

## Nation, literature, location

PHILIP MEAD

Until recently ‘Australian literature’ has been an imagined entity that belonged predominantly to the discourse of national culture and its institutions. The historiography of this institution, with its constant revisions and contradictions, is complex.<sup>1</sup> But by far and away the strongest influence on its formation was the rage for nation that Europeans in Australia brought with them from the beginning. This will to nation, driven more than anything by an unassuageable hunger for identity in possession of the land, was political, social, psychological and mythic. It was also divided between an anxious sense of being displaced and inferior, and a confidence in being independent and distinctive. It imposed a precise and exclusive alignment of unitary ethnicity, national territory and literary tradition. Federation, as a political contract between regions with vast geographical differences, and with different histories of discovery and settlement, nevertheless imposed a continental sovereignty with determinate effects on the cultural field. The idea of an Australian ‘civilisation’ was understood as essentially bound to the establishment and legitimisation of a unisonant nation.

Thus the prefiguring of this nation-centred literature was read back into the intricacies of colonial writing. The flickers of its nativeness were discerned here and there for example, in William Charles Wentworth’s dream-vision of an Australian civilisation in his long poem of 1822, *Australasia*; in Charles Harpur’s topographic romanticism; in Catherine Helen Spence’s ‘unmistakeably (but not obtrusively) Australian novel’ (*Clara Morison*, 1854); and in Marcus Clarke’s assertions, in his preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon’s *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift* (1867), about the self-interpreting Australian bush and the beginnings of a national school of Australian poetry.<sup>2</sup> Its late-19th-century heroic age was represented as a legendary contribution to nation-founding. It accompanied and inflected the invention of Australian modernity, in an uneasy ascendancy of the metropolis over the bush. Its role, in the middle of the 20th century, was primarily

1 A useful introduction to the earlier version of Australian literary history is provided in G. A. Wilkes, *The Stockyard and the Croquet Lawn: Literary Evidence for Australia’s Cultural Development*, Edward Arnold, 1981, and Laurie Hergenhahn, ed., *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, Penguin, 1988. For more recent accounts of the strains and tensions in Australian literary history, see Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, A&U, 1991, pp. 1–22, and the articles in ‘New Directions in Australian Literary Studies?’, *Australian Literary Studies*, 19.2 (Oct. 1999), pp. 131–62.

2 Brian Elliott, *The Landscape of Australian Poetry*, F. W. Cheshire, 1967, p. 75; Frederick Sinnott, *The Fiction Fields of Australia* [1856], ed. Cecil Hadgraft, UQP, 1966, p. 36.

the provision of a nationally differentiated universalism. Its (postmodern) fate has been marginalisation, superseded as a canonical index of national identity by cinema and popular culture. No doubt, a discourse of 'nation' will always be with us, as a defining substrate of social and subjective life, and the narrative of Australian literature has had an important role in that discourse and continues to do so in various educational contexts. But it is now apparent just how unsettled it is in itself and how inadequate it is for understanding individual literary texts, the rise of genres and the socio-economic history of literary production, or even the value of literature generally.

The shift in thinking about literature in Australia, in recent decades, away from an overriding and limiting concept of nation has coincided with a broader change in Australian cultural life. The years since the 1970s have seen an extensive, if unresolved and contradictory, sense within Australian society and culture that a revised account of nationhood needed to be drafted. This has not meant tearing up the first draft of Australia that was begun with white settlement, but rather updating and extending the pre-existing historical and political terms of that settlement, re-examining the historical archive out of which it was produced, and recognising that previously marginalised or excluded peoples have contributions to make to the process of redefining the nation. In the instance of Indigenous writers this contribution has been profound. Kim Scott, for example, has argued for a fundamental reconceptualisation of the literary narrative of nation:

Some might place Australian Indigenous writing within the realm of Australian Literature, but there is a wider context; that of the emergence of Australia, as a nation, at the same time as some of the stories which have grown from our land continued or were adapted, or died forever. Australian literature, in such a context is a sickly stream.<sup>3</sup>

Of course this rewriting of a now problematised Australia has been politically contentious at every level, with cultural impacts and existential anxieties for everyone. This has been most obvious in the backlash at the social movement that led to the High Court's *Mabo* and *Wik Peoples* decisions (1992, 1996); in the political and moral challenges of the *Bringing Them Home* report about the Stolen Generations (1997); in the fate of multiculturalism and the idea of citizenship; in responses to the crisis in Australian environmental history; in the debate about an Australian republic; and in the bitter tussle over national borders and how permeable (or not) they should be in relation to South-East Asia, Australia's global region.

'Nation' remains a fundamental constitution of modern human society and culture. It includes individual histories of 'endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion' as well as problematic inheritances.<sup>4</sup> For any nation, the political and cultural question, in the present, is how to deal with these inheritances. And it is not as though nations are

<sup>3</sup> Kim Scott, 'Foreword', in Anita M. Heiss, *Dhuuluu-Yala: To Talk Straight: Publishing Indigenous Literature*, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2003, p. i.

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?', in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, 1990, p. 19.

free to struggle with their memories and with the ideal of consensus in the present in isolation. What a nation means – historically, culturally, symbolically – is everywhere under pressure, from internal contests over narratives of nation, as much as from the socio-economic imperatives of globalisation and evolving forms of state power. How we experience and are able to imagine the national in a postmodern world is undergoing radical reorganisation. The activist slogan ‘think global, act local’, for example, with its deliberate occlusion of the national, is a current expression of impatience with an order of human society that has often been violently maintained, historically short-sighted, racially exclusive and ecocidal. But if Ernest Renan is right, a nation is also a people’s ‘soul, a spiritual principle’.<sup>5</sup> This deep dichotomy is one of the reasons for our ambivalence about nationhood and how it is to be remade in the present. Any historical ground or contemporary reference it provides is unresolved and contradictory.

One effect of these shifts is that thinking about literature and nation is no longer in thrall to exclusive, limited templates of genre, geography, identity and temporality. Since the 1990s, as Robert Dixon has pointed out, previously residual comparative, transnational and interdisciplinary impulses in Australian literary studies have surfaced from beneath the ‘rhetoric of nationalism and disciplinary specialisation’.<sup>6</sup> We can now hear more clearly questions that were incipient, but muted, in the institutional conversation about literature in Australia. How is literature located? How do we read the history of ‘a literature’ once it is uncoupled from the drivers of national identity? How do different genres valorise the same locales (the city of detective fiction vis-à-vis the city of the poetic imagination)? What role does the literary imagination play in bioregional definition? Generally speaking, post-national Australian literary studies have been moving in two directions: towards transcultural comparisons and contexts, and towards rereadings of the local. These different spatial turns may appear antithetical – global or transnational versus regional or local – but in critical practice they are complementary. Much work in contemporary literary studies is an attempt to understand and articulate the complexities of the imaginary places, locales, districts and regions of literary texts and their recursive relations to the multi-faceted experience of actual, lived places.

This chapter focuses on the role played by place-consciousness in this constantly changing matrix of literature, nation and place. My argument is that the remarkable florescence of regionally focused literary cultures in recent decades is not an unmotivated or ephemeral phenomenon. And what we might refer to as a critical regionalism is developing as an interactive response to this new regionalism and to the possibilities of contemporary knowledge, particularly in the sphere of language and literature. Critical

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Dixon, ‘Boundary Work: Australian Literary Studies in the Field of Knowledge Production’, in David Carter and Martin Crotty (eds), *Australian Studies Centre 25th Anniversary Collection*, University of Queensland, 2005, p. 33.

regionalism draws to the centre of critical attention the specific, the singular, the (imagined and historical) places of literary texts and locational perspectives on authors, oeuvres and reception.<sup>7</sup> As such, it is part of a cultural trajectory driven by the desire to understand the singularities of literary texts and their production, including their role in the multi-levelled experience of place and its representations. In this context, knowledge about literary texts looks very different from what it did within the older nationalist paradigm

One aspect of place consciousness – landscape representation – has always been a focus of critical readings of national literature. Indeed, Australia is typical in this regard, even if the fixation on landscape meanings as ‘the inscape of national identity’ has its individual forms.<sup>8</sup> European-imagined Australia, for example, has a long prehistory in the operations of European vision in the South Pacific.<sup>9</sup> This prehistory includes heterodox elements of what Murray Bail has called European austromancy – thought experiments in social theory that repeatedly imagined utopias and dystopias, like Jonathan Swift’s Lilliput and Blefuscu, in what became Australian colonial space.<sup>10</sup> The task of much 20th-century national historiography, as well as literary history, was to assimilate these grand narratives of northern-hemisphere discovery and imperialism – their maritime heroism, iconic representations of man and nature, as well as their eccentric social imaginings – to the less grand one of penal settlement and colonisation. *The Landscape of Australian Poetry* (1967) by the South Australian literary critic and historian Brian Elliott exemplifies this tradition in the literary-critical field. Elliott’s study is concerned with how the actual topography of Australia ‘appeared at first to impose obstacles to poetic expression in Australia, then to liberate it; and finally, as the colonial period came to its close, to choke and inhibit it’.<sup>11</sup> The theme of the mid-20th-century focus of his history is on the ‘emancipation . . . from the shackles of the colonial topographical obsession and a return to the free vision of nature, a natural revaluation of the environmental image’.<sup>12</sup> In this connection, D. H. Lawrence’s descriptions in *Kangaroo* (1923) of the writer Richard Somers’ experience of the Australian bush – ‘the landscape is so unimpressive . . . aboriginal, out of our ken’ – have been a repeatedly contentious site of debate about the rhetoric and politics of settler nativism in the history of Australian ‘landscape’.<sup>13</sup>

7 I borrow this term from Gayatri Spivak who uses it to describe her activist academic work in a more purely political context of North–South differences but who nevertheless understands there is no ‘clear-cut distinction between self-determination and nationalism, [between] regionalism and nationalism’: Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?: Language, Politics, Belonging*, Seagull, 2007, p. 108.

8 Homi Bhabha, ‘DissemiNation’, in Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, 1990, p. 295.

9 See Bernard Smith, *European Vision in the South Pacific*, OUP, 1960. See also, for example, Ross Gibson’s reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s story, ‘A MS. Found in a Bottle’, in *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, Indiana UP, 1992, ch. 5, pp. 93–110, for a perspicacious analysis of Australia in the northern hemisphere literary imagination.

10 See Murray Bail, ‘Imagining Australia.’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 4,417 (27 Nov.–3 Dec. 1987), p. 1330.

11 Elliott, *Landscape of Australian Poetry*, p. xi.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. xi–xii.

13 D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, Penguin, 1986, p. 87.

The obsession with landscape was inflected in numerous literary tropes: one of the best-known is the literary and cultural dichotomy of Sydney or the Bush. It has a complex archaeology in the ‘secular failure [and] spiritual triumph’ of the literature of land exploration – Thomas Mitchell’s and Charles Sturt’s journals for example. We can see the conflicting cultural expressions at work in the attempt to define the nature of Australian belonging in the exchange between A. B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson and Henry Lawson in the *Bulletin* in 1892, ‘*allegro* and *penseroso* of the bush ballad school’.<sup>14</sup> Earlier, in ‘Clancy of the Overflow,’ Paterson’s vision had been of a romantically independent Clancy, riding somewhere on the ‘sunlit plains extended’ of outback Queensland. To Lawson this legend of the bush was a fantasy, city-bred, colonisingly Arcadian, and probably class-bound.<sup>15</sup> For him the bush was in reality a place of isolation, economic hardship and downtrodden drovers’ wives. In Barbara Baynton’s short story ‘The Chosen Vessel’ it was even worse. This topos has been revisited by numerous writers, in serious and comic registers. It includes contemporary rewritings like Murray Bail’s story ‘The Drover’s Wife’ (*Contemporary Portraits*, 1975); the stories about camping and bush-walking in Frank Moorhouse’s *Forty-Seventeen* (1988); the debate between Les Murray and Peter Porter in the 1970s about Athenian (city) and Boeotian (agrarian) traditions in Western and Australian poetry; in John Kinsella’s poetics of a radical pastoral. It even extends to instances of grunge fiction like Andrew McGahan’s *Praise* (1992), which might otherwise be thought of as exclusively urban in their concerns and location.<sup>16</sup> Even popular genres, like crime fiction, can be inflected by the dichotomy: Arthur Upfield’s Napoleon Bonaparte is an outback detective.

Elsewhere in the same archaeology Australians are taught to read the lopsided, doubled outline of their country’s ‘origins’: the map of Cook’s mythic voyage of 1770 is overlaid with the settlement of Phillip’s drear purgatory of 1788, both of them east-coast events. This faulty registration of history and place is reproduced in later maps of Australia. Matthew Flinders’ circumnavigation of Van Diemen’s Land in 1798–9 and then of the mainland in 1802 established the geographical entity of the continent and its lasting name. It also completed the more than 150-year insularisation of Tasmania (in 1642 Abel Tasman had no reason to think his newly discovered Van Diemen’s Land was an island). The cartography of the nation, on the other hand, has multiple iterations and is not finalised until the first day of 1901. Its mostly cadastral state boundaries – apart from the Queensland–New South Wales border from Mungindi to the coast, along the Macintyre River, and the Murray – produce a geodetic palimpsest of white exploration

14 Gibson, *South of the West*, p. 89; Elliott, *Landscape of Australian Poetry*, p. 157.

15 See Coral Lansbury, *Arcady in Australia: the Evocation of Australia in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*, MUP, 1970, for a reading of the origin of an Arcadian Australia in mid-Victorian English literature.

16 The Porter–Murray debate includes Porter’s poem ‘On First Looking into Chapman’s Hesiod’; Murray’s response to it in an essay of 1978, ‘On Sitting Back and Thinking about Porter’s Boeotia’; and Porter’s reply, ‘Country Poetry and Town Poetry: A Debate with Les Murray’, *Australian Literary Studies*, 9.1 (May 1979), pp. 39–48. For other details of this debate see Bruce Bennett, *Spirit in Exile: Peter Porter and His Poetry*, OUP, 1991, p. 146. For John Kinsella, in a reformulation of the Lawson–Paterson exchange, ‘Pastoral is the contrary of sublime’: *Disclosed Poetics: Beyond Landscape and Lyricism*, Manchester UP, p. 15.

and settlement.<sup>17</sup> Sovereignty requires maps. Tasmania is the exception again: the only solely geopolitical sub-national region. But overwhelmingly the 'natural' entity of the continent provided a powerful legitimating form for the political and social entity of the Commonwealth of Australia, coordinating the desired convergence of environment, nation and identity.<sup>18</sup> Regionalism, both creative and critical, is a process of resisting and critiquing this convergence.

The drawing and redrawing of the spatial parameters of Australia is analogous to the intervals of its temporal existence. As the historian Graeme Davison has demonstrated, using Eleanor Dark's work of popular fiction *The Timeless Land* (1941) as a reference, European settlers figured Aboriginal Australia as timeless.<sup>19</sup> Time, and therefore history, only arrive with European maritime discovery and white settlement. Likewise, before Flinders, Australia was only partially named and incompletely mapped. In this sense it was also a place-less land to the European mind because it was without *their* geopolitical definition. One of the first responses of Europeans to Australia, a heritage everywhere thematised in the literature of contact and settlement, is of a place-less, time-less, and people-less land. The poem by Australie, or Emily Manning, 'From the Clyde to Braidwood' (1877) is typical of this view of Australia as 'bare, bald, prosaic'. In one of the earliest published poems in Australia, 'The Kangaroo' (1819), Barron Field had used the same word, prosaic, to describe ahistorical, acultural proto-Australian space. As Paul Carter has demonstrated, it is not as though the Europeans arrived without ideas and desires about what they were determined Australia, as a place, was to be. The recent discovery of 'deep time' in Australian human history, Tom Griffiths argues, has linked Australia to world history in new ways. These revise European versions of it as the 'Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space', the South as other, upside-down, or monstrous, thus indigenising Australian history and 'localising' the Australian story.<sup>20</sup> The evolution of a similarly new Australian spatial consciousness in recent decades, profoundly influenced by Aboriginal being, has allowed Australians to relocalise their understanding of literary production and its representations of place in new ways.

17 This national chart of Australia has not been without residual dreams of secession and new states, including the New England seventh state movement, led by Sir Earle Page in the 1920s and 30s, and more vaguely, the push for a North Queensland separate state. A New State Convention was held in October 1923, in Rockhampton. The most spectacular attempt at secession was a petition from Western Australia that went to a Joint Committee of the British House of Lords and House of Commons in 1935. The boundaries of the Australian Capital Territory, within New South Wales, were not finalised until 1911.

18 See J. M. Powell, *A Continent for a Nation? Environment–Identity Convergences in Australia, 1901–2001* (2000); Libby Robin, *How a Continent Created a Nation* (2007); and Gibson, *South of the West*, for a reading of the 'duplicitous object of the South Land', p. x.

19 Graeme Davison, *The Unforgiving Minute: How Australia Learned to Tell the Time* (1993), pp. 7–8. For an important geographical reading of this history see J. M. Powell, *Australian Space, Australian Time: Geographical Perspectives* (1975).

20 Bernard O'Dowd, 'Australia', in *The Poems of Bernard O'Dowd*, Lothian, 1944, p. 35; Tom Griffiths, 'Travelling in Deep Time: *La Longue Durée* in Australian History', *Australian Humanities Review* (June 2000), p. 4. A. D. Hope's poem 'Australia' (1939) also explores the (European and settler) paradoxes of the geological age of the Australian continent and its youthfulness as a nation, although without any recognition of its Aboriginal history.

This spatial consciousness is expressed across an impressively varied discourse of spatiality, and it now works as one of the most influential developments in Australian intellectual life. This body of work includes *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology* (1985), edited by Stephen Muecke, Krim Bentrack and Paddy Roe; Kay Schaffer's *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, (1988); the collection of essays, *Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture* (ed. Paul Foss, 1988); Ross Gibson's first literary-contextual study *The Diminishing Paradise: Changing Literary Perceptions of Australia* (1984) and his later *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* (2002), a brilliant fictocritical and post-colonial study of the Capricorn coast of Central Queensland and its aftermath of story, ecology and history. Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay* (1988) and *Living in a New Country* (1992), although primarily concerned with setting out his original intellectual project of a 'spatial' (or non-imperial) history, have numerous reference points in literary texts, from Mary Fullerton's poetry, to Dante, Defoe and David Malouf and, in their response to non-Western conceptions of space, move towards his poetics of the locational in *The Lie of the Land* (1996).

The work of Meaghan Morris, Val Plumwood, Stephen Muecke, Deborah Bird Rose and Tim Bonyhady across a range of inter-disciplinary sites – cultural studies, ecofeminism, ethnography, art history – has revised the reference system of Australian place-consciousness. Terms like region and state, with their etymologically embedded dyads – metropole and nation – seem increasingly outmoded. The emphasis in the title of Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths' *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, for example, is away from landscape, a word 'freighted with cultural meaning which suggests a view that is remote and painterly,' and towards the indigenising term country.<sup>21</sup> Country is a word currently invested with very different cultural and cross-cultural meanings. While it defines specific places of Indigenous habitation and of Indigenous-settler histories, it is also a kinship term, implying familial and personal responsibilities and a differently conceptualised sense of ownership. 'Country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life.'<sup>22</sup> This kind of conceptual and linguistic shift is analysed in J. M. Arthur's lexical mapping of Australian settlement in her under-recognised study, *The Default Country: A Lexical Cartography of Twentieth-Century Australia* (2003).<sup>23</sup> Crucially, this discourse of country also includes the critiques and contributions of Aboriginal intellectuals and writers such as Kim Scott, Marcia Langton, Jeanie Bell, Anita Heiss, and Fabienne Bayet-Charlton.<sup>24</sup>

21 Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths, 'Landscape and Language', in Bonyhady and Griffiths (eds), *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, UNSWP, 2002, p. 1.

22 Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission, 1996, p. 7.

23 See also her chapter, 'Natural Beauty, Man-Made' in Bonyhady and Griffiths, eds, *Words for Country*, pp. 190–205.

24 See, for example, Michele Grossman (ed.), *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, MUP, 2003.

This heterogeneous and multi-disciplinary discourse of place-consciousness frequently draws on and critiques literary representations of place and region to provide the stimulus for a new regional- and location-focused literary history and critical reading. The groundwork for this reading was bibliographical, anthological and scholarly, but critics interested in the broader significance of Australian literary works have begun to build on this foundational work and to explore methodologically innovative and differently thematic possibilities for critical regionalism, emphasising the singularities and specificities of representations and imaginings of space and place. If the predominance of landscape in the Australian literary and critical tradition was the equivalent of a simple conic projection of space onto the flat page, our understanding of the history of spatial consciousness has evolved. We are now able to read the literary history of vastly differentiated Australian place, region and locale for its representation of how space is produced by acts of performative language, sustained by memory, sung into being, apprehended in the act of being travelled across, returned to, multiply imagined, interconnected to experiences of the global world – as well as being defaced and degraded by loss of language and story.

### The west

It is no surprise, perhaps, that Western Australia – given its vast size, geographical and historical difference from Eastern Australia, as well as its Indian Ocean orientation – has been a leader in regional literary definition. ‘West coasts tend to be wild coasts, final coasts to be settled, lonelier places for being last.’<sup>25</sup> The distinctive growth of Western Australian literature is reflected in anthologies like *Soundings: a Selection of Western Australian Poetry* (ed. Veronica Brady, 1976); *New Country: a Selection of Western Australian Short Stories* (ed. Bruce Bennett, also in 1976); *Wide Domain: Western Australian Themes and Images* (ed. Bruce Bennett and William Grono, 1979). There is also the on-line anthology *Western Australian Writing* by John Kinsella and Toby Burrows, as well as bibliographical and critical studies such as that edited by Bennett, John Hay and Susan Ashford, *Western Australian Literature: a Bibliography* (1981; revised 1990, as *Western Australian Writing: a Bibliography*). Bennett’s edited volume, *The Literature of Western Australia* (1979), is a collection of detailed critical studies of Western Australian diaries, letters, journals, novels, short fiction, poetry, drama, children’s books, newspapers, and literary journalism. Such scholarly and critical work ensures that Western Australia, in any understanding of the ‘ways in which the land or local conditions may have shaped, or been shaped by, the literary imagination’ is richly represented.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Tim Winton, *Land’s Edge*, Macmillan, 1993, p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Bennett, *The Literature of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia, 1979, p. xiii. The stimulus for regional literary history has often been celebratory and therefore ambivalent. Centenaries, sesquicentenaries etc. of first settlement, prompt the desire for stocktakes of substantive cultural achievement, but they are also



This important critical work of Western Australian cultural localisation exists alongside powerful narrative, mythic and poetic expressions of the west's difference. Examples are Randolph Stow's reading of the *Batavia* disaster of 1629 as the story of an Indian Ocean Anti-Christ, the mythic antithesis to the (Pacific) Southland; Kim Scott's *Benang, from the Heart* (1999) with its complex narrative tracks through Nyoongar country and history; the Indian Ocean littoral of Robert Drewe and Tim Winton (*The Bodysurfers*, 1983; *Land's Edge*, 1993); and Kinsella's Avon Valley-centred poetics of spatial lyricism and its localised critique of literary pastoralism and actual land management.<sup>27</sup> Since the 1970s, *Westerly*, the WA-based quarterly literary journal founded in 1956, has contributed not only to the nurturing of Western Australian creative writing but also to that writing's South-East Asian orientations.

### Small islands

Despite the historical depth of its literary heritage and the richness of its contemporary writing culture, Tasmania has yet to develop a critical regionalism comparable to that of the west or the north. There are single articles of cultural overview such as Jim Davidson's essay 'Tasmanian Gothic' (1989), Margaret Scott's 'Tasmania's Literary Heritage' (1999), and the environmental historian Peter Hay's collection of occasional pieces, *Vandiemonian Essays* (2002) that explore Tasmanian culture more broadly and personally.<sup>28</sup> Anthologies of Tasmanian writing, like *Effects of Light: the Poetry of Tasmania* (ed. Margaret Scott and Vivian Smith, 1985) and *Along these Lines: from Trowenna to Tasmania: at least two centuries of peripatetic perspectives in poetry and prose* (ed. C. A. Cranston, 2000) have been prompted by the perceived importance and distinctiveness of Tasmania as both geographically distinctive and equally fascinating as a place in the literary imagination. But these offer only the briefest introductory and contextual notes on the literary material they excerpt and anthologise.

As a place of the imagination, Tasmania has a presence in the literature of islands and island identity, a fact recognised in a 2000 collection of critical essays in

reminders of the violence of colonial origins. See for example: Cecil Hadgraft, 'this small commentary on our literature', in *Queensland and its Writers (100 Years – 100 Authors)*, UQP, 1959, preface; the location of Kenneth Slessor's 'Five Visions of Captain Cook' as a North Queensland poem in F. W. Robinson, 'The Earliest Writings of Queensland' in R. S. Byrnes and Val Vallis (eds), *The Queensland Centenary Anthology*, Longman, 1959, pp. 3–6; Bruce Bennett, *The Literature of Western Australia* (1979) was one of the volumes in Western Australia's Sesquicentenary Celebration Series.

<sup>27</sup> See Randolph Stow, 'The Southland of Antichrist: the *Batavia* Disaster of 1629' in Anna Rutherford (ed.), *Commonwealth: Papers Delivered at the Conference of Commonwealth Literature, Aarhus University, 26–30 Apr. 1971*, Akademisk Boghandel, 1971, pp. 160–7; and John Kinsella, *Disclosed Poetics: Beyond Landscape and Lyricism, and Contrary Rhetoric: Lectures on Landscape and Language*, both ed. Glen Phillips and Andrew Taylor, Fremantle Press, 2007, 2008. See also the suggestion of an 'Indian Ocean' Cultural Studies in Devleena Ghosh and Stephen Muecke (eds), *The UTS Review: Cultural Studies and New Writing*, 6.2 (Nov. 2000), and in Stephen Muecke, 'Cultural Studies' Networking Strategies in the South', *Australian Humanities Review*, 44 (Mar. 2008).

<sup>28</sup> See Jim Davidson, 'Tasmanian Gothic', *Meanjin*, 48.2 (1989), pp. 307–24; Margaret Scott, 'Tasmania's Literary Heritage', *40° South*, 12 (Autumn 1999), pp. 19–22; and Peter Hay, *Vandiemonian Essays*, Walleah, 2002.

cross-cultural island writing, *Messages in a Bottle: The Literature of Small Islands*.<sup>29</sup> Although *Island* magazine (originally *The Tasmanian Review*) focuses on Tasmanian writing and themes, further possibilities for critical regionalism in the literature of Tasmania remain to be explored, not least Tasmania's function in the literary imagination as a *mise-en-abyme* for Australia, the island continent. From the northern hemisphere, for example, Tasmanian literary insularity has recently been read as an allegory of 'tensions between the local and global'.<sup>30</sup> The localised influence of Clarke's *His Natural Life* (1874), a melodrama of penal Van Diemen's Land, usually thought of as a monument of national literature, extends into the present with the debate about the origins of gothic Tasmania: is it natural or cultural? distinctive or demeaning? Chloe Hooper's *A Child's Book of True Crime* and Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish: A Novel in Twelve Fish*, both published in 2002 and both reinterpretations of Van Diemen's Land and its convict history, are two contending fictions in this debate.

Tasmanian history seems to be a readily available archive of the colonial past but subject to the contradictory functions of remembering and forgetting. Novelists such as Drewe in *The Savage Crows* (1976) and Mudrooroo in *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983) have been fascinated with the workings of the settler unconscious as it surfaces in the journals of George Augustus Robinson, with their first-hand account of frontier conflict in 1830s Van Diemen's Land. Probably because of its insularity, Tasmania also reflects the use that humans have put islands to as social laboratories, in reality and in the imagination. The distinctive utopian/dystopian structures and themes in the literature of Tasmania begin with *Gulliver's Travels* (1726); they include Louis Nowra's play about the descendants of a lost tribe of ex-convicts and gold-seekers, *The Golden Age* (1985); Christopher Koch's east-coast faeryland in *The Doubleman* (1985); Dennis Altman's speculative novel of 1970s secession, *The Comfort of Men* (1993); Brian Castro's radically experimental novel of racial difference and lament for Tasmanian Aboriginal history, *Drift* (1994); Flanagan's magical-realist fiction of hydromodernisation, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (1997); and Julia Leigh's biogenetic-gothic *The Hunter* (1999).<sup>31</sup>

A further sign of the complexity of Tasmania's place in the literary imaginary of both an archipelagic Australia and the southern hemisphere as a whole is evident in its encompassing of the island chains of Bass Strait and its relations to the polar continent

29 See Fiona Polack, 'Writing and Rewriting the Island: Tasmania, Politics, and Contemporary Australian Fiction', in Laurie Brinklow, Frank Ledwell and Jane Ledwell (eds), *Message in a Bottle: The Literature of Small Islands: Proceedings from an International Conference, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada, 28-30 June 1998*, Institute of Island Studies, 2000, pp. 215-30. See also Tim Jetson, 'Place', in Alison Alexander (ed.), *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, University of Tasmania, 2005, pp. 466-71.

30 Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer, 'Introduction', in Birns and McNeer (eds), *A Companion to Australian Literature since 1900*, Cambden House, 2007, p. 5.

31 See Tony Hughes D'Aeth, 'Australian Writing, Deep Ecology and Julia Leigh's *The Hunter*', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 1 (2002), pp. 19-31.

of Antarctica, both regions with their own histories of literary representation.<sup>32</sup> In some contemporary Aboriginal spatial representation of Australia, like David Mowaljarlai's 'Bandaiyan: the Body of Australia', where Uluru is the navel of the country, Tasmania has a new antipodean presence as the country's feet.<sup>33</sup>

### Central south

In recent decades a number of anthologies of South Australian writing and some bibliographies of South Australian poetry have been published. Patterns of spatial representation in South Australian writing are characterised by the capital Adelaide's location, on the coastal edge of one of the most arid regions of the continent, and extend to the Centre, with its origins in the unique social experiment of the Wakefield Plan for emigration and William Light's city grid plan. Murray Bail's novel *Holden's Performance* (1987), for example, draws on the city's planning and social history in its portrayal of Adelaide. South and central Australia have also been the sites of some of the most important survivals of Aboriginal culture, including Indigenous languages and linguistic art forms. The importance of these rich and ancient cultures of country-located poetic, mythic and historical forms is only beginning to be understood in terms of a post-national Australian culture. This context includes the important figure of David Unaipon and the story of his *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*, a work he wrote for publication by Angus & Robertson in 1926 and which was appropriated by William Ramsay Smith and published under his name in 1930 (and subsequently reprinted until 1998). Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker, in their edition of his original *Tales* in 2001, have helped to repatriate Unaipon's work, 'weaving the text back home to the community (or communities or family groups) where the stories were told and traded in the first place'. Muecke and Shoemaker view their decolonising practice as editors, as countering the 'imperialism and universalism of writing that is supposed to transcend place, aspire to the universal, and conquer time by becoming of permanent historical significance'.<sup>34</sup>

In the 1940s Adelaide and South Australia were the hub of one of the most assertively nationalist episodes in Australian culture and, again, one with problematic relations to Aboriginal culture. Stimulated by P. R. Stephensen's *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* (1936) and led by South Australian writers Rex Ingamells, Ian Mudie, Max Harris, the Jindyworobak movement was an attempt to Australianise writing and

<sup>32</sup> See Stephen Murray-Smith and John Thompson (eds), *Bass Strait Bibliography: A Guide to the Literature on Bass Strait Covering Scientific and Non-scientific Material*, Victorian Institute of Marine Sciences, 1981; Stephen Murray-Smith, 'Three Islands: A Case Study in Survival', in Imelda Palmer (ed.), *Melbourne Studies in Education 1986*, MUP, 1986, pp. 209–24, and the 'Representations of Antarctica' bibliography at <[http://www.utas.edu.au/english/Representations\\_of\\_Antarctica/](http://www.utas.edu.au/english/Representations_of_Antarctica/)>.

<sup>33</sup> Bill Arthur and Frances Morphy (eds), *Macquarie Atlas of Indigenous Australia: Culture and Society through Space and Time*, Macquarie Library, 2005, p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker, 'Introduction', in David Unaipon, *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*, MUP, 2001, p. xliii.

cultural traditions (see Chapter 10). Aspects of Aboriginal culture (mediated through anthropological studies) were colonised in the cause of defining a white, decolonised version of Australian culture. As its name, even, betrays – a word from James Devaney's *The Vanished Tribes* (1929) meaning to annex, or join – the neo-colonial and depoliticising provenance of Jindyworobak is apparent. But as Brian Elliott's 1979 anthology of Jindyworobak writing demonstrates, it was also motivated by what has proved to be a continuing desire in the white Australian imaginary, particularly in relation to spatial representations, for a species of cultural–racial syncretism.<sup>35</sup> In the context of anthropological and linguistic research, Norman Tindale's well-known 'Map Showing the Distribution of the Aboriginal Tribes of Australia' of 1940 is analogous to the work of the Jindyworobaks, remapping as it does the spatial and social complexities of the continent-wide distribution of the Aboriginal nations.

Concurrent with these episodes of South Australian literary culture is the Hermannsburg linguist and anthropologist T. G. H. Strehlow's *Songs of Central Australia* (1971), the contentious product of a lifetime's work among the Arrernte (Aranda) peoples. (Strehlow had influenced Ingamells' conception of Jindyworobak by his essay 'Conditional Culture,' 1938.) Strehlow's study, overlapping in complex ways with the Jindyworobaks and with David Unaipon, is a monumental attempt to preserve and translate the great heritage of sacred Aboriginal song and story, including its essential and constitutive relation to, and celebration of, place. Strehlow's final vision of 'the strong web of future Australian verse' is that it will be woven with the 'strands that will be found to be poetic threads spun upon the Stone Age hair-spindles of Central Australia'.<sup>36</sup>

This evolving (white) cultural dream, given different expressions in Strehlow and in the Jindyworobaks, also appears translated into environmentalist terms in later essays of Judith Wright's under the heading of 'About Conservation' (in *Because I Was Invited*, 1975), in Les Murray's essay 'The Human-Hair Thread', and in such poems of his as 'The Bulahdelah–Taree Holiday Song Cycle'. As recently as 1977, over 40 years after Ingamells' first use of the term Jindyworobak, Murray was drawing on the contentiously nationalist material of Jindyworobak for an updated concept of cultural interchange and spirituality-in-place. Murray wrote:

my abiding interest is in integrations, in convergences. I want my poems to be more than just National Parks of sentimental preservation, useful as the National Parks are as holding operations in the modern age. What I am after is a spiritual change that would make them unnecessary. . . . the Jindyworobak poets were on the right track, in a way; their concept of *environmental value*, of the slow moulding of all people within a continent or region towards the natural human form which that continent or region demands, that is a real process.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Brian Elliott (ed.), *The Jindyworobaks*, UQP, 1979.

<sup>36</sup> T. G. H. Strehlow, *Songs of Central Australia*, A&R, 1971, p. 729.

<sup>37</sup> Les Murray, 'The Human-Hair Thread', *Persistence in Folly*, Sirius, 1984, p. 27.

## The north

The historian Regina Carter, in her study of early Asian–Australian contacts and polyethnicity in North Australia, asserts that Australian history ‘properly begins’ in the north. ‘Looking at Australian history from north to south,’ as she argues, ‘reconfigures much of what we think we know of the Australian past.’<sup>38</sup> This is exactly what Cheryl Taylor, Elizabeth Perkins and David Headon have done in their critical accounts of the writing of the Northern Territory and the tropical north. Headon’s *North of the Ten Commandments: A Collection of Northern Territory Literature* (1991) is probably the most eclectic selection of any Australian regional literature yet published. It acknowledges those classics of Australian and Territorian writing, Mrs Aeneas Gunn’s *We of the Never-Never* (1908) and Xavier Herbert’s *Capricornia* (1938) and *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975). In addition, it includes translations of Aboriginal song cycles and dreaming stories; Aboriginal retellings of white maritime exploration (Cook, Flinders); extracts from journals of overland exploration (Stuart, Leichhardt, Giles, Campbell, Stokes); accounts of violent white invasion like Ernestine Hill’s ‘The Daly River Murders of 1884 and their Aftermath’ and ‘The Coniston “Massacres” of August 1928’ by Sidney Downer. There are also many yarns, ballads and stories of frontier exploits and ‘incredibilities’; and modern Aboriginal writing, including the Yirrkala Bark Petition of 1963 and Vincent Lingiari’s speech in August 1975, at Wattie Creek, in Gurindji and English, at the handing back of Aboriginal land. All of these represent the ‘paradox and contradiction, idiosyncrasy and absurdity’ of the literature of the Northern Territory.<sup>39</sup>

In their analysis of the writing of what David Malouf has referred to as the ‘uncontrollable North’, Taylor and Perkins make the point that no ‘form of [non-Indigenous] writing has contributed more to the representation of North Queensland than long prose narratives’, predominantly of the encounter with a tropical environment and the long history of racial interaction and violence, including with the island and surrounding regions to the north of the north (Papua, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Timor-Leste).<sup>40</sup> They detail the foundation of northern regional identity in these narratives of explorers, colonisers, castaways, frontier policemen, female pioneers, amateur and spurious ethnographers, white fringe-dwellers and exiles (E. J. Banfield, Jack McLaren), as well as the mid- to late-20th-century critique and rewriting of this identity in the fiction of Jean Devanny, Sarah Champion, Thea Astley, Eric Willmot and Janette Turner Hospital. Chilla Bulbeck and Gillian Whitlock have both analysed the quirky and powerful regionalism of Astley’s fiction: the ‘strangeness of north Queensland tropical vegetation, time and space produce strange people, the “Queensland oddball” or “humanoids”’.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Regina Carter, *Mixed Relations: Asian–Aboriginal Contact in North Australia*, UWAP, 2006, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> David Headon (ed.), *North of the Ten Commandments: A Collection of Northern Territory Literature*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1991, p. xvii.

<sup>40</sup> Cheryl Taylor and Elizabeth Perkins, ‘Warm Words: North Queensland Writing’, in Patrick Buckridge and Belinda McKay (eds), *By the Book: A Literary History of Queensland*, UQP, 2007, p. 214.

<sup>41</sup> Chilla Bulbeck, ‘Regionalism’, in James Walter (ed.), *Australian Studies: A Survey*, OUP, 1989, p. 74.

A brilliant recent rewriting and extension of this tradition, Alexis Wright's novel *Carpentaria* (2006) embodies an Indigenous perspective on this conflicted history of human interaction and habitation. Wright's re-presentation of the gulf region, including its powerful white avatar in Herbert's *Capricornia*, embraces both Aboriginal cosmogony, including ancestor spirits' creation of the topography – 'the serpent's covenant permeates everything' – savage satire of white economic imperialism (bauxite mining), and allegories of the historico-spatial imagination.<sup>42</sup>

Cecil Hadgraft has a significant place in this overview. His *Queensland and its Writers: 100 years, 100 authors* (1959) was published within a year of his *Australian Literature: A Critical Account to 1955* (1960). The virtually simultaneous perspectives of these two studies, one regional, one national, were prescient of future directions in Australian literary studies. Building on half a century's work in regional literary studies, including Hadgraft's, Patrick Buckridge and Belinda McKay published their edited collection of essays, *By the Book: A Literary History of Queensland*, in 2007. So far, this is the most highly developed example of regional literary history in Australia. It includes a history of North Queensland writing by Cheryl Taylor and Elizabeth Perkins; and a version of the preface to the Writers of Tropical Queensland subset of the AustLit database and essays about 'South-East' (city, hinterland and Darling Downs), 'Central,' and 'Western' Queensland writing; as well as 'Statewide Themes' (Indigenous, children's, travel). Surveying the quantity and variety of Queensland literary heritage, Buckridge and McKay begin with the question of whether a 'Queensland difference' is identifiable: the idea of Queensland as not just a geopolitical subdivision of the nation but a 'state of mind'. Their response to this hypothesis is to 'see if we could use the literary history of Queensland not to boost and consolidate Queensland's image of itself as a whole and distinct entity but to scrutinise that image, to look beyond it, to question it, even to ignore it if that seemed the right thing to do'. In this sense, their 'consortium' of critical essays represents a reflective instance of critical regionalism that is informed by an awareness of how a geopolitical region may not be a holistically literary one.<sup>43</sup>

The historical depth of their study rests on earlier work in critical regionalism, including Hadgraft's; J. J. Stable and A. E. M. Kirkwood's *A Book of Queensland Verse* (1924); H. A. Kellow's critical study *Queensland Poets* (1930); and also the powerful presence of Queensland writers and intellectuals in simultaneously regional and national definition. Malouf's fiction – especially *Johnno* (1975) and *Harland's Half Acre* (1984) – his memoir *12 Edmonstone Street* (1985), and many of his short stories are meditations on human relations to the specific places and space of Brisbane (in wartime, in the louche 1950s, in the 1960s makeover), South-East Queensland and the 'North'.<sup>44</sup> Malouf has also contributed to the discourse of spatial consciousness, mentioned earlier, in his

42 Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria*, Giramondo, 2006, p. 11.

43 Buckridge and McKay, 'Introduction', in Buckridge and McKay (eds), *By the Book*, p. 5.

44 See William Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis: Imagining Brisbane Through Art and Literature, 1940–1970*, UQP, 2007, p. 1.

conversation with Paul Carter about writing and historical identity.<sup>45</sup> But, as the readings in *By the Book* demonstrate, there are many other distinctive facets to the representation of place and space by Queensland writers. And the Queensland-inflected intellectual tradition goes back, at least, to the Toowoomba-born A. G. Stephens and his role at the *Bulletin*. It includes important institutions in Australian literary production like the magazines *Meanjin* (originally), *Barjai*, *LiNQ*, the publishers Jacaranda Press, Makar Press and University of Queensland Press, and the contributions to Australian literary studies at the University of Queensland (*Australian Literary Studies*, *Hecate*) and James Cook University. On any map of Australian literary intellectual life, Queensland would have one of the most densely represented histories.

### Other regions

Patrick Morgan's work on the literature of Gippsland in Victoria – *The Literature of Gippsland: The Social and Historical Context of Early Writings, with Bibliography* (1986) and *Shadow and Shine: An Anthology of Gippsland Literature* (1988) – provides one of the earliest scholarly and critical discernments of a literary region. Morgan's identification of the rich traditions of Gippsland writing was stimulated by the project of *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia* (1987; rev. 1993), for which he was an associate editor. This guide to literary landscape features, while national in extent, is organised by state and territory. It provides short literary histories of Australian 'towns, townships, suburbs, rivers, mountains, well-known geographical areas such as the Riverina, the Monaro and the Mallee', in terms of where writers have lived, worked and set their works.<sup>46</sup> The section 'Australian Territories' includes entries on Antarctica, the Australian Capital Territory, Norfolk Island, and the Northern Territory.

Although 'Canberra' is an entry in the first edition of *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (1985) it was dropped from the revised, 1994, edition. This move goes counter to the complex and unique literary culture of this region, which includes the narrative history of pastoral settlement, lyric encounters with the Monaro (David Campbell, Michael Dransfield), the political novel (Sarah Dowse, *West Block*, 1983) and the Seven Writers literary collective (*Canberra Tales*, 1988).

### New readings

A tangible response to the development of localised literary cultures is research in the field of Australian literature that can now be conducted with sophisticated bibliographical resources able to differentiate for region and locale. Searchable and mineable spatially based subsets of the globally accessible AustLit database, like the Literature of Tasmania,

<sup>45</sup> See Paul Carter and David Malouf, 'Spatial History', *Textual Practice*, 3 (1989), pp. 173–83.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Pierce, 'Introduction', in Pierce (ed.), *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, OUP, 1993, p. xi.

Writers of Tropical Queensland, and Australian Literary Responses to Asia, provide data about writers and their works with a special emphasis on regional or spatial terms.<sup>47</sup> The possibilities of this kind of research into Australian literature and literary cultures are only beginning to be explored.

An important influence here is Franco Moretti's remodelling of literary history, including spatial elements, in *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary Theory* (2005). Moretti's insights are often informed by a 'distant reading' of fictional versions of places (cities, villages, suburbs) and statistical analysis of book history and genres (epistolary, gothic). In the European and British history of literary form proposed by Moretti, the national is a contested and conflictual structure; it is subject to movements of political and cultural devolution, as in Britain, and to the resurgence of 'older, smaller homeland' grounds of cultural identity in Europe.<sup>48</sup> Such cultural investments, Moretti demonstrates, are reflected in the provincial, regional or village-life novel, for example, and in poetic movements like the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s and Hugh MacDiarmid's project of Lallans.<sup>49</sup> What Australian literary culture might reveal, viewed as a topography of forms and subjected to similar kinds of spatialised reading, remains to be seen, but there is every possibility it would quantify, variously, the shift away from a nation-centred literature to a location-centred one. For example, such empirical analysis might compensate for what has been a blind spot in the nationalist paradigm about the significance in Australian writing of representations of the town and the regional city.

A locational literary history would also provide a re-evaluation of iconic instances of literary place-consciousness, sometimes located firmly within the older narrative of national identity. Examples are Clarke's Tasman Peninsula, Lawson's small selections, Mary Grant Bruce's South Gippsland, Kenneth Slessor's Sydney Harbour, David Campbell's Monaro, Malouf's Brisbane, Judith Wright's New England, Frank Hardy's Carringbush, Thea Astley's tropical north, Drewe's beaches, Kinsella's wheatlands, Alex Miller's stone country. A critical regional reading of such places of the imagination would return them to the strata of Indigenous and other localised histories of representation as well as contemporary reorientations of spatial experience and knowledge.

For example, a reading of the Kimberley might move between the universe of ancient and modern Indigenous narratives and songs (Worora, Ngarinyin, Wunambal) with their structure of monsoonal seasonality; Dampier's and Baudin's narratives of coastal contact; Daniel Defoe's *Adventures of Captain Singleton* (1720), Sir George Grey's late-1830s journals of exploration; and contemporary Indigenous mythography (*Joe Nangan's Dreaming*, 1976; Kim Scott, *True Country*, 1993; Daisy Utemorrah *et al.*, *Visions of Mowanjum*, 1980). It could also encompass white imperialist fictions of a vanished Lemurian civilisation (James Francis Hogan's *The Lost Explorer*, 1890; G. Firth Scott's

<sup>47</sup> <<http://www.austlit.edu.au>>.

<sup>48</sup> Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary Theory*, Verso, 2005, pp. 51–2.

<sup>49</sup> See Morag Shiach, 'Nation, Region, Place: Devolving Cultures', in Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (eds), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, CUP, 2004, p. 533ff.



*The Lost Lemuria*, 1898) and H. P. Lovecraft's 'The Shadow Out of Time' (1936), part Indiana Jones pseudo-anthropological romance, part speculative fiction. Other elements might be another narrative of civilisational cycles, Mary Durack's family memoir of failed pastoral settlement *Kings in Grass Castles* (1959); Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (1958); Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo* (1929); Gail Jones' *Sorry* (2007); as well as contemporary autobiographical and non-fiction accounts of the cattle and mining industries.<sup>50</sup> An indigenised reading of this region would emphasise the ways in which country has grown these rich strata of representations. Such a reading might also reveal the conjunctions of the cultural expressions of lived experience of a region, over thousands of years, and that same region's possibility as a remote locale of meaning and identity for writers who may never have experienced the actual place, like Lovecraft.

### The city as region

Although it necessarily works with the surviving archaeology and hierarchies of the region/metropolis dyad – Sydney and/or the Bush – critical regionalism is theoretically predicated on the assumption that all places are equally distinctive and meaningful in the literary imagination. John Docker's influential account of Sydney and Melbourne cultural history in *Australian Cultural Elites* (1974) – Sydney aestheticism versus Melburnian social commitment – predates the spatial turn in critical theory and is therefore almost entirely despatialised.<sup>51</sup> Rereadings of the city, though, as a region of the Australian imaginary are returning literary texts to the specificities of their historical and spatial contexts.

Since the growth of Australian spatial discourse, new readings of the city in the literary imagination have tentatively emerged. Peter Kirkpatrick's *The Sea-Coast of Bohemia: Literary Life in Sydney's Roaring Twenties* (1992; rev. 2007) reads Sydney culture of the 1920s in terms of the paradoxical maps of Bohemia, the originally European country of romance, and virtual city-space of the artistic demi-monde.<sup>52</sup> William Hatherell's *The Third Metropolis: Imagining Brisbane Through Art and Literature, 1940–1970* (2007) is a reading of post-1940 literary Brisbane, 'part chronological, part thematic', that focuses on the paradox of a city that its writers characterised as a cultural desert (Thomas Shapcott) but that at the same time produced a remarkable flourishing of literary and artistic activity.<sup>53</sup>

These studies emphasise the spatial (inner urban) contexts of literary production as well as the interconnectedness of writers to heterogenous creative communities and

<sup>50</sup> The most detailed reading of Lemurian fiction is in John Docker, *The Nervous Nineties: Australian Cultural Life in the 1890s*, OUP, 1991.

<sup>51</sup> Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis*, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> Kirkpatrick's critical study has a companion volume in Jill Dimond and Peter Kirkpatrick, *Literary Sydney: A Walking Guide*, UQP, 2000.

<sup>53</sup> Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis*, p. 3.

those communities' often contradictory relations to Australian social and economic history. Members of a younger generation of Indigenous writers, including Samuel Wagan Watson, Tony Birch and Lisa Bellear, are also writing about contemporary Indigenous perspectives on the Australian city – *Dreaming in Urban Areas*, as Lisa Bellear's 1996 poetry collection expressed it. *Radical Melbourne* (2001) and *Radical Melbourne 2: The Enemy Within* (2004) by Jeff Sparrow and Jill Sparrow, and *Radical Brisbane* (2004) by Raymond Evans and Carole Ferrier, although broadly cultural and committedly activist, are the work of Australianist literary scholars and represent a street-level rereading of the 'always alienated' and fully human city.<sup>54</sup>

### Regional production and institutions

The new regionalism I have been describing has also been supported and enhanced by the rise of regionally focused publishing projects and regional funding agencies for writers and writing, usually governmental. Important national publishing houses like the University of Queensland Press and Fremantle Arts Centre Press, in the 1970s, and Magabala Books, in the 1990s, for example, were also associated with regional cultural movements, playing an active role in regional literary production and definition. The institutional history of these publishers and their part in the growth of regional literary cultures is an important aspect of Australia's book history.<sup>55</sup> Since the Whitlam Government set up the Australia Council in 1973, including the Literature Board, as one of its policy and funding art form boards, with a mission to support writers and writing nationally, the states and territories have each developed their own funding and institutional support for writers and writing. These have evolved in their individual ways, sometimes closely associated with the premier's or chief minister's office, sometimes at a greater administrative remove. The instigation of literary prizes (and associated funding for festivals and events) has been a significant aspect of this regional subsidy of contemporary writing. The more populous states of New South Wales and Victoria have tended to badge their prizes with the names of writers particularly associated with their literary history, while giving them a national scope: the Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry (New South Wales Premier's Awards), the Nettie Palmer Prize for Non-fiction (Victorian Premier's Awards). But South Australia does the same; the biennial Adelaide Festival awards are national, but their poetry prize, for example, is named the John Bray Poetry Award.

The other states and territories have often maintained a regional focus for their prizes, like the Western Australian and Northern Territory awards for natives or residents, while the National Word festivals in Canberra in the 1990s capitalised, literally, on Canberra's

<sup>54</sup> Guy Rundle, 'Foreword', in Jeff Sparrow and Jill Sparrow, *Radical Melbourne 2: The Enemy Within*, Vulgar, 2004, p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> See chapters on UQP, Fremantle and Magabala, for example, in Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia, 1946–2005*, UQP, 2006.

dual presence as a simultaneously regional and national literary centre. Sometimes small states have emphasised international literary perspectives, like Tasmania with its Pacific Region prize of the 1990s. In 2006 a consortium of Melbourne-based benefactors, moving in the opposite direction of localisation, inaugurated an annual Melbourne Prize, thus narrowing its focus to the Victorian capital as a centre for writing. In 2008 the new directions in public patronage of literature were characterised by two major government announcements, one state-based, one federal: the inaugural Western Australian Premier's Asia–Australia Literary Award and the Prime Minister's Literary Awards (fiction and non-fiction). Also in that year, Melbourne was named a UNESCO City of the Book (Edinburgh is the only other so honoured).

Since the 1980s states and territories have also developed writers' centres, subsidised institutions that function as providers of services, resources and funding as well as coordinating events for sub-state writing communities. Typical of such organisations is this mission statement from the Queensland Writers' Centre: 'the QWC works to advance the recognition of Queensland writers and writing, locally and nationally'. While the history of the book in Australia, including its regional aspects, has received serious critical and scholarly attention in recent years, the history of state and regional institutions of literary patronage and cultural policy remains largely unwritten.

Writers themselves have always had slippery and mistrustful relations to entities like nation, with multiple responses in their writing and in their lives to the spectrum of what it might mean. Exile, after all, is one of the most ancient of literary subjectivities. And the literary imagination is no respecter of boundaries and borders, however it might take off from and reimagine the places it represents. All the same, place, environment and locale have frequently been the most profoundly formative influences on their imaginative work. And the evolving nature of the spatialised literary imagination – now decentralised, relocalised, Indigenising, transnational – suggests a number of focuses for the future work of critical regional reading: country, gothic Tasmania, the poetics of 'international regionalism', transnational spatial identities, the Indigenous city, quantitative literary regionalism, Carpentaria, Lemuria, regional book history, virtual Australia, regional cultural policy, alternative literary geographies (the edge, the insular, the trans-Indian Ocean), the town.<sup>56</sup> As the literary imagination in Australia continuously evolves in response to what country can mean, and to its own traditions of spatial representations, literary history and critical reading also need to reorient their theories and understandings of location.

<sup>56</sup> See John Kinsella, 'Poets Cornered', *Sydney Morning Herald* (20 Jan. 2001), Spectrum, p. 8.