

Haunted Identities and the Possible Futures of “Aust. Lit.”

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“I wish I was French,” my inner-urban twenty-two year-old cinema studies son announced desultorily one afternoon. We were driving home from coffee and a visit to the Brunswick St Bookshop, having just bought the latest copies of *Metro*, *Sight and Sound* and a book of interviews with famous French film directors.

“Why?” I replied, feigning equal desultoriness, beginning to guess at some of his reasons.

“Because it’d be cool to live in Paris, sit round drinking red wine and eating Camembert . . . and you know, their film industry protects 50% of their local content . . .”

“But it’s good *here*, isn’t it?” I remonstrated vaguely.

“Sort of,” he acquiesced.

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Early in Kate Grenville’s 2005 Commonwealth Prize winning novel *The Secret River*, the new settlement of Sydney is described through the eyes of Englishman William Thornhill, recently arrived from Newgate and nine months at sea on the *Alexander*:

It had an odd unattached look, the bits of ground cut up into squares in this big loose landscape, a broken-off chip of England resting on the surface of the place . . . Having never seen anywhere else, Thornhill had imagined that all the world was the same as London, give or take a few parrots and palm trees. How could air, water, dirt and rocks fashion themselves to become so outlandish? This place was like nothing he had ever seen. (80)

Grenville is about to take Thornhill on a journey from impoverished British convict to Australian emancipist, owner of his “own” piece of the earth, as she traces his transformation from scrabbling poverty and crime in late eighteenth century London to a deep love and growing knowledge of the new land. The psychological and social repercussions of that transformation are what Grenville probes unflinchingly through her narratives of the atrocities,

compromises and strivings of colonial Australia. Memories of the streets and laneways of eighteenth century London, and particularly the intimately known coves and inlets of the Thames, are mapped day and night, again and again, in the dreams, songs and memories of William and Sal Thornhill, settlers on the Hawkesbury river of New South Wales.

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Is Australian identity always and peculiarly constituted by dreams of elsewhere? In less romantic terms, are all forms of identity—individual, communal, national—riven, needing to be understood always in relation to what they are not? According to a range of contemporary psychoanalytic and linguistic models of subjectivity the answer is “yes”: identity is inevitably structured by desire and lack. If we accept this broad premise, within the scope of this argument we surely need to ask further: what effects does this rivenness of subjectivity, in its multiple forms, produce in Australia and in particular in relation to that institution of “Aust. Lit.”? (This phrase will be used in this essay to indicate just such a range of disparate allegiances). In other words, in what ways are Australian cultural discourses of identity ghostly or haunted? And further, what future-oriented discourses might be possible in this haunted context?

French literary theorist and anthropologist René Girard describes one form of structural, social rivenness, the violence at the core of all social contracts, the order of mimicry and representation, in terms of what he calls sacred violence. In relation to Australia’s colonial and post-colonial cultures, I want to ask what ghosting or scape-goating, echoing Girard, haunts and even tears apart Australian models of identity-making, in both the creative and critical wings of Aust. Lit. What can or should a national literature be in this haunted context? Finally, I want to ask how these hauntings, this rivenness might be negotiated for the future of any possible national literary cultures.

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So first, to the ghosts. Once upon a time, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, questions of national identity were solemnly, bleakly intoned, informed by a culturally cringing colonial ghostliness which haunted Anglo-Australians with a deep nostalgia for Mother England. But in the latter decades of the twentieth century it is post-colonial and diasporic hauntings that continue to provoke such questions about Australian culture’s relationships to elsewhere. These latter hauntings—some republican, some multicultural, some indigenous, some cosmopolitan—are more self-conscious, perhaps devious, having been blooded, or bled, in the scarifying

1970s. This is the decade when, for example, the cocky Australian identity in films hit its macho phase in the stridencies of *Stork* (1971), *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972), *Don's Party* (1976), *Alvin Purple* (1976), and in the colonial kickbacks and ambivalences of films such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975) and *My Brilliant Career* (1979).

Compared to the predominantly parodic bravado and still demonstrably cringing representations of Australia in 70s film culture, its Bazzas and Alvins and Storks, what kinds of ghosts hovered in 1970s Aust. Lit.? After all, this is also the decade in which Aust. Lit.'s academic arm, the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL), was born and the term Aust. Lit. itself came to be widely used affectionately, and sometimes derisively, to embrace academic, creative and marketing aspects of Australian literature.

Things Australian were arguably a bit more complex in literary representations in the 1960s and 1970s, with a range of colonial and global issues being confronted: Thomas Keneally published *Bring Larks and Heroes* (1967) and *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* (1972); Patrick White published *Riders in the Chariot* (1961), *The Vivisector* (1970), *The Tnyborn Affair* (1979), and won his Nobel Prize (1973); Helen Garner published *Monkey Grip* in 1977. Poets A.D. Hope, Judith Wright, Kath Walker, James McAuley and Vincent Buckley were publishing across these decades, as were the so-called generation of '68. If rivenness of identity and the multiple registering of otherness and difference, consciously and unconsciously, are the ghosts that haunt current theorists of subjectivity and identity, then the baby ghosts of such alterity were already well and truly cutting their teeth in Australia's literary culture of this time. The visions were of Australia's penal heritage and of the *Tyranny of Distance* (1966). Full-blown critical awareness of the ravages and palpable injustices of colonisation and genocide were still to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s, opening up fissures from which even wilder hauntings of the nation erupted, as well as some steps that might lead to addressing such injustices.

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But what is Aust. Lit. in 2006? And what and where are the discourses shaping cultural identity? The days of essentialism and aggressive national identity-making in critical debates have undergone a critical sea-change in the ambivalent spirit of *globalising difference*. In a recent essay, Mark Davis declares the ghostly afterlife of "the literary paradigm", including, of course, Aust. Lit. Davis' announcement is made on the basis that, in a market-driven and global economy where a handful of international companies dictate sales, "the

literary”, let alone the Aust. Literary, are dying commodities: “Attempts to resurrect their prestige and that of the literary-intellectual culture that sustained them . . . are ever more unconvincing. Quite simply, there can be no going back, because the cultural nationalist, protectionist moment is over” (105).

From a different angle, however, a range of critical debates *within* literary and cultural studies continues to care about the ongoing existence of the literary. Such debates have recently been identifying (still, again) unwanted ghosts in the machinery of Aust. Lit.: parochialism, insularity, smallness of market and vision, lack of global reach. For example, in the Summer 2005-6 edition of *Overland*, cultural critic Ken Gelder worries, among other things, about what he sees as the nostalgia and yearning of Australian critical and imaginative writing towards the authentic, the local, the vernacular and the insular. Gelder compounds these terms quite a lot. At a disciplinary level he is concerned, in the same way, about Australian Studies, a discipline that “still doesn’t quite know whether to stay at home or look beyond its borders” (62). One of Gelder’s particular targets is Christopher Lee’s book *City Bushman: Henry Lawson and the Australian Imagination*, which, he argues:

pitches the local against the ‘metropolitan’, the ‘authentic’ bush against a ‘public culture’, which is always biased. He [Lee] turns away from the clever, sceptical, cosmopolitan values of university-educated readers to look, instead, at how rural Australia has understood the honoured Lawson heritage. (61)

Further, Gelder—and he is close to Davis’ concerns in this—understands that the major context in which the humanities in Australia operates today is one of commercial justifications looming large for the Arts and for universities generally. It is within this context, he asserts, that writers and critics need to respond in more than local ways to the bureaucratic and commercial gods. Gelder is a subtle critic at best and argues that it is necessary not to react simplistically to this set of conditions, but rather “to treat commerce and culture dialectically and realistically”, understanding at the same time that “these things work on Australia not to localise it at all but to regionalise and globalise it; to fissure it” (59). For Gelder, “fissured” is a necessary state, fissured here meaning complex, not essentialist, aware of contradictions in the shifting nature of Australian identity making. Yet according to Gelder’s analysis, the “Humanities is still too attached to the local as an authentic expression of ‘homeliness’ in Australia to properly engage with transnational/industrial/cultural matters” (59). Hence, the logic of Gelder’s argument is that in order for the humanities to address the economic requirements of government and the marketplace properly, it needs to move beyond the merely local. It needs to discard older, sentimental

notions of “Australia”, to develop more fruitfully fissured and transnational modes of representation.

I would agree with Gelder that on the one hand, homely, inward-looking cultural practices which offer essentialist—whether white, bourgeois, working class or other—and unified versions of “authentic Australianness” are clearly suspect for many cultural critics, feeding as they can do into outdated nationalist, conservative, sentimental or static versions of Australia. With a clearly cosmopolitan and diasporic leaning to his critique, Gelder recommends a dialectic approach to cultural criticism. He is dismissive of the undialectic uses humanities academics are prone to make of the dichotomy *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, authentic community and alienating society. He asks rhetorically, “Where does one look for authenticity in the diaspora?” (61). Nowhere seems to be his emphatic answer.

I would argue, however, that in the debates around identity and difference, between homely Australia and global Australia, there are dialectics and there are dialectics. Gelder’s approach seems to be of the non-positional, anti-essentialist kind that privileges the “no place to rest” model of cultural discourse, seeking out rapidly moving, “situated, urgent” cases for analysis, and eschewing any whiff of organic, authentic, local, traditional or homely identity. The critic’s restless dialectic (if indeed it is a dialectic, not having any real time for the second term, let alone any Hegelian third term) is admirable at one level, refusing as it is of complacencies or merely parochial or sentimental essentialisms or universals. Arising out of poststructuralist procedures, Gelder’s approach is potentially healthy in its constant critique, something academia, with its high proportion of diasporic and international practitioners, seems to value above all else. However, might such constant critique and refusal of any place to rest or belong also lose something in terms of contexts—lived experiences and expressed needs—not for the homely, but for “home”? Can “home” or belonging or identity, or something called a national literature, have any currency in current literary and broader social discourses such as Gelder’s? Or is rivenness, in Gelder’s sense, the unchallengeable, unchangeable ground of his critique?

In the early twenty-first century there is a strong critical valuing of rivenness and alterity as favoured models of subjectivity, including national subjectivities, for some of the market-driven reasons Davis outlines, and also in the related cultural context of postmodernity. The values and specificities attached to such models, however, need further debate. Often, as in Gelder’s article, discourses of home or belonging or identity are critically dismissed as reactionary or sentimental. On one level this is understandable given the

current party political uses to which discourses of the homely, protected, defended Australia are put. Yet, the final section of this article will pose the following question: what other critical discourses are available or are being developed, which seek to negotiate in truly dialectical terms the central national and cultural debates regarding identity and otherness? And in relation to this question, how do and might Australian writers and critics think through the hauntedness and rivenness of the Australian nation in modes which do not fall into the merely guilt-ridden or sentimentally static, or, on the other side, reactionary and essentialist (a different but linked kind of nostalgia)? In other words, can critical and creative writers develop future-oriented and self-reflexive approaches beyond merely constant critique or sentimental (or worse) stasis?

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In response to these questions I want to identify three current developments in Australian literary critical debate that seek to negotiate and think through this rivenness, not to cure or placate it, but to discourse it towards the future. “Future” here is meant to imply, amongst many things, individual and communal identity, new ontological and social possibilities. These developments are not, of course, presented as the only three ways, but each offers a different, future-directed possibility, while addressing the ongoing hauntedness or rivenness of Australia:

1. Fictocritical discourses.
2. Critiques of colonial and bourgeois orientations in Australian literary culture.
3. Discourses of the sacred in Australian literature.

Diverse kinds of fictocritical writing have been making an important contribution to Australian scholarship over the past two decades. The work of Paul Carter (*The Road to Botany Bay* (1987), *Living in a New Country* (1992), *The Lie of the Land* (1996)) and Stephen Muecke (*Reading the Country* (1984), with Paddy Roe, *No Road* (1997), *Ancient and Modern: Time, Culture and Indigenous Philosophy* (2005)) for example, has often been collaborative and multidisciplinary, and has added much to the ways in which the land and Australian identity might be represented. The 1998 volume *The Space Between: Australian Women writing Fictocriticism*, edited by Heather Kerr and Amanda Nettelbeck, showcases a wide variety of experimental fictocritical approaches by Australian feminist scholars and writers.

However, Jennifer Rutherford’s fictocritical volume *The Gauche Intruder: Freud, Lacan and the White Australian Fantasy* caused a few barnyard feathers

to fly when it was published in 2000. Its combination of fictocritical, autobiographical techniques, and Lacanian psychoanalysis led one reviewer, fairly tongue in cheek, to claim that “Rutherford’s text is itself something of an intruder (gauche or otherwise) into the dominant mode of framing or ‘doing’ Australian studies or Australian literary criticism” (Henderson 276). *The Gauche Intruder* offers an analysis of a range of nineteenth and twentieth century fiction that sets out to reveal the fissures in “the Australian psyche” observed diversely in its folk and political mythologies and literary culture, and argues that there is a “manifestation of aggression at the very moment we set out to do good” (10). For Rutherford, Australian cultural identity is indeed riven. All the *bonhomie*, mateship and self-reference to Australia as the good neighbour and the great white land of the “fair go” reduces to a fantasy, papering over “a sustained aggression to alterity” and “the repetition of a series of discourses and practices that refer to a subjective and symbolic zero point—an encounter with a void” (11). Rutherford’s is not an optimistic account of Australian identity formation, but it is one that seeks to determine a future for literature as a still powerful interpreter of cultural issues.

For example, in her discussion of Patrick White, one of Rutherford’s case studies, Australian identity is read through psychoanalytic and feminist frames. This identity (too monolithically structured for some critics of the argument) threatens to continue its “experience of emptiness, of a symbolic fragility or inequality to the task of representing that nothingness, that fantasy has never finally been able to occlude” (12). However, I would argue that in *The Gauche Intruder*, and in Rutherford’s own fictocritical practices—her inclusion of autobiographical and writerly procedures into her literary critical work—opens up the authorial position as potentially vulnerable, still “making itself”, and as distinct from authority-driven modes of critical practice. In Rutherford’s book we have a seeking after aesthetic and psychic transformation, a set of practices that invite, rather than close down, continuing dialogue about Australian identity. The reader is asked, in reading *The Gauche Intruder*, to respond to the author’s passionate engagement with the intellectual, aesthetic, ideological contributions that Aust. Lit. offers to the broader culture.

Emerging from a very different direction, and in relation to discourses of class and Aust. Lit., critic and novelist Andrew McCann is nothing if not provocative. In his 2004 *Overland* essay, “How to Fuck a Tuscan Garden: A Note on Literary Pessimism”, McCann’s major complaint is that the “possibility of literary expression outside of the restrictive space

defined by market-capitalism is almost non-existent” (22). He draws on Graeme Turner’s argument that Aust. Lit. is largely about “national heroes writing their fiction for an audience whose conservative expectations are easily satisfied but rarely extended” (22); when he looks at Aust. Lit. as an institution, and particularly the ways in which it constructs identity, McCann sees impoverishment and only an “interest in questions of individual and historical identity that invariably devolves upon the integrity of bourgeois aesthetic experience coloured by nostalgia, melancholia, lyricism, natural grandeur and an insistently belletristic interface” (23). No shrinking violet in the face of the icons of Aust. Lit., McCann writes further, in sardonic mode: “the mysticism of David Malouf, indebted to Patrick White’s modernist transcendentalism, returns us to the spiritual and the lyrical as the bedrocks of a literary aesthetic that has apparently survived its entanglement with colonial ideology” (23). In this cultural climate furthermore, he argues with self-proclaimed pessimism:

A literature that attempts to alienate the reader from the pleasures of ‘cultured’ entertainment, or a writing based on montage, on a deliberate attempt not to tell the same old comforting stories of closure, spurious mysticism, self-discovery, or personal reconciliation, all seem perversely counter-intuitive. (24)

While “How to Fuck a Tuscan Garden” critiques the marketplace processes of publishing and distribution, and the tastes these practices perpetuate and fulfil, McCann’s 2006 essay, “The Literature of Extinction”, argues more positively for what he calls a new radical literature, as opposed to present bourgeois and often racist, perpetually colonial, or even melancholically post-colonial strands of Aust. Lit. Writing of Australians’ and Australian literature’s history of reliance on the very colonial genocide and absence of indigenous Australians it laments, his argument is based on the disturbing understanding that “The void left by a vanished race . . . will fill the void at the core of the settler’s imaginative experience” (“Extinction” 51). In other words, Australian literary culture, McCann argues, is a “literature of extinction”. Of his proposed radical literature he writes utopically (or is it subtopically?) of a future in which:

literature in Australia would consist partly in exploding the possibility of those transferences between historical catastrophe and aesthetic . . . and generating forms of writing in which notions of Anglo-Australian belonging—nation, landscape, the literature of the soil—are clearly identified as belonging to the toxic legacy of colonialism. But . . . the phantasmatic possibility of a national literature would also reveal its materiality too starkly to provide the solace that the vast majority of contemporary readers still expect from *belles lettres*. (54)

McCann's Australian literary culture and his understanding of Australian identity-formation is nothing if not riven, but in ways he proposes should be overcome, at least at the level of conscious decisions by writers and their relationship to Australia's "toxic" history. However, he argues more pessimistically, in the light of the market's and belletristic readers' requirements, that a national literature, like anything called Australian identity, is "phantasmatic". A question left hovering is whether such an identity, no matter how multiple, can ever actually be constructed or recovered.

There is in McCann another kind of deep rivenness, one that reveals the desire to surmount—intellectually? creatively? with a force of will?—the essentialising fantasies of Australian colonial triumphalism and what he derides as the false resolutions, the "spurious mysticism" of writers such as White and Malouf. Yet, McCann's desire to surmount, or to imagine another kind of contract, a radical one between writers and their relationship to Australian identity-making, can also be read as always already impossible, even within his own criticism. Where can imaginative writers, critics and readers stand in such a pessimistic, anti-triumphalist space? How might they move beyond the self-defeat so strongly evoked in McCann's criticism? Can a future for writing be imagined here?

Without more detail about what McCann calls "radical literature" it is hard to sympathise fully with his plea for what promises to be a more muscly, politicised, unsentimental and clear-eyed literature. I would agree with the political direction of this call, but am left wondering where and how the psychic, emotional and spiritual needs of Australians—indigenous and non-indigenous—might be justly and fruitfully imagined into the future. Questions remain for me after reading McCann: do critics have a right, even a responsibility, to engage with future constructive possibilities for the culture rather than merely to continue producing constant critique? How might they do this?

The third future-oriented discourse I want to outline is that of "the sacred". In 2002 Frances Devlin-Glass and I edited a volume called *Feminist Poetics of the Sacred* for the American Academy of Religion. Our subtitle was *Creative Suspicions*, a term borrowed partly from Paul Ricouer as well as from feminist scholar Rosemary Radford Ruether, both of whom use it to set up a self-questioning, radical approach to sacred texts and practices, including philosophical and theological analyses of religious institutions and their dogmas. In *Feminist Poetics of the Sacred* we were concerned to set out, with our Australian, English and Canadian contributors, some of the ways in which the contemporary sacred is, and might be, discoursed. In what can

easily be dismissed as utopic (or worse, reactionary or apolitical) discourse, some contributors sought to work with Luce Irigaray's feminist embrace of "a sensible transcendental coming into being through us, of which we would be the mediators and bridges" (Irigaray qtd. in Devlin-Glass 255). Far from a merely "spurious mysticism", Irigaray's "sensible transcendental" suggests a deployment of sacred discourses in dynamic relation with the embodied, lived, earthed and political.

In 2005, Bill Ashcroft, Devlin-Glass and I edited and contributed to a special edition of *Antipodes*, the North American Journal of Australian Literature, dedicated to the sacred in Australian literature. It is a diverse collection of essays by Australian scholars, including McCann's "The Obstinacy of the Sacred", which delivers a healthy dose of scepticism about the very category of sacredness. He writes, in line with his position in other essays: "The sacred is at once a powerful symptom of postcolonial disquiet, and a *path of flight that promises to lead beyond this, and beyond history itself*. Little wonder that it is so tightly bound up with a contemporary sense of the pleasure of reading" ("Obstinacy" 158, emphases added). In this volume of *Antipodes*, however, there is also an exemplary and historically detailed essay by Devlin-Glass entitled "An Atlas of the Sacred: Hybridity, Representability and the Myths of Yanyuwa Country". The essay is based on an interview with colleague John Bradley, an anthropologist, and Devlin-Glass' own visits and work with the Yanyuwa people of Boroloola in the Gulf of Carpentaria. In Devlin-Glass' essay you will be confronted with these two non-indigenous scholars of the sacred—one "post-Christian", one Jewish—who are also deeply enmeshed in the history and the present corporeal and creative potential of a small community of indigenous people.

Bradley and Devlin-Glass have worked over the past ten years reconstructing, together with the community, the Yanyuwa people's atlas of country. In this effort, concepts of sacredness, place and identity are complex and endangered. There has been much at stake for both the Yanyuwa people and the non-indigenous scholars in the project. Certainly rivenness of personal, communal and national identity can be heard in the following description by Bradley, in an interview with Devlin-Glass, of the relationships and dialogues between different peoples meeting around the process of remembering and recording Yanyuwa culture:

the song cycle . . . that goes from Vanderlin Rocks and ends up in Lake Eames isn't complete, we know that. But that was a wish of Johnson Timothy that he wanted to record as much of it as he could remember. And he did. And he did that not long after his father died, and I think he partly did that to come to terms with his father's death.

So it's not complete, and I've got the tape where he sings and he says "I can't remember how it goes here". So it's not all there, but it's a representation. This is what people are prepared to do. They want to demonstrate knowledge. They want to show that there are things still there, and do it to the best of what time has given us to do it in . . .

The Wurdaliya group who own the Ngabaya song [part of the Tiger Shark kujika], all the men are nearly dead, have remained in town, or gone to other places. Not even Pyro or Isaac [Isaac] or Dinny [McDinny, two senior men who died in 2003], who are Jungkayi for that song, remember it in its entirety. I'd recorded a lot of verses with old Tim Timothy who was also Jungkayi for it. Dinny remembered quite a lot, so I had verses from him. Isaac remembered some, so I had verses from him. Pyro wouldn't contribute, he just said "look, it's gone". But the important part was that it was an important text for the Wurdaliya people. They wanted to reclaim it somehow because the Wurdaliya people now use mostly the Mara song cycle which is far, far away from Yanyuwa country . . . So I wanted to work on it. And I worked on it with old Dinny . . . ("Atlas" 129)

The labour of Australian cultural critics and scholars is multiple: ideological and aesthetic critique; a necessary questioning of the assumptions by which we work; a dispersing of the ghosts who might lock "us" into older colonialist and even post-colonial dogmas. In the attentive, humble, passionate commitment of scholars such as Bradley and Devlin-Glass, however, another dimension of critical engagement emerges. The questions both scholars ask, in collaboration with their indigenous colleagues, are about the past, its histories, its songs, its peoples, its places, *and* they are yoked to possible futures. In such critical work, indigenous and non-indigenous scholars are learning from each other and fostering knowledge that can inform the future, and which would otherwise die.

Central to the work of both these scholars is a regard for "the sacred" as deeply historical, and as processual meaning making. Of course the Yanyuwa, as well as these non-indigenous scholars, acknowledge the rivenness of Australian identity, and they choose to write and reconstruct the past into the future. There is something sacred (utopic? counter-intuitive? emotionally and intellectually exhausting and thrilling?) about such approaches to Australian identity. Aust. Lit. scholars will hopefully continue to be involved in such future-oriented and crucial work. The sacred—as intellectual, emotional, spiritual category—does not need to be merely spurious mysticism or vague metaphysics.

For those critics and literary writers working within and around notions of the sacred, forms of rivenness are perpetually present and discoured

differently. Take, for example, White's overwhelming *Riders in the Chariot*; Girard's insights into the intimate ties between violence and the sacred; and Irigaray's dynamic feminist attempts at suturing body and spirit. Consider too Grenville's *The Secret River* and its representation of the despair, the brokenness and the hope upon which white Australia is ambivalently founded, and indigenous Australians' many calls to Australia to see its own injustices. In each of these circuits of critical and creative work there is an additional seeking out of new ways of speaking and representing identity which go beyond the current stases of guilt, on the one hand, or reactionary closure on the other. Each, I would argue, is informed by what might be called an apprehension of sacredness in addressing the fissures of Australian identity. At the close of *The Secret River*, Thornhill has claimed his piece of Australian land through hard work and endurance, and through participation in a massacre, a horrifying act of violence towards the Aboriginal people of the Hawkesbury. He sits in his fine, established villa, an old man surveying the land for any skerrick of Aboriginal life still left along the river and

Sometimes he thought he saw a man there, looking down from the clifftop. He would get to his feet and go eagerly to the edge of the verandah, would lean out squinting to see the man among so many confusing verticals. Never took his eye off the one he was sure was a human, staring down at him in his house . . . Finally he had to recognise that it was no human, just another tree, the size and posture of a man.

Each time, it was a new emptiness. (333)

Thornhill's psychic state is complexly rendered here. It is much more volatile and driven than mere nostalgia or regret. Grenville powerfully evokes Thornhill's hard-won white triumph as well as white guilt and white responsibility. The emptiness which Thornhill sees each evening in the land, and the fullness he has pursued in possessing and cultivating his own little piece of earth, are represented as being both of his own making and the products of historical forces. In the constant oscillation between these states of emptiness and fullness, Thornhill comes to see something of the history he has participated in, the injustices he has perpetrated. His growing understanding is accompanied by "a hollow feeling. *Too late, too late.* Every day he sat here, watching, waiting, while dusk gathered in the valley, scanning the trees and the silent rock . . . watching into the dark" (334). It will be interesting to read unfolding scholarly discussion of this novel as Grenville's richly ambivalent, psychic representations of colonial Australia are ideologically measured against post-colonial markers. How will Aust. Lit. critics process the rivenness and hauntedness of white settler Australia in this novel? Will authorial blood be called for?

In all that Aust. Lit. critics write there are ongoing relationships to the ghosts of the culture, to past models of identity, the cultural cringers, the macho parodists, the oz essentialists, the purveyors of guilt-without-end. However, this essay has proposed that Australian cultural critics need to be asking, beyond merely the activity of constant critique, how these hauntings, this rivenness of identity in its many forms, might be represented and negotiated productively for the future of a living, ongoing and multiple national culture.

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