Imagined Counterpart: Outlining a Conceptual Literary Geography of Australia

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‘All that is Australia begins not with man but with the land itself,’ wrote George Johnston in *The Australians*. He based this assertion partly on ignorance of the changes wrought by 25 to 50 thousand years of Aboriginal occupation, but also on a vision of the continent as an archetype:

Lodged within spacious oceans beneath a tiara of archipelagoes and scattered islands, Australia looks on a map the way a continent ought to look, like a fruit ought to taste like a peach or an apple... (11)

The cartographical image of the ‘Island Continent’ has great evocative power. It is displayed even more prominently in Australia than in most other countries as an official or semi-official icon of nationhood. In notional and perhaps also concrete terms, the map enters into an Australian’s sense of nationality and even personal identity more deeply than statistical, political or ideological definitions of what constitutes Australia and the Australian.

Perhaps for this reason Australian literature has been more diligent in literally, metaphorically and self-consciously mapping the continent than almost any other old or emerging national literature. There seems to be on the one hand an archetypal simplicity, on the other a complex mystique in the appearance of that plump, pointed silhouette. With no boundaries except the sea and thus separate from the rest of the world, Australia as a map of the imagination seems somehow to have more dimensions than those New World imaginative geographies which disappear along a single axis, in a single cardinal direction, whether the American West or the Canadian North.

A case in point is Judith Wright’s ‘Double Aspect’ theory in the introduction to *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (1965). An account of the ambivalence of literary attitudes might begin with a comparison of the two maps of Australia Christina Stead draws in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* and *For Love Alone*. In Blount’s complaint from *Seven Poor Men* Wright hears the voice of the exiled European consciousness:
Why are we here? Nothing floats down here, this far south, but is worn out with wind, tempest and weather; all is flotsam and jetsam... This land was last discovered: Why? A ghost land, a continent of mystery; the very pole disconcerted the magnetic needle so that ships went astray, ice and fog and storm bound the seas, a horrid destiny in the Abrolhos, in the Philippines, in the Tasman sea, in the Southern Ocean, all protected the malign and bitter genius of this waste land. Its heart is made of salt: it suddenly oozes from its burning pores, gold which will destroy men in greed, but not water to give them drink... Our land should never have been won. (Seven Poor Men of Sydney as in Wright xiv)

The proem to *For Love Alone* entitled 'Sea People' is diametrically opposed in feeling and orientation:

This island continent lies in the water hemisphere. On the eastern coast, the neighbouring nation is Chile, though it is far, far east, Valparaiso being more than six thousand miles away in a straight line; her northern neighbours are those of the Timor Sea, the Yellow Sea; to the south is that cold, stormy sea full of earth-wide rollers, which stretches from there without land, south to the Pole.

The other world — the old world, the land hemisphere — is far above her as it is shown on maps drawn upside down by old-world cartographers. From that world and particularly from a scarcely noticeable island up toward the North Pole the people came, all by steam; or their parents, all by sail. And there they live round the many thousand miles of seaboard, hugging the water and the coastal rim. Inside, over the Blue Mountains, are the plains heavy with wheat, then the endless dust, and after outcrops of silver, opal, and gold, Sahara, the salt-crusted bed of a prehistoriclea, and leafless mountain ranges. There is nothing in the interior; so people look toward the water, and above to the fixed stars and constellations which first guided men there.

...The skies are subtropical, crusted with suns and spirals, as if a reflection of the crowded Pacific Ocean, with its reefs, atolls and archipelagoes.

It is a fruitful island of the sea-world, a great Ithaca, there parched and stony and here trodden by flocks and curly-headed bulls and heavy with thick-set grain. To this race can be put the famous question: 'Oh, Australian, have you just come from the harbour? Is your ship in the roadstead? Men of what nation put you down — for I am sure you did not get here on foot?' (*For Love Alone 1*)

Both of Stead's literary maps are anthologies of stock geographical images and epithets of Australia, which tend to cluster round two main coordinates. The older of these is the idea of Antipodean inversion, which carried over from Babylonian and Ptolemaic cosmology to Copernicus' globe and Mercator's projection, and which seemed to be confirmed by the reverse seasonal pattern of the Southern Hemisphere and peculiarities of Australian flora and fauna. The other coordinate of images grew from the progress of inland exploration. It sees Australia essentially in terms of centre and periphery, as a circle both alluring and impenetrable, a succession of zones from the habitable rim to the riches and/or barrenness of the Centre, where a phantom sea spellbound the imagination of nineteenth-century explorers in the same way as a phantom continent, which turned out to be real, had spurred their sea-borne predecessors.
IMAGINED COUNTERPART

All this is well-known. But the persistence and proliferation of images along these two coordinates from a time when Australia was no more than a cosmological hypothesis to the most recent revisionist theories of 'spatial history' indicates, I think, that we have touched a fundamental ore of identity-building — or an increase-place of tropes, if you like. Even the Ulysses/Ithaca theme inscribed on Stead's map sends echoes back to Watkin Tench and on to Paul Carter.

Whether Australia as it appears on a map is seen as a joke, or a riddle, or a symbol either potent or pregnant; whether it takes on the attractive or the repellent guise of the Wrightian 'double aspect', the image persists. I wish to suggest how it may become the basis for a conceptual literary geography of Australia, which puts into a wider perspective my own previous studies of the literary geography of David Malouf, Randolph Stow and Les A. Murray (see Leer 1985, 1991, 1988).

Literary geography is the complementary dimension to literary history, as space is the other side of time. Although literary scholars have tended to be wary of geography (deterred perhaps by the spectres of geographical determinism, Montesquieu's climatic zones or even Blut und Boden) and have constrained themselves to rather innocent comments on 'landscape', which is immediately subsumed in other aesthetic, psychological or political considerations, historians and geographers have long used imaginative literature as a chief source of documentation for the way human beings through the ages have perceived their natural environment. The French Annales school (especially Braudel) have shown the absolute interdependency of history and cultural geography in materialistic terms, while American phenomenological and historical geographers have explored ideas and theories of 'landscape', 'space' and 'place' in different civilisations — and perhaps especially the changes between the Old World and the New (see Glacken, Tuan, Relph, Walter, Brinckerhof Jackson, Stilgoe).

Literary geography may be especially relevant in the New World and in post-colonial literature. The culture of that peculiar imaginative construct — 'the New World' — reflects another geography, that of 'the Old World' (which drew the maps upside down), at the same time as it refracts the other culture, that of the Aboriginal first-comers, which inhabits the same geography, physically, at least, though not conceptually. The New World imagination inhabits a space characterised by diffraction and interference between perception and conception. On many levels, in places like America or even more clearly Canada and Australia, length of settlement and complexities of social development have not obscured the ways in which geographical conditions determine or are changed by the arrival of an imported culture. It is thus interesting that previous treatments of the geographical dimension in Australian culture have tended either to see geography as a physical reality shaping Australian culture (as in such classics as Bernard
Smith's magisterial *European Vision and the South Pacific* or Geoffrey Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance*) or as an imposed European cultural text to be read and decoded (as in more recent revisionist writings like Robert Dixon's *The Course of Empire* or Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay*). This dialectic (or 'double aspect') is present also in imaginative literature — and perhaps even there a generational phenomenon, the idea of 'reading the country' (to borrow Stephen Muecke's term for interpreting Paddy Roe's traditional Aboriginal narratives) has become prominent in the 1970s and '80s. But, obviously, a conceptual literary geography must take both sides into account: that very ambivalence is its core.

Australian culture and literature — fictional and non-fictional, poetic and academic — has been centrally concerned with a process of *coming to terms*. This began not 200 years ago, but when people in the Northern hemisphere first began to speculate about a Southern continent. 'The New World was not discovered; it just grew,' as the *Literary History of Canada* has it. Australia is a phantom which turned out to be real. In this it is both like and unlike the other 'New World' of America. For while America will forever be an idea against which reality fails to measure up, a world 'known' to be something else (the Indies; the New Jerusalem) before it was found, mapped, explored and turned out to be different, Australia appeared on maps before it was known to exist. And somehow Australia partakes less of the New World ideality of 'America' than of a sense of intractable, anti-European 'reality' or even a sense of being a 'Dream', of the permanent rather than evanescent kind, which may strike off some kind of real and deep resonances with the Aboriginal conceptualisation of the land.

Such a dreamlike quality is even suggested by the history of the cartographical entity called 'Australia'. Just when it was about to disappear as the shadow Ptolemaic counterweight of the 'Antipodes' or the 'Antichthon' from the partly imaginary, partly conceptual maps of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Australia was caught in the net of longitude and latitude of early scientific cartography. Whereas the naming of America was largely a historical accident (a German cartographer in Paris honouring Amerigo Vespucci beyond merit), the name of the phantom 'Great South Land' was translated at some mysterious point — probably secretly and in a displaced position on the Dieppe Maps — from one world of the imagination to another. It became a relatively accurately measured, but wrongly projected outline, which was only fully traced by the partial and complete circumnavigations of Cook, La Perouse and Flinders — and not completely filled in by inland exploration till a century after those.

Australia is the only settled continent where the European *landnama* — the land-taking and land-naming — has taken place in an age of science. Other *landnamas* (from Aboriginal Australia to ancient Greece, medieval Iceland and Puritan America) have taken a conceptual form that is basically mythical and religious. For White Australians, however, the essentially poetic process of a settler
culture ‘inventing’, ‘creating’ or ‘imagining’ its new landscape, ‘scaping’ and shaping the land physically and conceptually, has become a dialectic between scientific taxonomy and literary and pictorial coming-to-terms. This goes back to Cook, Banks and Hodges — for whereas Europeans learned nothing on the way to America ‘as if they came through a dark tunnel’ (as somebody once put it), Europeans on their way to Australia traced the map we still think of as ours, the image of the world created by science and European imperialism. The voyages of Cook and his companions and successors including Darwin on the *Beagle*, all of which made Australia a touchstone of geography and natural history, were pre-eminently journeys of the imagination. As Bernard Smith has demonstrated, changes in taste and artistic practice went hand in hand with changes in scientific theory and fact from Cook to Humboldt and Darwin, from Hodges to Glover and Martens.

All was part of a ‘coming to terms’ with Australia, a ‘putting the continent on the map’ which goes on in Australian literature to this day. Thus a writer like Thea Astley almost standardly begins her books with ‘compass readings’ or ‘Let me draw you a little map’ to evoke settings which now enter literature for almost the first time, as pristine coordinates out of the grid.

The urge to fill the void is probably the most fundamental motivation towards literary map-making. A sense that Australia has not been fully explored, indeed is not fully *there*, underlies contrary impulses in Australian literature. On the one hand, there is the idea of the ‘Great Australian Emptiness’, which informs many different descriptions of the continent from Johnston and Stead to A.D. Hope and Patrick White, whose literary vision it dominates on both physical and spiritual levels of geography. The other side of the ‘Great Australian Emptiness’ is an almost Baroque urge to populate the void with dense textures of objects and names, characteristic of modern Australian writers as different as Kenneth Slessor, Hal Porter and Barbara Hanrahan, David Malouf and Les Murray.

These contrary impulses often coexist in the same imaginative writer (consider Stead’s maps), whereas critics and theorists tend to emphasise one or the other. The idea of Australia as a void reaches almost parodic proportions in Ross Gibson’s *The Diminishing Paradise* and perhaps even in Richard White’s far more influential *Inventing Australia*, while Paul Carter in *The Road to Botany Bay* brings the geographical void and the toponymic impetus to a kind of convergence in imperial *langue*. A conceptual map of Carter’s theory might thus closely resemble the definition of Australia as a perimeter encircling a void which I have explored elsewhere (‘At the Edge’).

Such a map, however, belongs on a different level of literary geography and conceptualisation. Several such levels can be distinguished in Australian literature and cultural theorising apart from the basic urge to put places on the map —
or the critiques which show, with varying degrees of sophistication, the arbitrary, critical and complex poetic relation between placing and naming. I do not wish to grade these other ‘levels’ of literary geography, only to suggest possible types.

One of them deals precisely with types, tropes and stock images. Australia seems particularly rich in this kind of geographical iconography, the history of which has been studied in detail by Brian Elliott (The Landscape of Australian Poetry). It is ‘landscape in a convex mirror’ (Elliott, Man and Environment in Australia), every detail magnified and standing pars pro toto for the continent. Christina Stead was preceded by a long tradition from Barron Field to Dorothea Mackellar, and followed by a range of others, for instance Murray Bail’s Homesickness, in which the approach reaches a peak of irony as the icons are paraded in a tourist space seemingly detached from their association with place.

Another, allegorical, level or type of literary geography reads Australia as a figure of Paradise or Hell. Australian literary self-perception is perhaps unique in the way that both readings are equally possible and interrelated: ‘Botany Bay’ sounds like a place of Edenic renewal, of hope — but acquires the opposite meaning in the convict ballads. Indeed this ‘double aspect’ may have been mythically present from before the arrival of Cook and his plant-collecting passengers: in his article ‘The Southland of Antichrist’ Randolph Stow traces the dualism back to the contrast between the imagined Australia del Espiritu Santo of Captain Quiros, who never set foot on the continent, and the Jonestown-like horror realised by the Batavia mutineers in the Abrolhos, two of the leaders of which became the first European ‘settlers’ of the continent — as a punishment.

This irony in allegorical geography has continued through Australian history. While European socialists towards the end of the nineteenth century were coming to see Australia as the new Promised Land, where social inequality was turned on its head, William Lane set sail to find the true Australia in Paraguay. Australia as a natural paradise and a place of renewal and Australia as a natural hell and a prison constitute a yin and yang dynamics, a sort of internal antipodes of attitudes, both at any given moment and through the changing phases of Australian cultural history, where the attractive and repellent aspects of the land seem to wax and wane. Whereas painting and literature of the 1940s and ’50s tended to portray a continent perversely attractive in its repellent otherness, more recent developments in the arts have tended towards seeing the previously ‘alien’, ‘ugly’ and surreal features (the desert, the monotony of the landscape, the ‘contorted’ forms of aridity) as the most intimate and familiar components of Australianness (Catalano, An Intimate Australia). At the same time claims have been made by an English art historian that the ‘old’ Underworld image of Nolan, Boyd and Tucker is really in international terms the most suitable metaphor for the postmodern human condition: the Antipodean scapegoat (Fuller, Australian Scapegoat).

The oscillation is not only due to a peculiar colonial cultural pattern by which
European visitors pick up on latent, handed-down or half-baked ideas about Australia, and — more aware of their 'difference' than Australians — restate them in clearer and subsequently more significant terms: what happened with first Marcus Clarke and then D.H. Lawrence and 'Weird Melancholy', with Bruce Chatwin and Aboriginal 'Songlines', and perhaps even with Paul Carter and toponymy. There is simply much more of a continuum in European and Australian perceptions of Australia (and of Europe) than we admit when we conceive of them as discrete places. Antipodes and hemispheres are conceptually interdependent, after all. No matter how hard we try to concentrate on an object as 'Australian', when we look, we look both ways. But the arrangement of lenses and mirrors for perceiving and conceiving, the cultural optics if you like, is becoming increasingly complicated.

The old notion of 'Europe transported', which still underlies most discussions of Australian culture just as much as the 'frontier thesis' dominates in America, has to be redefined as the process of coming-to-terms redefines both Australia and the terms. There is a breathing-space for conceptual geography before economics appropriates all the definitions. Two rephrasings spring to my mind, from my primary research. David Malouf sees Australia as producing 'critical variants of Europe'; it is 'Europe translated'. The linguistic metaphor turns our attention to the constant dualistic tension between idea and environment, conceptualisation and statement — for no word has an exact equivalent in another language. It shows how Europe redefines itself (reflexively) in Australia. Les Murray, by contrast, sees Australia as 'Europe transplanted'. The botanic-ecological metaphor turns our attention to the ineluctable consequences for the present of what has physically happened in the past, to how a process is set moving by the original grafts, certain transplants thrive in the new soil — and become pests — others barely hold out, or die. Australia has been redefined by Europe — or rather in a process they have (reciprocally) redefined each other. Malouf and Murray may be intelligent poles in contemporary conceptual-geographical theorising in Australia. But they agree on the need for redefinition — and to a certain degree on its terms, though Malouf tends to conceive it from the vantage-point of a European mind in an Australian body, whereas Murray begins by affecting a leap and postulates his mind as Australian.

Already this sketchy attempt to set out the theories, overviews or visions of two actual writers' work shows the interconnectedness of what I have called the 'levels' or 'types' of literary geography. Australia allegorised as Paradise or Hell (or Purgatory for that matter, as 'foreseen' by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*) often merges with the idea of the Antipodes. It also gives rise, indirectly at least, to an important icon or motif in Australian literature: that of 'the garden' and 'the garden run wild'. This is of course by no means a uniquely Australian phenomenon: in all New World literatures and cultures the garden is the central
image of culture itself, set over against the wilderness, nature, chaos, which is always threatening to rise and resubmerge the precarious foothold of civilisation. But such a besieged garden is also a type of Paradise (which means an enclosed garden in Persian): the iconographic-allegorical, cultural-symbolic and practical horticultural levels are linked.

In Australia the image of the garden becomes perhaps especially significant because of the distance from Europe, the contrast between imported and indigenous plants, and because so little of the continent has submitted to cultivation. But the paradisial associations have also been turned on their head during the brief history of European settlement in Australia: for whereas nineteenth-century pioneers from John Glover onwards depicting their imported gardens centre-stage in the wilderness saw in them the likeness of Eden in a fallen world, contemporary environmentalists see our First Garden in the wilderness, now under siege as the colonial plantations were when they were first established.

The garden is a central element, but only an element, in the conceptual apparatus Europeans brought with them to Australia, the net with which they have tried to map and catch the continent, the binoculars through which they have tried to see it. Paul Carter has turned our attention to the sometimes desperate, sometimes ironical way in which explorers applied the preconceived names of features like ‘hill’ or ‘river’ to a landscape in which these categories had practically no meaning. Carter shows how placenames can be read coherently as a text, speaking in different modes of meaning — descriptive vs. associative naming — of different philosophies, political ideologies and personalities. Overall, Carter argues, our way of conceiving Australian history theatrically, as a drama on a stage beginning with the arrival of Cook at Botany Bay, is inherently imperialist.

Les Murray, coming from a very different angle, has claimed that the seasons are the most significant cultural import Europeans have brought to Australia. In concrete and physical terms, Northern Hemisphere agriculture — of which the four-seasonal pattern is the conceptual wheel ordering time and the passage of time through space — has changed the continent as dramatically in less than two centuries as Aboriginal fire husbandry through the millennia and geology through millions of years. But the seasons have accrued new meanings in Australia: they are reversed, to begin with, but when Murray is done with observing and reimagining them in prose (The Australian Year) and in verse (The Idyll Wheel) they have also been turned inside out in much subtler ways. In his essay on the Australian summer Murray boldly identifies time and space, season and continent: Australia is summer; in Australia summer is immanent, not transient. It is not only that ‘in fact and in image, summer is the dominant season of the Australian year... generator of the greatest number of indigenous images’, but it is ‘the blazing core of the year’ (Australian Year 69), a fireball expanding and contracting in season. Summer is the red centre; the rest of the year the
coast, mainly palliatives and modifications, to a large extent imported. Similarly in other respects Murray sees Australia as a spatialiser of European categories: the Centre in its vastness for instance 'stretches' concepts like the horizon and the line to meaninglessness, at the same time as it decentres the concept of centre. Inspired by the Aboriginal vision of 'Australia' embodied in Papunya Tula art, Murray sees linearity exploded into points and clusters and centrality spreading all around. Even the term 'desert' is stripped of its Waste Land connotations and taken back to its hermit roots as a place of peace and contemplation (Australian Year 12). Accordingly, in his poem 'Louvres' Murray reinterprets the large section of the Australian map which used to be marked 'Of No Significant Use' as 'the three quarters of our continent/ set aside for mystic poetry'.

With very different results, Paul Carter critically and Les Murray creatively reconceptualise Australia as it appears on the map. They also in different ways question such concepts as 'landscape' and 'place' — to get from the bird's-eye view of geography to the ground-level, where geography surrounds as much as it underlies. The difference in perspective between these levels of literary geography — from being above the land to being in the landscape — is in itself formative. It is easy to comprehend the map-level as abstracting and/or imposed. But even the visually self-evident landscape or the concrete place exist in a dialectic between perception and conception.

When we observe a 'landscape' we are caught in a concept, a construct, which in itself has several levels. It orders space aesthetically according to the rules of perspective (this is the primary seventeenth-century meaning of the word in English, borrowed from Dutch: a landskip painting, a prospect). But 'landscape' (the Germanic Landschaft means basically 'district') also on yet deeper levels sets culture, cosmos, the world created for us to live in (farmstead, village, surrounding fields) off from the surrounding chaos, the wilderness of uncreation; this level of 'landscape' is perhaps the most basic category of spatial order Europeans brought with them to the New World (Stilgoe 1-31; Brinckerhoff Jackson 1-8). And on a level of animal territoriality and survival we may look for possible hiding-places and places to scout for enemies; a 'prospect-refuge' spectrum certainly seems to account for much of what we find beautiful in a landscape (Appleton, Experience of Landscape).

Without being consciously aware of these levels of landscape theory, Murray's poetry uses them and makes them apparent, perhaps because Murray as a farmer's son is always weighing the aesthetic appreciation of 'landscape' against the agricultural possibilities of the 'land'. Murray also proposes in poems like 'The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle' a whole philosophy of 'place' and placenames, distinguishing different layers of attachment and reality in 'place'. Ultimately, however, Murray's theory and questioning is diametrically opposed to Carter's. For although Carter acknowledges a dialectic, he ultimately discounts the reality of 'place', which he sees as a rhetorical topos.
There is, in all discussions of literary geography, a fundamental opposition or a dialectic between regarding geography as a cultural-linguistic 'sign' or as a physical 'reality', an extension often of the human body itself. A metaphorical or allegorical relationship between body and land is a literary commonplace — as can be seen also in the quite frequent sexual or gender-related interpretations of Australian literary geography, and the alleged landscape obsession of Australian literature (e.g. Thompson, 'Romance Australia').

One important meeting-point in literary geography between the reading of signs and the apperception of a revealed reality intimately connected with the writer's 'being-in-the-world' are the accounts of the 'First Real World' of childhood, which are prominent in Australian literature and important in all post-colonial literatures. In his essay 'A First Place: The Mapping of a World' David Malouf speaks of his native Brisbane as 'the only place I know from the inside, from my body outwards' and offers a description of how the elements of a place and our inner lives cross and illuminate one another, how we interpret space and in so doing make our first maps of reality, how we mythologise spaces and through that mythology (a good deal of it inherited) find our way into a culture' (3). Malouf emphasises the hilly nature of Brisbane topography, 'all gullies and sudden vistas', which does not induce 'contemplation, in which the mind moves out and loses itself in space', but rather provokes delight in 'new and shifting views'. Together with the vividness of colours, Malouf concludes, this landscape may, when it is internalised from earliest childhood, have produced the 'restlessness', 'delight in variety and colour and baroque effects' which he finds characteristic of a whole list of Brisbane writers including himself. Brisbane architecture has also played its part, and the Brisbane River in its deceptive windings, which make 'space in this city...unreadable':

Geography and its features offer no help in the making of a mental map. What you have to do here is create a conceptual one. I ask myself again what habits of mind such a city may encourage in its citizens, and how, though taken for granted in this place, they may differ from places where geography declares itself at every point as helpful, reliable, being itself a map.

How different conceptions of the world may grow from different places is expressed with clarity by Randolph Stow in his early poem 'Child Portraits: With Backgrounds'. Here two Western Australians growing up in Southern Forests and on Northern Downs respectively develop vertical and horizontal mental worlds, one as certain of cumulatively ever-present protection as the other is of cyclically dying and regenerating exposure. Nothing will ever appear in the same light to these children, who will remain inside adult consciousness, and neither of them will ever quite be able to get inside the other's world.

First Places are touchstones for our most basic and everyday conceptualisations of inner and outer, time and space, mind and body. And this is why they loom
so large in post-colonial literature. In colonial literature the imperial centre sets the standard of reality, even in literary geography. Post-colonial literature awakens to its own particular geography as the standard of reality. The periphery writes back to the centre — or rather it discovers itself as a centre.

Reconceptualising Australian geography also means reconceptualising Australian history. Paul Carter would agree with Les Murray, David Malouf and most of the writers mentioned about that. Carter's notion of 'spatial history' is precisely meant to counter the theatrical pageant of imperialism inscribing itself on a tabula rasa. Even Henry Reynolds' giving the view 'from the other side of the frontier' is not enough for Carter; the 'frontier' itself as the cutting edge of imperial history has to be demolished. Les Murray is in a sense even more radical: for him perspective and visual dominance in perception represent an imperialist, socially elitist gaze.

But perhaps a geographically reconceptualised writing of history is emerging in Australia, at least if one allows the essentially poetic nature of such reconceptualisation and coming-to-terms. In 1981 two poets published histories, which were completely new in their vision of history and geography. Eric Rolls' *A Million Wild Acres* was in fact hailed by Les Murray as truly Australian anti-perspectival history: a 'pointillist field' approach which overturns the Renaissance division of space into background and foreground. This not only means what Murray notes: untheatrical, unheroic, anecdotal narrative as in oral story-telling, where all participants — powerful and powerless, human and non-human — are named and have their story; details are not subsumed in an overall argument, but work by accretion. It also means that geography is not merely an inert scene which sets the limits to history's action, where temporal transformation is what counts: linearly abstracted sequence, chronology, development. *A Million Wild Acres* is ecological history: its focus is a space, the Piliga Forest; it records the changes in that space through time, ultimately how that space has been created by the European incursion, how in fact the modern Australian concept of a 'forest' has been created in a process of densification and diversification. Hence Rolls' book begins with the first European arrival, when the country was open parkland created by a totally different land-use, held in a precarious balance by Aboriginal fire husbandry, and ends with the animals of the Piliga, precariously surviving in marginal, concentrated wilderness.

Judith Wright's *The Cry for the Dead* conceptualises the European landnama of a particular area in a different, but equally novel way: not primarily on the basis of 'landscape' — how the land looks and how it is used — although the area does seem to have changed from marsh to pasture over the years she records; but rather on the basis of land ownership, how culture defines its relationship with the land. Thus her geography is one of confrontation, the story she tells not one of creation-in-destruction, but a tragic one of pure destruction of the
culture and people (the Wadja, though even the name is uncertain) who occupied the land at the time of first European contact. *The Cry for the Dead* is a historical map of deportation, dispossession and marginalisation: the shadowy other side of translation, transplantation and coming-to-terms with the Centre in Euro-Australian culture for as long as two judicial maps cannot coexist in the same space, which would after all be mainly a matter for the imagination to reconceptualise.

To understand Australia demands new ways of reconciling time and space; it reverses old patterns and turns them inside out. The main components of the reconceptualisation, however, still appear to be the two coordinates of images on Christina Stead’s map: the Antipodes and the Circle with centre and periphery. The antipodean may be a mode of perception, or of feeling or of meaning. The map may be cognitive, emotionally or religiously symbolic. The circle may manifest itself peripherally, centrifugally or centripetally. But a conceptual literary geography of Australia would to some extent disprove Laura Trevelyan’s high-minded ‘Knowledge was never a matter of geography’, opening up for us that ‘country of the mind’ which is James McAuley’s vision of Captain Quiros’ ‘mythical Australia, where reside/ All things in their imagined counterpart’.

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