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Return to Hanging Rock: Lost Children and the Australian Ecogothic by Rose Miller

The novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967) by Australian writer, Joan Lindsay, has been internationally acclaimed. Set in 1900, the text features pubescent protagonists and teachers from a rural, residential educational establishment, Appleyard College for Young Ladies, which is situated near Victoria's Mount Macedon. Much of the novel's success has relied on the indeterminate fate of three girls and that of their teacher of mathematics who disappear from a Valentine's Day picnic. The mystery surrounding the disappearance of these characters was intensified in the novel by the editorial decision to omit Lindsay's final chapter eighteen. Some information from this chapter was incorporated into chapter three where the girls disappear. Fellow writer, John Taylor, commented to Lindsay that certain parts of that chapter did not seem to fit. Impressed by this perception Lindsay arranged for the omitted chapter titled 'The Secret of Hanging Rock' to be published by Taylor in 1987, after her death. In this chapter, as with the rest of the novel, Lindsay interrogates the human relationship with the environment and is concerned with the Australian gothic trope of absence as well as colonial influences on the construction of history. After leaving the main picnic site to take a walk, some of the girls are transformed through a direct encounter with a bush landscape. Such uncanny experiences complicate existing representations of 'the wild' as ultimately knowable and tameable by suggesting instead that the land can be imbued with the sacred and transcendent.

The aim of this article is to examine how ideas from phenomenology can be applied to an analysis of Lindsay's missing chapter and used to interrogate the effects of colonialism on the land and the coloniser. There is an intimate connection between place and identity in Aboriginal belief systems and I suggest that Lindsay uses this to question the privileging of colonial philosophy and culture, particularly religion in its western classical and biblical incarnations over other belief systems and alternative ideas of the sacred. Such privileging carries serious implications for the development of a modern Australia. A related problematic is the androcentric position supported by Genesis in the bible where man is given dominion over all living things. This is completely at odds with Aboriginal belief where the Ancestors are integrated with the earth and all beings. Prior to colonisation, ideas of superiority were fuelled by European philosophical movements such as the Enlightenment and provided the rationale for ideologies like that of Manifest Destiny which was used to justify the colonisation of America. Configurations of the spatial are inevitably caught up in a system of power-relations that intersect with issues such as race, religious belief, gender and social class. In Australia, colonisation was founded on the myth of *terra nullius*. This idea that the land was empty, uninhabited and belonging to no one is described by Sven Lindqvist as a legal fiction which in Australia meant 'legitimizing the British invasion and its accompanying

acts of dispossession and the destruction of indigenous society' (Lindqvist, 2007, 4). Genocide was accompanied by bureaucratic acts of re-naming and re-mapping which reinforced a policy that was committed to erasure. The forced removals of native peoples under western colonial rule was 're'-presented as an inevitable decline due to disease and conflict and as Jan van Bremen & Akitoshi Shimizu describe, the 'vanishing race theory' was used within the discourse of salvage anthropology to justify the removal of tribal and often sacred objects to museums in order to preserve the cultural legacy of 'extinct' peoples (Bremen & Shimizu, 1999,121).

The real and attempted erasure of Aboriginal presence during colonialism is also the hidden sub-text that reverberates through the fictional disappearance of white colonial children in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, particularly when the novel's temporal frame is considered. 1900 is a liminal year in Australian history. On January 1st, 1901, six British colonies would unite to form the Commonwealth of Australia by a process known as 'federation.' On January 22nd Queen Victoria, on whose empire the sun never set, would die after an unprecedented 63 year reign. These events signalled both the beginning and the end of an era. However, despite the birth of a new, united Australia, Aborigines were not granted the rights of Australian citizenship, counted in a census or given the right to vote. In addition they could not claim benefits including wages, social security, maternity allowances or old age pensions. They remained, in many ways, invisible to the state. It was not until 27th May, 1967 (interestingly, the publication year of Lindsay's novel) that a referendum granted Aboriginal people citizenship and associated rights. Eventually, the overturning of *terra nullius* and the reclamation of land and sacred sites made possible by the Mabo decision (1992) and the Native Title Act of 1993 legally and politically re-asserted Aboriginal presence and visibility as well as offering compensation concerning land rights. The time periods 1900 and 1967 therefore prefaced significant change in relation to the construction of national identity within a modern, united Australia which would depend for its success on hopes for reconciliation. Lindsay, born in 1896, experienced this transitional era and its ensuing sense of 'unsettlement.' The novel's plot reflects colonial unease as the Victorian era draws to its close and utilises the already well established literary trope of white vanishing to convey these anxieties. The power and beliefs of the indigene rendered marginal and invisible by violence and dominant discourse yet continuing to reside within the guilty heart of colonial society (symbolised in the novel by the British headmistress, Mrs Appleyard), is released and made visible through the disappearance of the white colonial girls and their teacher of mathematics as they climb the monoliths at the sacred site of Mount Macedon.

In my reading of Lindsay's novel the narrative suggests a re-orientation or re-turning of the modern subject towards the material world in an acknowledgment that the human figure is neither the sole nor central inhabitant of time and place. These ideas resonate with the work of French ecological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty who asserts the importance of embodied perception and the idea of 'intersubjectivity' or a mutual connection with everything that is encountered: ... 'ultimately, the subject that I am, understood concretely, is inseparable from this particular body and from this particular world' ... and that ... 'each existence understands itself and understands the others.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 431). The

concept of intersubjectivity problematizes the separation of ‘the civilised’ from constructions of what it means to be ‘wild’. From the nineteenth century, Australian literature had represented the wild as a hostile contrast to the relative safety of settler communities. One early example is John Lang’s short story, ‘The Ghost Upon the Rail’ (1857) which at once positions the European reader in an uncanny time-space, set during a winter’s night in the middle of July (in Gelder & Weaver, 2007, 11). The bush, in particular was configured as an absent presence, described by Gelder & Weaver as ‘a kind of Gothic vacuum’ (Gelder & Weaver, 2007, 5). A place of loss, disorientation and death, the bush topos is a key feature of what might be regarded as an Australian ecogothic.

The Australian Ecogothic

The project of defining and analysing a set of characteristics for an Australian ecogothic is more ambitious and complex than the scope of this article. If, as Smith & Hughes have described, the Ecogothic is the application of ecocritical theory to gothic texts (Smith & Hughes, 2013,4), it would include the potential for examining the range and diversity of Australian environments (from rainforests to urban settings) as well as other gothic sub-genres such as the suburban and modern gothic. To support the focus of my analysis, I would like to select two gothic tropes that are frequently deployed by Australian writers within children’s literature and the wider literature respectively. These are ‘the lost child’ and ‘white vanishing’.

- **The Lost Child**

From the nineteenth century children have been represented as in need of instruction by adults to curb their inherently wilder tendencies. McGennissen describes the inherent ambiguity that distinguished representations of the colonial child:

Where the child is read metonymically for the nation; the child is contradictorily asked to embody innocence (and therefore vulnerability) at the same time he or she appears confidently assured about the future (McGennissen, 2012, 142)

School readers supported the vanishing race theory by publishing narratives that represented the inevitability of a white future against a fading black past even if the lost child was found dead. In *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859) published in *Queensland School Readers Book V*, a white ‘wild bush child’ is tempted to cross a river in order to explore a forest on the opposite bank, thus re-enacting a process of colonisation (McGennissen, 2012, 142-147). The child becomes lost and dies but the discovery of the body provides narrative closure in that the bush landscape has been forced to surrender its secret. Other texts which share the motif of small children who disappear causing upset in the community are Marcus Clarke’s short story “Pretty Dick” (1869) and Joseph Furphy’s *Such is Life: Being Certain Extracts from the Diary of Tom Collins* (1903). These texts were still popular when Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families by the Australian Federal and State government agencies and church missions under acts of parliament. The removals occurred between 1909 and 1969, although some children were still being taken and placed in orphanages or other forms of ‘socialisation’ until the 1970s. Indigenous Australian children

became ‘the stolen generation’, lost to their natural families through the intervention of the state. By contrast, in the Australian School Readers it is landscape that lures white children away from safety into the bush which then betrays them. The land, as metaphor for native, threatens to consume the child who represents a new national past and future. More importantly, the focus on lost white children in the narratives elides the real trauma occurring within Aboriginal families as a consequence of forced removal.

There were of course real-life occurrences which reinforced the lost white child trope such as the loss and recovery of Clara Crosbie (1885) and these became high profile cases in the press, inspiring paintings of the period, notably examples by artist Frederick McCubbin (1855-1917). Most famously his painting of a girl collecting mistletoe in a thicket of towering eucalypts where just a small patch of sky is visible is called ‘Lost’ (1886) (formerly known as ‘The Lost Child’) and a second painting ‘Lost’ (1907) features a boy seated wearily on the ground facing away from the foreground with one hand across his eyes, as if crying. McCubbin owned a cottage close to the bush at Mount Macedon and this was reputedly the setting for the 1907 work. Peter Pierce remarks that these ‘visual clichés’ would provide the material by which ‘so many urban Australians in the next century would comprehend the Australian bush (Pierce 1999, 55). One of McCubbin’s students at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School in 1916 was Joan á Beckett Weigall, later to become Joan Lindsay. Exhibited in the Victoria gallery was William Ford’s (1820-1886) painting ‘At the Hanging Rock’ (1875) depicting a group of scattered figures in pale attire enjoying a leisurely excursion. Lindsay would almost certainly have been aware of this painting and in addition knew the Macedon district from childhood. The tableau is clearly referenced in the picnic scene of Peter Weir’s 1975 film adaptation of Lindsay’s novel. Lindsay was certainly fully aware of various cultural representations of the lost child.

Lindsay’s novel in its original form seems, on first reading, to repeat the familiar trope of the lost child and its traditional associations with the bush configured as a space of entrapment and loss. Yet, what can be made of the transformative experiences described in the posthumously published chapter eighteen in this context? To begin to answer this question, I will connect the lost child trope from children’s literature with narratives of white vanishing from the wider literature and then examine their relevance to chapter eighteen of the novel.

- **White Vanishing**

If the critical emphasis is placed on the word ‘lost’ rather than ‘child’, particularly as an adult teacher also vanishes in the plot of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, then the trope of the lost child becomes absorbed within a thematic pattern that reaches beyond children’s literature to form a cultural preoccupation. The lost child paradigm can then combine with the indeterminacy of other white vanishing narratives within an overarching gothic mode. John Scheckter (1981) includes Patrick’s White’s novel *Voss* (1957) in his analysis of the Australian lost child because it focuses on a group of adult explorers who vanish while attempting to penetrate Australia’s hot and inhospitable interior. The connecting factor is ‘landscape’. However, the discovery of the explorers, living or dead is denied thus preventing narrative closure and signifying the triumph of wild landscape over rational man. In many white vanishing

narratives, death seems inevitable and the imprint of white presence in Australian space appears impermanent. Here, Lyotard's observation on the narrative tradition of a country providing the means 'through which the community's relationship to itself and its environment is played out' is pertinent (Lyotard, 1979, 21). Lindsay's novel, as well as offering a phenomenological reading, can thus be located within an Ecogothic which seeks to emphasise the haunted quality of the land.

The present-absence which underlies notions of white vanishing calls attention to or makes visible the dispossession and displacement of indigenous Australians as a result of colonisation. The omission of chapter eighteen at the time of publication denies narrative closure both to the reader and to the characters from the fictional community. The refusal of the wild landscape to surrender the lost children intensifies colonial anxieties concerning resistance to the colonial process of mapping and control. Furthermore, the *fin de siècle* colonial timeframe chosen for the text in juxtaposition with Lindsay's own at the time of writing signals a concern with the environmental destruction wrought by settlement. The withholding of narrative closure is intensified when one of the girls, Irma, is found, but appears to remember nothing of her experience on the rock. The most important effect of the omission of chapter eighteen is that the focus on white vanishing colludes with a collective forgetting concerning the material impact of settlement on the land and indigenous population. Tilley reminds us that this is a disingenuous power manoeuvre:

The textual and critical focus on absence and estrangement distracts from the reality of white intrusion into, and alteration of, Indigenous space. White vanishing functions, in effect, as sleight of hand (Tilley, 2012, 42)

The inclusion of chapter eighteen, while still denying the discovery of the girls to the fictional community would, like White's *Voss*, have enabled some closure for the reader enabling closer scrutiny of the effects of loss on the fictional community. In chapter eighteen, the continuation of Aboriginal presence can be affirmed through validation, as the analysis will show, of a belief in the interconnectedness of all things. Here, the separation of the bush from daily human life (a feature shared by the lost child and white vanishings tropes) has been utilised by Lindsay but in ways that depart from genre norms in that instead of a vacuum or *space* of loss and absence, the bush becomes a *place* where phenomenological connectedness can transform perception and affect the development of subjectivity. Lindsay uses the tropes already familiar to Australian readers to suggest that a postcolonial response is emanating from the land, and by implication, from indigenous culture. Although Lindsay is writing as a white Australian, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* could still be perceived as a text which is postcolonial in essence. The act of being lost in wild landscape forms the link between the lost child and white vanishing tropes integrating these motifs within larger cultural patterns.

Kathleen Steele states that previous analyses have neglected the representations of landscape featured in Lindsay's novel. Where critics have considered divisions between culture and the natural environment, Steele claims that the displacement of Europeans and the absence of Aborigines have either been largely ignored in their readings or remained vague (Steele, 2010, 35). Yvonne Rousseau offered four different analyses of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* prior

to the publication of the missing chapter eighteen. Although none of her interpretations predict Lindsay's outcome her chapter entitled 'Dreaming and the Landscape' does focus on possible connections between Lindsay's representation of the landscape and The Dreaming which is the animist framework of Australian Aboriginal belief and an identifier for the beliefs of an individual or group. All phenomena in The Dreaming are included in a complex matrix of relationships which originate from the sacred era of the Dreamtime when totemic spirit beings created the world. Rousseau draws attention to the man-made structures in the novel such as the non-indigenous garden struggling to survive in the heat, the capitalist origins of the school, the corsets that constrict the bodies of women and girls and the priority given to chronological time and mathematics (Rousseau, 1980, 112). By contrast The Dreaming is eternally present and the performance of ritual affirms a cyclical movement through time representing renewal and a deepening of human connection with the sacred. A mythical event can be a point of illumination (Rousseau, 1980, 116) and the land is the source of all consciousness. The emphasis on cyclical renewal resonates with the comment made by Gelder & Jacobs that 'the relationship between sacredness and modernity, far from being incommensurable, is continually under (re) negotiation' (Gelder & Jacobs, 1998, 20). It is this emphasis on the process of dialogue that seems central to possibilities for reconciliation in Australia. Lindsay's chapter eighteen repeats the trope of the bush as a transformative space where uncanny experiences occur. However, Lindsay attempts to replace absence with presence by eliciting an 'ecosophy' of 'wildness' as I will explain. Thus wild places contain unique possibilities for encounters which result in an increased knowledge and awareness of an interconnectedness that is always already there.

Wilderness and the Wild

Discussing the concept of an ecological philosophy or 'ecosophy', Sean Williams refers in particular to ideas of phenomenology developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968). Williams explains that a Merleau-Pontian ecosophy would explore: 'an ontology of human beings rooted in and enveloped by a living and active world that transcends us, yet has its own immanence' (Williams, 2010, 3). Williams claims that wildness 'has no clear definition that covers its many historical and modern meanings' (Williams, 2010, 36) and that it has more to do with experience than with understanding so is therefore in keeping with ideas of phenomenology. The American poet and Zen Buddhist, Gary Snyder (1990) remarks that 'Wild' is largely defined in our dictionaries by what it is not (for example, not tame, not cultivated, uncivilized, unrestrained, unruly). Snyder reverses these definitions using terms that express preservation, freedom and possibility (Snyder, 1990, 10) but with such a variety of meanings, wild remains elusive, as perhaps, it should; side-stepping the boundary of definition. Snyder also provides a definition of wilderness as distinct from wildness: 'Wilderness is a *place* where the wild potential is fully expressed, a diversity of living and non-living beings flourishing according to their own sorts of order' (Snyder 1990, 12 emphasis in original). William Cronon by contrast, emphasises the various cultural constructions of Wilderness which have shaped public perception. Specifically, Cronon bemoans the abdication of responsibility that escape to the wilderness signifies; an illusion

that he names 'the flight from history' (Cronon, 1996, 17) and alludes to the usefulness of wilderness as a trope which can lead to critical introspection:

To the extent that wilderness has served as an important vehicle for articulating deep moral values regarding our obligations and responsibilities to the nonhuman world, I would not want to jettison the contributions it has made to our culture's ways of thinking about nature (Cronon, 1996, 25)

Writers, then, will construct representations of wilderness to comment on, support or even subvert cultural perceptions of the nonhuman and the environment. This in turn offers a critique of societal norms. Wilderness, however, while also brimming with subversive potential defies the parameters of construction. The intertwining of body and mind and the idea that wilderness is everywhere, in all things and in all environments, encourages the questioning of cultural assumptions concerning dualisms such as human/animal, white/non-white, mind/body which have structured western thought. Snyder connects wilderness with the dialectic of 'inside' and 'outside':

Sensation and perception do not exactly come from outside, and the unremitting thought and image flow are not exactly inside. The world is our consciousness, and it surrounds us ... The body is, so to speak, in the mind. They are both wild (Snyder, 1990, 16)

In *Visible and Invisible* Merleau-Ponty uses the word 'chiasm' to describe how we open ourselves to wilderness. One of the ways in which this becomes possible is through a physical encounter which involves the flesh and the senses in an empathic understanding and recognition of connection. Yet these encounters will always contain elements of unpredictability and opacity because there is something about the Other that remains unknowable; an invisibility within the visible (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 142). Turning to the field of Cultural Geography, Jon Anderson's claim that 'place' is the intersection where context and culture meet and that it is continually being re-made (Anderson 2010, 11) is in common with Stuart Hall's assertion that identity is not fixed (Hall & DuGay, 1996, 1). According to Anderson, places are *ongoing compositions of traces* [emphasis in original] which can be the material markers of cultural life (such as buildings, statues or signs) and non-material markers such as events, performances, memories or emotions (Anderson 2010, 5). Ideas of the sacred quality of the land in Aboriginal belief constitute a non-material trace embedded in the material world. Every event leaves a record in the land. This integration of the invisible with the visible is perceived as an inescapable uncanniness which denies the possibility of forgetting to the national imaginary and challenges previous forms of knowing. The haunting quality of the Australian bush is thus an example of a non-material trace affecting the material world. As a representation this interaction is not only pertinent to the gothic mood of Lindsay's novel but can also demonstrate how the boundary between the two types of trace can blur within the phenomenological experience.

Prefaced by a brief synopsis, the following analysis will demonstrate how ideas of wilderness or a wild ecosophy blend with the literary tropes of the lost child and white vanishing to

interrogate whether a nation divided by its past can hope for unity and reconciliation in a modern and postcolonial era.

***Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Joan Lindsay (1967)**

Synopsis

The novel opens on Saint Valentine's Day in 1900, at Appleyard's College for Young Ladies, a boarding-school near Victoria's Mount Macedon. The first three chapters are taken up with the preparation for the proposed picnic and the mysterious events that will ripple through the lives of the schoolchildren, their teachers, the local community and the wider world. Three schoolgirls and their maths teacher vanish while climbing. One girl, Irma, is found a week later, unconscious and sprawled across a boulder. She remembers nothing of the afternoon of the picnic and neither does a fourth girl, Edith, who had been among the party of climbers and had run screaming from the Rock. During the picnic watches stop inexplicably at midday and the party is launched into the timeless world of the Australian bush and an encounter with a monolith which is six million years old. Beyond chapter three the novel is preoccupied with the effects of the mystery of the disappearing girls on the lives of the other characters. The scandal results in the demise of the College as parents begin to withdraw their children. Mrs Appleyard appears to suffer a breakdown, dramatically throwing herself off a precipice of Hanging Rock. A bush fire rages below.

Despite the focus on timelessness, the novel, as explained earlier is set very specifically in 1900, poised between the end of Empire and the beginning of modernity. A consideration of this timeframe within the colonial context is the subject of the first section of this article. The Hanging Rock, located fifty kilometres north-west of Melbourne, is formed from volcanic activity providing rich soil for cultivation. By 1900 the Macedon area had become a popular holiday resort for the wealthy, including the Governor of Victoria. However, this imposition of contemporary European civilisation on the ancient area is a source of unease in the novel and the Ladies College is described as 'an architectural anachronism in the Australian bush – a hopeless misfit in time and place (Lindsay, 1967, 2)'. The College gardens contain hothouse flowers from Europe such as dahlias (already drooping in the dry climate) pansies and hydrangeas rather than native plants. Jane Suzanne Carroll in her study of landscape in children's literature describes the symbolic significance of the garden as an attempt to recover the Edenic myth of innocence. Yet the garden is selective and bounded and exists on the principle of exclusion (Carroll, 2011, 26). It is balanced against the wilderness which threatens to consume it. This vulnerability suggests the temporary condition of man and of human work and foregrounds the fundamental anxieties which haunt the colonial position. The gardens require constant attention by the English gardener to ensure their continuation and the obsessive maintenance reveals the fear which lurks beneath the illusion of safety and security that has become necessary for the ideology of Empire. The College furnishings are Victorian and 'hideous' (Lindsay, 1967, 2) and the Union Jack is hoisted every year on Queen Victoria's birthday. Indeed, the Headmistress physically resembles the Queen and

Empress described as ‘a galleon in full sail’ (Lindsay, 1967,7) with high-piled grey hair and a cameo of her late husband worn at her breast (Lindsay, 1967, 2). The school’s steady demise after the unsolved disappearance of the girls represents the need, post-Empire, for white Australia to assimilate and adapt to the present and existing environment rather than import a version of Britain or to continue to dominate other peoples.

After the picnic, one of the three senior girls, Marion Quade, suggests a walk to the lower slopes of the Rock to take some measurements as the girls have been asked to write a geological essay the next day. The three seniors, accompanied by fourteen year old Edith, a girl described as ‘pasty-faced ... with the contours of an overstuffed bolster’ (Lindsay, 1967, 6) set off. Initially following the stream the girls then have to cross it. Intertextually, this is suggestive of the journey of the little boy from Kingsley’s tale as well as signifying the crossing of borders from one realm to another. As the girls draw near to Hanging Rock and encounter its wild power they fall silent:

On the steep southern façade the play of golden light and deep violet shade revealed the intricate construction of long vertical slabs; some smooth as giant tombstones, others grooved and fluted by prehistoric architecture of wind and water, ice and fire. Huge boulders, originally spewed red hot from the boiling bowels of the earth, now come to rest, cooled and rounded in forest shade (Lindsay, 1967, 25)

The anonymous and omniscient narrator then bemoans the limits of human perception stating that the girls are unconscious of the deep movements of the rock, the flowers underfoot and the teeming wildlife around them: ‘None of them see or hear the snake dragging its copper coils over the stones ahead’ (Lindsay 1967, 26), an image suggestive of the Rainbow Serpent of Aboriginal Dreamtime mythology. The limits of perception are also alluded to in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, as he describes: ‘there is always an horizon of unseen or even invisible things around my present vision’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 225). This is the impossibility of determinism. Human beings can never fully perceive another temporal being or object. Something is always withheld. Perception, however, is reciprocal: an interchange between the body and other entities. In the version of *Hanging Rock* that was published in 1967, the three senior girls, Miranda, Irma and Marion remove their shoes and climb towards the monolith while Edith begins screaming and runs back to the school party. This signals the disappearance of the girls. However, in the posthumously published chapter eighteen, Lindsay provides plot detail which accords with a phenomenological reading of the text. The reader is made aware that we are entering an eternal present:

It is happening now. As it has been happening ever since Edith Horton ran stumbling and screaming towards the plain. As it will go on happening until the end of time ... To the four people on the Rock it is always acted out in the tepid twilight of a present without a past. Their joys and agonies are forever new (Lindsay, 1987, 22).

This description invites an idea of time that is cyclical rather than chronological. Merleau-Ponty refers to the refusal of western philosophy ‘to locate geometrical space as immanent within mythical space’ because ‘the unity of consciousness, conceived in this way, makes its

variety incomprehensible' (Merleau-Ponty 1945:305). Perhaps it is the plurality of the sacred Other that induces a sense of lack in the colonial imagination and it is this insufficiency that is reflected in the nation's literature through the pre-occupation with white vanishing tropes. Furthermore, existence, claims Merleau-Ponty, is spatial and from inner necessity 'opens to an outside' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 307). An ecological interpretation of death is offered by David Abram as a moment of opening outward into the larger field of relations – into space. To indigenous peoples (and he does not specify indigenous Australians here) death is a metamorphosis, a reincorporation into the cosmos:

Those who have died are not elsewhere – they are present in the very space that enfolds ... Death, in such a culture, is not the closure of time, but a gateway into environing space (Abram, in Rothenberg, 1995,98)

On the monolith, Marion and Miranda feel a pulling sensation. Marion describes the feeling as being pulled inside out. Abram translates this type of perception as one of connectedness:

we are outside ourselves without having to leave, finding ourselves, by virtue of being in *this* place, suddenly connected to *all* places. It is not escaping the body, but embodiment that causes this feeling. It is neither of time, nor space but of earthly *place*, summed up as 'this breathing world as a locus of mysteries in which we participate' (Abram, in Rothenberg, 1995, 99)

In *The Spell of the Sensuous* Abram describes a transformation very like that which affects the girls on the rock:

By acknowledging such links between the inner, psychological world and the perceptual terrain that surrounds us, we begin to turn inside-out, loosening the psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere, freeing sentience to return to the sensible world that contains us. Intelligence is no longer ours alone but is a property of the earth ... (Abram, 1996, 262)

The separations of past and future, time and space are therefore constructions of western culture which are alien to other peoples. It is wildness, affirms Abram, that invites such connections and each place has its own psyche or awareness.

The girls then fall asleep and while they are unconscious merge with the surrounding wildlife. The absence of language and other forms of representation introduces the permeability of the boundary between human and animal life, symbolized in the text by beetles and a lizard crawling over the girls' bodies. They awake to an intensified clarity and awareness of their environment where they can hear microscopic sound. The girls then decide to remove the corsets that they have been wearing. Initially, this would seem to be a rather bizarre gesture, but in a colonial context is representative of a resistance to power.

Historically, the corset can be regarded as a symbol of the confinement and constriction of women's bodies and hence of the constraints placed on the circulation of women in the public sphere. The wilful discarding of such a garment can be perceived as a rejection of the ways in which women have been constructed by patriarchal discourse and consequent cultural

expectations. Women have long been conflated with cultural constructions of wilderness; the attraction of colonising Virgin territory; the Edenic temptation of Adam etc. The corset episode signifies a breaking up of the alliance of woman and wilderness as well as a liberation from other cultural restrictions. Irene Klaver, discussing such separations in her essay “Silent Wolves: The Howl of the Implicit”, affirms: ‘the modern subject is a subject of desire, the desire to become subject vis-à-vis the postulation of an object. A movement in which both are frozen into static identities’ (Klaver in Rothenberg, 123). Indeed, the corsets become frozen in mid-air ‘becalmed ... like a fleet of little ships’ (Lindsay, 1987, 28), a colonial simile which echoes the description of the ‘rigidly controlled’ Headmistress at the beginning of the novel (Lindsay, 1967, 7). The powerlessness of the rejected garments without bodies to give them significance, contrasts with the new-found freedom felt by the women. Identity is fluid and does not have to remain constrained by cultural expectations or the ideology of Empire at the turn of a new century. From a Phenomenological perspective, the corset restricts the circulation of air. As Abram emphasises, air is ‘the soul of the invisible landscape, the secret realm from whence all beings draw their nourishment’, an absence from whence the present presences, and thus a key to the forgotten presence of the earth’ (Abram, 1996, 226). This reading of the corset as colonial object suggests that what might have been regarded as strange material at the time of the novel’s publication had serious points to make.

With McCraw’s assertion that ‘ “Every living creature is due to arrive somewhere”’, a hole in space appears:

She saw it as painters and sculptors saw a hole, as a thing in itself, giving shape and significance to other shapes. As a presence, not an absence – a concrete affirmation of truth (Lindsay, 1987, 30)

Thus, the absence which has always been associated with the bush reveals itself as a presence. This is a manifestation of what Merleau-Ponty refers to as chiasm – the reciprocal participation between one’s own flesh and the flesh of the world – that we commonly call perception– a wild exchange (Abram, 1996, 131). An alternative yet compatible explanation is that the group has entered The Dreaming. Stephanie Gauper has stated: ‘our term “dreamtime” is a misnomer [for] the Aborigines define being in terms of place and space rather than time (in Saviour, 2012,84) Topographical features such as Hanging Rock are often regarded as the shapes or results of totemic beings. However, the entry of white Australians to The Dreaming and hence to the centre of Aboriginal belief is problematic. Possibly Lindsay as a white Australian woman is re-affirming the value and power of indigenous beliefs and ways of life prior to the attempts made by colonisation to eradicate them.

Led by a totemic snake to a hole under the rock, Miss McCraw proceeds to metamorphose into a giant crab ‘that inhabits mud-caked billabongs’ in order to enter the cave (Lindsay, 1987, 32). This is evocative of the billabong-dwelling bunyip from Aboriginal mythology that can take on other forms. Miranda and Marion follow into the cave and one of the boulders moves to cover the gap through which they have entered, indicating the ‘anima’ or living substance of the rock over which humankind has no control. Irma begins to tear at the

boulder with her bare hands: 'They were pretty little hands, soft and white' (Lindsay, 1987, 33). The emphasis on whiteness here is again suggestive of a postcolonial subtext. When Irma is discovered she will be unconscious and will remember nothing. Therefore the cave is never discovered and the girls remain underground.

Chthonic Space

Wealth, as represented by the character of Irma, has no place in pre-history or within a phenomenological interconnectedness of all things. The land rejects what colonisation and the displacement of Aboriginal peoples has been motivated by. Jane Suzanne Carroll reminds us that landscapes exist as historical texts (Carroll, 2011, 133) constructed as a palimpsest in which the correlation of space and time is realised through stratification (Carroll, 2011, 140). Caves, graves and ruins termed as 'lapsed topos' open up space or passages to the forgotten 'deep past'; to repressed memories or simply to those aspects of history that have been forgotten or overlooked. Chthonic or buried memories are those that society regards as damaging to national identity and therefore to the stability of a state. Memories have the twofold ability to be summoned by the conscious mind as well as irrupting spontaneously from the past into the present. Refuting the linearity of time liminal places combine memory with potentiality. The chthonic space, therefore, becomes synonymous with the relationship between past and present. In this context, the absorption of the group into the cave symbolises the importance of re-writing history to recognise Australia's indigenous past. This includes the philosophy of inter-connectedness with all things variously described in *The Dreaming* and within approaches such as phenomenology.

In this Australian ecogothic text, the land is not hostile or other but a deeply embedded palimpsest in which the past and the present time are interconnected. Lindsay employs the realist mode to interrogate the gothic trope of absence in the Australian bush. Whereas in the text the absence is ostensibly that of white vanishing, the sub-textual absence is that of Aboriginal people and culture in a landscape which by 1900 has been occupied by white Australians. Where it has been argued elsewhere that literary tropes and intertextual references undermine the phenomenological immediacy of experience (Buell, 1995), Lindsay uses them to challenge and confound reader expectations. The frivolity of a Valentine's Day picnic is transformed into a search, but does not extend to the caves inside the rock. This indicates a pre-occupation with surfaces rather than depths which is perhaps indicative of Lindsay's experience of modernity. In the missing chapter, Lindsay uses the chthonic space of the cave as a symbol for the importance of bringing into presence the Aboriginal and other Pre-history of the land that has been obscured by collective forgetting. The text also indicates an interest by the writer in the circularity and omnipresence of mythical time. Lindsay's autobiography of her early life is titled *Time Without Clocks* (1962) and refers to the fact that watches and clocks would not work when she was near them. Lindsay's belief that ideas of linear time which structure western societies is too restrictive for humanity is also evidenced in the missing chapter eighteen when the girls enter an eternal present. This emphasis, which urges humankind to attend carefully to our connections with all life in the moment of encounter is in keeping with ideas of wild being presented by phenomenological thought.

Lindsay's novel, including chapter eighteen, draws attention to the inseparability of the ecological from the ideological and questions the onward trajectory of capitalist expansion. Ursula K. Heise describes the ways in which the European Phenomenological tradition has challenged dichotomies:

One strand of Ecocriticism critical of modernist thought has tended to privilege philosophies and modes of writing that seek to transcend divisions between culture and nature, subject and object, and body and environment (in Hiltner, 2015, 171)

The novel's indirect references to Aboriginal beliefs signal that indigenous cultures are actively engaged with the welfare of the planet, ideas of human and non-human intersubjectivity and interrelatedness with regard to place, space, time and the cosmos. This complicates assumptions of the 'primitive' which have been used to justify white supremacy and consequent colonial expansion. Emphasis placed on the damaging impacts of colonial ideology throughout the novel suggest that ecological issues are intersected by power and the associated discourses of, for example, politics, economics, education, history, gender and social class. Ultimately, Lindsay's absent chapter eighteen affirms that it is our embodied encounters with our wild selves and wild others that enable us to recover our sense of being in the world.

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