

A ‘Grim and Fascinating’ Land of Opportunity: the *Walkabout* Women and Australia

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Walkabout (1934–1974) was a popular general interest magazine that enjoyed a diverse readership and had a wide circulation.¹ Its contributors included many well-known Australian writers such as Frank Clune, Ion Idriess, Mary Durack, John K. Ewers, Ernestine Hill and Henrietta Drake-Brockman, along with a number of respected scientists and anthropologists. Its production coincided with the period in Australia during which ‘the distinctive forms of mid-century middlebrow culture . . . emerged more clearly’ (Carter, ‘Mystery’ 189). From its first issue *Walkabout* professed to have ‘embarked on an educational crusade’ with the aim of inspiring ‘an infinitely greater knowledge and appreciation of’ Australia for those within the country and beyond its shores (*Walkabout* 1.1 (1934): 7). This brief fits David Carter’s definition of a middlebrow institution which is ‘committed to expanding the circulation of culture and “education” through culture’ (‘Mystery’ 177). While popular at the time of publication, *Walkabout* has since fallen into relative obscurity, and the magazine and its contributors have received little critical attention. This is changing, however, as scholars such as Sean Latham and Robert Scholes recognise the importance of ‘periodicals as cultural objects,’ arguing: ‘if we really wish to know the past and not just a few moments preserved from it, we must study the way that art and commodity culture influenced each other . . . And this means exploring more fully and more intensely the fascinating world of periodicals’ (519–21). Anna Johnston argues that ‘writers of middlebrow fiction were crucial educators and cultural interpreters’ (Johnston 2). For Mitchell Rolls, *Walkabout* ‘was one of the cultural industries engaged in nation building’ during a period of transition in Australia’s history (Rolls, ‘Finding Fault’ 181). If, as Roslynn Haynes writes, ‘we are continually creating the landscape that we “see”’ (3), then *Walkabout* magazine contributed to the infinite rehearsal of national identity and what it means to be at ‘home’ in Australia.

This article considers two of the female contributors to *Walkabout*, Ernestine Hill and Henrietta Drake-Brockman, offering an overview of their work and arguing for its value in evolving discourses of the nation. It examines how Hill and Drake-Brockman’s 1930s–1950s *Walkabout* articles fit with the middlebrow concerns of the magazine, and its brief to promote travel within and to Australia. This period was chosen due to its significance for the emergence of middlebrow culture in Australia, and because it was the time during which these women’s popularity was at a peak. It was also a time when travel writing or the travelogue was a particularly popular literary form. For Richard White, Australian travel writing ‘has always straddled the conventional explorer-traveller-tourist hierarchy’ (‘Retreat’ 90). White proposes that in a time where travel and adventure were traditionally a masculine domain, travelling women represented ‘a form of resistance’ (91). The essay explores ideas around gendered space and the ambivalent position professional, mobile women occupied in emerging modern Australia, and how this translates (or not) to the page in their articulation of the nation.

While not suggesting Hill and Drake-Brockman’s texts participate in radical revisions of the nation, I argue they do more than simply reiterate and reinforce common tropes and pejorative stereotypes of the time. Hill and Drake-Brockman negotiated masculine space on the frontier

and wrote about their experiences for an urban audience, addressing contemporary debates and concerns through a widely accessible medium. I aim to show that these texts can be re-read in light of arguments such as Doreen Massey's, which contend that identity should not be seen as 'a process of fixing [in time and space] but . . . a continuous production'; a process of 'constantly becoming . . . [in] an open disseminatory network of meanings' (28). Massey argues for 'conceptualising space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming' (59). Representations of identity in marginal spaces reveal, in her words, 'inevitable elements of indeterminacy.' In other words, re-reading publications such as *Walkabout* magazine today, in cognisance of the contemporary context, reveals them to be part of a dynamic and ongoing process of (re-)negotiation in postcolonial Australia; a continuous rehearsal and re-enacting of ways of identifying and belonging arising out of a complex colonial history. Writers such as Hill and Drake-Brockman were raising awareness of contested space within white consciousness and placing difficult issues of cultural identity (including difference) and how to negotiate it firmly in the minds of contemporary Australian society. Furthermore, by inserting and asserting themselves in traditionally masculine space on the margins of the nation, these writers reproduced space for women and marginalised others in the modern nation. In writing about the remote north-west and its inhabitants, they helped de-mystify the region while also participating in the creation of new mythologies around it.

Hill published thirty-three articles in *Walkabout* magazine between 1930–1950, while Drake-Brockman published twenty-three articles during the same period. The 1930s–1950s was a particularly successful period for each writer. Hill's popular collection of travel stories, *The Great Australian Loneliness*, was published in 1937 and her acclaimed historical fiction of Matthew Flinders, *My Love Must Wait*, in 1941. Amanda Laugesen (109) has noted that the 1930s 'was a prolific creative period . . . in which [Drake-Brockman] established her reputation as playwright and novelist'. Drake-Brockman's first novel, *Blue North*, was published in 1934 and her award-winning play, *Men Without Wives*, in 1938. Apart from their novels, both Hill and Drake-Brockman made regular contributions to various newspapers and magazines other than *Walkabout*. Like *Walkabout*, Hill and Drake-Brockman were popular at the time they were writing but have since fallen into relative obscurity. This could partly be due their middlebrow status: situated between high- and lowbrow culture, 'neither literary criticism nor cultural studies have had much to say about that broad domain of culture . . . the vast middle where high culture values are folded into the commodity form of quality entertainment or discerning lifestyle choice' (Carter, 'Mystery' 174). The term middlebrow is said to have emerged in the 1920s in Britain and America in response to changes in cultural production which occurred as a direct result of technologies of modernisation such as mass media, the mass production of books and new ways of marketing to a wide, educated audience. Its emergence in Australia coincided with a period of transition and rapid change.

Middlebrow culture was a product of modernity, manifesting in a proliferation of practices which moved art and culture out of exclusive highbrow institutions and into the public sphere, such as radio programs which discussed books and reading, and institutions like the Book-of-the-Month Club in America, which Janice Radway refers to as a 'characteristically modern cultural institution' in her study of the club (15). Modern culture, according to Latham and Scholes, 'was created from a still-obscure alchemy of commercial and aesthetic impulses and processes . . . [which] was most visible in magazines' (521). A burgeoning consumer culture produced an expanding reading public. A 'key point' of middlebrow culture, writes Carter, 'is that in all its functions [it] was reader-oriented' ('Mystery' 179). The contributors to *Walkabout* were writers like those Radway identifies in the Book-of-the-Month Club, who

'could capture the attentions of their readers and prompt them to respond intensely to the peculiarities of the author's vision' (284).² Radway calls the emotive engagement sought and invoked by middlebrow culture and reading 'middlebrow personalism' (283). Contributors to *Walkabout* magazine offered passionate evocations of a diverse country which were designed to provoke an emotional response in their readers and inspire them to want to know more about the vast reaches of Australia beyond the cities.

Walkabout was published by the Australian National Travel Association (ANTA), with Charles Holmes³ as founder and then as editor for twenty-three years, until his retirement in 1957 (Rolls, 'Picture' 19). The establishment of ANTA itself came about from the findings of a report by Holmes and T.E. Moorhouse which identified a need to promote travel and tourism within and to the nation.⁴ As Jim Davidson and Peter Spearitt noted, 'with promotion and propaganda at the heart of its operation, ANTA immediately started commissioning journalists and poster artists to promote Australia' (79). One of its first acts was to establish *Walkabout* for this purpose. *Walkabout* was aimed at the 'armchair traveller,' the middle-class urban Australian. Presented in an attractive format with accompanying photographs, it offered tantalising glimpses into an other world far-removed from the perceived sterility and conformity of city life. For Carter, *Walkabout* 'upgraded 'Australiana' into a serious, but still entertaining business, bringing the vast continent and its unique natural and human history . . . into the possession of its mainly urban readers' ('Mystery' 189). Carter argues for 'an Australian cultural history written around middlebrow nationalism,' and 'the kinds of virtuous citizenship and 'nationed' modernity' which Australian middlebrow publications such as *Walkabout* offered its readers (184). Middlebrow nationalism 'complicated' the reading culture in Australia by the shared belief 'that an authentic tradition had been founded in outback or pastoral Australia and that this remained the truest source of nation-building values', according to Carter ('Modernity' 139). *Walkabout* fed into this middlebrow nationalism in the first two decades of its publication.

Middlebrow magazines such as *Walkabout* were significant in Australia, where the publishing industry was small and many local authors were forced to seek out overseas publishers. Richard Nile and David Walker argue that 'literary morale . . . was not high' in modern Australia in the first half of the twentieth century,' due in part to lack of funding for writers and an unreliable publishing industry (285). In this climate locally produced magazines were an important source of income and exposure for writers and *Walkabout* paid its contributors well.⁵ This was a period of great flux in the publishing industry, as Nile and Walker recognise: 'The commercialisation of mass culture intensified the struggle for control, radically reshaping the face of writing, publication and distribution,' with publishers having a large influence over what sort of material was considered saleable and worth publishing (284–85). It was also a period of national uncertainty when the nation was recovering from the effects of the First World War, and the Great Depression, along with being thrown headlong into another world war. As Tom Griffiths asserts:

In the first half of the twentieth century, nationalist anxieties were played out in debates about environment, population and race, often on a backdrop of central and northern Australia . . . The open spaces, it was continually argued, needed to be talked up; they needed to be developed and populated for two reasons. One was for defence of the nation, the other was for defence of race. (186–87)

These concerns were played out in the pages of *Walkabout* magazine, and are evident in the articles of Hill and Drake-Brockman.

It is clear that *Walkabout* emerged during a period of transition in Australian society—an in-between space in the nation's development—into which contributors such as Hill and Drake-Brockman inserted their voices, articulating new ways of identification which harkened back to myths and legends of the past upon which the nation was built, while straining toward a bright and promising new future. Brian Kiernan has noted that during this period Australia 'seems to have gone through a self-reflexive phase during which a sense of independent national identity that necessitated appraisals of its nature, extent, and worth was more widespread than ever before' (282). This interwar period was on the cusp of a changing concept of the national type; a concept Richard White describes as an identification with 'The Australian Way of Life.' White writes: 'although it lacked definition, the image of 'the Australian Way of Life' was closely related to the image of Australia as a sophisticated, urban, industrialised, consumer society' (*Inventing* 161). In this concept of the nation women were finally acknowledged as an integral part of the Australian identity, albeit in a restricted (largely domestic) role (165). In his work, Carter also recognised an increased profile for women in the burgeoning consumer society: during the 1920s–1940s, he writes, 'women were much more prominent in the book world than they had been earlier' ('Modernity' 141). Carter saw this increased profile as being linked to 'the expansion of careers for young women in journalism and radio, alongside those in fields such as education, librarianship and stenography', and 'the rise of women as modern consumers' (141). This period saw the appearance of Australian publications which largely catered for women as consumers, such as Ure Smith's *Australia: National Journal* (1939–1947) and the *Australian Women's Weekly* (1933–current).

If women were increasingly given a space in the modern nation, this was a highly gendered one centred around the home and family in conservative Australia. The landscape was still 'gendered as an arena for masculine activity' (Carter, 'Modernity' 140). Notions of Australian identity remained tied to the remote outback regions, despite the fact that most of the population lived in urban spaces in the south and east of the country. Placing themselves outside the home in a masculine world on the road, and in marginalised frontier space, women such as Hill and Drake-Brockman disrupt and subvert gendered notions of space, offering alternatives for others (particularly women), and a revision of traditional conventions. They can be seen to 'symbolically contest the notion of the road [and travel] as a masculine space . . . [Women's] stories can be seen as a renegotiation of spatial politics by which they counter physical as well as symbolic borders and enclosures,' as Alexandra Ganser argues in her study of women's road narratives (Ganser 75). By stepping outside the home, Hill and Drake-Brockman offer revisions of traditional space, even if this is only by way of their presence in spaces traditionally troped as male.

Hill and Drake-Brockman's capacity to travel was a consequence in part of 'modern' Australia and modernity. As Sidonie Smith has written, 'the new technologies of motion that drove modernity' were significant enablers for women to move out of the traditional domestic realm into public spaces (xi). For Smith, 'the individualising logic of mobility, as it translated the traveling women into a masculine logic and domain, enabled some women to alter the terms of their "cultural construction in difference"' (xi). Hill and Drake-Brockman travelled confidently in masculine space and wrote with equal confidence in their articles, unafraid to express their opinions on contemporary debates and concerns. Their texts often display ambivalences and contradictions as they grapple with issues that were still little understood; such as how to celebrate and promote development while preserving unique aspects of the

environment, and the challenges of an expanding mixed race population who were contributing to society without being recognised by it.

The traveller in the border spaces through which Hill and Drake-Brockman moved occupied what Brian Musgrove describes as a position of ‘indeterminacy,’ and experienced a ‘disunification’ as they stepped beyond fixed and orthodox ways of being (39). Likewise, Justin Edwards and Rune Graulund contend that postcolonial travel writing can lead to ‘ambivalence: an ambivalence that can be used to challenge terms like “the imperial” and “the colonial,” “centre” and “margin,” “male” and “female,” “other” and “self”’ (13). Writing as white women within and from traditionally masculine space, Hill and Drake-Brockman can be seen in Musgrove’s argument as ‘wavering between . . . worlds’ (Musgrove 39). They move in the interstices of the nation, and their texts often display incongruities and incommensurabilities in their articulation of these spaces. J. J. Healy sees literature from this time and space as ‘frontier literature . . . open to the borders of Australian society’; literature which takes ‘upon itself the burden of making moral sense of what had happened, what was happening, on those borders . . . And what these fictions remind us’, according to Healy, ‘is that frontiers do not close’ (xx). Hill and Drake-Brockman’s texts are strands of these many trajectories; while some of their representations intersect with dominant tropes, they also extend them, providing altered ways of seeing the country and its others as they produce, reinforce and renegotiate ways of seeing and identifying as Australians.

Hill and Drake-Brockman were writing at a time when there was a great deal of focus on North-western Australia due to a perceived threat of invasion by foreign countries, a view exacerbated by the region’s sparse population. There was in Australia then an expansionist rhetoric with regard to the north, one in which Hill and Drake-Brockman participated. Russel McGregor notes that ‘the consistent assumptions were that the north held immense areas of fertile, well-watered land and that it remained empty in consequence of policy rather than of natural deficiency’ (McGregor, ‘A Dog in the Manger’ 165). McGregor shows that such a view had its detractors (165–72), but Hill, Drake-Brockman, and other contemporaries (Ion Idriess, for example), continued to act as ‘propagandists’ (173) for the development of the region. Tom Griffiths argues that ‘from the 1920s to the 1950s there was a surge of interest in the Australian outback . . . Writers and artists journeyed to the centre and celebrated it for a largely urban audience’ (176). Furthermore,

visitors to the centre instantly became self-appointed experts . . . There were many issues on which they felt urged to pronounce: the ‘problem’ of the Aborigines, particularly of the half-castes, the development of the north, life on the frontier, the protection of scenery and the future of tourism. (178)

Hill and Drake-Brockman certainly offered accessible, entertaining and thought-provoking accounts of such matters to everyday Australians through their narratives. As Haynes has suggested, an important factor ‘in domesticating the desert by vicarious encounter was the published response of individual travellers with whom readers could identify’ (146). These writers’ focus on the north-west had the effect of bringing into the consciousness of urban Australians ‘the ambivalent world of the not quite/not white on the margins of metropolitan desire,’ to borrow from Homi Bhabha (92). As such their texts display the ‘perplexity’ which Bhabha sees ‘of living and writing the nation’ from these spaces, and the ‘disjunctive’ narratives which result (161). Hill and Drake-Brockman each refer to the remote north-west as the ‘real’ Australia, even as they describe its otherness in relation to the rest of the country. In an article titled ‘The Spell of the North,’ for example, Drake-Brockman explores the area’s

‘enchantment,’ which is bound up in its contradictions. In the far north, she writes, a man is able to get his ‘perspective right’; he is an

infinitesimal speck in the universe, but also is he [sic] the lord of creation. He is a part of the world. As he fights a lone battle he feels neither lost nor unwanted, for he is too intent upon the grim and fascinating task of possessing a new land. (‘Spell of the North’ 9)

It is a space which both repels and fascinates and the tension between the two is worked out on the page in these accounts.

Yet, while still describing the country in terms of its vastness, emptiness and remoteness, Hill and Drake-Brockman’s accounts did not display the ‘morbid nationalism’ identified by Michael Cathcart, one which lamented the notion of a drab, monotonous landscape and ‘the melancholia associated with the Dead Heart [which] had become a core national ethos’ (215). Rather, their writing is a celebration of Australia’s immense diversity and wonders, there for those with ‘seeing eyes’ (Hill, ‘Along the Last Lost Border’ 43). Hill ‘confronted urban Australians with a new image of the Centre,’ Haynes has written. ‘Instead of the empty, monotonous and dangerous expanse they had been led to fear and regret, it burst into life and colour as she peopled the desert with characters’ (149). Remote Australia is home but also other; surveying and reconfirming the areas at the edges of civilisation and conveying their impressions textually has the effect, as Dixon sees it, of making ‘home seem more precious, more clearly itself, as a white modern healthy nation’ (Dixon 21). By bringing these areas at the edges of modernity to the armchair traveller, the urban Australian would perhaps feel more at home within the borders of a large and diverse continent.

Significantly, although Hill contributed to notions promulgating the development of a white nation, she also complicated this project. Believing in the early twentieth century that Australia was ‘still a stranger to the world and to its own people’ (*Loneliness* foreword), she writes of setting out with her ‘swag and typewriter,’ ‘unknown, into the unknown, to meet the people of the real Australia . . . black and white’ (17–18). Hill actively looked for ‘copy’; stories of individuals who inhabited the remote north-west, both past and present, and depicts herself transcribing history as she travels, as well as promoting the potential of the region for the future. Her narratives can be seen as ‘renew[ing] the past, refiguring it as a contingent “in-between” space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present,’ to borrow once again from Homi Bhabha’s work (7). Hill looks back in order to look forward to a refigured, re-imagined space which is not there simply for the white settler’s taking, in an uncomplicated presumption of possession. She does not erase Aborigines from this past in an act of effacement in order to assert white presence.⁶ Her concern is to capture the essence of the Aboriginal *and* white pioneering past and preserve these on the page so each is not completely elided or forgotten in the face of modernisation.

In her first article for *Walkabout*, for example, Hill writes:

I have travelled this country, wide-eyed at its magical beauty. The last act of Sinbad the Sailor miraculously come true, hills and gullies swept with the red tinsel of ruby dust, the ranges glowing like milky opals in the cloud-races, and the peaks capped with quartzite white as the eternal snows. (‘Mining Mica’ 37)

Hill sees Australia as ‘the most fascinating, the most contradictory country . . . too near Nature to be summed up in parables’ (17). An ongoing fascination with the land and the people she encounters permeates her writing. She positions herself as a professional traveller in her books and articles. In *The Great Australian Loneliness* she writes: ‘This is the story of a journalist’s journey round and across Australia . . . On anything that came along, I followed ‘the story.’ It was all in a journalist’s job, and it was all good hunting’ (1–2). She describes her travels as an ‘adventure’ (2) and indeed her writing often reads as a type of adventure/romance, which was a popular (mainly masculine) form of travel narrative during *Walkabout*’s run. She roams the countryside and writes of ‘blue-bonnet parrots and pools in the ranges, sunlight and sand and mirage on the plains’ in a land where ‘seeing eyes can discover the richest colour, and where writing folk can always find the fabric of romance’ (‘Along the Last Lost Border’ 43). Hill celebrates the pioneers, writing of the ‘miracles of achievement’ that are the reward ‘for their lonely lives of loyalty in faith, hope and love, the co-operation in labour and kinship of ideals’ (15). Ironically, on a first reading Hill’s romantic tales of outback characters may appear to ventriloquise the masculine bush tradition of the late nineteenth century—with her references to stoicism, humour and strong, laconic types of skilled bushmen; yet her stories are largely those of people she has met and spoken with. The writing offers a glimpse into a life and type of person far removed from that of *Walkabout*’s predominantly urban readership. The stories enable readers to cast their imagination into an ‘other’ realm which is part of an older Australia, but one which was changing along with the developments of modernisation.

Hill projects her role in the modern nation as that of a record keeper of the stories it is built upon, considering them ‘indelible in Australia’s history’ (‘Wings to Borroloola’ 10). She sees herself as one of ‘the scribes and story-tellers . . . busy with their records and recollections, writing biographies and romances that will become history and folk-lore, enshrining our heroes, setting the pattern of our early days for writers to the end of time’ (‘Following the Star’ 16). Although a proponent of Australia’s development she is mindful of the history upon which it has been built and the need to write this down. While her attitude toward Aborigines can be read as merely a reflection of the general attitudes of the time, she spent considerable time amongst them and her views are complex and contradictory. Paul Miller suggests that ‘the incompatibility between her colonial discourse, promoting inland expansion and her counter-imperial discourse sympathising with the Aborigines highlights the tension that existed within white Australian society itself’ (91). For Hill, the Aborigine is always already present in the landscape. In her stories of white expansion and settlement the indigene prefigures and is acknowledged as a continuing presence, if a troublesome and conflictual one. White bushmen work alongside Aborigines in her texts, and in some ways the older white bushmen are as much of a curiosity to Hill as the Aborigines, the Chinese in Darwin or the Afghans in Central Australia.

In Hill Aborigines are seen as marginal in modern Australia, but she also fears that the white pioneers whose stories she is intent on inscribing into the nation’s history are doomed. She concludes *The Great Australian Loneliness* with the line: ‘The men who subdued the wilderness . . . are swiftly slipping away. I should like to be back there before the last of the conquistadors is gone’ (*Loneliness* 340). These pioneers were ‘equally heroic . . . creating that pattern of colonisation in the virgin scrub, changing the face of the earth in Australia’ (Hill, ‘Following the Star’ 16). The ‘present pioneers’ in Hill’s narratives embody the new sense of the term John Hirst identifies as emerging in the early twentieth century: those ‘who were at present at work on the land, and particularly . . . at the edge of settlement’ (332). Hirst asserts: ‘This extension of meaning occurred at a time of heightened concern for racial strength and

purity and a new awareness of the vulnerability of the nation', which was part of the reason behind the promulgation of expansion and development in the north-west region (332). The new settlers were 'pioneering without tears' because of 'the comforts of the scientific age' ('Following the Star' 15), such as refrigeration and modern means of communication. Thus while the focus of Hill's articles is largely on people and stories of the past which she sees as underpinning modern Australia, she also celebrates the benefits of modernity for Australia's future.

Like Hill, Drake-Brockman spent a great deal of time in the remote north-west and she too expresses a strong connection to it: 'Too long ago I was enmeshed by fine unbreakable threads of fascination—infatuation, if you will,' she writes ('Sky Track Record' 18). Her articles contain romantic descriptions of a country that, like Hill's, is far from a drab, monotonous 'Dead Heart': 'The exquisite, often dramatic, hues of Australia . . . dispel forever the absurd legend of a colourless land' (15). For Drake-Brockman, Australia is 'a dramatic country, that sets the stamp of drama and humour on all who inhabit it for long' (18). Her writing too often is romantic and rhapsodic and though she never loses sight of the inevitability of progress and change, this leads to nostalgic reflection: 'Overhead the stars wink. The earth is warm, sweet-scented, amorous—the North weaves her magic spell. And still the stars wink. Do they know that magic is doomed to die, as dies the magic of all youth? Will the spell of the North vanish forever once she has been tamed by man?' ('Spell of the North' 9). As Laugesen writes, Drake-Brockman saw herself

very much as an Australian writer, writing stories about Australia. As is clear, her work explored ideas about what it meant to be Australian, but most particularly, Drake-Brockman was seeking a historical narrative that could tie a native-born generation to a new land, and to articulate why and how this generation was distinctive and not purely European. (117)

Drake-Brockman's articles describe journeys by plane, train and motor vehicle into remote areas of Australia being developed to increase 'expansion and wealth' ('Water Means Wealth' 5). Her vision of the modern nation is utopian, full of potential and promise. Her sense of connection is closely related to possession, development, expansion and future potential: 'By foot, by beast, by train, by air' she celebrates 'the progress of mankind in defying distance.' 'The Nullarbor was conquered' ('On Wings to the West' 5) with the building of the trans-continental railway. Agriculture is seen to be taming the wilderness: 'new patterns of cultivation drove back the wilderness' (7). She is a passionate advocate for the great irrigation projects, such as damming the Ord River (a project with which her engineer husband was involved):

If we are to expand, to develop as a whole, to lose our present restricted condition of being a fringe-country with the majority of our people and most of our amenities crammed into coastal cities, especially in the south, we must all develop a water-conscience . . . Water means growth, growth means wealth, wealth means power. ('Water Means Wealth' 6)

For Drake-Brockman, 'Australia is essentially a land of the future' (11) and as noted above in her writing she celebrates the progress of modernity.

Drake-Brockman sees a 'New Australia that is forming, slowly but surely' ('Service with Wings' 11). She stresses Australians' role in the formation of the emerging nation, even if

these Australians presumably are white and Anglo-Celtic like the writer). She exhorts: 'Of course it depends on *us* [my emphasis] how we actually do form that Australia' (11). She sees the developments of a scientific, modern age as vital to the 'New Australia.' Like Hill, Drake-Brockman acknowledged the past as an essential foundation for the present but it has a fading, mystical quality, almost mirroring the 'dying' or 'doomed' race trope that was prevalent at the time.⁷ It is like the scenery passing beneath the plane: 'below, was an aboriginal world, shadow-filled: a sort of angel-eyed glimpse of our earth as but a small planet rushing through space. Queer. Fascinating' ('On Wings to the West' 7). Drake-Brockman's affinity for the land sees her reflecting on the value of natural conservation. When writing of the asbestos mines in Western Australia, for example, she comes across one gorge whose natural features she feels should be preserved as a national park, writing:

The people of Australia could make Dale's Gorge their own without despoiling it, if they have the will, and the good taste, and can be properly grateful for natural beauty . . . In an aeroplane age, distance need not lend enchantment. With adequate Government forethought and planning, we can keep our national highlights bright, available, and still enchanted. ('Blue Asbestos Gorges' 19)

This paradoxical attachment to land as unspoilt source of nourishment and simultaneously as the source of economic wealth inflects both Drake-Brockman's and Hill's texts, and it is found elsewhere in *Walkabout* as the contributors grappled with a country that was still both 'grim' and 'fascinating' and for which they were still finding expression.⁸

As Rolls has written travelling the remote regions of Australia and writing about their experiences was 'one means through which [the contributors to *Walkabout* magazine] could transform vastness and space into country and place' ('Reading' 10). J.J. Healy too identifies Hill and Drake-Brockman as being 'inside [Australian] society; [they] wrote to it, for it, [and] from it' in ongoing acts of settling (xvii). Moreover, for the female contributors to *Walkabout*, conditions brought about by modernity were liberating; through their writing, they could be seen 'taking possession of space . . . being able to interpret the environment they walk in . . . making it their own,' as Koskela asserts (310). If they participated in reproducing the dominant ideologies, by writing from within and to these structures, they also de-mystified and disrupted dominant discourses, albeit in subtle ways. Their very movement beyond traditional domestic space can be seen as a 'practice of resistance. By daring to go out . . . women produce space that is more available for other women' (Koskela 316). Out of their extensive experience of the border regions, Hill and Drake-Brockman opened up other ways of seeing to urban Australians as they all grappled to understand their place in the country.

Hill and Drake-Brockman offered readers a tantalising account of a country full of wonder and new experiences for those who wished to discover them. Theirs was a land of contrasts whose environment still needed learning in order to better develop, possess and harness it. It was predominantly a white person's land, yet Aborigines are an undeniable presence in their texts, even if their marginality is unquestioned. In their writing, the authors presented complex narratives of the north-west and its inhabitants, though focalised from a white viewpoint. They depicted the country's profound and irresistible effect on white Anglo-Celtic Australians; its uniqueness was a constant surprise. Its harsh pioneering history was both a thing of the past in an era of modern technology and a part of history to be transcribed and revered. Johnston and Alan Lawson have argued that 'it is in the translation from experience to its textual representation that the settler subject can be seen working out a complicated politics of representation' (363). This complicated politics of representation is certainly

played out in Hill and Drake-Brockman's accounts of remote Australia. Their travel narratives can be seen as 'turning the road into a site of feminine presence, at the same time map[ping] dominant gender ideologies onto space, but also allow[ing] for [textual] spaces that oppose order and social regulation,' as Ganser argues (77).

The travel texts of Ernestine Hill and Henrietta Drake-Brockman reflect and also challenge, add to and expand upon, notions of country during the time in which they were writing and living. Theirs was an Australia which could no longer identify itself merely as a satellite of Empire but was negotiating new ways of identifying as a separate nation. Key to this was the textual celebration of its uniqueness and potentialities in a modern world. The work of Hill and Drake-Brockman was instrumental in presenting Australia to Australians in ways that expanded and extended notions about the nation and encouraged personal participation in knowing the country in all its wide diversity. Reading *Walkabout* through tropes of travel and mobility provides a compelling study of multiple interpretations and ways of seeing Australia in the midst of modernisation during the early and mid-twentieth century.

NOTES

¹ See Jim Davidson and Peter Spearritt, *Holiday Business* (2000), 82; Rolls 'Reading Walkabout in the 1930s' 4.

² At least one of *Walkabout's* contributors had a book listed in the Book-of-the-Month Club: Eleanor Dark's *The Timeless Land* (1941) won the Book of the Month in America in 1941.

³ Holmes published his own book of travels, *We Find Australia*, 'the most popular travelogue of the 1930s . . . [which] portrayed the country as a strange mix of open spaces and civilisation, of tourist adventure and stone age culture' (Davidson and Spearritt 80).

⁴ See Davidson and Spearritt 79.

⁵ 'Liberal payment was offered to people submitting good photographs and articles about outback Australia and Australian "by-ways," New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. *Walkabout* prided itself on its Southern Pacific focus. Like the *National Geographic* it had considerable success in attracting advertisements from government tourist bureaus, shipping lines, brewers, car manufacturers, classy hotels and individual tourist sites, from Mildura to the Jenolan Caves' (Davidson and Spearritt 81).

⁶ See Terry Goldie. *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993. 1–18.

⁷ This theory has been explored in Russell McGregor's *Imagined Destinies* (1997).

⁸ Mitchell Rolls expands on this in 'Flora, Fauna and Concrete: Nature and Development in *Walkabout* Magazine (Australia: 1934–1978).' *ZfA* 27 (2013): 3–28.

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