

The Place of the Journey in Randolph Stow's "To The Islands" and Sheila Watson's "The Double Hook"

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AN AMBIVALENT ATTITUDE towards the land is foregrounded in Randolph Stow's *To The Islands* and Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, published just one year apart, in 1958 and 1959.¹ In both novels, the journey through landscape entails an attempted escape from community history and the gods of a particular place. The horse treks of Heriot in *To The Islands* and of James in *The Double Hook* are precipitated by acts of defiance and accelerate previously planned departures to vague destinations. Heriot is "going nowhere" (62) on his journey to the mythological islands; James's destination is the "nowhere on the other side" of the rock rise surrounding the valley (23). In these "border" fictions (McDougall and Whitlock 22) both characters seek in the periphery, represented as a neutral ground untouched by the implications of colonial settlement, escape from the consequences of their crimes.

Comparing Canadian and Australian literary geography, Margaret Atwood describes the Australian Outback and the Canadian North as "the place of the journey or the quest" (204). In *To The Islands* and *The Double Hook*, each character ventures from an isolated settler community into unmapped country and the uncharted region of the self. They pass through a landscape from which they are curiously absent. They are, to quote from another story by Watson, "in the land but not of it" ("And the Four Animals" 74). They quest for a pure "ground"² that is socially, spiritually, and ideologically neutral and unmarked by their colonizing community, a space where they may evade psychological torments. In both journeys, the characters' ambivalent relationship to place reveals an anguished sense of loss attendant on

both the settlers' inability to possess the new land and their experience of dispossession, displacement, and exile. The place of the journey in these novels is a dehumanized, dehistoricized landscape. Ambivalence about place and the problem of representation it entails are inscribed clearly in the two journeys, and particularly in their somewhat mechanical endings. The characters' final acceptance of homecoming requires the neutralization of the realities of settler colonization. In both novels, the journeys may lead characters to psychic wholeness, but this closure perpetuates the "othering" and colonizing of the land. By examining the journeys in the two novels and the landscape through which the travellers pass, this essay traces the quest in these narratives for a "myth of location" (McDougall and Whitlock 15).

Heriot's journey in *To The Islands* is an intense and allusive psychodrama of pride, guilt, and loss, a psychological voyage in search of the personal sublime in a metaphysical waste- and wonder-land. The narrative shifts dramatically from the opening account of social tensions at the mission to a trek into Heriot's psyche, or what Anthony J. Hassall calls "the landscape of the soul" (1-6).³ The novel's main genre is psychomachia, an allegorized moral conflict, cinematically intercut with reflections on Heriot by characters at the station. At the core of the novel is the actual journey to the islands, which passes through a landscape represented as ideologically neutral. This voyage mirrors a psychic journey into the heart of the protagonist, and this account of psychological exploration is privileged over the frontier story of cultural confrontation presented in the early parts of the novel. This is one of a number of examples of the juxtaposition or "parallelism" that Russell McDougall identifies as the representative feature of Australian literary form, as opposed to what he describes as the emphasis on "fragmentation, discontinuity, freedom from definition" in Canadian literature (McDougall, "Sprawl" 209).

Watson's polyphonic narrative journey moves from radical fragmentation to an artificially constructed unity. It is a journey from "dismemberment" to "at-one-ment" (Helen Tiffin, "Voice" 125). Watson sought in *The Double Hook* to articulate a new formal

aesthetic, incorporating comedy and tragedy, anarchy and the sacred. Her aesthetic principles are apparent in her concern, like that of Canadian-born Wyndham Lewis and other modernists, with cultural “metamorphosis or mythic transformation” (Watson, “A Question” 46), with a new way of seeing, with a dialogue between the observer and the observed, an understanding of “environmental space” in which “matter stag[es] its own happenings” (Watson, “Unaccommodated” 110). In *The Double Hook*, plot is elemental. The constituent units are based on images derived from the pre-Socratic philosophers: fire and water, and their spiritual counterparts, fear and glory. The narrative begins with still-life portraits of individual households. Initially, at Mrs. Potter’s house of silence and madness, the women unite. But Mrs. Potter’s house burns, and, later, water wells up under it. Finally the entire community assembles at Felix Prosper’s home. The narrative thus moves from the house of death to the dwelling of the failed priest. Interposed here, however, is James’s journey to the town and Watson’s parody of the conventions of the Hollywood western. James assumes the role of the outlaw gunslinger striding through a clapboard frontier town into which Watson, with her absurdist sensibility—perhaps inherited from Lewis, who felt his writing displayed a sense of both the “Ah-ness of things” and the “Ho-ho-ness too” (qtd. in Watson, “A Question” 43)—has introduced a talking parrot, who forces James’s realization of the hopelessness of “escape” (106).⁴ James cannot follow through the motions demanded by the genre invoked. Partly through his compassion for the parrot and his sense of obligation to Lenchen, James is empowered to return to the valley.

The treatment of landscape through which the two characters travel replicates the settler’s experience of geographical alienation. Both novels foreground the white protagonist’s sense of separation from the culture of the land. Using different formal techniques, these novels present the longing of the imperial eye and, especially in *To The Islands*, the impossibility of a holistic merging of subject and landscape. Both novels in this way represent their characters’ ambiguous ideological stance regarding what Marian Engel has called “bastard territory, disinherited countries and traditions” (qtd. in McDougall and Whitlock 15).

The landscape through which Heriot travels in his doomed search for psychic wholeness alternates between sprawling desert and lush tropical water holes. The desert here is a testing ground, a place of trial and punishment.⁵ However, Heriot's stays at the water holes of the Kimberley region, replete with cooling water, food, and even picturesque vistas, resemble sojourns in a mythical earthly paradise. Some early observers held that Australian nature came into being after the Biblical Fall. For Barron Field, for example, Australian nature "emerg'd at the first sinning" (qtd. in Smith 227), and Erasmus Darwin said Australian animals were "produced as the result of the promiscuous intercourse of original genera" (qtd. in Smith 228). By combining the purgatorial and the paradisaical, the representations of landscape in *To The Islands* rehearse such nineteenth-century European responses to what was regarded as "the exotic wilderness of an antipodean topsyturveydom" (Smith 268). Heriot stumbles through this wilderness searching for the mythical islands, a further extension of the exotic world, the "exotic" defined as "the space of an Other, outside or beyond the confines of a 'civilization'" (Bongie 4-5). In this sense, in his journey, Heriot is the "exotic subject," a character who "hopes to overcome his alienation, to recuperate a wholeness from which he was separated at birth" (Bongie 10). But at least three factors prevent him from seeing the wholeness of his own being reflected in nature: these are the anxiety of loss predicated on the colonial experience, his personal guilt, and his failure to perceive the land save through the filter of his European consciousness, a failure indicated by the many allusions in the novel to European literary works (Beston 168-77). Furthermore, Heriot can read nature only in terms of the oppositional binary relationship of hunter and hunted, subject and object. His experience of nature can remind him only of his separation from the land. In *To The Islands*, self-awareness seems to be anchored in a character's perception of the visible world. Unlike Brother Terry Dixon, a gentle working man with a sincere religious vocation who recognizes and accepts his separation from the land when he observes the Aboriginal Stephen moving over the rocks at Onmalmeri, Heriot, when he views his surroundings, can only mourn his tragic alienation from the place he loves.

The landscape of *The Double Hook* is a desiccated wasteland, a “blighted kingdom” (Nesbitt 167) that James first abandons to Coyote’s “servant” Kip (Watson, *The Double Hook* 26) and then returns to claim.⁶ Despite its spareness, the description of the landscape has a bold constructionist quality, like the paintings of Wyndham Lewis. It is assembled, plastic; it bears the marks of its making. It is composed of a chimera of images, built “ply on ply” (43), “the pieces [fitted] into a pattern” (65). Characters watch “images” they could easily “shatter with a stone” (44). Landscape description here, as in *To The Islands*, is highly allusive. The dryness of the valley—where Mrs. Potter fishes in increasingly shallow pools, where the grass is brittle, cows cast feeble shadows, and the sun burns—is caused by “the fire of righteousness” (12) and heavenly rebukes, and by God “holding out the long finger of salvation . . . drying up the blue signature like blotting-paper” (11-12). This metaphoric spiritual aridity seemingly is resolved at the novel’s end by James’s discovery of hidden springs and the gushing of water from under the ashes of the Potter household. The fragmentation of the land for most of the novel, however, replicates the settler’s sense of displacement. There are many malevolent anthropomorphic references. For example, William says apocalyptically that the day will come “when the land will swallow the last drop [of water]. The creek’ll be dry as a parched mouth. The earth . . . won’t have enough spit left to smack its lips” (24). The valley, too, has a “mouth” (26), and the moon is a “cool mouth,” the moonlight a “white tongue” (48). The creek and valley lie within the “arms” (21) and “shoulders” (107) of the hills. In the town, James resists his desire to throw himself into the river’s “long arms” (85). The land is a dry, fragmented body. The description of landscape in *The Double Hook* reflects Coyote’s hostility to the other characters and their inability to perceive the land as an organic whole of which they are a part. At the close of the novel, characters ostensibly learn to reassemble their fragmented world, to connect the glory and the fear, darkness and light, life and death, the twin prongs of the double hook.

The motivation for James’s solo journey into the town is largely unarticulated. In Watson’s extensive pre-publication revisions—and the entire novel may be regarded as a “quite different

version" (Neuman vii) of the recently published *Deep Hollow Creek* (1992)—characters' histories and motivations were scrupulously excised, and in the published text characters stagger in the harsh light of present difficulties: they "have no history apart from the experience of their readers" (Flahiff 125). They resemble Lewis's characters, who, Watson writes, "are unmatrixed. They simply appear, apparently from nowhere, and begin to act or . . . they are absentee presences" ("Unaccommodated" 111). However, James's journey is prescribed vaguely by his mother's death, the tension of his possibly incestuous relationship with Greta, Kip's crafty failure to inform Lenchen of James's plans, and James's blinding of Kip after Kip's attempted seduction of Lenchen. In his blinding of Kip and his journey to the periphery, James is involved with Kip in a conflict for the right to Coyote's land, "the glory of the world" (116). Like Coyote, Kip is a meddler who sows disruption in the community, and before his departure James blinds him. In his journey, James seems to pass beyond the bounds of this communal history and to override Coyote's authority.

In *To The Islands*, on the other hand, the motivation for Heriot's journey, which begins as a search for an appropriate place to commit suicide, quickly becomes overdetermined after Justin's arrival. Heriot searches for meaning, for reconciliation, and for death. Like Diana and Patrick in Stow's early novel *The Bystander* (1957), Heriot has been living like "people on islands" (222), but, paradoxically, his journey to the mythical islands of death leads him to a more compassionate understanding of other people. Heriot's is only one of a number of journeys in the novel, all of which in part entail a quest for home. The novel opens with Rex and Stephen's return journey. After Heriot sets off for the islands, Terry Dixon goes to Onmalmeri to search for him, and travels on mission business to the "little shanty township" (69). On this journey, like Heriot, Terry feels he "was foreign everywhere" (70). Terry eventually discovers his home, with Helen Bond, at the mission. In a scene contrasted with Heriot's final anguish at the edge of the sea, Terry "felt his foreignness leaving him. No need ever again to wander. . . . He had his home here, she was his home" (115). Heriot's jour-

ney ends not at the mission but at the farthest point of his journey of discovery. He relinquishes his authority at the mission, not to Rex, the Aboriginal king whose return to "my country" (11) challenges Heriot's rule, but to his double, Terry, who will preserve the mission, but will use more effective and modern methods to exercise control.

The journeys of Heriot and James function allegorically, re-enacting voyages of imperial exploration or, more precisely, what Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes* terms the "anti-conquest," which she defines as

the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony. . . . The main protagonist of the anti-conquest is . . . the "seeing-man" . . . the European male subject of European landscape discourse—he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess. (7)

Heriot appears to be a pathetic victim, even a token sacrifice for the crimes of his race, wandering lost in the wilderness, which is always partly a psychological setting. However, he carries with him the anger and arrogance of his mode of colonial conquest enforced by the power to banish or stop the wages of Aboriginal inhabitants like Rex. He has been one who has gone "round spreading civilization with a stock-whip" (4), unconcerned about violating the Aboriginal islands of the dead by talking about them. His very incursion into mythical Aboriginal terrain colonizes and appropriates. The implications of his journey are not erased by his psychological or metaphysical waywardness. The novel's first edition contained a single epigraph from *The Malcontent*, a play that employs the disguised duke convention, with its political implications, but the passage appears to have been selected to emphasize the exclusively psychological nature of Heriot's journey. In the epigraph, Pietro Jacomo, Duke of Genoa, disguised as a hermit, counsels his remorseful wife, banished by her lover and the Duke's usurper Mendoza, to observe "the checkless winds" and "unquiet sea." As in *To The Islands*, the "rocky barrenness" (Marston; qtd. in Stow, *To The Islands* vii) of the journey inward is a figure for hardship leading to self-knowledge.

Stow, however, added to the revised edition of *To The Islands* a second epigraph from an explorer, his relative Jefferson Stow, which clarifies the ideological underpinnings of Heriot's journey and its resemblance to the anti-conquest. In the "Preface" to this edition, in which he also admits the novel originated as "propaganda" for "Christian mission-stations for Aborigines" (ix), Stow explains:

I did, in writing of Heriot's travels, consult the accounts of several explorers of the North Kimberley . . . and [despite not having toured the landscape described in the novel] realized that I had, in effect, seen all the landscapes Heriot would have encountered. (xi)

Stow also mentions here that he paid particular attention to C. Price Conigrave's *Walk-About*, an alternately bland and poetic, pious and brash account of two journeys through the Kimberley, which Conigrave calls one of "the etceteras of Australian and world geography" (2). His first journey was as one of the "bug and beetle bastards" (49), although he discovered good pastoral country and traces of gold, "which some day may become of commercial value" (127), and his last was to survey a 10,000-mile route for a car race around Australia. Stow's writing carries occasional echoes of Conigrave's style. For example, Conigrave mentions spotting a water-hole where "a large number of pelicans stood in a row like a lot of solemn judges" (83), and Heriot sees pelicans as a "bench of uncorruptible judges" (101). Heriot's discovery of Aboriginal caves at the ocean bears a resemblance to Conigrave's accounts of the burial caves near Admiralty Gulf and of the shoreline at Mount Casuarina. For Conigrave, these walkabouts were a metaphor for life. In drawing on Conigrave's account, Stow's writing shares a common heritage with such explorers as Alexander Forrest, who travelled in the Kimberley in the 1870s, and also with J. M. Stanley, the African explorer, whom Conigrave met as a child.

Earlier explorers' accounts made the "New World" readable for a European and colonial audience, and Stow's landscape draws directly on this legacy. The Jefferson Stow epigraph describes islands regarded from aboard ship as "wild and picturesque, grand sometimes almost to sublimity. . . . They seem abandoned by Nature to complete and everlasting desolation"

(vii). The passage from which this description comes combines aspects of sentimental travel writing with precise scientific observation, a feature in eighteenth-century exploration discourse, as Pratt notes, that blends newly emerged natural history and the fascination with interior exploration (9). Jefferson Stow's account combines a desire for "topographical accuracy" with a "respect for picturesque beauty" common in early nineteenth-century landscape painting (Smith 234). His northern Kimberley is a precisely rendered romantic landscape. Similarly, Heriot's journey to the islands is a voyage of exploration into hostile but beautiful terrain by one steeped in European cultural practices. Like nineteenth-century travellers in search of the picturesque, he notes the sublime associations of individual settings. However, he is never merely a voyager in search of the sublime and the picturesque, as Stow's later epigraph and the intertextual relation of his writing to the explorer's account make clear, but a purveyor of the anti-conquest whose very gaze on the land colonizes.

In *The Double Hook*, the anti-conquest is seen most effectively in the treatment of the Coyote myth. The use of this myth as a strategy of representation enables the narrative to contain the Native presence in the land; it also brackets the power of Native myth. Of Sheila Watson's spare comments on *The Double Hook*, perhaps the most enigmatic concerns her narrative's engagement with the Coyote myth: "I don't know now, if I rewrote it, whether I would use the Coyote figure. It's a question" (Watson, "What" 15). Coyote's erasure would have engendered a markedly different novel: his prominence in the narrative hierarchy of voices almost displaces even the narrator's. Disappearing and reappearing, jeering and enticing, creating and murdering, Coyote plays with the reader and seems to complicate endlessly the double bind in which all stories are placed in the novel. Coyote is the shape-shifter, guarding the border between figure and ground. Perhaps it was Watson's comment and the role of the implied author that George Bowering had in mind when he suggested that in *The Double Hook*, not only Coyote but also Watson is the trickster (191). The Coyote of the Shuswap people is a trickster, but also a defining figure in myths of place, specifi-

cally in designating ancestral boundaries. The setting of *The Double Hook* is Native land, and this land is Coyote's "pastime" (13). Coyote stalks the beginning and end of the novel, as if marking territorial borders. The figure of Coyote also crosses diegetic levels in the novel, but finally, while he has the last word, his voice is framed by the text's dominant diegetic level, that of the omniscient narrator.⁷ Both Coyote and the narrator are positioned at the extradiegetic level of narration (removed from the main story), but finally the narrator's voice is privileged and controls and encloses that of Coyote.

The journeys in the two novels have an added residue of the anti-conquest inasmuch as each one involves a passage through a landscape inscribed with traces of colonial history. In these allegorical journeys, place becomes story. In *To The Islands*, for example, Heriot journeys away from the mission. He has four experiences that constitute a tableau of Australian history: the early discovery of rock paintings; the encounter with Allunggu and his followers in a traditional encampment; the meeting with Rusty, the murderer, who represents early nineteenth-century settlement; and finally, his conversation with Sam, a Second World War relic living in a surreal, apocalyptic, deserted station.

Heriot dreads re-enacting the history of crimes, but his encounter with Sam seems to absolve Heriot of the implications of colonial history. His discarding of history is of a piece with his account of his expiations. Heriot explains to Sam that he has been driven by a generalized human guilt, inherited racial guilt for the massacre at Onmalmeri (which began as a dispute over boundaries), and guilt about his creation of the mission as his personal fiefdom. Then he renounces the burden of his own responsibility for involvement in colonial settlement. In this scene and for the rest of the novel, he takes refuge in a type of quasi-spiritual quietism resembling Taoism. This may be read as an early instance of what Diana Brydon, writing of *Visitants*, terms Stow's confrontation with the "potential meaninglessness of history," resulting in a discovery of solace "in universal religious values" (*Troppo* 17-18). It would appear in Heriot's case, however, that history's "meaninglessness" is a convenient way to deny its reality and to deny responsibility. As

Marc Delrez points out, Taoism is introduced into *To The Islands* to counter “the ideology of empire” (296), but its quietism cannot annihilate the archive of imperialism. Heriot’s discovery of peace entails unburdening himself of his involvement in colonial practices.

A similar tracing of national history and a similar search for a way beyond it is enacted in the account of James’s much briefer trek in *The Double Hook*. James follows the spine of the creek in his journey out of the nameless community, past the settlements of William and Ara, Widow Wagner, Theophil, and Felix Prosper. On a horse, an indirect legacy of the events marked by the Columbian quincentenary, he passes the Indian reserve:

The cabins huddled together. Wheels without wagons. Wagons without wheels. Bits of harness. Rags and tatters of clothing strung up like fish greyed over with death. He saw the bone-thin dogs. Waiting. Heard them yelping. Saw them running to drive him off territory they’d been afraid to defend. Snarling. Twisting. Tumbling away from the heels they pursued. (79)

This is a portrait in fragmented phrases of a doomed culture, marked by entropy and decay. There is no possibility of motion here, and the thin dogs ineffectively guard their territory. It is a description of the last remains of a derelict culture, defenceless and without hope. James easily dismisses the inheritors of the culture of Coyote. Next he proceeds past “fenced-off land” (79), perhaps owned by settlers like himself or by “half-breeds” (91), and then, on the highway, past the market gardens of Chinese men, of whom he sees only “the circle of their hats as they squatted among the plants or bowed down over the shaft of a hoe” (79).⁸ He has made an allegorical transit through the history of colonial settlement, on his journey to the train, although he has “no idea where to buy a ticket to” (86). Like that of Heriot, James’s journey is an escape from, rather than a journey to, a destination in the periphery; like Heriot, James seems merely to seek freedom from any sense of personal or collective responsibility.

Edward Said refers to “the journey” as one of the “typical encapsulations” or “lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the

encounter between East and West" (58). The journeys in both *The Double Hook* and *To The Islands* involve a quest for neutral ground away from the dictates of history and law. Watson has said that in *The Double Hook*,

there was something I wanted to say: about how people are driven, how if they have no art, how if they have no tradition, how if they have no ritual, they are driven in one of two ways, either towards violence or towards insensibility—if they have no mediating rituals. . . .
 ("What" 15)

The impetus for the journey in both novels lies also in the characters' sense of being driven towards a spiritually pure land where personal—and perhaps analogically communal or national—identity lies and where the intolerable burden of memory may be relinquished. In both novels, the "journey in a landscape" entails, in Robert Kroetsch's terms, "[t]ravelling the world back together" (49). This movement involves erasing memories of the past and forging a type of spiritual synthesis of the polarities in the spatial patterns noted in comparative studies of Canadian and Australian literary and cultural geography.⁹ In *To The Islands*, this locational synthesis comprises the home that Terry finds with Helen at the mission and the sense of mystical at-oneness Heriot experiences by the ocean. In *The Double Hook*, this synthesis is provided by the figure of the circle, and the journey nowhere that ends at home. James says, "I ran away . . . but I circled and ended here the way a man does when he's lost" (116). Both novels also involve an ontological transit from becoming to being. As Helen Tiffin notes of Commonwealth journey patterns, the hero's transformation entails a "rejection of the western notion of explanatory teleology of history in favour of the unthinking experiential present" ("Towards" 148). Heriot and James implicitly reject a historical consciousness. They both attempt at the end of their journeys to move outside history. They are left with an artificially manipulated synthesis, dependent on the flattening of territorial contradictions and the construction of demythologized rituals.

The journey through landscape in both novels leads to a closed ending at the settlement of the white community, thus re-establishing a debased collective myth of the settler community

amid the legacy of colonial dispossession. In the closure of *The Double Hook*, while Coyote has the last word, his utterance endorses the existence of James's and Lenchen's baby, named after both priest and prostitute. The baby, with "his feet [set] on the sloping shoulders / of the world" (118), seemingly enables the settlers to make contact with the fragmented land. The traditional ending of *The Double Hook* celebrates the restoration of the power of the white community, a demythologized movement from the "rebellious house" (99) to the house of the lord. As in the classic realist text, this make-believe of a closure signals "the beginning of the home epic" (Eliot 890). The baby is set by Coyote on the world's shoulders just as the land in which the settlers dwell is set like a baby naked on the "bare floor of the world" (14). The world is made anew for them. If Coyote's power is not exactly neutralized here, it is certainly radically diminished, as the settlers have discovered how to circumvent his power. They form a garrison in the makeshift church and maternity ward. At the closure of *The Double Hook*, the world has been revisioned as sacred, although the novel demythologizes, or at least reinscribes, Christian mythology, substituting humanistic and materialistic tenets.

Heriot's journey in search of a new land is also an escape from a fallen world. The passage from *The Malcontent* taken as the epigraph to *To The Islands* precedes a plea from Aurelia to what she believes is the departed spirit of her husband "in what orb soe'er thy soul is throned" for "reconciliation" (121). For Helen in *To The Islands*, reconciliation is heaven, and "hate . . . spreading and growing forever" is hell (53). The novel ends with Heriot, freed from "the cruellest prison of men" (Marston 119), perched over the sea, searching for the islands. He throws rocks, with which he is identified from the beginning of the novel, into the water, as if either accepting and even encouraging his demise (water's ascendancy over rocks is a common Taoist trope) or attempting to create the islands himself (Delrez 292). *To The Islands* is a novel whose prepositional title compels the journey, but it refers to a discourse in which the journey is always a paradox: both unnecessary and essential. Stow's use of Taoism here and elsewhere in the novel to figure paradoxical relation-

ships may issue from an attraction felt by a number of Australian writers to discover a middle way between strict adherence to the Christianity of the old country and belief in the alien Aboriginal gods of the "New World" (Helen Tiffin, "Melanesian" 109; *Tourmaline* 85).

In the closure of the journeys in both these novels, there is a rejection of older "mediating rituals" and a longing for community renewal. This renewal, however, is based on a wilful blindness to the contradictions of colonized space and an acknowledgement of entrenched power relations within the community, indicated by hierarchal succession. The succession in both novels is signalled in part by material transfer.

Heriot's name, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means "[a] feudal service, originally consisting of weapons . . . restored to a lord on the death of his tenant" (6). It is appropriate, then, that Heriot surrenders his knife, watch, and rifle to Rex. There is a "strange dream quality" (124) in this symbolic gesture, as in Rex's acceptance of the offering, for Rex is not a "citizen" (36). It is also significant that the power and autonomy of the white settler community recently have been reinforced by Way's speech about carrying on Heriot's plans for the "orientation" of Aborigines (82); by Gunn's decision to stay at the mission, together with the promise of "[m]ore staff, more money" (114); and by the commitment to raise cattle, long a dream of Terry and Heriot. Furthermore, in his breaking of the crucifix, Heriot has shown his contempt for symbolic objects, and his gift of rifle and knife perhaps is merely a stage in the process of his Taoistic renunciation of violent means of survival rather than a symbolic transfer of power. Rex, of whom Heriot has said "there is no future" (37), will not become lord of the mission; this role will be assumed by Brother Terry, who, like Heriot when he first came to the mission, has found a wife and a sense of belonging. Terry's renewed commitment to the mission, "the small world so long of Heriot's governing" (32), like Heriot's earlier, proceeds from a desire for expiation. Terry will officiate, albeit more compassionately, at what Heriot has called "the most heart-breaking phase in the history of this problem . . . this long cold war . . . between black and white" (32). Terry's value in this "war" is

stressed by Father Way, the mission's temporary supervisor, who steps down at the end of the novel, likely to be replaced by Terry. Using the language of philanthropy, one of the superficially benign discourses of the anti-conquest, Terry's fiancée Helen seems to emphasize the couple's future guiding role at the mission. She says, referring to the relations of missionaries and Aborigines, "[w]e don't want to be your bosses, we only want to show you things" (95). Although Rex is a king in name, even if he becomes "boss," he will be a boss without power and a king without a country.

In *The Double Hook*, the succession is claimed by James. His final confidence contrasts with the fumbblings of his main rival, the blinded Kip, who is reduced from playing with "the glory of the world" (116) to waiting for "what will walk into a man's hand" (117). The final meddlesome act of Coyote's servant has been a fruitless attempt to dislodge the community by persuading Felix to abandon Angel and their children. Providing for a family's material welfare, Kip intimates, will exhaust a man. James, however, has overpowered Kip and while in the town, he has purchased, in material terms, his freedom and his right to lead the community. In his contacts with store, hotel, and brothel, James relinquishes his money, which takes on the role of fetish object. The rituals of the marketplace—the "bond" created by debt (106), and the purchase of "escape" (95)—replace the rituals of priest and shaman, both Felix Prosper and Kip. William's profound, absurdist epigram—"A man who drinks coffee is dependent on something outside himself" (114)—is illustrated in James's symbolic surrenders, which re-establish bonds of material obligation.

On his return from the town, James holds "memory like a knife in his hand. But he clasped it shut and rode on" (111). He seems able to wipe out the past at will. From the ridges above the settlement, he surveys the domain that will be his. He gazes at the panorama linked by "the road which ran up the creek past Felix Prosper's, past Theophil's, past the Widow Wagner's, past William's, round by the flat lake to his own gate. From the height of the hill the land below seemed ordered and regular" (111). It is

almost as if he is surveying and, in this sweeping gaze, taking possession of this place. His ownership appears to be connected with the power to manipulate Lenchen's and Greta's history. He asks obliquely if the land must register the effects of the settlement's blighted history: "Must the creek dry up forever and the hills be pegged like tanned skin to the rack of their own bones?" (112). The emphasis in the novel's last pages on rebirth and renewed commitment within the community would appear to indicate that James's power will go unchallenged. He is able finally to regard the settlement as "a still unpeopled world" (115), as if he could reverse history to a point before his own crimes and those of his community and return to a primal, Edenic place, "the first pasture of things" (115). In the absence of an empowering mythology, the most potent basis for a renewed community spirit in this fragmented land is the ability to forget.

The traditionally structured closure of the two novels creates a largely monocultural, ahistorical home, in a neutralized landscape, ostensibly cleared of the traces of colonialism. *The Double Hook* ends at a safe distance from the nameless frontier, with James, in Matthew Arnold's words, "[w]andering between two worlds, one dead,/ The other powerless to be born" (161). He sees the lights of the town and thinks of the absurdist parrot, "who lived between two worlds . . . stupid with beer and age" (95). James's existential choice of direction—he being one of those who for a few moments "have their own way" (90)—is performed in a place purged of historical markings. In a sense the novel ends here, with the metaphysical drunken parrot, suspended in isolated moments of being, unable to sing of past, present, or future. Both James and Heriot try to journey from debased traditions and received notions of history to a pure land, seemingly cleansed of the operations of imperial power. The hopelessness of this attempt perhaps engenders the sadness, the sense of irreparable loss that pervades these novels. Both novels articulate the need for a "myth of location," but in their somewhat mechanically unified closures, the contradictions of colonial space are provided an ahistorical, quietistic resolution.

NOTES

- 1 An earlier version of this essay was read at the conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica, August 13-21, 1992.
- 2 Watson has said that she wanted to create "figures in a ground, from which they could not be separated," in which characters are "interacting with the landscape, and the landscape is interacting with them" (Watson, "What" 15). Following Angela Bowering (62, 90), Nesbitt argues for the significance of a symbolic ground in the novel—" [t]he ground . . . is the Quest of the Grail" (168)—although he wisely accepts that the medieval parallel is not sustained.
I discovered Helen Tiffin's "The Word and the House: Colonial Motifs in *The Double Hook* and *The Cat and Shakespeare*," a comparative analysis of Raja Rao's work and *The Double Hook*, which discusses these texts' "background of colonial inheritance" (204), too late to address its conclusions in this essay.
- 3 In the revised edition of the novel, Stow focused more sharply on Heriot's spiritual crisis by reducing the emphasis on social tensions.
- 4 A number of elements in the novel appear to derive from Watson's teaching experience at Dog Creek, in central British Columbia, Canada. Mrs Doreen Arnes, teacher at the Dog Creek school in the late 1920s and Watson's neighbour, recalled in a personal communication, that the Ashcroft hotel had a talking parrot like that mentioned in the novel.
- 5 It is an example of what Chris Tiffin, in "Nationalism, Landscape, and Class in Anglo-Australian Fiction," describes as the motif, in the Australian imagination, of "land as a purgatorial force" (21).
- 6 Moss writes of "[t]he anatomical form of the physical setting" in the novel (132), and Morriss names it a "visual typography" (56); Scobie, in a revealing phrase, refers to the novel's setting as "not so much a landscape as the *signs* of a landscape" (277). Like the characters, which, as Angela Bowering argues, move against the land's "inertia" (2), the writing of the text itself seeks the still centre behind words (Godard 169).
- 7 Putzel, following George Bowering, suggests that perhaps "Coyote's voice has subsumed the authorial voice" (15). Angela Bowering holds that in *The Double Hook*, an "omniscient 'I' sees as if from outside," but she also maintains that this voice is merely "one voice among others" (12). Here, Bowering tends to overlook the problematic relationship between the voice of the narrator and Coyote in the novel, and to associate too closely narrator and implied author.
- 8 In the late 1800s, Dog Creek, the place on which the novel's setting probably is based, had four Chinese hotels, and Mrs Place, owner of the largest house in the town and the centre of its social life, had a Chinese cook in the 1930s, as did the hotel at Ashcroft.
- 9 Critics have noted, for example, the predominance of centre and margin, outside and inside (Brydon, "Landscape and Authenticity" 279), sprawl and vertical (McDougall, "Sprawl" [passim]), or the search for the north or the centre (Leer 83).

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