

Lurkers on the Threshold:
Ghosts, History, and the Indigene in American and Australian Contemporary Literature

By

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Introduction: Ghosts and Nation

The title of Edith Wharton's 1910 story "Afterward," about a couple from Wisconsin who hope their recently-purchased house in England contains a ghost, reflects the warning from a friend within the tale: "Oh, there *is* one, of course, but you'll never know it Not till long, long afterward" (444-445). In some ways, "Afterward" is emblematic of the way the ghost functions in much of twentieth-century writing. It is a ghost story in which the ghost, a figure who has been banished from much serious literature, nearly doesn't appear and is unrecognizable when it does – at least, not until long afterward. This disappearance, the ghosting of ghosts, raises concerns about what has happened to the kinds of issues that literary ghosts used to illuminate in the stories of previous centuries. Jeffrey Weinstock notes that ghosts have historically represented both the possibility to challenge convention – through being truth-speakers – and reinforce it by ensuring that rule-breakers are exposed: "If ghosts do not return to correct history, then privileged narratives of history are not open to contestation. If ghosts do not return to reveal crimes that have gone unpunished, then evil acts may in fact go unredressed" (6). In earlier iterations of the ghost story, hauntings also necessitate exorcisms, allowing for a resolution to the relationships between past and present, memory and history, and the supernatural and natural. The decrease of literal ghosts – and their increasing tendency towards a metaphorical existence – as well as the demise of the classical gothic novel, do not indicate that tension between these issues and in these boundary lands no longer exists, but that the relevant conversations have been transformed. In this project, I hope to show that in making a claim about the nature of ghosts, and in particular the relationship between ghosts and indigenous peoples, texts simultaneously make claims about the nature of the supernatural – whether it is

privileged or devalued – as well as claims about the responsibility to remember and represent history.

“Afterward” is also emblematic, in particular, of the American ghost story, because of the way in which it addresses questions of cultural identity and sense of belonging, an issue that presents itself in the form of Native ghosts. Here, Wharton's New World couple seek an experience of enjoyable terror through and in the gothic architecture of the Old. This is a variation on a theme that extends through American, British, and Anglophone literature – “colonials” encountering ghosts which are older than the younger nations, but also threateningly tied to a colonial sense of ancestral history. This trope is possibly most famously used for comic effect in Oscar Wilde's 1887 “The Canterville Ghost,” a tone that recurs in Australian writer Murray Gordon's 1944 “The Ghost that Came to Darwin.” In both these stories, humor arises from the idea that, unlike their colonial parent, Anglophone worlds are so thoroughly modernized that there is no more room for ghosts. However, this theme also appears in more threatening guises, as in Stephen King's “Crouch End” (1980), where an American couple is consumed by eldritch horrors in the heart of London, or in Rick Kennett's series of Ernie Pine stories, about an Australian “reluctant ghost-hunter” who follows in the footsteps of William Hope Hodgson's iconic supernatural investigator Carnacki by investigating the paranormal in England. In narratives like these, emissaries from the New World are, because of their lack of connection with history, unprepared for their experiences with spectral terrors. In Wharton's “Afterward,” however, the ghost that finally appears is from the couple's own native nation, a fellow American who has followed them to England from their home in the American Midwest, and who refuses to let them forget or remain ignorant of the ways in which they have profited at the expense of others.

Wharton's ghost is not a literal Native, but may in some ways be read as one, particularly as he represents an American spirit seeking revenge for having been cheated out of money, land, and life through predatory capitalism. His identity as a native American, rather than a Native American, is another kind of ghosting: the disappearance of depictions of indigenous peoples within much mainstream twentieth-century writing, American and otherwise. This absence is no doubt motivated in part by increasing nervousness on the part of majority writers about the pitfalls of speaking about minority experiences, but the silence aligns Natives with the sort of ghostly existence they were assigned in works from the nineteenth century and earlier about the “disappearing Indian” or the “doomed race.” At the same time, indigenous writers have increasingly been able to represent themselves and their own concerns about the significance of history and the value of the supernatural. The ways in which indigenous peoples have experienced and expressed their understandings of the relationships between ghosts, identity, and history have in turn had significant influence on the mainstream literary consciousness of the wider societies in which they are embedded. Comparative studies between New World experiences of indigeneity, history, and ghostliness can highlight the ways in which this influence is felt and expressed, and the texts of America and Australia provide a particularly interesting case in that they display a nearly inverse relationship: in America, the ghosts of displaced Natives provide a haunting of national guilt, while in Australian writing, white Australians are frequently portrayed as more spectral than Aboriginal peoples, with implications about the firmness of white Australia’s hold on the land.

Ghostly literature begins, of course, with the gothic, which might in some ways be fittingly described as a dead genre; new examples are created only as pastiche. The classical gothic novel of the eighteenth century, as defined by Devendra Varma, is commonly fascinated

with medieval themes, the potential terror of the sublime, and stark divisions between innocence (the gothic heroine) and evil (the gothic villain), but is, most importantly, “the romance of the supernatural” (13). This kind of conventionally high gothic construction is rare in contemporary writing, and, if seen at all, appears in texts which are self-consciously nostalgic or anachronistic. It is still useful, however, to use the idea of “gothic” as a concept to describe literature of the twentieth century that deals with the kinds of themes of the classical gothic novel – the supernatural, the grotesque, and the macabre – that marked the genre in its origins. Works with ideas, figures, and themes that might be called “gothic” can of course be found in mainstream literature, and gothic themes permeate much genre fiction in not just the areas of horror and mystery, but also science fiction and historical romance. The traditional gothic form may no longer exist, but it is apparent that many of the concerns it represented still do. In Varma’s widely-read construction of the genre, the gothic *qua* gothic, in its eighteenth-century origins, is an exploration of terror – the moment of fear which expands subjectively in time – and horror – the confrontation with forces that threaten the integrity of the self. Varma sums up the difference between terror and horror as that between “the smell of death and stumbling against a corpse” (130). In classical gothic novels like Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), these explorations are always safely removed from the here and now, usually taking place in Europe in an earlier century, meaning that in some respects, the gothic has always been haunted by phantoms of an earlier era.

It is in the era of Victorian gothic revival in both Britain and America, through books like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) that novels with the gothic themes of terror and horror are allowed to prominently occupy themselves with the present. It is the tendency, in more contemporary fiction, for horror and ghost stories to insist on

a kind of perverse and permanent disruption that fulfills the opposite purpose of the more traditional gothic novel. This pattern of unsettling has caused critics like Fred Botting to declare the gothic to be dead because of the twentieth century's failure to repeat "the sacrificial violence by which Gothic forms reconstitute a sacred sense of self from the undead and spectral figures of humanist narratives" (179). Despite its transgressive forays into the world of the repressed and the unspeakable, the original gothic novel is essentially a conservative genre in much the same way that the mystery story can be understood as one: boundaries are in fact broken or blurred, but largely so they may comfortingly be set right at the narrative's conclusion. Mysteries are solved, murderers are caught, and ghosts are laid to rest. Twentieth-century tales with gothic elements, however, are much more likely to resist or refuse a resolution to the concerns they raise, ending with portrayals of an essentially disturbed or disrupted world, meaning that they betray this central concern of the classic gothic. The betrayal frequently reads as an intentional critique of or response to the gothic traditions of previous centuries. Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), for example, despite the book's internal promise that it will follow a traditional narrative arc (there is a recurring refrain of "journeys end in lovers meeting"), closes with the same claim that opens the novel, that "those who walk there, walk alone." The "sacred self" that Botting references is no longer sacred in the new gothic, but fragmentary or already corrupted at the outset, a representation that reflects broader concerns about the sanctity of cultural ideals and reality itself. This tension between older and twentieth-century concerns might be displayed through comparing the conclusions of "unsettling" novels straddling the year 1900. *Dracula*, at the end of the nineteenth century, has an almost comedic ending of bucolic marriage and birth, and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), at the

beginning of the twentieth, ends with its iconic terrorist, the uncapturable and deranged Professor, still stalking the streets of London with his pockets full of explosives.

It is this kind of poststructuralist attempt at challenging worldviews that, I believe, allows new ways of thinking about the contemporary ghost story. We can read it as disrupting conventional gothic, similar to the ways it challenges more mainstream views of human experience and the value of the supernatural. A gothic story requires that a ghost be exorcised, representing as it does an aggressive incursion of the past into the present, and of the supernatural/unnatural world into the natural one. In the nineteenth-century works of the Irish writer Sheridan Le Fanu, one of the most important influences on the gothic ghost story, ghosts are nearly always figured as guilty consciences, which disappear after they have performed their vengeance or are exorcised through repentance and reparation. I claim that in the twentieth century, cultural experiences of the ghost which exist outside the constraints of the gothic – ghosts and spirits which are natural, rather than unnatural, entities – are permitted more entry into Anglophone culture and literature. Ghosts of conscience like Le Fanu's, of course, remain in both literary and genre writings of the twentieth century, and much of the genre of the horror film revolves around punishing on-screen victims for real or imagined moral lapses. However, there are also ghosts who do not seek vengeance and whose presence is not something which must be exorcised but instead accepted or embraced, and spirits whose features combine elements of both. This includes, for example, ghosts like those in the work of Anishinaabe writer Louise Erdrich and Cuban author Christina Garcia, where they may represent natural dangers to be avoided or important links with the past that help to inform the present and direct the future. Though the positive critical reception of these texts may represent the potential for a resurgence of the respectable supernatural, these new explorations of the ghost remain

exceptions within the field of literature, rather than the rule. What ghosts there are tend to remain metaphorical or psychological, rather than literal supernatural events or beings, and the gothic as a literary genre fades to a mood. The disappearance and exclusion of the ghost from so many literary avenues may suggest a problematic unwillingness to engage responsibly with histories of national guilt – but the ways in which new ghosts refuse to be or have no need to be exorcised are at least encouraging in that they represent more adventurous explorations of those histories.

In the twentieth century, the high literary gothic may be thought of as doubly dead – the genre itself has long since ceased to exist in its purest form, and further, many of the kinds of concerns that it represents, those of horror and the supernatural, are frequently excluded from mainstream literary projects. Gothic elements – such as fascination with an uncanny atmosphere or the repressed – creep into a sizeable number of works, but there are few reputable twentieth-century gothic “ghost stories,” in particular. There are exceptions to this, perhaps most famously as in Toni Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved*, or within much of the canon of Shirley Jackson and Joyce Carol Oates, but for the most part, the supernatural, and particularly the ghost, has largely been relegated to the realm of genre fiction – horror and speculative fiction, disreputable inheritors of the gothic tradition.

There are several potential reasons for this. One material cause is that the growth of literacy throughout the nineteenth century, and the resulting public market for adventure publications like the penny dreadful, grew into the pulp magazines and genre publications of the early and mid-twentieth century. Horror and the ghost story became devalued not only because of science's rise in intellectual stature during the twentieth century, but also through the ghost story's common occurrence in forms of media deprivileged because of their popular appeal – the

comic book, the film, the cheap magazine and dime-store novel. Another possible element is the twentieth century's increasing focus on rationality, especially in academic conversations, a process that has frequently insisted on linking serious belief in the supernatural to anti-intellectualism and over-credulity. It is possible that the resultant disappearance of ghosts and natives from much literature represents a reluctance to continue the conversation about the place of indigenous peoples within neocolonial nations, though I hesitate over whether this should be named yet another cause of the devaluation of the supernatural, or one of its results; it seems not unreasonable to suggest that the two are intertwined in some way. In a time when the reclamation of disreputable texts through renaming has become commonplace – comic books have become “graphic novels,” science fiction and fantasy “speculative fiction” – I intend to use the word “gothic” partially to invoke the tradition from which contemporary writing gains its themes, and at least in part in an attempt to brand the concepts with their own kind of new respectability.

Historical context – American Indians and Ghosts

The effects of colonial regimes on indigenous peoples worldwide are overwhelmingly devastating; America's history is a well-documented one of physical and cultural genocide via direct warfare, disease, and endless legal maneuverings through which colonial forces and then the United States Government worked to take from Natives their lives, land, and languages. Roy Harvey Pearce has described how historical attacks on Native American culture and identity began with Puritan concerns over the non-Christian status of America's indigenous peoples, an ideology of “saving the Indian from himself” that extended through and was used to justify concerns over the economic desire to acquire land to be used for farming and livestock. The

desire to maintain and expand a mainstream Christian American identity, and to “protect” white families, was aided by presenting the Native as a physical and ideological threat, against which direct action must be taken and laws erected. This ideology permeates texts like early American captivity narratives, their imitators, and descriptions of other “savage” acts. The movement of protecting white settlers’ lives and interests took the form not only of vindictive actions against and massacres of various tribes, but of massive displacement of Native peoples from their traditional and ancestral homes through legal machinations. This idea of protection – protecting both the Christian mainstream and the potentially desirable citizen within the body of the “savage” – expands even into the twentieth century, albeit in slightly different form via the infamous “Kill the Indian, save the man” motto of Richard Henry Pratt and the Carlisle academy (and others like it) which sought to produce citizens by erasing Native culture and language.

The effects of cultural concerns on public policy, and vice versa, are important contextual information for texts both by and about indigenous Americans throughout the country’s literary history – not only do past conditions inform the writings of their time, but those writings and their history continue to influence and direct the progress of later texts. Cultural exoticization of the Native made them sufficiently Other that pre-twentieth century texts about Native Americans tended towards the genre of the adventure story, including the above-referenced captivity narrative. Early Native writings like those of Samson Occam, as a result, are often posed defensively – forced to be invested, first, in proving that they were fully human and that they possessed a viable culture before they could begin further conversations. Once Native peoples seemed to be safely contained and/or removed, the story of the noble savage and the Vanishing Indian continued up to the twentieth century, describing a doomed race which could be further romanticized because of its ghostly distance both physically and culturally from the concerns of

mainstream America. It is here, as discussed by scholars like Renee Bergland, that the greatest growth of the image of the Indian as ghost in American literature takes place. Washington Irving wrote of Natives that, “They will vanish like a vapour from the face of the earth; their very history will be lost in forgetfulness” (qtd. in Bergland 57). Depictions in this tradition range from Sarah Wentworth Morton's very literal ghosts in her 1790 poem of Indian spirits and love affairs, *Ouabi, or the Virtues of Nature*, to the more metaphorical ghosting of Chingachook and Uncas in James Fenimore Cooper's 1826 *Last of the Mohicans*, where even the title itself indicates that Natives are figures of the past. Works throughout the nineteenth century inherit and participate in this tradition.

The identification of the Native with the ghost is furthered by the tendency of twentieth-century American horror to fall within the conservative spectrum. American horror film *auteur* John Carpenter suggests a useful division of horror into what he labels “left-wing” and “right-wing”:

In “left-wing” horror narratives, the source of the threat is . . . located within ourselves, in the human mind and its potential for creation or destruction . . . *Frankenstein* might be said to be the archetype for this kind of horror. Conversely, in “right-wing” horror, the threat comes from without, something other, alien and external to humanity . . . The archetype for *this* kind of horror would then be *Dracula*. (qtd. in Jones 146)

Ghost stories have the potential of occupying both ends of this spectrum, with ghosts representing either potentially the left-wing threat of the disturbed psyche – as in Henry James’ often-ambiguous turn-of-the-century spectral narratives – or the right-wing threat of dead and incomprehensible outsiders invading the world of the living – like the dead and threatening entity haunting F. Marion Crawford’s “The Upper Berth” (1886). Much twentieth-century American horror (as well as other genre fiction) has been inspired by the high pulp era of *Weird Tales* and similar publications, which were in turn heavily influenced by the popularity of H.P. Lovecraft’s

tales emphasizing the “cosmic horror” of the alien unknown. Right-wing Lovecraftian horror, with its focus on outside threats to human safety and sanity, has persisted through the writings of major genre figures like Richard Matheson and Stephen King as well as mainstream film. Identification of ghosts as hostile foreign forces further encourages their identification with a racial Other, which may help to explain the reason behind the remaining literary associations of American Indians with ghostly presences, beyond nineteenth-century gothic traditions.

This tradition of ghostly supernatural fiction only partially intersects with writings by and about Native peoples. The rise of the Red Power movement in the twentieth century and the increasing ability of indigenous American people to speak for themselves – despite legal and socioeconomic barriers that continue to disadvantage them within various systems – that their stories of dispossession are spoken in their own words. Previous depictions of Indians as savages, whether noble or not, have continued to appear to some extent throughout the twentieth century, including such unfortunate hoaxes as Asa Carter's 1976 *The Education of Little Tree*, which frequently allies Native spirituality with anti-intellectualism. However, novels like *Ceremony*, published the following year by Leslie Marmon Silko, reflect a re-evaluation of the power and efficacy of the supernatural and a willingness to confront the irrelevance of much of American culture to Native lives. Books in this literary tradition can reflect both gothic and Native conceptions of the supernatural. There exists a subgenre of American Indian thrillers and horror which can emphasize ghostly anger – as in Anna Lee Walters' *Ghost Singer* (1994), which creates a world in which Smithsonian employees suffer insanity and death at the hands of the bewildered, raging spirits that are tied to the Native bones in the museum's archives. Notably, however, *Singer's* novel does not end with an exorcism of the angry ghosts, but a realization that history has consequences, and that those consequences must be lived with;

acceptance of supernatural power is the only solution. It is this kind of acquiescence to the power of history that similarly informs contemporary Native writings that view ghosts as a source of information and power because of their link to the past, particularly in the works of writers like Silko and Erdrich.

Historical Context – Australian Aboriginal Peoples and Ghosts

While I postulate that the characterization of ghosts and indigenes is largely inverse from the American position in antipodean writing, much of the process of devaluation of the supernatural exists in Australian writing as well. Examining Australian literature in historical context is complicated by the problem of the “history wars,” a vast ideological rift that has caused significant polarization between Australian historians' versions of colonization. Both America and Australia have their own history wars that take the form of divisions over which kinds of histories are true and what emphasis should be placed on them – in America, this is represented in cases like the question of whether blankets infected with smallpox were knowingly distributed to Natives, or whether Christopher Columbus should be considered a heroic explorer or a genocidal murderer. In Australia, differences along these ideological lines are vaster and surprisingly influential in mainstream cultural understanding, as detailed in the second chapter.

The radical nature of this divide in understandings of Australian history has multiple causes: one is a dearth of accurate written records, another a regrettable history of sloppy scholarship. Research continues in these areas, but the deep ideological gulf that has formed between right and left-wing historians has currently muddied the waters such that it is difficult to determine with accuracy much of Australia's colonial and national story. There is, additionally, a

reluctance on the part of historians to refer to or rely on alternative kinds of records available to them – specifically, the oral histories of Aboriginal tribes, which, in keeping with the standards of their discipline, historians consider “uncorroborated by original documents.” Apologists within the field of history who work with oral narratives must insist, often ineffectually, that “Memory has an augmented significance in a society that has no written records. It enters into Aboriginal narratives, life stories, fiction, and painting that . . . extend the boundaries of conventional historical knowledge” (MacIntyre 46). Given the tendency of Aboriginal histories and epistemologies to spectralize white colonials, this denial of the potency and use of indigenous knowledge may represent not only a protection of mainstream academic concerns, but also a bid to re-establish white solidity and reality by claiming that the overwhelmingly white academy has exclusive access to greater historical accuracy and knowledge.

It may be a recognition of these doubts and questions about what Australian history is what has caused the common tendency of Australian writing, both black and white, to spectralize the non-Native and solidify the Native. White history, it seems, changes constantly depending on the speaker, while even contemporary Aboriginal tribal peoples tend to agree on a common and unchanging history, to the degree that they can often read, with confidence, the historical message of cave paintings so ancient they predate most European culture. Given the themes of twentieth-century Australian works involving ghosts and Aboriginal peoples – like Tracey Moffat's *beDevil*, in which we learn, through the oral narratives of both white and black subjects, about the angry ghost of a white American GI which threatens Aboriginal children – it seems that the academic insistence on the supremacy of Western knowledge has only partially succeeded in permeating Australian cultural expression. In literary texts, even discussing history that has less doubt about its veracity, e.g., Australia's convict roots, is a practice which is often

submerged or avoided because of its embarrassing overtones, and the mainstream's contact with the Aboriginal epistemology of a circular, collapsed time – as well as the stubborn perseverance of ways of life forty thousand years old – seem potential causes for white existence to assume a certain impermanence. Thus, in texts from the nineteenth century such as Charles Rowcroft's *Tales of the Colonies* (1843), white settlers are portrayed as having been forced to adapt their English mentality to Aboriginal ways of thinking in order to survive bush existence, and the character Mr. Crab prophesies white failure on the continent because of the tenacious foothold of indigenous tribes.

The anxiety over the permanence of white occupancy of the continent may also have relationships with Australia's problematic history of land rights ownership. There is an enormous difference between the history of land rights for indigenous Americans and that for indigenous Australians. Whether *terra nullius* was or was not, in fact, official policy during Australia's early colonial period, there are several court decisions from the nineteenth century which invoke the policy of *terra nullius* when finding in favor of white claimants to assert their rights to areas of land in cases where Aborigines had also claimed possession, and court decisions in the twentieth century have, in fact, officially affirmed the policy. Politically, therefore, Aboriginal rights to land in Australia did not exist until only recently. For the indigenous peoples of North America – and, indeed, in nearby New Zealand – the history of land claims between Native and non-Native peoples was one of broken treaties, claims made by tribes, affirmed by government, and then betrayed either through lack of enforcement or through manipulations of the same legal mechanisms which had made such claims possible in the first place. Indigenous Americans were misrepresented and disempowered in land agreements;

indigenous Australians were simply shut out of the process of claiming land altogether because they did not legally exist.

It is not until relatively late in the twentieth century that Aboriginal writers like David Unaipon have had both the ability and access to express literarily their own cultural experiences of ghosts, which their progenitors experienced in the form of deathly-white European invaders. For both indigenous and non-indigenous Australian writers, therefore, ghosts are nearly always white, a construction of comparative racial identity that seems to recur, in various works, as claims of white impermanence in the country, or that living as a white colonist is only partially to live. For example, in texts like Arthur Upfield's *Venom House* (1952), the act of living Aborigines – the ritual curse of “bone pointing” or “boning” – causes madness and death for generations of the settler family that takes their land, thereby ultimately revoking white ownership. The cumulative effect of white impermanence in these texts speaks to this image not as ghosts which happen to be in Australia, but ghosts which are specifically created by Australian social and national narratives.

It is apparent, here, that the trends of Australian and U.S. national literatures grow out of colonial and expansion periods that have enough to link them ideologically, but in contexts different enough to act as foils to each other. Comparing the relative histories of interactions between indigenous and non-indigenous populations of the two countries gives an oddly inverse relationship, in part because of this question of land rights, in part because of different economic relationships – American Natives were essential for white survival in colonial America, then later discarded when they ceased to be so important, while Aborigines were initially perceived to have nothing of value to offer white colonists and only later became important as guides and trackers. Both nations see significant displacement of Native peoples into undesirable land seen

initially as both uninhabitable and unprofitable by white forces – eastern and southeastern American Indians are driven westwards (most memorably on the 1838-1839 Cherokee Trail of Tears), while Australian Aborigines are driven from the coastlines into the interior of Australia. The circumstances of these displacements, however, were markedly different: the U.S.'s much longer history of white/Native relations included mutual beneficial trade, intermarriage, more politically-driven land needs, larger populations of both Natives and non-Natives, and more sustained and organized conflicts during the Indian Removal period. Australia, in turn, had an accelerated conflict period, in which smaller, less organized Aboriginal tribes were more quickly killed off and/or pushed out of their traditional lands and into the Outback's desert, for reasons of convenience by a smaller white population largely uninterested in any serious commercial or cultural interchange.

The white populations and ideologies of each nation were, additionally, dissimilar: the colonization of America was driven by a diversity of causes, ranging from religious refugees to pure naked commercial interests. Though the US had its share of imported British prisoners and indentured servants, the vast majority of American settlers were individuals who *desired* to be there, even if it was simply because it was better than the place they'd left. In contrast, a much larger proportion of early Australian immigrants were convicts, and there involuntarily, resulting in a national concern over the "convict stain" – both within its population, and as regarding their international reputation. The white population of colonial Australia was therefore both sparser than that of America, and more likely to view themselves in a derogatory way than their American counterparts, who were pursuing Manifest Destiny while ships of convicts were still arriving on Australia's shores. These two competing versions of white/colonial ego almost

necessarily played a part in dictating the colonists' relationships to the inconvenient indigenes they dealt with.

The literary histories regarding indigeneity, as briefly outlined above, also form an inverse pattern in terms of who is destined to outlive whom. It is through this contrast that the oddity of each tradition becomes clear: It *seems* natural within American writing to create fictional worlds in which the Indian is necessarily representative of the past dead, but similarly natural within Australian writing that the white population should be thought of as temporary spirits, ghosts. For each national consciousness, the existence of the opposing tradition's ways of depicting ghosts and indigenes highlights the ways in which their understanding is not natural, but constructed by the intersections of native and non-native understandings.

Methodology

In some ways and in some cases, comparing indigenous and non-indigenous writing may be thought of as already transnational, as individual indigenous nations struggle to speak with and against the broader country they are located in, as well as engaging with other indigenous national voices. To broaden the comparative act to one that encompasses the United States and Australia – which, because of the above considerations, we might think of as countries composed of nations – is an extension of this kind of transnational thought, not a fundamental change in theoretical approach. The value of comparative literary work, as referenced in the previous section, is that it may non-naturalize national constructions of history and identity by indicating alternate ways of understanding. The idea of indigeneity, as one of these constructed areas, occupies a unique place in the understandings of self and nation. At least since Fanon's entrance into postcolonial theory, it is fairly common practice to think about race in terms of Self and

Other, an approach relevant to Native and Aboriginal studies because so often the negative treatment of indigenous groups has been justified not only by the supposed superior value of European culture, but also European racial superiority. The idea of Otherness usefully applies in the current study not only because of this historical emphasis on racial divisions between colonial and indigene, but also because ghosts, the spirits of the dead, are similarly Other – both persons and non-persons, often capable of thought and emotions but separate from the living world.

It is true that the major theorists within the field of postcolonial studies have come out of colonies where indigenous populations have struggled to reassert and redefine themselves in the wake of colonial rule after the colonial government is out of power: the Middle East, Africa, and India. Problematic, however, are countries which no longer operate as outposts of larger colonial empires, but as independent entities; within the field of Anglophone writing, the primary countries are in this field are Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, a category to which the United States can be somewhat awkwardly appended. These latter nations are no longer colonial in that they utilize independent rule and have their own sense of nativity/Nativeness beyond their English and European roots. Some critics object, however, to these countries being considered “postcolonial” in that they still exist at the cost and detriment to the indigenous peoples of their land, so that their representation of self fits only uneasily into postcolonial theory. Alternatively, other theorists writing on these countries – for example, Graham Huggan on Australia, Laura Moss on Canada, C. Richard King on the United States – have proposed understanding these nations as postcolonial, for lack of a better theoretical framework to understand the problems posed by their historical circumstances. Tamara Palmer Seiler, in speaking specifically of Canadian literature as postcolonial, proposes a theoretical

construction which might be applied across these nations, claiming that theories of postcolonialism are “discourses that, in complex interaction, express . . . experience on the margins of several empires – and experience that continues to be shaped not just by difference, but by various kinds of difference, as well as by complex hybridity that is never static” (qtd. in Moss 62). For lack, again, of a better term, I would like to position these nations as “neocolonial,” a term which is potentially problematic, given its connotations in contemporary economic and geopolitical arguments. Neocolonialism, however, seems an appropriate concept to apply to these countries because of its usual association with one power’s economic dominance over other, economically suppressed nations, and given the frequently deprivileged economic and cultural relationships of indigenous tribes and nations with the larger countries in which they now find themselves to be embedded.

Within this understanding of a liminal neocolonialism, in which the nations of Australia and America can never quite fit into the categories that postcolonial theory currently comfortably serves, the problem of Self and Other is a further confusion. As Terrie Goldie has postulated, within the broad context of these neocolonial countries, the Indigene can never be fully Self – because of their obvious alienness from the dominant neocolonial culture – nor Other – because their privileged Native-ness precludes total alienness. Instead, they are the exotic Other which the white Self must somehow absorb – becoming ghosts in US texts – to become Native in turn. Always uncomfortably aware that previous civilizations represent a threat to whites being “real” Americans, Canadians, Australians, etc., members of white neocolonialist nations often feel challenged to assume some of the trappings and identity of the Native, a process which Goldie has helpfully named “indigenization.”

It is this need to assume the identity of a National Native that seems to have informed, largely, nineteenth-century American depictions of the "vanishing Indian." Renee Bergland has discussed how the figures of the doomed, marginalized Indians in works of authors like James Fenimore Cooper and Nathaniel Hawthorne allows for dominant white America to feel regret at the "inevitable" displacement of the continent's Native peoples, but also allows them to re-envision America as newly emptied for their use. The era of Mohicans may be coming to a close, but Hawkeye, in his various indigenized forms, remains. Bergland notes that though some ghosts in these kinds of texts "register dissatisfaction with the European conquest of the Americas, the fact that they are ghosts testifies to the success of that conquest" (2). The country may have already been occupied when white settlement began, run the implications, but those people have now gracefully faded away, leaving not only an open country ripe for habitation, but also an inheritance of Nativity for the expanding nation.

I intend, in part, to discuss how this vanishing is both discontinued and re-enacted through twentieth-century American texts. The theme of the Vanishing Indian continues to haunt, as it were, some of those texts that contain indigenous characters, though the focus is now more frequently directed towards the issue of white guilt. More commonly, though, the idea of the Native is entirely absent from books from white writers concerned with national identity and social anxieties of the twentieth century, while a small but significant number of Native writers attempts to fill the gap. While in theory this makes for greater verisimilitude in narratives attempting to express nuanced ideas of the indigene and indigeneity, in practice much major literature of twentieth-century America reads as though the vanishing project of the nineteenth has succeeded: there are simply no Indians within its pages, just as Indians gradually disappear

from films about the American West – though they are no longer vilified, they frequently fail to be replaced with a more positive image.

Though Australia has its own incidences of indigenization and tensions of aligning aboriginality with national identity, they frequently take different forms, and in different time frames, than those of the United States. Australian literature is in its themes almost infamously echoing those of literature written a few decades earlier in the United States or Britain. Trends are late to arrive on its shores and are often derivative; early Australian genre fiction, for example, has an English drawing-room flavor and later adopts an American adventure tone, and while this tendency has decreased as information technology has shrunk the distance between countries and cultures, some propensity for retrospective writing still remains. Its award-winning books, on lists both in and outside of the country, are riddled with historical fiction, reflecting the nation's fascination with its own past. Australia, struggling for identity, attempts to define itself as a nation through much of the early twentieth century by separating Australian-ness from British-ness. It is around this same time that Australians begin to self-consciously construct an Australian literature, especially after the perceived betrayal of Australian troops by the British during the Great War and at Gallipoli in particular. This growth increased during World War II as a result of anxieties about the proximity of action in the Pacific Theater, resulting in calls for writers to present a united front against invasion. In constructing a national literature, therefore, it is usually less important for white Australian writers to position themselves against non-white Aborigines than to position themselves against threats from outside: both the colonial parent and the threat of Asia. This results in phenomena like the figure of the effeminate and ineffectual Englishman/woman within Australian writing, as well as Australian “yellow peril” fiction and non-fiction. In a related vein are indigenization oddities

like the Jindyworobak Movement, an Australian nationalistic group of writers dedicated to promoting indigenous culture and ideas between the 1930s and the 1950s – though the group was named with an Aboriginal (Woiwurrung language) word for “join,” it contained no actual Aborigines, and the “Jindys” have since become nationally representative of well-meaning, paternalistic white imperialism, as detailed by Jennifer Strauss in her analysis of early twentieth-century Australian writing. Until the 1960s, there was, in fact, only one published Aboriginal writer, David Unaipon, though other Aboriginal voices and stories were transcribed by white writers.

As the language in this introduction indicates, it can be difficult to establish the appropriate terminology to describe the relationships between the different groups involved. I intend “Indians” to represent only the indigenous peoples of North America, “Aborigines” to refer only to indigenous Australians, and both “Native” and “indigene” or “indigenous” to indicate both. Similarly, I hope for “mainstream,” “non-Native,” and “white” to indicate non-Native Americans and Australians. Australia has its own racial rhetoric, popularly accepted in both indigenous and non-indigenous communities, of labeling individuals as either “blackfella” or “whitefella,” (alternatively, blackfeller/whitefeller) which also occurs occasionally here, as it both occurs within the texts I discuss and addresses the additional complication of skin color being a more major factor for Australian Aborigines than for most American Indians. While these labeling systems reduce the racial history of both countries to a dichotomy rather than a spectrum, it does at least avoid the problem of overly long descriptions. It also reproduces, to some extent, the kinds of divisions that have been frequently created by legal procedures and cultural constructions, as well as ideological cultural boundaries which occur within the texts themselves.

Overview

Ultimately, what this work attempts to do is to open up the possibility that looking at the competing versions of ghosts – both between America and Australia, and between Native and non-Native texts – opens up the possibility of nation reformation through the act of literally rewriting history. To do so, I start first with what appears to be “settled history” – ghosts in the American and Australian literary canon, represented here by Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House* (1925) and Patrick White’s *Voss* (1957), respectively. Though separated by a generation, both ruminate on the historical sources of their respective nations, and arrive at separate conclusions, with Cather focusing on the ghostliness of pre-colonial American Indians, and White instead largely spectralizing his white Australian characters. The second chapter then explores ways that “settled” history has been questioned and rewritten by examining two books on the Tasmanian genocide: Robert Drewe’s *The Savage Crows* (1976), and Mudrooroo’s *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983), in which the perspectives of white and Native characters – by a white and a “Native” author – present different characterizations of those events.

The third chapter examines the oeuvre of a particular writer dealing with Natives – H.P. Lovecraft and his “posthumous collaborator” August Derleth – which is both instrumental to understanding the foundation of the horror genre in which defines ghosts for much of the twentieth century, and whose work can be read as an intentional attempt to write America into existence as entirely white. The fourth and final chapter is an exploration into ways that genre has both been built upon and subverted by Native voices, by examining, in particular, Devon Mihesuah’s novel *The Roads of My Relations* (2000) and Tracey Moffatt’s film *beDevil* (1993).

There are a multitude of sites of conflict that occur within these comparisons: America/Australia, Native/non-Native, past/present, living/dead, damaged/whole. I hope within the following pages to explore ways in which looking at these conflicts show us that they are not necessary or inevitable points of conflict, but instead suggest a porousness in our histories and identities that allow us to change the way that we move towards a future.

Chapter One: The Ghost as History in *Voss* and *The Professor's House*

“Feel differently about the ground you walk over every day”

Historian P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, while describing ghostly traditions, explains, “the living feel some continued responsibility for their dead, some obligation to fulfill their possible needs. Hence graves are tended, prayers said, anniversaries observed” (13). To expand on this idea, it is apparent that the way one’s personal ghosts are treated is sometimes indistinguishable from the way that one’s national history is treated – national events long outside of living memory receive their own graves, prayers, and anniversaries, and can be said to have gained their own ghosts. This relationship with the dead, particularly literarily, is complicated by the ghost’s place in social imagination. Its association with the Gothic tradition ties the ghost to both the uncanny and the grotesque. If a national history, therefore, is a kind of ghost or dependent on ghosts, does that mean that history is also uncanny, or also grotesque?

Much of the history surrounding the colonization of both America and Australia, is, of course, violent or inhuman to the point of grotesquerie, particularly interactions between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. I will argue here that the texts I use – Willa Cather’s *The Professor's House* (1925) and Patrick White’s *Voss* (1957) – self-consciously fill their discussions of history with literal or figurative ghosts because, in part, of these kinds of conflicts.

But furthermore:

The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively

. . . into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition. (Gordon 8)

The idea of being haunted by history is, indeed a “very particular” way of thinking of it. I would suggest the sense of history being an uncanny haunting emerges in these texts as well. The dead, as Maxwell-Stuart reminds us, need to be venerated – but some of their actions are unvenerable. The uncanny figure of the ghost emerges out of the clash between veneration and horror, and Cather and White’s texts demand, to use Gordon’s words, transformative recognitions of their respective nations as haunted countries in the same fashion of 19th-century haunted Gothic castles.

Both *Voss* and *The Professor’s House* are bifurcate novels, each containing one narrative that encompasses the domesticated world and another, parallel narrative describing the unknown wilderness surrounding and excluded by that sphere. The heart of *The Professor’s House*, and the portion which Cather wrote first, is the wilderness memoir of the founding Tom Outland, a first-person journal which describes his explorations in Blue Mesa, New Mexico, where he discovers an ancient Native cliffside city based by Cather on the real ruins of Mesa Verde. Outland’s narrative is ultimately one of disillusionment, as he attempts to convince other Americans – including the Smithsonian and the Bureau of Indian Affairs – of the important and astonishing nature of his discovery, only to have them ignore him. Ultimately, without his knowledge or permission, Outland’s working partner sells the entirety of the contents of the ruins – including the bodies of its indigenous inhabitants – to a German collector, and Outland leaves the Southwest grieving the loss.

Outland’s journal is embedded in a longer novel detailing the domestic sphere, which occupies roughly the first two-thirds and the final few chapters of the text, describing the academic and personal life of Professor Godfrey St. Peter, who Outland studied under after the

events of his journal. St. Peter is a professor of history in the town of Hamilton, in an unnamed Midwestern state that borders Lake Michigan, where he is able to devote most of his time to his academic writing because of his family's relatively recent wealth. The source of their fortune is Outland's estate; he has died in France in the first World War, and willed everything to his fiancée, St. Peter's daughter Rosamond. During his life, Outland invented and patented the Outland vacuum, also known as "the gas"; its exact nature is never explained, but it has unexpectedly become massively profitable through its aeronautical applications. St. Peter, uncomfortable both with the source of his wealth and his family's avaricious response to it, prefers to remain in the family's older, smaller house to perform his academic work and edit Outland's journal in solitude. At the text's conclusion, he goes to sleep in his attic workspace; he wakes smelling gas from a malfunctioning stove, and ambiguously is either helplessly overcome by it or passively allows himself to commit suicide. He is, however, rescued by the family's sewing-woman, and resigns himself to live his life "without delight," colored by his contemplations of Outland's journal. Cather's divided narrative gives us what John N. Swift describes as "a pivot or moment in which two worldviews or aesthetics self-consciously [compete]: worldliness and escapism, materialism and idealism, the overfurnished and the *démeublé*" ("Fictions" 176).

While White's novel also depicts two different worlds, the individual narratives are not as discretely divided into sections as they are in *The Professor's House*. Instead, the setting alternates between Laura Trevalyn's privileged experiences in the outskirts of genteel Sydney and Voss' struggles in the great inland desert of the Australian continent. *Voss* is a piece of historical fiction, using as its source Prussian explorer Ludwig Leichhardt's fatal 1848 attempt to explore the interior of Australia. Leichhardt, like so many others over the course of Australian

history, disappeared mysteriously and entirely into the country's voracious Outback, leaving few traces and no written records. This absence of official recorded history allows White to envision a transcendent experience for his fictional explorer, Voss, whose goal is to create Australia via the acts of exploration and mapping. His impractical party of explorers contains seven white men, six of whom have little experience of the wilderness and one, Judd, who serves as guide because of his status as a former convict forced to labor in the Outback. Though they are further accompanied by two traditionally tribal Aboriginal men, the elderly Dugald and teenaged Jackie, the party is ultimately doomed. Though half the party rebels and, led by Judd, attempts to return to settled lands, both groups are slowly killed by starvation, disease, and hostile Aboriginal tribes. Judd is the sole survivor of his group's journey, while Voss' men are captured by a tribe who demands that Jackie demonstrate his Aboriginal allegiance and manhood by executing Voss, the white man he has begun to worship.

These scenes of desperation and violence are interposed with *Voss*' representations of the domestic sphere, Laura Trevalyn's life in Sydney, where she chafes against what she perceives to be a petty world of marriage and financial concerns. The English Laura and German Voss – both newly-Australian – meet only once, briefly, at the novel's outset, at the house of Laura's wealthy relatives, the Bonners, who are largely responsible for funding Voss' expedition. However, two are so struck by each other that they enter a kind of immediate spiritual marriage. Laura, contemplating Voss' journey, struggles towards an intellectual and moral maturity that will ultimately surpass that of Sydney's domestic sphere; when a sexually disgraced housemaid dies in childbirth, Laura adopts the child, whom she names Mercy. As Voss sickens in the distant Outback, Laura does so simultaneously in Sydney, and the two become linked through a supernatural series of visions of each other that join them in suffering: Laura speaks feverishly to

Voss as she lies on her sickbed, while Voss develops his relationship with a dream-Laura. Laura's fever breaks as Jackie decapitates Voss, and ultimately she and the ex-convict Judd are the only white witnesses who survive to bear witness to the exploration's failure and speak of its meaning.

The competition between opposing viewpoints, in both texts, suggests unresolved tension over how these nations establish their temporal identities – the ways in which they see themselves relating to history, as well as the kinds of futures they envision for themselves. The characters of *Voss* are constantly reaching towards their future, though the novel, as a piece of historical fiction, raises the specter of the origins of the country and the various kinds of grotesqueries that occurred there. *The Professor's House*, occupying a different genre and focused more directly on recent and ancient history, has a morally post-apocalyptic tone in keeping with other post-WWI aesthetics. The novel, like its contemporaries *Great Gatsby* and *Babbitt*, has a view of the new America, and its future, as a place populated by those with ghostly, insubstantial ethics. In both novels, there is no “safe” time to exist – past, present, and future all contain problematic ghosts.

Further, the divided narratives in each text are complexly interrelated to each other, and ultimately inseparable. Part of the project of these novels is that they confuse and complicate the two different spheres which they describe: the “empty” wilderness shows signs of occupation, while civilization becomes demonstrably empty of important human emotions and concerns. Nationality and identity also become confused: Outland discovers that the nature of American-ness is complicated by previous generations of indigenous peoples. Voss, however, finds a history of Australia which insists on an Aboriginal autonomy, one that resists efforts to be co-opted by the land's new inhabitants in their bid for authentic nativity. I would like to suggest

that another line that becomes blurred or inverted in these two texts is the one between the land of the living and the land of the dead, and that this theme of hybridity caused via haunting is what ultimately both claim to be a creative, honest method by which to experience national identity.

***The Professor's House* and the new Gothic narrative**

In Cather's *The Professor's House*, the character Tom Outland notes in his journal that, "To people off alone, as we were, there is something stirring about finding evidences of human labour and care in the soil of an empty country. It comes to you as a sort of message, makes you feel differently about the ground you walk over every day" (194). Outland's "evidences," his discoveries of a pre-historical indigenous presence, consist at first only of stone tools and pottery shards found on the ground, clues that ultimately lead him to an entire forgotten, vacant cliff-dwellers' city. For Outland, the "different feeling" he describes is initially one of awe, a feeling he tries, and fails, to share with those around him. He meets with blank incomprehension from both his partner (who sells the relics they find to a German collector) and the official guardians of America's past – representatives of the Smithsonian museum, who refuse to show the appropriate concern for his discoveries because they "don't care much for dead and gone Indians" (Cather 235).

Over the course of the novel, Outland's altered feeling about the ground "walk[ed] over every day" becomes a twofold challenge to conventional discourse over American-ness. One of these challenges causes Outland to begin to understand his country not as empty and therefore discoverable but instead as already preinhabited and therefore claimed by others. The other challenge posed is to an understanding of the American landscape as something that simply can

be used – mined, farmed, or ranched – and instead seeks to define it as a place that, because of its sacredness as “home,” has emotional meaning and demands responsibility. Both insist on a reconceptualization of American identity that builds upon an indigenous past, acknowledging that the national myth of American exceptionalism is dependent upon and interwoven with more previous generations of inhabitants than the twentieth century always cares to remember. Outland’s name itself contains a similarly doubled meaning; linguistically, it suggests the German “Ausländer,” or “foreigner” – the stranger who cannot be at home – and Outland’s status as an orphan is a driving force behind his explorations. But he can also be seen, ultimately, as a figure who comes out of the land, who ultimately creates his identity based on the connection he feels to the Native bodies and creations he discovers. Outland’s discovery sends him on a crusade to demand recognition of America as a haunted country, and it is his failure to convince those he meets that allows Cather to reimagine the Gothic narrative arc and the relationship between indigeneity and nationality.

Much of Cather’s writing, as Susan Rosowski has noted, incorporates some elements of the classical high Gothic, such as the threatened heroine of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, the shadowy presence of Catholicism and Gothic sense of space in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *The Professor’s House*, and unstable boundaries of various kinds. Ann Radcliffe’s eighteenth-century works, foundational to the Gothic tradition, are often preoccupied with descriptions of the kinds of crumbling Gothic Catholic structures from which the genre takes its name, as in her 1794 novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*: “the edifice . . . was vast, ancient and dreary. . . . two round towers, crowned by overhanging turrets, embattled, where, instead of banners, now waved long grass and wild plants, that had taken root among the mouldering stones, and which seemed to sigh, as the breeze rolled past, over the desolation around them.”

Radcliffe's exoticization of Catholicism finds an echo in Cather's interest in America's southwestern missions; Radcliffe's descriptions of looming and ornate architecture are similar to Cather's vertical natural landscapes and, in *The Professor's House*, Native construction.

Outland's journal parallels language like Radcliffe's in the way it portrays the rediscovered cliff city: "It was more like sculpture than anything else. I knew at once that I had come upon the city of some extinct civilization, hidden away in this inaccessible mesa for centuries . . . guarded by the cliffs and the river and the desert" (202). Overtones of gothic aesthetic permeate both descriptions of the outdoor Southwest and the indoor Midwest of the novel.

In keeping with the idea of both the gothic and ghosts being linked with the uncanny and the grotesque, *The Professor's House* also contains an undercurrent of bodily disquiet; there is a recurring motif of uncanny, mismatched, and grotesque physical forms. These damaged bodies recur through the text, even appearing, importantly, in the private attic room where St. Peter does his academic writing. Of this sheltered space, Cather informs us portentously, "This is the place where he worked. And not he alone" (16). The ominous-sounding "not he alone" includes not only the devout (and fairly prosaic) German Catholic sewing-woman Augusta, who uses the room for her work in St. Peter's absence, but also the troubling dressmaking forms with which the professor shares his space. Cather's description of the dressmaking "bust" echoes Jentsch and Freud's theoretical concerns about the uncanny feminine:

Though this figure looked so ample and billowy (as if you might lay your head upon its deep-breathing softness and rest safe forever), if you touched it you suffered a severe shock, no matter how many times you had touched it before. It presented the most unsympathetic surface imaginable. Its hardness was not that of wood, which responds to concussion with living vibration and is stimulating to the hand, nor that of felt, which drinks something from the fingers. It was a dead, opaque, lumpy solidity, like chunks of putty, or tightly packed sawdust--very disappointing to the tactile sense, yet somehow always fooling you again. For no matter how often you had bumped up against that torso, you could never believe that contact with it would be as bad as it was. (18)

This confusion of organic flesh and inorganic putty in this passage gestures back to Jentsch's 1906 definition of the uncanny, and his insistence that it is powerfully invoked by the, "doubt as to whether an apparently living being is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate" (11). That the confusion is, further, represented in a (pseudo-) female body echoes Freud's claims about the uncanny, castrating nature of feminine sexuality.

Though *The Professor's House* is far divorced from most standards of the twentieth-century horror genre, the text's early introduction of these unsettling bodies does establish that the novel takes place in a world which is potentially horrifying. In twentieth-century texts, the idea of the uncanny inherited from Jentsch and Freud is linked prominently with generic horror in both theoretical and generic terms, as in Noël Carroll's work: "the character's affective reaction to the monstrous in horror stories is not merely a matter of fear, i.e., of being frightened by something that threatens danger. Rather threat is compounded with revulsion, nausea, and disgust" (22). The text's bust is monstrous enough that touching its "unsympathetic surface" produces a "severe shock." Carroll goes on to cite Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* in explaining that the things which inspire these feelings are monstrous because they are "interstitial" – things "that cross the boundaries of the deep categories of a culture's conceptual scheme" and are therefore impure (32). The boundary crossed by the bust in Cather's text is, like Jentsch's, the one between living and non-living entities: the bust appears as though it should offer the universal comfort of the female breast and living mother, but offers only absolute tactile deadness rather than even the false life of wood and velvet.

The attic's bust is accompanied by another dressmaker's figure, this one full-length. Though Cather does not describe it in equally strong terms of revulsion, it poses a similar problem of confusion between the living and the inert: "It had no legs, as one could see all too

well, no viscera behind its glistening ribs, and its bosom resembled a strong wire bird-cage. But St. Peter contended that it had a nervous system. When Augusta left it clad for the night in a new party dress for Rosamond or Kathleen, it often took on a sprightly, tricky air” (18). The bust, which looks lifelike – “ample and billowy” – betrays and disturbs St. Peter because it refuses to be fully alive. The full-length figure, which never looks convincingly human, becomes threatening in its potential to achieve human-like motion, and the professor lightly references “her” as a dangerous entity: “She never fooled St. Peter. He had his blind spots, but he had never been taken in by one of her kind!” (19).

The dangerous interstitiality represented by the dressmaker’s dummies is echoed in the character of Doctor Crane, Professor St. Peter’s formerly well-respected and now chronically-ill colleague, who lives a life of poverty partially because he has been left out of Tom Outland’s will. Where the dummies are inert objects resembling humans, Crane is a human who uncannily resembles the inert. Crane’s wife, accusing St. Peter of having partially caused their financial problems by not pressuring his daughter – Outland’s former fiancée and sole inheritor – into sharing the money, describes her claims using imagery that suggests Gothic romantic betrayal: “My husband was done out of it [Outland’s patent] by an adventurer, and his friendship for you tied his hands” (138). The paralysis and helplessness suggested here, via the image of the tied hands, continues throughout passages in which Crane is mentioned; his invalid status overpowers his personality as a whole. Ian Bell notes that Cather emphasizes the unpleasantness of Crane’s ill body, claiming that in the comparison between Crane’s and Outland’s flaws, “the grotesque character of Crane’s mouth, his ‘most conspicuous feature’ . . . is allowed a greater force than the cavalierly ‘careless procedure’ of Outland’s laboratory technique” (16). Crane exists narratively largely through descriptions of his grotesque shortcomings.

At one point, speculating that Crane may be undergoing yet another operation, St. Peter muses that, “It’s like *The Pit and the Pendulum*. I feel as if the poor fellow were strapped down on a revolving disk that comes around under the knife just so often” (133-134), a reference that suggests both mutilation and mortality. Here, Cather explicitly refers to Poe’s version of the nineteenth-century Gothic, incorporating the image of the body made grotesque because it is damaged or incomplete. Crane himself is apparently aware of his conspicuous mouth, using his thick lips to speak “through rather than with” (Cather 145), as though it belonged to an automaton, or a corpse. Crane is unsettling because of his closeness with death, both his own impending one and the degree to which he has become haunted, like St. Peter, by his association with Tom Outland and the repercussions of Outland’s death. In the same way that the bust dummy represents a threateningly false woman, “one of her kind,” Crane also ultimately exhibits a tendency towards duplicity. St. Peter believes Crane to be, like himself, a high-minded academic, declaring that the physicist Crane “doesn’t care about anything but the extent of space” (87), and Crane’s own wife describes him as “unworldly” (137) when pressing her case to St. Peter. But St. Peter’s visit to Crane’s house – in which he lives “in the most depressing and unnecessary ugliness” (Cather 142) – reveals Crane as bitter and resentful about his financial circumstances, reduced “to pinched mean-spiritedness” (Swift 183). He admits he has no interest in the scientific aspects of Outland’s work, only the money over which he believes he has “certainly been ill-used” (Cather 148). St. Peter decides that the physicist has been corrupted by envy over the success of Outland’s patent, and the ultimate effect is that Crane is now disguised by two different grotesquely false appearances: one of his artificial-looking body trapping the living man inside it, the other of attempting to maintain his image of academic piety by allowing his wife to become the mouthpiece of his own pettiness.

These bodies of the “civilized” space – the sick professor Crane’s, the dummies’, and possibly by extension, the imagined dead body of Outland himself, killed in WWI – perform several functions. On one level, they serve to blur boundaries between the novel’s two narratives and therefore the two worlds that they represent. For St. Peter, these two worlds can be separated into civilization and what he thinks of as the “rugged, untamed” frontier, something unformed, “an escape from civilization rather than a cradle of civilization” (Schwind 83). The most prominent literal corpse seen in the novel is that of a Native in Outland’s southwest, a tiny mummified woman discovered in the cliff city who Outland’s elderly cook, Henry, names “Mother Eve.” Mother Eve is described by Cather in terms that might read as horrific: “Her mouth was open as if she were screaming, and her face, through all those years, had kept a look of terrible agony. Part of the nose was gone, but she had plenty of teeth, not one missing, and a great deal of coarse black hair” (214). The repulsion implied by this description echoes the passages which introduce the attic’s dressmaking dummies, indicating a rejection of Mother Eve’s physicality – and, by extension, a rejection of the value of the cliff dwellers’ city and history. This devaluation of indigenous presence is emphasized when the educated Father Duchene invents a romance about Mother Eve’s possible murder, claiming that, “In primitive society the husband is allowed to punish an unfaithful wife with death” (Cather 223). In the absence of Native voice, Father Duchene constructs Mother Eve’s life and death as undesirably primitive, violent, and promiscuous. By assuming this authority to define the city and create a narrative for Mother Eve, Father Duchene is “encasing or boxing her . . . [which] forces Eve into a cultural framework that destroys her native identity” (Schwind 74).

Though Outland does not make a similar pronouncement of Mother Eve’s primitiveness, he is the one who initially records her appearance in horrific terms. One reading of his

relationship to her may be that his rhetoric encases her in an identity as rigid as Father Duchene's: Outland essentializes Mother Eve as a corpse, whose most important identity is not as a woman who lived, but one who is dead. Outland's initial "different feeling" about the American southwest is the shock of learning that his "empty country" has in the past contained other people. His description of the city's appearance as a sculpture, and therefore a static work of art, suggests that he continues to think of the land as having been *previously*, but no longer currently, inhabited by indigenous peoples. Mother Eve is not alone, but the most symbolically significant of four bodies in the otherwise-vacant city that Outland discovers. The other corpses are found "wrapped in yucca-fibre, all in the same posture and apparently prepared for burial. They were the bodies of old people" (Cather 215). The anonymity of these bodies, and the emptiness of the city, suggest that Cather is participating in the same kind of literary genocide of Indians that is so prevalent in the nineteenth century: the idea that Native people can be considered fully dead and may therefore be safely cannibalized to help form a new idea of authentic America.

The contrast between Outland's attitudes and those of other Americans in the text suggest that we are intended to read his reactions as more ethically and spiritually appropriate than those who react with disgust, disinterest, or avarice. However, many of Outland's other actions would seem to indicate that he is instead participating in a lesser version of this kind of possession, as in his assumption that he has the authority to speak for the deceased residents of Cliff City. Even though he refuses to participate in the philistinism of consuming Native relics, he does commandeer what he can of their history for his own purposes, raising serious questions about whether Cather is repeating or refusing this sort of cultural aggression.

Similarly, the Belgian Father Duchene's cultural imperialism appears relatively innocuous next to the reactions of nearly all Americans in the novel to the existence of indigenous culture. After having explored and described the empty cliff city, Outland embarks on a journey to Washington, DC, so that, in Duchene's words, "an archaeologist . . . will interpret all that is obscure to us. He will revive this civilization in a scholarly work. It may be that you will have thrown light on some important points in the history of your country" (222). However, Outland quickly discovers that most of those he encounters in positions of power, including the Commissioner of the Indian Commission and the Smithsonian Director's secretary, do not care about his discoveries. Those Americans who do evince interest are usually motivated by the artifacts' various kinds of purchasing power, including the Director of the Smithsonian, who wishes to gauge how much prestige the discovery will bring, and others who are intrigued purely by the financial possibilities. Though it is Outland's uneducated partner Blake who will finally sell off the artifacts, one clerk at the Indian Commission attempts to dupe Outland out of his pottery, claiming "it had no market value" (Cather 226), though his persistence in chasing after Outland to tell him so shows otherwise. Only Europeans like Father Duchene seem to share Outland's relatively altruistic interest in the depth and symbolic weight of history, and ultimately the novel "compares America unflatteringly to Europe . . . contrast[ing] French sophistication with America's intellectual and artistic mediocrity" (Schubnell 41). It is a German, Fechtig, to whom Blake sells the artifacts while Outland is away, but "it is important to note that there is no resentment against the German collector in Cather's portrayal of Fechtig . . . Not even the irate Tom condemns the German" (Schubnell 32), instead reserving his anger for Blake.

However, this theorized contrast between European sophistication with American philistinism is not necessarily a simple condemnation of American shallowness, but potentially a

nod towards American vulnerability. While Father Duchene is willing to become so involved with Mother Eve's fate that he weaves his own romance about her in a way that Blake does not, he also has less at stake in the issue of her identity. Both Duchene and Fechtig are identified not as Americans with European origins, but as Europeans, belonging to a continent, as Outland insists, "that's got plenty of relics of its own" (243). Outland's crusade on behalf of the cliff city makes it clear that to take interest in Mother Eve is a luxury that not all can afford. The Indian Commission and the Smithsonian, both putatively in charge of national interests, choose not to spend their limited resources on investigating Southwestern prehistory; the independently-wealthy Fechtig and Church-subsidized scholar Duchene do not have these constraints. However, interest in the Native ruins is luxurious in another way, as well: as Europeans, Duchene and Fechtig can consider Mother Eve a curiosity from a foreign country's history. For the Americans of the novel, as Outland continually insists, acknowledging Native prehistory potentially demands a non-monetary price as well: the cost of acknowledging that the United States is a country built on and out of the cultures that previously inhabited the land. Outland's recognition and appreciation of Native history are costly to him in various ways, and ultimately, by embracing Native America to become a native American, he, himself, has to become as ghostly as the cliff city itself.

It may be tempting to simply identify Outland's reactions with European sensibilities, constructing him as a man sophisticated enough to understand the importance of history. Unlike his fellow Americans, he both values the discoveries and, moreover, understands them as having value not only on a personal, but on a national level. He harangues Blake: "I never thought of selling them, because they weren't mine to sell – nor yours! They belonged to this country, to the State, and to all the people. They belonged to boys like you and me, that have no other

ancestors to inherit from” (242-243). Though European sentiments and historians inform Outland’s experience of the Southwest, he also assumes the authority to exclude them from sharing in his emotional experience of the space. Further, he specifically identifies himself as a descendant of the vanished Indians, continuing that “I’m not so poor that I have to sell the pots and pans that belonged to my poor grandmothers a thousand years back” (243). What may make his understanding of history seem particularly European, however, is his tendency, like Father Duchene, to impose upon it the sort of narrative that suits his needs. Outland’s claims about Native artifacts “belonging” to him are problematic, as Sarah Wilson notes:

The cliff dwellings of the Blue Mesa once belonged to a now vanished culture, and no living Native American population has an indisputable claim on them; nonetheless, Tom’s list of those who do have a claim on the cliff dwellers’ past includes the country, the state, the people, and “boys like you and me.” The erasure of Native American inheritance has been necessary for this history to become a national possession. (574)

The combination of Outland’s reference to “grandmothers” and the very fact that the symbolically important mummy has been named “Mother Eve,” indicates a romantic experience of the past: not only he, but all of America, become members of her family. The erasure of racial difference accompanying Outland’s identification with the dead tribe may appear to serve much the same purpose as Father Duchene’s seizure of history, and Wilson has further claimed that, “exemplified by Tom’s outburst, this turn to the Southwest [for identity] resembles the violent, simplifying grab of imperial power. Recognizing no earlier claims on the histories it appropriates, it reenacts the violation of history that Americanization represents” (575). When constructed by Outland as voiceless, the dead tribe of Blue Mesa can be whitened and Americanized.

Contemporary criticism on *The Professor’s House* frequently describes Outland’s experience of indigeneity in terms of imperialism – as indicated above in the pieces by Wilson

and Schwind – but the alignment of *Outland* with European sensibilities is ultimately incomplete and insufficient. Unlike Duchene’s academic detachment, *Outland* expresses appreciation of Native history as a highly emotional, personal experience. When he returns to the mesa after his disappointing journey to Washington, DC, even after learning that Blake has sold the artifacts, he continues to find comfort, not disillusionment, in the experience. His journal expresses that, despite his losses, “Every inch of that trail was dear to me I wanted to see and touch everything, like home-sick children when they come home” (Cather 240). In fact, *Outland* experiences his ultimate “moment of lyric fullness” (A. Wilson 68) only after deciding to give up on convincing both official (governmental) and unofficial (e.g. Blake) figures that all of America must claim Native heritage in order to form their own native identity. *Outland*’s “lyric fullness,” however, proclaims that he himself is successful in becoming both native and Native, at one point proclaiming that, “It was possession” (Cather 251). The “possession” here is clearly not *Outland* possessing either the artifacts, which have been sold, nor the land, which he ultimately leaves – both acts of dispossession. Instead, it may be read both as Tom’s possession of peace in establishing his identity, and the way in which he is simultaneously possessed *by* the southwest and its previous Native inhabitants. Tom has, himself, become inhabited by ghosts, and, in a nation that figures its Natives as ghosts, his success in embracing America’s prehistory means that he himself is spectralized.

Mother Eve is clearly not a literal ghost within the text, but may be considered a sort of corporeal ghost, existing as one of the interstitial dead who continue to insist on their own versions of history. She is determined to have been a young woman, but her body is ancient; she is dead but unburied; she is both and neither an American; she is both and neither an ancestor of the novel’s white characters. Like a ghost, she does not have a corporeal body that can be

controlled by the living, even though attempts are made to do so. When Outland speaks of her as being unsellable, claiming, "I'd have sold any living woman first," Blake replies, "Save your tears She refused to leave us. She went to the bottom of Black Canyon and carried Hook's best mule along with her" (244). As a ghost, and therefore an autonomous agent, she makes it impossible for the city to be fully empty; she illustrates that the collection of buildings is not a dead city, but a city actively populated by the dead. Her refusal of readability and ultimate return to the land come with their own kind of power, an insistence that, despite Father Duchene's presumption, her life and those of the other dead she represents possess autonomy from non-Native concerns and voices. Her insistent presence, and by extension, that of other Native Americans, makes it impossible for non-Native Americans to move into the seemingly-deserted landscape of the "dead city" that is the nation; it is already too heavily inhabited.

Outland's view of Mother Eve at times appears to be one which figures her as an Othered ghost who can be appropriated by twentieth-century Americans – and, by extension, this attitude may be read into the responses of patron Professor St. Peter. However, this reading does not hold up as the claim of the novel as a whole. Mother Eve cannot ultimately simplistically represent either the rejected/abjected Other, nor the cannibalized indigene, because of the grotesque bodies and haunted subjects littering the spaces of the "civilized" half of the text. The difference between the two worlds is diminished by the parallel ways in which they are described: the grotesquerie of Mother Eve's gaping scream, for example, is matched by that of Crane's corpselike mouth. She is described with as much detail, and with less creeping dread than the dressmaker's dummies of St. Peter's attic – her dried flesh is less repulsive than the "most unsympathetic surface imaginable" of the full-length dummy, and even with her wound she is more complete a body than the bust. Grotesquerie and ghostliness are not phenomena that

can be constrained, and their ability to bypass boundaries becomes an avenue of agency for both Mother Eve and Outland.

Outland's insistence on adopting Nativeness – or allowing it to claim him – means that he, in turn, necessarily becomes spectralized in the same way as the Southwest's "dead and gone Indians." John Swift notes that, "Tom comes finally, strangely, to *resemble* Mother Eve. Functionally, he is a dead, wordless presence at the center of someone else's narrative" ("Unwrapping" 19). Outland's death may be read as superficially resembling Mother Eve's; both occur outside the narrative and so are never fully explained, but neither are the circumstances of either event represented as particularly important, paling in comparison to the symbolic weight of the characters' symbolic cache after their deaths. Outland does not only follow Mother Eve into death, but also into the transformation from human to ghost and to potential commodity, via the valuable patents his fiancée Rosamond St. Peter inherits. Professor St. Peter speaks of Outland's money in terms strikingly similar to the way Outland speaks of selling the Indian relics. When offered an income by Rosamond out of the proceeds from Outland's invention, he responds that, "my friendship with Outland is the one thing I will not have translated into the vulgar tongue . . . there was no material clause in it" (62-63). Though this positioning of them as economic objects might position them as vulnerable, their characterization as ultimately uncontrollable in death allows them to be ghostly subjects. Mother Eve, though she cannot speak – mouth open in an apparent silent scream – refuses to be buried or sold. Outland's name and ideas are more successfully coopted for commercial purposes, but he assumes, through his journal, the authority to speak after death. He haunts not just the academic sensitivity of St. Peter, but the mainstream American consciousness represented by Rosamond and her husband.

Further, because for the majority of the characters in *The Professor's House*, Outland's haunting of America is of concern as a result of the financial terms in which it can be represented, his commodification is in itself a haunting. Though Crane's grotesquerie is largely physical, St. Peter is more disturbed by what he interprets rapid decay of his colleague's former high-minded professionalism, attributed to Crane's regrets over not receiving any money from Outland's patents and his inability to receive money from a dead man. Just as Outland attempts to speak for Natives, St. Peter channels the ghost of Outland immediately after his interview with Crane, as he contemplates his own potential suicide: "If Outland were here tonight, he might say with Mark Antony, *My fortunes have corrupted honest men*" (150). Outland's ideas and the money they produce ultimately control the lives of not only Crane, but St. Peter's family; they may be read as simultaneously coopting his name and being forced to pay tribute to his legacy, in much the same way that Outland hoped the United States would acknowledge its Native inheritance.

Professor St. Peter, while putatively figured as Outland's mentor and patron, becomes a student of Outland's experiences and is, in turn, faced with the danger (or freedom) of becoming ghostly himself. There are indications throughout the novel that St. Peter is familiar with boundary-crossing: like Crane, has his own mild physical grotesqueries that echo Gothic conventions, particularly the "wicked-looking eyebrows" that make "his students call him Mephistopheles" (Cather 13). Further, in the attic he shares with the uncanny dressmaking forms, he labors over a piece about the history of the Spanish in North America, and the nature of his profession means that he is perpetually negotiating the present's relationship with the past. When he undertakes the task of preparing Outland's diary for publication, St. Peter's relationship with history moves from the academic to the personal, just as Outland's does during his time on

the Mesa. As a result, St. Peter's narrative begins to revolve problematically around the ghost of Outland, to the point where his own voice is overpowered, and the diary takes its place:

The diary . . . does the essential narrative work of prosopopeia: it bestows voice upon the dead, providing the illusion of presence and the possibility that the dead so evoked may yet reply. . . . [M]ost notable about this move in *The Professor's House* would be Tom's absence despite the conjuring of his presence: the point would be the novel's inevitable repetition of a lack. But the diary itself is the absence, an absence that suggests what the novel at once most wants and must most avoid, not Tom's presence, but rather the desire for Tom's presence that the diary, vibrating in St. Peter's head with suppressed emotion, makes uncomfortably manifest. (A. Wilson 69)

St. Peter is overtly haunted by the diary, to the point of letting it overwhelm him. The task of annotation turns the professor into a "primitive," his true or native self, a phenomenon which Cather describes in alluring terms: "[H]e was terribly wise. He seemed to be at the root of the matter; Desire under all desires, Truth under all truths" (265). As St. Peter begins to embrace his native-born self, and consequently approach the possibility of a Native self, he assumes – without alarm – that he is approaching death, suggesting that he, like Outland, must experience death as the consequence of possession.

St. Peter ultimately does not follow Outland in death at the novel's close, though the manner by which he narrowly escapes it is linked to the novel's hauntings. It is meaningful that Outland's lingering physical presence beyond the diary, in the form of his invention, is referred to continually as "the gas." When Crane complains to St. Peter of feeling wronged, the spectre bothering him takes the form of "the gas" that he developed with Outland, and for which he was never compensated: "[Outland] spoke as if there would be something in it for both of us if our gas became remunerative" (145). St. Peter also uses the term – "the gas," "our gas" – when referring to the patent. Outland's invention therefore functions itself in a ghostlike way, gas being a material which is both real and intangible, another absent presence. It is another gas, the untrustworthy gas stove in St. Peter's study, to which the professor turns over his own autonomy,

allowing it to decide whether he should live or die, thereby surrendering to Outland's ghost. Even after he is saved by the sewing-woman Augusta, St. Peter remains haunted, unsettled; he reflects that his family will probably never "realize that he was not the same man they had said good-bye to" (283). The closing passage of the novel, representing the professor's experience of his new self, expresses his survival as a kind of failure, the loss of something "very precious." There is evidence that the crisis has not, however, dispelled Outland's ghost, as Cather's narrative voice claims of the new St. Peter that, "At least, he felt the ground under his feet," (283), a phrase enveloped by Outland's own: "feel different about the ground you walk over every day."

This continued haunting is a major disruption of the classical Gothic narrative, a significant development in a novel that so heavily uses Gothic themes and tropes. The Gothic ghost story presents its readers with a relatively reliable sequence of events: a traumatic death occurs, followed by a haunting, the revelation of the haunting, and finally an exorcism via which the ghosts are put to rest. These events are admittedly not always presented in this order within a particular text: the traumatic death, for example, frequently occurs before the story begins, and is only accessible to the reader at the point of revelation. Cather reorders and reweights the elements of this formula – though Father Duchene attempts to cast Mother Eve's death as a traumatic death, she fails to fulfill the generic requirements for the role of Gothic ghost. The cause of her death is never explained, only speculated about, and she refuses the exorcism process by re-burying herself within the landscape. Further Outland's sense of haunting occurs before and independent of his discovery of her and the other corpses on the mesa, but is instead his reaction to all evidences of an American prehistory. The haunting may, in fact, be read as preceding the novel's central trauma, in the form of Outland's realization that he cannot induce

others to share in his new sense of history. The central death of the novel might instead be construed as being Outland's own, though he also fails to fulfill the requirement of the Gothic ghost role. Beyond noting that Outland died in Flanders fighting with the Foreign Legion, neither the characters nor the text as a whole express interest in the specific cause or nature of his passing, indicating that, unlike in the conventional haunting arc, an unjust death is not a major motivating force within the narrative. While Outland himself becomes a specter, lingering in the lives of St. Peter and his family, they do not seek to exorcise him – Rosamond and her husband name their estate after Outland, and St. Peter, as discussed above, surrenders himself to Outland's voice. It is intimated that even the damaged Professor Crane remains, at the end of the novel, unable to escape Outland's ghost and the way it symbolizes his own failures.

These corporeal ghosts and (physically or morally) grotesque characters, existing in a grotesquely inverted ghost-story narrative, serve metonymically to represent larger Gothic "bodies." St. Peter's house, for example, though transported to a quiet Middle Western college town setting, while missing the stark splendor of the Mesa, is its own sort of Gothic space. Marilee Lindemann notes that: "St. Peter, of course, finds the atmosphere of his house noxious . . . in a novel that is happy to clutter itself with . . . detail" (52), in a style suggesting the needless intricacy of romantic Gothic interiors. Like a hidden staircase or secret door in the high Gothic tradition, the professor has both a "show study" for visitors, and a tiny attic office that is the actual site of his academic production. St. Peter's private and haunted emotional life, it is implied, is covered by a facade he erects to protect the feelings of his family; this relationship is reproduced within his house, creating the attic haunted by the dressmaker's dummies and the near-fatal gas. Ann Moseley maintains that Cather "does indeed construct and order the individual forms of Cliff City so that they not only define and organize the available space but

also provide the overall ‘form’ or ‘shaping principle’ of the novel” (201), going on to illustrate the ways in which architectural forms on the Mesa are repeated symbolically within St. Peter’s house and his familial relations. If we can understand this pattern as repeating itself metonymically outwards – so that the largest space within the novel duplicates the elements of the smallest – America itself becomes a grotesque and haunted national body. The “show” facades of the Smithsonian and Indian Commission serve to cover nation’s dispossession of Native peoples and its resulting possession by not just Native ghosts, but the very ideas of nativity and Nativeness.

These different levels of “bodies” invoke Botting’s idea that the purpose of the Gothic is to perform, through resolution, a “reconstitution of the sacred self,” which can only be initiated by first damaging that self. A common critical reading of the novel, based partially on Cather’s own commentaries on the piece, is that it exists as: “A critique of modernity the evocation of the mesa and Tom Outland’s ‘discovery’ of it in the central section of the novel [proposes] an aesthetic alternative to a debased, commodified contemporary society” (A. Wilson 64). This kind of reading suggests that *The Professor’s House* is a successful iteration of the classical Gothic; that Outland’s revelations have created a potential way for America to cohere into a sacred self destroyed by commodification. However, this reading of the mesa as a viable alternative occludes many of the problematic elements that remain by the end of the novel. Not only are the major characters still haunted, but the narrative’s Native population has been textually genocided, existing only as corpses or in passing references. Notably missing from Outland’s catalog of who the pottery and other relics “belong to” are the contemporary Indians with whom Father Duchene works, or even to the deceased tribe – the dead, it seems, have no

possessions, not even their own bodies. The mesa remains a dead space, which Outland travels too far into to return.

Ultimately, the use of Gothic elements is subverted by the ways in which Wharton reweights and reorders them. If we may read the uncanny elements here appropriately as grotesque bodies, it emerges that, as per Botting's criticism of what he perceives to be the failure of 20th-century Gothic, the "sacred self" is *not* cleanly reconstituted. There are few resolutions within the novel to the kinds of disquiet offered by the narrative's focus on the grotesqueries of the nation. Some solutions seem to present themselves: Mother Eve, for example, is not successfully transported out of the country, instead plummeting to the bottom of a canyon with the mule she is strapped to, finally becoming as "buried" as the dead are supposed to be. The nature of the burial, however, remains outside of human, and specifically American, control – the Native prehistory of America is not exorcised through this action. Instead, the novel ends with St. Peter feeling its weight, and realizing as he prepares to see his "happily preoccupied" family that, "If his apathy hurt them, they could not possibly be hurt as he had been already" (Cather 283). Though he has not followed Outland into death, the haunting power of the Native presence means that St. Peter is positioned as a ghost at the feast.

"Mr. Voss is already history"

Patrick White's works, like Cather's, have been commonly read as incorporating tropes of the uncanny and grotesque; Turcotte claims that White, "developed his own brand of Gothic, one which blended a metaphysical with a scatological darkness" (15). Veronica Brady has, further, characterized the novels of White's "middle period" – including *Voss* – as indicative of White's "need for a metaphysic of suffering and the novelist's obligation to explore social forms"

(133). In keeping with these concerns of scatology and suffering, *Voss* has its own share of tortured forms; as the members of its exploration party move towards their deaths, their bodies began to fall apart in variously horrifying and repellent ways, including insanity, starvation, sores, diarrhea, and what the novel refers to as the “Gothic splendours” of death itself. There is also, however, a heavy focus in the novel on elements of haunting, some of which parallel *The Professor’s House* in terms of treating history itself as a ghost, and some of which are more directly supernatural in nature.

Voss’ titular character – the explorer Ulrich Voss – embarks on a journey which is similar to *Outland*’s both in the spectacular failure of the protagonist’s mission and its narrative connection to Gothic literary tropes. Voss also similarly encounters unexpected revelations about the nature of his new country’s interior. He boasts, at the novel’s outset, “The map [of Australia]? . . . I will first make it” (23); the claim indicates that by creating the cartographic image of the country, Voss believes can assert his ability to create the nation as a whole, both Australia and Australian-ness, and the text frequently describes him acting as a god attempting to remake the world in his image. One major difference between the way that *The Professor’s House* and *Voss* treat their native populations is that White’s includes living indigenes, ones whom Voss attempts to reshape into his image. However, Voss ultimately shows evidence of developing a “different feeling” about the ground under his feet, losing control of his relationships with the land and its Aborigines as his own body begins to degrade over the journey.

Also as in *The Professor’s House*, *Voss* is interested in the project of criticizing and complicating the ideology of a “civilized” space being preferable to a “savage” one. The members of Voss’ party carry with them the values of Western civilization, which include its

vices: while ornithologist Palfreyman brings science to the Outback and the “genius” Le Mesurier represents classical education, the expedition also includes the drunken Turner as a symbol of civilized dissipation, and ex-convict Judd is a stoic reminder of Australia’s brutal origins. Further, the novel’s depictions of the harsh environmental conditions of the Outback are compared to the emotionally and culturally empty world of the Bonners, who are both Voss’ patrons and Laura’s extended family. Their lives in Sydney, as Graeme Turner claims, illustrate the “barrenness of Australian social context” (59). This barrenness is partially spiritual, given the overtly bourgeois preoccupation with class and social niceties, but the trope of physical sterility appears, as well. White’s narrative voice tells us that in the Bonners’ Australia, “men fall in love . . . only with themselves” (120). In this atmosphere, the Bonners’ maid Rose dies after joylessly giving birth to an illegitimate child – Mercy, who the celibate (and also orphaned) Laura later adopts. Conversely, the “civilized” marriages which exist are frequently childless, including that of the couple who initially attempt to adopt Mercy before Laura takes her into care.

This sterility seems to fuel a self-conscious desire on the part of the novel’s white Australians to form a connection to the Aboriginal population. The Bonners’ socially-conscious daughter Belle, through her interest in marrying well and her deep disinterest in suffering, is cast as relatively superficial and therefore a foil to the more spiritual Laura, who becomes the novel’s “bearer of grace” (Bliss 80). But even Belle, realizing the social limitations placed upon her – which the novel’s free indirect discourse describes as – “rooms that she might not enter” – has a moment of ideological rebellion when she is not allowed to see Voss’ ship leave port. Though the exploration party which initially leaves Sydney is composed entirely of white men, Belle expresses dissatisfaction with her own status in terms of racial, not sexual, difference: “I wish I

was free . . . like that black woman. I would stay and wait for the wind. I would wait all night if need be. And watch the ship out” (White 115). This idea of Aboriginality as providing an advantage within Australia reoccurs for the party in Jildra, where the owner Boyle describes his station’s Aborigines as “dirty beggars,” but confesses that “a man could not do without them” (White 172). This is clearly partially an economic claim, given their status as a cheap labor force, but the context also indicates that even the brutal Boyle feels the inadequacy of white survival in the Outback: Boyle instructs two of his Aboriginal workers, who have the Anglicized names Dugald and Jackie, to accompany and assist Voss’ party in order to improve their chances of success. Boyle explains the mission’s purpose to the Aborigines in terms of a linked identity between the races, claiming, “Mr Voss go far places . . . find new country, do good all of us, black and white feller” (170). In these and other exchanges, the novel expresses a level of white jealousy of aspects of Aboriginality; beneath these runs a current of white concerns about Native-ness.

Though Ulrich Voss is driven to master Australia largely through his own narcissism, it is apparent that he has also internalized this need to be identified with indigenous presence. Because of Voss’ continual arrogance for the bulk of the novel, this frequently takes the form of his asserting not that he belongs to the Aborigines, but that they belong to him. The novel’s narrative uses the tones of Voss’ voice in referring to Aborigines variously as: “his loyal subjects” (189), “his people” (205), “these subjects of his kingdom” (273) and he ultimately becomes their “rejected sovereign” (335). In this way, Voss, the man who boasts that he is creating the map of Australia, asserts that he is also capable of dictating not only the Aborigines under his direct authority, but the nature of Aboriginality itself. Like Boyle, however, Voss admits to underlying deficiencies of European-ness which life in Australia exposes; Graham

Huggan theorizes that for Voss, whiteness becomes, “the altar on which he sacrifices himself to ensure that his story passes into self-glorifying myth” (86). Despite Voss’ continual posturing, however, his insistence on aligning himself with the Aborigines he travels with and encounters betrays a preoccupation with belonging to authentic Native-ness, represented in his belief that his Aboriginal followers “would continue to share his sufferings long after the white men had fallen away” (White 273).

Voss’ experiences in the Outback therefore depend heavily on White’s construction of what it means to be Aboriginal. The text’s only two named Aborigines are the guides Dugald, an older man who eventually leaves the exploration party on a mission to communicate with civilization; and Jackie, the young man who stays with Voss and executes him under the direction of an Aboriginal tribe the party encounters. Both black men ultimately return to bush life, albeit in different ways, and their experiences – both as actors and as scenery against which other characters act – are essential to the novel’s claims about Native identity. As with other Patrick White writings, *Voss* is densely mystical in several respects, and the explorer experiences Aboriginality partially in supernatural terms. On meeting the tribe which will ultimately order his execution, Voss feels that, “he must communicate intuitively with these black subjects, and finally rule them with a sympathy that was above words” (White 334). This sense of being “above words” has a fairly literal representation in the narrative in that the Aborigines of the text are given very little in the way of direct speech; instead, their voices appear largely through the narrative voice’s use of free indirect discourse, or their bodies are allowed to speak for them, as when Jackie kills and prepares to eat a lizard he has caught: “‘What will he do with the lizard?’ Voss asked of Dugald. The old man popped a bony finger into his mouth. All his grey stubble laughed” (White 190). White’s Aborigines are not only “above words,” however; they are, more

pertinently, above time, which is best illustrated by the departure of Dugald from the party.

As Voss begins to accept the probable failure of his journey, he sends Dugald back to Jildra with letters intended for Sydney; after Voss instructs him to hurry, “The old man could only laugh, because time did not exist” (White 218). The journey to Sydney is never completed; instead, moving “above words,” Dugald leaves behind his Anglicized name, the doomed party, his dead horse, and ultimately joins an Aboriginal tribe that he encounters on the way. His progress away from Voss is described as a resurrection, and as he moves through the desert, “The veins of the old, rusty man were gradually filling with marvellous life, as his numbness of recent weeks relented” (219). Voss’ letters are torn to pieces, and, as the old man moves on with his new tribe, the narrative describes their departure in transcendent terms: “They went walking through the good grass, and the present absorbed them utterly” (220). The existence of Aborigines becomes an eternal present, an existence of perpetual life.

Though Voss attempts, through sheer will, to claim Aboriginality by assuming the authority to define what it is, White’s prose indicates that his protagonist’s claims to authority in this area are largely posturing. Instead, we receive repeated images of what Cynthia vanden Driesen describes as, “the sense of native autonomy which White seems concerned to project” (47), an autonomy which ultimately positions Voss as a Christlike, discarded king. When the exploration encounters its first “party of blacks,” it is the whites which emerge as vulnerable to exclusion as Voss offers his hand to one of the black men: “Each of the white men was transfixed by the strangeness of this ceremony. It would seem that all human relationships hung in the balance, subject to fresh evaluation by Voss and the black. Then the native dropped the hand. There was too much here for him to accept” (205). This rejection is reiterated over the course of the novel, as various white artifacts, tangible and intangible, are denied or destroyed by

the text's Aborigines: a bag of flour, a frying pan, Anglicized names, white magic, and ultimately the lives of the party. Even the gesture of the rejected hand is repeated near the end of the novel, as Voss tries to claim authority over the Aborigine Jackie's loyalty by grasping at him; Jackie, feeling how "the withered hands of the white man were physically feeble," wrenches "his hand away" (377).

As Voss' group nears its destruction, the text's rhetoric elevates its Aboriginal characters, until the tribe which will fatally spear the ornithologist Palfreyman is described as being, "of superior, almost godlike mien, [who] waited upon their cloud, to pass judgement" (341). This judgment's ultimate form is the death sentence the tribe orders Jackie to carry out on Voss. Vanden Driesen, who names Voss "the indigene-elect" (57) in the fashion of Terry Goldie, describes the moment of execution as transformative, claiming that when "Voss merges with the Australian earth" (61) by bleeding into it, he is able to reach the state of Aboriginality he has been attempting to assume. In vanden Driesen's reading, Voss' "candidacy for indigenization . . . has . . . been programmed from the very beginning of events" (54), as evidenced by language like his constant claims of sovereignty. What this reading elides, however, is the language of death and of spectrality that also permeate the text "from the very beginning."

The novel constructs the European drive for indigenization as fueled by the sterility of Sydney, in which, it seems, colonials participate in their own deaths through a theatrical imitation of life; nongenerative social ritual. Conversations between hosts and members of the exploration party at both of the party's main departure points, Sydney and Jildra, broadcast the explorers' deaths so clearly that they read not simply as inevitable, but as already accomplished. The last words of Belle Bonner to the departing Voss are: "You may send me a black's spear . . . with blood on it" (116). Over the course of the novel, the "black's spear" invoked by Belle

becomes the one which kills Palfreyman, and ultimately that which the ex-convict Judd (incorrectly) tells Laura he pulled from Voss' Christlike side – the sacrifice is, even at the journey's outset, assumed. At Jildra, where Boyle tells stories of his own minor explorations, he discloses the information that the party is entering an already-haunted country:

Once, treading through the bracken, his horse's hoof had struck against a human skull, probably that of some convict, escaped from the coastal settlements in search of the paradise those unfortunates used to believe existed in the North. The narrator presented the skull with such detachment that Ralph Angus could almost feel the downy bracken growing through the sockets of his own eyes. (White 135)

The dead of the Australian wild are presumed not to be its black inhabitants, but its white ones, and the members of the current exploratory party are immediately identified as being on the same kind of doomed journey, though theirs is towards a different picture of paradise, one in which they hope to assert dominance over the creation of a national identity.

The Outback through which the expedition travels is in some respects a place whose hauntings sound similar to those in Cather and other texts of indigenous ghostly presence, in that traces of living and dead Aborigines shadow the party's progress. These traces are frequently interpreted by Jackie, as when he explains that a tree-suspended platform is where Aboriginal bodies are left so that the spirit of the dead can escape. During his explanation, Jackie's "smile was radiant," but the white expedition members more somberly reflect that "It was easy in that landscape to encourage thoughts of death" (White 243), with the youngest member fearing that he has actually seen Jackie's own soul escape during the black boy's narration. Later, when coming across Aboriginal cave paintings, Voss asks Jackie to explain their meaning. After having him identify the animals on the wall – snakes and kangaroos of apparent totemic significance – Voss asks Jackie to decipher the meaning behind a group of painted skeletons, the winding appearance of which reminds the German of "how, as a boy, he had flown kites with

messages attached to their tails . . . he had never received a reply” (White 274-275). Jackie’s description confirms this impression, describing an Outback filled with indigenous ghosts:

“Men gone away all dead . . . All over . . . By rock. By tree. No more men. . . . No more nothink. Like this. See?” He laid his cheek upon his hands, seed-shaped, and his eyelashes were playing together. “Wind blow big, night him white, this time these feller dead men. They come out. Usfeller no see. They everywhere.”

So that the walls of the cave were twanging with the whispers of the tangled kites. The souls of men were only waiting to come out. (White 275)

Jackie’s smiling familiarity with the landscape’s ghosts, contrasted with the reactions of the white expedition members, invite a reading of the narrative as functioning like a conventional ghost story, albeit a postcolonial one, a sub-genre which concerns itself with “the impressions received by others from a haunted site which does not quite belong to them” (Gelder and Jacobs, 188). In these texts, indigenous peoples are linked with the ghostly, and non-Native individuals experience the ghosts they encounter as doubly alien – both as an intrusion from the world of the dead, and as an intrusion of an impenetrably foreign Native worldview. It is, however, a framework which aligns indigeneity with ghostliness, and non-indigeneity with vitality – and therefore a framework which ultimately does not support *Voss*’ narrative arc.

Instead, the expedition’s journey into the wilderness, and particularly the experiences with the Aborigines they encounter, serve to emphasize the white party’s link with death. Peter Beatson’s work suggests that the expedition members number among White’s characters “for whom death is no more than the moment of physical disintegration, the last of the chemical changes . . . who have only experienced the semblance of life and have never really lived at all” (51). The text’s rhetoric, indeed, supports not only this claim of lives not fully lived, but of people who are figured in spectral terms; as the expedition journeys into the interior, they find that they are, “but adding to the ghost-life of the place” (White 210). What emerges from their shared experience is a communal vision of having a single avenue by which they may inherit the

earth: by moving toward their physical deaths. After Jackie explains the meanings of the cave paintings in the above-referenced sequence, Voss' response is not one of dread; instead, he feels "immensely happy" (White 275) at the implied promise that he can commune with the dead, in opposition to the kite-messages of his youth to which he never received replies. Rather than being threatened by foreign ghosts in a site which does not belong to them, as in Gelder and Jacobs' definition of a postcolonial ghost story, they take possession of the site by haunting it themselves.

One way in which this haunting is expressed is via the physical grotesquerie of White's narrative: bouts of diarrhea and fly-covered, infected wounds are detailed within the text. The party as a whole wastes away through illness and starvation, causing them to look less and less like living men. The spectrality of the group's ornithologist, Palfreyman, becomes a mystery of such power that it provokes an Aboriginal attack: the a group of Aborigines the party crosses paths with spears him after realizing with horror that they, "would soon begin to see inside the white man's skin, that was transfigured by the morning; it was growing transparent, like clear water" (White 342). After burying him, the group splits, with ex-convict Judd attempting to lead half the survivors back to Jildra, and Voss leading the rest forward on their original mission, though his followers are forced to "compel themselves to ignore the fact that [Voss' head] was a skull with a candle expiring inside" (White 358). Voss himself has become the living version of Boyle's tale in Jildra, told at the expedition's outset: the white skull in the wilderness. The descriptions of the final days of both halves of the split party are full of confusingly blurred boundaries as bodies and minds fall apart; it becomes subjectively unclear who is present, who is missing, who is dead, who is living, and whether the white men, in physical death, actually exist in a markedly different way than they did in life. The narrative itself imitates the inchoate nature

of ghostliness, blurring reality as it represents the subjective experiences of the hallucinating expedition members: the genteel young farmer Ralph Angus dies, “as young ladies of his own class offered him tea out of Worcester cups . . . They smothered him, and mothered him, until, at the last, he was presented as a swaddled baby” (White 425-426).

In mixing the living with the dead, *Voss* enacts a ghost story, and even a story of a haunted burial ground, but it is an iteration of the form which, as in *The Professor's House*, has undergone a major, and vital, reordering of the Gothic narrative arc. Instead of the traumatic death creating a haunting, and then an exorcism which purges history, White has provided a haunting that leads towards a traumatic death, and again no exorcism – the novel's conclusion is as rife with ghosts and the living dead as its beginning. Voss does not become a ghost because he suffers a traumatic death – even while he is still alive, the Bonners live with “the spirit of the explorer, the scarecrow that had dominated the house beyond all measure with his presence, and even haunted it after he had gone” (White 310). One critical reading claims that both the expedition and Voss himself see the explorer “as a Gnostic version of the Godhead” (Williams 68); through his visions and insistence on being able to create a new reality independent of the physical world, Voss is always already mostly spirit – Laura, while recovering from her illness, declares him to be “already history” – and his literal death allows his physical self to align with his spiritual one. Ultimately, it is the way in which Voss is able to finally possess Australia, as a ghostly presence who perseveres in the social consciousness of both the white and Aboriginal worlds.

In White's construction, regardless of European distaste of Aboriginals themselves, Aboriginality is not a model of native-ness available to *Voss*' white characters because of the strength of Aboriginal autonomy. Instead, death becomes the vector through which colonial

claim can be made to the land; the power of the expedition is to haunt the landscape. As the three final members of the original party face death, Voss laughs that living is shameful, and Le Mesurier, who by now is uttering “startling echoes of the master’s [Voss’s] own mind,” has the revelation that, “Dying is creation. The body creates fresh forms, the soul inspires by its manner of leaving the body, and passes into other souls” (White 361). Unable to imitate or penetrate the Aboriginal inhabitation of the present, Voss and his men lay claim to the kind of ideological indigenization left open to them – they join the convict’s skull of Boyer’s earlier story in becoming the native dead. They possess the land in part by possessing Jackie, who becomes a prophet and a mouthpiece for spirits, both white and black: “after Voss’s death, Jackie is possessed by his spirit to the point that he must recapitulate his life. While his people look to him as a prophet, Jackie wanders confused, haunted, in search of what he cannot find” (Bliss 73). In death, Voss has in some ways succeeded in defining an Aboriginal: Jackie is a man delineated by his hauntedness.

Voss is the character most clearly positioned as being ghostlike while still living, but the theme runs through much of the white expedition. When Jackie finds the remains of the “mutineers” – those who left Voss and tried to leave the desert under the leadership of Judd – the scene of their deaths is transformed for him into “the land of the dead,” and he begins a life permeated by their spirits: “He was always speaking with the souls of those who had died in the land, and was ready to translate their wishes into dialect. If no other blackfellow learned what those wishes were, it was because his fear prevented him from inquiring of the prophet” (White 421). Even Judd, the only white survivor of the party, exists as a ghost in Jackie’s consciousness: “the form of the big white man was riding with him on and off, the veins in the back of his broad hand like the branches of a tree, his face a second copper sun” (White 420).

Notably, among the expedition members, it is Judd who most heavy-handedly represents the past of Australia, because of his history as a convict. He is figured early in the text as having survived death and resurrection via his “burial” in Australia as an exiled criminal, and his “resurrection” as a citizen and modestly successful squatter.

Though Jackie is arguably the most prominently haunted character, he is far from isolated, nor are the members of Voss’ party the only ones to haunt. The novel’s two white survivors of trauma – the former convict Judd, who emerges alone from the desert, and Laura, who psychically experiences Voss’ sufferings – both end the novel as haunted ghosts. Their ultimate meeting occurs at a ceremony, in Sydney, unveiling a memorial to Voss twenty years after the expedition’s launch. Laura, a “spinster” who considers herself Voss’ spiritual widow, is headmistress of a girls’ school; Judd is revealed as having survived only by living with a group of Aborigines, but his speech and apparently his memories are confused as he narrates his experience to her. The novel ends with Laura echoing Judd’s words, which he in turn has received from “the blacks,” all insisting that Voss is still in the country, and always will be (443, 448). Laura and Judd are the novel’s closest candidates for living white indigenes, both having already “died” previously in the text. Judd dies first as a victim of Britain’s court system, then again after leaving the expedition in the Outback, where he prays for death as a relief from thirst. A third death for him occurs in the form of discovering, after returning to his property, that his wife and children have all died – another union which ends with no issue. Laura, while feverishly ill, has had visions through which she shares Voss’ suffering and death, a visionary journey he experiences as well, seeing her riding beside him, her head transformed into a skull with cropped hair and “pared flesh” (White 367), again echoing the skull of Boyle’s story, and descriptions of Voss himself. It is these experiences which allows Judd to have “lived beyond

grief” (White 443) and for Laura to declare to her mystified family that, “I am the only survivor of you all” (White 370) after her fever breaks. They have a relationship with death, and therefore with history, that the rest of the novel’s white characters lack, and it is that lack which the novel posits as its idea of dispossession. Belle Bonner, who earlier wished for the freedom from social constraints that Aboriginality could provide, is ultimately shut out from the possibility – while Laura, who has “died,” experiences both the independence and exclusion that result.

Desire and Death as Creation

Clearly, both *The Professor’s House* and *Voss* incorporate elements of the Gothic genre into their narratives: their incorporation of the grotesque, their depictions of landscape, and their invocations of the dead, hauntings, and a threatening past. The presence of these elements, however, does not produce narratives which follow the pattern of a classical Gothic narrative arc; instead of ghosts presenting a problem which must be solved via some sort of exorcism, ghostliness persists to and through the culminations of the narratives. Haunting becomes, ultimately, a problematic solution to the problems presented by insecurity over how non-indigenous populations can construct identities in response to indigenous presence. Both also tell their stories using twinned narratives of contrasting worlds – one world containing a Gothically “overfurnished” novel of manners, the other a stark, ghost-haunted wilderness – and by collapsing the difference between the two, invite other boundary-crossings to occur. This boundary crossing is central to the project of indigenization that *The Professor’s House* and *Voss* are heavily involved in, attempting to negotiate the ways in which the texts’ originary, largely-white nations acknowledge, avoid, assimilate, and destroy Native presence.

The texts' most important examinations of indigenization, Tom Outland and Ulrich Voss, can in many ways be read as parallel figures. Both men journey into the interiors of their respective nations in an attempt to establish identity. Outland, an orphan, seeks a way to define himself and ultimately discovers a need within himself to define all of America. Voss, living in his adopted country of Australia, seeks to mold it into the image he has created for it and ultimately discovers that he must let the nation define him before he can achieve real agency. The landscapes in which they perform this search are each, in their own way, haunted ones, and both men ultimately journey too deep into them to fully return to the empires which struggle to claim the land.

However, Voss' and Outland's journeys are intrinsically different, even inverse. When Outland "goes Native," it is in the context of a nation that has addressed the "problem" of its indigenous peoples by symbolically burying them, declaring them "dead and gone." *The Professor's House* inherits a American literary tradition in which, "When European Americans speak of Native Americans, they always use the language of ghostliness. They call Indians demons, apparitions, shapes, specters, phantoms, or ghosts. . . . that they are ultimately doomed to vanish. Most often, they describe Indians as absent or dead" (Bergland 1). This is, however, a tradition which it both repeats and subverts, similarly to how the text treats its Gothic elements. The residents of Cliff City have almost entirely vanished, leaving behind the land that the novel's Americans occupy; Outland may break with the mainstream by insisting on acknowledging Native presence, but continues to ideologically construct them as dead, absent. Identifying himself as a spiritual descendant of the Cliff City Indians means that Outland necessarily aligns himself with the dead; his own death, which, like the Natives', happens outside the scope of the text proper, is an inevitable and necessary part of his being able to successfully claim his

identity. It allows Outland to replicate the haunting process, both through St. Peter's consciousness and through Outland's patent, which his former fiancée and her husband use to live comfortable lives of morally empty "meaningless conventional gestures" (Cather 161) while dealing only cursorily with his "dead and gone" presence.

But, while Outland becomes a ghost because he becomes Native, Voss becomes Aboriginal through his ghostliness. Australia's national literature is one in which "the ghost story is . . . a *marginal genre*" (Gelder and Jacobs 187), and the ghosts who are present are almost invariably white. Literarily, Aboriginals are typically "presented either as a savage, a loyal but, oftentimes, ludicrous servant, a cannibal or a noble savage. In the present century, he is portrayed either as a mystic or an underprivileged person" (Melendez-Cruz 433); while these are also common tropes for American texts dealing with indigenous populations, the idea of the ghostly Native is conspicuously absent. Instead, *Voss* participates in a literary tradition in which "white Australia has traditionally looked for security *from* the landscape [while] a black magic promises to turn the world upside down by maintaining that there is security *in* the landscape" (Gibson 92). Where a perception of Native silence is a factor in Outland giving voice to his adopted ancestors, the persistence of Aboriginal voice in *Voss*, represented as existing in an eternal present, means that the novel's European characters turn to haunting as a largely European mode of possessing the land upon which the new Australians live. Voss' beheading, ordered by Aborigines and carried out by the emotionally-torn Jackie, is elevated in the narrative as a sacrificial event, attended and encouraged by spectral figures, even as he prepares for the act, "the spirits of the place were kind to Jackie: they held him up by the armpits as he knelt at the side of Mr Voss" (White 394). When Voss cannot dictate how the land's indigenous inhabitants should exist and therefore possess indigeneity himself, he turns to the only form of

possession left open to him – of finding “security *in* the landscape” via haunting it. In the world of *Voss*, ghostliness confers indigeneity, rather than indigeneity conferring ghostliness.

The processes of indigenization in both texts have, therefore, significant differences, and *Outland* and *Voss* have radically different ideas as to how individual ego contributes to the idea of national identity. Neither of them, however, are characters who ultimately survive the indigenization process; instead, they haunt, and are memorialized by, the figures who implicitly represent the new stakes of national identity: St. Peter inherits *Outland*’s experience, and Laura does the same for *Voss*’. Both St. Peter and Laura, notably, have to near the borderland of death in order to understand the “new feeling” of their nations’ landscape. St. Peter experiences his near-suffocation by gas as a moment of moral helplessness: “he had felt no will to resist, but had let chance take its way, as it had done with him so often” (Cather 282). Laura, similarly, expresses that, “I feel . . . that the life I am to live is already utterly beyond my control” (White 328) before she enters her near-fatal fever, from which she can only emerge at the moment of *Voss*’ death. Both experiences speak to boundary-crossing – like ghosts, they hover for a while between life and death – as well as, via their expressions of powerlessness, a kind of possession by the “indigenous” white men who inform their experiences. They are, ultimately, the new citizens who are created by the texts.

This act of creation, in both cases, incorporates elements of indigenous – or mock-indigenous – experience. St. Peter reflects at the outset of *The Professor’s House* that, “Desire is creation, is the magical element in that process” (Cather 29), and the text as a whole is “suffused with characters who desire to possess” (Winters 48-49). *Outland*’s desire for a personal and national history to which he can belong drives his portion of the narrative; desire for *Outland*’s absent person is the foundation for St. Peter’s actions; and material desire, clearly, dictates many

of the actions of the professor's family, as well as Crane and his wife. St. Peter's ultimate state is that he has learned to desire differently: "He must make the leap to radical *dispossession* to a new understanding of finally of what one can possess: one's own life" (Winters 49). Though he now feels apathy towards his family, he is ready to "face with fortitude the [ocean crossing to Europe] and the future" (Cather 283), a journey informed by what is essentially a claim of indigeneity, of feeling, in a genuinely new way, "the ground under his feet" (Cather 283). The haunting continues, but, as a haunting of desire, it exists as a productive, creative haunting.

The contrasting claim of *Voss*, as previously referenced, is that "Dying is creation" (White 361), and while this is spoken by the character Le Mesurier rather than Laura, this theme runs through her experience as survivor and speaker for the dead. At the end of the novel, as she resists interrogation from the colonel who hopes to discover the fates of the members of the exploration party, she reveals the extent to which she is haunted by Voss' (decapitated) ghost, crying in frustration, "You would cut my head off, if letting my blood run would do you any good. . . . Mr Voss is already history" (White 413). The colonel determines that he must return to the Outback in order to solve the mystery of the exact fates of the party, which Laura begs him not to do – as the fact of Voss' death is already an act of creation, she finds no need to further explore it, instead preferring to live in her present, haunted state.

This idea of death as a generative act is, further, explicitly linked in the text to indigeneity when it is first presented. At this point in the text, the exploratory party has split, Laura is on her sickbed, and as Voss and the men remaining with him starve, the narrative has begun collapsing the two worlds into a single hallucinatory reality, so that: "[Voss'] party rode down the terrible basalt stairs of [Laura's] house, and onward" (White 358). With the party's fate essentially

already sealed, Voss' fateful head is by this point described as "a skull with a candle expiring inside" (White 358). One evening, as the party gathers around the fire, the "genius" Le

Mesurier, who responds to his approaching death with increasing philosophizing, declares that:

"Dying is creation. The body creates fresh forms, the soul inspires by its manner of leaving the body, and passes into other souls."

"Even the souls of the damned?" asked Voss.

"In the process of burning it is the black that gives up the gold."

"Then *he* will give up the purest," said Voss.

He pointed to the body of the aboriginal boy Of the three souls that were dedicated to him, Voss most loved that of the black boy. Such unimpaired innocence could only be the most devoted . . . the sophistications of Frank Le Mesurier could have been startling echoes of the master's own mind. (White 361).

Voss has, here, transformed the idea of moral blackness into physical blackness, moving away from a sort of ethical alchemy into one instead involving race and selfhood. Voss' death both aligns him with the land, recreating him as newly-indigenous, and makes him unable to ultimately inhabit the nation he desired to forge. But where Voss intended, originally, to create the map of Australia, Laura – through her own feverish "burning" to emerge as the "gold" who provides a model for ethical Australian identity – inherits a version of blackness. She, like Jackie and Judd, can feel Voss still within the country, and his death becomes the point at which she is recreated as authentically Australian.

Ultimately, both *Voss* and *The Professor's House* perform the task of creating white national identities by creating white, hybrid ized ghosts to haunt the landscape. The reformulation of both Gothic ideas and history endows both the indigenes and the ghosts of these texts with power and extended influence, rather than stripping it from them. Both attempt – with potentially limited success – to discourage the imposition of order, control, or rulership over the "native" aspects of the land that make us feel vulnerable and orphaned. Instead, there us a

suggestion that we can, but subsuming ourselves to those aspects and allowing them to consume and possess us, become a valued part of them and add our own voices to the landscape.

Chapter Two: The Ghost as Invader in Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World and The Savage Crows

Australia's "Empty Land"

Though Cather and White's texts are separated by two decades, they in some respects occupy similar historical moments: both concern white anxiety over the legitimacy of their inheritance, in a time period when indigenous land rights are unsettled or denied. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which would encourage the processes of reservation formation and preservation in the U.S., was ten years in *The Professor's House's* future, and the forced individuation of American Indians occurring during Cather's time was one way in which an Indian identity was dissolved. The idea of a tribally-based life, as Outland discovers in the Southwest, is both an increasingly alien one and one that may indeed seem like it is "dead and gone." At the time of *Voss's* publication, Australian indigenous land rights are similarly unsettled, though the discussion over them is vastly different than the American one of betrayed treaties and Manifest Destiny, based instead on an intentional exclusion of Aborigines from the nation. Both of the texts, importantly, seize on moments in the past – of moments that produced contentious history and therefore ghosts, and suggest that their hauntings *might* not exist had history proceeded differently. These texts offer the opportunity for reforming history by presenting different possible narratives: history told by the living and by the dead, by the Native and non-Native, and by Australians and Americans. The process of indigenous land rights and how they confer identity in Australia gives us context to see how they are *constructed* (as opposed to inevitable) in a different way than in the U.S. In particular, the uniquely Australian

narrative of the Tasmanian genocide offers opportunities to see ways in which Native and non-Nativeness could and have been created differently on a national scale.

After a decades-long fight, in 1971, the first indigenous land rights case in Australia was settled; the conclusion of *Milirrpum v Nabalco Pty Ltd* was that the Yolngu people who had brought the suit had no right to their own traditional and ancestral land; it instead belonged to the mining company to which it had been sold by the government. Among the reasons given, in the lengthy and complex decision handed down, was that the Yolngu claim was based on an idea of law too primitive to be compared to or recognized by the far superior British law. Part of this primitiveness included the statement, on the part of the judge, that the Yolngu did not actually have a concept of owning the land, but rather feeling that they belonged to *it*. As a result, the claims of these “uncivilized inhabitants in a primitive state of society” had no way to exist within a courtroom in Northern Australia. Though the phrase *terra nullius* does not appear in that court decision, echoes of it as a political idea can be seen – the British colonial claim that Australia was “empty land,” that the people who lived there were not people in any meaningful sense of the word.

While the eventual outcome of *Milirrpum* was increased activism and support of indigenous land rights in Australia, that idea of Aboriginal non-existence, that *terra nullius*, speaks deeply to the ways in which Aboriginality and Australian-ness have been constructed in regards not just to land and law, but history, time, and humanity. Bain Attwood sees this as defining even the way we are able to talk about the past: “History, as a discourse which deploys temporality as a marker of difference, has been the means by which Europeans have constructed Aborigines in terms of an absence or lack – they were either of another time or were even timeless, and so were not of our time, that is, modernity. For much of the last 200 years or so,

this has been an ever present image of ‘the Aborigine’” (viii). As occurs so often when we come into contact with the Other, white Australia has defined itself by what it is not – displacing and projecting qualities it rejects onto the Aboriginal Other. There are, of course, multiple important Others for Australia – Asian, American, and ultimately even British – but Aboriginality occupies a privileged part of this hierarchy, given that they represent the unsettling possibility of an “authentic” Australia that white Australians can never inhabit.

The “absence or lack” that Attwood describes is manifest through much of Australian history; he cites a school primer from 1917 that claims that Aborigines are a question only for anthropologists, rather than historians, as history is solely the domain of whites. Aborigines are, in fact, absent from most historians’ work until the 1970s, at which point they begin to be addressed in the wake of a growing Aboriginal rights movement – and Australia’s History Wars begin their long, slow burn. The two camps have simplistically come to be labeled the Black Armband historians, indicating those who emphasize Australia’s national guilt in the treatment of its indigenous population, and the Three Cheers historians, who maintain that such claims are exaggerated. Stuart MacIntyre, in his assessment of the History Wars, states that a major motivation in the fight is not just national identity, but the “harsh doctrine” of historical determination – the idea that discovering what Australia’s “true” history is in terms of white/Aboriginal relations will limit or allow what kind of nation it can become in the future.

Attwood – among others – questions the usefulness of this binary: both versions of the colonial conflict, he maintains, are Australian history, rather than Aboriginal history. In Attwood’s explanation, Australian history is dependent on the European viewpoint of an empirical, immutable past, while: “history in the (Aboriginal) oral tradition assumes a conjunction between past and present, that the past is something which is fluid and shifting and

so amendable to intervention, and has an inevitable subjectivity as people seek to establish meaning for the past in the context of their present” (xx). The two main competing “Australian histories” of Aboriginality take for granted that indigenous communities are fractured, destroyed, and discontinuous, and work towards discovering what “really happened,” for a variety of political and cultural purposes. Aboriginal histories, in contrast, focus on Aboriginal identity as continuous, enduring, and in resistance to the “hegemonic narrative which decreed Aborigines were ‘dying out’” (Attwood xix-xx). As part of doing so, they occupy a worldview which insists that the past is a reflection of the present just as much as the present is of the past, and both therefore become mutable.

These concerns of representation and history come to a head in the context of the “Friendly Mission” to Tasmania and the Torres Strait Islands, led by the missionary George Augustus Robinson. Robinson’s journey stands as one of the better-documented instances of nineteenth-century genocide of an indigenous people, both because the mission was government-sanctioned and because the eventual genocide was at least in part unintentional. In 1830, Robinson, a self-educated missionary acting under Lieutenant Governor George Arthur’s authority, began his Friendly Mission to convince what remained of the native Tasmanian and Torres Strait populations – already decimated by disease and the “Black War” skirmishes between themselves and white colonists – to relocate to Flinders Island. The Mission was both notable and mismanaged in multiple ways; historian Henry Reynolds explains that, “By any measure Robinson’s six expeditions were significant journeys of exploration. But . . . Robinson was the most inexperienced of explorers. He was neither bushman, squatter, surveyor nor soldier. He had no bush experience at all. He was guided, fed, sheltered and, in all likelihood, managed by his Aboriginal companions” (*Fate*, 136).

The most important of Robinson's companions, by his own estimation, were the Bruny Islanders Wooraddy (sometimes written as Wooreddy) and his eventual wife Truganini (variously written as Trucanini, Trugernanna, and other alternative spellings). The Bruny Islanders became Robinson's translators and diplomats as he attempted to convince the native Tasmanians to accept protection from the Crown; while the Mission's efforts were largely successful in relocating the indigenous population to Flinders Island, the results were ultimately disastrous. The Tasmanians and Islanders were relatively safe from violence directed against them by white colonists and sealers; however, disease and the poor conditions of their new home quickly destroyed their gathered tribes. A group of five Bruny Islanders, including Truganini and Wooraddy, escaped Flinders Island and began raiding the settlements around Port Phillip (now Melbourne). When two whalers were killed, the group was pursued and captured; the two men, Wooraddy and Ummarrah, became the first people in the district to be hanged by the government. Truganini ultimately became famous as the "last known" living full-blooded Tasmanian, dying in 1876.¹

The trauma of the Tasmanian genocide was compounded by the way many of its last members were treated, living in a sort of indentured servitude on Flinders Island for decades, and the fact that their mixed-race descendants lost all land rights and claims. But important to understanding these texts are also the ways in which the Tasmanians' bodies were treated in death. When William Lanne, known as "King Billy," the last known full-blooded Tasmanian man, died in 1869, his body was subject to horrific disfigurement:

A Dr. William Crowther . . . sneaked into the lab, beheaded Lanne's corpse, skinned the head, removed the skull and slipped another skull from a white cadaver into the black

¹ The historical records are almost necessarily spotty, given that the Tasmanian and Islander populations were so widely scattered, and their oral histories of family disrupted. Fanny Cochrane Smith – who died in 1905 – is considered by many to be the last full-blooded Tasmanian, and was certainly the last fluent speaker of a Tasmanian language.

skin. . . . the officials decided not to let the Royal College of Surgeons get the whole skeleton; so they chopped off the feet and hands from Lanne's corpse and threw them away. The lopped, dishonored cadaver of the last tribesman was then officially buried, unofficially exhumed the next night and dissected for its skeleton. (Hughes 423)

Truganini, learning of what had happened to King Billy, demanded that, upon her death, she be weighted down and buried at sea. Instead, she was buried in the Protestant Chapel in Hobart, only to be dug up two years later and have her skeleton be prepared for display in the Tasmanian Museum, where it stayed in a glass case until 1947, at which point it was stored in the basement. In 1976, on the hundredth anniversary of her death, the museum finally cremated her bones and scattered them at sea. These are the major elements of the final days of the Tasmanian genocide that the various histories agree on, though, as noted, even some of these are contested or uncertain. Major questions remain about how these events should be read, who has the authority to dictate that reading, and under which circumstances the official history can be changed.

The real-world results of addressing these questions are far-reaching. There are clear theoretical implications for the determination of the nature of Australian cultural history, as well as Aboriginal identity and agency. Different responses invite us to read both historical documents and works of fiction in ways that open up possibilities for an Australia that might have been or could be. Mark McKenna, an historian whose ideology is centered towards discovering the "real" history of Australia, is to some degree dismissive of the usefulness of an Aboriginal history to perform much other than this theoretical work, stating that, "The use of history in a court of law demands that one line of reasoning is pursued and a particular conclusion proved. The law has great difficulty in accommodating history as equivocation, doubt or exploration" (59). I would contest that this is a too-limited way to understand the possibilities offered by multiple historical readings. The *Milirrpum* decision was finally overturned in 1992 by the *Mabo v Queensland* decision, which effectively also overturned the

concept of *terra nullius*. This was not a case of the law recognizing new factual history; it was never contested, in *Milirrpum*, that there were no Aboriginal peoples actually present when white colonists arrived, just that they did not exist in a way that gave them the same rights as the descendants of British colonists. *Mabo*, born as it was out of the efforts of academic argument and Aboriginal land rights movements, represents a moment in which new theoretical ways of understanding white/Aboriginal relations allowed for the rewriting of the law. While McKenna may be correct in his statement describing the limitations of the British legal system to deal with history, there is room to suggest that what is at stake may be whether a concretely, legally different future for Australia can be constructed through theory – even through fiction.

It is into this fray that both Robert Drewe's *The Savage Crows* and Mudrooroo's *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* enter in attempting to narrate the Tasmanian genocide. The two texts join the conversation about history, Australian-ness, and Aboriginality from different perspectives and, even though they are only separated by five years, at different points in the legal and cultural arguments. Drewe, an accomplished white journalist, writes his 1976 novel in the wake of the *Milirrpum* decision that evoked claims of *terra nullius*; its publication coincided with the 1976 Aboriginal Land Rights Act, which granted much of the Northern Territory to its traditional indigenous inhabitants.² Despite this and other decisions related to specific areas of Australia, *terra nullius* remained in effect as the default legal doctrine regarding traditional Aboriginal land – the law of the land insisting that indigenous law and indigenous people are essentially nonexistent. This is still the case when Mudrooroo (then Colin Johnson), known as the first Aboriginal novelist, publishes his novel in 1983 – however, at this

² It should be mentioned that there is another 1976 novel, *Queen Trucanini* by Nancy Cato and Vivienne Rae Ellis, which details the Tasmanian genocide from the point of view of Truganini. Focusing on a supposed sexual relationship between Robinson and Truganini, it is not particularly well-regarded, having been described as “uneven,” “unsuccessful,” and “juvenile.” The extensive research that the authors performed in writing it, however, has since become a source for other texts on the subject.

point, *Mabo* was already being argued in the High Court of Australia, and arguments about *terra nullius*' viability were already being undermined as a result.

Both *The Savage Crows* and *Doctor Wooreddy* can be seen as teetering on the cusp between rewriting Australian history – attempting a claim of authenticity as to what “really” happened – and, potentially, creating a kind of Aboriginal history in contrast to Australian history. Throughout the court decisions involving Aboriginal land rights, there is a recurring outcry from the Three Cheers camp of historians that history is being rewritten – that colonization has been inappropriately relabeled as invasion. Keith Windschuttle's writings, in particular, have become a focal point for historical argument; his “Three Cheers” series, titled *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, is one that makes the claim that land cannot have been unlawfully taken from Australia's native people's because they never claimed to possess it in a European sense. It has been attacked at length in works like the 2002 anthology *Whitewash: On Keith Winschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*. In the latter work, Reynolds – a major pioneer in addressing Aboriginal history in Australia – summarizes a list of ignored linguistic sources and then bitinglly characterizes Windschuttle's position as being: “Assuming that the Tasmanians didn't own the land, had no sense of property and traditionally knew nothing of trespass, the conflict itself could not have been about land. That being so, the Aborigines were not patriots, not even warriors. They were criminals engaged in murder, assault and theft. They were largely responsible for the violence and they brought their own fate on themselves” (*Terra*,” 115). While Mudrooroo attacks this idea directly, by creating a new history in which black Tasmanians are given voices to speak about their feelings on culture and country, Drewe places Robinson as an untrustworthy, Puritanical, and somewhat naïve narrator to make a similar point about who the land “belongs” to.

In many ways, the conversation about all of these issues can be focused around the idea of mutilation, the partial but not entire destruction that necessarily brings trauma but has the potential to also create possibility. Michael Taussig addresses a similar idea in his treatment of defacement, speaking in his explorations of “the labor of the negative,” in which defacement does not *destroy* a secret, but is instead a revelation of it. While some of the aspects of mutilation in these texts align with this description of defacement, the problem of the collision of different worldviews prevents it from being a sufficient description. The act of settlement by white colonial Australians is expressed in their historical texts – as in those of North America – as a “taming” of the land. From an Aboriginal viewpoint, however, colonization existed not only as a process of invasion, but of mutilation – not necessarily of the land itself, but of their relationship with it; an 1837 report from Flinders Island reveals that the “Sunday school examinations” Robinson put his charges through included the rote questions: “Is the bush a good place to live? – No Sir. Do you like to live on Flinders Island like white people? – Yes Sir” (qtd. in McKenna 29). Without ever having had a legal claim to be destroyed by colonization, they were required to emotionally and spiritually damage their concept of their country by this collision of worlds. It is a process which we can see an echo in of the U.S.’s “Indian Schools,” where the goal was to “kill the Indian, save the man.” McKenna notes that this mutilation, for Robinson, offered the Tasmanians the promise of heaven in return. What *Savage Crows* and *Doctor Wooreddy* offer, instead, is a different kind of mutilation: one that destroys parts of Robinson’s project, leaves it limping through the bush, in order to offer the possibility of an Australia that could have been or could now become, via the process of different and creative understanding of history.

The other major mutilations that occur in the texts, of course, are those of human bodies, which we see repeatedly harmed – even in death – throughout. Two main collisions can be occurring here, the first being the split between white and black worlds’ often inverse understandings of what mutilation is. Some ways in which indigenous Australians alter their bodies – including sacred ones such as scarification or burning of the dead – are viewed as mutilation by the white world that encounters them. In contrast, nineteenth-century white Australia “preserves” Aboriginal bodies in ways that are experienced as mutilation by those who experience this treatment – not just the unfortunate Truganini, but the living Tasmanians who are “saved” from their interactions with white men only to have their bodies destroyed by disease. The second major collision present of broken bodies is that between the living and the dead. In many ghost stories, the ghosts appear with mutilated bodies that indicate the manner of their deaths: the image of the headless horseman, for example, is one that persists far back before Washington Irving into medieval folklore. Contradictorily, however, ghosts themselves cannot be mutilated because of their spectrality; only the living can have their bodies damaged. So while mutilation *produces* ghosts through its infliction of fatal wounds, it is also a quality of the physical world, and particularly the world of the living, to be maimed or mutilated. Considering the mutilation/defacement of human bodies in this way through the texts offers the possibility to consider that to be mutilated, even in death, is to create a kind of life.

“Exhumed, tidied up, lacquered and stapled to the museum wall”

Robert Drewe came to fiction from his career as an award-winning journalist, and 1976’s *The Savage Crows* represents his first novel; since its publication, he has entered the contemporary Australian canon via his short and long fiction, drama, and memoirs. In early

criticism of Drewe's fiction work, Bruce Bennet describes the writer's "conception of truth as 'elusive' and 'bewildering[ly] hybrid'"(14), drawing on journalistic strategies of reporting fact while attempting to create a coherent and compelling narrative. This tendency, which persists through Drewe's fiction, emerges in *The Savage Crows* via a combination of verifiable real-world detail with two fictitious narrators, one contemporary, one colonial. Drewe's work has filtered its way into the Australian canon; his 1991 Ned Kelly novel *Our Sunshine* and his 2000 memoir *The Shark Net* – in which Drewe recalls a childhood friend who became a serial killer – have been particularly influential in understandings of their respective presentations of Australian history and its relationship to the world. *The Savage Crows*, concerned as it is with the history of a genocide which even historians had at the time only recently begun to grapple with, deals heavily with "unprintable stories" in both colonial and contemporary Australia.

The apocalyptic collision of cultural worlds and the attempt to cement identity is in Drewe's work further complicated by issues of class and propriety, while its central character attempts to make Aborigines Australian by defining their true history. In *The Savage Crows*, the narrative of the Tasmanian genocide exists largely as viewed through the imagination of its contemporary main character, Stephen Crisp, who is attempting to write what he calls his "thesis," though it is not a professional or academic work, but instead, a personal project which the narrative voice of the novel calls "a thesis in the sense of an act of laying down, of getting it all on paper, *everything*" (14). The guilt with which Crisp – and arguably Drewe – experiences the nature of his project is palpable: "The thesis concerned aspects of the hunting down, slaughter, rape, infanticide, betrayal, deportation (redemption?) and extinction of a unique race of five thousand people. . . . His stated intention was to finish the thesis in time for the centenary of the death of the last Tasmanian, an old woman named Truganini, in 1976. . . . Crisp thought it

the most effective act of genocide the world had known” (36). Though we as readers are only allowed to see small portions of Crisp’s thesis on the Tasmanians, it is made clear that he is transfixed on the atrocities committed against them, both in life, and in death. He becomes a hoarder of information about them, and as he begins his research on the Tasmanian and Bruny Island genocide, he finds himself gathering: “fringe items of information, trivia, piled up in his mind and notebooks. He collected a list of various tribal translations from old research books: I love you – *Mena coyetea*, I will go and hunt – *Mena mulaga*” (18). The novel’s listing of this accumulation of parts is enmeshed in Crisp’s own written description of the violated corpse of William Lanney, King Billy. By the end of the passage, “Crisp retained a vision of the headless, limbless Last Man” (Drewe 24). Though it is tempting to use this to posit King Billy as a haunting presence for Crisp, the novel’s construction of the sequence suggests otherwise – that Crisp, in pulling apart history and taking what he wants, is a contemporary stand-in for the dissectionists who so callously dismantled the last full-blooded Tasmanian man, and it is he who therefore becomes aligned with the past. Crisp anchors himself, via Black Armband-like guilt, in the history of white invasion of the continent, and as the novel progresses, he can be read as desperately attempting to use the specter of Robinson as an anchor point by which he can affix Aborigines into history.

Through this semi-possession by nineteenth-century white men, Crisp’s guilt is personalized, rather than being a broad experience of white cultural culpability, and their actions echo through the incidents he recalls of his personal life. Both living and dead Aboriginal bodies are ostensibly banished from mainstream view in conservative 1970s Sydney, further instances of their “lack” within Australia. Aboriginal presence, however, looms in Crisp’s mental and emotional world – in his memory of his 1950s childhood, his father discovers Crisp and his

brother ogling what Crisp internally terms, “The Naked Lubra³ Calendar,” which depicts three young, topless indigenous women in a photograph entitled “Outback Innocence.” His father’s confiscation of this, which he calls a “filthy photograph,” then becomes associated, for Crisp, with his father’s subsequent and persistent criticism of his mother’s daringly short tennis skirt as being similarly sexually filthy. In all reactions to the photograph – the calendar’s label of “innocence,” the boys’ mild curiosity, their father’s insistence on “filth” – the voice and agency of the women themselves is unimportant, erased, and the problem their nudity represents is solved by their being literally hidden out of sight. As an adult, Crisp is horrified to witness this attitude repeated by his brother Geoff; Geoff recounts a story in which a friend “rooted a coon” (had sex, in a car, with an Aboriginal prostitute) and then refused to pay her: “[The prostitutes] start screaming like maniacs. Can boongs yell! . . . Bob shook one, you know, to quiet her down and the other one screams out the window for the whole bloody tribe. Then the boss wakes up in the back and wants to know what’s going on. ‘Can we give you ladies a lift home?’ he says. Christ, and we’re fighting the Black War” (98-99). The terms used by Geoff – “coon” and “boong” – are almost unthinkable for most Australians to speak today, but both are overtly offensive terms even within the context of the time and place of the novel. When Crisp, hoping for some glimmer of regret, asks Geoff whether he has any thoughts on the incident, Geoff only replies, “I still think Bob was lucky not to get a dose [of venereal disease]” (99). Crisp’s contemporary life is almost inexorably shaped, and partially haunted, by this stretching back in time of the sexual bodies of Aboriginal women – not just to his own childhood, but all the way back to the Black War of Tasmania, and specifically through the abuse of women.

³ “Lubra” is a term formerly used to refer to Australian Aboriginal women, adopted from an indigenous language in the 19th century and has slowly become considered to be a pejorative – akin to “squaw” in the Americas.

It is, however, less the women themselves who are Crisp's resident specters, and more the white men who abuse or exploit them – both in the present and the past. The novel itself is non-chronological, jumping between Crisp's current life writing the thesis, his memories of past personal relationships, and entries from a fictional journal of George Augustus Robinson's, itself titled "The Savage Crows." Crisp begins the novel already fascinated with Robinson, spending much of his time perusing Robinson's original journals and papers: "He lived and breathed Robinson. He saturated himself" (38). Though Crisp's perusal of these papers is grounded in reality outside the novel – Robinson's records are in fact located in the Mitchell Library in Sydney, where Crisp reads them, and the journey described matches the historical accounts to some extent – the language of journal itself is entirely constructed by Drewe. Susan Martin refers to these portions of the text, as when Drewe constructs historically-accurate but nonexistent newspaper articles that Crisp discovers in his studies, as "fictional/factional" – performing not only just a blurring of boundaries between veracity and falsehood, but actually splintering the narrative and indicating the difficulty Crisp has in reforming the factions into full coherence. In Drewe's own introduction to the book, he explains that "only the characters of Robinson and Truganini bear any resemblance to their *known* personalities" (6, emphasis original), indicating not just that most of the historical portions should be considered fiction, but that even history as we know it is a sequence of fictions.

Despite or perhaps because of the indeterminacy of this history, Robinson's presence in the novel is in many ways more intense than Crisp's own – while Crisp is discussed by the narrative voice in the third person, Robinson speaks in the first person, a voice which ultimately reads as stronger and more strident than Crisp's own because of its confidence. He, like Crisp, is fixated on the idea of the ways in which Aboriginal women use their sexual abilities, particularly

when it comes to their encounters with white men. He bemoans at one point while at a waystation with part of his gathered Aboriginals that, “No sooner had I chastised the servants at Kelly’s farm about their immoral relations with the native women than I found two of the convicts trying to entice the women away, not half a mile from our establishment. They were chiefly ogling after Truganini. She, in her way, was neither encouraging nor modest in the European style but like most of the aboriginal women had a keen sensual curiosity and a desire for the material luxuries” (52). This reaction of Robinson’s, casting Truganini as both innocent and sexually calculating, becomes a refrain every time there is the possibility of Truganini using her body – apparently willingly – to procure something desired from a white man. However, after both her spouse and Wooraddy’s have died, and Wooraddy pursues her romantically to her apparent distress, Robinson states he was uncertain about the morality of their courtship, but then “decided it was a peculiar characteristic of savage life – that there existed a mutual dependence and one could not exist without the other” (93). It is Robinson’s thoughts and fears about black women’s sexual intermingling with whites that end up ghosting how Crisp – and by extension – male white contemporary Australia – construct their confused sense of Aboriginal lustiness, innocence, and agency.

Further, while it is the Tasmanians who slowly die over the course of Robinson’s narrative, it is Robinson’s suffering, and Robinson’s “mutilations,” that are emphasized in the fictional/factional sections of the novel, and how Crisp further sees that history as meaningful in his own life. The depictions of the Tasmanians’ deaths from unspecified disease, at the outset of Robinson’s narrative, do take on a grotesque character through Robinson’s vantage point: while he is assisting with the cremations that the Aborigines find spiritually important, he comments on their “intolerable” stench, says his “feelings were particularly agitated by the distasteful . . .

request” (54), and describes having to order his “charges” to re-burn a body when they discover “one of the dogs chewing on an unconsumed limb” (56). Later, however, the deaths of the indigenous characters assume a listlike, impersonal quality, though it is possible that the repetitiveness of their nature and their numerousness makes this inevitable. Robinson’s own torment, in contrast, is dwelt on almost lovingly. This begins in his concerns over how he is treated socially – casually dismissed or humored by his social superiors, mocked by the white convicts he ineffectually commands to assist in his mission, and disobeyed by the black Aborigines who he sees as children refusing their father’s guidance. As his mission continues, these become mingled with often-lengthy descriptions of his own physical ailments:

We were again out of provisions. The cutaneous distemper broke out over my whole body, my skin erupting in scores of weeping ulcers. I rubbed myself with gunpowder mixed with urine as a desperate measure. . . . I wrote in my journal: ‘Such was my fate and that of any person desirous of making himself useful to these unbefriended people.’ As I wrote, imagining my situation at its lowest ebb, mosquitoes rose from the damp bushes and settled on my tortured body. (122)

This echoes both other narratives of Australian exploration – as in the previous chapter’s *Voss* – and the way in which Crisp’s consciousness structures the more contemporary sections of the novel. The suffering of those around Crisp – a girlfriend’s pregnancy and (implied) abortion, his divorce and resulting distance from his ex-wife and daughter, the deaths of his mother and a friend in adolescence – are all reframed in terms of his own “castration, emasculation and disempowerment in the novel” (Martin 56).

This is not to make the claim that neither Robinson nor Crisp genuinely care about the Aborigines that they express concern over, but that their social positions and needs limit the ways in which they are able to formulate their care. The monstrously preserved bodies of Truganini and King Billy that help motivate Crisp to begin his thesis are echoed in the historical

portions, in which black bodies become horrific signifiers of white brutality. Crisp feels the need to persevere over Truganini's body having been "Exhumed, tidied up, lacquered and stapled to the museum wall" (238). Robinson, in parallel, stumbles upon a massacre of indigenes by his countrymen, and is shocked at the destruction of black bodies: "An old *Toogee* woman crawled to her knees from behind a lichened outcrop. Blood gushed from a vast black cave in her cheek. The woman turned her half-face to the sea and struggled to stand upright. . . . the ruddy-faced Gael rose silently from behind a boulder and blew her body like a bunch of black feathers over the cliff. 'You murderer!' I was near blind with rage" (148-149). Robinson, in his colonial era of the Friendly Mission, is enveloped in a world in which the colonists, sealers, and whalers around him are acting to make the reality align with the law, creating an actual absence of aboriginal bodies through murder. Crisp, two hundred years later, sees a world in which the preservation of dead black bodies perpetuates the lie that there are no living ones which could desire legal rights or historical attention.

If we, in the manner of Taussig's idea of defacement, attempt to examine these mutilations as offering up the possibility of revelation, what kinds of potential do they have? While these are historical bodies, they are also, importantly, *fictional* ones – fabricated stand-ins for atrocities whose realness is in some ways always unrecoverable. One potential answer is that Robinson's initial shock at and the graphic depictions of burning and murdered Aboriginal bodies makes those bodies real and concrete in a way that defies *terra nullius*; that even as the passages describe apparent destruction and death, they help to create, in Crisp's world of 1976, an insistence that indigenous Australians have always existed, and still exist in the country even if expressed primarily through white guilt over their physical suffering. Guilt is a major theme of the novel; in one of Crisp's final encounters with the descendants of the Tasmanians, he is

cheerfully informed that, “There’s money in [guilt], boy” (262), and Drewe himself, in an interview about the novel, has stated that, “I wanted to annoy white racists; I wanted to bore it up [attack] the white racists – right across the country . . . I wanted to annoy *them* more than I wanted to bring pleasure to Aborigines” (qtd. in Shoemaker 151, *Black Words*). Another, possibly more generous reading of the text is that the shared suffering, the similarly damaged bodies of Robinson and the Tasmanians, offer the revelation of an Australia that could have been: there is an opportunity for Robinson to recognize, through his own ordeal, the kinds of mutilation he is forcing upon the Aborigines, and to change his course of action. It is the potential for a revelation that he never seizes, but which readers in the time before *Mabo* might participate in, an empathetic understanding of bodies and acknowledgement of physical Aboriginal presence. It is, in other words, a use of non-factual, human feeling which invites a rewriting of the factual world.

The historical, fictional/factional portion of the novel contains three different endings, the first of which is the contented last line of Robinson’s first-person narrative: “I had – through the blessing of the Almighty – brought tranquility to the Colony” (217). This highly biased historical perspective is then followed by a newspaper article from the January 7, 1832 edition of the Hobart Town *Courier* congratulating and thanking Robinson for his success in “the removal of these blacks” – a version of which exists in reality, but which Drewe has greatly expanded and aligned with Robinson’s claims, giving the newly white Tasmania a bucolic setting. Finally, there is a fragment of a fictional personal letter from Robinson to an unidentified recipient, in which he details some of the Bruny Islanders’ final experiences, including the hanging of Wooraddy and Ummarrah for murder, explaining that “the unfortunate deaths of the two sealers would not have occurred had [Truganini] not been prey, as usual, to the unwise influences of

men” (220). In the letter, written from England, he speculates about whether or not Truganini is still alive, and states that he plans to dedicate his manuscript of *The Savage Crows* to her, regardless. Crisp, however, ruminates later on all of those whom Truganini outlived: “Five husbands, scores of lovers and numerous rapists gone before her, slaughtered, hanged, syphilitic and tubercular; even Conciliator Robinson (the self-aggrandizer, the cop-out, the *petit-bourgeois* paternalist. ‘*I am the Father!*’) ten years mouldered in Bath’s quiet soil” (238). In Crisp’s imagination, Truganini exists as more vibrant than the dead Robinson, though he speaks, ghostlike, from beyond the grave in a way denied to her because of his access to the written word. The cumulative effect of these endings is further emphasis on the relativity of history in Drewe’s text, and another gesture towards the contradiction of adapting a single view of that history. Though the Tasmanians and Bruny Islanders are largely shut out from the processes of British history and law because of those disciplines’ limitations, it is through Robinson’s voice – both in fact and in fiction – that Truganini is able to speak to a contemporary audience. Robinson’s position as an untrustworthy, biased narrator gives Truganini her own sort of agency via her impenetrability; as with the woman the character is based on, we can only guess as to her ultimate goals and motivations.

The novel’s final passages tend more towards these kinds of claims of “Aboriginal history,” a rewriting that moves closer to insisting that there is value in understanding the official record of the Tasmanian genocide as at least partially fabricated and therefore usefully discarded. Crisp’s “own colonial odyssey” (239) culminates in a flurry of movement; overwhelmed by the ways in which the chaotic past haunts and informs his own equally chaotic present, he makes a frantic trip to the former Tasmanian enclosure at Flinders Island seeking coherence. Ultimately, with the help of locals, he makes his way to a tiny nearby island and its temporary master, the

mutton birder⁴ Blue Plum, a descendant of the Tasmanians. Or, as the Plum himself puts it: “We’re a whole new human population brought into being by hybridization . . . Know what I am? . . . A fourth generation cross. Tasmanian Aborigine on both sides. American nigger and a touch of Polynesian on my old man’s side. Also Irish. On my mother’s side Australian Abo twice and Scottish. Glasgow actually. . . . We’ve got hybrid vigour, sport” (253). Crisp’s thesis – and by extension his construction of Australian identity – has been based on the idea of the Tasmanians being a dead people, but in the Black Plum, he encounters a contradiction to this construction. Instead, Crisp is positioned as a relic of the past, an antiquarian who is unable to fully inhabit or inherit this hybridized version of Australia which the descendants of the “extinct” Tasmanians are ascendant in. Crisp’s attempt to write indigenous Australians into history, his attempt to memorialize them in defiance of his middle-class white surroundings, is revealed as a futile attempt to *fix* them into place, much the same way that Truganini has been lacquered into place in the museum. In the face of the Blue Plum and his long, unbroken tradition of speaking, trading in guilt and mutton-birding, his adaptability and authority, Crisp is rendered spectrally ineffectual himself.

It is ultimately not Robinson’s *Savage Crows* which is destined to live on as a remnant of the past – what we and Australia receive, instead, is a hybrid text of history, speculation, and doubt. Robinson’s narrative is filtered through Crisp’s consciousness and, in turn, the political and social circumstances in which Drewe himself is writing. Drewe anticipates the reactionary politics of Australian histories that would continue to find justification for denying land rights to the descendants of Tasmanians and Bruny Islanders by voices like Robinson’s to condemn them as sexually immoral and so foolish that they essentially create their own destruction.

⁴ “Mutton birding” is the commercial seasonal harvesting of petrel chicks on coastlines and islands. In Australia and New Zealand, these industries are managed almost entirely by indigenous peoples.

Simultaneously, however, his fictional/factional rewriting of history can be read as a nascent move towards an Aboriginal history that insists on the vitality of Aboriginal cultural and genetic inheritance – refusing to allow them to be so spectralized that they cannot lay claim to land, and instead writing them as intact and in resistance to preexisting hegemonic histories.

“All at once it hit him that he would die and at the hands of the ghosts.”

If Drewe has become firmly ensconced in Australia’s canon, then Mudrooroo might be understood as existing in Australia’s “counter-canon”: a voice which speaks stridently against the mainstream of literature, and gains importance both because and in spite of the fact that it is always excluded to some degree. He has become, somewhat problematically, “by far the most wide-ranging Aboriginal author” (Shoemaker, *Mudrooroo*), writing under four different names during the slow transformation of both his personal and public identity, accompanied by a degree of scandal in the literary world.⁵ Coming from a too-common Aboriginal background – growing up poor in the care of the state rather than with an Aboriginal family – he appeared on the literary scene in 1965 with *Wild Cat Falling*, which was widely publicized as the first novel ever written by an Australian Aboriginal. He spent the next few decades as a writer doing important work in describing Aboriginal ideas of kinship, rage, and reclamation. In 1996, the journalist Victoria Laurie published an article titled “Identity Crisis” in *Australian Magazine*, revealing that genealogical research showed no links to any Aboriginal tribe – Mudrooroo’s family was, instead, genetically rooted in Irish and African-American immigrants to Australia. In the ensuing controversy, Mudrooroo himself was rejected by both his adopted Aboriginal tribe and

⁵ While he has written as Colin Johnson, Mudrooroo Narogin, Mudrooroo Nyoongah, and Mudrooroo, this project chooses to simply use “Mudrooroo,” which is his preferred name at the time of writing. “Mudrooroo” means “paperbark” in the Bibbulmun language group (Noongar), chosen to signify his identity as a writer.

his biological family, and much of his writing was also rejected in literary and academic spheres as being no longer “Aboriginal enough.”

Mudrooroo’s *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* covers roughly the same events as Drewe’s *Savage Crows*, but the novel is set entirely during the genocide itself, and from the vantage point of Wooreddy (the “Wooraddy” of *Savage Crows*; Mudrooroo also uses “Trugernanna” rather than “Truganini”). Multiple critics, skirting the issue of Mudrooroo’s “authenticity,” still emphasize the importance of the work, as “the first time . . . the history of the Tasmanian Aborigines is engaged in fiction by a Black Australian” (Shoemaker 8, *Mudrooroo*). Wooreddy is in the text referred to as a “doctor” not because of medical skill, but because of his status as “an explorer, a philosopher, a man of science, a moralising theologian and a great lover” (Clark 146). Ghosts are at the forefront of Wooreddy’s world – throughout the text, the white colonists he encounters are referred to as ghosts, or “*num*,” “pale souls that the *Ria Warrawah* had captured” (Mudrooroo 4, *Doctor Wooreddy*). While the use of *num* is highly speculative – as are other terms the text uses as indigenous vocabulary, given the limited access contemporary writers have to Bruny Island language use – Mudrooroo draws here on the 1976 novel *Queen Trucanini*, which used the word similarly. While the meaning of “num” as spoken by Bruny Islanders is clearly “ghost,” its English language homophone, “numb,” can be read onto it as well, indicating that the invaders are a people devoid of appropriate feeling. Adam Shoemaker’s commentary is that the *num* “do not speak any form of civilised language but mumble a form of simple gibberish; they are greedy, violent and foolish. In brief, they are irredeemably primitive” (48, *Mudrooroo*). The similarly speculative term *Ria Warrawah* is, in Mudrooroo’s formation of Aboriginal mythology, a force aligned with darkness, evil, and the sea, kept at bay by the Great Ancestor. The text draws a distinction between the

dead and the ghostly – while the black characters of *Doctor Wooreddy* die, they are not described as ghosts, a position left filled only by the white invaders. Instead, the Bruny Island dead “live on with Great Ancestor in bliss” (Mudrooroo 5, *Doctor Wooreddy*).

Doctor Wooreddy, as it ends with the death of Wooreddy, does not display the same fascination with the desecration of black bodies that *Savage Crows*' Crisp is so driven by. This is not to say that the imagery is, however, entirely absent from Mudrooroo's work. In his later poetry collection *Song Cycle of Jacky* (1987), he tells both King Billy's and Trugernanna's stories again in “Song Thirty-One,” and there he speaks of mutilation as emasculation: “[T]he last of her menfolk died, / Far from home and island exile. / His body was raped and his balls were stolen; / His body was raped and they stole his balls” (44). But in *Doctor Wooreddy*, bodily disfigurement is dependent on context. It can occur as a celebration of Aboriginal identity – Wooreddy, like the other men of his clan, enters into manhood via a ritual that includes scarification, and he is able to share and show his history and “Doctorate” via the “regular rows of scars on his chest and the two irregular healed spear wounds on his side” (Mudrooroo 15, *Doctor Wooreddy*). These scars are not mutilation but language: as Wooreddy and Ummarrah meet Waau (Crow), an Aboriginal headman from the mainland, they first apologize for their own loss of tradition, then work out their kinship, and then read each other's bodies: “‘We decorate our bodies differently,’ Wooreddy observed. ‘We emphasize our degrees of initiation more.’ He opened his blanket and showed his neat rows of cicatrices. . . . Waau indicated his own relatively unscarred chest, and said: ‘We do not over-scar the body, but our main mark is the absence of a front tooth.’ . . . The good doctor would have liked to question him further on such matters” (182). During this exchange, at Robinson's request, the men are preparing to perform a “ceremonial” dance to the white colonists present, while an entirely different dance of signifiers

is taking place. Waau frankly states that what they are performing is a “rubbish dance,” one only good for performing for outsiders, and the designs they paint on their bodies are meaningless, hollow, strictly for show. At the same time, Robinson’s wife complains about what she sees as the grotesqueness of their long, ochre-smearred hair, and the Great Conciliator himself lies to his fellow white colonists about the nature of the dance, declaring that they are about to see “a real savage ceremony, . . . ‘If they did not do this, they would be speared’ [by other Aborigines]” (*Doctor Wooreddy* 181). What the indigenes experience as sacred, the invaders see as disfigurement; what the indigenes see as meaningless, the invaders read as symbolic. The black, scarred, and painted bodies of the Aborigines appear to the white colonists as being visibly mutilated; what they offer, instead, to Mudrooroo and his readers is a way to highlight what are the invisible class markers that exist among the white population: Once Mudrooroo and Waau establish generational kinship, they can treat “each other as equals without restriction,” while one of Robinson’s audience members is “a Miss McCrae who gave herself social airs, though she was not English, but Scottish” (*Doctor Wooreddy* 181). The altering of bodies here provides, again, the opportunity for revelation.

This revelation is, of course, highly dependent on the collision of alien worlds. It is, in fact, the inability to destroy/transmute Wooreddy’s body that marks the novel’s final passage describing Trugernanna’s grief: “Now her husband was dead and lying in a shallow grave on that beach. She wished that she could have taken his corpse and burnt it in the proper way” (207). This neglect of the dead, again, is echoed in *The Song Cycle of Jacky*’s description of Trugernanna: “A museum displayed her bones, a museum stored her bones, / No rest, no rest . . . And the black folk saw and heard her cries” (Mudrooroo, “Song Thirty-One,” 44). As in *The Savage Crows*, however, the disfigurement of bodies is described in wholly negative terms when

it affects the white figure of Robinson and his infected skin; his defacement is tied both to the clothes in which he covers his body, and his inability to control the ways in which it changes, as Trugernanna is ultimately unable to control what happens to her own body.

Doctor Wooreddy is visibly, tangibly interested in rewriting history; even over the course of the text, the identity of the characters becomes malleable, possibly most noticeable in the figure of Robinson. In his theoretical book on Aboriginal literature, Mudrooroo describes the Aboriginal writer as “a Janus-type figure with one face turned to the past and the other to the future while existing in a postmodern, multicultural Australia in which he or she must fight for cultural space” (*Writing*, 24). One potentially revolutionary action of the novel, then, is not just that Mudrooroo is reshaping the past to affect the future just at the outset of the *Mabo* court case, but that he upends the expectations for Australian literature as he does so. As in McKenna’s statements about the shortcomings of Aboriginal history within the court system, the tendency within Australian literature is to assume that white/British history and law can learn to understand Aboriginality in a different way through exposure to sympathetic black figures that spur white society into action. Mudrooroo inverts this by using Wooreddy and the Bruny Islanders’ epistemology as the world into which Robinson and the other white colonists must be categorized; it is their failure to fit that leaves them less than human, and recreates them as ghosts. Shoemaker notes that “in Mudrooroo’s fiction you *are* what you are named by others. Throughout all of his work, identity is contingent upon naming and new names connote new patterns of behaviour” (*Mudrooroo* 63). The naming of the *num* as such not only relocates the vantage point of the events as centered in a black/Aboriginal experience, but transforms white history into one of haunting. Wooreddy himself undergoes a new naming; his given name, translated by Mudrooroo as “duck,” describes his waddle. But on his entry into manhood, he is

given his “secret name” by the men of his tribe, “*Poimatapunna* (Phoenix)” (Mudrooroo 5), despite the apparent lack of such a figure in Aboriginal mythology. Mudrooroo, in his efforts to write a world in which Aboriginality has a complex, unbroken cultural lineage has created a history in which Wooreddy can be figured both as the keeper of fire – a tool which makes human life possible – and as a figure of rebirth. Later, Wooreddy and his fellow surviving Islanders will be renamed by a triumphant Robinson with a mixture of classic and somewhat odd names, with Wooreddy being labeled – but never explicitly accepting – “Count Alpha” as his new identity: “In his numbness he did not care if he was renamed Mister Brown” (*Doctor Wooreddy* 139). It is Robinson himself, however, who seems to undergo the most renamings over the course of the text:

It is no accident that Robinson becomes, progressively, “Meeter Ro-bin-un”, “Fader” [a phonetic representation of “father”], “The Great Conciliator”, “Ballawine”, “Commandant”, and finally “The Chief Protector of Aborigines”. Each title signifies a change in the missionary’s relationship with the Aboriginal Tasmanians, just as it highlights his altering self-perception. This is made explicit by the author because successive names replace earlier versions; for example, when Robinson breaks out in huge red splotches caused by a skin ailment the Aborigines nickname him “Ballawine” or “Red Ochre.” (Shoemaker, *Mudrooroo* 62)

Robinson is literally rewritten over the course of the text, with no one identity being sufficient to sustain him over its length. The renamings have different sources: some are suggested by Robinson himself, some by the indigenes, and some by figures of authority in the Australian government. If we continue to think of the malleability of the past as a feature of Aboriginal – as opposed to Australian – history, Mudrooroo’s suggestion here is deeply subversive. Not only is it an Aboriginal mode of thought to change the past by changing the future, but this is the *correct* way to address history, as evidenced that the white characters in the text do the same through their constant renaming. Despite the battle between white historians over “what really

happened,” Robinson’s final name as “The Chief Protector of Aborigines” suggests that the way white Australians have traditionally treated history is, in fact, in line with the Aboriginal view of a malleable past. By becoming “Chief Protector,” Robinson rewrites the colonial tyrannies and gross failures of his “Friendly Mission;” *Doctor Wooreddy* seems to respond by redefining him to the point of nonexistence.

Doctor Wooreddy is a self-proclaimed apocalyptic work, but the apocalypse it portrays is one that is not only incomplete, but which offers, contradictorily, opportunities for progress. At the time of Wooreddy’s initiation, it is made clear that he and his people exist in a highly binary world, which Mudrooroo himself describes as being split into “sea-as-evil and land-as-good . . . the first chapter unfolds within a structure of oppositions, good (child as innocence) seeing evil (European ships) . . . Europeans intrude into the pristine world of Australia as an evil disrupting force” (*Writing* 171). The novel’s narration invites us to see European arrival as challenging this binary: “The European invaders are ghosts but they have bodily functions like humans; they are ruthless killers but some claim that they want to save the Aborigines from harm; they travel across the ocean with ease but cannot navigate effectively on land” (Shoemaker *Mudrooroo* 58). In reality, however, the colonial forces that Wooreddy encounters are strikingly just as binary in their worldview – while not a perfect match, the Christian God becomes the Great Ancestor, and the Christian devil becomes *Ria Warrawah*, the evil sea. In Robinson’s worldview, all that is Native must be denied, destroyed, and marked as of *Ria Warrawah*; Wooreddy is simply unable to initially perceive this from his indigenous vantage point. While Wooreddy’s world is being destroyed at a fundamental level – being mutilated beyond repair as the people are separated from life, land, language, and each other – its binariness holds some of the responsibility for its own destruction, lending itself as it does to displacement to Christianity’s similar starkness. The

arrival of Robinson and his ideology may be seen as less of a destruction of Aboriginal binarism and more of a replacement/translation, an ultimately incomplete destruction that, again, acts as mutilation.

It is only towards the end of the novel, as Wooreddy and Waau trade information about their religions and traditions, that a more robust kind of apocalypse can be seen. They are able to map their religious understandings on to each other's more or less, just as the Christianity of Robinson mapped itself on to indigenous spirituality. Then, however, Waau leads Wooreddy to a cave which challenges Wooreddy's bifurcate view of the world:

Great spears fell from the roof. Great Ancestor casting down his spears to keep *Ria Warrawah* at bay – but other spears rose from the floor to join them in a oneness. They met and there was no conflict as he always thought that there should be – that there had to be! And his skin did not itch at the proximity of *Ria Warrawah*, and he did not feel threatened by the new truth, though he felt beyond his old life. *Ria Warrawah* and Great Ancestor came from a single source . . . It was the origin of all things” (*Doctor Wooreddy* 197).

It is also at this moment when Wooreddy has the revelation that his peoples' way of life is doomed. But the focus has clearly shifted away from the physical deaths of the people around him – instead, what has been destroyed is the insistence on binary opposition that exists in both worlds. It is true that the Bruny Islanders face apocalypse, but the seeds are also present to end the world of the colonists as well, with both being replaced by “a single, unified vision . . . a new synthesis in the Aboriginal context” (Shoemaker *Mudrooroo* 59). Further, at the novel's close, Wooreddy “knows that ‘the promised land’ to which he is being transported is, in reality, ‘the Island of the Dead’ . . . He therefore chooses to vanish” (Clark 160), and the somber Trugernanna consoles herself that “the real Doctor Wooreddy had disappeared before they could get to him and inflict further humiliation upon him” (*Mudrooroo Doctor Wooreddy* 207). Shoemaker, further, sees a particular symbolism in the imagery of Wooreddy's soul shooting

towards the sky as a Phoenix-like spark while the sun breaks through black clouds: “a new beginning in the colours of the Aboriginal flag” (*Mudrooroo* 58).⁶ Maureen Clark considers this same scene as an indication “that, even in death, the spirit of Wooreddy lives on and that there is still much more he has to do and to say in the task of making Australia familiar with the ghosts of its (and perhaps the author’s?) past” (160). While Wooreddy’s world has ended, what that brings is not no world for Aborigines, but one so new it may simply be unrecognizable.

“They were wrong that we weren’t here, we were right that we were here”

Drewe’s and Mudrooroo’s texts exist in tension not just with each other, but with Australian/British law, the official historical record, and literature. The two novels buck literary conventions in different ways; Shoemaker describes *The Savage Crows* as being a mix of “the mordantly cynical style of much of the book’s modern section, and the far more reserved, descriptive style of the historical portion” (*Black Words* 150). Annalisa Oboe has described *Doctor Wooreddy* as “a ‘mongrel’ literary artifact, the originality of which lies more in its production of an ‘oppositional’ (hi)story . . . than with Sir Walter Scott’s literary prototype [of the historical novel]” (89). It is true, however, that they largely follow literary convention in terms of structure and style, and Australian literature in particular, in that their heritage can be seen as growing out of the British literary canon. But they also follow a particular Australian convention: unlike the American texts in which Indian ghosts have a sort of cultural omnipresence, indigenous ghosts are rare in Australian texts. Drewe and Mudrooroo refuse to allow their indigenous characters to be completely killed off, insisting instead on either a

⁶ The Aboriginal flag, designed in 1971, is a yellow circle (representing the sun) on a field whose top half is black (representing indigenous Australians) and whose bottom half is red (representing the land). It has become a major symbol in the Australian indigenous rights movement. While there is also an official Torres Strait Islander flag, which would be appropriate for the novel’s indigenous characters, it was not created until

continued, hybrid vitality in Drewe, or the promise of resurrection and metamorphosis in Mudrooroo – mutilations which bring revelation and opportunities for the future.

This is the contentious point at which literature meets law in Australia; the project of the law was, at the time of these writings, to spectralize Aborigines so heavily that they were unable to exist in a substantial enough way to be capable of legal claims to their land. The law, via *terra nullius*, is something which uses history as a bludgeon in an effort to dispossess indigenous Australians of land, to deny them the right to property. Literature, in these texts, instead works to allow legal precedent for allowing land and Aborigines the right to possess each other, and it does so by insisting not just that Australia's black bodies are not gone, only damaged – as well as creating a picture of white law and white culture that is itself insubstantial enough to be able to assert an unquestionable legal claim to the country.

The second *Mabo* case, the legal mechanism by which *terra nullius* was definitively overturned, was in large part driven by the energy of Eddie Mabo, a Torres Strait Islander whose passion inspired and attracted white legal help to navigate the problems with indigenous rights and British law. His name has become synonymous with the advancement of indigenous land rights. When the decision was reached in 1992, the mixed Aboriginal/*balanda*⁷ band Yothu Yindi, already famous for their 1988 song “Treaty” disparaging the failure of promises made by colonial authorities to Aboriginal Australians, released their song “Mabo” and its triumphant chorus: “They were wrong/That we weren’t here/We were right/That we were here./Liya balburk bapayili/Liya waltjan bapapili.” The last two lines here are a repetition of this claim in Yolngu – the tribal group to which some members of Yolngu Yindi belong, as well as the group which found itself disinherited by the disastrous 1971 *Milirrpum* decision. Mabo represented a

⁷ *Balanda*, of Malay origin, is a term that some indigenous groups, including the members of Yothu Yindi, choose to use as a label indicating European ancestry. It has parallels in the similar *whitefella*, New Zealand's *pakeha*, Hawaii's *Haole*, and the Central/South American *gringo*.

definitive moment in the legal and cultural relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australian peoples.

Eddie Mabo, sadly, died of cancer five months before the contentious court decision was reached. Three years later – a delay necessitated by the traditional mourning period – when “Mabo” had become a famous name, his memorial service was held. Overnight, his gravesite was vandalized – a bronze image of his face was hacked off his headstone, which was spray-painted with swastikas and racial slurs. More than a hundred years after King Billy’s body was torn to pieces by curious and acquisitive racists, Eddie Mabo became another name in the long line of Aborigines to be physically attacked in death. His re-interment by his fellow Islanders was, fittingly, a defiant, hybrid ceremony of Christianity and the traditional Malo dance – rarely performed but resurrected for one of the men who helped to rewrite the past in the present.

Chapter Three: Lovecraft and the Ghost as Miscegenation

“I am Providence”: Empty Graves and Speaking for the Other

When writers like Mudrooroo recreate reality and history through the image of the ghost, it is in part in resistance to the 20th century literary image of the Native’s place in supernatural fiction, one which is shaped largely through changes in U.S. fiction. The 20th-century uncanny in the English-speaking world can be traced back to the American pulp era, and, in particular, to the ultimate influence of H.P. Lovecraft, a man who set the pattern for both “weird” fiction and to some extent, racial portrayals within the genre. In a letter to James Ferdinand Morton dated May 16, 1926, H. P. Lovecraft wrote a line of his typical quasi-antiquarian verse: “I am Providence, & Providence is myself—together, indissolubly as one, we stand thro’ the ages; a fixt monument set aeternally in the shadow of Durfee’s ice-clad peak!”⁸ The phrase “I am Providence” recurs in at least one other letter Lovecraft sent to one of his many correspondents, and is now carved into his headstone at Swan Point Cemetery in Providence, Rhode Island. The writer was certainly devoted to the city, spending most of his life there outside of a brief, unhappy stint in New York City that increased his devotion to his home town. The phrase can be read as a statement of humility, as of Lovecraft claiming that he owes his identity to the town where he spent most of his life. It can also, however – particularly given its context within the original letter – be seen as a particularly arrogant claim on Lovecraft’s part, an insistence that he has the right and the ability to rewrite what Providence is and how it shall be remembered. It is notable that this inscription was *not* on Lovecraft’s headstone when he was first buried in 1937, nor did he leave instructions for it to be; instead, his name and dates were simply carved into the

⁸ The “Durfee” named here is Durfee Hill, visible from Providence, and has one of the highest elevations in Rhode Island at 805 feet.

communal stone of his mother's family. The inscribed headstone was only added forty years later by fans of his work, in 1977 – meaning that, in fact, the headstone inscribed with “I am Providence” marks a spot that contains no body. These multiple layers of inscription are metonymic for Lovecraft's work and legacy – endlessly rewriting the world, endlessly being rewritten by others, all in defiance of reality.

It is fitting that Lovecraft, in life, made much of his income through ghostwriting works for others – and that, in death, his body of work would be stolen, altered, copied, rewritten beyond recognition, and incorporated into “posthumous collaborations” with his de facto literary executor, August Derleth. Overall, Lovecraft is estimated to have produced nearly forty ghost-written and/or “collaborative” texts during his life. Though these did not pay as well as the publishing of original work through pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales*, they represented a steadier income for Lovecraft, as he could be assured of payment from his clients without worrying whether and when the piece would be published, and it is through these works that much of Lovecraft's worldview emerges. His different way of seeing the universe and his work with weird fiction are fundamental building blocks in the way that horror (and, to an extent, science fiction) formed over the course of the 20th century. His personal horror of the racial Other – which he frequently aligned with monstrous, alien forces bent on destroying mankind – has become, in turn, a specter haunting the way that horror texts have treated those who are not white and male. In particular, Lovecraft's fierce desire to *be* Providence, and the resulting ways in which he literarily treated New England's Native history, provides a fictional America in which American Indians are re-cast as too inhuman to lay real claim to the Nation. Lovecraftian texts, however, given the above problems with provenance and determining just how much Lovecraft actually wrote of the materials we have, end up occupying a bizarre space: While

attempting to establish Lovecraft's view of the "native" and foreign, the human and monstrous, the dead and living, their authenticity ends up in limbo.

Their unsettled nature means the texts themselves could be seen as ghosts, which are figures which typically belong nowhere – they do not belong in the land of the living and cannot rest with the fully dead – but they are also fundamentally hybridized creations:

A ghost carries with it all the particulars of a past identity into a present to which it both does and does not belong, a present in which it is marginalized. Thus, the ghost is a figure of both time and space that cannot be thought of in terms of the binary dialectics of presence and non-presence, center and periphery. The ghost is the awareness of mortality that haunts the living. In other words, this ghost is the spectral figure for subjectivity in flux, the subject which is neither locked within temporal or spatial parameters nor wholly free from its history. (Lieberman 3)

As we have seen already in the difference between national ideas of haunting, "the ghost" is not a universal and unified concept; ghosts are instead culturally-specific phenomena, and when cultures collide, as on the frontier, they breed their own new "species" of ghost in response.

American colonialism and expansion produces haunted Indian burial grounds; the white Australian need to self-identify as native creates efforts to seed their new land with white ghosts. It is also typically difficult to have a *shared* experience of ghosts – apparitions are, by and large, individual experiences. A ghost will often appear only to the person of most concern: e.g., only the murderous Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost; the *Flying Dutchman* is only seen by those about to die. A communal experience of ghosts – like many supernatural entities - generally requires confirmation in way that a natural phenomenon does not: "Did I really see that? Did you? What did we see?" A place generally becomes "haunted" after the repetition of experiences, and in this way ghosts, like ghostwriting, become composed of myriad voices.

Indigenous writing in both Australia and the United States has been a long process of ghostwriting, as well as intertwined with symbolic and literal ghosts. The two nations show a

similar pattern in the development of indigenous expression: before Native populations have easy access to the prestige of the (usually English) written word, their oral narratives are recorded by non-Natives with such access. In Australia – where, as we have seen, Aborigines were erased as much as possible from the landscape – this persisted as the main avenue of indigenous writing well into the 20th century. There, the first significant effort to capture Aboriginal folklore is represented by the 1896 *Australian Legendary Tales: Folk-lore of the Noongahburrahs as Told to the Piccaninnies*, by the writer and self-admitted amateur ethnographer, K. Langloh Parker. As the title may indicate, Parker’s work is problematically “colored” by colonial attitudes, but generally recognized as historically important, in part because of the scarcity of her contemporaries’ serious interest in such a project. In response to a negative review suggesting she had fabricated the tales herself, Parker responded, in part, with a description of her translation process:

I am very careful to get them as truly as I can – first I get an old black to tell it in his own language – he probably has little English – I get a younger one to tell it back to him in his language he corrects what is wrong – then I get the other one to tell it to me in English – I write it down, read it and tell it back again to the old fellow with the help of the medium, for though I have a fair grasp of their language I could not in a thing like this trust to my knowledge entirely. (qtd. in Johnston 160)

Parker’s process demonstrates the hybridized process of ghost-writing the Aboriginal voices she represents on the page. At least three different “writers” are ultimately represented in the final version, including some indigenous vocabularies preserved intact from the original speaker: Dinewan the emu, Goomble-gubbon the buzzard, Bahloo the moon. Parker’s presence is felt by the “neatness” of the tales, which have been packaged with the intent not as a serious anthropological record, but to be marketed as children’s stories.⁹ The stories – loosely related,

⁹ Originally, *Australian Legendary Tales* was published “under the aegis,” as Judith Johnston phrases it, of Andrew Lang, already famous for his *Fairy Books*. It is accompanied by an introduction by him that leans heavily on

part of a larger “Dreaming” narrative that is not fully disclosed to their audience – are ghostwritten, hybridized productions of the literary process.

They are, furthermore, *ghostwritten*. It is significant that Parker, in her explanation of her translation process, explains that she relies on a “medium,” a term typically reserved for those who serve as a bridge between the living and the dead. The stories themselves retain some of the eternal present of Aboriginal Dreamtime conception: some of the language used presents them as myths¹⁰ about the world that have always been and will always be true. The Aboriginal voice does not seem to be particularly concerned about its own culture’s potential destruction – possibly in part because of Parker’s need to present the texts as palatable for children – but her own foreword expresses that anxiety. Together, Parker’s nameless Aborigines, herself, her publisher, and her genre collaboratively create a version of Australian indigeneity that is not dead, but rhetorically positioned between existence and extermination.

The Americas, with their longer history of indigenous texts, have more available recordings of oral histories than in Australia: perhaps most prominently, *Black Elk Speaks* (1932), a collaborative text produced by the Lakota medicine man Black Elk, his son Ben Black Elk, and the non-Native writer John G. Neihardt. The text has become a battleground in Native studies over just how much editorializing was involved on Neihardt’s part – which, as in Parker’s work, is surmised to have been performed because of both existing cultural prejudices and the need for marketability of the published text. While there is no firm consensus on how much of *Black Elk Speaks* is an accurate account of Black Elk’s words, it remains unalterably “real” in

stereotypes of the “dying race” of Aborigines as he compares the stories favorably to Kipling’s, further expanding the ways in which the “oral narratives” are displaced from their point of origin.

¹⁰ Here, I intend “myth” not as a dismissive term, but to indicate a story which is told about the world to give it meaning for the teller and receiver.

that, even as a hybrid, it became highly influential in how the Lakota – and by extension American Indians in general – have been understood by those outside their cultural inner circle.

This “artificial realness” repeats itself in other Native/non-Native collaborations, including works of fiction such as *Cogewea: The Half-Blood* (1927), produced by the Okanagan Mourning Dove (Hum-Ishu-Ma) and her ghostwriter Lucullus McWhorter (who claims the name Sho-Paw-Tan), himself an amateur anthropologist and frontiersman in the pattern of Parker. It is a semi-autobiographical book not just because it is a fictionalized version of Mourning Dove’s life, but because her imperfect grasp of English resulted in heavy revisions on McWhorter’s part. A 1981 introduction to the text by Dexter Fisher states that, “neither Mourning Dove nor McWhorter could have written the book without the other. . . . Without question, the book is uneven, wrenched in parts, replete with clichés and unnatural language. Nevertheless, it stands as the first effort of an American Indian woman to write a novel based on the legacy of her Indian heritage . . . we must be grateful for Mourning Dove’s aspirations and McWhorter’s assistance” (xxvi). The Choctaw/Cherokee writer Louis Owens heavily criticizes McWhorter’s “cloyingly romantic epigraphs,” and both he and Fisher refer to Mourning Dove’s letter to McWhorter in which she states, with apparent admiration, that, “I felt like it was someone else’s book and not mine at all.” With no clear ownership of the text, both Mourning Dove and McWhorter seem to be assigned responsibility for the text’s successes *and* failures. Some of what Mourning Dove admires may be McWhorter’s fumbling stylistic efforts; some of what Fisher rhetorically cringes at may be Mourning Dove’s plot efforts. Here, there is again a representation of this not-quite-solid presence, this hybrid object that is not quite correct but whose faults belong collectively to the specters hovering behind the text.

The stakes of misrepresentation in the genre and the possibility of betrayal can be seen in *Pretty-Shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows* (1932), a biographical text created by its titular Pretty-Shield, the white journalist Frank Linderman, and a number of unnamed interpreters. While *Black Elk Speaks* remains the most central ghost-written Native text, a moment in *Pretty-Shield* indicates perhaps best one potential problem with these texts: Linderman records that Pretty-Shield tells him, “I once had a vision, Sign-teller, but you had better not write it down” (70). She proceeds to narrate a horrific vision in which young women are sucked into a “black hole” in a river, followed by seeing an inhuman creature crouched at the bottom, a “sprite” with “long and notched” ears. Linderman, as may be surmised, recorded the vision he was instructed not to, and Pretty-Shield scolds him for it as she watches – but it still remains in the published text. This can be read potentially, as a ghostwriter’s exploitative betrayal of his role, and a hint at the way in which the hybridized nature of ghostwriting can become monstrous. Ostensibly non-indigenous ghostwriting – like Lovecraft’s – is generally a situation in which the ghostwriter, as a paid contractor, is beholden to a patron who has final say in the finished product. Ghostwriting as a practice involved in indigenous writing sees this power relation inverted: the Native voice that is putatively at the center of the project is generally more highly reliant on its ghostwriter, and unable to access the final manuscript in a meaningful way. The ghostwriting of indigenous experience – like all ghostwriting – is subject to this kind of subversion, and it is “subversion” that we should keep in mind when examining the Lovecraft oeuvre.

The Construction of Lovecraft

In this field of particularly problematic ghostwriting, of world collisions and questions of agency, might be found H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) and his collaborator/"collaborator" August Derleth (1909-1971). During his lifetime, Lovecraft was a prolific writer: beginning as a fan of the then-developing field of "weird fiction," he wrote letters, articles, some novels, and short fiction, this last of which was often ghostwriting assignments undertaken for other writers. Despite limited success during his lifetime, H. P. Lovecraft has slowly become one of the most influential figures in what he would call the "weird tale": "the illusion of some strange suspension or violation of the galling limitations of time, space, and natural law which forever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis" ("Notes," 50). He is now also remembered as a reactionary racist who has become a famous symbol of genre fiction's ongoing problem with a "whites only" exclusionary tendency. Born in 1890 in Providence, Lovecraft heavily romanticized the city, the region, and the idea of its often-dubious aristocratic ties to England and Wales. His frequent obsession about this last item may be connected to the fact that his mother's family was "full of oddities; due to the colony's isolation, several of them married their first cousins. . . . [This] had much (though not all) to do with certain ideas that were central to his thought, among which were his fervent desire for racial purity and his literary theme of hereditary degeneration and unwholesome inbreeding" (Faig & Joshi 2). The deaths, in mental institutions, of both his parents – his father when Lovecraft was a child, his mother when he was an adult – almost certainly contributed to this predilection, as well as his preoccupation with insanity. Though he was highly prolific, he "was operating in an underworld of writing – contributing to amateur journals, composing eighteenth-century verse, revising the works of talentless would-be authors, and on occasion publishing highly original horror fiction" (Cannon 1). Outside of a failed two-year marriage and

its accompanying time living in New York – where Lovecraft was miserable, in part because of the racial heterogeneity which horrified him – Lovecraft remained based in Providence, though he traveled frequently in his later years. Despite his essential inconsequentiality to the literary world at large, his sizeable circle of correspondents within the pulp community, in particular, made him widely-known and appreciated in that context. It would not be until many years after his death that Lovecraft came to be considered what E. F. Bleiler termed, “the most important American supernaturalist since Poe” (iii).

In his work, Lovecraft unintentionally laid out the plans for how American horror, particularly, would treat subjects like the ghost as hybrid and transgressive figures, as well as how horror would treat the racial Other. Lovecraftian texts express high levels of anxiety about purity, hybridity, and bloodlines. Throughout his writings, both fiction and non-, Lovecraft attempts to erase American Indian presence in a way that we have seen before in the Australian continent – to pretend them out of existence so that he, a native of Providence, RI, can have the power to declare what America is, and what kind of existential threat Natives and other non-whites pose to the existence of the nation. He uses what are now familiar strategies while doing so: inventing “Indian legends,” sometimes entire tribes, as strategies which devalue the ways that Native ghosts might indicate possession of the land. As a frequent ghostwriter, paid to write stories based on the vague premises given him by other writers, he supplants those writers’ voices to condemn the horror he sees as presented by the non-white Other, often conflating them with an horrific extraterrestrial Other. Where ghostwriters working with indigenous populations have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to amplify their voices, Lovecraft uses his ghostwriting to diminish them.

Lovecraft's legacy, in some ways, exists irrelevant of Lovecraft himself or many of the words he wrote. His works have acquired what can appropriately be called a cult following in popular culture, initially among horror and science fiction fans, though now extending to some extent through culture in general, particularly through the vector of the Internet. There are multiple collections of literature based on Lovecraft's "Cthulhu Mythos" – his most famous creation, this phrase denotes the complex universe created in particular stories he wrote – and one can easily buy t-shirts and plush dolls featuring the Old One, Cthulhu, described by Lovcraft as having, "A pulpy, tentacled head . . . a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings" ("Call"). Cthulhu is only one of a pantheon of Elder Gods, which are in turn only part of the Mythos – which also includes artifacts like the mystical Necronomicon, a powerful grimoire penned by the "Mad Arab" Abdul Alhazred, as well as Lovecraft's own nonsense language, spoken by both cult devotees and those driven insane by their contact with the more terrifying elements of the Mythos. Stories which contain these elements have come to be considered as Lovecraft's major works largely through popular, rather than critical, opinion. Except for the true devotees, other parts of his work are essentially ignored: his more conventional stories and ones which do not involve the Mythos, his ghost writing, his poetry, and his numerous essays.

Problematically, however, Lovecraft did not actually create the Chulhu Mythos – not the term¹¹, and not the "rules" that comprise its universe. This was, in large part, the creation of August Derleth, Lovecraft's publisher and somewhat dubious literary executor. Derleth and Lovecraft began corresponding in 1926, when Derleth, then a seventeen-year-old living in Sauk City, Wisconsin, wrote Lovecraft a fan letter after reading his work in *Weird Tales*. Lovecraft first hired Derleth to type Lovecraft's handwritten manuscripts for submission, a task which

¹¹ There is a litany of different terms used for what Derleth ultimately named the "Cthulhu Mythos," some of which appear in criticism cited here. Lovecraft himself seems to have preferred "Cthulhuism & Yog-Sothothery," and critics wishing to distance themselves from Derleth tend towards "Lovecraft Mythos."

included sometimes-substantial editorial revisions; he also encouraged Derleth's ideas and writing, and Derleth himself began submitting stories to the magazine, successfully. With Lovecraft as a major mentor, Derleth himself became a prolific writer of pulp fiction, and ultimately both a publisher and an important regional writer, creating fiction, poetry, and ecological essays about Sauk City and its fictional counterpart, Sac Prairie. His independent work has often been overshadowed by his work on and with Lovecraft: both the unpolished stories he "touched up" before publication, and the "posthumous collaborations" he created based on Lovecraft's notes, which exist as inseparably hybrid texts through which Lovecraft's spirit haltingly speaks.

Lovecraft's relatively unexpected death in 1937 of intestinal cancer created a whirlwind of confusion over the ownership of his work, which Derleth and his partner Donald Wanderei appear to have struggled through successfully by sheer effort of will, a circumstance which defeated, created, and still haunts the nature of Lovecraft scholarship. Lovecraft had left a will leaving the totality of his property to his near-destitute aunt, Alice Gamwell, but appointed no specific literary executor. The day after the funeral, the eighteen-year-old young writer and pulp fan R. H. Barlow produced a handwritten note from Lovecraft naming himself executor, and packed up many of the late author's materials and personally owned books. Upon discovering this, an outraged Derleth and Wanderei began tracking down materials which Barlow had already disseminated or sold, and challenged his claim as executor, given that he had no legitimate legal document and was considered a minor, therefore unable to make most necessary decisions.

A rush of finger-pointing followed not just between the three parties – Gamwell, Derleth & Wanderei, and Barlow – but, via correspondence, among the entire "Lovecraft circle" of

publishers and other writers that had made up so much of Lovecraft's intellectual life. Some accused Barlow as acting predatorily and illegally on Alice Gamwell, describing him as "a rabid fan obsessed with a compulsion to possess Lovecraft's manuscripts and books, and whose behavior can best be explained by a psychiatrist" (Ruber 31). Derleth and Wanderei, in turn, have for decades been described as having overly pressured a naïve teenager into acting against Lovecraft's expressed wishes. Further confusion was caused because Lovecraft had sold the rights to many of his stories, and some of the pulp magazines which published his work contained no copyright notice whatsoever. Ultimately, Derleth and Wanderei won the war by founding their own publishing house – Arkham House – and creating editions of Lovecraft stories they felt they had the rights to, with Barlow's ultimate, reluctant help. Despite the uncertainty of their claims, Derleth and Wanderei sternly refused, and occasionally attacked, other publishers seeking to print Lovecraft editions of their own.¹²

Derleth, as a result of this and the further actions of Arkham House, often emerges as a villified figure in the work of critics writing on Lovecraft. It must be noted, though, that Derleth is responsible for much of the organization, preservation, and popularization of both Lovecraft's earlier work and pieces as yet unpublished at the time of his death, which provide important resources for interested scholars. Through Arkham House, he and others borrowed, copied, and returned what became some 45,000 pages of Lovecraft's correspondence with his circle. Pulp historian Stefan Dziemianowicz has declared that, "We know that if it weren't for Derleth, Lovecraft would not have near the reputation he has today" (qtd. in Ruber 8). Arkham House was similarly responsible for publishing the works of others in Lovecraft's circle.

¹² Most of the original manuscripts ultimately were donated to the John Hay Library at Brown. Gamwell's death in 1941 settled some of these matters, as she willed all rights to Derleth & Wanderei, but the continuing confusion over who owned rights to Lovecraft at what point in time still continues, causing his texts to often be reprinted freely, resulting in multiple editions of varying accuracy.

Simultaneously, however, Derleth is also responsible for the restriction of access to many of Lovecraft's papers or the rights to publish them, and took a free hand editing the works he chose to publish. Further, he wrote sixteen "posthumous collaborations" based on Lovecraft's ideas and scraps of unpublished work, through which the major structures of the Cthulhu Mythos were constructed – something which often goes unknown or unacknowledged by Lovecraft's popular audience. The critical response to Derleth's actions is such that, in 2000, the then-editor of Arkham House, Peter Ruber, thought it necessary to publish an essay pleading for "The Un-Demonizing of August Derleth," protesting against rumors and judgments of editorial decisions. Many critical works on Lovecraft simply choose to pointedly ignore Derleth altogether; some provide relatively mild criticism, such as horror writer Ramsay Campbell's assertion that Derleth mischaracterized Lovecraft's intentions by organizing the Mythos. Campbell claims that, for Lovecraft, the "Mythos was never coherent, nor did it need to be. Its function was to suggest something larger and more terrible than was stated" (10). Others provide biting criticism, chief among them the prolific Lovecraft scholar S.T. Joshi, who has bitterly contested Derleth's rights to Lovecraft's work and criticized at length what he terms, "Derleth's repeated misinterpretations of Lovecraft's pseudomythology" (*Subtler* 127). Joshi claims further that these "preposterous" misinterpretations were because "Derleth, himself a practicing Catholic, was unable to endure Lovecraft's bleak atheistic vision, and so he invented the 'Elder Gods' out of whole cloth to act as a counterweight to the 'evil' Old Ones . . . therefore making it acceptable to people of his conventional temperament" (*Subtler* 130).

While part of this bitterness is no doubt to do with Derleth's iron fist as regards the copyright, the principal sin he is accused of by critics is essentially his insistence that he could *become Lovecraft*. Derleth not only essentially asserted his rights to Lovecraft's work as though

they were always already his own, he rewrote Lovecraft's fictional mythology in fundamental ways, creating a new "authenticity," and even published new books – either partially or entirely his own work – which he published as the only legitimate new stories of the Mythos. It seems to have been Lovecraft's fate to become embroiled in this kind of rewriting, overwriting, and over-inscription – a lifetime of ghost writing for others, the possession of his works and ideas by Derleth and the resulting misconceptions about his work, and even his false grave. This leads us back to Lovecraft's own need to rewrite Providence, to create a reality in which he and the city are indivisible. Part of Lovecraft's rewriting, with its focus on history, degeneracy, race, and land, is linked with his rewriting of the American Indian history of the city, region, and country in which he lived.

Curiously, Derleth, whose independent work does not express the kind of racial animus as Lovecraft's, takes on the same kind of racial nation-building in texts which he has finished or largely created based on Lovecraft's notes. The Native Other in works like *The Lurker on the Threshold* (1945), which is largely Derleth's effort, is presented in grand Lovecraftian style: the American Indians in the story are otherworldly, ghostly phenomena. Derleth is Lovecraft's ghostwriter, and while he attempts to recreate Lovecraft's worldview, he allows the worst parts of that ghost to keep up their haunt. His "posthumous collaborations" are dismissible for many of the rabid fans that the genre tends to produce, because Derleth's contributions – though literarily he is regarded as a more reputable and capable writer – are considered inauthentic. Even the common usage of scare quotes around "posthumous collaborator" and "collaborator," is frequently deployed as an intentionally derogatory rhetorical device by some of the more virulent Lovecraft purists. But Derleth's apparent need to include Native Othering in his collaborations,

apparently in a bid for authenticity, speaks volumes about the limits of Lovecraft's vision of America.

Ultimately, this means that a substantial number of Lovecraft's texts have been published as the results of an effort between himself and Derleth; the man who experienced hybridity as a central feature of his own particular brand of horror is largely represented to his 21st-century audience through hybrid texts: Derleth's writings, but also homages by horror icons like Robert Bloch, Stephen King, and Ramsey Campbell, as well as filmmakers John Carpenter and Guillermo del Toro. And all of this occurs far after Lovecraft's ability to authorize or correct the record. Ultimately, Lovecraft, the man whose anxiety over miscegenation caused him to categorize American Indians as non-Americans and claim the land for Anglo-Saxons, has been placed into the position of so many ghostwritten Natives. His legacy, like theirs, is dependent on more mainstream writers who inherit enough cultural authority to speak for him, and he cannot approve the final product. Even while denying the validity of Native ghosts by redefining them as monstrous hybrids, he stumbles into their position.

A Robust Tradition of Ancestor Worship

H.P. Lovecraft's *Supernatural Horror in Literature* went through several iterations as an essay during his lifetime, though it was published in its final form in 1945, after the author's death. *Supernatural Horror* is simultaneously a critical history of the topic, a defense of it as a form of literature with aesthetic value, and a claim as to which works are of genuine quality. As this indicates, the text is highly biased; it dismisses as uninteresting stories that fail to move beyond the conventions of "secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule" (*Supernatural* 15). Instead, Lovecraft places value on "the hidden and

fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and moonstruck can glimpse” (*Supernatural* 14). It is this description of what is less a malevolent and more a simply uncaring universe that Ramsey Campbell and others have claimed to be erroneously overwritten by Derleth’s efforts. It is also this description that, along with the aforementioned family history of inbreeding and insanity, helps to inform Lovecraft’s positions on ancestry and race.

It should be noted that serious study of Lovecraft was for years, and sometimes still is, challenged on the basis of its quality, part of which is literary, and part of which is ideological. On the literary front, Lovecraft’s texts are frequently described as “pulp” not just because of his frequent publication in the pulp magazines of his time, but also derogatorily. This is only partially because of literary snobbishness regarding popular fiction, but also because there are genuine faults in his writing – it might be appropriate, in the context of this chapter, to refer to it as over-writing. Lovecraft is not a fluent stylist; one 1973 *Time* magazine review of new editions of his work, written itself as a tongue-in-cheek Lovecraftian pastiche, declares: “He tells his tales through a troubled, dim, first-person narrator, and he saves the grisly denouement for the last sentence and then prints it in italics, as though that gives it greater shock value. Also repellent at first is the man's habit of stuffing his leisurely, Latinate sentences to repletion with adjectives and adverbs to modify, often tautologically, a stark noun or gruesome verb” (Herrera). While Michel Houellebecq has attempted to defend the flatness of Lovecraft’s male protagonists by claiming that he was expressing “the futility of all psychological differentiation,” (68), the fact remains that nearly all of his narrators are dully interchangeable props. There are few women, and fewer children, in Lovecraft’s tales, which are instead filled with a sort of palimpsestic white, male central figure.

Possibly a greater hurdle to serious discussions of Lovecraft, however, is the writer's overtly racist opinions. Lovecraft's racial attitudes are not simply a product of his time; even his contemporaries found him to be reactionary, a not unreasonable opinion of a man who would sometimes sign his letters "God Save the King," as though Providence were still a British colony. Sometimes this atmosphere presents itself only in small details: the 1924 short story "The Rats in the Walls" contains a black cat named "Nigger-man," named after his own childhood pet. In other texts, however, Lovecraft's racial opinions form a much more central part of the narrative, often intended as elements of the horror. Pieces like this passage from "The Call of Cthulhu" indicate the kind of emphasis Lovecraft often places upon race:

The prisoners all proved to be men of a very low, mixed-blooded, and mentally aberrant type. Most were seamen, and a sprinkling of negroes and mulattoes . . . gave a colouring of voodooism to the heterogeneous cult. But before many questions were asked, it became manifest that something far deeper than negro fetichism [sic] was involved. Degraded and ignorant as they were, the creatures held with surprising consistency to the central idea of their loathsome faith. They worshipped, so they said, the Great Old Ones who lived ages before there were any men, and who came to the young world out of the sky. (153)

As referenced earlier, Lovecraft is most remembered for his works depicting these "Great Old Ones," his invented pantheon of evil, prehistoric gods with picturesque names – e.g., Shub-Niggurath the Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young, Hastur the Unspeakable One. His fascination with history and pre-history as sources for horrific images is deeply intertwined with his ideas about race, evil, and purity. For Lovecraft, "Evil is the product of a carnal union against nature. This idea fits his obsessive racism perfectly; for, to him, as to all racists, it is not one particular race that represents true horror, but the notion of the half-breed" (Houellebecq 112). In consequence, the pervasive trope of interstitiality in horror, the blurring of natural boundaries, is frequently cast in racial terms in Lovecraft texts: in the 1936 novella "The

Shadow over Innsmouth,” humans have produced monstrous offspring by breeding with amphibious creatures called Deep Ones. In “The Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family,” a short story from 1921, the source of the horror is an ancestor who “marries an ape-goddess, and whose offspring bear the physical and mental stigma of the unnatural union” (Joshi, “Explanatory,” 365). Lovecraftian evil – located in texts, places, and ideas – is frequently associated with “brute races,” as in the Middle Eastern origins of the aforementioned book of power, the *Necronomicon*.

Lovecraft’s ideology when it comes to American Indians in particular is intensely informed by his New England background. Jean M. O’Brien, in her work discussing the ways in which the indigenous inhabitants of New England have been erased from its history, declares the existence of, “a robust tradition of southern New England ancestor worship” (xi). She goes on to describe the mythology of Providence’s founding, in particular, as being something which is “sanctified” in the colonial imagination not because the Indians already occupying the land were remunerated appropriately, but because of the “just and honorable” actions of Roger Williams when speaking with said Natives. This initial celebration of Indians as existing to provide a backdrop of legitimacy to the noble nature of the Anglo settlers gives way, ultimately, to the mythology of a landscape in which Indians have been entirely supplanted, and white nobility becomes the whole of the region’s history. This empty landscape, this writing over the land that used to be occupied by others, is the vein in which Lovecraft habitually works. “The Street” (1920), one of the few Lovecraft texts that depicts settler-Native conflicts, describes a street in an anonymous New England town which prevails against the attacks of Indian “fire-arrows,” only to find itself more subtly destroyed centuries later by the arrival of immigrants with “swarthy, sinister faces with furtive eyes and odd features, whose owners spoke unfamiliar words.” At the

end of “The Street,” the spirit of the land comes alive, causing the collapse of the buildings along the street so that the immigrants within are crushed to death. It is not a Native revenge, however, but a European one, marked by the scent of the rosebushes the settlers planted when they arrived, another rewriting which claims that white English immigrants were the “original” inhabitants who are allowed to stake their claim and kill interlopers. The claim of “I am Providence” indicates not only Lovecraft’s insistence that he has the right to define Providence’s nature, it distills the city into, specifically, a single white man, and Native presence is frequently elided entirely. In his texts, he privileges the inhabitants of New England as being “purer” – racially and culturally – than other Americans. It is transparently important to him that his protagonists are not only white, but have ancestral backgrounds traceable to the British Isles, and that these Anglo-Americans are the “real” natives, the ones with a genuine claim to the land.

Lovecraft continues the American literary tradition of linking ghosts with Indians – but his ghosts, like his horror, are non-standard for the genre. As we have seen in the works concerning the Tasmanian genocide, Lovecraft’s ghost stories are overwhelmingly connected to this idea of horrific miscegenation as its point of unacceptable interstitiality, rather than the more usual element of boundary-crossing between the living and the dead. There are very few “true” ghost stories by Lovecraft, most notably “The Terrible Old Man” from 1921, in which burglars attempting to rob a retired sea captain are brutally slaughtered by the loyal ghosts of his dead companions. Even in this text, the burglars themselves are described as, “of that new and heterogeneous alien stock which lies outside the charmed circle of New England life and traditions,” and are helpfully named Angelo Ricci, Joe Czaneck, and Manuel Silva, in order to better communicate their racial inferiority. They are punished, in typical Lovecraft fashion, for their non-whiteness as much as they are for their actual crime.

Most ghosts in other Lovecraft stories are ultimately revealed to be not ghosts at all, but monstrous beings mistaken for ghosts by naïve and fearful locals, as in the 1922 short story “The Lurking Fear,” where the “ghost” is revealed to be the bestial offspring of a once-noble family turned degenerate. Similarly, the ghost of a colonial-era witch in “The Dreams in the Witch-House” (1933) is revealed not to be dead, but instead a living witch in possession of ancient cultic rituals that enable her to travel to various dimensions and times, accompanied by her familiar, a rat with human hands and face. Most pertinently to this project, in “He,” (1926) a displaced New Englander wandering Greenwich Village at night meets a man from the eighteenth century who slowly reveals himself to be not a ghost, but a magician/necromancer. He leads the narrator back to his rooms, where he then demonstrates his power to change the view from his window to look out across all time and space – a power, he says, he learned from Indians who he then poisoned with “monstrous bad rum” so that he alone could know the secret. As the narrator challenges this story, the “necromancer” stretches his powers too far and accidentally opens a doorway to a dimension where the murdered Indians have been waiting for vengeance. Confronted with their matching magic, he shrinks into a shriveled, spitting head; the Indians enter the room as a “shapeless influx of inky substance” and engulf the desiccated necromancer, while the narrator flees. Lovecraft’s ghosts, in other words, are generally not technically dead, but horrifyingly unnatural figures, a tendency which extends into his writings involving indigenous Americans.

In the few Lovecraft texts which see Natives playing influential roles, as in “He,” they are often identified as links to an ancient, terrifying, alien knowledge that must be avoided and guarded against. *The Whisperer in Darkness* (1931), *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (1941), and “The Shunned House” (1937) are all stories which contain Natives and (fake) Native

mythology as background characters and information. In these stories, Lovecraftian Old Ones, the first inhabitants of the planet, have essentially disappeared, and are represented in part by American Indian oral traditions regarding them, as well as relics mistaken for Indian ones, but which are in fact much more ancient. These Native Americans generally act as symbolic or practical intermediaries between Elder Gods and “civilized” humanity: *Dexter Ward* contains an elderly Indian couple who briefly appear as guards to the entrance to a pit of horrors, while *Whisperer* contains fabricated “Pennacook myths” about the Elder Gods coming “from the Great Bear in the sky.” The function of these Natives, as not-quite people, is to stand in as harbingers of the cosmic horror against which Lovecraft’s white, male protagonists will struggle.

In more minor Lovecraft works which see Natives as acting more central to the story, they can be seen as possessed of special relationships and special knowledge regarding ancient and cosmic dangers. One of these, “The Transition of Juan Romero” is a story which Lovecraft apparently disliked after completing it in 1919, refusing to have it published, so that it did not appear in print until 1944. The title character, the Mexican Juan Romero, is described as looking like an “ancient and noble Aztec,” though he is otherwise, “Ignorant and dirty . . . at home amongst the other brown-skinned Mexicans.” Romero and the nameless narrator are part of a party exploring a mysterious crevasse in Mexico; at the climax of the story, surrounded by strange light and noises, Romero “transitions” into an apparently non-physical being while screaming in an unknown language, leaving his body behind. It is implied that his special, genetic link to the Aztecs is the reason that he alone, amongst the white and Mexican characters present, is changed in this way: his final scream is, “Huitzilopotchli,” the central god of the Aztec pantheon. Perversely, Lovecraft’s insistence on this extreme othering of Natives gives them a special kind of privilege: his identification of them with his version of ghostliness allows

them to possess both unusual power and knowledge that is not only disruptive but potentially scholarly.

Because of Lovecraft's distaste for non-white, "primitive" peoples, it is not surprising that the more substantial texts he wrote dealing most directly with American Indians were written to a greater or lesser degree in collaboration. Two of these – "The Curse of Yig" and "The Mound," written for Zealia Bishop (née Reed) – are examples of ghostwriting which can be read as ghost stories, particularly "The Mound," though neither features the traditional formula or content of a usual ghost story. Both are, as well, set in Oklahoma, because of Bishop's experiences in the region. The American southwest, moreover, also potentially represents a part of the United States in which it is much less threatening for Lovecraft to admit to and describe Indian presence, due to his lack of personal stake in it. To declare himself "I am Providence" and then explicitly incorporate the lives of the land's previous inhabitants as an integral part of the city's history would be admitting to a degree of racial and cultural hybridity that would have been unthinkable for Lovecraft; far better to simply write Indians out of existence. The ghosts and spirits in these Southwestern stories are both aligned with the inscrutable knowledge of the Indians in them, and imperfectly understood by the same Indians because of the limitations of "primitive knowledge."

The third major Lovecraft text which references American Indians, the novel *Lurker at the Threshold*, is one of the "posthumous collaborations" created by Derleth and, by critical estimates, is the one containing the most significant portion of text actually written by Lovecraft, including the medicine man Misquamacus. Vitaly, *Lurker* takes place in New England, and again emphasizes the horror of the alien-ness of American Indian thought and race. In it, Lovecraft and Derleth present another kind of monstrous couple – a white man and a Native man

working together in the service of the terrifying Elder Gods. This union is ultimately depicted as one which must be eradicated because it represents a miscegenation of cultures – and, indeed, successive voices write over each other over the course of the text, just as Derleth writes over Lovecraft, just as Lovecraft has written over the indigenous peoples of New England.

Zealia Bishop, “the story nucleus”

Zealia Bishop (1897-1968) was a short story writer primarily interested in romantic fiction but who, like most of the pulp writers of the era, dabbled in whatever genre necessary for financial reasons, including the weird. There are three “collaborations” she wrote with Lovecraft, all of which were so extensively rewritten by him – “The Mound” was based on a single sentence of Bishop’s – that, while ghostwriting is always indeterminate to some degree, critics describe them as Lovecraft’s work, rather than Bishop’s. The “working relationship with [Bishop] was not a happy one, and it ended on a particularly sour note. . . . [S]he proved difficult to collect payments from and, following her marriage . . . refused to pay her outstanding debt. Later, she agreed to the sum of \$1 a week, hoping that Lovecraft would then write another story for her. When he refused, the payments stopped altogether” (Elliott xi). Two of the stories Lovecraft ghost wrote for Bishop, “The Curse of Yig” (1929) and “The Mound” (1940), are based on folk stories that she encountered in Oklahoma, where she lived at the time. It is these two stories that provide the bulk of Lovecraft’s direct writing on Native beliefs and peoples, possibly both because the outlines Bishop provided required that he do so, but also, potentially, because their remove from Providence made their indigenous populations easier to write into history and mythology in a way that appealed to Lovecraft’s obsession with the alien.

While the third of the Bishop stories, “Medusa’s Coil” (published 1939), which is generally accepted to be the weakest, is not directly germane to the question of indigenous portrayal by Lovecraft, it features another iteration of the horrors of hybridization, particularly in matters of race. Its odd, gothic plot, set in Missouri, centers on a woman who is revealed to some sort of vampiric Medusa; after she is killed and her snakelike hair severed, the hair slithers off to kill of its own accord, even bursting out of a painting of itself. The narrator’s final line, however, purports to declare the *true* horror that has befallen the fine old Missouri family into which she married: she is “faintly, subtly, yet to the eyes of genius unmistakably the scion of Zimbabwe’s most primal grovelers” (245). In other words, it is ultimately more grotesque that a secretly black woman has married into a white family than it is that she is an inhuman and murderous monster. This is, in some ways, unremarkable for its time, and the miscegenation aspect may have been suggested by Bishop herself; documentation on the creation of “Medusa’s Coil” is not as clear as it is for the other two Lovecraft/Bishop collaborations.

Of the two stories which actually depict American Indian subjects, “The Curse of Yig” (1929) is arguably the more conventional; while it does still depict a collision of worlds alien to each other, the Lovecraftian mythological elements are minimized to some degree. It is notable, in fact, within Lovecraft scholarship because it represents the first mention and only “appearance” of the snake-god Yig, who would recur in later Lovecraft works (e.g., *The Whisperer in Darkness*, “Out of the Aeons”) as part of his expanding mythology. As frequently occurs in Lovecraft, the story is told to the narrator within a frame tale, this time in an insane asylum in Oklahoma in 1925 by a doctor explaining the presence and nature of a hairless and malformed inmate who most of the staff are unaware of. The central story is about a husband and wife, Walker and Audrey Davis, who arrive in Oklahoma in 1889 as part of a gold rush;

Walker has a paralyzing phobia of snakes, and in order to protect him from the sight of them, Audrey crushes to death a nest of baby rattlesnakes despite warnings that doing so will anger the snake-god Yig. Yig's "chief trait was a relentless devotion to his children Frightful clandestine tales hinted of his vengeance upon mortals who flouted him . . . his chosen method being to turn his victim, after suitable tortures, to a spotted snake" (113). For the Davises, Yig's curse manifests by mass invasion of snakes into their cabin one night, causing Audrey to mistakenly chop her husband to death with a hatchet in panic. The narrator surmises that the misshapen occupant of the asylum is the unfortunate and insane wife, only to be corrected by the doctor: "That is what was born to her three-quarters of a year afterward. There were three more of them – two were even worse – but this is the only one that lived" (125).

Central to this narrative is the idea that Yig is a great and vengeful god known to the local Wichita Indians, which become the site of Lovecraft's over-writing in the story. In any weird tale, by Lovecraft's definition, reality has to be transgressed; in "The Curse of Yig" this does not just extend to the impossibility of an ancient snake-god cursing a woman with malformed snake-children, but also to the denial and rewriting of actual Native beliefs and traditions. Several critics have noted that Yig as a literary figure is "probably influenced by the Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl" (Galand), and Lovecraft here has translated the concept into a creature more fitting to his own rough cosmic pantheon. The fictional Witchitas' relationship with their fictional god is not fully explained by Lovecraft, though he does present a pidginized version of their beliefs, intermixed with actual Native beliefs: "Yig was a great god. He was bad medicine. He did not forget things. . . . All the tribes made medicine against Yig when the corn harvest came. . . . They kept the drums pounding to drive Yig away, and called down the aid of Tiráwa, whose children men are, even as the snakes are Yig's children. . . . Yig is Yig. Yig is a great god"

(118). Tiráwa is, in actuality, the creator god of the Pawnee people who are also based in Oklahoma, here apparently conflated with the Wichita tribe, as well as a small number of other tribes named over the course of the story. The invention of “ancient” myths held by minority or alien populations is a popular strategy in Lovecraft, and, in fact, in genre fiction in general. Here, multiple layers of rewriting are taking place – Bishop apparently presenting the idea of the curse to Lovecraft, and Lovecraft writing over her work with his own ideas of an ancient god, while in the process rewriting the theology and mythology of Southwestern tribes.

There is more evidence here of Lovecraft’s habitual horror of hybridization; Audrey, is “short and rather dark, with a black straightness of hair suggesting a slight Indian admixture” (114). Her susceptibility to the curse and her resulting descent into irrational, animal behavior as she kills both the snakes and later her husband, can easily be attributed to this “suggestion,” indicating that in a moment of crisis, her “primitive” nature rises up, ghost-like, to take over her actions. A colonialist reading of the text holds that “the narrator lays the blame squarely on the Davises’ susceptibility to Native American lore, and inability to live up to their Anglo-American heritage when removed into unfamiliar territory and surrounded by other cultures” (Killebrew 18). At the approach of Yig, the snake god is able to recreate who she is, to write over the veneer of white civility that hid her mixed-blood background. Though we have been told previously that Yig usually transforms his victims themselves into snakes, Audrey instead gives birth to his monstrous children. The unusual nature of her curse seems to be an echo of her mixed-race heritage – as an “unnatural” hybrid, for Lovecraft, she must in her turn give birth to further unnatural hybrids. As in “Medusa’s Coil,” there is a suggestion here of 19th-century American concerns over miscegenation and racial atavism: the idea that any childbirth might betray a parent’s previously hidden racial heritage.

The third and most substantial piece Lovecraft ghostwrote for Bishop is the novella “The Mound,” for which she provided only a one-sentence synopsis: “There is an Indian mound near here, which is haunted by a headless ghost. Sometimes it is a woman” (qtd. in Joshi 173). “The Mound” has been termed “a major Lovecraftian opus” (Joshi qtd. in Cannon 97). As in “The Curse of Yig” and its conflation of multiple tribes and beliefs, “The Mound” is largely unconcerned with the specific cultural identity of the tribe at the center of its structure, instead placing emphasis on their Other-ness and the potential of their (largely invented) mythology. The narrator of “The Mound,” for example, emphasizes that he is investigating “Indian” legends, though the reservation involved is largely nonspecific with regards to tribe – it is indicated at one point that a Wichita chieftain is present, but unclear as to whether one or many tribes are gathered there. In fact, the chieftain of “The Mound” shares the same name as one named in “The Curse of Yig” – Grey Eagle – though whether they are meant to actually be the same character or whether Lovecraft simply seized on this as his idea of a generic Indian name is impossible to tell. As in texts we have seen in earlier chapters, “The Mound” is a divided narrative, split between a frame tale taking place in the present day (c. 1930), and a discovered text set in the past (16th century). The frame tale’s “white and Eastern” “American Indian ethnologist” narrator is on a mission to investigate an Oklahoma legend: an Indian burial mound haunted by “two Indian figures” – an old man by day and a headless “squaw who took his place at night” (Lovecraft 307). In his investigations of the mound, the narrator discovers a scroll written in 1545 by the conquistador Panfilo de Zamacona y Nunez. The scroll’s narrative forms the heart of the tale: after parting from Francisco Coronado’s expedition, Zamacona is led by an Indian, Charging Buffalo, to caves penetrating deep within the earth, containing a lost, alien civilization of unimaginable power. The underground world’s inhabitants are vastly

technologically advanced, but their immortality has caused the moral and intellectual aspects of their culture to decay, so that they engage in ritual orgies and mutilations. They effectively keep Zamacona prisoner in order to relieve their boredom, and the scroll ends with the conquistador explaining that he has fallen in love with a woman from the underground who has promised to help him escape. In the concluding frame tale, the present-day narrator finds a way into the mound, and discovers to his horror that the “Indian” ghosts are actually the disfigured and reanimated corpses of Zamacona and his lover, who were caught escaping and punished by being forced to serve for the rest of eternity as mindless, undying sentries at the opening of the Mound.

“The Mound” is self-evidently not a “true” ghost story, a genre in which we have seen Lovecraft was deeply uninterested. Instead, it is largely devoted to Lovecraft’s idea of cosmic evil, the threat of an alien world which may destroy Western civilization, though in this instance it is subterranean rather than located in the gulfs beyond the stars. The idea of an alien invasion which results in apocalypse and destruction is one that would seem to lend itself well as a parallel to the historical invasion of European forces into the Americas, and the subsequent devastation of the continents’ indigenous peoples. However, Lovecraft’s Indians of “The Mound” are associated with the invader, not the invaded – their knowledge, and their presence in the West, threatens to disrupt and destroy the white families who have come to properly civilize it. J.M. Tyree argues that they are positioned as dangerously evil figures in part because, “In addition to his horror of miscegenation, Lovecraft felt an intense hatred for mixed and hybrid forms of culture” (145). In both of the narratives under discussion here, the indigenous presences are threatening because of the way in which they provide a direct link to what Lovecraft calls “the stupefying, almost horrible ancientness” (“Mound” 205) of America’s past.

This is not because they are ghostly, however, but because they represent a link to forces which rupture sanity, civilization, and time itself.

In “The Mound,” the presence of actual Natives occurs mostly in the frame tale from the unnamed narrator, where they stand as gatekeepers to the history of the ancient American southwest, like the Native guards in his *Dexter Ward*. They are less present in Zamacona’s central manuscript, which deals only vaguely with Indians as potential (and largely disappointing) guides to lost golden cities, until he meets a Wichita “young buck named Charging Buffalo, whose curiosity had led him into much stranger places than any of his fellow-tribesmen had dared to penetrate” (325). Charging Buffalo guides Zamacona to the entrance to the subterranean world, but refuses to enter with him, and so disappears from the narrative. The Oklahoma setting has echoes of Cather, even sometimes in its language; its opening contains a quote from an unnamed “British author” describing the Southwestern landscape as a, “moon-dim region, very lovely in its way, and stark and old – an ancient, lonely land” (305)¹³. Lovecraft’s narrator elaborates on this description, marveling at the mound’s “aspect of artificial regularity . . . the rim silhouetted against the deep blue of the west” (315). Even a hint of Southwestern (and Gothic) Catholicism makes an appearance, with the narrator lamenting that, “We cannot help regretting that the Catholic ardour of Renaissance Spain had so thoroughly permeated [Zamacona’s] thought and feeling” (335), causing the manuscript to be overly pious for the narrator’s tastes. Peter Cannon suggests that the setting and plot of the story further allow a broader-than-usual gesture towards Lovecraft’s fascination with cosmic horror: “In contrast to [his] New England narrators, whose scope is limited to the first English settlers in the New World and vaguely the Indians before them, he can hark back to the older civilizations of the

¹³ This passage is actually a slight misquotation from H.R. Wakefield’s 1928 short ghost story, “He Cometh and He Passeth By,” partially set in Arizona.

Southwest, both Spanish and Indian, in order to adumbrate more awesomely the antiquity of a still earlier civilization” (98).

In “The Mound,” then, the disturbing disruption pressing against civilization is the ancient, corrupt, sadistic, and degenerate world lurking underground – literally beneath the surface of America. But at the interface where the two worlds rub against each other, there are two major media through which disruption occurs: the figure of the Southwestern Indian, and the figure of the ghost. Bishop’s original prompt to Lovecraft requested a story in which these two were the same – a story with a ghostly Indian – and there are places in which the text has echoes of this theme. The narrator, near the beginning of the story, is warned away by locals telling the story of two brothers who, ten years earlier, dared to explore the mound; of the two, one died inside, and the second came back pushed so far to the edge of sanity that his hair had turned white and he committed suicide on the evening of his return. The suicidal man blames his brother’s death on “strange Indians,” and leaves behind a note in which he tells his family, “you cant tell if they are really men or just gotes” (313). After his death, “the whispers with which children and strangers were warned away from the mound quickly sank once more into the flat tale of a murderous Indian ghost and his squaw victim” (314).

The story simultaneously makes it clear, however, that, just as these are not “real” ghosts – representing cosmic horror rather than the literal spirits of the dead – neither are they “real” Indians, a distinction important both for Lovecraft’s narrative and his horror of hybridity. This occurs in places via Lovecraft’s relatively crude racism; when the narrator first observes the “ghost” atop the mound, he relates that: “there was borne in upon me the strong, persistent conviction that this man, whoever or whatever he might be, was certainly *not a savage*. He was the product of a *civilization*” (155, emphasis original). This is accompanied by a quick (and

questionable) racial, anthropological sketch of the characteristics of “Modern Indians” – “round-headed” versus the “long-headedness” of Europeans – that further distinguishes the mound’s ghosts from being actual Natives. The story’s contemporary Indians, though represented in a highly stereotypical literary fashion, are also allowed to distance themselves from the figures on the mound: “The Indians, on the other hand, did not seem to claim the spectres as kinfolk. They referred to them as ‘those people’, ‘the old people’, or ‘they who dwell below’ . . . The Indians had one or two old proverbs about these phenomena, saying that ‘men very old, make very big spirit; not so old, not so big, older than all time, then spirit he so big he near flesh; those old people and spirits they mix up—get all the same’” (306). This confusing “proverb” – essentially the claim that greater antiquity brings with it the power to create greater gods and then approach godhood – is a clear differentiation between “the Indians” who speak it and “those old people,” as well as a warning against “mixing,” though here between the physical and spiritual realms. It seems, in a sense, *necessary* for Lovecraft to make it clear through the voices of both his white and Native characters that the “ghosts” are not real Indians, but non-Natives made monstrous by contact with the kind of alien culture that the Indians represent. The horrific element of “The Mound” is composed primarily of the fact that Zamacona encounters a degraded civilization which creates monsters and practices sadism. In Lovecraft’s estimation, the present-day Indians, as “savages,” cannot be degraded – there is no horror in their culture becoming corrupted or, as in Tyree’s claim, above, “hybridized.”

August Derleth and *Lurker at the Threshold*

The novel *Lurker at the Threshold*, the most substantial collaboration between Lovecraft and Derleth, follows a similar pattern of divided time as “The Mound,” and similar concerns

over what it means to have Indians in America. The “present day” portion is set in 1921, and its convoluted plot details the results of protagonist Ambrose Dewart arriving in Arkham to take possession of his ancestral home. Dewart discovers a series of journals and records revealing that his seventeenth-century ancestor Richard Billington participated in occult rituals, “being instructed partly by Evill Books, and partly by an antient Wonder-Worker among ye *Indian Savages*,” (15) the Wampanaug shaman Misquamacus. Dewart, investigating this history, grows increasingly frightened and disoriented by the uncanny events occurring in and around the mansion; his narrative breaks off one-third of the way into the novel, concluding with his writing of a frantic letter to his cousin Stephen Bates asking for help. Bates narrates the next third of the novel; he arrives in Arkham to discover Dewart acting oddly calm, in contrast to the letter and in spite of the unexplained supernatural events that begin to occur around them. Alarmed by Dewart’s increasingly strange behavior, Bates in turn seeks out the help of a “professor of antiquity” at Miskatonic University, Seneca Lapham, in order to investigate the legends; Bates’ section of the text then ends abruptly as he meets Dewart’s new servant Quamis, who claims to be a Narragansett Indian. The final third of the novel is in the voice of Lapham’s assistant, who explains that Bates has mysteriously disappeared. Lapham and his assistant slowly discover that Dewart has been possessed by the spirit of his ancestor Billington, who has done this repeatedly to other family members over the course of two centuries. Additionally, “Dewart’s” mysterious servant Quamis is revealed to be Misquamacus, who has repeatedly disappeared and reappeared from Arkham several times over the same time period to assist Billington, using power gained from Lovecraftian Elder Gods to literally exist outside of time. It is implied that Billington and Quamis have sacrificed Bates to these Elder Gods, and the novel concludes with Professor

Lapham and his assistant killing both of the evil interlopers before they can call down the Old Ones to destroy mankind.

Of the text, Derleth explained, “I constructed and wrote [the book], which had nowhere been laid out, planned, or plotted by Lovecraft, but was evoked from his fragments and notes” (qtd. in Carter 162). Though it is a more convoluted text than either “The Curse of Yig” or “The Mound,” it shares many of the same thematic concerns. Some of its elements are distinctly un-Lovecraftian and seem to be clearly created by Derleth’s imagination, influenced by his lengthy involvement in early twentieth-century weird tales and pulp writing. At the novel’s conclusion, for example, the protagonists ultimately succeed in killing the supernatural shaman Quamis by shooting him with silver bullets, at which point he collapses into “fine, age-old dust,” because he has been dead “more than two centuries” (185) – a somewhat sloppy combination of the contemporary horror mythologies surrounding vampires, werewolves, and mummies. There are still, however, similar issues about hybridization and degradation; for one example, both Quamis and Dewart/Billington are ultimately hybrid entities, no longer quite human, but also too physical to be purely supernatural. As with creatures in the core of the Lovecraft canon, they have ghostlike qualities, and are sometimes treated by the “uninitiated” around them as though they are ghosts, but they are not “true” specters. The text also contains trace elements of racial integration and its undesirable end results: when Dewart begins his investigations into the history of his family and his house, he seeks out descendants of the shaman Misquamacus, and finds one – coincidentally (or not) named “Mrs. Bishop” – in “the back country in the hills.” The physical grotesqueries of locals he encounters there are described in more typically Lovecraftian terms:

The Dunwich people themselves were curiously repellent; it was undeniable, they were like a race unto themselves, with all the stigmata of inbreeding and some curiously different physiological variations – like the oddly flat ears, grown so close to their heads that they might have been attached over a far wider area than normal, and flaring in bat-

fashion along the back; and the pale, bulging eyes, almost ichthyic; and the broad, loose mouth, batrachian by suggestion. (48)

This passage is undoubtedly inspired by, and echoes, ones like those in “The Shadow Over Innsmouth,” which describe its unnaturally bred inhabitants as having “queer narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy, starry eyes.” Mrs. Bishop, the only person Dewart can locate who is the result of white and Native race-mixing, is an “old beldame” who appears “daemonic; her cackling laughter was obscene and horrible, a thin sound, like to the chattering of bats” (41-42). Further, the area’s morals are as corrupt as their bodies: “lust and cruelty and despair seemed to be an inevitable part of life in the Dunwich country; violence and viciousness and perversion suggested themselves as ways of life here” (48). Once again, part of the horror of *Lurker* is that the area’s populations have transformed into physically and culturally debased versions of their ancestors.

The main source of horrific degradation in the novel is, of course, the inter-cultural and unnatural partnership of Billington and Misquamacus, who need to be “exorcised,” in their own fashion, from Arkham. While this horrific partnership is not, as it frequently is in Lovecraftian narratives, the effect of literal interbreeding with non-white or non-human entities, it shares some characteristics of those narratives. For one thing, it grows steadily worse – as Billington possesses each successive member of his descendants unlucky or unwise enough to return to Arkham, the effects intensify. Dewart, the final victim of Billington’s is the most disastrous of this series of possessions, in that he must be forcibly killed by Lapham before Billington can destroy the world. Dewart is also the last of his line, as though the evil traced down through his bloodline has resulted in a kind of fatal infertility, the same consequences seen elsewhere in “degraded” Lovecraftian families. Further, this taint is acquired in part through his ancestor’s “congress” with people of another race – Misquamacus. It is an intellectual and spiritual

congress rather than a sexual one, but their “partnership” still stands as the origin point for his family’s destruction, as though the merging of Native and non-Native knowledge is an inevitable act of annihilation, even though it is necessary both for the New England atmosphere which Lovecraft and Derleth textually create.

Again, as in “The Mound,” the ghosts of *Lurker* are not “true” ghosts, though they are horrific, and both move through space and time in uncanny and unnatural ways. Where Billington relies on possessing his descendants, Misquamacus/Quamis keeps his own body through the centuries, periodically going back “beyond the stars” and then returning without having aged. This may be partially because his tribe – not wholly inaccurately – is considered to have died out, so that he has virtually no descendants to possess. But it is also Quamis who is partially responsible for teaching Billington the rites and secrets that give them both their powers, because they are the knowledge of his people. Derleth, here, seems to draw from Lovecraft’s short story “He,” in which the murdered Indians reach through time and space to avenge themselves on the necromancer to whom they unwisely taught their secrets. In other Lovecraft works, origins from a pre-Christian culture positions racial Others as being closer to understanding the Elder Gods – we have seen this implied earlier in the fabricated “Indian proverb” employed in “The Mound,” where “those old ones” become merged with “spirits.” It may be that Quamis’ “lesser” humanity, by virtue of his Native-ness, causes him to be able to actually physically join the Old Ones in body when he drops out of time, rather than only in spirit, as Billington can.

Both figures exhibit their ghostliness, however, in their shared ability to haunt Dewart as he researches the area’s past; he finds his ancestor’s actions too horrific, and the descriptions of Quamis’ rituals too intriguing to ignore. In typical Lovecraftian fashion, though, despite

Quamis' closeness to the inhuman powers of the text, he remains Billington's social inferior – in fact, his willing servant in both physical and mystical matters. It seems, in part, as though Billington's power arises from what Quamis lacks, a connection to the written word and its power over history; he can access not just Quamis' oral histories of the mysteries he guards, but other texts from other traditions as well. Dewart discovers these texts, as well as ones Billington himself created – writing his own version of reality – in the library of his ancestral home. Billington can not only “rewrite” the identity and nature of the descendants he possesses, but the known history of Arkham, acting in some ways as Derleth does in respect to Lovecraft himself.

Lovecraft's Providence, Rewritten

If Lovecraft *is* Providence, and Providence is, in Lovecraft's conception of it, the center of America in a way that, for example, New York City could never be, how do we see this in relation to Native-ness and its writing into, and out of, American history? We might start by considering whether Lovecraft works in the same way, if not with the same motives, as others who see American history as one which takes place after a Native genocide. Ian Frazier's 2000 work of creative nonfiction, *On the Rez*, is a mix of history and his own personal experiences and relationships in and around the Lakota Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. Frazier, like many who write on indigenous issues, is quick to attack the “breast-beatingly comfortable” idea “about Indians nowadays . . . that they and their culture were cruelly destroyed” (6). Frazier, however, goes further than reminding us that Indians and Indian nations are still in existence; he goes on to deconstruct the idea that they have been unable to enter mainstream American culture:

So, to the question “Why can't Indians get with the program?” one might reply that we have already gotten with theirs. Immigrants did not simply reproduce in America the life they had left behind overseas. They adapted instead to the culture they found here, a native culture that was immeasurably old and that still survives today. . . . Generations of

thought about the right relationship of people to God and to each other had already moved Europeans away from the oppressions of feudalism; but the example of freedom and equality among Indians provided a resounding real-life confirmation of theory. The pursuit of freedom drove the social revolutions that occupied over the world over the last two centuries, and reform in the name of equality produced great improvements and disasters. (13)

Frazier posits, in other words, that American ideology and American government are in many ways essentially, and to some extent invisibly, based on Native values. He cites the Iroquois nations as an influence on the founding fathers' construction of the Constitution, Indian egalitarianism as a model for America's rejection of European class conventions, and even tribal tendencies towards eternal schisms as a precursor for the way Protestant sections would splinter their way across the continent. For Frazier, the America we see now is constructed here as a hybridization of indigenous and European values, a nation built around an apparent absence that is in fact filled by the invisible presence of Native knowledge – in other words, a ghost which has persisted through time. It is a ghost which has been tastefully edited out of existence by the other rewriters of history.

Lovecraft – while he certainly has no interest in participating in nostalgic “breast-beating,” does have a vested interest in living in a world where Natives – particularly New England Natives – have become extinct. His loving version of Providence, and of an English New England, depends in part on the eradication of its Native population without intermarriage or other admixture with his white forefathers. Colonial conflicts are only briefly referred to (as in the short story, “The Street”), but when they appear, colonial triumph is emphasized. What American Indians do remain in the worlds he creates are always exotic, other, curiosities that only barely remember any of their largely-obliterated cultural histories. Considering this latter fact, though, may suggest that Lovecraft is in some ways enacting the kind of Native cultural

appropriation that Frazier describes, unwittingly claiming some aspects of Indian-ness as part of white America's heritage. If nothing else, at a very basic level, Lovecraft *needs* Natives to be present if there is to be a history of his Elder Gods on the North American continent, shown by his repeated fabrication of "Indian" myths and folklore that fold neatly into the "Cthulhu Mythos" that, in other stories, is represented as existing in ancient Egypt or Asia. The "degraded" American Indian Other provides a backdrop for Lovecraft against which to contrast white nobility, and his fictional white protagonists ultimately experience the "weird" world through the lenses provided to them by the Natives they encounter. Their knowledge is built upon the experiences and knowledge of American Indian legends and tribes in the same way that Frazier describes other Americans' national experience and identity as unwittingly being dependent on them.

The three major, hybridized texts examined here present a broad spectrum of views of the Indians they contain; if much of Lovecraft's ideology and literary output can be seen as writing over the works of others and being written over in turn, it raises the question as to whether these disparate versions of Natives can exist simultaneously, or repeat this action of cancellation and rewriting. "The Curse of Yig" most resembles the sorts of horror stories we have since become used to, in which white people suffer because they ignore the advice of natives – though here, it is arguably inverted, in that it is Audrey's putative Native background that ultimately leads to the story's horrific climax. While nobody but the narrator fully understands the mystery of "The Mound," it is the Natives who have a better understanding of it than the white town of Binger. Though the narrator takes pains to describe himself as an intellectual, and particularly one in the business of studying the "savage" races, the population of Binger is only able to provide him with stories of what have happened to them and their immediate relatives, and are collectively

unable to remember the stories and expeditions of previous generations. Instead, he can only initially access a more accurate picture of what the mound contains through the oral histories of the local indigenes. The figure of Grey Eagle is positioned as, “a Wichita chieftain whose more than a century of age put him above common fears” (“Mound” 311), and it is he who provides the oral narrative that is more accurate than that of the white Binger residents. In *Lurker*, perhaps out of racial necessity, Quamis is figured as Billington’s servant, who returns whenever his master bids him to. Quamis is also, however, the main source of the rituals of the Great Old Ones – without his assistance, Billington would have been unable to act as he does. In this way, *Lurker* might be seen as a story in the style of the 19th-century Leatherstocking stories – in which a white character, by virtue of his inherent superiority, ultimately becomes more Native than the Natives.

In that Lovecraft is generally not respected for his style or his prose but for his original work in the field of weird fiction and horror writing, some of the conversations his works create about the nature of Native presence in American identity must be assumed to be contributions on the parts of his collaborators Bishop and Derleth – both more traditional writers who might be seen as relying more heavily than Lovecraft on the conventions of the 19th century’s vanishing Indian. That he *is* prized for his new take on the weird is valuable in that he can be read as seeing the idea of Native ghosts as so uncontroversial that he never appears to challenge their existence in a serious way; even when he demands that a headless Indian ghost be rewritten as an alien creature from an older civilization, he positions it in such a way that it is still a being which white America has only a simplistic understanding of, while Native understanding of this anachronistic presence is more trenchant. In Lovecraft’s construction, his Natives *own* these “ghosts,” despite their mischaracterizations and misunderstandings of the beings’ true natures.

While the iterations of Lovecraft's burial spot are attempts to completely "rewrite" the space, they can never be fully successful; no number of dedicated fans making pilgrimages to his headstone will ever cause it to be anything but a marker over an empty grave. Similarly, Lovecraft's rewriting of Providence, New England, and America as one which now rests entirely on "white values" is incompatible with his tendency, and perhaps his need, to regularly use American Indians as the predecessors of white Americans who explore the history of the land they occupy – an exploration that often leads to insanity and death.

Chapter Four: The Ghost as Disruptor in *beDevil* and *The Roads of My Relations*

Problems with “Real” Ghosts: Genre Fiction and Indigenous Countercanon

The treatment of literal ghosts in mainstream twentieth-century writing, as in actual specters of the dead who actively haunt a place or a person, rather than symbolically haunting via memory, is largely sidelined into genre fiction. Part of the reason Lovecraft is a necessary component of any discussion of ghosts is because of the way that genres such as sf/speculative fiction developed in the English-speaking world over the course of the twentieth century, particularly in the relationship between America and Australia. In the US, the strangeness of Lovecraft’s ideas gave impetus to a new way to think about horror, and Kim Wilkins notes that, “Prior to 1995, Australian [speculative fiction] readers mostly read texts imported from the United States and England” (265), as there were few local publishing options. The UK’s lengthy history of bans on unacceptable materials – from violent comic books to “video nasties” – meant that, until, relatively recently, the work of US writers informed much of Australian readers’ experiences of fringe genres. There is an unsettling possibility, therefore, for Lovecraft’s views of racial and indigenous Others to inform the genre across nations, particularly as the Gothic ghost falls out of favor. Indigenous creators like Devon Mihesuah and Tracey Moffatt, when they produce supernatural “texts,” are therefore struggling against not just white traditions of describing where Natives fit into the world, but also the limitation of genre-specific ideas of race and reality. Moffatt and Mihesuah ultimately demand that Native ideology and experience be allowed to take precedence *over* genre: while using the trappings of horror, they are writing Native stories that happen to contain ghosts, rather than ghost stories which contain Natives. Their “texts” – the novel *The Roads of My Relations* and the film *beDevil* – assert the power of

Indians and Australian Aborigines to decide their own relationship to the supernatural and the general culture.

It is worthwhile to first examine how genre, and its inclusion or exclusion of Natives, has progressed since the construction of Lovecraft. The long tradition of the ghost story (already well-established enough by 1887 for Oscar Wilde to popularly parody in "The Canterville Ghost") has become less something to take seriously, becoming instead sidelined into horror film and fiction, or works for children. The separation of texts and films into genres, driven in large part by commercial concerns, encourages the censoring of literal supernatural elements; "serious" writers who incorporate ghosts, such as Toni Morrison or Gabriel Garcia Marquez, are slotted into the more acceptable genre of magic realism. In the United States, the less-privileged horror landscape has become filled with not just the 19th century's largely symbolic ghostly Indians, but actual ones. Multiple writers on horror discuss what Carol Clover has termed the "Terrible Place," the idea of a deadly location, marked by, "not just . . . decrepitude, but the terrible families – murderous, incestuous, cannibalistic – that occupy them" (30). In America, these "terrible place" narratives are often delineated by one of two ideological approaches: they are either Gothically corrupted, in that there is something terrible lurking there (a massacre, a tragedy), or they are corrupted in a Lovecraftian way, in which alien-ness and hybridity threatens reality. In stories involving Native supernatural elements, the "terrible place" often becomes the previously occupied land in which acts of genocide have occurred – and, problematically, white America typically occupies *both* the place of the murderous "family" and the later victims of the haunting.

An inevitable casualty in this situation is the undermining of indigenous texts about the supernatural. The edifice of genre fiction's "burial ground" and "terrible place" narratives create

a landscape of fake authenticity: there exists a highly stylized mode of Native ghosts in which all other Native ghosts are expected to fit, and the ubiquitousness of the image has potential repercussions in terms of political reality. If “real” indigenes are dead – or were never real in the first place – in the popular imagination, there is little use in discussing land rights or inequitable degrees of citizenship. For indigenous writers to resist that mode and create alternative ghostly texts means they are operating in a genre which is both exclusionary and devalued; their works are almost inevitably ways of opening the conversation in previously unforeseen ways. In this chapter, I will explore two works by indigenous women who have created non-standard ghostly texts: Devon Mihesuah’s *The Roads of My Relations* and Tracey Moffatt’s *beDevil*. Before we approach these, however, it is useful to examine the history of the literary and filmic situations they occupy.

An examination of just Stephen King’s work is emblematic of both the presence of Natives in genre fiction, and the ways in which it is problematic; Renee Bergland nominates King’s novel *Pet Sematary* (1983) as the impetus for an explosion of ghostly Natives in the horror genre at the end of the twentieth century. King, as well as being one of the best-selling and most influential contemporary horror writers worldwide, is in many ways H.P. Lovecraft’s direct inheritor. Not only does he frequently reference Lovecraft in his work, he has written some texts which take place entirely inside Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos, such as “Crouch End” (1980) and “Jerusalem’s Lot” (1978), he has similarly embraced the world of pulp writing, and been similarly influential within the genre. While not as overtly racist as Lovecraft, King has in some ways inherited the tendency to employ the racialized Other in genre fiction, particularly what Spike Lee – reacting in part to the 1999 film version of King’s *The Green Mile* - would ultimately term “the super-duper magical Negro.” One common trend within his writing is

referencing ghostly Indians or mystical Indian horrors, and it is in part thanks to King that America has become heavily steeped in the idea of the haunted Indian burial ground.¹⁴ Perhaps his most well-known of texts which use this conceit is *Pet Sematary* (later followed by a 1989 film of the same name, dir. Mary Lambert), in which pets, and later white Mainers, become malevolent undead beings after being interred in an ancient Micmac¹⁵ “burial ground.” But other Indians appear in King’s works as well, particularly in other “bad place” tales such as *It* (1986) and *Desperation* (1996), in which their suffering and mystic knowledge are used as background drama for horrific narratives. Perhaps most problematically, in King’s film *Creepshow 2* (1987, dir. Michael Gornick), a wooden cigar-store Indian, enraged by the murders of its elderly white owners, hunts down and scalps the Native man who committed the crime; at the end, the scalper’s grandfather nods to the placated wooden Indian in apparent approval.

King, while dominant, is only the bellwether of the multiple haunted Indian burial ground texts in the American landscape. Graham Masterton’s *Manitou* horror series (and the 1978 film of the first book, dir. William Girdler), which incorporates Lovecraft/Derleth’s character Misquamacus from *Lurker on the Threshold*, treats the entirety of America as a haunted burial ground, and Misquamacus as a vengeful spirit bent on destruction of white America. In many other non-Native American horror/fantasy texts and films, the mention of burial grounds becomes ubiquitous, to the point where the ghostly Indian functions almost like the plot of Poe’s “The Purloined Letter”: hidden in plain sight, they become unremarkable. *The Amityville Horror*, a book (1977, Jay Anson) and films (1979, Stuart Rosenberg; 2005, Andrew Douglas)

¹⁴The appearance of the “Micmac” – now more commonly spelled “Mi’kmaq” – in the text is relatively unusual. Often, the description of Native hauntings is generic, rather than tribe-specific, and the Mi’kmaq were in fact present in northern Maine in the pre-colonial and colonial periods.

ostensibly about a house which became haunted after a multiple homicide in 1974, casually mention that the Shinnecock Indians believed the land to be haunted by demons and kept it “as an enclosure for the sick, mad, and dying” (Anson 122). In the Tobe Hooper film *Poltergeist* (1982), the haunted house is built on a more contemporary cemetery, which is hand-waved away as being acceptable because, “it’s not ancient tribal burial ground. It’s just . . . people.” Even the psychological thriller *Identity* (James Mangold, 2003), a film which ultimately offers entirely prosaic solutions to its mysteries, makes sure to establish its location as a motel built on the “Tribal Tombs.”

This tendency to have literal indigenous ghosts is much rarer in Australian writing and films, for various reasons. One is that “the ghost story in Australia is a minor genre, a marginal genre” (Gelder & Jacobs 30), so that there are fewer ghosts in total to consider. The “terrible place” genre is almost omnipresent, but functions differently. In Margaret Atwood’s *Survival*, she makes the claim that the role of settlers within Canadian literature is to be victimized by the wilderness in some way: they either survive in taming the land but fail to “succeed,” in that some vital part of the human spirit has been crushed, or they fail to conquer the landscape and are destroyed by it. Some of these Canadian literature tendencies can also be seen in the way Australian horror has presented itself: Alan McKee sees the “terrible place” or “terror of place” as central to Australian horror in a similar way: “a failure of human frailty in the face of the Other, a sublime implicated in the landscape, ending in failure and death” (197). The idea of the threatening, alien, and inhospitable landscape is one we have already seen in White’s *Voss*, where, also, Voss’ haunting is not limited to the spot of his death, but all of Australia. In the seminal 1971 Australian film *Wake in Fright* (dir. Ted Kotcheff), an ambitious young Outback school teacher Grant becomes stranded in the nightmarish mining town named

Bundanyabba/“the Yabba,” only to become utterly corrupted by it over his Christmas holiday until – broke, dissolute, sexually violated, savagely violent and unable to leave even via hitchhiking – he attempts suicide. There are no visible Aborigines, ghostly or otherwise, in “the Yabba”; there is no local story of a massacre or any attempt to explain their absence. Their only trace is in the descriptor “the Yabba,” a stereotypically Australian cannibalizing of indigenous terms and place-names. In *Wake in Fright*, however, this functions less as an Aboriginal haunting and more as a display of what might be called “terror” *nullius*; identity-less, purposeless white Australians have been unable to fill the land with even their own name for it, and that emptiness itself is the essential nature of the place’s corruption.

There *are* bad places in the Australian canon which are ghost stories; however, those ghosts are almost universally white – they may be ghosts which have traveled from Europe to the New World, or previous generations of European convicts or squatters/farmers who met unlucky ends. The most famous Australian ghost is inevitably that of the apparently white “jolly swagman” who jumps to his death in the 1895 Banjo Paterson song, “Waltzing Matilda,” and whose “ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong: ‘Who’ll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me?’” As we have seen in previous chapters, this “whitewashing” of history may reflect the prevailing Australian attitude towards Aboriginal presence: one cannot have ghosts of a people who did not exist. Generally, a house needs to be occupied before it can be haunted. One short story, Ernest Favenc’s 1899’s “The Red Lagoon,” takes this to strange levels: the narrator learns that he is camping at a spot where Aborigines were once massacred by white colonialists, and he does encounter a ghost crawling threateningly out of the aforementioned lagoon that night. The ghost, however, is not one of the murdered Aborigines – it is that of a white supervisor that the surviving Aborigines killed in response. The closing lines of the story indicate that black

Australians do not camp there themselves, because “They nearly always shun a place where they have murdered a white man. I know of many instances” (141). The narrative almost suggests an upending of the American colonial/Native ghost story: the Aborigines can potentially be seen as being portrayed as invaders, avoiding their guilt and the ghost they have created.

There are also some examples of Australian ghost stories that more closely follow the American pattern, though they are relatively rare, even through the twentieth century. For example, “The Evil of Yelcomorn Creek,” written in 1899 by “Coo-ee” (*nom de plume* of William Sylvester Walker) is an American-like version of the Native burial ground tale. In it, the white narrator and his Aboriginal companion “Bobbie” discover a valley where the ghost warriors of an ancient battle claim Bobbie’s soul to help them guard the ground where they died.¹⁶ There is, here, an odd segregation of haunting, in that the narrator cannot be seriously affected by black ghosts. In contrast with the more usual narrative of an Old World ghost traveling to the Antipodes, Rick Kennett's 1992 short story "The Outsider" describes the angry ghost of an Aboriginal man trapped in an English hedge maze until his bones are dug up and shipped back to Australia in a hollowed-out gum tree. Though there are a handful of Australian horror films that reflect the “burial ground” narrative, which we shall examine later, there is a vacancy within Australian horror writing that includes images of the ghostly Aborigine, either mournful or vengeful. This can be seen, perhaps, as another iteration of Aboriginal absence within Australian conceptions of identity, but turning to contemporary indigenous writings of both nations can indicate other explanations.

One way in which mainstream understanding of indigenous beliefs about the supernatural has been problematic is the relegation of it to “just” superstition – as opposed to either

¹⁶ Though, bizarrely, Coo-ee’s “authentic” Australian ghost story seems to have borrowed over-much from the US literary tradition: both Bobbie and the Aboriginal ghosts are described as using “tomahawks,” which are not part of Aboriginal tradition.

“authorized” religion, or science-based reality, both of which are commonly decreed to be in the domain of non-indigenes only: Building on a cemetery is a Christian desecration, while building on a burial ground is only a violation of primitive beliefs so commonly repeated that it has been reduced to a punchline. However, white urgency and anxiety to give credence to indigenous ideas of the supernatural can be similarly problematic, causing it to become overly-adulated. Jack Utter records that American Indians have described New-Age appropriation of Native spiritualism as “‘poodle people,’ you know, ‘Dances With Poodles’” and “‘New Age Crystal Waving Twinkies’ who shamelessly appropriate, distort, misuse and disrespect our cultures” (138). In Australia, Marlo Morgan’s infamous 1990 hoax, her initially “non-fiction” book *Mutant Message Down Under*, tells the story of how she learned to master ESP by going on walkabout with an Aboriginal tribe. (The book was retroactively rebranded as a novel after a group of Aboriginal elders received a grant in 1996 to fly to the United States to confront her about her fabrications.)

Fortunately, there are multiple writings which help to skirt the line between being overly dismissive and overly fetishizing in depicting the supernatural beliefs of various tribes and language groups, many by indigenous writers. In the writings of United States American Indians – and, it should be noted, in Canada’s First Nations literature – ghosts are so common as almost to be a staple. Contemporary Native writers who have entered American mainstream literature, such as Louise Erdrich and Sherman Alexie, have books crawling with literal and figurative ghosts. In the considerably smaller body of Native writers working within genre fiction, the theme persists. Joseph Bruchac has written multiple “scary story” children’s books centered on ghosts, such as *Skeleton Man* (2001) and *When the Chenook Howls* (1998). Anna Lee Walters’ 1988 novel *Ghost Singer* – published two years before the Native American Graves Protection

and Repatriation Act, but set in 1969 – describes a haunted Smithsonian, full of screaming, angry ghosts who cause a rash of suicides among the researchers who refuse to return their bones to the ground. The Bram Stoker Award-winning writer Owl Goingback has, similarly, adopted the “burial ground” theme to his own purposes in novels such as *Darker than Night* (1997), *Evil Whispers* (2001) and *Breed* (2002), all of which revolve around ghostly threats and warnings from dead Native peoples.

The enormous marginalization that Australian Native writers experience in general, as well as the relative absence of horrific figures from Aboriginal epistemology, results in very few writers within the horror genre. Arguably, the closest thing to an Australian indigenous ghost story is the traditional tale of the bunyip, which is not so much ghostly as monstrous: the bunyip is a creature of varying grotesque descriptions, which lurks in fresh water and occasionally takes human victims – a potential precursor to the ghost of “Waltzing Matilda.” There are also “min-min lights,” the Australian equivalent of a will-o-the-wisp, though these are not popularly associated with ghostly presences, either. The already-discussed Mudrooroo borrows from European mythology in creating his “vampire trilogy” of the literary gothic: *The Undying* (1988), *Underground* (1999), and *The Promised Land* (2000). In these texts – which in some ways act as sequels to the events of *Doctor Wooreddy* – the white vampire Amelia, from London’s East End, preys on both colonial and indigenous Australians until her eventual defeat. The traditional lack of interest in ghosts is reflected in contemporary writing; Aboriginal writing tends towards realistic social commentary or, in the more specialized areas of poetry and children’s books, stories from the Dreamtime. Both Kim Scott’s *Benang: From the Heart* (1999) and Alexis Wright’s *Plains of Promise* (1997) deal with the gap between Aboriginal generations in a way that Katrin Althans describes as having gothic overtones, but there is very little of the

real supernatural: instead, the texts are focused on the historical reality of abuse committed against older black generations. Further on the fringes of genre, indigenous horror writer Raymond Gates, Australia's most eminent Aboriginal horror writer, specializes in contemporary urban horror that gives ghosts a pass.

Indigenous representation on the screen in both the U.S. and Australia is problematic; in the United States, there is the aforementioned influence of Stephen King and imitators that make the menacing and vengeful Indian into a supernatural figure, but very little filmmaking work by actual American Indians directly addresses or depicts literal supernatural elements.

Documentarian and Tewa/Dine film studies scholar Beverly Singer notes that "most films and videos produced and directed by Native people document actual life stories" (11), with narrative films being a minority. Singer links this tendency to film being a medium which, for indigenous Americans, can act as an inheritor to oral tradition; the need to transmit history takes primary importance. Not that there are no American Indian films which deal with ghosts; the film *Imprint* (2007), a supernatural thriller directed by Michael Linn and produced by Chris Eyre (Cheyenne/Arapaho), presents a contemporary medicine man "in a cowboy hat "rather than 'leathers and feathers'" (Hunter 117). The plot of *Imprint* concerns a Lakota lawyer who has drifted away from her roots; when she returns home, she discovers a cyclical haunting – an imprint – which allows her to come to grips with her family's past. More often, however, the past in Native-directed, -written, or -produced films takes the form of symbolic ghosts: in the Canadian film *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013), written and directed by the Mikmaq/Mi'gmaq Jeff Barnaby, imagery suggests supernatural threats and solutions, but the true dangers are posed by the reserve's history of abuse: emotional, physical, and substance-based. The answer to these

real-life dangers in *Rhymes* is, similarly, based in practicality, as the reserve's juveniles revolt against the systems in which they and their parents have become trapped.

Australian film as a medium tends to exclude many non-white creators and actors, particularly Aboriginal ones; Peter Krausz, in his "Screening Indigenous Australia: An Overview of Aboriginal Representation on Film" remarks that "Over 1000 feature films have been produced in Australia, yet I could only identify around fifty films that represent Aborigines in any way at all within the narrative" (90). While this claim is now dated – Krausz was speaking in 2003 – his results indicate an overarching pattern that echoes the treatment we see elsewhere of the erasure of Aboriginal existence. Australian film is, naturally, less rife with references to indigenous ghosts than its American counterpart. Examples of exploitation-style films concerning Aborigines do exist, though more rarely: *The Dreaming* (1988), directed by Mario Andreacchio and *Kadaicha* (1988), directed by Peter Bogle, are both semi-typical "haunted ground" stories in the American style, in which white atrocities against Aboriginal populations result in hauntings that must then be exorcised by modern white Australians who stumble across them. In the same year, the film *Zombie Brigade* (dir. Carmelo Musca) depicts an Aboriginal hero who leads an army of zombies against vampires which rise from the destruction of a Vietnam War memorial. McKee attributes the unprecedented appearance of this unrelated "trilogy" of films appearing in the same year to three factors: the influx and influence of American horror (including Stephen King) on Australia, the Australian box office success of American films like *Poltergeist* and *Nightmare on Elm Street*, and the "the last surge of films funded entrepreneurially by . . . tax concessions – a system which encouraged the proliferation of low-status genre films, selling cheaply and quickly to recognized audiences" (199). Mainstream

Australian horror since then has rarely focused on Aboriginal concerns, though the involvement of actors of Aboriginal descent has increased somewhat.

The marked absence of indigenous Australians in that country's filmmaking process is only partially explained by their intentional or unintentional exclusion from the industry. Where Singer sees filmmaking as a way to continue oral tradition for Native Americans, Katrin Althans notes that:

Mass Media are logically and practically the inverse of the personal Aboriginal information exchange system. . . . Particularly principles of secrecy regarding the Law, the entire body of knowledge governing local resources, custom and conduct, philosophy and science, and its transmission may be violated through public display of footage, as . . . since not every member of the community has the same rights to know, to hear, or to speak of something. (135-136)

The non-involvement of indigenous Australians, in other words, is in some ways dictated as much by their own refusal to submit to Western narrative modes and media as it is by the refusal of Australia's film industry to accommodate the need for minority access to the tools of production. Further, the ideology of the films that are produced involving Aboriginal characters is often discouraging to Aborigines who would be interested in entering the field: the prominent films *The Last Wave*, Nicholas Roeg's 1971 *Walkabout*, and Simon Wincer's 1990 *Quigley Down Under* are concerned, above all, with white reactions to Aborigines. Similarly, the genre films noted above – *The Dreaming*, *Kadaitcha*, *Zombie Brigade* – may be superficially concerned with Aborigines, but not with Aboriginality; their stories of ghosts and zombies are far divorced from any Aboriginal conceptions of the spiritual world. Both the medium and the message of film have caused it to be a phenomenon with which many Aboriginal creators have refused to endorse by participation.

This refusal is perhaps the clearest example of my contention that the ways in which the indigenous populations of the United States and Australia view *themselves* have controlled the

ways in which white writers and filmmakers are “allowed” to involve or depict them. Much American Indian tradition involves being willing to embrace history and the deaths of those who have gone before, and American Indian writers craft American Indian ghosts in a way that might be seen as being imitated by lowbrow American horror fiction, as powerful and knowledge-privileged ancestors who demand attention. Aboriginal tradition, for most groups, involves refusing to speak of the dead, causing even descriptions of them to become circular. For example, someone may refer to their deceased mother only as “the old lady,” refusing even to speak her name if it is shared by a living person, or even a location (as in Alice Springs). This latter tradition endures to enough of an extent that some contemporary films, texts, and television stations contain warnings like that at the beginning of Luhrmann’s 2008 film *Australia*: “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers should exercise caution when watching this film as it may contain images and voices of deceased persons.” The lack of Aboriginal ghosts runs through both Native and non-Native writings and films, and the exceptions seem to be more in imitation of the American Gothic and horror traditions.

In this section, I would like to further examine two indigenous textual creators who exist on the fringes of their disciplines, albeit in different ways: Devon A. Mihesuah and Tracey Moffatt. Both are writers coming from tribes and backgrounds with de-anchored conceptions of origin and place – Mihesuah because of her tribe’s removal from Mississippi to Oklahoma, Moffatt because of her suburban upbringing in a tradition that revolves heavily around the “authenticity” of nature, and both because of the racial and ethnic mixing in their personal backgrounds. Their works, partially autobiographical, resist genre and tradition in their insistence on the value of recognizing indigenous supernatural beliefs. It should be noted that Mihesuah and Moffatt are entering their respective national conversations not only from different

disciplines and in different media, but at different national moments. Mihesuah is both responding to a long tradition of non-Native texts which spectralize Indians for their own purposes, and participating in the preexisting narrative created by Native creators who themselves talk about indigenous ghosts. Moffatt's film, working in both an underrepresented medium and with an underrepresented subject matter, is both reacting to the current canon which excludes filmmakers like herself, and becoming a touchstone for contemporary Aboriginal filmmakers willing to accept and explore the possibilities of film.

Devon A. Mihesuah – “What kind of Indian are you, not knowin’ where you come from?”

Devon A. Mihesuah, an American Native writer of Choctaw heritage, is as of the time of this writing, a professor in International Cultural Understanding at the University of Kansas – a title which, like much of her work, resists simple categorization. The bulk of Mihesuah's writing is scholarly non-fiction and concerned with the history of indigenous Americans, including questions of the position of indigenous studies within the academy and strategies of decolonization, though she accomplishes this through means as varied as oral histories to foodways. She has garnered a number of awards for her work in these areas, including multiple accolades for her 2005 book, *So You Want to Write About American Indians? A Guide for Scholars, Writers and Students*. In her level of scholarship and through its variety, Mihesuah's work is solidly located and well respected within her academic field. Where she rests, however, more “on the fringes” is in her fictional works, which are similarly varied in form, though less widely read or considered in serious scholarship. This includes her first novel, 2000's *The Roads of My Relations*, which refuses to fit solidly into a single genre.

The Roads of My Relations might be described as a collection of short stories, but the individual stories are so heavily interconnected that some criticism describes the work as a novel. Though much of the text is, to varying degrees, based on the experiences of Mihesuah's extended family and friends, causing at least one critic to refer to it as an autobiographical history, the author's own afterword declares that, in part because some stories were "interesting but in need of embellishment . . . I do, therefore, consider this a work of fiction" (233). The narrative as a whole, spread across multiple generations and centuries, is largely the story of a Choctaw family's struggles with the Removal era, the American Civil War, Indian boarding schools, and ongoing challenges to cultural, racial, and personal identity. In a narrative that stretches from the 1830s to the year 2000, told in a non-chronological order that jumps from character to character as well as year to year, the central Native family is in conflict with a family of immortal witches, the Crows, who can assume the shape of owls. Because the novel covers so many generations, including intermarriages, it is difficult to pick a singular last name by which to call the Choctaw family of the novel; for the sake of convenience, I will refer to them here as the Watchman family. In many ways, the book's central character is Billie McKenney Watchman (1824-c.1924), the "family matriarch legend" (203), and it is through her first-person narrative that many of the chapters take place. The Crow witches – a "family" composed solely of men who rape human women in order to reproduce – stalk, rape and murder both the Watchman family and others at will, ultimately murdering seven members of the family until the Crows are definitively killed by the last generation of Watchmans the novel describes.

The nature of just what the Crows are and why they become locked in a centuries-long feud with the Watchman family is to some degree indeterminate. The two families first encounter each other in Mississippi in 1834 while the Watchmans are on their way home from a

journey visiting family. When the Watchman women attempt to relieve themselves in a river, they are chased by Jackson Crow, his cousin, and his son, only to be fended off by Billie Watchman's father with a shotgun. That seemingly minor confrontation spirals into the nearly two centuries of conflict between the two bloodlines. While the number of Crow witches changes over the course of the novel, there are two constants – the presence of the scarred patriarch, Jackson, and the absence of women. The original band of Crows is composed of Jackson, his brother, their cousin, and Jackson's son Dew, and others are later acquired in ways either obvious or mysterious. Billie Watchman's older sister Survella is at one point marked by Dew to be taken by him for breeding; when she refuses, he cuts both her throat and her youngest son's, and it is implied that the Crows reproduce via raping the women they encounter. Their supernatural nature gives them a bizarre agelessness, however, to the point that different generations of Crows appear to be the same age. The lone time the Crows are given their own chapter is when they are first introduced in the novel, a narrative set in 1829, in East Mississippi. In a description barely longer than a page, four Crows finish what has apparently been a small massacre by murdering Dew's black mother and a child, the latter of whom is frozen in fear as the Crows move towards him, while he thinks, "they looked like a family of owls he once saw perched together on a branch, staring, identical" (17). As the Crow father then commands his son, Dew, to scout ahead, Dew shrinks inside his clothes, then emerges as an owl to follow his instructions. Despite this supernatural ability, the Crows also ride horses that are moving trophy cases to the Crows' actions: "Woven into their manes were human ears and hairs – blond, black, and red" (17). Even after having been executed, the Crows return. They are, in short, nightmarish monsters in a way that approaches a Lovecraftian nightmare of the unnatural.

Roads, in the characters of the Crows, draws on the Choctaw idea of the “shilombish,” the spirit that lives outside oneself and, during life, can be seen in one’s shadow:

After death, Choctaws believed that the *shilombish* wandered restlessly the same ground it had lived on with the body . . . [it] had the ability then to assume the form, or possess the body, or just imitate the voice, of owls and foxes. . . . Choctaws listen[ed] carefully when an owl called or a fox barked at night. If another owl . . . replies in kind, then all is well. If no other owl or fox responds, the omen is evil. It means the *shilombish* is warning of an impending death, or perhaps other serious misfortune. (Morgan 55)

Throughout the novel, owls do, in fact, act as harbingers of evil events, occurring before a death or disaster in the Watchman family. It is often ambiguous as to whether these owls are or are not members of the Crow family, though sometimes they clearly are – and the dire events they “warn” of are, in fact, the murders they are about to commit. The Crows, however, also seem to be always in flux, in transit: they seem to neither be quite alive (as they cannot be permanently killed), or quite dead (as they can father children); they, along with the Choctaw, move from Mississippi to Oklahoma, seemingly as a result of the tribe’s federal relocation; it is impossible to determine just how many of them there are, or where they are, at any given moment. Phillip Morgan states, arguing the witches serve “a political function,” that “It is no coincidence, or authorial Freudian slip, that the patriarch of the Crow witch family is named Jackson” (35), as though the amorphous, malevolent, and implacable characteristics of the Crows are essentially supernatural stand-ins for Indian removal policy. Troublingly, this suggests that the power of American government policy is such that it can in some ways supplant, or overtake, Native belief systems: the Choctaw cannot even have their *shilombish* without the lurking presence of Andrew Jackson.

What might leave this explanation lacking, however, is its failure to account for the text’s complicated genre status. Mihesuah herself has complained, in response to Morgan’s work and most likely in response to this present work, that “simply looking at my first novel and picking

out the ‘supernatural’ aspects is not all that important. The other essential foci in that book, such as gender issues, patriarchal thought, colonialism, stereotyping, repatriation, author agency and accountability, activism, boarding schools, racism, traditional diet, family connections, and many other ‘et ceteras’ *are* important” (“Finding” 100). In her afterword for the book, Mihesuah explains the origins of much of the narrative as being from her personal family histories. Among these stories is, “the death of my great-great-grandfather Charles Wilson, a Choctaw merchant who was shot and hatcheted in 1884 by a violent Indian Territory gang. Jackson Crow led the group of Indian Men” (100). Mihesuah further explains that the fictionalization and elaboration of this story, in the chapter “The Death of Matthias Lamb,” was the first piece of text written for the book, and it is from this single, historical incident that the rest of the text eventually blossomed.

Given this contextual information, it could be argued that Morgan is almost perversely correct – it is *not* a coincidence that the patriarch of the Crow family is named Jackson, because the naming is intentionally related to an actual, historical Jackson Crow. In S.W. Harmon’s 1898 version of this incident, *Hell on the Border*, he describes Jackson Crow as “a wicked, unrepentant man, at whose door was laid many other crimes” (275); the incident itself was described by Crow at trial as his having become overenthusiastic as part of a posse sent to arrest Charles Wilson, and by the government as a violent fight resulting from “a misunderstanding that arose between them at [an] election” (ibid). In Mihesuah’s fictional text, by comparison, the 1884 attack by the Crow witches is similarly amorphous:

Some people, not just the old-timers, said the Crows were the same men who killed Lewis Wilson and thirty others back in Mississippi [c.1834]. Others said no, they were the grandchildren. Another rumor said that the older Crows were killed during the Civil War by Curly Johanson, a Swedish woman who shot all five men after they skinned her cat. Not everybody believed it but it made for good conversation. (121)

In this passage, we can see the ongoing supernatural abilities that accompany the Crows' appearances: their identities cannot be determined because of their agelessness, and they may or may not have already been killed once, but have returned nonetheless. Charles Wilson is, in Miheshuah's telling, apparently killed by Wirt Crow, another of Jackson's growing brood. Though Wirt and other Crows are executed for their crimes, one member of the Watchman family drily comments, "Those men . . . ain't men. You can hang 'em all day till their heads pull off, but they'll be back. . . . They always come back" (Miheshuah 126). Indeed, by the end of the chapter, the Crows have been executed, burned, and buried under a cairn, but still return before the end to slaughter those they encounter, both directly and indirectly: two of the Watchmans' neighbors are burned to death in a fire the Crows are implied to have set, while matriarch Billie's son Teague is mesmerized by a reanimated Jackson and killed by a speeding train. As Teague stares, "unmoving and transfixed by the owl-man," he wonders "*He looks so young . . . How can it be so many years and he hasn't changed any?*" (134).

There are other supernatural figures in Miheshuah's text, as well, though the vast majority seem to be constrained or hampered in some way. Some are friendly ghosts: in the chapter "Romy and George," two dead members of the Watchman clan (the first being the great-uncle of the second) skip through time and space rhapsodizing about women and horses; they begin at Thomas Jefferson's inauguration in 1801, moving as far ahead as 1997 to watch a contemporary powwow, and ending in 1922 to watch Man o' War, "the greatest horse of all" (195) run at the Santa Monica Downs. Along the way, they visit Wounded Knee, a Miss Indian Powwow Pageant, the homes of dead (and future) family, Maui before the arrival of white men, and even the place of the Choctaw/Chicasaw creation story, though Romy draws the line at seeing Moses and Jesus. It is intimated that the two are actually in a kind of hell, or purgatory, for having

taken the lives of others during their lifetimes. Here we can see the other side of the Choctaw *shilombish* tradition: while Romy and George seem fated to wander, perhaps forever, they have no real malevolence toward the living. There are, in some ways, also echoes of the Aboriginal Dreamtime here – Romy and George are in their own version of being loosed in an eternally repeating reality. They bemoan the fact that, as they travel effortlessly through history, they are unable to warn their relatives of their own impending deaths at the hands of the Crows (or otherwise), or make any real change in the world. Romy advises George:

Ya cain't kill nobody. I wanted to kill Custer but I cain't. Cain't kill Hitler, cain't kill Jackson. I've wanted to scream to them Cheyennes what was what was gonna happen. I wanted ta kill Chivington. I wanted to tell Geronimo to stay south and Chief Joseph to get north. I almost punched out Buddy Holly's pilot in the hangar . . . I was standin' next to Tecumseh at the Thames when he got shot. Twice. Don't ya think I wanted ta . . .
(Mihesuah 194)

Even when the duo encounter Jackson Crow, the two supernatural groups of men size each other up – Jackson commenting to Romy, “You smell dead, boy” (189) – but the ghostly Watchman men are unable to interfere. They part with this exchange: “Jackson walked to his horse, said something to his gang, mounted, and all five spurred their horses hard to get away from two men who were even stranger than they were. ‘They’re gonna kill your family, Romy.’ ‘Already did, George.’” (Mihesuah 190).

Some supernatural figures of the text straddle the boundary between frightening and benevolent: the Kowi Annukasha, the “little people,” show themselves to those in the Watchman family, most importantly the Watchman medicine men, and it is implied that they attempt to keep the Crows from rising from the dead by laying precautionary objects on their grave, objects which are unfortunately removed by others who misinterpret their presence. As a child, Billie Watchman encounters Hattak Fullih Nipi Foni, the Bonepicker: “Old man Tushkochaubbee died a half year ago . . . His family put him out in the trees so his flesh could rot. . . . When a person

dies, a picker comes to take the flesh with his fingernails. Then the stripped bones get put in a bone house” (Mihesuah 20). The bonepicker, a long-fingernailed and unsettlingly disheveled figure of indeterminate gender, apparently attempts to warn the Watchman family about the approach of the Crows the day before their first encounter, though its refusal to speak directly about them means that this effort, too, is a failure. Between the ineffective ghosts of Romy & George, and the inability of the Watchman family to comprehend the aid of the more inhuman presences in their midst, these supernatural diversions may come off as “dead ends,” scenery that does little to affect the world.

However, when the Watchman descendants – namely, Ariana and her cousin Annette – encounter the Crows, finally, in the year 2000, one of the Watchmans’ major vulnerabilities is that they have lost most of the medicine men of their family, as well as their ties to figures like the little people and the bonepicker. The solution to the eradication of the Crows is, ultimately, dependent not on an exorcism, but on supernatural aid, which comes in two forms: First, the medicine man Winchell Still, ultimately reveals himself to be Ruel Battiest (great-uncle of the long-dead family matriarch Billie), who disappeared long ago but who has been waiting and watching for the Crows’ return. Winchell/Ruel reveals that: “[N]one of us can kill them. The only way they can die is by the hand of someone they tried to kill, but didn’t. . . . There isn’t anyone alive like that” (Mihesuah 214). Winchell, unable to act directly against the Crows, instead raises from the dead someone who can: the stallion Archie, who belonged to Billie’s nephew Arie, was shot in the head by a Crow during the dramatic showdown that led to their first execution, but who failed to die: “Arie turned to see his horse standing, a hole the size of a silver dollar in his forehead . . . Arie saw bone pieces sticking out from the edges through the skin. Archie’s eyes were alert and he was breathing normally . . . Wirt [Crow] looked at where

Archie stood. ‘He’s supposed ta be dead,’ he said evenly. ‘Has to be’” (Mihesuah 122). Archie lives “another twelve years with the hole in his head” (132), fathering colts, and is ultimately brought back into motion – if not quite life – by Winchell/Ruel. Interrupting the rape of her cousin Annette by Jeke Crow, Ariana watches as Archie, the undead horse, begins slaughtering the fleeing Crows in graphic detail – punching a hoof through one’s spine, snapping another’s neck in half, stomping another, and chasing down the rest: “the owls Dew and Dixon emerged from their clothing and flew up and over the trees to the north. A furious Archie screamed a high-pitched reply that horses can’t make and ran into the woods after the evil birds, who knew they would have to finally die” (Mihesuah 225).

The very end of the text addresses the problems Ariana and Annette have in returning to the more prosaic natural world: confused police need their questions answered, Annette’s pregnancy from the Crow rape is aborted, Ariana must return to her life and teenaged son, unable and unwilling to share with him what has happened. Importantly, however, the death of the Crow witches does not depend on Ariana and Annette killing off the supernatural in their lives, but instead calling up the shared history of their family and their tribe. Horses are ridden throughout the novel, by both the Watchman family and others: the Crows have their horses, decorated with ears and scalps, at least one of which is adopted by a Watchman man, though he has to shave its mane to remove the gore. Even Romy and George, traveling through time, ride their own horses. It’s only by embracing the impossibility of ghostly and undead horses, of immortal witches and medicine men, of the impossibility, even, of Annette’s pregnancy (she is found to be pregnant hours after her rape, which occurs in the middle of her menstrual period), that allows them to triumph over the forces that keep attacking their family.

Tracey Moffatt – “I hated that place”

Tracey Moffatt is a native of Brisbane with Aboriginal (Koori) heritage whose major works have been primarily visual: performance art, photography, and short films that are often collage-like in nature, as in her 1999 short film *Lip*, which consists of clips from Hollywood films of black servants talking back to employers. Moffatt first attracted international attention with her *Something More* photoseries, "the story of an Aboriginal young woman who looks for 'something more' to her life in a small rural Queensland . . . Moffatt herself plays the part of the dreaming young woman discarded on the road to Brisbane" (Summerhayes, *Moving Images* 78). Her narrative films, similarly, tend more towards visual "storytelling" than verbal scripting, and *beDevil* may represent the most significant "text" she has provided actual words for. She, like Miheuah, exists in some ways on the fringes as a textual creator: while she is renowned in one field, that of visual art, her gender, her race, and the nature of her work position her as an outsider in the world of film, particularly as a director. Her first short film, *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*, is largely a series of tableaux depicting an Aboriginal woman taking care of her dying white mother in the Australian Outback. Her only major full-length film, *beDevil*, also relies on (sometimes-unnatural) set pieces, and racial relations in Australia.

beDevil is an anthology film of ghost stories, composed of three short, narratively independent pieces. In the first, “Mr. Chuck,” the ghost of a drowned American GI haunts a Bribie Island swamp, over which a small cinema has been constructed. In what is clearly an echo of the Aboriginal bunyip tradition, the ghostly Mr. Chuck attempts to drag in and drown a young Aboriginal boy; the story is told in flashback both by the boy in question, Rick – now an imprisoned adult – and an older white woman who remembers Rick as a mischievous and abused child. “Choo Choo Choo Choo,” the second piece, is the story of an Aboriginal family haunted

by a ghostly train in the Queensland outback, a haunting apparently caused by the tragic death of a blind white girl who was struck by the train. The final piece, “Lovin’ the Spin I’m in,” details two young lovers – Beba and Minnie, both Torres Strait Islanders from “up north” – who haunt the condemned building¹⁷ in which they died, despite the desperate attempts of the building’s owner to evict their ghosts while not alienating the Aboriginal community represented by Beba’s grieving mother.

“Mr. Chuck” and “Choo Choo Choo Choo” are, in contrast, much more reminiscent of other Australian ghost narratives discussed previously, which refuse to spectralize Aborigines and instead insist on the existence of white ghosts who haunt and harass living Aborigines.

Gelder and Jacobs, when discussing the tradition of ghost stories in Australia, maintain that:

Australian ghost stories generally do not respect the “localness” of their sites; they are by no means constrained in this sense. Instead, they show how their sites work to influence or impress people who are always passing through, people who take the effects of those sites elsewhere when they leave . . . The Australian ghost story, then, works by dramatically extending the influence or reach of its haunted site. (31)

While Gelder and Jacobs are referring specifically to the more traditionally Gothic ghost stories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this claim echoes McKee’s claims about the centrality of the “terrible place” narrative to other horrific Australian narratives. The previously-discussed film *Wake in Fright* ends with its narrator alive, but damaged from his time in “the Yabba,” perhaps irredeemably: his savings are gone, his face scarred from his self-inflicted gunshot wound, and his innocent relationship with his long-distance girlfriend overshadowed by his own experiences of sexual and violent excess. As the poisonous fingers of “the Yabba” – a place figured by its inhabitants as a sort of Australian heartland – stretch outwards, so also do the

¹⁷ The non-naturalness of Moffatt’s urban setting in this segment makes the actual original nature and purpose of the haunted building relatively indeterminate, though it does contain apartments. Critics variously describe it as an apartment building, an abandoned theater, and a warehouse, and those different labels are reflected in the citations here.

traumas in “Choo Choo Choo Choo” and “Mr. Chuck” stretch out not just in time, as ghosts do, but geographically, spawning haunted individuals elsewhere.

“Mr. Chuck,” the bunyip-inspired story that begins the film, seems like a natural candidate for a “terrible place” story, with its hungry swamp. We gain the narrative as told largely in retrospect by the apparent convict, the black Rick, and white Shelley, an older, white, bourgeoisie woman who remembers Rick as a child. At the segment’s opening, accompanied by his younger sisters, a seven-year-old Rick sits on a log poised over the swamp, tossing pieces of candy into it – candy which Rick, an incorrigible thief, has probably stolen from Shelley’s shop. Rick, with both feet dangling in the mud, reaches into it, and either falls in or is pulled in by the ghost of a dead WWII American G.I., referred to as “Mr. Chuck.” who was stationed on the island and drowned in the swamp. Rick and his sisters later watch as a white construction crew build a small cinema on top of the swamp, discovering, in the process, an old Army helmet and an ammunition belt. Rick later breaks into the cinema through a window, stealing candy and slashing the canvas chairs in an apparently directionless, frustrated rage. After a beating from a “stepfather” – possibly related to this theft and which occurs off-screen – Rick returns to the cinema through its window. This time, however, his landing snaps some of the floorboards, and he lies stunned as his feet dangle into the mud of the swamp. The adult Rick narrates, with much discomfort and stammering, “It stank worse than shit. And it was down there. And it was licking my feet. And it was spreading my legs, and its tongue was all over my feet.” The sequence closes with Mr. Chuck’s muddied face bursting out of the swamp waters towards the camera, in a slow-motion version of a horror movie’s jump scare.

The story of “Mr. Chuck” is about the invisible becoming known, primarily through the appearance of the swamp-buried GI, but also in the narration surrounding Rick’s history. The

ghostly Mr. Chuck is visible initially only via his different “effects” – Shelley’s memories of his death, Rick’s description of his touch, and the American military helmet and ammunition dredged up from the swamp by the workmen constructing the cinema. Rick’s biography is, similarly, largely hidden from the camera, and the physical abuse and neglect he suffers as a child – implied to be central to his adult incarceration – is made visible to us as an audience through distortions and elisions. The climactic scene of abuse is arranged as a horror-movie showpiece: the unseen abuser’s voice is distorted and monstrous, Rick’s younger sisters scream, and the solemn-faced blonde children of the cinema’s architect – a twin-like boy and a girl in blue-and-white striped matching tops whose earlier invitation to “come and play” evokes *The Shining* – watch the walls of the shack. The watching children are intercut with shots of swamp-fog boiling through the floor of the “poxy cinema” and the dead American GI’s face; meanwhile, a dark fluid that could be rusty water or blood pours from the shack’s drainpipe. Mr. Chuck as bunyip does not only seize victims to drown but, it is implied, bleeds into Aboriginal life to supernaturally inspire domestic abuse and neglect; the shack itself appears like a possessed object. Shelley, not Rick, is our most important verbal source of information about the abuse: She reminisces about feeling that she was the only one who cared about Rick, allowing him to go unpunished for stealing candy from the theater, because of “his home life,” and the beating sequence is accompanied by Shelley admitting to the camera: “Yes, I knew that was going on. We on the island all knew. We could have helped that child. We could’ve –“ Shelley breaks off, biting her lip. The final words Rick speaks in describing his second encounter with the ghost, of his legs being spread while an unseen tongue licks at him, are heavily suggestive of sexual abuse, and the “exposure” of Mr. Chuck’s face at the very end of the segment, spitting mud at the camera, resembles that of the terrified, mud-covered Rick as a child as he fights to

escape the swamp at the story's beginning. It is a highly stylized visual and narrative construction of Freud's return of the repressed; Mr. Chuck is ascendant at Rick's expense.

This pattern of slow revelation is also explicitly linked to the issues of white/black relation to land and home. When we first meet the adult Rick, we know only that he is wearing a singlet/sleeveless undershirt, in a nondescript location. He is introduced laughing, then becomes thoughtful, telling the camera: "The ghost swamp. Yeah, that was me. I was seven at the time. I was okay. They fished me out." At this, Rick leans forward to and rests his right palm against the previously-invisible pane of glass that separates him from the camera, and bursts back into laughter. It is Rick's hand, flattened against the glass, that tells us first that he is in an institutional setting, and his dialogue represents a subversion of the expected Aboriginal narrative of connection to and yearning for one's traditional land. As he narrates, he is "first introduced laughing heartily at the recollection of his adventures in the swamp, a segment that concludes with the dead-pan proclamation, "Yeah, I hated that place, that *island*" (italics mine, suggesting original performance emphasis). He later comments on the "poxy cinema above that stinking swamp." Shelley's introduction to the history, in contrast, begins with, "I've always loved this place. Our island home." It is likely that Shelley's phrase, "Our island home" – in this 1993 film – is a reference to the popular 1986 song by the Aboriginal Warumpi Band, "My Island Home," written about Elcho Island, but which has frequently been "repossessed" by other speakers talking of other originary island homes, including the entire "island" of Australia.¹⁸ Shelley, assuming ownership of the country, further takes loud pride in the fact that her father was an engineer who built the main road, stamping the land with white presence. However, our

¹⁸ The song would later be covered by Torres Strait Islander Christine Anu in 1995, in which some of the lyrics were changed so that "My Island Home" could better represent her background. It is this particular recording which raised the song to more widespread cultural awareness and its popularity in the charts; it was, however, well-known and celebrated in indigenous circles prior to that.

last sight of Shelley is an uncanny inversion of Rick's introduction: the camera zooms away while Shelley presses herself desperately to the glass windows of her expensive house as though she is attempting to escape towards us, gesturing to the camera, and holding up an unidentifiable black-and-white photograph (possibly of her father/family at the time the main road was built). Their mirrored actions – their revelation of trapped-ness by Bribie Island by their battle against transparent barriers – suggest a move on Moffatt's part to disrupt the distinctions between indigenous and non-indigenous claims to Australian-ness.

The "Native haunting" palimpsest of the Americas – and in its Australian imitators – involves a sort of battle of nostalgics: the indigenous ghost is typically invested with a love of the land it refuses to leave. In "Mr. Chuck," this is clearly inverted – the white, American ghost, trapped in a foreign country, has become a permanent and rageful inhabitant who attacks and drives out an indigenous population. Furthermore, the claim by Gelder and Jacobs of the Australian extension of haunted place is emphasized in that Mr. Chuck's influence spreads. It is, ultimately, difficult to tell whether the most malevolent presence arises from Mr. Chuck or Rick's suffering, or the indifference of the white inhabitants of Bribie Island. In the "Mr. Chuck" sequence's penultimate moments before a final recollection from Rick, Shelley is ultimately the one who is trapped by her "island home," proclaiming love for it, unable to leave it, knowing that the evil in the swamp – the bunyip/dead American GI – is not contained to that space, but reflected and magnified by the (in)actions of the community that has been built up around it, including herself. The indigenous Rick, a twice-over victim of the ghostly Mr. Chuck, shows as both a child and an adult signs of abuse. As an adult, he narrates his childhood experiences from inside a jail, in both an interview room, where he appears injured, and his cell, where he patiently tattoos himself. "Mr. Chuck" may still be rotting in the swamp on Bribie

Island, but the atmosphere of terror and abuse – and, presumably, white indifference towards him – has followed Rick out of the swamp and into the rest of the world, where he spreads it further through his narration. Rick has apparently escaped the island he hated as a child, where he was variously abused and ignored, only to replicate it in the outside world through his new imprisonment and the suggested violence it contains. The violence implied by the “invasion” and death of the American GI, whose “presence . . . is visualized also through film-like posters of an American soldier, recalling imagery of the 1960s and the Vietnam War” (Senzani 110), has become unmoored in place. It has infiltrated first the theater – where the child Rick, in a fury over his abuse and exclusion, steals candy and slashes seats with a knife – then the island, and then Australia, replicated in the imprisonment of both Shelley and Rick.

The ghostly presence in “Choo Choo Choo Choo” works similarly. As in “Mr. Chuck,” the narrative seems as though it could be passed off as a more traditional “terrible place” story – even the min-min lights make a brief appearance, though they inspire wonder rather than fear – but it refuses to keep itself rooted in place. Like all of the trilogy, it is largely told in flashback; a group of cheerful Aboriginal women ride a truck to a remote house next to a set of disused train tracks, where they communally prepare bush tucker and one, Ruby, tells her ghost story to the camera: When she was a young mother, she and her family moved to this same house, where they repeatedly experienced supernatural events, most notably a train they could hear, and which produced vibrations, but which never appeared. The rest of the story is filled in by other players from outside their circle and shot in the city: older men, white and Chinese, who explain the tragedy of a blind little white girl who was struck and killed by a train, and the engineer so haunted by her death that he disappeared in an apparent suicide.

Some of the major elements of “Mr. Chuck” – black poverty, guilt, and how community reacts to tragedy – are present in “Choo Choo Choo Choo” as well, though the community here is largely seen in a positive light. Different speakers cooperate, translate for each other, encourage each other, and refer the audience to other speakers, times, and places in a productive effort. The collaborative narration results in a dynamic setting: the title is suggested by the ghostly train, but some of the shots also suggest the way that train travel unites Australia. After a somber opening, there is a long “moving” sequence comprised of two halves, set to the song “Ghan to Alice”¹⁹. The first half shows the black women in the back of a pickup truck, driving (presumably) from the city out to the remote house for their expedition; they begin playing “Ghan to Alice” on a small boombox, clapping along, hugging, until a beaming Ruby demands of the camera, “Well? What do you think of my netball team?” The second is a sequence showing a journey out of the bush and through Brisbane filmed as though from a moving train, while the song plays. The choppy-cut scenes are filled with smiling people motioning towards the moving camera as though it were a train engineer, imitating the movement of a train wheelset with their arms, then pointing towards their ears, and covering their eyes. At its conclusion, a cheerful shopkeeper of Chinese descent asks the camera, “Want to hear a spooky story?” and motions us into his shop, where he becomes our interpreter for these actions, and the gateway to the community. He repeats the actions while explaining that he is reenacting the ghost train: the moving arm to represent the bar across the train wheels, pointing to the ears to indicate it can be heard, covering the eyes to indicate it cannot be seen. It is from him that we first hear of the engineer – who used to own the Chinese storekeeper’s shop and was “haunted by something” – before he grins, “Choo, choo, choo,” and refers us to his friend Mickey, who knows the rest. As

¹⁹ This particular version of “Ghan to Alice” – a song about the train journey from Adelaide to Alice Springs – is recorded by the Aboriginal (Arrente) country singer Auriel Andrew. Andrew also plays the older Ruby, so that the actress essentially appears in a diagetic and a non-diagetic role, and also in both halves of the “travel” sequence.

in “Mr. Chuck,” there is a partial collapse of difference here: both communities have experiential knowledge of the haunting, and must be heard from in order for the narration to cohere.

This collapse is repeated in the scenes set solely in the bush, which are both in a naturalistic present and a past shot on a sound stage landscape that suggests an imagined, partially artificial, memory. The combination of these two uses of the remote house, the present and the past, ultimately “carnivalizes representations of outback Aborigines living in tin houses, which usually serve stories of poverty and abuse, indirectly reinforcing the gap between white and black culture” (Senzani 231). This “carnival” occurs in part through the semi-comic sequences of the “current” black Australian women appropriating the white, middle-class genre of the genteel cooking show. Ruby’s netball team prepares “bush food” while performing a parody of professional television cooking shows. With the women sipping white wine and speaking directly to the camera, the sequences include faux-sophisticated lines like, “This is a wild pig being cooked underground.” The sequence is followed up with the older Ruby translating from an indigenous language as others shout back and forth over a live snake that has just been caught, “She’s telling them that she can’t cook it now, but she’ll take it home and make it into a snake terrine.” Althans notes that “the food itself unsettles white expectations of cooking: juniper berries, which are originally used in Scandinavian cuisine, are mixed with ‘herbs from this area’, the snake terrine will be ‘served with a walnut vinaigrette’, and the native yabbies²⁰ are decorated with a ‘common hollandaise’” (171). Even in the past, though, which lacks this element, the narration of black Australian poverty is undercut by younger Ruby (played by Moffatt herself) wearing a “stereotypical Sandra-Dee like dress out of 1950s

²⁰ A yabby is a species of native Australian crayfish, which the older Ruby also explains to the camera. Catching yabbies, “yabbing,” represents both an indigenous foodway and an experience shared now by rural and suburban Australian children across the nation.

American comedies . . . Her character never steps out of the confines of the perfect housewife” (Senzani 261). Young Ruby and her family, it should be noted, have moved into the house where the dead girl’s family used to live, and so symbolically occupy the role of the colonial settler: moving in to the “empty land” vacated by those who used to live there, only to be confronted with the evidence left by their predecessors.

This strategy, the celebration of community and the erosion of racial difference, is undercut by the hauntings at the segment’s center, and the hauntings which are present via absence. The symbols of the haunting – a dead white girl who apparently chases young Ruby from her home, the missing engineer who the city narrators describe, and a train, one of the major signs of colonization – are almost entirely unseen. They suggest, also, that the attempted erasure of difference would not be necessary without what lies underneath: the removal of Aborigines from their land by white people acting as malevolent forces. The young Sandra-Dee-ish Ruby is pushed out of her house by the blind white girl, who we finally see at the very end of the episode, superimposed on the train tracks, as the last remaining inhabitant; even as an adult, Ruby seems haunted by the memory, with “She’s here! She’s here!” being the dialogue that begins and ends the segment. Further, these ghosts undercut the image of the train uniting Australia, and again insist on a “terrible place” that *moves*, just as Mr. Chuck could not be confined to his swamp. While it is the Aboriginal family who lives with the ghosts of the train and little girl at the rural scene of the incident, the information of the missing engineer infuses the happy “choo choo” motions and noises of the city dwellers with an air of the macabre: even having left behind the location, the engineer has brought the ghost of the dead girl with him, via train. The human reenactment, over and over, of the chugging engine and blowing whistle is, ultimately, a recreation of that girl’s death.

Of the three narratives, “Lovin’ the Spin I’m in” reads the most like a traditional “indigenous” ghost story of the kind seen in US literature – the young lovers Beba and Minnie are essentially like any other pair of star-crossed lovers. The site of their haunting is a self-conscious intersection of Australian multiculturalism. The ghosts are almost the last, stubborn tenants of the building; their only housemates are Beba’s grieving mother Emelda and a cross-dresser who performs as Frida Kahlo, seemingly to an audience of herself. They are eventually evicted by its Greek owner, Dimitri, who is attempting desperately to convince his prospective business partners – one Italian, one Chinese – to help him tear down the property and invest in a resort/casino on the spot, instead. Much about the narrative is ambiguous – the precise nature of Beba and Minnie’s deaths, the motivation of the ghosts, and even the story’s climax. After an evening of the ghosts dancing with the teenager who lives across the street, Dimitri, suspecting trespassers, enters the building in frustration: “He is never shown to leave the old warehouse, but in the morning the investors return and enter it – only to hurry out of it in hasty flight . . . Yet they remain caught in an eternal spin inside their car” (Althans 179). Dimitri’s fate is presumably horrific, but unknown, while his partners end the film literally spinning in place in a squealing car. Despite the desire of “new” Australia to overpower and overbuild on Aboriginal Australia, the men representing its newness are caught by a combination of their own fear and incompetence.

As in the other segments, however, “Lovin’ the Spin I’m In” resists this kind of easy read at the same time it performs it. The story is again split into past and present, with much of the past sequences being played in pantomime; its events are narratively explained by Dimitri’s wife, Voula, to their son Spiro, who questions his mother about the rituals performed by Emelda as she grieves her son’s death. Through Voula, we learn that Minnie is from “up North” – that is,

though indigenous, she is not “local;” her presence, rather than Aboriginal displacement by whites, is figured as the catalyst for the disastrous events that unfurled. Dmitri, who is presumably somehow killed by the ghosts he tries to evict, cannot be simplistically reduced to the status of an evil outsider: we see him, in the flashback sequences, as happily partying with his tenants and involved in their lives. And when the ghosts do appear, it is to his son Spiro, who watches them dance and attempts to join in, so that it is ultimately the Greek Spiro who inherits the troubled history of the place even as its Aboriginal inhabitants finally leave. Spiro, it seems, is tasked with being haunted.

As noted previously, one reason for low Aboriginal involvement in Australian film has been the conscious resistance to a medium which denies Aboriginal ways of storytelling; through these trespasses of convention, Moffatt makes an implied claim that film *is* something which can be infused with an indigenous ideology. Part of this is through her hybridization of genres: In its visual style, *beDevil* has strong overtones reflecting Moffatt’s background in photography, including the juxtaposition of jarring images, which can often be read as Moffatt resisting dominant narratives of Australian representation. The settings are a mix of the organic – long, swooping aerial shots of Bribie Island resembling a tourism advertisement, for example – and the inorganic, with many of its sets clearly set on sound stages, looking decidedly and intentionally artificial. There are also elements of the deeply surreal or overly stylized mixed into the narratives themselves, including the “cooking show” sequences of “Choo Choo Choo Choo.” A side narrative in “Mr. Chuck” contains a “smiling Anglo-Saxon blond father . . . [who] transforms briefly into a threatening phallic image, momentarily snarling and sticking out a curling sexual tongue” (Summerhayes 139). “Lovin’ the Spin I’m In” includes sequences, without explanation, of actor Luke Roberts dressed and performing as Frida Kahlo in the privacy

of his apartment in the haunted building – a performance which is an echo of his performance art outside the world of the film.

But also, Moffatt practices here a narrative of non-closure: these stories do not have settled or clear endings, and exclude the “payoff” typical of the genre. We are left unsure as to whether Mr. Chuck is still on Bribie Island, just what happened to the engineer of the ghostly train, and the fate of Dmitri after he enters the warehouse. As we saw in the second chapter, this may be read as another iteration of Aboriginal thinking – these stories represent the opening of possibilities, rather than firmly established facts. Their unresolved nature speaks to the circular nature of Aboriginal history; firm endings preclude the kind of repetition that embodies the Dreaming.

Impossible Autobiographies – Moffatt and Mihesuah in Reflection

The Roads of My Relations and *beDevil* share some similarities that could be marked as superficial: It is difficult, for example, to refer to either of them as a single text, because of the ways in which they have been constructed from multiple and potentially independent narratives – but it is also difficult to separate those narratives, because of the ways each part productively draws on and informs others. “The Death of Matthias Lamb” chapter of Mihesuah’s text, for example, may have been its starting point, but it is difficult to understand without the previous chapters hinting as to the brutal and supernatural nature of the Crows; similarly, the narrative clues it drops about the witches’ unkillable nature informs the climax in the last chapter. *beDevil*, after its closing credits, includes a clip of “Choo Choo Choo Choo”’s happy Chinese shop owner yelling upstairs to his white friend to come down and “tell them what it’s all about,”

a claim which affects the reading of not only the chapter that includes them, but of the film as a whole and its claims about Australian identity.

Notably, both texts are also quasi-autobiographical. Mihesuah does not appear, herself, as a character in her text; it is irresponsible to suggest that the last generation of the Watchman family, Ariana and Annette, are stand-ins for the author's own experiences. Her family's history, however, is the centerpiece of the work, though it has been embellished and sometimes fabricated. Moffatt, similarly, does not seem to have written her personal history into the film she has produced – but she has chosen to appear in it as an actress, and has also stated that much of it is based on stories she experienced from Aboriginal communities. If these are, in their own way, true stories that represent indigenous experience, what are we to make of the fact that they include supernatural forces as truth? The elements which they contain – ghosts, witches, Min-Min lights, little people – are ones which we are now used to seeing contained to children's stories, or less respectable genres.

I believe that, here, it is useful to look back at two images from these texts: the Crow witches, resurrecting themselves from their cairn, and Mr. Chuck's muddy face lunging out of the swamp towards the camera. Neither *Roads* or *beDevil* is a true memoir or a true history, though they hang on to and contain elements of these genres in their attempts to represent something which is difficult to represent: the impact of cultural genocide and collision upon indigenous peoples of their respective nations. Various possible strategies for representation seem inadequate: statistics, individual stories like that of Billie Watchman detailing the lives of the generations she sees pass. The ghost is a force that appears when there is something which needs to be expressed that is beyond rationality. These two moments are ones of communal failure. The Crows, under their cairn, are only able to escape because the community has

forgotten about the little people of their own tradition, and so they remove the protective items that have been left to keep the witches sealed away from the world. Mr. Chuck, dragging Rick into the swamp like a bunyip to lick at his legs, is the embodiment of the community's failure to care for and protect its black children. The dissolution of community is an absence, a gap, a ghost; utilizing the supernatural allows these women to give that dissolution a physical *presence* that allows access.

It is also important that the supernatural figures of *Roads* and *beDevil* are uncontrollable in ways available to Western epistemologies. The Crow witches, the *shilombish*, are utterly beyond the reach of conventional justice or the Christianity the Watchman girls learn at their Indian boarding school: their ghosts are their own. By insisting on their independence from these systems, Mihesuah is able to assert that Choctaw identity, *including* Choctaw pain and recovery, is something which they alone are able to both identify and alleviate. Similarly, Moffatt, in creating her trilogy of ghosts, is able to challenge the limits of the white-authored horror film by creating a world in which Aborigines decide who the ghosts are – mostly white – and what they are able to accomplish. These are potentially revolutionary acts that allow indigenous writers to dictate to mainstream textual creators how Natives are *allowed* to be portrayed. There are no “dead and gone” Indians here, as in Cather's southwest, or Patrick White's imagined colonial Aborigines. Instead, the narrative of living indigenes makes the claim to own their own history and integrates it into white experience, rather than allowing segregation to continue.

Coda: Building on Bones

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” – William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

When Lovecraft imagines the collision of his familiar world with the alien ones of Elder Gods and racial Others, his visions are of apocalyptic horror, and the boldest claims that texts make regarding the power of Native ghosts to effect change are similarly cataclysmic, even beyond that seen in Mudrooroo’s *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*. Peter Weir’s 1997 film *The Last Wave* takes an end-times approach to white/Aboriginal relations, though the story may be read as a “burial ground” narrative: in his film, a white lawyer becomes enmeshed in the affairs of urban Aboriginals who have only seemingly lost their connections to their heritage, and begins to experience visions and supernatural effects in his daily life. He discovers, ultimately, that Aborigines have evoked a death curse, drawn from their traditions, in the form of a giant wave to assault the holdings of Australian whites on the coastlines of Australia while retreating, themselves, towards the interior. Similarly, Leslie Marmon Silko’s massive novel *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) presents a complex system of interwoven plots taking place over five hundred years, many of which are based on non-Western thinking and which primarily involve the destruction of European presence in the Americas. In *Almanac*’s prophetic conclusion, multiple groups are leading efforts to the complete overthrow of non-indigenous systems, propelled in part by Mayan metaphysics and two Yaqui brothers led by visions gifted to them by the voices of their ancestors who speak through “spirit macaws.” Texts like these present a mutilated world which can only be reconstructed through the uprising of history against the present; a blank slate led by the revenant dead is required in order for the living to reinscribe the palimpsest of reality.

Not all ghostly narratives are so drastic, of course, but the lengths to which these texts go are suggestive of what kinds of reinterpretations of the world ghosts can demand of us. Ghosts may be disruptive when they appear, and sometimes that disruption is necessary or useful; the false pretense that indigenous people no longer exist, or never existed in the first place, is always already a disrupted site. The real-world political and legal apparatuses delineating the relationships between nation and indigeneity – reservations and land rights, access to public facilities and monies, governmental recognition – is demonstrably interwoven with the *cultural* recognition of these relationships. The texts produced in these cultural circumstances are both descriptive and prescriptive, expressing the relative histories of colonial aggression and cultural genocide, but also using the interstitiality of the ghost to suggest that these histories are not as firm and discrete as we assume.

One site of possible change or flexibility is the way we think of the ghosts themselves. In indigenous traditions, ghosts are typically not supernatural figures, if we understand the word “supernatural” to refer to phenomena which cannot be explained by our understanding of the natural, physical world. In indigenous ontologies, ghosts (and other intangible entities) are natural, inherent features of the landscape – the idea, for example, of the Algonquin Manitou, the spirit/life force which inhabits all things. In the texts discussed here, we can see this in Mudrooroo’s Tasmanians’ lack of surprise that the white ghosts, *num*, are physical entities, and the ways in which Moffatt and Mihesuah’s semi-autobiographical narratives encapsulate witches and spirits as matters of fact rather than miraculous. Rather than being an unnatural violation of the strict division between the living and the dead, the ghost can be experienced as a tactile instance of the porous nature of the boundary between those worlds. There is a suggestion that embracing the ghost, and the history it represents, as part of the present, is necessary for a

productive national future. In his *Hold Everything Dear*, John Berger muses: “The living reduce the dead to those who have lived; yet the dead already include the living in their own great collective. . . . What is the relation of the dead to what has not yet happened, to the future? All the future *is* the construction in which their ‘imagination’ is engaged. . . . Thus living and dead were interdependent. Always” (5). Though this interdependence is often denied, with even Cather’s fictional version of the Smithsonian Museum not caring for “dead and gone Indians,” the continual return of the ghost insists on its truth.

Part of what the monstrous ghost in the room presents is the image of a mutilated nation, a corpus which cannot fully function because its disparate parts are too damaged and alien to work together well. This is in part an illusion – not because the nation is not disjointed, but because there is not a moment at which it was whole. The collision of worlds at the moment of colonization is a site which offers the possibility of both destruction and creation: neither Native nor non-Native ontologies will survive the experience unscathed, but the new forms they take, and the potential for their hybridization, represent the possibility for a livable future. The appearance of the ghost, the intrusion of the insistent dead, invites us – as in the Berger quotation, above, or in the epigram from Faulkner which begins this section – to consider ourselves as still living in that moment of possibility through our shared community *with* the dead. The defaced body of the Nation is not a dead one, but one whose incomplete nature invites continuous efforts to fashion its parts into a more solidly functioning entity.

This does not necessitate an apocalypse, in the fashion of the texts opening this section. An apocalypse represents the exorcism of either the invader or the invaded, in the style of the old Gothic model, in which the ghosts are dispensed of by, or drive out and murder, the living; apocalypse is an erasure. What is instead called for, and what these comparisons allow for, is an

ongoing and uneasy possession that continually invites reconciliation and reformation. The revenant ghost's insistence that it is of the same community of the living creates opportunities to tell new stories: Indigenes can be portrayed not only in a dominant narrative as being victims of history, but as agents who actively create the nation's present and future. White colonial forces can be constructed not only as ghouls building on top of the gravesites they have created, but as phantoms attempting to possess the ground they do not have enough substance to claim.

In the popular narratives of the mainstream genre horror that contains ghostly stories, and in the political reality that exists regarding indigenous land rights, there are repeated warnings against building up new edifices on ancient burial grounds. A more appropriate warning would be that Australia and the United States should be aware that *all* new construction - of buildings and ideas – takes place on a fully-populated burial ground, and that we live among the ghosts of history who have the right to claim us as part of their number.

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