The Uses of Fear: Spatial Politics in the Australian White-vanishing Trope

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[T]he Beaumonts are not the only ones who explored a little way off the cultural map and disappeared into thin air: Harold Holt, Ludwig Leichhardt, Azaria Chamberlain, the girls from Miss Appleby's school . . . All inhabiting now this Other space in Australian memory. (Spencer, sect. 8, par. 5)

[A] nation's management of its literal and metaphoric "space" reveals its anxieties more than almost any other feature of nationhood. (Tompkins, *Unsettling Space* 18)

IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY, CARTOGRAPHERS DEPICTING *Terra Australis*, the imagined but as yet (to European eyes) unconfirmed southern continent, placed fearsome mythical creatures in the "unknown spaces" on their maps. Dragons, gargoyles, and giant sea serpents both guarded and occupied the as-yet-undefined spaces of the Antipodes (Flint; McLean, *White Aborigines*). Their purpose was at least threefold: to disguise the glaring blankness of ignorance beneath the illustrator's flourish; to signal the anxiety and uncertainty attached to spaces beyond European dominion; and, perhaps not least, to symbolically warn off potential alternate northern hemisphere imperialists from seeing the south land as too readily accessible and available. They also marked the blank spaces with the inherent paradox of wilderness in the Judeo-Christian tradition, in which as-yet-uncultivated space is both a place of exile and the Promised Land: "a place outside God's grace, but also a place where salvation can be achieved" (Daly 10). This same logic was to underpin eventual British attempts to legitimize the occupation of *Terra Australis*, by tagging it *terra nullius*, inferring an unsown or "natural" wilderness—despite visible evidence to the contrary—awaiting European-style agricultural intervention before it could become "owned" (Williams 12; see also Frost "New South Wales"; Buchan and Heath).

In contemporary Australia's dominant, non-indigenous culture, the dragons and gargoyles, and even, ostensibly, *terra nullius* itself, now repealed, are gone, yet ghosts of their presence and purpose remain. White Australians still populate the spaces beyond their immediate knowledge with mythical presences and imbue them with qualities of fear and menace (see Gibson, *South;* Gibson, *Seven Versions*). This article explores the role of spaces of fear in one particular white Australian narrative trope, the white-vanishing tales. This is the paradigm of recurring stories in non-indigenous Australian textuality about disappearing whites (lost children,

missing explorers, vanishing tramps and drovers, etc.). The best-known and most widely discussed examples are the lost-child stories (see Pierce; Torney; Scheckter; Kociumbas), but the less-discussed narratives of lost adults share their key feature of a character displaced "into the bush, the difficult terrain of the uncivilized wilderness, with episodic crises in the struggle to survive" (Dermody 81).

None of the white-vanishing texts have been explicitly discussed in terms of their spatial politics; yet, in both lost-child and lost-adult texts, spaces of fear are used to make certain enduring discursive claims about the nature and quality of opposing "civilized" space and those who occupy it. In all of these texts, sustaining the idea of a frightening wilderness in which white people are helpless victims also sustains the idea of its opposite, the welcoming utopian garden given as of right to the just. The fear is retold, because the fear itself is a discursive tool of conquest with deep historical roots and ongoing political implications.

By way of introduction to the typical features of the white-vanishing trope, Eleanor Dark's canonical Australian novel *The Timeless Land* provides an exemplar. At the moment when the escaping convict, Prentice, suddenly realizes that he is lost in the bush, he has a terrifying, uncanny experience. The landscape around him instantaneously changes from a welcoming refuge to a dreadful prison worse than the one he has just escaped. He feels sure he has passed every tree, shrub, and rock "a thousand times" before, but now they are "differently arranged. It was like a nightmare in which the familiar, madly and horribly distorted and confused, becomes even stranger than the unfamiliar" (197). Space, in particular, seems to have become unreliable, perhaps even capriciously elastic. The confidence he previously felt judging his location and travel is instantaneously gone: "Distance was the trouble. He could make no estimate of how far he had come last night. It might have been five miles, or ten, and he could not even

guess now how much farther he must go" (198). He experiences the landscape as a sinister force, closing in upon him.

The language Dark uses to describe Prentice's terrifying experience at the moment of realization that he is lost brings to mind Freud's notion of the uncanny: a strange, unpredictable or illusory phenomena such as magic or the supernatural irrupting into what had seemed a "normal" situation. Freud, in "The Uncanny," interpreted sensations that juxtapose strange with familiar as external projections of a once-familiar but now-repressed animistic worldview. Their role in literature, particularly colonial literature, to signal moments of repressed knowledge or ontological conflict is well recognized. Gelder and Jacobs, for example, explicitly connect uncanny spatiality to questions of land tenure in Australia. They see the uncanny operating at moments such as the 1992 Mabo decision, when "what is 'ours'" is revealed as "also potentially, or even always already, 'theirs': the one is becoming the other, the familiar is becoming strange" (Gelder and Jacobs 23).[1]

For Prentice, the uncanny manifests as loss of scopic control of the environment. He has suddenly gone from master of the bush to victim of the bush, unable to trust his own eyes as to what is strange and what is familiar, and recognition of that transition reduces him to a trembling state of terror and confusion in which the land itself seems to become the agent of his torture. So great is his fear that even the brutal penal colony he has risked all to escape now seems attractive—it was imperfect, but it was home, he now realizes, and he has lost his way back to it. In a discursive sense, the abnormality of the uncanny bush normalizes the system he has escaped. In this state of mind, Prentice is unable to rationalize an alternative navigation strategy and is completely dependent upon the assistance of an indigenous woman who rescues him—a fantasy of timely unsought generosity from the noble and welcoming indigenous Other that is recurrent in these kinds of white-Australian-lost-in-the-bush narratives (Roeg's film *Walkabout*, for example, or Facey's *A Fortunate Life*).

Dark is far from alone in tapping the long European history of imagining the Australian landscape as a space of fear. Australian lost-in-the-bush episodes such as Prentice's—and the countless others like it that depict a white character's descent into a kind of Rousseauean pre-rational, child-like state of helplessness through an encounter with nature—seem to suggest that white Australians are very frightened of becoming lost in a vast hostile landscape. But are they? Certainly they write about it a lot, to the extent that death-by-landscape (or near-death, save for the unasked-for intervention of the indigene) has become one of the great clichés of non-indigenous Australian literature—think Henry Lawson's mummified tramps, Boake's sun-bleached stockmen's bones, and both these poets' bush-lost babies, along with the plethora of similar lost-child tales deemed by more than one critic to be "an obsessive theme" (Heseltine) in Australian literature. Think, also, of Foott's drovers departing for the land where pelicans nest, never to return; Patrick White's and Malouf's vanished explorer Voss; Stow's parodic Leichhardt zu Voss (a satirical amalgam of many versions of the lost explorer); cinematic renderings such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Weir), or Peter Dodds's 1973 *Lost in the Bush*, and song versions such as "Little Boy Lost" (Ashcroft).

This list conspicuously details a *white* narrative tradition. There is no comparable predominance of "lost in the bush" stories in indigenous culture. However, the theme is beginning to enter the non-Anglo, migrant Australian tradition—de Kretser's mindful exploration of it in *The Lost Dog* being the most recent example of a small handful that includes works by Kalamaras and Balodis—an expansion that substantiates use of the term "white" in this article to mean "any non-Indigenous subject in the Australian context, and any sense of belonging to this country that this white subject can enjoy" (Ravenscroft 3). In short, becoming lost in the terrifying landscape is a theme that has been treated by most of the best-known and popular writers of white Australian literature: Charles Harpur (in *Settler Will* and *The Creek of the Four Graves*); Marcus Clarke (in "Pretty Dick"); A. B. Facey (in *A Fortunate Life*); Judith Wright (in *Woman to Man*); Tim Winton (in "Aquifer" and other texts); Thea Astley (in *Vanishing Points* and other texts); and Peter Carey (the vanished Sonia in *Illywhacker*), to name just a few (for a more detailed bibliography, see Tilley, 2007). This article poses the question, why?—What is it about this theme that sees it recycled again and again?—and suggests that it is in the theme's construction and uses of fearful space that one answer to that question lies.

The nature of Prentice's transition from predictable space to frighteningly uncanny space through the act of becoming lost is typical of white-vanishing texts. Harpur's poem "Lost in the Bush" provides another archetypal illustration (and one that mirrors and extends Prentice's uncanny experience). When Harpur's character "Settler Will" becomes conscious that he is lost, everything that seemed familiar suddenly "stranger grows," until "the very world seems twisted round" (Harpur 201) and the sun sets where it ought to rise. With the fall of night, the transition is complete, and terrifying supernatural presences emerge from the land on all sides: "suddenly upward in the hollow gale / [come] Cries dismal . . . drear as those of Spectres pale" (203).

We can see the same transition and frightening experiences operating for Willie Saville, lost child in Anderson's 1902 cautionary tale "Disobedience." By day, the bush is sublime: "The beauty of the bush by daylight is acknowledged by everyone. And, as we gaze upon it, we feel lifted out of ourselves, as it were, to higher and more spiritual thoughts" (40). By night, however, the bush is suddenly "awfully gruesome . . . the trees seemed to stretch out their branches, like spectral arms towards him, as if to grasp him in their cruel embrace; and an eerie feeling seemed to creep up from a ravine close by" (40).

Grotesque images of clutching branches and evil things surfacing from the landscape's dark depths—a telling metaphor for the repressed resurfacing from the unconscious—also occur in perhaps one of the best known fictional lost-child stories, Clarke's short story "Pretty Dick." In Clarke's story, the uncanny landscape is an active agent in the young boy's death; the increasingly strange-looking scrub begins to take

on a life of its own, scratching at him "as though it would hold him back" (563), and the "cold, cruel, silent Night seemed to swallow him up, and hide him from human sympathy" (566). He feels "suffocated" by the silence of the bush "muffled about him like a murderous cloak" (566).

Like Settler Will, Dick sees apparitions and is "dimly conscious that any moment some strange beast—some impossible monster, enormous and irresistible, might rise up out of the gloom of the gullies and fall upon him" (566). This repressed Other is explicitly racialized: Dick fears that the "shapeless Bunyip" (an Aboriginalist creation of white folklore) might attack him. Eventually, calling constantly for his mother and the safety of feminized space that she represents, and praying out loud to God to "take me home" (566), Dick walks off a cliff, possibly hallucinating that this is the way home to the station, but possibly also choosing this fate of quick death rather than further endure the supernatural horrors in the landscape. The text is ambivalent about the exact nature of Dick's death but what is clear is that he is both physically and psychologically incompatible with the (constructed as) inherently hostile space into which he has wandered.

Variations on this pattern can be found in most if not all the lost-child tales. For the lost child Ada, in Franc's *Golden Gifts* (1883), uncanny moments begin soon after she has crossed the "merrily, cheerily . . . rippling" creek. Suddenly tree trunks have "lost some of the charm" that distance gave them (248), now appearing as "fallen monster[s]" (248). Soon, like Prentice, Ada has completely lost her ability to judge time and distance. She cannot distinguish the homeward path: there are "tracks branching everywhere . . . and all looking so alike" (249), and she turns "round and round, becoming every moment more and more bewildered" (249), finally bursting into tears at the thought that she might "never find home again" (249). These are the elements that persevere throughout the many variants of lost-in-the-bush texts: the bush is kind and beguiling (the protagonists are lulled, and trusting), then a transition occurs, and the bush is hostile and menacing (and the protagonists and their families who discover them lost are terrified).

These recurring constructs of uncanny space in white-vanishing texts are political rather than innocent: colonialism is a scopic regime, and dramatizing the disruption of scopic forms such as linear space is inevitably hegemonic or strategic in some way. Ching-Liang Low's definition of the colonial uncanny, as an event that "reflects back to the colonial identity another image of itself based on the inversion of its normal structure" (Low 114) is pertinent here. Simon Ryan, quoting de Certeau, points out that sightlines are crucial to the colonial sense of control: a Cartesian attitude is "a mastery of places through sight" (qtd. in S. Ryan 5). Becoming lost, by definition, involves the removal of the vanished protagonists from their community's—and often also from the narrator's—sight, and therefore *might* metaphorize loss of that mastery, inverting the power structure colonialism seeks to sustain. In this vein, Dermody argues that lost-in-the-bush films speak eloquently to "the guilt of the intruder, lost in the bush in the sense of seeing it with eyes of a hopelessly other time and world" (82). Certainly they express scopic alienation in the manner she describes, but this depiction can be understood not merely as guilt but also as a power strategy. The apparent expression of guilt and anxiety is part of a broader spatial politics of separation and difference, in which white-vanishing texts privilege a sense of estrangement that is both settler-centric and instrumental to colonialism. Scopism involves a "sense of separation from the environment" that constructs "the world as the object of a disembodied human gaze and control" (Dyer 103). Anxieties about, and dependence on, a scopic perspective are evident in both the form and the moral economy of the white-vanishing trope. The "before-vanishing" spaces of these texts both embody and valorize "the space of empire . . . universal, Euclidean and Cartesian, a measurable mathematical web constructed and maintained by positivism" (S. Ryan 4). Before vanishing, protagonists occupy space marked as safe, known, familiar, and reliable, while the terror and trauma invoked by the act of vanishing demonize the Othered sites of vanishing as irrevocably horrific. The mapped fantasy spaces of neat, safe settlement, and the scopic technologies that construct, survey, and maintain settled space are unequivocally aligned in white-vanishing texts with divinity and rationality. Fearful space, by contrast, functions to oppose and highlight the nature of settled space. Fearful space, characterized by disruptions to perspective and the failure of scopic and positivist forms through tropes such as blindness, illusions, irrationality, and the emergence of the supernatural, is the space in which white people disappear from the reassuring mastery of their community's sight. Fearful space is frighteningly aligned with the pagan, the irrational, and even at times with unqualified malevolence. Settled space is constructed as incommensurable with fearful space (settlers themselves are incompatible with fearful space). Settled space, then, must be everything unsettled space is not: divine, rational, and "good."

When space becomes uncanny in these texts, it always signals an acknowledgement—however repressed—that unsettled space is the space of the Other. Harpur's lost settler Will knows that "somewhere here for certain it is said / *There's a Black's grave ground!*" (201, original emphasis) and Dick fantasizes about Bunyips. Yet such acknowledgement, such as it is, is always transitory: within the standard semiosis of white vanishing—and the binary logic of colonialism generally—this knowledge is dealt with by constructing the Other, and its space, as both evil and irrational: "a night in such a cursed place / Might almost put one in a raving case" (Harpur 201). Once lost, Settler Will has explicitly entered the space of exile: he is now "A banished man" (203). The space of vanishing is always beyond God's dominion: a hyper-separated *terra nullius*. The spot where Ex Capite's lost child Daisy falls asleep, for example, is so exotically enticing—"a tiny stream lulling to sleep the senses in a drowsy spell" (917)—that it suggests a pagan bewitchment or devilish trap. It "might have tempted Christian to linger and rest on his journey to the fair land of Beulah" (917). In similar vein, Heney's lost tramp in the 1889 story "Lost" sees mirages of lakes in the desert but resists them as fiendish temptations:

"It is Satan's sea! [. . .] where those waters led are the white bones of men that never human eyes see and pity" (288). These merciless, satanic spaces stand in for, but also displace, the indigene. They invoke the mythology underpinning terra nullius in which cultivated land is "God's territory" and unsown land is outside God's territory (Williams 12; see also Frost, "New South Wales"; Buchan and Heath).

We can also see evidence of a Rousseauean binary logic— in which a "natural state" is opposed to a "civil state"[2]—in the way that entering another space disrupts vanishing protagonists' ability to reason. Pretty Dick, for example, is so overcome by "a strange feeling of horror, and terror, and despair" after a single night in the bush that he loses "all power of thought and reason" (565). Similarly, when sublime space becomes grotesque space as a result of the fall of night in "Disobedience," Willie becomes so frightened that "a kind of stupor came upon him and he knew not where he was" (Anderson 40). The obsessive reiteration of this motif of rapidly lost intellectual capacity in lost-in-the-bush fables makes sense when the descent into irrationality of lost characters is recognized as symbolizing not just a risk to their own individual life but also a risk to the discourse of superior rationality that provides an ideological platform for white land ownership and control. Irrationality, like mysticism, is the repressed space of the Other. Significantly, Clarke writes that Pretty Dick in uncanny space not only no longer knows *where* he is, but *who* he is (568). The tools that enable him to negotiate his position in space and time are also crucial in negotiating his settler identity, and both crumble during the white-vanishing experience. He has entered the space of the Other and the Other cannot be logical.

Yet, spaces of fear are not the only kinds of space depicted in these texts: in fact, spaces of chaos and irrationality are always prefaced by or sandwiched between spaces of order and rationality, and it is in the interplay between them that their political function becomes clearer. In white-vanishing texts, the fearful spaces of nature that exist beyond or outside the reach of domesticity are marked as contrasting absolutely with settled or designed spaces. Separation is achieved in several ways, one of which is the depiction of settled spaces as finite, measured, and deliberately "laid out" or arranged, in marked contrast with the unstructured and infinite background spaces of potential vanishing such as the bush, the outback, or the desert. In "Pretty Dick," for example, introductory paragraphs delineate the careful arrangement of homestead, outbuildings, fences, and yards that comprise the sheep station on which Dick's father is a shepherd, with each carefully laid-out space corresponding with a hierarchized purpose.

Surrounding this regularity is chaos: "jagged" mountain ranges looming in the distance are diametrically opposed to the neatly aligned, domesticated, ordered home space associated with the white settlers' occupied property. Pretty Dick has heard "fearful things about those ranges" (560). They conceal bushrangers and others who operate outside the moral boundaries of white society, such as two swagmen who murdered a traveling hawker. Feral bulls that have escaped the station's outermost fences and gone wild now roam there,

"savage . . . red-eyed, pawing, and unapproachable" (560). Dick is familiar with the body of folklore warning against approaching the "outer" zones—"men had been lost in that awesome scrub, silent and impenetrable, which swallowed up its victims noiselessly" (560)—yet still longs to explore where he has been "forbidden to go" (561). He is irresistibly— fatally—drawn to the mountains' savagery, imagining them to be "a strange, dangerous, fascinating, horrible, wonderful place" (561). In short, "Pretty Dick" sets out the spatial structure common to white-vanishing tales in general: there is safety in familiar, regulated, modern, settler space, yet there is also knowledge of an Other, freer space. This paradoxical Other space—summed up, for example, as the "treacherous beautiful forest" in another white-vanishing tale, Kingsley's *Geoffry Hamlyn* (Kingsley 264)—is a source (like the indigene, for which natural space so often stands in colonial texts—see Goldie; Lattas) of both fear and temptation.

We can see the same dichotomy of regulated versus tempting/ fearful space operating in Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. This novel opens, like Clarke's story, with detailed attention to the regulated spatial layout of domesticated, deliberately designed and explicitly human-controlled settler space and the boundaries that contain it. Appleyard College, the expensive colonial girls' school from which three students and a maths mistress will shortly disappear, stands "well back from the Bendigo Road behind a low stone wall," and the "spacious grounds, comprising vegetable and flower gardens, pig and poultry pens, orchard and tennis lawns, were in wonderful order, thanks to Mr. Whitehead the English gardener, still in charge" (8). There is unpleasantness and something stifling here, as the text goes on to reveal, but no fear, at least not of the amorphous, creeping kind. There are only the petty tyrannies of teachers and the sniping of schoolgirls—but nothing inexplicable, irrational, or terrifying.

By contrast, beyond the stone fence looms something incomprehensible. The careful regularity of the college's controlled and domesticated space is set against an encroaching background of disorderly natural force, particularly embodied in the presence of Hanging Rock, an "immense and formidable" mountain whose columns are "monumental configurations of nature [to which] the human eye is woefully inadequate" (Lindsay 18, 29). Compared with the "exquisitely ordered world" of the text's settler gardens, "Hanging Rock and its sinister implications were a nightmare" (72). As in Clarke's text, a stark Rousseauean opposition is constructed between ordered space as unnatural and disordered space as natural. Although the civility represented by Appleyard College is far from valorized in either the book or film version of *Picnic*, it is nonetheless distinguished from something far more sinister in the surrounding bush. The college is a bastion of order within a surrounding bush seething with chaotic, often poisonous, flora and fauna (10), and dominated by "the powerful presence" (18) of "the Rock itself" (13), which signals its ominous power in its uncanny form, its "queer balancing boulders" (31) poised, ready to fall. The mysterious space of the rock offers possibilities of escape from the college's claustrophobic, ordered routine—in the film in particular, the

main "vanisher" is shown gazing longingly at its slopes long before she begins her ascent.

Lindsay's and Clarke's constructions of introductory contrasts between modern, civil, industrialized and humanized space, and a looming, unknowable space of dire yet tempting nature just beyond the fence, typify the spatial politics of white-vanishing texts in general. Other characteristic dichotomized spatial demarcations along these lines occur, for example, in *Norah of Billabong*, a 1913 novel for young adults, and in "Jock," an 1897 short story. The novel describes a "little white cottage" neatly fenced at the front with pickets edging a "garden gay with flowers" (Bruce 243), while "at the back of the house the little kitchen garden stretched to the brush fence" (243). Beyond the fence is "a narrow, timbered paddock, and then the . . . dark maze of the Bush, where a little child had wandered" (245). Similarly, in "Jock," a zone of safe space surrounds the children's cheerful home, which is neatly fenced with cultivated plantings of bushes in straight lines, but beyond this flimsy boundary is "a vast area of wild scrub, with nothing to break its wearisome monotony" (H. E. 84).[3]

These images seem particularly to illustrate Carter's assertion that the settler project "depended on establishing a point of view with a back and front, a place with a human symmetry, a human focus of interest" (*The Road to Botany Bay* 168), but they also create contrasting spaces of fear to emphasize the symmetry. In these texts, natural spaces are characteristically haphazard, enigmatic, boundless, and perplexing; they tend to be described as messy, maze-like, infinite, dream-like, or unknowable. Once Jock and his sister enter the scrub, for example, they find it an "endless labyrinth of sticks and fallen timber . . . an endless vista of eternal gum and peppermint" (H. E. 84).

Twenty-first century white-vanishing texts inherit this separated semiosis of regular, deliberate, and finite settled space versus haphazard and infinite unsettled space. In Winton's "Aquifer," a 1994 short story in which a white boy disappears into a swamp, the suburbs are a symmetrical "grid" of streets, but the bush has "no straight lines. Beyond the fence there were snarls and matted tangles" ("Aquifer" 41). In this text, wooden fences mark off the divide between suburban spaces of cultured gardens where roses, lettuces, and imported trees are planted in orderly rows, and the space of wild nature: "A few fences away the grey haze of banksia scrub and tuart trees resumed with its hiss of cicadas and crow song" (38). Again, the natural landscape is disorderly, even slovenly: "The bush rolled and twisted like an unmade bed" (38), and the swamp itself is "shabby" (37). Nature is also ever-menacing, and sometimes the fence-line frontier only barely contains it: "Beyond the fence cicadas and birds whirred . . . When summer came and the windows lay open all night the noise of frogs and crickets and mosquitoes pressed in as though the swamp had swelled" (40–41).

Despite their fences, the suburban dwellers struggle constantly to keep the encroaching space of nature and its hostile effects (drought, flood, bushfire) at bay. Likewise, in Winton's *Dirt Music*, Georgie's search for her lost lover Lu takes her out of straight-line suburbia and into a space where "all rigid geometry falls away; no roads, no fences, just a confusion of colour. Out at the horizon the jagged, island-choked coast" (Winton, *Dirt Music* 299). Oppositions like this between ordered (colonized) and natural (Other) space characterize all white-vanishing texts.

All of the constructions discussed above can be understood as aspects of the white-vanishing trope's dominant spatial metanarrative in which the land exists only as hostile space or home space. In the hostile-space construct, mythology of the land as aggressively harsh is invoked and attached to the spaces into which vanishing white characters disappear. These spaces are unfamiliar, exotic, savage, uncanny and not only unable to sustain, but actively antagonistic to human life. This kind of spatiality often then enables a form of celebratory, nationalistic homescape construction for the spaces of not-vanishing, particularly—but not exclusively—in narratives in which lost characters are rescued. These spaces become exemplary spaces of life, love, family, nurturing, prosperity, and other naturalized positive values; unequivocally "good" territory.[4]

White-vanishing episodes, whether ending traumatically or triumphally, are almost always bookended with constructed homescapes. Familiar, domestic, and often patriarchally idealized maternal spaces are invoked at the beginnings and ends of the narratives, while absence or loss of this home is foregrounded during the vanishing episode itself. The lost twins Ellie and Johnnie, in Moth's "Tale of the Mountain Moss," for example, depart from "a peaceful home . . . a mother's paradise . . . a happy family" (23). When they recognize that they are lost it is because "At last it came to the little creatures with a bewildering misery too vast for them to quite grasp, that they were not near home, and, with all their efforts, could not get there" (23). When they are rescued, their mother clutches them to her breast and "there was laughter in the once more happy cottage" (23). A similar pattern of home known, then lost, then found again and emphatically reinscribed, occurs in Coleman's "The Bunyip." The story begins with Ethel at home, talking to her mother, then narrates her leaving home space to search the bush after "Billy the black boy told her all about the Bunyip" (37). Ethel's "trouble began" when she "decided to return home" but could find "no familiar paths and tracks" (37). This story also concludes by reinvoking a homescape: "Oh what joy . . . to know that she would soon be back at her home and with her darling mother" (37).

Likewise, Warner's lost child, Willie, is beguiled away from safe home space by a sublime vista, a "beautiful fascinating scene over which Nature had cast such a wonderful spell" (32). Only when he realizes that he has inadvertently wandered into "the ranges black and grim" does he begin to value and desire "his little white bed at home" (32) that before seemed prosaic and ordinary beside grand "Nature." When he is found, home itself has now become, through his vanishing and restoration, a site of sublime emotion: "the joy that was experienced in that humble cottage . . . cannot be described" (32). A matching celebration of home occurs in "Lost in the Bush," when Harpur's "settler Will" finds, at the end of the poem, a neighbor's home "and is welcomed there, / Consoled and fed with hospitable care, / [. . . then] his host can set him on his homeward way" (204).

Even stories in which the white vanishing protagonists die often invoke home, in the form of heaven or paradise. Pretty Dick goes "home" to heaven at the end of Clarke's tale. Ex Capite's Daisy, lost in "rugged ranges and dense forest, which yield no sign to her aching eyes" (917), has a vision of her dead mother as "a radiant form, clothed in shining garments . . . beckoning her to the dim unknown" (917). When Daisy is herself found dead at the end of the narrative, the narrator avers that "Little Daisy had found her mother" (917). Similarly, the 1867 poetic tribute by "Alice" to the three lost children of Daylesford asserts that they have now found, in death, "a brighter home" (26).

Sometimes this invocation of homecoming is so overdetermined that it seems almost frenzied; in the last page-and-a-half of the 19-page description of "What befell Ada Gray" in *Golden Gifts*, for example, home is mentioned six times. Ada, rescued and unconscious, "knew not how fast she was proceeding homewards, how soon her own little white bed would receive her" (Franc 256). In an exultation of repeated homecomings, first Ada, then her sister Winnie, then their mother, arrive "home": "Such a coming home it was! What a journey it had been to the agonized mother—a journey of mingled hope and agony and prayer!" (260). For the mother, the literal journey home is paralleled by her gender-role journey from negligence to "proper" maternal responsibility under patriarchy, but also of discursive importance are the arrivals back "home" by all the characters involved in the search and rescue. Through narrating their multiple moments of return as the highpoints of emotion in the story, the text composes their site of habitation as not just a dwelling, but a home—that is, a safe place, a stronghold in times of turmoil. The story constructs the sheep station as the place to which all the white characters rush when trouble strikes, regardless of their own class differences. In fact, the trouble that has arisen through Ada's vanishing is precisely the enabling catalyst that allows the settlers to undertake the action, which performs their belonging to this space. The problem of vanishing and the threat of surrounding fearful space are instrumental to constructing the sheep station, by contrast, as an unproblematic homescape in which a legitimized white identity and naturalized sense of communal solidarity—anchored in a strongly gendered and class-based social order—are grounded.

The construction of a fearful, hostile space in which vanishing can occur, then, is instrumental to constructing settler space as a naturalized homescape. The Australian bush is not literally an antagonistic or uncanny space; its hostility, as has already been widely acknowledged by a number of commentators, is a white Australian cultural construct. The hostile bush trope has a textual history that runs parallel to the history of the white-vanishing trope. Most studies identify its starting point as coinciding with the recognition of organized Aboriginal resistance to white expansion. Schaffer argues that, to early white arrivals "the land was imagined as an Arcadian paradise" and it was only in the nineteenth century that the land began "to be seen as harsh, raw, obdurate, cruel, barren and fickle" (Schaffer 60). Frost also argues that the early white settlers found the environment more comfortable than England. Many wrote of the land's abundance and succor, and their much-improved quality of life. Frost concludes that, "in general, those who inhabited the County of Cumberland [the main area of British occupation until the late 1820s] between 1788 and 1840 found a pleasant climate, benign air, relative plenty, convenient access, welcoming mien, a rapidly prosperous urban centre, frequent beauty, and difficulties less than those in England" ("The Conditions" 79).

Stories about white vanishing—as part of a wider stream of hostile-bush discourse—became more prevalent from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, when pastoralists began to push beyond the Dividing Range and emigrants went "up country" to find work (Ross; Frost, "The Conditions"). Alan Lawson notes that this was also the time when the doctrine of *terra nullius* began to be invoked in popular discourse, compared with, previously, a more widespread tacit acknowledgement of Aboriginal sovereignty, albeit constructed as applying in a practical sense only to areas not immediately required for European settlement.

Both Frost and Curthoys suggest that the hostile-land idea grew to prominence not solely or predominantly because of accuracy, but primarily because it served other, nation-building and national-character-defining, purposes. In particular, it facilitated the co-development of the pioneering and bushman myths. In these almost exclusively masculine myths, an unfriendly landscape provides the foil to create heroes of white-settler "battlers." Obscuring racial conflict over land, "the obstacles the settler-hero must fight are mainly the land itself. The desert and the bush become powerful adversaries" (Curthoys 191). Gibson notes that "[i]f the land can be presented as grand yet 'unreasonable,' the society that has been grafted on to it can also be accepted as flawed and marvellous. Indeed it can portray itself as marvellous because it has subsisted, with all its flaws, in this grand, yet unreasonable habitat. It is the kind of myth which 'naturalizes' a society's shortcomings and works to make them acceptable, indeed admirable" (*South* 67). The white-vanishing trope, of course, is precisely this kind of myth. It makes of settler society's blindness to the landscape's features, ignorance of water sources and edible flora and fauna, and inability to deal appropriately with the indigenous inhabitants to purchase such knowledge at appropriate value, a virtue, rather than a shortcoming. It transforms cross-cultural ignorance and absence of relationships in which whites are willing to adopt the role of visitor in order to learn about the land from its indigenous owners (so that they don't become lost in it and have no need to fear it) into a property of racialized superiority—incompetence in the bush becomes evidence of civility, a marker of innocence that signals the settler as *not* savage and, therefore, as entitled to occupy the land. The counter-effect of such mythology, however, is that over time the constructed fear can come to seem real.

Australian white-vanishing texts (stories about whites who become lost in the bush) consistently divide space into dichotomous parcels comprising settled, modern, rational, cultural, colonized spaces on the one hand, and uncanny,

irrational, fearful spaces of nature on the other. When a character strays from one space to the other, the pain, fear, and loss associated with the experience of being lost in the natural space provide what White calls a "counterinstance" (151); that is, a discursive entity that works to normalize, through contrast and negation, its opposite discursive construct. The spaces of fear in these texts are instrumental—indeed essential—to an attempted construction of colonized space as what Carter calls "good territory"; that is, territory that "allows of no dispute. Its bounding line closes up every gap where doubt might incubate" ("Ground Designs" 277). The unsafe, unpredictable spaces create and reinforce a settler homescape that is discursively positioned as safe, secure, and beyond dispute. As such, the spaces of fear in white-vanishing texts are recognizably part of a wider (and ongoing) colonial project entailing the imaginative possession and symbolic appropriation of Australian space. They are tools in an ongoing cultural repression of acknowledgement of indigenous sovereignty.

Several commentators have suggested that the fact that white Australians keep telling stories about getting lost and vanishing in what is supposed to be "home" space reflects settlers' ongoing status as aliens. Scheckter, for example, argues that, if "the philosophical basis of colonialism itself is the notion that one can always return home safely" (68), the lost white child's inability to find its way home enacts fears that this may no longer be possible for Australian-born settlers. Curthoys argues that tropes such as the lost child reflect white Australians' "fear of being cast out, exiled and made homeless again, after two centuries of securing a new home far away from home" (198). Such a viewpoint has entered the literary lexicon, too; de Kretser's narrator in *The Lost Dog* comments that "the real and imaginary vanishings in which Australian folk legend abounded . . . betrayed the fragility of European confidence in this place" (271). Certainly these anxieties are present, but they are sandwiched between confident articulations of home as found and home as certain. Vanishing *does not happen* in those spaces that are designated as home, it happens in spaces of fear. The hyperseparation between, on the one hand, unsettled space as a fearful not-home (the space of the uncanny, or familiar-made-strange) and, on the other hand, settled space as a secure and predictable home constructs, by its absolute contrasts, the occupied parts of Australia as whites' genuine and permanent home (the strange-now-made-utterly-familiar). In other words, these texts colonize space. Contained between and within narrative home-making strategies in this way, the texts' articulations of fear about homelessness and the projected hostility of unsettled space are instrumental to the performance of occupied space *as* home, rather than deepening a sense of the whole of Australia as unhomely. Ultimately, although these are texts *about* fear, alienation, fragility, and lack of confidence, they do not *perform* fear, alienation, fragility, or lack of confidence: quite the opposite. The white-vanishing texts are maneuvers of power. They are what Pratt calls anti-conquest discourse: "a strategy of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (7). The much-repeated fear of vanishing in the bush is a discourse of counterinstance that serves to secure a sense of belonging to those spaces designated as "home." And although the trope's full ideological load often seems to go unrecognized by the white writers who use it, white people's fear of the land has long been recognized as a strategy of domination and denial by Australia's indigenous owners: "To Aborigines . . . Europeans are a shallow people who are in constant fear not only of the people whose land they have appropriated but of the land itself. . . . Until Europeans have learned to cope with these problems and have resolved them, they will remain a problem for Aborigines" (L. Ryan 261).

White-vanishing texts construct separate (literal and psychological) zones of regular, finite space and irregular, immeasurable, fearful space. They constrast space that can be known and rationalized scopically with space that is uncanny and irrational. They surround homely, nurturing, settled spaces with space that is dangerous, mystical, and often actively hostile to human life. They imply settled space as God's dominion, through its contrast with frightening zones of wilderness or desert beyond the borders of settlement, where chaos reigns yet redemption can sometimes be found through conquering fear. Always, the function of these Othered "badlands" is that they define, by negation, the nature of settled space as "not bad." The "abnormal" of the strange uncanny normalizes settled space as familiar and known. These lost-in-the-bush texts are so common in white Australian textuality that it seems certain they reflect broader cultural constructs. If, as Tompkins argues, "an exploration of the nature of spatiality provides a means of understanding a nation's preoccupations with, and repression of, otherness" (*Unsettling Space* 20), the white-vanishing trope's binary spatial politics are evidence of a prevailing cultural metanarrative of hyperseparation—that is, a sense of exclusion, difference, and deep, profound fear of the projected Other. ❏

NOTES

Tompkins points out that Gelder's and Jacobs's uncanny differs from Freud's: theirs is "more productive, seeking to contain multiple interpretations of the past and present in the future within one place and, potentially, at the same time," whereas Freud's "suggests dread" (*Unsettling Space* 12). As already noted, I am using "uncanny" in the Freudian sense to mean the sensations and projections surrounding the threatened return of repressed knowledge. In the settler Australian context the Freudian uncanny, as Tompkins observes, "usually signals knowledge of what was done to places and the people in them" (*Unsettling Space* 10).

[2] Within colonialism such binary discourse is evolutionary (the "natural state" predates the "civil state") and all the binary schisms with which it is entangled (body/mind, irrational/rational, pre-modern/modern, etc.) likewise function hierarchically. See Roberta James for a penetrating analysis of just how entangled Rousseau's ideas are with liberal democracy in contemporary white Australian thought. James suggests that this "knot" is so tightly tied that "normative racism is pervasive, because of the appearance of icons and logics of race in influential and foundational discourses such as those of democracy, and vice versa, and not because white folks are

mean and evil" (75). Her argument that normative racism is "not an overtly moral issue" but rather "is the product of relationships between things and meanings through which other cultural articulations are made and understood" (59), is also useful here, in emphasizing that this is an analysis of discourse, not of authorial intent.

[3] The "monotonous" landscape has been well documented as a pejorative trope of settler representation (see, e.g., Haynes xii).

[4] I have co-opted the term homescape from work by Tompkins ("Homescapes"). Although she uses it in a slightly different context, I find it useful here to designate a place, whether literal, historical, or metaphysical, in which a community's imagined collective cultural identity is grounded.

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