Centre, and the physical landscape of the Centre itself, are significant in constructions of Australian identity, as Rowley (1996), Lynch (2007), Dewar (1993, 1997, 2008) and Griffiths (1996) have argued. Also, the traversal is recognised as a significant sub-genre of Central Australian literature (Griffith 1996; Lynch 2007), while Richard White examines the broader genre of

travel writing for its representation of Australia from both without and within (2007). Nevertheless, while Central Australia is one of the most studied regions in Australia by anthropologists and historians (Finnane and Finnane 2011), dedicated studies of its literature are few. And though many non-fiction walking narratives depict Central Australia, relatively few critical texts are so concerned. Melissa Harper's (2007) seminal history of bushwalking in Australia explores the significant role in the national psyche of the Burke and Will's expedition, but does not turn its focus to Central Australia per se. Importantly then, there has been no systematic review that I am aware of, of walking's role in producing place and identity in the literature of the Centre.

That this thesis goes some way to addressing this shortfall in central Australian walking and literary research is, nonetheless, an aside to its main aim, which is to test the veracity of the region's literary representation as a frontier. In other words, walking is a methodological means to an end, rather than an end in itself. The thesis reconstructs place using six texts as layers in a palimpsest: in each layer a walking protagonist encounters a space that is 'overwritten with stories and histories' of the people who have lived there (Saglia 2002:124). The thesis is not intended as an exhaustive history, rather a discontinuous history in which six chosen moments are used to pinpoint changes in the cultural representation of the region. As Paul Carter (2010) explores the spatiality of history, I explore the literary representation of space, place and identity through walking, and how these change historically. Importantly, this method also exposes the past as it is manifest in the present. In so doing I highlight the role frontier has played in disrupting literary constructions of home and in turn, of belonging. At the broadest level then, the thesis is a literary geography of Central Australia through walking narratives since precolonial times, with special emphasis on critiquing its representation as a frontier.

From a theoretical standpoint, the six texts reveal that constructions of place and identity in central Australia are more complex than simple frontier models following Turner's theory might allow (see Turner 1893). Such nuance lies, I argue, at the intersection of the body and the landscape in walking. *Homo sapiens*

have long come to know the places they inhabit on foot, a practice intimately linked with senses of place and identity. Each of the six narratives represents a particular type of walking, one immediately evident from the narrative and pertaining to the era in which it is set. In fact, the thesis builds on considerable theoretical interest in walking as a means of place-making (Myers 2012, Ingold 2002, De Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991), and consolidates the peripatetic as a critical method for examining postcolonial geographies (see Murphy 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Sideaway 2000, 2009). The rise of ecocriticism since the 1980s has corresponded broadly with a renewed interest in walking, perhaps underpinning walking's emergence as a 'focal point for a wide range of critical, theoretical and historical interest' (Robinson 2006:143). Weaving elements of ecocritical and postcolonial analyses, and examining a distinctive body of walking literature in central Australia, the thesis posits the peripatetic as an epistemological bridge between the two theoretical frameworks and situates walking as the natural ally of both (Morrison 2012a:2).

Significantly, settler narratives of walking journeys are examined alongside published stories of Aboriginal journeys on foot along the songlines, resulting in a cross-cultural examination of place-making. While the settler journey is acknowledged widely in constructions of Australian identity as a heroic act of nation building, the journeys of the songlines are largely ignored. To the best of my knowledge, such a cross-cultural comparison has not previously been undertaken in Australian literary or cultural criticism. In this I draw inspiration from Amy Hamilton's cross-cultural examination of American walking literatures in *Peregrinations: Walking the Story, Writing the Path* (2008). Hamilton traces the connections between walking, literature and the natural world across Euro-American, Native American and Chicano/Chicana literatures. Australian historian Melissa Harper explores bushwalking and an Australian peripatetic since early settlement from a historical perspective (2007), suggesting that while many bushwalkers may not have acknowledged Aboriginal people, they may nonetheless have valued the 'layers of human and natural history that shaped the

landscapes they walked in.’ Harper goes on to provide an inspiring framework for this research:

For today’s bushwalkers to acknowledge the presence of the past in so-called wilderness need not detract from the deep satisfaction that comes when temporarily leaving ‘civilisation’ behind. It may even provide a richer, multi-layered sense of connection to natural places, suggesting ways to bring together competing ideas about how to see and use wild country. These are paths that would be worth traveling (Harper 2007:304-5)

My aim is to travel such paths in a search for resonances between two ways of place-making — settler and Aboriginal — canvassing the degree of intercultural exchange evident in the literature, thereby seeking pathways across the frontier. In this way, the work speaks broadly to settler Australians struggling for a sense of belonging in a landscape wrested from its indigenous peoples then re-storied in layers of western mythic geography. It may speak also to Aboriginal people searching for a new point of cultural equilibrium in postcolonial Australia. Significantly, the study extends and nuances Australian research into frontier, which in much previous research is accepted as hegemonic (NB: a notable exception being Davis and Rose [eds] 2005).

Before the arrival of Europeans in the early nineteenth century, Central Australia was home to dozens of Aboriginal language groups. Foundational to Aboriginal constructions of home, the Dreaming tracks or songlines marked economic routes of trade and exchange in a walking culture. Since European explorers first gazed toward the centre of Australia however, the region has been represented in settler culture as a frontier, a wilderness to be overcome or a place in which to find redemption (Haynes 1998:3). The Aboriginal songlines are, I argue, prominent markers of this struggle between competing representations of frontier and home. That the songlines still persist as a ghosting of the precolonial Aboriginal trading economy and walking-based culture, points writers, I suggest, toward a more cogent articulation of home. However, ‘seeing home and writing accurately about it is no mean task’, as Henry David Thoreau scholar Peter Blakemore observes (2000:118). Writing home evokes the question of whether the author is an insider or outsider to the place, especially in postcolonial geographies where cultural perception can so strongly govern sense of place. Drawing on ideas of

phenomenology as well as postcolonial theory, my argument follows certain ideas of Thoreau, who suggests that ‘the observer should begin with all the knowledge of a native – and add thereto the knowledge of a traveller – Both natives and foreigners would be obliged to read his book’ (‘Thoreau Journal vol 3’:357; cited Blakemore 2000:120).

While the palimpsest idea may appear deceptively simple, the frontier as a discourse is complex; it is powerful through its use of storytelling, and can convey unintended meanings (Furniss 2005; Slotkin 1998). Furthermore, the consequences of the frontier’s discursive power are not merely simple or trivial matters of perception, but are manifest as anomalies in policy, funding decisions, and political will. As Will Sanders (2013) argues the focus of federal policy on indigenous issues shifts historically, and can be sensitive to prevailing representations. Whether ‘frontier’ is an appropriate descriptor for Central Australia may therefore have important ramifications across a number of areas. Also at the heart of the thesis is how places are represented, for in addition to recounting a journey, each of the six narratives examined here is intimately concerned with writing about place, which nature writer Barry Lopez calls ‘a huge – not to say unwieldy – topic, [which] different writers approach . . . in vastly different ways’ (1997:22). While the North American tradition of place writing of which Lopez speaks is widely revered, an Australian literature of place is, by comparison, in its infancy. According to poet and critic Mark Tredinnick ‘Australian geographies have their characteristic musics, [but] rarely . . . have our prose writers caught those musics’ (Tredinnick 2003:3). This is despite a variety of narrative forms — both creative and critical — now being used to explore philosophies and stories that adopt place as a central theme, including memoir, montage, travelogue and ethnography (Wylie 2005; Bryce 2009). The *affect* of place is tangible, and remains in the human consciousness where its impact is commonplace: travel writer Pico Iyer recently observed that certain places can shock us into a greater awareness of ourselves, or even ‘slap us awake, and into a recognition of who we might be in our deepest moments’ (2011:8). By recognising such characteristics the thesis aims to frame a different way for

writers and journalists to express place and identity in Central Australia, beyond use of the frontier binary, a writing better reflecting anthropological and literary evidence.

## 1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis comprises six essays of literary criticism, each of which does double duty as a layer in a six-layer palimpsest of the Centre. I draw conclusions across the various layers of the assembled palimpsest in Chapter Nine. I now outline the texts and sequence of chapters used to argue the thesis.

Selected from the broad field of Central Australian non-fiction, each of the six texts is used to represent an era in a proposed six-phase literary history. The six-phase model extends an earlier four-phase history of settler literature in the Northern Territory developed by Territory literary historian Mickey Dewar (1993, 1997). Later work by Dewar showed Central Australian literature to be generally consistent with this broader, Territory-wide model (2008). Dewar's four phases comprise: an exploration era beginning with the first European crossing of the Centre in 1860 until control of the Territory was handed to the Commonwealth in 1911; an interwar period finishing roughly at the end of World War Two; the so-called Menzies era of the 1950s and '60s;<sup>5</sup> and finally the Land Rights period of the 1970s and '80s. To Dewar's four phases I add two further phases, one prior to Dewar's model and one after. The first is a precolonial era prior to European exploration and settlement, and the second is a post-Land Rights phase including the late 1990s and beyond, which I call the Intervention era. For two of the texts, I discuss the era of publication, which is much later than the era the text represents. The question arises of whether a particular text more closely represents its era of publication, or the period about which it was written. To defuse this problem, my emphasis in the analysis is on the mode of walking, and, in turn, how the place of the era is represented by the text, rather than whether or not the text represents a particular period of history.

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<sup>5</sup> After Australian prime minister of the period, Sir Robert Menzies.

Chapter Two is a review of literature in which I sketch the boundaries of the study, provide background on Alice Springs and Central Australia, and review critical studies of Central Australian literature as well as relevant critical theory. The review knits ideas of space and place, walking and nation in order to develop a methodology to bring to the texts. In Chapter Three I examine the first of the texts: *A Man From the Dreamtime* (in Turpin 2003) representing place of the precolonial era. Kaytetye elder Tommy Kngwarraye Thompson tells a traditional story of an ancestral journey along a Dreaming track or songline, an act of pilgrimage in an intimately known and storied landscape. Here *space is place, and place is home*. Through his fourth published exploration journal, Chapter Four traces the 1860 journey of explorer John McDouall Stuart, who brings the colonial gaze to Thompson's Centre as he first crosses the arid heart of the continent from south to north. For Stuart and other walking explorers, Nature is to be conquered, the Centre is the frontier and *home is far away in Britain*. Chapter Five examines *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* (1969) in which anthropologist TGH Strehlow recalls a childhood journey down the Finke River toward his father's death at Horseshoe Bend in 1922. Strehlow weaves Aboriginal Dreaming stories of the songlines he heard in his youth with stories of Outback pastoralists and his own coming of age. As a self-styled insider, Strehlow renders the frontier momentarily translucent, potentially hybridised, *a place to call home*. In *I Saw a Strange Land* (1950), the subject of Chapter Six, Arthur Groom reimagines the Centre as undisturbed wilderness, a tourist playground for a coastal middle-class eager to escape the city to a more 'authentic' Australia. The songlines are concealed under Groom's nature park, and Aborigines relegated to being primitive exhibits inseparable from Nature. For Groom, the frontier of the Red Centre is an *escape from home*. Groom's wilderness is challenged by my analysis of Bruce Chatwin's hybrid travel text *The Songlines* (1987) in Chapter Seven. The text captures shifting Australian attitudes toward Aborigines during the Land Rights era, when the songlines re-emerge along with a bitter politics in which place is increasingly contested and politicised, a cultural battleground. A co-mingling of place-based identities however, offers *home as the way to a right death*. And finally, in Chapter Eight, Eleanor Hogan's *Alice Springs* (2012) represents place of the most

recent era as a political geography of alcohol, reasserting prevailing media images of Alice Springs, a town with an 'Aboriginal problem'. Hogan's narrative indirectly questions a settler's right to belong in Central Australia, which remains a frontier and *no place to call home*. In Chapter Nine I make my conclusions drawn from across the palimpsest constructed by Chapters 3 through 8. I now turn to the review of literature.



## 2. Literature Review: From Dead Heart to Red Centre

The trail begins with our verb *to learn*, meaning ‘to acquire knowledge’. Moving backwards in language time, we reach the Old English *leornian*, ‘to get knowledge, to be cultivated’. From *leornian* the path leads further back . . . to the word *liznojasn*, which has a base sense of to follow or to find a track . . . . ‘To learn’ therefore means – at root – ‘to follow a track’.

Robert Macfarlane *The Old Ways* 2013:31

### 2.1 Introduction

This thesis rests on a close companionship between walking and place as a path to knowledge, in the way Robert Macfarlane’s etymology implies. In this second chapter I assess arguments for the recounted walking journey as a way to represent place and identity, and to establish a basis for distinguishing between narrative representations of frontier and home in the literature of Central Australia. The review frames an exploration of the interface between cultures in Alice Springs and the Centre, which is elsewhere compared with Mary Louise Pratt’s *contact zone* (Bishop 2011:26; see Pratt 1991:34). Pratt’s term implies a degree of cultural mixing, appropriation and exchange, and so may accommodate a more nuanced examination of what is otherwise called the frontier. For it is this element of cross-cultural exchange, where it is manifest in the region’s walking literature, that I most wish to explore. Human communities, including those at the frontier, can exist as imagined communities, much in the same way Benedict Anderson has described for nations (1991:5-6). This imagined dimension of the Centre plays a crucial role in its representation, and is seen as increasingly significant (Bishop 2011:27). However, the divisive and dominating nature of the term frontier is, I argue, producing a failure of the Australian imagination, one that hampers the capacity of non-indigenous Australians to reimagine the Centre as home.

Spaces comprise perceived and imagined dimensions, both of which are apprehended and indeed produced, on a walk. As I will show, the literary walk is a producer of space and place. As well as producing space however, a walk is seen also as a way of deconstructing spaces and their pasts, of examining the

palimpsest of the city and environs farther afield. This review informs a critical reading of the texts in a way that is both grounded in existing walking and place theory, and conversant with the special circumstances and current state of research pertaining in Central Australia.

Walking the Centre invokes ideas of Australian identity, a notion which has shifted its focus significantly over the course of the postcolonial era between the bush (Bromhead 2011), the desert (Haynes 1998) and the beach (James 2000, Bennett 2007). Icons of national identity vary from surf lifesavers and cricketers to Anzac Day and the Australian ‘diggers’ of the First World War (Cashman 2002; Ward 2009; Seal 2004). Others explore the influence of multiculturalism, counter-cultures and American culture (Altman 2010). In this thesis I am concerned with walkers and their contribution not only to a national identity but also to a settler sense of belonging. For from the 1990s, a discourse of belonging has pervaded literary and history circles in Australia, displacing widely held concerns over a national identity (Bongiorno and Eklund 2014:40; Read 1999:36, 2000:2). Persisting throughout these shifts in representation has been an asymmetric perception of a rich and deep indigenous relationship with place, versus a shallower and poor-by-comparison non-indigenous relationship with place (Mackay 2005; Trigger 2008; Newbury 2012; Loewenstein 2014). In the aftermath of colonialism, the Land Rights struggle, the history wars, and numerous reconciliation marches in Sydney and elsewhere, there has emerged a framing belief that black Australians have a stronger sense of belonging to Australia than whites (Mackay 2005). As anthropologist David Trigger observes of Australians generally ‘just who has rights to place and nature, in what ways and with what degree of a sense of autochthonous indigeneity is a contested matter’ (2008:306). Many Australians find the question of a ‘moral right’ to belong deeply offensive: it threatens their sense of birth right. Such arguments prompt brash and provocative articulations of the issue, such as that of poet Les Murray, who coined the phrase ‘not indigenous, merely born here’ (1996:47). Curiously, the shift in Australian literature away from concerns over an Australian identity toward an interest in belonging, is not widely evident in a literature of Central

Australia, nor indeed a literature of the North. In fact, the idea of frontier upon which such earlier constructions of national identity were based has remained doggedly hegemonic, even in recent representations of 'The Centre'.

Twinned themes of frontier and home emerge repeatedly from the Centre's literature and in the few available critical studies of it. Contributing to these constructions are both precolonial and postcolonial narratives of place: for example, Dreaming stories and Aboriginal journey practices that persist from the precolonial era, and which are the basis for the settler colloquial term 'walkabout' (See Young and Doohan 1989, Peterson 2004, Donovan and Wall 2004, Kerwin 2012). The literature review supports modelling The Centre as a palimpsest (Huyssen 2003), a discontinuous history, starting with the representation of home in an Aboriginal Dreamtime story and ending with a recent settler memoir of place.

In this chapter I define the study region and introduce its geography and history. After providing an overview of studies of Central Australian literature, I critically evaluate the terms home and frontier in order to define them for the research. Theories of walking, space and place are then canvassed as foundational material for the textual analysis to come. And finally, I review the nature of walking Australian spaces, with particular reference to the Centre, frontier and home.

## 2.2 Boundaries of the study

Different cultural geographies operating in Central Australia make defining clear boundaries for its literature difficult. Tom Lynch (2007) adopts a bioregional approach to setting the boundaries of an arid zone literature. However, Lynch's method bears little relation to the Aboriginal language and clan groups pre-dating white occupation of Central Australia, and cannot accommodate the many songlines crossing and recrossing colonial boundaries. Lynch's definition, moreover, abides neither physiographic nor catchment boundaries, nor where they intersect the political geography; for example, the Lake Eyre Basin, the drainage basin in which Alice Springs is located, crosses four separate colonial jurisdictions (Herr, Smith and Brake 2009:48). Others refer more generally to a

‘literature of the north,’ as defined by The Brisbane Line (see Headon 1991:xix, James 1984, Rothwell 2007, 2013, Angel 2006, Parry 2003).<sup>6</sup> A literature of Central Australia is certainly *part* of a literature of the north, but a localised subset. Both literatures largely comprise white settler authors writing about Aborigines and place.

The sort of ‘regionalism’ I am suggesting frame this research was not really discussed in Australia until the late 1970s (Henningsgaard 2009:3). Political regionalism on the other hand has existed since the first years of European settlement. Henningsgaard makes this point by reference to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, in that regional areas have less capacity to participate in what Bourdieu (1993) calls the ‘field of cultural production’. For this reason, I define the region for this study not according to any feature of the literature itself, nor its interaction with environment, but in accordance with current geopolitical boundaries, which also help when comparing the literature to available social research. For the purposes of the study then, Central Australia (the study region), is defined with the town of Alice Springs and the MacDonnell Ranges at its notional ‘centre’, bounded to the north by the town of Tennant Creek, to the south by the South Australian border, and to the east and west by the Queensland and West Australian borders respectively. The region so enclosed comprises parts of several deserts, including The Simpson, Pedirka, Tanami, Gibson and Great Sandy Deserts.

### 2.3 Background on Central Australia

Roughly 200 km from the geographic centre of Australia, Alice Springs is 1533km by road south of the capital Darwin and lies to the north west of the sand dunes of the Simpson Desert on the north-west fringe of the Lake Eyre Basin (Appleton and Appleton 1992). It is the Northern Territory’s third largest town and the regional supply hub for Central Australia. Substantially smaller than Darwin (127,532), Alice Springs is home to 25,186 residents of whom 4688 — or

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<sup>6</sup> The Brisbane Line is so called because soon after the bombing of Darwin by Japanese forces in 1942, those living north of Brisbane became convinced a latitudinal line had been drawn through the city and across the nation, leaving them in an area not to be defended (Shultz 2005:8).

roughly one quarter — are Aborigines (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2011). A further 18,000 people live within a 500km radius of Alice Springs, spread across cattle stations, remote Aboriginal communities, the regional centre of Tennant Creek, mines and outstations (Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development [DBERD] 2010). More than 75 per cent of those living remotely are also indigenous. Alice Springs services these populations, and several others in Western Australia and South Australia, including the APY lands.<sup>7</sup>

Landforms of the Lake Eyre Region have changed little in the last 65 million years (Wager and Unmack 2000:8), resulting in country that explorer Charles Sturt suggested had, visually speaking, ‘no parallel on earth’s surface’ (Bechervaise 1967:117). Dividing Alice Springs are the MacDonnell Ranges, a red and craggy spine of quartzite, granite and other rocks that stretch some four hundred kilometres to the east and west of the town, climbing to 1506 metres at the highest point of Mt Zeil to Alice Springs’ west (Powell 1996:11).<sup>8</sup> Wet and dry periods dominate the region, with Alice Springs falling into the category of dry desert (Herr, Smith and Brake 2009:48; Jacobsen 1996:249; Keen 2004:7). Rainfall is low and erratic and varies from year to year under substantial influence from the El Nino Southern Oscillation, producing an average fall of only 254mm and a reliance on groundwater for the region’s water supplies (Newsome, Nicholls and Hobbs 1996:289; see also Appleton and Appleton 1992 and Thorley 2009). Erosion gorges punctuate the main range, passing floodwaters from north to south during periods of heavy rain. Alice Springs is clustered around one of these gorges, Heavitree Gap, and the course of the mostly dry Todd River carries floodwaters through it, which eventually drain to the Simpson Desert to the south-east (Herr, Smith and Brake 2009:48).

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<sup>7</sup> Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) is incorporated by the 1981 Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Rights Act giving Aborigines title to more than 103,000 square kilometres of arid land in the far northwest of South Australia. See <http://www.anangu.com.au/>

<sup>8</sup> For one of the first settler descriptions of the area of Alice Springs by construction overseer William Mills, see Donovan (1988: 46-47)

Before Europeans arrived, the landscape of Central Australia was transformed by the action of the hunter-gathering Aborigines, yielding a cultural landscape (see Sauer 1925). Details of this precolonial cultural landscape are largely described by anthropologists, notably Spencer and Gillen (1899, 1904, 1912), Carl Strehlow (1907), Herbert Basedow (1925), TGH Strehlow (1947, 1970, 1971), Geza Roheim (1971), Ronald M. Berndt (1970) and Fred R. Myers (1982, 1986, 2002, 2012). As Bill Gammage argues, Aborigines consciously engineered the landscape through a co-ordinated and precise firing of it for the purposes of hunting and grazing (2011). In fact, geographer Lesley Head suggests that: ‘Far from being wilderness across which hunter gatherers wandered aimlessly leaving little more than footprints, this is home: country named, known, curated and ordered (Head 1993:490; see also Clark 1990). While Aboriginal groups had long traded with the Macassan trepangers to Australia’s north (Powell 1996:32-37), such interactions did not have the profound effects that would soon be seen under colonisation by the British (Keen 2004:2). Much of the precolonial Australian cultural landscape is now overwritten by European colonial practices of placemaking. As a result, there are several ‘Othernesses’ that must be accounted for between present and past of this socially transformed landscape, between Western and Aboriginal relations to land and ways of knowing, and between physical and symbolic evidence (Head 1993:482). Such elements contribute to contested perceptions of the Central Australian landscape not only in literature, but in other endeavours such as land use decision making and property rights. In this research, walking is used to mark an identifiable point of intersection between the two traditions of place-making, Aboriginal and settler.

Prior to colonisation there were ‘six or seven hundred different tribes in Australia speaking between them over two hundred languages — each as distinct as French and German’ (Dixon and Duwell 1994:pxiv). Now it is common for Aboriginal adults and children to speak a number of Aboriginal languages as well as English or an Aboriginal version of English.<sup>9</sup> Originally, the Aboriginal language group

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<sup>9</sup> Creoles (or Kriol) are common further to the north. In Alice Springs a great variety of languages are spoken, all of which fall into one of three language family groups: Arandic, Ngarrkic and Western Desert (See <http://www.clc.org.au/articles/info/aboriginal-languages/>).

the *Arrernte* inhabited the area now called Alice Springs. Part of this area is called *Mparntwe* (pronounced em-barn-twa), meaning ‘backbone of the river’, and denoting one estate group of the Arrernte (Kimber 2001). Two other Arrernte estates — *Untoolya* and *Irlpme* — are indigenous to the immediate area of Alice Springs, with other language groups inhabiting neighbouring country (Kimber 1997). Owing to the relocation of various Aboriginal groups, many other language groups now inhabit the town of Alice Springs and surrounds. The place itself springs from the deeds of ancestral creation figures of Aboriginal storytelling (Brooks 2003:5-7), the Todd River that runs through the centre of the CBD being called *Lhere Mparntwe* (Kimber 2001).

Indigenous people have occupied Australia for between the widely accepted 60,000 years and an estimated 130,000 years (Smith and Sharp 1993:56; 1996:68; Thorley 2009). The length of human occupation of the Centre varies from place to place, the Arrernte having had a direct association with the region immediately around Alice Springs for at least 1000 years (Kimber 1997:2). The precolonial population of Arrernte local to the immediate area of the present-day town is estimated to have been about 200, based on 20 clan estates (Kimber 2011:27). Other language groups across Central Australia have unique histories of occupation too diverse to examine fully here, but include Kaytetye, Luritja, Pitjantjatjara and Warlpiri to cite several of the larger groups (see Hoogenraad and Thornely 2003).

Much colonial and postcolonial history of Alice Springs and Central Australia emerges from its literary history and is well documented.<sup>10</sup> In brief, the colonial history of Central Australia began with several expeditions from the 1840s (See Edward John Eyre 2009, Ludwig Leichhardt 1964, Sturt 1849, Augustus Gregory 1968). None reached the centre of Australia until John McDouall Stuart in 1860 on his fourth expedition to the north from Adelaide. Stuart mounted an

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<sup>10</sup> For histories of Alice Springs, see Donovan (1988), Rubuntja and Green (2002), Rowse (1998), Blackwell and Lockwood (1976), Kimber (1986, 1990, 1991), Petrick (1996) and Lockwood (2006). And for a concise history of the Alice Springs town camps, see Coughlan (1991). A comprehensive evaluation of Aboriginal history is found in Kimber (1997). There are also many broader Territory history texts with chapters on Central Australia, foremost being Powell’s *Far Country* (1996).

unsuccessful fifth bid to traverse the continent from south to north, eventually reaching Van Diemen Gulf on his sixth attempt on July 24, 1862 (Powell 1996:67). Setting out from Melbourne and considerably better-funded than Stuart, Burke and Wills reached the top first, but died on the return journey (Joyce and McCann 2011:xix). Largely as a result of Stuart's glowing reports, in 1863 South Australia annexed the region now known as the Northern Territory. Following Stuart's route, the Overland Telegraph Line was constructed from Adelaide to Darwin opening direct communications with Britain via Singapore from 1872 (see Shepherd 1996).

Construction of the Overland Telegraph Line sparked a frontier period in which as many as 1000 Central Australian Aborigines were shot and numerous whites speared (Kimber 1990:16). Pastoralists took over land around permanent water supplies, including the first stations at Undoolya and Owen Springs (Kimber 2010:48). The first Aboriginal mission was established at Hermannsburg in 1877 and the town of Alice Springs — then called Stuart — gazetted in 1888 (Donovan 1988:75). Meanwhile, imported camels ferried passengers and supplies from the northernmost railhead at Oodnadatta to Stuart, including at times those seeking gold to the east at the settlement of Arltunga (Gregory 1906:40). Many however, walked these vast dry distances as swagmen dreaming of a fortune in gold waiting in the desert (see Blackwell and Lockwood 1976:68, Carter 1971:14); others walked in chains as prisoners (Plowman 1933:69). Most swagmen carried their belongings on their backs; some pulled handcarts or pushed wheelbarrows (Carter 1971:14). On foot, Afghan cameleers led teams of as many as 70 beasts at a time and secured heavy loads of supplies and equipment of up to 600kg with a single length of rope; theirs was a busy route and they gained tremendous notoriety for their endurance (SA Museum:6). Nevertheless, the arrival of the rail at Stuart in 1929 largely spelled an end to the cameleers' reign. Between 1926 and 1931 Central Australia was separated from the Territory as its own 'state' administered from the nominal capital of Stuart (Donovan 1988:137).

Space in Alice Springs was contested from early in its history and marked by the periodic exclusion of Aborigines. In 1928, Aborigines were prohibited from Stuart



unless they had a pass to enter (Short 2012:133). Forced relocations of Aboriginal people, and the need for them to secure official permission to drink, marry or open a bank account among other restrictions, persisted until 1964 (ibid:34). Temporary accommodation for Aborigines, in the form of fringe camps, has been a feature of the town since before it was gazetted, and persisted into the twentieth century. In 1933, the town's name was changed to Alice Springs, preceding its rapid growth as a strategic military supply hub during World War Two. Removal of Aboriginal children from their families continued into the late 1960s and it was not until the referendum of 1967 that Aborigines were included in the official census. Self-government for the Territory would wait until 1978, with the Northern Territory Land Rights Act of 1976 and subsequent Native Title legislation during the 1990s significantly altering property relations between black and white in the town (Finnane and Finnane 2011). Aboriginal town camps took on greater permanency after land tenure was negotiated during the 1970s (Coughlan 1991:vii). Now there is an emerging Aboriginal middle class and a prominent Aboriginal contribution to the economy of Alice Springs and Central Australia (Finnane and Finnane 2011:262; Gerritsen, Stanley and Stoeckl 2010). Spaces of exclusion persist however, as recent studies attest (Lea 2012, Ottosen 2010, 2014). The rail line was extended to Darwin in 2003, and from 2007 the Northern Territory Emergency Response once again restricted the activities of Aborigines with welfare quarantining, drinking and pornography bans (Altman and Russel 2012:3-4).

## **2.4 A literature of the Centre**

Despite a history of significant Aboriginal dispossession, non-Indigenous visitors come to Central Australia for an 'authentic' Aboriginal experience (Friedel and Chewings 2011; Ryan and Huyton 2002). Many reach for popular literature to help them understand what they see and hear. It is now possible to read, for example, journeys from the Aboriginal Dreamtime as more traditional narratives are recorded, translated and published (See Turpin 2003; Brooks 2003; Valdez and Nungarayi 1995). As recently as the 1990s however, literary historian Mickey Dewar recorded that 'the Northern Territory has an Aboriginal voice in the

writing, but not Aboriginal writers' (1997:170). During the assimilation era, (1940s to '60s) for example, when Aborigines were, in theory, being assimilated into Australian society, 'not a single Aboriginal writer's work was published' (Shoemaker 1989:85). Now, Aboriginal voices appear more prominently, perhaps most evidently through ethnographic works (for example, Rubuntja and Green 2002, Turner 2010). Importantly, many non-indigenous academics, historians and fiction writers have also carved a reputation and career out of writing about Aboriginal society (Conway-Herron 2011:5). Anita Heiss notes this is 'unacceptable to many Aboriginal writers who are tired of competing with white writers for the opportunity to write and be published in the areas directly related to their lives' (Heiss 2002:10). Not surprisingly then, autobiography dominates among emerging Aboriginal voices (Cooper et al 2000:11), much of it historical (Healy 1989:82-3) and stemming from some Aboriginal authors' desire to rewrite, and put right, Australian history (Haag 2011:69). Recent growth in indigenous literature is partly fuelled by the desire among some Aboriginal people to get the traditional stories down before their old people die (Morrison 2014b:33).

Several authors have reviewed Indigenous Australian literature, best-known being Adam Shoemaker's *Black Words White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988* (1989), in which he documents Aboriginal writing in English since 1929. Margaret Clunies-Ross (1986) has made the most extensive evaluation of the oral storytelling tradition, including colonial representations of storytelling practices in diaries and journals of the early settlers. JJ Healy (1989) on the other hand traces representations of Aboriginal people and culture in Australian literature, as does Mishra (1988).<sup>11</sup> Others have assembled compendiums, including Headon (1988; 1991), Dixon and Duwell (1994) and the Northern Territory Writers Centre (2010), and Michael Organ has prepared a chronological bibliography of published Dreaming stories (1994).

The Northern Territory as the subject of a discrete North Australian literary genre has been variously compiled and analysed by several scholars including Trevor James (1984), David Headon (1991), Mickey Dewar (1993, 1996, 1997) and

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<sup>11</sup> See Brady (1989) for review of both Shoemaker and Healy.

Anita Angel (2006), in addition to others cited below. All of these studies were however, Territory-wide in scope. There are four principal reviews of a Central Australian literature per se: Dewar's research into the cultural values of the west MacDonnell Ranges on behalf of the NT Government in *Literary Constructions* (2008), Tom Griffiths' essay *Journeys to the Centre* (1998), Rosslyn D. Haynes' exploration of representations of the desert in *Seeking the Centre* (1998), and Tom Lynch's ecocritical paper *Literature in the Arid Zone* (2007). Other studies are less directly focussed, including Sam D. Gill's *Storytracking: Texts, stories and histories in Central Australia* (1997), which traces the scholarly links between Mircea Eliade's studies of an Arrernte creation story and the anthropological evidence used therein, to their source in the work of Spencer and Gillen. Eliade suggested spaces in Arrernte culture are not homogeneous; that some places are of higher cultural value than others (1968). Saskia Beudel's (2011) doctoral thesis *Walking Notes: Memoir with Landscape* is a creative response to place in Central Australia, while Paul Carter's (1996a) *The Lie of the Land* examines the work of TGH Strehlow and makes some preliminary remarks on the role of walking. A recent collection of essays edited by Craig San Roque, Amanda Dowd and David Tacey (2011) called *Placing Psyche; Exploring Cultural Complexes in Australia* uses a Jungian framework to examine the psychological and political role of place in the Australian imaginery, and makes specific reference to the Centre as Pratt's contact zone.

Anthropology is ranked as pivotal in Northern Territory literature, and in particular TGH Strehlow's *Songs of Central Australia* (1971). In the *Cambridge History of Australian Literature* (2009), Philip Mead describes Strehlow's work as an attempt to preserve and translate sacred Aboriginal song and story, and its celebration of place (2009:560). Others concur: Paul Carter highlights the importance of Strehlow's work as a counter current in western culture (1996a). Poet and Strehlow biographer Barry Hill remarks that Strehlow had connected Aboriginal poetry with the lie of the land (Hill 1996:60), while Carter suggests further that *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* (1969) may well define for Australian writers an environmental poetics capable of steering a more 'authentic' and truly

‘Australian’ literature (Carter 1996a:26). Broadly speaking, a literature of the North contributed to the development of an Australian spatial consciousness, as well as accommodating the survival of Aboriginal culture, important to a post-national culture (Mead 2009:559, 561; see also Carter and Malouf 1989). Mead cites concerns with representations of space, cultural interchange, nation and sense of place, while Griffith (1996), Haynes (1998), Lynch (2007) and Rowley (1996) note the importance of the journey and Christy Collis (2010) examines the geography of contemporary Australian exploration of its deserts. Lynch identifies explorer narratives as significant in a literature of the Australian desert, and lists several of relevance to Central Australia including Charles Sturt, John McDouall Stuart, Ernest Giles and Ludwig Leichhardt (Lynch 2008:78). Lynch concludes that ‘Travelling through the desert and subsequently returning to more settled regions along the coast to recount the tale is the dominant desert narrative’ (2007:77-8).

A great deal of attention has been focussed on the Territory for its significance in constructions of Australian identity (Carment 2005, McGrath 2004, Dewar 1996, Powell 1996 and Stratton 1989). John Chesterman and Heather Douglas for instance, have called the Territory ‘the nation’s crucible’ (2009:69). Interwoven causally with such political significance, Northern Territory literature embraces ‘subjects arising from colonisation, attitudes to the environment and the place of Aborigines’ (Dewar 1993:5). The underlying aim, writes Dewar, was to legitimise non-indigenous settlers’ actions during and after colonisation. Capturing the heroic course of such actions in this fledgling literature helped settler Australians forge a relationship with their adopted home. Shaping representations of Aboriginal people occurred in this way from the earliest encounters by explorers. Leaning on the work of Edward Said, for example, Hersey writes: ‘just as the west imagined the Orient, and within it the Oriental, so too people like Spencer, Gillen and Carl Strehlow imagined the Aboriginal savage’ (Hersey 2001:143). Dewar concluded that the literary construction of the Northern Territory was a metaphor for European occupation of Australia (1993:2). The idea is aptly demonstrated in this passage by the once popular novelist Ion Idriess:

And alas! The Stone Age man will fade away. And there will come mighty herds of cattle. And plains that for a thousand years have known only the call of the jabiru, the howl of the dingo, the cackle of wild fowl and the lonely passing of wild geese in the night will soon be green under cultivation (Idriess 1946:237).

The passage highlights how labels such as ‘Outback’ and ‘the Bush’ have been pivotal in shaping a Territory identity from its postcolonial literature. These labels are elsewhere conflated with ideals of ‘wilderness’, a land imagined as unsettled and wild (Short 1991:5; and see Chapter 6). Trevor James argues however, that Australia’s north is in fact somewhere outside the Outback, closer to the ‘Never Never’ of Jeannie Gunn’s depiction (James 1984:55; see also Gunn 1995). Either way, isolation shaped the sensibility of Territorians; and for the rest of Australia, ‘the Northern Territory has been regarded as not merely peripheral geographically but imaginatively as well’ (ibid). The writer in such a landscape is cast as ‘still an explorer, a pioneer in a terrain that is still alien’ (James 1984:56). While more detailed analyses would await later writers, and James’ analysis draws more on the Top End than the Centre, his is the first to examine a so-called literature of the North and therefore remains valuable.

Dewar would later conflate terms such as Outback, Centre and Never Never as fluid constructs (Dewar 2008), but in the 1990s she argued frontier was integral to literary constructions of the Territory (Dewar 1996), in turn providing a focus for an Australian literary imagination. Specifically, she states that:

Russel Ward in *The Australian Legend* commented that the archetypal Australian was an egalitarian bushman from the outback and as Thomas Keneally once said, ‘the region which in the imaginations of most Australians is *outback par excellence* is the Northern Territory’. ‘Outback’ like ‘Never Never’ has its existence in the imaginary rather than the corporeal world (Dewar 1996:15).

Widely characterised as a rigid binary between civilised and primitive, ancient and modern, city and country, nature and culture, the frontier is a familiar matter in postcolonial theory (Suleri 1992:111; Rose 2005:49-50). This eurocentric strategy helps to reinforce the binary logic at the heart of the Enlightenment project, and assert the superiority of the coloniser over the colonised. However, as I show in the chapters ahead, there is a great deal of exchange across this

supposedly rigid and impermeable barrier and between the two groups, who, after all, have lived in close proximity in various parts of Australia over rather a long period. As Suleri notes:

In historical terms, colonialism precludes the concept of 'exchange' by granting to the idea of power a greater literalism than it deserves. The telling of colonial and postcolonial stories, however, demands a more naked relation to the ambivalence represented by the greater mobility of disempowerment (Suleri 1992:111).

While Suleri's call for more nuanced representation in postcolonial narratives is certainly laudable, the powerfully poetic and persuasive metaphor of the frontier has nevertheless remained hegemonic in a literature of the Centre (Dewar 1993, 2008; James 1984; Haynes 1998; Griffith 1996). Along with the trope of the journey moreover, a discourse of frontier has been implicit in constructions of Australian bush mythology and nation (Dewar 1996, 1997; Rowley 1996). This imaginative dimension of the representation of the Centre is crucial, for as Lawrence Buell observes, 'all artistic work hinges upon the evocation of imagined worlds that may or may not bear a close resemblance to literal or historic environments' (Buell 2005:30). An analysis of this kind owes much to the ecocritics (eg Buell 2005; McDowell 1996), and to the work of Edward Said (1975, 1991, 2000) in order to embrace place as both an imagined realm, while firmly acknowledging the tattoo of both author and world.

Ecocriticism is often traced back to William Reuckert's 1978 essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. It was later defined as 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996:xviii). Ursula Heise (1997) expands upon this:

Ecocriticism analyses the role that the natural environment plays in the imagination of a cultural community at a specific historical moment, examining how the concept of 'nature' is defined, what values are assigned to it or denied it and why, and the way in which the relationship between humans and nature is envisioned.

In an ecocritical evaluation of Australian literature, Cranston and Zeller speak to the role of the world, arguing that ever since colonisation, 'Australian texts have been produced out of and in response to particular places' (2007:7). So too the

places of the Northern Territory and Central Australia have been pivotal in shaping a regional literature (see James 1984; Lynch 2007). Emphasising this role of landscape, John Ryan argues the work of Henry David Thoreau has moulded Australian place writings for the past hundred years (2011:43-57), although Ryan's analysis does not include texts from the Centre.

Edward Said (1975) argues the importance of an imprint of the author in terms of their authority to write about the subject material, and the way the text speaks to the broader group of texts and the cultural power such a group might generate. In *Orientalism*, Said (2003) calls these two influences *Strategic location*: the author's position in a text with respect to the Oriental material he or she writes about; and *Strategic formation*: the relationship between the texts and the way in which groups of texts, even genres, acquire mass, density and referential power in the culture (2003:20). In ecocritical terms, a text exists in a literary ecology that has inputs and outputs that shape a reader's impressions (McDowell 1996:372). Some influence arises from direct place affects or indirect political context; a European example might be the reading of Marx during Hitler's reign: allowable before 1933, but many changed their views during the war. Every writer must locate themselves vis-à-vis their world (or the Orient of which they write), and here intertextual influence is inevitable. Every text has a 'worldliness, circumstantiality, the text's status as an event having sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency' (Said 1975:8). Importantly:

This means that a text has a specific situation, a situation that places restraints upon the interpreter and his interpretation not because the situation is hidden within the text as a mystery, but rather because the situation exists at the same level of more or less surface particularity as the textual object itself (Said 1975:8).

Such elements are part of the text and therefore 'part of its capacity for producing and conveying meaning' (ibid).

This emphasis on place and circumstantiality are found in other Territory writings, especially of Alice Springs, where, as David Tacey suggests 'the raw nature of the Australian psyche is on show' in what is 'truly our own heart of darkness' (2011:284). In her analysis of approximately 750 books and pamphlets published

between 1837 and 1992, Dewar identifies the dominant representations of the Northern Territory as landscape, Aborigines and gender. Each of these representations shifts significantly in emphasis and character through each of four chronological phases in the history of Northern Territory fiction and non-fiction literature (1993, 1997). As noted earlier, the phases were an exploration era up until control of the Territory was handed to the Commonwealth in 1911; an interwar period finishing roughly at the end of World War Two; the so-called Menzies era of the 1950s and '60s; and finally the Land Rights period of the 1970s and '80s. As outlined in the introduction, for this thesis I add two further phases to Dewar's four phases, resulting in a six-phase model for the literary-historical framework adopted. There is a late and distinctive politicisation of the literature (to be discussed below) that is neglected in Dewar's later 2008 study of Centre literature. Dewar (2008) divides a literary analysis of Central Australia into historical periods as well as along thematic lines, which are: permanent settlement, frontier, a 'Lemurian' period (see Healy 1978), Desert sagas, the period after World War II when the 'Red Heart' becomes fixed in the Australian imagination, and the Land Rights era. Further valuable engagements of the region's desert literature include Centre historian Dick Kimber's *The Deserts in Literature I & II* (2001), in which he describes Aboriginal perceptions of the desert based on a lifetime of experiences with the Pintupi of the Western Desert, and several papers by Rune Graulund (2003, 2006, 2009) examining deserts in travel literature and the myth of the desert noble savage.

The Centre is often imagined as wilderness, the emphasis being on its 'emptiness'. Patrick White's fiction *Voss* (1975) is one example, its space invoking of a fearful solitude, coupled with the knowledge that Australia is a land which must be tamed (see Holmes 1935, 1936). Rosslyn Haynes calls this a 'gothic desert', which explorer Charles Sturt found to be like gazing into 'the entrance to hell' (Haynes 1998:76-7). Yet the same wilderness bears more than a passing resemblance to the American frontier, a place where 'resources are rich and land is free for the taking' (Furniss 2005:29). In tracing the desert as protagonist in the nation's cultural narrative, Rosslyn Haynes notes that Europeans' literary descriptions of



the Australian landscape fell into two categories: one ‘the wilderness image . . . harsh, infertile and punitive; the other . . . visionary . . . a place of spiritual enlightenment’ (Haynes 1998:3). Both views derive from the Judaeo-Christian tradition and reflect a spiritual dimension that pervaded settler appraisals of the Centre. Haynes notes that the desert is a reminder of the Fall (Genesis 1:28), a landscape under the curse of the Lord (Deuteronomy 28:23-24) and a place that progress and civilisation must tame (Isaiah 35:1 and 51:3). Here in the desert it is imagined, Man might subdue the Earth and have dominion over all living things (Genesis 1:28). Such sentiments led to efforts to restore meaning to an empty desert by ‘subjecting Nature to science’ (Haynes 1998:27) and sparking many a fantastic scheme to improve the desert by ‘turning the rivers inland’ or visioning it solely for its mineral wealth. Such images of opportunity sit alongside those of psychological condemnation, such as Marcus Clarke’s ‘weird melancholy’ (1887:vi) or JW Gregory’s ‘Dead Heart’ (1906:156).

In apparent contradiction to the images described above and again drawing on the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the desert also offered non-indigenous Australians a means to salvation and redemption (Haynes 1998; Rose 1996, 2005). Country to the north and west of Sturt’s ‘hell’, for instance, gifted ‘camel lady’ Robyn Davidson a path to spiritual salvation in *Tracks* (1980). From Sturt’s hell, Nature had come full circle, for as Davidson leaves Alice Springs to walk across the ‘wilderness’ to Australia’s west coast, she writes:

All around me was magnificence. Light, power, space and sun. And I was walking into it. I was going to let it make or break me. A great weight lifted off my back. I felt like dancing and calling to the great spirit . . . I wanted to fly in the unlimited blue of the morning (1980:111).

Davidson evokes Richard Slotkin’s argument that ‘the fable of redemption through immersion in the wilderness lies at the heart of the Myth of the Frontier’ (Slotkin 1992:246). While the American wilderness offered redemption through violence, as Deborah Bird Rose (2005) argues and Robyn Davidson (1980) intimates, Australia offers redemption through landscape. Edmund Burke’s sublime, initially associated with spectacular scenery, would ultimately be

conflated with a sense of spiritual illumination and Romantic celebration of Nature's immensity (Haynes 1998:30; Rose 2005:1).

Some journey texts of the Centre have attracted popular acclaim and critical academic attention, especially the bestsellers such as Frank Clunes' *Dig: A Drama of Central Australia* (1937), Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* (1980) and Bruce Chatwin's *Songlines* (1987). Others receive scant mention, such as the still little known work of once popular Australian writers Archer Russell and Michael Terry (see de Silva 2012; Dewar 2009). Moreover, older texts are only recently receiving critical appraisal, for example, the work of anthropologist T.G.H Strehlow (see Paul Carter [1996a] and Barry Hill [2003]).

## 2.5 The idea of home

Clearly, the journey is significant in literary representations of the Centre. Less clear, is that many of these journeys were on foot. Any walking journey is characterised by the place being walked, which, broadly speaking, is either familiar or unfamiliar territory. In this review I distinguish between two conceptions of place: that of a home place and that of a frontier. While these representations may both exist in the same location, they construe very different meanings.

Home is a concept that embraces both the personal and the cultural (Moore 2000:207). The idea of home is associated with safety and comfort or imagined as a line separating the inside from the outside, for example, in the house (Kaika 2004: 266). Gaston Bachelard holds that such a divide has 'the sharpness of the dialectics of yes and no, which decides everything' (1994:211). Thus home is the epitome 'of the idea of individual freedom, a place liberated from fear and anxiety' (Kaika, 2004:266). Comparing the home or 'nest' with the shell of an invertebrate, Bachelard construes that a human being likes to 'withdraw into his corner' (1994:91). It is exactly such notions that lead to home being widely considered appealing, affirming or noble (Manzo 2003; Ehrenreich and English 1978:10). This results in strong associations between home and the concepts of authenticity and belonging, perhaps most evident when one is displaced from

home (Vandemark 2007). In this way home is commonly understood to be ‘a place, region or state to which one properly belongs’ (Morley 2000:16; see also George 1999:11; Blunt and Varley 2004:3), or, put simply, the place one feels ‘at home’ (George 1999:11). Importantly, Case (1996) argues that home only gains its meaning when one leaves it, by taking a journey away. Such definitions imply that home is a place ‘supposedly untouched by social, political and natural processes, a place enjoying an autonomous and independent existence’ (Kaika 2004:266).

Narratives of home may however, be far more ambivalent, embracing ‘alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear’ (Blunt and Varley 2004:3). In a comprehensive review of the diverse literatures of home, Katherine Brickel argues for a more ‘critical geography of home’, one that establishes the seemingly innocuous term home as a ‘far more problematic concept across the social sciences’ than the ‘house-as-haven’ thesis would suggest (2012:225). Brickel’s idea finds its roots in Blunt and Dowling (2006) and Moore (2000), who propose a critical geography of home that moves beyond idealized spaces to embrace ambiguities born of the politicised and culturally layered spaces in which humans live. Such ambiguity might embrace, for example, the feminist critique, which reconceptualises the domestic home space as a potential site of struggle and conflict (Badgett and Folbre 1999; Olwig 1998; Young 1997). Nicole Schroder captures this more nuanced articulation of home as:

a site of and for ambiguity since its protective functions are interconnected with its limiting characteristics. Feelings of solidarity, safety, and protection are often achieved by severe acts of exclusion and regulation, which are in turn oppressive (2006:33).

In the Northern Territory, such ambiguity is evident in David Headon’s (1991) selection of northern Australian regional literature, including translations of Aboriginal song cycles, dreaming stories, extracts from explorers’ journals, accounts of frontier conflict, and examples of modern Aboriginal writing. In his introduction, Headon writes that he hopes the collection will ‘bring us closer to understanding that elusive term Australianess’ (1991:xiii). However, while writers so included tell stories of ‘courage and love’, they also tell of ‘killing and

conquest, eccentricity and madness, and a land as hostile and murderous as it could be gentle and caring.’ Above all, Headon writes, the story of the north is of how ‘two peoples have had to learn to live with each other in a capricious environment’ (ibid:xiii). From the literature itself then, emerges this same ambiguity, and the familiar binary: twin poles of frontier and home, violence and its antithesis.

Others argue the North is forever in the process of ‘becoming’, in the way Short (2012) describes for the ‘postcolonial city’ of Alice Springs. Ambiguity is implicit in this definition of Central Australian place; for example, historian Alan Powell (1996) distinguishes the frontier image of the North perpetuated in literature, political rhetoric and tourist advertising, from the reality and lived experience of the Far North (1996:58). This same logical discontinuity prompts Anita Angel to ask: what is meant by ‘The North’? Is it a distinct zone; different from the south? (2006:58). The reality, she argues, lies ‘not in the contrast between north and south, but in the complexity and lack of uniformity within this vast northern bloc’ (ibid:56). Angel recognises the prevailing representation of the North as a frontier, yet alludes to a ‘complexity’, a more nuanced lived experience, which only serves to bolster the need for this research project. Furthermore, Angel suggests that the North is a ‘particularly fertile field for the imagination; a theatre of myth-making and legend, and a canvass on which the national anxieties continue to be projected . . . a place of paradox: a frontier, but also a home’ (ibid:55). Here then Angel prefaces the aims of this thesis, to explain this ambiguous relationship between frontier and home as one of paradox.

Home as a secure place leads some to make the link to nationhood. National identity has been widely written about and researched;<sup>12</sup> so too an Australian national identity.<sup>13</sup> A study by Phillips and Smith (2000) however, suggests many research models are out of touch with everyday ideas of what it is to be Australian. Ideas of home can be explicitly a part of the struggle for nation; for example, the ongoing violence on the Israel-Palestine border means security is a

<sup>12</sup> See Anderson (1991); Ashcroft et al (1989); Fanon (2003); Bhabha (2003).

<sup>13</sup> See Lattas (1992); Gelder (2006); Bongiorno (2000); Bongiorno and Eklund (2014); Altman (2010); Byrne (1996); Manne and Feik (2012); Smith (2011).

rare commodity, and crafting a home a potentially life-threatening activity. New meaning — a Jewish homeland — has been imagined for an old landscape — Palestine (Field 2012:216). Thus home in this region is inextricably bound to the idea of nation. Home features in much ancient literature and poetry in just this way, as a birthplace or country of origin (Hollander 1993). Nation, nationalism and nationality are however, ‘notoriously difficult to define’ (Anderson 1991:3).

Max Weber understood nation in two ways: firstly as a status group united by common historical memory, and secondly as a way of fighting with other nations for the prestige of power and culture (Weber 1978). In an analysis of Weber’s theories, Zenona Norkus cites a second understanding as ‘the form of organisation best-suited to fighting for elbow-room in a globalizing world’ (Norkus 2004:389). Benedict Anderson defined the nation as an ‘imagined community’ (1991:15), arguing that: ‘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’ (1991:6).

Nationalism, which Williams defines as a political movement distinguished by language, ‘race’, religion or region (1983:214), can imply a complexity similar to the terms nativeness or simply native, of which indigenous is a close cousin (Williams 1983:215). The nation can manifest geographically as the nation state, its boundaries thought to mark the limits of sameness, which in turn implies difference from those beyond the boundaries, and for whom such a national narrative presumably does not apply. This idea of a national narrative is pivotal; for example, Halbwachs (1982 emphasises ‘historical memory’, a relationship to symbols and seminal events that form part of a shared storytelling. Martin (1995) argues ideas of nation are transformed by perceptions of the past and of the present, and are fundamentally about power, altering cultures by ‘emphasising certain traits and skewing their meanings and logic; the identity narrative brings forth a new interpretation of the world in order to modify it’ (1995:13). Australian historian Inga Clendinnen embraces this idea, citing popular films such as *Gallipoli* (1981) and *Breaker Morant* (1980) as depicting events that capture a

stereotypical white masculine Australian's 'scepticism in the face of bombast' (2012:221-228).

In 1936, PR Stephenson postulated twin aspects of Australia's national cultural narrative: imported and indigenous (1936:13; cited in Barnes 1969:211). The nationalist tradition has long embraced an entwining of cross-cultural elements of this kind, into what Bill Ashcroft et al calls a reconstructed 'indigeneity', an identity distinct from the European inheritance (1989:134). The first concerted attempt to construct an Australian aesthetic from Aboriginal culture was the *Jindyworobak* movement of the 1930s and 1940s (Ashcroft 1989:143; Elliot 1979). In the late twentieth century, such sentiments would be engaged again in an appropriation of Aboriginal culture toward a similar ideal in the struggle to find an Australian identity (Haynes 1998:31; see also Bongiorno 2000). But such 'authenticity' is often invested in 'a stereotypical Aboriginal figure, culturally identical with his or her pre-contact ancestors' (Haynes 1998: 264). Adding to the confusion, decades of multi-ethnic immigration and continuing disadvantage among Aboriginal groups has caused many to agonise over the relevance of such constructions of identity when one in four Australians was born overseas (*Future Forum* 2013). In the repositioning of cultural theory since the 1980s, constructions of Australian identity are being dismantled and re-evaluated (Spencer 2005:175). The once popular interpretation of Australia as the 'lucky country' (per Horne's *Lucky Country* [1964]) is giving way to a more nuanced interpretation of its contested history. As noted earlier, since the 1990s studies of belonging are replacing a mid-twentieth century obsession with Australian identity (Bongiorno and Eklund 2014:39-40).

Ideas of home, nation and consequently belonging or frontier, can be explored on a walk. During the Romantic period Wordsworth, Coleridge, Thoreau — and later, Baudelaire — all went on 'self-imposed treks through the environment seeking purposefully to gain individual experience to write about' (Krauth 2010). Recently, Palestinian lawyer Raja Shehadeh, walked his native hill country to explore the conflict with Israel in *Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape* (2008). Shehadeh's recounting of the journeys comprises what Robert

Spencer has called 'a device for contesting preconceptions' (Spencer 2010:40). This was most evident in the structure of Shehadeh's recounting of the walks, in which he used 'each meandering walk to amble no less circuitously around received ideas about the region in order to peruse them from an alternative point of view' (ibid). Walking and writing contested spaces, and the reverie, encounters and objects that pervade any resulting narrative, provide exactly this opportunity: to interrogate the nature of space and place in relation to identity, and so interrogate the concepts of frontier and home.

The Palestinian case highlights the blind spots a colonial power may develop toward any antecedent home, an affliction resonating in Central Australia, and one that is reminiscent of G.C. Spivak's 'necessary yet contradictory assumption of an uninscribed earth' (1985:133). Any 'new territory' falling under a colonial gaze is most likely already someone's home. As Doreen Massey notes, in the postcolonial context such a situation draws on the colonial text as 'writing over a thereby obliterated other' (2005:110). The palimpsest is a useful way to understand such postcolonial geographies, and suggests the inscribing text itself as a starting point for deconstruction. Postcolonial theory is concerned with the effects of colonisation on cultures and societies (Ashcroft et al 1998:186; 1989:2; Blunt 2007:176). Postcolonial studies investigates representations of place and the journey, and as a discourse emphasises the workings of colonial and neo-colonial power, which Blunt defines as 'the imposition of political control through conquest and territorial expansion over people and places located at a distance from the imperial power' (2007:76). Blunt's position would seem to court both humanist and Marxist interpretations of space and place, an idea to which I turn more at length below. Important here, is that Ashcroft et al regard place not as landscape, but as 'a complex interaction of language, history and environment' (2003: 391). Postcolonial place is characterised by a sense of displacement, a gap between the experience of the environment and the ability of the coloniser's imported language to describe it (ibid:391). Place is also a language in constant flux, again, a 'palimpsest . . . a parchment on which successive generations have inscribed and reinscribed the process of history' (ibid:392). The palimpsest is

fundamental to the construction of postcolonial place and indeed, my research method, as reflected in the array of texts to be examined. Here the map is the ‘critical signifier of control over place and thus of power over the inscription of being’ (ibid:392).

Such a method is suggested in radio journalist Susan Angel’s postcolonial analysis of ABC radio broadcast *The Writers Train* (2008), which follows authors and artists on a train journey from Alice Springs to Darwin. The program critiques some stereotypes of outback Australia by juxtaposing the past with the present, encouraging listeners to look in a new way at how Aboriginal people have been imagined in the past and how they might be represented anew (Angel 2008:124). Here Angel’s analysis is evocative of Jose Rabasa’s notion that ‘the image of the palimpsest becomes an illuminative metaphor for understanding geography as a series of erasures and over-writings that have transformed the world’ (1993:181). Considering home in the way Angel has, implies a narrative of place and home/nation. Edward Said argues identity always involves such narratives (Said 2000:177), a story which people tell themselves and others in order to lend meaning to their lives and society (de Cillia et al 1999; Hall 1997; and Geertz 1975). But a narrative of home begs the question: for whom does the narrative speak? In the colonial past of Australia, for instance, Sue Rowley’s journeying bushman represented ‘the space of the bush and home’ (1996:135). But dispossession of Australian Aborigines underlay this same narrative of a settler identity. Furthermore, Rowley’s journeying bushman might necessarily be joined by other figures across race and gender. This might be more in keeping with the emergence of intercultural exchange and interdependency in the towns of Alice Springs (Ase Ottosson 2010, 2014), and Katherine (Francesca Merlan 1998, 2005, 2006). Recent creative responses to place at Alice Springs emphasise this same cultural hybridity of ideas and aesthetic practice (See Tacey 2011, Finnane 2011, 2014) and add further ambiguity to the idea of home in the Centre.

Finally, there is the matter of how long it takes to come to an understanding of place. For the walking observer, home implies a familiarity not available to the casual visitor. Many of the texts analysed in this thesis were however, written by a



journalist or travel author merely visiting Central Australia. Heidegger's concept of *dwelling* becomes important, evoking the question of exactly how well a writer may come to know a place in a short time (1958). In the textual analyses I use a concept developed by Edward Relph, that the relationship between person and place can be described by a degree of 'insiderness' or 'outsiderness': 'From the outside you look upon place as a traveller might look upon a town from a distance; from the inside you experience a place, are surrounded by it and part of it' (1976:49). As Henry David Thoreau recognised, writing the home place is a specialist task requiring a reverence not typical of any scientific appraisal. Thoreau found such a reverence in writing of his walks from which, according to geographer David Seamon, a strictly scientific view of land might have investigated

only the empirically discernible, objective parts of human behaviour and experience. The less visible, more subtle portions of human existence – at homeness, habit, modes of encounter, dwelling – are ignored or reduced to recordable manifestations (1979:160).

Importantly, spaces become better known as places as they become 'time-thickened', in other words, 'they have a past and a future that binds people together round them' (Crang 2013:103). Willa MacDonald argues that sense of place and belonging in a landscape is all about the narratives we tell ourselves (2007). North American nature writer Barry Lopez concurs with Native American author Louise Erdrich in arguing it is time and history which count in developing a considered sense of place (Lopez 1986:12; Erdrich 1985). Jeff Malpas, on the other hand, argues a sense of belonging in place is tied to neither ownership nor length of residency, rather it is 'an existential opportunity that presents itself to all' (2008:330; see also Read 2000 and Trigger 2008). As Crang asserts, however, 'inhabiting a place over time leads to its incorporation into local people's identities lending a feeling of endurance and persistence' (Crang 2013:107). Heidegger argues dwelling was one of the essential properties of human existence, and, contrary to Cartesian thinking, humans did not exist as free-floating minds. Rather they existed in relationship to the world around them, what Heidegger describes as 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger 1958:19; see also Crang 2013:107). The result is that 'travelling in foreign lands limits the observer' and results in a

simpler, more easily stated viewpoint (Schneider 2000:125). The ‘native’ to a place however, can offer more complex depictions, resulting from ‘immersion in the totality of his environment’ rendering the observer steeped in ‘behavior, local tradition, lore and myth’ (Tuan 1990:63).

## 2.6 The frontier

If home is primarily safe and secure (if also steeped in ambiguity and ambivalence) then the term frontier implies all that is unsettled and in conflict, a place defined by turmoil. The Australian frontier has been described as ‘a line of settlement that swept aside Aboriginal nations to allow the advance of the British’ (Gerritsen 2010:18-19). The term is used both as a descriptive or geographic reality and a social construct within the cultural imaginary (Davison 1998:270); in other words, frontier is at once a place and an idea.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, like all landscapes, those frontier describes are both real and imagined (Davis 2005:7; Lopez 1986:256; Stratton 1989:40). While Rolf Gerritsen’s description of the Australian frontier emphasises a real place marked by conflict, Mickey Dewar’s emphasises frontier as an idea, a notional line where two opposing world-views come together; the collision, she argues, is about ‘competition . . . over land and resources’ (1996:15). Typically, this line is continually pushed forward (or back) by heroic frontiersmen, the pioneers; writes Paul Carter: ‘Inside the line is culture; beyond that, nature . . . (it) signifies the decisive exclusion of all that is not culturally familiar . . . (and) . . . as the frontier moves, nature is bulldozed into submission’ (Carter 2010:158). Such a dividing line might be conceptualised as a border between two different concepts of home, or more fundamentally, two different concepts of being. This understanding of frontier as a nature/culture divide (see Sundberg and Dempsey 2009: 458-463) would become a signifier of cultural difference and, as we shall see below in the theories of Turner (1893), the foundation of identity construction for the coloniser. The colonial frontier is widely defined as a binary in this way, inscribing the boundary between

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<sup>14</sup> For background on the Central Australian frontier, see McGrath (1987); Reynolds (1995); Kimber (1990, 1997); Rowse (1998); Nettleback (2004), Nettleback and Foster (2007); Attwood and Griffiths (2009); Davis and Rose (2005).

civilization and nature, primitive and modern. Such spatial metaphors presuppose exclusion and separation, rather than interaction and co-existence (Howitt 2001:233). Here I distinguish between two types of boundary: those that are ontologically porous and those that are non-porous. Boundaries were clearly present in the precolonial era, defining the borders between languages and tribal groups and delineating country, the border between one Aboriginal lifeworld and another (Sutton 1995). Place names were usually sung in 'the order they were visited, and in the language in which they are publicly uttered confirms the identity of the group that holds the primary rights in the territory' (Davis and Prescott 1992:2). Intertribal borders between territories were, I argue, ontologically porous, in that a 'way of being' remains homogenous (or flows) across the divide. Trade and ceremony were conducted across such boundaries and along defined lines of pilgrimage (songlines), with equal political power from one side to the other. It was the act of colonisation I propose that introduced the idea of the non-porous boundary, or colonial frontier.

In the most recent comprehensive review of the Australian frontier (Davis and Rose 2005), Deborah Bird Rose suggests frontier as 'a key site for reflexive critique of contemporary society' (Rose 2005:49). The frontier as a moving boundary between culture and nature first appeared in an address by historian Frederick Jackson Turner to the American Historical Association in Chicago in 1893 on the significance of the frontier in American history (Turner 1893; see also Furniss 2005 for comparison with Canadian experience). Turner described the frontier as 'the outer edge of the wave – the meeting point between savagery and civilisation.' It lay at the 'hither edge of free land' and was the 'line of most rapid and effective Americanisation' (Turner 1893:2). That line moved westward, and the frontier traced the limits at any given point in time of this westward march of exploration, settlement and progress. By a locus of pins on a map, the frontier marked the ever-shifting position of a kind of social alchemist's crucible in which wilderness and primitivism were transformed into civilisation and modernity. It was in these remote areas where, supposedly, a new American was being cradled, and, in turn as Barry Lopez writes, a new America, 'shaped by both the fact and

the concept of its westering frontier' (Lopez 1986:256). Turner's so-called 'frontier hypotheses' profoundly influenced the study and writing of history from that point on and throughout the twentieth-century. His thesis was that 'American history, culture and political institutions were shaped not by America's British heritage, but instead by the unique environment of North America'. From the frontier experience, Turner claimed, a uniquely American culture and political institutions were forged (1893:2). Turner's portrait of America was however, of 'empty, unoccupied wilderness,' where resources were a 'rightful spoil of war' (Furniss 2005:29; see also Slotkin 1992:11-13). This frontier environment selected certain traits and values, including individualism, resourcefulness, self-sufficiency, and democracy (Turner 1893:18), a 'new American' emerged from this melting pot (Furniss 2005:24) and the archetypal American was born.

Such constructions of a 'new American' identity, born of the 'wild west', foreshadow similar Australian efforts to construct a national type. As Dewar observes: 'the colonial outpost ceases to represent a . . . clone of the parent society (and) a different society is created' (Dewar 1996:15). The frontier was an important part of the mix of intellectual ideas prevailing in the late nineteenth century (White 1981:64). Five decades later Russel Ward sketched just such a 'genuine Australian character' as a nomadic bushman on the frontier in *The Australian Legend* (1958; see also Carter 2010:278). Ward located his national character where culture met nature, and in the fashion of Turner's American the Australian was remade by the encounter (MacIntyre 2003:10; Carter 2010:278).<sup>15</sup> The longevity of this image is telling and owes much to the Heidelberg School of painting (see Alder 2008:1). The nationally distributed periodical *The Bulletin* was also pivotal in allowing Australians across the nation to take part in the national conversation (Davison 2012:435). Ward's notion still persists today, nevertheless it is challenged on many fronts, not the least of which is that it was largely blind to the existence of Aborigines (Reynolds 2000:129; Wollacott 2008:23).

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<sup>15</sup> Angela Woollacott confirms the Turner connection (2008: 26), and Humphrey McQueen notes Australian historian Manning Clark had made Ward aware of Turner's work (2008:249).

While works from the Heidelberg and Bulletin schools depicted bush life, Paul Carter asks whether these representations were really of bush life at all, or whether they were merely the impressions of the bush as conceived by urban dwellers (Carter 2010:283). The question is especially pertinent when we consider the degree to which mobility characterised the Australian worker. Humphrey McQueen argues that ‘many bush workers were also city labourers, who shifted from construction sites to shearing sheds, or between the building trades and fruit picking’, and later that ‘the mobility of workers contributed as much to the acceptance of the type as did the balladists and writers’ (2008:224). Here is conjured the to-ing and fro-ing between the city and the bush, between civilisation’s centre and the frontier, an exchange perhaps best described by Raymond Williams (1975), but one long a part of Western thought (see also Brett 2011). Such vacillation perpetuates Turner’s image of the frontier speaking back to the centre.

Turner’s frontier theory has been criticised since the 1950s (see Harper 1952) and fell largely out of favour from the 1970s (Furniss 2005:27). Richard Slotkin turns the metaphor of frontier into a subject of critical inquiry in its own right (1992, 1998). Given frontier theory is so resilient, it is perhaps unsurprising that it remains in favour among some Australian historians and others writing on the frontier beginning from the Turner model (Rose 2005; Dewar 1996, 2008). Frontier theory enjoys a special currency vis-à-vis a literature of the North (Dewar 1996, Carment 2005, Angel 2006, Rothwell 2013). The problem is that the frontier process is seen as sequential: ‘an historical moment of encounter that will be overcome by civilisation’ (Rose 2005:1). Just how valuable it is as a continuing representation of Central Australia, or as a method of critical analysis therefore, is a matter for discussion and indeed, the subject of this thesis, which is, at least in part, a critique of frontier. Carter questions the very idea of frontier determinism, arguing that the concept is not helpful in understanding the particularities of Australian history (Carter 2010:160). Moreover, Carter questions historians’ continued interest in the notion, like Henry Reynolds, who offers a counter history in *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1995); here Reynolds adopts an alternative

paradigm in order to offer a different historical account of the ‘frontier’ experience.

Henry Reynolds’ thesis is that violence on the frontier between Aborigines and whites was largely written out of historical accounts roughly between federation and the early 1960s (2000:117). This occurred despite the meticulous records kept during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, much of which is retrievable through logs, diaries, newspapers and memoirs. Anthropologist Bill Stanner had once referred to this missing narrative as the ‘Great Australian Silence’ (1969:24-25), an idea taken up by Michael Meadows, who argues indigenous Australians were largely invisible in media (2001). Others believe Reynolds overdid the ‘violence theme’, sparking the so called ‘history wars’ (see Windschuttle 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; and for discussion Macintyre 2003; Kent 2006; Woollacott 2008). Certainly other types of frontier encounter besides armed resistance occurred between Europeans and Aborigines, as Reynolds himself acknowledges (2000:117). Nevertheless, conservative historians Keith Windschuttle and Geoffrey Blainey labelled Reynolds’ work a ‘black armband view’ of Australian history, a term which earned considerable political prominence through its adoption and use by then Australian Prime Minister John Howard around the turn of the twenty-first century. Windschuttle claims some massacre stories were confected, points to guesswork in the estimation of total numbers killed, and believes both efforts were squarely aimed at a separatist agenda for contemporary policy regarding Aboriginal people (See Windschuttle 2000a, 2000b, 2000c).<sup>16</sup>

In so many ways, constructions of Australian identity and the sort of political rumblings noted above are rooted in what Stratton (1989) calls a *mythic geography* and Said (2000) calls an *imagined geography*, with Central Australia and Alice Springs firmly at their heart. Stratton argues the Northern Territory plays Australia’s ‘Other’ to the southern states ‘real’, in which the south (and the real) is represented principally by the twin cultural and economic epicentres of Sydney and Melbourne (1989:38-9). The two poles are mutually interdependent:

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<sup>16</sup> For a summary of Windschuttle’s charges and the preparatory history see Stuart Macintyre (2003). Windschuttle’s suppositions are adequately refuted in at least two other works: Evans and Thorpe (2001) and David Kent (2006).

the North represents what is suppressed in the South. Echoing Richard White's (1981) dismissal of a 'real Australia', Stratton argues that such an idea is: 'a chimera, an appearance generated by the force of . . . desire' (1989:38). Beckett argues Aborigines have long been an integral part of this metaphoric frontier (1988:194). This imaginative dimension of the Centre is expressed clearly in the region's literature, as well as in media coverage. Yet, as Dewar has since observed, in the Territory these opposites can reverse their meaning (1993:16). For example, the bush or outback may be perceived as negative (a challenging obstacle to development), or positive (redemptive wilderness). Using binary logic, the land is understood as haven of liberty or uncivilised place of exile, a confused conflation of mythic representations, in other words, the frontier.

Any discussion of shaping settler consciousness toward national identity must include the popular periodical *Walkabout* — a publication often concerned with central Australia. A.T. Bolton argues that by 1960 the magazine had 'as much as anything, discovered outback Australia to the popular imagination' (1964:5). The magazine employed some of Australia's most prominent authors and journalists of the time, including Ion Idriess, Frank Clune, Wilfred Burchett and Ernestine Hill. Yet the magazine promoted white progress in the absence of Aborigines — in other words, it privileged the frontier as a land of opportunity (Rolls 2009; Russell 1994). Nevertheless, Rolls finds such ideologically-bound criticism 'overlooks the more nuanced forms of settler belonging the magazine facilitated' (2010a:1). Such objects of belonging lay also beyond Alice Springs of course; Anne McGrath (1991a:4) notes Uluru is also Australia's symbolic centre, a national and spiritual icon, while earlier Annette Hamilton suggested going to the Rock is 'a kind of pilgrimage into the deepest realms of national cultural identity' (1984:376).

Roll's observation above supports the same ambiguity of representations of the Centre that I argue here. And if White may conclude there is no 'real' Australia, nor by extension, a real Australian (1981: viii), and Jon Stratton enlists the myth as chimera, 'the Other which generates the system' (1989:38), then neither subverts my method, as both accord with Anderson's definition of nation as

imagined community (1991). Rowley argues that even the nineteenth century artists and writers who were engaged in producing a ‘Bush’ narrative ‘sought to deny the fictionality of representations in order that the imagined community they were engaged in constructing could be construed as real’ (1996:132). Given Alice Springs has been seen as the ‘schism the nation is built on’ (Hogan 2012), it is perhaps not surprising that the idea of nation is not only contested in Central Australia, but also inherently ambiguous.

I turn now to the way in which narratives produce representations of place and identity. As walking is central to the six narratives examined in this thesis, I make particular reference to narratives of the walking journey.

## 2.7 Walking and writing place

Walking is the oldest (and remains largely our principal) means of human locomotion (Amato 2004:19). In pre-industrial cultures, walking was a commonplace way of knowing the world, a means of understanding landscape and one’s place in it through the feet. Walking constructed a spatial narrative of history, ‘a region one walks back into’ (Macfarlane 2013:28). By a similar path, modern societies have also come to know places by walking them, and it is evident in the work of philosophers, poets and writers.<sup>17</sup> In this section I discuss the idea that in both settler and Aboriginal cultures walking is a particular method of mapping, in the ways discussed by Vaughan (2009) and Ingold (2002). Walking is a way of becoming familiar with space; walking traces a particular geography in the mind and, through the feet, on to the earth, a visual representation in memory comprising objects and encounters of significance and meaning to the walker. Through the navigating body, Merleau Ponty’s ‘measurant

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<sup>17</sup> Thoreau’s essay, *Walking* (1862) canvasses the benefits of a considered approach to walking. For an in-depth analysis of the cultural practices surrounding walking see Solnit (2001) and Amato (2004). Coverly (2012) categorises walkers into archetypes such as philosopher, flâneur and pilgrim, while Coverly’s earlier *Psychogeography* (2010) provides a good general introduction to the field. Studies of the literary walk include Robinson (2006), Nicholson (2008), Macfarlane (2013), and one chapter of Theroux (2011). Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2002, 2007) [and Ingold and Vergunst (2008)], is indispensable, introducing methodologies of walking ethnography along with the idea of wayfaring or wayfinding, which Ingold argues is ‘the fundamental practice by which living beings inhabit the earth’.



of the world' (1969:248-49), walkers create awareness and orientate themselves within the bigger picture, creating place; when space feels familiar, it has become place (Tuan 1977:73; Casey, 2001:683; Relph 1976:1). In this way, walking is a means of place-making shared between cultures.

While a place may act as a geographical source of meaning to one group, it can however alienate another (Massey 2005:6). As a result, claims to place can spark conflict or even suffering (Malpas 2008:327). Val Plumwood counsels against a false consciousness of place, drawing attention to hidden linkages and determinants of place, encouraging a critical view that embraces both place and its associated 'shadow' places (Plumwood 2008:139). For there are always other stories to be told arising out of place, other paths that have already been mapped, as Amy Hamilton suggests:

writing about walking is a way writers can tap into many cultural stories and beliefs about bodily movement. Walking can indicate the passage of life and time, bodily and mental suffering, and change from one place to another or from one mentality to another . . . walking can prompt readers to access those more complex cultural inheritances (2008:250).

In his earlier analysis of the work of Marcel Mauss, Claude Levi-Strauss argues (in similar fashion to Hamilton) that modes of human behaviour are bound up not only with the muscular and nervous systems of the body, but by 'a whole sociological context' (Levi-Strauss 1987:7). Nevertheless, it is the body that remains the cartographer's pencil in this exercise of map- and meaning-making.

That walking has attracted the attentions of poets, essayists, artists, philosophers and social theorists, is hardly surprising (Bassett 2004: 398). According to Stuart Evers, 'literature has always had a close, personal relationship with walking, from which so much inspiration can be taken, and so much can be learned' (2010). The walk itself may form the narrative arc of its own literary rendering: the retelling of a journey on foot; but this is not the only form. Walking literature may include poetry, fiction, non-fiction and the walking essay. A walking text may enunciate a theme of walking, be inspired by it, or espouse a walking philosophy. The Dreaming stories of the Australian Aborigines are concerned with Ancestors who walked the earth creating topography and sacred sites along the songlines as they

travelled. It is perhaps for these reasons that a strict definition of a walking narrative remains elusive in the literature. For this study, I propose a broad definition as: the literary retelling of a journey on foot. I qualify this by noting that in narratives of walking, encounter with landscape comes in two forms: phenomenologically through the walking body, as well as through discourse, story and representation. The common thread of walking renders all of the stories examined herein as comparable acts of place-making. They share a sensing portal, pointing toward the possibility of a shared ontology, even though such an ontology may never be fully shared. Further, it allows a fusing of literary criticism and political geography, perhaps a *narrative geography* (Hones 2011).

And there is something significant about walking, for the world looks different at ‘three miles an hour’, the speed of the feet, which journalist and walking historian Rebecca Solnit suggests is matched to the speed of thought (2001:10). This pace of walking is important, returning us to ‘an awareness ... more familiar to our evolutionary tempo’ (Hunt 2009: 73; see also O’Brien 2007: 84). Will Self argues similarly that ‘Nothing puts you in touch with the environment quite as much as walking; it has a balanced, rhythmic mantra of movement. When walking you lose the screen through which you habitually perceive modern life’ (Self 2007). However, while cultural theorists, geographers, authors and literary critics debate what meanings can be ascribed to walking (Bassett 2004), scientists try to unearth that which is *intrinsic* to walking, its *functionality* (Langdon 1985, McHenry 1986; Lovejoy 1981, 1988; Napier 1967; Thorpe 2009). For much is evident in walking’s anatomical balance and a skeletal structure rooted in the walking gait; Solnit calls walking an ‘odd fulcrum in human evolutionary theory’ and ‘the anatomical transformation that propelled us out of the animal kingdom’ (2001:43-44; see also Amato 2004:20-1). In fact, true bipedalism is an unusual way for mammals to move: energy efficiency is not significantly different to that of quadrupeds, yet speed and agility for bipeds is markedly reduced (Lovejoy 1981:342; See also Solnit 2001, Jones 2008, Hooper 2007). Such functionality determines a uniquely human identity, yet is so intrinsic to everyday life we

hardly notice it; the humble biped is mainly concerned with pragmatism, function, the ability to flee from conflict, to travel from A to B.

As a biped moves through space, much is learned about the places over which it travels. As Solnit states, walking provides a ‘crucial element of engagement of the body and the mind with the world, of knowing the world through the body and the body through the world’ (2001:29). Walking then, is a conduit through which we may register the world as it becomes known to us through our senses, as well as recording the imagined worlds traversed in our minds. Consequently, any recounting of a walk becomes a narrative of the places walked and imagined, the reverie or hardship which the walk brings shaping the kind of writing it produces. As Solnit suggests of the philosophers who walked and wrote:

Perhaps it is because walking is itself a way of grounding one’s thoughts in a personal and embodied experience of the world that it lends itself to this kind of writing. This is why the meaning of walking is mostly discussed elsewhere than in philosophy: in poetry, novels, letters, diaries, traveller’s accounts, and first-person essays (2001:26).

Some writers have felt driven to keep alive the tradition of walking and writing in the face of technological change, while others argue walking is more popular than ever. For example, Christopher Morley wrote in 1918 that ‘walking can never again be what it was – the motorcars will see to that – it is our duty to pay it greater reverence and honour’ (Morley 1918). Solnit believes walking as a cultural activity is fading (2001:250), while Sam Miller in his psychogeographic walks of Delhi laments that legs, once hegemonic in cities are now ‘only used by fitness freaks, the eccentric and the poor’ (2010:5). Meanwhile, others argue walking is on the rise in cities and elsewhere (Hoshino 2007:63; ‘India seeks higher Hajj quota’ 2013; Macfarlane 2012).

The position of the (solitary) walker is unusual: ‘in the world, but apart from it’, he or she feels the detachment of the traveller rather than ‘the ties of the worker, the dweller, the member of a group’ (Solnit 2001:21). This point of view, approximates both insider and outsider and is reflected in walking prose. Referencing the writing of Rousseau and the recounted walk, Solnit argues:

As a literary structure, the recounted walk encourages digression and association, in contrast to the stricter form of a discourse or the chronological progression of a biographical or historical narrative (2001:21).

Unstructured, associative thinking of this kind is often connected to walking, suggesting walking as ‘not an analytic but an improvisational act’ (ibid). In this thesis, I enlist both this ‘improvisational’ dimension of the written walk and its potential as a critical tool of geography. I expand on this below with reference to theories of place, which I relate to the broader term space and the influence of politics.

Artistic and poetic representations of places have long used the recounted walk as a narrative structure (Turner and Turner 2011; Webb 2001; Davidson and Gitlitz 2002; Krauth 2010). Investigations of the spaces and places of literature however, have been largely confined to narrative setting as background for plot, if and when they are discussed at all (Bucholtz and Jahn 2005:551; Herman 2002:265; Vermette 1987:146; Hone 2011:685). In other words, the story setting comprises spaces in which events might happen, a stage on which the characters might perform their parts (Hones 2011:688). Place can however, also be a central feature of literature, tying narrative to a particular location and inspiring a sense of place, while imparting knowledge to readers (Jeremiah 2000). In his foreword to Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*, John Stilgoe writes that setting is ‘more than scene in works of art . . . it is often the armature around which the work revolves’ (Bachelard 1994:x). Setting then, can also be fundamental to the writer’s creative process. Novelist and academic Nigel Krauth goes so far as to call it the ‘first important thing – the inspiration’ (2003); in this way, place carries meaning, and ‘already contains a drama, already implies characters, issues, particular kinds of action, a plot, or part of a plot.’ Investigating literary place is the work of literary geographers and ecocritics, who might, for example, analyse place in the work of a novelist (see Darby [1948] on Thomas Hardy; or John Ryan [2011] on Thoreau), or the relationship between a place and a writer (see Matley 1987).

In Central Australia, the walking writer/storyteller traverses a postcolonial geography, which I model herein as a palimpsest. From pilgrim to explorer,

philosopher and flâneur, the result of these walks is always similar: space becomes known to both protagonist and reader and a relationship to place, secure or otherwise, is forged; furthermore, a representation of place and identity are thereby produced. The relationship varies according to the experience, knowledge and the intent of the walking writer. In Central Australia, walking has long guided Aboriginal groups to an enduring and relational sense of place. But exactly what is meant by sense of place, and how it is manifest when several groups of people lay claim to the same location is not clear.

Prior to the 1970s there was no agreement on how to investigate place, or what exactly was meant by the term (Relph 1976:1). Yet the terms space and place remain fundamental to the geographical imagination (Hubbard 2005:41). Nevertheless, when asked to reflect on the role of the environment in shaping human lives, a critic might be forced to resort to any number of terms to frame an answer. These terms might include anything from location to area, region, space, neighbourhood, place or landscape, and each with an attendant definition to suit a particular profession or scholarly discipline. All are spatial metaphors used as descriptive shorthand; even the terms space and place are often conflated or used interchangeably, while methods of investigating the 'affect' of space and place vary widely. In her analysis of 40 years of place research, Maria Lewicka (2011) concludes that while there has been much peer-reviewed research published, much of it is empirical and little actual advance has been made. The most promising field of theoretical endeavour, she suggests, is phenomenology (2011:223).

To minimise such confusion, I want to be specific about the meaning of space and place, as the differences are germane to the textual depiction of Central Australia as a frontier or home. Space and place are related but distinct terms, and reflect the influence of two different strands of geography (Hubbard 2005:46). The first is a humanist strand of geography that emphasises place and *sense of place*. The second is a Marxist influenced political geography that emphasises the relations of power and resistance that play out over different spaces and the idea that space is culturally produced.

The philosophical geographers of place — Edward Relph, Yi Fu Tuan, Edward Soja, Edward Casey, David Seamon and others—developed more nuanced humanist definitions of place to account for its role in shaping lives and behaviour. Their emphasis turned from the environmental determinism which had pervaded nineteenth and early twentieth century geography, to *sense of place* as a guiding characteristic in different settings, thus placing the discipline on a more phenomenological footing (Tuan 1974; Buttimer 1976; Relph 1970, 1976, 1977, 1981, 2008). Relph and others envisaged places as ‘bounded’ spaces, where there was a sense of security and enclosure, echoing the idea of the home place (Tuan 1977). Under such an understanding, places are bounded by cultural relations and a distinctive identity; often they were places of dwelling to which an individual might have a strong relationship. The focus in geography shifted from social spaces to these lived-in places, and a humanist geography grew out of alternative philosophies, notably existentialism and phenomenology (Relph 1970, 1976; Tuan 1977; Holloway and Hubbard 2001; Hubbard 2005; Seamon 1979, 2000; Seamon and Sowers 2008). But this humanist approach failed to account for politics or culture as it varies over space and between spaces.

A humanist theory of place as bounded space then, is a ‘definite but complex relationship between the character of specific places and the cultural identities of those who inhabit them’ (Hubbard 2007:43). Place can be defined as ‘perceived or felt space, space humanised’ (Buell 1995:253), ‘a property of human intention and experiences’ (Relph 1976:47), or ‘space that is important to someone’ (Vanclay 2008:3). Recently, Graham et al (2009:19) divided the term ‘place’ into several sub-categories. Places – as *genius loci* – comprise the topographical, the cosmological, the built environment and people’s emotional and psychological engagement with place (see Jiven and Larkham 2003). *Place identity* can be used to refer to the way in which place is a subset of every individual’s self-identity (see Bird 2002; Hernandez et al 2007; Dredge and Jenkins 2003; McCabe and Stokoe 2004). *Sense of place* is defined by its relationship with concepts of *place attachment* and *place dependency* – although there is no consensus on the definitions of the three terms or how they relate (Lewicka 2011; also

Altman and Low 1992; Giuliani 1991, Giuliani and Feldman 1993; Casey 1993, 1998, 2001; Ramkissoo, Smith and Weiler 2012; Vanclay et al 2008; Cameron 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Schama 1996). Finally, place can operate at a range of scales: from the local to the national and beyond.

Humanist articulations of place and its relation to space are largely drawn from phenomenology, which has its origins in Germany prior to World War One (Dowling 2007:132). Phenomenology is concerned with perception and the truth of appearances, which is to say, distinguishing objects before our eyes as a way to knowledge. For this, it counsels a return 'to the things themselves' (Dowling 2007:132). Edmund Husserl is normally credited with founding the science of phenomenology, which attempts to understand phenomena free of cultural context, as far as can be achieved. (Husserl 1999, Hahn 2010, MacDonald 2001, Crotty 1996:95; Dowling 2007:132; Greaves 2010:10). German existentialist Martin Heidegger later developed a more hermeneutic and interpretative approach (Heidegger 1950, 1962; Heidegger and Farrel 1993, Heidegger 1969, Dowling 2007; Orr 1988). Husserl and Heidegger's work was expanded by French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty for embodiment (Matheson 2006:22; Merleau-Ponty 2008:14; Stewart and Mickunas 1974:3; Merleau-Ponty 1969:248-9; Dowling 2007). Without this embodiment, many now argue, writing about the world is robbed of a vital but 'invisible essence' (Caranfa 2006:91; see also Slovic 1996:352). While physical space certainly acquires shape in the imagination from discourse, narrative and representation, it only has geometrical properties and orientation by virtue of a sense of this through the body (Merleau Ponty 1969; Tuan 1979). As Tuan describes:

Visual perception, touch, movement, and thought combine to give us our characteristic sense of space. Bifocal vision and dexterous hands equip us physically to perceive reality as a world of objects rather than as a kaleidoscope of patterns (1979:390).

The walking author then, may know his or her environment through sensation (feeling), perception and conception (Tuan 1979:388).

At the same time as phenomenological or humanist theories of place as bounded space were emerging, a second school of thought arose under the Marxists and

political geographers. For these critics and theorists, the emphasis was on space rather than place and the way in which power relationships and the means of production played out across different spaces. Space, as distinct from place, is the ‘uniform medium in which things are arranged in three dimensions’ (Merleau-Ponty 2008:38). Casey later called this geometry the ‘encompassing void in which things (including human beings) are positioned’ (2001:1). In a Marxist apprehension of space however, both space and place are socially produced and consumed (Lefebvre 1991, Bachelard 1994, Soja 1990). Recently, space and place are being thought of in terms of the flow of the activities that produce them, a relational view of a space that is ever undergoing (re)construction (Thrift 2009:96).

The work of Henri Lefebvre (as modified by Edward Soja) proposes that ‘space is implicated in social relations’ (Hubbard (2007:42). Furthermore, produced space comprises both perceived and imagined dimensions (Lefebvre 1991, Soja 1989, Casey 2001, Hubbard 2005). Lefebvre (1991) proposes three ways in which space is produced. First, space is produced via the *spatial practices* of a society, including walking to work. Second, *Representations of space* are produced by planners and architects and some artists. And third, *representational spaces* are produced by those such as artists and writers: these are the spaces of mind and memory, which overlay physical space and make symbolic use of the objects found there (Lefebvre 1991:38). Representational spaces are of the greatest value in investigating textual space and place because they modify spatial *textures* informed by knowledge and ideology (Lefebvre 1991:42). An associated concept is Soja’s *third space*, third in the respect that it is over and above the *perceived* and *imagined* spaces of the cultural geographers (1989). Soja’s *third space* is both real and imagined and of particular importance to this thesis because of its resonant emphasis on a ‘lived’ dimension of space. A nomenclature from Casey (1991) calls such a space simply the ‘place-world’, which he describes as

A world that is not only perceived or conceived but also actively lived and receptively experienced. Inspired by Henri Lefebvre, Soja maintains that such thirdspace is at once social and historical — and, just as much, spatial (Casey 2001:687).



For this research, I define Central Australian space by reference to humanist notions of place as well as Marxist notions of space after the fashion of Casey's place-world, a Lefebvrian produced space and Soja's third space. The vehicle for traversing and producing this third space is, I argue, the body of the walking writer. In turn, the recounted walk becomes a lens through which to view space, place and concomitant identities.

Walking and space are explored recently in the field of postcolonial geography. While geographers of the 1970s had considered the effects of colonialism and imperialism as part of a broader Marxist analysis of world economies (Blaut 1975; Hudson 1977; Blunt 2005; Short 2012), postcolonial geography since the 1990s concerned itself with culture, identity and power (Blunt 2007). This trend can be seen in Paul Carter's investigations of the languages of travel, exploration and settlement, and more especially in the act of naming as an articulation of power that turns empty space into place: an act of colonial placemaking (Carter 2010:69). Previously criticised as offering the 'view from the West' (Robinson 2003:647; Murphy 2011a), practitioners of political geography have become more inclined to engage in embodied practices of fieldwork, travel and science. James Sideaway for example, explores the *affect* of geopolitics, in which the geography of the walk reveals the flow of capital (2000:1091-116), while other theoretical work since 2000 has posited walking as a critical tool for examining postcolonial geographies and other landscapes (Driver 2001; Sideaway 2002; Murphy 2011a; Spencer 2010; Wylie 2005; Vaughan 2009; Bassett 2004; Newhouse 2012). An enormous and related volume of work has been devoted to walking the city (Macauley 2000; Morris 2004; Meagher 2006; Toibin 2005; Coverly 2010; Solnit 2001; Robinson 2006; Wunderlich 2008; de Certau 1984; de Bord 1981) perhaps driving a fledgling literature in Australia (Markwell, Stevenson and Rowe 2004; Stead 2010). Geographer Joseph Murphy argues walking can help peel back the layers of history and cultural difference that obscure apprehension and understanding of landscape (2009; 2011a:239; 2011b). In the process, walking has emerged with the potential to define a new geography, one that is more

inclusive and multi-faceted rather than uni-dimensional; where creating one geography does not completely overwrite another.

Prior to colonisation, Central Australia was 'a complex system of land titles, based on lineage and family and conception' (Short 2012:131). The most recent overall review of the colonial and postcolonial political geography that now overlays this cultural landscape is by Will Sanders (2013).<sup>18</sup> Sanders argues there are considerable shifts in Australian indigenous policy every 20 or 30 years (Sanders 2013:167-8), each shift changing the political texture of space. The walking writer in Central Australia will encounter and must account for these different spatial textures of the world around them.

Michel de Certeau describes the link between walking and writing in the city in *Practice of Everyday Life* (1984:97), in a way that may enable the walking writer, at least in part, to address the spatial texturing raised by Sanders above. The city, de Certeau argues, is an arrangement in space of objects which convey meaning. To walk through this arrangement is to acquire by perception some but not all of these objects in a certain order as dictated by the configuration of the walk. The walk and its collection of objects becomes a narrative of meaning described by the arc of the objects so collected. Each path through the city, logically, produces a different story. Thus the city becomes a text which can be read in an infinite variety of ways, simply by choosing a different route each time. In this way, says de Certeau, 'The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or the statements uttered' (ibid). Geoff Nicholson reinterprets de Certeau's thesis more simply as: 'words inscribe a text in the same way that a walk inscribes space' (2008:27).

Though de Certeau and Nicholson were writing of the city their words amble far beyond the city's outer limits. In other words, what applies in the city, might work equally as well in the country; importantly however, spaces are read differently by different individuals and cultures (Head 1993:489; see also Anderson and Gale 1992; Clifford and Marcus 1986). And writing captures these spaces as text in a

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<sup>18</sup> See also Sutton (2009), Nowra (2007), Neill (2002), Hughes (2007).

certain way. Lawrence Buell argues the ‘excursion narrative’ orders natural phenomena as the perceiver might encounter them, and are both subjective and objective (Buell 1995:219). Each of these views of walking gives purpose and method to my reading of the Central Australian texts, in that walking and writing are forms of place-making.

## 2.8 Walking and a role for habitus

It is important for the textual analysis to come, that I establish a connection between humanist place and Marxist space, and for this I propose Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus as a mediator between them (1995:78-87). The concept is focussed on the learned habits of the body following the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Susen and Turner 2011:247). Habitus helps the critic to relate the personal experience of place within broader social space. The link between place and self emerges in Bourdieu’s framework as it regards how the outer of the social, shapes the inner of the body and self (Bourdieu 1995:72, 89; Grenfell 2008:51). Bourdieu’s theory proposes there are two factors at play, structure and agency (Bourdieu 1995:72). The concept of habitus results from Bourdieu’s efforts to resolve the tension between Claude Levi-Strauss’ structuralism and Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialism (Swartz 2002:625). These two theories of human action are not really poles at all, but meet in the body where rules of the governing political structure and the ability of the feeling individual with cultural capital to act intersect. Bourdieu suggests regular practices of the self in place, or habitus, is a way to bring together objective knowledge and subjective or ‘lived’ experience, a matter that is usually an ‘either/or choice’ (Bourdieu 1995:4). Edward Casey clarifies habitus as:

A figure of the between: above all, between nature and culture, but also between consciousness and body, self and other, mechanism and teleology, determinism and freedom, even memory and imagination. Habitus is not mere routine but something improvisational and open to innovation (Casey 2001:686).

As Casey argues, while Bourdieu does not mention place in his writing, it is ‘everywhere present in his discussion of habitus’ (ibid). For Casey, habitus is ‘a middle term between place and self – and, in particular, between lived place and

the geographical self' (ibid). Aboriginal dispossession, such as occurred widely in Central Australia, might usefully be seen as resulting from a disturbance to habitus, whereupon a person with cultural capital finds themselves in a field where their cultural capital is no longer valid. The resulting reduced agency restricts their ability to act in concert with their surroundings or even in their own interests, where there are new and unfamiliar rules of space. Casey makes this link most plainly, asserting that 'there is no place without self, and no self without place' (Casey 2001:684). By this Casey means that the displaced self cannot act in a way that is in concert with place, and so there appears a disjuncture or an incongruity between the two. Only from habits exercised in the home place can an identity emerge that expresses the full potential of the interdependency between self and place. Walking is one such habit, as de Certeau (1984) and Lefebvre (1991) have argued, and which, per Bourdieu's habitus, provides a bridge between self and other, place and space.

## 2.9 On foot across Australian space

Australian culture boasts a number of emblematic walkers each with an accompanying vocabulary. The swagman, or itinerant bush worker, is perhaps most familiar, 'humping his bluey' (carrying a swag or bed roll) while 'tramping the wallaby track' (see 'Meanings and Origins'). As mentioned briefly earlier, the tireless Afghan cameleer led a string of beasts across the desert along 'camel pads' or desert tracks, ferrying supplies and passengers deep inland. And, while many nineteenth century exploratory expeditions relied on horse and camel, many explorers found themselves frequently on foot in the tough desert terrain (Harper 2007:11-15). Criminals go 'on the lamb', while those unable to afford the fare to ride might instead saddle 'Shanks Pony' (see Marples 1959), only to be found 'hoofing it', or riding the 'hobnail express.' Even poet and journalist Banjo Paterson's *Waltzing Matilda* (1895), Australia's unofficial national song (Kelen 2003:161), is the story of an itinerant swagman in trouble with the law (see O'Keefe 2012). The song has been called 'a powerful adjunct of the Anzac legend, both as a precursor and a carrier of the same myth — the innocent male victim, at one with nature in Australia-the-beautiful, the independent man brought

low by brutish authority defied' (Radic 1996:39). The song is evocative of a 'typical Australian', akin to Ward's bushman of *The Australian Legend* (1958). It is this same character and bush mythology as they relate to the journey, that Sue Rowley argues makes 'the representation of national place and character . . . dependent upon the perception of the traveller' (1996:137).

Walking features prominently alongside other forms of traversal in the literature of both precolonial and postcolonial Australia and the Centre. And such journeys are significant as narratives of nation (Rowley 1996:134). Aboriginal art and songs sprang from indigenous Australians' descriptions of journeys, both real and imagined (White 2007:1-2). Among them were the creation myths that told of how the lands were shaped by the movement of spirit beings such as the rainbow Serpent. Following these indigenous representations of place were the first European depictions; these were 'another form of travel writing: the journals and maps of explorers' (White 2007:2), an interpretation shared by Carter (2010) and Ryan (1996). Referencing Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Carter argues that the coloniser produces the country he will inhabit from his own imagining (1996b:1), an argument made also in *Road to Botany Bay* (2010). Many explorations of the Centre were scientific in nature, prominent among them being the 1894 Horn Expedition, a collecting venture described extensively in Mulvaney and Calaby (1985) and Morton and Mulvaney (1996). Anthropologist Baldwin Spencer travelled to Alice Springs as a member of the Horn expedition, which is where he first met Francis Gillen; Spencer later edited the report from the venture, which included his narrative *Through Larapinta Land*. Mulvaney and Calaby rank it among the distinguished works of literature in the history of Australian exploration (1985:115).

Explorers depicted the Australian landscape in their journals and maps, a practice Paul Carter and Richard White call a form of travel writing (see Carter 2010 and White 2007). Such travel narratives emerge from diary entries; the map – a concrete representation of the imagined world – is the assembled journey. As a means of constructing European place from 'empty' space the explorer's account of his route 'would serve to bring the country into being' (Carter 2010:69). In fact,

Australia has been described so widely in its travel literature that an examination of travel texts is crucial to understanding how the nation is represented. Rune Graulund (2006; 2009) queries the treatment of explorer narratives as travel literature, when they are clearly marked by a more enthusiastic discovery imperative (2006:42) and less self-referential focus (2010:46). From the work of Casey Blanton (2002:3-4), Graulund supposes instead a spectrum of styles from the true 'explorer narrative' to the more touristic gaze of the 'travel narrative' (Graulund 2010:46). Simon Ryan argues the explorers were 'at the vanguard of the establishment of colonial space' and proposes that the ongoing Land Rights debate of the 1970s and '80s has forced a re-evaluation of the myths surrounding their journeys (1996:5). The explorers as agents of imperialism construct a universal and monolithic space, Ryan concludes, thereby helping to legitimise the colonial project. Although some have played down the role of explorers in the literary imagination (Hodge and Mishra 2003), Ryan reassures readers that explorers formed 'a touchstone in the . . . construction and reconstruction of Australia's national identity' (1996:12).

In addition to the explorer narratives of the nineteenth century, Lynch cites as significant in representing the arid zone the non-fiction narratives in the first half of the twentieth century, including scientific expeditions, journalism, adventurers, travel writing, and notes authors from David Carnegie to John Walter Gregory, H.H. Finlayson, Ernestine Hill, Francis Ratcliffe, C.T Madigan and George Farwell (Lynch 2007:77-8). Journeys by Cecil Madigan, Bob Croll, Arthur Groome and Ernestine Hill, are all reviewed by Tom Griffiths (1996), before he deduces that the main trope of the journey was configured around the ill-fated expedition of Burke and Wills in 1860-1. While not examining a role for walking per se, Griffiths concludes a journey to the centre came to represent many things and was often the first time a visitor would meet an Aborigine. In a similar vein to Lynch's later comments, and echoing an increasing conflation of Aboriginality with settler journeying, Griffiths writes:

Travelling to the centre was to travel differently. One went walkabout in Australian culture to become liminal, to escape or return to source. So travelling to the centre was a release and a pilgrimage, but it was also an exploration of Aboriginality (1996:179).

More recently, Lynch proposes a polyvocal bioregional literature, evident from texts such as Hill (1994), Lowe and Pike (1990) and various works by Mandy Martin (eg 1996). Lynch notes a shift in the literature after the Land Rights era, yet missing from his analysis is the emerging political edge of more recent texts. The same trend is missing from Dewar's (2008) analysis. Yet the trend in non-fiction is clear from Hill (1994) and Neill (2002), and readily apparent in later texts such as Nowra (2007), Skelton (2010), Stojanovski (2010), Moss (2010, 2013) and Hogan (2012). Such politicisation is now difficult to ignore in any literary rendering of the Centre (Hill 1994:15). This emergent political flavour underpins my argument for a sixth phase of Central Australian literature, the Intervention Era. The first of the six phases is however, a precolonial era in which place in the Centre is home to the Aborigines alone. It is to this narrative that I now turn, for the first of the textual analyses, and Chapter Three.





### 3. Pilgrims of the Dreaming Track

When the sweet showers of April have pierced...the dryness of March...people long to go on pilgrimages to renowned shrines in various distant lands.

Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales: The Prologue*, late 14<sup>th</sup> century

The natives (are exhorted) to relinquish their wandering, idle and predatory habits of life and to become industrious and useful members of a community where they will find protection and encouragement.

Proclamation by NSW Governor Macquarie, 4 May 1816

She leaves the station with her followers pretty frequently for a 'walk-about,' for the call of the wild comes irresistibly, no matter how long she has mixed with the whites.

ES Sorenson 'Bella Bush' 1911:43

The first of the six walking narratives to be examined is an Aboriginal Dreaming story that traces a journey by two Ancestors from country to the north of Alice Springs to the present-day location of Port Augusta in South Australia and return. Called *A Man from the Dreamtime*, the story was told to anthropologist Myfany Turpin by Kaytetye (pronounced kay-ditch) elder Tommy Kngwarraye Thompson, and published in a popular collection in 2003.<sup>19</sup> The story is an allegory, revealing important elements of place, identity and the cultural tradition of walking the Dreaming tracks. I argue that this recounted Dreamtime journey depicts a precolonial Aboriginal geography of home in which identity is independent of any notion of the frontier as it will come to be understood by settler Australians, that is, as dividing nature from culture and underpinning a discourse of nation. While intertribal borders are certainly evident from *A Man from the Dreamtime*, and clearly delineate Aboriginal language groups, country and totemic identity, such borders I suggest are ontologically porous, that is to say a 'way of being' is shared by the groups living on either side of the border. Such a border is contrasted with the settler frontier (to be discussed more at length in the next chapter) which is widely seen as a rigid binary, exclusionary, non-porous and resistant to intercultural exchange in the way of a nature/culture divide (Sundberg

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<sup>19</sup> Page references refer to the 2003 edition hereafter signified as AMD.

and Dempsey 2009). As such, this first text of six forms a foundational layer in the palimpsest, a basal layer depicting ‘Aboriginal home’.

In this way, my reading of Thompson’s text opens a critique of frontier and its related discourse of Australian identity as a framework through which so many writers and journalists have captured Central Australia. Furthermore, I explore the settler term ‘Walkabout’, a derogatory euphemism for the ritual ceremony and walking journeys of the songlines. By contrast, I treat the journey as a form of pilgrimage, a practice common to most cultures, including western cultures dating back at least as far as the twelfth century. Pilgrimage has long given rise to a unique form of walking narrative in which both the journey and the place being walked are germane to a spiritual or transformative aim. Use of the pejorative Walkabout is, I argue, a eurocentric strategy to deepen the apparent frontier divide between ‘civilised’ Australian settlers and their ‘primitive’ Aboriginal Other.

### 3.1 Overview

In 1996, Myfany Turpin began work on a dictionary project for the Kaytetye language group in country to the north of Alice Springs around Barrow Creek and Tennant Creek. Determined to work from collected stories so as to give everyday context for the language on which she was working, Turpin started recording stories from Tommy Kngwarraye Thompson, a father-of-five and one of the few Kaytetye-speaking elders left. Many of Thompson’s stories were subsequently translated, and later published as a collection entitled *Growing Up Kaytetye* (2003).

*A Man from the Dreamtime* tells of the journey of Marlpwenge and Nalenale, two Ancestors from the Dreamtime. The central message of the story is described here: ‘A single man travels a long way, gets a wife from another country group and brings her back with him. The Dreamtime laid the way’ (AMD:37). While the story is allegorical and examined here as a pilgrimage narrative, also revealed is the story’s subtle transformation since colonisation. As well as the journey being compared with an act of pilgrimage, the modern elements of the story can also be considered akin to the modernist observations of a flâneur (Morrison 2014c).

The story begins at a place called Ywerreleperle, near Alekerange about 200km north of present day Alice Spring. Here lives Marlpwenge and Nalenale, an old Kaytetye man and a young girl who are Aboriginal Ancestors from the Dreamtime. Marlpwenge and Nalenale are married but are of the wrong skin. Skin names are part of an Aboriginal kinship system, which delineates how people relate to each other, their roles, responsibilities and obligations and who they can marry (Central Land Council 2013). In defiance of this system the couple lives together. One day, the Ancestors send a wind. On the wind is a message, a plea for help from another language group to the south, near the place now called Port Augusta. 'Down there in the south they are eating each other,' says the message, 'one of them is a devil eating everyone' (AMD:21).

On the wind, the message reaches as far as the centre of Australia and into Kaytetye country. In response to the call, Marlpwenge decides the pair should travel south to help. Marlpwenge and Nalenale begin a journey that tells the origins and importance of the skin name system (AMD 28); in colloquial terms the narrative is referred to as a 'skin story'. The journey narrative serves multiple functions, and articulates its own unique geography and implied spatial politics. On foot the pair cover more than 1700 kilometres each way, starting in Kaytetye country, passing through the Alice Springs district on their way south to Arabana country near Port Augusta; Marlpwenge follows the same track of 1700km for the return journey. The narrative divides readily into six parts:

1. A Message: Marlpwenge receives a plea for help;
2. The Journey: Marlpwenge and Nalanale walk south to help their countrymen;
3. The Battle: Marlpwenge kills a devil beast for the Arabana;
4. A Trick: Arabana women steal Nalenale, replacing her with a young woman of similar appearance, but different geographical origin. Marlpwenge and the new girl return home;
5. A Test: The girl wants to leave and Marlpwenge consents, but others bestow upon the girl a skin name and convince her to stay;

6. The Moral: Travel far for a partner and live happily ever after.

Walking underscored most aspects of precolonial Aboriginal life and culture, whereby:

their pathways were determined by the availability of water, from sources such as rivers and creeks, waterholes, lakes and springs. The trade routes stretched in a network covering thousands of square kilometres connecting about 600 different language groups of people. It is thought to have been one of the most extensive systems in the early hunter-gatherer world (Donovan and Wall 2004:1).

In treating this Dreaming story as a walking narrative, I foreground the objects and encounters perceived by the walking protagonist-Ancestors in the environment around them. The objects and encounters define the place of the narrative, clarify the pair's identity through their cultural relationship to land and kin, and map the prevailing fabric of space, a political geography produced by walking in accordance with Aboriginal Law set down in the Dreamtime. Thompson's narrative alludes to this governing politic when he says 'The Dreamtime laid the way . . . ' (AMD: 37). Strictly speaking, the narrative speaks only for the Kaytetye language group, but while cultural practices vary across Australia, the basic conceptions of place, space and journey are remarkably similar across language groups (Myers 1986, 2012; Flood 1999; Rumsey 2001; Keen 2004).

To begin the discussion, I examine the genre of published Aboriginal Dreaming stories and provide context for Thompson's text. Then my argument comes in steps. First, a textual analysis demonstrates that journeys of the Dreamtime ancestors and ritual walking practice can be considered a form of pilgrimage narrative, in which a walking protagonist travels to particular and significant places resulting in a particular transformation. Next I confirm from textual and related anthropological evidence that Central Australian Aborigines of the precolonial era conceived of space as a network of familiar places linked by walking paths that together articulate a totemic geography of home. Such space is comparable to the produced spaces of Lefebvre (1991) and de Certeau (1984), that is, spaces 'produced' through walking and other habits and practices. Aboriginal

place was both relational and bounded, the latter known in present-day terms as bounded space or ‘country’ (Young 1987; Rose 1995; Davies et al 2010; Morrison and Mayne 2010). Most importantly, and in terms of my overall thesis, Thompson’s narrative defines an emplaced identity that does not owe its character to the frontier, an imaginary line separating ways of being. Yet bounded space does imply borders, and borders certainly define the bounded spaces of the pre-colonial era. But, as noted earlier, these borders were ontologically different from the settler divide erected during colonisation, which came to be known as the frontier (see Turner 1893, Dewar 1996, Davis and Rose 2005). Akin to the nature/culture divide (Sundberg and Dempsey 2009:458), the frontier became a signifier of cultural difference and the foundation of identity construction for the colonisers. In contrast, the relational sense of place enacted through walking the songlines confirms a high degree of open exchange and cultural interplay across the intertribal borders of the era. Once again, such exchange speaks of a boundary that is fundamentally different from a frontier.

Finally, in the postcolonial era the songlines would become a signifier of Aboriginal difference (Morphy 1996:172). Walking the songlines was demeaned and ridiculed by widespread use of the settler term ‘Walkabout’. The colonial slang distorted the meaning of this Aboriginal cultural practice, effectively deepening the apparent ontological divide between the two groups, emphasising Aboriginal culture as mysterious and exotic. In ways common to Orientalist practice, these ‘primitive’ habits of Aboriginal Australians were seen as encroaching upon the ‘superior’ imperialist space of the colonial era to come. This colonial space was ruled by an ethos of progress, in a worldview originating in sixteenth century colonial encounters (Sundberg and Dempsey 2009:458). In relation to my overall argument, this first text sets up a benchmark by which all subsequent texts are judged for the role and significance of the frontier. Echoes of such a ‘home’ are then traced throughout the six texts of the thesis.

### 3.2 Genre and context

Many collections of Aboriginal stories and myths from Central Australia have been retold and collected over the past 150 years (Harney and Elkin 1949, WE

Harney 1959, W Ramsay Smith 1930). And the number appears to have grown in recent times (see Koch 1993, Vaarzon-Morel and Nungarrayi 1995, Turner 2010). Around the turn of the twentieth century, the several books of Spencer and Gillen (1897, 1899, 1904 and 1912) were the most commercially successful set of ethnographic monographs published by Macmillan (Urry 1993:44, cited in Morphy 1996:141).<sup>20</sup> W. Ramsay Smith notes in *Myths and Legends of the Australian Aboriginals* (1930) that ‘its mythology . . . has been a matter of only slight general interest and fragmentary record’ (1930:7).<sup>21</sup> Of the post-war collection *Songs of the Songmen: Aboriginal Myths Retold*, A.P. Elkin wrote that, during his era ‘comparatively few people . . . read works of this type’ (Harvey and Elkin 1949:5). Yet such stories have long had an effect substantially more profound than either Smith’s or Elkin’s observations might indicate. It was from the late 1940s and early 1950s that Aboriginal literature that was *not* written by Aboriginals came into vogue (Shoemaker 1989:86). And the effect was pronounced:

The translations of anthropologists were, both in literary and in social terms, important factors which influenced the perceptions and opinions of those Australians either associated with, or interested in, the Aboriginal people (ibid:88).

Since the Land Rights era (1970s and ‘80s), there has been a steady growth in the number of Aboriginal authors of fiction, poetry and other works; authors such as Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Noel Pearson, Melissa Lucanenko and Alexis Wright now enjoy notice worldwide (Birns 2009:1309; see Heiss and Minter 2008). Along with contemporary narratives and journalism have emerged traditional Dreaming stories, still often collected by an outsider such as an anthropologist, but for which demand is likely to increase as literacy rates climb among groups of remote Aboriginal people (Morrison 2014b). Discussion of the form has reached popular forums: anthropologist Christine Nicholls recently

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<sup>20</sup> See <http://spencerandgillen.net/> dedicated to the work of Spencer and Gillen.

<sup>21</sup> Smith’s text has since been shown to be an appropriation of a manuscript by Aboriginal writer David Unaipon, entitled *Legendary Tales of the Aborigines*: see <http://www.austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/6080121>

completed a series on Dreaming narratives for popular Australian current affairs website *The Conversation*, arguing:

While the narratives connecting the travels of these Dreaming Ancestors to specific sites may be sung or spoken, they collectively represent a significant body of oral literature, comparable with other great world literatures, such as the Bible, the Torah, the Ramayana, and the Greek tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, to name but a few (Nicholls 2014).

Turpin's (2003) collection is part of this emerging body of works that document traditional stories, songs and performance across a number of Central Australian language groups, some of which include stories of journeys along songlines. Collection of these stories is conducted in conjunction with the community or in partnership with an Aboriginal organisation. So while Thompson's tale is a mythical allegory, it nevertheless traces a real route underpinning a physical ambulatory practice, and therefore warrants treatment here as non-fiction for its depiction of place. Publishing Dreaming narratives does however, pose challenges, which I explore in detail elsewhere (Morrison 2014b). For example, some cultural matters are secret: In the case of *A Man from the Dreamtime*, some elements of the original story were not published for this reason (Turpin 2003: xxiii). Conversely, there is a pressing need to preserve the oral wisdom of Aboriginal elders as 'the older generation . . . pass on without passing on their stories' (Gibson 2010:171).

### 3.3 Pilgrimage and the Dreaming journey

The journey of Marlpwenge and Nalenale is set during a period that in Arandic languages is called *Altyer* (or *Altyerrenge* in Arrernte), *Tjukurrpa* in languages of the Western Desert, and in English *The Dreaming* or *Dreamtime* (Green 2014:44). In its English translation, The Dreaming is a time both long ago and now (Arthur and Morphy 2005:19; see also Myers 1986; Stanner 2009), and represents 'a separate system in both space and time' (Memmot and Long 2002:46-47). Stanner's term 'everywhen' gives perhaps the most accessible translation of the

term (2009:58).<sup>22</sup> Arrernte elder MK Turner refers to Dreaming narratives as ‘Traditional Country Stories’ (2010:48).

Thompson’s Kaytetye story begins when Marlpwenge and Nalenale hear the Ancestors’ message on the wind, and Marlpwenge comes to a decision: ‘ “Well, us two will go south tomorrow.” They set off on their journey from . . . Yewrrelperle, their country. They went south’ (AMD: 21). The message itself reveals aspects of broader Kaytetye culture, including boundedness that is implicit in the leaving of ‘their country’. Further, when Marlpwenge watches the wind coming toward him, the narrator notes: ‘It’s just like today when you write a message on a piece of paper and send it, but in the Dreamtime the wind blew it’ (AMD: 21).

Set down in the Dreamtime, Aboriginal Law governs life for the Kaytetye right down to the way children might play the game of cubby houses (Turpin 2003:58). Features of the landscape have their origin in the creation stories and are of spiritual significance. According to the Kaytetye Dictionary, the verb *to walk* embraces a number of forms, for example: to walk heavily (*ayankare aperke*), in the rain (*arntwe warle atnywenke*), or in a group (*pwepelarrerke*) (Turpin 2012:786). Ambulatory practice clearly shapes a vocabulary of daily life. The routes taken by the creation beings are called Dreaming tracks, linking waterholes (usually finding the shortest distance between) and sacred sites along hundreds and even thousands of kilometres across Australia (Donovan and Wall 2004:x). In pre-contact Australia, the landscape was criss-crossed with Dreaming tracks, which can be thought of as walking pathways of exchange and travel in the Aboriginal economy (Ingold 2002; Rumsey 2001; Memmott and Long 2002; Peterson 2004; Morphy 1996; Donovan and Wall 2004; Kerwin 2012; Myers 1986; also Newbury 2012 and Chatwin 1988). As the couple begins walking this geography, an entire universe is evoked of which settler Australians know little. With Thompson as narrator, the Ancestors articulate a landscape well known to

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<sup>22</sup> Though often attributed to Stanner, Rubuntja and Green (2002) note the translation of the Arrernte word *Altyerrengge* as ‘dream times’ first appeared in the 1896 report of the Horn expedition, and was coined by anthropologist Baldwin Spencer.



them, reinforcing that this path through country and beyond is a ritual pathway, a feature common to Dreaming stories (McBryde 2000, Kerwin 2012).

But there is much more to the Aboriginal cultural landscape, for Aboriginal Law accommodates a great deal of magic and sorcery, demonstrated, I suggest, by the manner of arrival of the mysterious ‘message on the wind’. Magic and sorcery are an integral part of Aboriginal culture (Elkin 1994:6). Sorcerers or medicine men can ‘cure the sick, conduct inquests, accompany the kaditja revenge expeditions . . . and act as mediums’ (Elkin 1994:113). Mostly practised by *ngangkari*s or Aboriginal spirit doctors, some practitioners claim to travel through the air (Wanatjura n.d.; see also Morrison 2013c). Elkin notes some *ngangkari*s west of the MacDonnell Ranges would assume the form of eagle hawks and travel long distances by flying at night to camps in other tribes to cause illness and death (Elkin 1994:113). That the landscape itself is the ultimate embodiment of such spiritual power (McBryde 2000:156), and that it is the Ancestors and their activities that have sown this power into particular sites in the landscape means that place can be understood as the site of multiple presences and encounters (Rose 1996:289-90). For example, it is the Ancestors who sew the landscape with the spirits of children to be born again and again to successive generations of Kaytetye (Turpin 2003:1-9; see also Koch 1993). As TGH Strehlow observes of the Arrernte:

all the human beings living in this land were believed to be linked indivisibly, by means of ‘totemic’ ties, to the supernatural creators, who were still slumbering in their midst at sacred centres dotted throughout the eternal landscape (1970:95).

Such a landscape is a visible record of the travels, actions and existence of the Dreamtime ancestors (Wilkins 2006:61). Place and space are ‘entwined with notions of kinship and totemism in a fashion that is reflected in a language of space’ (ibid); such a land is often referred to as a living being (Turner 2010:116; Lehman 2008:107). That such embodiment of power is renewed through ritual practice by living persons (also a part of this landscape), brings us into the realm of a space produced both through imagination and lived experience, with ritual responsible for ‘producing’ space in ways Lefebvre (1991), de Certeau (1984),

Casey (2001), and Muecke (2004) have also described for other cultural environments. The emphasis is on the way place is ‘formed and sustained through journey and movement, pathway and track’ (Malpas 2008:330). Here, via a message that has ‘appeared on the wind’, the Ancestors summon to action Marlpwenge and Nalenale — who may be thought of as both people and Ancestors — to make a ritual pilgrimage with allegorical intent, to pass on this same apprehension of space to younger generations through storytelling.

On the journey southward, Marlpwenge and Nalenale pass sites of cultural significance. At *Alekerange* (Ali Curung) the couple stops when they see ‘newborn puppies’: these are topographic features created by an Ancestor, likely boulders, and perhaps related to this or another dreaming story. They see *ahakeye* plum tree, but ‘the fruit is not ready’ (AMD:21) and they leave it for later; a soakage ‘has water in it’ (AMD:22), but they do not stop to drink. Such observations form part of the intimate knowledge of place imparted through story and updated through walking. Leaving fruit may mean people would return when the season is right in a seasonal pattern of movements within known country. As Gibson (1950:3) has noted, for Australian Aborigines ‘the visual world . . . is filled with things which have meaning’; David Lewis records this must ‘profoundly reinforce his ability to note, store and code environmental data’ (Lewis 1976: 272).

Alan Rumsey notes ‘tracks cross each other, dreamings meet and interact in particular episodes identified with places where they meet’ (2001:24). At several sites like this the travellers stop, but at others Marlpwenge hurries them along: ‘Leave those puppies, let’s keep going south’ (AMD:21). At times, it is as if they are merely paying their respects to the site itself. Such a reverence suggests not only the uneven nature of space, but a similarity to other cultures that practice pilgrimage. The Chinese characters for pilgrim, for example, imply similar stops for ‘paying one’s respects to a mountain’ (Theroux 2011:130). The Taoists visit five holy mountains they regard as the pillars of China, the cardinal points of the compass as well as the centre of heaven and earth (ibid).

Such places are noted in many pilgrimage narratives, and begin to articulate the journey and the place over which the protagonist travels as a series of interlinked nodes, each of special value. A pilgrim is one who journeys, especially a long distance, to some sacred place as an act of devotion, or, more poetically, is a traveller or wanderer (Delbridge et al 2003:1447). Chélini and Branthomme (1982) define a pilgrimage by three pre-conditions: a sacred place and a particular way to reach this place; a distance to be covered and a road to go along; and a certain number of religious acts before, during, upon arrival, and after the trip. Generally speaking, pilgrims step away from normal living into a liminal space (Turner and Turner 2011:250). With minor variation, many authors agree on this general definition (see Robinson 2006, Solnit 2001, Nicholson 2008, Theroux 2011, Coverly 2012).

Deborah Ross notes pilgrims were important in classical times, pre-Columbian America, and in pagan religions in Britain and Ireland (Ross 2011: xxix). Linda Davidson and David Gitlitz emphasise the place toward or over which the pilgrim travels (Davidson and Gitlitz 2002: xvii); this sense of the geography of pilgrimage is important, its influence prompting Hilaire Belloc to label pilgrimage a ‘nobler kind of travel’ (1904). In his essay *The Idea of Pilgrimage*, Belloc elevates place to a destination toward which one is impelled by a ‘vivid memory of sacred things experienced, or a long and wonderful history of human experience in divine matters, or a personal attraction affecting the soul’ (ibid). Tim Ingold expresses this close link to place as: ‘the importance of knowing the places of your predecessors by knowing the stories which make it possible for their footprints to be followed’ (Ingold 2008:43) Here a sense of place defines pilgrimage not only as journey to a *sacred* place, but to a place deemed important through *lived experience*, or perhaps even, where there is a profound *place affect*, such as at Uluru.

Like the pilgrimage narrative, the walking narrative of the Ancestors Marlpwenge and Nalenale traces a *mythic geography* of Aboriginal Dreamtime Law. Space is not homogenous in this Aboriginal universe; some sites have more cultural and/or spiritual significance than others. Marlpwenge and Nalenale travel through a

landscape dotted with mythic and topographic features that are the work of the Ancestors. It should be noted that this feature of Aboriginal landscapes is found among other cultures, for example, Rumsey (2001) compares such landscapes to others in Melanesia. The explanation for the production of such a heterogeneous representative space lies in the Dreaming itself.

As Tommy Thompson describes in *The Birth of Kaytetye*, an earlier story from the same collection, ‘Everything was established in the Dreamtime. The Dreamtime laid everything out like a blanket, even the Kaytetye people’ (2003:1). The Ancestors are commonly non-human creatures, like a caterpillar or snake, but sometimes part-human or human as is the case here. When they emerged from the earth, they travelled across its empty plains creating hills and valleys, rivers and soakages as they walked. The totems — or totemic ancestors; that is, those which produce the topography — are:

Mostly plants and animals, [but] could also relate to such phenomena such as rain or sunshine. Personal identity was determined partly through an individual’s association with one or more of these totems (Gregory et al 2008:165).

In an Aboriginal worldview, people today are descended from the totemic ancestors; the Arrernte groups of the Alice Springs area are descended from the same three caterpillar Ancestors responsible for shaping the landscape (Brooks 2003:5-6). People are created partly through conception from the ancestral spirits, which continue to reside in the most important totemic sites:

A person’s ‘conception site’ is the totemic site at which their mother first determined she was pregnant. The same sacred sites that embody totemic ancestors act as ‘markers of country’ (Gregory et al 2008:165).

For Aborigines, as Haynes describes, ‘the whole land is semiotic, a complex web of signs, pointing beyond themselves to a spiritual meaning’ (1998:15). Arrernte elder Margaret Kemarre Turner explains that ‘kinship comes out of the country itself, it comes from the ancestor beings. Aboriginal people have grown up deep inside this from creation, and they live within it always and forever’ (Turner 2010:76). In *The Birth of Kaytetye* (Turpin 2003), gum leaves were laid out as if they were groups of sisters, ‘related as aunts and nieces to each other (Turpin

2003:1).’ The leaves were girls from the Dreamtime and they told each other stories which had the power to create: ‘From these stories, the Kaytetye language and people were born (*ibid*:2).’ In other words, the Ancestors ‘awoke’ to empty space and set about adorning it with places and people. Similar stories colour the creation myths of the Arrernte. Strehlow (1947:7-8), for example, describes the emergence of Karora, the ‘Bandicoot Ancestor’ which describes the first moments of the earth and the place-making role of the ancestors:

In the very beginning everything was resting in perpetual darkness . . . The *gurra* ancestor – his name was Karora – was lying asleep . . . at the very bottom of the soak of Ibalintja; as yet there was no water in it, but all was dry ground.

Then the *gurra* ancestor was minded to rise, now that the sun was mounting higher. He burst through the crust that had covered him: and the gaping hole that he left behind became the Ibalintja Soak, filled with the sweet dark juice of the honeysuckle buds. (Strehlow 1947:7-8).

Such excerpts may stand for many Dreaming tales across Australian Aboriginal groups (Rumsey 2001). The MacDonnell Ranges, for instance, are described at the beginning of time as a dark, featureless plain (Gregory et al 2008:165). Totemic beings rose from the earth and then travelled about inscribing this empty space, making the landscape and everything within it (*ibid*). The Ancestors ‘produce the topographical features . . . sometimes calling them into existence by naming them’ (Brooks 2003:6). As we will see in chapters to come, the process of naming echoes Paul Carter’s reckoning of the colonial renaming of places as an exercise in imperial power (2010:69).

Margaret Kemarre Turner notes however, that the term dreamtime could have been used by the ‘old people’ to explain *Atyerrenge* stories in a way white people could understand during the period of first contact (Turner 2010:46). In fact, the concept has led to confusion over whether Aboriginal culture is timeless and unchanging, or responsive and dynamic (see Langton 2013a,b). The problem stems partly from the viewpoint adopted by the nineteenth century science of anthropology, which sought to construe difference and in the process implied primitiveness or backwardness (Perkins 2001:93; Lattas 1992:46). Aboriginal Australian culture was represented with a temporal ‘otherness’, evident in

understandings of the Dreaming as well as the practice of walkabout. Aborigines were apparently timeless, in ‘a landscape that was disordered, threatening, and beyond recognition’ (Lattas 1992:46). Similarly, Stanner writes: ‘I have never been able to discover any Aboriginal word for time as an abstract concept’ (Stanner 2009: 23). Maureen Perkins suggests the portrayal of Aborigines as timeless was a strategy to support the righteousness of European land claims, citing the doctrine of *terra nullius* as founded on the belief that ‘Aboriginal cultures had no space of their own’ (Perkins 2001: 95). In the same vein, Bain Attwood suggest Aborigines were thought of as being in ‘the original state of nature’ and having ‘no concept of property’ (Attwood 1996:ix).

### 3.4 Identity and the boundaries of home

Two senses of Aboriginal place emerge from the Kaytetye narrative. The first is place as bounded space, a region commonly called ‘Country’ and defined by the boundaries of a language group for whom space is place and totemic features of the landscape are of spiritual, mythical and of practical significance (Gat 2000, Myers 1986, Lewis 1973). MK Turner defines several types of boundary between bounded spaces including homeland, language and others (2010:20). The second sense of Aboriginal place is a relational sense of place emerging from ritual journeying on foot and tied to particular places and other language groups along defined routes now widely known as songlines. I turn firstly to the former.

When Marlwpenge and Nalenale arrive at *Arntwatnewene* or Bluebush, they find bush plum and later record the location of two important soakages (where precious groundwater is known to be close to the surface). In the desert, a working knowledge of the location of reliable food and water supplies means the difference between life and death for a traveller on foot. As Philip Clarke notes:

Aboriginal people living in the Australian arid zone had to rely on a variety of water and food sources which, in contrast to the temperate and subtropical regions, are thinly spread over a wide area and are largely dependent on chance rainfalls and El Nino oscillations which have cycles longer than a year (Clarke 2003:140).

The Arrernte believe the Ancestors left landmarks and waterholes along key walking routes for the local Arrernte and well beyond into other people’s

countries (Kimber 2011:35). MK Turner says: ‘Our country is never alone, our country always has a connection with other Lands’ (2010:20). The songs that were sung at each named site were celebrations of the ancestor’s deeds, but importantly, by being sung in the correct order, the songs provided information about the nature of each site, most of which linked water to water for survival (Strehlow 1971). In this way, the story of *A Man from the Dreamtime* maps a *geography of survival* in an arid environment (Morrison 2014c). As Elkin notes:

the conception of mythological paths is no doubt associated with the dry nature of the country and the scarcity of readily accessible water in the past as in the present . . . the dream-time heroes, like the present-day natives, were not free to wander far to the right or left of the shortest route between the sources of water (1994:171-2).

Such a framework dictates a *habitus* for the basic tribal unit, having important implications for notions of place and dwelling. Anthropologist Nicholas Peterson defines the basic residential unit as ‘a group of households that made up a band which occupied a range’ (2000:207). This band was part of a network connected by social, political and ceremonial ties to other nearby bands and individuals. Fred Myers uses the term *countrymen* to mean ‘the widely extended set of persons with whom one might reside and cooperate’ (1982:180). Studies in the Western Desert show country is indeed perceived as a ‘network of places linked by paths’ (Munn 1973a: 215). People know the story for a particular segment of country; in fact, it would not be incorrect to say the country is the story (Strehlow 1947:5-6; Myers 1986:59; Rumsey 2001:24). As Tim Ingold notes, these paths were laid down ‘through the movements of ancestral beings in that formative era known as the Dreaming . . . paths . . . continually retraced in the journeys of the living people who take after them’ (2002:228). Ingold uses the example of the Walbiri tribe (the subject of Munn’s research) who ‘may draw web-like figures in the sand whose basic components are lines and circles. Every line conveys a journey to or from camp, while every circle conveys the act of making camp by walking all around it’ (Ingold 2002:228). This is place as bounded space, in which the Kaytetye (or any other group) felt similarly at home at any location within the language group’s area. In other words, rather than being true nomads, the Aborigines were ‘restricted nomads’, confined to particular territories (Gat

2000:23; see also Tindale 1974:10, 55-88; Meggitt 1962:44-46; Maddock, 1973:26; Peterson 1976:20; also Hamilton 1982:85-108).

Myers' work with the Pintubi of the Western Desert is important in articulating an Aboriginal ontology and concept of home. The Pintubi do not contrast domesticated culture with wild nature: 'instead they seem truly at home as they walk through the bush, full of confidence' (1986:54). Myers does not cite Heidegger's notion of dwelling, but it would seem to apply to the Pintubi concept of *ngurra* or camp, for which 'Unmarked and wild country becomes a camp (*ngurra*) with the comfort of home' (ibid). These camps might be set up anywhere within a few minutes, thanks to Pintubi creating a universe of meaning around the mythologized country. In other words, in their 'country' — a culturalised space — space easily becomes place, making a seemingly impersonal geography into a home, a *ngurra*' (1986:55). Wilkins (2002) describes a similarity between *ngurra* in the Pintubi language and *pmere* in Mparntwe Arrente, which may take a variety of forms. A *pmere* is a place where someone or something lives or exists, or might potentially live or exist. So, unlike the generally abstracted sense the word 'place' can often have in English, *pmere* is strongly defined by its association with another entity or entities (2002:29). Wilkins lists four types of association between places: on the same travel path, same totemic association, kinship linkage, or geographical proximity, for example within a single totemic area (2002:33).

The Aboriginal cultural landscape was divided into areas defined by a central totem in which every major totemic site has its own ritual, poetry, music and art. Strehlow describes the Arrente culture as being anchored to this framework, that: 'Every incident in the myth is firmly fixed', implying an unchanging epistemology, a notion I examine critically below. As for the Ancestors, after their work is done they return to the earth and turn to stone, becoming a *tjuringa*, a sacred item of wood or bone or stone (TenHouten 2005:137). The place where this return to the earth occurs is a sacred site. Kaytetye, and all other Aboriginal groups are defined by this same relationship with the landscape and with each other through the Dreaming stories and language (Donovan and Wall 2004:3).



The environment, sites and relationships define the parameters of habitus and dwelling. An example from Western Arrernte country outlined below comes from the work of TGH Strehlow, who, as noted earlier, is an anthropologist of some significance to representations of the Centre.

On the Finke River to the west of present day Alice Springs, country is divided into local group areas, each area home to about 50 to 100 people (Strehlow 1967:10). Boundaries were clearly defined and each group enjoyed property rights as well as hunting and food gathering rights for the territory, including any permanent waters and mythological sites therein. Family groups communicated by smoke signals, and visitors were obliged to announce their arrival: rituals prevailed when the home group met with the visitors. While this implies a frontier between groups, such borders are intra-racial and the rites of crossing clearly understood. Strehlow emphasises the difference with an example from the Simpson Desert, where ‘mythic travel routes provided lawful points of social contact between the totemic clans and local groups joined by them’ (1970:94).

While borders were an integral part of the political geography of Australia prior to colonisation, a tribal identity implied from this precolonial space does not invoke a frontier in the same way settlers would later come to understand the notion. Political authority was spread evenly across this cultural landscape without a centralised system of authority (Strehlow 1970:130). I call such borders ontologically ‘porous’ to indicate a way of being is shared across the divide. As I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, later representations of Central Australia would introduce ‘non-porous’ boundaries between different ways of being, between Aboriginal and settler; in other words, boundaries that were politically charged and ontologically non-porous. The non-porous boundary marks an imagined divide between the Aboriginal lifeworld as depicted in *A Man from the Dreamtime*, and a settler/imperialist space represented in settler narratives. A strong power differential arose between the two sides of this frontier. Indications of the existence and impact of this later space are evident in Thompson’s story, which speaks to both this power difference and to the fact that Thompson’s is a modern retelling of an ancient story. As I will show, the settler space was to be

valued for its potential resources, providing a backdrop for the spread of Enlightenment values and capitalism.

Another way to understand a porosity of boundaries is through ideas of community. Aboriginal bands were small and self-sufficient, in a way Redfield suggests indicates community (Redfield 1971:4). Aboriginal Central Australia might be thought of as an interlinked network of such small communities, in which there is a *sameness* or homogeneity (accepting the various totemic and language differences) from group to group. There is a sense of ‘insiderness’ as Relph (1976) would have phrased it; or of a ‘natural home’, a ‘circle that stays warm however cold the winds outside’ (Bauman 2001:15). However, conflict still occurred across Aboriginal boundaries, and violence was a common enough result in a landscape where ‘group territories existed and . . . boundaries . . . well defined and kept on penalty of death’ (Gat 2000:23). One early investigator notes both intertribal and intra-tribal violence (Basedow 1925), while another study in Arnhem land reveals intertribal warfare accounted for 200 deaths in a group of 800 over 20 years (Keely 1996:118-119). Spencer and Gillen note that following a disagreement between groups — perhaps over a woman or an act of sorcery — an avenging party called *atninga* might be formed (1938). Fighting between Walbiri and Waringari hunter-gatherers reached the level of ‘pitched battles’ with a ‘score or more dead’, which took place in order to ‘occupy’ and monopolize wells, among other reasons. (Meggitt 1962: 42). Kimber writes:

The red ochre gathering expeditions . . . were normally all-males parties, and although cordial relationships between groups were sought, fighting appears to have been a common hazard faced by travelling parties. One entire party, with the exception of one man, is recorded as having been ambushed and killed in about 1870, whilst in about 1874 all but one of a group of 30 men were ‘entombed in the excavations’ (1990:163; see also Gat 2000:26).

My purpose is not to re-examine the myth of the peaceful savage, which is dealt with adequately elsewhere (Keely 1996; Gat 2000). The aim is to emphasise that there is no ontological discontinuity over such intertribal boundaries and that both groups share a bounded and relational sense of place in part defined by ritual walking. Ultimately however, the non-porous colonial frontier provided settlers

with a discourse through which they might ‘other’ Aborigines, perceiving them as primitive and unsophisticated, in line with a staged history of European progress and development commonly portrayed from the Enlightenment onward (McGregor 1997:3).

### 3.5 Songlines and the myth of Walkabout

As Marlpwenge and Nalenale walk the songline of *A Man from the Dreamtime* they introduce a relational aspect to space and identity, rendering intertribal borders even more porous. When they arrive in the vicinity of Alice Springs, they decide to camp nearby at Ooraminna, now a tourist homestead, and the next day go on, whereupon the narrator tells us:

Marlpwenge and Nalenale used the soakages that were all along the track. Lots of Aboriginal people travelled along there in the olden days. It was a busy road . . . people coming from the south used it to come to Oodnadatta; they travelled on foot, naked in those days. The early white people asked the Aboriginal people to show them their track. They showed them all their soakages and the white people took their horses and camels to the soakages to get water. Marlpwenge knew where all these places were (AMD: 26).

The songline Marlpwenge and Nalenale walk will take them eventually past the Simpson Desert to the south of Alice Springs, and deep into what is now South Australia to Arabana country, near present-day Port Augusta. Journeying this track from Kaytetye country to Arabana country in the south has spiritual and kinship significance. For example, later when the pair turns for home, the narrator tells us: ‘Aboriginal people would come back on that track, on their Dreaming track, northwards. Those two Kaytetye people followed that line. They are all relations along that track. Countrymen’ (AMD:33). The allegorical nature of the story means it carries lessons for young Kaytetye. As I have shown, the story teaches a geography of survival conveying the location of important water and food sources. Additionally, it teaches the skin name system and a right way to conduct the marriage relationship according to Dreamtime Law through the adventures of the hero Marlpwenge and his ritual journey. Let me further nuance our definition of a pilgrimage, as:

a journey to a special place, in which both the journey and the destination have spiritual significance for the journeyer. A pilgrimage is by nature a quest, a journey in search of an experience that will effect the kind of change that will make a difference to the individual's life or spirit (Davidson and Gitlitz 2002:xvii).

An Aboriginal relationship with place is built and maintained 'not through ensuring one's own exclusive access to it – but rather through journeying across it and through the stories that such journeying embodies and expresses' (Malpas 2008:329). When Marlpwenge receives the message, for example, he is bound to act and the conceit of the narrative is established: he must set forth in order to help his countryfolk. There is no question over this, no weighing of options. In addition to being a simple narrative conceit then, this is also a lesson of Law. As well as the close link between Kaytetye, language and country (described earlier by Strehlow for the Arrernte to the south), there is also this other bond, or obligation, to other language groups who live along the same Dreaming track. The term countrymen, refers to groups living along the same songline, the track to be walked in this Dreaming story.

Like Marlpwenge, Aboriginal people travelled for many reasons: for ceremony, for survival and for kin, including maintaining family relationships or to attend social events in the form of gatherings big and small (Peterson 2004; Tonkinson 1970). Importantly, the routes were also highways of trade along which many goods were exchanged and distributed, including ochre, spinifex gum, myths, corroborees, song and dance, all of which were given and exchanged according to supply and demand (Flood 1999:268). There was a roaring trade in the narcotic *pituri* from the Simpson Desert region, for example, which was highly prized (Aiston 1937; Watson 2004; contemporary use see Morrison 2015). Isabel McBryde (2000) explores movement in east central Australia along routes skirting the Lake Eyre basin to the east of the Simpson Desert and joining the centre to the Flinders Ranges. Charles Mountford mapped the Winbaraku songline in the 1940s (NMA 2012). Winbaraku is in the West MacDonnell Ranges near Alice Springs, a place described in some detail in *Sacred Places in Australia* (Cowan and Beard 1991:136; 140). Such long journeys suggest a considerable feat of navigation, and warrant closer inspection.

While colonial explorers such as Stuart would later use sextant and compass to navigate the dry inland, a different sort of navigation was used by Aborigines to follow in the footsteps of Ancestors, like Marlpwenge and Nalenale. In the Aboriginal world view — as Ingold argues more broadly and as is evident from Thompson's text — places 'exist in space but as nodes in a matrix of movement' (2002:219). The matrix with which any group is familiar is a region (or, I suggest, the more familiar term 'country'). Knowledge of their region allows travellers to know their current position by the historical context of previous journeys made. It is important to remember however, that as for geographies of the west, phenomenological approaches alone are similarly inadequate to deal with Aboriginal geographies. Following the work of Munn (1970), Myers explains:

the experiences of 'country' are not innocent of social life: one of the significant concerns of Aboriginal social practice (at least in Central Australia) is in producing a particular mode of orientation to the world, a kind of subjectivity. People do not simply 'experience' the world; they are taught - indeed, disciplined - to signify their experiences in distinctive ways (2002:103).

The type of navigation used by Aborigines to traverse the inland has been called 'wayfinding' to distinguish it from methods of navigation that establish position by reference to an independent or global set of coordinates (Ingold 2002; Gibson 1950; Lewis 1976; Lynch 1973). Rumsey's description that 'people know a segment of country' (2000:24), comes to the fore, reinforcing Elkin's privileging of the 'track' or 'path' over 'country' or 'place' (Elkin 1934:171).

Mapping a similar path to Marlpwenge's, ceremonial and exchange links stretch from the Arandic groups of Central Australia to the *Arabana* of the southern Simpson Desert and the Nullarbor, tracing routes of trade and pathways to mine ochre, but also delineating roads along which are fulfilled ceremonial obligation and the education of young initiates (see Jones 1984). The routes converge on the well-known ochre deposits of Pukardu Hill near Parachilna in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia. Annual ritual journeys followed this strictly prescribed way (McBryde 2000:153; see also Donovan and Wall 2004:75). McBryde assesses the possible heritage value of traditional trade routes or songlines, citing for international comparison UNESCO's World Heritage Listing of the *El Camino de*

*Compostela* as a significant statement about the relationship between humans, culture and landscape. McBryde's argument is that the ochre dreaming trail constitutes a similarly valuable heritage resource.

In settler Australian culture however, the sophisticated network of trade routes and the walking of these spiritual pathways as described by McBryde (2000) and in *A Man from the Dreamtime* is misinterpreted. Firmly entrenched in the Australian vernacular is the expression 'walkabout,' which first appeared in print in the *Sydney Gazette* in 1828 (1828:3). The term came to imply a sense of misplacement, of being lost, of lacking purpose and direction (Perkins 2001:98). The colloquial meaning equates roughly to leaving a location seemingly without forewarning and without specifying a date for return (Peterson 2004:223). Non-Aboriginal Australians associate such Aboriginal mobility with laziness and unreliability (Young and Doohan 1989:1). Some of these sentiments hark back to the same sense of timelessness imparted to the Dreaming, which can be linked to the 'noble savage' of Romantic primitivism (Graulund 2009:71; Rowland 2004; Griffiths 1994:71), a figure living in a timeless and unchanging Eden (Perkins 2001:96). Highly mythologised, the term misrepresents the Australian Aboriginal practice of travel to perform ritual ceremonies at sacred places, an activity at the heart of Aboriginal cultural life. This strategy serves to trivialise Aboriginal cultural practice while emphasising the superiority of settler culture, resulting in a widening of the perceived differences between the two cultures and a deepening of the imagined frontier. As Maureen Perkins suggests:

The term 'Walkabout' is a reminder that at the very heart of representations of indigenous people as timeless is a deep abhorrence within Western European culture of the practice of nomadism (Perkins 2001:98).

The coming nineteenth century imperialist geography, to be examined in detail in Chapter Four through the fourth exploration journal of John McDouall Stuart, marks the beginning of colonial dispossession of the Centre. The frontier erected between the two spaces is ontological, and the term walkabout serves only to deepen division by emphasising the behaviour of the Aboriginal as Other: mysterious and inexplicable, perplexing and exotic. While differences are clearly

evident between the two ontologies of place however, walking practices are actually common to both cultural groups, highlighted here by my comparison between walking the songlines and pilgrimage practices. In light of this, use of the flawed settler term 'Walkabout' to trivialise Aboriginal walking practice can be seen to deepen the frontier while at the same time revealing its ambivalence. The argument militates against a widely-accepted colonial rigidity of the nature/culture divide that is central to modernity (Sundberg and Dempsey 2009:458). It is in just this way that my later analysis will critique the dualistic nature of this boundary: rather than being two descriptive categories, nature and culture are constructed in order to 'mark difference and hierarchy' (ibid:462).

The term walkabout likely earned its place in common usage from pastoral managers concerned at the sudden disappearance of an Aboriginal member of the workforce. Peterson suggests an element of rebelliousness in Aboriginal people not letting anyone know when they intend to leave, in order to deny an employer control of their lives (2004:233). The need for Aboriginal workers to attend ceremony still poses logistical challenges for twenty-first century Australian employers. Many however, manage to make allowances; as Rowley notes: 'In some regions, as in the Kimberleys, the off-season in the yearly routine of station work could be adjusted so as to fit in with the need to visit the sacred places, perform the initiation ceremonies, and the like – the "walkabout"' (CD Rowley Volume III 1971:217-18). Both meanings of walkabout concur with Arthur (1996): the first is of travel in a traditional manner, commonly applied to the lay-off season in the northern cattle industry; the second, an abandoning of responsibilities, mostly used of Aboriginal people by others. By way of an explanation for its title, *Walkabout Magazine* provided a third meaning, as signifying 'a racial characteristic of the Australian Aboriginal who is always on the move' (Walkabout Magazine 1954:9). This concurs with widespread and inaccurate characterisation of Aborigines as nomadic primitives.

While 'walkabout' is misleading as a representation, this has not stopped it being appropriated by settler Australians as part of a discourse of nation. Rowley's journeying bushman (1996) is a freewheeling traveller in the style of Walkabout's

implication of waywardness and lack of purpose. Similarly, Andrew Lattas describes the desire for the bush in Australian culture as being a ‘wish to escape the endless march of time’, in which Aboriginality becomes a quest for authenticity (1992:45). Where better to travel then, than Central Australia, seen as a site of ‘ancient, cosmic, healing power’ (ibid: 45-58). Along with other imperial discourses this appropriation and reimagining of pilgrimage as walkabout only serves to further demean the indigene in the eyes of the coloniser, and once again inscribes the ontological divide or frontier. That a ritual practice of walking is part of Aboriginal being is once again evident in *A Man from the Dreamtime* when the narrator’s perspective shifts from ancient to modern times, first discussing events long past, then shifting to the now and talking of ‘the old days’. Dreaming stories and songs typically show this shifting perspective, in which the singer is sometimes inside and sometimes outside the story. Of some central Australian Aboriginal love poems, for example, this means that:

the singer is sometimes singing *about* ancestral events and sometimes participating *in* the ancestral events as an actor in the process of attracting a woman. A fusion of subjective and objective experience is a salient feature of the concept of the Dreaming: human beings are both products of the Dreaming and participants in it, and the Dreaming existed in a far-distant past as well as in an ever present reality (Dixon and Duwell 1994:50).

This shift in perspective does two things: it reinforces the spiritual embodiment in the act of storytelling or performance of ritual — that the performer or storyteller *becomes* the Ancestor — and secondly, it helps to distinguish the changing geography of the narrative under postcolonial rule. Let me first examine the latter. Just as Tony Kevin reported the ‘modern’ landscape of Spain in his narrative journey of the Santiago de Compostela (or Camino Trail) *as well as* elements of its Twelfth Century equivalent (Kevin 2007), in Thompson’s narrative is reinforced a similarly dynamic interpretation of landscape, rather than the ‘timeless’ Dreamtime landscape of Australian mythology. For example, a number of post-colonial place names are used in *A Man from the Dreamtime*: Wagon Gap, Adelaide Bore, Snake Well, even the controversial Bungalow at Alice Springs Telegraph Station.



When they went to New Crown Station they travelled along where the railway is today – that track of theirs where the white people put the railway line down. Before that people used to take camels along that road (AMD:26).

Clearly, the telling of this story has changed since colonisation, as new objects and encounters have emerged. Like the nineteenth-century Parisian flâneur encountering Von Haussman's vision of modernity, the latter-day Aborigine adapts old ways and stories to new circumstances superimposed by Europeans (Morrison 2014c). Place emerges as Ashcroft's reminder of the separation and interpenetration of coloniser and colonised (Ashcroft et al 2003:391). Furthermore, while the practise of walkabout has by needs adapted to a postcolonial Australia; the old ways still lie beneath. From a settler perspective, the contemporary walker of the songlines ambulates between two planes of existence, the physical and the mythic, landscapes overlaid as templates of one another. Based on these walking pathways, traditional routes are still known and acknowledged and used, even if mostly now driven (Peterson 2000; 2004). A ghosting of Walkabout and the songlines is evident in later texts to be examined in the thesis, and, as I will show, their presence can serve to soften the idea that a frontier can only be a rigid divide between nature and culture.

### 3.6 Crossing borders with Marlpwenge the hero

A further manifestation of intertribal exchange is found in the portrayal of Marlpwenge as a hero, and a comparison of such mythmaking with Western storytelling practice. This brings me back to the first point of two raised above: that the storyteller *becomes* the ancestor. In Diana James' story of the Ngintika songline dancers perform the songline and *become* the Ngintika, the Lizard man who gave the *Anangu* mistletoe berries and other edible grass seeds (2008:110). Says James: 'Place is performed by storytelling, singing and dancing at each site along the creation ancestor's travels that crisscross the continent'. Anangu, the people of the song, are 'created by and actively co-create Tjukurpa by singing and dancing place alive . . . the ontology of place is expressed in the songs of the living being of place' (2008:110). In similar ways, other acts of pilgrimage reflect this re-enactment of journey along pre-determined paths, such as in the Muslim

hajj (Bianchi 2004:8),<sup>23</sup> or even walking a labyrinth (Solnit 2001:72). As the Catholic walking the stations-of-the-cross ‘becomes’ or identifies closely with Christ (see Bratcher 2014), so too the Aborigine walking the ritual pathways *becomes* the Ancestor.

At Port Augusta, Marlpwenge kills a devil beast on behalf of the Arabana (AMD: 28-32). Marlpwenge’s bravery in the face of such a beast could be interpreted as showing the reader that anyone who walks the track assumes the nature and identity of the Ancestor who forged it. In other words, and in an imaginative and allegorical sense, as James’ dancers became the Ancestor, the reader of Marlpwenge’s journey — perhaps a young Kaytetye listener — *becomes* the hero Marlpwenge. Stories like *A Man from the Dreamtime* are central to the way indigenous society educates and represents itself (Westphalen 2002:1; Rose D.B. 1999; Klapproth 2004:2). Songs and stories of Ancestors and heroes like Marlpwenge were and remain a pillar of Aboriginal culture and represent the link between people and country; again, the stories contain both law and history (Dixon and Duwell 1994). Importantly, they also act as signifiers of identity. This trait is shared with settler Australians, who also construct identity through narrative.

In *Narrative as Social Practice*, Daniele Klapproth draws parallels between Aboriginal and Australian settler practice, citing both as ways of constructing identity (2004:2). Klapproth hears the story of a group of Pintubi who were telling stories while being driven by 4WD into country around Warlungurru, some 450km west of Alice Springs in the Kintore Range. It was a white man in Richmond NSW telling Klapproth *his* story, and in doing so also constructing an identity for himself: ‘situating himself in the multicultural landscape of Australian society in which the coordinates on the map of interracial relationships have to be carefully negotiated and maintained (ibid).’ Both parties were mapping themselves into the landscape, physical and cultural, and orienting themselves between known points to establish who they were. Both are shared forms of

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<sup>23</sup> In which ‘much of the action dramatizes critical moments in the life of Ibrahim and his family’ Bianchi (2004:8).

storytelling, and the link to mapping is strong. In fact, Tim Ingold argues the connection between mapping and writing is closer than we think. At the outset, writing was not thought of as representation, but as a reminder of speech and a replacement for the memory palace (Ong 2002:5, 137; see Robinson 2006). In similar fashion, maps become reminders of itineraries, records that were once adorned with figures of ships and beasts, a pictorial storehouse for the travel stories they represent; during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, such reminding gave way to representation (de Certeau 1984:120). Eventually the map became the experience of the territory: spatial representation minus embodiment. The link supports retelling oral narratives as text; the written text merely a modern form of the oral map.

In *A Man from the Dreamtime*, the events following the hero Marlpwenge's killing of the devil beast form the heart of the narrative and lend the textual map its allegorical intent. Even though the Arabana offer gifts of food to Marlpwenge as a mark of their thanks for killing the beast, Marlpwenge is eager to depart for home (AMD:33). During preparations to leave however, the Arabana women grab Nalenale when she asks for a firestick, rub her in red ochre and swap her for another girl. The women send the new girl back to Marlpwenge with the firestick. In the story *Our Way of Life told by the Dreamtime Women* (See Turpin (2003:12-19), it is noted that when a girl is ready to be married, the mother-in-law brings a firestick to the girl, then they go together to her promised husband (2003:18). The mother-in-law gives her daughter to the husband to go back with him and they live as a married couple. Both of the girls had been rubbed in red ochre for the exchange. Red ochre appears widely in the story of Marlpwenge's journey: Jones (1984) identifies red ochre with the sacred blood of ancestral beings and notes ochre plays an important role in ceremonial life (see also Elkin 1934:187-9; Howitt 1904:712). The red ochre signifies the trickery of the Arabana women as being of ceremonial significance. They recognise that Nalenale is not the right skin for Marlpwenge, and act to rectify the situation.

In the company of the new girl, Marlpwenge turns north for home. Thompson tells the reader: 'That's as far as the Dreaming track goes. All along that track

lives Aboriginal people who are Kaytetye relations' (AMD:33). Near Alekarange the pair find a cave, where they decide to live. One day the new girl wants to go home and the old man consents. But as she uncertainly begins her journey, she meets several 'aunties'. The aunties rub themselves with fat and name the girl *Ampetyane* (a Kaytetye skin name). As Turpin describes in an introduction to *Growing Up Kaytetye* (2003), Kaytetye social groupings are based on a skin system. Today, there are an increasing number of 'wrong skin' marriages. But in pre-colonial Australia, certain 'wrong' skin couplings would be prevented. The implication from this part of *A Man from the Dreamtime* is that because of the naming, the new girl is able to return to live with Marlpwenge with the full support of Kaytetye Law. When the girl sees Marlpwenge again therefore, she is glad, and stays with him for good. Narrator Thompson describes the moral of the story:

That old man Marlpwenge married a woman from far away. That's why people travel around and get married to people from far away today. It's how it was in the Dreamtime and still is today. A single man travels a long way, gets a wife from another country group and brings her back with him. The Dreamtime laid the way (AMD:37).

As Strehlow notes, traveling was important to exogamous marriage: the arrangement of partners to keep group numbers at strength. (1970:98). But Aboriginal people travel for many reasons, the skin story of this chapter is only one example and from one particular region. Jeremy Beckett notes that people in NSW have 'beats' and 'lines' along which live kin who will give them hospitality, therefore affording convenience of travel and the opportunity of spouses (Beckett 1988:131). Peterson's analysis of the circumcision journey further reinforces the Aboriginal journey as pilgrimage, or 'rite of passage', highlighting that

Despite fifty years of government policy that has seen Aboriginal people . . . become . . . enmeshed in the welfare state . . . the social relations from their pre-settlement days remain relatively lightly transformed (2000:206).

Peterson describes initiation journeys of the past being taken on foot over several months (2004:230). With help from 'camels, horses and even bicycles' (Peterson 1979:230; Petri 1979:232), this situation continued up until the 1960s, when the motor car began to intercede. Of the earlier situation, Norman Tindale vividly

describes a 1933 circumcision rite in the north-west of South Australia. While short on detail of the journey there, his description bears comparison with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (see epigraph), in that:

In the case of the wanderings of the totemic beings, a man may only tell that part of the story which concerns his own territory. The whole story can therefore only be learned when the several owners are assembled in company and the narration of the several portions then passes from one individual to the other (Peterson 2004:221).

The circumcision space is liminal, the ceremony undertaken when Aboriginal lads reach puberty. As Tindale writes, as a first step the boys are beaten violently by female kinfolk, who

arm themselves with digging sticks, and at dusk form a circle around one or more of the youths. They prod and beat them about the legs and shoulders unmercifully, so that they become half stupefied (1935:201).

Everything thereafter is about disorienting the youngsters and estranging them from the tribe, both physically and mentally. Later Tindale writes of the importance of this treatment as:

(a) break in life . . . the initiation ceremony. His partial banishment from the company of his mothers and sisters has already disturbed his childhood outlook, and emphasises his position as an outcast (1935:221).

And still later,

(the boy) sits with lowered head . . . he is to undergo that mysterious abduction which his elder brothers have undergone before him, and which in some mysterious manner has transmuted them into men (1935:222).

Such examples further align ritual journey with pilgrimage, remembering that:

The pilgrim enters a liminal space where they are ambiguous, for they pass through a cultural realm that has few attributes of the past or coming state (Turner and Turner 2011:249).

The emphasis is on the pilgrimage as a life-changing event. Here the initiate fears the coming ordeal, and yet 'desires the event to take place because he will thus become a man. The whole basis of his child life is disturbed' (Tindale 1935:222).

### 3.8 Conclusion

The analysis of *A Man from the Dreamtime* (2003) reveals a precolonial Aboriginal geography of home in which identities were forged independently of any notion of a frontier. Thompson's retelling of the story compares well with a pilgrimage narrative, and constructs an emplaced culture rich in ceremony and myth, in which identity is established through kinship and an intimate knowledge of place. That Thompson's modern retelling of the ancient story uses colonial place names interspersed with Kaytetye names speaks to an adaptive narration of the Dreaming as part of a living culture.

Kaytetye place relationships and obligation are forged through bounded spaces called country, each space imparting a totemic identity. The precolonial borders of country have been shown from the text and through comparison to anthropological evidence to be ontologically porous, unlike the settler frontier that will follow in the colonial era. Place is also enacted relationally, connecting kin and linked places along walking paths now commonly called the songlines. In this political geography where the rules of space were set down under Dreamtime Law, space is reproduced and transmitted from one generation to the next by means of allegorical storytelling featuring protagonist Ancestors as attractive hero figures. The story articulates a geography of survival for living in an arid landscape as both bounded space or country, and as places linked by walking paths along the songline, thus connecting Kaytetye in a meaningful way to kin and trading partners as far afield as Alice Springs and Port Augusta. Other studies show these networks reached even further, across a political geography underscored by Dreamtime Law in a criss-crossing of established walking routes allowing economic and social intercourse. As John Mulvaney (1976) notes:

In theory, it was possible for a man who had brought pitruri from the Mulligan River and ochre from Parachilna to own a Cloncurry axe, a Boulia boomerang and wear shell pendants from Carpentaria and Kimberly.

As I will show in the next chapter, the intertribal borders of the precolonial era are different from the frontier of the colonial era, which is more akin to the

nature/culture divide. The porosity of precolonial borders challenges settler thinking about precolonial Aboriginal society as a collection of different tribes speaking languages 'as different as French and German'. Dreaming stories like *A Man from the Dreamtime* reveal a connection between language groups that would satisfy Benedict Anderson's definition of a community bound by a shared imagining (1991). Strehlow's description of the Arrernte confirms this, in that:

The survival of the inland tribes was possible through the creation of social structures and an economic order that allowed every region of the whole country to contribute to its support (1970:95).

That the songline journey represented in *A Man From the Dreamtime* is akin to a pilgrimage is clear from the transformations undergone. Long Aboriginal journeys on foot were undertaken for a number of reasons. A Pitjantjatjara manhood/circumcision journey at the end of childhood demonstrates:

At the end of the ritual journey, with its trials, loneliness, 'death', revelations, and rejoicing, he can say: 'Whereas previously I was blind to the significance of the seasons, of natural species, of heavenly bodies, and of man himself, now I begin to see; and whereas before I did not understand the secret of life, now I begin to know (Elkin 1994: 3-4).

Calling such ceremonial and Dreamtime journeys by the slang term Walkabout trivialises an important Aboriginal cultural practice that continues to the present day. For a ghosting of these precolonial trade and ceremonial routes remains both evident and active: in fact, as Peterson (2004) demonstrates, the number of Aborigines who drive the initiation routes and other traditional tracks is increasing, meaning the songlines are a living presence, a culture of the now. Despite its co-opting into the Australian vernacular to construct a settler identity of freewheeling nomad, the term is commonly used as a colonial strategy to harden the frontier between black and white. Continuing to misrepresent the tradition in this way has implications for contemporary land tenure, portrayals of identity and constructions of nation. Narratives such as *A Man from the Dreamtime* on the other hand, may help to keep the tradition alive in its more nuanced form, as well as making Aboriginal culture clearer to non-Aborigines. This practice of walkabout, such narratives assert, has more to do with an ancient and continuing rite of pilgrimage than any inability to comprehend modernity.

Importantly, the way this story is told has changed since colonisation, as new objects and encounters have emerged. This idea challenges the commonly-held misconception of Aboriginal Australia as a ‘timeless land’, part of an Aboriginal culture that is unchanging and static, a representation often used to reinforce the rigidity of the nature/culture divide upon which the idea of frontier is based. Many monumental changes, climatic and otherwise, were weathered by Aborigines during the centuries prior to colonisation. However, more change would arrive with British explorer John McDouall Stuart, whose fourth exploration journey of 1860 I explore through his journal next, in Chapter Four.



## 4. Planting Flags for the Enlightenment

What there is in this South land, whether above or under the earth, continues unknown,  
since the men have done nothing beyond sailing along the coast;  
he who makes it his business to find out what the land produces, must walk over it.

Anthony van Diemen, 1644

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 foot in its centre.

Charles Sturt, Nov 1845

A bare and level sandy waste would have been paradise to walk over compared to this. My arms, legs,  
thighs, both before and behind, were so punctured with spines, it was agony only to exist.

Ernest Giles, April 1874

In 1860 on his fourth expedition north from Adelaide, Scottish civil engineer John McDouall Stuart became the first European to reach the geographic centre of Australia. Stuart crossed the Macdonnell Ranges in Arrernte country to the west of Alice Springs and continued north into Kaytetye country and beyond. With Stuart arrived the colonial frontier, and many Central Australian Aborigines were confronted with white Europeans for the first time. In this chapter, I examine the instances of walking in the *Journal of Mr Stuart's Fourth Expedition- Fixing the Centre of the Continent, From March to October 1860* (JM Stuart Society from Hardman 1865).<sup>24</sup> Along with Stuart's observations and encounters come my analysis of their enlightenment and modernist subtext. Stuart's episodes of walking combine with the difficulty of the terrain to cast a forbidding unfamiliarity over Central Australia, overwriting Aboriginal home with the harshness of a frontier unwelcoming to Europeans. Under the gaze of Stuart's prospectorial eye comes not home, but the anticipation of future home, a habitus yet to be imagined in a frontier between primitive wilderness and settlement. As such, the chapter represents a second layer of the palimpsest being constructed from the Centre's walking literature.

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<sup>24</sup> The online version of the fourth journal was retrieved 21 August 2014 at <http://johnmcdouallstuart.org.au/expedition-four> as adapted from Hardman (ed.) 1865.

The frontier as a place and a period is often associated with recorded conflicts during the colonial era in Central Australia, beginning in 1860 with Stuart's journey and ending, roughly speaking, with the transfer of ownership of the Territory from the state of South Australia to the Federal Commonwealth in 1911 (Gerritsen 2010:18).<sup>25</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, the frontier as an idea is commonly compared with ideas put forward by Turner (1893) for the Americas, and Dewar (1996, 2008) who characterises frontier as a binary akin to the nature/culture divide (Sundberg and Dempsey 2009). The settler/Aborigine duality created by the metaphor of frontier divides the nineteenth century imperialist mission from the walking ontology of place outlined in the previous chapter. Further, an epistemological divide unfolds between the Enlightenment imperatives of Stuart's mission — which was to find a path for the Overland Telegraph Line to the northern coast of Australia, noting resources and mapping the route — and the more subjective familiarity of Aboriginal wayfinding, across a storied landscape of known places linked by walking paths.

As noted earlier, the frontier is commonly characterised by a rigid boundary between two systems of knowing and being. In everyday imagining and in postcolonial critiques of a frontier mentality, such a boundary invites little exchange between the groups (Suleri 1992:111). Using evidence from the journal however, I argue there is exactly this sort of ambivalence in Stuart's textual construction of a frontier. Furthermore, I propose that it is the walking parts of Stuart's journey which contribute most to his representation of central Australia as a frontier, one that produces this dualism. For it is the periods of walking that so closely shaped the seminal events of the journey and, in turn, their later representation.

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<sup>25</sup> The period of the frontier is debatable, and could easily be extended until the Coniston Massacre of 1928 (see Rubuntja and Green 2001). Gerritsen (2010) nominates starting a few years after the explorers and ending around the time of World War One. Like Dewar, he marks the closing of the frontier as being sparked by the transfer of ownership of the Territory from South Australia to the Commonwealth in 1911 (Gerritsen 2010:18). Local historian Dick Kimber (1996) defines the period of worst violence — which he calls 'The Bad Old Days' — as starting with the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line in 1871 and ending around 1894. Others argue frontier conditions still prevail in Central Australia today.

## 4.1 Overview

There have been various mytho-poetic readings of Australian explorer journeys, notably the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition (Lambeth 2013:207). Yet, in Australian history and literature the figure of the *walking* explorer and the special considerations this brings is little examined (Harper 2008; Morrison 2012; 2014a, b). Stuart's remarkable recounting of his fourth journey — in which there are significant periods of walking — defines the colonial era of the Red Centre by clearly marking its beginning. Though turned back from his ultimate goal by conflict with Aborigines at a place north of Alice Springs now called Attack Creek, Stuart conquered the central desert that had roundly defeated his mentor Charles Sturt some 15 years earlier. Details of the fourth expedition were published in the South Australian parliamentary papers (1858-63/2001) and as a stand-alone volume (Stuart 1860/1983). Individual journals are available online (see 'John McDouall Stuart Society'), and there is a compilation volume of all of Stuart's journeys (Hardman 1865), which are cited widely (see Favenc 1888/1987; Powell 1996; Clune 1955; Hill 1999). The journeys are also the subject of a number of historical and biographical narratives (Webster 1958; Auld 1984; Bailey 2006; Mudie 1968; Stokes 1996; Threadgill 1922). Mudie (1968) notes there were many changes between the original journal manuscript and the published version, however *Stuart's Fourth Expedition* (1984) is reproduced exactly as Stuart wrote it. All versions of the published journal are divided by date of entry from the original manuscript: considering the number of published versions of the text, I use these dates rather than page numbers to cite from the text.

In his effort to reach the Centre, Stuart had many predecessors. In spite of the associated risks, the desire to walk the Centre of Australia was intense and prolonged, as Dampier's journal citation suggests (see epigraph). In all, nearly seven decades were spent seriously contemplating or endeavouring to conquer Australia's centre, which, as Haynes notes, was 'closely associated with politically establishing possession of the whole landmass by the phallocratic act of planting a flag at its centre' (Haynes 2002:6). Eyre's 1840 expedition had left the

impression that country north of the Flinders Ranges was a wasteland. Several expeditions helped to change this from 1856 on, including those of Benjamin Babbage, Peter Warburton and Augustus Gregory (Bell 2004:84). Babbage and Warburton had discovered what Warburton described as ‘bright green mounds rising out of a saltpan’, which turned out to be a collection of freshwater springs (ibid:85).<sup>26</sup> Proving travel in Eyre’s ‘wasteland’ was indeed possible, these mounds of water, long-recognised by Aborigines as highly-valued features of their trade routes through and about the region — and in part associated with the route of Marlpwenge and Nalenale examined previously — proved key to Europeans successfully traversing the north.

Stuart set out from Adelaide in 1858 on the first of three expeditions that would fail to reach the Centre. Yet each journey contributed to Stuart’s knowledge of a prospective route (Bell 2004: 84-87). Between 1860 and 1862, Stuart would cross and re-cross the Centre three times in under three years before finally reaching the Top End in July 1862, an extraordinary physical and mental achievement (Bell 2004:87). Stuart’s successful traversal was his sixth attempt, for which he had left Adelaide on 23 October the previous year, only one month after returning from his fifth expedition (Day 2003:203). But the landscape had exacted a toll: A slightly built man of 46 years, Stuart had to be carried on a litter slung between two horses for some 900 kilometres of the homeward leg, gripped by scurvy, unable to walk or ride. Though Theodore Strehlow calls Stuart ‘one of Australia’s greatest explorers’ (1967:1), Stuart nevertheless returned to England ‘white haired, exhausted and nearly blind’ to die in London in 1866 (Morris 1976). Stuart’s journey ignited the imaginations of generations of Australians, for whom he became one of several iconic figures of an emergent Australian bush mythology (Donovan and Wall 2004; Rowland 2004).

Surveyors and construction crews were soon stringing the Overland Telegraph Line northward along the path Stuart had struck. They were followed by cattle, settlement and the colonial frontier. David Carment (2011) discusses the

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<sup>26</sup> More recently, the mound springs have been described as natural leakages from the Great Artesian Basin through fractures where aquifers abut bedrock or where confining beds are thin (Moore 2005:64).

explorer's gaze with respect to Stuart; but to read the journals only for his imperial gaze is, as White suggests, 'to miss the complexity, the multiple ways in which people connect to multiple lands' (2007:6). There is also the question of to what degree Stuart's route was influenced by the Aborigines he encountered along the way, which may have bearing on his representation of them and on how the frontier is constructed. This subject is only just beginning to attract research attention, and is considered briefly here (Donovan and Wall 2004; Kerwin 2012).

The journal of Stuart's fourth attempt to reach the northern coast begins at Chambers Creek, well to the north of Adelaide, on Friday 2 March, 1860. With companions William Darton Kekwick and Benjamin Head, and thirteen horses, Stuart navigated into country to the northwest. By March 10 it had begun to rain and boggy conditions hampered their progress throughout the month. Nevertheless, the party reached Arrernte country and the Finke River in Central Australia by early April after which the terrain became much more difficult. By April 12 they were approaching the West MacDonnell Ranges at Brinkley's Bluff west of present day Alice Springs. According to his journal, Stuart ascended the bluff alone and on foot, later recording that it was 'the most difficult hill I have ever climbed' (April 13). Further north, Stuart enters Kaytetye country, where the Ancestors Marlpwenge and Nalenale began their journey, and makes camp at the supposed Centre of Australia, about 200 kilometres north of the MacDonnell Ranges on April 22. Having reached the goal Charles Sturt had set for himself some 15 years earlier but never attained, Stuart names the peak for his former leader.<sup>27</sup>

Pressing through Kaytetye country, the party reaches Bonney Creek and the Murchison Range in June, by which time Stuart's physical condition has deteriorated. His regular practice had been to scout ahead for water and a way forward before proceeding with the party. But after (re)naming and climbing Mt Strezlecki to build a cairn of stones on top only days before, on June 3 Stuart writes: 'I feel very unwell this morning, from the rough ride yesterday. It was my intention to have walked to the top of the range to-day, but I am not able to do so.'

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<sup>27</sup> The name was later changed to Mount Stuart.

On June 13 the party encounters Aborigines, then on June 23 visiting blacks bring them gifts of food. But by June 26, the Aborigines attack: Stuart retreats, avoiding firing on his aggressors until the last possible moment. But he is shaken by the incident, and next day, June 27, citing the size and health of his party, failing water supply and 'hostile natives', he abandons the mission. Stuart heads south to Adelaide to begin planning his fifth expedition, reaching Hamilton Springs once again in August and remaining there until September 1, when the group proceeds to Chambers Creek. Here the journal ends.

The frontier apparent from Stuart's text is enabled by the dualism of the nature/culture divide, a pillar of Modernity. According to Sundberg and Dempsey, this divide is built on four factors: patriarchy, colonialism, scientific epistemologies and capitalist-political-economic relations (2009:458). Stuart's text imparts frontier thinking to the imagining of Central Australia and his readers in several ways.

First I show how walking in Stuart's journal is germane to its representation of place and identity. Second, I demonstrate how the text constructs Stuart as a hero of Enlightenment progress who conquers a harsh wilderness. There is no doubt Stuart's experience of the desert was physically tough. But as cause and effect, these two matters are co-dependent: in order for Stuart to become the hero, the landscape must, by needs, be difficult to cross. This representation of space perhaps underpinned — or at least provided historical support for — later less flattering representations of the Centre, such as Gregory's 'Dead Heart' (1905). In Stuart's text and in the colonial imagination, space becomes homogenous, the totemic geography of the Arrernte, Kaytetye and others is swept clear, ready for inscribing anew by colonists eager to recreate space as place in their own image and in pursuit of Enlightenment goals. Such aims differ markedly from the emplaced identity of the Kaytetye as described previously.

Third, I demonstrate Stuart's outsidership in this space, which, to the Aboriginal groups whose country he crosses, is home. By its very morphology, the frontier implies that home for Stuart is elsewhere, and turning this 'wilderness' space into place is the task ahead. Stuart's geographical naivety is really a hubris born of a

Cartesian epistemology, and a refusal to acknowledge the emplaced knowledge of the Aborigines. I argue Stuart's outsider position combined with such hubris led him to a naïve appraisal of the landscape, almost certainly contributing to the difficulty of his experience.

Fourth, I examine Stuart's imperial mission in the context of its Enlightenment and Modernist setting. I argue that for Stuart, walking was a form of work, performed in the colonial service of conquering a wilderness in which nature was foe: what mattered most was progress for self and Empire. The desert is also a spiritual stage upon which Stuart might demonstrate his worth to God. Modernist notions of time cast the Aborigines as primitives and therefore part of nature, leading Stuart to legitimately ignore whatever knowledge they might have to offer, such as the location of water and access to food. Instead, the Aborigines were relegated to the other side of an impermeable frontier.

Finally, I argue that while Stuart's representation of Aborigines reinforces this frontier divide, there is ample evidence of an ambivalence that is counter-discursive to the notion of a rigid boundary with little intercultural exchange. I examine difference portrayed in terms of Doomed Race Theory, the songlines and wayfinding, and the events at Attack Creek which resulted in Stuart abandoning the journey. To begin, I outline the context within which Stuart's text is considered then move on to the analysis.

## **4.2 Genre and context**

As Jennifer Speake notes, the exploration journey is a part of the history of most continents (2013:7). Certainly, the journey is seminal in shaping Australian postcolonial history and identity as well as a Central Australian literature (Dewar 2008; Lynch 2007; Haynes 1998; Favenc 1987; Griffiths 1996). Postcolonialism has guided much of the analysis of this Australian travel literature since the 1980s (Archer 2006; Brown 1991; Clarke 2002; Morrison 2012a) with journals by Australian explorers treated as a form of travel writing (White 2007:2; Clarke 2002:149; see also Carter 2010; Ryan 1996). Clarke (2002:149) notes ownership of space is an important theme in travel writing about Central Australia; further,

he argues that ‘the authority of the exploration text depends on the rhetorical construction of the explorer’ (ibid:153). For in the figure of the explorer is imagined the power and progress of empire (Danson 1994:59). I argue however, that a postcolonial appraisal of the explorer journey is incomplete without also accounting for the body, in the way Merleau Ponty has postulated (as a portal to place 1969:248-9). This element, I submit, is missing from much critical analyses of the travel writing of Australia. By isolating instances of walking, my intention is to foreground and interrogate this dimension of the explorer narrative. The argument builds on previous work by Morris (1988), Marcus (1988), Kimber (1990; 1996), Ryan (1996), Clarke (2002), Davis and Rose (2005), Harper (2007) and Rowley (1996).

As Graulund observes, the assumption with which the postcolonialists begin — that the explorers’ journals are a form of travel writing — warrants closer inspection (2006:143). Stuart lives during a golden age of nineteenth century exploration and colonisation when for European settlers Australia still exists largely as blank spaces. Travelling had the purpose of amassing wealth or fame, resulting in texts like Stuart’s that focus largely on the objectives of the journey and the building of a settler nation. Modern travellers, on the other hand, are differently motivated, resulting in ‘more explicitly autobiographical travel books’ that have a more purposefully self-referential focus (Graulund 2006:143-44). The basic difference is the consequences of the journey, which often proved dire for the explorer.

Occasionally however, some explorers wax lyrical. William Ernest Powell Giles, who sought an east-west route across the continent to Perth in 1874, is, for example, quite playful when he writes that the Olgas (Kata Tjuta) are like ‘the backs of several monstrous kneeling pink elephants’, or ‘a gigantic pink damper’ (1889:247). Indeed, some explorers looked beyond the struggle of the journey to find an appreciation of landscape, albeit framed in Eurocentric terms. Charles Sturt, who had vied for Central Australia with Stuart in 1844, once wrote he had never ‘been happier than when roving through the woods’ (McLaren 1996:77 cited in Harper 2007:13). Conversely, Stuart’s journal mostly retains a cloak of



scientific objectivity. Using Graulund's measure as a guide then, I suggest Stuart's prose is toward the explorer end of a textual spectrum of the journey, even though, his journal strays occasionally to travel writing.

Situated in this 'age of discovery', Stuart's text takes on a broader mission. Stuart's successful expedition marks the beginning of a phase of rapid infrastructure growth and dramatic change for the Aborigines. In one sense, prior to beginning the journey, the land is a blank canvas in the explorer's mind. It is the white void marking the centre of the earliest map, labelled simply as 'unknown'. And yet, in another sense it is already filled with mystery and hopes as yet unrealised, a landscape ready for inscription, an object of desire. Paul Arthur has described seventeenth century exploration maps that imagine, prior to first landing or cross-cultural contact, what might be found on the Australian continent: some reported as 'featuring curious images of elephants roaming the vast interior region' (1999:136). As the traveller makes his journey, step by step, naming as he goes, the landscape is recorded anew. As Paul Carter has argued, such a journey and record serves to 'bring the country into historical being' (Carter 2010:69). The logic of such exploration is neither geographical nor economic, but is derived, says Carter, from the 'inexorable continuity of the journal' (*ibid*: 74), which virtually digests space and excretes text and ultimately place.

#### **4.3 Walking in the journal of Stuart's fourth expedition**

Unlike the walking of Rousseau or Thoreau, Stuart's walking was not an opportunity for reverie, or like Wordsworth an aid to literary creativity. On the fourth expedition, and in spite of his rapidly deteriorating health, Stuart regularly climbed a steep bluff or mountain in order to get his bearings and to scout the country ahead, country that was unknown to him and where water was scarce. Such walking segments, I argue, shape the journal's representation of space and place and the way an audience remembers it. This conclusion renders an explorer peripatetic more critical to the region's representation than has been previously acknowledged. Further, it is this image of the explorer on foot which clings most doggedly to the Australian psyche, perhaps because it is so frequently reinforced in nationalist mythologies. It is crucial therefore to know why these walks came

about, how they shaped Stuart's representations of place, and, by turn, Australia's popular imaginings of identity.

Concentrating on the walking in Stuart's journeys offers an embodied analysis of the explorer, not normally a part of much postcolonial analysis. As Solnit has noted, walking brings about that 'crucial element of engagement of the body and the mind with the world, of knowing the world through the body and the body through the world' (2001:29). As I will show, corporeal effects are important in Stuart's representations of landscape in the text. Here is Paul Carter's 'exploring as a mode of knowing' (2010:187); in Carter's reckoning (citing explorers Mitchell and Flinders), the nature of exploring was epistemological, combining the God-like gaze with the small and particular through personal associations (2010:132-5,182-7, 200). Personal influences are manifest in the naming of places traversed during the journey. Consequently, Stuart's walking is largely a navigational and mapping practice. While there are exceptions, walking for the explorers of Central Australia was largely a form of work.

Harper's (2007) analysis emphasises the role of walking in exploration journeys, though it touches only briefly on Central Australia, in regard to Burke and Wills who passed to the east. She notes that: 'even when the expedition included riding horses, at least some of the party usually went on foot . . . And on those that were fully mounted . . . the riders could very often become walkers' (ibid: 11). While walking was largely a form of work for the early colonists of Sydney, diaries and letters from the period reveal some also walked purely for leisure: going for picnics, or day trips in the woods (ibid: 3-4). On Harper's evidence, many early settlers brought a well-developed walking culture with them to Australia from Britain. But the walkers soon discovered the place itself gave new shape to the old ways. Whereas walking in Britain was largely over settled and populated country dotted with ruins, steeped in history and sporting welcoming inns spaced at regular intervals, Australia was entirely alien with no such familiar conveniences. For the would-be rural walker and nature lover, the country was hostile: physically difficult, uneven and at times rocky, making for uncomfortable walking. Yet of the explorers, Harper suggests: 'While these journeys were often

extremely laborious, often life threatening, and had a purpose other than pleasure, this did not mean that pleasure was not an element of the walk' (ibid:12).

Harper argues further, that the explorers' journals or publications sometimes read as if written by a tourist in search of pleasure (ibid:13). Admittedly, it is plausible that Stuart and his men took breaks for a pleasurable walk, especially at well-watered camps such as the Finke River. But Stuart has not reported this. Even if the explorers did go for pleasurable walks however, it would not have suited Stuart's purpose to report the fact. Just as he did not report the natives' cleverness at finding water (see below), a pleasant walk might have broken the spell Stuart weaves, of the suffering explorer as romantic hero. To be fair, he *was* suffering in his effort to cross country which lack of knowledge rendered undeniably harsh. Likening the journeys of the Central Australian explorers to a European walking tour however — and further blurring the lines between exploration, travel and tourism — trivialises the severity of their physical experience as well as militating against the dire political consequences of the colonialist imperative for Aboriginal people.

Milestones of Stuart's journey include the crossing of the central ranges and the scaling of Central Mt Sturt and numerous other peaks on foot, as well as incidental walking such as botanising. But the physical effort of these walks brought tremendous pain to his scurvy-depleted limbs throughout the nights and days that followed. The walking milestones would be remembered as the high points of a remarkable journey and later represented in art, poetry and literature, embedding them as cornerstones of a mythology of the man who conquered the Centre.

Financed by Adelaide merchant William Finke, Stuart's first expedition of 1858 aimed to investigate freshwater mound springs to the north of Adelaide, discovered earlier by surveyors Benjamin Babagge and Peter Warburton. Stuart took with him an Aboriginal guide, and at first followed the man's directions (Tues, June 15). But Stuart quickly records his dissatisfaction with him from early on (June 15, 20, 25). Encounter with Aborigines is absent from the 1858 journal, being evident only as grisly remains, forgotten implements left near abandoned

camp fires scattered on the banks of creeks and waterholes. This is to become a pattern in Stuart's later journey texts, a type of representation in itself, and is taken up further below. On his second and third expeditions, Stuart reportedly locates the mound springs that enabled all further northward travel for the next 150 years (Moore 2011:64; Wall and Donovan 2004:84). Trust in camels was still uncertain as Stuart planned his expeditions, and confidence in the beasts increased slowly.<sup>28</sup> Integral to many nineteenth-century explorer journeys, walking persisted as a means of purposeful travel throughout the colonial era and beyond.

As the epigraph from Ernest Giles demonstrates, walking in Central Australia is tough on the body and requires endurance wearing on the mind. Such a bodily experience bears heavily on human perception, and both effects are evident in a certain weariness pervading Stuart's descriptions; as he notes in June:

I got up a tree to look over the top of this scrub, which is about twelve feet high, and I could see our course for a long distance; it appears to be the same terrible scrub, with no sign of any creeks.

For Stuart, walking was unrelated to the overall aims of the journey and certainly had little to do with a romantic European peripatetic popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Stuart relied on horses to carry water; furthermore, if the men had not ridden much of the route, they might not have lasted the distance. For example, on May 7 Stuart writes: 'Arrived at the creek after dark. Kekwick's horse is entirely done up; he had to get off and lead him for two miles.' In other words, if Stuart could have ridden a horse up Mt Sturt, he would have. There is no doubt that the going for Stuart and his party — as well as the colonists who would follow — was difficult. Stuart's most extensive walk on April 28 near Mt Denison is exemplary, where the hills were 'very rough' and Stuart had a 'great deal of difficulty'. And just when he arrives 'as I fancied, to the top', there was 'another gulley to cross'. At the summit the view was 'extensive but not encouraging'.

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<sup>28</sup> Camels were first imported into Australia from the Canary Islands in 1846 (Gregory 1905:40). The next importation was by the Victorian Government in 1860 for Burke and Wills. By 1893, 50 Afghans were running 400 camels to all points of the compass from the terminus for the Great Northern Railway, established at Oodnadatta in 1889. For more on camels, see <http://www.cameleers.net>.

Many of Stuart's pivotal moments however, and importantly those most likely to inscribe the national memory, were spent on foot. These episodes largely shaped his textual representation of himself as the hero explorer, to which I now turn.

#### 4.4 Identity, space and Stuart the hero

The textual construction of Stuart's identity and its implications for representations of space and place emerge more by contrast with nature than by contrast with an Aboriginal other (and are made more explicit by Stuart's framing of Aborigines as part of nature). The harshness of the 'wilderness' landscape is emphasised in the text through the difficulty found walking it.

There is a resonance here between Stuart's words and his frame of mind, in the way Paul Carter describes for explorers generally (2010:283). Stuart's descriptions are filled with his struggles as the going is repeatedly described as 'very difficult'. Based on evidence from the period 1860-1890, Centre historian Dick Kimber suggests good rains were more frequent during the nineteenth century than after 1895 (Kimber 1996:92). This means Stuart saw the landscape under the best possible conditions. On March 12 at Milne Springs for example, Stuart writes: 'The country is so boggy that I cannot proceed today.' He notes also that the rain will mean good feed and water for the horses. Boggy conditions trouble Stuart for the next few days. Crossing the Peake (river) required several attempts between March 15 and 16, and Stuart's notes become more detailed around the loss of a horse 'Billy' in the flow. The party camps in heavy rain and there is a 'sad accident' on March 18.

For Stuart, the desert — later to be widely dubbed 'the bush' — is unfamiliar space. His aim is to cross and map it, but his intention reaches beyond the present mission to the telegraph line construction crews and settlers who will follow him. Stuart's prospectorial eye must assess whether the settlers will be able to convert the space before him into a place where Europeans can live and thrive. Here geographical knowledge is really personal knowledge (Carter 2010:182) and for explorers this is often subject to mood and reflected in the names given to the places they map and the descriptions they give.

Illustrating this point are the wet and difficult conditions of 1860, which are actually an asset to Stuart, water being plentiful as a result. From the journal however, there emerges an adversarial understanding of nature. The conditions yield a representation of the explorer as romantic hero, pitting his wits and strength against the wilderness. Here and throughout Stuart's record, nature is something to be conquered, and, as Dewar (1993) observes of nineteenth century writers of the Territory, the hostile and threatening are emphasised. McGrath (1991) and Clarke (2002) note journals such as Stuart's helped fashion Central Australia as 'an initiation ground for male warriors where the explorer was defined as the epitome of courage' (McGrath 1991:118). Such notions are shaped by prevailing Enlightenment thought, being that it was a number of social, political and cultural changes that occurred near the end of the eighteenth century (Rabinow 2010:37). The Enlightenment emphasised bringing light to the Dark Age based on a core belief in human progress, and the 'power of reason to improve human society' (Barry 2002:85). In his essay *Was ist Aufklärung* (1784/2013), Immanuel Kant argues Enlightenment is man's emergence from a self-imposed immaturity. Michel Foucault interprets this to be 'both a process in which men participate collectively and as an act of courage to be accomplished personally. Men are at once elements and agents of a single process' (Rabinow 2010:35). For Stuart, persistent acts of courage were a necessary part of 'knowing the centre' and achieving the 'progress' his journey hoped for. The ultimate goal of this effort, this 'daring to know', is, as Kant suggests, for man to raise himself out of his immaturity (1784:2-3).

'Daring to know' had been the basis of long-standing speculation regarding an inland sea somewhere to the north of Adelaide and had driven efforts to explore the region. While there is clearly an element of identity-forging bravado in Stuart's account of the fourth expedition, it is also important to remember that for Europeans, the arid conditions *were* hostile and threatening. Even after Stuart had crossed the continent and the Telegraph Line was complete, Giles almost perished on the edge of the Gibson Desert to the west in 1874. Giles had given his

companion Gibson his own horse after Gibson's died, along with instructions to follow their tracks back to seek help. As a result, Giles is forced to walk to safety:

I started, bent double by the keg, and could only travel so slowly that I thought it scarcely worth travelling at all. I became so thirsty at each step I took, that I longed to drink every drop of water I had in the keg, but it was the elixir of death I was burdened with, and to drink it was to die (1889:39-40).

The passage demonstrates even more acutely perhaps than at any time in Stuart's fourth journal, just how ill-suited Europeans are to the desert environment. If Stuart or Giles had communicated with Aborigines and learned what resources the landscape might have offered them, all of this might have been very different.

While Giles' prose emphasises the romantic aspects of his ordeals, Stuart's maintains a more objective manner, only occasionally straying to more colourful description, as in the loss of Billy at The Peake (previously cited). His landscape description is largely pragmatic, seemingly unaffected by an earlier Romanticism that had found favour in Britain and Europe. Yet he occasionally strays to the imaginative. Stuart described the vertical red stack of Chamber's Pillar for example, as a 'locomotive engine with its funnel'. As Simon Ryan observes, rocks were often described as castles and grassy plains as seas (Ryan 2013b:1153). Stuart's gaze however, is overwhelmingly that of the imperialist whose aim is to conquer an untamed wilderness for the purpose of development, concerned most with matters of ownership of space and knowledge (Clarke 2002:149; Morris 1988:178).

In this respect, there is hubris in Stuart's text, for as his struggles mount his objectivity is revealed as a thin veneer. The explorer becomes what Carter has described as both 'the knight of romance and of the empirical sciences' (2010:73). Later linked to constructions of nation, this difficult terrain is made more difficult by virtue of Stuart's outsider perspective. For example, as Stuart and his party approach the Centre in early April the topography changes again, such that more and more walking is required. On April 9, Stuart starts for the highest point of the James Range through thick mulga scrub, about 100 km south of present day Alice

Springs. The range is composed of ‘soft red sandstone, long blocks of it lying on the side’, which he had difficulty crossing. His course is intercepted by:

deep, perpendicular ravines, which we were obliged to round after a great deal of trouble, having our saddlebags torn to pieces, and our skin and clothes in the same predicament. We arrived at the foot nearly naked . . .

It is easy to imagine many detours, dismounts and searches on foot for a better way ahead during this difficult day. From this point Stuart begins to encounter problems. The next day his saddlebags are damaged, and the next he discovers ‘my poor little mare, Polly, has got staked in the fetlock-joint, and is nearly dead lame; but I must proceed . . .’

Throughout this period, Stuart scales nearby hills and peaks to get his bearings and scout for water. On April 10, Stuart ascends a sand hill to spy ‘a large number of native encampments . . . rushes are growing in and about the creek: there is plenty of water.’ Stuart comes to rely on two things: a high vantage point from which to observe the landscape, and, increasingly, the presence of natives as a signifier of water. Ryan notes that a high vantage point was an essential tool in the explorer’s kit (2013a:14-15). It provided Stuart a commanding position, exerting a militaristic power of occupation over and above that of the indigene, as well as a point of view mimicking that of the map, in other words, the God-like position (Ryan 1996, 2013a; de Certeau 1984; Carter 2010). In Central Australia, the physical strain on explorers wanting to attain the ‘God-like’ position by walking the rugged terrain, combines with a lack of knowledge of an alien land and what resources it might offer, to put them at odds with the environment. The walking sectors of the journey take their toll, and it soon becomes clear these are the toughest on the explorers, physically and mentally, and also the events that remain most vividly in the mind of the reader. The struggle of Man against wilderness reinforces a dominant myth of national identity. Yet this struggle with nature as foe also serves to hide Stuart’s expropriation of Aboriginal land.

#### 4.5 The outsider and the possibility of home

As a first time visitor to Central Australia, Stuart was clearly an outsider. According to Relph (1976), an ‘authentic sense of place’ cannot be realised



without a sense of belonging. I suggest Stuart's position might be thought of as that of *incidental outsider*, for whom places are viewed as backgrounds for activities (Peet 1998:50). Several things demonstrate Stuart's outsider status: his lack of knowledge of flora and fauna, unfamiliarity with sources of water, and the consequences of these issues for the health and stamina of his party.

Like many in the nineteenth century, Stuart was fond of botanising. Settlement of Australia coincided with the heyday of natural history and much walking of the 'new' Australian landscape was for its scientific appeal (Harper 2007:10). Emphasis was placed on all things taxonomic, corresponding with recent developments in the field (Archibald 2009; Darwin 1859). Joseph Banks started the fascination with nature in 1770, inspiring many botanists and nature enthusiasts who followed. Australia provided ample opportunities for the amateur naturalist and the practice of botanising often appears as motivation for a walk (Harper 2007:10). Evidence of botanising abounds in Stuart's journal: On April 20 he 'discovers' a new tree and the seed of a vegetable, which 'we have found . . . most useful; it can be eaten as a salad, boiled as a vegetable, or cooked as a fruit'. On April 24 Kekwick brings back 'a new rose of a beautiful description, having thorns on its branches, and a seed-vessel resembling a gherkin.' Despite such botanical forays, Stuart remains largely ignorant of Central Australian flora and fauna, emphasising his status as an outsider and shaping his appraisal of the landscape and its inhabitants. It is at the Finke River however, that this ignorance is most clearly evident.

When Stuart reaches the Finke River during April, his journal hardly records seeing anyone, even though he spies native tracks, wurleys, fish weirs, shields, spears and waddies. However, when AH Elliot arrived in the vicinity of the Finke River in the 1870s, only shortly after Stuart, it was to 'large camps of laughing niggers' at 'every permanent waterhole on the Finke'.<sup>29</sup> Based on Elliot's report, Theodore Strehlow describes the Finke in Stuart's day as:

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<sup>29</sup> So he told TGH Strehlow in 1933, leading to estimates of up to 1000 people living and hunting on foot in the Finke River Valley alone around the time of Stuart's visit (Strehlow 1967:5).

a broad band of clean white sand, studded with reed-fringed permanent waterholes. These waterholes were filled with fish brought down by floods from their breeding grounds in the deep pools situated in the gorges of the Western MacDonnells; most of these gorges and their waterholes were inviolable sacred sites, and hence constituted game sanctuaries as well (1967:4).

While Stuart is aware he has entered good country, and acknowledges a native presence and a number of new birds, he nevertheless records a very different view:

The creek runs over a space of about two miles, coming from the west; the bed sandy. After leaving it, on a bearing of 329 degrees, for nine miles, we passed over a plain of as fine a country as any man would wish to see—a beautiful red soil covered with grass a foot high; after that it becomes a little sandy. At fifteen miles we got into some sand hills, but the feed was still most abundant. I have not passed through such splendid country since I have been in the colony.

Stuart's focus remains fixed on his stated mission: find pastoral country, strike a route northward, map it. For pasture Stuart has keen eyes, but to edible species which might feed his expedition, he is largely blind. As Carter (2010) and Ryan (1996, 2013a) have described, the explorer's gaze is linked closely to intent (see also Meinig 1976). The grasses would provide feed for Stuart's horses and future cattle, a concern ever on Stuart's mind. Such observations however, lack the nuance that longer exposure to a landscape can bring. As Buell notes, 'the best environmental writers continually recalibrate familiar landscapes' (Buell 1995:262). The best explorers can do is to check their observations on the return journey (Carter 2010:182). Stuart had neither time nor motivation for a hermeneutic (or Thoreauvian) approach to walking and recording place, to 'return again and again to the things themselves' (Schneider 2000:121). His ability to 'know' the landscape is constrained by his lack of geographic familiarity, the pace of the journey and the urgency and primacy of his imperial mission, as well as the unrelenting need to find water and feed. Had he known, for example, Stuart might have availed himself of ample supplies of kangaroo, wallaby, giant goanna, snakes and bush vegetables, which, according to Strehlow and his informants, were to be found in abundance (Strehlow 1967:4-5). To his detriment, 'Stuart only briefly used local knowledge,' writes historian Rick Moore, who 'can't find a

good reason why he did not use it more' (Moore 2011). Accordingly, Stuart's battle with nature continues through early April in the James Range, where he made slow progress toward what he would eventually name the MacDonnell Ranges, later linked to representations of an Australian national identity (Dewar 1996, 1997, 2008:212-214; Stratton 1989; Carment 2005). Typically now, on April 11 Stuart records 'I hoped to-day to have gained the top of the bluff, which is still seven or eight miles off, and appears to be so very rough that I anticipate a deal of difficulty in crossing it'.

Next day Stuart sets out for the bluff he will name Brinkley's, crossing and re-crossing the Hugh River. But the route is difficult and it takes him all afternoon. The following morning at sunrise:

I ascended the bluff, which is the most difficult hill I have ever climbed; it took me an hour and a half to reach the top. It is very high, and is composed principally of igneous rock, with a little ironstone, much the same as the ranges down the country. On reaching the top, I was disappointed; the view was not so good as I expected, in consequence of the morning being so very hazy. I have, however, been enabled to decide what course to take (April 13).

Today, Brinkley's Bluff is a renowned beauty spot for trekkers on the Larapinta Trail. Stuart, concerned perhaps with the needs of the expedition, makes little of the view, remarking only that it was 'hazy' and 'not as good as expected'. The significance of Stuart's journal entry about the climb is in his relief as leader, as he writes: 'I have however, been enabled to decide what course to take.' Again, here is Stuart's explorer's gaze writ plain; as Carter has argued of both the explorers and the settlers who would subsequently read their journals: 'they read them as they read the country, with a definite end in mind.' (Carter 2010:140, also 235). But for Stuart the hard work was not over, for

I had a terrible job in getting down the bluff; one false step and I should have been dashed to pieces in the abyss below; I was thankful when I arrived safely at the foot (April 13).

Without these difficult sojourns on foot, many of the obstacles Stuart and his men met on their journey north may not have been overcome. As well as defining the seminal moments of the journey, they are the means by which Stuart gains the high ground, the vantage points he requires to decide his next step. But they also

describe the difference between exploration journals and travel writing. The journal serves to legitimise the rights of Europeans to claim space and to appropriate culture (see Clarke 2002:149, Morris 1988:171; Dewar 1993). While Stuart's remains a text of dispossession nevertheless, to treat it only as travel writing would detract from the seriousness of the explorers' physical undertaking; a seriousness plainly evident in the walking segments of Stuart's journey.

#### 4.6 Raising the flag for God and empire

In Stuart's planting of the flag on Mt Sturt at the nation's centre, his dedication to the project of empire is made clear. As well as noting that Stuart's apprehension of space is led largely by ideas of the Enlightenment and Modernity, in this section I argue that the Centre is also a spiritual stage upon which Stuart might prove his worth to God. Here also is seen the beginning of an ambivalence toward the natives that belies the unimpeachable rigidity of the frontier.

After camping at the geographic centre of Australia some 200km north of present day Alice Springs, Stuart takes Kekwick and the flag and climbs to the top of the peak he will name Mt Sturt, again finding the going 'much higher and more difficult ... than I anticipated.' At the top he builds a large stone cairn, in the centre of which he places a pole with the British flag nailed to it, and

gave three hearty cheers for the flag, the emblem of civil and religious liberty, and may it be a sign to the natives that the dawn of liberty, civilization, and Christianity is about to break upon them (April 23).

Australia was colonised during a period in which Enlightenment values such as these had fostered a perception of nature as a phenomenon to be studied in its own right (Heathcote 1987). Emergent capitalism further underscored a belief in progress, inciting themes such as economic development, growing the population and expanding from the south-east into the 'rest' of Australia (Stratton 1989:41). Such ideas drove the machinery of the frontier. In this way, explorers such as Sturt, Stuart, Giles, and Burke and Wills, can be seen as agents of an emergent science (Carter 1988:46-61) and nature as something to be tamed and improved in the interest of human advancement (Heathcote 1987; Stratton 1989; Haynes 1998). Exploration pushed forward the imagined line of the frontier and opened

the dry interior to the productive gaze of capitalists. Yet some romantics continued to revere the deserts as pathways to salvation and redemption, a place far from civilisation and technology, where one found peace, solitude and where God was close.

On Mt Sturt, Stuart is preparing the way for a transfer of sovereignty and knowledge to the people. Such knowledge was power, and in keeping with the Enlightenment paradigm, such power might have allowed the primitives (who up until now Stuart has largely ignored), to better themselves and perhaps (presumably) to eventually hold sway over nature like the settlers. Enlightenment thought was considered 'progressive' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979:3), a freeing of humanity from suspicion and fear (Bate 2000:76). And yet such a conclusion clashes with the earlier representation of Aborigines as primitives and traditionalist, a part of nature. Were the natives to be considered primitives, or were they a people capable of rising to Stuart's new dawn of liberty and Christianity? The answer invites an examination of ideas prevailing at the time.

The Australian Aborigines had been viewed as part of nature since the first encounter between whites and blacks at Sydney Cove in 1788. In 'Description of the Natives of New South Wales', Watkin Tench invites the reader to 'contemplate the simple, undistinguished workings of nature, in her most artless colouring' (Tench 1789; also cited McGregor 1997:1). In 1793, Tench introduces the concept of savagery as a stage in the early development of mankind, writing: 'If the Aborigines be considered a nation, they certainly rank very low, even in the scale of savages' (Tench 1793:281; also cited McGregor 1997:1). And though Tench notes the natives possess 'considerable . . . acumen, or sharpness of intellect' they also 'hate toil, and place happiness in inaction'. Progress according to Enlightenment thinking however, required an 'application of labour' (Tench 1793:281). As McGregor notes, by associating savagery with indolence, Tench invokes the Enlightenment (1997:2). It is just such an edict that shapes Stuart's walking as a form of work, a suffering in the interests of his end goal: the Top End certainly, but also his progression up the ladder of human evolution. Work set civilised man apart from the savages, and it was 'the cultivation of the soil that

was the necessary badge of civilization' (McGregor 1997:2). French and Scottish ideas of progress were staged and followed a 'natural' sequence, from savagery (hunting and gathering) to barbarism (nomadic pastoralism) to civilisation (agriculture and commerce). As McGregor suggests (1997:4), Tench was convinced of the superiority of European civilization over the inferiority of Aboriginal savagery, yet still perceived a common humanity, they were just at a different point on the evolutionary scale:

that untaught man is the same in Pall Mall, as in the wilderness of New South Wales: and ultimately let them hope, and trust, that the progress of reason, and the splendor of revelation, will in their proper and allotted season, be permitted to illumine, and transfuse into these desert regions, knowledge, virtue, and happiness (Tench 1793:278-94).

Tench's statement provides the link to Stuart's heralding of the arrival of the Enlightenment atop Mt Sturt, which I suggest is a further motivation for Stuart's mission: to bring the benefits of progress to the Aborigines. I take up this argument further below, but it is clear there is an ambiguity in Stuart's representation of Aborigines, which in turn imparts ambivalence to the journal's textual constructions of the frontier. A diversity of opinion on such matters was however, commonplace. Based on the same Enlightenment thinking, Judge-Advocate David Collins had concluded the Aborigines were incapable of becoming civilized and useful members of society (Collins 1798/1975). The Great Chain of Being and other representations had imagined nature as a hierarchy of differently developed creatures arranged in sequence, from inanimate matter through to the simple organism, with man high in the rankings and God crowning the collection at its apex (Gordon 2003:215, 269).<sup>30</sup> Europeans had soon filled the gap between man and monkey with black races situated closest to the simian at the base of the human sector (McGregor 1997:5).

In addition to the acclaim Stuart was likely to receive by traversing the Centre, it is conceivable there was perhaps another motive for his struggle: to modernise the 'primitives'. In this identity, Stuart shapes a further auto-representation as 'selfless' hero. But the conflict between the two representations of Aborigines is

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<sup>30</sup> Though even God would be displaced under humanist and Enlightenment thought.

not resolvable, and merely denotes the ambiguities arising from the journal. In a beautiful moment of irony, for example, Stuart also observes from the summit that ‘We can see no water from the top’ (April 23). Recurrent in Stuart’s entries now is the search for water. Yet the local Aboriginal people have no trouble finding it themselves. Again, Stuart makes no comment about this. While this is what the reader has by now come to expect from the mission-focussed Stuart, the lack of such comment highlights what is missing from the journal, and, as Carter has observed of explorer texts, renders any presumed linearity or continuity of such journals an illusion (2010:175).

As I have shown in the previous chapter, Aborigines constructed place by ritual walking, a form of pilgrimage yielding a network of known nodes joined by walking paths. Such paths linked important water sources along the songlines: many of the soaks, wells and waterholes were sacred sites. Stuart’s walking is fundamentally different from this, and is defined by both the means of travel and his intent. The territory which the explorer crosses is unknown to him; Stuart brings his own food and carries as much water as he can, knowing he must find more during the journey, yet presuming his ability to do so is limited. In doing this, Stuart manages a risk that is exaggerated by his lack of local knowledge.

Combined with a reluctance to seek help, Stuart’s lack of knowledge led to difficulties later in the journey, especially to the north of Fisher in early May. Worn out and plagued by scurvy, Stuart reaches for a spiritual explanation for his hardship. Stuart had found few native tracks, which by May he was equating with a lack of water. As a result he retreats to Mt Denison. To this extent, Stuart is by now reading the footprints of the Aborigines to help him make decisions.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, Stuart’s condition worsens, whereby, after a fall from his mount:

Scurvy also has taken a very serious hold of me; my hands are a complete mass of sores that will not heal . . . My mouth and gums are now so bad that I am obliged to eat flour and water boiled. The pains in my limbs and muscles are almost insufferable (May 15).

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<sup>31</sup> The horses don’t do as well on the return leg, and it may be walking and leading the horses is more frequent here (eg May 7). The group rests from May 8-12, but by May 15 the horses again need rest.

Again, Moore argues that if Stuart had taken more notice of the Aborigines, perhaps he would not have suffered so badly, as bush foods could have provided him with the vitamins he needed (2011). For two nights however, Stuart suffers worst of all, when

Violent pains darted at intervals through my whole body. My powers of endurance were so severely tested, that, last night, I almost wished that death would come and relieve me from my fearful torture. I am so very weak that I must with patience abide my time, and trust in the Almighty (May 16).

Stuart's passion in this passage invokes the Burkean sublime (Burke 1998), which Clarke notes is a common device of the explorer text (2002:153). Like the nature writer the explorer walks a narrow divide between rhapsody and detachment (see Slovic 1996:353). The language of the sublime casts nature-as-physical-environment in the role of Other (ibid:352), in accordance with the dualism of a frontier. Similarly, Ryan argues the sublime was 'a way of capturing and annulling the terror [of the landscape] by including it within a system of European aesthetics' (1996:85; see also Clarke 2002:154). Either way, Stuart believes he is guided by God in his struggle. Alone in the desert with only God to face, many desert pilgrims would try to overcome bodily pain and discomfort in order to attain spiritual enlightenment (Haynes 1998:29). That Stuart sees his mission as a 'fearful torture' and that only by resorting to 'trust in the Almighty' might he see it through, indicates he sees a higher purpose to his journey.

That Stuart's crisis becomes spiritual is perhaps unsurprising. Stuart's dedication to rationality and the mores of the Enlightenment are antithetical to Romanticism. As Jonathan Bate notes, adherence to the instrumentalities of the Enlightenment was believed to free man from the tyranny of nature (2000:78). For Stuart, the Enlightenment delivers this same pact: God will end his suffering, his 'fearful torture', if only he can adhere to the plan and press on against all odds. In part, here is the answer to Stuart's reluctance to accept guidance from the Aborigines, an attitude which is both shaped by and shapes a dualism of the frontier. Persistent acts of such courage are in concert with Enlightenment ideals. Kant suggests the pursuit of knowledge and the concomitant use of reason had to be extended from



private use to public use, without the constraints imposed by authority (1784). In this way the use of reason became political as well as personal and both were in keeping with a sense of the eternal. For Stuart to have taken direction from the Aborigines was to thwart this path to improvement for self and Empire. To accept help from 'primitives' would be to step outside his Enlightenment framework and across the frontier that Stuart's very being ascribes to the landscape and his experience of Aborigines.

Stuart's dilemma is that of Baudelaire's modernist: modernity disrupts the continuity of time, privileging the disruption itself over any adherence to tradition (Baudelaire 1970:15). Baudelaire's modernism does not 'liberate man in his own being,' nor does it render him more content in the present moment; instead it 'compels him to face the task of producing himself' (Rabinow 2010:33). Baudelaire invokes an Enlightenment sense of duty for man to free himself from the chains of submission to authority through the exercise of reason. Stuart demonstrates this modernist leaning: not satisfied with who he is, but rather the man he may become through his herculean effort and achievement, Stuart persists through tremendous personal hardship toward his goal. Baudelaire believes such change is wrought through art, but Stuart is performing this transformation through the journey. He performs his duty to free himself from his 'vulgar, earthy, vile nature'; Stuart is Foucault's 'disciple of the modern' (Rabinow 2010:33). Stuart's walking then is not only a matter of work, but a task of the spirit and modernity: he resorts to walking for pragmatic reasons, yet walking also figures in a sort of spiritual economy in which he profits only by remaining dedicated to reason, through which he enacts progress by struggle and suffering.

Modernity calls into question the course of time by asking: 'what difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?' (Rabinow 2010:34). This invokes a necessary binary between modern and traditional thinking, and by inference splits a way of being. It is this binary, I suggest, which takes its geographical and metaphoric manifestation as 'the frontier' in Central Australia. This is a much less porous boundary than the intertribal borders of the Aborigines. Stuart's way of being in the landscape was to invent the landscape afresh as an imperialist land of

opportunity as he progressed along this path, that path being both across the land and along not only his spiritual road to Enlightenment by virtue of his struggle and courage to determine his own identity, but toward an enlightened society through progress at a political and institutional level. So the landscape is both an instrument with which to achieve political expediency and pathway to spiritual and material self-growth.

Modernity problematises human relations to the present, placing the emphasis on today (Rabinow 2010:42). Foucault explains that ‘Modernity is the attitude that makes it possible to grasp the “heroic” aspect of the present moment’ (ibid:40). Stuart’s journal is not only ‘heroising’ the present moment as this suggests, but is enacting the courage required of him by the Enlightenment ethic (ibid:35). The Aborigines then are quite irrelevant to his project. And because they are neither civilized nor in any sense modern, they are primitive and traditional and therefore part of nature. As we have seen however, the representation of Aborigines is not consistent, and I explore this further now.

#### **4.7 Representing the Aboriginal Other**

In this last section, I turn to Stuart’s representation of Aborigines, which reinforces the difference from the explorer/settler, so lending further rigidity to the binary divide of the frontier. At the same time however, there is ambivalence in Stuart’s journal in its representation of Aborigines, and in these moments of confusion the frontier is temporarily rendered ‘open’, and exchange across its seemingly impervious interface becomes possible. In the previous section I examined the influence of Modern versus traditional time. Here I examine contrasts in the context of Doomed Race Theory, the Songlines, and Stuart’s empathetic reaction to the violence at Attack Creek. Added to the events at Mt Sturt, Attack Creek lends a further counter-discursive ambivalence to Stuart’s overwhelming representation of the Aborigine as primitive.

By 1830, and prevailing at the time of Stuart’s expeditions, Doomed Race Theory was secure in the colonial imagination (McGregor 1997:14). Such ideas may explain his continued reluctance to accept the signs of water indicated by the

presence of Aborigines. Clarke, however, claims Doomed Race Theory is absent from Stuart's journal, and interprets Stuart's representation of Aborigines as a rhetorical device serving to 'furnish the myths and allegories that evolved to explain colonialism in this region (2002:158). Yet this does not explain the ambivalence evident in Stuart's representations of Aborigines. Doomed Race Theory held that the Aborigines were doomed to ultimate extinction. Combined with humanist thought, the role of the coloniser ranged from helping to hasten this process as being the kindest thing to do, to easing their suffering toward the inevitable. Inevitably, such ideas also coloured any appraisal of the ability of the Aborigines to civilise. English missionary Lancelot Threlkeld and colonial magistrate William Hull for example believed the Aborigines to be the degraded remnants of a formerly civilized people (McGregor 1997:14). Threlkeld argued Aborigines were on the decline before the colonists arrived (Gunson 1974:148). In 1858, Hull suggested that 'it is the design of providence that the inferior races should pass away before the superior races . . . since we have occupied the country, the aborigines must cease to occupy' (Mulvaney 1958:144).

At first, Stuart's journal from March seems to confirm Clarke's position, in that he sees 'very few signs of natives visiting this part of the country' (March 26). In fact, it is not until the West Neale River that Stuart notes 'numerous tracks of natives in the different creeks, quite fresh, apparently made to-day' (March 28). Stuart's Aborigines *in absentia* seem to support Clarke's argument, and general criticism of Stuart for a reluctance to communicate with Aborigines. According to his journal however, Stuart does in fact try to communicate with the Aborigines, giving question to such a conclusion. For example on April 6, while crossing a small gum creek of quick sand south of what he would later name the Hugh River, Stuart notes:

When we were nearly across, I saw a black fellow among the bushes; pulled up and spoke to him. At first he seemed at a loss to know from whence the sound came, but when he saw the other horses coming up he took to his heels, was off like a shot and we saw no more of him.

Many of the water sources found to the north of the McDonnell Ranges are native wells, likely sites dug along songlines as part of developing the 'geography of survival'. The Europeans had to dig the wells even deeper in order to retrieve enough to drink. On the night of May 4, for example, they worked all night and got no sleep, bailing water in a small tin dish: all for six gallons. It is likely that their digging of these wells locates the expedition party on a songline.<sup>32</sup>

As I have shown in the previous chapter, the totemic Dreamtime landscapes of the Arrernte, Kaytetye and other central Australian language groups remained relatively free from the influence of the west prior to Stuart's arrival. News of Cook's arrival, Philip's settlers and the early forays inland however, would likely have filtered through to the Centre by the normal means: gossip and story exchange along the songlines that criss-crossed the continent. Use of Aboriginal messengers, or 'big speakers', was an Australia-wide practice, and they were guaranteed safe passage during travel (Kimber 2003:29). Messages were transmitted verbally or carried on a message stick. Traditional message sticks became known as 'yabber' sticks, from a pidgin term probably originating from the English term to jabber, to converse or talk (Kimber 2003:30). Europeans quickly co-opted the Aboriginal letter carriers for their own purposes. Charles Sturt in his journal writes how he sent a man named Camboli (usually called Jacky) down river with letters as he progressed up the Darling (Davis 2002:xlvi, 31). Stuart was on Sturt's expedition, and would have been aware of the practice. In fact on April 28 1860, Stuart records seeing smoke from a nearby creek. As the Aborigines often used smoke as a way of communicating, it is likely news of Stuart's presence was being sent on ahead. Later, on June 27 Stuart writes, somewhat tellingly, that: 'This morning we see signal fires all around us'.

As I have shown, a pre-existing political geography ruled the landscape before Europeans arrived. That this is not envisioned as part of Stuart's text is perhaps to be expected for the outsider nineteenth century explorer. Nevertheless, this lack of recognition contributes further to the imagined divide erected between the

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<sup>32</sup> It should be noted also, that much of the grief Stuart and Giles suffered over water was greatly relieved on later expeditions that used camels.

precolonial world and its re-placing under Stuart's journal. For although Stuart sights relatively few Aborigines during the journey, his movements were, nevertheless, carefully followed. Tracking the party's movements, were 'the keen eyes of proud, dark men and women, who were watching them with amazement, anxiety, and often with indignation' (Strehlow 1967:7). The signal fires noted in the journal speak to a well-traversed Aboriginal homeland with strong and established networks of communication achieved by walking. For Europeans clinging to settlements on the coast however, one-third of the Australian continent remained unknown; Stuart's reported scarcity of Aborigines only serves to support this sparsely-populated vision of the landscape.

The more likely reason why Stuart saw so few Aborigines however, was wariness on the part of the natives. Old northern Arrernte men who had been boys in 1860 and recalled Stuart's expedition told as much to TGH Strehlow in 1933 (Strehlow 1967:13). According to Strehlow's informants, the Arrernte knew the footprint of all of the regular human residents of their country, as well as those of the animals and birds which frequented their homelands. Many Arrernte were startled and scared then, by the new tracks made by the strangers. One old man told Strehlow people were terrified by these new footprints.

The boot tracks looked as though they had been made by human beings; but what kind of creatures could men be who had broad, flat, toe-less feet, and a heel that was a hard lump, sharply edged from the main part of the foot? As for the horse tracks, we could tell that they must have been made by huge four-legged creatures, larger than any we had ever seen before. These creatures, too, had not toes, and their heavy feet had cut their way even into hard clay ground, and left their scars on the rock plates. Surely, we thought, both these kinds of creatures must be evil man-eating monsters! (1967:8)

In an Arrernte worldview shaped by walking and steeped in mysticism, not only were the men and horses cast as Other, they were imagined to be man-eating monsters. Moreover, Strehlow suggests the mode of progress practiced by the explorer party was one normally adopted in Aboriginal Australia only by roving bands of avengers when stealing across hostile country (1967:9). While Stuart could not possibly have known that this was what he was doing, such an embodied signature may well have frightened the Arrernte. All of the explorers

failed in this same way to realise or acknowledge that the Aboriginals considered their territories home (Strehlow 1967:9). The Arrernte had social protocols and courtesies to be observed when travelling in foreign lands or crossing borders between one language group and another. In keeping with ideas of the period, the explorers assumed however, that the Aborigines were nomadic primitives, and the closer to the centre one came, the more primitive they were (Mountford 1976:17). For the European, such 'wandering' tribesmen had no need of a 'home', at least not in the European sense of the word. As Robert Dixon has shown, widespread belief in the four-stage theory of Scottish enlightenment helped to underpin such notions (1986:1; cited in White 2007:8).

But when Stuart encounters a large native party (at Attack Creek) on June 26, Aboriginal wariness finally turns to violence. Strehlow believes that the gathering Stuart's party saw that day was a corroboree or ceremonial gathering (1967:11). Stuart writes of 'three tall powerful men, fully armed, having a number of boomerangs, waddies, and spears . . .' Stuart wished to pass them by, but:

they continued to approach us, calling out, and making all sorts of gestures, apparently of defiance. I then faced them making all sorts of signs of friendship I could think of. They seemed to be in great fury, moving their boomerangs about their heads, and howling to the top of their voices, also performing some sort of dance. They were now joined by a number more, which in a few minutes increased to upwards of 30 – every bush seemed to produce a man.

Before such an encounter can be interpreted, it is important to establish the 'protocols of the living Aboriginal culture' (Mulvaney 1989:1). Strehlow notes that the traditional way to deal with unannounced Aboriginal visitors to ceremony was to kill them; it is likely therefore, the locals made allowance for the European visitors' unwitting stupidity, in other words, the explorers were fortunate to escape with their lives (Strehlow 1967:8). Unfortunately, as Mulvaney laments: 'A mutual ignorance of behavioural rules and individual roles produced many unfortunate misunderstandings in stressful early inter-racial contact situations' (1989:1). The natives showered Stuart's party with boomerangs and waddies and fired native grasses to drive them back, leading Stuart eventually to return fire, although not until the last possible moment. There are two points to be

highlighted here. The Aboriginal response to the incursion of the explorers could be interpreted as a defence of space, cultural matters and home. News of an increasing number of white explorers over the previous two decades would likely have filtered north from South Australia along the songlines. Perhaps fears were held for the intentions of these invaders. This would tend to collapse a representation of the Aborigines as a 'doomed race' and imply instead a well-organised but patient resistance.

The second point is Stuart's restraint. After ignoring the Aborigines for much of the journey, and mistrusting signs of their presence (which might have led him to water), Stuart now shows a measured respect for their actions:

Their arrangements and manner of attack were as well conducted and planned as Europeans could do it. They observed us passing in the morning, examined our tracks to observe which way we had gone; knew we could get no water down the creek and must return to get it, so thus must have planned their attack. Their charge was in double column, open order, and we had to take steady aim to make an impression. With such as these for enemies, it would be destruction to all my party for me to attempt to go on . . . I think it would be madness and folly to attempt more (June 27).

Stuart's momentary glimpse across the frontier demonstrates respect and restraint, waiting, as he did, until the very last moment to give the order to return fire. Here is a less politicised Stuart than Clarke constructs, a more nuanced man struggling to come to terms with a landscape very different from his own. As Strehlow observes, Stuart was 'infinitely more humane than many of his white contemporaries ever aspired to be' (1967:13). Here more clearly than ever though, is seen the Aborigine's dominance and 'fit' in the landscape. The event also highlights the fragility of Stuart's construction of the frontier, leading to a similar conclusion as that which foils the doomed race representation: that the Aborigines had been biding their time, and were in fact a force to be reckoned with. In the journal however, Stuart remains philosophical, writing: 'it seems that I am destined to be disappointed; man proposes, but the Almighty disposes, and his will must be obeyed.'

Stuart's dedication to the imperial project ran deep, but the lengths to which colonial governments would go to control the inland perhaps ran deeper. This is

most evident in what happened after Stuart's fourth expedition. And it is here that the frontier most closely resembles the 'westerling frontier' of Turner's theory (1893) in which modernist time and political support for pushing forward the frontier is highlighted. As discussed earlier, from first settlement Aborigines were represented as "timeless". Stuart's journeys were framed most vividly however, by chronological western time; especially after the success of his fourth expedition, when subsequent expeditions became a race to the Top End (Bell 2004:86).

Yet there remains an adventurous, brave and persistent Stuart, whose dogged determination to see the mission through translates most readily to Ward's construction of an Australian identity, the daring and resourceful bushman who refuses to give up. Such independence shaped Donovan's Central Australian Legend (1988:90) and accords with dominant narratives of a national character. Yet there is a paradox between this independence and the imperial purpose of Stuart's mission, which as Kant describes is part of an Enlightenment ideal: that the perfect government provides a framework in which the unconstrained use of reason by individuals is not only possible but encouraged (1784). As Slattery observes of Burke and Wills, such myths are open to contest and 'other versions of achievement, relationship, heroism and competence' could have been told (Slattery 2013:188). Few would know, for instance, of the walking Arrernte who remember Stuart's passing (see Strehlow 1967).<sup>33</sup> Nor indeed, of the fleet-footed Aboriginal message men who may have spread news of Stuart's party up and down the songlines. A more nuanced and inclusive version of identity for Stuart is certainly possible, celebrating his bravery and determination while acknowledging his weaknesses and almost wilful blindness to the help that was so close at hand. For Stuart's walking is naïve, insofar as his exposure to a new environment is too brief to make any sense of it. In this way, Stuart anticipates generations to come of travel writers equally ill-equipped both materially and culturally.

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<sup>33</sup> The vital role of the Aboriginal messengers remains largely absent from Australian history; also few stand-alone stories of the swagmen of the Centre have ever been published, though there is frequent reference to them in Strehlow (1978), Kimber (1986), Blackwell and Lockwood (1976), and Carter (1974).



#### 4.8 Conclusion

The walking segments of Stuart's published journal of his fourth expedition of 1860 represent space as harsh wilderness: unforgiving and difficult to traverse. The Centre is the frontier, home is far away in Britain and nature is foe, ripe for the exploitation of its resources. Stuart's difficulties are amplified however, by a lack of familiarity with the environment: the position of outsider. Constructions of Stuart as a nineteenth-century Odysseus, owe a debt to these episodes of walking. Stuart's actions and representations are further seen to be consistent with the ideas of the Enlightenment and modernism that prevailed during the period.

Stuart's journal traces a first passage of the frontier over precolonial Aboriginal space. As I have shown, the journey of Marlpwenge and Nalenale (and others like them) had established pre-colonial space as a network of known places connected by walking paths, a storied geography of home. Stuart's act of flag planting on Mt Sturt erases this space in order to assert an imperial geography, articulating in that moment the imposition of colonial knowing and political geography over that of the Aborigines.

Stuart's physical struggle is represented as part of his mission in the desert; while he traverses 'empty space' naming landforms and progressing the aims of empire, the country becomes also his spiritual proving ground, a place in which to test his worth to God. Under this pact with the Almighty, Stuart's mission atop Mt Sturt is to liberate the primitives by bringing them the power of knowledge. And so a moral dimension frames his objective of converting space into place for people to live. Such evidence reveals ambivalence in the representation of Aborigines: they are both primitives and part of nature, and capable of progress and therefore part of culture. Stuart's respect and acknowledgement of Aborigines demonstrated at Attack Creek renders the frontier momentarily porous, and makes it problematic to see the text as a univocal invocation of terra nullius. In less obvious ways, the text acknowledges the space of the Aborigines as familiar and understood, by virtue of Stuart's having followed native tracks to water — and by default following the songlines — contributing to his ultimately successful sixth

expedition. While the journal remains Orientalist, Stuart's response at Attack Creek and the native tracks examples can be read counter-discursively.

My analysis of Stuart's text disputes widely-accepted treatment of explorer narratives as travel writing. The serious consequences and harsh conditions stand apart from modern travel texts and even Ernest Giles' more poetic prose (despite his troubles). Here I have argued Stuart's journal configures the explorer end of a journey writing spectrum as defined by Graulund (2006, 2010). Stuart's journal is, nevertheless, part of a body of texts portraying Central Australia and Aboriginal life as mysterious and 'Othered', a frontier environment, representations which certainly help to equip the imperialist project. Stuart's obsession with pushing forward the frontier at any cost overwrites the home of the Arrernte, and impedes any future imagining of the landscape as home for settlers, who are left with a representation of a harsh wilderness awaiting transformation.

## 5. Finding home

Newcomers experience their arrival in the new land as a form of rebirth and, with a minimum of regret, shrug off their former identity, swiftly assimilating to the ways of the new host culture.

Paul Carter 1990:429

Many young country lads responded to the appeal of the inland . . . the bush is something . . . they can never forget . . . a free land that no man has ever succeeded in taming.

TGH Strehlow 1969/1978:155

Coming home at last / At the end of the year / I wept to find / My old umbilical cord

Basho 1966:77

This chapter traces the journey of anthropologist Theodore George Henry Strehlow as he follows the Finke River from the remote Lutheran mission of Hermannsburg in Central Australia to the station hotel at Horseshoe Bend in 1922, a distance of roughly 240 kilometres (150 miles). Strehlow was 14 years old at the time, but it was not until 1966 following a serious bout of illness that he began to write down his remembrance of the journey, much of which he had walked. By then Strehlow had studied literature and conducted a distinguished, but later controversial research career in linguistics and anthropology. The recounted journey was published in 1969 as a memoir entitled *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*.<sup>34</sup>

Strehlow's text is represented here as the fusion of two worlds produced separately by the texts examined in chapters three and four: the totemic landscape of the precolonial Aborigines, and the conquered 'wilderness' of the explorer Stuart. The resulting hybridised setting of *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* — ostensibly a settler journey narrative — nevertheless displays all the intimacy and reverence of home, embracing the postcolonial complexity of the Centre's biopolitical geography and directly confronting its representation as a divided frontier. And yet Strehlow's willingness to speak on behalf of his other (the Arrernte) raises questions of authenticity and hybridity, as well as who may

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<sup>34</sup> Page references are cited for 1978 edition as JHB.

ethically write as other (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Spivak 1990; Elam 1995; Fee 2003; Bhabha 2003). This difficult question speaks to the problem of establishing otherness and authenticity, the danger being, as Homi Bhabha notes, that ‘the suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser . . . is an historical and theoretical simplification’ (Bhabha 1983:25). And other questions arise, such as: to what degree is Strehlow influenced by his upbringing and Western education? To what extent is an educated Arrernte person influenced by colonial discourse? Such questions inhabit this third layer of the palimpsest of the thesis and of the lifeworlds of Central Australia, a layer in which Stuart’s more rigid incarnation of the frontier is softened and blurred in a narrative evocative of a hybridised settler home. In the way Bammer has suggested, Strehlow’s sense of home is akin to an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991), an ‘enacted space within which we try on roles and relationships of . . . belonging and foreignness’ (Bammer 1992:ix). While examining various politics influencing Strehlow’s writing, I argue it is the author’s agency in both Arrernte and settler worlds, which gives the text this hybridised traction and depth. *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* tells of a very different journey from Stuart’s ‘crossing of the unknown’, because it is enriched by a strongly personal place-affect, sewn with simple facts of the regional ecology, Aboriginal stories of place and the attractive bluster of the Centre’s pastoral community evoking an emergent Australian ‘bush’ identity. There is intercultural exchange, which counteracts the rigid frontier as it is evoked by Stuart and others. Such a narrative geography is, I argue, a more inclusive Australian writing of place than is to be found (generally speaking) elsewhere in Australian literature.

In this chapter I first sketch events that prompted Strehlow’s journey, summarise the overall narrative and examine context for the text. The analysis then focuses on the account of the fifth day, between Henbury Station and Idracowra, a walk which captures most of the themes and issues represented in the broader narrative as well as those of importance here. One of these themes is the political circumstances of Strehlow’s later life, which impact on the memoir and its representation of frontier. Strehlow’s self-styled ‘insider’ agency — that is his

welcoming into Arrernte culture as a child — is discussed further below in light of questions of authenticity and hybridity (Fee 2003:242).

## 5.1 Overview

*Journey to Horseshoe Bend* follows protagonist ‘Theo’ — Strehlow’s 14-year-old self — and his ailing father Pastor Carl Strehlow on a journey down the world’s oldest river to seek medical help.<sup>35</sup> Afflicted with ‘dropsy’ at age 50, Pastor Carl must reach the rail head at Oodnadatta, at that time the only available lifeline to doctors in Adelaide. But he dies shortly after reaching Horseshoe Bend, some 140 miles short of his goal.

Set largely in the Finke Valley west of Alice Springs — not far to the west of Stuart’s 1860 traversal — and sandhill country to its south, the narrative weaves Arrernte Dreamtime legends with ‘encounters with bush folk, and descriptions of the landscape . . . written with the thoughts and observations of a 14-year-old boy’ (Cohen 2005:39). As well as Strehlow’s recollection of the journey, the text contains much reliable history of Central Australia (Hill 2003:94, Carter 1996a:25). For Hart Cohen, the text captures the ‘fundamental interrelatedness of the Aboriginal people, their totems, culture and language, the landscape, white settlers and the Lutherans in Central Australia during a relatively early period of settlement (1922)’ (2005:38). Significantly, Michael Platzer calls Strehlow ‘Australia’s only fluent native interpreter’, a man who ‘never received the recognition he felt he deserved during his lifetime’ (2007:1). Carter suggest the memoir articulates a more authentic Australian ecopoetics (1996a:26-7).

Each chapter of the narrative covers one day of the Strehlows’ thirteen-day journey from Hermannsburg to Horseshoe Bend, where a funeral and wake is held for Pastor Strehlow. TGH Strehlow’s father Carl and mother Frieda had run the Lutheran mission at Hermannsburg for 28 years before the pastor became ill. Widely respected as the ‘uncrowned king of Central Australia’, the ailing Pastor Carl was unlikely to survive a rough journey by buggy to the railhead at Oodnadatta, some three hundred and eighty miles distant. When the mission

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<sup>35</sup> For river geomorphology and history see Pickup, Allen and Baker (1988).

bureaucracy refuses to send a car for its man who the Arrernte call *inghta*, or ceremonial chief, a fellow Lutheran Mr Wurst offers one instead, and the Strehlows decide to journey downriver by buggy to meet the vehicle. As the critically ill Pastor emerges from the church, the voices of the assembled Arrernte rise and swell into a great Lutheran chorale sung in their language:

‘Wake, awake!’, proclaim with power (JHB:23).

Strehlow and the crowd are reduced to tears, the buggy moves away and ‘the population turned sadly to their camp, feeling an incredible sense of loss and bereavement’ (JHB:24). With young ‘Theo’ intermittently walking behind his parents riding ahead in the buggy, the journey begins.

From the outset, the party crosses boundaries of language groups, so defining an existing political geography of Arrernte territory, a geography with similarities to that described by Marlpwenge in Thompson’s *A Man from the Dreamtime*. The party leaves Purula-Kamara the local area group of Ntaria (Hermannsburg), regarded as the home of Theo and other boys and girls (JHB:29). To the east is the territory of Pananka-Bangata, then the Ellery Creek people of the honey-ant totem. The first day closes at a large waterhole in the Finke River called Rubula, fringed with high bulrushes.

Next day brings the party to Alitera, or Boggy Hole as it is known to Euro-Australians, a police camp abandoned in 1891 after its commanding officer Sgt Willshire was taken south where he was committed to stand trial for the murder of Aborigines, but later released. The journey narrative easily accommodates the frontier violence of Wilshire, while alongside it come remarkably poetic descriptions of the Finke River using a mixture of Aboriginal names and English. Using Aboriginal names comes without the hollow ring of a colonist’s use, the ring of incomplete understanding (see Carter 2010). The party follows the Finke to Running Waters, a pool fringed by bullrushes and populated by ‘black-and-yellow butterflies flitting about gracefully among the blue flowers that grew along the damp bank of the quiet pool’ (JHB:49). The Aboriginal name of the place is Irbmangkara, which the Arrernte believed to be ‘one of the cradles of mankind at the beginning of time.’ (JHB:50). Here was water, peace and a calm to offset the

roughly corrugated track and intensity of the journey's purpose. But even here in this seeming Eden the effects of the frontier are apparent, for a 'rich store of myths and stories had gone down sadly in numbers since the advent of the whites' (JHB:50).

On the evening of the third day, the caravan is visited by two white men, one of whom is Bob Buck of Henbury cattle station. Buck is warm and generous to the old man; he offers horses and donkeys to pull the van. From Buck emerges an identity of the bush folk, those celebrated so strongly in the narrative:

us tough bush people in these parts always had an unwritten law of mateship, and that law says that every man must help everyone else in trouble, never mind whether the poor bugger's been his pal or his enemy. That's the only way us poor bastards up here've been able to survive at all in this tough country (JHB:58-9).

Buck tells Pastor Carl that, had he known of his plight, with 'just one month's notice' he might have organised a car. After his treatment by the Lutherans, this pleases Carl, who labours to 'control his emotions' (JHB:59). Buck takes the party into his care at Henbury next day and is particularly kindly to Theo, walking the buildings of the encampment with him (JHB:61).

Early on Saturday, the fifth day of the journey, Theo walks the moonlit darkness with his friends, then on through the hot day until the next evening when they arrive at Idracowra station (JHB:101). Now bedridden, Pastor Carl begins to doubt his own faith, and on '. . . Sunday morning, hope itself seemed to have died' (JHB:108). Theo spends the day wandering the station, his 'first Sunday without hymns, prayers or church services' (JHB:116). Meanwhile, Pastor Carl's condition worsens and by Monday morning Idracowra manager Allan Breadon is shocked by his state. Mr Wurst and his car were due to arrive at Oodnadatta on Friday night, and Breadon suggests it best for Strehlow to wait for Wurst to reach them. Every jolt of the buggy along the torturous route had been agony for the pastor. Frieda had remained by his side throughout, and, while Theo often lagged, walking or riding on the van, he had nevertheless been acutely aware of his father's suffering. At Idracowra the heat and humid October conditions are relentless and Pastor Carl longs for an end to his suffering (JHB:121). Breadon

sends messengers ahead to Horseshoe Bend requesting Wurst come through to Idracowra, where Stehlow would be waiting.

Pastor Carl's suffering is here compared with that of Christ (JHB:124-5). The strain is broken at six pm with the arrival of Mrs Gus Elliot of Horseshoe Bend Station. With her are the messengers Breadon had sent the day before, bearing more bad news: Wurst's car from Oodnadatta has broken down. Mrs Elliot recommends Strehlow travel immediately to 'The Bend', where

you'll be on the Overland Telegraph Line. (Gus) said there's a doctor in Oodnadatta at present, and you could get medical advice from him or from the Hostel by phone (JHB:127).

Moreover, Pastor Stolz has arranged for another car to bring the doctor from Oodnadatta part of the way, whereupon Gus would bring him the rest of the way by buggy. Mrs Elliot proposes they all ride immediately for Horseshoe Bend, with her leading the way by lantern. Pastor Strehlow is impressed by Mrs Elliot. Here was a woman who was 'not only young and pretty, but strong athletic, vital and courageous.' Her smile warm and sincere, and physique 'slim, tanned, and willowy' (JHB:129), produces the identity of the 'outback woman'.

Carl and Frieda press on with Mrs Elliot leading the way, while Theo and his companions rest overnight. Next day, a bend in the river brings Theo to a place the Arrernte call the 'Land of Death' (JHB:137). The area makes Theo feel 'intensely depressed' (ibid), and he decides to walk again (JHB:141), whereupon:

the last miles were covered, chain by chain, yard by yard, step by step. Theo put one bare foot before the other almost mechanically, sometimes wondering whether the long expected station lights would ever come into view.

Eventually Theo 'began to stumble like a sleepwalker', until the lantern lights of Horseshoe Bend came into view around 10.30pm. News of his father is grim: he has been 'seized by an asphyxiating bout of asthmatic breathlessness' and only the thought of the telephone communication with a doctor had 'given him the necessary strength to complete the last few miles to the hotel' (JHB:143).

Day Ten brings a mixed history of Horseshoe Bend, part settler tale, part Dreaming story. The sense of the place is a fusion of cultures, 'remarkable for its



cruel heat waves for as long as human memory went back’ and the main totemic sites all associated with ‘fire or with the scorching heat of the summer sun’ (JHB:144). By 10am the mercury has climbed to over 100 F, and in his tin-lined room, Carl Strehlow endures ‘near bake-oven temperatures’ (JHB:149). Yet Horseshoe Bend was:

Gus Elliot’s pride and joy, and its furnishings gave expression to his desire to provide a home fit for occupation by his city-born wife who had come here as a bride from Melbourne (JHB:149).

When built it had ‘been considered to be perhaps the most modern hotel building in Central Australia’ (JHB:150). But Horseshoe Bend was also once described in the *Barossa News* as ‘one of the minor Hell’s on God’s earth’ where ‘all the sins against the Decalogue are committed . . . as no guardian of the law is near’ (JHB:12). The contradiction produces ambivalence between representations of ‘The Bend’ by those who have made it their home, and the new arrivals still aligned with those observing from afar.

Here the reader learns much of the frontier history of the region and the genealogy of the Elliots (JHB:151-7). But from Theo, most importantly, we learn of a journey a decade earlier, when the Strehlows were ‘struggling to get back to Hermannsburg on the dry and desolate road leading north from Oodnadatta.’ Mrs Strehlow and Theo walked much of the way, as the van crawled slowly across the plains:

one night they had even walked in front of the exhausted van horses for two hours, carrying a storm lantern in order to guide the driver along the telegraph line to Blood’s Creek. Strehlow had held the reins, while the dark coachman had walked beside the team to urge it along with incessant whipcracks. Walking had been a more comfortable mode of progress than sitting on the springless van, whose bumps over the pebble-strewn gibber flats had threatened to dislocate all the vertebrae in the backbones of the travellers (JHB:157-8).

As Carl Strehlow lay dying next day (Friday), Theo links his own identity to walking, whereupon:

The cheerful little freckle-faced boy who had ten years earlier walked many miles with his mother on the journey from Oodnadatta to Hermannsburg had long since acquired the

sturdy independent attitudes of a 'bush kid' to a degree that his mother had not yet comprehended (JHB:182-3).

Carl Strehlow concerns himself with Lutheran elder Reverend Stolz who has arrived from Oodnadatta, confronting him with his accumulated bitterness and disappointment. Later Strehlow's condition declines and Mrs Strehlow sings a hymn. But Strehlow begs her to stop, crying 'God doesn't help!', and later 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (JHB:179). Here in this harsh landscape, the narrative seems to say: even God is a figure to be doubted. It was a quarter to six in the evening by the time Strehlow 'suddenly gave a gasp, followed by a deep sigh' (JHB:180). Carl Strehlow had died. The remainder of the narrative concerns a funeral ceremony and a 'bush' appraisal of Carl Strehlow by the community of Horseshoe Bend.

## 5.2 Genre and context

While it is logical that Central Australia would always have become better known to settlers over time, a 'discovery' imperative still pervaded many texts contemporaneous with Strehlow's journey, and other texts of the inter-war period and beyond. The influence of anthropology was widespread, much aimed at a popular audience (Dewar 1993:78), while newspapers of the period gave national coverage to Aboriginal massacres (Wise 1985:80). Walking and travel narratives are abundant, whether for a popular or scholarly audience, including Philippa Bridges (1925), Archer Russell (1934), Olive Pink (1933/4) and Michael Terry (1931, 1937, 1942). However, much Territory writing tended toward escapism, emphasising British pluck and courage (Dewar 1997); and, as Tom Griffiths notes, from the 1920s to the 1950s interest in the Australian outback surged (1996:176).

When the Strehlows left Hermannsburg mission, ostensibly for Oodnadatta, the fanfare of their farewell rang with pathos. The passage inspired a cantata composed by Andrew Schultz and later performed by John Stanton and others, the Sydney Symphony and the Ntaria (Hermannsburg) Ladies Choir (Schultz and Williams 2013). Moreover, a film called *Cantata Journey* by Hart Cohen (2005)

was adapted from the text. The narrative is the subject of two recent research projects of note: a web-based multi-media database project by University of Western Sydney,<sup>36</sup> and another by Western Arrernte elder Mark Inkamala in conjunction with the Strehlow Centre, which aims to map the songlines of the Finke region (Raja 2013). Despite such popular and scholarly interest, only a small critical literature of Strehlow's text has arisen. Critical interest grows however, from an earlier biography of Strehlow by McNally (1981) to the more recent *Broken Song* (2003) by Barry Hill, and in between John Moreton (1995), Carter (1996a), Mudrooroo (1997), Sam Gill (1997) and Tim Rowse (1999).

While a distinct trace of 1960s' Australia and its emerging identity politics colours Strehlow's rendering of a journey that actually happened in the 1920s, I argue that the primal landscape of Strehlow's childhood consciousness combined with his familiarity with the landscape through repeated walking, underpins the intimacy of his narrative setting. The text is analysed for its reimagined walk of the Finke River, its innovative rendering of postcolonial geographies through walking, and its enunciation of a more cross-culturally nuanced environmental poetics. Strehlow's tracing of a culturally hybrid sense of place befits, I suggest, Tom Lynch's definition of a 'polyvocal' text, a bioregionally-informed narrative incorporating complementary and sometimes conflicting voices (Lynch 2007:86). Any reading of place in *Horseshoe Bend* would be incomplete however, without accounting for the political expediency of Strehlow's self-aware construction of his own identity. For the narrative serves to deepen an author identity as 'of the Arrernte', a construction seemingly designed to bolster the older Strehlow's standing in both the Hermannsburg Aboriginal community and among his fellow anthropologists.

While Strehlow's manner of constructing place is straight-forward in its rendering of memory and ecology, the prose is anything but. His sentences are grand, long and filled with adjectives, which, as Hill notes would 'give [Strehlow's] editors some trouble when the manuscript was typed up' (2003:642). Strehlow's description mimics stream of consciousness prose typical of walking's reverie and

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<sup>36</sup> <http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/coa/soca/ithb/>

characterised by modernist novelists like Joyce and Woolf. Carter (1996:26) suggests Strehlow's writing 'sought to devise what we might call an environmental poetics, a theory of representation that took account of the local lie of the land'. It is exactly this *lie of the land* and the significance of its resulting prose, with which this chapter is concerned. In the same way Jonathan Bate defines an ecopoetics, such prose might be described as situated between the 'experiential' or 'phenomenological' power of poetry and the merely 'descriptive' (and so 'political') effect of narrative (Bate 2000:42). For it is Strehlow's evocation of a settler's sense of home in a contested landscape which remains the work's lasting value to Australian writers — the 'promise of two cultures intermixing' (Schultz and Williams 2003:4). This mixing is what renders the frontier so permeable in this text.

*Journey to Horseshoe Bend* evokes a strong sense of place that fuses the philosophical and ethical dimensions of several cultures (Aboriginal, settler, Lutheran) with the events surrounding Carl Strehlow's death. Its success as a narrative of place owes much to its walking structure, which allows Strehlow to explore a cartographic dimension of culture and place, essential for rendering the Dreaming stories. In this respect, Strehlow's method is reminiscent of Henry David Thoreau's excursion narratives, which purposefully unpack place alongside history, ecology, philosophy and analysis of self and identity. However I do not make a direct connection between Thoreau and Strehlow. Instead I use Thoreau's work to highlight Strehlow's narrative technique. As I do throughout this thesis, I begin with the premise that space is produced (Lefebvre 1991). In the textual analysis I reference Thoreau and several of the Thoreauvian critics, including Richard Schneider (2000) and Peter Blakemore (2000). Strehlow's construction of himself as being privy to the secret knowledge of the Arrernte is examined as a discourse of power in the manner Foucault has argued (Crampton and Elden 2007), a matter already explored by Hill (2003) and Carter (1996a) and in terms of hybridity by Bhabha (2003). Further, Morley (2000) and the phenomenologists Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Bachelard help to understand how the walk itself can evoke the intimacy of home, as do the geographers conflating place, self and

inhabitation (Seamon 1984, 1996, 2000, Casey 1998, 2001, Tuan 1977, 1979 and Relph 1970). Such intimacy, I argue, results from a strong influence of the Centre environment on the imagination of the young Strehlow. The region has erected in his consciousness a primal landscape as postulated by Measham (2006), Lopez (1986), Read (2000) and others. Two representations of space meet in the body of Theo – that of the Arrernte totemic geography, and of the emerging pastoral geography – where they articulate a personal and hybrid sense of place through habitus, enacted in the walking of the country of Strehlow's youth (Bourdieu 1995:72, Grenfell 2008:51, Casey 2001:686). The resulting sense of place confounds the rigidity of the frontier, raising further doubts as to its appropriateness to characterise Central Australia.

### 5.3 Day Five: Henbury to Idracowra

In this section I argue that place in *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* is not defined by the binary term frontier because the narrative blurs the divide between white and black. I concentrate on the fifth day of the journey, on which Theo arises early, setting out barefoot and continuing through the hot daylight hours and into the next evening, whereupon the party reaches the safety of Idracowra. Four themes from this walking narrative are examined. First Strehlow's method of narrative construction is compared with the work of Thoreau, highlighting a polyvocal voicing of the cultural landscape, the telling of Dreaming narratives and the representation of complex intercultural relationships. The embodied experience of walking frames Strehlow's perception, delivering a more intimate textual environment. I also critique Strehlow's self-aware identity politics, and, finally, how all these factors contribute to a textual representation of place.

#### 5.3.1 Narrative construction: Thoreau, hybridity and Theo's walk

Theo begins his walk in the stillness of the pre-dawn, as 'the van moved away from the cheery blaze of the campfire into the moonlit sandhill silence,' a liminal moment between sleep and the challenging heat of the day (JHB:87). While this early coolness invokes an Edenic quality, danger lurks nearby nonetheless. For although 'The resinous scent emanating from the bulging tufts of spinifex . . . was

not as overwhelming in the cool night air,' it 'pervaded the atmosphere with the unmistakable menace of its aroma' (JHB:87).

Strehlow's younger self Theo, is introduced in the third person, a narrative strategy that creates a textual distance between author and his representation of a 14-year-old self. Theo the protagonist is, unsurprisingly, comfortable with the environment of his birth place. The narration shifts, at times uneasily, between close third person narration focalised through Theo, to the voice of an omniscient narrator. Ultimately, the older Strehlow uses this walk by the younger Theo to provide a divergent narrative, one suiting his purposes political. Theo's walk weaves his own coming of age with his father's journey toward impending death. In this way, the journey is Theo's search for his own identity. But it also includes a history of the frontier, Arrernte culture and the pressures foisted upon it, as well as the environment of the Finke River Valley in a state much as it had been for millennia. Retold also are Aboriginal Dreaming stories, tales with which Theo had grown up. A hybrid narrative, Theo splices segments of the journey, which move the narrative forward, with extended moments of history, reverie and self-analysis. To this extent he blends the structure of a walking narrative such as Tony Kevin's *Walking the Camino* (2007), with the ardent philosophy of Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* and a poetics at times reminiscent of Basho. In similar fashion, in the excursion narratives of Henry David Thoreau:

. . . penetrating landscape observation provided an unfailing point of departure for natural description, ecstatic contemplation, and violently paradoxical social commentary. His texts express, question, naturalize, and deploy many presuppositions about geographic order in the landscape (Pipkin 2001:527).

As well as documenting the tumultuous events of Strehlow's life during 1922 in memoir with a linear structure, *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* is a narrative of place, one that spatializes the historical narrative. The result is, as Edward Soja suggests of such projects, that Strehlow constructs 'simultaneous relations and meanings that are tied together by a spatial rather than temporal logic' (1989:1). In such a narrative

sequential flow is often sidetracked to take coincident account of simultaneities, lateral mappings that make it possible to enter the narration at almost any point without losing track of the general objective (ibid).

Giving this breathing room to space as well as time is, to some extent, to run counter to literature's tendency, which, since Greek literature, is to be temporal (Bakhtin 1938:146; Crampton and Elder 2007:162). The problem of writing place has been discussed widely by ecocritics and critical geographers and it stems from a long-standing primacy of history over geography, of time over space in the prioritisation of human affairs and the development of critical theory (see Soja 1989, Bakhtin 1938; Foucault 1967). Writing place is the same problem critical geographers have in narrativising space: spatial theorists like Edward Soja and Henri Lefebvre among others, have tried to overturn the dominance of time. When Soja tries to address this in *Postmodern Geographies* (1989), his strategy is evident in the structure of the book, which challenges the dominance of the historical narrative. For Strehlow, the walk provides both a passage through time and a traversal across space, thereby reuniting time and space, with Theo's body located at the intersection of the two. As Giddens argues, modernity splits space from place (Giddens 1996:19); in its emphasis on the present moment they are however reunited on the walk, the represented journey becoming an act of place making. In just this way, walking helps define a Bakhtinian literary chronotope where:

spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterises the chronotope (Bakhtin 1938:84)

The narrative of the walk is both a representation of a lived experience of the world, and a translation of its various spaces: the real, imagined, and lived spaces of the walk. It comprises an elegant foil to the inadequacy of language in translating and articulating space – because it is conducted at the very intersection of the fourth dimension of time with three-dimensional space. The eye observes many objects over space, while the mind perhaps dreams of an imagined realm, and all the while both are living in the embodied space of that moment. In the

telling of such realms, the reader desires a story to unfold over time. Like Foucault, who retained historicity while adding spatiality, walking allows the writer/walker to do both: to narrate at the intersection of the two, satisfying the desire for history and chronology, while breathing readability into the telling (Crampton and Elden 2007:163). In this way Carter is right to call *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* a ‘meditation on the Western assumption that a narrative is a journey’ (1996a:27).

Strehlow’s close third person narration situates the reader with Theo, under the ‘waning moon which was now lighting up the landscape sufficiently to allow the journey to be resumed’, where he ‘. . . rolled up his swag, while his three companions harnessed up a fresh team of eight donkeys’ (JHB: 87). The narrative of the walk is an assemblage of Theo’s reactions to the journey and his environment, his (apparent) knowledge of the history and biogeography of the landscape and the dreaming stories associated with the regions (learned much later) through which his fictional younger self walks. Strehlow pays particular attention to the writing of nature, showcasing it as a prominent dimension of a Finke Valley experience. His descriptions are informed by botanical knowledge, for example:

desert oaks on the dune slopes and crests, and ironwoods and mulgas on the numerous clay-flats between the dunes . . . the branches of the mulgas were densely covered with greyish-green leaves; the ironwoods with their drooping branch tips had come to resemble river willows; and the continual sighting of the magnificent desert oaks in the soft night breeze indicated the extraordinary length to which their jointed needle-like leaves had grown (JHB:88).

The reality however, is that Strehlow obtained his knowledge of the landscape much later, during his university studies and subsequent years of research in Central Australia. Nonetheless, I suggest that it was an intimate rub of the landscape deposited during Strehlow’s childhood that remains as the basal layer of this knowledge. Environmental psychologists link childhood exposure to natural environments, or ‘primal places’, with environmental preferences in later life, a result strongly influenced by our sense of play as children (Measham 2006: 426; also Lopez 1997; ‘Inspired Landscapes’ 2004; Read 2000). Barry Lopez



believes 'a human imagination is shaped by the architecture it encounters at an early age' (1997). Set up in the younger Strehlow, such a framework complements the studied experience of the older, delivering a rich texture of place. In this way, *Journey To Horseshoe Bend* is a form of nature writing, mixing nature and postcolonial themes, of which Lopez writes

The real topic of nature writing, I think, is not nature but the evolving structure of communities from which nature has been removed, often as a consequence of modern economic development. It is writing concerned, further, with the biological and spiritual fate of those communities. It also assumes that the fate of humanity and nature are inseparable . . . it addresses the problem of spiritual collapse in the West and, like [postcolonial] literatures, it is in search of a modern human identity that lies beyond nationalism and material wealth (1997).

As the narrative of the party's journey unfolds, the reader encounters waterholes as totemic sites, and the interwoven pattern of songlines as one moves down the Finke River. The geography of the Dreaming infuses the newer camel pads (trails) and other routes between Alice Springs and Hermannsburg. Strehlow's co-option of the Dreaming stories reinforces the apparent agency of the writer; his strategic selection of secret narratives that intersect the journey path, speaks to his insider knowledge of Arrernte culture. It also constructs a dual identity of the author as settler and Arrernte. Yet his well-animated setting adds to the poignancy of his father's dying. And all the while, the destination of Oodnadatta appears then disappears from view for Pastor Carl. As such, the journey and the present moment rise more prominently from the general background of the prose, the horizon (and the ultimate destination) here something of a blur: 'Gradually the dark eastern horizon became tinged with grey. The blurred and shapeless tree forms began to reveal their limbs with increasing clarity' (JHB:91).

With the destination now hazy, the focus turns from the intent of the journey to reverie, inviting impressions of the landscape, the turn of mind of the walker, and the political expressions and implications of the landscape for an emerging Australia. As Robinson (2000), Johnson (1986) and Buell (1995) have all noted, this is a pattern in Thoreauvian literature that began with 'A Walk to Wachusett' in which Thoreau relates an 1842 hike to Mount Wachusett, using the narrative

arc of the walk as ‘a vehicle for an inward journey of mind and spirit’ (Johnson 1986:12). This is not to say that Strehlow’s and Thoreau’s narratives are similar in theme or intent, for clearly they are not. Perhaps the main difference is that Thoreau’s recording of events is often contemporaneous (or nearly-so) with his walks, while Strehlow’s narrative is written forty years after the fact.<sup>37</sup> I draw attention only to the structural parallels, as well as both authors’ intimacy with their environment and the way this affects the prose.

The destination appears only as a ‘hovering presence’ in Thoreau’s ‘A Walk to Wachusett’, becoming a ‘reference point for imaginative projections of purpose that lend the authority of myth, antiquity, and scientific discovery to Thoreau’s excursion’ (Robinson 2000:83-4). And just as Thoreau makes himself a hero in the mould of classical literature on his walk to Wachusett Mountain, so too Theo is the hero of his father’s final journey. As he walks, Theo is

overwhelmed by the silence and the resulting sense of haunting loneliness that was brooding over these moonlit sandhills. It was easy to fill the scene with the spectred shapes of the *iliaka njemba* that had frightened him in his childhood, just as they had terrified the minds of the younger Western Aranda (sic) children at Hermannsburg (JHB:88).

Here the older Strehlow is once again shaping the identity of the younger, once more painting himself as Arrernte, an insider rather than an outsider. This strategy is an important device in the text and one to which I devote more attention below. For now, I remain with the landscape, animated as it is by human emotions, a ‘haunting loneliness’ added for dramatic effect. That Theo must overcome such emotional challenges and the demons that ‘frightened him in his childhood’, renders him all the braver for doing so, and closer still to the Arrernte with whom he grew up.

Arising from the walking journey through this land scaped as a frontier, is also an imprint of the Arrernte cultural landscape, the other side of the frontier to which Strehlow has long been exposed. Although it is doubtful that Strehlow would have known as much at 14, the overlay in the narrative is particularly effective. For example:

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<sup>37</sup> Although, Paul Carter notes Strehlow kept a childhood journal (1996a:22).

The normal wagon road which kept to the Finke valley between Ekngata and Talpanama . . . passed a long line of important Upper Southern Aranda (sic) ceremonial sites, each linked with a magnificent waterhole (JHB:92).

#### And further

The camel-mail road over the Britannia sandhills followed more or less in the wake of the mythical trail left by the fish ancestors – a trail which had already provided the party with a gap at Iltjanmaitnjaka or Parke's Pass.

The way Aboriginal Dreaming stories are fused with the walking narrative renders the frontier momentarily porous, for with each step of Theo's journey the reader takes a step in a more ancient journey, as the path of the Strehlows crosses the routes of the ancestors on ritual journeys of the Arrernte and others. Here Strehlow deconstructs a palimpsest of a different sort, a place where is imbricated precolonial, colonial and postcolonial history. Consequently, the walk maps not only a geography of loss equating to the journey and subsequent death of Carl Strehlow, but a Dreamtime political geography similar to that of Marlpwenge's, as well as a landscape of cultural loss for an Arrernte world irrevocably changed by colonialism. During the course of Theo's walk, five such waterholes are named and the stories of the Dreaming tracks intersecting at each are recounted in brief (JHB:92-95).

Here the older Strehlow again walks closely behind the younger, the years of accumulated knowledge filling the gaps in the data being revisited through the younger's eyes. The older Strehlow gathers memories of place, sewing them with a personal politics needed to build an identity that serves him forty years after the events. The elder's intimate knowledge of Arrernte culture is interwoven with the younger's memories of the colonial landscape, where camel pads through sandhills trace the ancient route of a fish dreaming (JHB:91). Where floods that brought fresh fish downstream from Irbmangkara or from the deep gorge holes of the MacDonnells that defied the longest droughts, accentuate the geography of survival such songlines sketch. Simultaneously, this is a frontier landscape, where 'pioneer settlers had . . . built a stockyard at Ultjua', where mustering and

branding now dominated a landscape of the middle Finke that once in Aboriginal story was ‘linked by myths with a number of other carpet snake sites’ (JHB: 94).

In ‘Walk to Wachusett’, Thoreau presents Humboldt’s modern-day excursion of the Andes as equivalent to the ancient journeys of Virgil and Homer. In fact, Robinson suggests the essay is a test of this thesis, and that in it Thoreau wrestles a suspicion that the ancient world is a lost utopia, a notion he might normally dispel (Robinson 2000). Likewise, Strehlow sees the world of the Arrernte and the once unspoilt Finke Valley as Australia’s lost utopia, which he alone remembers as he walks. Only Strehlow knows this utopian world the way it was, perhaps prompting his elegiac poetry as a rule by which to measure its loss. The world from where he writes — forty years hence in 1960s Australia — is only just waking to this loss. It is here Strehlow makes the most of his retrospective construction of an ‘insider’ status. Recounted are the violence of Willshire (JHB:48) and the trust vested in Spencer and Gillen by the Arunda *sic* (JHB:49), even those settlers who had gone unpunished for Aboriginal deaths on the frontier. To such human suffering however, ‘Nature is indifferent’ (JHB:49); the implication being, I suggest, that the Dreaming and its totemic political geography will outlast the ructions of humankind.

### 5.3.2 Perception of Landscape

Strehlow’s text creates a desired authorial identity by fusing the worlds described in Chapter Three (Marlpwenge) and Chapter Four (Stuart). In doing so, he infuses the text with ideas outlined later by Meinig (1976) and Carter (2010): that perception of landscape depends on the beholding eye. Strehlow sums this up here: ‘To the eye of the white man the sandhill country might have looked a useless waste, almost devoid of life; but the nomad Aranda (sic) hunters living at the middle Finke waterholes had once found the bordering dune country to be a rich source of food’ (JHB:96). Here are seen the important differences between Stuart’s appraisal of this same area as he struggles across the ‘cruel’ central Australian desert, compared with the veritable ‘food bowl’ described in *Journey To Horseshoe Bend* and Strehlow’s commentary on Stuart’s journal (Strehlow 1967). Even Strehlow’s description of the sandhills in winter is glowing and

almost romantic: 'On a sunny winter's day the dune country would have looked beautiful because of its rich colourings' (JHB:95). These hills of sand were dotted with 'flourishing' and 'magnificent' desert oaks, their 'Straight, dark, ridge-barked trunks' rising up to fifteen feet, while the younger trees 'soared' among them owing to a run of good seasons. Rather than the 'Dead Heart' of Gregory's (1906) description, here is a sandy desert bursting with life. Elsewhere, Strehlow describes that the 'sandhills were rich in carpet snakes and all those smaller marsupials that stood in no need of drinking water.' In tandem with food supplies from the flats, these highly prized foods meant that 'the middle Finke dwellers had once been a very numerous group' (JHB:95).

Compare this description with the prose of tourist Phillipa Bridges, who writes of her walk through the region around the same time, where:

The vegetation was withered, the grass burnt up. All plants and trees were of the passive resister sort that clings desperately to life, sets its teeth to endure privation, and becomes gnarled and woody, or else prickly and wiry, in the attempt (1925:169).

Rainfall may have been scant prior to Bridges' visit, but the disposition and preparedness of the viewing eye is also a consideration. Bridges' Centre is a 'gnarled' and 'prickly' place teetering on the edge of survival. Strehlow's knowledge, acquired over years (mostly after the period of which he writes), surpasses Bridges' less informed description, but the representation also differs markedly. As noted, precedent weather conditions may be material to the prose. In a similar manner, those who took a nearby road from Takalama to Talpamama across the Britannia Sandhills instead of the route taken by Theo, 'could catch no glimpse of the Finke or its gums from any point along the camel track' (JHB:95). In other words, the geographic trace of the walk determines what landscape is seen and recorded and the story that is told, in the way de Certeau suggests for the city (1984).

Interactions between the environment and the text are channelled through the body and its five senses (Merleau-Ponty 1969; Buell 1995; Solnit 2001; Murphy 2011a). Perhaps most profound of these environmental effects is the body's response to heat. Intense heat or cold produces harsher reactions than more

comfortable environments and shapes the representation of place; even Strehlow, with his intimate knowledge of the social ecology and biogeography was not immune. For while Theo enjoys walking in the cool of the evening, his attitude soon changes in the heat of the day: ‘on this particular morning Theo was conscious only of the heat and the menace of the dune country. It seemed to him a merciless, intimidating waste . . . his one wish was to get out of this *cruel red land* (JHB:96; my italics).

In contrast to Strehlow’s extensive knowledge of the desert environment and his intimacy with it, here we see a description to rival the harshest explorer’s appraisal, reminiscent of Sturt’s ‘hell’ (1844) and Gregory’s ‘Dead Heart’ (1905), both outsiders in the way of Stuart. The reaction of Theo’s young body to the searing desert heat is uncomfortable and makes for difficult walking. As Carter (2010) notes, such a response is reflected in language and translates directly to the boy’s ultimate representation of a ‘cruel red land’. This is an embodied response, the flinch resulting from bare skin on blistering hot sand, where: ‘By ten in the morning the blazing heat of the sand, which had begun to burn the tender parts of his toes, compelled him to climb back on the van.’ (JHB:97) Here a comparison with the transcendentalist Thoreau is again worthwhile, in divining the epistemological implications of this. Transcendentalism was a movement in nineteenth-century American literature and thought (Transcendentalism 2002). Thoreau was a proponent of transcendentalism, which he thought of as a ‘correspondence’ between the natural and the spiritual in the way of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Buell 1995:128-9). While Descartes might have argued all knowledge can be achieved through reason, Thoreau brought the senses and soul into his surveying and writing. Like Thoreau, Strehlow’s knowledge of the Central Australian landscape is gleaned by the mind and ably assisted by the senses. In his analysis of Thoreau’s influence in the Australian writing of place, John Ryan calls this a syncretic apprehension of place (Ryan 2011). Compared with JM Stuart’s apprehension of the same region (previous chapter), the influence of the differing durations of exposure to the environment is clear. This suggests also that the distance of the viewing eye from the object it views, is important. Often the

outsider's perspective is lauded for its objectivity, the insider being subject to potential distortion serving local loyalties and obligations. However, as Merriam et al note:

It has commonly been assumed that being an insider means easy access, the ability to ask more meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues, and most importantly, be able to project a more truthful, authentic understanding of the culture under study. On the other hand, insiders have been accused of being inherently biased, and too close to the culture to be curious enough to raise provocative questions. The insider's strengths become the outsider's weaknesses and vice-versa (Merriam et al 2001:411).

The roles of insider or outsider are therefore not clear cut and often depend on positionality, one's position in relation to 'the Other' (see Banks 1998:7). Depending on outlook, therefore, views of either insider or outsider may be accepted as legitimate in different situations (Lewis (1973: 590). For Strehlow — and in the context of the indigenous identity debate of the Land Rights era — it was politically expedient for him to represent himself as 'authentic'.

### 5.3.3 Strehlow's identity politics

While my argument in this chapter concerns itself primarily with the world of 1922 — that is, when the narrative's events unfold — the influence of the accumulated life experience of the author is significant. Considerable personal and related political pressures weighed heavily on Strehlow at that time. Two matters are of crucial importance to the textual analysis. First, as Cohen asserts, *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* is

an attempt by Strehlow to centre himself in Arrernte culture and provide authority for his life's work as a newly politicized generation of indigenous Australians rose to prominence in their own affairs (Cohen 2005:4).

Secondly, Strehlow's text is necessarily shaped by the prevailing thinking of the era in which he writes, that is, Australia in the mid to late sixties, an era of shifting politics when attitudes towards Aborigines broadened in the lead up to the Land Rights era. So while Theo's journey traces one boy's search for identity, it also traces the older man's struggle to retain that which he has forged, as well as a nationalist struggle to make sense of a violent past.

If Strehlow's text renders the frontier porous by imparting a literary sense of settler home (Carter's environmental poetics as lie of the land), then it is important to assess how ingenuous the author is being by constructing and asserting his insider status. That Strehlow set out on his journey barefoot (JHB: 89), for example, once again aligns him more closely with the Arrernte than as European. This construction has been clear from the first: for example, when preparing to leave Hermannsburg, Theo takes a last stroll among his friends in the settlement. A woman called 'Old Margaret' is forceful in her parting advice:

. . . you are not just a white boy . . . you are one of us. You belong to the totem of the Twins of Ntarea, and you are a true Aranda (sic). Go south and learn in the white men's schools, but then come back to us. No other white child born here has ever returned to us, but you must come back to us, to your own people (JHB:28).

As Cohen has observed, Strehlow wants to be considered at one with the nomad Arrernte (2005). But as Bhabha observes: 'Cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation to Self and Other' (2003:247). Strehlow uses his familiarity, the sense of family, and hearkens back to the woman's comments, all of which serve to construct his Arrernte-ness. And yet, as the hours passed on Theo's walk between Henbury and Idracowra, and 'mile after slow mile was put behind the travelers' (JHB:91), an interesting observation is made: 'Theo was glad that the luminous dial of his pocket watch enabled him to work out the distance covered from the time taken in travelling between points' (ibid). The sentence works to counter Strehlow's construction of himself as Arrernte. Linear time and the desire to measure it using instrumental technology marks him as Western, and therefore *not of* the Arrernte. This is perplexing, given Strehlow's strong desire to portray himself as native to this country. As Stephen Muecke notes, Aborigines and the colonisers had radically different philosophical outlooks, such that 'while Aboriginal people were anchored by place, the Europeans were busy counting time' (2004:24). And yet time is crucial to Strehlow's narrative, in the countdown to the hazy destination of Oodnadatta, soon to be cut short at Horseshoe Bend. But such a countdown would appear incongruous in what is elsewhere represented as a timeless land. Muecke writes: 'In indigenous Australian country . . . time has none of the urgency of the imperial



power seeking to improve quickly its capacity to exploit nature' (2004:14). One answer to why Strehlow uses such a construction, I suggest, is that it lends mystery to the imperative of the narrative, that two worlds so philosophically opposed are forcibly come together in a race to beat his father's illness; it is as if the world stands still for these events to occur. What's more, I would also argue that here Strehlow the author somewhat arrogantly gives himself permission to be both Western *and* Arrernte. Strehlow's argument is bolstered by the earlier comments from Old Margaret, which Carter recognises once again as a 'rhetorical invention . . . asserting his right to call Hermannsburg home' (1996a:22).

That Strehlow is forced as an older man to contemplate the death of his father and his own mortality by virtue of personal illness, may also be key. Gordon Kalton Williams suggests the work is a journey into death and self-knowledge (Schultz and Williams 2003). Heidegger's basic idea of being in relation to time has resonance with both this conception of the work and the Aboriginal notion of time outlined above, in that:

if we want to understand what it means to be an authentic human being, then it is essential that we constantly project our lives onto the horizon of our death, what Heidegger calls 'being-towards-death' (Critchley 2009).

In Heidegger's conception, as in Aboriginal culture, time has a different basis, it is being and being is time. This speaks of a narrative more akin to a peregrination, the walk of life and the author's struggle to come to terms with his or her role in it. Philosopher Simon Critchley explains Heidegger's thinking here as: 'The self can only become what it truly is through the confrontation with death, by making a meaning out of our finitude' (2009). It could be the text represents Strehlow's own search for meaning through narrativising the events of his life, which is however, outweighed clearly by its political intent.

The political drive of the text is perhaps most evident in what influences are not included. *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* makes surprisingly little of Pastor Carl's work, for example, neither its importance, nor the pastor's knowledge of culture and environment. This shift in focus effectively diverts attention away from the Pastor and toward TGH Strehlow, setting himself up more prominently as the

authority on the Arrernte. This position of knowledge, combined with Strehlow's desired dual identity of Arrernte/Western, translates to power, considerably enhancing the agency of the author. In this way, Strehlow crafts a powerful authorial identity. *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* is Strehlow's personal mythology; that it uses Aboriginal mythology to do so, Hill describes as an 'appropriation of the Aboriginal mythology for the purposes of his own story' in which Strehlow 'stages the myths to maximum theatrical effect' (Hill 2003:645). And there are serious implications underscoring this appropriation, to which I now turn.

By 1922, the western Arrernte had already sparked interest among academics internationally from the earlier ethnography of Spencer and Gillen. Sigmund Freud's protégé Geza Roheim would later do field work near Hermannsburg in 1929 (Hill 2003:459). When Strehlow's walking memoir was later published it carved a new position in Australian literature, giving both a European view of landscape and an Aboriginal description of country (Cohen 2005:42). But it also came at an opportune time, as the successes and failures of the assimilation era were being more critically evaluated. In no small part, Strehlow was responsible for highlighting these (Hill 2003:674-76; Carter 1996a:22). Perhaps more importantly, the same era saw mounting criticism of Strehlow's apprehension of Arrernte culture and the start of a questioning of the legitimacy of his work. This hardening of the frontier and its constituent and constituting racial division was asserting itself in Strehlow's own life and struggle for political identity.

In 1959, Strehlow was called upon to defend Arrernte man Max Stuart in an appeal in the High Court. Stuart was charged with the rape and murder of a white girl in South Australia and had little English (Hill 2003:551). He had been sentenced to death, but Strehlow argued a typed 'confession' could not have been made by 'the semi-illiterate man' (Strehlow Research Centre 2002). During the case, Strehlow suffered personal grief at the hands of the prosecutors, the commissioner and the press ('Extracts' 1959; cited Hill 2003:585). As Hill argues, the defence of Stuart was part of a wider battle against the failures of assimilation being waged by Strehlow (Hill 2003:588-9), the beginning of a number of defensive strategies he would be forced to wage for the rest of his days.

Controversy over films of secret ceremonies and sacred objects Strehlow had collected during his years in Central Australia, and the later publication of pictures of secret materials in European journals, led to political backlash, Aboriginal resentment and adverse publicity during the 1970s. A cynicism sown during the Stuart appeals and Royal Commission of the 1960s, infected factions within the Hermannsburg Aboriginal community, and assimilationists and others within the white community. In other words, Strehlow had plenty of motivation for setting the record straight with a memoir proving his identity as Arrernte. As Hill reports, '[Strehlow] had by 1957 amply rehearsed his main claim' that his affinity with Central Australia was 'a belonging ... bound to the aesthetics of nostalgia' (Hill 2003:555).<sup>38</sup>

Whatever Strehlow's personal and political motivations may or may not have been, the prose itself speaks clearly to constructs of nation. Evoking what Carter has called a 'postcolonial culture both bicultural and in some sense authentically Australian' (Carter 1996a:27). At the wake after Pastor Carl's death, Elliot tells the pub gathering that Strehlow had 'left a will that a case of whiskey should be donated at his own expense, so that we could celebrate things the right way, as is proper in the bush' (JHB:206). The revelation prompts frank discussion of Strehlow's character.

All the niggers in the country trusted him and would do anything for him. And parson or no parson, the bush people, too, grew to respect him – funny bloody thing, come to think of it! But he was honest. He was dinkum. He was a white man. He'd make any bush bloke welcome on the station. This is a man's country. Every white man on his station is the king of all he surveys, as the saying goes, and the old boy was a man's man (JHB: 206).

Ward's (1958) bushman thesis is evident here, along with a thumbprint of Turner's frontier hypotheses, for Turner wrote of the frontier that 'when it becomes a settled area the region still partakes of the frontier characteristics' (1893:2) Here is Strehlow in Paul Carter's hostile new country, befriended by

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<sup>38</sup> Notably, Strehlow's work is continued today by the Strehlow Research Centre, where the collection of sacred materials is housed. The Centre was launched as a foundation in 1978, acquired by the NT Government in 1985 and entrenched in legislation three years later; it finally opened as Strehlow Research Centre in 1991.

black and white alike, a wilderness in which one is dependent upon another. In the way Turner describes, 'The wilderness masters the colonist' for at the frontier 'the environment is at first too strong for the man' (1893:2). This frontier man (now imagined as being on the Australian frontier) is remade in the collision of self and nature. Christian parallels to Moses and Christ are also clear; and emerging from a walk in the desert is a new Australian, incubated on the frontier as Turner suggests, who, though caught between two cultures, is conversant with both. While to an extent it is a frontier mentality that births this sort of thinking, such conclusions miss a more nuanced reading. The interleaved nature of the relationships between the blacks and the settler-whites speaks of a hybridity or cultural interdependency, a co-existence in a contact zone, rather than a clear dividing line of frontier. At Hermannsburg and Horseshoe Bend is evident a two-way exchange across the cultural divide. Thanks to the mail run between the two settlements, for example, 'folk had always been kept well-supplied with all the news – and all the gossip too – relating to Horseshoe Bend and to its folk, white and dark' (JHB:200).

While the frontier and white culture is hegemonic and has resulted in the significant displacement of Aboriginal culture, as a walk at Idracowra explains, a more intricate web of relationships is also apparent. Here 'Theo spent hours wandering over the station area with his friend Johnson Breadon, the three-quarter white son of [Idracowra manager] Allan Breadon' (JHB:109). By Theo's telling, many whites were in sexual relationships with Aboriginal women, who subsequently found themselves in difficult marital positions. When a white stockman or station manager moved on, 'his half-caste spouse and her children would in most cases be left behind to fend for themselves as best they could' (ibid). Mixed-race sons worked on the stations and daughters were 'sent down south to a home for children . . . so as to save them from being brought up 'among the niggers' and treated by other white men as their mother had been treated by their father' (ibid). Yet the relationships were also warmer and more enduring than such a blunt telling would suggest. Johnson's mother Jessie had been 'living at Idracowra station for some time now; and she was keeping house for Allan

Breadon and her son Johnson.’ She had ‘been fortunate in being able to keep all her children’, more fortunate, in fact, ‘than other half-caste women’ (JHB:111). Jessie’s father had been one of two brothers who had established nearby Henbury Station; for those women left behind by departed white men, ‘Often it would be a dark man who came to their rescue. He would invariably be proud of his ‘white’ wife and he would become a perfect foster father to her children, looking after them as though they were his very own’ (JHB:109). Such intricate and complex relationships are woven throughout *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, where, in spite of both sides trading kills over cattle spearing in earlier frontier conflicts (JHB:118), Allan’s native employees now ‘referred to him in appreciative terms’ (JHB:119). They are even reflected in other walking narratives of the period, such as Gregory’s *Dead Heart*, where can be found this revealing passage:

The Australian aborigines have been often described as the most degraded of human beings. The work of the Lutheran missions shows that, given a fair chance, kind treatment, and a suitable education, the Australian aborigine will develop into an intelligent, industrious, and useful member of society. . . . the honesty of the Kilalpaninna blacks is remarkable in contrast to that of negroes and Asiatics’ (19056:61).

Though Pastor Carl had foisted Lutheran ideals upon the Arrernte, he had also worked diligently to understand their culture, forging an easy and respectful alliance (JHB:4-5). And so it was with an easy reliance, that he allowed them to conduct what he hoped to be his journey of salvation. In the Lutheran Church, he finds little camaraderie or respect. Meanwhile, Breadon, like other cattle men, would spend most of his money in ‘liberal drinking bouts and on trips to the southern cities’ (JHB:119). Nevertheless, for these whites ‘the vast spaces of the Never Never were stripped of many of the terrors of isolation by the knowledge that in times of need every man in the Centre could be counted on to come to the rescue’ (JHB: 119). Clearly, this applied on both sides of the supposed frontier. And here among the Arrernte and the rough and tumble bushmen, even Pastor Carl had found company worth keeping.

### 5.3.4 The world, the text and a representation of place

*Journey to Horseshoe Bend* invites the reader to receive Strehlow's narrative as a simple retelling and arrangement of the Dreaming stories, an otherwise 'authentic' representation of both the landscape he traverses in the footsteps of his family and those of Arrernte ancestors. In this interpretation, the Dreaming stories remain intact, just as they came to Theo and were later gathered by TGH, through indigenous storytelling. As might be the case for any author however, Strehlow selects the stories to include and which not, and he makes his choice to suit a narrative intention, desired tone and theme. In other words, Strehlow co-opts the Dreaming stories as objects in the same way de Certeau (1984) and Sinclair (1991) arrange objects on a walk. As there are a myriad songlines densely criss-crossing the totemic landscape of the Arrernte, he had plenty of choice. Furthermore, as Hill writes: 'It is clear Strehlow was a depressive, melancholic man. This is speaking descriptively, not clinically, but our experience of him so far is invitation enough to the clinical. He was living under the black sun' (2003: 610).

The chosen stories lend light and shade to real events as they unfold, and even the landscape itself, according to Strehlow's authorial need and mood of his intent. To this extent, and to the same degree that Iain Sinclair's psychogeographic walks represent a 'fictional' London (1991:2), Strehlow's journey narrative is a fictional Central Australia. There are, however, limits to the latitude one can take in the interpretation of any text, especially in relation to its place in the world (Said 1975 :9). This does not mean the world of *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* bears little relationship to reality, for Carl Strehlow's final journey was real; it takes place in a real landscape and is informed by real and tragic events: Pastor Carl dies at Horseshoe Bend. Yet the representation is also contrived, a mythical geography, as any identity of Strehlow is also mythical, constructed from this contrived narrative. The Arrernte cultural landscape around the Finke River might be considered the film negative onto which Strehlow's narrative develops a print of his identity, a representational and mythical self. As other walking writers might co-opt objects from the landscape as points of interest and meaning to create a

narrative geography from a walk, Strehlow co-opts cross-cultural ideas linked to particular places and ties them to his political intent, so constructing an identity that is intimately entwined with that of the Arrernte. And yet:

The Aranda (sic) people did not have a word for map. It seems that they did not need it. They were in the map, and their conception of their habitat was a matter of continuous enactment of the map's meaning. The meaning was its value for its inhabitants. You are in the country and all representations of it (in dance, song, painting) are one and the same (Hill 2003:624).

For Strehlow, who felt he had 'walked over so much of the ground that he had earned certain rights to it' (Hill 2003: 624), retelling the stories of his choosing lends legitimacy in both white and black worlds, while also lending the prose a resonance of home. In effect, the European Strehlow uses his self-constructed Arrernte identity to step momentarily across the frontier divide to articulate place from the other side. In the one world, he becomes an authority on Arrernte life and culture (thereby shoring up his writings), and in the Aboriginal world of Hermannsburg, he legitimizes his standing in the community where he grew up and substantiates his translations and use of secret Arrernte materials. In a way, Strehlow's journey narrative traces his own enactment of the country and its stories, akin to the practices of the Arrernte, yet fulfilling his own place as a part of the landscape and its culture by walking it and its sacred places and fusing them with his own story.

Strehlow feels justified in fusing the individual worlds of the Arrernte and the settler. As I have argued, and Hill (2003) confirms, this is partly selfish and for political gain. In the same way Thoreau did for *Walden*, Strehlow manages to similarly construct a prose of place with the feeling of home. In the way that Turner's 'new American' is forged in the crucible of his 'westering frontier', in Strehlow is born a hybrid Australian identity. However, this identity is more than the lonely bushman of Ward's manufacture, or the tough, yet attractive feminine determination of Mrs Elliot. Strehlow's identity binds these on to the resilient surface of the Arrernte culture. For in *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, Strehlow investigates those elements of a narrative of place which geographer David Seamon suggests are usually ignored in more scientific appraisal of landscape:

‘at-homeness, habit, modes of encounter, dwelling’ (Blakemore 2000:115; Seamon 1979:160). And much of this effort is directed through walking; Strehlow’s younger identity Theo, for example, is captured best in the ‘cheerful little freckle-faced boy who . . . walked many miles with his mother’ (JHB:182-3).

Theo’s tale repeats the same sort of solipsism for which Thoreau was roundly criticized (Blakemore 2000); after all, *Horseshoe Bend* is a memoir. However, Blakemore writes in defence of Thoreau that such criticism ‘fails to understand this philosophical necessity and how crucial it is to the project of inhabitation’ (Blakemore 2000:118). For there can be no consciousness that is separate from place, only consciousness with *intention toward* (Sokolowski 2000:8) or, *consciousness of* (Blakemore 2000:119). As already noted, ‘seeing home and writing accurately about it is no mean task’ (ibid:118). In this way, and beyond the possible political motivations for *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, the text maps a way forward for settler depictions of Australian places. It crafts a more nuanced appraisal of Central Australian place than a crude binary descriptor such as frontier can provide. Furthermore, and in the way Thoreau recognized and Casey (1990) would later reinforce, Strehlow understands that self cannot be separated from place. Seamon suggests that we are not separate from the world, rather we interpenetrate it, for:

people are immersed in their world, and this immersion is qualitative, subtle—in many ways, ineffable. Thus a walk through a well-tended garden evokes a different state of being than a similar walk through an uncared-for garden or an unsightly vacant lot (2000:190).

A taxonomic or scientific account of the landscape (such as that mostly rendered by Stuart in his journal, for example) conveys one meaning, but grasps little of a relationship between self and place. The result is place identity without an immediate reverence for home or the resonance of Marlpwenge’s world, instead, merely the prospect of future home, a much less personal idea. Again, Thoreau is instructive, and I would argue that for both he and Strehlow it is true that ‘greater meaning arises from the continuous recording of a life, and going back to places over and over turns the ‘symbolical’ significance of a phenomenon into realized experience’ (Blakemore 2000:121). In this way, and drawing on the work of



Tuan, Seamon, Relph and others, Blakemore distinguishes between the visitor or traveller, and the native. Here I draw the same contrast between the viewpoints of Marlpwenge and Stuart, and contrast them both in turn with the hybrid and politicised viewpoint of Strehlow in *Horseshoe Bend*.

## 5.4 Conclusion

The frontier is temporarily rendered porous by Strehlow's representation of Central Australian place of the inter-war era in *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*. While particular political and personal pressures are at large in the text, the walking memoir directly questions what it means to belong or to be at home in a place. Using the recounted walk to narrativise space means two systems of political geography can meet in the body of protagonist Theo. This meeting imparts to the boy a hybrid identity that is of benefit to the elder Strehlow (the author) in his struggle with political factors external to the text. By reimagining the Finke as home, in the same way that Anderson's imagined community (1991) speaks to nation, Strehlow bolsters his extra-textual position as an authority on the Arrernte, in the eyes of both the Arrernte themselves and his fellow anthropologists. This textual status as an insider however, ultimately renders him an outsider to the Arrernte in the public sphere.

In JM Stuart's fourth journal the mission was to inscribe space for the colonist. Home was far away in Britain. Over time however, settlers would enact place along Stuart's hard-won route across space. In *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, the space of the Finke Valley is already place, not only for the Arrernte, but for the young settler boy Theo as well. Home has become more than the object of desire of an explorer; it rests comfortably in the lifeworld of Theo the insider. Through a remembrance and reimagining of the journey, Strehlow has crafted a narrative of home that closely aligns with the storied landscape of his Arrernte self. The world of his 14-year-old self/protagonist Theo, is in upheaval and hurtling toward the death of his father Pastor Carl, a man he both reveres and fears. While Theo's is a personal search for identity during which he reaches for the stories of place as a way to position the self, the same search for identity bedevils the narrator, who in

this representation of a particular landscape, betrays his own struggle to shape a politically beneficial identity through the younger Theo. Strehlow selectively retells particular Dreaming stories to suit this purpose. As a result, Theo is infused with all of the accumulated wisdom and political wariness of Strehlow the elder and develops an identity closely aligned with both settler and Arrernte.

Ultimately, I argue that the value of *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* is not in whether the narrative is accurate, politically neutral (assuming this is possible), or even whether Strehlow rightly or wrongly co-opts the Dreaming narratives to his advantage. It is that the text points the way to a literature of inhabitation for the settler, one that better reflects the intercultural dependencies arising in Central Australia. For the narrative has the intimacy and reverence of home, embracing the postcolonial complexity of the Centre's unique bio-political geography and directly confronting its hegemonic representation as a divided frontier. It is the author's insider agency in both Arrernte and settler worlds that gives the text this traction and depth. Strehlow's journey is very different from Stuart's 'crossing of the unknown', and is enriched by a strongly personal place-affect which Stuart never expresses. The narrative is sewn with facts of the regional ecology and Aboriginal stories of place, as well as characters drawn from the Centre's pastoral community, who evoke an Australian 'bush' identity. The inter-cultural exchange evident from *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* works counter-discursively to the frontier, and softens any rigid divide separating the two understandings of place that are represented in the narratives of Thompson/Marlpwenge and Stuart.

## 6. Into the Wild

I want to speak a word for freedom and wildness.

Henry David Thoreau 1862

Wilderness: A place where man has not yet set foot.

David Brower 1978:7

The idea that indigenous Australians can't adapt to modern life is a myth,  
and declaring their land 'wilderness' is a travesty of justice.

Marcia Langton 2013b

This chapter argues that representing Central Australia as a wilderness destination for tourists, an idea brought to popular consciousness after the Second World War, issued an unsettling and contradictory challenge to the business of constructing an Australian identity. Conjoining the idea of wilderness as undisturbed nature with a broader Australian mythology of the Outback became popular, and texts delivering such themes contributed to the Red Centre's attraction as a tourist destination (Haynes 1998, Frost 2004a; Lynch 2007; Berzins 2008; Barnes 2011). While such representations are evident in a number of works, prominent is journalist Arthur Groom's recounted walking journeys of the region in *I Saw a Strange Land* (1950).<sup>39</sup>

In one sense, Groom's recounted walks provide a sophisticated portrait of post-war Central Australia and an Aboriginal culture in transition. The text gives a scientifically-informed articulation of the desert landscape, at times rivalling that of Strehlow (1978) and sketching a strong sense of place for the reader, which in turn conveys a cultural landscape bathed in contradiction. I argue however, that its constructed place identity of wilderness — aimed at the traveller eager for an authentic Australia — served only to deepen existing perceptions of Central Australia as a frontier, prolonging this representation and further disenfranchising Aborigines. The inherent contradiction between Groom's nuanced and peripatetic place and the text's closely argued frontier identity for Central Australia, further demonstrates the inadequacy of frontier as a model of place for the Centre.

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<sup>39</sup> All page references cited for 1959 reprint by Angus and Robertson, denoted SSL.

## 6.1 Overview

First published in 1950, *I Saw a Strange Land* recounts journeys across Central Australia made by journalist Arthur Groom in 1946 and 1947. Of 25 chapters, the first two provide context and background for his later recounting of some 23 separate journeys, segments of journeys and encounters. Groom first recounts eight journeys from 1946, while remaining chapters describe camel and other treks to the south across the Amadeus Basin and to Ayers Rock (Uluru) in 1947. To begin the narrative, Groom paints a lively portrait of the Alice Springs of the day, where the ‘future of the town has gripped the people’ and ‘everyone is now a civic planner and a critic’ (SSL:5). Groom’s eye soon roams outward from the town however, ‘Straight out onto desert sand or rocky wilderness’, to where he intends to walk.

Before recounting the main journeys of the text, Groom takes his reader back 25 years to when he worked at Lake Nash cattle station near the border between the Northern Territory and Queensland from January 1922 until June 1926 (SSL:7). Here the young journalist’s imaginings are filled for the first time with stories of a remote region ‘cut off from the rest of the Northern Territory by eighty miles of spinifex desert’ (ibid:7). Round campfires at night such stories are told and absorbed, Groom alluding to their mythical dimension when he describes his companions as ‘men of the elusive West, which is always west of where the tales are told, at least one more day’s travel beyond tomorrow’ (SSL:8). One day, while Groom and the group are mustering cattle, they spy a family with horses and a wagon droving a herd toward the west: a man, woman and four children. They were going to Central Australia: ‘“out” to the Sandover River Country, east of the Overland Telegraph Line to take up land somewhere “out there”’ (SSL:9). Though Groom describes their mission as ‘utter lunacy’, the memory of the family and their audacious intent haunts him. For as he leaves Central Australia for Brisbane, Groom writes:

Two unanswered questions went with me, and persisted throughout the years. Someday I would go back, and . . . find out the name of the man who had taken faith and loyalty and

crossed the desert . . . and even more important, perhaps, I might find out what was being done to ease the passing of Australia's primitive man (SSL:11).

Two things are immediately discernible in this quotation: Groom's hazy allusion to 'out there', implying a mythical outback, and his subscription to a Doomed Race Theory of Aborigines, predicting a rather glum future for 'Australia's primitive man'. As noted earlier, the perception that Aborigines were a 'doomed race' pervaded the beliefs of Australian white society from the early nineteenth century. Studies by contemporary anthropologists suggested a race with genetic links to the 'Stone Age' could not survive the more advanced culture of the white race. Extinction was the expected destiny for Australian Aborigines. Russell McGregor suggests the theory held sway until the 1950s, withering rapidly after the Second World War. The grim prediction lost currency as concepts of race, given credibility in the Western imagination since the Enlightenment, were disentangled from concepts of progress (McGregor 1997:ix).

Groom returned to Central Australia in 1946, where his motivation for walking and writing the Centre is made plain:

I wanted to see if Central Australia's scenery was grand enough, the climatic conditions moderate enough, to warrant tourist development in any large degree; and I wanted to find out what degree of protection over the native men and women and the wilderness areas they roamed in, might be necessary to preserve intact the heart of our continent for the education and benefit of future generations (SSL:12).

The analysis of this chapter draws upon Groom's work as a whole, plus a somewhat closer focus on Chapter VI: *Voice of the Ages*, a solo desert walk of more than 100 kilometres. First I consider Groom's articulation of Central Australia as a 'destination', a term defined in recent research of tourism geographies (Dredge and Jenkins 2003; Frost 2004a; 2010; Trauer and Ryan 2005 and White and White 2004). Groom relies heavily upon a humanist interpretation of place via the phenomena of place affect, with the broader political geography of space given far less emphasis. Such a walking portrait both dislocates and reinforces the frontier. Second then I explore the role of place attachment and place affect in shaping humanist place through the work of Lewicka (2011); Silva et al (2013); Larsen and Johnson (2012) and Avriel-Avni et al (2010). Finally, I

introduce the ‘moral geographies’ of Sack (1999) and Gill (2005) as a way of embracing the complexity of place evident from the text. As such, I would suggest that *I Saw a Strange Land* clearly defines a demarcation between humanist notions of place and Marxist understandings of space, a gap, if you like, where unintended consequences might emerge. The idea that sense of place may ‘leak’ deleterious effects in this way has been noted by Massey (2005) and Plumwood (2005), whereby cultivating an intimate sense of place and place identity, evident from Groom’s text, can mask hidden connections and generate unexpected political effects.

In summary then, the chapter argues that there is a fundamental ambivalence in Groom’s narrative, which challenges the notion of Central Australia as a frontier, while simultaneously reinforcing its status as such by virtue of its construction of a landscape as wilderness. The reader is left with an impression of Central Australia as an exotic destination where one might *escape* from home, rather than a literary representation of a place to call home.

## 6.2 Genre and context

*I Saw a Strange Land* proved quite popular, its first run of 3000 copies selling out in eight months, prompting a second edition in 1952 (Berzins 2008:12). Groom’s non-fiction collection is still mentioned occasionally in the Australian press; in 2013, for example, journalist for *The Australian* newspaper Nicolas Rothwell wrote of his admiration for the work, observing how ‘Groom loses himself in the landscape, a realm of depths, a space where the horizons lure the traveller on’ (Romei 2013). In an obituary marking Groom’s death in 1953 at age 49, the *Centralian Advocate* newspaper called the book ‘one of the best-read books on Central Australia’ (‘Arthur Groom is Dead’ 1953; see also Stone 1954).

Little critical attention has been devoted to Groom’s text, and is limited to citations in general chapters regarding desert literature, or short analyses (see Berzins 2008, Frost 2004a, Dewar 2008, Lynch 2007 and Griffiths 1996). The text’s popularity however, makes it influential, if not pivotal, in reconstructing the Centre as a wilderness for tourists, a ‘managed nature’ (see Rolston 1999).

Groom was commonly described as a ‘remarkable walker’ owing to his extraordinary ability to traverse great distances unassisted (Berzins 2008:12). He was an excellent outdoor photographer and many of his evocative black and white photographs illustrate the book (Macartney 1951). Groom was well prepared for the Australian bush: during World War II, he ‘lectured on survival in the jungle to the 50,000 Australian and American troops who passed through the Canungra jungle training centre’ (Jarrott 1983). Though it is the walking journeys that stand out, all of Groom’s journeys, whether on foot, by camel or car, tell a story of Central Australia. The recounted journeys also reveal Groom’s conservationist imperative and his concerns for the future of Aboriginal culture.

Texts that use the walk as a form of environmental protest invite an ecocritical analysis (Glotfelty & Fromm 1996, Buell 1995, and Reuckert 1978). Between the lines of Groom’s text is the assumption that literature can help to ‘do something’ about Australians’ attitudes toward the natural environment. While Groom’s text might be thought of as a form of Australian nature writing using walking and the journey as a narrative device, the term a ‘narrative of place’, embracing authors from Edward Abbey to Annie Dillard and Wendell Berry, is perhaps more suited. In writing like Groom’s there is concern for the world outside the self, in which geography itself is a shaping force (Lopez 1997). As Mazel notes of Mary Austin’s *Land of Little Rain*, in such morality plays there are two performers: environmentalist and environment (1996:138).

Groom envisaged the Centre as a wilderness for bushwalking tourists, an area of some significance that was under threat and in need of preservation. As Tom Griffiths notes, *I Saw a Strange Land* was intended to encourage the ‘creation of a National Park in Central Australia and far more concerned with the promotion of tourism than others’ (Griffiths 1996:180). In his book on Queensland’s Lamington Plateau, Groom notes the need for ‘a great National Park for the Centre of Australia’ (Groom 1949:205). Groom pursues his goal throughout *I Saw a Strange Land* via his protagonist-self as the archetypal walker-activist, his aim to promote the conservation of the cultural and physical landscapes he describes. In this way he might be compared with John Muir, the Scottish-American nature writer and

advocate of preserving areas of wilderness in the US during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (1890). Articles by Muir in two 1890 editions of *Century* magazine regarding threats to the Yosemite area and the Sierra, led to the region being declared America's first National Park. Walking as protest or as an action characterised by political purpose gained currency in the twentieth century. While the political walker who writes shares something in common with the journalist who walks, the walking activist in literature remains distinctive and familiar in western culture, bringing together 'the iconography of the pilgrimage with that of the military march and the labour strike and demonstration' (Solnit 2001:58).

Groom's embrace of the Doomed Race Theory echoes its popular reach. For example, early on Groom encounters a female tourist, who wants to know:

*all* about the Macdonnells; whether they would be able to walk through the ranges. And were the savages *really* wild? And had I a gun? Goodness! Why didn't I carry one? Were the missionaries exploiting the natives? And did Albert Namatjira do his own paintings or were they done for him? Could they get a pet kangaroo somewhere? And, perhaps best of all. Almost word for word: 'Where might one purchase Aboriginal weapons? My husband is most *vitaly* interested in the aboriginal question. He *already* has several boomerangs and spears from the Nullabor Plain, and is *particularly* anxious to get a big collection before these unfortunate people are allowed to die out (SSL:76).

This frontier representation emphasises the nature of the 'Australian outback' (Gill 2005). In other words, the idea of the Outback invokes the idea of the frontier. The frontier is a place marked by privation and conflict and not encouraging of the thought of home (which implies safety and comfort) nor inviting a sense of belonging for settlers or Aborigines. Groom's tourist articulates the frontier as a 'destination' where might be had a 'frontier experience'. Invoking wilderness as a place identity for Central Australia has only served to deepen such conflict. One effect has been to condemn Aborigines to be part of a representation of Central Australia as primitive nature, diecast as traditional or primitive hunter gatherers, and acting to exclude the modernising Aborigine, an outcome which Marcia Langton has called a 'travesty of justice' (Langton 2013b:39). Such a



representation resonates strongly with the romantic construct of the 'ecological Aborigine' emerging later during the Land Rights era (Rolls 2007).

Nevertheless, Groom captures well the difficult choices faced by Aborigines of the Menzies era, many of whom had never encountered whites. Noteworthy is this passage, concerning a 'bleary eyed, dirty child' who has walked in from the desert with family to Hermannsburg, and who is

puzzled and still a little frightened, in this first contact with an outpost of civilisation. Tomorrow he might be gone again with his parents into the wilderness; or he might stay. The freedom of the nomad was his, and the call of his primitive forefathers still strong and definite; but the white man's foods were sweet and tempting (SSL:22).

Later, while gathering a potted history of Hermannsburg from Pastor Albrecht, Groom observes that such a native was in need of

vast space in his own domain, freedom, unlimited movement, and time to gather his own bush food and water so necessary to provide a diet that was instinctive to him, and as definite as the centuries (SSL:34-5).

Yet 'every advance of the white settler interfered with known supplies of food and water' (SSL:35), as the frontier spread across the Australian wilderness. Groom explains to Pastor Scherer of the Lutheran Mission at Hermannsburg, his keen interest

in the protection of primitive wilderness, particularly in relation to the future of nomadic natives. [Scherer] begged me not to walk straight off alone through the MacDonnell Ranges, as I had planned. But to go with him to Hermannsburg Mission and get helpful advice (SSL:14-15).

To a significant extent, Groom's vision was ultimately realised: the West MacDonnell Ranges and Uluru are now Territory and Federal parks respectively (see *Parks Australia; Parks and Wildlife NT*). It is arguable that it was Groom's conservationist standpoint which encouraged this interpretation of wilderness to be conflated with the notion of Outback, forming not only an attractive destination for tourists, but helping to shape the next half century of government policy. The shift to appraising the Centre as wilderness coincided broadly with a push for the Commonwealth to take a more national role in Indigenous affairs and to move to a

more equal rights approach. Such ructions eventually brought about the move away from assimilationist policies toward Aboriginal self-determination, and later the homelands movement and Land Rights (Sanders 2013). While such juxtaposition is interesting, further research would be needed to discern whether the link between wilderness and policy change is casual or even related, and I do not propose to undertake that research here.

Defined by contrast with its other, Groom's wilderness invokes its own sense of frontier between itself and civilization. While already celebrated by Australian bushwalkers of the early twentieth century, the particular experience of a journey on foot into 'undisturbed nature' had come to the fore by mid-century (Harper 2007:304). Such walks were best done 'in nature', or better still, in 'wilderness', a term which has co-evolved with Thoreau's concept of 'wildness' (Schneider 2000:25). Wilderness signifies a place where nature is at its purest and the influence of people is slight. This notion was manifest as early as the 1930s in *The Red Centre: Man and Beast in the Heart of Australia* (1935) by H.H. Finlayson.<sup>40</sup>

During and after WWII, the Australian National Travel Association (ANTA) introduced marketing campaigns, which 'enfranchised pre-eminent nature-loving sportsmen and "artists of the wild" to redefine the primal motive for travel as wandering into the "heart" of the Australian "wilderness" to contemplate man's place in natural creation' (Barnes 2011:170). Finlayson's text underscored rising concern that overdevelopment was destroying Australia's remaining 'unspoilt wilderness' (Finlayson 1935). Such themes had already characterised the relationship between US literature and the American desert, a path blazed by Mark Twain in *Roughing it* (1872) and *The Innocents Abroad* (1869). In analysing these texts, Amy Clary concludes the latter is preoccupied with Twain's unshakeable belief that 'domesticating the wild American Desert would be a fundamental loss to American culture' (2011:29). The parallels with Groom's text

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<sup>40</sup> Best remembered for his 1933 walk of some 500 kilometres across the Rawlinson Ranges where Lasseter had perished in search of gold, Finlayson's expeditions took place prior to a massive wave of extinctions gripping the Centre in response to changing land use, the spread of foxes, cats and rabbits. Finlayson was the only scientist to have recorded ecological information for many mammal species now lost. (Notes by author, Museum of Central Australia, June 2014)

are clear: Clary's analyses and Twain's texts help illuminate the role wilderness played in not only the US nation's emerging sense of itself (ibid), but reflect also on the Australian case. It is interesting to note nevertheless, that Clary's analysis ignores Twain's likewise neglect of the American Indians in his treatment of place.

Wilderness is widely used to represent Central Australia today. The eco- and adventure tourism industry markets remote places to hikers keen to walk the Larapinta Trail and other routes, as well as to climb Uluru (see *Wilderness Australia* and *Truly Australia*). Other tourists are keen to follow four-wheel drive routes, some of which retrace the steps of the explorers and old stock routes. The image of an Outback destination is a major strategy of the NT Tourist Commission (Hall 2003:167-171). As Rosslyn Haynes notes, books, newspaper and magazine articles, painting, poetry, films and television were critical in shaping ideas of the Outback and its potential as a holiday destination (1998). The result is that American tourists, for example, perceive the Outback as being at an earlier stage of development, similar to their own frontier period, which is no longer available for them to see in the US (Frost 2004a:3; see also Durack 1962).

Fundamentally, Groom's wilderness representation raises important questions about perceptions of nature. The meaning of nature has long been a complex matter; Raymond Williams described the term as 'perhaps the most complex word in the language' (1983:219). The word troubled the aesthetic of the picturesque, popular in the literature of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe and America, just as it now bedevils discourses around use of its etymological cousin wilderness, and the often intense debate surrounding the management of 'wilderness areas' and national parks (Byerly 1996:53). It was during the Menzies era however, that wilderness came to be understood by Australians as something different from the wilderness of Stuart's depiction, the dangerous 'great unknown' of his expedition journals and those of other explorers, or even the empty land of opportunity of Idreiss' appraisal, otherwise called *terra nullius*.<sup>41</sup> Wilderness

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<sup>41</sup> The Australian landscape was declared *terra nullius* in 1835 after New South Wales Governor Richard Bourke quashed an attempt to purchase Port Phillip land from the Aborigines there via a

came to mean not only a landscape in its primitive or original state, relatively undisturbed by humans and thereby closer to nature (see Brower 1978), but one of particular size and accessibility to those wanting a ‘wilderness experience’. Such a landscape was attractive to city dwellers looking for escape from their everyday lives, a significant change from Gregory’s earlier appraisal of the Centre as a *Dead Heart* (1906).

In Australia, wilderness evolved a range of meanings suited to specific interest groups (for example *The Wilderness Society*). In the US, such definitions are entrenched in the 1964 Wilderness Act (Buell 2005:149). Such definitions usually specify an area that is remote, of substantial size and relatively undisturbed by humans. Buell quotes a range of meanings of ‘wilderness’ including ‘the abode of beasts rather than humans: a place where civilized humans supposedly do not (yet) dwell (2005:151). Silva et al argue that undisturbed areas like mountains may be seen as symbols of undomesticated nature (2013). Like mountains, deserts may be expected to also invoke such symbolism. Such an idea combines both Enlightenment and Romantic worldviews to invoke varying definitions of nature, which, as Williams describes, vary from

Nature as the primitive condition before human society; through the sense of an original innocence from which there has been a fall and a curse, requiring redemption; through the special sense of a quality of birth as in the Latin root; through again the sense of the forms and moulds of nature which can yet, paradoxically, be destroyed by the natural forces of thunder; to that simple and persistent form of the personified goddess, Nature herself (1972:151).

The meaning of nature may range from the essential essence of a thing, to Mother Nature, a mystical force somewhat at odds with a monotheistic God. Further, while socialists along with imperialists have talked of the conquest of nature, environmentalists and — with the greening of literary studies — ecocritics speak of its preservation. Ecocritics argue for the role played by representations of nature, while censuring ‘Judeo Christian thinking for its anthropocentric

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treaty (Bourke 1835). After this time, anyone found occupying the land without authority was considered to be trespassing.

arrogance and dominating attitude toward nature' (Glotfelty and Fromm: 1996:xxvii).

The imagined wilderness of *I Saw a Strange Land* is a managed version of nature, not the savage and empty desert of Stuart's depiction. As I have shown, Stuart's great unknown was a dangerous place where the skills of human beings were tested. Managed nature is a much safer prospect than Stuart's desert: here experiences are constrained and regulated so as to meet the needs of modern-day visitors, and to convey a particular and attractive image to those thinking of visiting. Groom's touristic gaze recast Central Australia as a 'wilderness' in this safer mould, suitable for a generation of tourists keen for adventure. Having said this, walking in Central Australia remains challenging, as Groom attests:

The only hardship I experienced was the physical effort of walking up a long exposed ridge of rock that cut my shoes badly. The rock is rough and abrasive, and the action of goose-stepping over the sharp spinifex is rough on clothes and shoes alike (SSL:62).

A journey to the Centre is outside the normal experience of many and into a liminal zone (White and White 2004:202), which has often been argued as a journey back in time (Croll 1937:129; Griffiths 1996:179). More recently, Griffiths argues the closer one gets to the Centre, the further 'outside' you are:

Being 'outside' mean[s] being beyond the limits of established settlement, a land as yet unredeemed by the hopefully advancing frontier, and therefore full of the freedom, promise, and danger of such liminality. The 'inside country' [is] nearer the coast and the capitals, it [is] civilised, populated and tamed. It [is] possessed. The outside country [is] a metaphor for everything the inside country [is not]: inconvenient, uncomfortable, insecure, unproximate (Griffiths 2002:23).

Groom was greatly attracted to being 'outside' in this way, to the 'amazing series of parallel ranges that wall the heart of Australia' (SSL:4), and saw a different future for the Centre from Brady, Stuart and others with a prospectorial eye. It was different again from Strehlow's hybrid geography of home; Groom would tap instead the Centre's liminality. From the 1920s on a pilgrimage of artists to Central Australia had begun to shape this representation, while later would come Russel Drysdale's seeping red landscapes of western New South Wales and Sidney Nolan's surreal landscapes of Central Australia (Griffiths 1996:185).

Importantly, and in contrast to Stanner's so-called 'great Australian silence' (Stanner 2009; Healy 2008; Meadows 2001), many writers of Central Australia, including Ion Idreiss and Ernestine Hill, and anthropologists including Donald Thomson, the Strehlows and R Berndt, were writing of a Centre well-populated by Aborigines (see Rolls 2010b). Most however, emphasized the 'strangeness' of the environment, including the nation-building magazine *Walkabout*. Other books of Groom's era in this vein include Charles Mountford's *Brown Men in Red Sand* (1948) and *Adam in Ochre* by Colin Simpson (1951). In Groom's text, the emphasis is on the 'strangeness' of his title, a mark of difference of the Centre's desert environment compared with the more temperate home landscapes of his readers. I would argue therefore that Groom's text is a form of what Mazel has called 'domestic Orientalism' (1996:143-4). The appeal of the landscape of the Centre is dependent on its difference from what is 'home' to many of Groom's readers, in other words, their 'Other'. And this Other may be Nature or Aborigine. For example, Nature writing relies upon Nature as Other; as Thoreau writes in his Journal: 'I love Nature, partly because she is not man, but a retreat from him' (Thoreau 1906:4.445, cited Slovic 1996:353). Groom linked such retreat with the Centre's potential for tourism, citing a need for the protection of such a landscape and the preservation of Aboriginal culture. In other words, he used the mysterious and 'surreal' nature of the landscape to its own advantage. As Lynch notes, Groom 'seeks to convert strangeness from a liability into an asset; the land's strangeness is the source of its appeal to the tourists he hopes will visit the area; its otherness is what makes the land worth visiting and protecting, not despising' (2007:78).

### 6.3. Imagining Aborigines on a walk to Hermannsburg

In Chapter VI: *Voice of the Ages*, Groom walks across remote desert from a location near Alice Springs west to the Ellery River then on to Hermannsburg, a distance of more than 100 kilometres. Hermannsburg missionary Pastor Albrecht drops Groom by car roughly twenty miles from the town, before heading further to business in Alice Springs and elsewhere, expecting to drive through much of the night. 'Fully laden with food for several days, and water bottles that might

last twenty-four hours' (SSL:46), Groom aims to head west into the MacDonnell Ranges.

After alighting from the vehicle, Groom pauses momentarily to tell the reader of his admiration for 'Mission men like Albrecht,' constructing an heroic identity for the pastor for whom 'time and fatigue, disappointment and hardship meant little. Their goal was selfless, and far beyond the understanding of ordinary man' (SSL:46). Here the thankless lot of the Christian missionary is blended with the bold courage of the rugged pastoralist, the bushmen of Strehlow's construction, the two characters similarly moulded by the harsh conditions of the Outback. Pastor Albrecht is immediately reminiscent of TGH Strehlow's construction of his father, Pastor Carl. Despite having 'found the remnants of the once virile and proud Central Australian natives a filthy and sick people' (SSL:35), Carl Strehlow had laid a foundation for Christianity, an achievement, it is implied, rivalling the taming of the inland by pastoralists and a significant challenge given the 'primitive' nature of his congregation.

Though Albrecht had suggested Groom camp nearby with some native stockmen, Groom was 'fresh and eager to go'. The stockmen's apparent disposition — they were reportedly camped 'about three miles' to the north and may well have happily received the stranger Groom into their midst late at night — speaks of a communal spirit flexible and welcoming. It also speaks of a flexibility in the Aboriginal community: They had begun working on Outback cattle stations in greater numbers when the inland was still accessible only by horse and camel, proving themselves 'good horseman and useful house servants' (Jupp 1988:142). To cite an example from one of Groom's later walks, while staying to the west at Areyonga, natives come in to the settlement one Sunday night from 'near and far'.

They were native pastoralists who had been shepherding their cattle. They had ridden in many miles, and gathered now to form a choir about the low fire . . . the old favourites of civilization are also favourites of these native men and women and their children (SSL:112-3).

In Groom's narrative there is ample evidence that Aborigines are adapting to changes that surround them, to which the choir attests. But farewelling Pastor

Albrecht near Alice Springs that night, Groom foregoes the recommended comforts of the nearby stockmen's campfire to head 'through the brilliant golden night towards the Ellery River' (SSL:47). Immediately the reader is among 'Clay pans and stoney ridge country, with mulgas and ironwoods scattered thinly and shimmering like silver' (ibid). Groom's botanically well-informed descriptions of country rival those of Strehlow, giving the same assuredness of the abilities and knowledge of the walking observer. By the following evening, Groom had 'walked nearly forty miles.' Groom's walking feats are legend, in fact about 1930 he walked across south-east Queensland by moonlight 'from O'Reilly's to Mount Barney, selected a camp-site, talked to landowners and returned, covering seventy miles (113km), midnight to midnight' (Jarrott 1983). After his return to Queensland from Lake Nash, Groom went to work for the *Sunday Mail*, and in 1930 became the first honorary secretary of the National Parks Association of Queensland, having set up the group with Romeo Lahey, as described in *One Mountain After Another* (1949). Later, the pair established Binna Burra Lodge in Lamington National Park, in the hinterland of what is now the Gold Coast (Frost 2004b). The reason I give this detail is to make clear that prior to his journeys in Central Australia, Groom's template for turning large tracts of the continent into a conservation zone for bushwalkers was set.<sup>42</sup> This administrative vision of the national park, I argue, is clear from the text itself. The recent 'handback' to Aboriginal groups of the management of large tracts of Central Australia's national parks has done much to restore a sense of dual ownership and use of these lands, whilst remaining controversial in some quarters (Chlanda 2006). However, a place identity of wilderness still generates a disturbing friction between the traditional ownership of these areas and the Eurocentric construct of Australian 'wilderness'.

Confounding Groom's aim to construct Central Australia as wilderness is his own account of a region populated by Aborigines. Early on Groom writes: 'I had

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<sup>42</sup> Groom wrote articles based on his walks of south-east Queensland for the *Queenslander*, the *Brisbane Courier* and *Courier Mail*, while many of his photographs of the Lamington National Park appeared in Brisbane newspapers of the period. Later he wrote for the popular publication *Walkabout*.



believed the work of the Missions to be nothing more than a merciful delaying of the final death of the Aboriginal race' (SSL:22). However, he is moved to modify this articulation of doomed race theory, writing: 'The contrast presenting itself at Hermannsburg was unexpected. This was no dying race – there were too many children' (ibid). Despite this more gracious depiction, when set against Groom's own representation of the landscape as wilderness, the text once again condemns Aborigines to be part of primitive nature. That night in the desert after leaving Pastor Albrecht, brisk walking brought Groom to Ellery River, tributary of the Finke where the landscape seems to lend itself to Groom's imagining of the native as primitive. After a swim, Groom camps and

Towards midnight a far-off whispering came in over the high hills. At first it was a complete sound in itself, distant and soft, then gradually becoming powerful and definite. It was soon part of the whole wilderness: part of the pines and ghost gums, and cycads and spinifex, and of the rocks and hills and valleys; surely the voice of an ancient people dreaming, and yet stirring once again in their ancient land, the ghosts of millions down the ages (SSL:48-9).

As the wind increased in volume, Groom takes his argument further, making his link between Aborigines and nature even stronger: 'I could sense acutely the first aborigines peering into the darkness and fearfully chanting the legends of mythology that are now in danger of being lost forever' (SSL:49).

This Romantic view of Aborigines supports most strongly Groom's representation of the Centre as wilderness. But as seen earlier, the choir of Areyonga challenges this identity, of which Groom writes, somewhat ambiguously, that

in the native Pitjantjara and Arunta (Aranda) tongues into which these well-known hymns also have been translated, and with the organ effect of the echoing hills, there is a Sacrament and worship by primitive people in their own wilderness . . . (SSL:113).

Groom argues elsewhere that songs have always been a part of the wilderness, an oblique reference perhaps to a performative dimension of the songlines, yet offering the singing as proof that 'the natives have fully accepted the white man's worship in song in place of some of their old and barbarous ceremonies' (SSL:112). The very presence of Aborigines in the landscape should work against a representation of wilderness. Instead, here their presence renders them as part of

nature. But an actively modernising Aborigine works, I would argue, to counter even this conflation of Aborigine and wilderness, by granting them human agency. Groom's ultimate argument is already hinted at when he conflates the 'organ effect' of their voices with a 'worship by primitive people in their own wilderness'. Protagonist Groom is oblivious to such contra-indicative arguments however, and next day

climbed the high quartzite ridge west of the gap, up through prickly spinifex and rocky outcrop, to the crest one thousand feet up; and looked out through winter's clear visibility over this strangely beautiful coloured land of parallel ranges both north and south, for I was in the middle of them all (SSL:49).

The calming effect of the ranges surrounds Groom, while the tension of the thematic contradiction of the choir remains unresolved. His walk to Hermannsburg is 'cooler and more pleasant than the first hot day' (SSL:50) and by the time he reaches the Hermannsburg Mission a Sunday night singsong is making ready in the yard beside the Superintendent's house. Groom sits beside Pastor Albrecht and the artist Rex Battarbee, and soon, once again, a choir begins to sing:

They sang in the Arunta language, then in English; and by far the loveliest and deepest effect, which revealed the unforgettable harmony and ease of control and exhilaration in their voices, came from the rendition by these stone-age, primitive people of the hymns of Christianity translated by the early missionaries . . . one can imagine the patience of the teachers, and the bewilderment of the black man trying to judge and understand the strange new music of the voices brought by the white men (SSL:51).

The scene is worth contrasting with earlier representations of the Centre. As Frost notes (2004a:5), Brady had treated the Central Australian landscape as terra nullius upon which great development might take place. His travel work *Australia Unlimited* (1918) is considered 'a powerful shaper of the Outback' (Frost 2004a:3). Based on the contemporaneous discovery of underground reserves of artesian water, and the consequent softening of perceptions of the inland as a waterless landscape, Brady predicted a rosy future for Central Australia, proclaiming:

Out of this mighty heart what treasures of meat and wool are destined to be poured! By its maternal beats what millions will yet be fed and clothed . . . [flooding] national life into the veins and arteries of the whole Commonwealth (Brady 1918: 588).

Brady's text reflects the optimism of the early interwar era, the expectation of opportunities yet to be fulfilled. Groom's Menzies-era text portrays a community in the throes of change, a settlement still on the frontier of colonialism and the periphery of Brady's hopeful development. As Finlayson noted during the 1950s however, the 'old Australia is passing' as culture and environment responded to the external influences of religion and capitalism.<sup>43</sup> Later however, Groom cannot sleep, worried about this very fact, disturbed by the relentless passing of tradition:

I could sense the tragic passing of the native chants and ceremonies handed down with amazing accuracy and religious fervour by the patriarchal tribal elders, from generation to generation; only to be threatened with oblivion and forgetfulness. But the savage and primitive ceremonies, once so much a part of the chanting, are now no more. White man's laws have discouraged them: and slowly, through the period of bewilderment and transition, the native has replaced many of his chants and myths and legends with the hymns of the missionaries (SSL:51-2).

And yet it is the Aborigines' agency that threatens Groom's own desire to represent the Centre as a wilderness, which arguably has room only for a more romanticised and traditional Aborigine. If the Centre is to become the destination Groom hopes it to, something must change (other than the Aborigines). The answer becomes clear next day when Groom travels with others to nearby Palm Valley, 'a tributary ten miles down the Finke River from Hermannsburg':

The area is a scenic reserve, but unpoliced; and visitors, in ignorance or selfishness, take the young palms in a vain attempt to grow them in city fern-houses. The trade is not great yet, but it will grow if it is not checked by flawless regulations. There is a big danger in this creeping sort of vandalism (SSL:53).

The purpose of the trip that day was for the 'Mission Board members . . . to surprise Albert Namatjira', the watercolour artist.<sup>44</sup> Groom has already posed vandalism by tourists as a danger to the wilderness (SSL:48): Central Australia is

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<sup>43</sup> From notes on the HH Finlayson exhibit, Museum of Central Australia, 14 May 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Born in 1902 and raised at Hermannsburg, Albert (Elea) Namatjira won international acclaim for his water colour portraits of the MacDonnell Ranges (Kleinert 2000).

a landscape under threat; the wilderness will be spoilt unless tourism and nature are managed. But vandalism is not the only danger; there is also the adaptable Aborigine, whom Groom addresses directly in his narrative representation of Namatjira, whose ‘presence somewhere in the valley was known, but no smoke or track or sound betrayed his actual whereabouts’ (SSL:54). Suggesting he might be ‘asleep somewhere beneath a tree’, or ‘away hunting for lizards’, Groom rounds off a primitive portrait of Namatjira as ‘an unspoilt man of nature’ in other words, the noble savage, who was ‘putting on record the colours of Central Australia.’ Groom concludes that this was a ‘paradox almost unbelievable’ (ibid).

#### 6.4 Place as wilderness destination

With Namatjira and the Aborigines represented as stone-age primitives, Groom is free to develop his thesis of Central Australia as wilderness. Place as a destination, denotes a location or region where a particular experience can be had. The success of a landscape purporting to provide a particular experience to tourists depends intimately on how this destination is perceived by those wanting the experience. This is commonly called place branding in destination marketing parlance. Destination image is ‘the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination (Crompton 1979:18). This includes both cognitive and affective components (Baloglu & McCleary 1999:11; Silva et al 2013:17).

*I Saw a Strange Land* constructs the Centre as a place where nature still rules, a counterpoint to the busy urban lives of Groom’s readers in the city. As I have shown, earlier representations of Central Australia were of a well-traversed and populated home for Aborigines — a place they would vigorously defend as Stuart’s journal attests — and the site for hybridised constructions of belonging by Strehlow. However, Groom’s text ingenuously constructs an idyllic escape from the norm, a wilderness where the influence of humans is small, a place with all the romantic appeal of the American frontier. To put such authorial hope in context, Groom was not alone in this desire.

Australian walking historian Melissa Harper (2007) notes the term wilderness was first used to describe the Australian landscape by Alexander Sutherland, a Scottish

emigrant who arrived in Melbourne in 1870 and later established the *Melbourne Review*, a journal of philosophy, culture and politics. Between 1880 and 1882, Sutherland published a series of walking essays in which walking became a conceit to allow the contemplating of issues of the day. Walking was a time for ‘intelligent discussion’, to philosophise on the contemporary problems facing society. Sutherland only felt comfortable however, with the bush as wilderness, a corollary to his work-a-day life in the city. He was happiest camped out in a forest somewhere (he always referred to it as the forest, not the bush) and in the company of cultured companions, where they could truly appreciate the beauty of the bush (Harper 2007:125).

Sutherland’s depiction of place as salve for the urban soul was a stark contrast to Stuart’s, for whom walking was a form of work, a necessary part of conquering and mapping Australia (see Chapter Four). It was different again from the sensuous writings of the poet John le Gay Brereton, who, like Thoreau, found communing with nature a transcendental experience, for ‘when he was in the bush,’ Harper writes, ‘the self merged with the universe’ (ibid:109). From the outset this incarnation of wilderness as an urban imagining, hinged upon the difference between city and bush. By the 1920s such notions had shaped a cultural activity called *bushwalking*, an activity in which a ‘real’ bushwalk meant to walk into the wilderness. In inland Australia on the other hand, food and water supplies had to be carried often across great distances, making bushwalking a greater physical commitment than the polite saunter of the Romantic. Jillian Barnes argues the Australian National Travel Association (ANTA) ‘enfranchised historians and educators to cast the explorer as the human embodiment of the travel art’ seeking a ‘new sense of historical consciousness and identity based on dual loyalties to Empire and nation’ (2011:156). In other words, travel to the Centre invoked nation building. Meanwhile, Australian bushwalking became more ‘masculine’, a testing of the human body against the elements and a challenge of survival in the tradition of the early explorers (Harper 2007:54,64). Man’s relationship with nature was adversarial, even though it also embraced a

coalescing of man *with* nature for so many. Walking in the Centre combined the two, a powerful narrative force shaping empathies toward nation.

As argued earlier, language groups such as the Arrernte and Kaytetye had their own walking traditions, frequently maligned by use of the term 'walkabout'. There is periodic discussion of walkabout in *I Saw a Strange Land*: Here for example, after rain, a

Large group of Pitjantjara (*sic*) men arrived across three hundred miles of rough desert from Ernabella mission in the Musgrave Ranges. They had come 'up' to contact members of their tribe for initiation ceremonies . . . They stayed a few hours, plotting and begging, and then vanished (SSL:115).

Their vanishing does little to help the reader understand why they have travelled so far, only deepening the representation of Aborigines as mysterious, inscrutable and Other. Similarly, while travelling with camels Groom deduces from smoke signals that 'natives were on a walkabout, heading south to Ernabella' (SSL:181). Earlier at the Old Woman's Cave at Ayer's Rock, Groom speaks of the site as a 'Dreaming place' (SSL:164). Once a year, some undertake a 'three-hundred mile walkabout to Hermannsburg or Areyonga for man-making ceremonies' (SSL:178). This last is perhaps a little more informative; generally speaking however, there is no guide for the reader to a deeper appreciation of the journeys and their possible meanings. Once Groom alludes to a different way of travelling about country, one that is a hallmark of travel on the songlines, although Groom does not flag it as such. Following his guide Tiger through what the native refers to as 'My country . . . only Tiger know 'em properly' (SSL:140-1), Groom is forced to

Throw all thought of travel by landmark or direction to one side, and patiently follow old Tiger through passageway and crevice between the giant domes, several miles toward the plateau's edge above Reedy Creek (SSL:140).

With little information to go on, the reader remains unaware of the more sophisticated aspects of the Dreaming, the pathways across the landscape, or indeed the narrative mapping upon which such wayfinding depends (see Ingold 2007).

Groom's construction conflates two mythologies: wilderness, and the other notion of the Australian inland, the Outback. The text does not conflate a Dreaming geography with either, and without it quietly reaches for a link to nationhood. Consider the following passage from Groom, while camped once again at Ellery Creek.

Late that night I heard the restless high wind once again. I had heard it the year before. It appeared to have no direction, and it seemed as if the rocks and hills and trees were gasping in a frantic struggle for life. The calls of the birds in the gap ceased. No cattle moved in to water. This strange, whirling, unseen power of the heart of a continent is beyond understanding; it is awesome, bloodcurdling, yet inspiring (SSL:97-8).

Groom reaches from a clear perception of the environment to grand metaphor, in effect constructing a prose of nation building. The 'unseen power of the heart of a continent' invokes the mystery of the Centre and its Otherness. But at the heart of this is silence, where something momentous might be learned in the lucid moments such silence brings; something 'awesome', yet 'bloodcurdling', and above all 'inspiring'. While Groom is actually resting here, the mood is reminiscent of Hazlitt's views on walking, where 'We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and of all inconveniences; to leave ourselves behind, much more to get rid of others' (1822:15).

Like Groom, who often walked alone, Hazlitt feels it is better to walk without company. For Hazlitt, walking is akin to shedding the cloak of the town, a place where one best shuns companionship, which would only distract him from the 'undisturbed silence of the heart, which alone is perfect eloquence' (1822:16). Such lone reverie is especially pertinent to walking in deserts where the opportunity for such solace is ever present. While the influence was more profound in Europe than America, Peter Wild suggests

Over the past two hundred years or so, Western poets, artists, novelists, musicians (even crashed pilots) have journeyed to the deserts of the world. Many of these visitors have found what they've seen, if not always lovely, then at least otherworldly and exotic. They have found strange places that are treasure troves of wonder and opportunities for self-discovery. Such writings in turn, as the books of French novelist Albert Camus and

American novelist and nature writer Edward Abbey illustrate, have had a large impact on the literature of Western nations (Wild 1994).

For Groom often leans on a journalist's style of 'objective' reportage. What emerges from his prose however, is that which John Van Dyke (1901) wrote of in *The Desert*, whereby: 'The desert has gone a-begging for a word of praise these many years. It never had a sacred poet; it has in me only a lover.' Like Van Dyke, Groom is nature's lover in *I Saw a Strange Land*. Silva et al's research in mountainous European areas suggests that mountainous terrain are host to places of powerful symbolic attraction that generate profound place affect and strong links with those who visit them (see 2013:17): I argue the same for deserts. In fact, in a rare moment of introspection, Groom demonstrates this plainly when left alone near Glen Helen Gorge: 'When camping right out in the open there is time and leisure to think of many things while the bowl of night turns slowly over. The freedom of thought and feeling is tremendous and lasting' (SSL:58). As night descends: 'The whole country vibrated and moved with life; mostly silent, mysterious, pulsing, and tremendous beyond the knowledge of man' (SSL:64).

Later, walking in the George Gill range, Groom pauses and remarks how 'it was hard to imagine anything else but peace in the world' (SSL:131). Upon finding a tree marked with the letter 'G' (one of the explorers Gosse or Giles), he shares a laugh with his native companions, whereupon he felt a 'deep contentment and well-being' (SSL:136). In these several passages, Groom is citing an unknowable nature, the perfect Other against which he might reflect upon his own life, a place where, perhaps as Kate Soper suggests, 'humanity performs its difference' (1995:155). As Slovic (1996:351) notes, such correspondence between inner and outer worlds is a hallmark of nature writing. Yet it is one Groom so rarely enlists.

The term wilderness invokes a specific appraisal of nature as being 'pure only in the absence of human will, design and desire' (Wall 2000:17). As shown earlier, Central Australia was home to a number of Aboriginal groups whose culture, now threatened by colonialism had once been hegemonic in Central Australia through a regimen of burning, hunting and ceremony. This had long been a managed



nature. As Aboriginal academic Marcia Langton emphasises in her 2012 Boyer lecture:

They are not wilderness areas. They are Aboriginal homelands, shaped over millennia by Aboriginal people. Our customary and traditional governance systems exist, and continue as rational systems of law in the lives of thousands of Aboriginal people (2012:108).

Yet even while such cultural law remains, the long-term implications of preserving a representation of Aborigines as primitive are insidious and would prevent those who want to from adapting to change.

Groom's representation of the Centre as a European fantasy of undisturbed nature leans on a divide between science and faith, between accepting science as the sole interpreter of God's nature, or locating man as part of nature. Groom navigates the western scientific viewpoint, where nature is something to be managed toward man's betterment, the native unavoidably primitive, doomed to extinction in the face of white supremacy in accordance with Enlightenment thinking and the ideas of the social Darwinists. At the centre of *I Saw a Strange land* is a landscape in need of man's help; God's nature threatened by the activities of man. The text however, conflates this position with man's return to nature by the act of walking in wilderness, a Romantic position that contradicts the former. Yet such inconsistencies were present even in Thoreau's definitive writings on the subject, during an era in which the term environment first came to popular use (See Schneider 2000:3 and Buell 1995). As noted earlier, Thoreau and other nature writers vacillate between rhapsody and detachment in their writing (Slovic 1996:353). The earnestly philosophical Thoreau pleads not only for the preservation of wildness (later reimagined as wilderness) under an umbrella of Romantic rationalism, wherein man is part of nature, but simultaneously endorses an anthropocentric view of place. As Schneider notes, this position is 'derived partly from Humboldtian comparative geography' a sort of natural theology that preceded the science of ecology (2000:3; also Wall 2000:18). Such confusion reflects a long-standing Kantian bifurcation in scientific thought: is man part of nature, or separate from, even above it? This split between science which may act to control nature, and nature itself, which holds the possibility of man's

redemption — the very foundation of the idea of frontier — is reflected also in the philosophical divide between literature and science (Wall 2000:17).

The problem for Groom's text becomes one of how such philosophical underpinnings translate to policy and whether they eventually become manifest as a changed political geography. A view of Central Australia as a wilderness in which the world's most primitive natives dwell, invites two considerations. The first is that policies to encourage economic development of a race doomed to extinction might be considered wasteful. The second is that such investment might work against any intrinsic economic appeal of the natives themselves, who, in their position as part of nature, and in the setting of Groom's text with all its Orientalist mystery, might be considered a lure for tourists from the coast to Australia's inland. Both of these arguments are underscored by a textual political geography that is informed largely by the Lutheran Church and its pastors, who, in the main, are Groom's informants for the book. Here for example, Groom journeys to Haast's Bluff Aboriginal Reserve:

The Mission policy, strongly backed by the Commonwealth Government, is to overcome the native's tendency to seek the doubtful benefits of town life by providing, firstly, the basic tenets of a living in his own primitive wilderness. It is gradually bringing the native to a sense of comparative values (SSL:65).

Such paternalism speaks to the era, during which produced space is already leading to geographies of exclusion, outlined as Groom continues:

There are still many whites who defraud the full-blood native and half-caste at every opportunity. The Mission has to act as a protecting barrier between such a parasite and the aboriginal hunting grounds so well placed geographically a hundred and more miles west of Alice Springs (SSL:65).

Such conveniently placed (for whites) hunting grounds ignore the pre-colonial hunting grounds that previously existed in the vicinity of Alice Springs, now covered by the town. The remote settlement of Haast's Bluff is taken over by the Mission in order to rebuff the scourge of pastoralism (SSL:66). Here the Lutherans are positioned awkwardly between the two sides of the normative frontier: whites and blacks. The result, this mixture of reserves and missions,

perhaps helped to trace a template for the Homelands movement of the Land Rights era still to come, already sketched in by the mission movement. All of this comprises a new imperial geography overlaid across a Dreamtime geography that was once akin to Tommy Kwengwarre Thompson's, so clearly described in Turpin (2003).

Conflated with wilderness ideals, Outback mythology was long considered part of a quest for authenticity, and, as Gill (2005) notes, was exercised through pastoral practice and history, which provide further 'produced' or 'mythical' geographies that the text lays over the existing landscape. Travelling to the outback and the 'Journey to the Centre' (as Gill 2005, Griffith 1996 and others have noted) were part of a search for something quintessentially Australian. Robert Croll and others wrote travel narratives that promoted Aboriginal art to the urban centres (Griffiths 1996:176-9). In recent times, these journeys have been largely by motor vehicle, whereof, and as Gill observes, the journey to the Centre or to climb Uluru, is talked about by coastal dwellers as a once in a lifetime venture; there is 'a strong tendency for settler Australians to focus on highly partial or self-referential outback pasts' (Gill 2005:43; see also Bishop 2011; McGrath 1991a; Rose 1996, 1999). Arguing a pivotal role in this for the ANTA, Barnes notes it ascribed new meaning to the first arrival and climb to Uluru's summit; she cites John Bechervaise writing for the popular magazine *Walkabout*, of how this first arrival

reconstituted the rite of standing atop the 'last sandhill' to attain the first full view of Uluru as a particularly powerful moment during which waves of memories and emotions swept over the naturalist to produce an experience of deep cultural meaning and pride (Barnes 2011:171 from Bechervaise 1949:21-38).

On such journeys there is less engagement with the complexities of the present, other than to reinforce existing binary representations of frontier. The casual visitor does not have sufficient time to develop a deeper appreciation of place, and such contrived moments perhaps must suffice. The tourists get what they expect and what they have paid for: an experience that accords with their preconditioned appreciation of the place. Romantic notions sometimes dominate travel reportage: on his way to Uluru, Groom compares the sand hills he traverses to the ocean,

noting that ‘Ayers Rock and Mt Olga seemed still years away as a reward only to be gained at the end of life’s span’ (SSL:159). Later, closer up: ‘The Rock was now much too big to be seen as a unit. It towered above in a dizzy height of sheer red wall to meet the white of floating mackerel cloud, evenly spaced across a blue sky’ (SSL:162). Groom’s prose is generally devoid of such romantic notions, walking diminishes his tendency to do this, his perception focused on what is before the walking body, exposing him to a multi-layered, more complex geography of which there is ample evidence in the narrative. But the sublime and the romantic appear at strategic moments; Groom uses them sparsely but to great effect. For the reader, the result suggests the experience of wilderness generates strong emotion or place affect, a device to which I now turn.

### 6.5 Place affect and a ‘moral geography’ of home

Groom’s textual representation of place relies heavily on the phenomena of place affect, the author’s embodied perceptions of his surroundings, which suggests the text might be readily amenable to phenomenological analysis. Through the work of Seamon (1979, 1984, 1996, 2000) and Bachelard (1994), this type of analysis would resonate most closely with the idea of home. However, such an analysis would likely ignore the broader scale effects of space, the political geographies produced in the manner described by Marxists such as Lefebvre (1991). Here I propose to consider place as ‘an area of bounded space with rules about what may or may not occur’, using the ‘moral geographies’ of Sack (1999). However, I will also highlight how this privileging of place affect over a postcolonially-produced political geography of dispossession results in distortions of textual place for the reader.

Considered as a destination, Groom’s Central Australia exudes an identity desirable to the visitor. Representing Central Australia as a wilderness evokes a textual place where scenic values are high, place affect is strong and the sublime is ever at hand. Organisations at national, state and local levels are active in promoting particular place identities to attract tourists and increase tourism revenue and market share in exactly this manner (Dredge and Jenkins 2003:383).

The question arises however, as to how sophisticated and equitable such constructed place identities or tourism geographies might be, and further, how Groom's text helps to highlight this. Furthermore, and as I have shown earlier, places can be linked by hidden effects to their shadow places (Plumwood 2008). Certain place-based practices are linked to ideas of a 'good' and 'moral' self (Matless 1995), which speaks immediately of a good or moral identity for place. In this way, the bushwalking tourist might be imagined as more ecologically moral than one staying at an expensive resort, for example (See McCabe and Stokoe 2004:604).

'Moral' places are those emphasising openness and interconnectedness and which preserve diversity (Sack 1997, 1999). Sack's framework eschews 'pastoral deathscapes', or landscapes devoid of connectedness (Rose 1991:35), and preferences dialogue with others over the 'monological self' of the frontier (Rose 1999:177). Gill has applied this definition to pastoral geographies in Central Australia, and discerns that it is geographical practices (or habitus if we follow Bourdieu) that define place, and what contributes to a place being morally good is the practice contributing to an attribute of 'seeing through to the real', or of fostering 'variety and complexity' (Gill 2005:41). Walking is such a geographical practice, contributing to understanding the consequences of actions, perceiving interconnections and constructing enriched geographical representations. Though not immune to the hegemonic appeal of the frontier binary, the walking writer is well positioned to interrogate postcolonial geographies (Macauley 2000; Bassett 2004; Wylie 2005; Spencer 2010; Murphy 2011a; Morrison 2012a). The walker has a greater chance of defining a moral geography of the terrain they traverse than those travelling by modern transport. The walker's experience is an embodied one and Groom delivers numerous passages of prose which are plain yet evocative; he camps in the floor of Glen Helen Valley after walking near Mt Sonder along the Finke River, whereupon:

. . . at dusk a very large dingo walked in proud silhouette onto the highest crag and paused awhile, looking down at the sandy river below. He made a magnificent tableau; then disappeared into the silence; and I sat on my swag, still looking at the darkening slabs, and watched large night birds and bats flutter noiselessly out, one by one (SSL:64).

Such prose speaks to an ‘open sense of place’, a phenomenological notion which Larsen and Johnson define as being revealed through situatedness, a ‘being-there that is simultaneously open and bounded, intensely personal but immediately intersubjective.’ Such a sense of place they argue is ‘nothing short of attuning to wonder and compassion’ (2012:644).

Compare such prose to the very next paragraph in which Groom reaches for a prose of nation, whereby: ‘Daylight dwindled with all its life and colour, but Australia’s wild heart beat on into the night’ (SSL:64). Suddenly, as a reader I am elsewhere. In the preceding paragraph one is at Groom’s shoulder watching the bats wing their way out of the river canyon. In the second, there has been a shift in perspective and one becomes lost, contemplating where such a wild heart might be hidden (if indeed, it exists at all). Despite Groom’s metaphoric meaning, the reader’s attention is scattered and a sense of place consequently broken. Compare this to Groom’s journey by truck a few pages later:

We left Hermannsburg at midday, with Pastor Gross driving; and once again I sat on top of a large drum of water behind the cabin of the truck, with Rex Batterbee on another. Pastor Simpfendorfer squatted before us with a shotgun. At every bump the iron roof beneath him boomed noisily (SSL:66).

My situatedness as a reader is relative to the truck, rather than the landscape. All subsequent landscape description is from the truck, and comes with the embodied and uncomfortable feeling of *every bump of the iron roof*, immediately less personal and intimate than the walking prose, inviting comparison to the similar result of his reaching for nation. From early on, Groom argues against the experience of Central Australia by car:

Sand and erosion have obliterated many of the old camel pads that lead through deep mountain passes, and mechanical transport has chosen new routes. Much of Central Australia’s scenery is now panoramic, from a window; and often viewed from a distance in a passing show of blue and purple shadows, dominated by masses of red rock (SSL:6).

Yet the idea of a safe and managed wilderness is sold to the tourist on the basis of the panoramic view. The complex business of linking the intimate place of

Groom's walking to nationhood through wilderness, which it seems is the imperative of the text, requires some analysis.

During the Menzies era, the political geography of Central Australia started to become muddled by entrenched beliefs and the adoption of fixed cultural and political positions (Sanders 2013). Even in the 1950s, the Centre was becoming a patchwork of geographies of exclusion, white, black, old, new, ancient, modern. Sacred geographies had emerged in the work of Spencer and Gillen and others, which excluded whites. Pastoral geographies arrived with drovers and settlers, tying Aborigines to unpaid station work then later abandoning them to welfare (Gill 2005). Urban geographies like Alice Springs enacted laws to exclude blacks (see Sanders 2013 and Lea et al 2012). This patchwork geography becomes so intensely detailed and complex, that a frontier framework is no longer useful for analysing it, as demonstrated in Groom's contradictory text.

As I have argued, walking as a geographical practice that crosses boundaries and frontiers, is inherently cartographic with respect to place, and amenable as a critical tool. Walking provides this possibility both in a practical sense and a literary one: the walk as rendered in literature could be argued to reproduce Sack's intention of a moral geography, one that 'reaches for the real,' which is demonstrated in the passages from Groom above. Gill dubs visioning of the Centre as 'limited by frontier thinking and the boundaries and disjunctures this creates. The variety of connections between land and peoples are not part of these visions' (2005:39). These geographies are of 'questionable morality'. They 'render the inland opaque' (ibid). While walking is no panacea for writers (see Stuart, for example), here I argue, it could have provided a solution, but it is one that Groom lets elude him. Admittedly, Groom's experience of the environment provides an excellent regional biogeography of the era. Yet from this strong position, he reaches directly for nation, without sharing with the reader a personal accounting of any connecting political geography. This is where place can become distorted, the problem being that the text then leads the reader to a particular viewpoint, rather than to a rounded appraisal of all of the dimensions and connections of place.

Consider the point of the previous paragraph in light of Groom's own conclusions from the text. In the rendering of the Finke River the prose is translucent. Yet the passage segues immediately to an intending toward nation, Groom's thematic concerns never far from the surface. Yet this nexus between wild place and national identity is never made plain and transparent to the reader, either through a sharing perhaps of self-doubt over the consequences of his plan to conserve the wilderness, or by articulating the future political geography he might already foresee. Nicolas Rothwell's observation of the text noted earlier has bearing here, where Groom seems merely lost in the landscape, lured on by its horizons (Romei 2013). From this milieu of affect, the first of Groom's conclusions about the Centre emerges as:

Unless its protection is made permanent before access is considered, the day will surely come when people will paint their names on its pink walls, steal the native pounding stones and relics about it, shoot its many birds and unusual animals and root up the unique plants at its base (SSL:168).

While such a conservationist imperative undoubtedly has merit, as Finlayson forewarned, it positions Groom outside of Nature. The framing argument of whether Aborigines might preserve culture or to modernise has in subsequent decades proven to be both divisive and heated. That many Aborigines may do both may seem obvious to some. At times, however, the argument is taken to extremes. For example, Marcia Langton suggests of her fellow Aborigines that

those of us who are successful run the risk of being subject to abuse, accused of being 'traitors' to our people, 'assimilationists' and of a number of others crimes against the natural order of things (2013a:14).

That Groom's touristic gaze, so closely aligned with the capitalist imperative, should persist to cloud the argument among Aborigines themselves is disappointing. The position vis-à-vis nature and native is the same toward landscape, clarified here: 'close protection of this strange land is more than necessary. It will be a criminal tragedy if exploitation is allowed in terms of dividend only' (SSL:211). Both positions have merit. If the Centre was not protected, Finlayson's grim prediction would move closer to being realised, and Aboriginal culture in the region would be lost. But it is here in this logical bind



that is best articulated Groom's inherent contradictions: a political geography of exclusion that stymies the modernising Aborigine and protects Red Centre space from encroachment by the very tourists Groom invites with his humanist evocation of place (see also Hains 2002).

## 6.6 Conclusions

Previous work by Frost (2004), Dewar (2008), Griffiths (1996), Lynch (2007) and others has emphasized Groom's conservationist imperative, without grappling with the text's contradictory elements, nor its implications for Aborigines. Here I have investigated this through a particular walk taken by Groom and recounted in the text, probing its implications for Central Australia as a frontier.

At one level *I Saw a Strange Land* provides a nuanced and sophisticated representation of a cultural landscape in transition. Yet such a representation of Central Australia is simply another reinscription of the frontier: a divide between wilderness and civilisation, escape and home. Groom is a consistent narrator from whom the reader receives trustworthy reportage of landscape and culture, a nuanced rendering of place and identity. While other nature writers vacillate between rhapsody and detachment (Slovic 1996:353), Groom refrains from exploration of self and seems to eschew out-and-out Romanticism on most occasions. When he does stray from his walking observations and its clear prose, he is more likely to reach for a prose of nation, entwined with his related thematic concerns of conservation of wilderness and preservation of Aboriginal culture, than to enter into self-analysis or introspection. Prominence is given to Aborigines, portraying them in a way that is often less reliant on romantic, pre-colonial representations than other texts before and since.

At another level however, Groom's text does the reverse, reinforcing the frontier model by virtue of its incarnation of the Centre as wilderness, which locates Aborigines on the other side of Groom's frontier as part of primitive nature. This is clearest in Groom's portrayal of Albert Namatjira, the 'man of nature' whose ability to render his own landscape in watercolours is presented as a 'paradox almost unbelievable' (SSL:54). With the landscape cast as wilderness, Groom's

narrative locates Aborigines on the other side of the frontier. Wilderness and a dislocated patchwork of ‘primitive’ zones as Native reserves, are closely entwined in an imaginary geography that serves to fragment the more far reaching pre-colonial geography of Thompson’s description in Turpin 2003, and even the hybridised geography of Strehlow (1969). While Groom brings a touristic gaze to his standpoint as walking activist for the environment, Central Australia emerges from the text not as the hybridised home of Strehlow’s construction in *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, nor the unrelenting emptiness of Stuart’s exploration narrative. Nor does it reveal the networked spaces of Thompson’s Dreamtime construction, a desert that is already home. Indeed, if anything, the Centre of Groom’s envisioning is an *escape* from home, into the wilds, a place where city tourists can escape to the country (bush or outback). Thus Groom’s text provides a fourth layer of the palimpsest of this thesis.

By privileging the frontier as a suitable model of place for Central Australia, and adopting a place identity of wilderness destination, I argue that *I Saw a Strange Land* further distances the representation of the region from any idea of home. As such, the narrative stops short of being an inclusive narrative of place and remains trapped between its humanist articulation of place and an incomplete accounting of produced space. Groom’s text seems bent on dividing the social melee along frontier lines, putting nature and human into bounded spaces that might yet become known and manageable, and so remain preserved as found. On the other hand, Groom does at times demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of the Centre. One example, with allowance for the vernacular of the day, is here:

The inbred inability of the Australian native to help himself causes him to develop a craving for any available white man’s food in the same measure as he loses appetite for his own bush tucker. It is a problem not understood by casual white observers. There are many that upset and unbalance him; and if his desires are not understood and he is not helped at this critical stage of his transition, then he is quickly doomed.

Perhaps most clearly of the texts so far, Groom’s demonstrates the advantages of the methods of the thesis. By tracing the representation of Central Australia in its walking literature – that is, those who have walked the geography then invoked it a second time for the reader as text – we can begin to discern the pervasive

influence frontier thinking has had, while also noting the factors contributing to its inadequacy. Fusing literature and geography in this way helps to tease out perceptions that are conveyed to the reading public and which have formed the basis of nationalist ideals. Such a method helps to defuse the mythologic hegemony of the frontier, replacing it with a more complex and nuanced picture. While some authors call this 'the real', a controversial and perhaps misleading term, I prefer to call it a more nuanced representation of place, from which more ambivalent identities might be drawn, and which accords with Gill's call for a moral geography of the Centre.



## 7. In the shade of a ghost gum

*solvitur ambulando*: it is solved by walking

St Augustine

By spending his whole life walking and singing his Ancestor's Songline,  
a man eventually became the track, the Ancestor and the song.

Bruce Chatwin 1988:200

[Chatwin] was looking for stories the world could give him and that he would embellish . . . He  
didn't give a damn whether they were true or not; only whether they were good.

Salman Rushdie, in Shakespeare 2000:10

Groom's Central Australia as a primitive 'wilderness' is questioned by comparison with Bruce Chatwin's Land Rights era text *The Songlines* (1987), from which emerges instead a hybridised sense of home. Like Strehlow's construction of home in *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* (1969), Chatwin's representation of the Centre is another 'imagined geography' (Said 2000), one that speaks to a home for settler Australians and others. At the same time however, the text articulates the contested spaces within which these complex relationships emerge. Earlier I demonstrated how Theodore Strehlow constructed the viewpoint of an Arrernte insider in order to produce home in *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*. Here, Chatwin does the same as an outsider travel writer by using interviews with insiders in Central Australia, coupled with his construction of a prominent insider character, Arkady.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Chatwin juxtaposes a philosophy of walking with an Aboriginal ontology of place through ritual journey along the songlines. The text comprises the fifth layer in the palimpsest of the thesis.

Researched and published amid the struggle for Aboriginal land rights after the passing of the Land Rights Act in 1976, *The Songlines* arrived during a period of tremendous change for Australia. The emergence of identity politics and the left-leaning government of Labor prime minister Gough Whitlam challenged the eurocentric perspectives of history and identity as Central Australia once again

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<sup>45</sup> While many thought this character based on Salman Rushdie, Arkady was actually based closely on real-life anthropologist Toly Sowenko, who helped Chatwin during his research in the Centre (Shakespeare 2000:414)

tumbled into the national political spotlight. It was during the early 1990s that colonial and anti-colonial discourses of nationalism shifted focus to themes of belonging (Bongiorno and Eklund 2014:40; Healy 2008:117). While Chatwin's text was criticised for promoting the imperial project, here I argue that rather like Strehlow, he constructs a narrative of home, but one that is phenomenological before it is in any way political. Chatwin's portrait of a culture in transition and the contested spaces that result, prepared the way for more sophisticated settler mappings of geopolitical space in Australia's inland. In capturing these politics of place, *The Songlines* both articulates and contributes to, an ongoing discourse around space and identity in Australia.

First I give an overview of the narrative then canvass the circumstances of the book's publication and its main themes. After briefly surveying the critical responses to *The Songlines* I then move on to the main argument, referencing recent work in the Northern Territory on intercultural dependency by anthropologist Francesca Merlan (1998, 2005, 2006). Fusing elements of ecocriticism (Larsen 2007, Malpas 2008) with Heideggerian notions of being as well as postcolonial thought (Bhabha 2003, Carter 2010, Pratt 2008), I argue that place in *The Songlines* is characterised by intercultural dependencies that question the veracity of the Centre's representation as a frontier, offering instead a narrative of hybridised home.

## 7.1 Overview

In broad terms *The Songlines* describes an encounter between a British travel writer and an unfamiliar and exotic Aboriginal culture, and in doing so represents the place where this encounter occurs. As Thomas Smith suggests however, 'unlike most travel writing, *The Songlines* has a thesis – that all humans are by nature migrators or nomads' (2003:90). Central to Chatwin's thesis are the songlines themselves, which the text describes as 'a labyrinth of invisible pathways which meander all over Australia and are known to Europeans as "Dreaming-tracks"' (TS:2). *The Songlines* follows protagonist 'Bruce' on a journey to Alice Springs where he encounters an exiled Ukrainian named Arkady

who maps Aboriginal sacred sites for a railway company. Arkady agrees to help Bruce in his attempt to decipher the meaning of the songlines. Understanding Bruce's quest is best done in the context of Chatwin's relentless pursuit of the theme of nomadism, described as 'the biggest of Bruce Chatwin's big themes' (Clapp 1998:200).

Of importance to this research, is that the text returns a degree of porosity to representations of Central Australia as a frontier, a portrayal that had hardened considerably during the Menzies era in texts such as Groom's *I Saw a Strange Land* (1950). Using the Aboriginal Dreaming tracks or songlines as its central metaphor, *The Songlines* interrogates walking as a philosophy of being. Yet here Chatwin is concerned also with Aboriginality, which has long been co-opted toward an Australian identity (Bongiorno 2000, Bongiorno and Eklund 2014; Read 2000; Rolls 2007). In the text's humanist comparison of Aboriginal and settler, it retraces a path to hybrid constructions of identity seen earlier in Strehlow's (1969) journey and the controversial efforts of the Jindyworobaks (Mead 2009; Ashcroft 1989; Elliot 1979).

Part of the fabric of a precolonial home for Aborigines in Central Australia and elsewhere, the Dreaming Tracks were studied by anthropologists and retraced by the young Theo Strehlow and others. But the songlines disappeared from view for settler Australians under changing perceptions of nature, as depicted in the wilderness of Groom's imagining, and amid the confusion generated by the derogatory term 'Walkabout'. With help from Chatwin's text, the songlines resurfaced in the postcolonial imaginary during the Land Rights era, part of a political shift that ended a federal policy of assimilation for Aborigines and ushered in an era of self-determination. Perceptions of Central Australia shifted from the adventure playground of Groom, to the political battleground that remains embroiled in conflict today. Anthropologist Howard Morphy writes that as a result of Chatwin's book, the songlines became 'a symbol of the *difference* of Aboriginal society' (Morphy 1996, my italics). In the public sphere however, *The Songlines* turned the Dreaming Tracks of the Aborigines into a popular symbol of the relationship between journeying and place-making. The text provided a

populist literary echo of the freewheeling travel habits of the ‘hippy’ generation. Although heavily criticised for breaking trust with its readers by mixing fact and fiction, and pored over by an equal number of critics for its orientalism, championing of nomadic lifestyles and Romantic representations of race, remarkably, there has never been a dedicated reading of *The Songlines* for walking, perhaps its single clearest attribute.<sup>46</sup>

In his new foreword to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *The Songlines* (2012), Rory Stewart divides the narrative into four ‘acts’, which effectively captures the structure of Chatwin’s text and thinking, as well as reflecting the course of his field research (2012). The first act takes place over a day in Alice Springs; the second concerns a three-day trip ‘out bush’ to the north of the town; the third act is the controversial notebooks section, a somewhat disjointed tracing of the peripatetic and other themes and metaphors across the history of literature and Chatwin’s real-life travels; the fourth is an epilogue: journey’s end and a death scene that brings together many of Chatwin’s divergent themes. While drawing on the entire text for the analysis, I focus more closely on the three-day trip into the bush featured in Act II. Here Bruce discovers the link between the musicality of walking the songlines and the geography so described, and further how language links to the narrative production of space.

Chatwin certainly arrived in Australia with his ‘big idea’ tucked into his travel bags: Nomadism as cure for an ailing West. I argue however, that *The Songlines* goes further to search for a resolution in the dialectic between human restlessness and home. Bruce’s philosophy explores how walking can jolt us into ‘being’ and, in time, into an understanding of our own ‘being-ness’. At one level the text reinforces a representation of frontier, by concerning itself with the clash of cultures so evident in Central Australia as largely determinant of a sense of place. But *The Songlines* also looks beyond this to the resonances between the cultures. This dimension of the narrative is of greatest significance for this thesis, for while Bruce assuages his curiosity for a ‘right death’ (Palmer 2011), the narrative is

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<sup>46</sup> See Morrison 2012 for an earlier version of these arguments. Otherwise, see Jeff Archer (2006): which contains excerpts of walking from the text, though a detailed critical analysis of walking is not developed.



busy dismantling the differences between Aboriginal and settler ontologies through a humanist comparison of the shared experience of life, death and the journey between. Without facing death, the text argues — something Heidegger calls ‘being-towards-death’ (1962: 253-255) — one cannot understand the nature of being, and will therefore remain ignorant to the nature of belonging and home.<sup>47</sup> In Bruce’s reimagining of the songlines, all the tjuringa tracks lead back to a final resting place, the end of the journey as foreseen in the beginning, a peregrination, ending at the ‘place where you did not have to ask’ (TS:63): Home. In this way, the text supports my contention that a persistent literary representation of Central Australia as a frontier is not only misleading, but an impediment to a more sophisticated reimagining of the same landscape as home.

As explained earlier, home is a place, region or state to which one properly belongs (Morley 2000:16; George 1999:11; Blunt and Varley 2004:3), the place where one feels ‘at home’ (George 1999:11). Yet in Australia, a discourse of home is of a derivative nationalism, of the kind Partha Chatterjee has described for Indian nationalism, as a battleground for political power (Chatterjee 1993:22-3). What is found in *The Songlines* however, is not so much political, as phenomenological, not a derivative nationalism, but an ontology, a place affect coupled with belonging through racial hybridity (and right beside it strident racism) and a story of a settler community that thinks itself different. In *The Songlines*, Chatwin finds a sense of home in a community that seems to mirror his own nomadic ontology. Some Central Australians led by an Aboriginal ontology of place, thereby find a sense of home outside a discourse of nation.

*The Songlines* is narrated in first person through Chatwin’s quasi-fictional protagonist-self Bruce, who arrives in Central Australia to ‘test his ideas’ about nomadism (TS:18). The first Act (Chapters 1 to 14) establishes this basic premise, the main themes, and principal characters of the book, while recounting a series of shaping events during Bruce’s initial stay in Alice Springs. In the opening scene the reader meets Arkady, restless, a nomad: ‘A Russian who was mapping the

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<sup>47</sup> As a matter of context, Chatwin was increasingly ill while researching the book, and discovered he had AIDS during its editing. He died in 1989, aged 48 (Clapp 1998:240; Krebs 1989).

sacred sites of the Aboriginals' (TS:1). Arkady becomes Bruce's insider, his guide into the unknown world of Aboriginal people. Later Bruce relates how Arkady once 'sat with sadhus on the ghats of Benares' (TS:3), the sadhu in hindu being a wandering ascetic monk who has renounced all material and sexual attachment. Further bolstering this impression of the wandering ascetic, Arkady had 'few possessions apart from a harpsichord and shelf of books' (TS:2). The suggestion that 'nomadic' Arkady is a kindred spirit of Bruce is hard to ignore; Bruce has found a like mind.

In his biography of Chatwin, Nicholas Shakespeare introduces an Englishman carrying a rucksack and walking boots who strides into a bungalow in the Irene district of Pretoria (2000:1). This impression of Bruce Chatwin as the archetypal walker, remains the popular conception of Chatwin the man. His reinvention of himself as Bruce, protagonist of *The Songlines*, does not stray far from this impression. Drawing closely on events from Chatwin's real life, the text shapes Bruce's childhood as an autobiographical narrative of self (Smith 2003). Chatwin constructs a genealogy of walking and nomadism through Chatwin's/Bruce's grandfather (a 'great walker' [Shakespeare 2000:19]), and despite his father's absence ('away at sea, fighting the Germans' [TS:23]). Walking figures largely in the fictionalised self, for example the surname Chatwin, originally 'Chettenwynde', means winding path, thus 'poetry, my own name and the road, were, all three, mysteriously connected' (TS:6). Bruce recalls an early fascination with Central Australia in 'the fumes of the eucalyptus inhaler and an incessant red country dominated by sheep' (TS:6). His favourite bedtime story is of a coyote pup that bolts for the wild (TS:11), which he somewhat naively connects to the Australian slang term *Walkabout*. Bruce explains his childhood understanding of the term as

those tame blackfellows who, one day, would be working happily on a cattle station: the next, without a word of warning and *for no good reason*, would up sticks and vanish into the blue' (TS:11).

The italics are Chatwin's, implying Bruce has since come to a special understanding of *Walkabout* which may soon become clear to the reader. The point here is that the parallels between Bruce's life and Chatwin's actual life are

so close that they mark the book as autobiographical (Smith 2003). Larsen argues this is irrelevant, and that ‘this book is not about Bruce’s erratic travels, misconceptions and changing conceptions, but about the text they give rise to and why’ (2007:360). However, I argue the journey and its relationship to the author’s life and travels is pertinent, while the ambiguity of genre may be interpreted as contributing to one possible reading of the text.

Through the conversations between Arkady and Bruce, and in the nature of their characters, the themes of nomadism are established early in the text and developed throughout. At a café, Arkady tells of witnessing secret Aboriginal ceremonies before abandoning Central Australia for Europe. There among ‘the monuments of western civilisation’, in a Europe of mindless materialism, he longs for the old Aboriginal men of Central Australia, who seemed ‘wiser and more thoughtful than ever’ (TS:3). The result is a familiar orientalist binary between ‘the West’ as superficial materialist modernity and Aboriginal culture as something wiser, a simpler, more authentic and by implication preferable nomadic primitivism, attractive to those disenchanted with the West. Much analysis of the text conflates nomadism and walking in the broader sense of journey, and treats Chatwin’s notions of primitivism as building blocks of his own identity in a common enough postcolonial evaluation of the texts as travel writing (See Johnson 2002:59; Youngs 1997:81; Featherstone 2001:84; Fullagar 2004:6; Brown 1991:7; Chatwin 2008:269). Walking however, is much more important than such a conflation might suggest, an argument which I now make.

## 7.2 Genre and context

*The Songlines* and Chatwin have been widely studied, reviewed, and critiqued.<sup>48</sup> As already noted, Chatwin was a dedicated walker, citing walker-writers such as

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<sup>48</sup> Scholarly criticism is voluminous; a broad overview is provided by JM Chatwin’s thesis of 2008, Clarke 2002, Archer 2006 and my recent paper, Morrison 2012a. Other notable works include: Johnson 2002, Youngs 1997, Featherstone 2001, Fullagar 2004, Brown 1991, Clark 2009, Smith 2003, Palmer 2011, Larsen 2007 and Natale 2009. Reviewers have labelled *The Songlines* everything from ‘nutty’, ‘romantic’ and ‘curious’ to ‘cryptic’, ‘nonsense’ and ‘unbearably pretentious’. Conversely it has been called ‘stunning’, ‘a masterpiece’ and compared to Sartre and Blake (see paratext of 1988 edition). Anthropologist Howard Morphy called the book ‘a resource for speculating on the human condition’ (1988:19). Chatwin is the subject of several

Wordsworth, Basho and others as literary mentors. Yet, as JM Chatwin notes, critical interpretation of *The Songlines* focussed largely on the political, resulting in ‘substantive thematic material being overlooked’ (2008:2). Much of this early criticism came under the rubric of postcolonialism, and a number of neglected themes of the book are now being retrieved by ecocritics (Palmer 2011; Larsen 2007; Natale 2009; Morrison 2012a). It is important to accept and account for this very public treatment of the text, as its notoriety — and Chatwin’s celebrity, as Clarke (2009) has argued — is prominent in readers’ minds. As Brown supposes, as ‘Australia fades from the forefront of European consciousness, Chatwin’s Australia may be a dominant surviving image’, while at the same time noting ‘there are better maps of reality’ (1991:12). In deference to this prominence, I highlight the most penetrating of the popular reviews and criticism, against which my argument is contextualised.

More concerned with a philosophy of walking than with actual traversal, *The Songlines* is not a walking narrative in the conventional sense of the term (for example, Davidson’s *Tracks* [1980] or Matthiesson’s *The Snow Leopard* [1978/1998]). In fact, as Paul Theroux related in a radio interview, Chatwin rarely gets out of his four-wheel drive during the book (*The Book Show* 2011). Similarly, Stephen Muecke quipped: ‘The book’s walking is confined to the English garden path. It ends up, after a slightly sordid adventure with the Other, back home in time for high tea’ (Muecke 1989). Most journeys in the text are by car, with Bruce’s walks confined to short sojourns at prominent locations. However, Chatwin, as Shakespeare records, completed a number of walks in Alice Springs and elsewhere and, although not necessarily appearing directly in the text, are indirectly influential (2000). For even before Chatwin’s arrival in Australia his ideas about humanity’s walking nature had ‘approached the level of a secular religion’ (Chatwin 2008:12). As Theroux writes: ‘Walking defined him . . . (he was) one of the great walkers in travel literature’, moreover he believed ‘walking

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biographies (Shakespeare 2000, Clapp 1998) and theses (notably Chatwin 2008), and there is a collection of his letters (Chatwin and Shakespeare 2011). Biographer Nicholas Shakespeare interviewed those adversely affected by the work, and their comments are included in his 2000 volume *Bruce Chatwin*.

defined the human race – the best of it’ (Theroux 2011:135-36). In *The Songlines*, walking is a pathway to Chatwin’s grand narrative of the human condition. And while many walking narratives are concerned with a ‘journey against great odds’, Chatwin’s challenges are social rather than geophysical: how to get past the gatekeepers to the ‘real’ Aborigines, and on to a deciphering of the mysterious songlines.

Strictly speaking therefore, any analysis that examines the text for nomadism but neglects walking misses the point. Besides, conflating nomadism and walkabout misrepresents a well-documented Aboriginal cultural practice, which, as I have shown earlier is based on a relational sense of place along defined paths joining bounded spaces (Donovan and Wall 2004; Myers 1986, 2002; Peterson 1976, 2000, 2004). Though examples are piecemeal, walking is the key to unlocking many of the themes of Chatwin’s narrative. Chatwin’s cross-cultural exploration of place ontologies through walking is the basis for his hybrid deconstruction of frontier. While it might be considered both, *The Songlines* emerges as more a humanist peregrination, rather than a straightforward example of Said’s Orientalism, for which it was so widely critiqued (Brown 1991; Clarke 2002, 2009; for analysis see Morrison 2012a). Chatwin’s grand theory of nomadism is wound into the narrative as a ‘search for a right death’ that straddles and traverses the nature/culture boundary. Andrew Palmer summarises this theme as: ‘that modern, city-bound human beings will recover their true selves if they return to the desert-wandering for which they were designed’ (Palmer 2011:313).

Dewar (1997, 2008) locates Chatwin’s *The Songlines* as part of a fourth phase in Northern Territory writing, during which there was a marked reappraisal of attitudes toward Aboriginal Australians and their land rights. As discussed earlier, Dewar’s fourth phase corresponds to the fifth phase of the literary geography/palimpsest being constructed in this thesis. During this era, successive governments since 1972 had fostered challenges to eurocentric perspectives of history and identity; there was an increasing acceptance of the postcolonial point of view. Official Aboriginal policy carried a new emphasis on decolonisation (Archer 2006:1). Through Arkady and other characters, *The Songlines* speaks

directly to constructions of national identity. However, through its reimagining of the songlines and Aborigines, it also speaks to the possibility of hybridised constructions of identity. In this respect, dogged by his Englishness and hampered by his attempt to speak for Aboriginal culture informed mainly by whites, *The Songlines* became an easy target for critics.

A new foreword to the 2012 edition of *The Songlines* however, claims the text transformed travel writing (see Stewart 2012:1), while others argue it provided insights into a contemporary Aboriginal culture and world view (Morphy 1988:20; Shakespeare 2000:491). Drawing perhaps the harshest criticism of all, *The Songlines* blurs the boundaries between fiction, non-fiction, autobiography and travel writing. The genre debate is important, as it shapes and generates knowledge of the world that the reader may take from the text (Frow 2010:2). I consider the genre position of *The Songlines* – caught between fiction and non-fiction – to be a narrative strategy of the text, mirroring in textual form the hybrid lifeworld and complex sense of place represented therein. Nevertheless, debate has been vigorous over the ‘truth’ or otherwise of Chatwin’s narrative, based closely as it is on historic events and living persons, many of whom were upset by his dishonest ‘fictional’ presentation and critical of the author’s ethics (Theroux 2011:136, Archer 2006:21; Ignatieff 1987:24; Shakespeare 2000:417-18,433).<sup>49</sup> The result is that ‘Most readers regard [the text] as Bruce’s own adventures in the Australian outback’ (Theroux 2011:135).

The argument over whether the text is fact or fiction, and the ethics of this indeterminate genre status, are, I suggest, misdirected. Hybridity is a feature of the contact zone as Bhabha (2003) and Pratt’s (2008) work implies, and arises also from any walking narrative, inviting some to describe such prose as intrinsically fictitious by definition (see Iain Sinclair 1991). As a mixed-genre text, *The Songlines* could be interpreted as an aesthetic rendering of the contact zone, achieved by conflating the *form* of the narrative with its content, together

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<sup>49</sup> Three in Central Australia who helped Chatwin, and whom he subsequently used as sources then fictionalised as easily-recognisable characters – Toly Sawenko (role model for Arkady), anthropologist Petronella Vaarzon-Morel (Marian), and Philip Toyne (Kidder the gym bore) – said they felt used and deceived by Chatwin (Archer 2006:21).

producing a multi-faceted aesthetic object. Larsen suggests the text itself depicts an aesthetic experience of the nature/culture boundary in its crossover between fact and fiction (Larsen 2007:359). While I agree with much of Larsen's diagnoses, I think Chatwin the writer has gone further than this, in that he proposes walking to be a way to investigate this boundary, the very hybrid nature of walking prose aptly suited to such poetic research.

With this in mind, I examine another textual example: before leaving Alice Springs to journey north, Bruce grabbed his notes from an earlier Chatwin work, the so-called 'nomad book' (see below), intending to 'hole up somewhere in the desert' and see what they contained (TS:84). Here any semblance of fiction is once again lost, as Chatwin the autobiographer speaks, rather than protagonist Bruce. The text is inconsistent in this way, moving from fact to fiction without warning. The notebooks form part of the literary and historical trawl of walking, performed later in the text. To this extent, author Chatwin steps periodically outside the narrative to acknowledge his textual production of space, an important and revealing facet of the text, which I discuss further below.

The roots of the genre conundrum lie in the earlier Chatwin project. Before coming to Australia Chatwin produced an ambitious work of non-fiction entitled *The Nomadic Alternative*. The work was never published but much of the original manuscript would re-emerge in *The Songlines*, which researcher JM Chatwin calls the 'foster child' of the discarded first attempt (Chatwin 2008:10).<sup>50</sup> When he arrived in Central Australia, Chatwin presented the as-yet-unnamed songlines project as a serious work of non-fiction to those he used as sources. After significant reworking and an argument with original publishers Jonathan Cape however, the book was released as a novel, and widely touted as fiction by its author (Shakespeare 2000:486-7; Ignatieff 1987:24). Chatwin's admitted 'preoccupation with roots' however, presages my own reading of *The Songlines*, which is that it juggles the momentous tension between two divergent human imperatives: the first, a desire to discover new experience through journey, and

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<sup>50</sup> Chatwin once claimed to have burned the manuscript, but it is held by the Bodleian Library of Oxford University (Chatwin 2008:7)

the second, a yearning to belong, for a sense of home. JM Chatwin describes the author's central message as being that 'humankind is hard-wired to a life on the road' (2008:192), however I argue the text's poetics invite comparison with Basho and express a strong yearning for home.

Postcolonial critics on the other hand judged that the text furthered the aims of the British Empire and deemed it an example of Said's Orientalism (see Brown 1991; Clarke 2002; Said 1991:295). Furthermore, Chatwin had appropriated Aboriginal culture to further his 'pet theories' of nomadism (Muecke 1989). As biographer Shakespeare observes:

If publishers had fretted over the genre, critics and readers welcomed a misfit who dodged the usual categories. His harlequin tricks annoyed some, who complained that he had set up an intellectual apparatus he could not support, and had failed to give the Aborigines their true voice (2000:487).

Yet Jeff Archer – who makes the most serious attempt at a preliminary assessment of walking in the text – later found Chatwin had taken the Aboriginal debate more seriously than Australian conservative governments since the mid-1990s (2006:23). Like Morphy a decade earlier (1988:20), Archer believed non-indigenous Australians might learn something from this 'flawed novel' (2006:22). Refuting Archer's contention, Robert Clarke argued Chatwin offered little of lasting value for non-indigenous readers (2009:231). Elsewhere, Clarke described *The Songlines* as what Marie Louise Pratt calls an anti-conquest narrative (Clarke 2001:166), echoing Ruth Brown's earlier position, which had also asserted Chatwin naively romanticised Aboriginals (1991:6). Poet and Strehlow biographer Barry Hill declares Chatwin's interpretation of the songlines plain wrong (2003:5). Admittedly, the book's timing and high profile made it a target for Western anthropologists, who were undergoing a period of self-reflection regarding Western representation of non-Western cultures, while simultaneously considering an embrace of travel writing as the new ethnography (Michaels 1988:48). However, anthropologist Howard Morphy describes the accuracy of the text with respect to Aboriginal culture as 'wont to oversimplification and over generalisation, but not seriously misleading.' (1996:174). Recently, the



predominantly harsh criticism softened and an ecocritic placed Chatwin's search for a 'right death' at the heart of *The Songlines*' thematic endeavour (see Palmer 2011). In all these critical appraisals, however, little emphasis is found on walking, frontier or home.

### 7.3 Walking and place in three days 'out bush'

A central feature of *The Songlines* is the three-day journey to the north of Alice Springs recounted in Chapters 15 through 30, Stewart's so-called Act II. Here emerges what Chatwin observed and recorded on 'February 8, 9, and 10 in 198[3] with Toly Sawenko in Ti-Tree, Stirling and Osborne Bore' (2012:5). Much of this real journey appears as 'fiction', as Bruce and Arkady travel on railway business to a settlement called Middle Bore, which also serves to introduce Bruce to remote communities and the 'real' Aborigines he desires to understand. From there they go on to the communities of Popanji and Cullen (Papunya and Kintore).

While I draw on other parts of the text, it is at Middle Bore that Bruce first begins to shape and distil his ideas about the relationship between walking, the songline and human nature. An earlier 'real' meeting between Chatwin and the zoologist and Nazi sympathizer Konrad Joseph is recounted, helping Bruce to clarify his emerging ideas. Later, at Poponji and Cullen such notions are reinforced and other viewpoints represented. For example, we meet Lydia who encapsulates a bitter and contrary white cynicism regarding Aborigines:

. . . the Aborigines, with their terrifying immobility, had somehow got Australia by the throat. There was an awesome power in these apparently passive people who would sit, watch and manipulate the white man's guilt (TS:158).

On the way to Middle Bore, Bruce and Arkady encounter old bushmen (including loner Jim Hanlon), a racist policeman investigating a roadside death and they pick up Timmy, an Aboriginal elder who knows the dreaming stories around Middle Bore. Here several others join the expedition: 'We were a party of six now and the smell inside the Land Cruiser was rich and strange' (TS:99). At Middle Bore, word arrives that Jim Hanlon is ill, and so the pair return to Glen Armond from where they press on to Popanji police station, its school and then to Cullen.

The sheer number of circumstances jammed into the one journey begins to lack credibility and the narrative may well be a collage of several journeys by Chatwin, or at least a number of separate incidents. In this fashion, the journey and its events might well be considered fiction. Importantly however, *The Songlines* produces slabs of reportage representing life in Central Australia during the 1980s. As Eric Michaels argues,

Many more people will read these texts than will ever encounter an Aborigine or ethnography. The image of the Aboriginality constructed by them will have considerable popular force, indeed, *Songlines* has already found its way into land claims testimony. Nor can the label of narrative be invoked to deny accountability for this (1988:49).

Themes arising from the analysis include the effect of walking and embodiment on Chatwin's prose, the divide between fact and fiction (a genre boundary which, as noted, Chatwin crosses numerous times), settler perceptions of space and consequent identities, the Aboriginal songlines and the dreaming, and the relating of a lived experience of the frontier through a strongly hybridised sense of place. I turn first to embodiment.

### 7.3.1 Walking, embodiment and sense of place

While Theroux may have joked that Bruce hardly alights from his four-wheel drive during *The Songlines*, the effects of walking are certainly evident in Chatwin's prose. Michel de Certeau suggested steps in a walk are akin to lines on a page (1984:97); anthropologist Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst take this concept further, proposing that walking and the words that result from a walk are closely linked, the walk fusing with the prose and, in turn, with the place walked into 'a unified tale of belonging' (2008:9). Ingold asks whether footprints are akin to punctuation, citing Parkes (1992), who suggests that punctuation was introduced into written texts in order to assist their oral delivery, to show where the narrator could pause for breath. Perhaps, Ingold suggests, every step might correspond to a sounded word, or even a silent inhalation (2008:9). Chatwin's straightforward description of what is before the eyes without excessive interpretation, I argue, suggests such a relationship. The resulting clarity has a substantial and surprising effect: it serves to humanise Aborigines, reducing their

apparent strangeness to the reader and consequent sense of Orientalism, and thus defuses representations of place as a frontier. To give an example, when Bruce goes for a run across Alice Springs prior to setting out northward with Arkady, he describes what he sees:

Across the street, some Aboriginal families had parked themselves on the municipal lawns and were freshening up under the lawn sprayer. They sat close enough to get sprayed but not too close to kill their cigarettes. Some snot-nosed children were tumbling about and were glistening wet all over (TS:83).

Bruce says hello and their reply causes everyone to laugh. All of which lends a street-wise humour to the Aborigines regarding their appreciation of their own position in the Alice Springs community. Later, on the way to Middle Bore, Arkady and Bruce stop to pick up Kaytetye elder Timmy at Skull Creek, a 'sleepy camp where nothing much seems to be happening. Timmy knew the Dreamings around Middle Bore Station' (TS:96) and would be needed to identify important sites there. Again, the narrator's description is strong, and the sense of place resonant:

We parked under a pair of ghost gums, alongside a small whitewashed house. Songbirds were chattering in the branches. Two full-bosomed women, one in a loose green smock, lay asleep on the porch . . . in a circle around an expanse of red dirt, were about twenty humpies: half-cylinders of corrugated sheet, open ended like pig-shelters, with people lying or squatting in the shade (TS:96).

Timmy stands in the doorway of his house, an

impish-looking man with a wispy beard and one eye clouded with trachoma. He wore a brown felt hat at an angle and a red handkerchief knotted at his neck. He was so skinny he had to keep hitching up his pants (TS:96).

While there is a strong textual sense of place, there is also evident a discomfiting lack of fit between worlds, a disjuncture across the frontier between black and white: the half-cylinders of corrugated sheets and the whitewashed house. For all that, the portrayal speaks not of primitives, but of people caught in trying circumstances. Later at Popanji there is discussion about how Aborigines could have managed to lose a large piece of earthmoving equipment, a grader (TS:151), demonstrating again reduced social capacity (per Bourdieu's definition) in the

settler world; at the school, the pupils have been known to ‘shit on desks’ (TS:153).

Earlier I described the Australian landscape as being filled with hopes unrealized for explorer JM Stuart, a landscape ready for inscription: an object of desire. Conversely, for Aboriginals, the desert was already place (Haynes 1998:28). As Arkady tells Bruce early on ‘If you look at it their way . . . the whole of bloody Australia is a sacred site’ (TS:5). Though walking creates place (de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991; Macauley 2000:7) in postcolonial geographies it also becomes a starting point for reflection and scholarship (Murphy 2011a:239). So when Howard Morphy writes that Chatwin ‘provides descriptions that get past the superficial disorder and squalor of contemporary Aboriginal camps to focus on the aesthetics of people’s lives’ (1988:20), the assessment suggests Gill’s moral geographies examined earlier in relation to Groom’s text. Gill aims to ‘see through to the real’ and to convey ‘variety and complexity’ (Gill 2005:41). Seeking an open sense of place in this way, speaks to a porosity of the frontier. In the same way Chatwin’s sense of place compares to the ‘real’ or ‘lived experience’ of others’. Of Bruce’s description of Cullen, for example, Morphy says:

the image of the X-Ray house in the sunset is one that anyone doing fieldwork in Australia must find familiar, and somehow the phrase evokes for me the feeling of the sympathetic whites as they view the Aboriginal world from behind their plate-glass window (Morphy: 1996:20).

In its complex representations of place, *The Songlines* approaches Gill’s moral geography, rendering the frontier permeable and positioning walking at the intersection of place, life and Murphy’s (2011) scholarly reflection upon that life.

*The Songlines* also embraces the peregrination, linking language through naming and walking to a Heideggerian sense of being. Others have examined how important naming is to the colonialist’s demonstration of power (Carter 2010:69). Chatwin takes this idea a step further. In an earlier aesthetic rendering, fictionally reinterpreting (in a dream) anthropologist Theodore Strehlow’s *Songs of Central Australia* as a reimagining of the Genesis story, Bruce produces a hybridised

Aboriginal Dreaming (*In the Beginning* TS:80-82). Chatwin's 'dreaming' takes up as the Ancestors rise from their slumber beneath the earth's crust, to cry out:

'I AM!' 'I am – Snake ... Cockatoo ... Honey Ant ... Honeysuckle ...' And this first 'I am!', this primordial act of naming, was held, then and forever after, as the most secret and sacred couplet of the Ancestor's song.

Each of the Ancients (now basking in the sunlight) put his left foot forward and called out a second name. He put his right foot forward and called out a third name. He named a waterhole, the reedbeds, the gum trees – calling to right and left, calling all things into being and weaving their names into verses (TS:81).

Here is a more nodal and less linear imagining of what might otherwise be called the frontier, calling to mind Larsen's aesthetic rendering of the mind/body boundary (Larsen 2007:356). But this frontier is a world called into being through walking; the link is made between place and its creation, walking, naming and dwelling. Everywhere he travels, Bruce traverses the interface between such worlds where social circumstance is jumbled and confused. This confused reality might be considered a phase of transformation. In other words, the sense of place is fluctuating and dynamic and varies with place, time and social grouping. Bruce's own producing of textual space is juxtaposed with that of the Ancestors, each step they make 'calling to right and left, calling all things into being and weaving their names into verses', both worlds ushered into being through narrative. Perhaps the notion is best made with an example from anthropologist Francesca Merlan's (1998) work near Katherine. She walks repeatedly in the same hills over a long period with some Aboriginal friends, and notes:

On these expeditions, over time, I began to feel that I was learning something of my companions' mode of absorption . . . Over months, the experience became an increasingly subtle one for me, as I learned about some of the things they were watching for and learned something of the layers of the past to which those markers belonged and of the people with whom they were associated (1998:29).

As noted earlier, it is through the navigating body that walkers orientate themselves within space, ultimately creating place. Chatwin's prose comprises such objects as delineators of textual space and place. Consider the following

passage, in which protagonist Bruce takes a walk while visiting a remote Aboriginal community west of Alice Springs:

I filled my water flask, put two extra bottles in my rucksack, and set out. On the edge of the settlement, I passed a lady's handbag hanging from a tree.

I walked over a plateau of sandhills and crumbly red rock, broken by gulches which were difficult to cross. The bushes had been burnt for game-drives, and bright green shoots were sprouting from the stumps. (Climbing a hill, I found) Old Alex, naked, his spears along the ground and his velvet coat wrapped in a bundle. I nodded and he nodded.

'Hello,' I said. 'What brings you here?'

He smiled ... and barely opening his lips, said: 'Footwalking all the time all over the world.'  
(TS 252)

The language is plain, and the observations precise. Place is distinguished from what Bruce sees before his eyes. As noted earlier, Self suggests walking has its own 'balanced, rhythmic mantra of movement' which helps to 'lose the screen through which you habitually perceive modern life' (Hunt 2009:73). Sinclair pictures the walking-writer as one who brooms-up objects of place (1991), which, I suggest, is the key to Chatwin's textual voice, unaffected as it is by the complexity of the environment, using instead objects to speak for place, bricks of detail which build setting and the relationships it invokes. Further, there is a lyrical quality to the prose; an appealing assonance, the very sound of the words and their meter is arguably as important to the passage as the content. Solnit suggests the same of Wordsworth: whereas 'most modern writers are deskbound', Wordsworth spent a great deal of time on foot: walking, composing, writing (2001:113). Wordsworth's poetry is 'a throwback to oral traditions' and his best work, like that of Chatwin's, has 'the musicality of songs and the casualness of conversation' (2001:114). For it is easy enough to imagine the rhythm of walking in the step of Chatwin's prose. And others have noticed this clarity. Editor of *The Songlines* Susannah Clapp wrote

his most effective broaching of new ground was his descriptions of expeditions – in making other people see places for the first time. *The Songlines* benefits from the vigour of these descriptions (Clapp 1998:205).

Similarly, Theroux suggests ‘when Chatwin is on foot, his prose is sharper’ (Theroux 2011:136). What is proposed here then, is that when Chatwin walks, his prose talks; the walking voice stems from its method of invocation: walk, perceive, record, notate; perambulatory data collection, with an attendant (and residual) lyrical quality in the prose. In the notebooks section of *The Songlines* that follows Act II, Bruce quotes from an interview with the director of the Transvaal Museum, Bob Brain, who believes the way to approach nature is to see things the way they are ‘without filters’ (TS 269). Following this line of thinking, walking can help to reduce the effect of these filters through which humans usually view the world and defines the phenomenological domain of the writer/walker. Chatwin’s embrace of walking in this way accords with Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of ‘embodied experience’ (Waldenfels 2008:81), that one learns with the body, not just the brain (Krauth 2010:5).

### 7.3.2 Characterisation and national identity

Many of the characters in *The Songlines* speak to constructions of Australian identity, as well as contributing to the apparent transparency and ‘openness’ of the text’s sense of place. In turn, both defuse the representation of Central Australia as a frontier. Here I examine the significance of the character Arkady.

Bruce describes the town of Alice Springs as a ‘grid of scorching streets where men in long white socks were forever getting in and out of Land Cruisers’ (TS:1). It is here Arkady finds solitude and an escape from his former wife; in this way something of a stereotype, even if in all other respects he is the antithesis of the Australian ‘outback’ male. In Alice Springs, immigrants of all types find a place, some bearing resemblance to Arkady in one way or another.<sup>51</sup> Yet the Australian stereotype is also challenged by Chatwin’s portrait: while the text resonates with a lived experience of Alice Springs, Arkady’s ethnic heritage both resembles yet counters Ward’s thesis of the bushman of the Outback.

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<sup>51</sup> While earlier migrant groups were from Europe, a 2013 study by the Northern Institute found ‘Emergent and rapidly growing ‘new migrant communities’ from India, Zimbabwe, the Philippines and New Zealand in particular have helped arrest population loss from interstate migration (Yuhun, Taylor and Winter 2013:2).

Arkady ‘invents’ his own job, according with the sense of opportunity in the town and other frontier towns like it, a job in which he interprets ‘“tribal law” into the Law of the Crown.’ (TS:4). A quick intellect honed in the rugged conditions of the frontier zone, Arkady is a non-conformist, unsuited to the ‘hugger-mugger’ of the Adelaide suburbs or a ‘conventional job’ (TS:1). He plays Bach on the harpsichord after a hard day in the outback (‘their orderly progressions . . . conformed to the contours of the . . . landscape’). He has degrees in history and philosophy, but saddened parents when he took work as a schoolteacher with Aborigines of the Western Desert, the Walbiri (*sic*). There is much to suggest Arkady as Ward’s Australian bushman, perhaps even Frederick Turner’s frontiersman of the emergent Americas, a character forged in the wilderness. And yet this gentle giant is not only an intellect but ‘a tireless bushwalker’ who ‘moved through the bright Australian spaces with the ease of his footloose forebears’ (TS:1).

Arkady is equal parts free-wheeling nomad and Aborigine as noble savage, likely to go ‘walkabout’ at any moment. His character suggests the first hint of appropriation of Aboriginality toward a settler identity. Moreover, it suggests a sense of nation blossoming in the characters of the Red Centre. This is an unexpected confrontation with Ward’s legend, which Humphrey McQueen criticises for being anglophile and racist (1970). Instead, Arkady is a Russian immigrant, thereby offering a more pluralist bush identity. McQueen wrote of the Australian myth of the bush worker, that many workers migrated between the city and the bush, and dubs them ‘improvising nomads’ (McQueen 2008:225); many were migrants, perhaps placing Arkady as a better fit for the archetypal Australian. Rather than bolstering Ruth Brown’s charge that Chatwin portrays all Australians as racists and all Europeans as more sophisticated (Brown 1991), Arkady’s characterisation is based more closely on lived experiences of Australian bush life. Either way, in Alice Springs the text suggests, is where one might find such men (and women).

Embracing the bush image described above, ‘[Arkady] thought nothing of setting out, with a water flask and a few bites of food, for a hundred mile walk along the



ranges' (TS:2). Like Groom's self-protagonist, such a carefree embracing of the 'wilderness' through grand feats of walking, and its conflation with the finest cultural habits, speaks to a strength of character that thrives in this romanticised Central Australian landscape. This is a prelude to Chatwin's later relating of walking and language, and the assertion that it is language itself that constructs such a landscape. Combined with Arkady (and Bruce's) distaste for civilisation — the 'hugger mugger' of the suburbs (TS:1) — walking provides the lens through which such alternative viewpoints may be viewed. Always such themes are channelled back through walking: attachment to land is that which is covered by known human feet; Aboriginal people, says Arkady ' . . . were a people who trod lightly over the earth' (TS:13); Arkady suggests that 'The world, if it has a future, has an ascetic future' (TS:148), and points to 'the centrality of travel, especially walking travel, in human life.' In this way, Arkady echoes Pascal, with whom Bruce aligns himself later in the Notebooks, citing: 'Our nature lies in movement, complete calm is death', along with the Buddha's last words to his followers: 'Walk on' (TS:200).

The text suggests that the Aborigines and their performative and embodied cultural practices hold the key to unlocking such mysteries. Ceremony and walking are woven narratively in an intimate dance between body and earth: 'slit a vein . . . and let their blood spatter on the ground' (TS:14). As Hill has suggested 'Aboriginal song is as bound up with the teachings as it is with the performance of the body' (2002:5). For Bruce, walking is the only way to cross the nature/culture divide, and perhaps in doing so, dissolve it, rendering the frontier transparent and invoking a sense of home. As Strehlow needs to narratively construct himself as such, Chatwin also needs an insider: Arkady. In the same way as Hill contrasts the work of Spencer and Gillen as having 'observe(d) the ceremonies as outsiders', whereas 'Strehlow took us inside' (2003:5), Arkady is Chatwin's Strehlow. Fusing a European persona with traits borrowed from the Aborigines is however, different from Strehlow's construction of a hybrid identity seen in *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*. The difference is the agency of its author: Strehlow constructs

himself as ‘of the Arrernte’ a more cogent strategic position than Chatwin’s status as a newcomer, which relies on the character Arkady.

### 7.3.3 Space, geopolitics and identity

On the three-day journey north, Bruce learns a great deal about the geopolitics of settler space. This process begins before leaving Alice Springs when Arkady buys a copy of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* – ‘reading matter for the trip’ (TS:85). There are numerous intertextual references to *Metamorphosis* throughout *The Songlines*, each signposts a theme to be highlighted in events that follow. Ovid’s collection is gathered from a range of sources, and at times Ovid is the only written source of an oral narrative. This is code, I suggest, for Chatwin’s method for constructing *The Songlines*. Each story gathered by Ovid is embellished and re-embellished throughout European literature. Citing Ovid speaks not only to the form of Chatwin’s text, but to the effect of *his* journey, which produces its own unique space. Ovid is cited as an influence for Chaucer, and both Chaucer and Ovid bear some similarity to the storytelling practices of the songlines. Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* for example, is based on a pilgrimage framework for his narrative during which the characters tell stories at significant points along the way. In similar fashion, walkers of the songlines gather periodically for ceremony, dance and storytelling. Ovid’s story is concerned with creation of the world and construction of civilisation, also inviting a parallel to Aboriginal creation mythology. The emphasis is on transformation, and much of the poem concerns itself with brutal events. Through Bruce, Chatwin signals to readers that his journey is also a quasi-Creation story, not just *analogous* to the journeys along the songlines of Aboriginal mythology, but one that *produces space* in its own right.

During their journey, the pair passes pastoral leases, which Arkady advises have been ‘bought up by foreigners: Vestey’s, Bunker Hunt and the like. No wonder Territorians feel cheated!’ The anecdote highlights the confrontation of values dogging land ownership in Central Australia. Arkady describes how a cattleman once drove up while he was working, and ‘waving a shotgun, hollered: ‘Get off

my land! Get them coons off my land.’’ Later Bruce and Arkady discuss British H-Bomb tests at Maralinga to the south:<sup>52</sup>

‘ . . . the army posted ‘Keep Out’ signs, in English, for Aboriginals to read. Not everyone saw them or could read English.’

‘They went through it,’ he said.

‘The cloud?’

‘The Cloud.’

How many died?’

‘Noone knows,’ he said. Arkady suggests Bruce ask Jim Hanlon.

A subsequent meeting with Jim Hanlon, a drinker in his seventies who lives alone, highlights common frontier attitudes to sacred sites. Hanlon is sceptical of sacred sites: ‘Sacred bloody baloney,’ he says (TS:93). Hanlon’s house is unkempt and uncivilised, a frontier dwelling. Though Bruce and Arkady have travelled only a short distance from Alice Springs, one gets the sense of being far from a world in which Western norms prevail. Out here, the text suggests, where a hydrogen bomb was dropped and land is bought by foreigners, anything can happen. Even time is different: ‘Late? What’s late and what’s early?’ says Hanlon, who seems to have adopted a more Aboriginal chronology (TS:89). Nevertheless, he divulges the story of the Maralinga tests and its cloud, which ‘instead of sailing out to sea to contaminate the fishes, sailed inland to contaminate us . . . lost the bugger over Queensland . . . Vaporized a few Abos on the way!’ (TS:93). In Hanlon is seen the white man’s isolation in the bush, fobbing off the uncaring attitudes of the British — proven in their act of negligence at Maralinga — which Jim conceals with bravado and a show of intellectual rigour through his reading of Marx. Yet as they prepare to leave, Jim becomes ill, and suddenly we see also the very human frailty of Hanlon and his remote circumstances.

The visit to Hanlon conveys how space is produced as frontier by the settlers. At Skull Creek Camp, more signifiers are evident: An entry sign warns of a \$2000 fine for bringing in liquor. Prohibition has been widespread across Central Australia, sometimes enacted by government and other times voted on by the Aboriginal settlement (see Buckley 2014, AIHW 2015). At Middle Bore is heard

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<sup>52</sup> For further information on Maralinga see Grabosky (1989).

how the Kaititj (sic) had early contact with the whites stemming from their traditional lands being along the Overland Telegraph line. There is the story of the Coniston massacre (1928), a history that produces a landscape of loss for the Aborigines (TS:105). But it is in the figure of a white woman whose car has broken down by the roadside between Popanji and Cullen that we come to the heart of settler space. The woman has her child with her, and the pair awaits the return of her husband, gone for three days seeking help in Alice Springs. One wonders if her husband will ever return. Arkady leaves sandwiches for the stranded pair and continues the drive, later remarking on the pity that northern Europeans and Russians did not reach Australia before the British.

Any people who can cope with wide horizons. Too much of the country went to islanders.  
They never understood it. They're afraid of space (TS:142).

North American nature writer Barry Lopez argues that difficulty in evaluating the landscape is 'related to the distance a culture has travelled from its own ancestral landscape'. Those from temperate zones are at a disadvantage, being

. . . ill disposed toward deserts and expanses of tundra and ice. They have been wastelands for us; historically we have not cared at all what happened in them or to them (Lopez 1986:12).

Together with the image of the stranded and hungry mother and child, such fear is a powerful symbol of settler Australians' lack of fit in a hostile wilderness. The complexity of the mother's position, stranded on a highway — a metaphor for modernity and technology — and in danger of losing her life, leads Bruce to an anecdote regarding nomads, from which he concludes:

The idea of returning to an original simplicity was not naïve or unscientific or out of touch with reality.

'Renunciation,' I said, 'even at this late date, can work'.

[Arkady agrees.] 'The world, if it has a future, has an ascetic future.'

This is a return to the nature as wilderness formulation, which Groom so doggedly pursued in his literary preface to an Australian conservation movement. The reader is left with a complex array of settler feelings toward space: the settler is fearful, yet determined to conquer this frontier space and extract its resources.

Having started this process, the settler resents any impediment to their progress, for example, sacred sites on pastoral lands. Again, underneath this tussle for power, lies the land described by Thompson, a land in which the songlines are no longer walked, where ‘All our words for “country” are the same as the words for “line” ’ (TS:62-3). It reminds us this is living landscape, and that

In Aboriginal belief, an unsung land is a dead land: since, if songs are forgotten, the land itself will die. To allow that to happen would be the worst of all possible crimes . . . (TS:58).

In an arid landscape where rainfall is patchy, movement is vital, emphasising a long-standing nexus between journey and home:

To move in such a landscape was survival: to stay in one place suicide. The definition of a man’s ‘own country’ was ‘the place in which I do not have to ask’. Yet to feel ‘at home’ in that country depended on being able to leave it (TS:62-3).

Still later, Chatwin seems to reflect on his own childhood, his father away at sea, when he writes ‘A man knew very well who his father was. Yet there was, in addition, a kind of parallel paternity which tied his soul to one particular point in the landscape’ (TS:67). Here again is the geography of survival and spirituality so clearly evident from Thompson’s narrative, where such a landscape spoke deeply to constructions of identity and belonging, something Bruce (and by inference Chatwin himself) also seeks.

#### **7.3.4 Race and frontier**

While *The Songlines* acknowledges the hegemony of the frontier, it clearly delineates this as being stronger in some demographics than others. In this way, the text’s representation of the frontier accommodates a greater degree of intercultural exchange than the term frontier would normally engender; again, this is more evident in some groups than others. As Homi Bhabha argues, the problems of cultures emerge most at the boundaries between them, where ‘meanings and values are misread or signs are misappropriated’ (Bhabha 2003:206). The frontier is often described as a line dividing nature from culture (Carter 2010:158; Davis 2005:7; Lopez 1986:256; Stratton 1989:40; Rose 2005:49; Turner 1893:2). Such linearity is criticised as foreign to an Aboriginal

world view (Carter 2010:161) and to a phenomenological view, in that walking embraces place as a flow of objects and encounters past the perceiving and moving body. Yet Larsen argues the human body plots this same dividing line, a screen upon which we may project some measure of the environment and our interaction with it: ‘we are that boundary ... in our bodies’ (Larsen 2007:365). Instances of ‘boundary disturbances’, often evident as racism in the text, are often counterbalanced by whites who are sympathetic to the Aboriginal cause, examples of which I examine here.

In one such instance, Arkady and the group stop at Burnt Flat for ‘gasoline’ where a policeman is taking affidavits regarding a white man in his 20s found dead on the road. The narrator relates the policeman’s apologetic manner. He is sorry to ask them questions, saying: ‘Run over a coon in Alice Springs and no one’d give it a thought. But a *white* man . . . !’ (TS:100). The policeman and Aborigines act as if the other does not exist. The incident echoes sentiments still pertaining in Central Australia today: if an Alice Springs driver collides with an Aboriginal pedestrian, prevailing wisdom is not to stop for fear of a drunken confrontation or payback from relatives (Hogan 2009:72). Deepening the racial tension, proprietor Bruce delays filling Arkady’s tank in order to first serve a vehicle not containing Aborigines. Proprietor Bruce had made his money selling fortified wine to Aborigines until a change in licensing laws, which alerts the reader to a quiet underbelly of racism, not necessarily visible to the casual observer. Later Bruce tells a bar drinker he’d ‘bought a place in Queensland where you could still call a Boong a Boong’ (TS:103).

Such tensions are only deepened inside the roadhouse, where Arkady encapsulates the political issues of the day with an anecdote about Mike, proprietor Bruce’s former barman. Earlier, Arkady indicated he likes the aboriginals, learned a couple of their languages and ‘had come away astonished by their intellectual vigour, their feats of memory and their capacity and will to survive’ (TS:2). ‘They were not, he insisted . . . a dying race.’ He admitted to mixed feelings about the Aborigines in his work and contact with them, often having to ‘defend (them) from people who dismissed them as drunken and incompetent savages’, a

representation documented by Marcia Langton as the ‘drunken Aborigine’ (1993). And yet ‘there were times in the flyblown squalor of a Walbiri camp, when he suspected they might be right’ (TS:3). In the bar at Burnt Flat is a collection of outback types (TS:102) and on the spirits shelf is ‘an old bottle with yellow liquid and labelled: “Authentic NT Gin Piss”.’<sup>53</sup> In Arkady’s story, four Pintupi boys had stopped to get fuel and a drink. One of them, offended by the Gin Piss bottle, said something abusive and so was refused service, prompting a violent turn of events:

The boy aimed a beer glass at the bottle and missed. Mike took Bruce’s .22 rifle – which Bruce kept handy under the counter – and fired above their heads.

‘That, at any rate,’ said Arkady, ‘is what Mike said at the trial.’

The first shot hit the kid through the base of the skull. The second shot hit the wall . . . a third . . . went into the ceiling (TS:104).

Locals held a ‘gala with a topless show from Adelaide’ to raise funds for Mike’s defence. The verdict was self-defence; for cultural reasons no Aboriginal witnesses had testified. Prefacing this exchange however, an engineer had expressed distaste when his half-caste friend is refused service (TS:103).

The frontier of *The Songlines* is not linear but sporadic and confused, manifesting when least expected, perhaps in the comment of a fellow drinker: ‘know the best thing to do with a sacred site? ... dynamite!’ (TS:135). Or in a lady’s handbag absent-mindedly ‘hanging from a tree’ (TS:252). Or when relentless heat means it would be ‘madness to go on’ (TS:253); or as wily traditional artist Winston, who, thought to be naïve and about to be taken advantage of by gallery owner Mrs Houston, unexpectedly demands his rights and a higher price for his artwork (TS:290-291). Then, once again Chatwin cleaves to romanticism:

from what I knew of the Songlines ... the whole of Classical mythology might represent ... a gigantic song-map: ... the to-ing and fro-ing of gods and goddesses, the caves and sacred springs ... could be interpreted (as) totemic geography (TS:130).

Later, when an Aboriginal man named Joshua traces a songline in the sand, Bruce has trouble understanding, until he realises: ‘this was a *Qantas Dreaming*. Joshua

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<sup>53</sup> A Gin is slang for an Aboriginal female.

had once flown into London' (TS:171-173). Chatwin has come full circle, and here he demonstrates a number of things. First, is that the frontier is a confusing place, where Bhabha's 'misunderstandings' are clearly evident. Second, my reading of this passage suggests a descriptor of transition zone, or 'crucible of change', may be a better fit than frontier; openness in the sense of place on the frontier leads to possibility and opportunity, rather than merely a troubling clash of cultures and values. And third, in the Qantas Dreaming is seen the strongest suggestion yet of a shared ontology. Joshua likens a flight to London to a Dreaming journey, opening a more dynamic discourse around resilience and change in Aboriginal culture and suggesting that settler lives and journeys construct a songline of their own.

Chatwin's conflation of culture old and new, foreign and homespun, ancient and modern, is typical of Pratt's *contact zone*. And while these scenes suggest frontier, which many believe Alice Springs to be (see Womack 2009), they also suggest something much richer and loaded with possibility. Chatwin's observations of this frontier nevertheless speak of his presence or embodiment in the contact zone, and such experience shapes his representation of Aboriginals. Rather than constituting the 'backdrop' or 'shadowy presence' of one critic's appraisal (Harvey 1987:27), representations of Aboriginal people vary widely, and are boldly characterised. Consider Bruce's first meeting with an Aboriginal person:

An Aboriginal girl came in with a stack of papers. She was a secretary, a pliant brown girl in a brown knitted dress. She smiled and said: 'Hi Ark!' but her smile fell away at the sight of a stranger (TS:5).

The reader perceives a young woman in every way unremarkable, perhaps shy with newcomers, preferring to keep to her self. Now consider a later flashback, to lunch time in Katherine, when: 'a black whore pressed her nipples against my shirt and said, "You want me darling?"' (TS:37). Rather than romanticising Aboriginal people, Chatwin presents a continuum of Aboriginal humanity, a potpourri of traditional and modern, according well with a lived experience of the town and other contact zones. Out of such confusion, safely contextualised, can emerge the romantic appeal of the Dreaming; here an American tourist views a



painting: she ‘liked to think of the honey-ants dreaming their way across the desert with the bright sun shining on their honey sacks’ (TS:29).

### 7.3.5 Tjuringa tracks, a ‘right death’ and the journey home

At Middle Bore Station Bruce hears a Dreaming story that bears remarkable similarity to Tommy Thompson’s *A Man from the Dreamtime* (2003). Once again emerges the now familiar ‘geography of survival’, when Bruce and Arkady meet Alan, a survivor of the Coniston massacre (TS:109). The group hears much history of the frontier round a campfire near a prominent hill, where Bruce is told the story of the Lizard Dreaming. Alan tells how ‘the lizard and his lovely young wife had walked from northern Australia to the Southern Sea, and of how a southerner had seduced his wife and sent him home with a substitute’ (TS:117). In summary form like this, this ‘kaititj’ story closely echoes that told by Tommy Thompson to Turpin (2003). This story contains much Aboriginal culture, even though, as I have shown in Chapter Three, and as Arkady later tells Bruce, it is a

‘false front’, or sketch performed for strangers. The real song would have named each waterhole the Lizard Man drank from, each tree he cut a spear from, each cave he slept in, covering the whole long distance of the way (TS:117).

However, the effects of the frontier are close at hand; Arkady is worried the railway will destroy ‘the eternal resting place of a Lizard Ancestor’ (TS:109). Arkady describes the ‘geography of survival’ inherent in these Dreaming stories, even those stripped down to the ‘false front’ version. Importantly, having witnessed Alan’s animated performance of the story, Bruce gleans that:

Certain phrases, certain combinations of musical notes are thought to describe the action of the ancestor’s *feet* (TS:120).

And further,

‘So a musical phrase’, I said, ‘is a map reference?’

‘Music’, said Arkady, ‘is a memory bank for finding one’s way around the world.’ (TS:120).

Closely following this epiphany, Bruce recalls an interview with ethologist Konrad Lorenz, in which he and Chatwin had discussed his theory of aggression as a natural trait. During the fictionalised discussion, Bruce demonstrates an

intimate (if somewhat naïve) understanding of particular geographies as the ‘home’ of Aborigines, rather than representing them as nomads, of which his critics accused him. This casts grave doubt over two widely accepted interpretations of *The Songlines*: first, as suggested earlier, any analysis which isolates nomadism without considering the role of walking and home is misguided, and second, interpretations of Chatwin’s narrative as suggesting (incorrectly) that it represents Aborigines as ‘nomadic’ may have been overstated. It might be said that Bruce comes to this realisation as the narrative progresses. And yet here it is right at the beginning, in an exchange with Arkady:

‘So the land,’ I said, ‘must first exist as a concept in the mind? Then it must be sung? Only then can it be said to exist?’

‘True.’

‘In other words, ‘to exist’ is ‘to be perceived’?’

‘Yes.’ (TS16)

For traditional Aborigines, walking was not the idyllic wandering or reverie of Thoreau, nor any other romantic writer or walker. Order, structure and observance of law were core to their socially-binding endeavour, as described earlier for Thompson’s Dreaming narrative. At the heart of such storytelling was a bid for survival in an unforgiving arid environment. In an earlier conversation Bruce is told:

‘The trade route is the songline,’ said Flynn. ‘Because songs, not things, are the principal medium of exchange. Trading in ‘things’ is the secondary consequence of trading in song’ (TS 64).

As I have shown, Western translation of Aboriginal walking business as ‘Walkabout’ suggests a random, inexplicable act, incomprehensible to any Westerner. From *The Songlines* however, the reader gleans a more serious business is afoot, of attending to ritual and observance of an underpinning law that relates self to land and movement across it at specified intervals, highlighted in this exchange with Flynn at a party:

Supposing the elders of a carpet snake clan decided it was time to sing their song cycle from beginning to end? Messages would be sent out, up and down the track, summoning

some owners to assemble at the Big Place. One after the other, each 'owner' would then sing his stretch of the ancestors footprints. Always in the correct sequence!

'To sing a verse out of order', Flynn said somberly, 'was a crime. Usually meant the death penalty.'

'I can see that,' I said. 'You'd be the musical equivalent of an earthquake.'

'Worse,' he scowled. 'It would be to un-create the Creation' (TS:64)

To step out of sequence was to 'un-create the creation'; in other words, the law and the land and the ceremonial act of walking the songlines were intimately bound up in a sophisticated culture of place making. Here we see Larsen's difference between the Aboriginal conception of space as place, and the Western conception of nature as infinite space (Larsen 2007). On the myth of the nomad:

White men, he began, made a common mistake of assuming that, because the aboriginals were Wanderers, they could have no system of land tenure. This was nonsense. Aboriginals, it was true, could not imagine territory as a block of land hemmed in by frontiers: but rather as an interlocking network of 'lines' or 'ways through' (TS:62).

Again, such passages rebut postcolonial critics who suggest Chatwin appropriates Aboriginality to further a preferred theory of nomadism. For it is in these passages that a walking style begins to emerge that owes more to ceremony and ritual than any sense of escape from Western mores, a spiritual search or even simple reverie, not like the slang term Walkabout at all. While these fundamentals are explained to Bruce in the early chapters, the ideas really start to germinate on the drive north and in his encounters at Middle Bore and elsewhere.

However, the pillar of Chatwin's grand theory of walking, a role for language in this process, is not clarified until near the end of the book, when, of Wendy, Bruce as narrator remarks,

she was beginning to wonder whether language itself might not relate to the distribution of a different species over the land (TS:300).

And later:

you're saying that man 'makes' his territory by naming the 'things' in it?

Yes, I am (TS:301).

There is a similarity between the Ancestors' creation of space and place via the songlines, and Chatwin's own producing of space through the text. In this way,

Chatwin combines his walking observations of the landscape with its totemic significance to others: for the reader, his prose becomes an entertaining deconstruction of a 'desert palimpsest'. This is perhaps most evident in the passage cited earlier when Bruce climbs the hill at Mt Liebler to find Old Alex. Consider the passage again now, with the palimpsest of the thesis in mind. Bruce crosses sandhills and gulches, which at first hold no more meaning than that they are 'difficult to cross'. Then Bruce notices 'the bushes had been burnt for game drives' and further, that 'bright green shoots were sprouting from the stumps'. Here Chatwin references the Aboriginal practice of patch burning to drive small game on the hunt and spur new growth for bush tucker (Latz 1995). Farther on he looks down at the plain: 'I understood why Aboriginals choose to paint their land in "pointillist" dots. The land *was* dotted.' But in a nod to the pioneers and early explorers, he also says: 'I understood too, better than ever, what Lawrence meant by the "peculiar, lost weary aloofness of Australia"' (TS:252). Chatwin continues and climbs another slope: 'I clambered up the scree of the escarpment and came out on a knife edge of rock. It really did look like the perenty (sic) lizard's tail,' a reference to the Lizard Dreaming embracing this hill (ibid). Here Chatwin infuses his own observations with what he is now learning of others' ways of seeing. As the cultural geographer DW Meinig wrote: 'Even though we gather together and look in the same direction at the same instant we will not – we cannot – see the same landscape' (Meinig 1976:47). The different ways of seeing are cultural constructs, but here Chatwin tries to render such cultural layering translucent (see also Schneider 2000:161). Finally, Bruce can assemble the three legs of his theory. Relating landscape, language and walking, he describes

a vision of the Songlines stretching right across the continents and ages; that wherever men have trodden they have left a trail of song (of which we may, now and then, catch an echo); and that these trails must reach back in time and space, to an isolated pocket of the African savannah, where the First Man opening his mouth in defiance of the terrors that surrounded him, shouted the opening stanza of the World Song, 'I AM!' (TS:314).

In other words, Man conquers fear of space through language and makes place through being and by the act of dwelling. Earlier, Bruce suggests walking was a calnative for crying babies on the African savannah (TS:255). Here he reimagines

Adam and Eve: Adam ‘puts a left foot forward and names a flower. He puts a right foot forward and names a stone.’ Defining the key to his own restlessness, Bruce suggests that: ‘The verb carries him to the next stanza of the song’ (TS:314). By this measure, humanity is doomed to restlessness because motion is the only means by which one can come to know a place. Otherwise condemned to exist in the tension between restlessness and the idea of home, Bruce navigates by triangulation using his holy trinity of language, walking, and landscape. Through the tri-partite of grammar: Subject-Object-Verb, he saves humanity from the void, only his final scene completing the circle.

Earlier, Bruce had established a childhood self who is restless: ‘home, if we had one, was a solid black suitcase called The Rev-Robe’ (TS:7). Leaning on the Anglo-Saxon roots of his surname, he asserts poetry, his name and the road are connected. Fast forward to the final scene: Bruce walks toward three Aborigines in the bush at Palm Valley, each lay on a hospital bed with no mattress, content with impending death: ‘They were all right. They knew where they were going, smiling at death in the shade of a ghost gum’ (TS:325).

When approaching his own death, Chatwin asked Werner Herzog to carry his pack for him (Shakespeare 2000:531). In this same way, *The Songlines* is a journey of discovery, perhaps a pilgrimage; Chatwin once conveyed in a letter he wrote upon hearing of the death of a friend: ‘Aborigines, when they feel death close, will make a kind of pilgrimage (sometimes a distance of thousands of miles) back to their conception site; their centre, the place where they belong’ (Chatwin and Shakespeare 2011:456). Here Bruce has come full circle, from restlessness through journey to a witnessing of home. The longing for home is resolved in the search for a right place and a right death. Once a way of being-toward-death is found, the cycle can complete.

## 7.4 Conclusion

Representations of Central Australia in Chatwin’s *The Songlines* concur with Merlan’s findings for elsewhere in the Territory, that place is both contested and characterised by intercultural dependencies arising between Aborigines and

settlers, and intra-cultural change among Aboriginal groups (Merlan 1998). The degree of exchange in Chatwin's text varies with social groupings and is consistent with recent anthropological findings (Ottosson 2010, 2014; Merlan 1998). This contrasts with a broader Australian discourse around the intercultural experience of space/place as a frontier (Dewar 1996:15; Stratton 1989:40; Carment 2005:31). In environs that are significantly Aboriginal, traditionalist representations of Aborigines leave no room for the cultural change evident from both Aboriginal and settler lifeworlds. By leaving the way open for an intermingling of cultural identities, *The Songlines* defuses constructions of Central Australia as a frontier, with implications for Australian identity. What emerges is an ontological intersection between journey and home, where, as Amy Hamilton suggests: 'Walking serves as a nexus – a point where complex metaphor meets the real' (2008:251): in other words, a metaphoric crossroads linking European journeys and the songlines, both tracings of human existence. The main relevance of Chatwin's text to this thesis is its humanist comparison between Aborigines and settler Australians upon which such a resolution is based. Both groups evolve together, and it is increasingly difficult, therefore, to note a clear cultural demarcation point for either.

Further, postcolonial criticism such as Clarke's (2002) and Brown's (1991) may be insufficiently nuanced to reveal the many layers present in this text. Rather than a journey in the service of Empire, Chatwin's emerges as a peregrination, a journey of a more fundamental and spiritual nature: his walk is from birth to death and his concern the right way to step it, something akin to Sartre's life in good faith or Heidegger's 'authentic' human being. This phenomenological reading of *The Songlines* for walking and its embrace of otherness has suggested a way into spaces otherwise quarantined by dichotomous logic. Protagonist Bruce wrestles the tension between the desire for travel and the longing for home. The resolution comes in Heidegger's being-toward-death, and knowing the place that constitutes the equivalent of the Aborigines' conception place. The right way to live is with eyes firmly fixed on death, a guide for the journey, wherein is to be found a belonging oriented toward the ultimate destination: home.

## 8. A Flâneur in the Outback

I sit first . . . inhaling the smell of dry grass and earth, feeling the texture of grains of dirt along my bare arms. It is almost too much, this sense of belonging, of coming home.

Kim Mahood *Craft for a Dry Lake* (2000:35)

It may surprise many non-indigenous inhabitants of Alice Springs that ceremonial life remains a pivotal feature of Arrernte lives.

Rod Moss *The Hard Light of Day* (2010:215)

This is where the real world ends, as most Australians know it, and the Outback — as in ‘out the back of nowhere’ — begins . . .

Eleanor Hogan *Alice Springs* (2012:20)

While a hybridised sense of home emerges from Strehlow’s and Chatwin’s texts, Melbourne author Eleanor Hogan’s narrative of political geography and memoir *Alice Springs* (2012) returns the representation of Central Australia to a frontier. Hogan narrates the town using a variety of methods, one of which is the recounted walk. The text represents the final and most recent era to be examined in this thesis, a sixth phase of Central Australian literature coming after the Land Rights era and from the 1990s onward, which I have called the Intervention era. In her second chapter entitled ‘The Gap’ (AS:42-64), Hogan ventures from her apartment on a shopping errand and encounters Aboriginal people on the way. There are two types of journey here: one a rambling stroll, around which Hogan hangs a second journey, her first-person traversal of a political geography of ‘grog’.<sup>54</sup>

Accompanying a return to paternalistic federal policy initiatives toward Aborigines (Sanders 2013), the literature of the Intervention era is increasingly

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<sup>54</sup> Originally meaning a spirit such as rum mixed with water, the Oxford English Dictionary explains that the Australian colloquial use of the term grog has come to mean alcohol generally. Anecdotally in Alice Springs, use of the term is more commonly associated with alcohol that is consumed by Aboriginal people.

politicised, something Barry Hill has noted is hard to avoid (1994).<sup>55</sup> Moreover, during the first decade of the twenty-first century considerable national and international media and literary attention has been devoted to the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), which has shaped many recent representations. Ironically, the Intervention era has also heralded rising popular interest in the songlines themselves, evidenced in the number of Dreaming stories published and recent documentaries such as *First Footprints* (2013). Published in this same era, Hogan's text provides an informative yet ultimately divided final layer (culturally speaking) to the palimpsest, one that turns unexpectedly to frontier representations of the past.

I began my argument in the Dreaming landscape of Marlpwenge and Nalenale, a storied geography of survival and Aboriginal home (Turpin 2003). A frontier layer is superimposed over Marlpwenge's home by JM Stuart's fourth expedition journal of 1860, which reimagines the Centre as a forbidding wilderness to be conquered. TGH Strehlow (1969) adds a hybrid form of settler home through his politically expedient text entwining Aboriginal Dreaming stories with settler stories co-located along a walk of the Finke River in 1922. Another frontier forms the fourth layer however: tourism's 'wilderness', as depicted in Arthur Groom's (1950) memorial to unspoilt nature and primitive culture of the Menzies era. Bruce Chatwin (1987) challenges Groom's representation of nature park with a different form of hybrid home, as he recounts a philosophical walk through a conflation of Aboriginal and settler ontologies toward a 'right death' in the Land Rights era.

In this sixth and final text, the frontier returns in a variety of forms, most prominently as a town ruled and divided by alcohol, a representation that reflects and underscores vigorous contemporary debate about Australia's treatment of its indigenous population and a settler's right to belong. Place affect, pastoral history and the songlines themselves — so variously prominent in Thompson (2003), Strehlow (1969), Groom (1950) and Chatwin (1987) — are subordinated in *Alice*

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<sup>55</sup> Other works demonstrating this include Russel Skelton's *King Brown Country* (2010), Andrew Stojanowski's *Dog-Ear Café* (2010), Mahood's *Craft for a Dry Lake* (2000), Rod Moss's *Hard Light of Day* (2010), and Hogan's *Alice Springs* (2012).



*Springs* to widespread concern over alcohol and its deleterious sociocultural effects. A sense of home is masked by a politics of suffering and disadvantage, which is privileged over other aspects of place and identity. This representation of frontier counters recent evidence to the contrary, especially in the arts, of increasing inter-cultural exchange (see Finnane 2011, 2014). As a result, the text returns the representation of Alice Springs and Central Australia to a less ambivalent conception of the frontier. In part, Hogan's representation is less ontologically porous because of her conscious choice not to engage in discussions of Aboriginal culture. The decision means depictions of place do not draw on material explaining the strongly remnant influence of pre-colonial Aboriginal traditional practices, that is, she does not articulate the view from the other side of what has clearly become, in different places, texts and ways, a porous frontier.

In order to traverse and critique Hogan's *Alice Springs* I reimagine Baudelaire's flâneur. To the best of my knowledge, the flâneur has not appeared previously in any analysis of Central Australian or Aboriginal literature.<sup>56</sup> Invoking the flâneur in Alice Springs, however, has its precedent: anthropologist Tess Lea and her co-researchers used the flâneur to investigate Aboriginal resistance to anti-vagrancy laws seemingly designed to evict them from shopping malls in Alice Springs (Autry and Walkowitz 2012; Lea et al 2012).

Hogan's text is important for a number of reasons that emerge in the analysis, but I summarise them briefly here. First, it demonstrates the persistent hegemony of the frontier metaphor in the face of mounting evidence of hybridity as part of an Alice Springs sense of place. Second, a peripatetic place is shown to be closely aligned with the interests of the walking author. Combining this with the evidence so far gleaned from the texts of the other walking writers, forces me to conclude that walking and writing in and of itself is no guarantee of a broadly-based textual representation of place. Third, the ethics of speaking about or on behalf of the Other, is crucial to writing some postcolonial geographies.

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<sup>56</sup> Though anthropologist Isabel McBryde compares Aboriginal walking of central Australian songlines to pilgrimage on the El Camino de Compostela (2000:158).

As I will show, the author's decision not to include elements of Aboriginal culture in her account of place has produced a narrower political geography of alcohol, rather than a fuller account of place. Such constraints may also stymie expressions of an emerging settler sense of home and belonging. Moreover, and as a direct result of these constraints, *Alice Springs* deepens existing representations of Aborigines as victims lacking agency. In the sense that *Alice Springs* strongly reflects prevailing media perceptions of Central Australia, Hogan's portrayal reinforces popular representations of the region as a frontier, further distancing it from the idea of home. At the same time the text crystallises Alice Springs' role at the forefront of Australian efforts toward reconciliation. In these ways therefore, the text highlights the strengths and frailties of the walking narrative as a way to articulate — and to investigate — postcolonial place.

### 8.1 Overview

Eleanor Hogan arrived in Alice Springs in 2003 to work as an indigenous policy specialist, and resided in the urban Gap area not far from the town's central business district. In *Alice Springs*, she tries to take the measure of the town as part of publisher New South's 'Cities' series, which commissions prominent authors to write about their home, each literary portrait vying for position as the last word on Australia's major centres (See Heath 2011, also Morrison 2011). *Alice Springs* purports to speak as a broader narrative of place, yet the text maintains a tight focus on the town's Aboriginal community and its challenges, and for this it was harshly criticised in the press.<sup>57</sup> Elsewhere, Hogan suggests Alice Spring's 'indigenous and non-indigenous populations were to some extent traumatised by the past and present realities of frontier life, and that certain aspects of this – like violence, alcohol abuse, racist attitudes – had become normalised as a result' (The Wheeler Centre 2012). As I demonstrated in Chapter Two, Alice Springs has long been represented in this way (Short 2012:129; also Skelton 2011; Rothwell 2011; Richards 2010).

The narrative opens at Hogan's office in the town's central business district 'in a small, subdivided house, a converted butcher's shopfront near the Gap' (AS:1).

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<sup>57</sup> see Finnane (2012), Wilson (2012), Morrison (2012b) and Mills (2012).

Here Hogan works as a policy officer for an Aboriginal Health Service. The location is compared with 'the Bronx or Redfern' (AS:1); outside on the town's streets there are 'splashes of broken glass' and 'trails of blood', which trace out a tragic history of dispossession (AS:2). 'Disemboweled tawny port casks' scud about, a 'stubby holder from the local escort service' tumbles across the street along with used condoms, while even a disposable nappy sees its way clear to begin 'wrapping itself around my ankle like a giant kelp' one morning as Hogan walks to work (AS:2). Soon a group of Aboriginal girls troops in to Hogan's office:

They are all gorgeous. They have huge brown eyes, wide smiles and long, slender limbs. Although dressed in grubby sportswear topped off with a rough-edged, home-styled haircuts, they possess a lanky, model-like quality (AS:3-4).

Hogan wonders what will happen to the girls, when 'so many teenagers end up pregnant out here, or worse, infertile from sexually transmitted diseases by their mid-twenties, or the victims of family violence' (AS:4). Tragically bearing out Hogan's concern, within three months one of the girls is dead. As Keiran Finnane reported for the *Alice Springs News*, this was 'J. Ryan, who died in January 2006, having been assaulted and raped by other young Aboriginal people and left for dead by the side of Grevillea Drive' (Finnane 2012:2). As Finnane observes, while the girl's death was terrible, Hogan's anecdote prompts no analysis other than to highlight how 'white middle-class residents [have] become inured to Aboriginal violence' (ibid). This scene signifies the beginning of a frontier thematic that pervades the remainder of the book, and during which Hogan remains similarly at arm's length from her subject. The dust-jacket declares: 'this is where the real world ends,' a label echoing Stratton's suggestion that 'Australia defines itself discursively in relation to the Northern Territory which is signalled in a variety of ways . . . as less real' (1989:38). Hogan's phrase marks the end of the Australian real as the beginning of the Australian Outback, an area that shapes a mythology of national identity.

Broadly speaking, I deal with two aspects of *Alice Springs*. First, the text's representation of Alice Springs as a troubled frontier, while the cross-fertilisation

of ideas between Aboriginal and settler cultures, strong regional place affect and a pastoral demographic central to constructions of settler identity — key components of place at Alice Springs, as I have demonstrated — are neglected. So while *Alice Springs* works as a political geography of alcohol in a town beset by the issue, it is limited by its tight focus and reliance on frontierism.

Second, I examine Hogan's decision to avoid matters of Aboriginal culture in the narrative. In an interview with Melbourne's Wheeler Centre, Hogan explains: 'I felt it would be inappropriate for me to cover' (Wheeler Centre 2012). This decision reflects and highlights a divisive argument over the right of settler authors to speak on behalf of or even about Aboriginal culture. It raises a broader question as well, of how anyone might adequately write postcolonial places if they are to follow the argument to its logical conclusion. Christine Morris argues that non-indigenous writers should refrain from 'anything that comes under customary law or depicts our basic worldview and values'. Morris rules as admissible however, any 'issues involving interactions between blacks and whites' (cited in McDonald 1997:12), which is largely the path taken in *Alice Springs*. Morris's view seems to be predicated on a belief that Aboriginal culture is completely separate from non-Aboriginal culture and that the non-Aboriginal writer can therefore only write about where the two supposedly separate cultures intersect. While imagining the cultures as completely separate has some advantages, including fostering the emergence of Aboriginal writers and the promotion of Aboriginal role models in the field, it nevertheless reproduces a frontier. The result is to leave settler writers (and perhaps, ultimately, both Aborigines and settlers) ill-equipped to articulate an increasingly interwoven sense of place in Central Australia. For Hogan, the decision results in her neglect of past relationships to place, which I argue through walking, is part of a relationship to place for both Aborigines and settlers. I have addressed these questions in more detail elsewhere, beginning with the tradition of orality in indigenous culture and whether it should constrain the publishing of Aboriginal Dreaming stories as text (Morrison 2014b). My research suggests that reference to

ethically-published Aboriginal Dreaming stories may greatly assist the writing of place in the region and elsewhere.

Structured around the Arrernte calendar, *Alice Springs*' six sections each bear an epigraph describing prevailing climatic conditions during upcoming chapters. Hogan's recollections are then arranged according to the time of year they occurred and together construct a 'year in the life of the town', six seasons collected over a number of years. Season-wise, the book begins in *Uterne mpepe* when 'Hot winds begin to blow from the north west. We call that the bad wind, making people tired and irritable.' (AS:1). Hogan assembles memoir of place from history, media reports, interviews with locals, and observations during walks.<sup>58</sup>

## 8.2 Genre and context

The period after the Land Rights era and since the 1990s I call the 'Intervention era', after the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). The Commonwealth Government initiative arose after the 15 June 2007 public release of the report on the sexual abuse of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory, entitled *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle, 'Little Children are Sacred'* (Taylor and Carson 2009:29; for report see NT Government 2007). The Intervention began in the same month under a five-year timeframe: A range of measures applied mainly to remote communities in the Northern Territory followed, including increased police and military presence, restrictions on alcohol and pornography, compulsory health checks for children, new housing construction, and welfare income management (Edmund 2010:4-5). Intervention policies and actions would later provide much impetus and material for Hogan's narrative.

Considerable recent research on the intervention formed essential background for analysing Central Australian literature of the period. Any review must begin with the aforementioned *Little Children are Sacred* (2007) and include subsequent

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<sup>58</sup> While the seasonal epigraphs are one of the most valuable features of the book, the reader must refer to the endnotes to find their source: Dr Veronica Perrurle Dobson, an Arrernte woman and revered local researcher, who is an interesting character in her own right. In a text otherwise citing few Aboriginal sources, Dobson might have made a valuable contribution.

reviews of the NTER by the Central Land Council in 2008<sup>59</sup>, their response to the *Stronger Futures* bill in 2009<sup>60</sup>, and that published by federal agency Fahcsia in 2008.<sup>61</sup> Craven et al (2013), Altman and Hinkson (2007), Edmund (2010) and Altman and Russell (2012) all provide excellent introductions to the field. The Intervention profoundly impacted life in Central Australia with changes widely documented in the Australian press. As Susan Angel surmises, media reporting of the federal intervention tended to reinforce traditional binary opposites and images of indigenous people of Central Australia as ‘other’, reminding them that they were ‘still under the yoke of colonial control whereby concessions, privileges and agreements can be revoked at any time with or without consent and consultation’ (2008:124). Hogan herself says of its representation in *Alice Springs*, the Intervention polarised remote indigenous issues and proffered some simplistic solutions:

There’s the neo-liberal agenda on one hand, that all Aboriginal people need to do is get off the grog and the welfare then they’d get a job. And the left-wing denialism on the other, about the degree of dysfunction that exists in some communities, accompanied by ideas that all that needs to be done is reinstate the RDA in its entirety, scrap the BasicsCard and resource the outstations, and all would be peace, joy and mungbeans for the noble hunter-gatherers. Both approaches contain certain ‘truths’, but the overall situation is too complex to be remedied so easily (Wheeler Centre 2012).

While referencing the whole of Hogan’s text, my analysis focusses largely on the second chapter, a narrative of walking that reveals at least two levels of produced space prevailing in the town with many other imagined spaces imbricated in a more complex political geography than discourses of frontier can explain. In this and other passages periodically throughout the book, Hogan emulates the *flâneur*, defined as one who ‘saunters around observing society’ (OED ‘Flâneur’). The literary method of *flânerie*, ‘the activity of strolling and looking’, is a ‘recurring motif in the literature, sociology and art of [the] urban’ (Tester 1994:1).

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<sup>59</sup> <http://www.clc.org.au/publications/content/reviewing-the-northern-territory-emergency-response-perspectives-from->

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.clc.org.au/publications/content/senate-inquiry-submission-into-the-stronger-futures/>

<sup>61</sup> Produced by the NTER review board: <http://www.nterreview.gov.au/>

Hogan's second chapter highlights both the strengths and shortcomings of walking as a way of constructing place. The text is examined in the light of the five previous texts and references other contemporaneous memoirs, including a recent fiction by Jo Dutton, *From Alice With Love* (2013), which benefited from the extensive lived experience of its author. I discuss belonging starting with the French philosopher Simone Weil's notion of 'rootedness' (2003). It is worth remembering once more, that it is the common thread of walking that renders Hogan's text and other texts of this thesis comparable as acts of placemaking.

### 8.3 Walking and de/constructing frontier in *Alice Springs*

One Sunday, Hogan sets out on a walk to Piggly Wiggly's, an independent grocery store in Alice Springs catering to a largely Aboriginal clientele. After the fashion of Walter Benjamin, Hogan goes 'botanising on the asphalt'; she is an urban detective poised for social encounter, in other words, a flâneur (Benjamin 1973:36). The conceit for the walk is established, and memoir is mixed with journalism for an ongoing discussion of the politics of grog. In this respect, 'Chapter 2: The Gap' is a walking essay, echoing Shehadeh's walks of Palestine in which he uses 'each meandering walk to amble no less circuitously around received ideas about the region' (Spencer 2010:40).

Though the term dates to the sixteenth or seventeenth century, Edgar Allen Poe's *The Man of the Crowd* (1840) arguably marks the first literary appearance of the detached observer or flâneur, the solitary walker who observes and records the emergence and evolution of the modern city. Many have reviewed the history of the flâneur, citing the character as a re-emergent figure of twentieth and twenty-first century literature and critical theory.<sup>62</sup> Most authors cite the poet Charles Baudelaire and critic Walter Benjamin, for the flâneur is less a figure of Poe's London than one associated with nineteenth-century Paris and its arcades, demolished during the rebuilding and modernising of the city between 1853 and 1870 (Solnit 2001:201). Baudelaire expressed the rise of modernity as an

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<sup>62</sup> For general introductions to the flâneur see Solnit 2001; Coverly 2010 & 2012, Robinson 2006; and Nicholsan 2008; for critical literature see Tester 1994, Kramer and Short 2011; Bassett 2004; Gluck 2006, Buck-Morss 1986; Crickenburg 2007; Autrey and Walkowitz 2012.

‘unprecedented experience of change and disruption,’ characterised by the ‘loss of stable external references for individual perception’ (Gluck 2006:748). To the walker, modernity is manifest in unusual or unfamiliar encounters or objects of place: a new bridge, an unfamiliar path, a building no longer there. For the flâneur ‘read’ the city, as one would read a text; an idea implied by Poe, but most compellingly described much later by Michel de Certeau when he notes the ‘act of walking is to the urban system what . . . speech . . . is to language or the statements uttered (1984:97).

While the flâneur is most often thought of as a figure of the urban environment and of a particular time (Tester 1994:1), changes in the landscape as perceived by the walking writer/storyteller might just as validly be gleaned in a rural setting. For example, a colonist’s new homestead viewed by a visiting Aborigine, a waterhole destroyed by cattle, or, from a settler perspective, an influx of remote Aborigines into an outback town. Strictly speaking, Baudelaire’s flâneur is a ‘passionate spectator’ of his environment (Baudelaire 1970:9), by turns ‘popular journalist, urban reporter, caricaturist and story teller’ (Gluck 2006:749). When observing unfamiliar objects of a place, as Laurene Vaughan describes, the flâneur’s walk is an act not only of placemaking, but of cartography (2009:316-22). In particular, the walker ‘maps’ (and in the recounted walk ‘produces’) the observed environment and may register changes to it over time. I propose that in the desert or remote town and other non-urban areas, a similar body of walking theory may apply as in the urban setting: objects and encounters as observed on a walk—as well as recorded changes to these—become material for place and identity. As acknowledged earlier however, other influences such as narrative and representation are nevertheless also at play in the construction of setting.

In the early twentieth century, Walter Benjamin lent the flâneur a political dimension, aligning him with the activist as well as the journalist (Coverly 2010:20). In Benjamin’s appraisal, the street was a ‘dwelling for a flâneur; he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls’ (1973:37). Yet, the flâneur used his street position to protest the pace of the city: progress, it was suggested might best match the pace of a turtle being walked in



the arcades, which, according to Benjamin, was briefly fashionable around 1840 (1973:55). Later geographic experiments and theoretical work established walking as a critical tool for examining postcolonial geographies and other landscapes (see Macauley 2000; Bassett 2004; Wylie 2005; Spencer 2010; Murphy 2011a). Raja Shehadeh uses what is arguably an adapted flâneur in walking the frontier between Palestine and Israel in *Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape* (2008).<sup>63</sup> Walking and the flâneur have started to appear recently in Australian research (Lea et al 2012; Ryan 2010; Waitt, Gill and Head 2009) and journalism (Wood 2011; Yeoman 2010; Morrison 2014a).

While not all of the modes of walking I have described above necessarily imply the flâneur, they all contribute to a reimagining of Baudelaire's flâneur equipped with Benjamin's political sensitivity to the effects of Modernity. Together they provide a convincing lens through which to read Hogan's recounted walk of Alice Springs. As Henri Lefebvre (1991) has argued and Edward Casey (1993, 2001) confirms, an understanding of social space is created through social practices, one of which, notes Michel de Certeau, is walking (1984:93).

In her ethnographies from the Northern Territory town of Katherine, Francesca Merlan notes factors shaping place also shape the processes of social reproduction (2006:77). The effect of this shaping can be profound. In his review of Merlan's *Caging the Rainbow* (1998), Bruce Kapferer writes that 'whites and Aborigines are enmeshed in interpenetrating social worlds' (1999:185). Both groups tend to evolve together and it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between them, just as it is impossible to predict the outcome of what is arguably a process of social evolution. For example, Merlan argues (and Kapferer reiterates) that Aborigines practice a form of mimesis, and that 'Aborigines themselves have adopted the images . . . purveyed by anthropologists, administrators and other members of dominant society' (Kapferer 1999:185).

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<sup>63</sup> Robert Spencer calls Shehadeh's walking method a device for testing preconceptions (2010:40). While the flâneur may document the urban palimpsest, in contested Palestine Shehadeh extends this mission to examine what Spencer calls the 'forces and agents that threaten his environment' (39).

Like Marlpwenge and Nalenale the ancestors depicted in *A Man from the Dreamtime*, but with significantly different motivations, Hogan also notes encounters and objects of place she passes on her walk of contemporary Alice Springs, as well as introducing elements of a popular political discourse. As she departs for her walk, she notes that a cyclone security fence surrounds her home. Hogan adds statistics for the number of murders in her area (AS:43); also that much of the violence is 'black-on-black' (for more on this see Finnane and Finnane 2011:261). Aboriginal people are her focus; there are few white people apparent in Hogan's rendering of 'The Gap,' though they form 79 per cent of the town's population (Charles Darwin University 2010), perhaps also reflecting a concentration of Aborigines in this district.

Like Sinclair, Thoreau, Shehadeh and other walking writers, Hogan mentally collects the objects she sees and arranges them in order on the walk, presenting them as issues or interesting anecdotes for expansion, discussion and analysis.<sup>64</sup> Not long after setting out for example, Hogan approaches Heavitree Gap where:

A police troopie grinds around in the riverbed. It parks for a few minutes and a couple of cops jump out. They disappear into the shrubbery; they might be checking on people or looking for stashes of grog or other signs of illicit drinking (AS:44).

Sighting the police vehicle in the river facilitates a return by Hogan's narrator to the broader intent of the walk, a discussion of the politics of alcohol. In 'The Gap', there is little discussion of walking itself and, in contrast to Sinclair and Shehadeh, Hogan's 'self' rarely makes an appearance. Hogan is not the romantic solitary walker of Hazlitt (1822:14-35), or even Rousseau whose 'senses are possessed by a deep and delightful reverie' (1979:108). Hogan may have abandoned such notions to make more room for political geography. For to indulge the romance of the walk, as Jonathan Bate notes, is to pay 'the price of [romantic] intoxication with the spirit of things . . . a definitive break from the human community' (2000:41). In other words, there is a weaker connection with matters political.

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<sup>64</sup> See Thoreau's excursion narratives (Robinson, DM 2000:83-92; Johnson 1986; Thoreau 1862; Ryan 2011) or Iain Sinclair (1991) 'Lights Out for the Territory'.

Exactly which objects and encounters a walking writer chooses to record is significant. Iain Sinclair — who describes himself as a ‘born-again’ flâneur, interested in ‘noticing everything’ (1991:4) — argues that what he passes on the path is not as important as what he chooses to record, for it is that which he records that underpins his prose. In his first London walk of nine, Sinclair sets out from Hackney bound for Greenwich Hill then back along the River Lea to Chingford Mount. He traverses the streets and back alleys of his route in a bid to record its graffiti, and the resulting narrative he labels ‘serial composition: the city is the subject, a fiction that anyone can lay claim to’ (1991:2).

For Sinclair, reading the graffiti of the city emerges as a more reliable alternative to reading the newspapers, which have ‘atrophied into the playthings of grotesque megalomaniacs, uselessly shrill exercises in mind control’ (1991:3). Reading the tags is akin to reading one layer of the urban environment. The resulting prose is overtly political, lying as it does at the intersection of Sinclair’s self and the path he walks. As a depiction of place, he judges it fiction. Here is the hybrid nature of the walking narrative of place, amplified in Merlin Coverly’s definition of psychogeography as ‘the point at which psychology meets geography’ (2010:13). The psychology is that of the walker, whom the reader meets in any resulting narrative. Another walker might not trace so political a trail as Sinclair (or Hogan), for this is Sinclair’s tracing, a locus of points describing the arc of the places where his mind and memory meets the environment. The narrative becomes the sum of his interests and background multiplied by the objects he sees, the answer writ large on the blackboard of his politics. But this practise reaches far beyond the urban; for as Paul Carter wrote of the Australian explorer, the country does not precede the traveller, rather it is ‘the offspring of his intention’ (2010:349). While Coverly’s use of ‘psychology’ is useful shorthand, I do not mean to use the term in a strictly scholarly sense. Instead, I imply a more ‘common sense’ or ‘uncritical’ psychology, one that speaks to Said’s ‘situatedness’ of the walking author and the set of enculturated ideas and knowledge they bring to the walk.

Similarly, Hogan's walk traces the psychology of author/narrator against the background of Alice Springs, a factor central to any understanding of the narrative as 'nonfiction.' In the way of the psychogeographer, and Benjamin's activist, Hogan's walk is associated with the political, an act of subversion. As Coverly writes: the act of walking becomes bound up with psychogeography's characteristic political opposition to authority (2010:12). For example, while elsewhere concentrating on the environment of the present day and its challenges, Hogan turns briefly to the Alice Springs of old. Walking toward the dry Todd River near Heavitree Gap, Hogan notes 'dark figures' drift between the trees towards a picnic area:

It used to be a sacred place where only men could go. Women traditionally made a detour 30 kilometres west down through Honeymoon Gap, another deep orange slit in the ranges, because of the presence of men's sacred objects at Heavitree Gap. If they passed through the Gap, they walked in the footsteps of the men with their head bowed, looking at their feet. Some women still walk this way or avert their gaze out of respect in the area (AS:44).

The reader is transported back to precolonial times and the journeys of the ancestors. The women walk with heads bowed inferring a persistence of the Dreaming into the modern era. Unlike Chatwin or Strehlow however, who might have explored an open version of the Dreaming narrative, Hogan does not. As a result, the reader remains uninformed as to the reasons for this cultural belief. Walking a little further, Hogan reveals the mark of Modernity, the layer of modern infrastructure top-dressing this precolonial world: the Ghan railway line, a five-way roundabout and highway, a dry riverbed where once flowed a spring, and finally The Gapview Hotel. The effect is to juxtapose momentarily the past with the present, emphasising the significant impact of colonisation on Aboriginal lives. Twin imaginings of space are imbricated, defining the frontier both as dividing line and consequence of history.

Hogan aligns herself with the political underdog, the dispossessed, she is on their territory. Yet at times her discomfort is discernible; she describes Aboriginal people making their way down the Todd Mall as 'shoals of disconsolate fish' (AS:23). Her conversations with her 'other' are awkward but clearly she takes the part of Aborigines in her political dissection of their predicament. Here Hogan

betrays a curious imagining of self, one perhaps driven by guilt, and which may speak more broadly to the confused state of an Australian identity. In a recent interview, Hogan herself confesses she is a ‘do-gooder urban type’ (Wheeler Centre 2013). Similarly, some forty years earlier, Charmian Clift assumed the role of the flâneur in *The Centre*, expressing similar shame and uneasiness upon arriving at Alice Springs, that ‘landscape of saints, mystics and madmen’ (1983:203). In her descriptions of Aboriginal people in the town’s shopping mall, Clift-as-flâneur observes how Modernity has affected them; she protests injustice and, as Coverly suggests, carries its trace into history’s prose, her fate ‘bound up with the fate of the city’ (Coverly 2010:20). For example, Clift writes:

I will be haunted by that daily frieze impasted on banks and tourist agencies and galleries and gem shops and rock shops. Patient. Waiting. Moving, if at all, from one side of the street to the other. The women and girls squatting in ripply black silk circles around groomed trees in a groomed park. Looking on. (1983:205-6)

Here Aboriginal people are hapless outsiders, ‘looking on’ to the white man’s world of groomed trees in groomed parks, modernity, an alien world in which they seemingly have little agency. ‘What are the dreaming people dreaming now?’ Clift wonders guiltily (1983:206). As for Thompson’s narrative — except that now a whitefella is the observer/narrator — Hogan narrates changes to the Dreaming landscape, embracing elements of indigenous culture in a personal search, like Clift’s, for an explanation of colonial dispossession. As Hogan strolls through the impact zone between black and white, she chronicles an Aboriginal culture grappling with western modernity (in binary representations, the antithesis of primitive culture). Her simple phenomenological apprehension of place through walking is supplemented by journalism, history and encounter. As Nicole Pietrantoni observes, encountering landscape and conceptualising place is an ongoing process of negotiation between competing systems of representation (2010:1); between the past and present of place (Massey 1995:182). Hogan’s description does not however, explain how Aboriginal people related to place prior to dispossession. In other words, walking or flâneury can provide the backbone of a walking narrative, but alone it is not nearly enough to adequately represent the complexity of place. There must be historical, political and cultural

context, which Hogan certainly provides, yet ignores traditional cultural matters that are clearly pertinent.

#### 8.4 Place affect in *Alice Springs*

Place affect is rare in Hogan's *Alice Springs*, and where it does appear it is often negative in nature, such as the dirty nappy wrapping itself around her ankle, cited earlier (AS:2). Moreover, when Hogan leaves her secure compound on her Sunday walk, she describes the number of murders there, a construction that questions her safety by introducing an element of danger, and so imparts her protagonist-self with a certain bravado. In fact, while Hogan suggests she had hoped to 'move past the 'polarities of political debate and media perceptions of Alice Springs' (AS:38), instead she frequently focusses on the political, comparing Alice Springs with the east coast, infusing the text with an Orientalism that deepens its frontier representation. Meanwhile, like others who come to the town, Hogan slowly becomes inured to its more challenging aspects; she filters out 'the sprays of glass, the trails of blood, the figure lying on the road – in an attempt to maintain some personal equilibrium' (AS:18).

Reminiscent of Trevor James' 'alien in the landscape', Hogan as outsider *and* flâneur constructs Aborigines as dysfunctional and problematised, whitefellas as racist and the town largely by its difference from an East Coast 'normal'. There is a strong resonance here with Stratton's view that in representing the Territory, 'Sydney and Melbourne [are] produced as the urban sites of civilization' (Stratton 1989:39). Hogan's portrait resuscitates these old differences between city and country, and belies the complexity of feelings and relationships in the town. Jo Dutton captures such complexity more resolutely in her recent work of fiction *From Alice With Love* (2013). Dutton's Aboriginal characters are 'warm, cheeky and hilarious and the pages burst with their good-natured mischief-making under difficult circumstances in lives conducted in overcrowded dwellings and under-equipped schools' (Morrison 2013d:42). But neither does the novel squib on the many intractable issues of life in the Centre — alcohol, welfare dependence and cultural obligations — that often run counter to western expectations.

In contrast, Hogan's town emerges in often trite terms, as if the subject of casual observation, such as 'the place where you change your name, your hair and your sexuality' (AS:149), which refers obliquely to the fifteen per cent of the town's women who are lesbians. Here Hogan's ethnography helps; the source of the fifteen per cent figure is historian Megg Kelham, who suggests Alice is a 'refuge from the constraints of corsets, stilettos and the good-girl manners of city living.' For Kelham this contributes to the town's broad appeal, to which she adds: 'It's not a yobbo, male-dominated town. There's a cultural sophistication that doesn't happen in other inland towns' (AS: 160). If the purpose of her book however, is to take the measure of the town, Hogan has taken it mainly of its Aboriginal community.

Home is however, more clearly manifest in other contemporaneous settler memoirs, such as Mahood (2000) and Moss (2010), and in fiction (Dutton 2013). Artist Rod Moss's *Hard Light of Day* (2010) depicts a raw edge to life for Aborigines in the town through his personal relationships over several decades. A violent frontier environment is still apparent from the text, nonetheless Moss finds reasons to feel at home. Nowhere is this as evident as in his love for his daughter Ronya, and her acceptance by Moss' Aboriginal friends, especially Arranye:

Many of the kids in camp received Arranye's emu walking medicine. He regarded most of the Arrernte kids as his grandchildren. They were all little grubs living under the power of the Emily Gap Dreaming. And he related to Ronja in this way too (2010:98).

As Alice Springs writer Michael Giacometti, who examined the state of indigenous publishing for literary journal *Meanjin*, observes:

Respect and relationships develop over many years; for some it takes most of a life. For it goes both ways. *The Hard Light of Day* would not reveal the great depth of understanding or empathy if Rod Moss had only been in Alice Springs for a year or two (*Two Cultures*).

The differences between Hogan's and Moss's texts are discernible as genre constraints, time lived in the town (which may enhance insidership), and the degree of personal involvement with Aboriginal people.

## 8.5 Representing ‘race’

*Alice Springs* offers several competing representations of Aborigines. Hogan certainly spells out the inequality wrought by colonial expansionism and local profiteering from alcohol, also reported elsewhere (see Krein 2011). However, in articulating relations of power over a socially-produced space, the author herself produces a spatial politics. For example, strolling to The Gapview Hotel, Hogan passes a resort frequented by whites, where ‘Couples and families lounge by the pool’ only to arrive shortly afterward at a ‘dusty tongue of dirt,’ where the ‘familiar surf of bottle tops, VB cans,<sup>65</sup> casks and silver foil bladders’ ebbs at Hogan’s feet (AS:46). The latter is represented as an Aboriginal world, where, under large XXXX signs,<sup>66</sup> Aboriginal women linger in the bottle-o<sup>67</sup> driveway waiting for ‘cheap take-away grog’ from the shop — ‘small and dingy, with grimy fly strips’ — where staff are ‘surly and patronising towards Aboriginal people’ (AS:46). Here is Marcia Langton’s ‘drunken Aborigine’ (1993:195), a common representation and familiar sight on the streets of Alice Springs. The contrast between the traditional, perhaps even ‘romanticised’ walker of the songlines portrayed in *A Man from the Dreamtime* and the problem drinkers waiting for their fix at the hands of profiteering publicans, could not be more starkly wrought. A pattern emerges: whites are demonised and blacks portrayed as victims, deepening predominant media representations.<sup>68</sup> In contrast, journalist Helen Womack observed while reporting on a controversial murder trial in 2009 that:

Alice Springs is full of well-meaning white people with university degrees, working for Aboriginal development. While Aborigines might seem concealed in some cities, this town grapples daily with the task of peaceful coexistence and reconciliation.

In its narrow representation of Aborigines during this chapter, *Alice Springs* foregrounds the Aboriginal drunk and demonises whites on their behalf. The text is largely concerned with disadvantage; in a recent interview, Hogan says of her time in Alice Springs: ‘there was a lopsided emphasis among urban elites on

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<sup>65</sup> A brand of beer

<sup>66</sup> Also a brand of beer

<sup>67</sup> Colloquial expression for a shop where one buys take-away alcohol.

<sup>68</sup> Another example is the interview with accommodation owner Ken (AS:82-85).



media representations and symbolic issues at the expense of a focus on basic need, especially in relation to social justice and difference' (Wheeler Centre 2012). However, others argue representation has a real effect on the lives of everyone living in remote Australia. For example, Kapferer observes: 'The way Aborigines are represented is implicated in their frequently shocking political and social circumstance and in often destructive debates that surround them' (1999:184). Bruce Walker and co-workers suggest representation is why remote residents remain so ill-served by government (Walker, Porter and Marsh 2012). Surprisingly then, in the Wheeler Centre interview Hogan reveals that she aligns herself with a growing number of critics, who, as Marcia Langton has put it, encourage 'a more sophisticated view (of Aborigines) than the archetypal one of the native as perpetual victim with no hope'; in particular I refer here to Langton's history of a proposed 'economic Aborigine' (2013a:12). In *Alice Springs* however, wherever the reader ventures they find Aboriginal suffering. In their analysis of Perera and Pugliese (2011), Finnane & Finnane condemn similar representations as being to 'reproduce a stereotype of Aboriginal people as victims, lacking agency' (2011:262). Such representations led Perera and Pugliese to mistakenly render the Alice Springs town camps as 'Spaces of respite and survival', where, in fact, black-on-black violence is widely reported (2011:267).

In *Alice Springs*, Langton's drunken Aborigine is equated with a violent one. At the start of the walk, Hogan's internal dialogue is about the number of murders in her area. Finnane and Finnane note convictions of Aboriginal people for homicide is 'principally on account of the killing of other Aboriginal people' (2011:261). In fact, alcohol has been responsible for perhaps the most significant transformation of the Central Australian landscape (Neill 2002; Sutton 2009; Nowra 2007; Hughes 2007; Craven, Dillon and Parbury 2013; Hogan 2013; Krein 2011; Austin Broos 2009; MSHR 2009). Despite these problems, it is evident also that Native Title provisions have had a profoundly positive effect, at least in western terms. Finnane and Finnane reveal the 'rise of an Aboriginal middle class, the rise of black business and the accumulation of black capital' (2011:262). Such economic developments 'accompany and are frequently in tension with the main focus of

Australian (Federal) Government investment in the town,' which is welfare that caters to 'the needs of a large and mobile central Australian population' (ibid:262). Considered alone, without other facets of the lifeworld of Alice Springs to nuance the picture, Hogan's internal dialogue on her walk easily constructs a representation of frontier.

In a later article moreover, Hogan (2013) examines the economic and health effects of excessive alcohol consumption in the Northern Territory. Hogan notes that '60 per cent of all assaults and 67 per cent of all domestic violence incidents involve alcohol, costing our community an estimated \$642 million a year.' Such intra-racial violence is 'a product of a complex set of factors (AHRC 2011) and includes using physical force or power against oneself, another person or a group, and resulting in injury, death or psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation' (WHO 2002:5). This sort of violence is widespread in indigenous communities worldwide and not restricted to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Anthropologist Dianne Austin-Broos attributes such violence to the loss of 'a way of being' through dispossession of land and culture (2009:266). Other considered appraisals of Aboriginal violence in the Centre have been made by Peter Sutton (2009) and Louis Nowra (2007). Pro-interventionist and NT MLA and Warlpiri woman Bess Price, herself a victim of violence, speaks of confusion over the system of governing laws (Price 2010) and believes the answer lies only with Aboriginal people themselves (Price 2013).

Again, these representations are certainly real, and taken on their own add up to a frontier representation. Reinforcing the temptation to accept this representation without question is a growing body of right-wing research and opinion by think tanks such as The Bennelong Institute, and periodicals such as *Quadrant* and *Viewpoint*, which look for the roots of Aboriginal violence in precolonial cultural practices (see Jarrett 2009, Franklin 2008 and Johns 2010). Yet in representing this in a literature of place, or a text like Hogan's, it is important to remember Moss's warning that:

It is easy to present the camp life around town as dysfunctional: just take a photo of litter, dogs and snotty-nosed kids. So it is vital to note the Aboriginal-inspired initiatives as a counter-balance (2010:248).

In other words, this home for many might be easily dismissed as a dysfunctional frontier. Equally misled however, is the reader who digests only the ‘strong-in-culture’ Aborigine of *A Man from the Dreamtime* as representative of a smoothly continuing tradition. This approach merely substitutes one stereotype for another: the ‘Romantic’ Aborigine for the ‘violent drunk’. And virtually ignored in both of these representations is an emerging Aboriginal middle class. The problem is, as I have outlined earlier from the work of Sinclair, that walking creates a particular form of place, one linked closely to the interests of the walker.

Finding more nuanced understandings of Aboriginal people is challenging for many. In an essay describing her 2005 return to the town, *Tracks* (1980) author Robyn Davidson ponders:

People come to the Centre hungry to learn — the town floats on the tourist dollar — but how are they to penetrate something so inherently secretive and complex? How can they see past the drunks and the misery, or the sentimentality and kitsch, to the sophistication and beauty of aboriginal ideas? (2005:143).

Nowhere in Hogan’s *Alice Springs* is seen Davidson’s ‘beauty of ideas’, merely the tragedy of dispossession and the violence now so heavily researched and widely blamed on alcohol. As an alcohol policy analyst, Hogan represents an important aspect — but only one aspect — of the town’s multi-stranded narratives from her walk. The tight focus contributes to a deepening of the frontier, and a distraction from representations of home. On another walk in the closing paragraph of her book, Hogan observes Aborigines working on a car in the CBD: ‘I’m not exactly sure what they are doing: changing a fan belt perhaps’ (AS:308). Ironically, this leads to a comment on Aboriginal ingenuity: ‘They are *ninti*: ingenious, adaptable survivalists’ (AS:309). By this point Hogan has however, invested a great deal in representing Aborigines as victims and the town as a divided frontier: this perhaps more nuanced construction comes too late.

## 8.6 A politics of space

While encounter with Aboriginal people might have proven a rich source of insight in *Alice Springs*, it is instead problematic. When Hogan's walking narrator meets an Aboriginal man in a red-checked flannelette shirt and a ten-gallon hat, they are soon joined by two Aboriginal women waiting for a lift (AS:57-64). The man inquires where Hogan is from. Hogan notes this is a typical opening line for Aboriginal people, whereas a Westerner might be more inclined to ask: What do you do? Here is a missed opportunity for the narrator to explore the difference between a place and kinship-based culture and a profit-based one.

Austin-Broos (2009) compares the hunter-gatherer life with life in a market society; the former kin-based and emplaced, the latter characterised by the bureaucratic state, cash and commodities. Change for the Arrernte from Thompson's Dreaming landscape and the world Stuart encountered on the Finke River in 1860, came abruptly. The Arrernte's passage between these states brought tension over time between two value systems of unequal power (Broos 2009:246, 265-9). Such an ontological shift invites comparison with Heidegger's idea that 'the very materiality of life, including both the natural environment and things of social life, is defined by particular acts, "concernful dealings"' (ibid:5). Colonial change affected social environments as well as individuals; embedded identity, the very meaning of what it is to 'be', was redefined (ibid: 5-6). Nothing demonstrates this more clearly than commonplace practices of conversation, as Austin-Broos suggests:

The Arrernte still ask, 'To whom are you related?' whereas non-indigenous Australians ask, 'What do you do (for a living)?' (2009:246).

Unfortunately, this idea is not discussed during Hogan's encounter with the man in the hat. The reader is left uninformed as to this important cultural difference. Hogan's textual rendering of the conversation is stilted and awkward: 'I don't want to deluge him with questions whitefella-style.' But here I must wonder: Isn't that why she is there? Ultimately, Hogan warns the group of the alcohol laws she earlier took some trouble to describe:

‘You know you can get in trouble with the police for drinking in a public place?’ I say.

Geraldine nods.

‘Does it bother you?’

She shrugs.

‘I saw the police driving up and down the riverbed a little while ago.’

None of them seem fussed (AS:63).

Like Marlpengwe and Nalenale in *A Man from the Dreamtime*, and the women Hogan saw with heads bowed as they walked through Heavitree Gap, perhaps these Aborigines abide different laws of space, defined by tradition, where the old (but not necessarily fixed) ways still hold sway. A political geography of contemporary Australia is superimposed over the top of these old ways. Yet the imbrication of both spaces is also confused by alcohol and this aspect of Alice Springs is deftly described and argued by Hogan. For example, she interviews Daryl Pearce from the Lhere Artepe Aboriginal corporation, a representative body for Alice Springs Native Title Holders. Pearce elaborates on the breadth of the alcohol problem, and the difficulty the Gapview Hotel has promoting itself as a sophisticated establishment, when

At two o’clock closing . . . all the blackfellas are leaving and we’re loading them into the minibus and getting the minibus to circle back through the bottle-o’. The hypocrisy of the town is the issue (AS:47).

Anna Krein describes the same pub as one of Alice Springs’ three notorious ‘animal bars’ (2011). Money spent per capita on alcohol in the Territory, Krein reports, is between 50 and 100 per cent higher than in the rest of Australia, surmising that:

while the national annual cost of alcohol-related harm is about \$15 billion (which works out to be a little less than \$1000 per adult), the figure for the Territory alone is more than \$4000 per adult.

The National Alcohol Beverage Industries Council disagrees, citing its own report which shows more costs are borne by the individual, with national public costs at \$3.8 billion. But again, this is the major focus of a text purporting to deliver a broad representation of place, yet it leaves a narrow impression of place as a grog-fuelled frontier. Alcohol has long been a signifier of the frontier in representations

of Alice Springs. Hogan notes a raft of laws as relevant, since 1928 when a law prohibited Aboriginal people from entering ‘within a two mile radius of the Governor’s residency in the town’s centre’. Previously a mark of masculinity on the frontier, Hogan argues, drinking has been rebadged as an ‘Aboriginal problem’ (AS:53). The 1928 law was overturned in 1964, enabling Aboriginal people to purchase alcohol. As a result, Hogan points out:

certain local mercenary elements have repeatedly exploited this situation, delivering liquor to town camps when its sale to Aboriginal people was first legislated and later engaging in practices such as selling high-content alcohol products at cheap prices to attract low-income heavy drinkers (AS:52).

Though narrow when considered as a broad textual depiction of place, as a political geography of the Centre, Hogan’s coverage of the region’s alcohol-related woes is extremely troubling. In 1984, she writes, the NT Government ‘banned the public consumption of alcohol within two kilometres of licensed premises’, known locally as the 2-km law (SA:54). In 2002-3 a trial of alcohol restrictions sought to ban certain high-alcohol products. 4- and 5-liter wine casks were removed from sale. But sales of 2-litre casks of port — dubbed monkey blood because of its highly toxic effects — rose ‘by 1000 per cent, accompanied by a 20 per cent increase in alcohol related offences’ (AS:48). Hogan tallies 70 liquor outlets across the town, nineteen of which sell take-away (AS:49), often alongside healthy food options like food and vegetables, or even alongside petrol at service stations. By 2005-6, Hogan notes, alcohol consumption across the whole of the Alice Springs community ‘averaged 20 litres of pure alcohol per person — twice the national average and four times the planet’s average’ (AS:49). When the Intervention came into force in 2007, Aboriginal remote communities were declared prescribed areas in which drinking, possession and supply of alcohol were banned. In early 2008, this was extended to Alice Springs’ (then) 21 town camps. As a result, inhabitants who ‘already could not drink in public places, could not lawfully drink in their own homes either’ (AS:55).

Despite Australia-wide evidence to the contrary, heavy drinking in Alice Springs is represented as an Aboriginal problem. This is partly because some Aborigines

drink in public, in the riverbed or on pathways and in parks; also drinking camps are set up on the fringes of town, on or behind hillslopes, tucked out of sight (Rothwell 2011). As Hogan argues however, a high percentage of Aborigines are teetotal, particularly those who have seen first-hand the trouble it can cause. This contrast between evidence and representation suggests that, like the settler interpretation of Walkabout, the problem of 'grog' and Aboriginal drinking is partly a cultural construction serving to alienate Aborigines from a European 'norm', and thereby deepening the frontier. Still, as Anna Krein notes: 'No claims of high visibility can explain away certain facts' (2011). Begging for money to buy alcohol is frequent (AS:64), prompting Alice Springs' CBD security guards and police to encourage Aboriginal pedestrians to 'keep moving on' (Lea et al 2012:152).

The important point to note from this complex array of politicised spaces, is that the Aborigines Hogan interviews largely ignore legislated means of controlling the flow of alcohol. Perhaps this form of silent revolt is to be expected in a town where regulations create white space that excludes blacks. But black spaces also prevail. Photographing or trespassing on sacred sites, for example, is also forbidden by law. Visitors to town camps require a reason and permission from Tangentyere Council, the responsible managing body.<sup>69</sup> Crossing some regions of Central Australia or visiting certain remote communities requires a permit issued by the Central Land Council (*Visiting Aboriginal Land*). In Alice Springs, Hogan and some whites emerge as her 'do-gooder urban type(s)' who come to Central Australia to work in the 'Aboriginal industry' (The Wheeler Centre 2012), while others are demonised for leading blackfellas to alcohol. Perhaps Hogan's most meaningful encounter on this walk comes shortly after her encounter with the man in the hat, as she continues to the store:

The footpath is full of people, sitting in clusters, facing the road. Mothers breastfeed their children. An entire family, including a baby in a stroller and a child on a pink scooter, watch the traffic come in and out of the Gapview. A granny with matted, yellowing white hair calls out to me: 'Hey, do I know you from somewhere? You got twenty dollars?' (64).

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<sup>69</sup> Tangentyere Council was established in 1977 as a representative and resources body for town campers (Coughlan 1991:x).

One gets a clear picture of what is before the walking author. But Hogan is also maintaining distance from her 'other'. In the previous cross-cultural encounter, the author appears uncomfortable and lacks confidence. As a result, the encounter is not informative. As such, Hogan's narrative highlights some acute deficiencies of the flâneur for cross-cultural encounter. But evident also is its strength for articulating the political means of producing space.

As discussed earlier, the explorers and pastoralists followed and usurped Aboriginal travel routes for their reliable water sources, themselves sacred sites (McCarthy 1939; Reynolds 1995). While Hogan reviews the history of the frontier early in the book, and there is the description of Alice Springs' past at Heavitree Gap, the text largely ignores the Dreaming landscape or 'geography of survival'. Such reluctance to write about Aboriginal culture is widespread, and examples of cultural mistakes abound. The aspects missing from Hogan's account of space in the Centre bring me to the ethical issues facing settler writers of 'black' or contested spaces.

### 8.7 Ethics and writing the postcolonial geography

Hogan's decision not to discuss matters of Aboriginal culture mirrors a general fear among non-indigenous authors and journalists at large in the contact zone regarding ethical and cultural boundaries. The question of who has the right to speak for, or even about, Aborigines is vexed, and, I argue, another manifestation of the frontier.

In the already cited Wheeler Centre interview, Hogan explains her rationale for the writing of *Alice Springs*:

I avoided including commentary on areas where books had already been published: for example, IAD has published several books where traditional Arrernte talk about their culture and spirituality, an area where I would have been entirely out of my depth and which I felt would be inappropriate for me to cover (Wheeler Centre 2012).

Hogan's wariness is understandable. In a widely publicised conflict over the planned siting of a flood mitigation and recreational dam on the Todd River near Alice Springs for example, Arrernte elders expressed difficulty and frustration at



having to explain to white authorities the importance of their places in Arrernte culture ('Weeping dancing as ...'). As Davidson writes, to the outsider the culture is secretive and complex (2005:143). I argue however, we must consider to what degree Aboriginal culture now contributes to place for both cultures in Central Australia. As Suleri notes is common in postcolonial literatures, widespread cultural exchange blurs the frontier divide, making Hogan's decision to exclude such matters from her text problematic. This is not a matter of epistemology, but of ethics. An ethical framework discouraging one cultural group from writing of or about their other, or at least the role their other plays in constructing place, can only serve to reinforce an imagined frontier divide between them.

In ethnography, anthropologists once wrote about their Other as a matter of course. In the 1980s however, anthropologists underwent what James Clifford labels a crisis of representation, a trend toward a 'specification of discourses', which prompted him to pose to ethnographers the questions 'Who speaks? Who writes? When and where? With or with whom? Under what institutional and historical constraints?' (Clifford and Marcus 1986:130). The questions emphasise how, as Gayatri Spivak has argued 'There is always a risk in writing about the other . . . something which you used to dominate' (Spivak 1990:62-3). But perhaps this dilemma cannot be resolved. Perhaps, as Diane Elam suggests, it is more a problem of ethics than epistemology:

Trying to do justice to the other, trying not to appropriate the other's discourse, is an unresolvable epistemological bind – which still does not mean that we stop trying to be just. Rather, the significance of this predicament lies in an ethical not an epistemological recognition: the recognition that there is no guilt-free speech (Elam 1995:235).

As Spivak suggests this ethical bind is, in itself, no reason not to speak. Researchers willing to critique their own position, earn the right to criticize and be heard (Spivak 1990:62-3).

Important cultural protocols should of course be observed, for example not publishing privileged information, or using the names of recently deceased

Aboriginal persons.<sup>70</sup> As I argue elsewhere however, the publication of ‘open’ Dreaming narratives might serve to enhance cross-cultural understanding, and is more in keeping with the sort of cultural exchange that is happening anyway in Australia’s contact zones (Morrison 2014b).

The ethics of writing frontiers is a consideration in being true to the hybridity apparent in the contact zone. I return to Robyn Davidson’s question of Aboriginal culture: How might the outsider penetrate something so secretive and complex? (Davidson 2005:143). Many align themselves, as Willa McDonald observes, with Spivak’s bind in writing the other, and suppose that the time has come for whites to stop writing about Aboriginal people, history and culture altogether, to ‘vacate the field’ (1997:12). Yet, unravelling the complex dimensions of place in the contact zone would seem key to fostering an Australian literature of place that embraces and promotes cross-cultural understanding. Otherwise, Aborigines remain inscrutable in any settler narrative of place, trapped on the other side of a frontier divide.

If settler Australians are to be able to express a cogent sense of place in their literature, and to help develop a sophisticated literature of place, they must be able to touch upon Aboriginal culture in some acceptable manner. Similarly, if Aboriginal writers are to articulate their own dynamic sense of place in a postcolonial context, surely they must discuss settler culture. It appears Hogan’s solution — to avoid matters of Aboriginal culture altogether — was no solution at all. An ethically-produced literature of the Dreaming, such as the one used in this thesis (Thompson in Turpin 2003) provides one answer to Hogan’s dilemma. Such an argument appears however, to run counter to current thinking in the field.

In answering critics regarding her focus on Aboriginal disadvantage, Hogan argues much material had to be removed from her text in order to meet the

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<sup>70</sup> For example, Kwementyaye(or Kumanjayi) is an Arrernte word meaning ‘no name’. When a person dies, their name is not used for some time, at least a year. They are referred to instead as Kwementyaye. People, places or objects with the same name or similar are also referred to as Kwementyaye. See <http://www.naccho.org.au/download/media-press-releases/Cultural%20Protocols%20mackinoly%20notes%20for%20referring%20to%20deceased%20Aboriginal%20people.pdf>

publication requirements of UNSW Press' *Cities* series (The Wheelers Centre 2012). As such, Hogan's text highlights how focussing on one particular aspect of produced space — in this case the effects of alcohol — while ignoring others, does not produce a narrative of place, so much as a political geography of a particular issue. The lack of cultural exchange this suggests again reinforces the binary rigidity of the representation of place. Nonetheless, it also raises once again McDonald's (1997) and Davidson's (2005) question. Perhaps the argument comes down to the way Aboriginal oral narratives and histories are translated and presented. For example, parts of *A Man from the Dreamtime* are presented in a written form of the Kaytetye language. Margaret Clunies-Ross suggests Aboriginal texts may be in Aboriginal languages, including creoles, Aboriginal English, standard Australian English, or mixtures of these, as well as being accompanied by 'film, painting, or other visual illustrations of the non-verbal components of Aboriginal oral performances' (1986:249). Indigenous literature generally has been widely applauded for bringing a minority culture into the mainstream (Davis and Hodge 1985; Podemska-Abt 2008). In this way, says Podemska-Abt, Australian Indigenous societies inscribed in works are sustained (2008:3). Such publications are crucial not only to assuring Aboriginal cultural heritage, but to breaking down Davidson's representation of the culture as 'secretive and complex' (see Morrison 2014b:41), and to breaking down an emerging ethical frontier between black and white writers that is demonstrated by Hogan's deliberate choice to ignore matters of Aboriginal culture.

## 8.8 Home and belonging on the frontier

Hogan's choice results in a deepening of her textual representation of frontier. This has the added effect of neglecting an emerging sense of shared belonging in the town, a sense of home, to which I now turn. Rather than the black and white of Hogan's rendering, relationships in the contact zone are much more 'grey', as Hogan's interview with Tracey Stevens, a former Northern Territory lawyer, demonstrates:

Despite its justified reputation as a frontier town with a palpable black and white divide, Alice taught me 'grey', . . . The longer I lived there the more I realised the depth of the social problems and the complexity of the relationships between its inhabitants (AS:276).

In a 2011 government study aiming to address Alice Springs' social woes, community engagement specialist Jane Munday detected a strong sense of place among residents and was prompted to ask interviewees what they loved about the town (MWM 2011). Central Australia is memorable for its scenery, so along with 'economic opportunity', it was not surprising the most common settler responses embraced community, landscape and spirit; in other words, a *sense of place*.

Arguably, both Aboriginal and settler groups have a right to a sense of belonging in Central Australia. However, perhaps justifiably, this is questioned in *Alice Springs*. Hogan refers to projections that 'by 2012, the population of Alice Springs is likely to be 60 per cent Aboriginal. In 2009, Aboriginal people were employed in only 600 of the 11,000 jobs in town' (AS:300). Lhere Artepe's Daryl Pearce concludes from these figures that 'to employ Aboriginal people, white people will have to lose jobs.' Pearce estimates it will take another 15 years for white and black groups in the town to 'work through their relationship' (ibid). Here the text implies that one solution to Alice Springs social woes is that all the white people leave town. In fact, by 2010, weary after 'being confronted regularly by basic human need' in a town of 'too much extremity' Hogan herself leaves for Melbourne. The sense of despair prompting Hogan's departure is not uncommon, as was her escape route to an east coast city where such problems are less immediately apparent. As to its implications for ideas of belonging and home, Hogan's leaving warrants closer inspection.

Despite possible ambivalence and ambiguity, home is where one properly belongs; when one does not have a home, one becomes 'placeless' (Relph 1976). The notions of sense of place and belonging are closely allied and Weil entwines them as 'rootedness':

A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain expectations for the future (2003).

In the contested spaces of Australia, belonging can be problematic (Ottosson 2014). For example, Paul Newbury agonises: ‘I reach out for a sense of belonging because I do not want to be forever an immigrant in Aboriginal land’ (2012). Newbury desires what Peter Read calls a ‘moral sense of belonging’ (2000:6), one that acknowledges the palimpsest. While political issues remain, many settlers and indigenous people in Alice Springs find every day social practices in the town bring them into a shared space, as well as their practices producing a particular space (Ottosson 2014). This is separate from the identity politics of identifying as one or another category of indigenous or non-indigenous. Yet settler articulations of home and belonging remain ambivalent at best. Stanner suggests ‘Our word “home”, warm and suggestive though it may be, does not match the Aboriginal word that may mean “camp”, “hearth”, “country”, “everlasting home”, “totem place”, “life source”, “spirit centre” and much else all in one.’ Such linguistic inadequacy, according to Stanner, left us ‘tongueless and earless towards this other world of meaning and significance’ (Stanner 1979:230).

Simone Weil writes that to put down roots is ‘perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul’ (Weil 2003:43). The question is central to deciding exactly what might constitute an idea of home in the Centre, as opposed to the frontier of popular conception. While Hogan left the town, others respond favourably to the physical environment of the Centre, an outcome suggested by artist Craig Walsh’s investigation of home in remote Australian towns for the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney (Walsh 2011; see also Richards 2011). Others respond to economic imperatives as Hogan notes:

If it wasn’t for the Intervention monies flowing into Central Australia, the place may have gone under during the economic recession. For all the anxiety about ‘white flight’, the degree of economic opportunism that often draws people into Alice, then on to less arid pastures, is rarely mentioned. (AS:298).

But economic opportunism is not a motivation for all non-indigenous people to live in Alice Springs (Ottosson 2014). The opportunity to *leave* Alice is however, certainly not there for some Aborigines. As Daryl Pearce observes: ‘I can’t retire to the Gold Coast, even though, you know, I’m as light skinned as I am . . .

Because all my family, my cultural background disappears' (AS:301). Such sentiments suggest a cultural divide in opportunity, a difference in social capacity for mobility, or to change habitus.

To put this in perspective, some long-term Centre pastoral families also feel their own strong sense of place. Ross Stanes and Jo Kesby are leaving the city to return to Lyndavale Station, a cattle property 260km south of Alice Springs. Ross is fourth generation on Lyndavale, which the Stanes have owned since the 1920s. In an interview for *Territory Q*, Ross's father John who runs Lyndavale, told me:

Obviously we have a love for the land. We try to look after country as much as possible: low stocking rates, fairly intensive management systems . . . It's something we've learned from being here a long time' (Morrison 2014d:52).

Important to the Stanes were the journeys of their ancestors, who they remember through story. Nicholas Gill finds this same production of pastoral memory produces its own pastoral landscapes which he calls 'loci of personal, group and national identity, meaning, belonging, experience and what Furniss calls "the burden of history", the consequences of indigenous dispossession' (Gill 2005:68; see also Furniss 2000). The Stanes' sentiment is not so far removed from an Aboriginal sentiment for land, borne through intimate knowledge and family connections. In addition to their long-term practice of pastoralism, the Stanes and others share with the Centre's indigenous people a tradition of placemaking through storytelling and journey, a tradition not only at the heart of this thesis, but core to constructions of Australian identity (Rowley 1996). In this way, as Carter has noted ' . . . language, like traveling, gives space its meaning' (2010:175).

This comparison is worth exploring further. In retelling Plato's story of Protagoras, David Malouf defines the relationship between humans and nature as one of 'unrest' or 'restlessness', sketching man as man the maker, whose mission is to 'turn wilderness into a fruitful landscape and lay down roads to move on' (Malouf 2011:18). This echoes Chatwin's appraisal in *The Songlines* (1987), as well as the ideas suggested by the experience of the Stanes, in the same way Amy Hamilton suggests when she writes the songlines were:

paths that have been etched into the earth by American walkers . . . the millions of literal footsteps . . . also the narratives and stories that have risen . . . as . . . writers . . . grapple with the relationship between self and land (2008:249).

Westerners have long perceived the Aboriginal sense of place as dependent on a 'primitive' positioning as part and parcel of nature: the mythologised ecological Aborigine, at the mercy of, and yet in harmony with the environment (Rolls 2007). While it appals many that western modernity is usurping an emplaced and ecologically masterminded hunter-gatherer lifestyle, this does not negate the fact that the same basic intent permeates both points of view: to make a place in the world, to dwell, to nest, to make a home. For as geographer David Seamon notes: 'as human beings, we cannot fail to dwell, for dwelling, ultimately, is the essential existential core of human being-in-the-world from which there is no escape' (2000).

In other words, Aborigines and settlers share some of the same elements of a sense of place and identity. That frontier suggests an ontological divide, which these many links and resonances across a supposed nature/culture divide would argue against, suggests the frontier is simply an imagined cultural construct between groups of humans. For ritual connects people to place, *any people*, and, as Stephen Muecke points out, 'this happens not only with traditional ceremonies, but with modern ones' (2004:14). Nonetheless, many still question the rights of settler Australians to feelings of emplacement, indeed, whether any sense of belonging they might acquire 'would be morally inferior', and binding identity to a question of 'nativeness' (Trigger 2008:306). This line of reasoning underpins the call for settler authors to leave Aboriginal culture alone, to which Hogan has duly responded. But like Stanner's 'Whitefella (who) got no dreaming' — indicating, roughly speaking, that settler Australians lack a cultural narrative with which to articulate their landscape — Hogan and her readers are left without a home. Hogan's text perpetuates the frontier discourse to which she has responded.

In contrast, Jeff Malpas argues a sense of belonging in place is tied to neither ownership nor length of residency, rather it is 'an existential opportunity that presents itself to all' (1999). This argument works in terms of the first *affect* of

place, a reaction of the ‘body’ to the physical environment surrounding. This reaction is soon tempered however, by other influences, such as politics and opportunity. While it should be clear from the analysis so far that various inequities and laws governing place might interfere with the position of ‘an existential opportunity for all’, it nevertheless frames belonging as a possibility independent of origin: the Muslim migrant, the fifth generation pastoralist, or the Arrernte woman with her head bowed (who Hogan met on her walk), would all have equal theoretical right to connect with the place in which they choose to live. A strong advocate of Aboriginal law, the late Wenten Rubuntja said *all* children born in Alice Springs, *both* Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, are spiritually connected to the Ayeparenye Caterpillar Dreaming (Rubuntja and Green 2002:175). Even though Alice Springs was once a restricted area for Aborigines, Rubuntja understood the town ‘as both an Arrernte place and a ‘white’ place.’<sup>71</sup> This is not to imagine that settlers might have any form of legal ‘right’ of claim, but such flexibility points to a shared articulation of the idea of ‘home’. And it would seem to substantiate Dianne Austin-Broos’ assertion that contemporary Aboriginal society is not so much embracing a Modernist worldview, as updating a traditional hunter-gatherer worldview, assigning meanings to the objects of modernity they now find dotting their world (Austin-Broos 2009:266). Make no mistake regarding Rubuntja’s meaning however, for he also says:

When English people found our country, and [found] Aboriginal people, they put their cities and culture all over our country. But underneath this, all the time, Aboriginal culture and laws stay alive (Rubuntja and Green 2002: 175).

In effect, Rubuntja describes the layers of the palimpsest described herein and attests to the persistence of the Dreaming landscape, akin to that described earlier as produced by the ancestor Marlpwenge.

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<sup>71</sup> For part of its history Alice Springs was a restricted zone for Aboriginal people (See Rubuntja and Green 2002:73). Nevertheless Rubuntja saw the town as a domain for both peoples (Rubuntja and Green 2002: 50).



## 8.9 Conclusions

*Alice Springs* (2012) produces a politicised space that reinforces a representation of Central Australia as a frontier, with little exchange evident across a rigid binary divide between nature and culture. While some social groups are well described in this way, other texts of the Intervention era provide more nuanced representations evoking hybridity and a sense of home. Increasing interest in the Aboriginal songlines during the Intervention era is not mirrored in Hogan's text, further detracting from the apparent depth of place in this sixth layer of the palimpsest. Relying heavily on place affect, Arthur Groom (1950) produced a humanist articulation of place, coupled with an inadequate accounting of produced space. Hogan has produced the reverse: a political geography of alcohol, lacking a hybrid, or even inclusive, sense of place.

As a narrative of place, *Alice Springs* accords well with popular media representations of the region, representations lacking nuance in their articulation of local cultural and political challenges. From my earlier analysis of *A Man from the Dreamtime* (2003) emerged the representation of an emplaced culture, rich in ceremony and myth, in which identity and belonging were established through kinship and an intimate knowledge of place. In other words, the desert was the pre-colonial home of the Kaytetye, Arrernte and others. This representation of home appeared again in hybridised form in Strehlow's (1969) narrative of 1922, is lost under Groom's (1950) tourist wilderness of the post-war period, then resurfaces in Chatwin's (1987) work of the Land Rights era. But home is absent from the present day of *Alice Springs*. While the latter text deftly argues the production of space in its depiction of a political geography of grog, the author's decision not to include matters of Aboriginal culture in the text limits its construction of the intercultural dependencies of the Centre. Also absent is the significant role place affect has assumed in the other textual representations of Central Australia examined here.

The protagonist in 'The Gap' suggests comparison with the cultural figure of the flâneur, one who wanders around observing place. The flâneur also provides a useful metaphor for the action of reading the text, in that a reader walks the place

of Alice Springs a second time through Hogan's text. The analysis has shown that place as represented by the walking writer is linked to the intent and 'psychology' of the walker. The text demonstrates the enduring appeal of the frontier metaphor, while also giving lie to its credibility as a way to represent the lifeworlds of Central Australia. As is evident from this analysis then, walking is no guarantee of bridging cultural barriers, and a frontier representation is just as possible an outcome for a walking writer as any other.

## 9. Conclusion: Journey's End

Nomadic peoples journeyed over the same territory again and again (which) cannot be compared with the colonial acquisition of new lands where the journey is defined in terms of discovery. Both forms of travel can be seen from a modernist perspective as a leaving of home. But from a traditional perspective only the colonist has left home; the nomadic journey is a form of staying at home.

Jeff Archer (2006:19)

Native and non-Native activists who overcome the burden of colonial history and ideology [develop] strong interpersonal relationships out of a shared concern for the integrity of belonging to a specific place in the world.

Larsen and Johnson (2012:642)

In this thesis I proposed that persistently representing Central Australia as a frontier prevents Australians from reimagining it as home. To test the proposition, I examined six consecutive non-fiction narratives of walking in Central Australia as a way to map representations of frontier and home and how this changes historically. While dominated by the frontier metaphor — which proves to be both powerful and resilient — the texts also betray a distinctive cultural hybridity in the contact zone between settler and Aboriginal Australians. The palimpsest constructed by the six texts goes some way however, toward redressing frontier's failure of imagination by suggesting a new ecopoetics of the Centre. Notwithstanding this ambivalence, frontier remains the dominant metaphor, as if its social and cultural gravity prevents the literary walker from ever escaping its orbit, never fully realising therefore, an enormous and clearly demonstrated potential of the recounted walk to act counter-discursively to frontier's hegemony.

From text to text the emphasis in the analysis varies, at times privileging a phenomenological appraisal of place, at others a Marxist accounting of space, or conflating degrees of both. It is clear from the analysis that an exclusively phenomenological or Marxist approach alone would have not have been adequate to the task. Walking has helped build an epistemological bridge between the two frameworks, and to thereby negotiate historically competing understandings of

space and place. Importantly however, the research also finds that walking is no panacea for the writing of place. In particular, walking is no guarantee of an inclusive or even moral narrative of place, and a frontier representation is just as possible an outcome for a walking writer as any other. Together however, the texts comprise a literary layering of representations, wherein the ‘percolation of histories’ suggested so provocatively by Julianne Schultz (2014) is indeed possible. The result is a more nuanced representation of Alice Springs and the Centre, one that resonates with Kapferer’s ‘interpenetrating social worlds’, a term which puts paid to the orientalist mistake that there is a ‘thoroughgoing difference in thought and practice between Aborigines and white Australians over a range of matters’ (1999:185).

In the concluding chapter that follows, I summarise the main findings of the thesis emphasising the recurrent hybridity found in the texts, but at the same time (unavoidably) enunciating cultural differences, which, as Bhabha notes ‘problematises the division of past and present, tradition and modernity’ (Bhabha 2003:207). In the texts examined from Central Australia, political geography emerges as different for different groups: some groups prefer a representation of frontier, while others articulate geographies of home. Walking and critically reading the walking narratives of the region suggests one way of deconstructing these complex spaces and desires.

It is worth noting also the number of texts examined here, which has been important to the outcome: too many texts and the thesis becomes a history of walking in the Centre. Too few texts, and the thesis becomes an analysis of place for a particular author. Six texts, I argue, has been enough to evaluate how walking affects the representation of place, and to approximate how this representation has changed historically. By using a strategy that embraces both a phenomenological and Marxist reading of the texts I have been able to treat the narratives as Raja Shehadeh treated his recounted walks of Palestine: that they may contest preconceptions of place (2008:40). The result traces the shifting over time of the metaphor of frontier and related conceptions of home through representations of place and identity.

## 9.1 Overview

Jeff Archer suggests that the two forms of journeying I have compared — that of ‘nomad’ (by which he means Australian Aborigines) and settler/colonialist — are essentially incomparable: they imply, he says, different intents and ways of being-in-the-world. This is an important matter, for the thesis begins by questioning this basic supposition. As I argue in earlier chapters, comparing narratives of walking means comparing narratives with a shared epistemological tradition, a method that has the added advantage of entertaining the possibility of an ontological sharing between cultures.

It is clear from the textual analysis undertaken that the representation of the frontier for Central Australia and Alice Springs remains hegemonic in the literature, a conclusion perhaps most strongly reinforced by the return to older imaginings of the frontier in the most recent text (Hogan 2012). All of the texts deal to varying extents with the boundary between Aboriginal and settler cultures, even (to the least extent) the Dreaming narrative with which the thesis begins. The Aboriginal Dreaming story articulates a representation of space as place and home, and represents the pre-contact cultural landscape. As Homi Bhabha notes however, the problems of the cultural are most clearly manifest at the boundary between culture, otherwise called the *contact zone* (Pratt 1991:34; see also Bishop 2011:26), or Franz Fanon’s ‘zone of *occult instability* where the people dwell’ (1967:168). Commonly observed in this zone is an emergence of cultural hybridity and ambivalence of identity, typically an element of the colonial struggle, and one which a representation of frontier in literature can serve to suppress. Such hybridity is evident throughout the discontinuous history of place represented by the recounted walks of the thesis. Contemporary literature and media commonly eschew this hybridity however, the results therefore demonstrating not only the validity of my thesis — that frontier is preventing Australians reimagining the Centre as home, by virtue of suppressing a belonging emerging from an evident hybridity — but that the frontier as a myth has been frequently pressed into the service of various political agendas from colonisation to the present.

All of the settler texts are in one way or another characterised by an ‘explorer’ aesthetic. The theme harks back to Trevor James’ description of the settler writer of the territory as ‘alienated from the landscape he admires’ (1984:56). By contrast, the Dreaming narrative is told by a Kaytetye insider who is intimately familiar with an Aboriginal ontology of place and its nuances. This fundamental difference of being-ness, as demonstrated between the five settler texts and the Dreaming story retold by Thompson, is at least partly responsible for dividing the frontier along nature-culture lines from the first. The frontier is a divide with roots in the dichotomy of inside and outside, here and there (Bachelard 1994:211). Widely defined as a binary, the frontier marks the boundary between nature and culture, primitive and modern. From the walking literature, the Central Australian frontier is most conspicuous as this ontological divide, which, with respect to settler and Aboriginal lifeworlds, is here considered the most significant and constraining influence. Such a divide mirrors the mind/body split, between Aboriginal ways of knowing and Enlightenment rationales. The shared epistemology of the walking storyteller however, brings these two different ways of being into close proximity, allowing closer inspection for representations of both frontier and home, and for resonance as well as difference.

The six texts distinguish between representations of frontier and home historically, slowly building a more nuanced picture of place and identity. Moreover, the thesis delineates the link between the walking journey, landscape, culture and discourses of nation. The method reveals a broad spectrum of cultural boundaries between bounding limits of porous and non-porous (or impermeable). Boundaries were certainly present in the precolonial era of Thompson’s narrative, but these were porous in nature: a ‘way of being’ was continuous (remained intact) across language and tribal borders from one lifeworld to another. Stuart’s text however, introduces an imaginary and material divide between this Aboriginal lifeworld and a settler/imperialist space in which space is to be valued for its resource potential, a backdrop for the spread of Enlightenment values and capitalism. In Stuart’s text, such a boundary is non-porous: ways of being differ across such a boundary, which is characteristic of the colonial frontier.

The point of view of the walking perceiver provides each narrative with a point of commonality, via comparable means of placemaking, narrative structure and epistemology. The walking body may be considered a sensing portal through which the world becomes known and is translated to text. But worldviews are shaped also by discourse, narrative and representation. And so the sharing of ontologies of place between settler and Aborigine may never be fully realised. As Said notes (1975:8), such influences constrain the textual interpretation of the walk and the place, as well as the relationship between self and place. The characteristics of place are modified again by extant factors of the space itself, the residual political geographies, which are a broader field of influence on place. Space has been shown to shape place and self through habitus which provides the link between space and place through the body. Nevertheless, walking also provides a point of comparison for the representation of place across cultures, perhaps a first step along a path toward a shared or at least commonly understood worldview.

## **9.2 A literary model of a Central Australian palimpsest**

The thesis uses six texts to track the ways place in Central Australia has been represented, overwritten and re-appropriated over six periods of history spanning from the precolonial era to the second decade of the twenty-first century. The palimpsest so constructed, an act of placemaking in itself, suggests walking as a pathway to a new ecopoetics of the Centre. Briefly, I reprise these six layers of non-fiction literature, starting with Thompson's representation of the precolonial era.

### **10.2.1 Thompson: Precolonial era (before 1860)**

Underlying the contemporary space of Central Australia is a precolonial space that pertains before 1860, represented in Tommy Kngwarre Thompson Kaytetye story *A Man from the Dreamtime* (Turpin 2003). From this recounted walking journey emerges Aboriginal Law and guidance on aspects of everyday life, from survival in the desert, to proper social conduct and explanations of conception. All are manifest in and from a totemic and storied landscape that equates to a

precolonial Kaytetye political geography. The idea of home comprises two components: place as bounded space, and a relational sense of place performed through a storied culture of walking and pilgrimage along the songlines. The latter journeys crossed many thousands of kilometres, achieved by following a *geography of survival* articulated in storytelling and song, a practice of ‘wayfinding’ (Ingold 2002). Kaytetye roamed bounded space, now commonly called country, one ‘country’ separated from another by codes and rituals of passage between. Such a separation implies a frontier; however, as I have argued, such a border is ontologically porous and so does not imply a nature/culture divide as would the frontier of colonial imagining.

Thompson’s story also articulates the proper conduct for finding a marriage partner. This sophisticated cultural practice of placemaking would later be demeaned and trivialised by the widespread use of the settler slang term ‘Walkabout’. The pejorative term implies a purposeless wandering of a person who is lazy and unreliable and serves to emphasise and reinforce the superiority of settler culture. The term reinforces the binary contrast of a nature/culture divide and a frontier mentality. While the ritual ceremony and practice of pilgrimage along the songlines is the basis of an intimate and storied relationship with place, reborn in settler parlance as Walkabout, it becomes mysterious and inscrutable, and lay at the heart of the Orientalist/settler viewpoint.

### 10.2.2 Stuart: Exploration age (1860-Federation)

The storied landscape of the Kaytetye and other Aboriginal groups becomes obscured under the gaze of the explorer John McDouall Stuart, who became the first European to cross the Centre during his fourth expedition of 1860. In the *Journal of Mr Stuart’s Fourth Expedition* (1865) Stuart recounts this remarkable and gruelling journey, and appraises the Centre anew for its potential as a resource, a land of opportunity for an expanding Australian colony. The Centre also emerges as a place for Stuart to test his worth to God and Empire under prevailing ideals of the Enlightenment. While there is no doubt as to the significance of Stuart’s journey for an emergent Australian nation, and the



physical exertion and privations apparently necessary for him to achieve his goal, the journal emphasizes the Centre as a harsh wilderness to be conquered, nature providing an arena in which Stuart can prove his heroic worth. In this way, space is produced in the manner Lefebvre and others have suggested, and that would become a trope of the explorer's journal. The explorer is cast in the role of mythical hero, a reimagined Odysseus. Home however, is something that beckons from the edge of Stuart's prospectorial gaze. For a more intimate relationship with space than Stuart's outsider heroics might ever have allowed, was always a matter for the future and the settlers and pastoralists who would follow him. Meanwhile, for Stuart, home was far away in England, a place to which he would return to die in 1866, less than four years after traversing the Australian continent from south to north. The purpose of Stuart's journey had been to conquer the wilderness that challenged not only him personally, but was also inhibiting the further expansion of the Australian colony. Perhaps another purpose was to bring the values of the Enlightenment to the uncivilized primitives. Walking was largely responsible for enabling Stuart's self-serving portrait and in turn for the journal's production of space. While the explorers' journals have previously been explored for the journey, this is the first analysis that isolates instances of walking. I argue that walking in a difficult arid terrain is largely responsible for Stuart's representation of a harsh wilderness, providing fresh interpretation of the text. The difference in intent between Stuart's efforts to push forward the frontier, and Thompson's narrative of place and home examined in Chapter Three, is a first glimpse of the misunderstandings and dispossession that would characterise the nature/culture divide of the Central Australian frontier.

### **10.3.3 Strehlow: Inter-war era (Federation to World War II)**

While the idea of frontier remains evident in Strehlow's reimagined journey of the Finke River in 1922, a sense of home also emerges, produced by the author's hybridizing of the differing ways space is performed by Aborigines, and the missionaries and pastoralists who followed Stuart. Following the path of his younger self Theo, Strehlow weaves elements of the environment of his journey with the very much alive and persistent Aboriginal Dreaming stories along the

songlines, which the party's route periodically intersects. These are coupled with the stories of an emerging pastoral industry of the same region, which Strehlow accesses through encounter at homesteads and stations along the route to Horseshoe Bend. Strehlow's is a more inclusive narrative than Stuart's, calling (strategically) on his (disputable) insider status and thereby constructing a sense of home; for as I have shown, the place of the story is produced as an aid to Strehlow's political intent. Strehlow constructs for himself a dual identity: one the white anthropologist, a second 'of the Arrernte'. Nevertheless, it is the narrative's construction of home that remains instructive for postulating an ecopoetics of the Centre.

#### 10.3.4 Groom: Menzies era (1940s – '60s)

During the post-war era, a new frontier emerges, represented here by Arthur Groom's *I Saw a Strange Land* (1951), which forms a fourth layer to the palimpsest. Here Central Australia is represented as a wilderness for tourists, which Groom performs by the very act of walking, then recounts in his walking narratives of the region. While Groom's walks produce a great deal of trustworthy reportage of space and place and provide beautiful evocations that impart the place affect of Central Australia to the reader, the recounted walks nevertheless invoke this new and familiar frontier between wilderness and civilisation, modern and ancient, escape and home; one which locates Aborigines as part of primitive and exotic nature. Wilderness and Native Reserves are closely entwined in an imaginary geography that overwrites the pre-colonial geography of home of the Kaytetye, but which is neither Stuart's harsh wilderness to be conquered, nor even the hybridised geography of home of Strehlow's *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*. Groom is a walking activist for conservation, and Central Australia emerges from his text as an *escape* from home, a place where city tourists can escape to the country (bush or outback). Here in the wilds of Nature-as-redeemer, Aboriginal culture must be preserved in perpetuity, perhaps so that it may continue to provide this frontier experience for visitors.

### 10.3.5 Chatwin: Land rights era (1970s and '80s)

Chatwin's 1987 text *The Songlines* represents place in Central Australia during the Land Rights era as openly contested and characterized by intercultural dependencies of the sort flagged in Strehlow's earlier portrait. The degree of exchange across the frontier accords with subsequent anthropological findings and varies across different social groupings. This exchange contrasts with the hegemonic Australian discourse of race on the frontier based on dichotomous logic, and speaks rather to a hidden ambivalence in representations of place and identity. By leaving the way open for an inter-mingling of cultural identities, *The Songlines* defuses constructions of Central Australia as a frontier, with implications for Australian identity.

An ontological crossroads emerges from *The Songlines* linking European journeys with the Dreaming tracks, both tracings of human existence and epistemologies. Using this humanist comparison between Aborigines and settler Australians Chatwin explores the nexus between journey and home, echoing Sartre and Heidegger to postulate home as a 'right way to live' with one's own death firmly in view. In this perspective is to be found a sense of belonging by virtue of an orientation of one's being toward life's ultimate destination. From Chatwin's reckoning, this is open to both Aborigines and settlers, each tracing songlines of their own across the planet.

### 10.3.6 Hogan: Intervention era (1990 – present)

Eleanor Hogan's *Alice Springs* (2012) produces a political geography of alcohol that reinforces representations of Central Australia as a divided community, and recuperates older ideas of the frontier. Here there is little exchange evident across a rigid binary divide between Nature and Culture, in a text that represents Aborigines, broadly speaking, as victims. A precolonial sense of home, established using Thompson's Dreaming narrative, appeared again in hybridised form in Strehlow's (1969) narrative of 1922, was lost under Groom's (1950) tourist wilderness of the post-war period, then resurfaced in Chatwin's (1987) work of the Land Rights era. This sense of home is as absent from Hogan's work

of the present day as are the songlines themselves. My analysis reveals that Hogan's decision not to include matters of Aboriginal culture in the text limited her ability to represent the intercultural dependencies arising in the Centre. By contrast, other texts of the era explore a hybridity that better reflects recent anthropological findings for the town and others like it. Also absent is the significant role that place affect has assumed in other more nuanced textual representations of Central Australia. On the other hand, the text provides a strongly wrought 'map' of the political forces shaping space in Central Australia. Similarly to other texts of this thesis, *Alice Springs* demonstrates how place as represented by the walking writer is linked closely with the intent and situatedness of the walker. Hogan's text demonstrates the enduring appeal of the frontier metaphor, while also giving lie to its credibility as a way to represent the lifeworlds of Central Australia.

### 9.3 Walking as critical method

The type of walking in the six narratives ranges from the pilgrimage of the precolonial era, to the archetypal explorer Stuart, the insider's walk of a homeland by Strehlow, the conservationist treks of Groom, the philosophical wandering of Chatwin and the flâneur-like roaming of Hogan. At first, walking was thrust by circumstance upon many of those who journeyed across the arid Centre (Stuart, Strehlow). Later it became a choice for some settler travel writers, as a way to access nature and a wilderness experience (Groom), to perform a philosophy of the peripatetic (Chatwin), or to apprehend the city for the purposes of writing it (Hogan). But walking itself is no guarantee of nuance. While there is no doubt that walking has advantages for apprehending place — embodiment being perhaps the most evident — each of the texts demonstrates that the recounted walk is strongly linked to the 'psychology', politics and intent of the walking writer (or storyteller, in the case of Thompson). The ramifications of this are particularly important when it is considered that walking and the retold narrative of the walk are acts of placemaking. Texts such as Chatwin's, which acknowledges its own construction of place through storytelling, are perhaps the more ingenuous and provide the most accessible and open sense of place.

Settler narratives of nation are largely drawn from stories that most strongly reflect non-porous or impermeable understandings of frontier. However, the thesis demonstrates that alternative readings of these texts is possible and proposes walking as a reading strategy to achieve this. As noted earlier, the walking body ‘brooms up’ objects and encounters in place, an empirical method reliant on bodily perception and imagination invoked by the action of walking. The phenomenological apprehension of space and place must however, be supplemented by discourse, storytelling and representation, as Thoreau (1862), Ryan (2011) and others have demonstrated. Tempering the recent celebration of walking among ecocritics and others, my analysis reveals walking itself to be no guarantee of an inclusive narrative, one that accounts for all or even most of the dimensions of place and its hidden connections and shadow locales. Similarly, the walking outsider in a postcolonial geography is limited by their ability to represent their Other, compared with a protagonist with some degree of insiderness. The analysis has however, re-emphasised Murphy’s (2011a) call for a greater focus on walking as a critical method for postcolonial geographies. While Murphy was suggesting *actual* walks through such places, this thesis suggest a cogent role also for a literary geography based on walking narratives as a tool for analysing postcolonial geographies.

#### 9.4 An Australian ecopoetics of home

Arranged together, the six texts help to articulate an ecopoetics of Central Australia. Given the links to nation demonstrated by such texts, the palimpsest also speaks to an Australian ecopoetics. I mean this in the root sense of the term, that is, poetics as a ‘making’ and eco as ‘home’: the making of home (Bate 2000:42). In this way, the thesis itself constitutes an act of placemaking, a way of both constructing and understanding a hybridized sense of place and home. But it is also a site where such an ecopoetics meets the destabilizing politics of frontier. Several reasons arise to account for this confusion.

Belonging I suggest, may be linked to a political cause. For some in Central Australia — and this is most evident from Chatwin’s text — the idea of home and

sense of place is intimately linked with a political will to reconcile. Under this paradigm, both settlers and Aborigines make a conscious choice to engage with each other and to find a way forward *in the place where they live*. In other words, and again, as Larsen describes in the epigraph, the place itself is intrinsic to the construction of a hybrid sense of belonging. The texts of Central Australia that I have examined in this thesis contain the basic elements of such alternative narratives. Groom's and Chatwin's narratives for example both emphasise place affect. Strehlow's text emphasises place attachment and the viewpoint of the insider. The more inclusive narratives are foregrounded and become suddenly visible in a textual milieu otherwise dominated by the frontier metaphor. In the way Schultz (2014) suggests, the palimpsest affords a poetic bleed between its own layers, akin to the hybridised and necessarily intertextual experience of the contact zone itself. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard suggests the poetic image is a place where 'the distant past resounds with echoes, and it is hard to know at what depth these echoes will reverberate and die away' (1994:xvi). The six layers of texts lend depth to Bachelard's 'reverberations of the past', which are clearly felt in the various lived experiences emerging from my textual analysis. As is increasingly clear from recent work by Finnane (2011; 2014), Bishop (2011) and Moss (2010; 2013), it is in the arts that this hybridity and resonance of the past is most clearly evident.

Nevertheless, some settlers prefer a frontier image for Central Australia, a mark of difference, a way of ascribing to themselves an identity that locates them as part of a more 'authentic' Australia (see Carment 2005, 2009). In some ways this preference may account for the longevity and popularity among settlers of the frontier metaphor. This essentially urban imagining of the Outback has its genesis in the coastal cities where, eager to know their country in the way of Groom's postulated tourist, readers still strongly desire an imagined frontier. The myth appeals to a dimension of restlessness in human nature, the logical binary opposite of the desire for home. Others use the frontier label to afford financial advantage, either to themselves, to individuals or to organisations dependent on whatever political agency this generates. The popularity, persistence and continued political

agency of this image outweighs the ‘insider’s’ view of place in Central Australia. In mapping the frontier’s extent and effects, the thesis both interrogates the existing discourse and makes a political statement of its own. Perhaps the more nuanced interpretation of the texts presented herein suggests a more nuanced reckoning of nation, in which shared ways of being contribute to portraits that accommodate the increasingly hybrid lived experiences of outback Australian places. A more inclusive narrative of Australian identity might recognise the significance of the trope of walking, and other walkers, such as the pilgrims and travellers of the songlines — the fleet-footed Aboriginal message men, the songmen walking the precolonial geography of survival — as well as the more familiar colonial explorer seeking to conquer and the swagman searching for gold.

‘Nature’ in its many incarnations and guises, along with the strong place affect of the Centre, comprises a stage upon which is possible — and even now in some demographics, is already performed — a resolution of actual and perceived tensions between Aboriginals and settlers. Shehadeh comes to a similar conclusion in considering paths to peace between Palestine and Israel (2008). Indeed, while the situation is arguably more fraught in the Middle East, there is nevertheless a strong parallel with Central Australia, especially in the articulation of the frontier and ongoing dispossession enacted into law, and where home has become a complex and long-contested issue. Indeed, it is this very intertextuality that is part of the problem with using the term frontier. Conflict and frontier go hand in hand, and using the term to describe Central Australia immediately invokes other frontier experiences around the world, the Israeli-Palestine conflict being but one example. For this reason alone, the continued use of the word frontier to describe Central Australia is problematic.

Groups already living a more open sense of place are most evident in Strehlow’s and Chatwin’s narratives where the influence of the songlines is strong and coincident with a hybridised sense of home. The non-porous boundary or frontier is most evident in the texts by Stuart, Groom and Hogan. Boundaries evident in Thompson are porous in nature, although its modern retelling provides evidence of the frontier already encroaching upon the narrative. The analysis suggests that

writing home in Central Australia demands a sense of place according with both cultural viewpoints, an argument running counter to present discourses of writing ethics. The songlines themselves, I suggest, provide a fulcrum upon which to balance the differences and synergies between settler and Aboriginal traditions of journey and home. In other words, the possibility exists for walking to provide a shared literary pathway to Australian places where white and black reside together in the same desert landscape. It must be said however, that whether the writer be a walking writer or any other, there are no guarantees that such progressive politics will be the result.



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