

Worlding the island-continent: the spatial-cultural logics of interwar historical fiction

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Abstract: The naturalisation of the Australian continent and its imaginary closure have long formed an important component of Australia's culture of nationalism. This spatial dimension has been bound up with, but analytically separable from, figurations of Australian identity which were dependent upon imposing racialised boundaries. The culture of Australian nationalism thus depends in its formation upon exemplary instances of an "island-continent" perspective in some of its most prized narratives. This article turns to a specific moment in the cultural history of Australian nationalism—at the end of the interwar period—to examine some influential narratives that construct such a perspective. It analyses elements in two historical novels, Eleanor Dark's *The Timeless Land* and Ernestine Hill's *My Love Must Wait*, which appeared in 1941, as war in the Pacific loomed. By addressing Dark and Hill's parallel projects, it will elaborate on how this nationalist spatial imaginary mediates an Australian national modernity that is also about difference and distinction from its metropolitan models. This is a project of worlding the nation, creating in narrative a meaningful background for spatial politics. These novels show us how Australian modernity finds a point of difference precisely in what Suvendrini Perera refers to as the "massivity" of the island-continent, Australia.

Keywords: nationalism, worlding, modernity and space, Eleanor Dark, Ernestine Hill

Ien Ang has argued that the history of White Australia involves "an assertion of racial and spatial symbiosis" (2003: 54) and that Australian nationalism still embodies a "spatial-cultural logic" (53). In spite of this symbiosis, asserts Ang, critics of nationalism "have to take the ideological distinction between 'one nation' and 'white nation' seriously" (60). This assertion has a periodising implication: while White Australia represents the dominant configuration in an earlier historical moment, Fortress Australia emerges as a recombination of spatial and racial logics (where race was, as it were, under erasure). Teasing apart the spatial and racial logics of nationalism may allow us to address its pernicious effects, but also its potentialities, in more adequate terms. Since 2003, when Ang framed her analysis, the problematisation of Australia's territorial and sea boundaries (most recently under the heading of Operation Sovereign Borders¹), and the simultaneous disavowal of explicit forms

of racist hierarchy (including the preservation, against all odds, of the original form of the Racial Discrimination Act²), have continued to bear out her argument.

In a similar vein, Perera's *Australia and the Insular Imagination* (2009) makes a significant contribution to the critical understanding of what she refers to as the "shaping of territorial nationalism in Australia" (1). Perera identifies a dialectical relationship in the imaginary of Australian nationalism between insularity and massivity:

The imagining of Australia as the island-continent, the world's "largest island and smallest continent," so schoolchildren are taught, fuses the insular consciousness derived from "Great Britain" (itself a conceptual and imaginative insularity imposed on a more complex political configuration) with a sense of continental massivity and regional destiny that aspires to emulate that of another former colony and empire, the United States (11).

Perera points to this dialectic precisely in order to underwrite an analysis of its more recent configurations, particularly in relation to the discourse of the "War on Terror" and the ways in which the arrival of asylum seekers by boat have been understood and responded to in Australia. As with Ang, then, Perera provides a framework for linking the spatial dynamics of "Australia" in the White Australia period, to contemporary spatial politics.

Centrally important to Ang's argument is the non-innocence of "the idea of Australia as an 'island-continent'" (55). Perera, too, seeks to challenge the pre-givenness of Australia to put into question its presence as a "self-evident geographical entity, a body on the map" (18). While some recent scholarship has tended, by contrast, to valorise "Australia's environmental difference" (Robbin, 2007: 215), restoring the frame of the continent as itself a natural one, it remains conceptually and politically important, following Ang and Perera, to continue "historicizing the categories through which we think about the world" (Lewis & Wigen, 1997: 16) by interrogating the shifts in metageographies in forms of knowledge, in political discourse, but also in public culture and the cultural narratives of nationalism. Together, these critics suggest the usefulness for any present politics for examining earlier moments in the cultural history of Australian nationalism. It is to such an examination that this article turns.

When they first appeared in late 1941, Eleanor Dark's *The Timeless Land* and Ernestine Hill's *My Love Must Wait* were understood as parallel projects, seeking to express the Australian nation in the form of the historical novel. An early review in *The Bulletin* ("Two Historical Novels", 1942: 2) considered the pair together, and saw them as "responding to a national need": "there must be," wrote the reviewer, "within the Australian consciousness, a deep hunger for some seer or prophet, disguised as a novelist, to state what this country Australia is" (2). Nevertheless, as the reviewer went on to suggest, there was a "staggering difference between Ernestine Hill's method and approach and Eleanor Dark's" (2). Over the decades since, this formal difference has led critics to position the novels within quite different intellectual spaces: Dark's within histories of Australian literature and women's writing (including feminist histories), and Hill's within media history and popular culture. This article proposes to explore in parallel the visions of nation advanced in these novels. Through this examination, some insight will be attained into the narrative formation of Australia's 'island-continental' imaginary, the specificity of which is so significant to both the racial/spatial politics of the mid-20th century, and also those of the contemporary moment.

Both novels, though published as the Pacific War began for Australians, were products of the inter-war period which was a high-point for the operation of White Australia as a policy. The 1930s were also a significant decade in the cultural history of Australian nationalism, with a number of state and national celebrations of the anniversaries of colonial foundation dates. This period saw the formation of a “historical culture” in Australia which was “dominated by the theme of foundation and geared towards a bright national future” (Nettelbeck & Foster, 2010: 535). The decade culminated in the Sesquicentenary celebrations in Sydney and around New South Wales during the period of January to April, 1938 (Souter, 1987). While these celebrations continued to exclude the history of convictism, Arthur Phillip³ was nevertheless accorded a central place, particularly in the reenactment of the British landing at Sydney Cove on 26th January that year. Indeed Phillip was prominent in celebration and promotional materials which would often “juxtapose the figure of Phillip with some sign or signs of modernity” (Thomas, 1988: 84). Matthew Flinders⁴ was there too, if in less prominent position, among the explorers on a float in the parade that followed the reenactment of the landing.

The novels of Hill and Dark can be seen as both contributing to and responding critically to this emergent historical culture. Dark, who also contributed to Flora Eldershaw’s sesquicentenary volume on Australian women (see Dark, 1938), responded to the tone and content of these celebrations by giving thoroughgoing fictional treatment to Aboriginal perspectives (by contrast, Aboriginal people were enlisted in the festivities in tokenistic ways—see Souter, 1987—and otherwise saw the occasion as one of protest and mourning—see Horner & Langton, 1987), by including convict characters as major focalisers in her drama, and by elaborating a complex interiority for Phillip. Hill’s novel adopts a tone consistent with this celebratory historical culture, and subject matter which is also consistent, but her interest in Matthew Flinders as representing themes of mobility, exile and failure, as well as her investment in the liminal zone of the North, implicitly challenge key assumptions of official nationalism.

These historical novels were quickly taken up by a national readership, and also circulated beyond Australia in different forms among North Atlantic readerships, both critical and popular (Brooks & Clark, 1998; Johnston, 2013). The novels also became key texts in the cultural pedagogy of the Australian state, being used as part of various state educational curricula (see Brooks & Clark, 1998; Bonnin & Bonnin, 1996). In the period since their publication, they have continued to circulate in the quintessentially middlebrow space of the Australian classic, especially in the various series of Angus & Robertson Classics (now an imprint of HarperCollins). Indeed, at the time of writing this article, they remain in print (together with the two sequels to Dark’s novel, *Storm of Time* and *No Barrier*) as part of the most recent iteration of that series, which is in both hardcopy and ebook formats. This popular and official reception, as well as continuous republication, allows us to trace through these novels a line of continuity between the culture of White Australia and the culture of Fortress Australia.

In light of this, it is worth considering the formation and elaboration of spatial-cultural logics within these narratives. These spatial perspectives are part of what can be called the “worlding” work of cultural nationalism. I adopt this phenomenological term as complementary to the frame offered by Ang and Perera in order to stress, too, the ways in which the spatial has receded into the background, become part of what Billig refers to as

“banal nationalism” (1995). Consistent with this, the concept of worlding has been used to describe the work of certain narratives that form a space of meaning which, in a sense, precedes and shapes the possibilities of a politics. Gayatri Spivak argues that certain fictional texts “world” the Third World in such a way that it becomes available for the cultural imagination (and in this particular case as a category of literature). Spivak defines this concept by referring to Heidegger: “My notion of ‘the worlding of a world’ upon what must be assumed to be un-inscribed earth is a vulgarization of Martin Heidegger’s idea” (1985: 260). For Spivak, this worlding as inscription produces a schematic metageography of “worlds”—First, Second, Third, Fourth—which later form the limits of intelligibility and political possibility. Worlding a world in this postcolonial inflection is thus an ontologico-poetic activity of singular importance with respect to modernity, and one to which works of art are fundamental, just as they are in Heidegger’s earlier account. At the same time, worlding in Spivak’s postcolonial reading takes on a specific set of historical coordinates that grant it a political significance that Heidegger’s own trajectory could not, and that point to the way that particular metageographical configurations actually function to produce the terms of the political. This, then, is a more worldly conception of worlding.

In the following sections, I look at the novels of Dark and Hill as narratives that establish a national spatiality as an ambiguous topos that, at the same time, worlds a nation, Australia, as a bounded, “circumnavigable” continent: an island-continent as background. I will thus deploy Spivak’s model to explore an ontologico-aesthetic activity of worlding that is basically nationalist, rather than imperialist. This is what is at stake in these narrative texts. And it is in relation to the metageographical scheme that worlds a world of islands and continents, in particular, that Australian nationalism finds its specificity, and the contemporary configuration of Fortress Australia its history. After exploring the work of these narratives, I will offer some further reflections on the meaning of this specificity and some alternative possibilities that these narratives offer.

Contrasting interiorities in *The Timeless Land*

Dark’s *Timeless Land* narrates the first five years of European habitation at Sydney Cove. The novel adopts multiple focalisation characters, drawing the reader close to the perspectives of historical figures: both Eora, such as Bennilong and Barangaroo, and British colonial officers, such as Arthur Phillip and Watkin Tench. Dark also introduces socially representative, but fictional characters including the members of the Prentice (convict) and Mannion (landholder) families. Alongside its sequel volumes, which continue the stories of these families, *The Timeless Land* has long been recognised as an important text in Australian cultural history. Historians, including Manning Clark and Humphrey McQueen, cited the volume for its historiographical accuracy as well as its compelling narrative form (see McQueen, “Preface”). In her influential study of Australian women writers, *Exiles at Home*, Drusilla Modjeska positioned Dark’s novel as an “illuminating” return to “White Australia’s origins” (Modjeska, 1981: 280) in pursuit of both an explanation for the social forces at work in the interwar period, and some political possibilities for the future. In both cases, a gesture of return is, in a sense, also an initiation and statement on the present. These readings recognise that the cultural work of nationalism reproduces colonial histories as narratives of national significance, and thus speaks to its own present, and to a future set of social and political possibilities.

Before examining some moments of the constitution of continental space in the novel, it is worth commenting on the gendered and racialised dynamics of the narrative and its

construction. Dark thematises the differences of perspective not only between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal (distinguished using the language of race), convict and officer, but also between men and women. In certain respects, gender is accorded greater significance in determining experience and perspective than these other categories in the narrative. Further, and as some critics have noted, the land itself is gendered feminine at certain points in the book (Schaffer, 1988: 106-109). The gendered dimensions of land and perspective in Dark's novel have provided an important entry point, then, for feminist criticism. This is never entirely distinct from the nationalist spatial operations at work in the narrative with which I am concerned. For example, Schaffer has argued of Dark (like certain of her contemporaries), that her fiction "supports, even as it seems to challenge, the codes of national identity" (Schaffer, 1988: 107). Schaffer's analysis identifies the feminised challenge posed by the land, but notes, too, how Dark "upholds the authority of the masculine speaking voice" (108). In other respects, Dark attributes distinct insights based on racial categories, adopting romantic and anthropological discourses on Aboriginality (Muecke, 2004), often with racist implications. Certain critics have addressed both anti-racist and feminist readings to the novel. A recent example is Nicole Moore, who explores Dark's "Aboriginalist maternalism" (Moore, 2006: 184) as an important moment of feminist intervention in thinking Australian history.

A relationship between Governor Phillip and the land as an indifferent antagonist emerges through the narrative. The land becomes active in the narrative, defined by its aloofness from colonial concerns and interests. On the celebratory enactment of imperial possession, Phillip notes how through this indifference "[t]he land was determined, it appeared, to make all this pomp and circumstance look rather silly" (98). (Indeed, this passage may be a reference as well to the Australian sesquicentenary celebrations which had taken place in 1938, not long after Dark had begun writing the novel). In spite of this indifference, Phillip is given moments of experiential insight into the country. Dark offers her character a particular kind of privileged access to a national interior of future possibility. After the fleet arrives at Sydney Cove, Phillip contemplates the work ahead, his judgment shifting back and forth. His perception is altered by contemplation of land: "Suddenly he looked up; the swarm of humanity and its destructive activity was lost, and he saw only the country and felt a strange stirring of excitement in his heart" (81).

Against this "exciting" perception, formed by the intervention of the land, is the perspective of an imperial modernity within which his vision has been trained. This view finds the raw materials wanting, particularly the human materials, and it is against this sense of deficiency that a nationalist difference emerges. At one point, the sunlight dazzles Phillip into a momentary hallucination: "He had seen a city on these shores" (81). He finds it difficult, once this vision has formed, to dismiss what he has seen of "wide streets and lofty buildings and the homes of a free and happy people" (82). Later, the Governor will return to this "ghostly dawn of promise" (218), and Dark links this to his capacity to embody universal values—"his indestructible faith in human dignity and worth" (218)—a universality testified to by their being "instantly apparent to the black men" (218). What is taking shape here is a vision of an Australian modernity, albeit a spectral or virtual one, which is markedly different from the models that the metropolitan centre has bequeathed through Phillip.

However, it is some time before Phillip's perspective takes on the continental quality, and before the narrative, through his character's insights, links nation and continent. Later, the

ambivalent structural position of being between modernities, is spatialised more explicitly. Dark finds Phillip turning his view back and forth between interior and exterior:

He turned to look down the harbour towards the sea, and then abruptly faced the west again, annoyed because he had recognised a faint, irrational hope that a miracle might happen—that he might see a long-awaited sail rounding the point, and know that England had not forgotten him after all. But there was no sail. He must school himself to face the fact that there might be no sail for many months yet, and turning his back upon the ocean, facing the unknown hinterland of the continent, was a movement symbolic of his determination to put his faith not in miracles, but in his own fortitude. (290)

The immediate circumstance that shapes Phillip's awareness is the colony's isolated condition and material scarcity. It is significant here, however, that Dark evokes a continent. Also significant is that the hinterland remain unknown and, in a sense, empty. It is an emptiness that is full of the possibility of the nation-to-come. And that possibility is figured as continental: it is only, as Tench observes later, in that hinterland with “a continent to dispose of” that Phillip can give “his instinct for spaciousness full play” (407-8).

Phillip is thus used to posit a nation-in-the-world which is “caught between” modernities. This is sometimes rendered in affective terms—for Phillip faith, doubt and reassurance—but is increasingly based in an “inward” looking (inward from the coast) sense of the continental. Later, Dark allows for the possibility of a corresponding Aboriginal articulation of this continental imaginary to emerge, but codes it in distinct terms. Barangaroo gains partial insight, late in the narrative:

She looked with jealous suspicion upon the world which was to receive her child. Haunted by a dread which she could not name, she turned her head away from the settlement and looked towards the northern shore whose trees still came down to the water's edge, and still climbed the hillsides as they had done ever since she could remember. Behind that hill the eye of her mind saw more hills. Behind those hills more, and more still. Endless they were, they trees. Endless land. And the camps of the Bereewolgal so small. She felt a little reassured, and was too wise to seek a reason. Comfort had come to her, and she would not seek its source, but was content to hold in her mind an image of the endless land. No man of her race knew its limits. (463)

Barangaroo thus has access to a continental perspective, yet it can yield for her only uncertainty, a tragic perspective. And unlike Phillip in this narrative she is not permitted knowledge of the continent's limits: she is not able to stand at the boundary between outer world and inner nation that is yet to emerge. I will not dwell further on the gendered dimensions of this imaginative solicitude and powerful spatio-temporal closure in Dark's treatment of Aboriginality but it is worth noting how maternity figures in this passage (again, see Moore, 2006).

In the closing sections of the novel, Bennilong too is granted access to such a perspective, as he is ready to depart his country for England on board a ship. Here, Aboriginal access to a sense of the limits of the continent is linked explicitly to death. I will quote it at length, because it is also a moment of perspectival overlap with Hill's novel: Bennilong gets to

occupy, if momentarily, the same sort of “view from the sea” that, as I will go on to examine, Flinders does. Dark writes:

The black man darted a swift, strange look at him. The cheerfulness and assurance with which he had farewelled his friends was gone now, and his eyes, after that one glance at the Be-anga's face, went back to the distant shore, now lying like a shadow along the horizon. There were the high cliffs of Burrawarra, from which, long, long ago, he had watched with Wunbula for the coming of just such a nowee as this one upon which he stood, and his brows wrinkled painfully in an effort to recapture the confidence and serenity of that desire. For a moment he succeeded, borne back by emotion to a time when legends had been truth, and spirits no less real than men, and he saw Wunbula on the cliffs, enormous, his head touching the sky. He saw the lean, tireless legs, the great chest, the upflung head, the strength and the grace and the pride of a man who had never known physical or spiritual humiliation ...

Phillip said kindly:

‘What is it, Bennilong? What do you see?’

Bennilong twitched like a startled animal, and looked again, nervously, at the Be-anga. He pointed to the shore, and for a moment, with uplifted arm, stayed motionless, staring, for Wunbula was no longer there. He looked sideways at the Governor, in bewilderment, and muttered uneasily: ‘Wunbula ...’

Phillip, puzzled, shook his head. This was a word he did not know. Bennilong looked at him in sudden earnestness, his dark eyes full of misery. ‘Bo-ee,’ he said sadly, ‘Bo-ee.’ He made a little upward movement with his hands, and turned himself away.’ (580-581)

‘Wunbula’ in the novel is Bennilong’s father; ‘Bo-ee’ means death, according to Dark’s synthesised Aboriginal language. What follows is a brief epilogue on Bennilong’s return. It forms an ellipsis—the journey itself is, narratively speaking, time without significance. This location what takes place within Bennilong’s country is the only thing that the novel seeks to comment upon. Here it differs substantially from Hill’s novel, which is a novel about travel, motion, and mapping across vast maritime space. In that novel, the continental limits which figure symbolically in Dark’s narrative are literally mapped through Matthew Flinders’s journeys of circumnavigation.

Naming and circumnavigation in *My Love Must Wait*

In contrast to Dark, whose novels have long formed points of reference in scholarly discussions of Australian cultural and literary history, Ernestine Hill has emerged from the category of “ephemera” (Morris, 2006 [1988]) somewhat more recently. Noteworthy recent contributions have emphasised the transnational resonances (Morris, 2013) and career (Johnston, 2013) of Hill’s writings. Renewed interest in the middlebrow contexts of publication and reception in the interwar period has also drawn attention to Hill as a prominent figure in that cultural space (Carter, 2004; Carter, 2011), albeit at the “popular” end of any middlebrow valuation. While much of this work has focussed on Hill’s travel journalism, landscape writing, and popular history, here I will follow Thompson (1987), in looking at Hill’s one published novel, *My Love Must Wait*, as a national romance. This novel is biographical, tightening its focalisation to Matthew Flinders alone, following him from his childhood in the east of England, to his death in London after the thwarting of his plans to extensively map the Australian coastline. Where Dark did a great deal of primary research,

Hill's acknowledged dependence on Ernest Scott's *Life of Matthew Flinders* is evident throughout.

While Dark's Phillip is accorded a degree of insight into the modernising potential of the Australian interior, Flinders is granted something closer to prophetic powers in relation to Australian modernity. He values this virtual space against both the properly colonial milieu of Mauritius, where he is confined for many years (as was the historical Flinders) and the metropolitan space of old London, in which, late in the narrative, he also finds himself trapped. At one point, visiting the South Australian coast, Flinders envisions "A land of vines and olives" (281). At Port Phillip Bay he finds "[t]he wealthiest land of all he had seen in Australia—day-dreaming, he visioned a noble city of homes and harvest and trade, its cathedral spires against those guardian blue hills, three-decker of England at the quays." (291) Later, Flinders routinely asks after "his" continent when he returns to England. When fellow traveller John Franklin calls it "dreary and uncultivated" Flinders responds: "In a continent as wide as that, there surely must be something. God doesn't make three million square miles for nothing. Lost, I grant you—too far away. Uncultivated, I grant you. How could it be otherwise? But it's young. Earth uncluttered by the mould of the dead. Give me the new thoughts, the breath of new earth—and it's there. If I could go back—to know what there is to know!" (471)

Circumnavigation is a key figure for Hill's continental imaginary: the tragedy of Flinders's confinement in Mauritius is that he is unable to complete his charts, and thus the figurative enclosure of the continent. Indeed, this interest in the technological encircling and enclosure of the continent can be found in Hill's earlier travel writing (Hill, 1940) as well as in other interwar forms of popular narrative (Clarsen, 1999). While arguing with his brother Samuel about his motives and whether to continue the journey, Flinders dramatises this impulse to circumnavigate and thoroughly chart:

"I promised Sir Joseph [Banks]"—was he speaking to his brother or himself—"that I would not fail. The wish of my heart is to survey this great continent so that none will need to follow ... but we are indeed in dreadful condition. I doubt I can do it. With the blessing of God, I would have left nothing to be discovered. I know there is risk. For my men I dare not face it." (299)

Banks occupies an important metonymic position for Hill's construction of distinct imperial and Australian modernities. During the first half of the novel, Joseph Banks is a benevolent patron, but the portrait in the second half is more ambivalent, and much of that ambivalence is attached to Banks's contradictory responses to the choice of name for the continent. The worlding of the Australian continent is thus not a strictly imperial process, but a doubled process of producing national modernity between the imperial gaze (here represented by Banks) and a national perspective that is still virtual.

Later, when Flinders is trapped on Île-de-France by the malevolent (in the novel) Decaen, the urgency of escape is heightened by his continental project, localised to the North West of Australia. The coast calls, even before his romantic attachments: "That north-west coast. He must go back. For all the aching of his loneliness, for all his need of Ann, there should be no return to England till he knew. He could not leave things half done." (393) Hill, in her closing commentary, restates the significance of the premature termination of Flinders's trip in accounting for his "failure" to recognise Australia's great rivers: "But he was to

circumnavigate Australia again” (531). Hill’s Flinders also expresses a desire to live in Australia, and in her narrative he attempts to move Ann to Port Jackson after their marriage. Indeed, the “love” of the title remains ambiguous throughout *My Love Must Wait*: is it Ann Chappell or Australia that is the object of his love? Early in the novel, while riding in the countryside with George Bass, the subject of their conversation turns to love. There is ambiguity when Flinders tells Bass: “I’ve been in love so long that I can’t remember” (137). But on reflection, he rejects a romantic vision of love as inconsistent with his animating desire, even though the narrative maintains the shape of a romance: “Romeo and Juliet died for each other—he wanted to live. He wanted New South Wales” (137). Also important for Hill—and made explicit in her closing commentary on the text—is that the Flinders family has descendants in Australia, including Mr F Pilgrim of Adelaide, whose archive she accessed in preparing her novel.

Hill’s narration turns throughout to the laborious nature of Flinders’s charting work: during his voyage he was “faultlessly following monotonous miles inch by inch in his charts” (266; the other great drama of labour here is the labour of authorship of the *Voyage* to which Hill devotes a long chapter. By contrast, it is the production of the archive of correspondence and journals that occupies much of Dark’s novel. Dark’s interest in the generative circumstances of her primary sources works to legitimate the historiographical qualities of her novel). The novel centres on the voyages of discovery themselves, and also naming. A scene somewhere off of the South Australian coast, forms something of a climactic moment. Flinders soliloquises:

“Terra Australis... New Holland... New South Wales... Java la Grande and all the rest, old names, outworn.” He sat up in sudden eagerness. “No. They won’t do. This is a young land, a kingdom of the sun, a world for youth to conquer. The Spaniards called it Terra del Oro, the Land of Gold—that was better—or Austrialia [sic] del Espiritu Santo, that was better still. The Great South Land of the Holy Spirit. There’s music, a benediction in the name. Out of these misty scraps of maps, we’re going to make a true one. Whatever we find, I call the whole land Australia!” (263)

This vision of the whole is premature, and the failure to complete “a true map” is the locus of failure around which the other tragedies of Flinders’s life pile up. Hill suggests in her closing commentary that “the scene is not a direct paraphrase of written history” (527). Later, after he has authored his *Voyage*, his preferred name for the continent is withheld: “The honour of naming his Great South Land was snatched from his hands” (510). Here, the hero of the nascent nation is thwarted by his imperial masters, including his earlier benefactor, Banks. Thus, even as Hill affirms the nationalist assumption of the Australian continent as “a nation in waiting” which “needs only to be called by its name, Australia, to enter into its proper being, its destiny as a nation” (Perera, 2009: 19), she also uses Flinders’s story to highlight the thwarting and failure of such fulfilment.

Reading a settler-colonial worlding of the nation

As has been established in this reading, each of the novels “worlds” the nation by positing a bounded, but “continental”, interior space. This worlding work can be understood in a number of ways. In his discussion of postcolonial nationalism in South Asia, Partha Chatterjee offers one model for understanding such cultures of nationalism. Chatterjee describes the “doubleness” of the postcolonial nation, which must produce an account of its own modernity as significantly *different* to the metropolitan modernity of the colonisers

(1986). Thus, the postcolonial nation produces an “inner” or spiritual nation that is irreducibly different in fundamental respects to the modernity of the colonising powers. Nevertheless, it is a modern vision that requires the same outer forms of state as those that the metropolitan powers have adopted (Chatterjee, 1993). We can see such overtones as an element of Phillip’s ambivalence towards the land and his imperial mission in it. This thematic is much more pronounced, though, in Hill’s positioning of Flinders. The national difference is firmly established by his prophetic vision, which is at odds with those around him.

Australia's status as a settler-colonial society generates some additional inflections of this broader “doubleness” of its national modernity, too. Australian settler-colonialism embodies a “logic of elimination” (Wolfe, 1994), wherein it seeks direct articulation to the land itself irrespective of the mediating presence of indigenous peoples. Some critics have argued against this as significantly different from other forms of colonialism (Krautwurst, 2003), but recent scholarship has gone some way to clarifying what is specific to this form of colonialism and its culture (Veracini, 2011)⁵. Thus the politics of indigeneity represents a point of distinction from Chatterjee’s account of postcolonial nationalisms. The settler does not belong in the way that the native does, but a national culture nevertheless requires some articulation of national subject and land. There is thus an “indigenising” imperative (Goldie, 1989; Ingram, 1999), which can be either appropriative or destructive, but is generally indifferent to indigenous peoples. As a consequence of this, nationalism often draws upon perspectives, practices and experiences of “the land” to fill the “inner” spaces that are made to bear the national difference. In both of these novels, this inner space remains somewhat ineffable, offering spectral visions of Australian modernity rather than being filled out with established meanings.

Thus, the worlding of the Australian nation depends upon key moments of looking outwards to the world of imperial and metropolitan modernity, and looking inwards into a time-space that is specifically national, yet disarticulated from specific indigenous content. It is the land that serves as a national interior, but the land as, in certain respects, “continental” and “massive” rather than full of local sites of significance. Thus, as Perera has argued, “the Australian nationalist imagination predicates itself, retrospectively, on a geographical rather than a human figure: *island-Australia*” (19). Yet what distinguishes this insularity from one of its metropolitan models is precisely the continental massivity, the expansiveness which can form a national *interior*. The worlding of the nation, in Australia's case, depends upon the interplay between these two. As Perera confirms, “Australia is both an island isolated and a world in waiting” (19), and thus “a claim, written of/on earth, for the best of both worlds” (21). Each of the novels I have examined rereads imperial history, including key figures in its official culture, as a national history by constructing for them privileged vantage points on this continental interiority. The novels do this in quite different ways that are, nevertheless, comparable instances of worlding the nation as continent (or indeed island-continent). These figures turn their gazes back and forth: outwards to the world; inwards to a national space-time. These perspectives embody what Muecke describes as “specular and intrepid” (2005) practices of landscape typical of the European imperialist perspective; they are also consistent with Mary Louise Pratt’s (1992) account of the imperial gaze and travel literature. But in their nationalist articulation, they evoke, at key moments, the “island-continent”: a figure of expanse *and* enclosure; a figure empty yet full of possibility, and part of a distinctively Australian geopolitical imaginary against or in contradistinction to an imperial modernity.

The novels “world” Australia as a bounded, continental space out of the materials and perspectives contained in the imperial archive. Both, too, stage the possibility of an Australian modernity that is linked explicitly to the capacity to envision this space. This modernity sits uneasily with the imperial modernity from which it is derived and with which it is in dialogue. The nationalist imaginary must rearticulate a colonial past as a national present and, more importantly, a national future. As my opening comments suggested, this constitution of Australia as a continental space is linked to the politics of White Australia in Dark and Hill’s moment and, more significantly in the present moment, to the politics of Fortress Australia.

Conclusion

In Heidegger’s essay on the work of art, he draws attention to the active, historial (as opposed to historical)⁶ role of not only the artist who creates the work, but also the preserver who attends to its continuity and reception. In light of this, a critical reading such as the one I have elaborated here cannot rest with identifying problematic continuities. Although a strong reading of this Heideggerian perspective would emphasise the relationship between the creation of the work of art and the creation of a political community, the postcolonial rearticulation of this conception of art initiated by Spivak would also, I hope, lead us to strategically identify points of difference between the work of art and the historial creation of the State. Further to this, the specular and spatial, indeed continental, emphasis of my reading, suggests that any such preservation work that sought to undermine the conservative implications of the continental interior ought to look for places where the enclosure of an “island-continent” is rendered symbolically incomplete. There are hints at the edges of these narratives, potentialities which to date have been better acknowledged by scholars in relation to progressive, feminist Dark (see, for example, Ferrier, 2001). Yet in addressing the spatial politics of the nation, it is Hill, perhaps, who is more interested in exploring its ethnic and racialised limits (Gall, 2013). By way of conclusion, I will examine some of these other textual dimensions briefly now.

Hill’s text is a self-reflexive biography, thematising its own relationship to a national history which it is also narrating in a mediated way. One way in which this is done is through the mobilisation of images of undeath, spectrality, haunting and ‘visitation’. As with Hill’s later work, *The Territory* (1951), here Hill frames her task as being to “hear the spoken word in voices from the dead” (1941: 521). Within the narrative, the character of Flinders is also a vehicle for the gothic, emulating Hill’s own self-positioning later in the book. He says at one point: “If the plan of a voyage of discovery were to be read over my grave, I would rise up, awakened from the dead.” (246) Later, somewhere off the coast of the always spectral North of Australia, we find Flinders hallucinating: “Delirious, he sometimes wondered if he was charting his dreams” (302). By this point, the *Investigator* “was a funeral ship” (307), and the narrative has truly entered the haunted tropics of Hill’s *The Territory*. Indeed, from the point of the *Investigator*’s crossing of Torres Strait, we are very much in Hill’s vision of the North, recognisable from certain parts of *Great Australian Loneliness* (1940 [1937]), but dominant in the later work.

A comparable gothicism is harder to locate in Dark’s novel. Rather than thematise the problem of making living narrative from “voices from the dead”, Dark offers a creative resolution of this impasse which depends on the deployment not only of fictionalised events but focalisation on wholly fictional, though representative (of classes, groups) characters. Because we don’t know precisely what will become of Andrew Prentice and others, there is a

metanarrative openness here that Hill's chosen model cannot really summon. Yet Dark, too, has her moments of gothicism. On an exploratory mission, Phillip and the other officers find Receveur's grave ("a strange resting place") which has "already lost its form" with "sand blown over and about it" (178). The formless grave suggests the impermanence of the French presence, but for the intervention of Phillip who has attached a plaque to a nearby tree. However, Phillip finds himself "wondering in a detached way if he too would end like this, giving his body to disintegration in a hard, unfriendly earth" (179).

While both of the novels do have both spectral and gothic dimensions, only Hill's worlding of Australia includes one of the most important precedents for the contemporary national spatial imaginary: that is the figure of "Asia". Turning *Investigator* into the Gulf of Carpentaria, Flinders and his crew discover there Hill's vision of the tropics: "Haze without horizons, sweat and sorrow and thirst" (297). This tropical space eludes Flinders's cartographic impulses, and he struggles to map the changeable coastline, while the cyclone season looms and *Investigator* falls apart. On an island in the Gulf, they discover archaeological traces of Asia:

Ashore on one of the red raddled islands he [Flinders] found an India rope and the rim of an earthen jar, and on another one a small wooden anchor of Chinese framework, a straggle of houses half-built, a pair of the blue coolie trousers worn by the Chinese. There were stumps of trees sliced by European axes... the mystery of the Asiatics again (300).

After leaving the Gulf, the ship encounters an entire of Macassans who metonymise 'the Asiatic'. At the head of the fleet of "Vikings of the Timor Sea" (302) there is a flag-ship without flag: "No ensign flew to the masthead of the queer little flagship, a cross between a Torres Strait war canoe and one of the clumsy junks of China" (302). This ship thus carries a diminished, malformed "China" to the Australian coast. The captain, Pobassoo, explains their trade in sea cucumber, *trepang*, and the market in China for this product. Hill offers this as "the strangest commerce on earth, and the only export from Australia" (303). Throughout this description, Hill shifts discursively between pop anthropology and what Perera calls her "characteristically exuberant racism" (29). There is thus a sort of closure enacted in her description, since these "Asiatics" are figured as barbaric. Yet considered in the context of a spatial worlding of the nation, there is something significant about these visitations: that of Flinders and that of the Macassan fleet.

Perera has noted that Hill's ideological descriptions of this northern encounter (albeit in its rendering in *The Territory*, published a decade after *My Love Must Wait*) nevertheless, and even in spite of their other investments, include a sense of indigenous possession. This meeting on the North coast also speaks to the symbolic openness of the Australian continent as a point of fascination for Hill. This irresolute dimension to the continental imaginary may be designed to provoke a will to closure for a national audience—a will to insularity—but it remains an open point of problematisation, and interrupts Hill's narrative with a certain didacticism that emphasises the presence of "Asia" at the ill-defined edges of Australian continental space. This is the point where continental massivity begins to leak away, where the island's boundaries unravel. In the intervening decades, the explicit racialisation of this space has, to an extent, fallen away, but the anxiety of this openness has, arguably, intensified, fixated, but perhaps no longer fascinated by the limits of the island-continent upon which it depends.

Notes

¹ Since 1992, government policies dealing with refugee arrivals by boat “have inflicted a scale of systemic abuse on unauthorised refugees that can justifiably be described as state crime” (Grewcock, 2013: 11). 'Operation Sovereign Borders', which commenced in 2013 is a militarised update of the Coalition's earlier 'Pacific Solution' (2001-2007) and of the various ALP-led 'solutions' that followed it after 2007. Each of these policies has been intensely concerned with the maritime border space to Australia's north.

² A 2014 Coalition government initiative to alter sections of the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act (in response to a successful court action against conservative columnist Andrew Bolt in 2011) was halted by unprecedented opposition from the public and community groups during the consultation process.

³ Phillip, a veteran British naval officer, was the first governor of the New South Wales colony, from its inception until the end of 1792. The penal colony's existence remained tenuous during his tenure.

⁴ Flinders, also a naval officer, was a navigator and hydrographer who charted sections of the Australian coastline during a number of journeys of exploration conducted between 1795 and 1803.

⁵ More recently still, this model has been rejected for the ways in which it downplays “the diversity evident in contemporary indigeneity” and for its implied incuriosity about “distinctions of period, place and agent” (Rowse, 2014: 310) in Australian colonial history. Veracini (2014) has responded by affirming the political and intellectual significance of the colonialism/settler-colonialism distinction.

⁶ This distinction, active in *Being and Time*, is less firm in the later work. But it remains useful for drawing attention to the ways in which the historical, which makes “life and experience accessible to causal calculation” (Inwood, 1999: 92), is itself underwritten by different “modes of being” that precede and enable its activity, and which it necessarily reflects in its concerns. In my reading, the difference resides in whether the question being posed pertains to the epistemologo-aesthetic or the ontologo-poetic.

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