

**Angst of Forging Australianness:
A Study of Australian Responses to India between 1890-1950 with Special Reference to
Alfred Deakin and Mollie Skinner**

Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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This thesis titled "Angst of Forging Australianness: A Study of Australian Responses to India between 1890-1950 with Special Reference to Alfred Deakin and Mollie Skinner" submitted by Ipsita Sengupta, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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Declaration by the Candidate

This thesis titled “Angst of Forging Australianness: A Study of Australian Responses to India between 1890-1950 with Special Reference to Alfred Deakin and Mollie Skinner” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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Dedication

*For my teachers,
including parents and friends,*

And for JNU –

*That seeded the dream
and the dare.*

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Introduction: Australia's India and the Angst of Forging Australianness

A. In the beginning: Scope and Objectives

This thesis aims to investigate the formative influence of India in kindling multiple, even contending, self-definitions of Australia between 1890 and 1950, as refracted through the life and works of Alfred Deakin (1856-1919), thrice Prime Minister of the Australian Federation in the first decade of its formation between 1901-1910, and Mollie Skinner (1876-1955), relatively anonymous author and nurse who had served at various hospitals of British India as a member of the Lady Minto's Nursing Service from 1913 to 1917, four years largely overlapping with the First World War. Both my subjects have written on India, Australia and on possibilities of entanglements of the two spaces across multiple tenses. Right from the first piece of legislation passed by the new Federal Parliament in 1901, the Immigration Restriction Act, till as late as the 1970s, the dominant politics in Australian national imaginary, policy-making and historiography sought to preserve the continent as spatial inheritance for the European race and civilization. Given this radically expulsive vision of white Australia, I shall explore the role of India as a creatrix of alterities in imagining Australianness, beneath and beyond the prescription of purity or exclusions, and work towards a fresh, non-exclusive epistemological framework for investigating the same.

With special reference to Alfred Deakin and Mollie Skinner, I shall try to trace if India had provided the element of plural, the element of debate and a pivotal unfinishedness¹ to the enterprise of Australian nation-making, defying the order of final solutions in an age of empire and the World Wars. My research hopes to retrace some of the forgotten or hidden motifs of Antipodean connections and conversations with India during 1890-1950, a period that could be read as crucible to the making of federated Australia as detailed below. Some of these braided narratives spilled beyond the imperial routine of tea, cricket, Kipling and the quaint Orient. Prying beneath the singular and certainties of an Anglophone, imperially oriented, official Australian historiography, I want to retrieve the implications of these intersections with India for plural possibilities of being Australian, and trigger post-amnesiac, palimpsestic

¹ In his lecture titled "A Contemporary Analysis of Buddhist and Hindu Atheism", philosopher Arindam Chakrabarti who teaches at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, contended that the possibility of pluralism, ambivalence, ever-recycled questions and ever-provoking skepticism, i.e. the defiance of final solutions or the very unfinishedness of the enterprise of debating provides a pivot to the otherwise diverse, though uniformly polemical, Indian philosophical schools of thought. Chakrabarti, Arindam. "A Contemporary Analysis of Buddhist and Hindu Atheism." Anushtup. Asiatic Society, Kolkata. 17 Apr. 2016. Lecture.

readings of Australia's Asian pasts in the process.

India, as historian Gautam Bhadra observed at a seminar on re-thinking Indian democracy, could be variously conceived as a geographical, social, mental, historical or political space.² I shall primarily engage with plural, often contending Australian imaginings of India between 1890 and 1950 and explore the impact of this ambivalence in triggering notions of the Antipodean nation, and its -ness(es), as a site contested. Australia's India of this period comes stitched to an imperial cartographic reference, however, and the territorial India I thus invoke is directly or indirectly linked with British political power; it comprises post-1857 British India plus the princely states. Deakin had travelled exclusively through British India in 1890 and his writings on the subcontinent righteously reinscribe that boundary, Skinner and her characters found themselves tangled in addition with the princely states. The why, which and what if questions hovering around my slant on India and Australia's chameleon reconstructs of it shall be raised and briefly examined in subsequent sections of the introduction.

The segment "Scope and Objectives" shall further branch out into the following three subsections: the first investigates the multi-layered "angst" around Australianness as invoked in the thesis title, along with the multiple layers to this "-ness" accreted in the tangle with trans-factors, including the 'neighbour'. It lays down the conceptual and historical background and the debates on Australianness, the purvapaksha³ as it were, etching thus the entry-points for my research intervention. The second subsection raises the why questions of this research and the third examines its interdisciplinary and comparative premises, along with their epistemic-political promise. Separate heads under this segment and its subsections mark the entry of multiple strands and their intertwinings within a single trope.

Subsection I: Of Angst, -ness(es) and the Tangled Tenses embedded in Imagining Australianness

Angst being a category of existential unrest, operates in the domain of uncertainties, possibilities. In this part of the introduction, I engage with the category in some detail in the

² Bhadra, Gautam. International Seminar on "Social Stratification and Political Transformation: Rethinking Indian Democracy." Bankura University and Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi. Bankura University, Bankura. 10 Nov. 2016. Keynote Address.

³ "Purvapaksha" – etymologically "that which goes before" in Sanskrit – technically denotes counter schools of thought in classical Indian philosophical traditions. Invoking the collective of critiques and queries i.e. alternative positions in a debate as part of the text of one's individual intervention, argument or response was considered indispensable to the form and grammar of research in philosophical traditions as divergent as the Buddhist and Nyaya schools. Citing the purvapaksha not only layered the argument, but also performed its receptivity to the interrogations, alterities and continuities embedded within the other.

context of self-imaginings of the nascent Federation, and this not merely since it occurs as the first word in my thesis title. “Angst” may be analysed as a vector directed towards alternatives and, in that avatar, becomes crucial to the scope and objective of my thesis. For I aim to retrieve alternate and richer readings of Australia’s pasts between 1890 and 1950, with a focus on transnational narrations of interconnections and cross-fertilizations in their making, and on the often obscured role of India in stoking the vocabulary of connections and plural contentions for the avowedly singular, insular Antipodean nation during this period.⁴ Angst then emerges as a medial political category suspended between binaries. And from this unhomed locus, it becomes best situated to play home to an Australianness caught between mimetic lust for the pure and the original and an equally obsessive hunger for, as well as fear of, various alternatives and shadow-narratives.⁵ Australianness, posited in the thesis as attempts to essence the (white) Australian nation and state, with a focus on the years leading to and immediately following the formation of the Federation in 1901, found itself moored and mired in this anguish of uncertainties and possibilities in at least four dimensions – locational/translational, racial, spatial, temporal – to be briefly explored under the following heads.

Dis/Locations, Translation: Anguish, and Possibilities

Where is Australia? During 1890 and 1950 – and beyond, as many scholars have argued⁶ – the continent was predominantly imagined by its white settlers and British colonialists as an outpost of empire encircled by Asiatic neighbours. Was settler Australia then fated to represent a Cinderella people on the edge of the verge, exiled to forever isolation by the tyranny of distance that separated it from Europe and its supposed pivot, England the Home? Spatially at least, the settlers had found themselves translated, in the etymological sense of being “carried across”, far away from Home. Translation in the colonial context signified a derivative

⁴ For commonly held perceptions of Australians as a parochial and insular people both within and outside the continent during the early twentieth century, see for example Moffat, J.P. “Australia and the Australians; Memorandum to the Secretary of State, 18 January 1937.” *Records relating to Internal Affairs of Australia 1910-1944*. Record Group 59. Microfilm T1190. National Archives of the United States of America. 19-20.

Also, “Interest in World Affairs: Australia’s Share should be Greater.” *Courier-Mail* 16 August 1934: 15. Print.

⁵ In this thesis, the shadow-narrative marks a zone of exiled possibilities gathered on the limits of a narrative; it comprises thus the desolation or counter/s against which the elect narrative marks its territory and norm. Shadow-narratives cannot be equated with an absence zeroed. Through the alterities they invoke, they remain as tenaciously leashed to the narrative as a shadow, impinging on its limits which they test and remake.

⁶ Greg Lockhart, for example, contends that the outpost narrative survives the empire in defensive Australian historiography which continues to cultivate the imperial context of Australian history in post-imperial times, while anxiously occluding the immediate geographical context – its post-colonial, largely democratic Asian neighbourhood. See

Lockhart, Greg. “Absenting Asia.” *Australia’s Asia: From yellow peril to Asian century*. Ed. David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska. Crawley: University of Western Australia Publishing, 2012. 269-297. 286-287. Print.

category tethered to the shadow-narrative of the original; it came tattooed with the guilt of loss, removal, relative dilution and finally morphed into a metaphor for the central act of European colonisation and imperialism: “For Europe was regarded as the great Original, the starting point, and the colonies [including the settler colonies] were therefore copies, or ‘translations’ of Europe, which they were supposed to duplicate”.⁷ Did the colonial discourse of translation as a rite of less-ness banish Australia to the inverseness of the Antipodes, was it to retain “this upside-down sea quality” as “Europe’s underneath, its inversion” in the European, and possibly white settler Australian, imagination?⁸

“Antipodes” of course is a Greek word which literally means “having the feet opposite”. Till at least the unravelling of the British empire in the 1950s, the settlers had dominantly read island-Australia as a strange and singular territory cast away from Europe, unmoored in space and time and caught in the tropes of antipodality, inversion, difference and isolation.⁹ If I have used the terms “Antipodes” and “Antipodean” recurrently in the following chapters, it is to invoke the angst of this rued, second-handed geography of Australia post-settlement. Yet the tyranny-of-distance narrative came coupled with the tyranny of proximity: the carefully cultivated image of the fortified island-continent in quarantine from its immediate neighbourhood in the Southern Hemisphere tended to fissure, alas, in the northern littoral zone.

The seascape to Australia’s north, comprising the Indian Ocean and the Timor and Arafura Seas, provided a zone of fluidity and contact between South-East Asia, China, India and northern Australia. The northern seas had historically served “as a maritime road to South-East Asian societies”, being the first to connect Australia with the wider world of the peoples and markets of Asia. They linked northern Australia to the global Indian Ocean trade routes and maritime economy and networks since long before the arrival and settlement of the British; the British empire in India only reinforced the marine trade between the Dutch East India Company, Anglo-Indian traders, Chinese junks, South-East Asian communities and northern Australian port towns from at least the eighteenth to twentieth centuries.¹⁰

Through alternative affiliations, connections and cross-fertilizations with Asia, the northern maritime edges continued to stage an aberrant space adrift from the mainstream

⁷ For further exploring the role of translation in facilitating colonisation, along with its post-colonial plural possibilities as provoker of a fresh politics of in-betweenness and dialogue, see Bassnett, Susan and Harish Trivedi. “Of colonies, cannibals and vernaculars.” Introduction. *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. Ed. Bassnett and Trivedi. London: Routledge, 1999. 1-18. 2-6. Print.

⁸ Balint, Ruth. “Epilogue: The Yellow Sea.” *Australia’s Asia* 345-365. 345. Print.

⁹ See Perera, Suvendrini. *Insular Imagination: beaches, borders, boats and bodies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 29. Print.

¹⁰ Balint 348.

colour-blanced geo-political body of a uniform federated Australia of secured borderlines: Mollie Skinner had set one of her novels, *Black Swans* (1925), in the region. In the early years of the twentieth century, many visitors to the cosmopolitan pearling ports like Broome, Darwin and Cairns in northern Australia noted with fascination and alarm that “a part of Asia had been detached and grafted onto the Australian continent”; the port towns still seethed with a transient polyglot population of traders, sailors and workers from China, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and Sri Lanka.¹¹ In the dominant national imaginary anchored to land, the northern littoral zone was spatially inverted to represent barricaded white Australia’s treacherous back door. This “back door” performed the fragility of borders, permitted the fluidity that Deborah Bird Rose terms “water business”, played carrier to the troubling cargo of dark intruders and dememorialized histories and memories from the near North, and threatened to return to its older position as gateway to the world for an alternative, connected Australia, provoking a revision of the isolationist, Indian-Ocean-and-Asia-phobic settler archetype of the continent and its historiography.

If the northern littoral zone frayed and unravelled into the sea and the sea segued into Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Malaysia, how did Europe’s Far East translate for Australia? Did it hover as the looming Near North? David Walker, historian of Australia’s ambiguous relations with generic Asia as well as with specific nation-states like China and Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, traces the growing currency of the term “Near North” displacing “Far East” as locational signifier for Asia in Antipodean political commentary through the 1930s. On 3 April 1939 in his first radio broadcast as Prime Minister, Robert Menzies foregrounded the term “Near North” and its geo-political implications for Australia, since what remained the “Far East” for Britain hovered as “Near North” for Australia, he emphasized. This freshly-attained focus and its cautionary flavour was reinforced in *Near North: Australia and a Thousand Million Neighbours*, a late 1940s title by H.V. Evatt, Minister for External Affairs in the Chifley Labor government. The title captures the dangers and possibilities of Australia’s regional location in the wake of emergent Asian democracies post empire.¹²

In this topsy-turvy of new maps of location and dislocation and fresh geographical names, did white Australia lurch on the brink of living its perennial, unspeakable nightmare – that of a merger with Asia? Alfred Deakin seemed to suggest as much, though not with as much

¹¹ Balint 351-352.

¹² Walker, David. “Soul Searching.” *Stranded Nation: White Australia in an Asian Region*. First Draft Chapter dated 8 March 2015. 2-3, 7.

darkness, in the twin 1893 publications *Irrigated India: an Australian View of India and Ceylon, Their Irrigation and Agriculture* and *Temple and Tomb in India* in which he located Australia firmly within an Indian sphere of influence. Spatially, he had mapped Australia as “Austral-Asia – Southern Asia”,¹³ a canny SAARC association¹⁴ he possibly hoped would awaken Australian colonists to their proximity to India and the special opportunity this proximity provided to act as seasoned traders and authentic authorities on the subcontinent. Deakin’s enthusiasm for the possibilities of proximity to, if not inclusion in, Asia did little to assuage the dominant and persistent settler anxiety since at least the late nineteenth century, of being invaded and inundated by menacing, silent and watchful Asiatics from the Near North.¹⁵ White Australia, it was feared, might then be historicized as a brief interregnum between Australia’s aboriginal past and an equally tenacious Asian future. And Asia in the settler perception threatened to “do to white Australia what it had done to the Aborigines”¹⁶ i.e. to invisibilise and annihilate.

White Australia’s anxiety about Asia teeming with land-hungry neighbours was evident in its choice of oceanic affiliation: “Although Australia is patently an Indian Ocean country”, observes Ian Copland, “the nation’s political centre of gravity lies in the southeast [locus of Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne], which is much more Pacific-orientated”.¹⁷ The tilt towards the Pacific might have had geo-political compulsions more urgent than the traditional east coast bias in geography and historiography. According to David Walker, “the Pacific” was the preferred term for Australia’s regional location from World War I down to the 1940s since it necessarily included the United States and was more suggestive of expansive oceans and sea power than a populous landmass. ‘Pacific’ invoked British and US naval dominance and Australia’s faith in their presence as protector-guarantor should it have to counter a crisis from Asian neighbours: “For Australians at this time, a ‘Pacific future’ appeared more secure and reassuring than an Asian one”,¹⁸ the latter being equivalent to an unwavering Indian Ocean alignment. Perched on the fringes of the British empire, the Australian Federation had invested

¹³ Deakin, Alfred. *Irrigated India: an Australian View of India and Ceylon, Their Irrigation and Agriculture*. London: W. Thacker and Co., 1893. Print. 13.

¹⁴ The term SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) coined in 1985, though, is post-facto by almost a century to Deakin’s bold interpretation of Australia’s location.

¹⁵ Walker, David. “Fathomless Eyes: An Australian Guide to the Evil Oriental.” *Reading Down Under: Australian Literary Studies Reader*. Ed. Amit Sarwal and Reema Sarwal. New Delhi: SSS Publications, 2009. 539-550. 539-540. Print.

¹⁶ Walker “Fathomless Eyes” 542.

¹⁷ Copland, Ian. “Beyond the Mirage: Reflections on the Indo-Australian Relationship.” *Australian and Indian Literature: studies in mutual response*. Ed. David Kerr and R. K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies and Prestige Books, 1991. 124-133. 130. Print.

¹⁸ Walker “Soul Searching” First Draft 2.

in becoming a Pacific principal with pretensions to leadership in the region since the 1930s. By the late 1940s it found itself doubly second-handed instead to a “Pacific pariah”¹⁹ – an anachronic relic of empire – still relegated to the margins of a decolonising neighbourhood that detested its (post)colonial privileging of whiteness.

Enter Angst, Racial/Spatial (or Spatially Imagining, Interrogating the Promised/Pure Land)

The desire to gain the centre was performed in Australian educator and parliamentarian Charles H. Pearson’s *National Life and Character: A Forecast*, first published in 1893.²⁰ The book with a remarkable transnational impact sought to draw the global colour line²¹ in the context of its apocalyptic predictions of an imminent, post-colonial Asian surge in global political clout, trade and territories: “the European world had reached the limit of its territorial expansion and power”, Pearson argued in his elegy on the decline of the white man, “henceforth the East, China in particular, would gain in power and influence”.²²

To the transnational fraternity of white men that Pearson as well as Deakin had imagined to be a political alternative to the hierarchical multi-racial empire or the cosmopolitan unity of mankind,²³ Pearson poised the Australian continent as the last white homeland available for extensive European settlement and racial renewal. He represented Australia as “a major strategic resource [reserved] for the white cause”, even a vital racial inheritance that would help determine the future of “the higher civilization”.²⁴ The once-upon-a-space continent might then become the promised land for a second coming of racially revitalized Europeans, provided white Australians secured their place against Chinese colonisation, a real possibility brewing in the Near North according to Pearson. White Australia, sacralised above questions or imperial commerce into a momentous mission committed to the future and security of the white race, was projected as the national purpose fetching global visibility by Pearson and his contemporary compatriots, the popular “yellow peril” fiction-writers.²⁵ It catapulted an outpost

¹⁹ Walker “Soul Searching” First Draft 10.

²⁰ Pearson, Charles H. *National Life and Character: A Forecast*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1893. Print.

²¹ “Drawing the global colour line” evokes the title of Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds’ book investigating the late nineteenth century “discursive and psychic frameworks” that placed a climactic East-West rivalry, the resultant imagined, imminent race war in the oceanic neighbourhood, or whiteness at the heart of Australian national identity. See

Lake, Marilyn and Henry Reynolds. *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White men’s Countries and the Question of Racial Equality*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008. Print.

²² Walker, David. “Orient and Re-Orient: Australia in Asia.” *Australia and India Interconnections: Identity, Representation, Belonging*. Ed. S. K. Sareen. New Delhi: Mantra, 2006. 266-285. 274. Print.

²³ Lake and Reynolds 207.

²⁴ Pearson *National Life and Character* 17.

²⁵ The term “yellow peril”, coined by German Kaiser Wilhelm in 1895, refers to the trans-continental racialized terror of a potentially invasive Asia with its seething millions. The proximity of the terror caught the Australian popular imagination in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Australia’s first sustained invasion

to “somewhere near the centre of an intensifying battle for space and racial advancement”.²⁶

Unless I explore this desire of a self-situated outpost to gain the centre and am able to map the racial/spatial axes and overlaps forming that desire, it grows impossible to decode Alfred Deakin’s much-vaunted political dream of white Australia despite remaining lifelong entangled with India, or to explore Mollie Skinner’s marginalized, non-exclusive oeuvre given to interrogation and subversions of the racial/spatial nation-making templates that ticked the elect types and sites. Many outposted Australians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries recognized that perilous proximity to awakening Asia could make the survival of a white, racially homogenous Australia an issue of global significance. Here, on the vulnerable frontier of the empire where East met West, the threat of racial annihilation gained immediacy. White settlers loved to posit themselves as racial heroes and trustees defending precious territories against “the rising tide of colour” along the Pacific and Indian Ocean littoral.²⁷

The “threat ethos”²⁸ had traditionally informed settler Australia’s security obsession and a concurrent desire to be wrenched away from bordering seas and the exposed northern coastline – the site of sustained hemorrhage, contamination and slithering invasion anxieties – to the vast territory within, protected by bushmen, that ultra-terrestrial tribe of patriots and race visionaries. The spatial vocabulary of white Australia had been tethered to land instead of the

novel, serialized in 1888, was written by William Lane and titled “White or Yellow: A Story of the Race War of AD 1908”; other “yellow peril” titles followed, including Carlton Dawe’s *Yellow and White* (1895) and Fleetwood Chidell’s *Australia – White or Yellow* (1926).

See Walker “Fathomless Eyes” 540.

As counterpoint to the hyper-imagined yellow peril, Rabindranath Tagore quoted Anatole France on the very real and sustained terror unleashed by “white peril” during this period: “It does not, however, appear at first sight that the Yellow Peril at which European economists are terrified is to be compared to the White Peril suspended over Asia. . . . He (Admiral Togo) did not burn Versailles in the name of a higher civilization. The army of the Great Asiatic Powers did not carry away to Tokyo and Peking the Louvre paintings and the silver service of the Elysee”.

Qtd. in Tagore, Rabindranath. “Batayaniker Patra [Letters from a Window-Lazer].” 1919. *Kalantar [Across Times]*. *Rabindra Rachanabali [Collected Works of Rabindranath]*. Vol. 12. Kolkata: Visva Bharati Press, 1990. 568-585. 574. Print.

²⁶ Walker, David. “Race Building and the Disciplining of White Australia.” *Legacies of White Australia: Race, Culture and Nation*. Ed. Laksiri Jayasuriya, David Walker and Jan Gothard. Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2003. 33-50. 40. Print.

²⁷ “The rising tide of colour”, yet another alarmist phrase apprehending the end of white supremacy, was coined in 1921 by American race theorist Lothrop Stoddard and gained considerable trans-continental currency. The term inspired by Pearson’s *National Life and Character* refers to the contemporary great flood thesis that imaged invasive Asia as an infiltrating, shape-shifting, silent, perennial “flow” subtly readying to swamp and finally deluge Australia with its northern hordes.

See Stoddard, Lothrop. *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1921. Print.

Also, Walker “Orient and Re-Orient” 279, “Race Building” 34.

²⁸ The term “threat ethos” had been coined in 1997 by J. Fitzpatrick in his paper on European settler colonialism and national security ideologies in Australian history. See

Ang, Jen. “From White Australia to Fortress Australia: The Anxious Nation in the New Century.” *Legacies of White Australia* 51-69. 57.

fluid littoral since at least the late nineteenth century, a period deeply invested in yellow peril fiction and the Lawson-and-Furphy-promoted bush legends and ethic of male mateship, inarticulacy and exclusions (of women, the city, intimacy, aborigines and colour, and other solvents of patriotism). This vast hinterland, envisioned as empty, untamed and inviting settlement by pioneers, comprised the bush: Australia was spatially reconfigured as an ‘empty continent’ on the edge of Asia.

“Empty space”, according to Greg Lockhart, is euphemism for “indigenous space”, the term signifies the silenced history of “partial genocide” through imperial occupation. Lockhart reads the imperial occupation of empty/indigenous space through partial genocide in continuum with Australia’s angst about Asia; “the Asian menace” represented but an irrational projection of “the settler destruction of Aboriginal Australia”, he contends.²⁹ The “empty continent” was unmoored thus by twin sources of borderland unease. The term rehearsed the unspeakable imperial past that had terrorized, dispossessed and disenfranchised the aboriginal peoples, it evoked too the increasing proximity of Asia. The “empty continent” might have promised “renewal and a new beginning for the European race” in the early years of the Federation.³⁰ Yet it constituted a standing provocation to land hungry Asia as lebensraum for its overflowing populations. Only an irreproachable Antipodean performance of whiteness as selfless rite of racial solidarity could possibly resist Asian colonisation and retain an immaculate continent and cartography for the futuristic mission of white race-building.

“Whiteness”, notes David Walker, “was not simply an unproblematic inheritance, but a moral discipline and there was a good deal of uncertainty over whether Australians would make the grade, given the demanding [northern tropical] climate and a morally compromised history (for which read convictism)”.³¹ Since the late nineteenth century, white identity had been visibilised as code for the discursive, imaginative and mythic matrix of “trans-imperial Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism, embraced both at metropolitan and at colonial levels”. At the unruly edges of empire, such as the uneasy hybrid sites of British settler colonies like British Columbia or Australia during this period, whiteness acquired racial as well as spatial dimensions;³² it

²⁹ Lockhart “Absenting Asia” 289-290.

³⁰ Walker “Race Building” 40.

³¹ Walker “Orient and Re-Orient” 270.

³² In her paper on the rise of trans-imperial Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism through the nineteenth century, Penelope Edmonds traces how the narrative of exceptionalism had helped construct “the spatiality of whiteness” in settler colonies, where vast territories across oceans were violently re-inscribed, racialized as white spaces. Edmonds, Penelope. ““I Followed England Round the World”: The Rise of Trans-Imperial Anglo-Saxon Exceptionalism, and the Spatial Narratives of Nineteenth-Century British Settler Colonies of the Pacific Rim.” *Re-Orienting Whiteness*. Ed. Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 99-115. 100-101. Print.

emerged as trans-colonial signifier for the colonisers' absolutist (non)ethics of political and territorial entitlements, as they "remade Indigenous spaces into white territories".³³

Yet whiteness in British settler colonies such as Australia could provide no absolutist refuge. Nor did it comprise an uncontested invisible category operative largely by default, as within the metropole. At the boundaries of empire, whiteness unravelled into a site of anxiety, vulnerability and liminality, being a geopolitical as well as "biopolitical" formation, inscribed as much on racialized geographies as on bodies. Here, it needed to be defined, defended and effected through restriction of contact with various others; here, in barely conjured terra nullius, whiteness had to be recast as a flexible frontier "mechanism of sliding scales and thresholds" that allowed "the production of probationary whites, liminal whites, degenerate whites, deferred whites, and part whites", as Warwick Anderson observes.³⁴ Many Australians of the late nineteenth century, for instance, had reason to suspect themselves a dark strain of white, given the taint of the aborigine and of neighbouring Asia that "might have entered the national character, whether through [the northern tropical] climate or another source".³⁵ One route to redemption lay in harnessing the national narrative to the transnational racial-spatial-political project of whiteness. Racial anxiety coalesced with an equally formative spatial anxiety to erupt as a dominant, intoxicating vision of Australianness in the late nineteenth century. The vision elected colonial Australians to the role of custodians of the last white space and as forerunners of a coming white race of racially revitalized Europeans. Aboriginals were blanked out and Asians reduced to an amorphous enemy designate in the phoenix-fiction of a freshly minted "pure race in a clean continent".³⁶

This double-helixed national dream of racial/spatial purification was officially defended on grounds of socio-economic equity: apparently the immigration restriction policy of the newly forged Federation was motivated not by racial discrimination, but solely by the egalitarian desire to protect a uniformly high standard of living – especially for the local working class – from incursions of cheap coloured labour. Whiteness being the spectacle and politics of absence parasitic on both bodies and spaces, what better recruit than the anonymous white rural male labourer and itinerant worker, in other words the bushman situated in the bush,

³³ Carey, Jane, Leigh Boucher, and Katherine Ellinghaus. Epilogue. *Re-Orienting Whiteness*. 253-257. 254.

³⁴ Anderson, Warwick. "Traveling White." *Re-Orienting Whiteness*. 65-72. 69.

Besides his speculative register for the shifting degrees and possibilities of whiteness as an unstable, hybrid though disciplinary formation on racial borderlands, Anderson posits whiteness as a "biopolitical formation" in settler colonies (68), performed as much through the surveillance and regulation of bodies of individuals and populations as through the policing/purification of space.

³⁵ Walker "Orient and Re-Orient" 270.

³⁶ Bedford, Randolph. "White, Yellow and Brown." *Lone Hand* 1 July 1911: 224-228. Print.

as its spectral martyr and signifier from emptied spaces? Spectral, since the bushman, upheld as the prototype of the White/Australian Man committed to purge both ‘virginal’ land and white womanhood of Asian contagion, was nothing like the majority of Australians in any tense,³⁷ a contention I investigate in the context of Mollie Skinner’s anuvadic³⁸ texts in the third chapter. After all, Deakin had valorized the bushman in his diaries and Skinner in *The Boy in the Bush* (1924) radically reinterpreted him.

For the majority, the middle-class urban dwellers who produced and consumed the Australian legend since the 1890s,³⁹ the bushman and his billy patrolling the bush, legend protagonists both, had been invented and received largely as a racial/spatial category of nation-making wrath against various intimate enemies including Asian neighbours. “The rise of Asia” theme from the 1880s had as one of its domestic effects in Australia a reification of the bushman as exemplar of the idealized race patriot best equipped, as also best positioned, to repel invasive Asia.⁴⁰ This rural male exemplar projected whiteness and the defence of white Australia as a masculinist enterprise built on the imaginary of bodily prowess, virility and racial fitness. The enterprise and its upholder the bushman thus emerged as ontologically rooted in the ostracism of suspects such as women, the city and its gender-bending neurasthenics, Asians and so forth.

White Australian women, for example, occupied a spot of trouble in the settler Antipodean’s national security/vulnerability syndrome. They could fall easy prey to the suave manners and elaborate courtesies of the wealthy Chinese, it was assumed, and ominous Asia “would make inroads into Australia through its gullible and politically naive women”. White Australia, regularly symbolized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a virginal female passive in need of male protection, cast the bushman as “the chivalrous defender of white womanhood [invisibilised into the gendered land] against lascivious oriental males”.⁴¹

³⁷ Hodge, Bob and Vijay Mishra. *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian literature and the postcolonial mind*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991. 172-173. Print.

³⁸ The term “anuvadic” is a qualifier denoting “of or relating to anuvad”, etymologically “saying after” in Sanskrit and semantically in partial convergence with “translation”. I explore “anuvad” as an autonomous category of re-creation/re-interpretation in the chapter on Alfred Deakin and his India. I have termed most of Mollie Skinner’s fiction prior to *Tucker Sees India* as anuvadic texts overtly invested in re-circulating received templates of national types while they interrogate and secretly subvert in the process, a premise detailed in the third chapter.

³⁹ Besides Hodge and Mishra, Richard White notes that the bush/outback-oriented image of the continent, cultivated as the ‘real’ Australia by the 1890s, was “essentially artificial” and “usually developed in the city” by urban artists and authors based in the relatively populous south-eastern states of Victoria or New South Wales; the artists made only “occasional forays into the bush to gather material”. See White, Richard. “Growing Up.” *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981. 97-98. Print.

⁴⁰ Walker “Orient and Re-Orient” 279; Walker and Sobocinska Introduction *Australia’s Asia* 11.

⁴¹ Walker “Race Building” 38-39.

Skinner interrogated the invisibilisation, by making a female larrikin her protagonist in *Black Swans*. With Australia becoming increasingly visible by the 1890s as one of the most urbanized societies in the world, the city – a site of cosmopolitan co-mingling, potential piebald offspring, lost vitality and declining birthrates – seethed as yet another zone of discomfiture, a signifier for the decay of the white race and counter-space to the bush and its warden-patriot.⁴² In the narrative of imperiled Australian nationhood, both susceptible white women and the city as a contaminable, cowardly retreat that feminized its men and made breeding-reluctant viragoes of its women, were perceived as inviting silent Asian encroachment.

The bushman as contrapuntal rural male was conjured as antidote to these maladies, providing the lone line of resistance against the Flow of Asia⁴³ into the continent. Stern in his commitment to a determined anti-cosmopolitanism and self-protective parochialism,⁴⁴ the bushman and his locus the bush legend remained embedded in the hauntology⁴⁵ of Asia proximity. With whiteness and manhood inextricably intertwined in the context of survivalist settler anxiety, nation-building in federated Australia brewed into a strictly masculinist, militarist project. Bush-workers were hailed by the larrikin conservative *Sydney Morning Herald* as “men that could be sent anywhere to do anything, from shearing to soldiering”.⁴⁶ From “bushman” to “digger” – a term retroactively used to refer to Australian (and New Zealand) volunteer private soldiers of World War I, which set up the invincible gold-digger in the bush as predecessor to the digger at the front – involved then a minor mutation in the national stereotype.⁴⁷ Deakin’s invocation of Anglo-Saxon military prowess in 1857 India as

⁴² Day, David. *Claiming a Continent: a new history of Australia*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1996. 191. Print.

Also Walker “Race Building” 37, “Orient and Re-Orient” 277.

⁴³ The image of invasive Asia as an unpredictable, mobile “flow” eroding white Australia had been evoked in the early twentieth century by the *Lone Hand* editor and righteous nationalist Frank Fox, among others. See Fox, Frank. *Problems of the Pacific*. London: Williams & Norgate, 1912. 106. Print.

⁴⁴ Ien Ang considers “a self-righteous, self-protective parochialism, and a determined commitment to provincialism and anti-cosmopolitanism” to be foundational to the “formation of white Australian culture” (Ang 58): I have merely foregrounded the bushman as carrier of these transferred nation-bounding epithets.

⁴⁵ “Hauntology”, a portmanteau of “haunting” and “ontology”, was coined in its French form “hantologie” by Jacques Derrida in *Spectres de Marx* (1993); the term replaces the ontological priorities of being and presence, tracing instead the figure of the ghost as that uneraseable in a text which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive. The shadow-narrative of Asia proximity with its recurrent afterlives remained just as amplified and ominous in white Australian national imaginary, beginning from the inception of the Federation till its post-colonial/post-imperial tense since the late 1940s.

⁴⁶ Qtd. in Ward, Russel. *A Nation for a Continent: the history of Australia, 1901-1975*. Richmond, Victoria: Heinemann Educational Australia, 1977. 12. Print.

⁴⁷ According to Graham Seal, “Australian troops did not begin to call themselves ‘diggers’ – or to be called so by others – until at least two years after the Anzac landings at Gallipoli” (122). Australian troops were sent to Gallipoli in Turkey in April 1915 as part of Allied strategy: the eight-month campaign proved a military disaster and the troops had to be finally withdrawn from Gallipoli. Yet the digger had been sacralised in popular culture and official history as national hero as well as the great female-immune exemplar of courage, resourcefulness and resilience. “The Australian foot soldier was now cast as the bushman in uniform”, observes Seal (124).

foundational mythology for the Australian Federation precludes the national sacralisation of the digger, as I explore in the second chapter, and Skinner had come up with a happily displaced India-traversing war-fearing polyglot variant of the icon, as detailed in chapters three and four. The digger remains an uneraseable in their traces of India-Australia collusions, collisions and collaborations.

Why were diggers extolled as defenders of the homeland through World War II when they had been sent to inflict their invasive valour on others' homelands in Tobruk, El Alamein, Cairo, Palestine, New Guinea and Borneo and that too, as in World War I, at the behest of British colonialists?⁴⁸ Japan had arrived as the new Pacific threat on the Australian horizon, especially since 1941 when they swept through South-East Asia capturing Borneo, Ambon and Hong Kong after the attack on Pearl Harbour: the much-apprehended Japanese assault at Darwin in Northern Territory, though, never actually materialized. Why were the campaigns launched in Asia and ending in military retreat, defeat or massacres – such as at Gallipoli, Turkey during World War I or the massacre of Australian prisoners of war by Japanese executioners at Laha, Indonesia in World War II – legitimized, even reinstated, as central war-narratives for narrating the post-Federation nation? Why was the appallingly higher slaughter of young Australians on the Western Front, as at the battles of Fromelles and Pozieres in France in 1916, denied the centrality? Did the blood icons of Gallipoli and Laha memorialize the British settlers' hushed fear of failure to secure the continent in case of an Asian attack? Did they serve as pivotal shadow-narratives to the triumphalist bildungsroman of white nationhood “and the conquest of a hard land”?⁴⁹ Was this why the digger had to be reinvented as prisoner of war brutalized in Japanese captivity during World War II?

I return to some of these questions in the fourth chapter, in the context of Skinner's alternative war-narratives *Letters of a V.A.D.* (1918) and *Tucker Sees India* (1937), yet the questions remain crucial to detailing my scope and objectives in the introduction. For fears and shadow-narratives belong to the realm of prohibited possibilities. And it is in the largely convergent zone of missed opportunities, the otherwise lost or obscured histories of transnational engagements with Asian neighbours and the concurrent, contending epistemes of

See Seal, Graham. “Diggers.” *Symbols of Australia: Uncovering the stories behind the myths*. Ed. Melissa Harper and Richard White. Sydney: UNSW Press; Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2010. 121-127. Print.

⁴⁸ For a memoir of campaigns of Australian battalions in North Africa, New Guinea and Borneo during World War II and their responses to these locations, see Walker, David. “The Cheerful Rat.” *Not Dark Yet: A personal history*. Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2011. 177-196. Print.

⁴⁹ Walker and Sobocinska Introduction *Australia's Asia* 9.

Australian nation-making, that I want to intervene with my extensive albeit admittedly partial study of Indo-Australian entanglements between 1890 and 1950 with reference to Deakin and Skinner.

Belonging had always remained a fraught question for non-indigenous Australians, open to be “contested, articulated, shared, forgone or possessed absolutely”.⁵⁰ ‘What if’s lurked in the penumbra of prohibited possibilities. What if white Australia proved to be an experiment that failed? What if the promised land morphed from terra nullius awaiting civilization to an alien Eastern continent, occupied accidentally and temporarily by “second-hand Europeans”⁵¹ and destined to have an Asian future? Were Europeans capable of colonising the Australian continent in the first place? The latter question festered for white settlers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, since the strength and durability of white settlement in Australia had remained a case for angst on climactic grounds: “Northern Australia, the most exposed and vulnerable of its territories, lay within the tropics and scientific opinion around 1900 was adamant that whites could not create permanent settlements in the tropical regions, a view that persisted, though not without challenge, down to the Second World War”.⁵²

With overwhelming scientific certainty around this period that the “white races” declined in tropical climates, and chances looming of indigenous and Asian contamination, could white Australia disappear? Must it succumb to the growing Asianising pressures of a racially contaminated, imperial/urban world? Angst, that category taut in tension between binaries, heaves with the promise of a third space. Degenerationists might have alarmed with Cassandra prophecies of possible reversion of white settlers to becoming indigenous or coloured peoples: the settlers ran the risk of becoming racially compromised, they had held, given the hostile climate and the tabooed miscegenation with neighbours.⁵³ Yet contemporary vitalists, fewer and less heard, came up with an outrageous spin on racial/spatial possibilities of the promised land.

What if the continent constituted no backwater exiled geographically and strategically to the utmost rim of imperial Europe and teetering on the edge of a free fall into miscegenation/Asianisation? What if it could alternatively be perceived as strategically placed at the crossroads – between East and West – and thus fecund in the promise of a heady,

⁵⁰ Read, Peter. *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 2. Print.

⁵¹ Hope, A. D. “Australia.” *Poems*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1960. N. pag. *Australian Poetry Library*. Web. 11 March 2017.

⁵² Walker “Fathomless Eyes” 542.

⁵³ See for instance Cole, E. W. *A White Australia Impossible*. Melbourne: Cole’s Book Arcade, 1903. Print. Also Dawe, Carlton. *A Bride of Japan*. Chicago, New York: H. S. Stone & Co., 1898. Print.

futuristic metaphor, that of the ‘trans-’⁵⁴ resonant bridge post walls, isolation and intimidation? What if Australia enjoyed “a favourable, even providential, geographical proximity to a world of great trading opportunities”?⁵⁵ What if a future Eurasian Australia held the best possibility for “hybrid vigour” in the context of racial renewal? During the 1920s and 1930s, the notion that Eurasian race crossing produced a higher racial ‘type’ gained increasing scientific currency and was given credence by some among the historians and eugenicists in Britain and North America.⁵⁶ Given the tropical climate of northern Australia, what better antidote to colonial degeneration “than an infusion of Asian industriousness to strengthen the mettle of the new race”?⁵⁷ According to Eurasian enthusiasts, the continent could then metamorphose from being a vulnerable land of the pure to a veritable time-machine that turned an outpost into a futurist nation at the heart of the geo-political transformation of the post-imperial, post-war world.

In 1939, one of Australia’s most influential public figures, Sir Robert Garran, called for a School of Oriental Studies in Canberra; he imagined Asia as Australia’s “special opportunity” to stand out as translator-interpreter of the region and “understanding Asia” its ticket to assuming intellectual leadership in the Pacific.⁵⁸ Much later in the early 1990s, Prime Minister Paul Keating speculated that the final result of Australia’s engagement with Asia would be the creation of the world’s first Eurasian nation.⁵⁹ Yet this surprisingly tenacious, if less visible, speculative tradition of an alternative imaginary of Australianness and its racial/spatial weave with Asia has older roots.

During the 1880s, Sydney Congregational minister James Jefferis, an opponent of anti-Chinese legislation in New South Wales, had dared to suggest that Australia was uniquely positioned to be the locus of the transfusion of East and West, a new Pacific cosmopolitanism. “Australia will become great by a fusion and mingling of races,” he imagined, and Australians will create the apogee of human civilization by blending the supposedly best characteristics of the most advanced of European and Asian ethnicities – the “unequalled metaphysical power of the Hindoo, the unswerving steadiness of the Chinese, the singular artistic faculty of the Japanese . . . the idealism of the French, the philosophy of the German, and the practical

⁵⁴ “Trans-”, a prefix of excess derived from Latin “trans” denoting “across”, signifies the urge to test, un-think, re-draw and finally, cross as also smudge boundaries and the conditions of confinement and exclusions they might represent.

⁵⁵ Walker, David. *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939*. Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1999. 10. Print.

⁵⁶ Collins, Kane. “Imagining the Golden Race.” *Australia’s Asia* 99-120. 115-116.

⁵⁷ Collins 104.

⁵⁸ Walker “Soul Searching” First Draft 9.

⁵⁹ Collins 101.

sagacity of the Anglo-Saxon”.⁶⁰ In 1903, E. W. Foxall, a Sydney businessman and Secretary to the Japanese Consul in Australia, published *Colorphobia: an exposure of the white Australia fallacy*, interrogating the aesthetics of whiteness and the politics of its construction and privileging.⁶¹ The influential doctor and leader of the British eugenics movement C. W. Saleeby chose to read the “yellow peril” as the “yellow promise” in 1904, anticipating racial fusion between Asians and Europeans to facilitate the coming of a revitalized race.⁶²

As Kane Collins observes, it is ironic that the white Australia ideal of early twentieth century coincided with a quest for bronzed, brown and tanned skin tones among the Britons who peopled Australia: the much extolled ‘bronzed Australian’ would cleverly appropriate the ‘golden’ aesthetic of non-Europeans, it was assumed,⁶³ while not compromising on the crucial non-dermatological aspects of whiteness as a discipline of purity. Yet the golden-race enthusiasts, a minority in each generation in Australia beginning from the late nineteenth century, had often contended that the disruptive alternative, a Eurasian Australia, might not only be inevitable for the future but possibly better placed to develop and hold the continent. Disruptive, since the critique of the land of the pure embedded in that subversive imaginary “denied Australia control over its own population, and potentially disrupted the entire range of Australian social ideals”⁶⁴ premised on racial homogeneity.

In the plastic space⁶⁵ of such unsettling, competing narratives of Australia’s alternative “usable pasts”⁶⁶ textured in unlikely confluences, conversations with various others and their

⁶⁰ Jefferis, James. “Australia’s mission and opportunity.” *Centennial Magazine* 1.2 (1888): 104. Print. Jefferis’ dream continues to gain afterlives in Australia and India. For instance, author and critic Makarand Paranjape redreamt the dream when he urged his Indian and Australian readership to “imagine what would happen if the best of the oldest and newest civilizations of the world were to combine in Australia”. Paranjape, Makarand R. “A Passage to Uluru: Rethinking Sacred Australia.” *Sacred Australia: Post-Secular Considerations*. Ed. Makarand R. Paranjape. Melbourne: Clouds of Magellan, 2009. 1-20. 19. Print.

⁶¹ Collins 106-107.

⁶² Collins 111.

⁶³ Collins 108-109.

⁶⁴ Collins 117.

⁶⁵ “Plastic”, derived from French “plastique” or Latin “plasticus”, suggests “breaking the form” and the scope to remould and remake; a “plastic space” is thus always in the making and remains an unfinished enterprise, teasing in its transformative, proliferating possibilities. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes codes plastic as less a thing than the trace of a movement. Notwithstanding his suspicion of the ethic and telos of this medium most malleable into an inventory of infinite inventions, the French form “plastique” denotes an explosive, and the aligned creative urge to break or exceed the extant. A text of Australianness woven in past confluences and conversations with neighbours breaks the form/norm of isolated homogeneity and could thus be termed “plastic” in its multivalent, disruptive connotations.

See Barthes, Roland. “Plastic.” 1957. *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972. 97-99. 97. Print.

⁶⁶ The phrase “usable past/s” has been used in the singular in Van Wyck Brook’s national bildungsroman *America’s Coming-of-Age* (1915) and in the plural, in an eponymous anthology edited by Tad Tuleja (1997) on the invention/manipulation of tradition on sub-national scales among diverse North American micro-identities. In either variant, it refers to the reconstruction of a past – alternatively, dissident plural pasts – ripe in cultural and ideological possibilities meant to be projected into remembering the future, alternatively the fissures, of a

radical possibilities, I want to locate my present study of its connections and continuities with India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with reference to Deakin and Skinner. Translation in this context is released from the colonial stigma of remaining the non-original. It emerges instead as yet another medial political category operative between languages and locations which, like angst, defies the order of borders. And from this in-between locus, it plays home to an Australianness of transit, transgressions, coming together and cross-fertilizations. Through my second, third and fourth chapters, I return to the pluripotent⁶⁷ possibilities of translation as routes to the polyphonic, non-colonial/non-centric Australias⁶⁸ crafted in plural engagements, including ruptures, with India during the colonial past. The past and the post have however been isotopes in Antipodean national imaginary. We thus arrive at the fourth and final dimension of the angst,

The Temporal Angst of Forging Australianness

With a past that “appeared [or was made to appear] so short and undistinguished” and a present barely settled or certain,⁶⁹ the future had been cast as the potent tense for white settler Australia. White Australia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was invented as a time-machine poised for a quantum leap into the future, and not just by Eurasian enthusiasts. It had been imagined as incubator for a coming race or the refuge for phoenixed Europe post war and emergent Asia, by the likes of William Lane, Charles H. Pearson and writer, entrepreneur and politician Randolph Bedford in Australia and American race theorist Lothrop Stoddard across the Pacific. Could white Australia in the avatar of a twice-born Europe innocent of history and empire, serve as ideologue and exemplar for the war-devastated,

nation. This thesis aims to excavate some of Australia’s “usable pasts” in terms of the loose-ended histories and forgotten narratives of its connections and tensions with India during 1890-1950, evoking thereby contending transnational/translational p/refashionings of Australianness as refracted through the prism of India.

⁶⁷ “Pluripotent”, literally denoting “plural possibilities”, is a biochemical term that refers to the unique attribute of embryonal stem cells to regenerate or develop into any cell type; John B. Gurdon and Shinya Yamanaka have since discovered that even mature i.e. specialized cells could be reprogrammed to become pluripotent.

I have applied this biochemical qualifier to the field of India-Australia contacts between 1890 and 1950; like a pluripotent cell, the fluid field too could act as a reservoir of renewal into fresh possibilities for an Australianness unitarised and made into a gulag. Interestingly these other, translational, sometimes non-colonial possibilities could be harvested from a past colonial and contained in static, empire-obsessed print, much as the mature, specialised cells could be biologically and chronologically reverted to emerge as pluripotent stem cells. On stem cells and pluripotency, see

Mukherjee, Siddhartha. *The Emperor of All Maladies: a Biography of Cancer*. London: Fourth Estate, 2011. 458. Print.

On the Nobel-winning discovery of the reprogramming of mature cells to become pluripotent, see “The 2012 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine - Press Release.” *Nobelprize.org*. Nobel Media AB 2014, 10 March 2016. Web. 11 April 2017.

⁶⁸ The plural form “Australias” refer to the non-exclusive imaginary in which multiple models of the Antipodean nation might intersect and converse.

⁶⁹ Walker “Orient and Re-Orient” 266.

autophagous original? Or was it destined to commit “race suicide”⁷⁰ in the future, given the looming spectre of Asia-engagement? Could this dreaded autophagy⁷¹ in the Antipodean context be alternatively perceived to fulfill the mission of race renewal, development and differentiation from jaded Europe, by invoking the phoenix birth of a Eurasian future? Seeking answers to these questions tangled that uncompromised tense, the future, with the pasts that federated Australia sought to memorialize, invent, or erase.

Though fixated on the future, post-settlement Australia had been invented as a fossil. The settlement at Botany Bay, the site of James Cook’s first landing on Australia in 1770, was planned by the British as a penal colony in the late 1780s, following the loss of the older settler and penal colony with the outbreak of the American War of Independence (1775-1783).⁷² Founded as the ersatz version of a past imperial outpost, white Australia was already caught in a time-warp and leashed to the past since its moment of inception, however feverishly addicted it might otherwise have been to a postal rhetoric nestled in “post-settlement”, “post-Federation”, “post-war”, “post-colonial” and so on. Despite the formation of the Federation, the British empire continued to provide the centre to its act as an abandoned imperial outpost in mainstream national historiography, well into the post-imperial age. So much so, that James Curran and Stuart Ward based their book *The Unknown Nation: Australia After Empire* on “this notion of a vacancy – an emptiness or void”⁷³ as one of the most potent metaphors for Australia’s post-imperial “crisis of national meaning”⁷⁴ through the 1960s, after the British empire had unravelled and Britain retreated into Europe.

⁷⁰ During the early twentieth century, “race suicide” was much evoked in the transnational context of the decline of the white man. The phrase was popularised by American President Theodore Roosevelt and subsequently embraced by physicians, psychologists and politicians in Australia: “Advanced urban civilizations, of which Australia was considered a pretty good example, were believed to be leading the way in declining birthrates and the decay of the white race” (*Not Dark Yet* 100). Besides the decline in birthrates, the suicide of the race and of the Antipodean nation was attributed to neurasthenic city populations addicted to devitalized food and depleted of physical vitality and moral discipline, while resurgent Asia waited and watched from the neighbourhood. See Walker *Not Dark Yet* 100-101; “Orient and Re-Orient” 278.

⁷¹ “Autophagy”, a term in cellular biology, refers to the fundamental mechanism within a cell by which it can degrade, cannibalise and recycle its own cellular components. Ostensibly a process of self-destruction, autophagy has been understood to be essential for cell renewal, cell defence against invading intracellular bacteria and viruses, cell differentiation and embryo development – all regenerative possibilities, and the reason I choose it as metaphor to explore the ambivalence embedded in the vision of “race suicide” for white Australia, when situated against its trope of Asia proximity.

For information on the definition, physiological functions, disruptions and therapeutic promises of autophagy, see “The 2016 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine - Press Release.” *Nobelprize.org*. Nobel Media AB 2014, 10 March 2016. Web. 11 April 2017.

⁷² Day *Claiming a Continent* 28.

⁷³ Curran, James and Stuart Ward. *The Unknown Nation: Australia After Empire*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2010. 19. Print.

⁷⁴ Curran, James. *The Power of Speech: Australian prime ministers defining the national image*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2004. viii. Print.

It was hard to let go of the empire thus memorialized, either in the past or for the future. And federated Australia had performed its old sub-empire dreams at an unlikely moment, when Australian forces quickly seized the lightly defended German colonies in the southern Pacific in September 1914, during the First World War.⁷⁵ And it continued to play late at those futurist memories of empire. In 1979, Australia's outer maritime boundary reached the 200-nautical mile limit, an invasive official cartography that took it to the boundaries of southeast Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, and in the process appropriated the traditional fishing grounds of the Rotenese, rendering illegitimate their livelihood and existence. Bruce Campbell has called the appropriation of these waters "Australia's last colonial act".⁷⁶

Yet Australia had remained a colony, not only of the British empire but also of a largely invented European past and the spectacles that the past assigned. As a nation elected for the second coming of twice-born Europe and Europeans, "White Australia seemed poised to relive Europe's vibrant past in a new setting" and tense, namely the heroic future.⁷⁷ To be a Europe simulated for the future, apparently it needed only to stage the spectacle of youth, exuberance and racially perfected bodies, outsourced from a much-mythicized Homeric or Elizabethan past, and in contrast to the ageing, war-weary, empire-saddled, present-prone continental original. The future, however, did not always promise the resurrection of a perfected past; it could sometimes become an uneasy metonym for denial and deference and get oddly entwined with the pasts erased. Possibilities of an Asian 'turn' for white Australia, for example, have been firmly, and recurrently, posited in the future.

That 'Asia' would have a determining influence on Australia's future has been a recurrent trope embedded in the Antipodean "national story" for successive generations, beginning from the late nineteenth century.⁷⁸ As persistent has been its corresponding exorcism from the visibilised history of the nation. In announcing a White Paper investigating *Australia in the Asian Century* in September 2011, Prime Minister Julia Gillard twice insisted that "we haven't been here before". She was referring to the rise of a new China, a new India and the unprecedented need for Australia's all-round link with the resurgent Asia-Pacific region in "the Asian future we face".⁷⁹ In 1893 Alfred Deakin, aspiring Victoria-based politician of a yet-to-be Federation, recommended Australian scholars as future expositors and translators of

⁷⁵ Day *Claiming a Continent* 201.

⁷⁶ Campbell, B. "The last colonial act: the expulsion of Indonesian fishermen from the north west coast." *Studies in Western Australian History* 16 (1995): 3-7. Print.

⁷⁷ Walker "Race Building" 44.

⁷⁸ Walker and Sobocinska Introduction *Australia's Asia* 4.

⁷⁹ Gillard, Julia. "Speech to Asialink and the Asia Society, Melbourne." Transcript of Speech. *asiasociety.org*. Asia Society, 28 Sept. 2011. Web. 21 Apr. 2017.

neighbouring India;⁸⁰ he had partitioned the subcontinent into a past of temples and tombs safely severed from Australia and the future fecund in Indo-Australian academic, strategic and commercial connections. For both Gillard and Deakin, the routine invocation of an Asia-embracing future helped dispense with the “untidy . . . [and largely dememorialised] history of Australia’s past encounters with Asia”.⁸¹ The ‘future’ had become a remote terminus for dissolving Australia’s frequently fragmented and elusive pasts of contacts and proximity to Asia including India; some of these pasts, such as the connect with Malaccan fishermen and sea-skilled Indian lascars, pre-date European settlement.⁸²

In this thesis, I want to re-member and explore the Indian dimensions of such dismembered Australian pasts⁸³ of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with special reference to the non-/fiction of Alfred Deakin and Mollie Skinner, their unpublished diary entries or posthumously published, heavily edited autobiography. With the new connections and continuities thus established in my thesis, I re-examine the legacy of canonical and invisibilised figures like Deakin and Skinner respectively. What transnational/translational possibilities of Australianness are retrievable in their afterlives, how do they speak to us today? Retracing alternative, more inclusive pasts in a mapcraft of interconnected histories, texts, peoples, religions and epistemologies of India and Australia restores the richness of pluralities to the discourse of Australian nation-making – apparently self-contained and thus, diminished. Alternative pasts could help remake the present and cast alternative futures⁸⁴ emergent through

⁸⁰ Deakin *Irrigated India* 14.

⁸¹ Walker and Sobocinska Introduction *Australia’s Asia* 2.

⁸² For Australia’s myriad maritime pre-European links to the Indonesian archipelago, India and China, see Balint “Epilogue: The Yellow Sea.” *Australia’s Asia* 345-365; Tagliocozzo, E. “A necklace of fins: marine goods trading in maritime Southeast Asia, 1780-1860.” *International Journal of Asian Studies* 1.1 (2004): 23-48. Print.; Ganter, R. *Mixed Relations: Asian Aboriginal contact in north Australia*. Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2006. Print.

For an unabashed study of the pre-colonial ecological, familial, trade, linguistic and community connections between Australian indigenous tribes and India, see

Kenna, Len. *Are Indians an Ethnic Minority?* Bundoora, Victoria: Jika Publishing, 2008. Print.

⁸³ By “dismembered pasts”, I want to connote the less documented or commemorated pasts of a space, event or collective imaginary which tend to lose their political resonance, even materiality after a point and could thus be contrived as mutilated, existential, if barely retrievable texts.

⁸⁴ As social psychologist and thinker Ashis Nandy observes, the past and the present need not necessarily constitute disjunctive anti-categories set apart by the chasm of repression and revolution, as they constituted for Freud and Marx. For the traditional “Indian folk ‘historian’ – the *bhat*, *caran*, or the *kathakar* for instance”, as for Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (58), the pasts preserved in myths and oral histories were to be received as plural, fractured and thus “shifting, amorphous and amenable to [contemporary] intervention” (57). Alternative versions or interpretations of the past could then induce undoing or remaking the present as *the* “‘historical’ moment, the permanent yet shifting point of crisis and the time for choice”, activism and political change aligned with that past (62). Revisiting multiple, invisibilised Indian pasts of the Australian Federation from the early decades or even the eve of the federal formation could help us re-imagine and restore rainbow possibilities to the present and future spectrum of an otherwise narrowed-down flattened-out, much-unitarised Australianness and its relation with India.

displacements, translations, dialogue, transformations and such other trans-habits⁸⁵ of nation-making, as at play in Mollie Skinner's exilic novels on Australianness.

Where and what should Australia be? A British imperial memory – the last outpost – stranded on the edges of a restless and resurgent post-colonial Asia? An exuberant, youthful replica of Europe, purged of its racial impurities and imperial failures, that dared trump the original? Or a geo-politically strategic, futurist site of transfusion of the East and West, as James Jefferis had imagined during the 1880s? What pasts must federated Australia evoke, and which erase? As I have shown above, such questions receptive to alternative, even counter possibilities for imagining the Antipodean nation, could only invoke angst, that alterity-inducing, liminal political category. Asia – the plural conglomerate of peoples, languages, epistemologies, political systems and ecologies – and especially India, as argued in the thesis, remain indispensable to framing these angst-resonant questions.

At least since Federation, then, Australia had been torn between its centripetal attractions for a mythic European history and centrifugal pressures of the divergent Asian geography, its status as settler colony of the British and thus hardly a player in the imperial game as against the dated dream of racial exceptionalism and sub-empires as coloniser, its exclusionary politics of White Australia policy versus the ground-reality of aboriginal presence/precedence and the Asian, especially Chinese, trickle, and finally the engagement versus enmeshment debate taut across tenses when it came to Asia. “Unresolved Antipodean dichotomies”⁸⁶ between history and geography, black and white, colonised and coloniser, empire and the post-imperial, Asia and Europe, belonging and exile gather in and amplify the amphibious, binary-eluding “angst” of forging Australianness. Embedded in an unsettling, else-prone angst, the Antipodean “-ness” too exceeds a hermetic script and tends to its twin centrifugal counters – “trans-” and the “neighbour”. Below, I briefly examine the making of Australianness as a formulaic, fiercely singular essence between 1890 and 1950 and its occasional coeval unmaking into dissident variants, when braided with shadow-narratives of trans- and the neighbour. After all, this thesis

See Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983. 56-63. Print.

⁸⁵ “Trans-habit”, a term used by philosopher and critic Ranjan Ghosh in *Thinking Literature across Continents*, refers to the liminal habit of crossing over, across various shadowlines partitioning disciplines and politically demarcated territories.

See Ghosh, Ranjan and J. Hillis Miller. Introduction. *Thinking Literature across Continents*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2016. 3. Print.

Counter to the hermetic essencing of a singular national –ness, could be cited a more plastic national imaginary sited in the “trans-habit” of excess, connection, conflict, conversations and translations of various others, possibilities mined in my thesis in the context of Australian national imaginings inspired by the susurrus of India-Australia encounters between 1890 and 1950.

⁸⁶ Broinowski, Alison. *The Yellow Lady*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992. 21. Print.

posits neighbouring India as a major trans-factor in transforming Australianness, its premise and possibilities during the period.

Introducing the debate on Australian –ness(es), along with tangled factors of trans- and the neighbour

In his reading of “essence or *Wesen*” as a verb, Heidegger unravelled “essencing” to comprise an act of violence at least at the linguistic and formal-ontological levels; it homes in a reality or historical context among a set of select significations, at the cost of exiling other probable disclosures.⁸⁷ The suffix “-ness” embeds “essencing” in its exclusionary, settling compulsions, and Australianness cropped rich in blanks, borders and purifying exclusions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. “Making Australia convincingly “Australian”” involved the “dual process of differentiation and separation”, observes David Walker. Such an overly-historiographed⁸⁸ Australianness had to be conceived as the project in borders, not just to estrange and protect it from aboriginal and Asian associations, but also in lonely separateness from the “old country” and “jaded Europe mired in ancient disputes and past usages”, both much-vaunted (out)sources of its origins and the past.⁸⁹ After all, which other European nation was preoccupied with the fear of being monitored and shadowed by invasive Asia, from just across the border marked by the northern waters?

Within the terra nullius, borders proliferated as blanks. Both the rural Australian ‘type’ of the late nineteenth century and the Australian suburban ‘way of life’ supplanting it since the 1940s proved useful tools of intolerance against ‘outsiders’ and were used to suppress social, sexual and ideological dissent and diversity within society, according to Richard White.⁹⁰ Blanks performed excisions of Asians, aborigines and various others from the fiercely pure essence isolated as Australianness, and produced and reproduced through maps, coins, flag, songs, literary texts, politicians’ speeches, iconic images and rural myths generated in towns.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Heidegger, Martin. *Introduction to Metaphysics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. 115-128. Print. Also see Slavoj Žižek’s illustrative discussion of Heidegger’s reading of “essence” as a verb in Žižek, Slavoj. “Fear Thy Neighbour as Thyself” *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Picador, 2008. 40-73. 67-71. Print.

⁸⁸ Such historiographies dedicated to a monolithic Australia of borders, blanks and the scared, secured future of whiteness plus its exceptionalism are abundant and normative. They include Charles H. Pearson’s *National Life and Character: A Forecast* (1893), Charles Bean’s twelve volume *Official history of Australia’s Involvement in the war of 1914-1918* (1921-1942), R. M. Crawford’s *Australia* (1952), Russel Ward’s *The Australian Legend* (1958) and *A Nation for a Continent: the history of Australia, 1901-1975* (1977), Geoffrey Blainey’s *The Tyranny of Distance: how distance shaped Australian history* (1966) and *This land is all horizons: Australian fears and visions* (2001), *Australia’s Empire* (2008) edited by D.M. Schreuder and Stuart Ward, among others.

⁸⁹ Walker “Orient and Re-Orient” 268-269.

⁹⁰ White *Inventing Australia* 158-168.

⁹¹ See for instance Harper, Melissa, and Richard White eds. *Symbols of Australia*, or Alison Broinowski’s *The Yellow Lady*.

Voids and vanishing surged thus as the key shadow-narrative to this –ness: being ‘not Asian’ had become the definitive non-category for Australian identity during the first decades of the twentieth century, according to David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska in *Australia’s Asia*.⁹²

Greg Lockhart contends that the geo-political, economic and cultural impact of Asia remains “most notable for its absence” within the default imperial construction of post-imperial Australian historiography.⁹³ It tends to ignore or trivialize anti-imperial movements and the process of decolonisation in Australia’s neighbourhood, along with their post-colonial implications for Australianness. Thus the Indonesian and Vietnamese republics of 1945 “fail to figure as reference points in histories of Australian republicanism”, just as Australian attempts at “counter-revolutionary warfare”, a major state enterprise engineered to suppress national independence movements in its region during the period of decolonisation, feature as another cautiously sustained silence of defensive, Anglophone Australian historiography.⁹⁴

Had India too been reduced to a veritable blank for imperial Australia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, barring the routine empire connections of “cricket, Kipling, tea, the sea route to Europe, a succession of state governors, the British Missionary Society, and the Theosophical Society”,⁹⁵ trade in Australian horses and Indian spices, textiles and textile designs? Was it pygmied into performing a flattering looking glass for the Antipodes, which could serve in season antique orientalia, spiritual exotica or else, barbarous mutiny?⁹⁶ Was this looking glass then tasked to reinforce growth, maturity and modernity as elements fundamentally divergent from what it could ever conjure, and belonging exclusively within the borders of the weltanschauung of white Australianness?

Or, had India exceeded the colonial script of blanks and borders in its connections and conversations with Australia between 1890 and 1950? Did it emerge as the questioning, the unsettling, the tarkik⁹⁷ other that kindled dialogue between diverse imaginings of Australia –

⁹² Walker and Sobocinska Introduction *Australia’s Asia* 15-17.

⁹³ Lockhart “Absenting Asia” 273.

⁹⁴ Lockhart 283-284.

⁹⁵ Broinowski *The Yellow Lady* 38.

⁹⁶ In his chapter titled “The Antique Orient”, David Walker locates the impact of Indo-Australian connections through much of the nineteenth century in the empire-etched orbit of trade, the orientalist tropes of antique, spiritual, tourist-seducing India, along with the 1857 uprising and alleged mangling of inoffensive British women and their innocent children by mutinous, barbarous Indian soldiers during the upheaval, reported with righteous imperial outrage in Australian newspapers.

See Walker “The Antique Orient.” *Anxious Nation* 13-25.

⁹⁷ “Tarkik” is a qualifier derived from “tarka”, a Sanskrit term connoting structured debate and reasoning on a subject, between scholars representing diverse, even counter schools of thought. Tarka not only refutes passive submission to a hypothesis or the much-advertised post-/truths; as an epistemological category, it stretches the borders of reasoned argument to include engagement through perceptual empathy and the accommodation of alternatives, including counters, in all their asymmetries. Arindam Chakrabarti aligns tarka and kalpana as conceptual categories in conversation, kalpana etymologically being the power to build or compose which tends

dominant and obscured? Could it have re-created Australianness as a tarkasamsara⁹⁸ constellated around the conversations, contestations, continuities and ruptures of these diverse imaginings? Could Australia's India as envisioned by Deakin be finally contained within colonial grids, and how and why did Mollie Skinner's anuvadic, exilic models of Australianness home in on India? In seeking answers to these questions in the thesis, I want to insert India as a medium of transition and transgressions for imagining Australianness in the plural. In the process, I hope to disturb and add to the existing canon of influences – such as the Anglosphere, Europe, or antithetical Asia – considered crucial to its making in the monochrome.

Returning to voids and vanishing and their role in forging Australianness, Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra had based the seminal *Dark Side of the Dream* on what they term a “schizoid nation” and its obsession with the absented, exploited Other – aborigines, in their book – as printed in the politics, popular culture, myths and literature comprising the canon of Australianness.⁹⁹ They observe:

If amnesia [or the routine of blanking] is a defining quality of the Australian mind, then the proper history of that mind should be the history of an absence of history . . . The history of Australian literature [and of Australianness] is determined and deformed by precisely this problem . . . the hebephrenic search for what was purely and uniquely ‘Australian’ ignored . . . [the] essential intertextuality, and instead tried to isolate Australianness as the autonomous residue left after all alien elements had been subtracted. (14-15)

In this lust for purity or parochialism of Australianness, Humphrey McQueen had read “British chauvinism intensified by its close geographical proximity to Asia” and a closed,

to “imagination” in translation, as detailed in the fourth chapter of the thesis. Tarka and kalpana are both medial categories premised on the hunger for alternative realities.

See Chakrabarti, Arindam. “Nyaya-satarka Bimalkrishner mityunjayi swapna” [“Death-defiant Dream of Tarkik Bimalkrishna of the Nyaya Tradition”]. *Anandabazar Patrika* [Kolkata] 9 June 2015: 4. Print.

In positing India as a tarkik other, I emphasize its agency as a creatrix of alternatives for the debates around Australianness during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and hope to uncage India from the empire-induced kitsch of the docile, different Orient when discoursing Indo-Australian connections.

⁹⁸ “Tarkasamsara”, a Sanskrit term found in *Vivriti Vimarshini* (CE 1020) by Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta (c. 960-1020 CE), compounds “tarka” and “samsara”, the latter etymologically denoting “that which shifts or departs”. “Samsara” connotes the fragile, worldwide web of exile and belonging as experienced by entangled individuals. I invoke “tarkasamsara” as a metaphor in refrain throughout my thesis, in the context of exploring the India-resonant, translational/transnational imaginings of Australianness between 1890 and 1950. “Tarka” provokes conversations and churning between divergent positions and schools of thought, “samsara” rests on transits, unsettlement and unfinishedness. Australianness when perceived as tarkasamsara, becomes a weave always in the un/making, and threaded in dialogue, perceptual empathy and engagement with various others, rather than by race or kinship.

⁹⁹ Hodge and Mishra. Preface. *Dark Side of the Dream* ix-xix. xiv.

repressively homogenous, suckling society¹⁰⁰ wallowing in its radically expulsive version of fraternalism. The obverse of that lust recurs in the trope of a soured dream, a lack, a great emptiness, noted by critics as far apart as radical nationalist Nettie Palmer in 1937¹⁰¹ and post-imperial Copenhagen-based Australian Studies scholar Stuart Ward in 2010. In their book, Ward and Curran located the void in the bereaved bewilderment of mounting an Asia-oriented, post-colonial avatar of Australianness “wrenched clean from its British foundations”.¹⁰² Could the “post-”al condition entail marginality and obsolescence, tethered as it is to the form and meaning inflicted by a now-past original?

Purity came stapled to the promise of an elegiac shape-shifting blank haunting Australianness when projected in the singular. Such an Australianness smoulders with ambivalence and alternatives, and tends to erupt into dissident plurals. Historians like Ken Dallas and Alan Frost roused contrarian perceptions regarding the settling of the settler colony in books such as *Trading Posts or Penal Colonies* and *Convicts and Empire: A Naval Question*.¹⁰³ Was Australia conceived primarily as a penal colony by the empire, they queried? Or was Sydney designed to serve as trading post and naval base for possible use in an empire war with France around control of the eastern trade? Was Australia then “settled as part of a wider commercial expansion by Britain into the Pacific” which aimed at securing the sea-routes that swept past Australia to China, along with eventual control of the eastern trade?¹⁰⁴

Also, which event, which year represents the originary moment for the settler nation? Is it 26 January 1788, when the first British fleet landed in the continent? Or the first day of 1901, when six self-governing British colonies federated to form the Commonwealth of Australia? Or April 1915, when the Anzacs (abbreviated form of Australia and New Zealand Army Corps) landed in Gallipoli on behalf of the empire and anointed Australia a blood-baptised nation? Should the founding moment be shifted instead to 1942, when the Federation formally adopted the Statute of Westminster allowing it legislative autonomy from the British Parliament and

¹⁰⁰ McQueen, Humphrey. *A New Britannia*. Ringwood: Penguin, 1980. 42. Print.

¹⁰¹ Palmer, Nettie. *Fourteen Years: Extracts from a Private Journal, 1925-1939*. Melbourne: Meanjin Press, 1948. 41. Print.

I shall return to Nettie Palmer’s comment on empty spaces in the national imagination in my second chapter, in the context of the Alfred Deakin commemorative lecture series broadcast on Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 2001. See p. 134 of this thesis.

¹⁰² Curran and Ward *The Unknown Nation* 7.

¹⁰³ See Dallas, K. M. *Trading posts or penal colonies: the commercial significance of Cook’s New Holland route to the Pacific*. Hobart: Fuller’s Bookshop, 1969. Print.

Also, Frost, Alan. *Convicts and Empire: A Naval Question, 1776-1811*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980. Print.

¹⁰⁴ Day *Claiming A Continent* 29.

For history debates surrounding the designs of the British in settling Australia, see Day 29-31.

Government? The questions, some of them raised in *Mistaken Identity*,¹⁰⁵ point to the profound unease and ambivalence around Australianness remaining captive to its British legacy. As John Hirst deduces, “Australia is therefore an oddity among the post-colonial nations in that the date of its independence cannot be definitely known”.¹⁰⁶

Despite the ironic deduction, token imperialist Alfred Deakin, along with colleagues like Edmund Burton, had worked during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries towards forging a Federation that could resist the destiny of remaining the imperial province. Since Deakin, the British connection had been increasingly contested through the World Wars and decolonisation in Australia’s neighbourhood: journalist and author Gavin Souter warned against the continent remaining a “Land of Echoes”,¹⁰⁷ John Pilger urged that breaking free of the imperial past constitutes the only future course,¹⁰⁸ while Stephen Muecke insisted on a republican post-nationalism which “necessarily means we have to stop telling stories in the Oedipal way”.¹⁰⁹ Once unleashed from an exclusive British past, Australianness emerges a fissured, ravine territory seamed with contending histories – white settler and indigenous, penal and bourgeois royalist, Asian and European. It tends then to take the postal turn that salvages the shadow-narratives and surges with post-national, non-centric, and Asian possibilities.

How do descendants of the aborigines who saw the first British fleet remember 1788, 1901 or 1942; do these years resonate as nation-founding milestones for them? More importantly, as Stephen Castles and his co-authors dare to ask, “Was a nation founded at all? After all, our monarch still lives overseas”.¹¹⁰ Bypassing the republican alternative or Greg Lockhart’s lure of an independent national narrative,¹¹¹ they posit a locally engaged, multi-nodal possibility of Australianness which could make the margins matter. Such a variant would have to be (trans)formed by a synthesis of “the best elements of national Australian tradition [the urge for a “fair go” or social justice according to the authors], the most important postulates of multiculturalism [e.g. the cosmopolitan streak and promise of cultural self-determination], and the needs and interests of the broad majority of the population”. In a departure from the exclusionary politics of the nation-state, they envision Australianness as creating a “community

¹⁰⁵ Castles, Stephen, Bill Cope, Mary Kalantzis, and Michael Morissey. *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia*. Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988. 4. Print.

¹⁰⁶ Hirst, John. “Empire, State, Nation.” *Australia’s Empire*. Ed. Deryck M. Schreuder and Stuart Ward. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 141-162. 160. Print.

¹⁰⁷ Souter, Gavin. “Land of Echoes.” *Lion and Kangaroo: the Initiation of Australia*. 2nd ed. Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2000. 359-391. Print.

¹⁰⁸ Pilger, John. *A Secret Country*. London; Sydney: Vintage, 1990. 355. Print.

¹⁰⁹ Muecke, Stephen. *No Road (bitumen all the way)*. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997. 225. Print.

¹¹⁰ Castles, et al *Mistaken Identity* 4.

¹¹¹ Lockhart “Absenting Asia” 273.

without nation” which could shift and adapt to care for, engage the hitherto annulled – women, ethnic groups, aborigines, the unemployed, industrial casualties, the financially, culturally and socially deprived, and so on.¹¹² Exposing the limits of “Australia Unlimited”,¹¹³ John Pilger unfolds Australia “as a land half-won, its story half-told”.¹¹⁴ His Australianness comprises restoring the secret narratives, whispers, and their dispossessed bearers, including testimonials of anger and anguish of the indigenous “first Australians”,¹¹⁵ and unsung ordeals of the colonial convicts he terms to be “white slaves”.¹¹⁶

Such shadow-narratives lurk to fissure and dissolve even the bush ethos, that much-circulated insignia of Australianness. The bush legend of the 1890s had been virulently espoused as the dreamtime of White Australia by none other than Vance Palmer (1885-1959) – author, critic and forbidding arbiter of literary tastes in Australia through the first half of the twentieth century, to whom I return in the third chapter of the thesis. Mollie Skinner found herself pitted in a battle of books and legends against this dedicated keeper of the Lawson-Furphy tradition, as unfolded in that chapter. Yet his exclusivist, increasingly ossified world of men¹¹⁷ from the outback has been critiqued as isolationist fantasy, removed in space and time from the realities of a majorly urban, post First World War Australian society.¹¹⁸ The famously home-grown bush legend with its disdain for the colonial cringe crumbles from this perspective to little else than the embalmed aborted dream of a sentient socialist commune, dreamt by an Antipodean intellectual minority that had outsourced its socialism from early twentieth century British thinkers Shaw, Wells, Chesterton and Orage.¹¹⁹ These Australianists remained

¹¹² Castles, et al 147-148.

¹¹³ In the chapter titled “Australia Unlimited”, Geoffrey Blainey re-evokes the complacent kitsch of the Antipodean nation-state as the land of the “endless horizon” defying limits, in terms of its vast spaces, standard of living, political stability and “attractive tempo of life”. See Blainey, Geoffrey. *This land is all horizons: Australian fears and visions*. Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2001. 15. Print.

In *Australian Nationalism: A Documentary History*, Stephen Alomes and Catherine Jones contend that “Australia Unlimited”, the popular nationalistic slogan of the 1920s, suggested a national achievement measured chiefly in terms of “men, money and markets”, i.e. in material, imperial and managerial terms.

See Alomes, Stephen, and Catherine Jones, eds. “Australia Unlimited (Almost).” *Australian Nationalism: A Documentary History*. North Ryde, New South Wales: Angus & Robertson, 1991. 182-201. 182. Print.

¹¹⁴ Pilger 2.

¹¹⁵ Pilger 5. Also see

Reynolds, Henry. *Why Weren't We Told?: A personal search for the truth about our history*. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.

¹¹⁶ Pilger 95.

¹¹⁷ Vance Palmer had authored a novel titled *The World of Men*, published from London in 1915.

¹¹⁸ Walker, David. *Dream and Disillusion: A search for Australian cultural identity*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976. 196-201. Print.

Also see Walter, James. “Defining Australia.” *Images of Australia*. Ed. Gillian Whitlock and David Carter. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992. 7-22. 15. Print.

¹¹⁹ Walker *Dream and Disillusion* 210.

ensconced in invented memories and found themselves increasingly estranged from their contemporary, early twentieth century Australia.

In 1943, Manning Clark read the bush legend as veneer for the white settlers' exploitative destruction of land and environment. Further, he suspected that its promise of mateship could barely bridge the rift between the rampaging rural pioneers and their liberal urban counterparts' Europe-emulating Australianness.¹²⁰ Australianism radiated by the bush legend, with its ideal of innocent other-phobic happiness and the mate-snarl of the collectivist bully, constituted "an anti-civilized movement", according to the editor of *Australian Civilization*, Peter Coleman.¹²¹ Coleman's edited anthology traces the Australian civilization, the point of entry of this anthology for exploring Australianness, in alternative ecologies – of the history of religion, free thought, education, culture and business with their niches in the arts, architecture, the universities, cities, law and Parliament. Hodge and Mishra argue that the bushman, represented in the chiefly literary stereotype of the inarticulate, misogynist, emotionally and intellectually challenged white male, was crafted as the surrogate subaltern. This stereotype is premised on the "symbolic annihilation" of women, aborigines and Asian migrants from the domain of Australianness as endorsed by the legend.¹²² Yet, given his proximity to certain other sets of marginalized Australians, like the mad, the criminals or the dispossessed, the bushman is offered as an object for gaze, and never as an ideal to be imitated by those who produce and consume the legend – the urban middle class.¹²³

As I delineate in the third chapter on Mollie Skinner's encounter with Australianness and the mutations she planted, the bush legend canonically embeds its own subversion. Its critique has always already been performed in canonical short stories set in the bush, such as Henry Lawson's "The Drover's Wife" (1892) or Barbara Baynton's "The Chosen Vessel" (1896), both featuring the men as absent or vicious, and the women either as exhausted survivors of the legend, or dead victims of the violence the bushmen unleash. Despite her alleged loyalty, I investigate in the third chapter how Mollie Skinner, whose life as well as that of her brother Jack lurched perilously close to the legend, outed the legend as gullible gazer fantasy. She had seeded her dissent in her memoir and earlier fiction as well by queering the stereotypes, what

¹²⁰ Clark, Manning. "A Letter to Tom Collins." 1943. *Occasional Writings and Speeches*. Melbourne: Fontana, 1980. 91-93. Print.

¹²¹ Coleman, Peter. "Introduction: The New Australia." *Australian Civilization: A Symposium*. Ed. Peter Coleman. Sydney: F. W. Cheshire, 1962. 1-11. 4. Print.

¹²² Hodge and Mishra. Preface. *Dark Side of the Dream* ix-xix. xv.

¹²³ For accessing the stereotype of the bushman as an infinitely ambiguous carrier of Australianness in the exclusions he makes and unmakes, see Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* xvi & 172-173.

with the introduction of female larrikins and bushmen disruptive of whiteness as the arch-value. Skinner unravelled Australianness as potential terra incognita open to less rooted, less exclusive possibilities.

Besides featuring as the regular absence within the defining limits of Australianness as shown above, Asia especially in its rising avatar was invoked of course as indispensable shadow-narrative during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It roused phobia and fascination, and the self-fashioning of Australia as “an innocent and vulnerable middle power culturally and politically different from its region”.¹²⁴ Only since 1960s had Australianness begun to take an overt Asian turn beyond the routine of disconnection and otherisation. Even then, according to Mads Clausen, this post-imperial, regionally attuned moment of Australianness – apparently a marker of the imperially inhibited, long-thwarted emergence of authentic nationhood in the Antipodes – cast decolonised Asia as little more than a backdrop or mirror “held up to measure Australia’s progress, maturity and modernity”, or at best a routine talisman for chartering the neighbourhood sans Britain. Regional perspectives on Asia, based on mutual deep knowledge and transnational narrations of cultural contacts and cross-fertilizations, were conspicuously absent.¹²⁵ “Peopled from all over Asia”, runs the title of the Prologue to *The Lucky Country*. The book, written in 1964 on the cusp of the ‘Asian turn’ and acclaimed to have catalysed the change, was designed as sardonic requiem to “what the huge continent was like in those early days in the nineteen sixties before it was peopled from all over Asia”.¹²⁶

It is in this riven and fissured territory of Australianness, pockmarked with blanks, borders, parochialism, dilemmas and shadow-narratives, that I wish to intervene by recuperating some of the connections, combinations and confluences with India between 1890 and 1950. How was India projected by Australians during the Raj? Were there plural projections, some of which exceeded the epistemes of empire? Who projected it thus and why? What dangers and possibilities did the projections entail for the Australian national imaginary, its myths and –nesses, contested histories and margins? I engage with such queries in the thesis, with special reference to Alfred Deakin and Mollie Skinner.

Curating the confluences and conversations might help uncage Australia, and even India, from iconographic pantheons installed respectively by Antipodean settlers or the Raj. As suggested above, India could not be ghettoed either as a blank or a neatly otherised shadow-

¹²⁴ Lockhart “Absenting Asia” 260.

¹²⁵ Clausen, Mads. “Donald Horne Finds Asia.” *Australia’s Asia* 298-321. 316-317.

¹²⁶ Horne, Donald. *The Lucky Country*. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1964. 13. Print.

narrative for Australianness during this period. Despite Deakin's ardent attempt at orientalist kitsch, the India of his texts resists being pygmied to a space enslaved by transcendentalism and matters of religion. Instead it looms as a witness to the plurals and histories he had banished from his dream of Australianness on the eve of the movement for Federation since 1890, as traced in the second chapter.

Skinner's India too brews into an ideological hazard in excess of colonial enclaves of the antique or exotic Orient. It becomes for instance, a space of non-didactic interactivity for her protagonist Tucker, the unabashedly bicultural Indian-Australian and reluctant Anzac who idolizes the much-forgotten failure Emperor Humayun and explores the multiple languages, realities, tenses and architectures spiralled around him in British India. The subcontinent had morphed into the liberating exilic space of self-expression, conversations and creativity for Tucker's author as well, as detailed in the untinkered manuscript of Skinner's posthumously published, heavily edited autobiography *The Fifth Sparrow* (1972) and in her debut novel *Letters of a V.A.D.* (1918), a veiled testimonial. I explore in the third and fourth chapters why and how Mollie Skinner's India wove her Australianness as a text in transits, exile, transnational narrations and many voices, in excess of the representational monochrome and inside/outside limits of paranoid nationalism.¹²⁷

Had Australia's India, then, been crucial to untying the Antipodean -ness from an inward, ethnocentric obsession during this period? Could it have seeded inclusiveness and engagement in a project avowedly dedicated to exclusions and separations? Did it induce currencies other than fear, difference and deferral for coping with the other, especially the oriental other, and trigger alternative cultural and ideological possibilities for Australianness? In retrieving the defiant pluralities of Australia's Indian pasts, I interrogate imperial tropes of estrangement such as phobia and fascination, and reclaim India at the least as a healing refuge. Not only for Skinner's angst of many failures, but for the many dormant fragments, even subversive tokens of Australianness. Such subversions often lay in re-webbing the weave of exile and belonging with trans-factors.

Trans-factors need not always be transgressive. Despite hermetic aspirations, the Federation since early years of its inception had been predominantly imagined as a function of trans-tendencies, whether in terms of the British empire, Europe or the Asia-Pacific. I posit

¹²⁷ Ghassan Hage uses the term "paranoid nationalism" for a particularly virulent variety of Australianness derived from the white colonial fear and exclusion of various others, a trend that remains richly resurgent in twenty first century Australia, he observes.

See Hage, Ghassan. *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for hope in a shrinking society*. Annandale, New South Wales: Pluto Press, 2003. Print.

India as Australia's trans-factor with a difference, as home to the banished plurals of Australianness including its hunger for the sacred, and to its multiplied iconographies, visible and invisibilised. In the process, I investigate if India between 1890 and 1950 could have implanted in Australianness the radioactive streak given to ever-mutant, even recycled logics of connection, disconnection and transformation, and set off the shifts, unmaking, tarka, translations and unrest of imagined alterities in its relation with the trans-factors.

The trans- tangle of Australianness, and the India twist

The spatial history of Australianness has been forged in “active engagement with the road and the horizon”, proposes Paul Carter; “like a journey”, he observes, “it opens up the possibility of going back”, of not taking much-traversed routes, and remains as open-ended as an unfinished map, open to unsettling the past received from imperial history.¹²⁸ In the introduction to his seminal book, Carter thus intertwines his pluripotent, exploratory spatial history of the Antipodes with travelling.

Travel had for long woven the tenacious trans-possibilities into imagining Australianness. A liminal category, travel implies crossing of boundaries, and transits and locations “betwixt and between”.¹²⁹ Yet in the very crossing of borders, travel defines nations by seeking out those national boundaries, and situating itself in a discourse of difference between self and other, between the national and the foreign.¹³⁰ Travel, as much an experience as mythic metaphor, had been central to the making of Antipodean white settler iconography since before the formation of the Federation. Laying claim to the continent did not only involve the dispossession of Australian aborigines, but also an appropriation of their English neologism “walkabout”, coined to explain to the European intruders the aboriginal relationship to the land. Even as aborigines were being exorcised or increasingly confined during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “the ability to go walkabout [within and beyond Australia] became a sign of the privileged Westerner”.¹³¹

So much so, that the explorer and itinerant bush-workers, such as the drovers, shearers, swagmen and miners, were catapulted to becoming heroic icons of Australianness; Australia's outback of the late nineteenth century was defined by this nomad tribe, their isolation and travel. Not only had they been iconized as Australians fit to be enshrined in national legend,

¹²⁸ Carter, Paul. “Introduction: A Cake of Portable Soup.” *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History*. 2010 ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. xxii-xxiii. Print.

¹²⁹ Pesman, Ros, David Walker, and Richard White. Introduction. *The Oxford Book of Australian Travel Writing*. Ed. Pesman, Walker and White. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996. ix-xxiv. xvii. Print.

¹³⁰ White, Richard. “Australian Odysseys: Modern Myths of Travel.” *Reading Down Under* 409-418. 410.

¹³¹ White “Australian Odysseys” 413.

by the likes of canonical authors Joseph Furphy and Russel Ward.¹³² Outlier Mollie Skinner cast Jack Grant, an expatriate, explorer, swagman and pioneer fused into one, as the protagonist of her first Australia-based novel, *The Boy in the Bush*. Tucker turns out an explorer nomad in India.

Skinner had also come up with a spin on the nation-making trope of the explorer/bushworker. She introduced a disruptive iconography of female explorers and bush-homed larrikins like Letty in *Black Swans*, and a blitzkrieg of horse-riding female travellers and pioneers from Western Australia comprising Margaret Hamersley and Deborah Hackett among others, in the memoir *The Fifth Sparrow*. This, despite Richard White's take on Australian odysseys: "women travelling in Australia remained an anomaly; . . . within Australia— as elsewhere— mobility was defined as masculine and settling down as feminine".¹³³ *Where Skies Are Blue* (1946), Skinner's last book published in her lifetime, belongs to the rainbow tribe of travellers in the bush, including diasporic British aristocrats, German immigrants, Irish bushrangers, female gangsters, murderous criminals, eccentric bushwomen and men, aborigines resistant and pliant, and indentured labourers set free. Many among that diverse tribe switch identities, gain afterlives and get entangled with unlikely others while traversing the bush. Travel becomes their locus for reclaiming alternative possibilities, polyphony and the play around transgressions, cross-fertilization, miscegenation, national identity. And Australianness gains for them the shape of nomad travel.

Travel then, even within Australia, could become trans-resonant in its evocation of liminal, and sometimes forbidden, possibilities. At least in Skinner's fiction, it could unsettle returned expatriates, immigrants and women with the desire for distance without destination – a rite of Australianness, of connecting to the land. And Skinner's Australia-based novels, as I contend in the third and fourth chapters, were possibly influenced by her itinerary as a nurse in India from 1913 to 1917. Travel foregrounds mobility to be as indispensable as frontier sessility to stoking Australianness. Such travel did not always remain devout to national boundaries. Since the late eighteenth century arrival of white settlers, Australianness had been as intensely debated, forged and re-cast through overseas travel.

Overseas travel amplified trans-possibilities. The possibilities had stuck mostly to formulae, though. Travel-writing by Australians, for example, tends to spill over into the boundaries of other genres, such as autobiography, social commentary, journalism, war

¹³² See Joseph Furphy's sprawling novel *Such is Life*. Sydney: The Bulletin Newspaper Company, 1903. Print.; also, Russel Ward's history *The Australian Legend*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958. Print.

¹³³ White "Australian Odysseys" 415.

correspondence and war fiction.¹³⁴ Deakin's travelogues *Irrigated India* and *Temple and Tomb* are as autobiographical as they comprise a journalist's social commentary on British India and the pre-British subcontinent fossilised in stasis and stereotypes – an imperialist binary he revels in. Skinner's autobiographical texts – be it *The Fifth Sparrow* culminating in the apotheosis of her meeting and collaboration with Lawrence, or her debut novel and veiled testimonial *Letters* – overlap with travel-writing: the author had moved frequently between England, Australia and India. All of Skinner's war fiction, including *Letters of a V.A.D.*, *Tucker Sees India* and *WX – Corporal Smith* (1941), can be read as fictive and sometimes picaresque travelogues set in exotic territory; Tucker turns as keen a tourist in India as he remains a reluctant Anzac through the tour. In a way, my thesis explores literatures of travel which unmake the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, and unsettles garrisoned spaces into liminal play. Deakin's Australia pure borrows from his India, and many of Skinner's protagonists travel overseas to celebrate their Australianness while becoming bicultural polyglots.

Again, in defiance of outpost isolation from the centre, white Australians in their overseas travel-writing sought to print their tracks, and Australianness, in European traditions of transnational travel.¹³⁵ Deakin, for example, chose to locate his India travel and travelogues in the lineage of European orientalist routes through and writings on the subcontinent: *Temple and Tomb* remains an intertext in conversation with Max Mueller, Edwin Arnold, Rudyard Kipling, Thomas De Quincey and Thomas Carlyle, among others. The pilgrimage and the Grand Tour were two much-historicized metaphors of pan-European travel evoked by the Antipodeans as formulae to inscribe their routes across Europe¹³⁶ and at times, its empire. Deakin's travelogues proclaimed his pilgrimage to the sprawling British India webbed into an imperial cartographic network of irrigation channels and railway tracks. Since the nineteenth century, the Grand Tour of Europe gained an alluring, masculinist variant as “travel further afield – to the Middle East, Africa, Asia – came to be embroiled in the imperialist adventure”.¹³⁷ Such travel might have helped extol the status of Australians as colonisers by proxy, at the least.

The empire had come to cast a long shadow on the formulae of trans-possibilities for Australian overseas travel during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite subversive self-insertion in the traditionally male public realm of Australian travel across the

¹³⁴ Pesman, Walker, and White “Introduction” xiii.

¹³⁵ Pesman, Walker, and White “Introduction” xvii.

¹³⁶ White “Australian Odysseys” 410-411; Pesman, Walker, and White “Introduction” xvii.

¹³⁷ Pesman, Walker, and White “Introduction” xxix.

subcontinent, Skinner could not escape colonial entanglement during her India days. The toast of Delhi sahibs, Skinner, also a nurse at the elite Hindu Rao Hospital reserved for British officials, had found pleasures of her travel predicated on the “pleasures of imperialism”.¹³⁸ Her independence, authority and freedom to gaze at the local other stemmed in the first place from her collusion with imperial structures of power in British India. In *Tucker Sees India* and *WX – Corporal Smith*, Skinner’s Australian adventurers Tucker and Kit Smith took up their Grand Tours across India and Libya in all piety as imperialist assignments during the First and Second World Wars respectively.

Another related formula for Australians’ overseas travel, as observed by historians Ros Pesman, David Walker and Richard White, is as follows: “The sense of being Australian for non-Aboriginal Australians has involved a comparison with somewhere else a world away – most often England or a generalised Europe, but also frequently Asia or the United States”.¹³⁹ The trans-category of overseas travel eventually turned self-referential for Australians and their ideas of Australianness, and especially so in an age of empire, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While England qualified as the much-mythicized Home and generic Europe provided the measuring standard, Americas promised the future and Asia was evoked as the great mystery and neighbourhood threat, as well as a tense and possibility ever deferred.

My thesis marks an intervention in this context. It attempts an analysis of India-Australia entanglements, as represented in literary connections and traveller’s accounts of India from the 1890s till 1950. Both Deakin and Skinner had travelled extensively through India during this period, and I explore the impact wrought by the languages, literatures, stories, histories and epistemologies from the subcontinent in kindling the divergent Australias of their texts and politics. My focus is on the imaginative encounter with India, and the shocks, dislocations, translations, refuge and yearnings it spelt for the literary traveller from Australia. In the process, I hope to bring a new critical vocabulary and analytical framework to the pasts and palimpsests that constitute both Australia’s India and the Australianness(es) it had possibly triggered. For Australia’s India sometimes exceeded the above-mentioned formulae of representation and response. It could unravel the imperial binaries of centre/periphery or coloniser/colonised for an Australian traveller, even from the age of empire.

¹³⁸ Indira Ghose uses the term “pleasures of imperialism” to refer to the network of privileges and protection extended to English women during their nineteenth century colonial travel; I have applied Ghose’s phrase to the experiences of a white woman from a settler colony employed with an imperial nursing service in early twentieth century British India, where she was extolled as the pukka British memsahib.

See Ghose, Indira. Conclusion. *Women Travellers in Colonial India: The Power of the Female Gaze*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998. 158-166. 160. Print.

¹³⁹ Pesman, Walker, and White “Introduction” ix.

As part of formula the Australian traveller could play at being both coloniser (in terms of race) and colonised (in terms of territorial sovereignty) in the imperial game: “So Australian travel writing can readily encompass both the centre’s journey to the periphery – as a modern western traveller explores the ‘unknown’ [i.e. Asian and African territories] – and the periphery’s journey to the centre – as the provincial explores the metropolis”.¹⁴⁰ India, however, could not be made to play the periphery to Australia’s centre even by Alfred Deakin the unabashed orientalist, however whetted his urge to cage the subcontinent in colonial stereotypes of the seductive, also repellent and presently insignificant other done up in ancient mystique, in his travelogues. As explored in the second chapter, the subcontinent in various avatars emerged the lifelong pivot to his narratives of self and nation. *Irrigated India* and *Temple and Tomb* performed as much Deakin’s overt pilgrimage to the British empire as his concurrent counter-pilgrimage to an India pre-existing the empire and resonant still in architectural sites and spiritual centres. By playing sly witness to and trustee of the pluralities and alternatives he had expunged from his monochromatic vision of the Federation, India etched the limits to Deakin’s vision of (white) Australianness. Deakin travelled to London to politically negotiate the conditions of Federation formation with the Colonial Office. Yet India, indispensable shadow-narrative and fecund reserve of sacred-secular mythology to Deakin’s Australia, had decentred the alleged Home and Centre to moor Deakin’s national imaginary.

Skinner travelled and served in much of India as part of an imperial nursing service. Yet her un-centred, un-cumulative travel through the subcontinent finally exceeded the colonial framework; it sought neither to possess nor to charter. The travel unleashed in her late fiction a tribe of unhomed Australian protagonists rooted in routes, displacements and trans-habits. As explored in the fourth chapter, their Australianness gets unmade and made while traversing India, Libya or the pukka homemade bush, in a crucible of translations and tarka i.e. convergences, ruptures, dialogue and entanglements with various others situated across the differentials of language, place, colour and religion. In their hunger for outsides, impurities and engagement with alterities, Skinner’s heterogeneous group of Australians in *Tucker Sees India*, *WX – Corporal Smith* and *Where Skies are Blue* dissolve the centre-periphery geometry and are dispossessed of the coloniser’s gaze; they do not inflict an imperial, or for that matter Antipodean centre, as the still point of the turning world they travel. Nor do Skinner’s Australians fetishize or demonize India and Libya. While Kit Smith’s routes through Libya translate into a pilgrimage to his beloved, Tucker is able to turn his Raj assignment of espionage

¹⁴⁰ Pesman, Walker, and White “Introduction” xii.

to a Grand Tour without templates through India, which he receives as a land of plural, forgotten routes and unfinished maps. The imperial tour morphs into a tirtha – etymologically a “threshold” in Sanskrit, rendered in English as a site of pilgrimage – as explored in the fourth chapter; it releases Tucker into an alternative, querying kalpana of Australianness kindled by routes and empathetic engagement with various others, across limits of nation and the empire.

If India inspired the emergence of this non-centric, worldwidewebbed model of Australianness as the central nomadic motif wandering from text to text in Mollie Skinner’s late novels, as I contend in the thesis, it had also decolonised her oeuvre from cowering allegiance to aridly masculinist, early twentieth century mythologies of the bushman and the Anzac. *The Boy in the Bush*, *Black Swans* and *Tucker Sees India* build on her interrogation and subversion of the root-reeking, much circulated national mythologies of Australianness, and in the third and fourth chapters I investigate the role of India in catalyzing the interrogation and interpolations.

Indeed, Skinner crafts Australianness as a gift of exile. Her Australians, whether in *Black Swans*, *WX – Corporal Smith*, *Tucker Sees India* or *Where Skies are Blue*, travel, translate and inhabit a linguistic Babel. Tucker and Kit Smith thrive, and are twice-born as pukka Antipodeans in diaspora and cross-cultural exchange; many of the bush-honed Australians of *Where Skies Are Blue* turn out to be unhomed exiles from someplace else. As I argue in the third chapter, Skinner’s inadvertent sojourn in India at a moment of personal crisis and exhaustion had possibly healed and set her free, socially and as an author. She outed her despair and margins in the semi-autobiographical *Letters of a V.A.D.*, written during her First World War years of exile in the subcontinent. Memories of India might have inspired Skinner to release “exile” from its etymological and trans-factorial grammar of loss, dispersal and isolation.

Etymologically, “exile” derives from Latin “exilium” denoting “banishment”, and white Australia of this period had invented for itself the convention of an exiled outpost mourning its desolate distance from the imperial centre. In *Ashtadhyayi*, the seminal Sanskrit text on grammarology composed in the 6th to 5th century BCE, Indian grammarian-philosopher Panini had however proposed departure and dislocation as an existential relation with origins and centres, anticipating an other take on “exile” as a not-necessarily-pain-and-guilt-ridden rite of transit to new locations, connections and births.¹⁴¹ Such a take resonates with Skinner’s late novels where “exile” emerges as a liberating trans-category, even episteme, of displacement,

¹⁴¹ I delve further into Panini’s take on departures in the fourth chapter on Mollie Skinner’s exilic novels.

fluidities and fusions, as explored in the fourth chapter. It grows indispensable to re-imagining her Australianness as an after-Babel¹⁴² – the post-colonial healscape of belonging gathered in conversations with, translations of rainbow margins and pluralities, beginning with Skinner’s India.

However much its “-ness” might seem to have been captive to the hermetic “less”, Australia had always ridden on the trans-factors, even in more normative narratives of its pasts. Australian colonies are settled to have been founded and settled by the British, in the shadow of international affairs such as the American Revolution (1775-1783) and French Revolution (1789-1799), and under the gaze of competing imperial powers such as the Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese and the French.¹⁴³ And settler Australia’s phobia and fascination around Asia have been imprinted by broader transnational patterns coeval with its foundation in the late eighteenth century, such as the loss of the Americas and the subsequent turn of Britain and the broader ‘West’ to creating a new trading empire in the ‘East’.¹⁴⁴

As evident thus far into the introduction, the trans-factor and correlate that pervaded, even defined the late nineteenth and early twentieth century imaginary of Australianness besides travel and exile, remained the British empire and Australia’s status as its settler colony. Economically, strategically and racially, imperial networks had become indispensable to white Australia of the period, and being Australian induced dual loyalties to nation and empire. Yet who were they – white settler Australians must have wondered, perched on an edge of their own making – civilizational co-partners and collaborators in colonisation, or colonial country cousins? As “outsiders who were also on the inside”, Australian colonial identities grew hybrid, fractured and complex,¹⁴⁵ like being unequally British, Australian and Irish to begin with.

Since the formation of the Federation, the qualifier “colonial” had begun to erupt into various postal mutations in the Antipodean context,¹⁴⁶ with occasions of complicity,

¹⁴² The received interpretation of the Biblical myth of the Tower of Babel reads difference as disruption. Biblically, Babel evokes confusion and the failure of human communication owing to linguistic divergence of divine infliction, resulting in dispersal and estrangement of the architects of a God-provoking city and tower (Genesis 11: 1-9). It invokes the prowess of the unitary.

The other Babel or after-Babel, my image for Skinner’s variant of Australianness after George Steiner’s 1975 title on translation, refuses erasures and unitaries. It gathers differences, transits and polyphony into a design of collective, transnational un/making of Australianness; the divergence invites engagement, translations, conversations and cultivation of various others as media for the mongrel making.

¹⁴³ See for instance Day, David. “‘A land seen for the first time’: Claiming and Naming Australia 1788-1829.” *Claiming a Continent* 27-42.

¹⁴⁴ See Walker and Sobocinska Introduction *Australia’s Asia* 12; Day *Claiming a Continent* 31.

¹⁴⁵ Hassam, Andrew. “Neither English nor Foreign: Australian Colonial Identity.” *Through Australian Eyes: Colonial Perceptions of Imperial Britain*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000. 9-29. 26-27. Print.

¹⁴⁶ Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra observe that the postcolonial could signify as much an historical moment as the underside of any colonialism coeval with it, that it is a fissured complex comprising oppositional and complicit possibilities, within settler colonies as well as in colonies like India that had been colonised by a foreign power.

subversion, even defiance and the routine, always, of inextricable enmeshment with the empire and its fate in the Indian Ocean and Pacific neighbourhoods. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra observe that the Antipodes constitute a lapsed colonial power, whose postcolonial converges largely with the neo-colonial. They read Australian “culture and its literature as still determined massively by its complicity with an imperialist enterprise, coexisting in a necessary but compromised symbiosis with moments and forces of subversion and resistance from within the society”.¹⁴⁷ Mads Clausen too, unravels Australia’s post-imperial arrival at an Asia-conscious ‘-ness’ as its British-orphaned response to intersecting transnational factors such as decolonisation, imperial retreat and Cold War in the neighbourhood since the 1950s, rather than a post-colonial moment of radical emergence into the much-awaited, Asia-engaged national assertiveness.¹⁴⁸ Curran and Ward read Australia after empire as a nation chiefly comprising abandoned Britons in a state of “salutary shock”.¹⁴⁹ The authors identify imperial retreat through the 1950s and 1960s to be “the primary catalyst for the rhetoric of new nationalism” in an allegedly post-colonial Australia, much more so than the recognition of new migrants from Asia or a decolonised neighbourhood.¹⁵⁰

Australia then remains inflected by colonial asymmetries, even in the postal mutations. And Australian connections with the Indian subcontinent, especially those being forged during my period of investigation 1890-1950, are habitually filtered through “shared subordination to the machineries of Empire”, as Paul Sharrad observes and Alison Broinowski details.¹⁵¹ As seen above, Deakin and Skinner’s entanglements with India too can be read, and contained, through the prism of empire. Need Australian transnational entanglements during that period be refracted exclusively through prisms and -isms of asymmetrical power relations, such as colonialism and its reactive/imitative binary? Does it remain impossible to outgrow colonial subordination and apprenticeship in revisiting, resurrecting connections and conversations of the colonial period? In this thesis, I want to decentre the discussion of India-Australia

Hodge and Mishra also explore the web of collusion and betrayal weaving the colonial into the post-colonial in their 2005 paper titled “What was Postcolonialism” which I detail in the next chapter. See Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* xi-xii.

Also, Hodge & Mishra. “What was Postcolonialism?” *New Literary History* 36.3 (2005): 375-402. Print.

¹⁴⁷ Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* x & xiv.

¹⁴⁸ Clausen “Donald Horne Finds Asia” 306.

¹⁴⁹ “A Salutary Shock” – runs the title of the first chapter of Curran and Ward’s book *The Unknown Nation*. It is an ironic, acquiescent nod to the state of British Australians caught in a state of free fall into the post-colonial, once imperial retreat from the Asia-Pacific neighbourhood loomed as insistent reality through the 1950s, with local agency in former colonies now claiming global significance.

¹⁵⁰ Curran and Ward *The Unknown Nation* 15.

¹⁵¹ Sharrad, Paul. “Seen Through Other Eyes: Reconstructing Australian Literature in India.” *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (JASAL)* 10 (2010): 1-15. Print.; also Broinowski *The Yellow Lady* 38 as cited above.

engagements from an exclusively colonial lynchpin and map it as an ecology of connections/conversations which exceed strictly colonial frameworks, in terms of politics and epistemology. Weaves in that elusive ecology seem to respond beautifully to Indic categories invoking multi-nodal webs such as tarkasamsara, for instance.

My thesis intervenes in the transnational dimension of Australian Studies; it focuses on the hidden arc of India-links and the transformations they wrought in shaping competing, contemporary imaginaries of the Antipodean nation between 1890 and 1950. In breaking out of the dominant nation-bound limits of discoursing Australianness, I seek to situate this -ness in a matrix of connections rather than the much-mythicized isolation/disconnection from the neighbourhood. The thesis thus participates in a poignant epistemic revision. It displaces the normative Anglophone historiography of Australia – defensive, Asia-occluding, empire-derived – with alternative narratives and not-always-colonial interpretations of Australia’s pasts rewritten in contact and conversations with India. “India” is individuated from the monolith of generic “Asia” for Australian Studies, and trans-formulae for etching Australianness queried.

As much as “trans-” brims with the promise across boundaries, conventions of etching Australianness during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had contained it in kitschy formulae of responses to Empire and Asia, factors intertwined for Australia. At the time of Federation white settler Australia was imagined as satellite orbiting the periphery to an imperial centre, and the image proved tenacious. In the early years of Federation Britain constituted this centre, to be incrementally substituted by the US since the Second World War.¹⁵² According to Mads Clausen and Richard White, political dependency and cultural derivativeness defined post-Federation nationhood,¹⁵³ whether this unquestioning dependency be foisted periodically on Britain, Europe or on US, the neocolonial variant. “‘Endlessly Coming of Age’: Continuities”, reads the title of the seventh chapter of Curran and Ward’s *The Unknown Nation*, in reference to the infantile warden-seeking associated with federated Australia’s trans-tendencies. Comprising “a composite mimic Anglo-American culture” as “the world’s leading followers”¹⁵⁴ entailed of course the other trans-formula – that of raising the barrier against Asia. An Asia refracted through empire had to be quarantined in colonial appropriation/translation, lest it doubly colonise the second-handed, outposted Antipodean colonials and turn the imperial game on its head.

¹⁵² Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* 6; Lockhart “Absenting Asia” 270.

¹⁵³ Clausen “Donald Horne Finds Asia” 311; White “Inventing Australia” ix.

¹⁵⁴ Broinowski *The Yellow Lady* 118.

Whether as part of formula or of the possibilities of boundary-breaking, Asia remained embedded beyond purging in Australian trans-stories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Post-Federation nationhood had been characterised by sustained commentary on Asia-Pacific themes, even as Britain or the US was sought out as persistently as guarantor.¹⁵⁵ Debates simmered on whether to remain an insignificant appendage of the West or to share the variety and richness of Asia as an equal.¹⁵⁶ And above I have explored how Asia, while perennially reinvented as the invasive enemy, was also invoked during this period as incubator for alternative, pluralist possibilities of Australia as a futurist Eurasian trans-nation at the heart of geo-political transformations in a post-imperial, post-war world. It is in the matrix of proliferation of such Asia-catalysed, hitherto invisibilised alterities for imagining Australianness and its transgressive possibilities, that I wish to intervene. Does “trans-” gain the transgressive, transformative edge, the edge of betrayal¹⁵⁷ in the context of Australia’s weaves with India between 1890 and 1950? If the edge, then how and why? – I seek and ask in the thesis.

India had hosted tarka among competing imaginaries of Australianness, between those of Deakin the haloed and the much-forgotten Skinner for instance. Trans-resonant India of the period thus visibilised and unleashed the plural Australias within white Australia and beyond, proliferating possibilities for the Antipodean nation as had been and might yet be imagined into existence through the struggle between such contending traditions and imaginations. As per my research, the trans-zone where India could kindle Australianness as a layered narrative aligned with the multiplication of possible Australias, seems to have been that of translation – of texts and words, events like 1857, ideas, icons and of course, people. Translation was invoked in multiple avatars in the context of Indo-Australian entanglements, as detailed in subsequent chapters with reference to Deakin and Skinner. Much applied as an imperial technology for colonial appropriation, “translation” could also alternatively carve out a zone of betrayal adrift from pre-scripted loyalties to empire, or an exclusivist Australia washed white. In the latter context, it constitutes a release from collusion with the pre-constituted home or original and erupts into after-Babel plurality, in creative betrayal of the original. Such an act of translation embeds an hermeneutics, even ethics, of engagement through exposure and

¹⁵⁵ Walker *Anxious Nation* 12.

¹⁵⁶ Broinowski *The Yellow Lady* 118.

¹⁵⁷ “Betrayal” need not necessarily invoke the stigma of abandonment; rather it could constitute a trans-category of boundary-breaking. As painter Sabina in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* contends, “Betrayal means breaking ranks and going off into the unknown. Sabina knew of nothing more magnificent than going off into the unknown”.

See Kundera, Milan. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Special ed. London: Faber and Faber, 2004. 87. Print.

openness to various others, as well as the forever unfinished business of such engagements across borders and settlements.¹⁵⁸

To what extent had translation remained the imperial ploy in India-Australia encounters between 1890 and 1950? And how far could translation de-provincialise Australianness, initiating it into the neighbourly networks through rites of transit transgression mediation exile inclusion, launching it thereby into other orbits not always tethered to the imperial metropole? I dig into these questions with special reference to Deakin and Skinner in the thesis, seeking to salvage traces of the post-colonial and non-colonial – concurrent with the co-colonial – residual in Australian intertwinings with India during the period.

“Every act of casting out” is also, “as Homi Bhabha would remind us, an act of gathering, of coming together, of being reborn”.¹⁵⁹ Translation, etymologically the rite of ferrying across, invokes the casting out, the dispersal and estrangement from older locations and borders as much as a new emergence relocated, reconstellated. Could India between 1890 and 1950 etch Australianness as a translational emergent re-routed through the neighbourhood, freed in part, at last, from the colonial anxiety of dispersal/displacements – I investigate.

*On the neighbour syndrome as amplified for settler Australia, and the role of neighbouring
India*

The “neighbour” was long constituted as a category fraught with unease; it has since become alibi for otherisation and the right of refusal to engage. In his 2008 title *Violence*, Slavoj Žižek explores the traumatic, even terrorizing dimension of the “neighbour” in Western ethics and epistemology, beginning with the basic Judeo-Christian injunction to “love thy neighbour”. As Žižek notes, both Freud and Lacan insist on the problematic nature of that injunction since the Neighbour is posited as an imponderable that defies engagement in the

¹⁵⁸ For translation as an ethics of unfinished engagement with the foreign and plurals, see Kearney, Richard. “Introduction: Ricoeur’s philosophy of translation.” Introduction. *On Translation*. By Paul Ricoeur. Trans. Eileen Brennan. London and New York: Routledge, 2006. vii-xx. Print. Also, Ricoeur “Translation as challenge and source of happiness.” *On Translation* 3-10. Interestingly, Arindam Chakrabarti’s reading of “sahishnuta” (a Sanskrit term usually rendered as “tolerance”), as a crucial category for various schools of Indian ethics and epistemology evokes the translational as ethic and hermeneutics. Chakrabarti characterises “sahishnuta” not as mere tolerance, but as the constant curiosity and labour of unfinished engagements with diverse others and outsiders including the foreign, through conversations and tarka. Now tarka as shown above, invites ambivalence, mediation and accommodation of alterities, all of them translational currencies.

See Chakrabarti, Arindam. “Sahishnuta Mane Thik Ki” [“What Exactly does Sahishnuta Mean”]. *Anandabazar Patrika* [Kolkata] 9 Jan 2018: 4. Print.

¹⁵⁹ Paranjape, Makarand R. *Another Canon: Indian Texts and Traditions in English*. London: Anthem Press, 2009. 2. Print.

subject's universe and gets invested with an "inhuman dimension".¹⁶⁰ It falls outside the universal, this "less-than-human Other-enemy" with whom no authentic encounter is possible. The Levinasian figure of the Neighbour too reinvokes the imponderable i.e. absolute other who cannot be accessed or understood and provokes, and deserves, a pure affect – of unconditional respect i.e. refusal to engage.¹⁶¹ A neighbour then becomes a thing, a traumatic intruder whose different way of life disturbs us, whose proximity and potential as subject of desire is unsettling and who can finally only be essenced as unfathomable, inaccessible. A neighbour is thus constituted in language as the abyss of otherness,¹⁶² a crater of exclusions with which engagement is absurdity. It becomes ideal candidate for the unknowable enemy designate, a hint borne in Australian diplomat R. G. Casey's binaristic title *Friends and Neighbours: Australia and the World* (1954), reflecting on this Antipodean nation's transnational norms.

In addition to the alien neighbours, white Australia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seemed to find itself marooned in a forbidding neighbourhood – an "otherwhere"¹⁶³ unmoored into the southern hemisphere. The geography proved an unnerving mismatch to its brandished belonging in terms of history, hemisphere, as well as the kin and race-memorials. In such a neighbourhood, Asia – amorphous signifier for the neighbour genre in white Australia's context of severance – could have only amplified the habits of suspicion and insecurity roused by that genre.¹⁶⁴ In his review of David Walker's work on the inevitable Asian imprints in Australia's pasts and national, cultural formations, Greg Lockhart observes that 'Asia' had begun its career as a "versatile nightmare" in Australian imaginary of the Federation era. He further rues the "pattern of perennial Australian apathy about nearby nations that is periodically broken by startled discoveries of them".¹⁶⁵ Getting to know Asia entailed its integration into the discourse of the trans-factors perennially performing Australianness. The inclusion might have grown all too disruptive for transnational norms and historiographies of the federal outpost, since Australia's outpost narrative thrived on a much-cultivated ignorance of Asia. Apathy on the other hand could comfort, with its reductive projection of an

¹⁶⁰ Zizek *Violence* "Fear Thy Neighbour As Thyself!" 40-73. 56.

¹⁶¹ Zizek *Violence* 55-56.

¹⁶² Zizek *Violence* 73.

¹⁶³ Lesbia Harford uses this term for Australia's Asia in her poem. See Harford, Lesbia. "Buddha in the Workroom." C. 1917. *Re-orientations in Australian Literature*. Ed. David Brooks. Sydney: University Publishing Service (The University of Sydney), 2009. 37. Print.

¹⁶⁴ See for instance Anthony Burke's title *In Fear of Security: Australia's Invasion Anxiety*. Anandale, New South Wales: Pluto Press, 2001. Print.

¹⁶⁵ Lockhart, Greg. "Loss and recovery: David Walker's work on Asian influences in Australian history." *History Australia: Journal of the Australian Historical Association* 10.3 (December 2013): 293-297. Print.

“unknowable ‘Asia’”¹⁶⁶ – that classic neighbourly contour.

Even during the bouts of startled discoveries, with the local allegedly privileged over the imperial, apparent leaps of engagement only re-scribed the kitsch of phobia and fascination/exoticization. Or at least since the early twentieth century, periodically revived the other kitsch, of Australia’s having to face for the first time an all-new, freshly emergent, “unprecedented Asia”. “Unprecedented Asia” came with the further leverage of casting politicians, academics and commentators concerned with Australia’s Asian future as pioneers and visionaries, bravely going where none have gone before, worthy of Russel Ward’s race-engineered national legend.¹⁶⁷ All of these tropes served of course to routinely relegate Asia to “a non-specific zone of incomprehensible foreignness”, for pre-Federation or a freshly federated Australia.¹⁶⁸

In an ironic inversion of the contemporary colonial situation, rising Asia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – especially Japan and China – was to be framed and feared as potential plunderer-colonisers of white Australia.¹⁶⁹ While being tarred as the catastrophic, darkling other, Asia could also on occasion be fancied as the niche for delectable orientalia. Japan for instance had been identified as virulent source for the much-apprehended yellow peril of white Australia since the 1890s. Yet at around the same time it was conjured too as enchanted island – home to exquisite art, arresting designs, bonsai and an Asiatic people exquisitely deferential yet anachronistically Elizabethan in their energies and ambition.¹⁷⁰ Bruce Bennett, otherwise tenacious proponent of mapping Asian-Australian intertextuality, interdependence and interplay indispensably into Australian Studies, offered an M.A. course titled “Exotic Neighbours: Australia and the Asia-Pacific”.¹⁷¹ Habits of terror and exoticization – rites of not knowing, both – remain difficult to unmake when it comes to that category

¹⁶⁶ Lockhart “Absenting Asia” 292.

¹⁶⁷ See Walker and Sobocinska Introduction *Australia’s Asia* 2-3; also Cochrane, Peter. Rev. of *Australia’s Asia*, ed. David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska. *The Australian*, 26 Jan. 2013. Web. 22 Feb. 2018.

¹⁶⁸ Lockhart “Absenting Asia” 273.

¹⁶⁹ For the imagined threat of an aggressive Asia bent on the conquest of white Australia through the late nineteenth century, see

Walker Introduction *Anxious Nation* 1-12; Walker “The Invasion Narrative” *Anxious Nation* 98-112; also, Walker and Sobocinska Introduction *Australia’s Asia* 05 & 12.

¹⁷⁰ “In the late nineteenth century there had been a surge of interest in things Japanese throughout Europe and North America. . . . A new term *Japonisme* was invented to capture this enthusiasm”, observes David Walker. The enthusiasm had piously caught on in the Antipodes, with the complex, elegant and mannered Japan giving some competition to the formidable steel of the Imperial Japanese Navy as *Japonisme* in wide currency in white Australia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

See Walker *Not Dark Yet* 20-21; Walker Introduction *Anxious Nation* 3; Lockhart “Loss and recovery” 296-297; also, Cochrane, Peter. “The Declaration of White Australia.” *Best We Forget: The War for White Australia, 1914-1918*. Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2018. 47-64. Print.

¹⁷¹ Bennett, Bruce. “Australian Studies and International Relations.” *Australia and India Interconnections*. 1-10. 7. Print.

unknowable by default, the neighbour, and especially so when it came to Australia's ultra-unknowable, ever-unprecedented, racially and politically different neighbours.

How to cope with the loneliness of such unknowing? Federated Australia responded with dilemmas, periodically reformulating its images and policies around 'Asia'. As late as 1940, Japan had officially been upheld as "Australia's nearest neighbour among the major powers of the Pacific"; the Federation at that point appeared keen to promote and pursue a long-standing relation based on "Goodwill. Cordiality. Friendship. Neighbourliness." with this particular Pacific neighbour.¹⁷² As war with Japan broke out in the Pacific in 1941, it was swiftly tarred the inhuman adversary, narrowing possibilities once again for Australia's neighbours in the Asia Pacific.

Was Asia to remain the sea of disease to its island of white privilege, in keeping with white Australian imaginary since the 1880s?¹⁷³ Was it to be nominally readjusted post the World Wars and colonies into the still-to-be-quarantined neighbour-harbinger of fresh threats and disruptions such as the tide of communism and racial antagonisms, merely switching colours this time from yellow peril to the red apocalypse? Or should Australia take the great leap forward into Asia, into the language of partnership and engagement in a post-colonial neighbourhood of great diversity and potential? It might possibly risk playing itself out of Asia otherwise, as cautioned by Gareth Evans as late as 2001.¹⁷⁴

Ambiguities further piled up. Would such post-colonial engagement cumulate into a quiet, if reluctant, shift in identity and diplomacy for the Federation through the 1940s and 1950s?¹⁷⁵ Was Australia awkwardly placed in Asia but not really part of it? Must it stick to the routine of playing "one of nature's allies", the brave and resourceful younger partner to some great Western power,¹⁷⁶ earning thereby a forever clout to flaunt in its neighbourhood? Should it seek a place with or in Asia? Could it ease into location as the indispensable translator-mediator between Asia and the West, playing the unhomed in-between at home in the minds and markets of both regions and de-provincialised too, in the process? Cross-cultural exchanges promised Australia intellectual redemption at the least, anointing it as the nation given to translations, transplantations, such as a few Antipodean thinkers and politicians like

¹⁷² Walker *Not Dark Yet* 133.

¹⁷³ Watters, Greg. "Contaminated by China." *Australia's Asia* 27-49.

¹⁷⁴ Evans, Gareth. "Australia in Asia; Looking Back and Looking Forward." *Alfred Deakin Lecture*. ABC Radio National. 11 May 2001. Radio. Web. 23 Apr. 2013.

¹⁷⁵ See Sobocinska, Agnieszka. "Hearts of darkness, hearts of gold." *Australia's Asia* 173-197.

¹⁷⁶ On the Australian obsession with the possibility of catastrophe from its Asian neighbourhood, along with the resultant policy loop of inventing Australia the nation-state as perpetual ally of some distant white power, see Horne, Donald. "Australia Looks Around." *Quadrant* 41.X.3 (May-June 1966): 31-38. Print.

Deakin had dared to hope. All of the above perform the perplexed polyphony of Australian responses to their geo-political setting, beginning from the late nineteenth century.

In order to ward off the potentially catastrophic neighbour, post-Second World War Australia had set about inventing itself as exemplar of the ideal neighbour. In this new avatar – sincere, Asia-friendly and updated in the racial etiquette of meeting Asians as equals – it hoped to preserve the identity of the racially immaculate, even innocent, in a politically shifting, rapidly decolonising neighbourhood. The sincere Australian reflecting on Asia's problems was circulated post War as idealized behavioural template for the non-Asian neighbour, observes David Walker. The newly-minted poise in the posture “suggests a mixture of openness and friendliness that would become Australia's defining signature, a point of differentiation between the stuffy British and the brash Americans . . . entangled in past and present imperial adventures and power plays”.¹⁷⁷ While Australians were promoted as a uniquely hospitable people innocent of history through the late 1940s, the Australian continent was insistently propagated to be uniquely inhospitable and undeserving of settlement by the millions from land-hungry Asia. The odium of being inhospitable – just the neighbourly sentiment, going by Žižek – was shifted from the white Australian people and their White Australia policy that weaponised Asian immigration as anathema, to the arid and drought-ridden continent.¹⁷⁸

Thus, however much Australia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries might have suspended itself in plural postal weaves with Europe, especially Britain – as outpost, or alternatively Europe's future post the World Wars – in the lust for authentic self-definitions, and however much might Europe have concurrently colonised Asia including India, as fossil and the heart of darkness to its quickening Enlightenment since the late eighteenth century,¹⁷⁹ Asia continued to loom as the unsettling, even pivotal factor for a self-definition or any

¹⁷⁷ Walker “Soul Searching” Second Draft Chapter dated 6th Jan. 2017. 22-23.

¹⁷⁸ Walker “Soul Searching” Second Draft 18.

¹⁷⁹ On the churning of orientalist stereotypes coeval with the Western economic, political and epistemological colonisation of Asia and their imprint on federated Australia's imaginings of its neighbours, see Gooneratne, Yasmine. “Fabricated Stereotypes: Asia in the Australian Imagination.” *Reading down under* 503-512.

On how the colonisers circulated such orientalia and orientalist ethos seeking to contain the East in the domain of curios, kitsch and the exotic past, while refusing it any imprint whatsoever in the West-claimed craft and scripts of enlightened humanism, universalism and cosmopolitan modernity, see Chaudhuri, Amit. “A Pact with Nature”. *On Tagore: Reading the poet today*. New Delhi: Viking, Penguin, 2012. 61-115. Print.

Could Australia's Asia, especially India, be entirely provincialized into the kitschy ghetto of non-engagement during the imperial era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – I ask in the thesis. Or, had ‘being neighbours’ ruptured the orientalist/colonialist routine?

imagined future of federated Australia during this age.¹⁸⁰ Much more immediate and indispensable as the trans-factor forging Australianness and its possibilities than, say, Europe. Given Australia's geo-political proximity to its neighbourhood, 'Asia' had become necessary invocation in variant versions, as the guarantor of greatness or extinction and everything in between for Australia's white settlers.¹⁸¹ Unlike in the case of Europe, it provided the lynchpin to formulating a national narrative for the Federation – whether Europe-oriented i.e. Asia-phobic or independent (read Asia-aligned)¹⁸² – and to framing that territory of promise, Australia's future,¹⁸³ as I have shown above in this introduction. 'Understanding Asia' grew into a vital objective for federated Australia.

Neighbouring India:

How had India between 1890 and 1950 featured in Australia's networks of neighbourly interest, filtered as this interest so often was through the prism of fear – fear of China, fear of Japan and the post-colonial fear of Indonesia?¹⁸⁴ As neglected neighbour, according to the dominant schools of historical-literary scholarship on Australia's India.¹⁸⁵ The ambitious

¹⁸⁰ In their Introduction to *Australia's Asia*, David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska embed Asia "as an ongoing formative presence near the centre of our national history" (9). According to them, proximity to Asia had shaped the favourite strategic-literary motives and motifs of Australianness since the late nineteenth century, including the bush legend and its custodian the bushman, Australia as an empty continent inviting Asian colonisation, and so on (11). "The idea that 'Asia' would have a determining influence on Australia's future" also has its long and resilient history in the national narrative, they contend (4).

¹⁸¹ See Walker *Anxious Nation* 11.

¹⁸² As Alison Broinowski observes, Australian artists keen to connect the Antipodean nation's identity with its Asian neighbourhood imagine "the Other as a double, Aboriginal/Asian strand" inalienable from Australianness. See Broinowski "Conclusion: The Best of Both Worlds." *The Yellow Lady* 198-203. 199.

In "Absenting Asia", Greg Lockhart too argues for the syncretistic "formation of independent Australian-Aboriginal-Asian histories" (288), unleashed at last from the tether of colonial historiography. In both the above instances, inscribing the Asia-factor into Australia's histories and stories and their retellings is taken to premise an alternative – the alchemy of non-exclusion in nation-making, and remaking.

¹⁸³ Australia's Asia-Pacific future has had consistent currency in debates and national imaginings since the late nineteenth century. From Charles H. Pearson's cautionary vision of doom against Chinese colonisation of the last white outpost to Alfred Deakin's safely futurist hopes of Indo-Australian exchanges across diverse spheres, both dating from 1893, and James Jefferis' disruptive 1880s dream of Australia as host to the transformative racial fusion of the East and West, the debate continued to prove quite contemporary and unsettling late into the twentieth century. Australian film *The Demonstrator* (1971) controversially emphasized Australia as part of Asia (Walker *Not Dark Yet* 292-293). In his 1981 article novelist Christopher Koch figured Australia as "one of a conglomerate of Asian and Pacific powers" (5) in the post-colonial future, which needed to inherit and transplant its nation-making myths as much from Europe as from neighbours India and Indonesia. See Koch, C. J. "Crossing the Gap: Asia and the Australian Imagination." *Quadrant* 25 (Jan-Feb 1981): 4-9. Print.

¹⁸⁴ Fear constitutes a major element in Australian responses to "Asia" according to Bruce Bennett, and Australia's Asia thus remains mostly indistinguishable from Japan and China, he maintains. Bennett, Bruce. "Crossing Cultures: Australia and the Asia Pacific." *Cultural Interfaces*. Ed. Santosh K. Sareen, Sheel C. Nuna and Malati Mathur. New Delhi: Indialog Publications, 2004. 1-17. 5-6 & 11-12. Print.

¹⁸⁵ International Studies people too rue the India-Australia relation, and especially the pasts colonial and post-colonial, as a bit of a blind spot – an unfulfilled promise given its diverse possibilities and extant, colonial/Commonwealth entanglements. Meg Gurry thinks the distance to be inevitable, given that the two states pursued fundamentally different post-colonial visions when it came to Asian immigration, Cold War

anthology *Thinking Australian Studies: teaching across cultures* published as late as 2004, explores Australian Studies as taught and thought about in locations as diverse and dispersed as Europe, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand and the United States. I flipped through its pages to discover that it does not feature India, and the pedagogical possibilities of doing Australia Studies in India, in the proposed cartography of global alliances with chartered friends and neighbours.¹⁸⁶

Australian literary critic and India expert Paul Sharrad observes that even after Australia's Asian turn, "visible emphasis shifted from European to East and Southeast Asian voices without much mention of South Asians"; the "Asian" label quietly bypassed South Asia in the Antipodean national imaginary.¹⁸⁷ As representative of migrant and minority writing in Australia, Yasmine Gooneratne concurs: "India, of course, has always been rather remote from Australia and the Australian writer".¹⁸⁸ Historian Ian Copland explores reasons for the remoteness. With an increasing trans-Pacific orientation, Australia drifted away from its Indian Ocean neighbour through the first half of the twentieth century, he argues. Much of Australian strategy and imagination around the neighbourhood had been invested in combating perceived

collaborations and security issues, or the international order. Further, India did not feature within the ken of Australia's Pacific or South East Asian focus. Owing to their divergent regional and global concerns/networks – though they had both become members of the IOR-ARC (Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation) since 1997 – India and Australia had remained traditionally marginal to each other's strategic and economic priorities, she contends.

R. G. Neale posits that the differences, often amounting to opposition, date back to the colonial era, what with the White Australia policy and its prohibitions against Asian immigration legally entrenched in the Federation since 1901. India and Australia had differed of course on the question of loyalty to the empire, and the differences continued to resonate with issues of security, peace and apartheid down to Commonwealth and the Cold War.

According to Alison Broinowski, "internal and external barriers" stood in the way of better relations between India and Australia. She traces these barriers to the widely divergent choices of national identity and international alignments of the two nation-states at their respective moments of post-colonial arrival in 1901 and 1947. As late as the 1980s, though, Australia did not seem to know what kind of nation it represented in terms of Asia, whether it needed to step up defensive alliances against or independent collaborations with the neighbour.

See Broinowski, Alison. "The Dancing Monkey: Australia and Indian Independence." *Unfinished Journeys: India File from Canberra*. Ed. Debjani Ganguly and Kavita Nandan. Adelaide: CRNLE, Flinders University, 1998. 35-47. 45-47. Print.

Gurry, Meg. "Australian Views of India: from Evatt to Evans." *Towards an Era of Cooperation: an Indo-Australian Dialogue*. Ed. Dipankar Banerjee. New Delhi: Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, 1995. 381-396. Print.

Also, Gurry, Meg. "Sharing a Region: 'Friends and Neighbours'" and Conclusion. *India: Australia's Neglected Neighbour? 1947-1996*. Queensland: Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Griffith University, 1996. 1-14 & 90-96. Print.

Neale, R. G. "Australia's Changing Relations with India." *India, Japan, Australia: Partners in Asia?* Ed. J. D. B. Miller. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1968. 67-85. Print.

¹⁸⁶ Carter, David, Kate Darian-Smith, and Gus Worby, eds. *Thinking Australian Studies: teaching across cultures*. St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2004. Print.

¹⁸⁷ Sharrad, Paul. "Reconfiguring "Asian Australian" writing: Australia, India and Inez Baranay." *Southerly* 70.3 (2010): 11-29. 11. Print.

¹⁸⁸ Gooneratne "Fabricated Stereotypes" 508.

threats from the strange and forbidding China or Japan during this period. Why, *Australia's Asia*, the remarkable 2012 compilation of cutting-edge interdisciplinary research on Australia's dis(re)membered Asian pasts, features only one chapter on India, while dedicating as many as five on China and the Chinese diaspora, three on Indonesia and Bali, and two on Japan. India with its comforting colonial links, such as the shared language of English and quaint kitsch of maharajahs, elephants, cameleers and snake-charmers, was perhaps not reckoned a significant national threat and was seen thus as meriting little attention.¹⁸⁹ That is, India had not qualified as the 'neighbour' – the archetype of the stranger-enemy – to excite Australia's neighbourly interest or alternatively trauma in a Zizek universe, as invoked at the opening of this section.

What if India had tweaked, even transformed, the universe of neighbourly possibilities for Australia? Between 1890 and 1950, were there moments when it could have transplanted the Antipodean convention of anxiety and estrangement termed the "neighbour" to an ethics of solidarity and companionship? If so, how? The questions kindle my thesis, as I retrace some of the elusive, almost forgotten counter-narratives intertwining Australia and India, and restore the plural legacies of their linkages beyond the theoretical and discursive certainties/limits to Australia's Asian neighbour.

Could Australia's South Asian neighbour have become its alibi for engaging with, and at times embracing the politics of alternatives as diversity and difference during this period? Could India have induced the freshly federated nation to translate, and eventually host the otherness of the other as a possibility, however recessive in the present, of its -ness? Could the neighbour have unsettled a notoriously exclusivist Australianness into the alternative of *anekantavada* – Sanskrit term and Jain epistemological category rendered as "non-one-sidedness" – given to imagining pluralities and alternatives through conversations with various others, in this case various transnational others? In the chapters to follow, I respond to these questions with special reference to Deakin and Skinner's *Australias and Indias*. In the process, I hope to add to the histories, interpretations and theories of connections – including the promise and the ruptures – between cultures and spaces, and their impact.

There was for instance never an undifferentiated singular 'Asia' for Australia to conveniently connect to, and this applies to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Home as the continent had been to myriad peoples, languages, cultures and political systems, one of my areas of intervention in the thesis is to posit 'generic Asia' as foundational fantasy for the Antipodean nation-state. The 'Asia' it inherited from Europe was an elusive concept,

¹⁸⁹ Copland "Beyond the Mirage: Reflections on the Indo-Australian Relationship" 124-133.

shaped and shifted by time and context, in particular by the Enlightenment and empire, rather than being a fixed geographical entity with agreed upon boundaries.¹⁹⁰ White Australia of the late nineteenth century notoriously adapted this European legacy of an imaginative geography into a “disciplining force”,¹⁹¹ the fantasy of nemesis against which it needed to define its nationing project as well as the nationalistic counter-mythologies of patriotism, permanence and a militarist masculinity vigilant of borders and of women.¹⁹² Equally notoriously, it collapsed the distinction between territory and tense in imagining ‘Asia’. ‘Asia’ was made metonymic of the future, placing outside of history the ancient and ongoing Australian political, cultural and economic interactions with its neighbourhood.¹⁹³

‘Asia’ as an exclusivist metonym was not always restricted to references around the future or an unspeakable destiny of fusion during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rubric was sometimes used to denote only China or Japan, to the exclusion of all other political or territorial entities in that continent. My thesis, with its focus on the incorrigible plurality of Australia’s Indias and their translational imprints on the fluid and contested versions of Australianness during this period, aims to dismantle the myth and metonym of Australia’s Asia as “a single homogenous and malign being”,¹⁹⁴ the perfect other. It labours to unpack ‘Asia’ for Australia and highlights the impossibility of its engaging with or immunising against the neighbourhood as a unit. If India, and the Australias it invoked between 1890 and 1950, had been so recklessly pied, could Australia’s Asia continue to be rendered thus abject as the monstrous monochrome? India, then, might have become crucial to pluralising, and finally de-Orientalising Australian attitudes to the Orient.

Australian Orientalism refracts an interesting mutant of the European metric. White Australia was an enthusiastic legatee of the Orient and Orientalism made in Europe since the eighteenth century. Yet the Orientalism transplanted and proliferating in the upside-down world of the Antipodes, came with its own topsy-turvy turns. To begin with, the ‘Orient’ of the Antipodes shifted its location from the beckoning ‘East’ to lurch and loom in the Near North.

¹⁹⁰ Said, Edward W. “The Scope of Orientalism.” *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. 1978. Indian ed. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001. 29-110. Print.; also, Walker “Soul Searching” Second Draft 2.

¹⁹¹ Walker, David. “Race Building and the Disciplining of White Australia.” *Legacies of White Australia* 40.

¹⁹² Walker, David. “Survivalist Anxieties: Australian Responses to Asia, 1890s to the Present.” *Australian Studies Now*. Ed. Andrew Hassam and Amit Sarwal. New Delhi: Indialog Publications, 2007. 312-327. 322-323. Print.

¹⁹³ Such interactions abound pre- and post white settlement in Australia, including the indigenous Australians’ trade in trepang with Makassan sailors from around the mid seventeenth century till the early twentieth. See Lockhart “Absenting Asia” 271-273; also, Ganter, Regina. “Muslim Australians: the deep histories of contact.” *Journal of Australian Studies* 32.4 (2008): 1-14. Print.

¹⁹⁴ Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* 12.

Also, given its neighbourly angst, Australia's "bad" Orient had to be assigned, evoked in terms of race and colour in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries instead of religion, the latter being the wont in Europe. Hence the currency of the "yellow peril" and since 1950, of communism-inflicted "red terror" in Australian discourse and invasion novels obsessing with the Asian other, rather than with Islam – pre-ordained villain as per the Orientalism disseminated as an intertextual product in Europe.¹⁹⁵

Made-in-Europe Orientalism posits the orientalist as the (male) scholar/voyeur and the oriental as a virgin, static subject transfixed and tyrannized by his gaze, in wait as it were to be judged, captured, described, disciplined, illustrated.¹⁹⁶ Australia's neighbouring orientals seemed ripe, however, to invert the game. With Charles Pearson's late nineteenth century vision of Asia as the resurgent site of geo-political ferment and upcoming global shifts in equations of commerce and power post colonies, the orientalist/imperialist stereotype of stasis did not hold in the Australian context. As evident from Australian invasion novels of the period,¹⁹⁷ white Australia instead had imagined itself as vulnerable to being trapped in the watchful gaze of menacing silent patient Asia waiting to colonise. The game of the gaze – European by default, superior, unassailable, focused on the Orient and performative of Western values and knowledge production – stood to be subverted at last, in the Antipodes.

Another area of subversion for the Antipodean mutant of Orientalism was gender. As Edward Said observes, Orientalism in its classic avatar lays down relations between East and West in terms of sexual dominance; the oriental according to this paradigm is the trophy or passive virgin to be won and ravished by the orientalist hero.¹⁹⁸ Here in the Antipodes, though, gendered images of the East as instinctive, illicit, subservient and exploitable, and of the West as male, pragmatic, rational and dominant were inverted in popular invocations.

Australian orientalist literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries envisioned the oriental as a fiercely aggressive, ambitious and manipulative male, a patient and determined Dr. Nikola or Dr. Tsarka who posed grave threats not just to Australian territory but especially to its white womanhood. Such an oriental could be resisted, and honour of the white Australian female preserved, by the lone barrier of a competing, chivalrous white warrior

¹⁹⁵ For the persistent stereotype of Islam as the "bad" Orient appended to Europe-made Orientalism, see Said "The Scope of Orientalism" *Orientalism* 99.

On the advent of the Middle East-Muslim nexus as a fresh focus for orientalist terror in contemporary Australia, see Jones, Gavin W. "White Australia, National Identity and Population Change." *Legacies of White Australia* 110-128. 127.

¹⁹⁶ On the orientalist as the tyrannical observer of his unchanging and absolutely different subject matter, see Said *Orientalism* 95 & 309-310.

¹⁹⁷ See Walker "Fathomless Eyes" 542-545.

¹⁹⁸ Said *Orientalism* 309-311.

masculinity home-grown in the Antipodes.¹⁹⁹ With Australia's Orient energised and masculinised, its Orientalism now unfurled in an unsettled world of race wars and contending masculinities,²⁰⁰ in a departure from the precooked passive conquest designed by norm. Such a malevolent, and male, oriental was often imaged in late nineteenth century Australian political discourse and invasion literature as the suave Europeanised Asiatic or "educated alien"²⁰¹ unleashed among innocent Antipodeans. He was a sinister specimen – privy to the secrets of Western knowledge and power, secretly bent on avenging the defeat and humiliation of the East by Asianising Australia, and irresistible to white Australian women.²⁰² Such unassimilable men need not always descend from awakening China or Japan. In Madge Peterson's bestseller *The Lure of the Little Drum* (1913),²⁰³ Oxford-educated Indian prince-predator Ishaq Khan represents the demonic Orient. He seduces the British innocent Esther only to cage her in his harem, driven by the lust to degrade the white woman and wreak his political vengeance.

Even the "inexorable undercurrent" of Australian enthusiasm for Asia, which seems at least as old as its anxiety,²⁰⁴ can barely escape orientalist exaggerations, as I have shown above, or exceed motives of strategy, rhetoric, commerce and calculation for that matter. Linguistic and cultural knowledge of Asia, however rarified, served mostly as skill-enhancing tools to exploit such regional opportunities.²⁰⁵ Such knowledge was perceived by prescients of the early twentieth century as a necessity for the commerce curriculum in Australian universities.²⁰⁶ Also, as Margaret Allen illustrates, the mobility of modernity promised by travel was kept astutely asymmetrical in Australia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While white Australians including missionaries could travel or put up across Asia for years as "innocents abroad", Asians in Australia were generically reduced to "prohibited immigrants"

¹⁹⁹ See Walker "Fathomless Eyes" 542 & 547.

²⁰⁰ Walker Introduction *Anxious Nation* 3.

²⁰¹ Reverend James Ronald reserved this prohibitive phrase for prospective Japanese immigrants to the freshly formed Federation; "the worst class of men we have to fear are the educated aliens", he insisted during parliamentary debates on conditions to be implanted in the Immigration Restriction Act in order to consolidate a white Australia.

See Ronald, James. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates. Vol. 4. Canberra: J. Kemp [for the Govt. of Australia], 6 Sept. 1901. 4664. Print.

²⁰² Walker "Fathomless Eyes" 544 & 547-548.

²⁰³ Madge, Peterson. *The Lure of the Little Drum*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913. Print.

²⁰⁴ Walker and Sobocinska Introduction *Australia's Asia* 14-15.

²⁰⁵ According to Greg Lockhart, "The 'closeness to Asia' was only geographical, and its primary importance for Australia was commercial" in normative historiographies given to outposting Australia as an imperial fiefdom. See Lockhart "Absenting Asia" 280-281.

²⁰⁶ Walker "Survivalist Anxieties" 320.

during this period, with their mobility severely curtailed and subject to systemic surveillance.²⁰⁷ Besides the hint and allure of danger, the protean possibilities and dynamism allowed at times to Australia's Asia were mostly limited to touristy isotopes, such as the exotic detour of Egypt en route an Antipodean's trip to England, or Thomas Cook's pious Orient of Jerusalem, Japan and India offered up for avid Asia-enthusiasts from Australia since the late nineteenth century.

Could there be routes to re-thinking Australia-Asia connections outside of the cautious, and finally limited, interests of strategy and commerce? This is something I query in the thesis with special reference to Deakin and Skinner. In the process, I hope to break out of the stereotypes assigned to Australia's Asia, constellated around dual metaphors – of the mirage, and the mirror. Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was either a bite off a dark fantasy for Australian travellers, storytellers, policy-makers and their audience or the mirror, ghastly in its parade of infinitely unsettling reactive-imitative reflections, refractions. As the avenging Orient, the invasive Orient, the passive and of course backward tableau-Orient, or even the talismanic Orient necessarily invoked yet never engaged with, Australia's Asia had been crafted of habit into a book of mirrors,²⁰⁸ that notorious looking-glass universe of provocations and portents “forcing Australians to take stock of who they are, and who they wish to be”.²⁰⁹

Is there no way out of white Australia's ancient paranoia about Asia the mirror, tending to slither always into the complex demonology of an invasive Orient? As historian Neville Meaney has argued, defending Australia against a potential Asian threat has long formed the centerpiece of Australia's foreign and defence policies.²¹⁰ Is it at all possible to imagine Australia's Asia between 1890 and 1950 beyond invasion scares and the politics of fear? How

²⁰⁷ Walker “Soul Searching” Second Draft 23; Allen, Margaret. “‘Innocents abroad’ and ‘prohibited immigrants’: Australians in India and Indians in Australia 1890-1910.” *Connected Worlds: History in Trans-National Perspectives*. Ed. Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake. Canberra: ANU Press, 2005. 111-124. Print.

²⁰⁸ In Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (c. 1608), Prospero remembers a quirk of one of the nobles who had put him and his young daughter in a boat without tackle, sail or mast, setting them off on a hopeless route of exile across the heaving seas: “of his gentleness,/ Knowing I lov'd my books, he [Gonzalo who designed the exile conceived by Prospero's brother] furnish'd me/ From my own library with volumes that/ I prize above my dukedom” (I.2.166-168). Peter Greenaway's film *Prospero's Books* (1991), a re-creation of *The Tempest*, the Renaissance mind and the creative process, imagines one of these volumes to be the book of mirrors:

Some mirrors simply reflect the reader, some reflect the reader as he was three years previously, some reflect the reader as he will be in a year's time, as he would be if he were a child, a woman, a monster, an idea, a text or an angel. One mirror constantly lies, one mirror sees the world backwards, another upside down. One mirror holds on to its image as frozen moments infinitely recalled. (Petergreenaway.org.uk/prospero.htm; Web; 31 Mar. 2013)

Going by stereotypes, Australia's Asia seemed to simulate the book of mirrors for a freshly federated Australia.

²⁰⁹ Walker and Sobocinska Introduction *Australia's Asia* 12.

²¹⁰ Meaney, Neville. *A History of Australian Defence and Foreign policy, 1901-1914*. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976. Print.; also, Meaney. *Australia and World Crisis, 1914-1923: A History of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy*. Vol. 2. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009. Print.

to rewrite, then, the transnational histories of Australia's engagement with its neighbourhood, with focus retrained on dialogue, dispersals, translations and contacts with individual nation-states? Perhaps by attempting to retrieve the fabric forbidden – of forgotten connections, untold stories and original understandings of Australia's chequered, plural pasts with Asia, in the context of specific territories and transnational events/movements unleashed during the period, e.g. the empire, resistance to empire and the World Wars. Such a restoration involves epistemic labour: unlearning the empire-dream of the Anglosphere and re-imagining Australia in a neighbourly network fresh configured in terms of its self-reflexive understandings of China, Japan, Indonesia, Bali, Vietnam, India, as also non-exclusive of their entangled, often excised pasts with Australia.

The thematic range and emphasis of my research is inflected precisely in this direction, with reference to the white Australian cross-cultural and self-reflexive interpretations of India during the early decades of formation of the Federation. It does not seek to domesticate or arrange the spectrum of such responses in ghettos and pre-ordained enclaves, nor even by the alluring metaphor of the mirror. Could India be contained as Australia's book of mirrors, refracting on command various tenses and fears for the Antipodes? However intimate or atrocious its gift of reflection-illusion-inversion, the looking glass is bound by the reactive/imitative binary. This thesis seeks to unearth a few buried links in the India-Australia relationship, while reading the whys and hows to those less remembered responses – the alternative stories – retraced, I hope, in all their many-splendored plurals and layers, as also in their contrasts, continuum and fragility. Retracing the forgotten might evoke the less heard appeals and possibilities of the relationship, and of an Australianness remapped in terms of some of these secrets as absences.

Subsection II: Enter the Why Questions of this Research

Why India?

Alfred Deakin had dreamt of Australian interpreter-translators for India and its people in a future transparent, as part of their bid to authenticate the status of stakeholders in the empire and its Orientalism.²¹¹ This thesis, alas, constitutes a rite oddly in reverse. It attempts a take

²¹¹ As Amitav Ghosh observes, to be a 'colonial' in the British empire translated into a rite of exile from the centre/origin, and of a priori reduction: "To be 'colonial' is to be imperfectly assimilated into the mother culture; it is to practice a second-hand or simplified . . . version of it. So, as generations of talented Australians have discovered in England, the voice of the 'colonial' is very easily marginalized . . . being imperfectly British, the colonial is simply excluded as a player in the mother culture". Deakin's dream for white Australians as future India experts might have stemmed from this Antipodean angst of being reduced to perennial non-players at the metropole and its imperial game.

situated in India – and not always, not necessarily abiding by the West/metropole and its epistemic empire – on Australian autobiographical interpretations of India between 1890 and 1950, with special reference to Deakin and Skinner. In the process it adds to “the tradition of reinterpretation of traditions to create new traditions”²¹² of understanding, inhabiting Australianness across tenses. As Ashis Nandy observes, “India has ‘always been a separate world, hard for any outsider, Eastern or Western, to penetrate.’ Such a culture becomes a projective test; it invites one not only to project on to it one’s deepest fantasies, but also to reveal, through such self-projection, the interpreter rather than the interpreted. All interpretations of India are ultimately autobiographical”.²¹³ My research then explores Australians’ autobiographical interpretations of Australianness through the India prism in early decades of the Federation.

Why India, normatively that margin of margins for Australia? Under this head, I reflect on my choice of research interest, viz. India as embedded in the craft of Australianness during early decades of forming the Federation. Which India, is there any one template for Australia’s India to hark back to, I ask. With a nod to areas habitually prescribed for Indians doing Australian Studies or Australian contact literature with India, I clarify my reason to steer clear of those prescriptions in this research. I then look briefly at histories of Australia-India connections, the stereotypes and the hazard in stereotyping Australia’s India emergent from such histories, and the way I want to intervene in the domain.

National histories, including the literary histories of a nation, should not cultivate a principally inward, ethnocentric or nationalistic approach, insists Australian litterateur Bruce Bennett.²¹⁴ He advocates “deep knowledge” of certain other countries, as opposed to the airified, rarified one in circulation on virtual global space, as an indispensable feature of national or area studies when it comes to still-mutating post/colonial spaces like Australia.²¹⁵ In this view, Australia’s Indias could well serve as the trans-wand, its “windows onto Worlds”.²¹⁶ Yet of all the indispensable trans-factors – say Australia’s Asia or its Western

See Ghosh, Amitav. “The Diaspora in Indian Culture.” *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal and Permanent Black, 2002. 243-250. 249. Print.

²¹² Ashis Nandy uses this phrase in the context of his critical and creative revisions in understanding India and its Britain during the imperial period; I retain the phrase in defining my domain, Australia’s India and Australianness, also during the empire.

See Nandy *The Intimate Enemy* 17-18.

²¹³ Nandy *The Intimate Enemy* 80.

²¹⁴ Bennett, Bruce. “‘Nation’ and Literary History: The Case of Australia.” *Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context*. Ed. Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1996. 99-110. 104-108. Print.

²¹⁵ Bennett “Australian Studies and International Relations” 1.

²¹⁶ Bennett “‘Nation’ and Literary History: The Case of Australia” 108.

protector – stitched to the making and unmaking of Australia, its -nesses and their plural possibilities during the above-mentioned period, why choose India as the focal point? Possibly since Australia’s Indias in their abundant multiplicity proved the most intractable to being settled into a singular – as the (spiritualist) centre or an invented enemy – for this officially pure-thirsting nation-continent. Between 1890 and 1950, they might have deluged, dislodged the resilient Australian arch-metonym of Asia≈fear. Australia’s Indias, a kaleidoscope of competing interpretations during this period, stoked the hunger of imagination, the kalpana of alternatives and multiplicity as an address for Australianness, as I hope to map in this research.

I hope too that my research on Australia’s Indias opens doors for fresh refractions and a moment of pause/poise in India Studies, given the current global resurgence of the nation-state addicted to the commune of the pure,²¹⁷ and the exclusive unabashed past it conjures.²¹⁸ Should India be shrunk into a singular in keeping with this transnational template of nation un/making, so it could be mapped onto a majoritarian garrison-state dreaming up walls? Should “illegal immigrants”²¹⁹ and violence/fear spilling across colour, caste, class, religion and gender surge as its trans-capital? Should a nation be translated to a cartographic wound addicted to the impermeable border?

²¹⁷ “Nation” is derived from the old Latin word “gnaci” (“to be born”) which is related to the proto-Indo-European language root “-gena” (“to give birth”). Etymologically a nation denotes those united by birth, and the current global resurgence could be seen as a return to that ascriptive pattern predicated on race, culture, religion.

²¹⁸ On July 19 2018, the Parliament of Israel passed a law with constitutional status which recognizes Israel as a Jewish nation-state, as the historic homeland of the Jews as opposed to the Arabs and grants Jewish people “an exclusive right to national self-determination in it”, exclusive of the 1.8 million Arab citizens of Israel. The law further strips Arabic of its national language status and vows to promote establishment and consolidation of Jewish settlements in all parts of the state, including territories inhabited by the Palestinians.

This ‘nation state’ law imagines Israel as a land of the pure – in this case of the Jews – and consolidates a past and a present institutionalizing discrimination against the Arab minority.

See “Dangerous law: on Israel’s ‘nation state’ law.” Editorial. *thehindu.com*. The Hindu, 20 July 2018. Web. 6 Aug. 2018.

Mr. Tayyip Erdogan, all-powerful president of Turkey re-elected in June 2018, is similarly and simultaneously set to turning Turkey into an Islamist state resonant with memories and the glory of the Ottoman empire; the Greek and Armenian minorities living in Turkey, along with their languages and religions, are neatly exorcised from such a national imaginary.

See Sood, Rakesh. “The strongman’s dilemma: on Recep Tayyip Erdogan.” *thehindu.com*. The Hindu, 3 July 2018. Web. 6 Aug. 2018.

Also, Pamuk, Orhan. *Istanbul: Memories of a City*. Trans. Maureen Freely. London: Faber and Faber, 2005. Print. The 2016 referendum in favour of Brexit and Donald Trump’s election in the same year as US President on the tide of his xenophobic rhetoric testify as well to the current global current of propagating monolithic nation-states stitched to the shadow of an avowedly trans-resistant past.

²¹⁹ The “illegal immigrant” as a category of outlawing/expulsion is caught in fraught kinship with the “refugee” who has earned the legality and dignity of her unhomed status from the UN or the state to which she flees. Both categories branding the liminal and the all-but-made-redundant remain the ubiquitous transnational crop of 21st century, across the US, Australia, European Union and South Asia for instance. Such a state-and-climate haunted person slinking along borders could be read as shadow-narrative to the mono-prone nation-statism given to a continuously progressing process of excluding/othing and replicated across 21st century democracies.

If the nation-state be an imagined community, as Benedict Anderson has argued in his eponymous book, need it re-trace forever the imagined stasis of homogenous nativism? Imagination invites alterities and the nation could well become a composite of continuing conversation around contending imaginaries regarding communities, and their commons. What if a nation is imagined in excess of territorial borders, as the osmotic function of dispersions, translation, accommodations and adulteration, its dynamic imaginary rooted in rootlessness as much as in roots, as happens in Mollie Skinner's novels? My research into vanished histories and erased choices explores such alternative pluralities to Australianness, prying textually beneath and beyond the official history of obsession with the Federation as racial monolith between 1890 and 1950, and it explores the heterogenous plurality of Australia's India/s which could have provoked the possibilities.

What if, in excess of a securitist model, India were to be imagined as a nation in mutation, portable in dispersions and secured around the proliferation of differences in a grammar of complementary differences, where "to be different . . . is irrevocably to belong"?²²⁰ What if, unlike the aggrandising, imperialistic version of nationalism spread from the West, India as a nation were created on an anti-supremacist premise, as a non-exclusive socio-political phenomenon in memoriam the dream of many of the anti-colonial movements in British India? What if, in place of an imagined community, the Indian nation were to emerge as a fraternity/samaj of individuated imaginaries committed to the commons of only a plural making of their swaraj, and the labour and receptivity needed for such a making, in terms of epistemology, ethics, creativity and commerce?²²¹ The last was Rabindranath Tagore's vision implemented and experimented with at Shantiniketan. Such a swaraj would be rid of

²²⁰ Ghosh, Amitav. "The Diaspora in Indian Culture" 250.

"It is impossible to be imperfectly Indian. . . . Were it possible to be an imperfect Indian, everybody in India would be. This is not merely because India has failed to develop a national culture. It is not a lack; it is in itself the form of Indian culture. If there is any one pattern in Indian culture in the broadest sense it is simply this: that the culture seems to be constructed around the proliferation of differences (albeit within certain parameters)", reflects Ghosh in this context (250). Mollie Skinner seems to have been inspired by such an imaginary of India.

Ghosh's reflection evokes that of Tagore. In one of his essays on the history of India, Tagore tries tracing the civilizational imprint of India which he reads as an ancient crucible of fluid movements and arrivals. The emergent imprint according to him continues to be that of initiating diverse others into a non-exclusive web of connections and caring, woven in shifting symmetries of complementary differences as well as access and unafraid protection of that plurality and difference, in excess of all the flux and apparent disruptions/invasions. Tagore contends that India as a civilization has not known the other as the enemy. See Tagore, Rabindranath. "Bharatvarsher Itihas [History of India]." 1902. *Bharatvarsha. Rabindra Rachanabali* Vol. 2. 703-709. 706. Print.

Also, Tagore. "Swadeshi Samaj [Swadesh as Samaj]." 1904. *Atmashakti [Our Energy/Strength Within]*. *Rabindra Rachanabali* Vol. 2. 625-641. 638-640.

²²¹ Tagore "Satyer Ahvan [The Call of Truth]." 1921. *Kalantar [Across Times]*. *Rabindra Rachanabali* Vol. 12. 585-597. 587-591.

unquestioning faith in a uniform doctrine of nation-making,²²² as seemed to have become the case with white Australia between 1890 and 1950. My research seeks to enable multiple ways of being Australian, and Indian, in the present.

Of the Ghettos of Australian Studies in India

In his essay “Reconfiguring “Asian Australian” writing: Australia, India and Inez Baranay”, Paul Sharrad maps the domain of Australian Studies in India. This according to him comprises the established study of canonical authors such as Patrick White, Judith Wright and A. D. Hope plus later additions of Peter Carey, David Malouf and Les Murray, along with a regular accent on Australian aboriginal and South Asian diasporic writing.²²³ My research does not fall within this domain. Nor does it engage with white Australian perceptions of the South Asian diaspora in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or with the multicultural literary representations by diasporic Indians in Australia, or even with Australian texts that have developed circuits of production and critical reception in India. Why must Australian Studies research from India or by Indians inhabit of necessity the ghettos preordained? In my departure from the lullaby patterns of Indian research on Australian contact literature with India, I want to break out of the metropolitan architecture of academic ghettos which pre-decide who can speak for, portray or perform proximity to whom. Such ghettoization serves to reinforce the game of authenticity. In this thesis I am intent on unravelling that game, especially with reference to Alfred Deakin who tried too hard to go uber-authentic on his Australianness, and Mollie Skinner who had been inauthenticated as an Australian by the gamers.

Of the Histories of Australia-India Connections

Some of these histories have been documented, and others excised. Len Kenna posits *Are Indians An Ethnic Minority?* as a counter-narrative digging into the much-forgotten multicultural beginnings of white settlement in Australia, with focus on the maritime links. He retraces the largely undocumented role of the lascars – canny seafarers and ship-makers from the Indian subcontinent – in forging the links. Lascars and merchants from India cultivated thriving precolonial trading relations with various Australian aboriginal tribes, Kenna contends, and had lived in the continent since long before white settlement. Into the colonial age, most of the ships owned by or trading under licence from the English East India Trading Company that set sail from British India to New South Wales during the late eighteenth and

²²² Tagore “Satyer Ahvan” 595 & “Swaraj-Sadhan” [Realising Swaraj].” 1925. *Kalantar. Rabindra Rachanabali* Vol. 12. 646-651.

²²³ Sharrad, Paul. “Reconfiguring “Asian Australian” writing: Australia, India and Inez Baranay” 16.

early nineteenth centuries, were crewed largely by the lascars.²²⁴ Since 1790 until the 1840s, the oldest Australian colony of New South Wales depended on British India, especially Calcutta, for supplies of food, textiles and livestock including sheep, cattle and horses.²²⁵ These merchant connections counted as vital ties, lifelines on some occasions, in the early years of white settlement.²²⁶ Initial exports from New South Wales were transported mainly to India, and in ships manned by lascars. Kenna credits the stranded, anonymous crew of seventeen Indian lascars and Anglo-Indian sailors of *Sydney Cove*, a small sailing ship from Bengal, for the discovery of the Illawarra Coal Fields along with the charting of the southeastern coastline of Victoria for the first time in 1797,²²⁷ an episode he holds to have been neatly sanitized out of white Australia's traditional trans-chapters.

Other histories read the connect as visibly colonial and lucidly exotic. The archdiocese of Calcutta included Australia until 1835, while the chintz style and paisley design became part of settler Australians' early perceptions of India. According to this rendition local Indians were settled as servants or scarcely visible margins to the imperial narrative of trade and conquest. Australia's first ballet audience in 1835 saw *The Indian Maid* and young Uday Shankar performed with Pavlova in *Oriental Impressions* during his 1920s tour of Australia.²²⁸ The great religions of the land were duly lauded and its spiritual wealth and stasis approved by erudite Australian travellers including Alfred Deakin and his predecessor to India James Hingston;²²⁹ I return to both pilgrims in my second chapter. When the threat of murder and mutiny broke out in British India, as it did in 1857, and had subsequently been quelled and annihilated by the Raj, Deakin, among other avid observers, mythologized the episode as race-and-empire parable sacred to the craft of Australianness.²³⁰

Of Australia's India Stereotypes, and the Hazard in Stereotyping

What could then look like an inventory of Australian stereotypes for India till about 1950, when the postal age would begin to rage in South Asia? Since the late nineteenth century,

²²⁴ Kenna *Are Indians an Ethnic Minority?* 141-145.

²²⁵ Kenna 163-165.

²²⁶ Cochrane Rev. of *Australia's Asia* Web. 22 Feb. 2018.

²²⁷ Kenna 220-225 & 253.

²²⁸ Broinowski *The Yellow Lady* 15.

On the Indians working their passage to India as grooms aboard ships that exported Australian horses for the British army and police, or as servants of the Australian horse-traders and their families who between 1844 and 1938 would regularly visit Madras and Calcutta on season i.e. from October to March to sell remounts and sporting horses, see

Allen, Margaret. "The Australian Horse Traders: Winter in Calcutta, 1930." *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia* 39-40.1 (2007-08): 37-49. Print.

²²⁹ Walker *Anxious Nation* 19 & 22.

²³⁰ Walker "Blood, Race and the Raj." *Anxious Nation* 26-35. 27-29.; Broinowski *The Yellow Lady* 29.

mainstream discourse in Australia habitually adopted the mythicized pioneer mode when it came to India,²³¹ disowning with alarming innocence any history or memory of Australia's earlier connections with the subcontinent. Anthologies that published Australian storytellers and explorers/travellers on India were aligned often to generic colonial constructions of India as pet fossil of an exotic past or a fief salvaged by the parental Raj, ready to prowl the depths of chaos, violence and even more filth once abandoned by the British.²³² Such representations seek to conform as case studies of Said's Orientalism with its currencies of provincialization and the pariah other. Small wonder then that Sally Percival Wood laments the conceptual void filled with ludicrous stereotypes of British imperial vintage which continue to regurgitate the time-warped India-Australia disconnect into the 2000s.²³³

And yet, Australian stereotypes of absencing and alienation from the late nineteenth century simultaneously read India also as a hazard in stereotyping. India had historically become a pluripotent word for Australia, the fluid signifier that could be variously re-programmed to model imagined originals – the intimate enemy, an exotic geography or a metaphor for hurtsplace. Was India to be arraigned as the mutinous Orient posing a threat to Australia and ripe to recover into a reek of the 1857 moment in the absence of the British? Or should it qualify as Australia's antique Orient, exotic, erotic, and a faith carnival? Or perhaps India could suitably be cast in the medicinal model as Australia's therapeutic Orient – its salve, not only in terms of the much-propagated mysticism but also as a hub of alternative possibilities. David Walker, in his course proposal on Australian Studies to be taught at Copenhagen University, seemed to equate “therapeutic Asia” with “the appeal of Eastern spirituality”.²³⁴ Since spirituality belongs to the region of the repressed in Australian national discourse,²³⁵ it could emerge as synecdoche for other submerged alterities when open, critical and compassionate, and especially when equated with India. A return of this repressed could restore the alterities, thus healing the partitions and expulsions otherwise metastatic to Australianness. If one were to interpret “therapy” as a curative category inclusive of the unrest

²³¹ Kama Maclean concurs with Mark Thirwell to note that “it has been a rule of thumb among Australian diplomats that every Australian government will “discover” India at least once in its term of office”. Qtd. in Maclean, Kama. “India in Australia: A Recent History of a Very Long Engagement.” *Wanderings in India: Australian Perceptions*. Ed. Rick Hosking and Amit Sarwal. Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2012. 20-35. 32. Print.

²³² See for example Pesman, Walker, and White, eds. *The Oxford Book of Australian Travel Writing*.

²³³ Wood, Sally Percival. ““So, where the bloody hell are we?”: The Search for Substance in Australia-India Relations.” *The Fearless Nadia Occasional Papers on India-Australia Relations* 1 (Winter 2011): 1-12. Web. 21 Aug. 2018.

²³⁴ Walker, David. “Australia's Asia: A Cultural History.” Course Proposal. *asiandynamics.ku.dk*. Copenhagen University, 2010. Web. 21 Aug. 2018.

²³⁵ Ashcroft, Bill. “The Sacred in Australian Culture.” *Sacred Australia* 21-43. 22.

and right to host questions, conversations and churning – as held by Buddhist philosophers and by Wittgenstein²³⁶ – Australia’s Indias still might not disappoint, going by the examples of Deakin and Skinner.

There was never one story, one meaning or one perception to contain Australia’s India, even for ideologues like Deakin who vouched for exclusivist models of Australianness while India loomed as a powerful and unsettling personal memory. Skinner’s bicultural protagonist Tucker points towards the unrealized potential and hidden maps of Indo-Australian connections and identities; rainbow Indias awaited discovery in the play of those connections.

I intervene in this context, choosing not to read Australia’s India and its chaosmos of ever-tensile realities between 1890 and 1950 through the orientalist prism of the colour peril or the talisman of the book of mirrors. I read it rather as that anomalous category, Australia’s en/gaging neighbour. Could India in this role have asked for engagement or “sat-tarka”,²³⁷ unsettling and querying white Australia’s surfeit of certainties and asymmetries during the period mentioned above? Could it have witnessed, provoked the tarkik kalpana of plurals and alterities geared to the re-making of Australianness as a multi-nodal trans-function, receptive and always in the making? In seeking answers, I hope to unlearn the oriental gaze habitually trained on Australian intertwinings with its neighbourhood and subvert the theoretical and discursive certainties ascribed to Antipodean connections with India through the regime of the Raj.

Why 1890-1950?

My research on Australian responses to India traverses the six decades from the eve of the movement for Federation in Australia through the 1890s till the point when decolonisation had become widespread in Asia, including in South Asia, with the Constitution of the sovereign democratic Republic of India having been adopted and implemented since 1950. It traverses thus the distance from the germination of national, autonomous and perhaps non-colonial aspirations of Australia as a Federation till the bloom of post-colonial democratic ecologies in its neighbourhood. Though enfolded in the aegis of empire, the period, one also of dreaming

²³⁶ Carlisle, Clare, and Jonardon Ganeri, eds. *Philosophy as therapeia*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Print.
Also, Ganeri, Jonardon. Interview by Richard Marshall. *3ammagazine.com*. 3:AM Magazine, 12 Aug. 2012. Web. 20 Aug. 2018.

²³⁷ In classical Indian philosophy “sat-tarka”, literally rendered as honest debate/argument, refers to the epistemological method of engagement with counter-schools of thought by inhabiting and including their interrogations in the architecture of one’s argument. The political implications of such a receptive epistemology have been detailed in the fourth chapter of the thesis (pp. 332-333) in the context of Mollie Skinner’s exilic novels.

beyond colonies and the colonial hierarchies in Australia as in its neighbourhood, seems to me to afford greater fluidity when it came to possibilities around India-Australia connections. The empire could provide alibis of exchange between the two colonies – however different the politics and state of colonisation in each – as well as the incubatory matrix to dream up occasional links beyond the architecture of empire. Despite adoption of the White Australia policy, Antipodean space for plural contestations and alternative imaginings during these years had not entirely been stifled either in case of individual responses such as those of Deakin and Skinner, as I hope to show in this research, or at the level of strategy and governance policy.

In part due to the efforts of Australian Prime Minister W. M. Hughes who wanted to reciprocate the wartime loyalty and camaraderie shown by the Indians, Indian travellers and immigrants were accorded a civil status superior to that of any other Asian since 1925, barring the right of franchise.²³⁸ Australia opened diplomatic relations with India, and trade and defence alliances were considered, as early as 1944 – three years before Indian independence.²³⁹ Australia was governed by the Labor Party at the time of Indian independence and the Party sympathized with its break from colonial rule. At the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in April 1949, Australian Prime Minister Joseph Benedict Chifley voiced his critical support for India remaining a member of the Commonwealth in spite of its choice to become a Republic,²⁴⁰ though personally he might not have been entirely comfortable with a Commonwealth that stretched beyond the core group of British Crown loyalists comprising Britain, Australia and New Zealand.²⁴¹ Australia and India collaborated on the cause of Indonesian independence at the UN platform in July 1947 as also at the Asian conference on Indonesia held in New Delhi in 1949.

All that collaboration and the promise of more began to change fundamentally and wither after 1949, when the Liberal Party led by Robert Menzies came to power. Not only because Menzies dismissed India as a place too difficult for any Occidental to understand,²⁴² but also since the Cold War and a decolonised neighbourhood set off Australia and India on widely divergent geopolitical trajectories. In the wake of imperial retreat and the Cold War, Australia scurried for a pact with the US in apparent refuge from post-colonial independence, while

²³⁸ Reddy, Y. Yagama. "Australia-India Relations: Opportunities and Challenges." *Cultural Interfaces*. Ed. Santosh K. Sareen, Sheel C. Nuna, and Malati Mathur. New Delhi: Indialog Publications, 2004. 214-226. 215. Print.

²³⁹ Reddy 216; also, Wood "So, where the bloody hell are we?" 2.

²⁴⁰ Reddy 216-217; also, Millar, T. B. "The Indian sub-continent." *Australia in Peace and War: External Relations since 1788*. 2nd ed. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978. 254-263. 256. Print.

²⁴¹ Wood 2.

²⁴² Qtd. in Wood 2.

Nehru detested decolonised India becoming a protectorate and a hostage to global war camps. Since 1950s India thus followed the policy of non-alignment which Menzies considered foolish. Such templates set in stone initiated decades of discord and drift and froze exchanges between the two territories post colonies,²⁴³ wilting for some time to come the non-colonial possibilities of unmaking and re-making of the Indo-Australian scape of collaboration, conversations, contestations and myth-minting. Such possibilities had not always seemed so elusive between 1890 and 1950.

Why Alfred Deakin? Why Mollie Skinner?

Both Alfred Deakin and Mollie Skinner are storytellers of India, both have multiple stories to tell. And the India stories of both are crucial to their craft of Australianness. I engage in some detail with the convergence and divergence in their narration of selves and nation in the third chapter of this thesis, Skinner being almost as much an anonymous failure²⁴⁴ but for a notorious collaboration, as Deakin was famed. Yet, is Skinner's failure as abject as it is made out to be? And why was she considered a failure in her times? Was Deakin's fame as ubiquitous, was he too not haunted by the shadow of having failed, especially in his latter days? I am invested in the complexity, range and ambivalence of their responses to India and eventually, to their notions of the nation and its -ness. I want to look too at the tension and oscillations in these responses, and the variety and inconsistency from author to author and sometimes, within an author.

Deakin had been deeply involved and ambivalent about India; he was its lifelong student and avowed translator for Australia and England. On the eve of investing in federated Australia, he visited India in 1890 and based two of his four published books, *Temple and Tomb* and *Irrigated India*, on that visit. The India-based texts could be read as much as memoirs of a private pilgrimage as an oblique ode to his federal vision offset by the Indian margins

²⁴³ S. K. Bhutani terms 1949-1966 as years of discord and 1967-1984 as years of drift in bilateral relations between India and Australia, even as he envisions the period beginning from 1985 as one of unfulfilled promise. Bhutani, S. K. "India-Australia Bilateral Relations: An Indian Perspective." *Towards an Era of Cooperation: an Indo-Australian Dialogue*. Ed. Dipankar Banerjee. New Delhi: The Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 1995. 367-380. 369-374. Print.

See also in the context of this drift and discord, T. B. Miller's essay "The Indian sub-continent" cited above.

²⁴⁴ The term "failure" need not necessarily be interpreted as the negative end of the success/failure binary. It could be read instead as non-formulaic term for a positive phenomenon – the zone of possibilities alternative to the dominant discourse or praxis delimiting a domain at a given point of time. Subaltern Studies thinker Dipesh Chakrabarty, for example, has recently read Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as a "failure" in the context of post-independence mainstream Indian politics, given that he continues to represent a possibility removed from its violent developmental, urban/industrial, end-addicted dreams.

See Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "'Gandhiji Keno Prashangik'" ["Why Relate to Gandhi?"]. *Anandabazar Patrika* [Kolkata] 2 Oct. 2018: 4. Print.

performing outlier possibilities. The possibilities could also grow symptomatic of the non-exclusivity programmed to be banned from his supposedly sane and sanitized Australia. As I show in the second chapter, *Temple and Tomb* and *Irrigated India* could be read as twin pretexts to Deakin's *The Crisis in Victorian Politics* and *The Inner history of the Federal Cause 1880-1900*, posthumously published memoirs on the formation of the Australian Federation and its pre-histories.

Skinner's years in India had shaped her as a storyteller of alternative Australias which privilege hybridity, shifting identities and translation as currencies of connection, and thrive in cross-fertilizations, polyphony and exile. In her autobiography and early novels, it had possibly given her the courage and the edge to weave subversive defiance into the received templates of Australianness. Her India in shifting avatars seems to surge as the signature of her pluripotent Australias, as I explore in the third and fourth chapters.

Yet, I have chosen Deakin and Skinner over some of their contemporary Australian authors on India since both, despite their fame or anonymity, success or failure, had been artists of absence and silence. In certain ways, Deakin intended to absent India from his political career and federal vision even as he ended up inserting it inexorably, in the Federation and its foundational mythologies as well as in his life. He had tried to silence too some of the disturbing counter-narratives from contemporary India, as he preferred to tether it to remote tenses for his Australia. And towards the end of his life, he had literally fallen silent. Skinner, an author absented from the exclusionary, often repetitive and masculinist (white) Australian literary canon, had sculpted the silences i.e. absented possibilities of Australianness and Australia's India in her oeuvre. My thesis seeks critical restoration of some of these possibilities. It writes back to the erasure, other-immunedness, amnesia and muteness that shape much of the storytelling and memory-making, in history and fiction, of Indo-Australian entanglements during this period.

Subsection III: The Epistemic-Political Premise

Of Comparisons

This research then engages in a game of explorations and the untaming of absences from the past. It cares to remember, resisting templates of forgetting and exclusions/sanitization. And it aims at a critical reconfiguration of stories, icons, events and legends that shape the collage of self, nation or the politics of popular memory. The thesis thus attempts an omnivorous reading of Deakin and Skinner and their emergent versions of Australianness, by listening and speaking to the silenced narratives of interconnections between civilizations and

civilizational conversations – between humans, texts and critical concepts – with special reference to Australia and India, between 1890 and 1950.

I call the reading omnivorous, since it compares authors, and not just Deakin and Skinner. It also compares histories of national identities and their making, and intertexts across literatures written in Sanskrit, Bengali and English. I have looked at Deakin's fiction from his youth, for instance, while taking a colonial short story by Rabindranath Tagore and a novel by Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay as co-texts. I also look at the convergences of his early fiction with some of the Upanishadic tropes and tenets and examine the implications. Epistemological, analytical, aesthetic and ethical categories from the Indic universe, terms such as tarka, tarkasamsara, kalpana, anekantavada, apar, anuvad, rasa, samatva, mamatva, anrysamsya etc. gather through the thesis, beginning with this introduction. Displaced and refracted in the context of India-Australia entanglements and another tense, these categories co-habit, and sometimes jostle and argue with the metropolitan epistemological frames and theories which also I duly invoke. I have tried to bring together varying visions of Australia and Australia's India, as also various, and occasionally comparable, categories from the Western and Indic epistemological traditions in conflict or in collaboration, in conversation or contestation.

I introduce the Indic categories in my thesis as an epistemological intervention, applying them in order to propose a separate explanatory epistemological argument. Need we freeze pre-colonial theories and concepts, particularly those of subcontinental origin, to their own local or contemporary examples? I think we could test and rejuvenate those concepts and categories by creative criticism, applying and adapting them to texts from other spaces and tenses.²⁴⁵ This would amount to occasionally trying the cross-cultural enterprise the other way²⁴⁶ – with the theories from here and the fields of application from there – and enable us break out of epistemological colonisation in the process.

²⁴⁵ As for the need to apply Sanskrit theoretical literature to radically different spaces, tenses and texts, in the contexts of which it had not originally been conceived, I stand corroborated by philosophers Arindam Chakrabarti and Ralph Weber who thus contend:

If we have to test and rejuvenate by creative criticism and adaptation those numerous intricate theories of making, communicating, enjoying, suffering, interpreting and assessing art that are already available in Sanskrit theoretical literature, then we must try it out on the literally outlandish examples and see if they work. The cultural difference between Elizabethan England and ancient Greece did not stop anyone from trying out Aristotle's theory of catharsis or mimesis on King Lear! (21)

See Chakrabarti, Arindam, and Ralph Weber. Introduction. *Comparative Philosophy without Borders*. Ed. Arindam Chakrabarti and Ralph Weber. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016. 1-34. Print.

²⁴⁶ On the direction of the traffic and conditions of barter held axiomatic for the colonial, and now postcolonial, cross-cultural enterprise, that continue to provide Oriental raw data as harvests to be processed by Western theory for global consumption, see Mukherjee, Meenakshi. "Interrogating Post-colonialism." *Interrogating Post-Colonialism* 3-11. 10. Also Chakrabarti and Weber 21.

I do not go on to translate the Indic terms in the body of my argument – though often I attach a footnote on the corresponding proximate rendering in English – for I consider the categories to be asymmetrical to any translated version in the accretive precision of their denotation and connotations. I do not also inflict on them the italics or quotation marks, though in this case both beckon as compulsive rites of glossary-bound, fashionably uncomprehending exoticization. I think the Indic words need to be de-exoticized, carried across and accessed as categories as indispensable to this research on Australia-India conversations as the much-circulated metropolitan jargon of theory. Since I use a mixed Indic and Western philosophical idiom, both the registers begin to belong inevitably to the realm of comparison within the space of this research. My research then builds on a polyglot, comparative premise, instead of remaining caged in monoglot, monocultural hubris. As a site of heteroglossia, India inspires the premise.

Why compare? As method and epistemology, the act of comparing is rich in trans-resonances and provides the much-needed antidote to purist templates of Australian Studies. Australian national literature expert Bruce Bennett espouses a comparative approach for Australian Studies; it would “allow an interplay of Asian with Australian myths”, he insists, and lead to the proliferation of an alternative mythology of Australianness. I attempt a similar interplay in the thesis with reference to myths of Indian, Homeric and Australian origin, when looking at Mollie Skinner’s characterization of Tucker, for instance. Comparison highlights the elements of “intertextuality and interdependence”, maintains Bennett, with “comparatists” providing a “horizontal” dimension to the “vertical [i.e. historical] cultural mosaic” of area studies.²⁴⁷ It should provide “in-depth insights” for Australian Studies, based on “real knowledge and understanding” of the nation²⁴⁸ in relation to various others and the trans-nation.

In a way, my pursuit is not far removed from that of Paul Sharrad either. Sharrad also works on Australia-India connections and receptions. In one of his essays titled “Reconfiguring “Asian Australian” writing: Australia, India and Inez Baranay”, he claims to have been inspired by Robert Dixon to move beyond the nation-bound, home-and-away frameworks for studying Australian literature. He too wants to see how “the Indian connection at the Australian end is matched by an Australian connection in India”, and how Australian Studies might be reconfigured when viewed from the Indian side of a transnational circuit.²⁴⁹ His focus, though,

²⁴⁷ Bennett “‘Nation’ and Literary History: The Case of Australia” 106-107.

²⁴⁸ Bennett “‘Nation’ and Literary History” 108.

²⁴⁹ Sharrad “Reconfiguring “Asian Australian” writing: Australia, India and Inez Baranay” 11-29. 12.

comes to rest on recent post-colonial authors inhabiting transnational space to narrate Australia and India, authors such as Inez Baranay.

Like me, Sharrad chooses to look at Indo-Australian transnational formations through the prism of translocation/translation and not always predictable generations of meaning and affect.²⁵⁰ How had Deakin translated Buddhism and 1857 for his Australia, I ask in the thesis. Transnational, as also translational considerations, are premised on comparisons. The Indo-Australian comparative paradigm, when refracted through translation/translocation, could unsettle into “creative reconstruction”²⁵¹ – of both India and Australia – at the site of reception, constituted mostly by Australia and Australians in this thesis. Transnational comparisons, especially in the context of India and Australia between 1890 and 1950, tend to displace the cosy self-other binary into the liminal suspended between the smudged boundaries of observation and introspection, exploration of the other and self-revelation.

What comprises then the set of purposes served by comparison as an epistemological and political method for this thesis designed as a comparative enquiry? The comparative mode is medial, it occupies the in-between space that separates and connects, making doors and bridges to bring distant places and positions into interrelation and conversations. I use this medial mode to enquire into the role of India as a formative influence on Australianness between 1890 and 1950. This research, focused on entanglements and conversations across borders – be they those of territories, disciplines, colonisers and the colonised, languages or epistemological traditions – also otherwise builds on medial categories such as *angst*, translation, *tarka* and *kalpana*, all of them inhabiting the in-between.

My comparative enquiry tends to correct asymmetries, and not only by bringing together the famed and the failed as Antipodean gatherers of an Australianness wrested and written in response to India. Comparison in my thesis resists the preservation of insularity, exclusions and purism with its telos of culture-straddling contemplation that revels in exciting connections, sharp opposition, dialogue and displacements. This involves the risky business of boundary-breaking, cross-cultural thinking which pushes the boundaries of familiarity to introduce new ideas of Indic origin into the host culture of Australia and the English language. I argue my case for the Indo-Australian constellation and transfusions between 1890 and 1950, by appropriating elements from different traditions or philosophical standpoints across geographical areas, cultures and time-periods. I wish thus to contribute back into English-

²⁵⁰ Sharrad “Seen Through Other Eyes” 7.

²⁵¹ Sharrad “Seen Through Other Eyes” 6.

language philosophy by introducing concepts and categories from the traditions and sub-traditions of Indian philosophy.

But I also use the comparative method of fusion philosophy crisscrossing varied traditions, concepts and styles of thinking, to create an eventual post-comparative epistemic-political premise/promise for this and other aligned research. According to Arindam Chakrabarti and Ralph Weber, post-comparative philosophy – my term for what they dub “the spin . . . beyond comparative philosophy” – amounts to “just doing philosophy as one thinks fit for getting to the truth about an issue or set of issues, by appropriating elements from all philosophical views and traditions one knows of but making no claim of “correct exposition””. They envision such a “truly borderless” praxis to “spontaneously straddle geographical areas and cultures, temperaments and time-periods (mixing classical, medieval, modern, and postmodern), styles and subdisciplines of philosophy, as well as mix methods” in a globalized world.²⁵² Though perhaps at a rudimentary level, I attempt just such a praxis in my thesis, imagining that it might help reduce the wild asymmetries, to begin with the post/colonial epistemological asymmetries, of the globalized world we presently inhabit.

Interdisciplinarity

My research inevitably straddles disciplines. It is multigeneric, in multiple ways. It explores a variegated group of works with kinship ramifications, even as they spill across genres. This comprises fiction and non-fiction by Deakin and Skinner, their biography of the nation and autobiography, one segueing into the other and often into travel-writing, and the responses to India braided through their oeuvre. With an emphasis on the close reading of primary texts, the broad basis of my investigation remains literary. Yet the quest and domain of the thesis reciprocates the interdisciplinarity of the texts explored. The fluidity of disciplines traverses territories normatively attached to histories – of narrating and imagining the nation in its insularity and trans-entanglements, as also the social and political histories of India and Australia between 1890 and 1950 – and literatures from the two places which on occasions speak to each other, as well as politics, geography, area studies, comparative studies, translation studies and philosophy, and the “pure” sciences like mathematics, physics, medicine and biochemistry. The latter, since I apply terms like “autophagy”, “radioactive”, “pluripotent” and so on, and revisit the concept of zero to explore the Australias reimagined in response to Asia, especially India, and to explore too how no purity derives without the gift of metaphor.

Interdisciplinarity in research makes for the bridges and permeable doors across

²⁵² Chakrabarti and Weber *Comparative Philosophy without Borders* 22.

disciplines, removing disciplinary fear, hostility and insularity. The intrusion of new ideas, categories and metaphors from outside of disciplinary boundaries especially displaces and trans-habituates literary studies – a field all ripe and ready in the synthesis of multiplicities²⁵³ – pushing its limits and opening it up to the possibilities of transfusion and new domains for exploration. Disciplinary collaboration emerges the epistemic correlative to border-crossings and the hospitality of listening to otherwise obscured, transnational narratives of nation-making that provide the pivot to this thesis, with reference to Australianness as forged in response to Australia’s India between 1890 and 1950. Interdisciplinarity in this case stokes the grammar of non-exclusive possibilities inside of the nationing project, alterities unabashedly entangled and crafted in conversation with diverse others including the neighbour.

Multiple disciplines gather in my research to jostle, argue, revel and sizzle with their gift of diverse dimensions, performing self-reflexively the “planetarity” or non-centric solidarity of diversities that Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak posits to be the ethical displacement of globalization,²⁵⁴ given the lust of the latter for uniformity and the centre. A collectivity of disciplines in vigorous dialogue, each from the preserve of an unflattened perspective, enables my parallel research interrogation into a dominant, unitary-inflicting, wildly asymmetrical imaginary of the (white) Australian nation by digging into the planetarist, trans-entangled alternatives emergent between 1890 and 1950, and kindled by India.

And eventually, of borders

This thesis then turns a bhashya²⁵⁵ on Deakin and Skinner’s works. In the context of those texts, it excavates some of the dispossessed histories and silenced, forgotten motifs of India-Australia engagement and their implications during the above-mentioned period, through forensic and fundamental interdisciplinary research of the histories, protean national identities/alterities, and texts and philosophies in circulation in the two territories. The exploration invokes a conceptual framework that synthesizes terms, categories and theories not always metropolitan, emergent from multiple spaces and in excess of the binarist colonial

²⁵³ “Sahitya”, the Sanskrit term for literature and literary studies, could be approximately rendered as “solidarities across”, connoting the incorrigible trans-tending of the discipline so as to connect and collide across boundaries of myriad specificities.

²⁵⁴ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. 16 & 97. Print.

²⁵⁵ The Sanskrit term “bhashya” refers to a creative commentary, adaptation or alternative interpretation of a text that situates it in a fresh context or school of thought. Bhasya translates the text to a new possibility of reception. It is a potentially plural term. Even a text as canonical as the Gita admits of multiple bhasyas by thinkers as diverse as Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Jnaneswara, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Aurobindo Ghosh and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, representing diverse schools of philosophy and individual departures.

formulae, or their reverse.

My research coalesces around the crossing of borders. Borders are meant to be crossed: they invite smudging, redrawing, undoing and un-thinking, provoking with “the possibility at each moment to step out, beyond the conditional confinement that borders might represent”.²⁵⁶ And the crossing of borders eventually raises the question: how to host the otherness of the other? It is a question I engage with in the thesis, evoking the hermeneutics of plurality, conversations, comparison and translation/anuvad as my epistemic-political premise. Such a premise seeks to destabilise habitual asymmetries of othering and of the colonial epistemological framework. It performs at least in part the conversational, multi-nodal form that moors classical Indian philosophical writing.²⁵⁷ Need the other be necessarily contained in a securitist, immuno-addict poverty of metaphors, I enquire. How do words, ideas and imaginings of Western and Indic origin – categories like Orientalism, Buddhism, exile and anuvad, for instance – get displaced, dispersed and refracted when carried over to Australia and the debates around Australianness? The epistemic-political premise of the thesis promises to look into infiltrations of the trans-nation and translation into the making, unmaking and re-makings of an allegedly purist nation between 1890 and 1950.

B. Existing Research

My research belongs at the intersections of multiple domains, including obviously the discourses around the making of Australia as nation and a -ness, understood and iterated in terms of various trans-factors and intimate others during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, along with the available literatures on Australia’s Asia, Australia’s India as well as the corpuses on Alfred Deakin and Mollie Skinner. From each of these domains, I invoke in this segment the research that I consider to be influential and entangled with questions raised in the thesis. Such a survey can at best be representative, and relevant works not mentioned here or explored subsequently in the thesis find a place in the bibliography. Co-texts and contexts from domains evidently less entangled, though still in conversation with this research – domains such as the colonial performance of gender, cartographic representations of national identity or the Indic paradigms with their parallel takes on tense, translation, exile or discourse as the unfinished business of dissent, to cite a few instances – are mentioned, and at times briefly elucidated, in the sub-section on secondary sources. The volumes and papers under the

²⁵⁶ Chakrabarti and Weber *Comparative Philosophy without Borders* 2.

²⁵⁷ Ganeri Interview by Richard Marshall. Web.

rubric of existing research come furnished with bibliographical footnotes in this segment, only if they have not been cited elsewhere in the thesis.

Coming to the diverse discourses in contention and conversation around Australian nation-making, Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1958) set piously to the "task" of reinstating a national legend coalesced around the bush, the white bushman, Irish bushrangers and the nomad tribe of freshly arrived, male white Australians. The legend had earlier been proposed by Vance Palmer in his cult title *The Legend of the Nineties* (1954), valorising the white settler bushman standing guard and toiling hard in his idyllic bush through the 1890s, apparently sans the hazard of women or urban lures in the middle of that not-always-green nowhere. Palmer's exclusivist, egalitarian legend has had little to do with the white Australian settler society that always remained overwhelmingly urban, as discussed above. David Walker in *Dream and Disillusion* (1976) explores the failure of this dreamt up legend to engage white Australia of the early twentieth century, and the consequent disillusionment of Europe-returned Palmer and his peers with the inheritance of Australianness.

As editors of *Symbols of Australia: Uncovering the stories behind the myths* (2010), Richard White and Melissa Harper depart from the Palmer convention with their historically informed, incisive and occasionally ironic stance on the making of the stories, myths and images that have come to transmit Australia as the constellation of a set of readily reproducible, widely disseminated symbols such as the national map, cooee, wattle, Uluru, digger – and silences. Elsewhere in his monograph *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980* (1981), Richard White examines the make of the Australian national identity in terms of a set of shifting images, iconography and exclusions invented or often outsourced from Europe, Britain or the USA since the late eighteenth century, images such as "Terra Australis Incognita", "Diggers and Heroes", "Everyman and his Holden" and so on, these being the titles of individual chapters in the book. Shirley Walker digs into the ambivalence and violence embedded in many of these circulated images and perceptions of Australia in her paper "Perceptions of Australia, 1855-1915" (1988). The perceptions remained "invariably Eurocentric" and dependant on empire, she observes. And the Promised Land of whiteness had been imaged primarily in terms of "its contempt for women" and xenophobia, the latter exploding in "hatred of the Chinese and violence towards them" during the period.²⁵⁸

Travel to and through the Australian continent thrives as a major motif for imagining

²⁵⁸ Walker, Shirley. "Perceptions of Australia, 1855-1915." *Australian Literary Studies* 13.4 (Oct. 1988): 157-173. 167-168. Print.

Australianness during the period investigated in my research. Richard White's "Australian Odysseys: Modern Myths of Travel" (2009) explores tropes of travel within and outside the continent, woven into the text/texture of Australian national identity since at least the late nineteenth century. In his seminal volume *The Road to Botany Bay* (1989), Paul Carter proposes an open-ended, non-linear spatial historiography to understand white settlement in the continent in terms of its past/possibilities and the simultaneous ambivalence of exploration and erasures involved in travelling the continent, and naming/nationing the routes. Stephen Muecke seems to take the cue in *No Road (bitumen all the way)* (1997), a work in which he induces the romance of the road. He chooses to leave the bitumen of settler society, "finally to get lost and maybe to find a way again" (133), as he falters and speculates through half-erased aboriginal passages, memories and storytelling, and gathers them into the fantasy of a syncretic, republican post-nationalism.

Then there are the feel-good nation-weavers. Geoffrey Blainey's *This land is all horizons: Australian fears and visions* (2001) is an upbeat volume conjuring the Australia that is extant as an "endless horizon" of space, possibility and yes, stability and development/industrialisation, though he does nod to the green and Aboriginal movements. Peter Coleman dubs his edited volume on a set of alternative ecologies for discoursing an isotope of Australianness released from the bush as *Australian Civilization* (1962), no less. And despite the tender irony of title, Donald Horne's *The Lucky Country* (1964) cannot bring itself to give up on the luck of being "one of the world's most prosperous and stable smaller nations" that is 'western' and has as yet survived being "strategically . . . part of Asia" (9). *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*²⁵⁹ edited by Elizabeth Webby trains its focus on literary genres, periods and receptions; Brian Kiernan's *Studies in Australian Literary History*²⁶⁰ explores its pick of canonical literary icons and Antipodean images across periods; the *Oxford Literary History of Australia*²⁶¹ edited by Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss examines the "settling-in" of English in Australia with the founding of a literary canon and of gendered national identities, exclusions and sometimes, even the blurring of gender-roles evident from outback fiction of the 1890s. All three volumes are invested in Australianness as rainbow-refracted through an eventually coherent national literary canon. Yet *Images of Australia* (1992), the Introductory Reader in Australian Studies edited by Gillian Whitlock and

²⁵⁹ Webby, Elizabeth, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print.

²⁶⁰ Kiernan, Brian. *Studies in Australian Literary History*. Sydney: Shoestring Press, 1997. Print.

²⁶¹ Bennett, Bruce, and Jennifer Strauss, eds. *Oxford Literary History of Australia*. Melbourne: OUP, 1998. Print.

David Carter, parses the multiplicities, divergence, contending versions, urban-rural divide, racial exclusions, sub-national groups, gender blindness, the masculinist monotone and its alternatives on the fringe – all a simmer within the domain.

For there slouches the dark side to the Australian dream, to borrow from Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra's ominous title. In *Claiming A Continent: A New History of Australia* (1996), David Day looks at the possession of Australia as continent and a nationhood through the prism of global contentions, conflicts and the dispossessions within – of aboriginals and the peoples of colour from Asia. Project White Australia and its afterlives in the new century are examined in their varied ramifications in *Legacies of White Australia: Race, Culture and Nation* (2003) edited by Laksiri Jayasuriya, David Walker and Jan Gothard. In *Best We Forget* (2018), historian Peter Cochrane chooses to look back at the inescapable racial legacy of Australian nation-making. He critically reconfigures its participation in the First World War as the War for White Australia triggered by race fear. Australia's terrible human cost at Gallipoli, the Middle East and the Western Front in Europe is interpreted as "the price paid for the future-proofing of white Australia" in the event of a much-apprehended Japanese invasion (224). Despite the deluge of centenary remembering – blinkered and sanitised – of the 1915 Gallipoli campaign, this history of Australian participation in lieu of British assurance of military aid in preserving its race purity against all forms of Asian aggression in the years to come has been tamed out of popular memory, argues Cochrane (227).

And finally there queue the titles and articles that query mythologies held sacred to the mission of Australianness and nation-making, stoking the idiom of alternatives. *What's Wrong with Anzac: the Militarisation of Australian History* (2010), a collection co-authored by historians Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds among others, interrogates the official sponsorship and apotheosis of Anzac as the inviolable nationalist myth and asks if nations are really made in war. In this nation-building ocean of whiteness, and militarist maleness, whither the liminal? Margaret Allen's paper "Betraying the White Nation: The Case of Lillie Khan" (2006) explores the great anxiety and distrust that hovered around Australia's white masculinist nationhood through the early twentieth century when it came to the white women, and especially those Antipodean females who dared to cross over by marrying partners from Asia. In his edited volume *Sacred Australia: Post-Secular Considerations* (2009), Makarand R. Paranjape considers re-coding "sacred Australia" as home and a healing space to the many exiled shadow-narratives and alterities entangled in dreaming Australia into a nation, including the Aboriginal Dreamings and their sacralisation of the land with its criss-crossing tracks.

David Walker's *Not Dark Yet* (2011), a personal history in conversation with various

seasons in Australian nation-making, delicately weaves the oft-erased complex of Asia connections into all of those seasons, despite seeming to inhabit a finally accepting, albeit profoundly ironic, vision of the dominant national myths and iconography. In an aligned vein, Bruce Bennett in his essay “Australian myths” (2006) pleads for the “proliferation of alternative stories” and “multiplication of myths”²⁶² associated with a new pluralist conception of Australia that could belong to the Aboriginals, post-Second World War immigrant groups and the women.

As to trans-factors braided ineluctably into the plurality of discourses around forging Australianness and the angst of that craft surveyed above, travel and translation provide fecund beginning points. In their Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Australian Travel Writing* (1996) – an anthology of excerpts from travel-accounts of Australians abroad during both colonial and postcolonial periods – editors Ros Pesman, David Walker and Richard White investigate this genre and its multigeneric possibilities as an index to the trans-tendencies of Australian self-perceptions as also to the great diversity, ambiguity and hidden hierarchies huddled into the holdall termed “Australian”. Between 1890 and 1950, white Australians discoursed themselves into a translated, thus removed people by norm, and as translators/interpreters of the regions that they would visit in the neighbourhood. Though it does not invoke the Australian context, Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi’s Introduction “Of colonies, cannibals and vernaculars” to their edited anthology *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (1999) is invoked repeatedly in my research so as to theorise translational possibilities, including the potential post-coloniality, of Australia-India connections during this period. The English version of Paul Ricoeur’s French title *On Translation: Thinking in action* (2006) has infused in me the courage and creativity to think of translation outside of the imperial grammar of conquest. Within the framework of this thesis, translation spills that grammar to emerge an act of liminality, mediality and receptivity, an endlessly unfinished business engaging various others in conversation, constellation.

“What was Postcolonialism” – enquire Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra in their investigation of the multiple mutants to that condition proliferated in an allegedly postal context. The 2005 paper amounts almost to a requiem on the promise of subversion embedded in the word, for postcolonialism seems as apt to invent a robust afterlife to the colonial asymmetries. Hodge and Mishra’s take resonates with my research on the inflections of

²⁶² Bennett, Bruce. “Australian Myths.” *Homing In: Essays on Australian Literature and Selfhood*. Perth: API Network, 2006. 15-29.17. Print.

post/colonialism for Australia especially between 1890 and 1950, when it had remained caught between the hunger for a national federated identity uneclipsed by Britain and the concurrent angst of finding itself abandoned and insecure in an alien neighbourhood. As one of the most potent trans-factors haunting Australianness, Antipodean post-colonialism as a literary spectrum has also been explored in Santosh K. Sareen's "Australian Post-colonialism" and Bruce Bennett's "'Nation' and Literary History: The Case of Australia", both articles featured in Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee's edited volume *Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context* (1996). While Bennett espouses a comparative post-colonial approach in Australian national literary studies by integrating Asian myths, Sareen examines the cultivation of a 'native' white Australian identity in the national literary canon through relative creative resistance to England and all that it had come to symbolize.

With the many shades to Australian post/colonialism, Britain and its empire had loomed visibly large in shaping Australianness with all its blanks and remakes between 1890 and 1950, and thereafter. *Australia's Empire* (2008), edited by Deryck M. Schreuder and Stuart Ward, and Andrew Hassam's title *Through Australian Eyes: Colonial Perceptions of Imperial Britain* (2000) trace Australian identity in a weave of white settler responses to imperial Britain. In their co-authored volume *The Unknown Nation: Australia After Empire* (2010), James Curran and Stuart Ward further read Australian national identity as an uncharted plunge into crisis post the British imperial retreat from Asia and the Pacific. So much so, that Australian scholars have not yet been able to come up with any consensual conceptual shorthand for invoking their own 'end of empire' story as a national makeover. The shock and upheaval of that end continues to addle Antipodean attempts at conceptual and semantic coding of the British imperial retreat into a nationalist grammar of post-imperial resurgence, argue Curran and Ward.

In her essays "White Man's Country: The Trans-National History of a National Project" (2003),²⁶³ "The White Man Under Siege: New Histories of Race in the Nineteenth Century and the Advent of White Australia" (2004) and "On Being A White Man, Australia, Circa 1900" (2003), Marilyn Lake contends that project whiteness – embedded in the vision and policy of a federated Australia since the late nineteenth century – has to be read against the wider canvas of a contemporary transnational imaginary widely circulated and as enthusiastically received and discoursed across Britain, the USA and Australia. This was the noir imaginary of the white insecure Anglo-Saxon male under potential siege from emergent coloured races of China and

²⁶³ Lake, Marilyn. "White Man's Country: The Trans-National History of a National Project." *Australian Historical Studies* 122 (2003): 346-363. Print.

India that he had once colonised. The white man needed thus an exclusive continent and constitution to himself in order to secure his manhood and its pristine privileges against the deluge of colours. In his title on this trans-project that had dyed and defined Australian nationhood during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Andrew Markus names the unspeakable – *Fear and Hatred: Purifying Australia and California, 1850-1901* (1979).²⁶⁴ *Re-Orienting Whiteness* (2009) edited by Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus historicises whiteness as a trans-imperial project of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism violently inscribed on colonial spaces and bodies. As a case in point, “Australia may well prove to be paradigmatic” (10), observe the editors. In *Placing Race and Localising Whiteness* (2004) edited by Susanne Schech and Ben Wedham, on the other hand, race and whiteness studies are localised in Australia, as a performance webbed in trans-entanglements such as the “Southern European Foreigner”, transcolonial migrants like the Anglo-Indians or the indigenous Australians.²⁶⁵

What is white solidarity without the spectre of the other, and the other, especially the Asian other, remained as haunting a trans-entity for debating and imagining Australianness between 1890 and 1950 as imperial Britain and the empire-induced project whiteness planted in the Antipodes.²⁶⁶ As to the sustained presence of Asia within, and the history of Australian political and policy responses provoked by that diaspora, Laksiri Jayasuriya offers an investigative analysis in his papers “Australian Multiculturalism: Past, Present, and Future” (2003)²⁶⁷ and “The Australian-Asian Connection: from Alfred Deakin to John Howard” (2006).²⁶⁸ In *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (2008), authors Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds premise Australian nationhood on an exorcist dream that had enshrined the “dichotomy of white and non-white” (9), non-white being here code-word for the competitive agency of the awakening “Asiatic”

²⁶⁴ Markus, Andrew. *Fear and Hatred: Purifying Australia and California, 1850-1901*. Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1979. Print.

²⁶⁵ Schech, Susanne, and Ben Wedham, eds. *Placing Race and Localising Whiteness*. Adelaide: Flinders Press, 2004. Print.

²⁶⁶ As to how the other – not always the brutalised, demonised, prostrated, invented enemy but also the other from the other side, as a subject of negotiable desire and difference perched at the comfort-end of the spectrum of privilege – could permeate the formation of an ethnic, territorial or national identity, just as “Europe” permeated the ideas and emergent identity of “Bengal” and Bengalis since the mid-nineteenth century through the oeuvre of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda among others, see Tapan Roychowdhury’s *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (OUP, 1988) and Arindam Chakrabarti’s *Bangalir Europecharcha [Bengali’s Europe]* (Anushtup, 2016).

²⁶⁷ Jayasuriya, Laksiri. “Australian Multiculturalism: Past, Present, and Future.” *Discipline of Social Work and Social Policy*, School of Social and Cultural Studies, University of Western Australia, 2003. Web. 6 Dec. 2018.

²⁶⁸ Jayasuriya, Laksiri. “The Australian-Asian Connection: from Alfred Deakin to John Howard.” ASARC Working Paper. ANU Research Publications, 2006. Web. 18 Dec. 2018.

from the near future, who could “elbow”, “hustle” and “thrust aside” the white man in his axiomatic superiority. Australians at the beginning of the twentieth century “drew a colour line around their continent and declared whiteness to be at the very heart of their national identity” (138), they maintain, to securitise what Deakin perceived to be Australia’s “strategically perilous position south of the awakening Asiatic peoples” (165). Such had been the hunger for Asia as the liminal, suspended between being trans-factor and the intimate other in the shape of Australia’s “national destiny” (149).

In his essay “Australia Looks Around” (1966), Donald Horne urges the nation-state to recover from its strategic destiny of playing natural satellite to a Western power and engage its emergent, post-colonial environment with a more informed, autonomously designed foreign policy. In “Crossing the Gap: Asia and the Australian Imagination” (1981), Christopher Koch suggests the same in the literary domain. He proposes an infusion of Asian myths – especially those of Indian and Indonesian origin – in Australian national imaginary so as to step across, into a post-colonial tense. Both respond to the asymmetries institutionalised when it came to an Australia keen to contain Asians including Indians during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as highlighted by Margaret Allen in her article “‘Innocents abroad’ and ‘prohibited immigrants’: Australians in India and Indians in Australia 1890-1910” (2005).

The variety of Australia’s concrete historical relations with neighbouring peoples and cultures from Asia has been etched in its rainbow hues and depth of detail by David Walker in *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939* (1999), a trailblazing account of the intimate yet obscured impact that the emergence of modern/imperially afflicted India, China and Japan has had on the vision and formation of Australia as a nation. *Anxious Nation* not only disturbed the imperial slant of mainstream Australian historiography with the thrill of its corrective focus on geography. It has inspired my research-dream of retracing, at least in part, the invisibilised spectrum of India-Australia conversations between 1890 and 1950, with special reference to its bearing on the making and possibilities of Australian national identity. This seminal work by Walker – especially the Introduction and the second and third India-resonant chapters titled “The Antique Orient” and “Blood, Race and the Raj” respectively – serves to anchor my research and its background. Walker’s volume *Stranded Nation: White Australia in an Asian Region*, published by the University of Western Australia Publishing in 2019, has been planned as the chronological sequel to *Anxious Nation*, mapping Australia’s Asia from 1930s till the seventies. I have occasionally referred to its first and second drafts – which I have had the privilege to access – in this introduction, while reading the reluctant shift and dilemma in Australian responses to the seismic shifts in society and politics transforming

a post-Second World War, rapidly decolonising neighbourhood.

In other ways as well, Walker has been a muse for the thesis. *Not Dark Yet* digs into Australia's rich and reflexive links with Asia, through the personal prism of loss and elegant irony. The research anthology *Australia's Asia: From yellow peril to Asian century* (2012) on this traditionally marginalised territory of Australia's past has been co-edited by Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska, and becomes yet another seminal reference for navigating the lost, silenced plurality of Australia's Asia narratives since the nineteenth century. Several papers with their fresh findings from *Australia's Asia* are woven into my thesis. The following chapters in particular have emerged a refrain through this work: Walker and Sobocinska's incisive Introduction on Australia's curious reluctance regarding its Asian pasts, Greg Lockhart's audacious history of "Absenting Asia" from the imperially ordained, normative settler version of Australian historiography, and Ruth Balint's poignant Epilogue on the sea and its associated imaginary in the pollution politics of inventing Australia as a nation of borders and barricades – raised against the troubling cargo of colours.

Alison Broinowski's *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* (1992) remains a comprehensive pioneering work in the field of Australian perceptions of Asia, though with a variant focus on the chronology of exchanges and influence of China, Japan, India and South-East Asia on Australian literature, art and reflexive representations from prehistory till 1991. *Cultural Interfaces* (2004) edited by Santosh K. Sareen, Sheel C. Nuna and Malati Mathur is yet another volume that kindles, with articles on Australia's multicultural possibilities, its Asia and India. These would include "Crossing Cultures: Australia and the Asia Pacific" by Bruce Bennett, "Islands in an Archipelago: the Writer and the Multicultural World" by Satendra Nandan or "Australia-India Relations: Opportunities and Challenges" by Y. Yagama Reddy. Though not constituting research in its orthodox avatar, "Australasian" (2004) – the title of issue no. 63.2 of the literary journal *Meanjin* – brims with fiction, memoirs, essays, paintings and graphic narratives by authors from widely divergent backgrounds, the plural genres limning Australia's Asia of multiple aspects, in its undoused, edgy diversity. Again, the reader for the course "Re-orientations in Australian Literature" offered at the University of Sydney by David Brooks and Bernadette Brennan, curates for analysis and query the identities and difference in Australia's China, India, Japan, Java, Singapore, Colombo, Vietnam and Bangkok as refracted through Australian poetry, fiction and travel narratives since the late nineteenth century. Both compilations provide fecund sources for fresh research possibilities on Australia's Asia, what with the very varied literary takes.

Coming to readers, *Reading Down Under: Australian Literary Studies Reader* (2009)

edited by Amit and Reema Sarwal also features several articles indispensable to exploring Australia's Asia. Among these, David Walker's "Fathomless Eyes: An Australian Guide to the Evil Oriental" explores Antipodean nationalist constructions of the "yellow peril" during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The peril was construed as capable of infiltrating Australia through its littoral edges and the local Anglo-Celtic women. Yasmine Gooneratne's "Fabricated Stereotypes: Asia in the Australian Imagination" examines the history and process of otherisation/orientalising of Australia's Asia, while looking for traces and possibilities of more contemporary conversations and connect. The ambivalence in the interconnections is further brought out in Lyn Jacobs' "Proximity and Distance: Australian Literary Responses to Asia",²⁶⁹ also from this collection. Bruce Bennett's essay "National Images and Stereotypes: India through Australian Eyes, 1850-1950"²⁷⁰ elects to be more focused in its ambit, with an ambitious survey of representative authors and tropes in Australian literary evocations of India through prose narratives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Australian Studies Now (2007), another reader edited by Andrew Hassam with Amit Sarwal and intended primarily for Indian audiences, assorts a compendium of papers on diverse issues, with a slant on teaching and researching Australian Studies in India, the performance of national and diasporic identities in Australia, and of course immigration and multiculturalism. Of these, relevant for my research are David Walker and Bruce Bennett's essays on Australia and Asia. Walker's "Survivalist Anxieties: Australian Responses to Asia, 1890s to the Present" foregrounds a perennial angst around Asia and the fantasised future of Australia Asianised, which would prove crucial to the nationing project of Australia since at least the late nineteenth century. Bennett's "A Family Closeness? – Australia, India, Indonesia"²⁷¹ invokes Christopher Koch's "Crossing the Gap: Asia and the Australian Imagination" and is designed as its sequel. It gazes at the doors opened by recent literature and films of Sri Lankan, Indian and Indonesian diasporic origin in expanding notions of self and the nation in Australia, through multifocal cultural – in place of the patently commercial – exchanges with an Asia not exclusively limited to China and Japan.

As to the hunger for that other "other" – the indigenous peoples of Australia, also dememorialised witnesses pivotal to the making and unmaking of Australianness in terms of exclusions and unspeakables during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – I have

²⁶⁹ Jacobs, Lyn. "Proximity and Distance: Australian Literary Responses to Asia." *Reading Down Under* 513-525.

²⁷⁰ Bennett, Bruce. "National Images and Stereotypes: India through Australian Eyes, 1850-1950." *Reading Down Under* 551-559.

²⁷¹ Bennett, Bruce. "A Family Closeness? – Australia, India, Indonesia." *Australian Studies Now* 328-341.

found the following texts illuminating for my correlated research on exiled stories, memories, margins and the anguish of absented possibilities, in relation though to Australia's India. *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian literature and the postcolonial mind* (1990) by Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra highlights the massive silence and obsession around the exploited, repressed other as haunting the core of the Australian national self-image. The authors theorise Australianness as "locked in an unresolved and undeclared struggle with the original possessors for legitimacy and land, producing a neocolonial form of literature from a neocolonial mentality that is still obsessed with the exploited Other".²⁷² In his provocative black-archival history *Why Weren't We Told: A personal search for the truth about our history* (2000), Henry Reynolds rues the absencing and visibilises frontier violence in Australia and words such as "invasion", hushed out of circulation in the context of indigenous dispossession. Documentary film-maker and journalist John Pilger too etches Australia and Australianness as *A Secret Country* (1990), "a land half-won, its story half-told",²⁷³ half-lived²⁷⁴ to remain a nation of outsiders "until nationhood [i.e. land rights] is restored to the first Australians",²⁷⁵ and their continuing mass extermination by white settlers rehabilitated within national history.

For the writings back, the restoration, contested histories and healing spaces created around these exorcised memories and stories, in which realm I hope this thesis to be homed, Peter Read's *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (2000) and *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians* (2003) edited by Michele Grossman²⁷⁶ serve as exemplars. *Blacklines* seams plural indigenous voices, emergent and eminent, on Australian aboriginal identities, histories, knowledges and critiques of colonial knowing, the imaging, aesthetics and politics of their representation and finally, the praxis of resistance, recovery, movement and memorialising across the continent. Read's *Belonging* is designed as a series of encounters with "Australians of every variety" and provoked by the audacious want to witness their myriad conceptions of belonging to "this divided land",²⁷⁷ posited in relation to the Indigenous past and present. By creating conversations around

²⁷² Hodge and Mishra. Preface. *Dark Side of the Dream* xiv.

²⁷³ Pilger 2.

²⁷⁴ "Half-life" as an English verb is my neologism or take-off from the term "half-life" aligned to radioactivity. In physics, "half-life" refers to the time taken for the radioactivity of a specified isotope to fall to half its original value. Australianness in Pilger's version seems as much a heave of hauntings and absences as the anguished claims to legitimacy by the white arrivers/banishers. It thus remains half-lived by the blanks and silences, the weight of connections vanishing and lost.

²⁷⁵ Pilger 5.

²⁷⁶ Grossman, Michele, ed. *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*. Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2003. Print.

²⁷⁷ Read *Belonging* 5.

possession and dispossessions that gather to listen in to the silenced indigenous narratives of land and lives loved and lost, Read hopes to connect, and to heal. My research, I imagine, is aligned to this hope. With special reference to Deakin and Skinner, I try to restore a few of the lost narratives of plurality, engagement and difference to Australia's India and the Australianness it had flavoured through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Marginalities, however, are asymmetrical and I intend not to walk into the trap of equating all margins and their voices, when it comes to Australia and Australianness of the period mentioned above. Despite the occasional enmeshments of my research domain with that oft-mentioned minority, I have in the preceding couple of paragraphs only nodded to Australian aborigines tucked away in the reserves, before now venturing into a more intense survey of the existing literature on Australia's India.

The remarkable volume *Indo-Australian connections: retrospect and prospects*²⁷⁸ (2016), edited by Santosh K. Sareen, Swati Pal, GJV Prasad and Meenakshi Bharat, runs the gamut of this domain, with essays exploring new paradigms for Australian Studies, including comparative studies, the comparative prism applied to Aboriginal, Dalit or gender studies in the Antipodean context, identity trans/formations across transnational spaces and the seaming of geographies and identities into song by home-seeking minorities, the postcolonial connections as also the role of such connections in configuring Asia-Pacific regional and maritime networks, and so on. Barring the reference to individual authors, the volume does not flaunt much of a slant on the contacts and prospects churned by the colonial past.

Australia and India Interconnections: Identity, Representation, Belonging (2006) edited by Prof. Santosh K. Sareen features essays on Indian and Anglo-Indian diasporas in Australia even as they come to terms with their perceptions of Australians and their own identity dilemma. Of particular relevance for my research from this volume is Bruce Bennett's article "Australian Studies and International Relations", urging deep knowledge of neighbours especially India, as an indispensable trans-dimension to Australian Studies. "Orient and Re-Orient: Australia in Asia" by David Walker, also from this collection, serves as yet another reference point with its ironic gaze on survivalist anxieties of whiteness and manhood in early twentieth century nationalist Australia, designed against the spectre of potential infiltration by polluting Asia. Walker's essay is followed by R. Narayanan's contrapuntal take "David

²⁷⁸ Sareen, S. K., Swati Pal, G. J. V. Prasad, and Meenakshi Bharat, eds. *Indo-Australian connections: retrospect and prospects*. New Delhi: Pinnacle Learning, 2016. Print.

Walker's Asia – "Possessed" Anxiety-Ridden Australia"²⁷⁹ in which he critiques the white settler program of inventing and exploiting an imagined sense of insecurity to legitimize exclusionary violence and xenophobia. Narayanan's essay had set me off to look for alternatives within the arc of Indo-Australian interconnections between 1890 and 1950.

Australia and India: Convergences and Divergences (2010),²⁸⁰ yet another collection edited by Santosh K. Sareen, delves into the possibilities of conversations and intersection across the twined territories. Notwithstanding the articles on colonial masculinity, diasporic narratives, comparative studies of Australian authors and Indian poets writing in Hindi, or on the Australian literary representations of Kolkata, popular icons and their globalized consumption, I have discovered my land of promise in a couple of other papers from this volume. "Australian Studies: An Indian Perspective" by Prof. Sareen etches an astute history of current interest in Australian Studies across Indian universities and associations along with the popular research tropes in these locations, while simultaneously locating emergent research priorities. One of them is to "look at the Australian gaze from those who have travelled to and interacted with Indian people . . . [to look at] India in the Australian imagination",²⁸¹ to which terrain I believe my work belongs. Bruce Bennett's essay "Australian Encounters with India: Short Prose Narratives since the 1950s"²⁸² explores the more rounded, complex and sometimes ambivalent representations of India in Australian literature of the latter half of the twentieth century, providing an arresting postal note to my research.

Wanderings in India: Australian Perceptions (2012) edited by Rick Hosking and Amit Sarwal has an aligned focus on travels, encounters and linkages connecting India and Australia across tenses and in multiple areas, from capital and cricket to the first Australian-born novelist on Indian soil John Lang, and nineteenth century traveller sophisticate James Hingston. Of particular resonance for this research have been two chapters from this collection, viz. Bruce Bennett's "India Through Australian Eyes, 1850-1950"²⁸³ and Susan Cowan's "Connecting with India: Australian Journeys" from this volume, both engaging with the major tropes and representative authors from Australia that conjure an exotic, otherworldly and sometimes ambivalent India, colonial and post colonies. Part of Cowan's essay has appeared with the title

²⁷⁹ Narayanan, R. "David Walker's Asia – "Possessed" Anxiety-Ridden Australia." *Australia and India Interconnections* 286-297.

²⁸⁰ Sareen, Santosh K., ed. *Australia and India: Convergences and Divergences*. New Delhi: Mantra Books, 2010. Print.

²⁸¹ Sareen, Santosh K. "Australian Studies: an Indian Perspective." *Australia and India* 1-17. 12.

²⁸² Bennett, Bruce. "Australian Encounters with India: Short Prose Narratives since the 1950s." *Australia and India* 18-36.

²⁸³ Bennett, Bruce. "India Through Australian Eyes, 1850-1950." *Wanderings in India*. 75-88.

“Glimpses of India: A Military Dekko” in *Explorations in Australian Literature* (2006) edited by Jaydeep Sarangi and Binod Mishra: in chapter three, I invoke this latter essay on depictions of Australian recruits in the colonial British army in India for my research on Mollie Skinner’s Tucker.

An earlier volume titled *Unfinished Journeys: India File from Canberra* (1998), edited by Debjani Ganguly and Kavita Nandan, shores the kaleidoscope that is India for the unabashedly pluralised citizens of Canberra, from Satendra Nandan and Bill Van Der Heide to Alison Broinowski and Bruce Bennett. The kaleidoscope refracts India through a Canberra palette of memoirs, travelogues, pilgrimages, memories and readings – of films, maps, photographs, paintings, temples, rock art, fiction, iconic moments and people from history and literary texts. As moving and myriad-sided as the connect proves to be in this beautiful book, it does not speak directly to the domain or to the period of my investigation. Except perhaps Alison Broinowski’s “The Dancing Monkey: Australia and Indian Independence”, to which I have referred elsewhere in this introduction, the edition has had little to do with the forging of Australianness between 1890 and 1950.

As already detailed above in this Introduction, Len Kenna’s *Are Indians an Ethnic Minority* (2008) traces the enmeshment of India and Australia to the obscured yet extensive pre-colonial trading and familial ties between seafaring lascars and various Australian aboriginal tribes. This fascinating history is however preoccupied with a period pre-dating that of my research. In their Preface to *Colonial Cousins: A Surprising History of Connections Between India and Australia* (2010), authors Joyce P. Westrip and Peggy Holroyde on the other hand claim ambitions of a pioneering research adventure into forgotten affinities, anecdotes and documented evidence enmeshing India and Australia through the regime of the Raj. The volume, though, turns out to flaunt little outside nostalgic flashbacks into the “to-ing and fro-ing” of spicy tales from princely states, Anglo-Indian officers and traders from the Raj, or the ruggedly exotic Afghan camel drivers.²⁸⁴ Of much more interest, since offering a more diverse palette in terms of trope and form, seems the collage of Australian impressions of India across multiple genres over the past century and a half, collated as a chronological series in *Of Sadhus and Spinners: Australian Encounters with India* (2009) edited by Bruce Bennett, Santosh K. Sareen, Susan Cowan and Asha Kanwar. Though not a formulaic critical edition, the short

²⁸⁴ Westrip, Joyce P., and Peggy Holroyde. *Colonial Cousins: A Surprising History of Connections Between India and Australia*. Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2010. Print. Phrases such as “To-ing and Fro-ing” or “Spicy Tales and Strange Happenings” belong to the titles of individual chapters in the book.

stories, essays and excerpts from travelogue and fiction by Australians white and coloured curated in this collection provide a fecund source of contexts and co-texts speaking to my research, within and beyond the period elect.

And then there is the past-is-placid argument mentioned above, in the subsection on India as Australia's neglected neighbour. In her piece commissioned by the Australia India Institute, "'So, where the bloody hell are we?': The Search for Substance in Australia-India Relations" (2011), Sally Percival Wood for instance recommends fresh beginnings for intercultural exchange and access, to be fueled by the curiosity of mutually unlearning anachronistic cultural judgements inherited from the British empire. The past could exhume "unhelpful, negative stereotypes", she implies.²⁸⁵ Instead of inhabiting the exorcist's scream and exclusion, Wood's pessimism triggered me to look for the alternative, less visible imaginaries of Indo-Australian connections haunting yes, even the imperial past. Ian Copland's "Beyond the Mirage: Reflections on the Indo-Australian Relationship" (1991) also reads the Indo-Australian past down to 1947 as "a bi-product of British imperialism"²⁸⁶ and the present or its promise "does not get even the limited public attention that East and Southeast Asia receive",²⁸⁷ owing largely to the shadow of that imperial tense. Despite its obvious economic, geographical and military significance for Australia, could India have become neglected terrain in Australia's Asia Studies for being possibly too imperially familiar to qualify as a threat even after independence, muses Copland.

In *India: Australia's Neglected Neighbour? 1947-1996* (1996), Meg Gurry puts down the "neglect" to divergent post-colonial visions, oceanic imagination and strategic concerns, regional or global, of the two nations, while R. G. Neale traces it to their very different legacies of the colonial past and aligned differences on the question of loyalty to empire, colonial or neo-colonial. T. B. Millar's chapter "The Indian sub-continent" from his title *Australia in Peace and War: External Relations since 1788* (1978) nods to Indian participation in the two World Wars alongside the Australians under British command as well as to the Commonwealth connection, but that is about as much of a hint of Indo-Australian intersections as we are granted from before 1950. Of the International Studies wallahs, S. K. Bhutani does not deign to look into the colonial past in his analysis titled "India-Australia Bilateral Relations: An Indian Perspective" (1995). And a volume like *India and Australasia: History, Culture and*

²⁸⁵ Wood "So, where the bloody hell are we?" 9.

²⁸⁶ Copland "Beyond the Mirage" 127.

²⁸⁷ Copland "Beyond the Mirage" 129.

Society (2004)²⁸⁸ edited by N. N. Vohra is perched on migration, multiculturalism and the Indian diaspora as hotspots of Indo-Australian exchanges, and action in that zone had quickened only since the 1960s. My research, I hope, untames the past of India-Australia connections from the rote of stereotypes and legitimised neglect.

Deakin – “literary statesman”²⁸⁹ and Australian – remained an enigma for his contemporaries and political collaborators, and had roused researchers ever since. Interests shift from the trans-perspectives reflected in the staunch nationalist’s reading lists to the vision of the nation, and tones have meandered from the adoring to the downright interrogative.²⁹⁰ Walter Sofronoff reads back the recent centralizing tendency in several judgements of the federal High Court to Deakin’s intervention in enacting the extant Australian Constitution more than a century ago.²⁹¹ In “The Australian-Asian Connection: from Alfred Deakin to John Howard”, Laksiri Jayasuriya takes Alfred Deakin as the originary point for reading the limits and possibilities of federal public policy and imagination around Australia’s Asia connection since the inception of the Federation in 1901.

Of the plethora of biographies and articles delving into his imprint on the nation resonant since the making of the Federation, La Nauze’s magisterial *Alfred Deakin: A Biography* (1965) sets the template. With resolute focus on the political persona, *Alfred Deakin: A Biography* enshrines Deakin as foundation figure and ur-myth for the nation, and not one of the twenty eight chapters in that tome engages with Deakin’s India. La Nauze has edited a volume titled *Federated Australia: Selections from Letters to the Morning Post 1900-1910* (1968) comprising many of Deakin’s anonymous reports written in the guise of an Australian correspondent for the London-based daily *Morning Post*, as also the title *Walter Murdoch and Alfred Deakin on Books and Men: Letters and Comments 1900-1918* co-edited with Elizabeth Nurser. The latter features Deakin’s correspondence with young friend and confidant Walter Murdoch. In both the editions as well as in sketches and lectures such as “Alfred Deakin: Two Lectures” (1958), La Nauze’s Deakin finally arrives as an avatar of “the thrilling prophet of a united Australia, the man who lifted people’s hearts and minds above the envies and divisions

²⁸⁸ Vohra, N. N., ed. *India and Australasia: History, Culture and Society*. New Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2004. Print.

²⁸⁹ See for instance the title chosen by Graeme Powell, Manuscript Librarian at the National Library of Australia, for his paper on Deakin. Powell, Graeme. “The Literary Statesman: Alfred Deakin and his Papers.” *National Library of Australia*. National Library of Australia, n. d. Web. 16 Dec. 2012.

²⁹⁰ See for example, Crowley, P. K. “Alfred Deakin: The Day of Judgement.” *Meanjin Quarterly* (June 1966): 220-223. Print.

²⁹¹ Sofronoff, Walter. “Deakin and the Centralising Tendency.” *Quadrant* (Sept. 2008): 86-93. Print.

of their day”.²⁹² Deakin’s youth, friendships and other roles and interests are but tributaries to the telos. And La Nauze deems India as decidedly not instrumental to that narrative.

For years, bibliophiles Deakin and Murdoch mulled over the possibility of cultivating a distinctively Australian literary canon as national signature.²⁹³ Walter Murdoch’s *Alfred Deakin: A Sketch* (1923) exudes the warmer tone of a memoir authored by a grateful young protégé and foregrounds Deakin’s earlier aloof dreamtime years as crucial to the making of a formidable politician and nation-wielder. Notwithstanding, even in Murdoch India is relegated to being a benign distraction before Deakin’s involvement in the protracted 1890s conflict for Federation, as detailed in the second chapter.

Al Gabay’s *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin* (1992) and John Rickard’s *A Family Romance* (1996) attempt fresh biographies with a slant on the private, familial and spiritual, visibilising some of the silences in Deakin’s much publicised life, or lacunae in the preceding life-sketches. Yet India remains the consistent elision decked in cursory Edenic epithets, as in Rickard’s biography that I analyse in the second chapter, or seems not much else besides a hub for outsourcing spiritual metaphors to finally legitimise Deakin’s political ambitions re-coded into sacred mission, as in Gabay. The latest biography, Judith Brett’s *The Enigmatic Mr. Deakin* (2017), curates Deakin’s India as a curio, museumised and void of resonance for his policies and political vision regarding federated Australia.²⁹⁴

Then there are the contemporary interpreters of Deakin’s relevance for the nation. Apart from the Alfred Deakin lectures hosted by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) on the centenary of the foundation of the Federation – many of which seek to reassess the continuing influence of Deakin for Australia and are explored at some length in the second chapter – historians Stuart Macintyre and Marilyn Lake repeatedly revisit and question Deakin’s political praxis and vision in their essays. Besides La Nauze, Stuart Macintyre has also edited Alfred Deakin’s *The Federal Story: The Inner History of the Federal Cause 1880-1900*, which he titles ‘*And Be One People’: Alfred Deakin’s Federal Story* (1995). Macintyre’s Deakin is an ambivalent figure, an outsider as much as a liberal icon and architect of nation, whose national motifs/motives today could be construed as both noble and ignoble and continue to resonate in Australia, even if many of those motifs have been overtly dismantled.

²⁹² La Nauze, J. A. *Great Australians: Alfred Deakin*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962. 1-30. 29. Print.

²⁹³ “Alfred Deakin on Australian Literature: with a comment by Walter Murdoch.” *Meanjin* (Dec. 1957): 427-430.

²⁹⁴ On the gaping silences in Brett’s biography, see Lockhart, Greg. “At the Limits of Liberalism: *The Enigmatic Mr. Deakin*.” *Sydney Review of Books* (2019): n. pag. Web. 9 Sept. 2019.

His “Australian Settlement” including the restrictive immigration policy and the protective tariff system prioritised the nation, even as it enshrined inequities of race and gender at the heart of the nation’s egalitarian ideal, contends Macintyre in “Alfred Deakin: A centenary tribute” (2003).

In her lectures and papers such as “Alfred Deakin’s Dream of Independence” (2006), “On Being A White Man, Australia, Circa 1900” (2003) and ““The Brightness of Eyes and Quiet Assurance Which Seem to Say American’: Alfred Deakin’s Identification with Republican Manhood” (2007), Marilyn Lake traces the angst of in-betweenness of colonial masculinity of the late nineteenth century at the root of Deakin’s fraught relations with imperial Britain and his dream of autonomous nationhood for Australia. Albeit that dream, according to Lake, was premised on an imagined transnational fraternity of white Anglo-Saxon men for Deakin, and the orbit importantly encompassed the United States. India as Deakin’s lifelong influence however remains the constant omission in such reinterpretations.

Once again I shall have to steer clear of the lucid syntax of symmetries. The deluge of biographies and contemporary re-evaluations of Deakin is matched by a competing draught of discourse and cultivated silence on Skinner – the author who would not, could not toe the norms of Australian nation-branding of her time. Her oeuvre of Australian fiction consistently wove trans-factors and multiple others into the text/ure of Australianness. For instance Susanna De Vries’ *Great Australian Women* (2002) does not mention her, despite relating “the stories of sixteen strong, independent but compassionate women who have made a difference to Australian society and changed attitudes about women’s roles”.²⁹⁵ Of the few who wrote on her and whom I invoke and engage with in the third chapter of this thesis, Barbara Kearns’ 2005 thesis “Mollie Skinner: on the brink of all the balances” is incisive and stands out. It attempts to write a life that salvages Skinner from the tyranny of varied tense-savvy prototypes of the Australian female – genteel, democratic or feminist – as well as from her heavily edited, posthumously published remake of an autobiography.

Both Joan Newman and Sylvia Martin attempt feminist readings of Mollie Skinner’s life and fiction. Newman’s “Constructions of the Self: Mollie Skinner” (1991) cages the author into the role of a reluctant feminist trapped in the grid of Western Australian colonial gentry of the late nineteenth century and hurtled into consequent confusion, contradiction and ambivalence in her creative oeuvre. I read the limitations of such a position in my third chapter.

²⁹⁵ De Vries, Susanna. *Great Australian Women Volume II: from pioneering days to the present*. Sydney: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002. Print.

Sylvia Martin in her 1993 essay “Mollie Skinner, Quaker Spinster and ‘The Witch of Wellaway’” again reads Skinner as a frustrated feminist and closet lesbian based on her published autobiography and a short story; her Skinner though is done more in black-and-white – the suppressed passive and the witchish alter-ego – than Newman’s nuanced portrait.

Unlike Newman and Martin who are invested in Skinner the Victorian colonial woman and author as refracted through her select works, Donna Coates and Susan Cowan choose to focus on her Great War fiction. In her article “Guns ‘n’ Roses: Mollie Skinner’s Intrepid Great War Fictions” (1999), Coates reads two of Skinner’s alleged war-novels as war-weary and subversive of the patriarchy-inflicted traditions of literary representation of women in Australian Great War fiction and occasionally, of the sacralised Anzac myth. Susan Cowan in her paper “Glimpses of India: a military dekko” (2006) looks at Australian representations of colonial India through the prism of barrack life and military-induced encounters. Skinner’s *Tucker Sees India* features as an anomalous war-military-and-empire evading exemplar of the genre.

Among the articles and manuscripts I found arresting while looking through a trove of Mollie Skinner’s papers preserved at Batty Library, Perth, and at the archival collections of the University of New South Wales, I shall like to mention here Marjorie Rees’ memoiristic papers and her 1964 article published on Skinner and D. H. Lawrence in *Westerly*. Yet these papers and article either limn her collaboration with Skinner in typing and revising the manuscript of *The Fifth Sparrow*, or ruminates on the Lawrence episode. Skinner’s manuscripts, typescripts and unpublished fiction and essays mostly attempt biographical sketches, nation-sealing moments or reflections on culture and lifestyle from the early days of white settlement in Australia. They exude anxiety to inhabit nationalist stereotypes of the time, or again, obsess with her meeting with Lawrence. I explore papers of both Skinner and Rees in the third chapter.

C. On the Significance of this Research, or how is this Research going to be Different

Amidst the flood of texts and explorations related to my domain, that again is located at the confluence of a sea of interdisciplinary domains, what comprises then the signature of this research? Resources print and electronic abound on Alfred Deakin the Federation maker, thrice Australian Prime Minister in the first decade of Federation, architect of the White Australia policy, lawyer, Alfred the affable yet enigmatic, journalist incognito, youthful dabbler in theosophy and seance, untiring diarist and keeper of clues and memories, eclectic in his choice of readings from multiple religions yet purist in the pursuit of Australia for the Anglo-Saxon.

In all such studies, however, India is represented as more of an excusable diversion, a boutique niche closeted to a certain season of life and kept to the diaries, not unduly enmeshed in Deakin's public life, political career or national imagination for Australia. My research on the other hand retrieves Deakin's India as a constant, myriad-motifed imprint in his life, both private and public, with which he had to engage and wrangle – intellectually, politically, spiritually and in terms of affect – to shape, shift and yes, silence certain sets of possibilities for self and the Antipodean nation and Federation.

I have also not come across any work that researches Deakin along with the obscured Mollie Skinner under the rubric of Australian responses to India between 1890 and 1950. As icons and authors of Australia, the two have apparently very little in common. Rather than make a study in contrasts or in the symmetry of counters, one of my aims in the thesis has been to map the bewildering range of their visions and versions of India and concurrently, of Australia, restoring some of the depth and complexity – the erased and exiled narratives – to the web of Indo-Australian connections during the above-mentioned period.

The research also retrieves Mollie Skinner from neglected margins of the Australian literary canon. Why the neglect, I ask, and why the silencing, induced amnesia and ultimate exile of her texts from the national literary canon, when she had been an author published in her own right by Jonathan Cape, leading London-based publishing house of the day? My quest e/merges into an intense, tenuous exploration of the life and published oeuvre of a perennial misfit, a fecund “failure”, wordsmith of alterities, with special reference to the four years Skinner had spent travelling as an empire-appointed nurse in British India between 1913 and 1917, and to the trail of that India morphed and memorialised through her life and writings. Some of her writings erupt into barely fictionalised testimonials of her marginalization as I investigate. The perch of the India imprint clearly departs from an obsession with Skinner's collaboration with D. H. Lawrence in composing and publishing *The Boy in the Bush*, that overwhelms much of the sparse existing literature available on her.

I delve also into the dialogue between Skinner's India and the unsettling imaginary of her Australianness, the latter steeped in forbidden trans-factors and transgressive of the myriad shadowlines of partition and othering throughout her fiction. Such a study promises to restore not only a few fragile, invisibilised links outside of the imperial routines braiding India and Australia during the colonial past, but serves also as a node of genesis for possibilities in the post and the present. Among other dreams, my research aims to revise the absurd asymmetry of ghettoizing Skinner either as colonial feminist or a cringing Lawrence-collaborator, by shifting the debate to the layered matrix of her India and Australia, and to the portrait of an

author who had failed to belong – to communes and their stereotypes in season. In this departure at least, I think the thesis comprises original research on Mollie Skinner and her works.

As discussed above, significant fundamental research exists on the emergence of the white Australian national identity that loved to define itself against coloured Asia at least in the early federal years. And a number of texts chronologically charts the Asian influence on Australia in terms of the dynamics of repulsion, fascination and engagement, if reluctant, that informed the relation from the colonial era down to the present day. The Indo-Australian dialogue too has been debated in books, the thrust being on future possibilities that could redress the past neglect. However, as David Walker concedes, there are “no histories for the Australian relationship with India . . . for the period to 1939.”²⁹⁶ To the best of my knowledge, there exists no concerted research that examines Australian responses to India between 1890 and 1950, with special reference to the twin authors of my choice.

The thesis hopes to fill that gap. It explores relations between different parts of the colonial periphery, how one colony intervened within another different colonial site, thus shifting focus to the exchanges between extra-metropolitan parts of the British empire. This is in departure from the convention of privileging the metropole-colony traffic in writing and rewriting the imperial past. The thesis untames that past as a place of myriad possibilities and visibilises India and the Indian Ocean as indispensable to evoking Australia’s Asia even in the late nineteenth century, for Asia since that tense has habitually been evoked as a Pacific constellation for the Antipodean nation.

I do not insert Australia’s India between 1890 and 1950 as the antique Orient or passive pet of empire or even as a simple threat, as is the wont of much of the existing literature in the domain. Rather, in alignment to Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s *Europe’s India* (2017),²⁹⁷ this thesis explores Australia’s India as a spectrum, open to shifts and transformations especially during early years of imagining and legislating the Federation, with different Indias awaiting discovery in the crucible of Australian nation-making. To enter the vast historical churn of that era, I choose to focus on the particularities of individual lives and responses, one a politician and closet memoirist, the other a nurse and sometime author, one famous and the other little remembered. I read India between 1890 and 1950 as Australia’s engaging neighbour, ready to question and kindle alternatives that could speak to the post-colonial conversations around

²⁹⁶ Walker *Anxious Nation* 11.

²⁹⁷ Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. *Europe’s India: Words, People, Empires, 1500-1800*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2017. Print.

transnational connections and a securitist nation – then and now.

Also, to read Australia's India as also unlearn the gaze pre-scribed for such a subject, I use a post-comparative method, trans-infusing Indic terms, categories and theories into my theoretical framework while freely appropriating elements from the Western, metropolitan philosophical standpoints and traditions. I consider this boundary-breaking heteroglossic praxis through my thesis to be an epistemological intervention. Disrupting the epistemological colonisation that partitions between metropolitan sites of production of theory and the texts/markets readied for their application/consumption, the research aims to create a trans-resonant conceptual matrix that could situate and explore Indo-Australian connections between 1890 and 1950 outside of the pre-scripts of a colonial past.

D. Sources

Primary Sources

Texts – sometimes rare or unpublished – by Alfred Deakin and Mollie Skinner, on India and the possibilities of Australia it helped conjure, are my primary sources. As to the primary texts, i.e. texts I read closely in the thesis, I have confined myself to published works by the two authors. When it comes to Alfred Deakin, the primary texts I study comprise his early allegorical fiction, *A New Pilgrim's Progress: Purported to be Given by John Bunyan* (1877) which he allegedly wrote as an otherworld-channelling medium, as well as *Irrigated India* and *Temple and Tomb in India*, the twin travelogues based on India and published in 1893, and his posthumously published memoirs – *The Federal Story: The Inner History of the Federal Cause 1880-1900* (1944) and *The Crisis in Victorian Politics, 1879-1881* (1957) – on the making of the Australian Federation and pre-Federation colonial politics. I have however frequently referred to Deakin's unpublished diary entries, his speeches in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, the manuscript of his 1890 testament, letters as also the anonymous reports he had sent to newspapers and newspaper clippings of the period, as co-texts I retrieved from archives of the National Library of Australia.

As for Mollie Skinner, her six published novels mentioned in this introduction constitute my primary textual sources, along with *Men Are We* (1927) – an anthology of anecdotal sketches based on outback encounters with aboriginals of a white Australian nurse-protagonist – and *The Fifth Sparrow* (1972), Skinner's posthumously published auto/biography. I have looked at sections on India in the initial untinkered manuscript of her autobiography as a co-text, so as to explore the excised bits that could not make it to the published version that was

heavily edited and remade almost into a biography by Mary Durack. I have nodded too to her letters, the stories “The Witch of Wellaway” published in *The Bulletin* and “The Hand” featured in an Australian literature anthology curated by Nettie Palmer, as well as Skinner’s unpublished fiction, typescripts of her memoirs on the encounter with Lawrence and unpublished sketches of epic episodes and their pioneer-adventurer protagonists – male and female – from early days of the Federation, available as manuscripts. These manuscripts and typescripts have been sourced from various State and University Libraries and Archives, especially the Battye Library of Perth and non-state collections such as the Religious Society of Friends Archive at Mount Lawley in Western Australia.

Secondary Sources

For my research I have referred to a comprehensive array of textual sources from Australia, India, UK and the USA. Secondary sources on Deakin would include the five biographies authored from multiple perspectives by Walter Murdoch, J. A. La Nauze, Al Gabay, John Rickard and lately, Judith Brett, as already mentioned in the “Existing Research” section. Then there exists the deluge of journal papers, articles in magazines, newspapers, addresses and commemorative lectures on Deakin or reassessing his influence on Australia, available in print or online, by Marilyn Lake and Stuart Macintyre among others, a few of which I have explored and applied en route my interpretation of the enigmatic Australian Prime Minister and the nation he had resolved to serve, as midwife and muse.

Compared to Deakin, Mollie Skinner is quite the shadow, as much a pariah, an erasure from the national literary canon and history, as Deakin continues to be memorialised in Australian politics, policy-making and public speeches. I could gather only Marjorie Rees, Joan Newman, Sylvia Martin, Donna Coates and Susan Cowan to have written papers on Skinner outside of the Lawrence connection and I look at them in the chapters on Skinner. Besides her own memoirs, manuscripts, typescripts and published oeuvre, I have often fallen back on Barbara Kearns’ unpublished thesis fecund in insights on Skinner’s life as author and outlier in early twentieth century white Australia, and the politics of the posthumous image-lift accorded by the much-arrived feminist editor of her autobiography.

The literatures on Deakin and Skinner exist and unfold in a wider socio-political, historical and literary matrix. Multiple maps – as literary iconography and literal cartographs – of British India and Australia thus figure in my research. These comprise the sacred geography of India as also the irrigational cartography installed by the Raj and perambulated by Deakin. My discussion on Skinner’s Australian scapes and protagonists features an upside-

down map of Australia dating from 1793 and drawn by the captain of the flagship to the first fleet of white settlers that arrived in New South Wales in 1788.

I have analysed too the extensive discourse on race and race patriotism published in books, journals and magazines such as *Lone Hand* in the early twentieth century, *Drawing the Global Colour Line* (2008) by Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds and *Re-Orienting Whiteness* (2009) edited by Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus, literatures on the Australian nationing project and national iconographies including the Anzac in books like *Symbols of Australia* (2010) edited by Melissa Harper and Richard White, David Walker's *Not Dark Yet* (2011) and *Stranded Nation* (2019), and on the pan-European phenomena of colonisation, Romanticism and the vision of universal modernity that so influenced Deakin, Skinner and the Australia of their times. As to the latter domain, I consider particularly illuminating essays by Nigel Leask and Alan Richardson on intimate connections between Romanticism and colonisation, whether of the East or of the feminine, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Mark Mazower's lecture on the imagination of Europe as a vision of universal modernity since the late eighteenth century, evoked in the chapter on Deakin. To access Skinner's performance of late Victorian colonial gentility and femininity in Australia and her failure to fit in either as a conformist or even a dissident, I have looked at literature on the white colonial performance of gender, especially femininity, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including books like Penelope Russell's *'A Wish of Distinction': Colonial Gentility and Femininity* (1994) and Susan Sheridan's *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women's Writing, 1880s-1930s* (1995).

Texts on travel and translation, within the frame of European colonialism and the white Australian settler colony – books such as David Arnold's *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze* (2005) or Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay* (2010) and Richard White's paper "Australian Odysseys: Modern Myths of Travel" (2009) – enter and entwine this my thesis on travel, transits and translation between Australia and India, from 1890 to 1950. Invoked by the white Australian hunger for a retrotopia²⁹⁸ of the perfected European past as telos for its futurist nation-making, classical Western epics like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* gather, as sources and intertexts for the research. The above list of secondary sources is of course representative and by no means exhaustive.

²⁹⁸ The term "retrotopia" has been inspired by Zygmunt Bauman's 2017 title *Retrotopia* published by Polity Press. Bauman's retrotopia is his translation of Thomas More's "utopia" for a late capitalist world, it refers to the contemporary, globally emergent architecture of disenchantment with the absurd inequities of modernity. The disenchanted look back to a perfected, menacing past designed as future goalpost for a particular location, or nation.

There also gather the India texts and Indic concepts – contemporary and classical – as sources, intertexts and counter-texts to narratives in norm for white Australia between 1890 and 1950. Could exile be gathered into a gift – for crafting new collectivities? Could it emerge as home and healing space to a non-exclusive nation made in transit, in excess of the nation’s etymological hunger for origins and originary identities? Could a diaspora bear a nation post the “impossible mourning”²⁹⁹ and “never healing wound”³⁰⁰ of dispersion? In engaging with questions crucial to invisibilised possibilities of Australianness during the above-mentioned period, I refer to Vijay Mishra’s title on the unhappy diaspora – *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (2007) – in the fourth chapter, along with Amitav Ghosh’s rather different take in his essay “The Diaspora in Indian Culture” (2002), as well as to Panini’s *Ashtadhyayi* (c. 6th-5th BCE) for its grammatology of separation and migration from home and origin, among other texts.

What spin could translators and the act of translation add to this churn of nation-making, especially when it came to Australia and its India? As I explore with reference to Alfred Deakin and Mollie Skinner in the following chapters, Amitav Ghosh’s novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) proves a fascinating co-text. As does Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi’s Introduction to *Post-Colonial Translation* (1999), in which they posit their take on *anuvad*, the proximate Sanskrit term in conversation/contestation with Paul Ricoeur’s “translation” in my thesis.

And how to revisit, imagine and re-interpret the past, when eluding the trap of the nation reinvented as a retrotopia purged of, and made into a weapon against the other/outsider? How to re-member a nation’s past of trans-entanglements as the site of present possibilities, if strands from that past had been silenced, erased? For this research retracing the elusive strands of India-Australia interconnections between 1890 and 1950, I have found particularly useful Ashis Nandy’s paper on “History’s Forgotten Doubles” (1995) and Sibesh Bhattacharya’s title *understanding itihasa* (2010). Both engage with alternative, multigeneric and dynamic forms of historiography preserved in the narratorial traditions of *itihasa-purana*. Given his free-wheeling re-telling and interpolations in locally received myths and anecdotes, why, I go on to propose Skinner’s Tucker as a potential *puranika*. Amitav Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land* (1992) features as a co-text on marginalised histories of the pre-colonial, intercontinental Indian Ocean trade thriving for centuries on an ethic of cooperation and compromise and including northern Australia in its cosmopolitan network, prior to the European scramble for monopoly and

²⁹⁹ Mishra, Vijay. *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary*. London: Routledge, 2007. 9. Print.

³⁰⁰ Mishra *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* 114.

colonisation of ocean routes and territories. Skinner's *Black Swans* is set in northern Australia and alludes to that invisibilised past.

As to revisiting the idea of India and its varied receptions by Australians like Alfred Deakin and Mollie Skinner during this period, I have not always gone by the imperial, orientalist traditions of scholarship so avidly followed by Deakin, nor even by the templates of writing back, of which Said in *Orientalism* is brilliant exemplar. To access and investigate these receptions, I invoke traditions of analytical thought within polemical pluralities of the classical philosophical schools of India – traditions invested in the labour of engagement with various others/outside and driven by the anguish and ethics of imagination, empathy, receptivity, epistemic humility and the desire for equity. I have sourced the concepts of samarasa yoga, samatva and sat-tarka from Abhinavagupta's magnum opus *Tantraloka* and that of tarkasamsara from his *Vivriti Vimarshini*, anrsamsya and anukrosha from the *Mahabharata*, mamatva as a category of activism in aesthetics from Prof. Jaidev, and the exploration of these and aligned terms and ideas such as tarka and kalpana, from Sibaji Bandopadhyay's *Three Essays on the Mahabharata: Exercises in Literary Hermeneutics* (2016) and Arindam Chakrabarti's lectures, newspaper articles and English and Bengali titles, including *Comparative Philosophy without Borders* (2016) and *Bhatkaporer Bhabna [Thinking about Food and Clothing: Essays in Quotidian Philosophy]* (2014). The classical epics, treatises and recent commentaries mentioned above preserve and protect dialogue, provocative difference and the plurality of alternatives inside of the "orthodoxies" of Hinduism, just as fourteenth century Kashmiri Sufi poet Lal Ded gathered them outside in her poems, one of which serves as my intertext for reading Mollie Skinner's India.

Some of Deakin's early fiction, especially *A New Pilgrim's Progress*, and his late diary entries share remarkable overlaps with select verse from Chandogya Upanishad, Katha Upanishad and the Svetasvatara Upanishad. These have been referred to, as source and intertext. Rabindranath Tagore's short story "Kshudhito Pashan" (1895) narrated by a suave English-initiated Bengali colonial, serves as yet another fascinating intertext for reading Deakin's colonial anguish in his almost coeval twin publications obsessed with decoding India. Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* (1983), fecund in insights on colonial relations and the way they shaped both coloniser and the colonised during and after the British colonisation of India, provides a consistent co-text to reading Deakin and Skinner, and their responses to India and Australia.

As to transits and responses of the British sahibs and memsahibs to colonial India, I refer to Ketaki Kushari Dyson's treatise *A Various Universe* (1978) and the volume compiled by

Indira Ghose, *Memsahibs Abroad: Writings by Women Travellers in Nineteenth Century India* (1978) along with her authored title *Women Travellers in Colonial India* (1998), as co-texts to both our Australian co-colonials' craft of India and Australia, crafted in empire-aided travel across the subcontinent. The anthology *1857: Essays from Economic and Political Weekly* (2008) remembers and queries the 1857 anti-British uprising and its narrations from multiple historiographical angles. This book serves as my co-text to compare and at times, interrogate Deakin and Skinner's evocations and installation of the moment in their oeuvre. On anti-colonial movements and Indian nationalism – phenomena that erupt with some recurrence in both Deakin and Skinner – and on nation-making and its norm of blood and borders in general, I refer among other texts to Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and Faisal Devji's article "Nationalism as antonym of communalism" published in *The Hindu* (2014), on the history of nationalism in colonial India. Besides the featured India angle, these texts resonate with the making and re-makings of Australianness, in contexts colonial and postcolonial.

Yet, "any historical moment was concurrently pregnant with effects of different forces that operate with different time lags",³⁰¹ and other tenses had gathered around colonial moments of the Indo-Australian entanglements. In evoking the pre-colonial and non-colonial within and as witnesses to the colonial, I take as one of my sources Surajit Sen's Bengali volume *Fakirnama* (2009), structured as the weave of a series of interviews with bauls and fakirs – syncretistic, wandering mystics and poet-composers from the margins of the subcontinent – and the author's musings on their world. A few ideas and metaphors from the fakiri universe cohabit with terms and categories from the classical Sanskrit epics, verses, texts and treatises in my thesis, representing the concurrent Indic paradigm for engagement with Deakin and Skinner's India and Australia. That paradigm is also inhabited by translated excerpts from Abul Fazl's sixteenth century biography *Akbarnama* and emperor Jahangir's narrative of his rule, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, with sections devoted to Akbar as ruler and his father. Both texts, besides Rushdie's intensely researched fiction *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) on East-West entanglements in Moghul India during the season of the Renaissance in Florence, serve as sources for reading recurring references to the Moghuls in Skinner's *Tucker Sees India*.

My sources then straddle fiction and non-fiction, ranging from memoirs, biographies,

³⁰¹ The idea that a historical moment is made of a constellation of different times and their varied forces in operation at that moment, has been associated with French historian Fernand Braudel (1902-1985). See Sasidharan, Keerthik. "History is not just about villains and heroes." Serendipities (Columns). *thehindu.com*. The Hindu, 20 May 2018. Web. 6 Aug. 2018.

historical volumes and theoretical treatises to novels, poems, maps, newspaper articles, periodicals, epics and commentaries. I cite Salim Sinai, whose birth and life seem to coincide with that of the nation in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1983), as a reference from fiction to resonate with Deakin's occasional, indulgent self-nation equation. Just as in this research, Nabarun Bhattacharya's orphaned eponymous protagonist from his novel *Herbert* (1997) speaks to Mollie Skinner the marginal's status as an eternal outsider and her subsequent erasure from the national literary canon. However, it is as sources fraught with counter-narratives to the norms – of Orientalism, India, nation-making and Australianness – in circulation in Australia between 1890 and 1950, that the India texts seem to be at their most poignant and indispensable.

Early nineteenth century reform movements in Bengal, such as the Young Bengal movement under the aegis of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831), or the Brahmo Samaj co-founded by Dwarkanath Tagore and Ram Mohan Roy in 1828, led to socio-intellectual revolutions that had erupted into the Bengal Renaissance of the second half of the nineteenth century. In its inclusive nationalism, cosmopolitan self-expression and query of the unthinking or inhuman social habits and practices extant in the name of established orthodoxies, the Bengali bhasha literature forged in the unrest of those movements steadily contests Deakin's idea of India as an orientalist stasis. A few such texts are posited in the second chapter as counters to Deakin's sweeping observations of Bengal, and India, during the 1890-1891 visit. And more than once through the chapters, I refer to Amit Chaudhuri's monograph *On Tagore: Reading the poet today* (2012) that interrogates Orientalism and its politics of inventing the static West/non-West binary, with the non-West reduced to routine exotica of an anti-modern, permanent and natural antipode to Europe. Sometimes, spirituality could emerge a register of resistance against the tyranny of a dominant discourse. Since she had come to India, Mollie seemed to have adopted this rich dialect of dissent against colonisation at multiple levels. She quotes Omar Khayyam's Sufi philosophy of existence as a signature of defiance, and I cite Khayyam as a source in the fourth chapter.

In a 1919 essay, Rabindranath Tagore quotes Anatole France on the "White Peril" inflicted as also rationalised for the colonised; it exposes and subverts the "Yellow Peril" crucial to exclusivist templates of nation-making for white Australia through the early twentieth century. I cite this essay in the introduction as an alternative take on the fear of colours dyeing Deakin's dream and the then dominant discourse on Australianness. And I invoke Tagore's seminal 1904 essay "Swadeshi Samaj" on creating and claiming a non-exclusive swaraj and nation through an individual's active, imaginative collaboration with the

heterogenous plurality of Indian society and its web of complementary differences. The essay proposes an imagined alternative to purist, monolithic dictates of -ness and nationalism, in currency at the time in settler Australia. Though not always overtly braided into the works of either Deakin or Skinner, these and other counter-narratives are gathered from the India texts as sources to charter and witness the silences, missed possibilities of Australianness as conceived in terms of its trans-factors, especially India, between 1890 and 1950.

E. Methods

Mine has been an integrated methodological approach comprising comparative, interdisciplinary and translational methods, as detailed above in sub-sections on epistemic-political premise and the sources for this research. Intertextuality is indispensable to such a methodology. I have compared Deakin's non-fiction with fiction written in India in the Bengali bhasha by Rabindranath Tagore and Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay, so as to investigate connections in the colonial's anguished response; I have read too the influence of Upanishadic ideas in coding Deakin's quest for an ideal Australia. *The Intimate Enemy*, Ashis Nandy's analytical treatise on the psycho-social dimensions of Indian colonial history for colonisers and the colonised, has proved as pivotal to reading Skinner's India and Australia in her fiction, as Surajit Sen's documentation of the politics, aesthetics and philosophy of fakiri tenets in *Fakirnama*, among other co-texts.

I have made use of different traditions and philosophies in a consciously methodological or instrumental fashion to explore and argue the case in hand. Theoretical terms and frames from the Western metropolitan centres cohabit and converse with epistemological, aesthetic and ethical categories from an Indic universe. Ideas such as exile and anuvad and people like Deakin and Skinner are examined in translation – between India and Australia – and displacements the translation wrought. In trying to forge an innovative critical apparatus based on the hermeneutics of plurality and conversations, I hope I have finally been able to cultivate a post-comparative methodology for analysing traces of Australia's India in the debates around Australianness between 1890 and 1950.

Being a student of literature by training, I have depended heavily on literary methods for investigating my primary sources, both fiction and non-fiction, by Deakin and Skinner. These methods comprise close textual exegesis and literary-critical reading of the primary texts along with their comparative analysis, while mapping them against their socio-cultural contexts, multiple translational and transnational co-texts and intertexts, and existing research pertinent to my area of interest. Discourse analysis on the making of Australian identity and history as -

ness and a nation between 1890 and 1950, on Orientalism and othering in the Australian context and on Australia's England/Europe, its Asia and especially India as perceived during this period provide the socio-political, cultural and ideological matrix to my research.

Yet my research is also intimate with history and its writing – and silencing – of memories and narratives of trans-entanglements from the past. And I apply historical methods. I have dug into literatures on Australian national identity and India-Australia relations between 1890 and 1950 available at the JNU Central Library, the History DSA Library at JNU and The Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. Thanks to the Australia-India Council sponsored Australian Studies Visiting Scholarship received in the 2009 round, I have also been able to explore State and University libraries and archives across Australia, including the rich holdings in these areas of Australian National University, Monash University, University of New South Wales, the Geelong Waurn Ponds Campus of Deakin University, the National Library of Australia, J. S. Battye Library of West Australian History at Perth and the Mitchell Library of Sydney. Books, journals, magazines and newspaper-clippings procured from these libraries proved enhancing, even transformative, for my research. I have sourced the archival resources on Deakin, Skinner and D. H. Lawrence including their letters, diaries and unpublished papers from these libraries, especially the National Library of Australia for Deakin and the Battye Library at Perth for Skinner's India-related and other literary manuscripts.

In reading into Deakin and Skinner – the biographies, memoirs, Skinner's auto/biography and even the fiction so fluid with their lives – I nod to the methodological approach of an historiographical tradition originating in France and now with a global spread including in India – the history of mentality (*histoire des mentalite* in French). This method seeks to access a period emplaced with its proclivities and fissures in terms of the lives of individuals, their perceptions, emotions and sensibilities, instead of the overarching impersonal descriptors of race, class and gender. What were the material and moral forces – dominant, residual and emergent – that had shaped Deakin's responses to India and his vision of Australia and nation-making? And Skinner's? How had these spoken to the cultural and social history of their generations?

This research incorporates cross-media resources. Besides the time-tested archival method, I have used up-and-coming technologically savvy methods, sometimes simultaneously and for the same source. Having discovered that photocopying or scanning of manuscripts and rare books was not permitted at Battye Library, I carried across Skinner's archival texts in camera. Of course, I have also gone digital. A mass of web resources, featuring maps, books, journals, newspapers, online lectures, addresses and interviews, gather as the kindle to my

research. Along with the isolation of poring over manuscripts and accreting electronic or print publications, my methods have simultaneously been conversational, collective and peer-prone. The latter has included listening to public lectures and oral presentations made at seminars and conferences, especially the biennial seminars organized by the Indian Association of Australian Studies (IASA), the IASA Eastern Region and the Conference on “Contested Histories and the Politics of Memory” held at East China Normal University in Shanghai in October 2015. Having participated and learnt from these lectures and conferences, I cite some of the presentations and addresses as my sources. For this research then, I adopt methodological pluralism with an analytical and multi-dimensional approach.

F. In a Time-machine, across Select Australian Literary Representations of India

Thinkers – among them, historians and philosophers – and politicians of pied positions have conjured and hopefully, kindled this introduction with the jostle of their plural imaginaries of Australianness and Australia’s India between 1890 and 1950. Yet literary refractions of Australia’s India during the period feature far less in the chapter, alas. Speaking to that ache and absence, this section takes a dainty detour around select literary representations of India by a few Australian authors, contemporary or slightly earlier to Deakin and Skinner.

Between 1850 and 1890

From the earliest days of the British settlement of Australia, India had been a familiar part of the colonial imaginary of white settlers in the Antipodes. When it came to the trading and shipping connections – around grain, foodstuffs including chutneys, curry powder and tea, spirits, textiles and textile designs and live animals, including walers – or “to an increasing flow of administrators, merchants, army personnel, clergy and tourists between the Indian subcontinent and Australia”,³⁰² British India provided a lifeline for the new settlement through the nineteenth century. White Australians saw themselves as proxy representatives of the British empire while India with its wealth, diversity, architecture, mysteries and strategic importance, glimmered as the jewel in the imperial crown. Why then 1850?

For India begins to be sieved into Australian literary representations since the 1850s, though of course as that land of outlandish romance, home to the “wild and exotic otherworlds” of “adventure tales of tiger or cheetah hunting” or looting temples.³⁰³ As I flip through a

³⁰² Walker *Anxious Nation* 13.

³⁰³ Bennett “India Through Australian Eyes, 1850-1950.” *Wanderings in India* 75-88. 80.

typescript of collected short stories refracting Australian encounters with India since the 1880s, bequeathed once by Prof. Santosh Sareen, I am arrested by the 1889 anonymous piece, “A Strange Night-watchman: A Story of Northern India”.³⁰⁴ Mr. Tremmel, the English visitor to a hill-station in northern India, trembles to discover a six-foot black and yellow snake as the pet of his missionary host’s children doubling as the eponymous night-watchman of the house. And the narrative plays on stereotypes of exotic India as the coloniser’s litmus test of masculinity/emasculatation in colonised territory.

It is not the above set-pieces though, nor the rehashed colonial tropes that urge me to look back at early Australian literary representations of India. I wish rather to briefly gaze at the prisms provided by two curious Antipodean flaneurs travelling across the Raj between 1850 and 1890 – one a precariat and the other a sophisticate, John Lang (1816-1864) and James Hingston (1830-1902).

Currency lad of Jewish and convict origins, John Lang juggled multiple parts with as many locations, keen on erasing the afore-mentioned ascriptions. He remade himself into the colonial gentleman-traveller between Australia, England and India, yet would not resist an indulgent exhibit of the larrikin flaneur at home in multiple lands and languages – Greek, Latin, French, Hindustani, Persian, English and Anglo-Indian pidgin – through his life and works. Much published in London, Lang spent most of his adult years in India however, where he did not have to be a second-hand flash colonial, but was “accepted as simply John Lang, gentleman, without family connections or a past . . . [with] regular work and an income from his newspaper and an established position”.³⁰⁵ As Victor Crittenden assiduously chronicles in his biography, Lang went on to become Australia’s first native born novelist and first best-selling author, successful editor and proprietor of *The Mofussilite*, the “free-and-easy” popular news magazine³⁰⁶ with a focus on the local and sensational as also the trans-colonial. Lang had run *The Mofussilite* from Calcutta, Umballa, Agra and the military cantonment of Meerut since 1845; it featured most of his translations, poems, short stories, journalistic pieces, sketches and

As to the motif of the plunder of temples by Pacific pirates, see Albert Dorrington’s 1907 tale “The Mouth of the Moon-God” published in *The Australian Town and Country Journal*, and mentioned in Bennett’s essay in 82-83.

³⁰⁴ “A Strange Night-watchman: A Story of Northern India.” *The Australian Town and Country Journal* 16 Nov. 1889: 29.

³⁰⁵ Crittenden, Victor. *John Lang: Australia’s Larrikin Writer*. Canberra: Mulini Press, 2005. 158. Print.

³⁰⁶ “Mofussil.” *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical, and Discursive*. By Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell. Ed. William Crooke. 1903. New ed. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2012. Print.

serialized novels. He became the favourite barrister with Indian royals³⁰⁷ and financiers, one they could trust to take on the mighty East India Company,³⁰⁸ though he had tried to play down that role post 1857.

A reluctant pioneer to almost stumble into genres like the Australian novel in *The Forger's Wife* (1855) – in which Lang vividly evokes the city of Sidney and its slang, its convicts and Emancipist entrepreneurs, and a non-English, non-nostalgic bushscape of lush beauty and attendant risks such as the bushranger³⁰⁹ – or the emergent detective novel in *The Detective*, commenced in *The Mofussilite* in early 1860 as a series of mysteries solved by a mysterious, globally itinerant detective and left unfinished, or even the crisp, comic and brief ‘Railway’ novel that supplanted the then customary three volume affair, Lang nonetheless remained the lifelong precariat. He remained the peripatetic alcoholic deserted by his first wife and perched on the edge of dissipation and freefall, buried in Mussoorie and erased for long from public memory.³¹⁰ How had this “colonial curiosity”,³¹¹ the anomalous interloper thirsting for respectability, represented India in his oeuvre?

Lang’s books on India include novels such as *The Wetherbys, Father and Son* (1853) comprising a lightly satirical look at English cantonment life in India, *Will He Marry Her?* (1858) engaging the forbidden of transracial love and marriage in the Raj, as well as the largely autobiographical series of sketches *Wanderings in India*, published in *The Mofussilite* in the mid- to late-1840s, recirculated since 1853 in Dickens’ magazine *Household Words* and brought out finally as a book in 1859 with the addition of two new sketches, possibly in response to the metropolitan horror and fascination roused around India post 1857. And there are more than one India that Lang evokes in these texts.

The narrator’s voice being that of a seasoned English gentleman traversing the empire, much of his India fiction presents a sardonic insider’s take on the absurdities of expatriate life of British officials in India – maladministration, disorderly regiments, chaotic marital lives,

³⁰⁷ Lang, John. “The Ranee of Jhansi.” *Legends of India: Tales of Life in Hindostan by John Lang*. Ed. Victor Crittenden. Canberra: Mulini Press, 2008. 10-17. Print.

³⁰⁸ Crittenden *John Lang* 208.

³⁰⁹ Keesing, Nancy. Conclusion. *John Lang & “The Forger’s Wife”*. Sydney: John Ferguson, 1979. 100-104. Print.

Crittenden further notes in his biography *John Lang* that George Flower the ‘Thief taker’ in *The Forger’s Wife* was the first detective to appear in Australian fiction (141).

³¹⁰ Ruskin Bond tried to trace John Lang’s grave in the Camel’s Back cemetery in Mussoorie in early 1970s and thus signed off: “All I know just now is that . . . like his books, his manuscripts and his wife, his grave has mysteriously disappeared” (242).

Bond, Ruskin. “Looking for John Lang’s Grave.” *Blackwoods Magazine* 311.1876 (Feb. 1972): 237-242. Print.

³¹¹ Earnshaw, John W. “Legends of Australia and John Lang – A Curiosity of Colonial Literature.” *Biblioworks* 11.4 (Apr. 1958): 1-3. Print.

“the idioms and foibles of new colonial elites”,³¹² i.e. the dissolute, falling-apart, mythically inexorable, up-at-Shimla civil and military officer sahibs of the British East India Company, adrift in their amoral, caste-rife, violent colonial world. The narrator’s sentiments though remained unmistakably imperial, as outed in several sketches of Indians in *Wanderings in India*³¹³ where travelogue and memoir tend to fiction and sensation. Australia is hardly mentioned by name in his India works. Adrian Mitchell argues that “the influence of the colonising agency itself, the lesser [British] officer class in particular . . . upon the emerging social and literary structures of the colonies” as etched in Lang’s works,³¹⁴ might be a linking factor. Mitchell goes on to link the sardonic tone in many of Lang’s British officer-narrators serving in India with Australian laconic fatalism, though the connection seems tenuous at best.

If individual episodes like “The Mahommedan Mother” and “Black and Blue” in *Wanderings in India* tinker with the transgressive Raj motifs of transracial erotics and miscegenation, implicitly questioning the assertively masculinist, misogynist and racist codes of empire, the plotlines only reaffirm those entrenched codes. Dooneea, the eponymous Mahommedan mother, must be expunged from her child’s life and fortuitously die, if the child is to be raised an Englishman and inherit his British father’s property. Chandee, another child of transracial contact in “Black and Blue”, is denied in London courts the title and inheritance that is rightfully his.

When it comes to the depiction of Indian royals he had legally advised, Lang seemed reluctant to let go of the orientalist stereotypes revitalized post 1857.³¹⁵ Rani Lakshmbai had approached him to act for her against the East India Company so as to reverse its order of annexation on Jhansi. Lang’s 1859 sketch of the meeting exudes the cynical imperialist stance, “asserting his power over the Rani [when he agrees to take off his shoes in deference to her gender, but insists on wearing his black hat], demonstrating he can behave as truculently as any of the heaven-born who have treated her and Jhansi with such cavalier disregard”.³¹⁶ The

³¹² Medcalf, Rory. “The Rani’s Kangaroo Lawyer: Writings and wanderings in India of Australia’s first novelist John Lang.” *MARGIN (Monash Australiana Research Group Informal Notes)* 67 (Nov. 2005): 5-14. 8. Print.

³¹³ Lang, John. *Wanderings in India and Other Sketches of Life in Hindostan*. London: Routledge, Warne, and Routledge, 1859. Print.

³¹⁴ Mitchell, Adrian. “John Lang’s Botany Bay Tricks in India.” *Austral-Asian Encounters: From Literature and Women’s Studies to Politics and Tourism*. Ed. Cynthia vanden Driesen and Satendra Nandan. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2003. 305-316. 311. Print.

³¹⁵ See for instance Lang’s memoir of his meeting with Peshwa Nana Sahib, Maratha leader of the 1857 uprising, in *Wanderings* 104-117.

As Rory Medcalf observes in “The Rani’s Kangaroo Lawyer”, “He [Lang] offered some explanations of the character of Nana Saheb but certainly no apologia for the man Britons saw as a mass murderer and villain” (12).

³¹⁶ Hosking, Rick. “A Traveller’s Eye: John Lang’s *Wanderings in India*.” *Wanderings in India: Australian Perceptions* 89-104. 95.

narrator ends with an amused inventory of the Rani's lavish gifts: "an elephant, a camel, an Arab, a pair of greyhounds of great swiftness, a quantity of silks and stuffs (the production of Jhansi), and a pair of Indian shawls . . . The Ranee also presented me with a portrait of herself, taken by a native, a Hindoo".³¹⁷ Lang sketches an exotic episode recounting his encounter with the glamorous Rani of 1857 "notoriety", without choosing to wade into the troubled waters of supporting the enemy.³¹⁸

Despite the occasional odd nuances and ambiguity to empire, Lang's motley sketches in *Household Words* and *Wanderings in India* eventually end up chartering India as the exotic orient bordering at times on the Gothic – with its thuggees and wolf-boys, its jungles full of game in wait for the sporting Britons at rest and play, its bricked-up skeletons of young women draped in white muslin and buried alive in underground vaults, and the various, invariably subordinate contact groups such as the porters, Eurasian compositors and keranees, ludicrous royals, invisibilised punkah-wallahs cooling the climate-afflicted sahibs or the remote tribe of Abors,³¹⁹ all asprawl under territorial surveillance of an imperial Kiplingesque commentator. The precariat was not ready to be sidled to the margins, when it came to the craft of depiction of the defeated and the colonised.

Victor Crittenden and Rory Medcalf, Lang scholars both, rue that John Lang has long been forgotten in the land of his birth. Despite vivid evocations of the still bush, bushrangers, convicts and the Sydney babel, Australianness as nation-building nous seems too nebulous a notion in Lang's works. Crittenden and Medcalf rather hope that he be resurrected in the subcontinent as a keen chronicler, storyteller of early British India.³²⁰ A reason could be that his writings do not read like those of a colonial with a specific locational mooring, but aspire to ventriloquize an English gentleman at home in the pre-1857 Company Raj of India, luxuriating as habitue and wry observer at the Himalaya club, Shimla, or wandering the mofussil backblocks in style – with skin tanned, Hindustani zubaan and a bedecked khitmutghur, his personal servant and commissary Shamsheer keen on conjuring a moveable feast for Lang and friends.³²¹

1857 is the watershed that sets apart Lang and Hingston's responses and routes through

³¹⁷ Lang "The Ranee of Jhansi" 16.

³¹⁸ Crittenden *John Lang* 166.

³¹⁹ For illustration, please see the episodes titled "Wolf Nurses" (75-77), "Wedding Bells" (34-38), "The Himalayan Club" (110-125), "The Keranees" (64-69) and "The Abors" (53-56) in *Legends of India* edited by Victor Crittenden, featuring excerpts authored by Lang from *Household Words* and *Wanderings in India*. Also, for the streak of the Gothic, "Bricked Up" (196-197) from *Wanderings in India*.

³²⁰ Crittenden *John Lang* 139; Medcalf 13.

³²¹ Crittenden *John Lang* 78.

India. In deference to the post-1857 British outrage against the alleged massacre of white women and children by the “mutineers”, Lang edited out from *Wanderings in India* a number of his stories woven around Indians and previously published in *Household Words*. The expunged narratives include “Wedding Bells” on the thugees who used to waylay and strangulate travellers, or “Wolf Nurses” on local children lost in forests and adopted by the wolves. A number of the pieces were subsequently edited for post-1857 publication, but such touches merely note in passing events associated with the uprising.³²² The frontispiece of the 1859 edition of *Wanderings in India*, showing Lang seated beside Nana Sahib in the latter’s carriage, had been likewise removed from the 1861 version. Formerly a sign of favour, the frontispiece could come back to haunt the favourite with the now forbidden connections to an arch-villain and rebel leader from 1857, and Lang had to have it removed.

These re-workings seem cosmetic. Between 1854 and 1859, Lang had lived in England or as a traveller in continental Europe: “in a journalist’s worst dream, he missed all of the action [of 1857]”.³²³ Despite the obligatory nod to the Meerut massacres in *Wanderings in India*,³²⁴ meant as a salve for his British readers still reeling from the shock, Lang’s India narratives are often set in Uttar Pradesh and belong to a period from just before the 1857 uprising. That is, they are crafted around encounters, dialogue, hobnobbing and play with motley individuals, British and Indian, and the sea of stories in osmosis across the colonised-coloniser membrane. Unlike Hingston, who travelled by rail, road, river and sea across Madras, Calcutta, Benares, Lucknow, Delhi, Agra and Cawnpore, and yet hardly got to converse with the locals or pick any one of their multitudinous languages. He chose to be drawn to the “strangeness and intractable difference of the mysterious East”.³²⁵

Hingston’s India, as revealed in *The Australian Abroad on Branches from the Main Routes Round the World* (1879-80), speaks to Deakin’s. It is as resonant with literary allusions and templates from orientalist texts, especially Thomas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh* (1817) and Max Muller’s lectures on the origin of religion, as curious in dabbling with the ancient/exotic as distant romance, as keen on partitioning the place between a sensuous, imaginative, extravagant and pitiless past and the benevolent, British-administered if opium-financed present, time machines apart. Hingston invented himself as an investigator and adventurer in Benares, a city he perceived to be at once holy, filthy and moving in its antiquity, an elegiac

³²² See Lang *Wanderings* 102, 130, 192, 218, 229-33, 242, 244, 261.

³²³ Medcalf 5.

³²⁴ Lang *Wanderings* 261-262.

³²⁵ Walker *Anxious Nation* 17.

observer of desolation and the ruined greatness of architectural splendours at Lucknow, Agra, his dream – Delhi, all but razed in 1857, and a rather reluctant, omission-prone colonial gentleman on tour to the 1857 memorials, in these cities and in Kanpur.

“The recital of the names of palaces and forts and mosques Hingston endows with romance are precisely the same names and places that only a short while before carried terrible associations of massacres, appalling privation, war and heroic battles, and carnage”, observe David Walker and Roderic Campbell, “Hingston does mention the Mutiny . . . but only in passing and only from a British perspective”.³²⁶ His take is unabashedly imperialist. India for him evoked a theatrical extravaganza painted to life, the literary leaf-come-true from a remote tense and space, “an Arabian Night’s sort of dream”.³²⁷ The uncomfortable recent past, of 1857 for instance, with its alternative versions and unsettling possibilities, were best elided in touristic good taste. Quite unlike Deakin, who aspired to implant the angst-ridden 1857 moment as a secular sacred in Australian national mythology, based on Anglo-Saxon military prowess and the motif of invasive valour in someone else’s homeland in the east, as I detail in the second chapter. Deakin’s India, despite the obvious imprint of a Hingston romance, goes on to loom as a more expansive, immediate, disturbing and indispensable intrusion into his national vision.

On a few Australians writing India between 1890 and 1950, besides Deakin and Skinner

“A Tale from Tigerland” (1889), “The Jadooing of Jagger” (1895), “The Boy” (1908), “A Visitor from Mars” (1917) – thus reads a sizable sample of the titles of stories set in India and featured in Australian periodicals such as *The Bulletin* and *The Lone Hand* between 1890 and 1950, as I discover on leafing through that typescript of Australian tales evoking India since the 1880s. Louis Esson’s “The Boy”³²⁸ harps on the figure of the swindle-savvy, conniving, oft-resented servant, the ubiquitous “boy” who all-rounds as valet, body-servant, trainer, guardian, private secretary, shampooer, warden, guide, philosopher and shadow to the sahibs made decadent by the Raj. In Sydney North’s “A Visitor from Mars”,³²⁹ a spectral brahmin holds his white auditor in thrall with glimpses into the mystique of spirits, yogis,

³²⁶ Walker, David, and Roderic Campbell. “Up the Hooghly with James Hingston.” *Wanderings in India* 105-125. 121.

³²⁷ Hingston, J. H. *The Australian abroad on branches from the main routes round the world*. Melbourne: William Inglis and Co., 1885. 333. Print.

The book, originally printed in two volumes from London in 1879-80, was re-issued in a single volume by the Melbourne publisher, William Inglis and Company in 1885.

³²⁸ Esson, Louis. “The “Boy”.” *The Bulletin* 8 Oct. 1908. Print.

³²⁹ North, Sydney. “A Visitor from Mars.” *The Lone Hand* 1 May 1917: 287-289. Print.

astrology and karma, knowledge the auditor usefully applies to later affirm his demoniac stereotypes of the German Kaiser, prescribed enemy of the allies during the First World War. If Lewis R. Freeman's "Cheetah Hunting"³³⁰ conjures the spectacle of a shikar party in the forests of Jammu led by a trained cheetah and his rugged, aged Dogra cheetah-master, "The Twenty Rupee Tale"³³¹ by H. H. features a canny astrologer fleecing a jolly-faced Aussie officer of a hefty amount with the prospect of love though only for a happily married woman, as he divines in the end, having pocketed the money.

India in the above narratives remains limited to the empire kitsch of routine orientalia, served in consumables of instant spiritualism, cunning or the untamed strange, and done in palates comic, uncanny and touristic to suit the empire-weaned Australian reader. In his essay "National Images and Stereotypes: India through Australian Eyes, 1850-1950", Bruce Bennett strives to explore the "more interesting, intriguing, complex and dangerous" variants to tropes and tales refracting India for Australia during this period.³³² One of his finds is Mary C. Elkington's story "The Soul of the Melon Man", published in *The Lone Hand* in 1908, the other R. Francis Strangman's "Black and White" that appeared in *The Triad* in 1926. Both stories have since been re-published in his 2009 co-edited collection *Of Sadhus and Spinners*.

"The Soul of the Melon Man"³³³ magic-carpet a local fable on the ethics, politics and aesthetics of compassion and equitable distribution, from the lull of India summers to the Antipodes. Memsahib Mrs. Seymour is here lulled auditor of the narrative, and her sage ayah the storyteller. "Black and White", yet another narrative where the desi subaltern gets to share a story or enter into dialogue with her Australian master, brings out the unease and fissures leashed in that binary. The self-absorbed white Australian narrator has only to settle into similes between the "dull-green rolling plain scarred by yellow sheep-tracks"³³⁴ lain before his newly acquired Raj bungalow and memories of an Australian scape, for the reverie to be broken by Naghu the bearer. Complacent narrator seeks to patronize efficient bearer with conversation and the hint of an invitation to Australia, but Naghu surprises with the shy retort that Indian immigrants are prohibited in that territory. What is more, Naghu is passionate to replicate the prohibition in the Indian context. He foams at the mouth at the mere mention of Parsees, the business-and-job-poaching, emperor Alexander-inflicted outsiders who should be expunged

³³⁰ Freeman, Lewis R. "Cheetah Hunting." *The Town and Country Journal* 9 May 1917: 30-32. Print.

³³¹ H. H. "The Twenty Rupee Tale." *Aussie: The Australian Soldiers Magazine* 15 Nov. 1920: 16. Print.

³³² Bennett "National Images and Stereotypes" 558.

³³³ Elkington, Mary C. "The Soul of the Melon Man." *Of Sadhus and Spinners: Australian Encounters with India*. Ed. Bruce Bennett, Santosh K. Sareen, Susan Cowan, and Asha Kanwar. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2009. 22-25. Print.

³³⁴ Strangman, R. Francis. "Black and White." *Of Sadhus and Spinners* 31-35. 31.

from India, he rants. Realizing his position, the aghast narrator must retreat from dialogue into the succour of stereotypes – “Were they *all* the same? So many detonators waiting to be touched off”.³³⁵ He later learns from his boss that Naghu is suspected to be a murderer on flight under a false name, having killed a Parsee a couple of months ago. The narrator’s play at being Naghu’s co-colonial has been pulverised. He and his boss, imperialists both, are left to douse their angst in evening drink, while Naghu is on cocaine supplied by the Europeans. Coloniser and colonised are sucked into mirror worlds of xenophobia and the addiction to drugs and stereotypes, as a dialogue-defying abyss opens up between them.

Such ambiguities and troubling doubts around the British imperial occupation of India rarely characterise Australian literary representations of the period, even when it came to the set that “felt called and definitely entitled to travel and stay in India for long periods of time”³³⁶ in order to serve the diverse local communities – Australian missionaries situated in the Raj between 1890 and 1950. As Margaret Allen argues in her papers,³³⁷ the South Australian women missionaries working in India during the late nineteenth century cut across gendered and racialised hierarchies of the contemporary imperial setting. In their choice of vocation overseas, these women had rejected the gender norm of remaining metonym for home and household. The choice involved the craft of Antipodean women’s national identity as a female bildungsroman within networks of empire. The Australian girl was not only wild and colonial but also capable of laying claim to independence, mobility of modernity and the glamour of pioneering missionary work in distant parts of empire. The common Christian faith could have forged links and understandings between them and the Indian converts, as co-colonials in the metropolitan-colonial axis. Yet, even as they negotiated their in-between position within imperial hierarchies and the trans-racial sisterhood – as coloniser and colonised, white but not quite, extra-metropolitan if not peripheral like the Indian women they wanted to save and occasionally befriend³³⁸ – Australian women missionaries during this period could not quit locating India and the Indians they encountered in the differential dimension.

In letters she wrote back home in the 1880s, letters subsequently published in the South Australian Baptist publication *Truth and Progress*, Marie Gilbert, one of the first two

³³⁵ Strangman 34.

³³⁶ Allen, Margaret. “‘Innocents abroad’ and ‘prohibited immigrants’” 111.

³³⁷ Allen, Margaret. “‘White Already to Harvest’: South Australian Women Missionaries in India.” *Reconstructing Femininities: Colonial Intersections of Gender, Race, Religion and Class*. Spec. issue of *Feminist Review* 65 (2000): 92-107. Print.

For the entitlement of imperial mobility axiomatically extended to Australian women missionaries in India, see Allen’s paper “‘Innocents abroad’ and ‘prohibited immigrants’: Australians in India and Indians in Australia 1890-1910” (2005), cited above.

³³⁸ Allen “‘Innocents abroad’ and ‘prohibited immigrants’” 117.

missionaries sent out from the South Australian Baptist Missionary Society to undertake zenana work in East Bengal in 1882, recorded her impression of Bengali women.³³⁹

I think you would be greatly amused to see the quantity of gold and silver jewelry these little girls wear, most of it being very heavy . . . Each lady has her own little cell, where she and her children live, never going outside of the court, except under close cover . . . Their only occupations are to prepare their husbands' food and mind the children; still, they seem very contented. (56)

Gilbert's Bengali women seemed sentenced to live alternative realities, strange and sequestered. She and her peers read them as exotic, albeit redeemable others and India as the field of missionary promise, capital for catapulting white Australian women to a less peripheral position within the national, colonial and imperial framework.

Australian aboriginals, discursively constructed as infinitely inferior in race hierarchies and doomed by default to destruction/dispossession, were elided as mission fields. They had been ossified into the exceedingly other, those who bore too disruptive and proximate a scripture of settler brutalities in confecting the terra nullius. "Recognized as being in possession of a civilisation",³⁴⁰ Indians were more medially located for launching Australianness and the self-fashioning of Australian women somewhere nearer the heart of empire. The feat of redeeming India, that far-flung feast of antique idols and orientalia in imperial imaginary, could add sheen and visibility to the Australian nation and gender narratives being forged, fused in the crucible of empire-nested missionary ventures of Anglo-Saxon women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As mission field, then, India served to stitch the Indo-Australian connection to imperial/oriental stereotypes.

1857 provided another empire routine for reading and threading the Indo-Australian connections between 1890 and 1950, especially by contemporary Australian historians and politicians including Alfred Deakin, though Deakin had lifelong cultivated other more ambivalent routes to accessing India. The year was anointed a chant in Australian schoolbooks of the late 1890s. For the Antipodean nation, 1857 proved enchanting in its instant harvest of race heroes, race-nation-and-empire parables, as also the lazy binaries between Indians and the British. It inspired avid memorialists in Australia, among them British-born historian A. W. Jose and Melbourne-based educator Rev. W. H. Fitchett.³⁴¹ Both Jose's textbook *The Growth of Empire: A Handbook to the History of Greater Britain* (1897) and Fitchett's *The Tale of the*

³³⁹ Gilbert, Marie. *Truth and Progress* 1 May 1883. Print.

³⁴⁰ Allen "White Already to Harvest" 48.

³⁴¹ Walker *Anxious Nation* 26-27.

Great Mutiny (1902), ardent in shaping the young Australian, memoirised 1857 as a pastoral in the abjection of the brutal East by the empire-honed, masculinist militarist West. Such a template petrified war and empire as the medium of innocence for an Australian imaginary of India. Engagement beyond the pale of defence and security ashened to a phantom word in the context.

R. G. Casey, Australian Governor of Bengal during 1944-1946 – years rent by riot, insurrection and the Second World War in a province seething on the cusp of partition – details his administrative ordeals from the assured supremacist vantage point of “we” the British burdened with empire.³⁴² His 1947 title reads *An Australian in India*. Notwithstanding, Casey does not risk the lapse from a wry coloniser’s condescension to the co-colonial’s complex connect. Amused, he records local resentment at being allotted a governor from the colonies: “Have we become a colony of Australia?”, the locals had fumed (13). Dismissive of local resentment and allegations of the devastating 1942 famine having been engineered by the colonisers, Casey remains moored in imperial stereotypes and the “British tribal instinct” (111). His amateurish Kipling-quoting anthropological take on Bengalis curates them as “fanatical and political-minded, without the gift of initiative and capacity for solid work” (15).

Casey’s tender caricatures of Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Ambedkar and babu English too toe the official British line. He was not ready to depart from the brisk certitudes informing colonialism and racial discrimination: “indeed we [the British] have pressed on probably in advance of the ability of the country to take advantage of the progressive steps towards self-government that we have made possible” (53). The East remains for him anarchic, irreconcilable. And if decolonised India remains the interminable “blank on the map” with its “periodical famines, terrorism and political troubles” (115), as he prophesies it would, the righteous propagator of the White Australia policy is anxious to ensure that underpaid postcolonial Indian labour does not spill over and contaminate the “egalitarian” Australian scene. “I have heard no suggestion that India is seeking new outlets for her people abroad”, he finally concedes, with some reluctance (120). Casey’s Australia “was an odd beast among nations, awkwardly placed in Asia but far from comfortable in being so”.³⁴³ At the time he considered alluring an alliance with the Pacific giant US, the other melting-pot; such an alliance could not threaten Antipodean racial purity, the sacred founding principle of Australian

³⁴² Casey, R. G. *An Australian in India*. London: Hollis & Carter, 1947. 13, 53 & 104. Print.

³⁴³ Walker, David. *Stranded Nation: White Australia in an Asian Region*. Crawley: University of Western Australia Publishing, 2019. 198. Print.

nationhood in early decades of the formation of Federation.³⁴⁴

The principle of racial purity was held inviolable by Louis Esson (1878-1943), playwright, poet, essayist, columnist on India and Japan for *The Lone Hand* during 1908 and disillusioned dreamer of a national theatre for Australia. The Australian literary monthly had been established in 1907 by Frank Fox and J. F. Archibald, founder-publisher of *The Bulletin*. An aligned publication, *The Lone Hand* remained politically committed to “an Honest, Clean, White Australia”, as claimed in its opening editorial of May 1907. “I feel sure Australia must be kept white, and have severe immigration laws”, wrote avid socialist Esson to his friend and peer Vance Palmer.³⁴⁵

Nationalist Esson was resentful also of the excessive European, especially English, influence on Australian journalism, art and its reception.³⁴⁶ Notwithstanding, his vision of the non-derivative national derived from the trans-national. He met W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge in London and Dublin, both of whom had urged him to collaborate and create an Antipodean version of the Irish Literary Theatre or the Abbey Theatre Players. The Pioneer Players was set up in Melbourne in 1922 as an organization dedicated to performing Australian plays. Esson was uncompromising in his demand for “nothing but local and original works . . . a kind of Folk-Theatre”³⁴⁷ focused on bush workers, shearers, diggers and robust goldfield prospectors like Ogilvie in his play *The Battler* (1922), or the industrial workers of Melbourne and Sydney at best. In counterpoint to the “make-believe” of New York,³⁴⁸ he chose to foreground the aggressively authentic, simple, isolated and masculinist Australia of the bush depicted in *The Drovers* (1923) – his “spare, atmospheric bush play in one act . . . [with] evocative scenes and a handful of sombrely inarticulate bush folk caught in the toils of a great life experience”.³⁴⁹ Such plays expressed the spirit of the country and made the nation, he professed while voicing his disdain for the other kind, the “so-called intellectual drama, abstract and cosmopolitan”,³⁵⁰ dedicated to middle-class sentiment and drawing-room ethics. Maurice, the writer protagonist mirroring Esson from an untitled manuscript,³⁵¹ had dreamt of “an old bush scene, with its

³⁴⁴ Walker *Stranded Nation* 105-106.

³⁴⁵ Esson, Louis. Letter to Vance Palmer. 16 Feb. 1917. *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*. Ed. Vance Palmer. Melbourne: Georgian House (A Meanjin Press Publication), 1948. 8. Print.

³⁴⁶ Esson. Letter to Vance Palmer. 20 June 1921. *Louis Esson* 42.

³⁴⁷ Esson. Letter to Vance Palmer. 8 June 1921. *Louis Esson* 40.

³⁴⁸ Esson. Letter to Vance Palmer. 16 Feb. 1917. *Louis Esson* 6.

³⁴⁹ Walker, David. “Esson, Thomas Louis Buvelot (1878–1943).” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Vol. 8. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1981. N. pag. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Web. 21 June 2019.

³⁵⁰ Esson. Letter to Vance Palmer. Nov. 1917. *Louis Esson* 27.

³⁵¹ Esson, Louis. Untitled Playscript. N.d. MS The Palmer Papers 28/23. Australian National Library, Canberra. Also see Hainsworth, J. D. “Some Louis Esson Manuscripts.” *Southerly* 43.3 (Sept. 1983): 347-357. Print.

sunlight and stillness” (I.28) while living in New York or Sydney. The character’s dreamtime comprised a retreat to the bush to author “a real novel” (II.21).

Esson’s tastes and talents, though, seemed more suited to urban spaces, conversation, life and art. He had quickly tired of the magic and experience of the primitive offered by his chosen retreat, the Mallacoota inlet, and ached for “the gay life of the city . . . the people and the shops”,³⁵² settling soon for Melbourne. Some of his well-received plays were set in that city. These would include *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* (1912), his satirical peek into the chameleon lives of high society ideologues who ran the gamut from fashionable socialist idealism to constipated liberalism. Comedies like *The Woman Tamer* (1910) and *The Bride of Gospel Place* (1926) captured in contrast a Melbourne underworld smouldering with tarts and petty criminals. “I would do better if I could write on cosmopolitan subjects”, reflected Esson the urbanite in a letter to Vance Palmer,³⁵³ but refrained from want of interest. The Pioneer Players managed to stage their productions between 1922 and 1926. The project showcasing local drama, local colour and local dramatists could not quite stand competition from formats popular with the Melbourne audience of the day – British musical comedies and the silent American movies. “It is strange that Australia has no interest in seeing its own life depicted on the stage”, concluded a resigned Esson, giving up on high expectations of his experimental collaboration towards a fresh national theatre.³⁵⁴ He came to insist on the Australian note in a national novel that he now outsourced to his friends Vance Palmer and Katharine Susannah Prichard to author.³⁵⁵

“By upbringing and temperament Esson was ill-equipped to explore themes which he came to see as distinctively Australian”, observes David Walker on the playwright’s longtime struggle with his art and a darkening sense of futility.³⁵⁶ By the late 1920s he had lost hope of a literary rejuvenation. Trapped in his quest for the authentic Australian play, Esson posited the bush as literary locus of the real and the national, categories he construed in binaristic opposition to his personal penchant for the urban and cosmopolitan and motifs aligned, such as creative growth and stagnation, freedom and bondage. Suspended between pulls of the national and the transnational, allure of etching the alien, elemental bush or the provincial suburbia and city of Melbourne he had known so well, how could he have gathered India in his universe of a new aesthetic for Australia?

³⁵² Esson. Letter to Vance Palmer. 1 July 1924. *Louis Esson* 62.

³⁵³ Esson. Letter to Vance Palmer. 21 May 1921. *Louis Esson* 35.

³⁵⁴ Esson. Letter to Vance Palmer. 15 Nov. 1926. *Louis Esson* 78.

³⁵⁵ Esson. Letter to Vance Palmer. 29 Sept. 1926. *Louis Esson* 76-78.

³⁵⁶ Walker. “Bushed: Louis Esson in Melbourne and Paris, 1904-1914.” *Dream and Disillusion* 11-30. 29.

Esson set his one-act play *The Sacred Place* (1911)³⁵⁷ at an Indian hawkers' accommodation in the dingy slum quarters of the "rowdy neighbourhood" of Little Lon, "a little Asia in Melbourne" (42). It is set within stained dilapidated walls of a room inhabited by Indian Muslim hawkers in shabby European clothes, who flaunt coloured turbans nonetheless and install in the shared bazaar space a secret sacred place, heavily curtained and secured with a Yale-lock. The play projects how the secret place with its miniature mosque and Koran displaces British law to emerge as metonym of Sharia or the Mohammedan law and therefore, exclusive moral compass operative for the Indian hawkers at Melbourne. *The Sacred Place* becomes a study in filth and faith and all else that differentiates Esson's undifferentiated Asiatic from his white Australian compatriot in racial discourse. Representing "Asiatics at heart" (45), Said Shah Shereef claims that "Many things you can teach us, you English, but you cannot teach us faith" (46). The Koran is their text and testament. Even for transactions in trade, they prefer swearing by the Koran to retaining records or receipts. Yet "all Asiatics love litigation", confirms Constable Matthews (47). Esson peppers the play with Hindustani dialogue and cues to exotic rituals such as the fasting during Ramadan, apparently to add anthropological panache to his portrait of the coloured enclave that fetishizes difference.

Ironically, the portrait voids any variation among "Asiatics". The hawkers might have migrated from places as divergent as Delhi, Bombay and Kashmir, but they speak in one voice, settle uniformly on a pilgrimage to Mecca despite one among them bearing the Hindu name Ram Chandra, and cannot allow an alien shadow to fall across the food they cook to break the fast of Ramadan, as Rev. Herbert Jordan expertly observes (41). Food pollution through the contamination of shadows of untouchables constituted a brahminical taboo, though, in the Indian subcontinent. Esson curated his Indian hawkers as generic totems of an untranslatable, tenses-apart, obdurate oriental alternative – in terms of food, faith, fashion, filth and hookah – that must in no way be allowed to pollute the sacred Australian dream.

Esson curated India as a "hashish dream",³⁵⁸ a time-machine trip to fantasies of a static past for white Australia. The series of articles, essays and stories from his 1908 trip to India and Sri Lanka was published under the collective title "From the Oldest World" in *The Lone Hand*. In its chaos and diversity, the quaint city of Jaipur seemed to him "deliciously impossible".³⁵⁹ Life in such native States conjured "an Oriental extravaganza", seamless and

³⁵⁷ Esson, Louis. *Three Short Plays*. Melbourne: Fraser and Jenkinson, 1911. 39-51. Print.

³⁵⁸ Esson. "From the Oldest World: A Disciple of Siva." *The Lone Hand* 1 Sept. 1908: 584-589. 586. Print.

³⁵⁹ Esson. "From the Oldest World." *The Lone Hand* 1 May 1908: 21-26. 21. Print.

timeless in the “riotous and incongruous, bizarre and fascinating”, all jumbled together.³⁶⁰ As for the Maharaja of Jaipur, Esson was as ironic as tender regarding his indifference to the people, his attachment to the old ways and displacement of state affairs with an unabashed addiction to sporting excesses: “The stables – they are the State”, he wryly deduces.³⁶¹ The sporting Maharajah could be his friend and an exemplar of a sportsman even by Australian standards, yet he too must finally be reduced to the spoof of a redundant, fossil administrator. Delhi in ruins conjured on the other hand the perishable past with its deluge of decayed, decadent, tyrant-tamed, phantom cities.³⁶² In Benares, Esson highlighted the phantasmagoric dimension of demented crowds as also the crowd of idols and vignettes from sacred geographies in India.³⁶³ His pre-British India featured a rainbow palette of theatrical, theme-parked pasts, more removed and unreal than New York could ever be for his Australia.

Nor was Esson a proud British imperialist claiming vicarious pride in colonial feats. Righteously he chartered British economic exploitation and ruthless profiteering rampant through the Raj: “Indian manufacturers have been ruthlessly destroyed; millions of artisans have been tossed out of employment . . . plague and famine have increased to an alarming extent”, while food from India continued to be exported to England, he observed. He was outraged at the political conduct of the government that readily muzzled dissident opinions with the charge of sedition.³⁶⁴ He mocked the British in India for their racial arrogance, venality and the sedition they smelled everywhere, even as the “table “boy” comes around three minutes late with the green peas, or under-cooks the vegetable curry”.³⁶⁵ For him, “the wild jungle of Indian woe and trouble” served at best as passive pet antithesis, a cautionary tale for Australia so it could cultivate anti-imperialist nationalism, ensure economic protection for local products and industries and resist the “delusion and snare” of the influx of cheap coloured labour.³⁶⁶ Quite unlike Japan, that he made relevant, resonant in Antipodean national imaginary as part of an awakening East bent on imperialist expansion.³⁶⁷ “From the Oldest World” was regularly

³⁶⁰ Esson “From the Oldest World” 1 May 1908. 26.

³⁶¹ Esson. “My Friend, the Maharajah.” *The Bulletin* 1910. Rpt. in *Of Sadhus and Spinners* 26-30. 30. Print.

³⁶² Esson. “From the Oldest World: The Decay of the Delhis.” *The Lone Hand* 1 July 1908: 294-296. Print.

³⁶³ Esson. “From the Oldest World: Benares.” *The Lone Hand* 1 Oct. 1908: 676-682. 680. Print.

³⁶⁴ Esson. “From the Oldest World: Swadeshi, and Other Imperial Troubles.” *The Lone Hand* 1 July 1908: 290-294. 293. Print.

Also, Esson. “From the Oldest World: The Golden Temple of the Sikhs.” *The Lone Hand* 1 Sept 1908: 581-584. 581.

³⁶⁵ Esson “Swadeshi, and Other Imperial Troubles” 290-291.

³⁶⁶ Esson “Swadeshi, and Other Imperial Troubles” 294.

³⁶⁷ Walker “Blood, Race and the Raj” 33-35.

interspersed with Esson's series on Japan titled "The Asiatic Menace" in *The Lone Hand*.³⁶⁸

Writing between 1890 and 1950, Ethel Anderson (1883-1958) curated also an antique, incredible India signaling high adventure and the exoticism of the other, and partitioned tenses apart from Australia. When Ethel Mason arrived at Raj-ruled Bombay in 1904 for her wedding to Austin Anderson of the fifty-fourth battery at Campbellpore, she was twenty-one, not much older than Mrs. James Greene, the fresh-bloomed love-sieged 1857 Mutiny survivor and protagonist of her eponymous narrative from the anthology *Indian Tales*.³⁶⁹ India excited, dazzled and mildly repelled the young bride Anderson. She lived with her British military husband in several parts of India including Campbellpore, Dinapore, Lucknow and Nainital for ten years, from 1904 till the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. As her daughter Bethia Foott reminisces, "Ethel hated the poverty of India, but loved the people. In their insoluble problems, she grieved for them; in their absurdities, she adored them".³⁷⁰

Pied Indias are unleashed in Anderson's narratives, ranging from the intrigue-brimming syncretic harem of Akbar to the lyric-weaving tyrant Amir of Afghanistan, from the cunning Maharajah of the British-supervised princely state of Miran and competing, conniving Bengali judges of the Raj, to risk-addict white adventurer-governors like Elihu Yale and Sir David Ochterlony both of whom ran seraglios "Indian style" during the Moghul rule. Her India brimmed with rajahs and the Raj, trysts and the surreal.³⁷¹ There could have been no more spectacular posters for the touristy slogan – "Incredible India". Interestingly, many of her incredible India narratives claimed print space in *Bulletin*, the Sydney-based nationalist weekly passionate to preserve Australia as the last Anglo-Saxon outpost.

Anderson suffered no Adela Questedian naivety or compulsion in digging out the "real India".³⁷² She seemed to flaunt an insider's grip on what she projected as alternative Indian realities in her fiction. She was unabashed on narrative authenticity, carrying a secret license

³⁶⁸ See for instance Louis Esson's articles titled "Japan the Gamester" (514-517) and "Japanese Imperialism" (617-619) published in consecutive volumes of *The Lone Hand* dated 1 Sept. 1908 and 1 Oct. 1908 respectively.

³⁶⁹ Anderson, Ethel. "Mrs. James Greene." *Indian Tales*. Sydney: Australasian Publishing House, 1948. 28-67. Print.

Another collection of Anderson's Indian tales titled *The Little Ghosts* was published posthumously in 1959. John Douglas Pringle argues that most of the stories in both volumes were written around the same time. Based on the converging style and themes, I subscribe to Pringle's contention and include both the titles in my discussion.

See Pringle, John Douglas. Foreword. *The Best of Ethel Anderson*. By Ethel Anderson. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973. vii-xvi. ix. Print.

³⁷⁰ Foott, Bethia. *Ethel and the Governors' General*. Paddington, NSW: Rainforest Publishing, 1992. 63. Print.

³⁷¹ Anderson's "Chess with Akbar" (13-27), "The Amir's Visit" (92-106), "Unborn Son" (68-91), "The Two Unjust Judges" (122-138) and "Elihu Yale's Women" (107-121) from *Indian Tales*, and "Nishat and Shalimar" (1-5) and "Twenty-four Elephants" (42-56) from *The Little Ghosts* would constitute a representative palette.

³⁷² Forster, E. M. *A Passage to India*. London: Penguin Books, 1936. 20. Print.

to being the chosen Australian storyteller and translator of India, as it were. “If I queried her accuracy”, recounted her daughter, “saying that this time she had gone too far – her eyes lit with laughter as she shook her head. ‘Gospel, I promise you’”.³⁷³ Her India stories came woven with a self-reflexive account of origin and dissemination through the narrator, or a carefully curated anecdote was circulated around the inviolable source of that account. Every text axiomatised a pre-text of authenticity either embedded in the story or in currency outside it.

Bethia Foott related Lord Kitchener’s written request to her father to look into the rumour that a white woman survivor of the Indian Mutiny lived in Lucknow under the protection of an Indian sowar or cavalryman who had rescued her and taken her into his house. The intensive search yielded results. Having been found, the lady, now very old, lacked the will to return to England where she knew no one. Mirza Khan, her savior and companion, was blind and utterly dependent, she could not leave him and chose to relinquish her British origins instead. “Mrs. James Greene”, Anderson’s fictive take on a cross-cultural liaison, was thus famed to have taken off from reality.³⁷⁴ The suave and hilarious escapade of the Prime Minister of Nepal with the entire booty of gold Ashrafis of the Nepalese government, in which gold coins were stitched inside the Persian style thirty-yard silk trousers of his fifty wives and mistresses, might seem to be caricaturish. But the narrator assures us that she received the story from the Prime Minister’s son while attending a purdah party in the royal zenana.³⁷⁵ Anderson managed to pull off a heady hybrid. She narrated the unbreakable spell of the incorrigible East, with the cautious refrain that this mystery-fantasy combine was authentic and mostly culled from local history. It would go a long way to reinforce the *Bulletin* reader’s phobia and fascination around India as the site from which he must needs inoculate himself in order to pursue his pure fantasy of a white Australia.

With her omniscient insider’s take on the marketable, dark exotic India, Anderson’s role as translator-storyteller of the territory was uninhibited. The angst of loss and interpolation in translation became non-existent. The narrator claimed access to abstruse metaphors mouthed by the locals. Begum Miriam’s aphorism “Allah has stitched the earth to the sky with arrows” in “Twenty-Four Elephants” seemed beyond comprehension, but the storyteller was instant with an interpretation: “By this she meant that the matter had completely baffled her intelligence” (55). If such a proverb was invented and satiric in intent, it also exposed Anderson’s unreliability as the elect Australian translator-ventriloquist for India, its languages

³⁷³ Foott 203-204.

³⁷⁴ Foott 77.

³⁷⁵ See “A Seraglio Has its Uses” in *The Little Ghosts* (88-99).

and peoples.

Ethel Anderson's Indian tales gaged and engaged with moments of dialogue between colonisers and the colonised. Nor did they apparently elude the subversive possibilities of colonial relations and hierarchies. What if the "Illicit space, alluring and repugnant"³⁷⁶ dreamt up by the white man in his conquered colonies, was transformed by the white woman into an erotic heartspace? What happened when the unspeakable terror stitched to the underside of that white masculinist dream materialized and, in a subversion of the gendered imaginary of colonised territory, India the metonym for the colonised, supple and exploitable sprung also the chivalrous, wily and inscrutable seducer of Anglo-Saxon women? What if the gift of refuge came to depend on the abject, colonised refugee? Then Mrs. James Greene, a Mutiny victim saved by Mirza Khan, discovered a "feline sheen" in her tranquil blue eyes as she gazed at his Greek profile and he gazed back with eyes "sad, hungry and reproachful".³⁷⁷ There being no discomfiting Eurasian kids at the end of the story, the narrator was able to invest a myth-making intensity to the bond that exceeded social and legal forbiddens.

After all, miscegenation was not particularly welcome in Anderson's fictive universe. The offspring of inter-racial liaisons constituted an always already suspect category in her Indian oeuvre, what with their in-between accent and threat to the ethics and aesthetics of whiteness. Only a Eurasian mother and her two daughters of the mongrel "chi-chi" accent could possibly conceive of joining the Afghan Amir's seraglio in "The Amir's Visit", moved by his impetuous indulgence of a moment. The spectacle of the Amir's equally whimsical tyranny – and the trickle of sensible British blood in their veins – finally dissuaded them though. Sir David, protagonist of "Twenty-four Elephants" in *The Little Ghosts* and a historical figure who served the British East India Company in Oudh towards the beginning of the eighteenth century, was projected as reluctant keeper of a seraglio. Redeemed even in this "oriental" context by his ethics-insulating whiteness, Sir David had always been generous in making due provisions for his dependents (45), as the narrator faithfully chronicled. Learning of the practice of female infanticide mandated by the orthodox chaperone of the seraglio, Begum Miriam, he was finally able to free himself from the Eastern affliction and pensioned off all the ladies in the harem. They were rehabilitated in his villa outside Lucknow. The white male had de-hypnotised himself, even as Anderson's India-based fiction unravelled into archiving stereotypes converse to the provocation of cross-cultural transfusions.

³⁷⁶ Broinowski *The Yellow Lady* 105.

³⁷⁷ Anderson "Mrs. James Greene." *Indian Tales* 57 & 65.

Must coloniser and colonised relate exclusively in erotic equations, could there be no more to the colonial game than the gendered and occasional cross-gendered posturings? Anderson did not seem keen to tinker with the alternatives. Aligned to nineteenth century Australian invasion narratives, her India constituted an amoral challenge. Location became metonymic of erotic license and harems were paraded as a consistent trapping.³⁷⁸ Why, the very heterogenous trio of Elihu Yale, Sir David and the absurd Amir of Afghanistan must all converge as keepers of harems, since situated in the subcontinent, in her oeuvre. “A Seraglio Has its Uses” opened in a harem of thirty Hindu women protected/terrorised by Sir Sri-Sri-Sri Bahadur of Nepal. Seraglios and their flourishing intrigues featured as part of harem – and Indian – routine in Anderson’s tales. Sir David improved his simple Scottish mind and knowledge of “the turbulent and treacherous people over whom he ruled” by studying the plots and counter-plots in “ma hoose” (48). Such plots and counterplots were abundant among native rajahs and officials, as illustrated by corrupt and competing Bengali judges in “The Two Unjust Judges”. The Rajah of Miran in “Unborn Son” exhibited another’s son as his own to deprive his nephew of legitimate right to the throne.

Such extreme cunning only pointed to a barely hidden undertone of violence and violation. The apparently transgressive “Mrs. James Greene” reinforced the empire-perspective on 1857. In the opening of that narrative, sowars had been dispersed to kill every European man, woman and child; Khuda Buksh, the innocuous cook with his dark treacherous looks, turned potential violator and murderer for Mrs. Greene. A few British survivors comprising four women, a child and a shock-numbed old man were placed as bet by Rajah Lone Singh in the cock-fight against his friend and fellow-sadist Nawab Allah-ud-din; the winner could torture the victims to death. The survivors had begged Lone Singh for refuge. Except the names of the murdered, which included that of Mrs. James Greene, Anderson seemed to have abided by the British memorialization/erasures of 1857 sculpted on the Chinar Bazar Road on the fringes of Lucknow. “Mrs. James Greene” comprised a deferential, if differential, footnote to the British-scripted Mutiny mythology of white vulnerability in a seething brown sea of perfidious native violence. Mirza Khan constituted but a shade in grey. Valiant and kind, he had nonetheless made an exile of Mrs. Greene who was interned in his house, shut off from her community.

At best Mrs. Greene’s fate served as an example of the anomaly that reinforced the

³⁷⁸ See my article “Indias Translated, Created and Memoired: Ethel Anderson Narrates the Subcontinent.” *India and Australia: Bridging Different Worlds*. Ed. Brian Stoddart and Auriol Weigold. New Delhi: Readworthy Publications, 2011. 145-154. Print.

barricade-breeding stereotypes. As the narrator reconfirmed in Anderson's sketch on the sublime royal gardens conceived in medieval India, "Nishat and Shalimar": "The eyes of these men [Jats, Mahrattas, Sikhs, Dogras, Pathans], clouded over (as I have seen) with a film of softness, sad, like the eyes of cattle, may blaze with a cruelty past the limits of torture . . . Murder, conquest, rapine, lust – these were the pastimes of the Emperors of Hind" (2).

Racial hybrids remained a suspect category in Anderson's India-inspired works, yet those very works performed a hybrid genre that flavoured a romanticized take on history with personal memories and streaked fantasy with fact. "Chess with Akbar" was supposedly based on Abul Fazl's court accounts woven into the narrator's recollections of a trip with the spouse to Fatehpur Sikri, her sensuous fantasy of a Mughal past along with the whiff of local anecdotes whispered around the friendship of Akbar and Birbal. Her English in these texts too jostled with Hindustani words such as "kincobs" or fine embroidered silk fabric in "Chess with Akbar", "chokra" i.e. "young boy" in "Twenty-four Elephants", "tamasha" in "Three Wakeful Nights" etc.

Ethel Anderson's Indian characters belonged to the royalty or the military ranks; her social life was limited to the higher echelons of Indian society. The occasional commoners in her fiction included seraglio-wardens planted in an antique past or sly and ingratiating local judges of the Raj. A rare release from her mostly larger-than-life tales and memoirs of the place came with the sketch of a retinue of desi servants during her husband's hunting expedition, published in the *Indian Pioneer*. The cook with an unmoved tragic air seemed to have set trouble-making for the memsahib as his mission, the ayah or governess could not be shaken out of her inertia, the shikari was too lordly and remote and Punchum the Hindu bearer would take orders from none but the sahib.³⁷⁹ This grating gap of communication was not the reality Anderson elected to etch in her India-based stories published in the *Bulletin*. Nor did she "concern herself with the lot of the oppressed and underprivileged". The huge mass of her contemporary Indians huddled in the margins of the Raj remained silent, silenced in her India-based oeuvre.³⁸⁰

As part of the military establishment of the Raj, Ethel Anderson's position of secured privilege enabled her emerge the polyglot scholar and storyteller of an India quarantined in the remote passive past, partitioned from its servile conning present. In both the tenses, she seemed to have museumised India as a motley hold-all of diverse non-white possibilities, the veritable

³⁷⁹ Qtd. in Foott 74-76.

³⁸⁰ Cowan, Susan. "Connecting with India: Australian Journeys." *Wanderings in India* 138-148. 142.

antipodes to Australian whiteness/purity. Could her India-based narratives have precluded the project of redeeming Anderson's Australianness? As John Douglas Pringle observed,³⁸¹ Anderson might have been a fifth generation Australian brought up and educated at Picton in New South Wales and then at Sydney. Yet

When still a young girl, however, she married Austin Thomas Anderson, a British officer serving in the Indian Army, and left Australia to live with him, first in India and then (after the First World War) in England. She did not return to Australia until her husband retired from the Army in 1926. This was unwise because Australians, as I said earlier, are quick to disown any Australian writer who has the temerity to live overseas. (106)

Her authenticity as an Australian storyteller might well have hinged on her earlier fictive universe of an other-tensed India absurdly removed as also fantastic for contemporary white Australia and presented as a quaint alterity or trove of arcane historical curiosities in the *Bulletin*. When Austin Anderson died in 1849 without leaving her much of a savings and the pension was delayed for five years, she "had to write to eat" and accepted with delight an offer from the *Bulletin* a week after her husband's death to write a series of stories on the early settlement days in Australia.³⁸² This series was later published in 1956 as *At Parramatta*.

Technically 1956 does not belong to the scope of the present research. Yet perhaps, it would not be out of place here to conclude my exploration of Anderson's India with a note on her evocation of the Australian settler past at about the time of the Crimean War in *At Parramatta*. The early struggles, pigmy tyrannies and convict context of the pioneering days of settler Australia are limned in their pain and hilarity within the sensuous comedic world of the interlinked series where time slows, convicts double as warm-hearted employees of an eccentric gentry, fruits are luscious, feasts ample, tempting wines brewed from the lost recipes of Calcutta nabobs, Donalblain of five wakes up to a sky done in experimental colours, and love and tenderness are in season though rage does occasionally edge in.³⁸³ This is no mere farce and fairyland, but the author's take on an earthy if eccentric past seeded with the present of the Antipodean nation. The Australian past in *At Parramatta* is not time-machined to a differential dimension from its contemporary reality, as in case of Anderson's India. Her India

³⁸¹ Pringle, John Douglas. "Ethel Anderson." *On Second Thoughts: Australian Essays*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971. 104-116. Print.

³⁸² Foott, Bethia. "Ethel Anderson." *The Australian Quarterly* 32.3 (Sept. 1960): 23-30. 29. Print.

³⁸³ Look up for instance the first expository chapter of *At Parramatta* titled "Juliet Mc Cree is Accused of Gluttony", as well as other stories in that volume e.g. "The Rector's Wife Tempts the Bishop with a Brew of Nyppe", "Donalblain Mc Cree and the Sin of Anger" etc. The latter narrative delves into the unprovoked, unanticipated bruising and intimidation of a child, from the child's perspective. See Anderson, Ethel. From *At Parramatta*. *The Best of Ethel Anderson* 87-207.

and Australia, both imprinted in the *Bulletin*, were neatly parted, beyond play, permeability, conversation and transfusion, for the Australian audience.

It is thus that I turn to Deakin and Skinner, relinquishing the routine of Australian literary authors representing, interpreting India between 1890 and 1950, the likes of Casey and Strangman, Esson and Anderson. Their India rehearsed orientalist formulae and the Antipodean angst of playing authentic translator, thus notched up in colonizing capital in the game of empire, even as the subcontinental territory remained quarantined as a disease and asymmetry inducing other, unworthy of inclusion or dialogue let alone tarka.³⁸⁴ Deakin and Skinner inhabit and yet inhibit the charter of stereotypes ascribed to this India of empire. They etch plural, if unsettling possibilities for Australia's India – as the engaging neighbour. India in this avatar unleashed Australia into an unending play of boundary-bending and tarka, into the leela³⁸⁵ that Australianness could be. Which brings us to the theoretical framework underpinning this research, its ambit and core concerns.

G. Theoretical Framework

Must a text or thesis remain harnessed to a strictly singular theory? My thesis, as shown above, explores texts, intertexts and co-texts – multilingual, multigeneric – from an interdisciplinary, post-/comparative epistemic-political premise. It explores vanished histories, erased choices, forgotten possibilities and exiled stories in the making of a purely pure, allegedly isolated nation addicted to the past-as-post. It examines mythologies of that European “past” and Antipodean “post”, while retracing hushed alterities of Australian entanglements with India in an apparently singular-fierce nationing phase in Australian history between 1890 and 1950. With special reference to the life and works of one eminent and another invisibilised Australian, both of whom had visited India and variously envisioned Indo-Australian connections during the period, the thesis investigates triumphalist national types and exclusions then in fashion in the Antipodes and often of trans-oceanic Anglo-Saxon derivation. In the process, it unravels binaries such as insider and the unhomed, triumph and failure, nation and the trans-nation. “Failure”, a function of contemporaneity for instance, could prove fecund in

³⁸⁴ In a literary sampling of Australian representations of India beginning from the late nineteenth till the early twenty first centuries, reviewer Giti Chandra is startled at the relentless stasis of orientalist stereotypes. See Chandra, Giti. “Beggaring Belief.” Rev. of *Of Sadhus and Spinners*. *Biblio* XIV.11-12 (2009): 41-42. Print.

³⁸⁵ The Sanskrit term “leela” could literally be rendered as “sport” and approximately connotes what the French refer to as “jouissance”. “Leela” performs an end-reluctant, inclusive creative play of possibilities that defers finishedness and eludes the limits inflicted on a created matrix; it could be the other-intense gaming metaphor for Indo-Australian connections as explored in this thesis.

forging alternative possibilities presently recessive, as in case of Mollie Skinner explored in the third and fourth chapters.

What if the nation be imagined as an osmotic function of dispersion, transits, transition, translations, accommodation, adulteration, mediation, mutation in excess of an imagined community labelled by limits? In studying the angst of forging Australianness in a crucible of responses to India between 1890 and 1950, I seek to infuse the defiantly plural, liminal and exilic in a “-ness” dominantly disseminated as homogenous, in stasis and made of partitions from the other. Instead of a tepid introductory appendix, my theoretical framework then needs to become a suitably pluralist and multi-nodal text/ure woven through the thesis, unafraid of cross-temporal appropriation from multiple Western metropolitan theories and Indic terms and categories, to which I stitch my occasional tweakings, interpolation and neologisms. Ripe in betrayal of any unitary school of thought, the framework nonetheless emerges a polyglot collage-craft in amphibious, liminal categories³⁸⁶ resonant with trans-habits, categories like angst, exile, travel and translation, tarka, tirtha, anrsamsya and kalpana. These comparative caught-between categories tending to the other are residual to the b/order of neatly-cleft binaries. They refuse erasures, invoke hybridity and salvage a fragile arc of other-engaged alterities to narrating self and the nation, especially when it comes to looking back at the make and makers of an Australianness settled in horror and hauntings of the absented, excluded during early decades of the Federation.

Such a framework could provide a post-amnesiac tool and the epistemic humility to reading erasures and listening to dismembered pasts, along with the displacement, refraction, translation, transformation, of texts, events, ideas and people that shaped the elusive narratives of India-Australia interconnections in excess of an orientalist grammar of otherisation/exoticisation spiked with mirrors and terror between 1890 and 1950. It foregrounds liminal spaces and the non-exclusive trans-habits of self-fashioning and nation-making, even in a scape as phobic of neighbourly contamination as white Australia. Deakin, as

³⁸⁶ Liminal categories and iconography suspended between boundaries are formative to the ontology and epistemology, ethics and aesthetics of an Indic universe.

For instance, the kalasha or kumbha indispensable to everyday life and sacred rites in the Indic universe constitutes a metaphor of thresholds. It is embedded in the earth but evokes the sky and given its location at the intersection of finite and the infinite, images mediation between the outside and the inside. See Dehejia, Harsha V. “*Kalasha: A Living Visual Metaphor.*” *Sabda: Text and Interpretation in Indian Thought*. Ed. Santosh K. Sareen and Makarand Paranjape. New Delhi: Mantra Books, 2004. 199-214. 211-212. Print. Likewise, the four antastha varnas, literally in-between phonemes ya, ra, la, va suspended between vowels and consonants in the Sanskrit alphabet, are mantras or sacral sounds perceived to seed four of the seven chakras or energy circles of the human body according to the *Shiva sutras*.

Khanna, Ravi. “The Metaphysics of the Sanskrit Alphabet.” *Sabda: Text and Interpretation* 40-65. 59-61.

I show in the second chapter, received the idea of Australianness from his in-between position as a white colonial male, suspended between coloniser and the coloured colonised. He responded to the liminality of translation as both trauma and capital for a nation of white colonials suspended between that binary. The critical vocabulary and analytical framework for this thesis intends to unsettle the mainstream masculinist, original-and-unitary addict Australianness of the period to a tarka or play of competing imaginaries, un/making it into a polyphonic India-inflected plural-in-making. It displaces the habitual architecture of desolation in -ness with a palimpsest of muted connections and query around absurd asymmetries, such as those of race and gender in the context of dominant models of Australianness during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Alleged triumphs and failures of the then policy-makers and dispossessed bearers of various variants of Australianness – people like Deakin and Skinner – unravel concurrently into a pluripotent inverseness.³⁸⁷

I intend not to deluge this paragraph with an exhaustive register of names of the Western and Australian metropolitan thinkers from diverse schools of thought, disciplines and persuasions whose theories and interpretations I invoke, explore in creating the multi-nodal theoretical framework for this thesis. They are quoted and their works suitably visibilised, wherever cited in the research. I would rather look at the motifs of their post-Babel gathering. Nonetheless, even a selective sample of the range and diversity of prisms and perspectives thus represented should constitute settler-navigator John Hunter's upside-down map of Australia dated 1793, late nineteenth century contemporaries Kaiser Wilhelm on "yellow peril" and Anatole France on "white peril", Warwick Anderson on the nineteenth century imperial cultivation of whiteness as a gradient, Edward Said on Orientalism and Islam as the "bad Orient", Max Mueller on his tense-spliced binary of India, Homi Bhabha on colonial mimicry and casting out as a form of gathering, Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra on the nationalist tropes and erasures formative of Australia as a "schizoid nation" and the rubric "postcoloniality" embedded with divergent possibilities, Faisal Devji on the pre-independence antecedents of Hindu nationalism, Vijay Mishra on the mourning of dispersion seeded in exile and the diaspora, James Clifford on nations imagined by crossings as much as in stasis, Jacques Derrida on hauntology, Van Wyck Brook on "usable past/s" as applicable to loose-ended alternative histories preserved outside of official historiography, Zygmunt Bauman on "retrotopia" as the globally emergent dystopic destination of modernity, Paul Ricoeur on the ethics and ontology

³⁸⁷ "Inverseness" is a humble neologism, a term that hopes to invert the promise of exclusionary essencing in "ness" with an alternative craft of conversation and confluence, as in Deakin and Skinner's versions of Australia – a translational emergent entangled with India.

of translation as the unfinished labour of engagement with the strange/estranged, Bill Ashcroft on the “terrifying sublime” of untamed space in Australian culture, Slavoj Žižek on violence and the idea of the “neighbour”, Heidegger on essencing and its implications, Nassim Taleb on black swan events, Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak on planetarity and “learning from below” as ethical displacements of globalization, historian Paul Carter on spatial histories of Australian nation-founding, Dipesh Chakrabarty on failure, Salman Rushdie on defeat and Humayun as its carrier, essayist-novelist Milan Kundera on betrayal and the “cemetery of missed possibilities”, Jose Saramago on Cain, playwright Tom Stoppard on *rasa*, Peter Greenaway on mirrors in his 1991 film *Prospero’s Books*, Ernest Hemingway on memory as a moveable feast and historian Peter Cochrane on popular memory and the art of national forgetting. The voices of writers, critics, cartographers, theorists, historians and film-makers, housed in plural times and -isms, constellate and converse on norms and their taxonomy of types and exclusions, along with the preservation, provocation of myriad alternative trails, the whispers unhoused and their dispossessed other-bearers.

As to authors, thinkers – classical and contemporary – based in India, or working within the Indic intellectual traditions, or exploring Indic traditions in post-comparative collusion/collision with Western metropolitan terms and frames, this research nods to a second politico-creative enclave. A representative sample would include Arindam Chakrabarti on the polemical diversity and labour of engagement with counters and alterities that gather together the Indian philosophical schools of thought, twentieth century scholar Jaidev on *mamatva* as a category of critical activism and empathetic imagination, Sibaji Bandyopadhyay on *anrsamsya*, the medial self-reflexive term around violence highlighted repeatedly in the *Mahabharata* and suspended between binaries of non-violence and violation, Ashis Nandy on the customisation of pasts amenable to contemporary intervention and the “principle of principled forgetfulness” in mythic societies like India, historian Sibesh Bhattacharya on understanding *itihasa* as a stylised mode of memorialising and contemporising the past based on selective narration and ethical amnesia, Ranjan Ghosh on trans-habits of territories, Amitav Ghosh on the pre-colonial idea of India and the non-terrestrial trans-network of the subcontinent with the rest of Asia, Egypt, Aden and Europe through the Indian Ocean trade route since at least the 11th century CE, grammarian Panini on *apadan karaka* or the syntax of dislocation as inevitable relation of departure or exile from unmoved centres and origins, C. D. Narasimhaiah on the gifts of exile, Amitav Ghosh on the Indian diaspora who have dispersed but continue to belong and translate their roots and memories onto newer spaces, Rabindranath Tagore and Amitav Ghosh on India as a nation in mutation webbed in a grammar of creative, complementary difference, Tagore

on the plight of the colonised who discovers himself partitioned from his past and local cognitive context in “Kshudhito Pashan”, Amit Chaudhuri on the coeval births of Orient and Europe as anti-categories in nineteenth century colonised India, historian Tapan Roychowdhury on the other as a potential function of negotiable desire and difference in the formation of national or territorial identity, Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi on the colonial, post-colonial and trans-creative/anuvadic nodes of translation, Sujit Mukherjee on translation as new writing, poet-mystic Lal Ded and thinker Ashis Nandy on hunger for the non-binaristic, syncretistic as telos for knowledge and experience in India, wanderer-researcher Surajit Sen on fakiri tenets of non-possession, fluid identities and uncumulative travel, novelist Raja Rao on the Indian style of storytelling rendered in English in *Kanthapura*, and so on. Through the concepts and categories mentioned above, these thinkers engage variously with othering, otherness – in terms of tense, space, trans-factors and departures – as a site of conversations, interactivity across asymmetries, without the immediate militarist metaphor of battle or those of outrage and exorcisation, such as disjunction and revolution.

The Indic categories I invoke tend to what-ifs and counter-narratives, the ethics of possibilities from the premise of the present and the extant. Categories such as purvapaksha, anuvad i.e. the unabashed re-telling, trans-creation of an original in another language and context without the tether of guilt and derivativeness leashed to this new original or its maker the anuvadak, bhasya as fresh interpretation, reception and co-creation of the original by an other original thinker-receiver of the text from a younger tense, purana as a format that sustains histories and their alterities along with contemporary commentary and re-makes by the puranika their weaver and memorialiser, kalpana connoting the hunger for alternative realities and counter arguments, Abhinavagupta’s concepts of tarkasamsara and sat-tarka, tirtha the etymologically liminal location, sahitya embedded with the trans-habits of literary studies, rasa from Bharata’s *Natyashastra*, the accretion of samatva or samarasa yoga as posited by Abhinavagupta within the rasa model, antar connoting both “within” and its apparent opposite “distance/difference”, leela, maya and such gaming metaphors for the world wide web of creation, viraha as a frame defined by the absent etc. reject the promise of purity, a hermetically sealed text or the completed and thus forbidding narration. They remain open to alternatives, excess, “post”al possibilities and unsettlement. As explained above in the subsection on the epistemic-political premise, I do not seek to delimit such boundary-bending categories from the rest of my research with inverted commas. They are integrated, not exotic, to the theoretical framework I propose.

Of my intervention, and/or translations:

Not all my interventions in terms of theoretical framework are detailed here, they should interpermeate the thesis. And, within the ecology of voices and versions evoked above, I do not wish to stake a pioneering claim of originality for my research framework. Such lust for originality could eventually taper to only another testimony to the angst of derivativeness, as already observed in case of the legend-makers of white Australia between 1890 and 1950. In proposing Australianness as a translational emergent, I hope to break out of a discursive design obsessed with the pure-and-original. I hope to have intervened by translating the trans-tweak to my research framework, not least by gathering in an asymmetry of liminality terms and thinkers from very diverse disciplines and schools of thought. “Trans-” here represents the transgressive transformative edge, the edge of fusion and betrayal. Translation and translator-interpreters emerge a crucial node for the research and its theoretical framework. Taking cue from Harish Trivedi and Susan Bassnett on translation-as-occupation in the colonial context, I theorise fraught equations with multiple perceived originals for the colonially translated in Australia during early years of Federation in the second chapter, along with the Antipodean colonial’s hunger to gain capital and stakeholding status in the colonising game by posing as translator for a third space and culture such as India. I compare translation to anuvad in the chapters on Deakin and Skinner. Skinner’s anuvadic texts illustrate translation-as-ventriloquism of the templates of Australianness prescribed by D. H. Lawrence and Vance Palmer. These texts seem to perform a Gulliver anuvad of nationalist myths and legends, I contend, while stitching secret subversions to the author’s apparent surrender. What could have remained mere surrogate fiction implanted with inflicted visions crosses over into Skinner’s autobiographical excursions to margins, her guerrilla tropes and metaphors for remembrance, resistance and a site of sat-tarka with Lawrence and Palmer’s violently purist take on Australianness.

I translate terms such as “pluripotent” and “autophagy” from physics and bio-chemistry to the space of this research, so as to examine the shadow-narratives and dismembered pasts of Indo-Australian entanglements during the period I study. Tucker is read as a pluripotent myth, a syncretic whole that repossesses the older myth of Anzac while installing fresh interventions and multiplication, such as Krishna and the fakir. I have applied C. D. Narasimhaiah’s “gifts of exile” to access Mollie Skinner’s India-inflected model of early twentieth century Australianness rooted in open-ended routes, fluid identities, transits, a rainbow diaspora translated, twice-born in the bush and the polyglot translator-picaros at home in playful patois, englishes of contact, tweaking of words and meanings of the helpless monoglots, partially

invented semantics and sometimes, even an absence of translation into English in bilingual dialogues. Keen in their appetite for engagement with diverse others across the shades of difference, the translator-picaros grow adept in a linguistic ecology of adulteration, confluences and conversation with other languages.

Exile emerges as yet another node for this research. In a release from Vijay Mishra's exilic grammar of loss, dispersal and isolation, "exile" mutates to a liberating epistemology of trans-habits that could fashion a self or nation interperfumed with others in Skinner's exilic novels. Translations back and forth in multiple languages become the contour of connect in this exilic matrix, it embeds the ethics of engagement through exposure and openness to diverse others. Azad from imperial diktats of collusion with and appropriation for consumption of the metropolitan centre and its grid, translation erupts at last into post-Babel plurality in Skinner's exilic novels, performing its post-colonial avatar of a fertile craft and cognition of coming together as ideated by Paul Ricoeur.

I theorise in the fourth chapter as to how Australianness also heaves as a sea of stories – literally kathasaritsagar in Sanskrit – stories in full spate, half-told, hidden or hinted at, flowing past censors and borders in Skinner's exilic novels. Storytelling emerges the ethics and aesthetics of these texts, the creatrix for polyphony, digression, contamination and translation, housing the unhomed and teeming with possibilities of alterities. The two World Wars are made into tools for guerrilla storytelling that militate against the nationalist violence of purity, the righteously "Australian" narrative or its tropes of border and silence. Stories, always already disseminated, dislocated, recast through retelling in many tongues and seeded with other stories, heal as a rite of passage to multilingual possibilities of Australianness made of mutation, cross-fertilization, travel and translation, even during wars. And Skinner's Australian warriors mutate into the devious tribe of translator-picaros as compulsive storytellers, keen on plurality, empathy and occasional solidarity with unlikely others. The picaresque protagonist Tucker seems to invoke Australianness in terms of a syncretistic puranic matrix ribbed with alternatives, "impurities", displacing a universe addicted to pollution, as I argue later.

In a departure from the traditional octet posited in Bharata's *Natyashastra*, I identify otherness and inclusion as rasas for Skinner's version of Australianness. I term her model an exemplar of the nation as osmotic function, an unfinished composite of sat-tarka around contending imaginaries sieved across boundaries, and a veritable alternative to the Benedict Andersonian community imagined in terms of exclusivist limits and the unitary. A cartography of transfusion across seas or other passages under erasure surges as a network of possibilities, besides the familiar charter of developmental settler conquest and cordon during the period.

My intervention perhaps also lies in coining terms like “ideological hazard” or “en/gaging neighbour” for Australia’s India, an outlier in excess of singular or stereotypes even between 1890 and 1950. Such terms subvert the theoretical certainties ascribed to translational imprints of India on Australia during the Raj, when viewed through lazy prisms of Australia’s Orient or the oriental neighbour. I propose Australia’s India as a spectrum open to shifts and transformations in the crucible of Australia nation-making, and its influence to be more profound than that of routine imperial exotica and commerce. Then there are the occasional neologisms e.g. “jinn” and “phoenix” used as verbs to highlight Deakin’s concurrent politics of absenting certain sets of possibilities for white Australia while labouring to project it as the legatee of some others. I come up with “Cain narrative” – a take-off on Jose Saramago’s *Cain* – as a phrase for exiled texts, texts of the exiled outside of official history and fiction of the empowered, while examining Mollie Skinner’s anuvadic works and her craft of Australianness as a gift of exile.

The quest of this research and research framework comes down to hosting the otherness of the other without recourse to currencies of fear, absolute difference and deferral or the militarisation of metaphors, such as battle and the subaltern. Must asymmetry, diversity be engaged only inside a design of hierarchy? The motifs of connections and responses, overt and invisibilised, between India and Australia during 1890 and 1950 and their resonance could inspire us to conceptualise a fresh non-exclusive epistemological framework for connections and their ruptures and possibilities beyond the Saidian orient or villainous Asiatic neighbour, obeisant to the white Australian pre-script on the enemy designate. How does the philosophical concept of “apar” speak to the “neighbour”, for instance?

The Sanskrit term “apar” semantically signifies that which is “other”. Etymologically it is more ambivalent. The negative prefix “a” connotes “not” even as “par”, along with “apar”, denote the other. “Apar” is quirky in connoting the “other” concurrently with that which is not “par” i.e. alien or different. The term then becomes paradoxical and trans-resonant, belonging within the spectrum of negotiable distance, difference and counter-narratives, and deserving of engagement, tarka and entanglements to the extent that it does not remain othered but becomes a possibility of the self, unlike the neighbour – subject of inert horror in the Zizek universe. Could India be seen through the prism of a tarkik apar, its shape-shifting, debate-stoking kindle aparatva³⁸⁸ provoking conversations, transfusions, other routes and alternative, if silenced imaginaries for Australia during this period, without its being reduced to an other? When

³⁸⁸ “Tva” is a Sanskrit suffix roughly translatable to “-ness”, aparatva thus rendered as aparness, otherness.

translated to “apar”, the other seems to grow into a richer possibility in excess of binaries or the call to exorcise. Skinner’s Tucker tribe thrive in ecologies of the apar in India and Australia.

“The negative labeling of positive phenomena is, ultimately, unsatisfactory”, observes historian Dipesh Chakrabarty on “an attempt to qualify categories characteristic of European metahistories by attaching to them negative particles or prefixes”, categories like “not bourgeois”, “not capitalist”, “not liberal” and so on, in order to translate them to Indian situations.³⁸⁹ Yet in a shifted context, negative particles or prefixes could be creative and unfold a nuanced vocabulary, rather cognitive system, for reading difference as a finely calibrated gradient of possibilities inviting engagement. In *Ashtadhyayi*, a text that details as much the grammar of Sanskrit as of a reception of life in its transits, ruptures and interconnections, Panini lays down plural modes of relating to the matrix of difference in his classification of meanings of the negative Sanskrit prefix “nan-”, cognate with Latin “non-”: “Tatsadrisyambhabashcha tadanyatam tadalpata/ Aprashastyam birodhashcha nanyarthah shat prakirtitah”. It could be approximately translated as follows: “There are six ways of interpreting otherness. This could imply similarity, lack of an intersectional trait, difference, inadequacy, another scale or hostility/negation”. Perhaps one could re-think Australia’s relations with its neighbourhood, especially its tarkik apar India, and indeed conversations between civilizations from this epistemic angle.

H. A Review/Preview of this Chapter and the Ones to Follow

The Introduction, the first chapter of this thesis, lays down within its pachyderm proportions the framework, scope and objectives of the research, introduces to the research questions and creates an architecture of entry points into the research. It is structured as an octet and its eight parts include a proposition of the scope and objectives with sub-sections invested in the epistemic-political premise and the why questions inspiring the research, a review of existing literature in the domain, a third section on the significance of the thesis, segments on sources and methods, a detour as taut study of representative Australian literary authors besides Deakin and Skinner writing India between 1890 and 1950 and in the age just preceding that, around and after 1857 with the onset of the Raj and of white settler connections with India. The two remaining parts of the thesis comprise the present preview/review of the Introduction and the chapters to follow along with the theoretical framework designed as a

³⁸⁹ Chakrabarty, Dipesh. Introduction. *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*. New Delhi: Permanent Black (by arrangement with The University of Chicago Press), 2002. xix-xxiv. xxii. Print.

collage of thoughts and thinkers from here and there, the Western metropolitan theories and Indic categories convergent in only their liminality, trans-tendencies and a dis-ease with boundaries. The pachyderm chapter hopes to give depth to the context around researching Australia's India and its imprint on the un/make of Australianness in its contending alterities between 1890 and 1950, a research domain traditionally neglected in favour of investigating the London-ties of Australia and India during the period. The introduction seeks to listen to some of the silences and retrace elusive narratives of Australian entanglements, conversations with India beyond the kitsch and niche of routine orientalia or imperial chore and commerce, so as to receive Deakin and Skinner's oeuvre in that context. Reading palimpsests under erasure, teasing out silences or preparing its groundwork could perhaps grow as expansive in space and time as this chapter turned out to be.

The second chapter of this thesis, on Alfred Deakin, explores his earlier writings on India, his 1890 'pilgrimage' to British India and the interconnections between this fascination and white Australia of which he was no unconvinced proponent and policy-maker. How had Deakin braided self and India into his narration of the Australian nation and its foundation myths? Was his India as monochromatic a singular as his Australia, did he seek to contain India in the frame of anxious Orientalism in Antipodean translation? Could he? In seeking answers to these questions, the chapter revisits, compares Deakin's India writings with classical as well as his contemporary co-texts from India, ranging from the Sanskrit Upanishads to Rabindranath Tagore's Bengali fiction, and brings out the continuum in tropes and the implications.

My third chapter foregrounds an invisibilised author of Australian fiction, M. L. Skinner. Her sole claim to fame had been the collaboration with D. H. Lawrence on what both assumed would be a pukka Australian novel, the first of its kind. The chapter delves beyond that, to look at her posthumously published autobiography and a selection of published fiction, in all of which she had aimed, and failed, to translate to her fiction the then dominant templates of Australia and Australianness. What kind of reception did her books evoke? And why had she failed? Sometimes failures could provide the researcher a domain of greater fecundity than the formulaic, Vance-Palmerish predictables, since they help restore the silenced alterities, in this case to imagining Australianness. The chapter seeks to restore Skinner to the white Australian literary canon, as much as read India into her life and writings in terms of creative/critical categories of resistance and remembrance such as anuvad and de/colonisation, among others. Skinner had lived four War years in India, penned her first novel there and her imaginary of self and Australianness is dyed in Indian ink, I contend. The third chapter focuses on her anuvadic texts.

The fourth looks back at her exilic novels. Could “exile” exceed being the hurt-word? Could it, for instance, be read and received as a liberating epistemology opening doors to transgression, dislocation, translation, refraction, cross-fertilization and the smudging of binaries, boundaries as conditions of nation-un/making? Skinner’s exilic novels come out with her imaginary of Australianness as a polyphonic, other-engaging, always-in-the-making tarkasamsara, etched in the medium of exile and sometimes, of war. Her mythography and imaginary, even in terms of war, depart radically from contemporary templates. Could an Australian World War novel tend to a female nurse’s veiled testimonial, and fiction around the nation segue into self-narration of the invisibilised? And how and why had Skinner’s India interperfumed such exilic constructs of her nation woven into furtive shadows of the self? In seeking answers in the fourth chapter, I have referred to Indian critical, analytical, ethical and aesthetic categories such as sat-tarka, mamatva, rasa, samatva, kalpana, anrsamsya etc., along with the regular, metropolitan-exuding epistemic frames. In this, my praxis is entirely in keeping with Skinner’s boundary-bending liminal politics of projecting Australianness. It cannot, and should not, be caged in a singular, centric epistemological paradigm.

The fifth chapter provides a structural counterpoint to the rest of the thesis, and most of all the introduction, in being terse, taut. It revisits a few crucial findings of the preceding chapters, leaves trail of a few immediate possibilities for further research and ends up linking the past with the most anguished of tenses, the present. How could an apparently less remembered season of the past, that of entanglements between India and Australia from 1890 to 1950, that too with reference to a politician like Alfred Deakin and an obscured author like M. L. Skinner, speak to issues of -ness, nation and India Studies today, it briefly reflects.

Deakin's India: Australia Dreamed and Jinned¹

Of Deakin and Mrs. Moore

There could be few more unlikely invocations for Alfred Deakin and his engagement with Australia and India than the compassionate and finally unmoored Mrs. Moore's love-and-betrayal dyed entanglement with India, seething beyond the Raj in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. And there could be few more apt. Despite Mrs. Moore and Deakin's affinity for the subcontinent, it overwhelmed and partly estranged both.

"The Alfred Deakin Lectures 2001" organised by Melbourne International Arts Festival commemorated the centenary of the Australian Federation. They were broadcast on Australian national radio and titled after the conspicuous federal parent and thrice Prime Minister of the country in the first decade of the Federation.² The lectures focussed on Australia as a nation, its achievements, absence, silences, future possibilities and pitfalls. Interestingly, Alfred Deakin, in Esmiss Esmoorish style,³ looms as the presence-in-absence in these lectures engaging with the modern Australian family, economic, political and foreign policies of the nation and its exclusions along with a visionary blueprint of the future Australian.

Dr. Peter Carnley in his lecture titled "Does Australia Nurture its Young?"⁴ cites the young print-addict Deakin planted in his apparently picture postcard Victorian family as the

¹ "Jinn"/ "jinn", derived from the Arabic root "j-n-n" meaning "to hide/ be hidden", refers to a set of supernatural creatures in Arabic folklore who inhabit a dimension beyond the spectrum visible to humans. They could be evil, good or neutrally benevolent and are supposedly able to shift shapes; these infinitely fluid creatures could become invisible, if they so chose. "Jinn" as an English verb is my neologism inspired by the Arabic root.

Jinns have been abundantly circulated in the Indian context, with bottled-up jinns ready to do their master's bidding being a nomadic formula in many subcontinental versions of Arabic narratives, e.g. Aladdin. They are, functionally and etymologically, potent metaphor for Deakin's imagined version of an impossibly 'pure' federal Australia built on various silences, invisibles and undesirables, e.g. the indigenous and coloured peoples of Australia or the sacred in the public domain.

For further details on the nature and origin of jinns, see stories e.g. "The Fisherman and the Jinni", "Maruf the Cobbler" or "The Tale of Ali Nur-al-Din and his son Badr-ad-Din Hasan" in *One Thousand and One Nights*, verses 7:27, 15:26-27 of the Quran and Hadith no. 6757 in Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj's Hadith, *Sahih Muslim*.

² The lectures were published as *The Alfred Deakin Lectures: Ideas for the future of a civil society*. Sydney: ABC Books for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2001. Print.

³ "Esmiss Esmoor" is the Indian slant on the name of Mrs. Moore. Mrs. Moore having already left for England, "Esmiss Esmoor" is invoked as a phirang deity sympathetic to Indians by the impassioned locals awaiting justice for Dr. Aziz in *A Passage to India*: "She is Mrs. Moore, she would have proved his [Dr. Aziz's] innocence, she was on our side, she was poor Indians' friend" [wails Mahmoud Ali, an Indian lawyer defending Aziz]. . . . The tumult increased, the invocation of Mrs. Moore continued, and people who did not know what the syllables meant repeated them like a charm. They became Indianized into Esmiss Esmoor, they were taken up in the street outside".

See Forster *A Passage to India* 198-199.

⁴ Carnley, Peter. "Does Australia Nurture its Young?" *Alfred Deakin Lecture*. ABC Radio National. 18 May 2001. Radio. Web. 21 Apr. 2013.

lost idyll in the context of the present day Australian nuclear family on the brink of breakdown. He assumes a lack of shared spiritual space as the cause. In “The Blessed Country: Australian Dreaming”,⁵ John Carroll identifies the national (white Australian) sacred in the secular self-sacrificing archetype of the Anzac⁶ as volunteer hero and probes the possibility that there could be a spirit to the land. Hushed words like “blessed” and “dreaming” seem to have returned with a vengeance in Antipodean representations of this wryly irreligious⁷ nation. Many of these lectures deal with the exclusions and phobias of an earlier overt and now subterranean White Australia policy. Dr. Jared Diamond⁸ dreams of greater space for indigenous Australians and their histories and languages in the emergent national identity, while Kim Scott⁹ exposes Australian neurosis in its dominant nationalist stereotypes. The noble bushman tramping it out in the outback of empire and obsessed with “destroying the land, destroying its people, destroying himself” is read as a myth haunted by “failure, scepticism and insecurity”. For Scott, the Australian settler society is bonded by expulsion and violence: “When I look at our colonial history it seems that a collective Australian identity is founded upon destruction of the land and its people. And – think about Gallipoli – is founded upon failure”.

As an architect of the White Australia policy who chose to “smoothe the dying pillow”¹⁰

⁵ Carroll, John. “The Blessed Country: Australian Dreaming 1901-2001.” *Alfred Deakin Lecture*. ABC Radio National. 1 Jan. 2001. Radio. Web. 21 Apr. 2013.

⁶ The full form of Anzac is “Australia and New Zealand Army Corps”. Historically, it refers to the First World War Army Corps of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force that was formed in Egypt in 1915 and operated during the battle of Gallipoli in Turkey. The army comprised more nations than its name suggests, with Indian, Sri Lankan, French and British members. Its landing in Turkey was “an international affair, not a narrowly national one” (*What’s Wrong with Anzac* 9-10). The army had to finally beat a retreat from Turkey but the Anzacs – an idea as much as an army corps – became an increasingly sacralised icon for the Australian nation. Some scholars like Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds read it as seminal signifier for “the relentless militarisation of our [Australian] history” (vii). For a critique of the normative nationalist Anzac narrative, see Lake, Marilyn, Henry Reynolds, with Mark McKenna and Joy Damousi. *What’s Wrong with Anzac?* Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2010. Print.

For a foundational narrative of the Anzacs as epic heroes of the imperial nation, see

Bean, C. E. W. *The story of Anzac from the outbreak of war to the end of the first phase of the Gallipoli campaign, May 4 1915*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1921. Print.

Also see Bean’s *The story of Anzac: from 4 May, 1915 to the evacuation of the Gallipoli peninsula*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1941. Print.

The books by Bean mentioned above comprise the first two volumes of the *Official history of Australia’s Involvement in the War of 1914-1918*, published by Angus and Robertson between 1921 and 1942.

⁷ According to David Tacey, spiritualism and religion remain tabooed topics for discussion in Australian public and academic discourse though many profess an interest in spirituality in private (Tacey 46). As Bill Ashcroft comments, “The sacred occupies the region of the repressed in Australian cultural life” (22). For details, see Ashcroft, Bill. “The Sacred in Australian Culture.” *Sacred Australia* 21-43.

Tacey, David. “Spirituality in Australia today.” *Sacred Australia* 44-64.

⁸ Diamond, Jared. “A Biological History of Australia.” *Alfred Deakin Lecture*. ABC Radio National. 15 May 2001. Radio. Web. 22 Apr. 2013.

⁹ Scott, Kim. “Australia’s Continuing Neurosis: Identity, Race and History.” *Alfred Deakin Lecture*. ABC Radio National. 15 May 2001. Radio. Web. 22 Apr. 2013.

¹⁰ Qtd. in Macintyre, Stuart. “Deakin and the Sovereignty of the People.” *Voices: The Quarterly Journal of the National Library of Australia* 4.2 (Winter 1994): 8-18. 8. Print.

for indigenous Australians, Deakin in some of these lectures is possibly located at the heart of darkness of what Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra term as “the schizoid nation”. Sir Anthony Mason¹¹ critiques Deakin’s visions regarding Project Australia which he thinks had eventually boomeranged: “Water irrigation, an undertaking which Deakin strongly supported, is endangering the Australian environment. At that time, it was not thought that irrigation would lead to the modern problems of salinity which afflicts so much of the lands in the Murray-Darling basin”. Former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser¹² laments the political and strategic overdependence on the USA though geographically Australia remains in vulnerable proximity of its Asian neighbours. The US-Australia special alliance can be traced back to Deakin who invited the American ‘Great White Fleet’ in 1908 to show its “power mailed fist”¹³ on Australian shores, a token of transnational white brotherhood against the coloured spectre of Asia. On a similar note, former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans¹⁴ proposes a more Asia-engaging isotope of the pure white, geographically insecure Australia that Deakin had so notoriously envisioned.

In his lecture titled “Being Shaped by the Stories we Choose from our History”, Rodney Hall¹⁵ chooses to disbelieve the narrative pivoting on purity and whiteness of the Australian Federation scripted and disseminated by Deakin and others as the ur-Story of the Genesis of the nation;¹⁶ he would rather voice other denied, rainbow stories as crucial to its un/making. The First Fleet that arrived at Botany Bay in 1788 was multiracial, what with the presence of Black Africans and Orthodox Jews and “the dark secret haunting the Australian heart is the knowledge that we stole what we have. We killed to secure the theft”. Hall installs the aboriginal tragedy and the history of its white denial as the central lack haunting the nation. He suggests an antidote in the acceptance that “all non-indigenous Australians are migrants, really, a migrant society, still accustoming itself to the land. If we told this story, instead of an Anglo-

¹¹ Mason, Anthony. “Deakin’s Vision, Australia’s Progress.” *Alfred Deakin Lecture*. ABC Radio National. 11 May 2001. Radio. Web. 22 Apr. 2013.

¹² Fraser, Malcolm. “My Country 2050.” *Alfred Deakin Lecture*. ABC Radio National. 21 May 2001. Radio. Web. 22 Apr. 2013.

¹³ Lake and Reynolds *Drawing the Global Colour Line* 203.

¹⁴ Evans, Gareth. “Australia in Asia; Looking Back and Looking Forward.” ABC Radio National. 11 May 2001. Web. 23 Apr. 2013.

¹⁵ Hall, Rodney. “Being Shaped by the Stories We Choose From Our History.” *Alfred Deakin Lecture*. ABC Radio National. 13 May 2001. Radio. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

¹⁶ Alfred Deakin narrates his memories of the Australian Federal movement with the relish of an omniscient and benign voyeur in *The Inner History of the Federal Cause* written in 1898 and published posthumously; it limns also a colourful character-sketch of protagonists of the Federal movement in Australian colonies, with Deakin self-casting himself as puppeteer-dramaturge of the entire theatre. For more details, see Deakin, Alfred. *The Federal Story: the Inner History of the Federal Cause*. Edited and with an introduction by J. A. La Nauze. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1944. Print.

Celtic establishment which makes all other people outsiders – “New Australians” as used to be said – it’s a great leveller”.

Many of these centenary Federal lectures focus on the lack and lacunae of the federal version today, on what Australian critic Nettie Palmer (1885-1964) rued in 1937 to be “great empty spaces” in the national imagination.¹⁷ In many of them, Deakin seems to have become the invisible yet indispensable metaphor for this portable absence apparently so definitive for the Antipodean nation. He is invoked as the muse of the symposia on the nation; the invocation, however, is fraught with unease and covert accusations of guilt and failure. Deakin, apparently, must somehow model and reconcile the Australian ambivalence – its unspeakable secrets and secular sacred, the ancient paradox of (European) history versus (Asian) geography, its status as a settler colony of the British against racial supremacism as coloniser, its cultural conservatism and determination to remain pure as reflected in the White Australia policy versus the ground-reality of aboriginal presence and Asian, specially Chinese, immigration and miscegenation.¹⁸ This is a tall order for any individual or politician, but Deakin has been dubbed a charismatic enigma by his biographers, despite the voluminous personal notes, memoirs, diaries detailing his dilemmas and a few published texts preserved at the National Library of Australia, five major biographical studies and innumerable contemporary evocations and evaluations. As Stuart puts it:¹⁹

He [Deakin] was surely the only prime minister in Australian history to have received inner messages from spiritual sources – and he was certainly the only one to have secretly doubled as a journalist who wrote regular accounts of Australian politics in which he reported his own conduct as if describing the actions of an inscrutable stranger. (36)

Let us then have a brief look at the mystery that is

Deakin’s life-story

Born on third August 1856 in Melbourne, Deakin was the second child and only son of upwardly mobile English immigrants and had loyalties twinned as native-born colonial statesman and imperial loyalist. A garrulous pupil who inhabited his dreamdom more than textbooks, Deakin studied law at the University of Melbourne but his principal interests remained elsewhere. *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver’s Travels* and

¹⁷ Palmer, Nettie. *Fourteen Years* 41.

¹⁸ For an account of the intimate connections between white Australians and Chinese immigrants in the late nineteenth century, see

Bagnall, Kate. “Crossing oceans and cultures.” *Australia’s Asia* 121-144.

¹⁹ Macintyre, Stuart. “Alfred Deakin.” *Australian Prime Ministers*. Ed. Michelle Gnattan. Sydney: New Holland Publishers, 2000. 36-53. Print.

Arabian Nights were his favourites since childhood and he remained a voracious reader through life, literature, religion, philosophy and spiritualism being his preferences. “More and more the height, depth and breadth of the life I have led in and thro letters expands as I recall it until I wonder whether I have not lived more and more intensely in and thro books”.²⁰ He had even tried his hand as a budding dramatist in forgotten plays like *Quentin Massys*.²¹ Though not successful as a playwright, Deakin maintained copious notebooks and diaries in private for the rest of his life; his journals were confessor and confidante of life exceeding politics. Here he scribed his self, solitary musings, spiritual experiences and opinions, zealously guarded from public and even family exposure.

While he secured few briefs as lawyer, Deakin joined Dr. J.B. Motherwell’s séance circle in 1874 and in a short while discovered himself as medium and impromptu writer. He subscribed to the English spiritualist journals *Medium* and *Daybreak*. At this time he met David Syme, the dour Scot owner of the formidably influential Melbourne daily newspaper, the *Age*. He mentored Deakin as a contributor to his paper. In 1878, when the Victorian liberal organisation consulted Syme to find a candidate for a parliamentary by-election, Syme nominated his young protégée and threw all the resources of the *Age* in securing his election. Deakin, at the age of twenty two, was hurled into the world of politics: “So it was that at length I became a politician from 1880 till 1890 by sheer force of circumstance rather than independent choice”.²²

Deakin’s entry into politics coincided with his marriage to Elizabeth Martha Anne Browne or Pattie Deakin, whom he met through spiritualism. He loved to imagine home as a Garden of Eden, ready to soothe the reluctant politician in its idyllic refuge.²³ His three daughters and wife comprised a sacred circle secured from strangers and colleagues. “Happier than Adam, sinning, I retain/ Eden and Eve, three gracious cherubims;/ The fateful flaming sword that banished him/ Protects our Paradise . . .”.²⁴ So began Deakin’s dutifully conjugal sonnet to his wife on their wedding anniversary in 1898.

Once launched on his career, Deakin advanced rapidly. A commanding orator and administrator, he had become leader of the Victorian Liberals by 1886 and joint leader of a

²⁰ Maroon leather covered notes similar to Clues. No. 13. Entry dated 11 and 12 January 1908. Qtd. in La Nauze, J. A. *Alfred Deakin: a Biography*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1965. 640. Print.

²¹ Deakin, Alfred. *Quentin Massys: a drama in five acts*. Melbourne: J.P. Donaldson, 1875. Print. This is his only published creative work, published at his own expense.

²² Deakin, Alfred. *The Crisis in Victorian Politics, 1879-1881*. Ed. J. A. La Nauze, and R. M. Crawford. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1957. 59. Print.

²³ Rickard, John. *A Family Romance*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996. 116. Print.

²⁴ Deakin. “Sonnet.” 1898. TS 1540/4/Box 14. National Library of Australia, Canberra.

coalition government until 1890. As Chief Secretary he represented his colony at the 1887 Imperial Conference in London, where he affronted and impressed the British representatives by pressing for local interests in the Pacific region. It was at this conference that he was offered and refused a knighthood. Aged just thirty, his was a meteoric rise to become the most conspicuous of the Victorian politicians and an independent Australian Briton.

Deakin had his darker moments. The severe depression that wreaked havoc in Melbourne finance led to a no confidence motion against the Gillies-Deakin ministry in the Victorian parliament and he had to leave office late in 1890. He was complicit in the special bankruptcy laws passed by members of the Victorian legislature to allow debtors to make secret compacts with their creditors and protect themselves from ruin and disgrace. As lawyer, he defended some of the chief villains involved in this dubious collusion between politicians, company promoters and bankers.²⁵ Syme was more than eager to bail him out of this crisis and proposed a trip to Egypt to report on irrigation there. Deakin persuaded Syme that a report on irrigation in India would be more relevant for Australia.²⁶ He arrived at Colombo on 11 November 1890, explored India from Srirangam in the south to Kutb Minar and Benaras in the north and boarded the steamer at Colombo for the return journey on 1 February 1891. The stay at India inspired a number of articles for the *Age*, republished in some other Australian papers, on themes as diverse as Indian history, art and architecture, temples and tombs, religions, ethnography, irrigation schemes and the Raj. These articles were later anthologised as *Irrigated India*²⁷ and *Temple and Tomb*,²⁸ featuring among the few books Deakin authored and published during his lifetime.²⁹ They aroused widespread interest in Britain and Australia.

²⁵ Macintyre, Stuart. "Alfred Deakin: A centenary tribute." Department of the Senate Occasional Lecture Series. Parliament House, Canberra. 22 Aug. 2003. Lecture. Web. 21 Apr. 2013.

²⁶ La Nauze *Alfred Deakin: a Biography* 133.

²⁷ Deakin, Alfred. *Irrigated India: an Australian View of India and Ceylon, Their Irrigation and Agriculture*. London: W. Thacker and Co., 1893. Print.

²⁸ Deakin, Alfred. *Temple and Tomb in India*. Melbourne: Melville, Mullen and Slade, 1893. Print.

²⁹ Walter Murdoch, Deakin's young friend, admirer and first biographer, maintains in his biography of Deakin that his published volumes overwhelmingly comprise statistics and estimates, despite his voluminous private musings on religion, philosophy, literature and the self: "Fate . . . played a strange trick with Deakin as a writer. Of the writings for which he cared most, the writings into which he put most of himself, not one was given to the world. All that he wrote on poetry, and philosophy, and religion, remain unfinished, or at least unpublished. . . . The chief published works of this "unpractical idealist" were three volumes dealing with statistics and estimates, measurements and quantities" (94).

These printed books are *Irrigation in Western America* (1885), *Irrigation in Italy and Egypt* (1887), *Irrigated India* (1893) and *Temple and Tomb in India* (1893), which Murdoch seems to have regarded as a kind of appendix to *Irrigated India*. His *Federal Story* and *The Crisis in Victorian Politics* remained unrevised drafts and were published posthumously. For more details, see Murdoch, Walter. *Alfred Deakin: a Sketch*. With an Introduction by Frank Moorhouse. Melbourne: Bookman Press, 1999. Print.

During the 1880s, Deakin had been popular as the Irrigation man who dreamt of transforming arid Australian interiors into oases of abundance. Imperialism and the idea of the Australian federation featured among his priorities as well. Deakin described himself as a “Federal Imperialist inspired by the ideal of a group of self-developing and self-governing dominions united with the Mother Country by ‘community of sacrifice’”.³⁰ However, in the 1890s the federal movement became his exclusive obsession; in this decade, Deakin remained a backbencher at the Victorian Parliament and did not accept office. As Al Gabay observes, Deakin believed both Federation and his role as its resilient apostle to be “divinely mandated”.³¹ The assertion of Australian nationhood and/or statehood became for him a sacred mission that allowed him to assert his individuality and to transform his political activities into a life of devotion.³² He crusaded for this cause as advocate, parliamentarian and mediator, as delegate to the federal conventions of 1891 and 1897-8 that drafted its constitution, as campaigner in the referenda for its adoption, and as representative of the colonies during the final negotiations in London with the Colonial Office, for its enactment during 1900. 1901 saw the birth of the Commonwealth as a legal entity.

Deakin plunged into making this constitutional framework a functioning reality; Australia must emerge as an autonomous nation, albeit bonded to Britain. He fashioned its distinctive institutions. The first Tariff Bill passed in Parliament in September 1902 ensured independent revenue for the Commonwealth and granted financial freedom to the national Parliament; he played a key role in establishing the High Court of Australia or the Federal Supreme Court through the Judiciary Act of 1903 which guaranteed freedom of constitutional interpretations for the Commonwealth. In the first decade of the Commonwealth, aptly branded the “Deakin period”,³³ he was thrice Prime Minister, from 1903-04, 1905-08 and 1909-10; he was also Attorney-General of the first federal ministry headed by Edmund Barton. He had a unique opportunity to frame policies and stamp “his own ideals on the mind of his country”.³⁴ These include the Immigration Restriction Act in 1901, “the first piece of legislation passed

³⁰ Deakin, Alfred. “Letters to the Morning Post”. Entry dated 9 Dec. 1903. Qtd. in La Nauze *Alfred Deakin: a Biography* 321.

Deakin had anonymously played the journalist while remaining the Prime Minister of Australia. He sent regular reports and analyses of Australian issues and politics to the London-based Liberal journal *Morning Post* from January 1901 to October 1914, in an attempt to educate authentic (and indifferent) Englishmen in Antipodean issues. He had assumed the role of interpreter-propagandist of colonial nationalism.

³¹ Gabay, Al. *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 85. Print.

³² Macintyre, Stuart. Introduction. *‘And Be One People’: Alfred Deakin’s Federal Story*. By Alfred Deakin. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995. x. Print.

³³ La Nauze *Great Australians* 25.

³⁴ Murdoch *Alfred Deakin: a Sketch* 292.

once Federation was secured”.³⁵ It institutionalised racial discrimination through adoption of the dictation test to keep out all non-Caucasians. Deakin’s ground of defence for this discriminatory act was cultural relativism:

The unity of Australia is nothing, if that does not imply a united race. A united race means not only that its members can intermix, intermarry and associate without degradation on either side, but implies one inspired by ideas, and an aspiration towards the same ideals, of a people possessing the same general cast of character . . . a people qualified to live under this Constitution”.³⁶

Deakin envisioned a white Australia since “if you destroy the British manhood, the basis upon which the nation rests, it will fall”.³⁷ ‘One people, one flag, one destiny’ was the federal motto. Non-white Australians, e.g. the Aborigines and Asian immigrants, were excluded from his Australian Settlement. As Victorian Chief Secretary, he had earlier evicted aboriginal inhabitants of the Framlingham Reserve to make way for an agricultural college.³⁸ Victorian Aborigines were huddled in cordoned-off reserves where, unhoused, not counted in the census and denied the right to vote, they were courteously provided the setting to disappear without a whimper. The new law provided for the removal of those of mixed descent, who were to be assimilated into white society and expunged of their aboriginality. As for the Asians, Deakin was unapologetic:

The yellow, the brown, and the copper-coloured are to be forbidden to land anywhere. . . . The ultimate result is a national determination to make no truce with coloured immigration, to have no traffic with the unclean thing, and to put it down in all its shapes without much regard to cost. Those Chinese, Japanese, or coolies who have come here under the law, or in spite of it, are not to be permitted to increase.³⁹

Central to this national organisation was Deakin’s doctrine of New Protection which linked tariff protection for local industry to the maintenance of Australian living standards. Henceforth, protection was available only to employers who provided fair and reasonable wages. Deakin’s version of liberalism and the Australian dream set limits on the operation of the market and on transnational movements of labour, in order to forge a white nation-building social solidarity that would promote both equity and efficiency in a prosperous and true

³⁵ Lockhart “Absenting Asia” *Australia’s Asia* 286.

³⁶ Deakin, Alfred. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates. Vol. 4. 1901. 4807. Print.

³⁷ Deakin Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates. Vol. 18. 1904. 718-19. Print.

³⁸ Macintyre “Deakin and the Sovereignty of the People” 10.

³⁹ Deakin, Alfred. *Federated Australia: Selections from Letters to the Morning Post 1900-1910*. Edited with an introduction by J. A. La Nauze. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1968. Entry dated 8 Oct 1901. 80. Print.

Commonwealth. Alarmed at the scramble of France and Germany for overseas territories in the south-west Pacific, the Federation at Deakin's initiative took over the government of Papua New Guinea and the Northern Territory in 1907, emulating European colonialism. A High Commissioner was appointed in London.

In 1908 the federal capital was chosen at Canberra, eliminating the power struggle between Melbourne and Sydney. As a prelude to the construction of a transcontinental railway webbing Australia from east to west, a survey was authorized. As a man who held himself as a scholar hurled into the world of politics, Deakin was also personally invested in beginning the Commonwealth Literary Fund in order to foster an original, distinctively Australian literature. Imperial preference affirmed trade links of Australia with United Kingdom. Deakin went to the 1907 Imperial Conference in London with a proposal for an imperial secretariat that would give self-governing dominions such as Australia a voice in foreign policy, and was rebuffed. He began preparations for the creation of an Australian navy, a project completed by a later Labour government. He also introduced legislation for compulsory military training.

Deakin's intense imprint on the nascent institutions of the country had its share of controversies and possibly resentment from both allies and opposition, in the final years of his tenure. In 1909, he set aside his partisan loyalties and resumed office, joining his former opponents the Free Traders, to form the Commonwealth Liberal Party and expel his former ally, the Labor Party, from the government benches. In his confidential journal titled "Clues", Deakin cited sacred duty as the reason for this coalition gymnastics: "Not for myself O God, not for myself . . . but for Thy purpose, for Thy will, for my country and kin first and always be my retention of official place".⁴⁰ Such decisions bewildered the comprehension of his colleagues and the public; many Liberals and Australian voters felt betrayed and in general lost trust in Deakin's integrity. Deakin's decision of Fusion of Free Traders and Protectionists was defeated in the 1910 election and the party was routed by a triumphant Labour.

This public debacle was coupled with a marked deterioration of Deakin's physical and mental powers. He steadily lost his memory since the final years of his prime ministership and in morbid moments of lucidity, charted the degeneration in diaries. Towards the end of this memoired life in 1917, despair pervaded: "Life has ended – in truth in fact and in judgment – none can know, not even my self . . . what once I was capable of doing or did".⁴¹

⁴⁰ Qtd. in Macintyre "Alfred Deakin" *Australian Prime Ministers* 38.

⁴¹ Deakin. Diary, 19 January 1917. MS 1540/3. Australian National Library, Canberra.

Deakin's last public meeting was a conscription rally at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in 1917, "an inauspicious place for one who had recoiled from crowds at sporting events with their base passions".⁴² Unable to speak in his state of incurable aphasia, he nonetheless refused to give up his stake on the Commonwealth Ideal or the self-assigned role as "trustee for [the white Australian] posterity, for the unborn millions"⁴³ whose destinies he could foresee, and perhaps had dared to design. His last public message was not spoken but published. It was a plea for conscription:

Fellow Countrymen – I have lived and worked to help you keep Australia white and free. The supreme Choice is given to you on December 20th. On that day you can say the word that shall keep her name white and for ever free.

God in his wisdom has decreed that at this great crisis in our history my tongue must be silent owing to my failing powers. He alone knows how I yearn, my fellow Australians, to help you say that magic word. . . .⁴⁴

Deakin's magic was undone. Australians voted a resounding No. The disillusionment and reluctant fascination with him linger to this day. Core elements of his national vision – "the White Australia policy, British race patriotism, protectionism, state control, the damming of rivers and channelling of desires"⁴⁵ – have been dismantled and held up for public condemnation post globalisation and eco-awareness and yet continue to inform subconscious racial and national motifs for Australia. Deakin with his paradoxes, closeted rainbow selves, desperate devotion to the Commonwealth and puckish pleasure in mysteries and covering track,⁴⁶ elude, mystify and even exasperate; small wonder, then, that he sometimes provoked the magisterial judge in his biographers. Let us then briefly explore

Deakin's Trail in his Biographies

There are four major biographies, and now a fifth one published late in 2017, of Deakin that probe his protean lives and selves. The first one of these by Walter Murdoch (1874-1970), Deakin's junior friend and admirer, was commissioned by Mrs. Deakin and modestly calls

⁴² Macintyre "Alfred Deakin: a Centenary Tribute" 9.

⁴³ Deakin's speech at the Adelaide meeting of the federal convention in 1898.

Qtd. in La Nauze *Great Australians* 30.

⁴⁴ Qtd. in Macintyre "Alfred Deakin: a Centenary Tribute" 9.

⁴⁵ Macintyre "Alfred Deakin" *Australian Prime Ministers* 40.

⁴⁶ Later in life, Deakin tried hard to disown the authorship of *A New Pilgrim's Progress*, a séance-inspired adaptation in youth of Bunyan's canonical text to his private vision, apparently written under the spiritist guidance of John Bunyan to this "impressionist writing medium" [quoted from the subtitle of the book] at Motherwell's circle.

As noted earlier, Deakin had also played the anonymous Australian correspondent for the London-based *Morning Post* for years, commenting on himself and other politicians in third person while keeping his identity as Prime Minister in disguise.

itself *Alfred Deakin: a Sketch* (1923).⁴⁷ Murdoch explains in the preface: “The reader is to be warned that this book is nothing more than what the title-page proclaims it: a sketch. It will be followed, I hope, by a larger, more fully documented work, in which I shall have the advantage of collaborating with one whose intimacy with Mr. Deakin was immeasurably closer than mine”.⁴⁸ This ideal collaborator was Deakin’s son-in-law Herbert Brookes, his first daughter Ivy’s husband and yet another young protege of the Prime Minister.

Murdoch boldly proclaims his freedom as a biographer: “I was asked to write a biography; it was not suggested that I should write a panegyric”.⁴⁹ Yet the biography, written in the wake of Deakin’s death and weighed with Murdoch’s personal gratitude at his friendship and recommendation,⁵⁰ falls little short of eulogy. Murdoch’s Deakin is a dreamer and thinker who, when cast in the temperamentally hostile world of politics, turns out to be a formidable pragmatic statesman as well. He traces two sides of Deakin, the aloof and the amiable. On the one hand, he was the self-isolated young romantic – “a boy too old for his age; lonely, thoughtful, a passionate devourer of books, an industrious architect of splendid castles in the air. On the other he was a boy among his mates; as fond of a lark as any, and more impressively garrulous than most” (23).

Murdoch is eager to redeem Deakin from the suspect tag of a dreamer and reinstate him as the icon of the Australian political (white) male. An imperialist who regretted British indifference to white dominions, he returned from the 1887 Imperial Conference resolute to espouse the Australian Federation. Deakin’s brand of imperialism combined “in a perfect harmony an ardent love for the great self-governing [white Australian] community of which he was a Minister, with a wide and fervent patriotism for the [British] Empire of which we are all citizens” (248). Murdoch’s Deakin is also the haloed prophet of Australian nationhood and embodies the political history of the Commonwealth during the first twelve years of its existence. The awestruck biographer compares Deakin’s life to an “earthly pilgrimage” (286) and concedes that religious faith “lay at the very foundation of his being” (287).

⁴⁷ Murdoch, Walter. *Alfred Deakin: a Sketch*. London: Constable, 1923. Print.

⁴⁸ Murdoch, Walter. Preface. *Alfred Deakin: a Sketch*. Ed. Frank Moorhouse. 12.

⁴⁹ Murdoch Preface 12.

⁵⁰ Deakin and Murdoch had shared a literary correspondence over eighteen years from 1900-1918. Deakin who loved to conjure himself as a scholar exiled to the realm of politics, sought out Murdoch when the latter was a young schoolmaster and literary journalist in the Melbourne-based newspaper *Argus*. They shared an interest in Australian literature and Meredith’s novels and poetry. They exchanged views, lent each other books and met fairly often. Deakin with his enthusiastic recommendation possibly played a role in securing Murdoch’s appointment to the chair of English at the newly established University of Western Australia in 1912. For details, see

La Nauze, J. A., and Elizabeth Nurser, eds. *Walter Murdoch and Alfred Deakin on Books and Men: Letters and Comments 1900-1918*. Melbourne : Melbourne University Press, 1974. Print.

Walter Murdoch contains Deakin's India visit in a sub-chapter, as a prelude to the Federal movement. Murdoch discusses the history of publication of his India-based texts. Deakin is redeemed as a diligent student of India and its religions since childhood, rather than a spurious globe-trotter, with the tall claim: "he knew the history of the country as few Englishmen knew it." Murdoch's India is a benign digression before the heroic "Ten Years' Conflict"⁵¹ for Federation; the sub-section seems an oblique testament to Deakin's superior wisdom over the pukka British when it came to India and the Raj. The empire still existed, as did the always already translated⁵² Australian's thirst for authenticity.

The second biography of Deakin authored by Prof. J. A. La Nauze of the University of Melbourne is no humble sketch but a forbidding tome titled "Alfred Deakin: a Biography" (1965) on "the thrilling prophet of a united Australia" (29). La Nauze explains the difference: "About two-thirds of Sir Walter Murdoch's book was devoted to Deakin's life before the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. In this work the proportion is reversed . . . the relative space I have given to the different phases of his life reflects a deliberate biographical judgment" (Preface vii). India does not merit a chapter in his scheme, but is compressed to a few paragraphs as quirky tour destination in the episode "Farewell to Office, 1890"; it was Syme's indulgent package for Deakin after a stressful political tenure. Surely, the subcontinent could demand no greater space in a White Australia policy-maker's biography.

In his "magisterial survey",⁵³ La Nauze explores the contradictions Murdoch had hinted at. This devotee of the secular cause of Federation was in his youth president of the Spiritualist Association of Melbourne, he notes. Though increasingly embarrassed as a Victorian and federal parliamentarian with his youthful dabbling, "his interest in occult phenomena never vanished, and he still from time to time attended séances until the 1890s" (56). His quest for a religion was more sustained than his spiritist adventures; this "god-intoxicated" man (66) added to his reading lists in the 1890s the Quran, Buddhist scriptures, Bhagavad Gita, Vedanta, Upanishads and other sanatani⁵⁴ texts. Deakin's public fantasy of purity for his nation co-existed with his "incurably eclectic" faith (70) in private. A politician by vocation, he had

⁵¹ It is the title of Murdoch's twin chapters on Deakin's Federation struggle.

⁵² "Translated" etymologically has a spatial connotation, "to be carried across". Many Australians feared spatial, and consequently, cultural removal from the original centre at Home in England.

⁵³ Rickard Introduction *A Family Romance* 1.

⁵⁴ "Sanatani", a Sanskrit word in currency in many modern Indian languages, etymologically means "the ever present". It connotes the pre-colonial multi-nodal matrix of Indian knowledge systems and epistemologies in conversation with each other; they include grammar, mathematics, aesthetics, astronomy, various schools of philosophy and analytical thought, along with multiple takes and debates on religion and spiritualism, including the various schools of atheism.

variously wanted to become a writer, critic, teacher and preacher to mankind; La Nauze calls him a “would-be ascetic and mystic” (77).

According to La Nauze, the twin strands of Deakin’s policy, colonial nationalism and imperial unity, were not as harmonious a hybrid as Murdoch would have us believe. Tension fraught relations between the Colonial Office of Britain and the Australian government. Deakin’s “co-operative Empire” (480) comprising “relations and association of Great Britain and the self-governing colonies of European settlement” (475) was premised on crucial invisibles; his Anglo-Saxon “tribal illusion” (483) of collective imperialism showed no interest in Britain’s tropical dependencies in Asia, Africa or India. John Morley, the British Secretary of State for India, mocked the vision: “I laugh when I think of a man who blows the imperial trumpet louder than other people, and yet would banish India, which is the most stupendous part of the Empire – our best customer among other trifles – into the imperial back kitchen” (481). I can almost hear La Nauze’s chuckle, as he lays to rest speculations about Deakin’s Indophilia with the acid yet indulgent epithet of a “British racist” (482). Judith Brett’s 2017 biography *The Enigmatic Mr. Deakin*, too, promises to be no different in its embarrassment in visibilising Deakin’s India connection in all its complexity and potency; India continues to be quarantined as the quaint little distraction.⁵⁵

In his other publications on Deakin, La Nauze re-engages with his “very puzzling contradictions”:

We have here an eminently public man in appearance and manner, a magician, a spell-binder with an audience who yet always cherishes the retreating dream of a life of solitary contemplation. “Affable Alfred”, witching even his enemies, the centre of laughter and talk in any group, who yet attends only such convivial gatherings as duty requires. A skilful Parliamentarian . . . who is yet in his studies a mystic, brooding on mysteries.⁵⁶

He probes Deakin’s veiled inner life for an answer. Deakin’s cherished yet safely unviable ideal was a “life of meditation and literature” (9). Throughout his adult years, he maintained the cathartic ritual of scribing his self in private writings that ranged across diverse genres e.g. reflections on books, on conduct, on human relations, epigrams, fancies, sketches for plays or novels which he had no intention of writing, fragments of verse, naturescapes,

⁵⁵ Brett, Judith. *The Enigmatic Mr. Deakin*. Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2017. Print. Brett covers Deakin’s India in the biography, but as the odd detour. She does not, for instance, reference *Australia’s Asia* or my chapter in that book titled “Entangled: Deakin in India”, which visibilises the centrality of the India connection to Deakin’s life, texts and political decisions centering the Federation. See “Entangled: Deakin in India.” *Australia’s Asia: From yellow peril to Asian century*. 50-72.

⁵⁶ La Nauze, J. A. “The Mind of a Politician.” *Alfred Deakin: Two Lectures*. Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1958. 7. Print.

prayers, meditations on religion and visionaries he called “gospel-bearers” and much else. He retained this practice right from 1884 when as a young Minister of the Crown in Victoria, he began a series of notebooks which he called “Clues” with numbered and generally dated entries. He continued to write his introspection with different titles till 1916 when all notes ceased due to his declining health (9). According to La Nauze, this subterranean yet perennial other life of reading, writing, meditation and prayer holds the key to reading this “strange man” (12) with his duality “which seemed intensely real to Deakin himself” (12). “Much has been said, but much remains to be said, about this complex man, so withdrawn, yet so inevitably the inspirer of affection”,⁵⁷ concedes the bewildered scholar.

Al Gabay takes a different approach to assessing Deakin; in the third biography titled *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin*, he maps the centrality of the sacred in this secretive yet exuberant Prime Minister’s life. Deakin took pains to obscure the creative and spiritual dimensions of his being from the gaze of others, yet that carefully closeted self avowedly inspired his public career and errors. Gabay’s protagonist is the “silent student, the seeker for Providential ‘signs’, the fervent believer in prophecy and inspiration, the would-be poet, preacher and mystic, whose insights and experiences gradually convinced him that his political labours were mandated by the Divine will, and that the fate of his beloved nation was somehow linked to his own capacity for spiritual gnosis and moral improvement” (2). The self-nation equation and a sense of Mission sustained his political destiny.

Deakin joined the Theosophical movement rooted in India and Buddhism in February 1895. Theosophists aimed to form a Universal Brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour and to promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern literatures, religions, philosophies and sciences.⁵⁸ He was the founding secretary of the Ibis branch in Toorak, Melbourne, of the Theosophical Society founded in honour of Annie Besant in 1894 but resigned the following year; on the same day he joined the Australian Church. The theosophical movement challenged many concepts of racial exclusivity and suggested a troubling pro-Eastern presence in Australia, to the chagrin of mainstream opinion set against racial mixing of any kind. It was a rather disreputable association for a young Australian parliamentarian. Deakin attempted a “ritual cleavage with the past” (27) but his investment in the mystical could not be set away. His ardent quest for signs and prophecies became the secret epistemic route to his federal dream. For him, it was a divinely mandated “transcendent

⁵⁷ La Nauze, J. A. “The Foundations of the Commonwealth.” *Alfred Deakin: Two Lectures*. 24. Print.

⁵⁸ Roe, Jill. *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia*. New South Wales: New South Wales University Press, 1986. 22. Print.

responsibility” (74), the long prayed-for purpose which had chosen him. It could blend his sublime quest with more worldly political ambitions.

India features primarily as an abstract intellectual and sometimes mystical principle in Gabay’s biography. Deakin’s brush with Buddhism and Theosophy and his personal religion of karma and reincarnation were inspired by India, as was his subconscious role of Buddha who relinquished nirvana⁵⁹ in order to serve mankind, in the ten letters written as dialogue with the self sometime after June 1904 and to be briefly mentioned below. Well-versed in Bhagavadgita and the Quran, he had attempted an elaborate exegesis of the texts at the peak of his political career between April 1904 and July 1905. Gabay’s India remains a spiritual ghetto, its traditional posture for the West. Perhaps Deakin was not keen to challenge the stereotype either. As Mark Hearn observes,⁶⁰ his reading lists between 1909-1914 show an anxious affinity for British and French literature and philosophy, seeking “moral assurance and spiritual comfort” in a Western diaspora of imagination on behalf of his nation. Was it also a late attempt to mute India as an intellectual and mystical influence?

Possibly Deakin believed that a Reason-and-Democracy fortified Australian State would be an ideal outpost of the Anglo-Saxon race and its imperialism in the potentially polluting Southern Seas. It would prevent a Charles Pearson envisioned kidnapping of the continent by Asians “through overpopulation of the inhabitants of the ‘tropical belt’” in his *National Life and Character: A Forecast* (1893).⁶¹

Over the years Deakin made detailed studies of many of the world scriptures, along with long journal entries at various points on Jesus, Socrates and Buddha; he had written gospels based on the visions of Shakespeare, Swedenborg and Mohammed. A lifelong seeker of

⁵⁹ In Buddhist and sanatani epistemology, nirvana signifies a state of self-realization when one finally identifies with and dissolves into the cosmic self, achieving moksha or liberation from the unending cycle of desire, birth, suffering and death.

⁶⁰ Hearn, Mark. “Examined suspiciously: Alfred Deakin, Eleanor Cameron and Australian Liberal Discourse in the 1911 Referendum.” *History Australia* 2.3 (2005): 1-20.

⁶¹ Pearson *National Life and Character* 90.

The book which caused a shock wave in European, American and Australian academia, was a jeremiad predicting an inevitable future decline of the white man and empire faced with the postcolonial threat of surging black and yellow races:

The day will come, and perhaps is not far distant, when the European observer will look round to see the globe girdled with a continuous zone of the black and yellow races, no longer too weak for aggression or under tutelage, but independent, or practically so, in government, monopolising the trade of their own regions, and circumscribing the industry of the Europeans . . . We shall wake to find ourselves elbowed and hustled, and perhaps even thrust aside by peoples whom we looked down upon as servile and thought of as bound always to minister to our needs. (89-90)

The phobia of this imminent coloured awakening created a fresh transnational subject since the late nineteenth century, termed “the white man under siege” by Professor Marilyn Lake. For further details, see Lake, Marilyn. “The White Man under Siege: New Histories of Race in the Nineteenth Century and the Advent of White Australia.” *History Workshop Journal* 58 (2004): 41-62. Print.

spiritual enlightenment and discipleship, his personal faith syncretised diverse influences. From Swedenborg he derived the proclamation of a future existence, from A. R. Wallace the idea of eternal progression beyond death, from Blavatsky and Theosophy, karma and reincarnation, understood as an extended cosmic mechanism for attaining spiritual maturity. His fascination with the liminal zone where the mundane segues into the transcendental is rehearsed in his remarkable insights and out-of-body experiences, the bulk of which covered the troubled 1890s at the height of the movement for Federation. Well-versed as he was in Upanishadic schools of thought, these narratives often enact the sakshi-bhokta duality⁶² of the self and a desire for nirvana.

Yet nirvana was no option for Deakin, torn as he was between “his highest aspiration, the life of meditation, writing and reflection, and his lower ambitions, represented by politics and power” (153). His practical mysticism turned inadvertent alibi for his ambitions and he considered politics his reluctant but “pre-determined goal” (94): “Deakin could only reconcile the dichotomy between his ideals and his ambition by bringing them together in a divinised secular Mission, as when he had dedicated himself to the cause of Federation” (164). The private spilled into the public as his political career was made into a metaphor of his religious quest.

In later days, Deakin began to hear voices which he interpreted as signs for public action. He had always considered himself an insider in matters of inspirational experience. The auditory signals according to him offered parallels with Socrates, with whom as with Mohammed, Deakin had felt a special affinity: “Just as Mohammed had been galvanised to his Mission by an angelic voice that commanded him to ‘Recite’, so too Socrates had been guided by a *daimon*, a voice of admonition or ‘divine sign’ that guided his actions.”⁶³ The first voice which Deakin heard in October 1899 coincided with a moment of crisis in the federal movement. On the eve of the Federation, he needed to marshal all his resources to save the union from Colonial Office manipulations in London as well as from an eleventh hour coup at home: “an important phase in Australia’s destiny in which he would play a central role was heralded by an esoteric private experience which signified a transcendental influence” (91). The second voice urging Deakin to “finish your job and turn in” (181) was heard in November

⁶² In the sanatani matrix sakshi (witness/observer) and bhokta (experiencer) refer to the twin dimensions of participation in existence. The resultant wisdom expectedly blends the distanced and the disturbed perspectives on incidents and relations in life. The Self as sakshi has been explored at length in Sarva Sara Upanishad and Isha Upanishad, among other texts.

⁶³ Gabay, Al. “The Private Writings of Alfred Deakin.” *Historical Studies* 22.89 (October 1987): 525-546. 545-546. Print.

1910; he interpreted it as divine sanction to retire from public life. As Gabay observes, his “monition experience had an inordinate influence on Australia’s federal history” (186).

John Rickard is among the latest biographers of Deakin. His book, significantly titled *A Family Romance* (1996), casts Deakin, among other things, as a storyteller who relishes tailoring lives in order to customise them to his Australian idyll. Telling stories, of course, includes creating and recruiting certain narratives over others. In his biography, Rickard unearths some of those buried chapters from Deakin’s life and dreams. For example, despite his passion for the nationalist stereotype of the invulnerable bushman, Deakin was no icon of the tough Australian male. On the contrary, notes of sexual ambivalence lurk in his self-image as a child. Trained at a girls’ school in Kyneton in his childhood, he was his sister Catherine’s pet. “The absence of boy companions helped to keep me girlish”,⁶⁴ he observes. Later sent to Melbourne Grammar School, Deakin bore the stigma of being the girls’ school trainee and was promptly nicknamed ‘Miss Deakin’, which Deakin concludes self-mockingly, was “not inappropriate to my slimness and ladylike ways”. Though thrilled by the military, little Alfie’s androgyny ran deeper than looks or manners. As Rickard comments, “There was a ‘feminine’ aspect of his temperament which these school years exposed. He was emotional which, in such a male environment, made him vulnerable. . . . In all he was a ‘curious compound . . . highly nervous, slender, overgrown, sensitive, sympathetic, variable, emotional, apprehensive and dreamy’” (26). At Grammar School, he secretly worshipped his master Thompson of Apollonian beauty and later confessed that this hero “could have made me do anything” (29).

Androgyny, a latent streak in Deakin’s young adulthood, along with the dream factor erupted in fleeting fascination with his mediumistic potential. As a medium in Dr. Motherwell’s house, he had his first experiments in passive writing. The result was *A New Pilgrim’s Progress* (1877), completed in forty nine sittings in semi-trance. The text was an anuvad⁶⁵ of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*⁶⁶ adapted to the intelligence of the present day. Bunyan’s original text in

⁶⁴ Deakin, Alfred. “Books and a Boy.” 1910. MS 1540/4/316. Australian National Library, Canberra. Qtd. in Rickard 25.

⁶⁵ “Anuvad” etymologically signifies “saying after”. The word plays on an underlying temporal metaphor – to say after, to repeat – unlike its English/Latin equivalent “translation” which embeds a spatial dimension, the etymological signification of “translation” being “to carry across”. “Anuvad” is less anxious about fidelity to the original than “translation”; it invites re-interpretation, even re-creation of originals in the process of re-telling, according the anuvadak greater agency as translator/storyteller. Both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have been variously re-interpreted and disseminated with interpolations and shifts of emphasis and ideology by writers/anuvadaks in Sanskrit and modern Indian bhashas for centuries across the subcontinent. Some of these, e.g. *Ramcharitmanas* composed in Avadhi by Tulsi Das (1532-1623), are outstanding creative works in their own right.

See Bassnett and Trivedi “Of colonies, cannibals and vernaculars” 1-18.

⁶⁶ Deakin, Alfred. *A New Pilgrim’s Progress: Purported to be Given by John Bunyan*. Melbourne: W. H. Terry, 1877. Print.

its title claims to be in “the Similitude of a Dream”; *A New Pilgrim’s Progress* houses Deakin’s personal dream as potential redeemer of a lost world. It traces the spiritual journey of Restless, Deakin’s romanticised self-projection, who with the guidance of benign spirits, births himself as the Reason-girded Redeemer. Arrogant yet intense, Wilful is an orphaned child whom Restless fosters as disciple and soulmate. Her mediumship gives Restless access to the guiding spirits of higher worlds. In her, Rickard discovers the Deakinian ideal of a companion who is also an adept at being the eternally receptive student and co-visionary. Wilful is a thinly-veiled reference to his future wife Pattie, an assertive young girl who gained celebrity in her youth as an exceptional medium. Deakin tried hard to align their relationship to the guru-shishya⁶⁷ mode and would love to play Pygmalion⁶⁸ to his wife.

Experiments in mediumship could be read as Deakin’s exploration of the passivity/femininity in his nature, since “receptiveness and self-abnegation were regarded as necessary qualities for a good medium” (54) and hence the popularity of the empowering vocation among Victorian women. He soon put aside mediumship; such experiments subversive of gender stereotypes had become taboo in an increasingly masculinist Australian society. He tried to make himself invisible as composer of *A New Pilgrim’s Progress*: “He mutilated his own copies of the book to remove the name of the printer. By 1890 the State Library’s copy had gone missing” (56). Deakin had first met his wife as a teen in the Progressive Lyceum, the spiritualists’ version of the Sunday School where he was conductor/teacher, and in the regular séances conducted at her parents’ house. Yet the couple maintained a baffling silence about their first meeting and marriage made in séance; the love story (and their mediumistic experiences) had to be hushed out of the secular national narrative of which Deakin considered

⁶⁷ The guru and shishya, rendered as teacher and receiver of mantra, are vital for knowledge-production and dissemination in the sanatani tradition. They are connected by the quest of wisdom through dialogue and debate. *Katha Upanishad* which debates the nature of self, death, knowledge and reality opens with a meditation on the ideal equation of this cherished connection:

Aum saha navavatu; Saha nau bhunaktu; saha viryam karavavahai; tejasvi navadhitamastu ma vidvisavahai; aum shanti shanti shanti. These lines could be read as “May Brahman equally protect us; may we share equally in the gifts of knowledge; may we both be able receivers; may our learning prove equally potent and may we not resent each other; let Peace be in this world”.

See *Katha Upanishad*. Trans. Swami Lokeshwarananda. Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1992. 1. Print.

⁶⁸ Pygmalion, a character out of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses X*, was the mythical gifted sculptor from Cyprus. He fell in love with his own creation, the lifelike sculpture of a woman. Venus granted him his desire and the statue melted into life in his embrace. Pygmalion named her Galatea. Pygmalion could be read as the fantasy of everyman who wants to sculpt his beloved in the image of his dream, whose companion could be welded to his imagination and remain innocent of everything else. For further details, see Hamilton, Edith. “Pygmalion.” *Mythology*. Boston: Mentor Book, 1942. 108-111. Print.

himself both sutradhar⁶⁹ and storyteller and to which he bended all other potential roles and stories.

Buried narratives of a séance-flavoured love imply alternatives to the much-mythicized (Australian) family idyll that Deakin had carefully cultivated on the secret bodies of his dream and romance. Their home must become a “city of refuge” (100) without a hint of discord; it would be his imagined fable of perfect love where young love procreated and yet was not banished from Eden. The hardened resentment between his wife and sister Catherine Deakin, his sole confidante and companion before marriage, was also evaded by Deakin in his records about family life. The charmed circle of the ‘ideal family’ dissolved after his death; the fable fell apart with an immediate split between Pattie and Katherine and a gradual fading of ties between the Deakin daughters.

Ultimately “Alfred and Pattie were bound together by the shared, private fable of Restless and Wilful” (158), maintains Rickard. Though Pattie occasionally chafed at having to live Deakin’s design, her charities and social service, especially for war-returned soldiers, completed the transition from Wilful to Redemptress: “in death Pattie had become a symbol of Australian womanhood” (169).

Rickard’s account of Deakin focuses on some of the silences of his life. His courtship with Pattie began with a book, *A New Pilgrim’s Progress*, in which he represented Pattie as his atmaja (soulborn). Its end is also sculpted as an open book – the shape of their tombstone – with the dates of birth and death of the partners inscribed. Yet Deakin’s life is not an open book and Rickard exposes the lacunae of the biographies which have done a Deakin on Deakin, i.e. fostered certain silences. According to him, Murdoch played down Catherine’s intimacy with her brother in a biography commissioned by Pattie Deakin. Pattie Deakin, to whom Herbert Brooks sent the draft chapters, asked for any criticisms, however mild, of Alfred’s political record to be excised. She also wanted Murdoch to censor out the bleakness of his last years; “apart from the necessary reticence about family relationships, it also played down Alfred’s involvement in spiritualism” (165). J.A. La Nauze, too, forty years later “devoted a slightly embarrassed chapter to his inner life, effectively quarantining it, so that it would not infect the main narrative” (1). Al Gabay fully developed the spiritual/religious aspect of Deakin and its sometimes forced alignment with his ambitions. Yet all three biographies left untouched the myth of his family life as sacred circle.

⁶⁹ “Sutradhar”, literally thread-gatherer in Sanskrit, refers to the omniscient character in a dramatic performance who unspools and eventually gathers and weaves the strands of unfolding events and characters and enjoys the license of presenting, evading and interpreting them for the audience.

Contemporary interpreters of Deakin are less reticent. Stuart Macintyre, for example, concedes that “Deakin laid the foundations of a national policy that persisted, with various modifications, for much of the twentieth century – so much so that when Paul Kelly wrote the story of the 1980s as a watershed marking *The End of Certainty*, he traced the old order back to Deakin’s original design and described it as the Australian Settlement”.⁷⁰ According to him, the Settlement institutionalised fundamental inequities of race and gender – a man’s basic wage fixed by the Arbitration Court was sufficient to support a family while a woman was paid only enough to support herself, and aboriginals were not part of the census – and its principal object was neither the economy, nor social justice, but the nation. Deakin sought to “weld a thinly peopled continent with distant centres and regional differences into a secure whole and to regulate its divergent interests to serve national goals”.⁷¹

Yet Macintyre eyes with suspicion “the evasions of one who so often seemed to assume that others were there to serve his destiny”.⁷² He reads Deakin’s ideals, policies and political expediencies as both noble and ignoble, one nestled in the other. The uncertainty about the “most striking and enigmatic of our public figures”⁷³ seems to have seeped into Australian national imaginary. The contemporary Liberal Party which shares the name of the party he led, claims him as their ideologue, yet distances itself from his paradigm of communitarian liberalism. Menzies, not Deakin, is their unquestioned icon. The national pantheon of political leaders prepared on occasions by a national newspaper exhibits him as a lesser god who must be included, and yet featured only after Curtin, Chifley and Menzies.

Marilyn Lake further unravels Deakin’s self-alleged divine connections by reading into his love-hate tangle with Britain and transnational racism. She defines the birth of the nation as a “radical act of racial expulsion”.⁷⁴ By drawing a colour line around the freshly settled continent, Deakin had invested in whiteness as the root of national manhood, character and future for Australia.⁷⁵ This “militancy of the ‘white man’ was crucially linked to his positioning as a ‘colonial’ – an ambiguous in-between figure – on the one hand the beneficiary of British

⁷⁰ Macintyre “Alfred Deakin: A centenary tribute” 2.

⁷¹ Macintyre “Alfred Deakin” 51.

⁷² Macintyre “Deakin and the Sovereignty of the People” 8.

⁷³ Macintyre “Alfred Deakin” 3.

⁷⁴ Lake, Marilyn. “On Being a White Man, Australia, Circa 1900.” *Cultural History in Australia*. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003. 97-112. 97. Print.

In *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, she observes: “The Australian welfare state was conceptualised and structured in racialised terms. Its racist exclusions were, paradoxically, an expression of its commitment to democratic equality and dignity of labour. Manhood asserted its elevation, as we have noted, in opposition to aristocrats and coolies. The advocates of White Australia often argued in terms of social justice” (156).

⁷⁵ Lake and Reynolds *Drawing the Global Colour Line* 140.

imperialism and Aboriginal dispossession, on the other, dependent on, and subordinate to, the condescending imperial power”.⁷⁶ The word “manhood” was an uneasy signifier for Deakin:

At the turn of the century manhood was enshrined in the Anglo-Saxon world as a key political value. Manhood rested on and required power – personal, physical, moral, mental and oratorical – and power was necessary to man’s self-respect. . . . Deakin’s quest for power, precipitated by the humiliations and scorn visited on colonials by the British government, was articulated in a discourse on manhood, which he equated with the great republic [USA].⁷⁷

The status of being a translated man and Prime Minister of a transplanted Antipodean nation exiled spatially at least from the sacred centre at Home, did not add to the sheen of manhood for either self or nation. Deakin had visited London thrice, in 1887 the Imperial Conference as Victorian representative, in 1900 the Colonial Office for final sanction of the Australian Federation and in 1907 the Imperial Conference with a proposal for greater autonomy for self-governing dominions like Australia. Each time London had rebuffed, repelled and fascinated him, so much so that his regular epithet of ‘Australian-Briton’ misses more than a hint of trouble. His relation with Britain was one of awed rebellion. Colonial humiliation fuelled his federal passion. He modelled his fantasy of Australian manhood on the virile republican manhood of the United States and wooed the friendship of American philosopher Josiah Royce and President Roosevelt. His Anglo-Saxon race patriotism importantly encompassed the United States: “In the ‘perpetual concord of brotherhood’ [between Australia and the U.S.A.] Deakin imagined a transnational fraternity of white men as an alternative, both to the hierarchical multi-racial Empire and the cosmopolitan unity of mankind”.⁷⁸

In his last years as Prime Minister, Deakin sought to reconcile his republican desire with imperial loyalty, in his dream of an imperial white confederate in which Australia and Britain would relate as equal governments. The result was “Two Deakins” (50) with an apparent contradiction between his policy of defiant national autonomy for Australia and a ritual fondness for the imperial cause: “He has accomplished the impossible and has succeeded in standing on both sides of the Imperial fence”.⁷⁹ The conflict between the pre-scripted pull of

⁷⁶ Lake “On Being a White Man” 101.

⁷⁷ Lake, Marilyn. “‘The Brightness of Eyes and Quiet Assurance Which Seem to Say American’: Alfred Deakin’s Identification with Republican Manhood.” *Australian Historical Studies* 129 (2007): 32-51. 36. Print.

⁷⁸ Lake and Reynolds *Drawing the Global Colour Line* 207.

⁷⁹ Punch. 27 February 1908. Deakin Papers. MS 1540/15/2033. National Library of Australia, Canberra. Qtd. in “The Brightness of Eyes” 50.

loyalty and the personal desire for autonomy came according to Lake at the considerable psychic cost of a dissolved self and memory, which could be traced back to the 1907 nervous breakdown on his return from London.

Lake interprets Anglo-Saxon racism as an earnest alibi for Australians to break free from the British bond and forge new allies around the turn of the nineteenth century. Yet delinking the self/nation from an obsessive British nostalgia was not easy for Deakin or his nation. Australia today models the postcolonial condition and its oft-focussed contraries,⁸⁰ as it postures defiance and yet inhabits the old world colonial paradigm with Elizabeth II's profile embossed on one side of its coins and benign Australian landscapes, flora and fauna awaiting the white man's civilising touch, on the other:

As we look at Australia's role and allies in the world today, it is possible to think that in failing to break with Britain, the nation remained psychologically trapped in a condition of colonial dependency, even if that dependency is now transferred, ironically enough, to the great republic across the ocean, that was once itself the very symbol of independence for idealists as diverse as Hose Marti in Cuba and Alfred Deakin in Australia.⁸¹

As I try to shore the myriad Deakins gathered from his biographers' and students' accounts, a remarkable collage of plural assertions, elisions and paradoxes emerges. A Prime Minister who writes in order to catharsize and unmask, who relishes the need for masks and secrets, and sustains them with Puckish thrill, as in the *Morning Post* episode, though he bewilders colleagues with his frankness. A man who self-experiments as a medium, fantasizes about the potential androgyny and gender-fluidity of a higher existence and invests in the notion of a hyper-masculinist nation. Affable Alfred who closets certain selves and stories and though incorrigibly global in his reading lists and quest for the sacred, remains phobic about any colour streaking the notional pure white of Australia. Above all, a man who seethes with a tension that costs him his formidable memory and gift of oratory, so that he falls apart, Salim

⁸⁰ Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, for example, have traced multiple shades of the term "post(-)colonialism" with its promise of subversion, resistance, explosion and of course secret collusions with the colonial legacy, in their twin articles "What is Post(-)colonialism?" (1991) and "What was Postcolonialism?" (2005), produced over one and a half decades. According to them, the hyphen gestates the distance and defiance traversed since colonialism; yet post-colonialism, as they contend in the later essay, could also belong irretrievably to the colonial, haunted as it is by the colonial connect between imperialism, labour and modernity. For further details, see Hodge, Bob and Vijay Mishra. "What is Post(-)colonialism?" *Textual Practice* 5 (1991): 399-414. Print. Hodge and Mishra. "What was Postcolonialism?" *New Literary History* 36.3 (2005): 375-402.

⁸¹ Lake, Marilyn. "Alfred Deakin's Dream of Independence." Inaugural Richard Searby Oration. Lecture Theatre 13, Central Precinct, Melbourne Campus at Burwood. 3 Aug. 2006. Address.

Sinai style,⁸² at the end of a life meticulously self-documented.

What could have triggered the tension? Was it the conflict between his political ambition and a guilty sense of sacred mission, as Al Gabay alludes? Or was he haunted by the shadow that fell between ruptured realities and the singular Australian (and family) idyll he upheld, as Rickard seems to suggest? Did a desperate dream of independence for self and nation from dogged British loyalty haunt him, tired as he was of a white colonial's eternal mongrel status? Marilyn Lake thinks so. Yet for a man seasoned in secrets, the musk of other hidden possibilities gathers. Deakin's multivalent engagement with India exceeded his biographers' stereotypes. And, as intrigued as his biographers, I too set about to solve the riddle of the man who had autographed self (and its sacrifice) into the nation, with his

Pied selves, self-nation equation and the issue of translation

"Little bundle of contradictions" – that is how Anne Frank, the astute teenager in hiding from Hitler's Gestapo, reads herself in her diary.⁸³ Marilyn Lake implies as much for Deakin: "An idealist and intellectual, ambitious but unworldly, a passionate man but shrewd politician, a cosmopolitan and nationalist, an ardent Anglo-Saxonist and a student of world religions".⁸⁴

A man privately non-exclusive, yet in pursuit of a national purity maintained by the violence/violations of erasing aborigines and evicting coloured immigrants. One who flinches from mobs or the rustic but hails Lawson's mass icon of the hinterland rover as "the workman, the tramp, the shearer – the true bushman – the inner Australian beyond civic or imported influences – the most Australian Australia".⁸⁵ One who aims to build a nation more British than Britain and yet dreams of an original, distinctively Australian literature. The Prime Minister for whom politics is both prank and quest. And the devout quester who reads nation-making as a sacred cause but silences the sacred in white Australian public discourse.

Ambivalence and hypocrisy also index possibilities. Cocooned in the staid role of an audaciously successful Victorian and later federal politician, Deakin had always imaged himself in other lives, mirrors and selves. Here, for example, is a safely out of bounds though cherished alternative:

⁸² The moment of birth of Salim Sinai, protagonist of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), coincides with that of politically independent India. He is born with the reluctant gift of a life and body that must stage the nation's contemporary chaos and history. Both metaphor and doomed storyteller for his country, Sinai's wide-cracked body literally coming apart at the seams, rehearses the fragile simmering unity of India into the 1970s. Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1981. Print.

⁸³ Frank, Anne. *The diary of Anne Frank*. 1947. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1993. 220. Print.

⁸⁴ Lake "Alfred Deakin's Dream of Independence".

⁸⁵ La Nauze, J. A., And Elizabeth Nurser eds. *Walter Murdoch and Alfred Deakin on Books and Men: Letters and Comments 1900-1918*. 93. Print.

In fine the life I have actually lived, though on the whole hugely enjoyed . . . has only been accepted reluctantly when door after door which I should have preferred to open proved beyond my power to unbar. My ideal has always been to live far from towns though actually born, bred and always confined to them, travelling for a few years in an unpretentious way and afterwards earning by my pen . . . To have spent my days in retirement without public appearances, public speaking or public notice under a veil of anonymity and largely in communion with Nature, and with my inner self in the presence of Nature, represents the dream cherished by me with but slight alteration from boyhood up to the hour of writing.⁸⁶

As Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra contend, such Wordsworthian illusions characteristic of the narrowly urban is not just personal, but insidiously national.⁸⁷ White Australia, one of the most urbanised nations in the world, has historically invested in the atypical bushman and bush as its archetypes; Deakin seems to have dreamt his desire into the national iconography. Ironically, he seems to have come closer to this alternative during his India visit rather than in Australia.

Wordsworth was not Deakin's only inspiration. He had wanted to be essayist, poet, playwright, actor and teacher and been an amateur medium. Around 1904, at the peak of his political career, he had considered becoming a full-fledged preacher of his personal gospel, "that Gospel which he had been already writing and thinking about for over two decades".⁸⁸ Though inspired by Brooks to take up religion as vocation, he finally decided against the pulpit around April 1905.

Yet other roles always lurked around the corner and Deakin dyed his politician's avatar in hints of fluid selves. Letters to the *Morning Post*, for example, required him to play Sydney-based anonymous journalist and analyst of Australian policies and politicians, himself among others. "Deakin evidently saw no conflict of interest between journalism and his role as prime mover in many of the events he reported upon," remarks Gabay in his biography (143). He relished the prospect of mystery and anonymity; it added a touch of suspense to his life. Judith Harley recalls her mother, Deakin's youngest daughter Vera's weekly chore of addressing

⁸⁶ Deakin *The Crisis in Victorian Politics* 60.

⁸⁷ In *Dark Side of the Dream*, Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra explore white Australian anxiety to be embedded in the national literary history. Aborigines are the repressed of the national canon, they subversively suggest, and the white Australian settler invests in invented stereotypes of apparent belonging such as the bushman, to displace the guilt and violence of that haunting absence.

⁸⁸ Gabay *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin* 157.

envelopes in her handwriting to her father's column for the London paper.⁸⁹ "The situation is fit for fiction rather than real life and that is one of its attractions though its responsibilities are hazardous in the extreme," he confided to Richard Jebb in 1907.⁹⁰ Besides donning the selves – as witness, expositor and detached critique – he liked gaming with a bit of unreality/fiction in "real life". Towards the end of his life, he broke down: "My memory is but a little fiction a chance return of the pitiful and a withering memorial of AD".⁹¹ Life, in which he had tried to interpolate 'unreal' episodes as in the *Morning Post* chapter or during his India tour, mocked his lifelong pursuit of authenticity by posing as a bit of fiction. He could no longer sieve the real from unreal, or the pure from impure.

Earlier too, Deakin had experimented with representing 'real'/historical events in genres associated with fictive territories, as in the posthumous publications, *Inner History of the Federal Cause* (1944) and *The Crisis in Victorian Politics, 1879-1881* (1957). Both were written around 1900. The first is an exposition of the Federal Movement and the second a memoir on colonial politics prior to the Federation. They are histories, yet unfold in each chapter with the drama and suspense of a serially published Victorian novel with its share of caricatures, heroes and villains. Deakin performs his many selves, as the understated yet omniscient narrator, actor, knight, dramaturge and sutradhar of the piece, inviting the future reader into shared voyeurship of a crucial behind-the-scenes episode in nation-making.

Deakin ostensibly narrates his nation in the twined texts. *The Crisis in Victorian Politics* is a prequel to *Inner History*; both engage with pre-federal politics in Victoria and across the other colonies. They serve as chapters of autobiography as well. In *The Crisis*, Deakin for instance explains being whirled into politics as a young adult, a design of destiny as per his narration. He discusses his dreams, selves and "myself as seen by myself" (*Crisis* 60), even as he renders a period of fervent political passion in the life of colonial Victoria, retrospectively a build-up to the federal movement. The account, meant to cover political life in Victoria from 1878 to 1900, remains a fraction of its promise. As responsibilities loomed large for the nascent Federation, Deakin signed off on 4 December 1900 with a note on future episodes:

The remainder of these articles must wait. The formation of the first coalition [1883] and its inner history. . . . The inclusion of Patterson and the audacity with which he posed as the man responsible for calling out the troops, with which he had nothing whatever to do

⁸⁹ Judith, Harley. "My Grandfather's Legacy." *Alfred Deakin Lecture*. ABC Radio National. 11 May 2001. Radio. Web. 23 Apr. 2016.

⁹⁰ La Nauze, J. A. Introduction. *Federated Australia: Selections from Letters to the Morning Post 1910-1910*. x.

⁹¹ Deakin, Alfred. Diary, 19 January 1917. MS 1540/3.

as it was decided by Gillies, Bell and myself . . . The fall of the Ministry [November 1890]. My resolution to devote myself to the creation of an independent position in the House without accepting office, and to the Federal cause. How I helped to defeat the Shiels Government [1892-3] and more than anyone did defeat the Patterson Government [1893-4], and made and sustained that of Turner [1894-99]. (81)

The chapters did not get written. But in the above excerpt, as in the entire text, Deakin invents himself as the central figure, storyteller and puppeteer of federal history and the would-be Federation, even as he is presented preparing for the role in the Victorian colonial context. Self becomes signature of the nation and future Federation in *The Crisis of Victorian Politics*.

Both accounts assure the privilege of an insider's intimate – and sensational – perspective. The public-private divide is blurred as Deakin apparently readies himself to expose the “private aspect of public life” (*The Crisis* 60) in Australian politics. He dubs *The Crisis* as supplementary memoir, a version seductively confidential: “I shall continue to include here only those items which are not fully or perhaps at all given anywhere in print” (61). The reader is invited with the promise of secrets and Deakin enshrines his histories as indispensable, though informal, reading on the genesis of the Federation: “This, I repeat again, is not a history but a collection of some further materials for a history not to be found in Hansard or the newspapers, if ever the future requires that one should be written” (61).

The manuscript of *The Crisis in Victorian Politics* was written with the dash and fluency of a journalist. Written on half-quarto sheets, the draft was unrevised and largely unpunctuated. It was officially a fragment. Begun in March 1898, *The Inner History of the Federal Cause*, though projected as a neat fable of “national self-fulfilment”⁹² in the Australian tryst with federal destiny, was written in sporadic fragments on eclectic stationery – mostly recycled personal correspondence, tradesmen's accounts, cut up legal documents, financial accounts and minutes of evidence.

In his introduction, Macintyre regards *The Inner History* as “the most readable and influential version of Australian federation” (viii). Deakin's version shapes a foundation myth at once intimate and momentous; as sacred text of Federation, it became “a staple of the national story that was taught to generations of Australian schoolchildren as part of their civic training” (xxvii). It provides a ready canon of Federal heroes (and villains), which decided the way “Federation became codified in public memory” (xxvii). With the benign malice of a choric gossip, Deakin exposes or haloes politicians in the Federal scene. Thus Higinbotham, a

⁹² Macintyre, Stuart. Introduction. ‘*And Be One People*’: *Alfred Deakin's Federal Story*. xxvii.

Victorian Liberal, is angelic: “he was filled with a holiness of purpose that in many a crisis crowned as with an aureole his singularly beautiful head and face, and thrilled through his rich harmonious voice” (10). On the other hand, George Reid, with his grotesque features, is posed as *the* threat to the Cause:

Even caricature has been unable to travesty his extraordinary appearance, his immense, unwieldy, jelly-like stomach, always threatening to break his waistband, his little legs bowed under its weight to the verge of their endurance . . . [He consistently showed] the intensity of his determination to carve out and keep the first place for himself in New South Wales and in Australia if possible – but in New South Wales at all events until sure of the other by any means and at any cost. (62-64)

Deakin tries out his amateur anthropological skills on his colleagues. Outer appearances become an index of inner motives. He seems to share with Saleem Sinai not just the fate of narrating the nation, embodying it and designing its destiny, but the magic “ability to look into the hearts and minds of men”.⁹³

La Nauze thinks that *The Inner History* had almost entirely omitted references to Deakin’s own activities.⁹⁴ Yet Deakin casts himself as the self-effacing narrator, interpreter and chief protagonist of the Federal movement. In the narrative, he makes occasional appearances in third person as the prophet-redeemer at crucial moments. He decides the debate on naming the nation in favour of “Commonwealth”; his Bendigo speech delivered in 1898 clinches Victorian support for the Federation. His longest and most effective speech in defence of the federal draft constitution in 1900 wrests victory in the “drawn battle”⁹⁵ against Colonial Office and the British Government who insisted on major amendments, chiefly to ensure that British courts would serve as courts of appeal from the Australian High Court. The Colonial Office dutifully acknowledges him: “They wished him to understand that to him more than to any of his colleagues they attributed the finally satisfactory compromise which had been secured [on Australian Federation]” (171). Deakin too reciprocates and rehearses his ancient dilemma about Britain; three of the twenty three chapters dwell on the British parliament, political personae and intrigues though London has been compared to Vanity Fair.

In *The Crisis*, Deakin scribes himself as the auteur of Australian history, with his personal fascination and prejudices grafted onto the national body politic and body of his multigeneric text in which theatre, novel, speeches and memoir jostle and co-exist. In his biography, Al

⁹³ Rushdie *Midnight’s Children* 277.

⁹⁴ La Nauze, J. A. Introduction. *The Crisis in Victorian Politics*. xi.

⁹⁵ It is Deakin’s title for the twenty second chapter of *The Inner History*.

Gabay argues that *The Federal Story*, the public narrative of the Federation struggle, at times against seemingly insurmountable obstacles, obliquely attested to a divine authority for Australian nationhood (199). “To those [read Deakin] who watched its inner workings, followed its fortunes as if their own, and lived the life of devotion to it day by day, its [the Federation’s] actual accomplishment must always appear to have been secured by a series of miracles”, concludes Deakin (*The Inner History* 173). He is not too modest to play the chosen midwife of this difficult birth and the gospel-bearer of the federal narrative.

The Crisis in Victorian Politics and *The Inner History of the Federal Cause* are Deakin’s notes for a potential biography of the nation at the federal and pre-federal stages. So are his regular anonymous columns to the *Morning Post*, in which he could pose as the appropriately distant sakshi and student of Australian nation and politics, also foster archetypes of Australian scape and populace,⁹⁶ dote on racial and cultural ties with England and educate the English reader on the White Australia policy unabashedly occupied with the ideal of “a pure-bred population capable of full citizenship”.⁹⁷ *Letters to the Morning Post* is not without whimsical self-sketches, as in this excerpt by Deakin on his own enigma and inevitability: “There is no consensus of opinion regarding him [Deakin] or his policy. . . . Yet perhaps because he is not identified with any section and has a curious aloofness even from his political inmates he is accepted without question as at present the only possible leader of the conglomerate party”.⁹⁸

All these texts were intended as fragments or at best lonely chapters on critical episodes of history, awaiting a comprehensive scholarly research on Federation by a future historian. In a parallel ritual, Deakin had recorded his life and thoughts in numerous journal entries. Writing was for him as much purgation and an escape as a process of surveillance and self-fashioning, “[an activity] that integrated his experience, aspiration and belief into a unity he could recognise”.⁹⁹ Deakin’s discourse with the self in his dairies could be seen as ‘clues’ to a never-

⁹⁶ In an entry dated 30 April 1901, published on 4 June in the *Morning Post*, Deakin’s romantically rustic Australian hinterland and the bushman spring to life: “But, after all, they [the major Australian cities] are only important because they serve as inlets to and outlets for the vast interior. There lie the sources of our wealth. There, in mine and field, are bred the men who must be depended on to build for us something more than a half-exotic sea shore civilisation. . . . Though bucolic, they are not progressive. The life they live is studded with trials and privations, with adventure and masterful conquests, with risks and endurances likely to shape in the long run the most distinctively Australian character.”

For more details, see La Nauze ed. *Federated Australia* 53.

⁹⁷ La Nauze ed. *Federated Australia: Selections from Letters*. Entry dated 24 September 1901. 77.

In the entry dated 8 Oct., Deakin is even more vehement: “A handful of British with little more than nominal occupation of half the continent is so stubbornly British in sentiment that it proposes to tolerate nothing within its dominion that is not British in character and constitution or capable of becoming Anglicised without delay. For all outside that charmed circle the policy is that of the closed door” (80).

⁹⁸ La Nauze ed. *Federated Australia: Selections from Letters*. Entry dated 20 Nov 1905. 158.

⁹⁹ Gabay *The Mystic Life* 199.

written-ever-cherished autobiography dispersed in jigsaw puzzle across entries. He had earlier made a false start at autobiography in 1903 when he wrote a severely edited introduction to that unwritten book. He had even tried his hand at fictionalised autobiography, when tracing Redeemer's mission and trajectory in *A New Pilgrim's Progress* (1877). In 1910 he hoped to twin the two projects – biography of the nation and autobiography – in an ambition no less fantastic than Saleem Sinai's: "He had been looking forward to rereading and destroying nine-tenths of his accumulated notes and manuscripts so as to 'put the other 10th into shape, coupling this with any gleanings in the shape of notes upon Australian politics & politicians (as I have known them) which might be of service to future students of my time'"¹⁰⁰ Self was encoded in the nation. Yet Deakin never wrote the book. With rapid loss of memory, his past vanished a bit every day and his self seemed to have splintered into shards. Sinai's anguish that he will literally fall apart and become a "broken creature spilling pieces of itself into the street, because I have been so-many too-many persons" (647) turns achingly true for Deakin.

Yet Deakin had tried to tuck away his "so-many too-many persons" in the image of a prophet-politician driven by the ideal of an unadulterated/authentic Australia. "Australia will be a White Continent with not a black or even dark skin among its inhabitants. The aboriginal race has died out in the South and is dying fast in the North and West even where most gently treated. Other races are to be excluded by legislation if they are tinted in any degree",¹⁰¹ asserts the reporter in *Morning Post*. His quest for purity and obsession with scripting myths of origin for (white) Australia unmask the anxiety of translation, white settlers having been literally carried across the ocean and planted in other soil. The angst becomes obvious when, in the settled despair of receding memory and the loss of oratory in 1910, Deakin concludes that he felt already like "a man dead and translated, talking to the living".¹⁰² He equates death and translation in their trauma as terminals. Translation, etymologically and otherwise, signified

¹⁰⁰ Gabay *The Mystic Life* 179.

¹⁰¹ *Federated Australia: Selections from Letters*. Entry dated 8 Oct. 1901. 80.

Deakin belonged to a generation of Australian and American thinkers and politicians in his ruthlessly nonchalant, if euphemistic, views about aboriginal "evanescence" as Anglo-Saxons colonised the continent. In 1883, G. W. Rudsen wrote of the "atrocities" and "war of extermination" that had conditioned white Australians to think of aboriginals as "the perishing race". In 1913 Billy Hughes, Labour Party leader and later Prime Minister of Australia, linked the defence of white Australia to the destruction of the Aboriginal population and paralleled Australia and America in that they were "two nations that have always had their way, for they killed everybody else to get it".

See *Sydney Morning Herald* 13 March 1913: 10. Print.

Echoing Deakin, Charles Pearson claimed in *National Life and Character* (1893) that "the natives have died as we approached" (16). He apparently alluded to the devastation that European diseases wrought upon Aboriginal communities, but did not mention the partial genocide. For details, see Lockhart's "Absenting Asia" 274-277.

¹⁰² Deakin. Foolsap A3 Notebook. 24 September 1910. MS Deakin 3/294. Australian National Library, Canberra.

removal/distance from the original; as I have detailed in the introduction, the word was fraught with guilt, loss, inferiority and the status of a non-stakeholder when filtered through the imperial perspective.

Deakin's anguish in self-discovery as a translated man about to forge an always already translated nation was voiced in shrill claims of possession of the Australian space, in an almost cannibalistic consumption of aboriginal presence if necessary.¹⁰³ He even suggested in an 1890 Clue a wistful monument to celebrate "The Meeting of the Two Races" and the consequent demise of one:

One group in black marble comprising an Aboriginal father with spear, and a mother and child, would bring out 'their beauties of wiry vigour' as well as their 'defects of form'. The other group in white marble would depict a young white settler on horseback, wearing riding trousers, booted and spurred, and holding in one hand a revolver 'ready but not pointed', the other hand being 'extended as inviting peace', with his wife and child also behind him. They were depicted in their physical perfection¹⁰⁴

The vanquishing act is sealed in the name he chose for his cottage, 'Ballara' – the Aboriginal form of 'Ballarat', the electorate he represented in federal parliament, the word meaning "resting place" – and its location. The aboriginal name is a curio which colonisers sometimes demand of conquered peoples. Built in 1904 at Point Lonsdale over several acres of land, Ballara had pleasant views of both the beach and bush, thereby staking claim on the alien Australian landscape and seascape in a bid to belong.

If one original was consumed as curio and later declared dead or absent, Deakin countered the other high-status Original, England, by playing back the translation game. He projected Australia as the ideal nation of toughened and invigorated Anglo Saxons, of whom the Britons at Home were at best fallen samples. Though a native colonial, his accent and English were both pukka and his reading list, increasingly continental. From 1909 to 1914, his reading list focussed on the Western canon: "Deakin's reading lists, however, reveal not so much a transnational pattern of familiarity as an imagined diaspora of difference, an outsider's search for moral assurance and spiritual comfort. . . . Deakin looked on the world through

¹⁰³ In an act of radical post-colonial subversion, a group of Brazilian writers coined the metaphor of translation as a nourishing cannibalism of the source, for translation was colonially conceived as a malnourished and fragile copy of the powerful (European) Original. Translation as consumption and assimilation, on the other hand, is a signifier of empowerment for sites of colonial translation, invariably the colonies, and inspired by the practice among some Latin American tribes like the Tupinimbas several centuries back, of devouring the strongest enemies or most worthy elders as the means of acquiring powers they had wielded in life. For details see Bassnett and Trivedi "Of colonies, cannibals and vernaculars" 1-18.

¹⁰⁴ Qtd. in Al Gabay *The Mystic Life* 50.

Australian eyes and, in the fin de siècle, his reading reflected the search of a people looking to secure their place in the world”.¹⁰⁵ The diaspora of his imagination which sought refuge in Europe in his later years, was Deakin’s intended antidote for a nationally imagined exile from Europe and Home in the British Isles, a loss that could not be wished away.

Besides dismissing originals or playing origins to it, another way of usurping authenticity for the translated is to pose as translator for a third space and culture. Deakin recommends Australian scholars as future expositors and translators of neighbouring India: “Our thinkers may yet become authorities upon questions which need personal acquaintance with India and its peoples”.¹⁰⁶ Though a custodian of white Australia, he had been a lifelong student of India and its translator for Australia and England; two of his four published books are based on India, an enthusiasm not even reserved for the two national biographies which came out after his death. The translator, dubbed an insider in both the original and host cultures, could possibly aspire to a share of power and authenticity in the colonial hierarchy, and Deakin and his notional Australia could ill afford to ignore that position. In his enthusiasm for appointing his nation in the role of translator and interpreter of India, Deakin anticipated the position of a section of Australian politicians and intellectuals like Sir Robert Garran, Sir Frederic Eggleston and William Macmahon Ball in the late 1930s and post Second World War, who held that proximity to Asia placed the nation strategically “at the crossroads between East and West”. Its regional location could be read as Australia’s special opportunity to understand Asia on behalf of Europe and (the lost) empire, and thereby “turn [from] an outpost into a nation at the heart of the geo-political transformation of the modern [de-colonised] world”.¹⁰⁷

*My memory keeps getting in the way of your history. . . / If only somehow you could have been mine, / What would not have been possible in the world?*¹⁰⁸

Such could well have been the subtext of Deakin’s passion for India braided as a shadow-narrative to Australian history. In *Temple and Tomb* he concedes that India for him is a “magic name . . . before which the throng of unimpressive words falls back as if outshone by a regal presence” (5), embedded in mythologies of opulence. Elsewhere, he confessed that in his youth, India, more than any other country, had stirred his imagination, filling him with visions of a

¹⁰⁵ Hearn, Mark. “A transnational imagination: Alfred Deakin’s reading lists.” *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World*. Ed. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott. Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2008. Web. 4 Nov. 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Deakin *Irrigated India* 14.

¹⁰⁷ Walker “Soul Searching” First Draft 10 & 20.

¹⁰⁸ Ali, Agha Shahid. “Farewell.” *The Country Without a Post Office*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997. 7-9. Print.

splendid, if decaying Antique world.¹⁰⁹ India was the name of an old Deakinian dream; there could have been no more apposite site to translate, when the need arose.

And the need arose with Deakin's fresher dream – Project Australia as the hermetic hub of Anglo-Saxon race and destiny, immune from the multiracial cosmopolitanism of empire. If, according to eminent Europeanist Mark A. Mazower, “the idea of Europe [was] conceived . . . as a vision of universal modernity” in the wake of global European ascendancy since the late eighteenth century,¹¹⁰ then Australia provided for Deakin the metaphor of Europe phoenixed¹¹¹ and purged of its errors and racial impurities. The time of white settlement in Australia since 1788 coincided with the period of the rise of Europe over Asia. Located on the edge of Asia, Australia could be readily idealised by its white settlers as the last beacon of Anglo-Saxon and European civilization against a ‘tableau’ of backward Asia condemned to live the dark subtexts of racial exclusion and colonisation underlying Europe's “universal modernity”.¹¹²

Where to gestate the Australian dream? Dreams designed Deakin's life, right from *A New Pilgrim's Progress* scribed in a semi-trance or dreamlike state in his first youth to the monition of 1910 urging him to finish his job and turn in, received in the twilight world between sleep and waking. Yet dreaming, the sacred epistemology of the aborigines, had been hushed from the landscape and public discourse in Australia. “Dreaming [for the aborigines] is non-dual; it fuses subject and object, spirit and matter, man and nature, nature and culture, the inner and the outer, earth and the heavens. Guided by dreaming, the indigenous people of this land lived a remarkably sustainable life for over forty thousand years”.¹¹³ White settlers, as part of their secular tyranny, violated Australia as dreamtime and dreamscape.

Dreaming and wombing¹¹⁴ are androgynous activities at best, aeons removed from those of the unabashedly masculinist white Australian male even Deakin, in the avatar of the *Morning Post* reporter, fantasized to be his iconic countryman. India provided an ideal womb. This unwieldy, alluringly piebald site uncorseted his plural selves. Here he could safely rehearse his

¹⁰⁹ Walker, David. Introduction. *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939*. St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1999. 1. Print.

¹¹⁰ Mazower, Mark A. “Europe And The Historical Imagination.” The Indian Economic and Social History Association and Sage Publication. India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. 11 Dec. 2012. Sixth Annual IESHR Lecture. Web. 12 Apr. 2013.

¹¹¹ The verb is a neologism corresponding to the noun “phoenix” and connotes regeneration and rebirth.

¹¹² Shirley Jennifer Lim contends in her paper “Glamorising racial modernity” (*Australia's Asia* 145-169) that the “performance of racial difference has been a critical part of Western modernity” (150).

Also, David Theo Goldberg argues, “If premodernity lacked any conception of the differences between human beings as racial, modernity comes increasingly to be defined by and through race”.

See Goldberg, D. T. “Modernity, race, and morality”. *Cultural Critique* 24 (Spring 1993): 193-227. Print.

¹¹³ Paranjape, Makarand R. Preface. *Sacred Australia: Post-Secular Considerations*. xvii.

¹¹⁴ “Womb” as verb is another modest neologism.

older tensions and fascinations, e.g. with India and the Raj and unleash the student, pilgrim, ethnographer, translator and orientalist in him before finally removing them from the public domain in his monolithic engagement with the Federal movement. Ironically, only this non-exclusive site could gestate his exclusive version of purity. On the eve of investment in united Australia, Deakin needed to inoculate his dream against the unbreakable spell of India, metonymic of the other. Thus the hunger to kidnap India of its present and exorcise its sacred in order to recast it as terra nullius ready to incubate his secret sacred of the white continent. India thus postures as the infinitely fluid repository of Deakin's dream Australia and as witness to the fissures of his vision. It models the liminal beyond his cautiously defined threshold of home and nation, closely approximating the much-cherished-never-lived idea of a sensuous yet serene alterity. India was his tirtha¹¹⁵ as well as an Eden with a difference,¹¹⁶ immune from Fall and unspeakably close to what Broinowski terms as the staple white Australian fantasy of "Illicit Space", at once "alluring and repugnant".¹¹⁷ He needed now to visit and, if possible, expunge the partly forbidden from his past, in order to map neat borders for an Australia made of exclusions.

Deakin visited India in 1890, a critical interlude in his life. The Deakin-Gillies ministry had fallen in the same year. His role in the recession and the government's handling of the maritime strike had come under harsh critique. Politically, as well as personally, the year triggered a season of unmaking and remaking. He prepared a remarkable testament dated 7 September 1890 on the education and upbringing of his daughters in the event of his death. His daughters should share something of the social mission to change the world, have a reasonable hold on science and philosophy besides expertise in house management, be good walkers and enthusiastic about sports, "but excessive in none of these things".¹¹⁸ Their prime role would be as home-makers: "Within yourselves and within your homes you can make a city of refuge, a Garden of Eden, from which you can pluck flowers to scatter in the world . . . the duties of the

¹¹⁵ "Tirtha" is any space – land or river – that has a depth dimension in public imagination. Etymologically, it means "crossing over", suggesting a threshold or ghat liminally located between the dual modes of human existence, time-rent and transcendent. It could approximately be rendered in English as a site of pilgrimage.

¹¹⁶ Rickard 117.

¹¹⁷ Broinowski *The Yellow Lady* 105.

Broinowski explores the Australian orientalist fantasy around the turn of the nineteenth century "of Asia as Illicit Space, alluring and repugnant, where moral restraints on violence and sex can be abandoned", given the supposed "hierarchy of races, and of males over females, which is threatened by miscegenation; and the division of the world into East and West, identifying one as female, emotional, instinctive, subservient and exploitable, and the other as male, pragmatic, rational, and dominant." Eastern women were overwhelmingly represented as "objects which promised endless congress and provoked endless contempt" (105).

¹¹⁸ Rickard 101.

daughter, the sister, the wife, the mother, come before all others”.¹¹⁹ Having entrusted the responsibilities of home, he set out alone for India unlike his 1885 irrigation tour to USA with wife and daughter. Possibly he thirsted for a lull of introspection and rebirth.

Death haunts Deakin’s testament. Death, if not physical, is a token of self-transformation. Deakin re-birthed himself in India with his persona and purpose twice-born since. The Indian experience was at least chronologically a prequel to intensive investment in his Federation ideal. The tour was not as casual/accidental as Deakin and his biographers seem to insist. He influenced Syme to make it happen. Apparently, the largest irrigation network installed by the Raj was incentive enough.

Was irrigation the only link between Deakin, his dreams and India? It would seem too simple a conclusion given the details of publication of his India-based experience. His articles about India were published in the *Melbourne Age*, the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* and the *Adelaide Advertiser*. They were then anthologised in two books. In 1892 his friends Sir Charles Dilke and Philip Menzell edited a selection of these articles for publication in England and India as *Irrigated India*; these concentrate on imperial irrigation achievements in India and half-amused amateur anthropological case studies of Indians by the colonially burdened white man. Dilke patronisingly found these views “fresh and striking”.¹²⁰ The articles weeded out from the English edition engaged exclusively with native India, its pre-British histories, indigenous syncretic architectural styles and religious pilgrimages and archetypes. These omitted chapters then resurfaced as a separate small volume published in Melbourne in 1893, *Temple and Tomb in India*, a book that relegates India to a blood-bathed and sporadically Aryan i.e. civilized past with a vaguely vibrant future and vacuum as present. As it were, tombs and ancient temples are metonymic of a sleeping, if not blissfully dead, India.

There was a more curious metonym at work though, in the history of publication of the texts. A part of Deakin’s response to India had been carefully removed from the British version and re-appeared in Australian print; this element of hide-and-seek performs Deakin’s own attempt to jinn¹²¹ and contain India in the Australian context. By jinning India, I refer to Deakin’s need to incessantly re-invent and fantasize the subcontinent. India is his jinn, the half-baked dream-shaped androgynous space/entity which he could cast in the mould of his own desires, fears and un/certainties. India in his texts is tolerant host to his older tensions with the

¹¹⁹ Deakin, Alfred. “Testament prepared by Alfred Deakin in 1890 for the guidance of his daughters.” 1890. MS Deakin 1540/19/356. Australian National Library, Canberra.

¹²⁰ Murdoch *Alfred Deakin: a Sketch* 165.

¹²¹ The jinns’ infinite fluidity of shape and intent could be interpreted as ready metaphors of Deakin’s approach to India, which oscillated between all the shades of intimacy and otherness.

British attitude to colonials; it sustains his epiphany of future amicable India-Australia academic exchanges; it even provides an alternative reality where the translated Antipodean Anglo-Saxon could flaunt his authenticity as shrewd translator and storyteller of India.

But India is also Deakin's jinn, in an obscure, yet etymological sense of the word; it is what he needs to hide – or quarantine in the cybernetic sense of the term¹²² – from himself as an aspiring Federation-maker and the Australian public. An avid reader, India was for him an imagined memory-making land from childhood and haloed “the reflection of early enthusiasms . . . with a glamour greater than that of romance”;¹²³ he dabbled in theosophy and remained fascinated with sanatani philosophies. However, from the 1890s, with his interest turned towards white nation building, India had become a forbidden luxury at least in public.

Indeed, Deakin's reports in *Temple and Tomb* on “the motley mass of degenerate and degraded beliefs, grouped in modern times under the name of Hinduism” (51) or on “the grossest superstition, the coarsest priestcraft, and the blindest fanaticism” (128) that jostle in Benaras, the city sacred to Hindus, read like a decisive counter-pilgrimage to India. Irrigation sometimes becomes an alibi; he seems intent on a private mission of disenchantment with India's sacred geography as he traversed Allahabad, Benaras, Madurai and Srirangam. Did Deakin want to exorcise his Indian dream at least in print and public before vouching for the Australian Federal one? Could he? Did this secretive icon of Australian spirituality visit India to banish the numinous from public imaginings of Australia, so that his nation could be conceived as a more rational and enlightened version of Home i.e. England? It is interesting to note that the man who prolifically maintained journals, clues, prayers and memoirs and yet published very little since his young adulthood had made sure that *Temple and Tomb* was published in Australia, “the one publication”, Murdoch observes in his biography, “in which he escapes from technical questions and expresses something of his inner self” (94).

Temple and Tomb and *Irrigated India* could be read as twin pre-texts to *The Crisis in Victorian Politics* and *The Inner history of the Federal Cause 1880-1900*. Composed over the gap of a decade, the couple of twinned texts accommodate Deakin's leap of faith in critical moments. The India-based texts were an oblique ode to his federal vision offset by Indian margins and possibilities; they were symptomatic of the non-exclusivity (of India and self) programmed to be banned from a ruthlessly sane and sanitised Australia. The posthumously published Australia-based narratives look back at Federation achieved, and the sensational

¹²² Quarantine in this respect signifies the process of safely closeting a potential threat without removal; ironically it also denotes a process of internalising the threat.

¹²³ Murdoch *Alfred Deakin: A Sketch* 70.

twists and turns in the preparation and process; they also prelude his plunge into the post-Federation nation-building process. The four intertexts consolidate and interpret Deakin's stake in the Federation and Australian nation-making.

Yet the open counter-pilgrimage of *Temple and Tomb* presupposes shier ur-pilgrimages, actual and virtual. His India trip was a sequel to earlier sojourns in the USA (1885) and London (1887). They steeped his Australia dream in archetypes of a global trinity of Anglo-Saxon presence – UK, USA and the remote southern outpost. The dream demanded phobias and invented enemies in order to flaunt its fragility and affirm its borders, thus the discovery of India as an advertised obverse. A more adoring textual ur-pilgrimage to India had happened long back in a mediumistic automatic writing spree by young Deakin in séance circles. The book was titled “A New Pilgrim's Progress: Purported to be Given by John Bunyan through an Impressional Writing Medium” (1877). It poses an eastern, possibly Indian guru for Restless the chosen protagonist and engages with Indian philosophical and spiritual precepts. Deakin had been a keen student of Indian history, philosophy, religions and the Raj since childhood; it had featured as his romantic/textual homeland long before he visited India physically.

Deakin's India as Text and Vision

A New Pilgrim's Progress speaks to an old love of Deakin, “the liminal zone where the ‘two worlds meet’, the traffic between divine and secular, between the mundane self and its highest expression in the Ideal”.¹²⁴ Gabay terms it Deakin's “gospel of mediumship” (103). The text features a motley cast picked from Deakin's notional “sublime hierarchy” (131) of cosmic existence in life and death, ranging from Restless and his companion Wilful, both beloved of god and spirits, to the eastern guru who initiates Restless in spiritual wisdom before he dies and the evolved spirits who act as benevolent guides to the couple in their mission on earth. Indian precepts and philosophies permeate the allegorical self-narration.

To begin with, *A New Pilgrim's Progress* aligns with the sanatani concept of translation as anuvad, a re-created co-text of the original speaking to changed contexts and communities, rather than an imperial power-game geared at the production of diluted copies of the original. It was literally said/written after Bunyan who had apparently prompted the text to his ardent medium: “Nothing had occurred which could direct my attention to that book or its author, when it was suddenly announced through my own lips, that he [Bunyan] purposed inditing another under a similar title [to that of *A New Pilgrim's Progress*]”.¹²⁵ Deakin almost

¹²⁴ Gabay *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin* 126.

¹²⁵ Deakin. Preface. *A New Pilgrim's Progress* 3.

renounced authorship with this declaration, but he rejected too the sub-status of translation in the colonial frame by adapting the Indian model.

A New Pilgrim's Progress is a curious anuvad of Bunyan, with several departures from devout Christian maxims of the original. In Bunyan's version, Graceless becomes Christian, while Restless becomes his own Redeemer, hence implicitly rejecting the major Christian tenets of Atonement and a vicarious Saviour. Significantly, the Celestial City was reached after crossing the River of Death, while the City of Reason is to be attained in this life. Deakin's composition could claim another accidental co-text besides Bunyan – *Debjan (Route to Godhood)* by Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay (1894-1950), a Bengali novelist much acclaimed for *Pather Panchali* and his haunting scapes of village life in its beauty, poverty and apathy. Though composed decades after Deakin, towards the end of Bandopadhyay's life, *Debjan* (1944) is an identically impassioned epiphany of being before and beyond death, with an eerily parallel crew of debs and debis, evolved souls guiding the just-deceased Jatin and his companion Pushpa to eternal life and love. *Debjan* too syncretises sanatani precepts of the plurality, sanctity and oneness of life in the experimental genre of mystical fiction and shares many overlaps with Deakin's text.

Like *A New Pilgrim's Progress*, *Debjan* is a threshold text; both explore alternative rhythms of mind and being, heaven and earth, life and death, god and godlings as men and women in order to access the ecstasy of unity with the divine. Restless and Wilful, about to be reborn into their higher selves as Redeemer and Redemptress, retire to a sacred and little-trodden site beyond the peripheries of the City of Reason for their union to be blessed and solemnised: "Tradition ascribed to it an antiquity of glorious renown and especial sanctity, but the carelessness of later days had forgotten the legends which in the city of Reason were denied, and it had remained long unvisited even upon its borders" (166). In this borderland beyond language, "hand in hand they would dream of that which was the reality of all dreaming" (167). The scene echoes Pushpa's advaita (non-dual) wisdom at the end of *Debjan* that the world is its creator's dream: "You/I, heaven/hell, life/death, deb/debi, god, good/evil, space and time – all is His/Her dream. S/he is all (my translation from the Bengali original)".¹²⁶

In *Debjan*, the couple's realisation of reality as maya¹²⁷ or the dream-eyed divine's plural self-expressions invokes the spirits' revelation that "Forever one, forever manifold is it" (188). The world is His leela (playful jouissance) through which he seeks a yoga or intense

¹²⁶ Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. *Debjan*. Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh, 1944. 168. Print.

¹²⁷ Maya in sanatani epistemology could be rendered as the web of creation that Brahman or the cosmic self dreams into being out of jouissance and the desire to proliferate and connect.

union with Brahman, the cosmic self dispersed in/as many. Jatin realises this, as does Restless when allowed a glimpse into the mystique of cosmic creation, sustenance and dissolution. They are both tutored in the Upanishadic tenet that man is *amritasya putrah*¹²⁸ i.e. “God is a spirit/ Whose offspring is man” (*A New Pilgrim’s Progress* 86). Restless’s apocalyptic spirit-channelled vision of “death sifting the souls assigned to each by invisible but despotic sympathy, a home and fellowship of correspondent unfoldment” (120) echoes representation in the *Debjan* of the exodus of souls post-death to hierarchic *lokas* which are as much psychological states as physical planes.

Debjan shares with *A New Pilgrim’s Progress* its hybrid genre of allegory-and-fiction, the fascination with limits of knowledge, reality and existence, influence of the imperceptible and evolutionary ambitions, as reflected in the titles of both the volumes as well as in themes of death, re-birth and regeneration. As in *Debjan*, the ubiquitous reference point for *A New Pilgrim’s Progress* is the Upanishads. Restless’s guardian spirits mentor him in Upanishadic revelations e.g. “Man is a spirit, nowhere more, never less; bound to a body but as to a shell in which to cross the stream of life” (107) or the spirit “creates, sustains and develops all. Mind cannot perish, for it is of him” (116). They evoke Katha Upanishad – “The self is neither born nor dead, nor sprung from anything else nor with offspring, it is without birth, eternal, unchanging and ever-present; the body perishes but not the self”.¹²⁹ Their exposition on the nature of the self, “To this nothing could be added, from it nothing could be taken away, it was as incapable of fall as of advance, being in itself perfect” (120) echoes a core precept of the immanent perfection of soul and cosmos in the first verse of Ishopanishad – “Purna¹³⁰ is all that is near and distant; from whole emerges whole; if you add or take whole from whole, the whole alone remains”.¹³¹ Another pivotal sanatani code¹³² becomes refrain for Redeemer: “The many were one; the one was many” (223).

Through Redeemer, young Deakin slipped into a role-playing abandon. He had

¹²⁸ The term literally signifies “born of the immortal”. This famous phrase from Svetasvatara Upanishad (ii. 5) meditates on the innate perfection of man who remains clouded by many anxieties and expectations; with self-realization, he is released into the eternal joyous freedom of oneness with creation and creator.

Qtd. in *Debjan* 91.

¹²⁹ The Sanskrit version runs “Na jayate mriyate va vipasci-; nnyam kutascinna babhuva kascit; ajo nityah sasvato’yam purano; na hanyate hanyamane sarire” (I.ii.18).

¹³⁰ “Purna” literally means fullness/wholeness; it suggests a non-exclusive principle of being in which even emptiness becomes a part of the spectrum of fullness.

¹³¹ The Sanskrit verse reads “om purnamadah purnamidam purnat purnamudachyate/ purnasya purnamadaya purnameva vashishyate”.

¹³² For example, the verse in Katha Upanishad “Eko vasi sarvabhutantaratma, ekam rupam bahudha yah karoti” (II.ii.12) can be rendered as “The Cosmic Self is one, yet it controls all. It is the inmost self of all beings, and it manifests itself as many”.

subconsciously cast himself as Buddha Bodhisattva who, even after achieving nirvana, remains in the world in order to reform and relieve ever-suffering maya-struck humans. In the process, Buddha-like, Redeemer too is put on trial by the impure and evil, iconised as Mara (one who strikes) in Buddhist lore. Redeemer plays Arjuna as well, the warlorn hero of Mahabharata who must perform beyond his memories and personal ethics and is chosen by charioteer, friend and Vishnu incarnate, Krishna, for the revelation of the cosmic mystique of the cycle ruthless in its repetition of creation-sustenance-dissolution.¹³³ The spirits who initiate Restless in the role of Redeemer show him a strikingly similar Brahmanda darshan/ cosmic vision of “the death of the mother, and the birth of the offspring coinciding ever” (112) as the wheel rotates.

If spirits, epic heroes and epoch reformers in *A New Pilgrim's Progress* represent the ideologues of Deakin's strictly textual, Aryan India, Restless's Eastern guru becomes its archetypal exemplar. He arrives at the city of Reason on a camel, lodges at a bedouinesque caravanserai and yet performing a Deakinian paradox, initiates his disciple into the Upanishadic mantra.¹³⁴ Voices bid the sage to “pass thy mission into his [Restless's]” (56). He prepares the couple for their spiritual regeneration and second birth into a reality receptive to cosmic presences. His tenets are sanatani. Self-knowledge, he reveals, is the ultimate knowledge. “Inasmuch as we know it [the soul], we fathom God” (86) approximates “tat tvam asi” literally rendered as “That [the Brahman/cosmic self] is you”;¹³⁵ it stresses the identity of the soul and higher Self/God.

The sage lives to initiate Restless in his vision. He expounds spiritual growth as against western addiction to materialism. However impressive his exposition, in Deakin's text he speaks from a position of defeat accomplished. Restless champions the illusion of a consumerist model where “compulsion is overthrown, choice unlimited. It is to attain this, that we western nations labour” (47). Restless' ostensibly Indian guru is ready to wilt as his disciple flourishes. Like India and Asia, he belongs to the background of Deakin or Restless's project.

¹³³ This episode, referred to as Arjuna's Vishwarupdarshana (gift of cosmic vision), famously features in Bhagavad Gita, an excerpt from the Bhishma Parva of Mahabharata.

¹³⁴ Confusing Asia and India is no accidental error committed by Deakin in isolation, but a favoured Australian trope even with the historians who conceptualise Asia as an undifferentiated chaotic landmass with teeming populations ready to infiltrate and occupy the outpost. Greg Lockhart suggests in “Absenting Asia” that the holdall term “Asia” plays on an ancient Australian phobia about the region and inhibits a desire to know the neighbouring continent with its plural ethnicities, cultures and histories: “This raises the problem of using the term ‘Asia’ at all: historians would be less likely to go on suppressing the interdependence of ‘Asia’ and ‘Australia’ if they began to refer to individual nations rather than continental swathes” (273).

¹³⁵ *Tat tvam asi* occurs in the Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7 in the debate between Uddalaka and his son Svetaketu on the relation between atman, the soul, and Brahman, the originatory cause of the universe. The mahavakya (great saying), one of the four in the Upanishads, upholds the yoga/unity of jivatma (the embodied soul) in its undeluded state and paramatma (the ultimate self/reality).

Restless is the righteous receiver: “All I possess is yours. Hasten to receive it” (49), announces the guru as his protégé must be anointed as conqueror of both worlds, east and west, before he dies: “Fix your feet here [earth/worldly pursuits], and your eyes yonder [horizon/otherworldly awareness], walking so as to command both of them” (69). He surrenders to the role of the antique, obsolescenced Orient in Deakin’s rational scheme, of one who “must linger by the old altar, to keep their pure fire burning for the new. . . . Such is the office of the Eastern race, not bounded by the compass points but born in open bosoms” (48).

A New Pilgrim’s Progress is a self-reflexive text in which Restless plays roles Deakin had aspired to; like Deakin, he is “at once the leader and the thinker, the student and the teacher, the general and the man-at-arms” (144) of political, social and spiritual causes and an avid writer-publisher. Like his creator, he self-reflexively produces a mini-gospel regarding “the philosophy and method of communication” (154). Like Deakin, Redeemer’s is finally a Science-and-Reason enabled project of power and empire; he assimilates the sacred under the rubric of higher Reason. The book could be read as an alibi of the West to “civilize” the rest, as Redeemer proselytises Cities of Deceit, Complicity and Reason and even a prison for lunatics to the cause of Progress and R/Evolution. Conquest is his currency of legitimacy, sanctity: “A similar strife between the higher and lower took place in all undeveloped souls, *and in undeveloped worlds at certain epochs*, when brought face to face they were compelled to decide superiority” (emphasis added) (208). Buddhist Mara festers as a geographical and ethnic, instead of remaining a merely existentialist, possibility.

Redeemer’s precognitive “brown-skinned” (173) guru is a revered immigrant in the City of Reason; he must offer his knowledge and power to his white disciple, die and dutifully continue to inspire post-death. India is assigned a similar hauntological presence in *A New Pilgrim’s Progress*. It unfolds in many versions – as guru, the spiritual guides and philosophical precepts that enable Restless to access the depth dimension of reality and transform his mission – and unlocks his plural potential. The little-trodden site where Restless and Wilful are united and baptised by the spirits as a redeeming couple, models the position of India in the Deakinian scheme. Like the sage, the space disappears from the text after furnishing Redeemer’s meta-narrative of Reason and power with its inoculating footnote. His dying guru suggests that he contain this ‘other’ influence in the pigmy metaphor of an “amulet of wisdom” (173). Beyond the boundaries of the City of Reason, the templed space hosted the couple, their dreams and spiritual resurrection; yet “what passed in those days they never told” (167). India was Deakin’s

dreamtime¹³⁶, a site and tense to formalise his Project Australia, but it was to remain an unspeakable out-of-bounds episode in his version of the making of the Australian Federation.

India continued to haunt Deakin as a never-ebbing experience throughout his life, specially the inner life of diaries, introspection and confession. Between April 1904 and July 1905, he had attempted an exegesis on the Koran and Bhagavadgita¹³⁷ and contributed articles on topics like “The Gospel of Buddha” which defends doctrines of karma and reincarnation, to the *Australian Herald*. At a more intense level, his private out-of-body narratives, the bulk of which spanned the troubled 1890s,¹³⁸ often invoke Deakin’s ideological India. They seem to provide an escape from a body racked with ailments and a life beset with worries, expressing in literary form an attendant frustration with mundane matters and a desire for release, spiritual wholeness and moksha. The involvement in sculpting the violently visible body of white Australian politics and policies left Deakin aching for a parallel out-of-body repose in non-intrusive, healing India.

One of the starkest out-of-body narratives was dated June 1892. The thoughtful idealist, the disembodied protagonist of the story, watches in silent terror as his chore-scarred mundane double performs the routine of everyday life. None suspect the split of the self into experiencer and observer: “Then he realised, and almost fainted as he did so, that he was a spectre, an invisible, a nameless something outside of life and beyond the world, and yet a silent witness, a spectator not an actor, an exile from the flesh and from his kind”.¹³⁹ Only when the dazed dummy self stakes claim on the love of his wife and children, “with an agony unspeakable, of crucifixion, of the tortures of the damned, the impalpable one flung himself upon and into the body from which he had been displaced with an intensity of will and fury of desire that almost stifled him”. “I was absent . . . for a little”, he concedes (133). Deakin’s account exudes an Upanishadic awareness of twinned selves eternal and individual, the sakshi and bhokta, as well as the transient mayik¹⁴⁰ dimension of physical reality. Restless bhokta (one who

¹³⁶ Dreamtime refers to an era of the sacred in the framework of Australian aboriginal mythology, in which ancestral totemic spirit beings shaped the Creation. It represents a coordinated system of belief and action and generated a web of stories around life, nature and the cosmos that sacralised the Australian geography. For the aboriginals, dreaming contains all beings eternally – living, dead or non-born. Dreamtime laid down the principles of life for an aboriginal who found himself spiritually linked to the totems and the locale of his birth. In claiming the land, white settlers banished the sacred from the Australian landscape and thus drove the ontology of dreamtime underground.

For more details, see “the Dreaming.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013. Web. 21 Apr. 2013.

Also see Paranjape, Makarand R. Preface. *Sacred Australia: Post-Secular Considerations*. xi-xxv.

¹³⁷ Gabay *The Mystic Life* 152.

¹³⁸ Gabay *The Mystic Life* 126.

¹³⁹ Deakin, Alfred. “Clues.” Vol. 4, 3/286, no. 539. 18 June 1892. Qtd. in Gabay 133.

¹⁴⁰ A Sanskrit adjective derived from “maya”.

consumes/suffers) is caught up in roles of life, while his cosmic self plays the still sakshi/witness to all actions. Occasionally one welds to the other, generating for instance Deakin's body-trapped counter currents between political ambitions and the cherished life of the spirit, between an Australia sans adulteration and his desire for India.

Deakin's out-of-body experiences build on the leitmotif of temporary absence from and a passionate plunge back to the body of self and nation. The absences are often framed in the vocabulary of Indian thought-systems. His "Ten Letters", an anguished epistolary dialogue with self written sometime after June 1904, are excellent examples. As Al Gabay shows, the narrative symbolises a crisis in Deakin's life;¹⁴¹ at this juncture, he seriously considered leaving politics for the pulpit in order to become a fulltime preacher. The letters that run to over two hundred and fifty pages apparently engage with the ideas of Epictetus and Plato; yet they have a narrative frame influenced by Buddhist tenets and the sakshi-bhokta duality. Apparently they are written by an unnamed writer to 'I', a young professional bereaved by the loss of his wife; there is also a mysterious 'P.S.', the letter-writer's guru lurking in the background who seeks to guide 'I' through the letters. Inspired by P.S. and letter-linked with great thinkers like Epictetus, Plato and Emerson, 'I' has a personal transcendent experience. Instead of becoming a fulltime seer, 'I' chooses to get meaningfully tangled in the world; he remarries and returns to the world of professional affairs. In this hardly-veiled autobiographical allegory, 'I', the letter-writer and P.S. (abbreviation probably of Permanent Self) model multiple dimensions of existence – 'I' is the event-scarred world-weary self, the writer could be the mind, an intelligent but distracted commentator on I's sufferings and dilemmas and P.S. is the kutastha brahman, the deep-seeded cosmic self who is both witness and teacher. The spiritual hierarchy of these selves is Upanishadic and Deakin casts himself as the compassionate Buddhist bodhisattva who side-steps moksha (liberation) to return to the practical welfare of the world. Once again, India serves as the metaphoric healer and host of absences as well as disposable transport to the Higher Self. Content with epistolary catharsis, Deakin returned to politics from contemplated self-exile, with the nation-as-mission equation reinforced.

Deakin had perfected India, of the text, vision and youthlong dreams, into the unspeakably intimate, disavowed premise of his imagined exclusivist nation. For him, it was amniotic lair, pet fossil of an imagined past and potent site of academic, commercial and strategic communion with Australia in the benignly distant future. Yet, for the present, "real

¹⁴¹ Gabay *The Mystic Life* 165-166.

India”¹⁴² was a threat; it could contaminate with colours. It had to be contained as the tranquilised past of temples and tombs, or as a fief redeemed by the parental rule of the Raj. India and his obsession with it could then be wrenched from the pre-natal Australian nation, and its sacred geography re-mapped into the alternative cartography of a British-installed countrywide irrigation network. His two texts on ‘real India’ could be interpreted as an exercise to this end, besides being a peek into his own fascinations, now increasingly hard to reconcile with the narrowing demands of the federal cause. The statistical overload in *Irrigated India* performs the tension.

India Irrigated (Cartographed and Ghosted)

The Introduction to *Irrigated India* harbours optimistic visions of Australia-India relations “in the closest manner, in trade and in strife, in peace and in war” (13) and its inevitability. Academic exchange remains Deakin’s favoured channel for this promised “communion” (14), though the guru-shishya roles are a reversal of the model depicted in *A New Pilgrim’s Progress*. For Australian scholars would profess while Indians played demure disciple in this scheme:

That intellectual give and take which is everywhere a stimulus to thought should be especially quick and prolific between Australasia, or Southern Asia, and its northern continent. We are near enough to readily visit India and be visited. Its students might come to the universities of our milder climate, instead of facing the winters of Oxford, Paris, or Heidelberg. (14)

India is the exotic obverse of Australia, Deakin maintains, in age, demography, civilization and even politics: “almost within the shadow of its most absolute military despotism [the British Raj] our nation should be building up ultra democracies of the most pacific type” (14). Yet, this predictable narrative surprises with the metaphor of India as “magic mirror” for Australia, while Deakin meditates on the geography-induced, future correlates of connection: “Racially, socially, politically, and industrially, far asunder as the poles, their geographical situation, bringing them face to face, may yet bring them hand to hand, and mind to mind. They have much to teach each other” (16).

¹⁴² The phrase invokes Adela Quested’s naive desire to see “real India” when she arrives at Chandrapore from Britain in *A Passage to India*. The benign naivety threatens cross-cultural relationships and explodes into deep-seeded bitterness between the colonisers and the colonised, when she visits the ancient Marabar Caves and alleges molestation there by Dr. Aziz. In this the entire British civilian community of Chandrapore flock to her support. See Forster *A Passage to India* 20.

In Deakin's design, all such visions must be shelved for fruition in the indefinite future; India could be a partner but not here, not yet. For his present, India was equivalent to the British Raj and Australia must be content playing temperate Shimla – the summertime resort of climate-afflicted Britons in India – of the Antipodes for the sahibs: “Our southern colonies are certain to be always in favour with their officials on furlough in search of health, or those who have retired, and seek a home in a temperate climate, free from the tropic heat of their field of labour, or the snows of their place of birth” (11). Deakin suggests that current Australian exports should exclusively target the microscopic British presence in India; he enlists potential supplements like milk, butter, fruit and vegetables, bacon, ham and preserved meat to the already existent trickle of Australian gold and horses. The native Indian population is kept out of these trade speculations. For him avowedly, only the Raj is real.

Deakin had ostensibly visited India as an irrigation tourist; according to him, the irrigation network engineering the whole of the fissured subcontinent into a composite whole is a spectacular British achievement. It sealed sanction on their benign despotism, being “the best justification for British supremacy in India, and the best evidence, from facts and actions, of the large minded generosity and courage of its rule” (149). It even qualified their Anglo-Saxon kin, the Australians, to bask in vicarious greatness and learn to convert transcontinental irrigation into a tool of nation-building: “Australia will do well, therefore, not only to secure the present experience of the empire, but to take care to keep abreast of its developments from time to time” (237).

The irrigation system in India was not just a mammoth British enterprise in benevolent profiteering, “the most striking monument to the practical genius of the British engineer” (322). It domesticated Indian rivers and scapes and offered an alternative to the sanatani sacred map of tirthas spanning the entire subcontinent. Irrigation channels are the Anglo-Saxon's triumphant new cartography of India:

Indeed, a navigable channel is proposed to be constructed from one of these [branches of the Sirhind canal drawing water from the Sutlej of undivided Punjab] below Patiala across to the Western Jumna Canal. When this is executed it would be possible to ascend the Ganges from Calcutta to Delhi on the Jumna, and, passing thence into the Sutlej, descend into the Indus, having made the circuit of Northern India from the Bay of Bengal to the Indian Ocean by water. (307)

This marine route through irrigation channels into the heart of India had itself become a

secular tirtha, and Deakin's was a "parikrama"¹⁴³ (177) through it. The rational Raj code to index India legitimised the Anglo-Saxon's claim on the land, sometimes usurping the earlier sacred, e.g. the Ganges canal system "though in itself entirely modern, is connected by association with a far-off legendary past, the beginnings of national life, its marvellous epic poetry, the most sacred river, and most illustrious shrines of Hindu faith, and the dawn of the independent history of India" (176). Sometimes older geographies are sacrilegied to make way for the enlightened architecture of rails and irrigation channels. Bricks for the Bari Doab channel were sourced from ground old bricks of the ancient fort at Pathankot (199), a sacred site was utilised for the city water supply in Benaras (38). The British railway from Delhi to Lahore was ballasted with bricks from the ruins of Sirhind, an ancient city pivotal to Sikhs, Moghuls and Hindus and formerly home to many famous poets, historians and scholars (215). As Deakin observes, the act fulfilled a prophecy said to have been uttered centuries ago by a fakir (saintly mendicant), who cursed the city in its pride and foretold that its remains would be scattered between Delhi and Lahore.

The British performance could be read as a non-conscious revival of the Sati myth. In her incarnation as Sati (the pure/honest), Durga, wife of Siva, committed suicide at her father Daksha's palace, since she refused to hear evil of her husband. With the corpse of Sati on her shoulders, Siva insane with grief and fury exploded into a tandava, the dance of dissolution. Fearing cosmic collapse, Vishnu, imagined as the divinity of sustenance, secretly chopped off Sati's corpse into fifty-one parts. The parts dispersed across the subcontinent in Siva's rhythm of wrath, marked its borders and generated fifty one shakti piths – centres of Shakti, Sanskrit for energy and expansion, and yet another name for Durga. Robbed of the body, Siva finally calmed.

The shakti piths literally map the sacred geography of the Indian subcontinent, from Karachi to Chattagram. The British dispersal of ruins from older cities and forts across a fresh-mapped, rail-linked and irrigated India oddly re-enacts the Sati myth, if Sati be interpreted as the imaginative correlative of pre-colonial India. The de-sacralisation of older Indian cities and temples, performed by the Raj and textually by Deakin in *Irrigated India* and *Temple and Tomb*, becomes a necessary rite of passage for re-mapping the subcontinent along the new re-sacralised lines of empire-inflicted progress. Precolonial India as the body of sati is dispersed and re-configured as a map of rout, to be re-routed through the alternative tirthas of irrigation channels and railways. Deakin's *Irrigated India* precisely begins with such a map, with the

¹⁴³ "Parikrama" is the Sanskrit term for circumambulation of a sacred site.

following legends:

Red lines divide watersheds.

Blue lines denote canals.

Black dots denote Himalayas.

Blue dots denote tanks.

The zeal with the statistics of masonry weirs and embankments in *Irrigated India* seeks to invest the Anglo-Saxon feat in India with its alternate mystique. De-sacralisation of an older India precludes the re-sacralisation of the British Raj; they are twin projects arduously espoused by Deakin in his book. Yet the mythology of the taming-and-coming-of-age-of-India-under-British-regime needs better props than obscure statistics. It needs its canon of heroes, civil and military. Such a canon would respond to the hunger for myths and sacred of his would-be nation. Deakin enlists quasi-military civil heroes for inspiring Australians in *Irrigated India*; Anglo-Saxon military heroes of the 1857 uprising are haloed in *Temple and Tomb*. Yet again India plays the anti-body on which he aspires to build a secure body of secular sacreds for his dream nation. It generously stages his reluctant fascination with the Britons along with an emergent Australian nationalism.

Deakin hails India as a theatrical spectacle fit for the romance of Arthurian knights, or gallant servants of the East India Company like Clive, Hastings, Wellesley and Dalhousie: “Our Indian empire has been erected in defiance of rules, regulations, and precedents, even in defiance of prudence and caution. It is one long record of adventurous zeal and dashing knight-errantry” (76). He is unapologetic that India had been conquered and is still held at the point of the sword; the reflected Anglo-Saxon glory of philanthropic tyranny is too tempting to resist. Are not the natives “children in their love of jewellery and display, in their thriftlessness and thoughtlessness, their humours and their credulity” (40) who need protection? And had not the British magi gifted this ahistorical society (28) their history and a neat, rail-linked, irrigated geography of progress and development?

Quieter martyrs throng the mythology too: “Forts and tombs express the spirit of the old regime, its selfish tyranny and barren pride, just as the canals of living water, and the unregarded graves of the Britons who built them, illustrate the more peaceful, unselfish and utilitarian tendency of the new era” (111). Englishmen who have sacrificed their lives to pioneering irrigation work in the field and remain buried in India in quiet out-of-the-way corners, have finally made the land theirs. So have Mr. Reid, designer of the Sirhind Canal, and Mr. Benton, executive engineer of the Bari Doab Canal. Benton unleashes the anthropologist in Deakin as the latter observes in him the “monarch of this tract” (192) and

“the type of a conquering race. He had the pose of a Roman consul, too indifferent to despise the aliens who stood before him, accepting them as treacherous and untrustworthy, without annoyance, and quietly but determinedly compelling them to do his will” (206).

It was difficult for Deakin, though, to present *Irrigated India* as an official panegyric of the Raj and, by extension, as a mythology of Anglo-Saxon agency and superiority. He could not wish away as unreal, the India looming beyond the Raj statistics. Exasperated, he observes: “India is truly a land of wonders and wild extremes of the same surprising order as those depicted in the *Arabian Nights* – a country of contrasts and contradictions, of splendour and poverty, profusion and barrenness, vicissitude and adventure, voluptuousness and mortification of the flesh” (15). Yet his own text models contrasts and contradictions, not least in his attitude to the British or Indians.

Officially, *Irrigated India* is awed by the white man’s burden of shepherding the colonies, unheeding of value or profit. The British government in India, oppressed by the routine of Indian ingratitude, “feeds them, teaches them, finds them land and water, and lends them money to buy seed or cattle, or build their houses and dam their streams” (129). But Deakin with dreams of an autonomous nation-state, is co-colonial enough to realise that “the Government in Calcutta does daily and cheerfully all that it is forbidden to do in London, and does avowedly in the interest of the native races just what the parent Government is prevented from doing in the interests of white labour” (20). As an insider-outsider to both India and Britain, he occasionally startles with shifts from the official position, for instance when he reads the Raj as anti-democratic, exotic and nomadic, “always external to the country, always personal, and capable of unlimited abuse” (21). The despotism does not allow for Indian legislative representation in his time, though some of the Congress chiefs move Deakin with their oratory. He laments the exclusion of deserving Hindus and Muslims from the legislative councils as “a loss to both the natives and the British; the public service needs to be brought into closer sympathy with the masses” (27). The natives are at best ciphers, according to him, permitted only such illicit influence as is common among women in England and Australia (20). He then swiftly returns to the earlier status quo, maintaining at the same time that this loss does not prove that there ought to be any sudden change in the Government of this dependent empire (26). After all, election and representation might fail as political measures “among the half-savage races who go towards making up the Indian Empire” (27), as opposed to the would-be independent Australians.

Deakin’s discomfort and contrary remarks about British policies in India are matched by his confusion about Indians. Often he seeks refuge in racist stereotypes and dehumanisation;

India morphs into a second terra nullius ready to radiate British heroism and host his personal nation-dreams. Thus he decides that cupidity, cunning and lying go hand-in-hand among the lower castes (37); obsequious servants are dedicated to “petty thefts, small commissions, breakages, and blunders” (39). What is worse, Indians seem to raise a barrier to his promise of Australian translation and interpretation of the subcontinent. They either disappear into dark after taking commands from the irrigation engineer or chatter and eat sweetmeats in cocooned clusters. “The ceaseless rattle of their tongues bears testimony to a taste for gossip, common to both sexes” (192), concludes Deakin in his incomprehension, displacing the private baggage of androgyny/effeminacy onto the tamed colony. Animal metaphors gather in bewildered anger. Indians commute by train “packed like sheep in trucks on market-day” (41). The ryot, the agricultural labour deprived of rights to land, is on the perpetual brink of starvation which erases from his existence all but the animal (54). He is the eternal “timid, industrious, inoffensive, domestic, gossiping hind” (147) with his intelligence cobwebbed by superstitions and surroundings. From Deakin’s elated distance, the three parts nude Hindu labour “swarming like so many ants” (172) become all but invisible.

Less invisible are the women about whom Deakin probably felt unexplained pangs of guilt.¹⁴⁴ He pre-empts what Broinowski terms the “Butterfly Phenomenon”,¹⁴⁵ the Australian orientalist fantasy of Eastern women as desirable and infinitely dispensable commodities. Here are fascinated, yet mildly repelled, details of their bizarrely bejewelled appeal:

The Hindu woman, whether princess or peasant, walks embellished, as much as metal and stone can embellish the human form. She takes advantage of her bare feet to place rings upon every toe, of her short skirts to carry a set of anklets, of her open dress to exhibit necklaces and pendants, of the absence of sleeves to display bracelets and armlets, and invariably disfigures her face with a nose-ring, or nose-brooch, and earrings in profusion as well. Among the wealthy there are fanciful ornaments in the hair, which is long and carefully dressed, resplendent zones . . .

The nose comes in for very bad treatment everywhere, the least offensive being the fitting of neat pearl stars in one or both nostrils, but there are in some districts solid nose-rings

¹⁴⁴ According to Rickard’s *Family Romance*, Deakin’s entries in his book of prayers through the early 1890s contain sudden bursts of self-loathing. “I am dominated by appetites,” he confessed in a dark moment and asked to be cleansed of “selfishness, sensuality and pride” (116). Rickard thinks that silhouettes of exotic India with its sensuous wealth of the new and unknown, especially in *Temple and Tomb*, thinly veiled his desire. Infidel fantasies, if not realities while in India, might have haunted the 1894 brooding poems of estrangement and cynicism about “wedlock’s wooden cross” in ‘Clues’ (117). For further details, see Rickard *A Family Romance* 116-121.

¹⁴⁵ Broinowski *The Yellow Lady* 105.

of the size of small watches, and others, lighter and finer, so large in circumference that they fall below the chin, and can be rested upon the crown of the forehead. . . . It is said that the natives do not kiss, and certainly one would judge so from their reckless habit of putting obstacles in the way. (36)

Deakin's account also regularly disrupt such negative stereotypes. Marathas, for example, are hailed as "true Hindus" of pride and power (86), worthy inheritors of Max Mueller's India. And Bombay is praised as a city of the future with its burgeoning commerce and manufacturing industry, the zeal of its citizens and ability to hide from its panorama "the hundreds and thousands of Hindus who live and labour in narrow space" (88); with citizens absented, it aesthetically approximates the Bay of Naples. The Parsis of Bombay with their European features and energy too have almost arrived. So has Punjab, the last province to be annexed by the British and yet the most resplendent in the bounty of roads, bridges, canals and irrigation systems and a thriving export trade, possibly a reward of their 1857 loyalty. Despite the chaotic diversity and lack of sanitation of the city of Lahore, Punjab with its manly populace has fast emerged as the "model province" (106) of British India, being most amenable to its reforms and the project to re-cast the colony as translation. Deakin muses that the Punjabi version of "local responsibility and local irrigation schemes" through panchayats (311) could be adapted with profit in Australia. Punjab too provokes the anthropologist in Deakin. He records the religious, caste and tribal groups of Punjab – the fine Jats, brave Rajputs, soldierly Sikhs, Brahmans with their secluded ways and civic occupations and the Muslims – their occupations and rules of proscription and prescription on marriage. He translates and inserts local verses on Pathan lifestyle and ethics; Deakin celebrates his access to the psyche of tribes teeming on the margins of Punjab.

Bengal becomes the antipode of Punjab in Deakin's framework. The province and its people earn his fury. He terms the Bengalis "pusillanimous" (105), slight, corrupt and completely effeminate. They do not deserve a show of British gallantry; "a drunken sailor landing single-handed captured an important fort, securing the passage of Hooghly" (80) and the battle of Plassey shortly afterwards ensured absolute British dominion over its earliest Indian territory. He echoes Macaulay's opinion that Bengalis lack personal courage and are as subtle and deceitful as "the Jew of the dark ages" (81). Bengal unmasks his xenophobia. He takes revenge by robbing Bengal of its history of simmering anti-colonial unrest, both political and agrarian, that exploded in myriad movements since the late eighteenth century, such as the post-famine sanyasi-and-fakir led Sanyasi Rebellion in East Bengal (1763-1800), tribal Santhal rebellion (1855-56), the farmers' indigo revolt (1859) and peasant leader Titumir's uprising

against the British and local landlords in 1831, among others. Many of these movements are widely read today as prequels and parallels to the 1857 uprising.¹⁴⁶

Bengal is famine-ridden, Deakin observes, and Bengali peasants the “poorest and most wretched class in the country” (82). He omits that this was largely due to the notorious 1793 Permanent Settlement of the British East India Company headed by Charles Cornwallis. The Settlement made zamindars virtual freeholders of the land and annulled rights of the millions of peasants who tilled the soil. Here at last the narrative of the white man’s burden and British reform is turned on its head. Unable to fit Bengal into his text about a Raj triumphant and benevolent, Deakin retaliates relentlessly. Kolkata is fallen beyond redemption: “Nowhere in India are superstitious observances pushed to a greater extreme, nowhere are orthodox Brahmans more narrow or more bitter; nowhere are well-to-do women more jealously imprisoned or innovations more stoutly resisted” (83). Its religions are repressive, learning spurious and babu English¹⁴⁷ hilarious. Deakin cites the sarcasm of an unnamed Briton in India as intertext to justify his judgement. But he absents countertexts, e.g. the self-reflexive caricature of babu culture by a member of the radical Young Bengal movement,¹⁴⁸ Parichand

¹⁴⁶ Gough, Kathleen. “Indian Peasant Uprisings.” *Peasant Struggles in India*. Ed. A. R. Desai. Mumbai: Oxford University Press, 1979. 86. Print.

¹⁴⁷ The mechanical and often malapropic English used by early generations of colonial Bengali clerks who struggled to ape the coloniser’s language had been caricatured in countless texts by both British officials and educated Bengalis, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay among others. Even today the word babu, signifying the generic civil servant, is dyed with hilarity and faint contempt.

¹⁴⁸ Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831), a young academic at Hindu College, was a Eurasian who considered himself an Indian, being born in Kolkata. He introduced his Bengali students to the ideas of Western free-thinkers and sceptics like Thomas Paine and David Hume and inspired them to question and critique socio-religious principles and rituals. Derozio was expelled from the College in 1831 following severe opposition from the orthodox wing of Hindu society. But his disciples, known as Young Bengal, continued to play intimate outsiders to the contemporary Hindu society and scandalised it by querying and subverting all rites, rituals and rules of proscription. As flamboyant young radicals, they openly flaunted their relish for beef and publicly drank water from Muslims, breaking taboos of food and untouchability. Some like Parichand Mitra retained the zeal for change; he published journals and books in a Bengali that experimented with the street lingo and various argots specific to sub-communities within Calcutta. Social and religious reform and patriotism remained their priorities.

The Young Bengal group contributed majorly in shaping modern Bengali prose as “a respectable vehicle for cosmopolitan self-expression” and for independent nationalist literature (Amit Chaudhuri 133) and initiated new, often provocative thinking and socio-intellectual revolutions which erupted into the Bengal Renaissance during the second half of the nineteenth century. Most of the prominent Young Bengalis like Radhanath Sikdar who measured the height of Mount Everest, Parichand Mitra, Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee who donated land for the Bethune School for girls actively participated in various social and linguistic reforms through the nineteenth century. Their absence from Deakin’s account of Bengal is conspicuous.

For further details, see Chattopadhyay, Goutam. *Awakening in Bengal in Early Nineteenth Century (Selected Documents)*. Kolkata: Progressive Publishers, 1965. Print.

Some of the aesthetic and linguistic motifs of the Bengal Renaissance have been astutely analysed in Amit Chaudhuri’s “The Flute of Modernity”. *On Tagore: Reading the poet today*. 15-60.

Also see his chapter titled “Poetry as Polemic” (117-167) in the same book for a history of the emergence of Bengali as a literary language, capable of narrating both nation and the cosmopolitan.

Also see Gangopadhyay, Sunil. *Sei Samay*. Vol. 1. Kolkata: Anondo Publishers, 1981. 203-211. Print.

Mitra, in *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1858)¹⁴⁹ or by the more mainstream Deputy Magistrate, famous novelist and nationalist thinker Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) in his satirical sketch “Babu” (1874). Bengalis prove less privileged than the Pathans whom Deakin chose to translate in *Irrigated India*.

Similarly, while he lashes out against the word-spouting, morally regressive babus who protest against the rise in the age of consent of girl-brides from ten to twelve, Deakin retains an ominous silence on the lifelong struggles of reformer-scholars like Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891), in effect sweeping aside the churn of social reforms which had been taking place in Bengal during the period, including the prohibition of sati (1829) and remarriage of widows (1856). He claims credit only for the law-makers, the British. Vidyasagar had confronted the orthodox sections of contemporary Hindu society on issues of untouchability and women’s education; he helped establish numerous girls’ schools and wrote textbooks for their curricula. The nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance created by a cross-fertilisation of local and Western cultures was in full bloom in Bengal during the period of Deakin’s visit. Writers like Bankim Chandra and Rabindranath Tagore, political activists and seers like Aurobindo, visionaries like Ramkrishna and Vivekananda who tried to connect sanatani epistemology with modernity and social service birthing also the promise of a new India, social reformers like Vidyasagar and scientist polymaths like Jagadish Chandra Bose had all invested in a democratic, secular India released from systemic violence and inequities and receptive to global influences and dialogue during this age. Late nineteenth century Bengal was being churned in the crucible of changes, public debates and competing dreams for the making of a new nation.

How had this “real” India become so invisible to the usually astute Deakin? Would an acknowledgement of current hopes and upheavals, including those of social change and political autonomy in Bengal and finally across the nation, delete the otherness of India? Would the Indian dream become too close for comfort to his Australian nation and challenge his static fantasy of the subcontinent? Or is Bengal untranslatable into Deakin’s grids of reality? The littoral territory bordering the Bay of Bengal, overwhelms Anglo-Saxon irrigational cartography. The perennially course-changing rivers, Brahmaputra and Ganga, make attempts

This Bengali fiction, whose title can be rendered as “Those times”, presents a well-researched, layered version of the lives and cultures converging in Kolkata and its underbelly in the beginnings of the Bengal Renaissance, from the 1830s to 1870.

¹⁴⁹ The title, literally rendered as “The Spoiled Brat”, is a sarcastic take on the life of a contemporary half-educated, pampered offspring of a babu and of the Kolkata thugs and decadent culture that ensure his dissolution and self-destruction.

at irrigation redundant:

There is no need of an artificial water supply. The forces of nature here are too vast and their activity too incessant to permit human co-operation. . . . in spite of such vagaries the peasantry utilise the flow to the fullest extent, and year by year in Eastern Bengal obtain from the richly laden inundations the fertilisation of fields which rival in their returns those obtained with patient toil by the fellahin on the banks of the Nile. (278)

Bengal with its ever-mutating landscape and defiant storytellers with their counternarratives defies control and colonial translation in Deakin's text.

Deakin finds insidious resistance to translation to the progress-addict, Anglo-Saxon way of life endemic even beyond Bengal. The "machinery of western national life and its terminology are utterly inapplicable" to India (97), he rues. Despite rails and irrigation, the Raj has never been able to scratch beyond the surface. Whereas, the British in India were in real fear of translation:

[India] impresses its character to a large extent upon its conquerors. The British in India have themselves ceased to be British in many respects. They have developed castes and curious creeds, walk with troops of retainers, live like Persian satraps or Roman proconsuls, coming at last to think and speak in the phrase of the Orient, and with its vivid colouring. It is they who have adapted themselves to the Hindu, and not the Hindu who has taken their imprint. (29)

Untranslated, though lengthily explained, Hindustani argot e.g. nakka, bangar, razail, chher, panchayat, choki etc. slither into Deakin's impeccable British English as well.

The inscrutable Hindus unnerve Deakin with their "enigmatical countenance" and "Oriental secretiveness" (42). Mutual sympathy and understanding between the rulers and the ruled is non-existent and the British, with the intention of welfare, had sometimes blundered, he concludes. At Panipat, for example, they had disrupted traditional communal governance and distribution of land and services and imposed on the peasants a harsh and alien capitalist market system (50), to the chagrin of the local populace. India proves a difficult proposition for passive translation to the progress package. It confuses Deakin with its horse-and-oxen infested, white-and-brown ghettoed cities and impenetrable people; he professes repulsion but India turns out to be more of an addiction with its "insidious warmth" and "fecund clime, bathed in perpetual light, swathed in perpetual heat, and steeped in enervating moisture" (79).

Given this teasing non-translatability of the spectrum of diverse, differing realities and minorities that constituted India, how to accommodate Deakin's obsession with the

subcontinent as romance and colony¹⁵⁰ to culture his Australia-dream? A potent way was to rob India of its reality and present it, Sinai style, as an infinitely mutable fantasy, at once universal and intensely private. Just as Salim Sinai in *Midnight's Children* textualises and, in the process, fictionalises India in order to possess it as his nation-twin, Deakin's India is rendered unreal beyond and beneath the Raj. He could thus suitably remake it as a space mapped purely by his words, with plural potency as witness, other, mirror and secret incubator of his national vision. Indian, specially Punjabi landscapes at Shahpur or the sublime twilight-shaded Ravi Valley, are paralleled to Australia: "before us [in Shahpur] are stretches of high, sharply cut, glacier clad masses, like Feathertop in July, sweeping to the left with even slopes, in curves of Australian form and hue" (194). Knowledge about India could only be understood and transmitted via analogy, as it were, which in turn was stretched to its interpretive seams.

India is framed as an infinitely passive and emptied canvas ready to frame Deakin's Australia and clone it, if necessary. It is his way of a possession which equals translation, so that he can literally magic-carpet the land away to his federal dreams. A text with the apparent agenda of mythologizing the Raj and shaping India as the anti-myth, subterraneously welds together his twin dreams, so that the secret, forbidden and older enchantment could be embedded in his fresh federal passion. This imagined India could then be tailored to suit an exclusive Australian version:

So far as the lessons of irrigation to Australia are concerned a great part of the continent can at once be *blotted from the map*, and omitted from further notice. . . . In point of fact a half circle, beginning at Sind and passing up the Indus and down the Ganges Valley, avoiding Bengal proper, but sweeping down the east coast to Cape Comorin, comprises the area of India in which irrigation is the most important factor. This is "Irrigated India." Omitting Bengal proper, such a circuit embraces the most populous and most prosperous tracts. Within this charmed area famine finds few victims in ordinary years (emphasis added). (62)

Perpetual irritants like the famine-starved yet fertile Bengal can be safely absented from Australia's India, as can histories and geosophies¹⁵¹ inconvenient to the white man's burden. Thus, "to the average Hindu there was no history . . . no guarantee for any Government except

¹⁵⁰ I have used the word here in the etymological sense. Colony shares its root with "culture" and "cultivate". It is derived from Latin "colonia" signifying "settlement, farm". "Colony" blends hints of aggression and intrusion, in the sense of settling a land, and of civilization.

¹⁵¹ The word "geosophy" used by Charlesworth is a portmanteau of geography and philosophy. It implies a perspective on the land that exceeds its topography and attaches to it an epistemic, mnemonic-intense valency. For further details, see Charlesworth, Max, ed. *Religious Business: Essays on Australian Aboriginal Spirituality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. xix-xx. Print.

that of the strongest [prior to British arrival]" (28). The conviction provides the license to appropriate Indian histories as "a series of biographies" (76), specially of the new-age knights who helped found empire and civilization in India. Deakin mutilates the past of India to "a record of heroes and heroism wherein, every now and then, as in Homeric battles, all has depended upon the courage and ability of a single man" (76). Periods of relative political stability over a large part of the subcontinent, as during the Maurya (322-185 BCE), Gupta (320-550 CE) or Mughal regimes (sixteenth to mid-eighteenth centuries) are denied, as are local democratic traditions of government-by-discussion in assemblies termed samitis/gana sanghas among Lichhavi and Saka clans among others, as early as the sixth century BCE, prior to Buddha's birth.¹⁵² Open discussions, reasoning and interactive formation of norms have been an important part of public life in India since at least the sixth century BCE. These traditions were invoked in the development of participatory panchayati governance and administration through discussion and hopefully dissent, in the subcontinent post colonies.¹⁵³ During Deakin's India visit too, they were largely alive in the community-oriented panchayat governance model in autonomous Indian villages.

Similarly, by representing the subcontinental past as a series of tyrannies by adventurous marauders, the Anglo-Saxons being the most recent, evolved and charitable of the lot, Deakin alienated India not only from Australia, but from a substantial part of its past. For example, he excludes histories of the debate around ideas in India. India has had a vibrant tradition of intellectual pluralism and heterodoxy. As Amartya Sen argues, "Sanskrit not only has a bigger body of religious literature than exists in any other classical language, it also has a larger volume of agnostic or atheistic writings than in any other classical language".¹⁵⁴ Dissent and dialogue among diverse intellectual traditions from within and beyond India, in such varied disciplines as mathematics, logic, epistemology, astronomy, linguistics, phonetics, economics, political science and psychology constitute crucial components of subcontinental history of ideas and analytical thought, often neglected in routine exotic/mystical or orientalist interpretations which Deakin fails to query.¹⁵⁵ Besides the six philosophical schools of thought,

¹⁵² For a brief history of the long-sustained model of participatory governance in the Indian subcontinent through public debate and discussion, see

"Village Assemblies in Ancient India." Lokraj Andolan, 2009. Web. 21 Apr. 2013.

¹⁵³ Sen, Amartya. "The Argumentative Indian." *The Argumentative Indian*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2005. 12-16. Print.

¹⁵⁴ Sen "The Argumentative Indian" 23.

¹⁵⁵ For an overview of the rationalist and humanist intellectual traditions of India, as well as Western models for imagining and understanding the country, see

Sen, Amartya. "Indian Traditions and the Western Imagination." *The Argumentative Indian*. 139-160.

Also see his "The Argumentative Indian" 3-33.

Nyaya, Mimamsa, Vaishesika, Shankhya, Yoga and Vedanta and their plural matrix of texts, arguments and counter-arguments, the sanatani epistemology validates debates and original interventions through *bhashya* (creative commentary/adaptation) and *tika-parampara*, an accretion of polyphonic intellectual debates kindled by commentaries, major departures, new modes of reading and fresh protocols of reception proposed by generations of scholars across millennia, for re-interpreting or dissenting canonical texts and their received analyses.

In denying Indians a sense of the past, Deakin also disowns alternative forms of historical consciousness, that Ashis Nandy terms the “principle of principled forgetfulness”¹⁵⁶ as a moral metaphoric interpretation of the past in mythic societies like India, rather than an illusory ownership of objectivity. With signature self-contradiction, Deakin alludes to such popular, sometimes non-literate methods of preservation of the past in the appendix to *Irrigated India*, in which he acknowledges the existence of prior native irrigation structures that had been of vital help to British engineers, e.g. the Western Yamuna Canal built four centuries earlier by Feroz Shah Tughlak and later, Akbar, or the Kaveri Scheme in erstwhile Madras. In the latter case, the British engineers became aware of the ancient weir near the mouth of Kaveri, guided by oral verse fragments celebrating the feats of an early king (252).

Again, Deakin interprets the diversity of India as the chaotic dispersal of warring creeds: “Neither the conquest, nor the mutiny, nor the reign of peace since has as yet created any other unity in “India” than that of British rule” (31). The inverted commas around India perform its fictional quality for Deakin; he terms it an anachronism prior to British rule. Yet India had been conceived by the Arabs as an “academic geography”¹⁵⁷ since at least the twelfth century, contends Amitav Ghosh. The Arab Jews and Muslims who had vibrant trading relations with India prior to European colonisation used the term “Al Hind” since the eleventh century to refer to the subcontinent beginning at the eastern border of Sind and extending as far as Assam and even beyond.¹⁵⁸ “Al-Hind” was not a precise cartographic description. Though seldom a politically united empire, it referred to a scape connected by networks of complementary differences, epistemologies and polemical perspectives in creative argument, as also by sacred

¹⁵⁶ Nandy, Ashis. “History’s Forgotten Doubles.” *History and Theory*. 34. 2 (May1995): 44-66. 47. Web. 12 Feb. 2012.

In his book *understanding itihasa*, Sibesh Bhattacharya explores alternative forms of historical consciousness and historiographies premised on selection, idealisation and the ethics of social justice as preserved in traditional narratorial formats from the subcontinent such as the puranas; in my chapter on Mollie Skinner’s exilic novels, I have detailed key arguments of the book regarding the subcontinental philosophy of history, propositions which I show Mollie’s protagonist Tucker to partially inhabit in the novel *Tucker Sees India*.

Bhattacharya, Sibesh. *understanding itihasa*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2010. Print.

¹⁵⁷ Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal and permanent black, 1992. 282. Print.

¹⁵⁸ Ghosh, Amitav. “The Slave of MS. H.6.” *The Imam and the Indian* 231-232.

sites and the receptivity to others. Megasthenes's *Indika* describing India in the early third century BCE, specifies its boundaries to be the Himalayas in the north, the Indus in the west and the ocean in the south and east.¹⁵⁹ The South Asian subcontinent has been ideologically conceived, imagined and referred to as Jambudwipa for two and a half millennia by poets, storytellers and scholars of the land.¹⁶⁰ Contradicting his earlier stance of a fragmented India, Deakin concedes, "India is self-contained, and has been mainly self-developed. It is a whole physically . . . Its several divisions are part of one great whole" (57).

Irrigated India promises real India but confesses to be more of a scholastic rather than field exercise. Much of the information is second-hand, collated from official reports and blue books of the British Government, "condensed from many sources, unravelled from conflicting or incomplete reports, and mainly composed at a distance from the country" (151). *Irrigated India* accepts the subcontinent at a remove, as translated and interpreted by the British administration. Deakin, ostensibly justifying his irrigation policy in Victoria with the Indian irrigation network as reference, does not often dare to play his aspired role of original storyteller or even anuvadak¹⁶¹ when it came to textualising the British Indian empire.

When Deakin steps in with a personal version of India, it veers towards fantasy. The fantasies too are second-hand. Either they are Max Mueller induced paeans to the now-vanished "high-spirited, generous, warlike, and intellectual Aryans, with whom, not without pride, we claim kinship" (106). Or they are surreal renderings of ruins that faithfully evoke romantic archetypes of a predictably voluptuous oriental past. Jaipur, though built in imitation of a European metropolis, turns out to be at best an unkempt menagerie with elephants, falcons, buffaloes, monkeys, cheetahs and camels. "Real" Rajasthan, revealed in the presently desolate city of Amber founded by Man Singh, is uncanny. The grim, memory-warped, mountain-fortified city in which Man Singh lived "with some of his 1500 wives, of whom 60 went to the funeral pyre in honour of his death" (100) is metonymic of the appeal of the grotesque yet irresistible royal India for Deakin. He staples his private dreams of a savagely grand India to

¹⁵⁹ Megasthenes. *Indika*. Frag. IV. "Of the Boundaries and Extent of India." Trans. John W. McCrindle. *Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian*. London: Messrs. George Routledge and Sons, 1877. 46-47. Print.

¹⁶⁰ Bani Basu's *Maitreya Jatak* is a minutely researched fiction on the socio-political, economic and philosophical churnings, tarka and upheavals in India during a particularly creative, argumentative and iconoclastic age, the fifth and sixth centuries BCE witness to the life and works of grammarian Panini, philosopher Yajnavalka and Mahavira and Gautama Buddha, expounders of the agnostic, anti-Vedic faiths of Jainism and Buddhism respectively. The book engages with the classical idea of Jambudwipa and its histories, ruptures, debate and promise as one of the leitmotifs.

See Basu, Bani. *Maitreya Jataka*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1996. Print.

¹⁶¹ One who composes an anuvad or re-writing/re-rendering of a text.

Amber; the now-abandoned and decayed marts and dwellings with a few fakirs and elegiac flute-notes are peopled in his imagination by fierce, predatory Rajput brigands.

Amber, like Coleridge's Xanadu, has its own pleasure dome and Deakin can almost peek into a forbiddingly seductive royal vignette of the king and his consorts in the harem:

Above the whole, where Greeks would have built an acropolis, and Romans a capitol, the Hindu despot built himself a palace and a zenana. . . . From here [the exquisitely beautiful hall of audience in the palace], sitting in state, looked upon by his ladies through a lattice, the majestic and bejewelled Rajah, turning his glances from those who came to do him homage, to crave alliance or to sue for peace, looked down upon his busy city at his feet, and over it. . . .

He might wander within from hall to hall of luxury, marble bathrooms, and day rooms bright with mica and dazzling chunam, through ivory doors, to a garden hidden in the heart of it, where, between stone walls and paved paths, sprung fruits and flowers of tangled greenery. Here a fountain leaped in the noonday sun or in the evening shadows, when out of the dark little cells in which they slept the beauties of the harem came forth to breathe the fresh air or to rest in the lamplit chamber, down one of whose sides a cool stream plashed, flowing brightly in its marble channel along the dainty floor. (101)

Deakin's narration is strikingly similar to that of the enigmatic traveller in "Kshudhito Pashan" (1895), composed around the same time by Rabindranath Tagore and translated by Amitav Ghosh as "The Hunger of Stones".¹⁶² Amitav Ghosh, in his preface to *The Imam and the Indian*, terms "Kshudhito Pashan" an allegory of the colonial condition (xii). The Indian traveller-narrator of the story, who held forth on every conceivable subject from secret anti-British plans hatched by Russians to Vedas and Persian poetry with Deakinian charisma, relates to co-passengers in a train his strange experience as collector of cotton revenues in Barich under the Nizam of Hyderabad.

As a young bachelor the narrator had lived in Barich at a forsaken palace built by Shah Mahmud II as his "house of pleasure" (327) some two hundred and fifty years before the storytime. Pre-twilight, he used to be very much the absurd-little-English-jacket-and-solaptee wearing pompous Anglophile colonial engaged in business; post-twilight, the house seemed to summon him back to its mirage of fragmented scenes conjured from the past, especially those invoking a Persian beauty and her unspeakable suffering. After daily office

¹⁶² Ghosh, Amitav. "The Hunger of Stones." *The Imam and the Indian*. 326-339.

chores, he would change into a nawabi outfit and like a lover in viraha,¹⁶³ await her surreal presence in the evenings. “A strange feud now arose between my days and my nights,” reflects the colonially-educated narrator (333), unable to access the past that waits for him every evening in that palace. Amit Chaudhuri reads in Tagore’s viraha-laden lyrical poems like “Meghdoot” [The Cloud Messenger]¹⁶⁴ “a narrative of the separation of the self from history; the beloved pining in the city of Alaka becomes a figure of the past, intimate but distant, beautiful, but not quite recoverable . . . a symbol for the modern [i.e. colonial] Indian’s desire to be one, through the Imagination, with his identity and history.”¹⁶⁵ An identical tension of desire for the nameless world of the subconscious and the precolonial is performed by the secular-rational-colonial narrator of “Kshudhito Pashan”.

Like the narrator of that story, Deakin too is torn between dual worlds in his quest of India, both of which are equally illusory. The hyper-real colonial sphere with its anxious, elaborate apparatus is as spurious a key to “real” India as the Europeanised orientalist’s romantic vision of a curated Indian past teeming with Arabian and Persian slave-girls who wait in abandoned palaces to seduce from beyond death. Trapped in pre-scripted archetypes, Deakin and Tagore’s fictive narrator, arch-colonials both, find it difficult to access uncharted, unpredictable, living Indias. Even before the traveller of Tagore’s tale ends narrating his escape from that castle, the train arrives and an Englishman hails him away from Indian co-passengers to his first-class apartment for the remainder of the journey. Deakin’s Raj-shadowed representation of India remains similarly suspended in the limbo of conflicting binaries.

Anxious at the textual space allowed to pre-British Amber, Deakin robs the stylised frescoes of sacred Hindu cities on the palace walls – and the entranced episode itself – of significance. Signs are emptied of content, so that Amber becomes little more than a spectral fresco preserved by the Raj, with “the long walls enclosing nothing” (102). Sculpted stones of walls and the city hunger to host stories and meanings; he pours into this fresh-forged emptiness the anti-myth of Durga, the presiding deity of Amber, as the bloodthirsty goddess who must be satiated with hundreds of buffaloes and scores of goats each year at Dashera.¹⁶⁶ Deakin’s

¹⁶³ “Viraha”, a Sanskrit term predominant as an emotive category in medieval Vaishnav literature and evoked as a state of mind by Tagore in his lyrics, signifies a subject’s wistful longing for her beloved in absentia.

¹⁶⁴ The title is an allusion to the ancient Ujjaini-based poet Kalidasa’s Sanskrit poem “Meghadootam”. The speaker in the poem is an exiled lover who on the first day of monsoon, asks the rain-heavy clouds to bear a letter from him to his beloved in the faraway city of Alaka. Viraha, a Sanskrit word evocative of lovelorn Radha’s separation from Krishna in Vaishnav literature, connotes the bhava or state of romantic, metaphysical separation from the unbearably intimate.

¹⁶⁵ Chaudhuri “The Flute of Modernity” 26.

¹⁶⁶ In northern India, the festival of Dashera celebrates the victory of Rama, the royal Ayodhya-born protagonist of Ramayana, over Ravana, king of Lanka, in the epic battle. Prior to the battle, Rama had prayed to Durga.

Amber gains meaning only as the site of that macabre scene. Deakin reinvents Durga, the image traditionally symbolising shakti in a benevolent avatar and as triumphant over evil, as a demonic deity, if only to offset the canon of British heroes. Amber and Durga are restored to the routine of de-sacralisation in order to sacralise white power, progress and Australian national aspirations.

Yet within the text, exceptions to the routine of statistics and colonial stereotypes regularly subvert the assured contentions of *Irrigated India*. Despite its narrator, multiple Indias beyond the Raj proliferate and intervene through the text, performing Deakin's desire for the subcontinent and his last bout of occasional fluidities before the resolute deflection to federal politics. In the process, the unsuspecting reader encounters versions of British India, Australia's India, Deakin's private hypnotic versions; Indians' Indias too prise entry in the carnival of dialogues.

Three of Deakin's Indian co-passengers in train are quoted on the situation in their country. They offer a glimpse of the country heaving under the Raj. A north Indian brahman travelling to Jaipur with his son is a warm supporter of the Congress plea for self-governance and representative institutions in India. Well-informed in international politics, he relates the Home Rule Struggle in Ireland to India and questions Deakin on the powers of self-government in Australia. Sceptical of Anglo-Saxon superiority, he hopes for future Indian national equality with the colonisers. Religious reforms are needed but should be brought about internally, rather than by drastic governmental intervention. He mildly mocks Parsis and Brahma Samajists¹⁶⁷ for aping Europeans. Neither apologetic about idols nor about the differences within Hinduism, he compares the idols to saints and images in Catholicism and the castes and creeds to various Christian sects. Conceding that everything is not perfect within Hinduism or its practice, he questions the axiomatic British ethnocentrism and right to rule, "Do Christians practise all they preach? . . . Must they not develop also?" (44). Socially, he ardently supports the abolition of

¹⁶⁷ Brahma Samajists denote a reformist community which worships only Brahman or the universal cosmic energy and abides by the Upanishads that they recognise as their crucial intellectual and spiritual inheritance. The Brahma Samaj was yet another socio-religious reform movement rooted in Bengal and founded in 1828 by Dwarkanath Tagore and Ram Mohan Roy. A reaction to prevailing Brahmanism of the time, specially the Kulin (a particular sect of the Brahmans) practices of sati and polygamy, Brahma Samaj aimed to propound a heterodox, querying version of Hinduism that not only engaged with the Upanishads and the classical subcontinental idea of India, but responded too to the Judeo-Hebraic and Enlightenment ideals. Brahmans were invested in the making of a modern India receptive to the East and the West, the past as well as the present. Their Samaj abolished caste and dowry systems, child marriages, promoted women's education and relative emancipation and supported widow-remarriage. In 1860 Brahmaism was formally separated from Hinduism. Ironically, the movement attracted many idealists born into Brahman backgrounds, Dwarkanath and Debendranath Tagore among others. For further details, see Kopf, David. *The Brahma Samaj and the shaping of the modern Indian mind*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979. Print.

infant marriages and a new order of domestic life and female education. Poverty for him is the main bane of his land.

Though embittered by recollections of some of “their [the colonisers’] treatment of his race”, the brahman is open to reconciliation and collective political action and courteously concludes, “They must lead us; we have no leaders as yet, and we cannot accomplish our enfranchisement of ourselves alone” (45). Fluent in English and more the mediator across languages and cultures than Deakin, he undercuts many of the stereotypes espoused in *Irrigated India* about the ignorant and subhuman colonised, who are born to deceive and would perish without white guidance. Embarrassed by his intelligent critique of empire, Deakin closes the dialogue with awkward racist humour: “But for his faculty of putting awkward questions of the kind with which Friday baffled the proselytising zeal of Robinson Crusoe, the Brahman was an agreeable conversationalist” (45).

A wealthy Muslim landowner and native magistrate from the north-west vents the communal suspicion, disdain and elite apprehensions regarding distribution of power which would, among other factors, precipitate partition of the subcontinent about half a century later. Exuding greater authority and desire to command than the brahman, he spoke of very different interests. Dressed in European fashion, he was confident that his race would seize political power once it had slipped from the present rulers. He had contempt for Congress which he felt could become dangerous with further British concession and feared for the Muslims in India if all were to be given franchise; the majority would then manipulate the Muslims to their advantage. He however supported higher education for Muslims. Despite his laboured English, he quoted Saadi in Persian to impress Deakin as his cultural equal.

A baniya¹⁶⁸ from Bengal, the region persistently vilified in *Irrigated India*, provides the most subversive and compelling postscript to dominant views on India and its colonial administration in Deakin’s text. The encounter happens at a moment of crisis, when the babu, an employee of the Raj, almost accidentally moves into the carriage. He had arrived at the last moment and the station master refused to sell him a third class ticket. He shared Deakin’s carriage, though he could ill afford the cost, since he must hasten home to attend to his ill wife. Distraught with grief and anxiety, he disregards the usually impenetrable veneer of cliched opinions and formal distance between the white and the brown man in colonial India. The Bengali explains the misery of his countrymen to Deakin. The root cause, he contends, is all-

¹⁶⁸ Deakin explains ‘baniya’ as a member of the caste hereditarily devoted to banking, money-lending and similar businesses (45).

round poverty, of wealth, ideas and ethics. The Government does not help by destroying local knowledge systems, while imposing cosmetic, clerical acquaintance with new western epistemologies. This uproots indigenous ways of living, understanding and wealth distribution and rehabilitates in vacuum the refugees thus uprooted:

Government, without intending it, makes our lot harder. My wife is ill, but there is no one to attend her unless he has a diploma, and he charges many rupees for seeing her and more for expensive foreign medicines. Formerly there were native physicians without diplomas, but with long practical experience of us – not good surgeons, but good physicians for most of our ailments. They received large fees from the rajahs and the rich, and they treated the poor for nothing. Now they are gone [along with the vanished system of patronisation]. Everyone must have a diploma and every one charges; native medicine is forgotten, and those who cannot pay the fees see their wives and children die unattended. We are taught something in your schools, but it is little, it is only a smattering of a few things. Before, we had what we wanted. All we needed came from our fields. Now we must purchase. We know of many new things, we have come to need many of them. We have many new wants and we cannot supply them. (46)

The consumerist need generated in the colonial market to satiate the lust for profit of the burgeoning British industry, coupled with crushing poverty and disincentivising of the local economy, have robbed Bengal of present hope or future dreams. The alienation of rulers from the ruled in the colonial context and allied misrepresentations on both sides aggravate the situation. Copying the West without assimilating their values has resulted in a massive unhinge, technological and ethical. Bengalis have become sceptical about their own faith while refusing conversion to Christianity. Unhoused and without refuge in their own land and religion, they have become desolate: “Many of us now have no religion and no caste, and many are ruined. Morality is what we need most of all, more than education. We can be nothing without morality, and we cannot have morality without religion. We were better when we were all Hindus, before we learned so much. . . . Vishnu [the deity he worships] is full of love. We need someone to love us, who will stoop to us and help us” (47).

Capable of intense self-critique and ardent without a hint of duplicity, this man of refined face and clean robes confounds Deakin’s generalisations about the babu. He roots the present suffering of his countrymen in the loss of swadharma,¹⁶⁹ pre-empting Gandhi. And he earnestly

¹⁶⁹ Swadharma etymologically is a Sanskrit compound of “swa” i.e. “one’s own” and “dharma” meaning “that which holds”, implying in this case one’s intelligence and ethics. Swadharma could thus be rendered as a being’s values and possibilities. Bhagavadgita famously suggests in the fourth chapter that it is better to be

reaches out to Australian Deakin as a co-colonial, in an attempt to heal the racial estrangement: “Tell the people far away, tell them that we-the masses-in-India are poor, are ignorant, are wretched beyond all conception of theirs, and that we need all their wisdom and their assistance to lift us up, to give us courage, and enable us to live as we ought to live and be what we ought to be” (47). Empathy, trust and dialogue are envisioned as new currencies of colonial connect and mutual deep knowledge; the less educated babu offers the Australians an astute analysis of the colonial condition in India and alternative conduits of cross-cultural connections, beyond Deakin’s regular stance of racial-spatial angst and cartographic exclusions.

Beyond this passing vignette of an India disruptive of orientalist stereotypes with characters like the babu briefly usurping the narrator’s role from Deakin, *Irrigated India* is as much an act of journalistic commission as omissions. It foregrounds British India and largely fantasizes or makes invisible the rest. Deakin tries hard to contain the subcontinent in statistics, contempt and ridicule for the natives, a white canon that displaces local maps, memorials and the sacred only to impose a randomly restructured, even reinvented history and geography. This hide-and-seek of excess and silence in his representation of India haunts the co-text of *Temple and Tomb*, an Australian publication which compiled reports sanitised out of the British version – *Irrigated India*.

Temple and Tomb; or Deakin’s Brand India for white Australia

Barring the chapter on the 1857 uprising, *Temple and Tomb* is an anthology on Indian architecture, religions and spiritual centres that preceded the Raj. Unlike *Irrigated India* which aims to rationalise the subcontinent despite digressions, *Temple and Tomb* resolutely invests in the irrational and the hyperbolic. *Irrigated India* engages with the “real” subcontinent conjured by the Midas touch of the Raj, with its railways, canals and charity, and mostly absents other realities; *Temple and Tomb* as twined co-text, foregrounds “unreal” Indias from the ghosted past that slyly bleeds into the colonial present. Both are part of an identical project of annexing the colony to personal, national and trans-national dreams and ambitions. Indeed, *Temple and Tomb* would not have featured as a separate text, had it not been for the politics of exclusion.

As mentioned earlier, the book comprises chapters on native India and Deakin’s personal interpretation and mythology of the Mutiny, censored out of the English edition of *Irrigated India*. It was published separately in Australia. Being a colonial, Deakin was only imperfectly British and possibly excluded as a translator-interpreter of India in the mother culture. The text

killed in swadharma than pretend loyalty to worldviews and perspectives inflicted from elsewhere. Gandhi has discussed the idea at length in his book on the principles of autonomy of self and nation, *Hind Swaraj* (1909).

in its turn builds on the politics of exclusion, even exorcisation, of his contemporary nineteenth century India that looms beyond the Raj. Deakin casts himself as the gifted dastango¹⁷⁰ who through his rainbow narratives would retrieve for his race and country the ‘original’ India fossilized in the past, of which the India of his times seemed to him an infinitely removed and redundant copy. He reduces the subcontinent to a cluster of temples and tombs, signifiers of hyper-religious sacred India, past and now dead, wresting from his readers the possibility of engaging with India in terms of its analytical and rationalistic paradigms. The Indian socio-political scenario during his tour, with its disturbing winds of change, rationalism, dissent, reform and resistance to his British paeon, is similarly absented.

My chapter does not deal with Deakin’s archaeological expertise nor with the extent of his scholarship on Indian histories and philosophies, though I have specified a few telling omissions and half-truths in his representation. It engages with his perception of India and the roots of this perch. Deakin desires to reinvent India as a word into which he could pour the semantic substance of his dreams and idealised versions of an appropriate oriental past. The mission needs prior conversion of the signified to a signifier emptied of content. India must be discovered afresh as an infinitely mutant, multivalent theatre that could alternatively be “the Ophir of the Old Testament, the scene of Sinbad’s trials, and certainly the heart and crown of that far “gorgeous East” which stately Venice held in fee” (5). It must also serve as synecdoche for the East, alternatively sensuous and sinister, in Deakin’s proposition of an “unceasing struggle between the East and the West” (1), needed to nourish Australian nationhood.

Icons in excess of the Raj in India must be omitted or verbally sacrilegied. Deakin prioritises the denial of the traditional sacred in the subcontinent. He religiously visits many of the most famous shrines and temple cities of India like Benaras, in order to perform his routine rite of disparagement. It is his private mission which precludes enshrining the otherwise profane as sacred in both India and his national vision for Australia. The rite performs his project to

¹⁷⁰ The word “dastangoi” in Persian and Hindustani signifies a stylised mode of storytelling with minimal props that originated in Persia and travelled to India in the sixteenth century; the storyteller is the dastango. Daastaans in Persian refer to traditional romantic epics that mesh adventure, magic and spectacle and charter unknown worlds and horizons. They approximate medieval romance among the western genres, with a liberal touch of magic realism, narratives of naughty pranks, social commentary and satire. Dastangoi transports the audience to a universe that blurs the margins of the public and the personal, the real and the imagined. The author-narrator performs and sometimes participates as characters in the tale. A dastango could choose to create his own repertoire from his times rather than perform traditional fare, as Mahmood Farooqi and Danish Hussain have often done in their revival of the art form. Their dastangoi Mantoyiat, for instance, adapts Saadat Hasan Manto’s life and stories. Deakin’s depiction of India seems a close though possibly unconscious parallel of the art. See Daftaur, Swati. “Showcase: A Storyteller’s Story.” *thehindu.com. The Hindu*, 4 Aug. 2012. Web. 15 Aug. 2012.

drive older, local sacreds underground while recoding a land as his dreamscape,¹⁷¹ be it India or Australia. Older liminal maps¹⁷² are abandoned in favour of colonialist cartographies etched in rails and irrigation tanks and canals. If *Irrigated India* textualises the imperially engineered cartography, *Temple and Tomb* erases the pre-maps.

Thus, Hinduism is compared to “the still bubbling witches’ cauldron beheld by Macbeth” (104) and the wily Indian’s fetish for deification piously spurned:

The judicious Hindu does not waste his offerings upon good spirits, whose aid he counts upon gratis, but devotes his substance to mollifying those whom he suspects of an intention to do him harm [e.g. Shiva and Vishnu]. . . . The main tide of native reverence runs indiscriminating at far lower levels than the poorest of these [temples]. A stone of curious shape, a rock on which the likeness of an animal can be traced, a tree with rustling leaves, the bird that makes its nest or the monkey that springs within its branches - a fish, a cave, a pool, a river or a spring – each and all are made objects of prayer and propitiation. . . . strips of rag tied to a shrub, or a small pile of rocks, often suffice [as deities]. . . . The service offered in them [temples] consists either of much reckless noise and the chatter of texts by rote, or in the more elaborate ceremonials of dressing, undressing, washing, feeding and painting an idol, as children do their dolls, with sometimes an accompaniment of half-irrelevant citations from sacred writings. (105-113)

Deakin interprets Hindu rituals and ceremonies as mildly abhorrent child’s play in an antique land whose inhabitants are not human enough to always anthropomorphize their gods. His cultivated distance inhibits the intimacy and knowledge claimed by a translator, since he seems unaware of the non-anthropocentric sanatani mantra for remembering ancestors and the world: “Abrahma stamba paryantang jagat tripyatu”.¹⁷³ It could be rendered as “May the world,

¹⁷¹ The Aboriginal idea of a non-exclusive sacred pervading their geography had been disowned in the white Australian’s meaning universe, at least in the early years of the Federation or in the decades preceding it, with a corresponding public embarrassment about any notion that exceeded the rational. The older sacred had given way to the tyranny of the secular in white Australian public discourse. Dennis Kevans’ furious elegy writes back to this apathy:

“Where’s your wonder? Where’s your worship? Where’s your sense of holy awe?
When I see those little children torn apart by fear of war,
What is sacred to you, white man, what is sacred to your clan?
Are your totems rainbow-feathered? Is there dreaming in you, man?”

Dennis, Kevans. “Ah, White Man, Have You Any Sacred Sites?” Sydney, n.p.: 1985. Print.

¹⁷² Tirthas or sites of pilgrimage in India, besides being metaphysically conceived as liminal locations suspended between dual planes of existence, constitute a dense constellation mostly on the geographical fringes of the subcontinent, e.g. in Bengal, Rajasthan, Karachi, Kashmir, Gujarat, West Bengal, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. This is particularly relevant for the Shakti-piths and the chaturdhams (four especially revered sites of pilgrimage situated in the three littoral and one Himalayan Indian states of Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Orissa and Tamil Nadu). They could be read as signs mapping the presence, and the limits, of a sacred geography.

¹⁷³ The mantra belongs to pitritarpan – literally rendered as “prayer for the ancestors” – the annual sacred Hindu rite of remembrance and gratitude performed annually around October when the living are supposed to

from Brahman to the smallest reed, be fulfilled”. It tokens the non-exclusive sanctity assigned to each in the Hindu universe.

With similar uncomprehending impatience, Deakin lashes out at Benaras as a dystopia infested with noir images of filth and violence and a fanatical asylum to beggars, salvation-bartering brahmans, itinerant vendors, grotesque idols, tramp fakirs and the “sick and dying, brought in palanquins or carts for long distances to breath their last in the holy place” (126). The city houses the deformed and crippled, in keeping with the faith that it represents: “in the sacred city of Hinduism . . . the grossest superstition, the coarsest priestcraft, and the blindest fanaticism of millions of worshippers display the fruits of that ancient faith, which for thousands of years has held the peoples of the peninsula in its inflexible grip” (128). James Hingston showed enlightened disgust and scepticism for Benaras, yet he had bathed in the Ganges and was ready to drink from the Well of Purification.¹⁷⁴

As a builder of nations rather than a curious tourist ready to entertain otherness, Deakin’s stakes are higher. His own narrative of India lacks both ease and balance, wildly oscillating between the binaries of British civil and military triumph and native corruption/degradation in every aspect of their lives, including of course the spiritual. His response to Benaras as nightmare cures both himself and like-minded Australians of potential empathy with contemporary coloured India. It telescopes his routine attitude to other tirthas and temples in India. Irrigation becomes pretext for a counter-pilgrimage that could, at least textually, exorcise Deakin’s by now embarrassing bond with India.

The temple complex in Madurai, for example, is “as huge in plan, as confused in arrangement and as pitiful in its symbols as is Hinduism itself” (121). This “undigested doctrine” (115) in all its elasticity and fecundity is best exploited by the Brahmans, who feature as grasping villains in Deakin’s representation. They had systematised the most arrogant sacerdotalism that the world ever beheld (53) and devised a plural pantheon of gods, including haloed ancestors and local deities, in order to hold their sway in all possible contingencies. The faith as practised is one of credulity, defeat and withdrawal, inspired by terror and prospects of profit: “Hence Hinduism was and is a religion of fear – of timorous, trembling, often frantic, always helpless, fear. Its aim was and is merely propitiation, the purchase of a safe conduct,

recognise their debts and connections to ancestors immediate and non-related, and to the world at large. The ritual emphasizes the wisdom of collectivity and interdependence of cosmic creation; the personal gains the plural. For a detailed discussion of the verses uttered during pitritarpan and their implications for the contemporary enquirer, see

Bhaduri, Nrisinghaprasad. “Brahma Theke Trinaraji, Sabai Bhalo Theko.[May wellbeing pervade all, from reeds to the creator.]” *Anandabazar Patrika* [Kolkata] 7 Oct. 2010: 4. Print.

¹⁷⁴ Walker and Campbell “Up the Hooghly with James Hingston” 115.

and its brightest hope of blessedness is that of release, by means of sacrifice, from this haunted, hunted world of strife” (57). Deakin omits the Upanishadic concept of god as *ananda* or unadulterated bliss which queries his simplistic conclusion; he also elides the history of brahmans as propounders of many of the subversive socio-religious reform movements that defied caste, religious rituals and the myriad divides across India since the medieval period, e.g. Ramananda and Chaitanya, among others, of the medieval bhakti movement and Vidyasagar during the nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance. With naive certainty of judgement, he ghettoes native India to the perversely sacred and performs his intended sacrilege for all tenses. Invented as all that Australia is not or should not be, including the hideously faith-ridden, “real” India is locked into a relation of unending unease with his pre-natal nation-state. He amplifies personal resentment into national instinct by reserving for India the “satirical and cynical laugh” (109) of no human settler, but the giant Australian kingfisher; even the local fauna of that freshly-settled (white) continent must share in his ridicule.

Deakin’s present India is a forbidden “dank tropical jungle” of faiths with its impenetrable thickets, delicate flowers and poisonous berries occasionally touched by “gleams of splendid insight”; it patiently awaits cultivation/colonisation of “its soil of inexhaustible richness and fertility” (50) by modern-minded theosophists from the west and the Antipodes. Civilized India, excepting the Raj, can only be accessed in a time-machine in Deakin’s texts; it is curioed in bookish memories of his youth and private fantasies. He chooses ancient and medieval Indian architecture, both secular and sacred, to contain those rare ruptures in which he could betray his other, hidden pilgrimage to the dreamdom he had forged since adolescence. The reasons he cites for his rapture are both the historian’s and the art-connoisseur’s:

They [Indian architectural edifices] appeal to us both because they illustrate and express in the most faithful manner, and far more eloquently than any records, the exact phase of social and political life of which they were the fruit, and because of their own intrinsic merit as works of genius and taste. They are at once . . . intellectual and emotional, blending romance with reality, like the Waverley novels, or “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” their grace and vigour of form instinct with the spirit of imaginative poetry. (13-14)

Against the Victorian experience of progress and civilization/colonisation, Deakin wants to archive India as a romantic trope frozen in dreams and time: “It [India] has the fantastic grace, and the nearness in remoteness, that belong only to dreams” (6). Monuments and mausoleums nourish his motive. As anachronistic, context-starved relics which unsettled the imperial axiom of the sahib’s supremacy, the three-dimensional and all-too-visible structures

could be evoked as witnesses to the constitution of a very personal India. His references to architecture are replete with romantic allusions; they become holdalls ready to host his ever-imagined historical romances: “Flowers of prayer and fruits of pride, they combine to reveal, *as in a vision*, all that was loftiest in their designers, pure and severe in their creed, royal and gracious in their reign, profoundest in faith, or in empery haughtiest and most debonair” (emphasis added) (26). In keeping with normative Western romantic treatment of the oriental, the architecture is also feminised. He traces the Hindu influence in architecture in the red-brown hues, warm as the complexion of its maidens (29). The exquisitely feminine Taj Mahal is imagined as worthy mate to the male Acropolis of Athens (43) and compared to the Greek divinity of lust and beauty, Aphrodite, in Tennyson’s early romantic poem “Oenone”¹⁷⁵ (1833).

Deakin transports these edifices to his self-created phantasmic world of a classical indigenous evocative of fairies, dreams and the gothic. He rates the cave temple of Elephanta with its serene representation of the co-equal trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, as worthy of any race or faith of the past in its sublime freedom and boldness of design (60). Its silence and secluded grandeur transfer him to the remote antiquity of an imagined higher ideal, immune to his contemporary decadent version of Hinduism in India. Qutb Minar with its exquisite finish is enigmatical and lovely and the Taj Mahal on which he devotes overwhelmed pages, seems made of moonlight (41), its proportions “harmonized by necromantic skill” (43). Lifted out of context, these buildings are co-opted into a bubble-world, the romantic’s lush and kitschy orientalia.¹⁷⁶

Like no other building in its style and character, it [the Taj Mahal] does not appear to be a building, or to have been built, but to have unfolded like the fabled city [Troy] . . . Fairy-like as a mirage, resplendent as the creation of an ecstasy, with a witchery “of imagination all compact;” shaped from “such stuff as dreams are made of,” this sublime

¹⁷⁵ Deakin’s quoted line “Fresh as the foam, new bathed in Paphian wells” (*Temple and Tomb* 42) from the poem refers to Aphrodite and, by extension, to her architectural correlative, the Taj Mahal in *Temple and Tomb*.

¹⁷⁶ Amit Chaudhuri observes that the “orient” invented during the British colonial period tended to slant towards the trivial, the exotic or the hyper-religious in an identified other: “The Orient, in Europe, continued to remain the province of arcane scholars and gifted enthusiasts [during the nineteenth century]; in the realm of culture, it retained, and still does, the ethos of ‘Orientalia’. Unlike Greek and Latin antiquity, which becomes an indispensable resource and a romantic myth for modernism, the Orient, with a handful of exceptions, such as the final lines of *The Waste Land*, is never inserted into modernist self-consciousness. Its domain becomes, in Europe, largely the domain of popular culture, of kitsch and the exotic” (72-73).

See Chaudhuri, Amit. “A Pact with Nature.” *On Tagore*. 61-115.

The “oriental past” was, likewise, an imperial appendix. Amit Chaudhuri observes, “An overarching, to all outward purposes secular, narrative about the historical past, in the crude sense in which we understand it now, was absent from the consciousness of Indians at the time [during the first wave of oriental studies in India in the late eighteenth century]; and the spiritual and political history of India reconstructed by Orientalist scholars in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries supplied, substantially, that narrative . . . of a golden past” (20). Deakin followed European tradition in imagining his India.

conception . . . retains in the maturity and plenitude of its powers, something which blends with them the magic of “those first affections, those shadowy recollections,” which are “the fountain light of all our day. (42)

Shakespeare’s Prospero in *The Tempest* (c.1610-1611) and Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” (1807) come together as intertexts to decode the Taj as an Edenic dream “in a poet’s phantasy” (42), sculpted in stone. Translated into the romantic’s opiated dream regime,¹⁷⁷ the Taj and Qutb represent Deakin’s India at its most pliant – elusive, a function of the observer’s fantasies and at a safe remove from reality. Witch references recur in the chapter on Taj Mahal and in his allusion to Keats’ supernatural-streaked narrative poem “The Eve of St. Agnes” (1820). The Taj is compared to Madeline of the poem, undressed and in waiting to receive the lover of her dreams: “As if a rose should shut and be a bud again” (44).¹⁷⁸ Does Deakin play the lover-voyeur Porphyro who stole into Madeline’s chamber, bleeding the boundaries between dreams and reality? The rose in the above line colours his deeper desire for India; re-shut into a bud, it models his instinct to preserve India in self and Australian imagining as a journey reversed in time both historical and personal, an odyssey that might silence all that interrogates this image of alarming innocence.

To awakened Madeline, Porphyro declares himself as a “famish’d pilgrim”¹⁷⁹; Deakin too hails the Taj as “the heavenly city of pilgrims’ dreams” (43). Yet such unguarded epiphanies must always be shadowed by the pre-scripted obverse, the obsessive counter-pilgrimage in order to expunge old enchantments. Even Taj Mahal is not spared the routine. All Indian architecture, including the Qutb, Taj and other edifices at Lahore, Fatehpur Sikri, Delhi and Agra, are always already tainted as witnesses to the “tragic medley of coarseness, corruption, and intrigue which honeycombed court and harem, or of the web of favouritism and injustice which overspread the country, and made the misery of the millions who toiled, suffered, and died that their masters might indulge debauch and extravagance to the height, and

¹⁷⁷ Deakin compared the hue of the Taj to the whiteness of poppies (44). Opium for the British Romantics like Thomas De Quincey and Coleridge was a favoured metaphor for the impact of the Orient on the empire, therapeutic in small quantities but a compulsive narcotic when consumed in excess.

For a detailed discussion on the issue, see

Leask, Nigel. Introduction. *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. 1-12. Print.

For an exploration of the huge literal impact of opium in financing the British empire, see Amitav Ghosh’s well-researched Ibis trilogy – *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2015) – on opium grown and processed in British India by the East India Company and then traded to China.

¹⁷⁸ The line is quoted from Keats’ “The Eve of St. Agnes” line 243.

¹⁷⁹ Keats “The Eve of St. Agnes” line 339.

might rear memorials of their unscrupulous and relentless domination, so lovely that in their contemplation it should be impossible not to rejoice” (28). Their maligning is indispensable for his routine, while the praise is reluctant, occasional and proof of the translator’s white justice.

Australian travel writer James Hingston (1830-1902) had brought a huge literary repertoire to aid his appreciation of India; a translated version of *Arabian Nights*, Thomas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh* (1817) and Byron help him recreate Delhi, Agra or Lucknow as excursions into moth-eaten historical romance.¹⁸⁰ Deakin locates himself in this tradition of white translators and storytellers of authentic India for his Australian readers in *Temple and Tomb*. His book could also be read as an intertext; it is in conversation with Western imperial representations of routes, traversed or conjured, to the East, especially India. It embeds many of these accounts – quoting them frequently, sometimes without naming the author – and engages in fierce dialogue with a few of them. He quotes, among others, Max Mueller (2, 51), civil servant orientalist who had survived the 1857 Mutiny in India like Edwin Arnold (107) and Alfred Lyall (147), imperialists like Rudyard Kipling (151), Romantics like John Keats (43), P. B. Shelley (41), William Wordsworth (6), Thomas De Quincey (148) and Victorians Alfred Tennyson (42), Matthew Arnold (82)¹⁸¹ and Thomas Carlyle (47). Occasional references to Italian Giotto’s architecture (31), a melody of German composer Mozart (44) and the satirical-romantic lyricist, travel writer and later reluctant socialist Heinrich Heine (91) lend the pan-European glint of glamour and erudition to the core Anglo-Saxon tradition of understanding India and the Orient, in which this text locates itself.

Temple and Tomb, an interpretative travelogue of India, rehearses Deakin’s rootedness in European, particularly British, canons of literature, culture and art, as it were. Geographically doomed to Asian proximity, it is his desperate nationalist bid to belong to Europe and England. If not a regular conqueror-ruler of the East, Australia could at least gain authenticity as faithful translator/cultivator or alternatively, curator/parodist of India, trusted with curating it as detoxified antique Romantic curio for the colonising West.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Hingston, James. *The Australian Abroad: Branches from the Main Routes Round the World*. London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1879-80. Print. Chapters LXVIII to LIX narrate his travels in India.

¹⁸¹ Deakin quotes without naming from Arnold’s “Obermann Once More” (1867), a poem that records eastern inertia, isolation and weariness prior to the arrival of the west.

¹⁸² According to Nigel Leask, engagements with the orient in English Romantic literature found a precedent and alibi in the Athenian practice of incorporating the imagery of its subjugated enemies into its own culture, e.g. flowery eastern capitals from Persia. The method could hopefully contain and neutralise the threat of the other. Thus many of the romantics’ oriental poems “could be seen as the products of an imperial heraldry which incorporated the symbols of the conquered into its own coat of arms” (8). Deakin possibly wanted to insert the Australians as eager smiths of such heraldry for England and the rest of Europe; it would legitimise their

Anxiety to fit India in Western conceptual and cultural grids permeates the text. Tughlak Khan's pre-Mughal capital near modern Delhi reminds him of "barbaric Pompeii" (15), the charm of Kutb Minar surpasses anything of the kind in Europe, the Taj is closer to elegies like Tennyson's "In Memoriam," Shelley's "Adonais" and Milton's "Lycidas" than to Milan Cathedral, Notre Dame and Westminster Abbey, the Vedas are read as an earlier and more barbaric edition of the Psalms and even Gautama Buddha's emphasis on love as a religious ethic is translated to "an earlier version of the great Christian maxim" (89). Deakin situates Buddha in the tradition of Western doubters like Lucretius and Schopenhauer. Madurai the temple-town of south India is compared to Jerusalem in antiquity. Though Benaras is close to Naples in its imposing line of buildings along the graceful curve of Ganga and its narrow footways echo those of Venice, it is still "without a vestige of the charm of either of those lovely cities" (127). Only the local landscape, when suitably made up in moonlight, seems intimately Australian; the translation finally converges with the original: "The night journey [to Karli through the Western Ghats in a train], which possesses charms of its own, suppresses the bright greens of tropical foliage, and thus renders many of the aspects strikingly Australian" (65). An old desire for India is stitched to his nationalist agenda.

Deakin wants to secure the certainty of possessing the secret key to the subcontinent, unadulterated and authentic, for his Anglo Saxon peers. His text contests Max Mueller's "misleading" presentation of the average quality of Hinduism (50), given that the faith had declined beyond recognition in recent times.¹⁸³ He mostly images the subcontinent as a spectre comprising "the shells – the husks – of the glory that has departed" (26). His discovery of India

position as insiders. For further details, see Nigel Leask's introduction to *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire*.

Also, David Walker in *Anxious Nation* refers to India as the mostly harmless antique orient in Australian national imagery, with the exception of the 1857 moment. Japan and China were more sinister faces of the looming Asian threat in the Antipodean imaginary. For more details, see chapter two titled "The Antique Orient" in *Anxious Nation* 13-25.

¹⁸³ Amartya Sen classifies Western responses to the subcontinent and its intellectual traditions under three categories – exoticist, magisterial and curatorial approaches – in "Indian Traditions and the Western Imagination" ("The Argumentative Indian" 141-142). The exoticist attitude concentrates on the wondrous and strange aspects of India. The magisterial category strongly relates to the exercise of imperial power and sees India as a subject territory, from the vantage point of the British governors. A sense of superiority and guardianhood colours this approach. Both these approaches image India as an alien other of the West and exaggerate the non-material and arcane aspects of Indian traditions compared to its more rationalistic and analytical elements. The third, curatorial approach is the most catholic of the three, according to Sen. It is often driven by curiosity rather than direct collaboration with the power games and includes various attempts at noting, classifying and exhibiting diverse aspects of Indian culture.

Like the loyal white colonial, Deakin remains apparently committed to the exoticist and magisterial perspectives during his India visit, with bitter emphasis on the religious and the mystical in his reportage. But he has been a curator and student of India in various dimensions since childhood, and it is a quest he betrays in *Irrigated India* and *Temple and Tomb*, as I try to show in the chapter.

as obscure hieroglyphics with muted meanings sporadically foregrounds symbols, but hijacks their context. Other censors gather, to manipulate stories and make them conform to his Australian brand of orientalism which translates, alienates, absents the other and at times, quirkily correlates this other as a metaphor for the self. He mentions, for example, the multiple cities of Delhi right from the Pandava capital at Indraprastha, which he casually misspells as “Indrapat” (15), to the contemporary British-occupied city. Instead of playing guide through these histories, he focuses exclusively on the gloomy ruins of the walled fortress-capital erected by Tughlak Ghazi Khan, since it seems to best represent the claustrophobic rule of the stereotypical oriental usurper-tyrant. Again, he labels Hindu idols as “grotesque and unnatural” (59), refusing to engage with the non-anthropomorphic premise of sanatani divinity, which does not always forge symbols of the sacred in the image of man. Three-eyed Siva with the serpent about his neck and a necklace of skulls is rubbished with deliberate incomprehension: “Combining as he does the grotesque, the horrible, the studious, the painful, and the abnormal, he is perhaps the most typical god of the Hindus” (107). Deakin does not mention the interpretative tradition of the snake-garland as a symbol of wisdom, creativity, awakening of the dormant power of self-perception and the potential of infinite self-transformation, or that of the third eye as invoking an insight that can access the depth dimension of reality. His translation of India turns out to be also a refusal to translate.

The resultant chasm breeds counter-currents of confused admiration at some moments and rage at others. While he praises Srirangam, a famous Vishnu shrine in Tamil Nadu, as “a marvellous testimony to the vitality and influence of Hinduism” (122), India exceeds his grids of translation. Almost refuting his official stance of interpreting present day India as a “weltering heap of decomposing credulity” (56), he at one point pins his faith in the “wonderful fecundity and elasticity” (115) of the old place: “But just as India is noted for its conservatism, it is also noted for its capacity for sudden and widespread change, and it is always possible that at any moment a new Buddha, or a new incarnation of Vishnu, may appear, who shall sweep away many of the abuses of the present creed, while he preaches the new with the electric power of inspiration” (58). The subcontinent subsumes his translator’s pride and certainties.

Deakin however shows little deliberate acceptance of subcontinental methods of storytelling and translation. Lust for the original and the angst of forging a nation always already translated drive him to deride Indians as a translated people, living at many removes from their source culture:

The facts are that the philosophy and poetry of their far-off ancestors exist for most Hindus in a lesser degree than Shakespeare, Beethoven, and Kant exist for dwellers in

the back lanes of our cities or the average sundowner of the bush. They have little or no leisure for extras of this kind, when they have the aspiration, and for the most part are content to accept a second-hand judgement and knowledge of them, in the crudest forms, and from incompetent exponents. . . . [Their] only inkling of it is gained from the lips of a village priest. (51)

He refuses to recognise the sanatani knowledge paradigm of oral reception and dissemination/re-creation of stories. In such an epistemology of dissemination as re-creation, the receiver/translator is accepted as an insider and co-creator and no special status is reserved for the original,¹⁸⁴ which is often “lost” or subverted and pluralised in community-and-context-specific re-creations, reinterpretations and re-tellings through translation.

The Sinhalese followers of Buddha likewise disappoint Deakin; he finds that they have strayed a long distance from their founder, with their idolatry, covert devil worship and deification of “a white piece of bone about two inches long” (99) in the Dalada temple of Kandy, believed by many Buddhists to be the tooth of the master. ‘Real’ Buddha apparently needs Deakin to salvage him from eastern corruptions.

Deakin devotes two chapters to Buddhism and its current distortions in the subcontinent. He even attempts a brief unbiased biography of Buddha, since Edwin Arnold’s account *The Light of Asia* (1879) “requires to be regarded as poetry and not as history” (76). Casual slips occur in the narrative, Deakin maintains, for instance Gautama was not the son of a rich aristocratic landowner in Oudh, but a prince of the Sakya clan of Kapilavastu in present day Nepal. But the creed moves him with its compassion for the human condition. As I have shown before, Buddha who relinquished nirvana for uninvolved service to mankind lurks as the model in his diary entries, letters addressed to the self and in a text as early as *A New Pilgrim’s Progress*. For Deakin, Buddha was “a true Saviour and Redeemer, who reached the apotheosis of unselfishness, setting up an ideal, the beauty and grace of which uplifted him to be the “Light of Asia” for many hundred years” (83). Deakin sees him as a sceptic rather than a seer who could be aligned to western philosophers like Comte, the stoics and Marcus Aurelius. His was a philosophy rather than a faith, with a wide appeal beyond its pale. Buddhism had softened

¹⁸⁴ In *Gods, Demons and Others*, R. K. Narayan’s narrator is just such a village brahman and storyteller whom Deakin holds in open contempt. Narayan upholds him as the source of the secret enchantment of content in which many Indian villages lived: “The report [the myth/excerpt from epics] travels, like ripples expanding concentrically, until it reaches the storyteller in the village, by whom it is passed to the children at home, so that ninety per cent of the stories are known and appreciated and understood by every mortal in every home, whether literate or illiterate (the question does not arise)” (7). For more details see the delightful introductory chapter titled “The World of the Storyteller” in Narayan, R.K. *Gods, Demons, and Others*. 1964. New York: The Viking Press; New Delhi: Vision Books, 1987. Print.

Hinduism with its mild iconoclasm, freedom, equality, spiritual democracy and greater status accorded to women, despite obvious apprehensions of their distractive influence. Deakin excavates an ancient dialogue between Buddhism and Catholicism. Apparently, St. John of Damascus had written a history of Buddha under the name of Josaphat in the eighth century and had been duly canonized at Rome in consequence.¹⁸⁵ If nominal Asian followers of Buddhism have either deserted the creed or abandoned its spirit by reverting to prayers, rituals and superstitions of the older faiths, Deakin is keen to adopt the original ideologue and exemplar as icon for self and the Antipodes:

The most faithful disciples of the great teacher to-day are not necessarily those of his own race or country. . . . Surely to a creed so gentle and good in its aspirations much extravagance and much failure may be forgiven, and from it there may be much learned by those who, like the great apostle, become debtors both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, closing no door of the mind to Divine Light, and welcoming all that witnesses to Divine Love, without narrowing too jealously the channels by which these reach us. (89-90)

In a rare interpolation in this otherwise white ethnocentric project, Deakin inserts himself, at least ideologically, in Buddha's non-exclusive legacy of humanity. In a Salim Sinai-ish quirk, he transplants his personal fascination with Buddha and his dharma in the spiritual void of white Australian public space. The flexibly defined creed, along with its agnosticism, has since remained a very visible link between India and Australia, peaking in popular faith and intellectual fashions in Australia during the 1980s. Buddhism, as Inez Baranay notes in her novel *With the Tiger*,¹⁸⁶ a re-working of E. M. Forster's Indo-American encounter novel *The Razor's Edge* (1944) adapted to Australia of the 1980s and 1990s, provided many Australians "a cool substitute for retirement, a chance to do whatever you felt like, a way of aligning yourself with the spiritual against the religious, a badge of credibility and good character" (118).

Deakin establishes himself as the pioneer official retriever and importer of original Buddhism for Australia. Small wonder he is allergic to competing Tibetan or Sri Lankan interpretations with their multiple-headed Buddhas and imagined tooth and footprints:

¹⁸⁵ Pursuers of this strand of connect in comparative philosophical and religious studies could look up the full text of an English edition of St. John's *Baarlam and Ioasaph*. Trans. G. R. Woodward and H. Mattingly. London: Heinemann, 1914. *Ebook and Texts Archive*. California Digital Library, 19 Aug. 2009. Web. 13 May 2011.

Ioasaph is apparently a corruption of the title Bodhisattva.

¹⁸⁶ Baranay, Inez. *With the Tiger*. Noida: Harper Collins, 2008. Print.

“Whatever it was in its origin, it is now, in all its popular forms and public manifestations, as gross in its superstitions and as feeble in its spiritual ideals as the other half-savage creeds of half-civilized Asia” (103). He alone must qualify as an exact renderer of this “ancient gospel, pure, pitiful, and loving” (103). It matches his quest for an ideal without divinities, which could further season the bush-bred independence and scepticism of Australia purified.

If “original” Buddha be one portable and healthy icon that Deakin was keen to adopt for self and the Antipodes, the other absolutely indispensable mythology is provided by the 1857 Mutiny¹⁸⁷ and its white heroes, to whom Deakin devotes his penultimate and longest chapter. His perspective is that of an Australian observer, apparently unbiased, yet diligent in forging an oriental demonology he thought to be crucial for Anglo-Saxon nationalism in Australia. Of the many dimensions of his India visit, we have explored the tirtha aspect in its dual mode. Deakin’s tour comprised an overt pilgrimage to British India webbed into a cartographic whole through irrigation canals and rails and a second, unnamed one to subcontinental spiritual centres and architectural sites. In the latter journey which could also be configured as a counter-pilgrimage, he digs up old enchantments and publicly pigmies most of them or contains them at best as curios without context, providing his dream-nation with the much-needed inoculation against the influence of an east that is not merely antique but too close for comfort. His overt pilgrimage instead idolises the Anglo-Saxon victory and anoints its 1857 martyr knights as the new icons. Deakin cites Kanpur, Delhi and Lucknow as compulsory shrines for the Australian, since these cities witnessed astounding courage and individual heroism of the “inexorable whites” (142), offset by shrewd native zealots ever ready to betray.

1857 had resonated with Australian men of Deakin’s vintage. As David Walker notes in *Anxious Nation*, by the turn of the century, the 1857 Mutiny had become an uncomfortable metaphor for the Australian condition: “Could Australia itself become an embattled community seeking to repulse surrounding Asiatic nations? Wasn’t Australia surrounded by teeming Asia in much the same way as the Residency at Lucknow had been surrounded and outnumbered? Was a tenacious identification with an Empire that forced itself on Asia the best strategy for Australia?” (28).

¹⁸⁷ The term “Mutiny” for the 1857 uprising reflects the empire perspective which branded the event as a mere military upheaval, robbing it thus of the political edge. Historians and thinkers since then have termed it variously according to their locations and ideologies; some believe it to be a “popular revolt” of the civilian population, Karl Marx could see in it elements of “national revolt” while Veer Savarkar, a political prisoner of the British and later ideologue of the RSS, branded it the “First War of Indian Independence”. For more details, see Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. “Eighteen-Fifty-Seven and Its Many Histories.” *1857: Essays from Economic and Political Weekly*. By Sameeksha Trust. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2008. 1-24. Print. I have used the term “Mutiny” as per Deakin’s viewpoint; the term resonates too with tender irony on the limits of that vision and the necessity he felt for such limits in forging Australian nationhood at the turn of the century.

Peter Cochrane, in his history of Australian democracy, notes how the Mutiny and patriotic funds for British soldiers in India brought onto the same platform arch political rivals divided on the electoral bill, like Sir Daniel Cooper and editor of *The Herald*, John West. Unsubstantiated tales of macabre massacres by Indians were helpful reminders of the bonds of tradition, identity, and phobia of the barbarous colony binding the white Australian tribe, “a union rooted in their grasp of race and faith, something above and beyond the touch of parliamentary warfare”.¹⁸⁸ G. W. Burston and H. R. Stokes, two members of the Melbourne Bicycle Club, cycled to all the Mutiny sites and massacre scenes in the late 1880s, claiming 1857 as their story.¹⁸⁹ Post-*Temple and Tomb*, Australian historians like A. W. Jose in *The Growth of Empire* (1897) and formidable public figure, debater and educator W. H. Fitchett in *The Tale of the Great Mutiny* (1902) selected the Mutiny as a core entry in Antipodean race-and-empire mythologies that would hopefully arouse new generations with its posited binary of British imperial heroism and Hindu treachery/misogyny.¹⁹⁰ Mutiny tremors featured in Hingston as well. He compared Kanpur, the shrine of his reckoning with the Mutiny, to *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* in a special chapter. Yet Hingston’s 1857 was a touristic allusion almost elided in an otherwise picturesque reverie.¹⁹¹ Deakin, perambulating the Mutiny memorials and playing pilgrim and amateur historian, inserted 1857 and thus a curious dependence on India, into Australian self-definition.

This freshly defined Indian pilgrimage for Project Australia came ready with legends of larger-than-life Anglo-Saxon heroes, worthy enemies and epic-style war-scarred sites:

Cawnpore to-day is distinguished only by its memorials of shame and sorrow. All other traces of its infamous butchery have disappeared. At Lucknow the ruins of the Residency and adjoining buildings mark one of the most glorious sites in modern English story, where 1,600 men, in a group of brick buildings upon a slight ridge, bounded by a hastily constructed rampart, overlooked all along one side by native houses filled with sharpshooters, and attacked by thousands of rebels well equipped with artillery and skilled in engineering, held out for three months, although Henry Lawrence, who prepared it, reckoned it fit for only a fortnight’s siege. Facades pitted with bullets and walls torn with shot still attest the severity of that terrible trial and the magnificent courage of its defenders. At Delhi there remains the breach in the wall by the Cashmere

¹⁸⁸ Cochrane, Peter. *Colonial Ambition: Foundations of Australian Democracy*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006. 474. Print.

¹⁸⁹ Walker *The Anxious Nation* 29.

¹⁹⁰ Walker *The Anxious Nation* 27.

¹⁹¹ Walker and Campbell “Up the Hooghly with James Hingston” 105-125.

gate, and many rude gashes about it from a cannonade, after which six dauntless Britons, under a rain of bullets, blew in its iron studded doors. (137)

In an original twist, Deakin inserts India as surrogate site for the ur-myth of the Australian secular sacred based on Anglo-Saxon military prowess, prior to the Anzac. He foreshadows sacralisation of the Anzac campaigns: white Australia's very own "creation myth"¹⁹² and a repeat-motif of invasive valour in someone else's homeland in the east. In the penultimate chapter, Deakin formally embeds India in the Australian nation-story, as "the most picturesque theatre in the world" in which brown enemies are vanquished and white nationalism, the premise for claiming Australia as an Anglo-Saxon reserve, kindled.

Deakin's 1857 narrative pretends to be neither subjective nor hyperbolic; it proposes a rational discussion of what he believes to be an irrational event. The opponents are cast in epic style. Against an "enormous, ill-organized, irresolute but inflammable population, including ambitious peoples of fine fighting quality and high intelligence" are poised "a handful of daring whites . . . determined by indomitable courage, inexhaustible resource, and superhuman energy to dominate the mighty empire and master its innumerable hordes" (130). Causes of the mutiny are enlisted e.g. the humiliation of alien rule, hatred of infidels, close bond among well-trained native regiments recruited from special castes, the local desire to revert to original anarchy and the phobia of drastic change initiated by the British rule through social reforms, introduction of railways and telegraph lines and the rapid annexation of princely territories. Despite the obvious condescension for undeserving Indians, Deakin also notes as an "impartial foreigner" the "cold and haughty character [of the British administration], its want of touch with native aspirations, its almost contemptuous indifference to their prejudices and ideals" (133). His conscience cleared with the wry Australian's detached footnote, Deakin is swift to switch to the usual posture of racial allegiance. The cool and quiet Caucasian had failed to fathom the credulous, subtle and treacherous oriental mind fermented with prophecies, rumours and omens, he posits (135). The rebellion with its violence and intensity caught the rulers unaware.

Deakin depicts the mutiny as limited mostly to ambitious Brahmans and warlike Muhammadans, with little sympathy from the commercial and educated classes who appreciated the enlightened British rule, except in the North-west Provinces where the agitation was wholesale. Stereotypical "good natives" like the Sikh and Goorkha sepoys or the princes of independent states, though "ruthless and barbarous" in general (140), remained loyal during the crisis and helped annihilate the mutineers. But the British led the way in the hostile tropical

¹⁹² Lake, Marilyn. "What have you done for your country?" *What's Wrong With Anzac*. 1-23. 1.

heat and terrain, fighting poor logistics and meagre numbers with “dauntless courage and inexhaustible endurance upon the most splendid scale” (145). Deakin chants the names of the “galaxy of heroes who sprang into the arena to retrieve the day” (143): the list as Australian national mnemonic includes Herbert Edwards and Nicholson in Punjab under John Lawrence; Gubbins and Inglis in Lucknow under Henry Lawrence; Havelock and Moore in Kanpur; Barnard, Chamberlaine, Cotton, Baird Smith and Taylor in Delhi. Hodson who shot the Mughal princes and Neill, the relentless executioner of insurgents, along with Sir Hugh Ross and Colin Campbell, are hailed as “the giants of the time”. The mutiny is also a vicarious test and triumph of Australian nationhood within the British imperialist structure. And not only in terms of race. The epic battle was not without Australian representation: Sir Henry Norman, the Governor of Queensland, “was in the struggle from the commencement, and took part in many of its most striking events” (143). Australia has a legitimate share in this historical romance, which vies with the Crusades as a crucial episode in the conflict between East and West (145).

Violence and retribution, for the right causes and on the right side, are legitimised and enshrined. Deakin rationalises the carnage by the retaliating British who did not exempt hospital inmates or helpless citizens, given the natives’ “butchery of their officers . . . [and] the murder of unoffending civilians, of mothers in whose households they had lived, and of children whom they had nursed and fondled. In some few cases consideration was exhibited, but in most the unhappy matrons and maidens who fell into their hands were only permitted to die after having suffered the last outrages from the ruffians of the rebel camp” (138). Like the rumour-addict Indians of his sketch, Deakin circulates vague yet culturally sensational myths about the sexual violation of white women, a suggestive portent of the state of things to come if Asians were allowed to infiltrate Australia. ‘Women and children’, as Forster observes in *A Passage to India*, is a “phrase that exempts the [white] male from sanity” (162).

In *Allegories of Empire*, Jenny Sharpe contends that no case of Indian rape of white women can be substantiated through the entire period of the Mutiny and speculates on the reasons thereof.¹⁹³ Deakin, however, reinforces this ultimate horror in white narratives with anecdotes of Nana Sahib’s betrayal of a written pledge of safe conduct. Fire was opened upon the helpless English decoyed from the entrenchments at Kanpur, he memorialises, while their bereaved wives and children were afterwards massacred at his orders by slaughtermen from the bazaar. Once again, like the mysterious Nana himself, who could not be captured after his

¹⁹³ Sharpe, Jenny. *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 67. Print.

defeat in the Mutiny and continued to inspire multiple narratives, both British and Indian, about his imagined afterlives post-1857,¹⁹⁴ his role in these massacres could never be determined. Some historians think that no definitive evidence have ever been found to prove that Nana sahib had pre-planned or ordered the killing of the British soldiers in Satichaura Ghat and that it was largely a result of confusion.¹⁹⁵ Others maintain that it was not clear as to who ordered the Bibigar massacre of the white women and children.¹⁹⁶

Nonetheless, Nana Sahib supplied Deakin the much-needed rallying point for Australian unity against threatening outsiders. He renders with righteous relish the spectacle of bodies swinging from trees and gallows loaded afresh each morning when British soldiers visited grim judgement on reconquered cities, and evokes images of Victorian domestic daintiness to justify the revenge: “A tress of child’s hair has had its hecatomb of victims; a lady’s glove or trinket has steeled hearts against mercy” (139). Deakin’s “fantasies of rape and counter-rape, seduction and counter-seduction, castration and counter-castration”, as Ashis Nandy would wryly observe, belong to the empire myths of violence/virility spawned whenever “Western man has gone beyond his narrow cultural borders to civilize, populate or self-improve”.¹⁹⁷

In narrating 1857 for his Australian readers in *Temple and Tomb*, Deakin retains the apparent rhetoric of sanity. But his catalogue of fearless Anglo-Saxon manhood and native perfidy transmute an empire myth into a subconsciously planted Australian addiction to the racially pure nation. He locates 1857 along with the Crusades and other hallowed episodes of conflict between East and West, including the valiant Greek defence against “Asiatic hordes” (146) commanded by Persian emperor Xerxes at the battle of Thermopylae fought during the second Persian invasion of Greece in 480 BCE.¹⁹⁸ The aura of classical Greece perhaps dims the flawed premise of the comparison, since during the 1857 uprising, the West was the invader-conqueror and Indian sepoys defenders of freedom of their homeland. The

¹⁹⁴ For details on Nana Sahib’s life, his role in 1857 and disappearance post defeat, as well as contending versions of his post-1857 afterlife, see

Gupta, Pratul Chandra. *Nana Saheb and the Rising at Cawnpore*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963. Print.

¹⁹⁵ Hibbert, Christopher. *The Great Mutiny: India, 1857*. New York: Viking Press, 1978. 194. Print.

¹⁹⁶ English, Barbara. “Debate: The Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857.” *Past and Present* 142.1 (1994): 169-178. Print.

¹⁹⁷ I have here quoted Ashis Nandy on the staples of colonisation that had shaped the Western concept of activism, identity and manhood for the past two centuries, as recorded in *The Intimate Enemy*, a study of colonial relations and its complex influence on the selfhood, coping strategies, ethics and ideologies of both colonised and coloniser.

For further details, see Nandy *The Intimate Enemy* 55

¹⁹⁸ For more details on the battle of Thermopylae, as depicted by Herodotus and other Greco-Roman historians, and the cycle of associated metaphors for east-west confrontations generated across centuries in Europe, see Cawkwell, George. *The Greco-Persian Wars*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.

Herodotus. *The History of Herodotus: Polymnia*. Trans. George Rawlinson. Greek-Texts.com & Greece Http Ltd. Web. 10 May 2012.

Thermopylae model of doomed heroism against overwhelming odds translates 1857 into a war museum with a removed setting and epic apparatus and helps interpolate Deakin's prospective Australian nation into mainstream Western history and its dominant politics of memories. The Greco-Persian military metaphor for Australia's vicarious triumph against Indians in 1857 anticipates the pivotal racial assumption in Charles Bean's monumental Anzac expeditionary epic-history, "that a 'crusade' was needed to keep Australia 'a white man's land'".¹⁹⁹

Having reproduced the Raj narrative of the plunder and pillage by armed indigenous bands in the country during the few successful months of rebellion, Deakin decides that Anglo-Saxon rule remains an incomparably superior alternative for India. His concluding chapter is an ode to the great engineering works of the white invader devoted to public weal, as opposed to the self-absorbed, "merely ornamental or venerable" Mughal memorials or giant-gated temples of the South (148). British railways, roads and telegraphs have knitted India into one national whole and their diversified irrigation schemes with "the most ingenious and often colossal groups of dams, aqueducts, super-passages, weirs and other works" (149) sustain millions; they have forged the modern Indian nation, he contends, if at all it exists. His book is overtly a pilgrim's memoir on the utopian welfare governance and progress imposed by "an alien Government more than paternal in wise and bold provision for the peoples whom it has subdued" (149). It manages to dissolve India into a diluted translation of the Centre/Original, catapulting Australia into the potential role of translator-interpreter.

Yet the Raj also remains Deakin's medium for the catharsis of deeper tensions, between Australia and England, India and Australia and the tenses that he so frequently switches. For Deakin dreams of a non-exclusive vision for the future, with suitably differential equations of course for cohorts of the rulers and the ruled. England must shed its insularity and blend with its "offspring oversea" in Australia and the United States (150-151); this invincibly virile Anglo-Saxon empire could then eternally lay "his armed hands upon India and Egypt, the two most ancient, conservative, intellectually rich and historically attractive of the great nations of the East" (150). Contact with coloured colonies must operate through the language and technology of violence and power, masked as an idiom of freedom/ free trade and progress. In

¹⁹⁹ Lockhart "Absenting Asia" 277.

Lockhart explains that the British War Office had manipulated the Australian fear of Japanese military power as the rising Asian threat, in order to make secret arrangements with Australian ministers before the First World War: "They [the Australian military] would prepare an expeditionary force for prospective imperial operations – such as the war with Germany that was already anticipated – in the hopeful expectation that the British would reciprocate when the much-anticipated Japanese attack was finally launched in the Pacific. . . . Fear of Japan determined the nature of Australia's involvement in World War I" (278). The Anzacs, which comprised troops from the AIF, and the Australian military strategy during the First World War were thus a Britain-orchestrated fallout of the Australian fear of Japan.

Deakin's framework, 1857 had earned India the privilege of being in long-term siege under the British empire.

Australia is grouped with the colonisers; in this context discussions of autonomous Indo-Australian engagement are misfit. Yet Deakin cannot entirely avoid that trope. Situating himself in the shadow of the antique Orient, he notes the inevitability of the more meaningful, plural connections with India, presently displaced to the future, since he must invest in colourphobic political boundaries for his nation: "Politically and intellectually, as well as geographically, we are already allied" (151).

*Let us go then, play tramlines and couplets*²⁰⁰

Such is possibly the dynamics of unending desire and distance between Deakin's twin and paralleled dreams, India and Australia. Like Sinai, he too cannot consolidate his contraries on self and India into a rational whole; *Temple and Tomb* and *Irrigated India*, texts meant to contain the country in the reason-and-progress paradigm, spill into the irrational. He thought he had to disown his Indianness in order to give currency to his concept of the authentic Australian,²⁰¹ but could neither make India disappear altogether nor contain it in his personal or the national white Australian present. India always hovered on the edges, representing for him lessons to be learnt from the past and an academic, strategic and business partner for Australia in the future; yet India and Australia could not be housed in the same tense. The more Deakin banished his fascination with India from public life, the more it shaped and haunted his vision for Australia as shadow-narrative. The throes of this lifelong self-destructive repression and disintegration might have exacted its emotional and cognitive price, for towards the end of his life Deakin fell apart.

I had begun this chapter with an allusion to Mrs. Moore, whose absence from Dr. Aziz's trial planted her as a mythical, almost transcendental presence among Indians. Yet she had been shaken in the Marabar caves by the eternal, indifferent echo which reduced all experience, sublime and banal, to the nameless anonymity of "boum". The caves robbed her of her hold on life and reality; it stole her grace, tenderness and conviction in Christianity. The terror of that encounter mocked her earlier promise of friendship and sincerity to Dr. Aziz and, metaphorically, to India. Apathy and cynicism overwhelmed her and she escaped from India, leaving Aziz to cope with the allegation of having tried to assault Adela Quested. Mrs. Moore

²⁰⁰ My translation of a Bengali poem by Srijaato, used as a background song in *Autograph*. Dir. Srijit Mukherjee. Perf. Prosenjit Chatterjee, Nandana Sen, Indraneil Sengupta. Mohta and Mantena, 2010. Film.

²⁰¹ The sentence slightly rephrases Ashis Nandy's observations about Rudyard Kipling: "Kipling had to disown his Indianness to become his concept of the true European" in *The Intimate Enemy* (85).

died on her way back to England. “The wonderful India of her opening weeks, with its cool nights and acceptable hints of infinity, had vanished.”²⁰² The country had lurched out of control and rendered insignificant her parameters of existence. Compassion did not suffice to domesticate it, just as reason, anthropology and textbook orientalism failed Deakin in his assessment, and finally, engagement with India.

Deakin’s Indias – fantasized, mutated and hidden – leapt beyond Edward Said’s monochromatic orient²⁰³ or the villainous Asiatic double, or even Deakin’s pre-script of invisibilised support for his (white) Australia, to play intimate trustee of heterodox possibilities expunged from the early twentieth century exclusive, official version of the Antipodean nation-state premised on prohibitions and certainties. Resisting the pre-scripted ghetto of the other, the subcontinent modelled for his Australia the philosophical concept embedded in “antar”, the Indo-European etymological root of “other”. The other co-habits with the self, indeed constitutes it and visibilises the inevitable ironies of this constitution in the Sanskrit cognate “antar”, since “antar” connotes both “within” or “heartspace” and “distance” or “difference”.

Deakin had etched India as the zero in his scheme, that placeholder with infinite potential which defines absence and positionally decides the weight of other numbers in the decimal system.²⁰⁴ The absence could be reinvented as the past, his dreams, the eclectic alternative to his project purity, obscene ghetto of the puerile sacred or the emptied centre and terra nullius; in all of these avatars, it preludes his numero uno, the Australian Federation. Deakin sought in India his looking glass into other realities, liminalities and perhaps even the non-real; he had proposed it as Australia’s “magic mirror” in *Irrigated India*.²⁰⁵ India subverted the mirror metaphor for Deakin and his Australia with a non-formulaic twist. Closeted as the antithesis to his vision for Australia, it loomed instead as the braided shadow narrative, elegy and sly witness amplifying the secret absences and contested histories stitched to Deakin’s imagined nation of certainties. Deakin’s India ended up playing resistant reminder to the rainbow colours, realities and alterities driven underground, away from the public and private domains of the colour-bleached Federation he had legislated, and avowedly imagined.

²⁰² Forster *A Passage to India* 140.

²⁰³ This Orient, as Amit Chaudhuri observes, is a static and blurred construct “whose relationship to European or Oriental culture, as may be the case, is defined almost exclusively by questions of power and appropriation” (“A Pact with Nature” 64).

²⁰⁴ Zero is termed the placeholder in mathematics since it decides the value of other integers in the decimal system, e.g. 102 is not equal to 12. 0 here plays the role of placeholder.

²⁰⁵ Deakin *Irrigated India* 16.

India and an Inauthentic Australian's Routes through Australianness¹ – a Study of M. L. Skinner's Anuvadic Texts

Of India and Mollie

I refer to M. L. Skinner (1876-1955) as Mollie in my chapters, not merely because her friends, peers and later writers or editors referred to her ubiquitously by that name, but also since the pet name seems to perform the 'lack' – of forbidding distance or stellar success – that shaped her life and writings in contrast to, say, Alfred Deakin. How does one trace "India" in Mollie? One can use text-mining software that scours for the word in her oeuvre with unflinching accuracy; it would occur in the highest frequency in her novel *Tucker Sees India* and lightly pepper some of her other texts. The digital project, however smart, would not be able to detect that India had midwived Mollie's first novel, *Letters of a V.A.D.*. She found the courage and freedom to write her first book here, yet the text promises to protect the secret. In *Letters*, France surrogates as ostensible context of her India experience during the First World War.

Unless I story Mollie's failure to emerge as 'authentic' chronicler of her nation in fiction and explore the roots/routes to that failure, investigating the India connection in her works remains a cosmetic exercise. She had found in the British-occupied territory a twin for the humiliations she lived and the textual space she surrendered to aggressive custodians and visionaries of Australianness; the subcontinent and its sly ontologies of survival had conditioned her response to colonisation in some of her texts like *Black Swans*, *Men Are We* and *The Fifth Sparrow*. It inspired her role as subversive anuvadak who betrayed the certainties and violence of dogma in these texts, just as it returned her to non-exclusive, pluralistic and shape-shifting representations of the Antipodean nation in her later works like *Tucker Sees India*, *WX – Corporal Smith* and *Where Skies Are Blue*, not all of which mention India.

Besides providing the obvious and closeted settings respectively of *Tucker Sees India* and *Letters of a V.A.D.*, India surged as secret signature through myriad masks, metaphors, strategies and locales throughout her oeuvre. It had designed her lifelong orbit of imagining Australianness and cannot be isolated to the novel that a piece of software might tick. I have used Indic categories like *apar*, *mamatva*, *anuvad*, *viraha*, *kalpana* besides western critical

¹ I use the term "Australianness" to refer to multiple, often competing ideological constructs of the Antipodean nation-state and citizens in its art, histories, narrative and politics. Thus, while mainstream models of Australianness which were proposed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries built on expulsions – of women, intimacy, city, suburbs, aborigines and coloured immigrants/inhabitants – and were driven by the ethics and aesthetic of purity, Mollie Skinner's hybrid versions explored a polyphonic, pluralist alternative.

paradigms in this chapter and the next, in order to navigate the embedded presence of India in her life and works.

“Who sees Self as Other, Other as Self, / who sees day as night, night as day, / whose mind does not dance between opposites”² – the fourteenth century Kashmiri mystic poet Lal Ded thus sees the seer.³ Ashis Nandy chooses this reluctance to abide by binaries and boundaries as a non-negotiable trait of “Indianness”,⁴ otherwise an incorrigibly plural universe:

Probably the uniqueness of Indian culture lies not so much in a unique ideology as in the society’s traditional ability to live with cultural ambiguities . . . Probably, the culture itself demands that a certain permeability of boundaries be maintained in one’s self-image and that the self be not defined too tightly or separated mechanically from the not-self.⁵

If the signifier “India” accommodates paradoxes embedded within the self and its lived ideals and inspires osmosis between the self and her other, then India and Mollie in her self-contradictory richness had been “in each other all along”,⁶ beyond her India-based novels, *Letters of a V.A.D.* (1918) and *Tucker Sees India* (1937), and the four-year stint as nurse at various hospitals in the subcontinent between 1914-1917. It provided her a palimpsest of dissent against the cultural pathology of the nascent Federation which tended to hurtle into a

² Lal Ded, *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Ded*. Poem 109. Trans. Ranjit Hoskote. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2011. 111. Print.

³ The ability to exceed rigidities of the self, inhabit alternative positions in apparent conflict and engage the polarities in dialogue, have been posited as the best way to “samatva” or “samarasa yoga” by Abhinavagupta – Kashmiri philosopher, aesthetic theorist, mystic and proponent of Saiva monism – in his magnum opus *Tantraloka*. The Sanskrit term “samatva” could be rendered as equivalence; Abhinavagupta proposes it as the condition of existence/intelligence that cognizes connections and crafts conversations between the apparently distant and disparate, in its aspiration to otherness and equity between self and its various others. For a related philosophical discussion of samatva as yoga i.e. the wisdom of connection in the context of pre-election politics in India, see

Chakravarti, Arindam. “Tritiyer Sandhane: Kshamata, Mamata na Samata?” [“In quest of the third: power, mineness or samatva?”]. *Ananadabazar Patrika* 16 April 2014, Kolkata ed.: 4. Print.

⁴ This is not to suggest that there could be any inviolable category or unitary model of “Indianness”; indeed, the recent bouts of rampant racism against north-easterners and Africans across India have multiplied divisions and boundaries, adding to the older atrocities around caste and colour. However, artists, thinkers, historians and travellers, from Tagore and Gandhi to Amitav Ghosh, Ashis Nandy and historian Tapan Roychowdhury, have traced continuities in the ideas and realities that inform India as an ideational, trading, territorial or even academic geography. While crafting her responses to colonised India, Mollie seems to have arrived at a personal version of the continuities that constitute her India as also anchor much of her oeuvre, as explored in this chapter and the next. In the manuscript of her autobiography *The Fifth Sparrow*, for example, she details her experiences as a nurse at Peshawar, Kashmir, Delhi and Bombay, but also reads in “the beautiful India” a “Spiritual Light” – possibly her code for the counter-ethics and aesthetic of suffering and receptiveness to alternatives and plurality that she translates in her fiction.

See Skinner, M.L. *The Fifth Sparrow*. N.d. MN 186. TS 1396A/64. Battye Library, Perth. 187-188.

⁵ Nandy *The Intimate Enemy* 107.

⁶ The excerpt is quoted from Persian poet and mystic Rumi (1207-1273) on love that exceeds the limits imposed by space and time: “Lovers don’t finally meet somewhere. /They’re in each other all along”.

Rumi, Jalal-al-Din. *The Essential Rumi*. Trans. Coleman Barks. San Francisco: Harper, 1995. 106. Print.

cartography of reductions and exclusions. And it provoked fresh readings of the nascent Australian nation state in her oeuvre, as an “open, anarchic federation of [divergent] sub-cultures and textual authorities”, incidentally Ashis Nandy’s key to understanding and interpreting Hinduism.⁷

India for Mollie was a pluripotent word, an ever-mutating maya. The subcontinent – hybrid, centreless and syncretic – resisted classification.⁸ A colony with its indigenous knowledge and education systems disowned by the state since the 1835 Macaulay Minutes⁹ and its wealth siphoned off systematically to sponsor burgeoning English industries, India could house Mollie’s pain and violations and protect her against failures of intimacy and nurture, meaningless silence and emptiness. It is here that Mollie the spinster of the cleft lips, anguished by her identity, background, ambition to be a writer and profession as a nurse, birthed herself as novelist, detailing the desires and defeats of her life in the debut novel, the masked testimonial *Letters*. India initiated her into coping strategies for humiliation and failures; they pervaded her fiction. Ashis Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy* expounds the philosophy of apparent passivity during crises and persecution, one of the subcontinental legacies Mollie appears to have inherited in defying defeat, especially in the three novels she

⁷ Ashis Nandy uses the phrase while situating the Bengali scholar and atheist social activist Vidyasagar (1820-1891) in the legacy of competing models open to re-interpretations and dialogue.

See *The Intimate Enemy* 28.

⁸ On 19.6.2013, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar observed during the debate on the confidence motion moved and adopted by the Bihar legislative assembly that basic values of egalitarianism, pluralism and inclusiveness constitute indispensably “Bharat ka darshan” or the idea of India.

See Kumar, Nitish. “There is only one idea, the idea of India.” Translated and edited excerpts of the intervention made by Nitish Kumar on 19.6.2013 in the Bihar legislative assembly. *The Hindu* 20 June 2013, Kolkata ed.: 7. Print.

⁹ As Law Member of the Governor General’s Council of India, T. B. Macaulay in his 1835 Minutes on Education recommended the re-allocation of funds which the English East India Company was required by the British Parliament to spend on education in India. He argued that the funds must be invested to educate a section of the colonised in European knowledge-systems with English as the medium of instruction. These local janissaries of the Raj would enable smooth running of the empire: “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect”. He considered it noxious to encourage in India the study of Sanskrit and Arabic “barren of useful knowledge . . . [and] fruitful of monstrous superstitions”.

See Macaulay, T. B. “Minute by the Hon’ble T. B. Macaulay, dated the 2nd February 1835.” *Selections of Educational Records Part I (1781-1839)*. Ed. H. Sharp. Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1920. Reprint. New Delhi: National Archives of India, 1965. 107-117. Print.

Macaulay’s Minutes formed the basis of the English Education Act of 1835 sanctioned by the then Governor General of India, William Bentinck. It ended debates on the medium of instruction in almost all government-aided educational institutions and alienated the new educated elite of the subcontinent from the local classical epistemologies, philosophies, literatures, sciences, aesthetics and traditions of diversity and debate. The Act perpetuated the subcontinental’s faith in the axiomatic superiority of the Occident by severing her linguistic and epistemological access to the entire complex of Indian folk and classical knowledge-systems and worldviews. It continues to profoundly impact perceptions on the medium, mode, curricula and policies of education in India post colonies.

published after *Letters of a V.A.D.*:

splitting of one's self, to protect one's sanity and to ensure survival, makes the subject an object to himself and disaffiliates the violence and the humiliation he suffers from the 'essential constituent' of his self. It is an attempt to survive by inducing in oneself a psychosomatic state which would render one's immediate context partly dreamlike or unreal. (109)

Mollie has been spurned by authors and critics, ranging from D.H. Lawrence to Vance Palmer and Mary Durack, the editor of her posthumously published autobiography, for the "dreamlike or unreal" context of her fiction and non-fiction. Her creative catharsis of hurts could possibly be dubbed 'Indian', for it bleeds her unbridled realities into an alternative mythography of synthesis in her texts which elects not one or the other, but integrates all. The male heroes Tim and Peter, gold-digger and soldier respectively in her Australia-based novel *Black Swans* (1925), inhabit the Australian legend, but they cherish at the same time the subversive other protagonist Letty, a female larrikin and Mollie's original intervention in the Australian national iconography. Tucker, the protagonist of *Tucker Sees India*, is a truant Anzac and loyal servant of the British empire who rushes off to join the AIF in Egypt at the end of the text. Her liminal world does not hierarchize or even always differentiate between facts and stories. She refuses to routinely classify and discipline the anarchic strangeness of contraries assembled in her montage characters, querying the modern metropolitan habit of cognition through binaries. Her twilight vision, suspended between monotonous antonyms, is unashamedly Indian, if we go by insights into Indianness cited in the opening paragraphs and footnotes of this chapter, by persons from as diverse a socio-chronological spectrum as a medieval mystic, a contemporary social psychologist and the chief minister of an Indian state.

Dreams deeper than being (a)trophied as a British imperial memory stranded on the edges of a restless and resurgent Asia, veined through the Antipodes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. White Australian society was then possessed by a communal dream of Australianness as the replica of ideal England or at best as phoenixed Europe, emptied of impurities and failures and twice-born in weightless innocence in the Antipodes. It was devised "as a bulwark between East and West".¹⁰ "The colonial experience made mainstream Western consciousness definitionally non-Oriental and redefined the West's self-image as the antithesis

¹⁰ Lockhart "Absenting Asia" *Australia's Asia* 269.

Lockhart uses the term "barrier function" (271) to explore the racial and imperial tilt in Australian historiography which according to him continues to be incubated in the colonial shadow.

or negation of the East”, observes Ashis Nandy (72).¹¹ Anxious to play the authentic Occident though geographically relegated to the margins of Anglosphere, Australia was meant to serve the “barrier function” against Asia by its white settlers; epistemic cross-fertilisations across the walls of the outpost narrative were forbidden for its historiography and literature.

Australianness built on imagined blanks. “Women, intimacy, the city, the suburb and the drawing room threatened this world” according to Vance Palmer (1885-1959),¹² author, unforgiving critic and arbiter of literary tastes in the Antipodes in the first half of the twentieth century. Local versions of Australianness dominant in print and policy during this period – whether implemented by Deakin or propagated by Palmer – were driven by the ethics and aesthetic of purity and a zeal for authenticity only replicas dare display. As historian David Walker excavates in *Dream and Disillusion* (210), even apparently radical versions such as Vance Palmer and playwright Louis Esson’s (1879-1943) visions of nationalist guild socialism and an original folk-culture rooted in Australia had been outsourced from ideologies of dissent raging in pre-First World War England and published in the London-based journal *New Age* during the early twentieth century. Shaw, Chesterton, Wells and the Irish literary movement shaped their thoughts¹³ and probably the bush-based Australian legend they championed.

All her life, Mollie had lived margins. Her beautiful mother from an elite Perth family was embarrassed by her looks, profession and spinsterhood. She dreamt of emerging as *the* original Australian voice, but most of her published novels were either lost in oblivion or they roused a scandal, the latter being true for *The Boy in the Bush* (1924) written in collaboration with D. H. Lawrence. She could not join the contemporary bandwagon of storytellers of an aggressively egalitarian and spiritually democratic Australia, nor could she bring herself to accept her status as an itinerant nurse, though the vocation qualified her for acceptance as an insider in the socialist bush legend. She felt banished from love and did not fit the dissenting stereotype of a feminist. Mollie the fugitive – in life and sometimes in her texts – could not be made to play by the rules of a pure and prohibitive white Australia; she could neither be tamed nor contained as stunted antidote/footnote to the norm.

The absurd dissenter intercepted with absented models of Australianness – female explorers, pioneers and picaros like Letty in *Black Swans* and Trudy in *Tucker Sees India*,

¹¹ Amit Chaudhuri adds on a parallel note, “Europe was born, for the Indian, at about the time the Orient was – twins, though not identical ones, that had, in the Indian’s mind, a momentous and painfully coeval birth”. India was obliged to define itself as a subset of the holdall signifier “orient”, the permanent and natural antipode to Europe, this self-image being part of the colonial affliction.

See Chaudhuri, Amit. “A Pact with Nature.” *On Tagore: Reading the poet today*. 63-115. 71.

¹² Walker *Dream and Disillusion* 176.

¹³ Walker *Dream and Disillusion* 6.

tragic aborigines like Yallaberrie in *Men Are We* (1927), soldier-scholar and polyglot Rex as Australian representative in *WX – Corporal Smith* (1941), an eclectic crew comprising aristocrats, female gangsters, thugs and former indentured labour in the bush of *Where Skies Are Blue*, and the ocean and northern territories considered taboo for their polluting proximity to Asia, as the setting of *Black Swans*. Her characters whether in *Black Swans*, *WX – Corporal Smith* or *Tucker Sees India*, travel, translate and inhabit a linguistic Babel.

Mollie deserves to be re-read and revisited as an original Australian voice because of the possibilities she chose to make visible in novel after novel, despite her invisibilisation from the national literary canon. Her Australias mirrored India in their non-exclusive ambivalence. India shaped her lifelong blasphemous quest of Australianness as a contested, polyphonic and necessarily impure jostle of ideas – a contingent construct with proliferating models, and doors open to uncertainties, alternatives and betrayals.

On the architecture of the third and fourth chapters

India lurks in Mollie’s surrender and sabotage as an anuvadak in *The Boy in the Bush*, *Black Swans*, *Men Are We* and *The Fifth Sparrow* and in the pluralism and *mamatva*¹⁴ of her exile-inspired Australian protagonists in the post-Tucker works, namely *W.X. – Corporal Smith* and *Where Skies are Blue*, the last text being apparently an edited memoir of a young policeman’s patrolling duties across the Western Australian bush in the early days of white settlement. For Mollie, India does not remain the ethnic kitsch portable as milieu of her fiction or counterfoil to Australia; she did not do an Esson or Anderson on the subcontinent. Instead, it turns witness and signifier for the angst of her journey through multiple possibilities of Australianness and metaphor for the tender irony and acceptance she arrives at. India dyed and designed Mollie’s war and peace with Australianness; the defeats and defiance of her life and works were written in Indian ink, I contend. I have read Mollie using filters of an India she conceived as an actual locale at home with uncertainties, as well as the civilizational matrix that could creatively engage with constellations of plurality and difference.

¹⁴ The Sanskrit word “mamatva” etymologically means “mineness” and connotes non-exclusive empathy and involvement with the *apar*. Prof. Jaidev (1949-2000), a leading literary and cultural critic in India, uses the term – “a pervasive motif in Indian life and Indian fiction” – as a category of activism in aesthetics: “Mamatva rules our excessive egotism, solipsism, narcissism; it attempts at sharing, community and communication, and involves reaching out to others, usually the less lucky others, and rising above one’s private self”. See Jaidev. “Mamatva Motifs in *Douloti* and *Balchanma*.” Abstract of a paper that could not be written. *The Politics of Literary Theory and Representation*. Ed. Pankaj K. Singh. New Delhi: Manohar, 2003. 61-62. Print. Mamatva as an ideological position and strategy of narration informs *Tucker Sees India* and the post-Tucker novels. Mollie’s protagonists, like Captain Smith in *WX – Corporal Smith* and Bob and Steve in *Where Skies Are Blue*, exude *mamatva* for othered peoples and positions and sometimes tend to the margins themselves. Tucker erupts as an insider in all spaces and situations. And the author revisits and weaves *mamatva* for othered models of Australianness in these texts.

Given the silences and occasional cleavages in her fiction and self-narrations, especially in the official autobiography *The Fifth Sparrow*, it seems futile to trace the genesis and routes to Mollie's experiments with Australianness or India as the secret yet sustained homeland of these experiments, while keeping to a chronological routine. This section lays down the narrative logic of the chronology shifting techniques I have adopted while reading Mollie's works, hoping to unravel the motifs, motives and absences in her texts.

Mollie's published books of fiction and non-fiction, in chronological propriety, include *Letters of a V.A.D.* (1918), *The Boy in the Bush* (1924), *Black Swans* (1925), *Men Are We* (1927), *Tucker Sees India* (1937), *W.X. – Corporal Smith* (1941), *Where Skies are Blue* (1946) and *The Fifth Sparrow* (1972). I have however divided my study of Mollie's life and works in two chapters, based on the variant of India connection that erupts in her representations of Australia. The present chapter on Mollie traces this connection in terms of conceptual categories of complicity, absenting, subversion and resilience like anuvad, de-/colonisation and viraha.¹⁵ They characterise her anuvadik¹⁶ texts – *The Boy in the Bush*, *Black Swans*, *Men Are We* and *The Fifth Sparrow*; these non-/fiction apparently render templates of the nation then in fashion or prescribed by a literary luminary like D.H. Lawrence or Vance Palmer, even as they perform the author's dis-ease with those models. Yet all four texts simultaneously invoke decolonisation from their overwhelming narratives; as anuvadak, Mollie intervenes in each by inserting alternative perspectives and forbidden characters in the dominant narrative of these texts. Anointed in betrayal,¹⁷ the texts come inflected with viraha for apar models moored in intersections, not expulsions. "India" being the trustee for such recessive, pluralistic possibilities of Australianness in Mollie, the viraha ends with foregrounding diasporic, heterogeneous and deliberately unfinished constructs of Australianness in the other quartet *Letters of a V.A.D.*, *Tucker Sees India*, *WX – Corporal Smith* and *Where Skies Are Blue*, a set of India-alluding isotopes I explore in the next chapter.

I begin in the end, with the phantom autobiography *The Fifth Sparrow*, published posthumously and written late in life. It looks back at multiple possibilities of imaging Australia as well as the pressures to conform. I enter Mollie's oeuvre from the perch of the motifs –

¹⁵ "Viraha", as annotated in the chapter on Deakin, signifies a condition of existence rooted in aching for the absent.

¹⁶ "Anuvadik" is the adjectival form of "anuvad", a variant of translation that accords greater agency to the translator as storyteller/ interpreter. In this context, it refers to texts that seem to translate then dominant notions of the nation, though consistently and subterraneously resisted by their author/translator in those very texts.

¹⁷ "Betrayal", as pointed out in the introduction (p. 40), need not automatically translate into a category of stigma, only because of the abandonment – of codes or a community – it exudes. Mollie's anuvad, for instance, betrayed her contemporary, dominant narrative of an exclusivist vision for the Australian nation, releasing it into alternative non-exclusive imaginaries.

failure, erasures, fantasies, rage and rebel designs – that composed her life; it enables me to compare her life and Australianness with Deakin’s and map the convergences and difference. I term the official autobiography “phantom”, since it intends to archive memories and postures she had invented or morphed, in the anxiety to belong to communally chic visions of self and the nation. She wrote it at the behest of her colleagues and Guy Howarth, Reader in English Literature at the Sydney University, who had requested her to “unravel the mystery” of the collaboration with D.H. Lawrence.¹⁸ Mary Durack drastically revised the manuscript to fashion a marketable product and cast the author in the 1960s feminist mould.

I compare the uncensored manuscript to the published text in order to retrieve some of the deletions in the latter and investigate the implications of those ominous absences, especially for the India-related sections. The production and publication of the text had been directed by contemporary social mores and discourses in fashion. In its tone, refrains, fabrications, silences and posthumous editorial censors, *The Fifth Sparrow* telescopes lifelong pressures to which Mollie had responded with sabotage and sporadic, parodic submissions in her fiction. I analyse, too, the politics of the pressures as played out in extant Skinnerana that had coloured the contemporary reception and afterlife of her works.

Post *Letters of a V.A.D.* which failed in the market, Mollie cowered as appeasing anuvadak of dominant traditions of imagining the Antipodean nation in her triad published subsequently – *The Boy in the Bush*, *Black Swans* and *Men Are We*. She was blanked beneath the never-ending labyrinth of others’ stories and their acid dreams of pure Australia museumized in the three texts. D. H. Lawrence inspired *The Boy in the Bush* and its prophetic pioneer and made Palmer livid; *Black Swans* aspired to appease Palmer and his loyalty to the legend of the 1890s and the Lawson-Furphy tradition;¹⁹ *Men Are We* could be safely presented as loyal transcription of her professional idol Sister Munroe’s anecdotes from the outback. It inserts the bush nurse as the female equivalent of the explorer and larrikin in Australian legend. True to the role of anuvadak as re-interpreter/creator of texts, Mollie stitched too her pain and resistance as subtextual betrayals of visions apparently endorsed in these texts.

Betrayals become the text in *Tucker Sees India*; for in this text national archetypes comprise one mere shade among the rainbow alternatives representing Australian national

¹⁸ Skinner, M.L. “DH Lawrence and *The Boy in the Bush*.” N.d. MN 186. TS 1396A/90/1. Battye Library, Perth. 1.

¹⁹ Palmer’s adored and invented legend of the 1890s and the Lawson-Furphy traditions of representing life in the bush merely rehearsed his fossil dream of what Australia should have been – on the side of health, socialism, community and communal art. See Walker *Dream and Disillusion* 90 & 196-197.

imaginary. Having investigated the triad, I take the India-based novel as a watershed moment in her oeuvre and the focal point for accessing her post-Tucker Australias in *WX – Corporal Smith* and *Where Skies are Blue* in my next chapter. In her last “war novel”, *WX – Corporal Smith*²⁰ set in Egypt and Libya, multiple avatars ranging from farmers and squatters to solicitors, university students, doctors, linguists, anthropologists, cartographers and architects impersonate divergent possibilities of Australianness. Moored in migration, the characters’ Antipodean traits bloom in Asian scapes in mateships with Arab guides, Italian housekeepers and alternative cultures. *Where Skies Are Blue*,²¹ the last book published in her lifetime, parades a carnival of Australian eccentrics, from Irish mariners-turned-farmers to travelling storekeepers, surreal hags, German refugees, British princes in disguise, reluctant heroes and cops who hunt and mirror outlaws. The jostle of apparently unmediated stories from the bush eases into representations of inter-ethnic marriages between black, white and half-caste. As the hag who slips out of the bole of a huge tree quips in a tale, “I never heard of Mr. Green, only Mr. Black, and Mr. Brown and Mr. White. All mixed up they are, too – might turn green” (66). The certainty of multitudes and miscegenation seeded in this vision beautifully betrays the late-nineteenth-and-early-twentieth-century communal dream of the outpost as a replica of England/Europe perfected and purified; Australianness is twice-born as a beloved mongrel, even in the bush.

India, home to myriad births, selves and realities, had conditioned Mollie’s cognition as an author. It recurred as the terminus in her trauma and attempts at re-birth. Here she gathered her splintered selves and birthed herself as a novelist in *Letters of a V.A.D.*, a wasteland work written during her stay in India as a nurse, when many of those who loved her had died and she was left exhausted by life. She was twice born as an author in *Tucker Sees India*, her only fiction which overtly sets the subcontinent as context and character. Unlike the hegemonic visions that sought to terrorise the triad published between *Letters* and *Tucker*, *Tucker Sees India* represents her Indian variant of Australianness in which myths and their counters cohabit in chaotic flux and freedom. The unashamedly bicultural protagonist serves the British war officials in India with unflinching loyalty yet cultivates the satyagrahi²² resistance/resilience of

²⁰ Skinner, M.L. *WX – Corporal Smith: A Romance of the A.I.F. in Libya*. Perth: R.S. Sampson Printing, 1941. Print.

²¹ Skinner, M. L. *Where Skies Are Blue*. Perth: Imperial Printing Company, 1946. Print.

²² “Satyagraha”, a Sanskrit term, literally signifies the “quest for truth”. In 1906, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi adapted the term to the Indian non-cooperation movement in South Africa organized under his leadership. In his words, “Truth (satya) implies love, and firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement Satyagraha, that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence, and gave up the use of the phrase “passive resistance””. See Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand. *Satyagraha in South Africa*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1928. 109-110. Print.

a victim who is “passive-aggressive, effeminate, and fights back through non-cooperation, shirking, irresponsibility, malingering and refusal to value face-to-face fights.”²³ The India-based “war-novel” ends the war of representations in her texts between militant standards of inventing Australia and her compulsive breaches. In both *WX – Corporal Smith* and *Where Skies Are Blue*, Australia erupts as an incorrigibly plural universe with myths multiplied. The Indian experience and India-based novels that shaped her life and experiments in imagining Australia, respectively frame and conclude my journey with Mollie in the thesis.

Of Deakin and Mollie

Mary Louisa Skinner or Mollie as she was known among friends and peers, was nurse, writer and antithesis to Alfred Deakin. Deakin in his youth was gregarious and charming with mesmeric eyes.²⁴ Such was his enigma and appeal that David Syme, the dour doyen of Melbourne journalism, took him under his wings and shaped his career as journalist and, in a short while, as Liberal MP at the age of twenty two. Elizabeth Martha Anne Browne, the rather wilful medium from an influential family and the girl Deakin adored since she was fourteen, broke with her family when barely twenty to marry her poor suitor. He was the inevitable rising star of movements, Spiritist or Federal. Mollie had no such luck or meteoric orbit. Born with cleft lips to a beautiful mother, she remembered having been crucified from the moment of birth: “My mother, who had already produced in triumph a perfect son, was heartbroken at the sight of my defect. Afterwards she used to take me down under the trees by the river to nurse me, they say, alone with her sorrow. I was to distress her, one way or another, for the rest of her life.”²⁵ Bereft of the Victorian capital of beauty presupposed in the role of the angel in the house, Mollie the pariah thanked god that she was born “with a cleft lip – but not a cleft palate” (1).

The statement was a veil. Dorothy Muir, her great niece with whom Mollie lived towards

Passive resistance assumes protest by the powerless. “Satyagraha”, differentiated from passive resistance in its insistence on truth and non-violence and the wisdom of its superiority as method and ethic over oppressors’ weapons, liberates the persecuted from passivity, the victim mode and the prison of hatred. A satyagrahi is an activist for satyagraha. For Gandhi’s discussion on the principles and popular practice of satyagraha as political ethos and idiom of civil disobedience upheavals in India against the British raj in India in the early twentieth century, see his *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* [1910]. “Passive Resistance.” Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938. 73-81. Print.

The concept and strategy of satyagraha continues to find global resonance in conceiving major socio-political movements against the violence and tyranny of power, inspiring Nelson Mandela’s epic struggle against apartheid in South Africa, Martin Luther Jr’s campaigns during the civil rights movement in the United States and the non-violent movements of homeless Palestinians in present day Egypt and Palestine, among others.

²³ Nandy *The Intimate Enemy* 68.

²⁴ Rickard *A Family Romance* 67.

²⁵ Skinner, M. L. *The Fifth Sparrow: An autobiography*. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1972. 1. Print. Henceforth, it is cited as FS in this chapter and the next.

the end of her life, recalls that a prominent scar extended bilaterally into Mollie's nasal cavity and she had a marked speech impediment.²⁶ When she was an infant, her mother had sought to hide her from public gaze; veils became idiom and metaphor for Mollie. She wrote her first war-based fiction and cathartic autobiographical novel *Letters of a V.A.D.*²⁷, with the nom de plume R.E. Leake, a surname on loan from her mother's maiden name. Besides being social columnist for the *Morning Herald* on a salary of two pounds a week, she contributed articles on contemporary society to *The West Australian* under the pseudonym Echo. The name perhaps suggested her desire to emulate the illustrious Muriel Chase who guided and inspired young Western Australians to help set up the Silver Chain Nursing Association for the care of the aged, in the children's section of *The Western Mail*.

The Fifth Sparrow chronicles the white settlement of Western Australia, lives and exploits of its pioneers, explorers and a series of enterprising women of charisma, as well as her mythical encounter and literary collaboration with D.H. Lawrence; the book ends with his death. *The Fifth Sparrow* could be thus construed as her open letter to Lawrence-lovers. Lawrence, as it were, legitimised the genesis of her autobiography. Katherine Susannah Prichard had proposed in 1950 that she write a book about D.H. Lawrence in Australia²⁸ and Guy Howarth wanted the autobiography written "so that the world might know what sort of a person was D.H. Lawrence's collaborator".²⁹ Mollie intended the book to be a vindication of Lawrence; it approximates his vision of an epic saga on the first white settlers of Australia he had so urged her to bring forth (*FS* 114). Colourful anecdotes and characters crowd *The Fifth Sparrow*; it straddles genres like history, memoir, fiction and a moving obituary for Lawrence but narrates little of the self. Names of characters, except for the famous ones, are changed, personal episodes of love and trauma hushed and the self muted to mothballed, coded and hardly visible pretext for an effusive pioneers' history of Western Australia. She had earlier compared herself to the sparrow from Luke 12:6, worth two-fifths of a farthing yet dear to the divine (14), and the bird sustained her self-image. A sparrow could not pin its anonymous throes to a self-important genre of memorialisation like the autobiography; it needed macro-narratives like divine grace or higher histories to validate its worth and printspace.

Perhaps veils in Mollie's narration also simulated her blurred vision, since she had

²⁶ Kearns, Barbara. "Mollie Skinner: on the brink of all the balances." Thesis. Murdoch University, 2005. 34. Print.

²⁷ Skinner, M. L. *Letters of a V.A.D.*. London: Andrew Melrose, 1918. Print.

²⁸ Mollie mentioned this in a letter to her friend Eileen Turner dated 8 June 1950.

See MS 2271A/43. Battye Library, Perth.

²⁹ Rees, Marjorie. "Mollie Skinner and D.H. Lawrence." *Westerly* (March 1964): 41-49. 49. Print.

picked up a serious eye infection in her childhood, when farmed out to Mrs. Shiras in Edinburgh along with her brother Bob in 1885, while her mother joined her husband, the staff major Captain Skinner in Egypt in the Relief-of-Gordon campaign. When the family reassembled in Aldershot, Mollie was eleven and her eyes bandaged and burning from corneal ulcers. Approaching puberty, she suddenly found herself blind. Life at Aldershot was “literally blacked out,” she recalls (14). Her siblings went to school; she spent much of her adolescence in a darkened room. Her reading was interrupted and education limited to absorbing genteel conversations of clever cultured people in her mother’s drawing-room; she was thoroughly, and involuntarily, tutored in the late nineteenth century Victorian codes of social acceptability, gentility and femininity. Her learning and reading lists could never contend with Deakin’s. She could not have mastered the canon of British women’s writing invoked in Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*,³⁰ though she long harboured ambitions to be an author. When Lawrence detected in her the Divine Spark and asked what she had read, she could not remember names beyond Kipling, Wells and Galsworthy. Later she added Rebecca West and New Zealander Kathleen Mansfield.³¹ The mention of Mansfield in the memoir could have been a touch in retrospect, since Mansfield had published only an anthology or two and was hardly read in colonial hinterlands in May 1922,³² when Lawrence and Freida visited Perth and its outskirts.

Mollie regained partial vision at sixteen but remained three-fourths blind for the rest of her life (FS 34). Unlike Deakin who met and married the girl he believed to be his destined love at twenty six, Mollie remained alone and anguished. She moans in her crisis,

At last I went down on my knees and argued with Heaven about being alone, without husband and children to lean on in the griefs, joys, excitements, frustrations, disappointments and adventures of life. I complained of my lot in being forced to fight, to kick against stones, to be betrayed and to love and be loved by the wrong people. One must have someone, I said, to prevent one falling into apathy.” (129)

The woman who would retort “ugly as ever” when asked “how are you?”³³ remained antipodal to Deakin’s situation and mission. A brief journalistic career initiated him into

³⁰ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*. 1929. New York: Penguin books, 1945. Print.

³¹ Skinner, M. L. “D.H. Lawrence and Mollie Skinner.” N.d. MN 186. TS 1396A/90/3. Batty Library, Perth. 15-16.

³² Determined to distance herself from her colonial origins and a domineering father, Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) shifted base to London in 1903. She had already published *In a German Pension* (1911), a collection of short sketches, and *Bliss and Other Stories* (1922) when Lawrence visited Australia. Vance Palmer was to assert three years later that Mansfield was unknown to Australian audiences. See Palmer, Vance. “The Writer and His Audience.” *The Bulletin* 8 Jan 1925: 1+. Print.

³³ Qtd. in Kearns 63. Pell, Olive. “Gold in the Veins.” Chapter 17. Perth Minutes 1942. Scrapbook no. 1 1930-1980. MS. Religious Society of Friends Archive, Mount Lawley, Western Australia.

political power; Mollie who dreamt of becoming a professional writer or journalist at least, was unceremoniously dropped when the Roman Catholic Church took over *The Morning Herald* and decided that they did not need a lady reporter. Deakin devoted himself as transcendently chosen midwife to the Federation movement. Mollie was professional nurse and midwife, the residual career alternative for a respectable Victorian female who did not teach. She wrote a popular textbook on midwifery³⁴ and served the nationalist cause and discourse by aiding to bring forth a fit race,³⁵ a feat she memorialised in the quiet despair of the last chapter of her autobiography titled “Fulfilment” by her editor Mary Durack: “After all what is more wonderful, or important to a nation, than new life and the fulfilling of a purpose in helping it grow healthy and strong?” (168). She had also helped midwife others’ visions of the future Australian nation, including those of D.H. Lawrence in *The Boy in the Bush*³⁶ and Mary Durack.

Durack edited the manuscript to contain Mollie in the trope of “a middle-aged Quaker spinster of fairly Victorian standards” (Foreword ix), compliant with the canon of early Australian feminists. Al Gabay used midwifery as modest metaphor³⁷ for Deakin’s aggressive agency at all stages of the Federal struggle; for Mollie, the word and profession evoked the anxiety to inhabit others’ models of Australianness.

While Deakin presented self as auteur-participant in the national biography, *The Federal Story: the Inner History of the Federal Cause*, Mollie in her autobiography remained eclipsed in the shadow of the historically famous, such as Lord John Forrest, the premier of West Australia, Deborah Hackett, her beloved friend and later Mayoress of Adelaide and D. H. Lawrence among others, a celebrity collage she assembled to add value to her life-account. Unlike Deakin, she was no firmly planted colonial either. In 1878 when she was two, the last remnants of the Imperial Troops were withdrawn from Western Australia and her father was appointed with the British forces in Ireland. The family relocated and Mollie would not return to Australia till she was twenty four, in the year of the Federation. The empire and Britain

³⁴ Skinner, M.L. *Midwifery Made Easy*. Perth: J.W. Barnard, 1912. Print.

³⁵ In post-First World War Australia, the bogey of race suicide and the decay of the white race were constantly touted as looming threats in public discourse, e.g. in ex-prime minister Billy Hughes’ speech in 1937, in popular parlance and in books like *Wither Away? A Study of Race Psychology and the Factors Leading to Australia’s National Decline* (1934), a collaborative project of psychologist John Bostock and the physician L. Jarvis Nye. Given that an epidemic of unfitness seemed to be stalking industrial, urbanized Australia, breeding a fitter race “capable of carrying the torch of civilization into the future” became part of the national mission of racial renewal. White Australia, as discussed earlier in this chapter, saw itself as an elect to that mission, thus the focus on the physical culture movement and the science of anthropometry through the 1920s and 1930s. See Walker *Not Dark Yet* 100-101 & 107.

³⁶ Lawrence, D.H. and M.L. Skinner. *The Boy in the Bush*. London: Martin Secker, 1924. Print.

³⁷ Gabay *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin* 85.

remained leitmotifs in her itinerant life and writing career. Post 1900, she would travel to England on several occasions, to train for her midwifery certificate in 1908 with Sybil Avis Daune, matron of the Maternity Nursing Association in London, and again in 1911 to continue her beloved and now dead Sybil's service in the slums. Racked by neuritis and the pain of her loss, she was shipped off by her British relatives to India in 1913 along with her cousin Monica Gough for a vacation in Kashmir.

In 1914, Mollie joined Lady Minto's Nursing Service at Rawalpindi in British India and nursed cases in Peshawar located at the geographical limits of the Indian Railway network, at Bunnu over the Indus, Lahore and Malakand Fort across the Afghan border, located in present day Pakistan and on the edges of the then British Indian territory. Tucker would be sent to these frontier locations as inadvertent investigator in her later India-based (not-quite-)war novel, *Tucker Sees India*.³⁸ When the First World War broke out, she served in Delhi at the elite Hindu Rao Hospital then reserved exclusively for British officials; it was "less of a real hospital than a show place of British administration in India" before the First World War (FS 95). She returned to Perth briefly in 1916, before being re-posted to Burma. In Burma she completed *Letters of a V.A.D.* which she had begun writing in India. Mollie longed to join the A.I.F., but the glamour of direct participation in Australian war efforts overseas eluded her. Overwhelmed by the number of applicants for A.I.F., she applied for the Queen Alexandra Military Nursing Service (Q.A.M.N.S.) and while in Burma, was posted by Q.A.M.N.S. to a makeshift Hospital for Officers set up at the Maharajah Gaekwad of Baroda's palace in Bombay. In 1917, she returned to Australia, too late to be sent overseas but posted instead at the Base Hospital at Jardee.

"I was a roving soldier's daughter on one side and a shellback on the other", concedes Mollie in impish acknowledgement of her contraries (103). Being a class-conscious shellback, she pelted back to England in 1924 inspired by the success of *The Boy in the Bush*, "confident, don't-careish and grinning like a Cheshire cat as I prowled round London" (145) armed with the manuscript of *Black Swans*,³⁹ her Australian fiction unspoilt this time by British intervention. Edward Garnett, the grand critic of London attached to the then leading publishing house Jonathan Cape, thought it "so damn, damn bad" and "so damn, damn good as well" (149) that Cape published it. Mollie was deluged by press cuttings of reviews from London, but her continent took little notice and the novel was a commercial failure at Home and in Australia.

³⁸ Skinner, M.L. *Tucker Sees India*. London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1937. Print.

³⁹ Skinner, M.L. *Black Swans*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1925. Print.

Her desire to become a full-fledged writer was not to be. She tried to settle back to nursing at Leithdale near Perth.

Transplanted and torn between locations and vocations, Mollie had been as peripheral to the history of Australia and its literary fashions and stereotypes, as Deakin was pivotal to the making of the nation, its policies and perceptions in the early and even later decades of the Federation. Perhaps born great and decidedly thrust into greatness, Deakin's voluminous diaries, clues and notebooks, the five biographical studies with multiple angles on his public and private selves and numerous articles, researched and memoiristic, deluge the thesis-writer with a bewildering range of resources. The sound of silence has been almost as forbidding in case of Mollie. Notorious for her collaboration with Lawrence, she received overwhelming critical attention almost exclusively on this account.⁴⁰ The halo around the association surpassed facts, as when the first edition of Mollie's Second World War based fiction *WX – Corporal Smith* published a brief front page note on her as Lawrence's collaborator in *Letters of a V.A.D.*, her first novel, instead of *The Boy in the Bush*. As Donna Coates observes, it is unfortunate and undeserved that "Skinner wrote newspaper articles, radio dramas, gave several talks for the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), published a book on midwifery, a collection of short stories about Aboriginals, six novels, and left a series of unpublished manuscripts, [and yet] her literary reputation rests almost entirely upon her ... association with D. H. Lawrence".⁴¹

Coates recovers her as the subversive feminist war-novelist who dared to "violate all the rules of the Australian Great War literary campaign" along with the sanctity of the Anzac myth cultivated during the First World War. Sylvia Martin in her article "Mollie Skinner, Quaker Spinster and 'The Witch of Wellaway'"⁴² unearths a madwoman-in-the-atticish alter ego to Mollie and her nurse narrator in the full-blooded wickedness of Isabella Abdul, the witch in the story. Joan Newman's "Constructions of the Self: Mollie Skinner"⁴³ attempts a feminist

⁴⁰ One could, for example, look at Marjorie Rees' article "Mollie Skinner and D.H. Lawrence" cited above. A number of similar Lawrence-oriented articles interested in the Skinner connection include, among others, Cornish, Patrick. "Spinster loved link with "sex writer" Lawrence." *The West Australian* 10 September 2001.11. Print.

Bartlett, Norman. "D.H. Lawrence and Mollie Skinner." *Australians are Different*. Perth, Western Australia: Artlook Books, 1988. 41-48. Print.

Eggert, Paul. "Lawrence, The Secret Army, and the West Australian Connexion: Molly Skinner." *Westerly* 27.4 (Dec. 1982): 122-126. Print.

⁴¹ Coates, Donna. "Guns 'n' Roses: Mollie Skinner's Intrepid Great War Fictions." *Southerly* 59.1 (Autumn 1999): 105-121. N. pag. *Informit*. Web. 4 Sept. 2011.

⁴² Martin, Sylvia. "Mollie Skinner, Quaker Spinster and 'The Witch of Wellaway'." *The Time to Write: Australian Women Writers 1890-1930*. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1993. 200-217. Print.

⁴³ Newman, Joan. "Constructions of the Self: Mollie Skinner." *Hecate* 17.1 (1991): 79-87. Print.

reading of her fissures. Mollie, according to her, never forgave herself the deviations from Victorian colonial standards, whether those be her alleged lack of physical beauty, status as a spinster or her profession.

According to Newman, Mollie was proud of her rebellion and yet inwardly frustrated at the inability to conform. She recreated in her Australian larrikins and bushmen “a masculine projection of the self she might have been” (84). The feminist straitjacketing culminates in Mary Durack’s edition of Mollie’s autobiography reinventing her as the ambitious eccentric homoerotic nurse and writer who spurned marriage, could hardly do better with the appearance of “hand-thrown pottery” (Foreword ix) and happened to meet Lawrence in the laundry. In her thesis titled “Mollie Skinner: on the brink of all the balances”, Barbara Kearns interprets Durack’s remake of Mollie as a “betrayal”, given the deletions and departures from the autobiographical manuscript. The narrator’s voice had been usurped by the editor’s modernist-feminist conventions:

It reaffirmed Mollie as the failure she had always suspected herself of being. She was not acceptable as she actually was, Colonial yet Australian, elitist yet devil-may-care, obtuse yet wise, passionate yet alone. By levelling Mollie to a sensible sameness, Mary was erasing the woman . . . *The Fifth Sparrow* is neither biography nor autobiography. It is without integrity; decentred. (106-107)

Caught between the reflected radiance of Lawrence and competing feminist claims, Mollie is reduced to a refugee in her severely doctored autobiography. Except the page long entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography,⁴⁴ no biography has as yet been published on her. Other than theory-hijacked, sporadic discussions of specific texts like *Tucker Sees India*, “The Witch of Wellaway” and the ubiquitous *The Boy in the Bush*, no comprehensive study of her fiction and radio plays, published or unpublished, have been published either. This chapter and the next aim to partially fill the void, with emphasis on her published novels, collections of sketches and autobiography and occasional nods to the rest of her oeuvre – short stories, articles, radio-talks and unpublished manuscripts – in the context of her losses and lies/lives exiled by prescribed truths. The renegade universe of her published fiction unfolds in dialogue with India and her hybrid imaginaries for the nation which expose pure Australia as an unviable fantasy, unlike many of her articles, radio talks and biographical sketches that often aspire to clone pre-scripted postures of nationalist loyalty, in compliance with the reductive uniformities

⁴⁴ Birman, Wendy and Olive Pell. “Skinner, Mary Louisa (Mollie) (1876-1955).” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Vol. 11. Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 1988. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 2006-2016. Web. 8 Aug 2011.

amplified and channelled by mass media.⁴⁵ I sample some of the postures in my study of *The Fifth Sparrow*. Much of her unpublished fiction e.g. *Behold Thy Son* (1947), *Eve in the Land of Nod* or *So I Opened the Window* (1947) comprise multiple typescripts at various stages of revision⁴⁶ and deserve a separate study on the layered corrections and their seething subtexts.

Deakin had been researched in various shades of his complexities and ambivalence by biographers; Mollie was toned down, silenced and robbed of her quirks, even in her autobiography. Deakin's biographical constructions parallel the privileges and awestruck, albeit at times reluctant, ovation from rivals and friends that he received in life, while she was spurned at least by her family for pursuing 'common' professions like writing and nursing. I was ready to pursue further their differences in status and impact, when my supervisor Prof. GJV Prasad interrupted my presentation of the synopsis of this thesis. "Are contradictions your rationale for choosing the two authors?" he quipped.

I had sounder reasons. Offset by contrasts, deeper connections chorded Deakin and Mollie's double perspectives as insider-outsiders, on Australia and its troubled -ness/es. Voices and hands, for example. As detailed in the previous chapter, Deakin heard voices at critical junctures and interpreted them as spiritual signs for action or withdrawal. In October 1899, the voice was precursor to a precarious moment for the Australian Federation; in November 1910, it urged him to finish his job and turn in. Voices bridged the twin worlds of his ambition and ideals; they gave divine sanction to political decisions. In 1890, the year he resigned from the Cabinet, wrote his will, visited India and decided to devote himself to the Federal cause, Deakin wrote: "Let me feel again the pressure of Thy hand upon me and see the pointing of Thy finger and know even in failure that I am about Thy chosen work".⁴⁷ Mollie believed herself to have been guided by such a hand throughout her life. She had initially intended calling her autobiography *The Hand on my Shoulder* (Foreword xi), so that it could be read as a graph of divine grace – ethereal veil to sublimate the ruins of a devastated life.

Solitude and anguish breed ghosts and gods. For Deakin they were confessors and sublime masks for personal nationalist goals, lurking since his youthful mediumistic excursions

⁴⁵ We could take for instance "Our Great Grandmothers" in MS 1396A/72 and MS 3940A/62 (c. Dec. 1948), a series of sketches of pioneer Western Australian Women, part of which was broadcast on the ABC in December 1948, or the unpublished biography of Sir John Forrest in MS 1396A/67, written between 1933 and 1935.

⁴⁶ MS 1396A/61 and 1396A/61/1 contain double versions of *Behold Thy Son*. Two undated manuscripts of *Eve in the Land of Nod* comprise MS 1396A/63 and 1396A/63/2, the first one with alterations and suggestions in D.H. Lawrence's own handwriting. In the later typescript, Mollie incorporates some of Lawrence's suggestions. *So I Opened the Window* has four copies, MS 1396A/76, 76/1, 76/2 and 76/3; at least 76/3 is "the copy I started to edit myself and thought better of it", as Mollie mentions on the title page.

⁴⁷ Deakin, Alfred. "Boke of Praer and Prase." Prayer LXX. 18 May 1890. MS 5/854. Australian National Library, Canberra.

into the spirit-ridden milieu of *A New Pilgrim's Progress*. Mollie invented them as answers to the irrational futility of her life, as the testament to her being singled out for oracles dictating her ambitious whims.

Both Deakin and Mollie had a taste for thresholds – of reality and possibility, and notions of the warily guarded mapbound nation. She claimed an intuitive access to such thresholds, being a synaesthete with blurred vision: “By now I had acquired unknowingly a sixth sense given to the blind. I perceived by touch of hand and foot, by hearing, taste and my own emotions, and could often sense what a person thought was discreetly hidden – his or her real self” (20). As a child, she had known and liked ghosts in their house when her father was placed in charge of Fermoy Barracks in Ireland. She would chance on one again later at Hindu Rao hospital, New Delhi, during her tenure as a nurse in India; her meetings with the spectre of an Indian nobleman had been expunged from *The Fifth Sparrow* by editors. But more of that later.

The Hand on the shoulder appeared early on. Isolated and deprived of schooling, companionship and Victorian beauty in her adolescence, Mollie had cause for an intense relationship with god. A near death experience and interview with an angel when she was nearly ten set the seal on the succour. She had almost succumbed to chloroform administered for a dental operation:

When a dentist gave her gas she became apparently dead and had an extraordinary dream. She stood by an angel who looked at her in an undecided way, and said, “You love life so much, we are giving you a choice. Return to the world where it will be hard going for you – or stay here. Even the struggle to return will be agony. Choose.” “I’ll go back,” I said, “I want to fight life out”.⁴⁸

From here on, the Hand and Voice become her companions. When her sisters Stella and Mittie are sent to finishing schools in Belgium, the Hand and Voice urge her on “another and harder road” (FS 19) that departed from sibling jealousy: “it seemed clear to me that the Voice and the Hand were God’s, that He loved me and had some special work for me to do” (20). The Hand directs her into the office of the *Morning Herald* in Perth to satisfy her journalistic dreams (46). When she decides to leave for England to obtain a midwifery certificate in 1908, she feels the push of the Hand again (69). It consoles her in humiliation, promises her a purpose in life and takes responsibility for her pride and potential as a writer: “‘From a worldly point of view you will never be anyone or do anything of importance,’ it seemed to say, ‘but I will guide you where you are needed if you keep faith with me’” (72).

⁴⁸ Skinner, M.L. *The Fifth Sparrow*. MN 186. TS 1396A/64. 15.

When a year later, she suddenly chooses to leave England and Sybil for Australia, the Hand is cited. In moments of despair, the Hand and Voice assure her, “You, a nurse, have learnt that a surgeon must hurt to mend” (130). They arrange the coincidences that result in the London visit of 1924 so that she might place *Black Swans* with an eminent publisher before resuming duties at the convalescent home at Leithdale. In London on the hunt for publishers, she believes God’s Hand to be on her shoulder, “using me for His Own Purpose” (138) of sculpting a writer, an angel in the publishing house. It chides her to take the leap of faith beyond mundane chores and continue writing on Western Australia even as nursing and self-doubt threaten to thwart: “But, I found myself storming, what the hell *was* His heavenly purpose? I could, I knew, help mothers bring their babies into the world but I was far from sure I could deliver a satisfactory book to Curtis Brown” (167). The Hand and Voice are metaphors of her hunger for love, authenticity and recognition as author and an Australian. They sacralise the desires, darkness and irrationalities of a life marginal by default and justify with an apparently cosmic plan her unrest and oscillation between England and Australia, or that between being nurse and writer.

As inscrutable alibis for personal convictions and decisions, hands and voices proved powerful props for Deakin and Mollie. They helped Deakin to frame White Australia policies and switch political loyalties when it suited him. They induced Mollie to aspire as an author while remaining entrenched in the late Victorian, colonial performance of feminine modesty, gentility, philanthropy and apparent lack of ambition.⁴⁹ They enabled both to elude the trappings of traditional Christianity and profess a more eclectic and personalised faith. Deakin’s personal religion absorbed many influences as shown in the previous chapter, including Swedenborg, Socrates, Buddha, Mohammad, Upanishads and Christianity; he once considered preaching his own gospel. Mollie veered between different sects of Christianity, though she considered that orthodox religion had long since left her (FS 72). Catholicism in Ireland, Presbyterianism in Scotland and the Anglican faith at home had claimed and confused her childhood; her Evangelical zealot uncle Evelyn, whom her family labelled as “Mad, Methodist and Married” (14), preached at her in the dark blind room when she was ill.

Subconsciously terrorised by the zeal of formal sects, Mollie transformed religion into a

⁴⁹ Penelope Russell’s *‘A Wish of Distinction’: Colonial Gentility and Femininity* studies Victorian values among the colonial gentility of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Women as custodians of the social status of their family were supposed to consider personal ambition as anathema. They were trapped instead in an elaborate masquerade of modest unpretentiousness as a signifier of innate social superiority in the colony. For a detailed study of the proposition, see Russell, Penelope Ann. *‘A Wish of Distinction’: Colonial Gentility and Femininity*. Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1994. Print.

flexible function of changing affiliations. In England, Sybil Dauney's Anglo-Catholicism hinged on selfless service moved her, as did Muriel Chase's Theosophy in Australia or the poverty and humility of Franciscan priests in India. In 1942, at the age of sixty six, she formally found a home with the Quakers.⁵⁰ The Quaker method of unprogrammed worship, with silent prayer and meditation in group mysticism and occasional unpremeditated speeches by participants,⁵¹ accommodated her maverick style of silences, abrupt action, Hands and Voice. Their obituary on her death reveals acceptance of her brand of spiritualism: "Her closing years were ones of failing sight and deafness... But hardship and suffering only sharpened her perception of things unseen. As human voices faded she heard the Inner Voice more clearly, blindness only served to make the light stronger."⁵²

Religion, or its individualised variants cultivated by Deakin and Mollie, played metonym for the razor-edge between their exile and belonging to dominant nationalist constructs of the time. Deakin officially severed his link with Theosophy as he prepared for the plunge in the Federal cause; his non-exclusive affinity for philosophies and faiths across the globe was closeted as potentially disreputable since the 1890s. Mollie played the religious rebel but Biblical idiom pervaded her autobiography, including the reference to the fifth sparrow. Elsewhere she recollects seeing the angel Gabriel in Lawrence and projects him as the Hand incarnate in her life: "So feeling a fool I submitted myself to a talk with Lawrence. And then I knew. It was then I was translated from earth to the holy ground. I was even aware of it. I thought "This man is like the Angel Gabriel""⁵³

If an obsession with spirits and spiritualism signified potential embarrassment in the emergent secular, egalitarian Australian national space, an insidious awe of the British Hand in Australian affairs, political or literary, was even more so. Deakin's ambivalent intimacy with England, the source of his Anglo-Saxon manhood and history, his pride in empire and his keenly felt colonial humiliation, have been meticulously charted by Marilyn Lake in her

⁵⁰ Perth Minutes. 10 May 1942. MS. Religious Society of Friends Archive, Mount Lawley, Western Australia.

⁵¹ Unprogrammed worship, found across Europe, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, southern Africa and parts of the USA and Mexico, represents around 11% of the total world membership of Quakers. Mollie evidently belonged to this tradition and relished the refuge. For further details on plural Quaker traditions, see "Epistles and testimonies: Compiled for Yearly Meeting, Friends' House, London. 25-28 May 2012." *Quakers in Britain*. Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), London, 2012. Web. 10 May 2013.

Also see Olive Pell "Gold in the Veins" Chapter 17.

⁵² *Australian Friends*. Newsletter of the Society of Friends. April 1955. Religious Society of Friends Archive, Mount Lawley, Western Australia. 14-15. Print.

⁵³ Skinner, M.L. "Typed notes on D.H. Lawrence." MN 186. TS 1396A/90/4. Battye Library, Perth. 4.

articles.⁵⁴ She argues that the tension between the pull of imperial loyalty and personal desire for Federal autonomy came at a considerable psychological cost resulting in the aphasia and mental decline of Deakin's final days,⁵⁵ though Stuart Macintyre insists that his Australian loyalty was nestled within British race-patriotism, "with a very strong idea of Australia as an offshoot of an older parent society and inheriting both its institutions and its ideals, and in some ways realising its ideals in a way that were not being realised in the home country".⁵⁶

The British connection haunted Mollie as well. As an Australian in England, she had little status. Spurning her mother's Australian origins, a matron in a British hospital accused her of being "a typical product of transportation, raised from the gutter by an adventurous soldier of fortune" (FS 20). Yet she was brought up and trained in nursing in London and started contributing character sketches to the London-based magazine *The Daily Mail*. Back in Perth, she was thrilled to discover herself a member of the elite circle by dint of her mother. When in 1901, she returned to Perth on the *Britannic* in the company of one thousand imperial troops bound for Sydney to parade before the Duke and Duchess of York at the Commonwealth inauguration, her idea of the nascent nation must have become entangled forever with Britain, its military and empire. They recur as motifs in her images of Australia.

Tucker, her most authentic Australian hero, has a web of British cousins to rescue and spoil him in India. The deferred Anzac narrowly misses Gallipoli and instead serves the wartime Raj with his trademark larrikin loyalty. Jack Grant, the more determined protagonist of *The Boy in the Bush* (1924), is a passionate and sophisticated British import who asserts himself as the 'real' Australian in the text; he has a thing or two to teach the mean aggressive rustics of the bush. Vance Palmer, the iconic post-First World War critic-exponent of a democratic, socially conscious nationalist literature, rooted apparently in the traditions of literary pioneers of the 1890s like Henry Lawson, Bernard O'Dowd and Joseph Furphy, read in the individualist Jack Grant a disruption of all that he espoused as quintessentially Australian. He rubbished it as "the sort of "colonial novel" that used to be written for nurse-girls a generation ago" and scathingly referred to Jack as that "Byronic English gentleman" who is "sent out to Australia, to shift for himself, armed with... an English kit, and a well-bred accent that is guaranteed to carry him successfully through all difficulties".⁵⁷ *The Boy in the*

⁵⁴ These include "The Brightness of Eyes and Quiet Assurance Which Seem to Say American": Alfred Deakin's Identification with Republican Manhood", "On Being a White Man, Australia, Circa 1900" and "Alfred Deakin's Dream of Independence". The papers have been cited in the previous chapter.

⁵⁵ Lake "The Brightness of Eyes and Quiet Assurance Which Seem to Say American": Alfred Deakin's Identification with Republican Manhood" 32-51.

⁵⁶ Macintyre "Alfred Deakin: a Centenary Tribute".

⁵⁷ Palmer, Vance. "Lawrence in Double Harness." *The Triad* 1 December 1924. 36. Print.

Bush was no paean to Henry Lawson's heroes.

Born two decades after Deakin, Mollie's vision of Australian nationalism with its allegiance to Britain and empire, galled many of her contemporary compatriots as anachronism in bad taste and was pilloried. Australia by now had bred its pioneers, in land and literature. The bush balladeers and outback storytellers of *The Bulletin* or Katherine Susannah Prichard's fiction *Working Bullocks* (1926) based on travails of timber workers in the karri country of Australia's south-west, defined the emergent nationalist literary indices. Mollie proved false the prophecies of her literary "guardians", Edward Garnett and D.H. Lawrence, about her writing career. She was not hailed as the pioneer Australian novelist after all. Her fiction was deemed as too enmeshed in the empire and romantic feminine fantasies to meet the Palmer standard. She tried to amend with yarns on Wiluna aborigines in her collection of anecdotal sketches, *Men are We*.⁵⁸ Though keen to acquiesce to the suggestions from nationally acclaimed Australian critics, she would remain the perennial suspect as storyteller of Australia. The Lawrence factor, as well as the British connections of her protagonists, branded her the outsider.

However much Mollie might profess her enthusiasm for "the carefree capability of the Australians, not only of the returned men but the rejects who while 'the boys' were at the war had completed the railway", she could not hide her enthusiasm for Home: "I loved the traditional code, the sweeping offhand manners of the insular English" (FS 103). In her three trips to London post 1900, in 1908, 1911 and 1924, Mollie sought it out as refuge. At the imperial metropole, she could place her novel with Jonathan Cape in 1924, get invited to cocktail parties of literary notables and even to a Buckingham Palace party where she caught sight of Queen Mary wolfing strawberries and cream and felt lost in the Alice world of *Through the Looking Glass* while exploring the palace; Mollie must have felt secretly enthralled.

During her London visit in 1911, Mollie visited the tomb of a Skinner ancestor at Worcester and was soothed by the English country: "How lovely to walk down old English villages, to smell the old English flowers and hay . . . to walk in fields under oak and elm or in parklands around the ancient houses, aloof, isolated, but English in their every detail" (FS 140). The capital of the empire and seat of the British royalty of blood and of letters was capable of other surprises. During her 1911 trip, it bestowed a gift in a phase of darkness – a voyage to India and employment as nurse at the prestigious Hindu Rao. Mollie would not live another

⁵⁸ Skinner *The Fifth Sparrow* 161.

Also see Skinner, M.L. *Men Are We*. Perth: People's Printing and Publishing Co., 1927. Print.

such phase of uninhibited self-expression, as in her four year stint in the subcontinent.

Deakin toured India in eighty days; Mollie lived and worked there for four years, including the beginning of the First World War. India had haunted Deakin since his youth, as a womb of alternative realities for self and the nation; he had been a lifelong student of its Max Mueller-mediated philosophies, sanitised orientalist histories and the Raj. In the Federal context, he invented India as mixed metaphor – a mirror which afforded Australia a gaze at other tenses, a witness to ominous exclusions in imagining the last, pure Anglo-Saxon outpost, magic realist silhouette only half-leashed by the British and too close for comfort to his cautiously crafted dream nation, the site which he invented as the counter to Australia, yet one that provided his Australia a readymade canon of Anglo-Saxon heroes from 1857 along with a few other slyly grafted icons like the Buddha, helped exorcise his past, released his many selves and staged the tension of his fidelity and resentment for England and its empire.

Mollie's India posed no such ideological or epistemological challenge to her Australia; she opened doors between the two. Deakin postulated a clear disjunction between India's past and its present. Civilized India was dead and museumized; the current, infinitely diluted version could know no redemption but the Raj.⁵⁹ Tucker adopts multiple avatars to live in India across tenses, as a wily spy of the empire during the First World War as well as expert guide and myth-monger of Fatehpur Sikri and the nine cities of Delhi ruined and resurrected across millennia. He imagines himself to be an incarnation of Humayun, the Moghul emperor and exile of whom it was said, "If there was a possibility of failing, he was not the man to miss it".⁶⁰ For him and his author, the past, present and other markers of time between and beyond are seamlessly braided in the subcontinent. Mollie's Australia could not be invented as the triumphant future that annexes the present and annuls the past, unlike Deakin.

Unlike Deakin, Mollie was no tourist invested in charting the glories of the Raj or imaging an India shaped to the shadow of absences looming over Australia. Her subcontinental experience, not staked on a political mission, did not aim to craft it into the orientalist fantasy of a non-place, hinged on excesses and silence in its politics of representation. Mollie's India was place-specific. Even as she foregrounded specific locales and memorialized these places – a cluster of government hospitals dotted in historical cities like Delhi, Peshawar or Bombay –

⁵⁹ Deakin's position could be situated in colonial/orientalist traditions of understanding/containing India. Ashis Nandy reads Max Mueller as an orientalist ideologue of such tense binaries: "As a popular myth would have it, Max Mueller, for all his pioneering work in Indology and love for India, forbade his students to visit India; to him, the India that was living was not the true India and the India that was true had to be, but dead" (*The Intimate Enemy* 17). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Max Mueller had shaped Deakin's readings of India.

⁶⁰ Skinner *Tucker Sees India* 186.

she narrativised India as an interconnected cluster of micro-histories that enables a more nuanced understanding than conventional histories can provide, of the operations of power, the formation of affective networks and the modes of survival within institutions like the empire. Her India thus created a spatial counter-history to that of Deakin: here at last she could own her contraries, weave webs of belonging and achieve social recognition. Briefly in charge of the Hindu Rao, she must have enjoyed the social superiority of a white nurse. At the Hospital she had devoted orderlies at her command, her British cousins in the Raj radiated the sheen of aristocracy and accepted her as one of their own: “Here my heart expanded. I began to love at last with true charity, and was filled with happiness. It was easy to be happy, for a Minto Sister was treated by everyone with honour and respect. Besides, in almost every cantonment I found a cousin attached to the regiment” (FS 94).

India, far from both Australia and England, was not entirely alien. It was an *apar* and provided Mollie the intimate distance where, as an Australian representative in imperial service, she could rehearse modes of national belonging exorcised from the Antipodes, modes which tweaked the binaries of elitism and equality, power and irreverence, war and game, England and Australia, and Australia and India in the tarkasamsara of Australianness. It set her free to narrate her self and trauma with a frankness and focus banished from *The Fifth Sparrow*. She could smuggle her wounds and fantasies into the veiled autobiography of *Letters of a V.A.D.*, the debut novel that moved Lawrence to invoke the pioneer Australian novelist in her. If India remained the unacknowledged context of *Letters* and actual site of its writing, Tucker unfolded as the pukka Australian hero with his exploits and epiphanies set in the subcontinent, in the war-triggered picaresque comedy *Tucker Sees India*. In and beyond *Tucker*, India erupted as context, muse or healing space for the uncensored versions of Mollie’s Australianness, a presence as pivotal and fecund for her as it had been for Deakin. India became home to their secrets, ironies and contraries, in self and imaginings of the nation.

Susan Sheridan’s *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women’s Writing, 1880s-1930s*⁶¹ studies ideological fissures in Australian women writers at the turn of the century when, caught between Victorian and modern milieus, women’s beliefs, actions and aspirations were in a process of churning. Mollie is not mentioned in Sheridan’s book. Yet Kearns’ account of Mollie’s gaping dilemmas invokes Sheridan: “the jobbing nurse who was a latent snob; the campaigner for Aboriginal rights who was a social-Darwinist; the peace-

⁶¹ Sheridan, Susan. *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women’s Writing, 1880s-1930s*. St. Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1995. Print.

activist who always wore her RSL badge,⁶² the committed Christian who abandoned organised religion” (Kearns 12).

Unlike Deakin whose voyages to the margins, territorial or self-reflexive, were intended as inoculation, Mollie lived on the edge – literally too, since her guest house/convalescent home located in Leithdale bordered the bush, and she was afraid of it.⁶³ Lawrence astutely observed her as “darting about on the brink of all the balances, and her partner [Nellie Beakbane], a wise, strong woman, sitting plumb at the centre of equilibrium”.⁶⁴ As a genteel, physically disadvantaged woman looking for meaning and status in a rapidly democratising world, she had to balance paradoxes through her life. She failed to live up to the elitist discourses of her upbringing, nor could she entirely align with the egalitarianism of the emerging nation. She was English and passionately Australian, muted by and obsessed with centres and the centred, a rebel seeking social approbation, a celibate who sought love and male attention, an autobiographer who eluded the generic promise and scripted instead an apologetic biography-of-nation teeming with pioneers, with the promised panegyric on her collaborator Lawrence featured in odd collage. Her contradictions and omissions plant her in a matrix close to that of the exalted Deakin. Mollie would have been pleased with that neighbourhood.

Mollie’s life, autobiography and betrayal of the Australian Legend

Autobiography from the margins could be a survivor’s translation/transgression of trauma,⁶⁵ or it might rehearse the terror of dominant, demeaning tropes. *The Fifth Sparrow* performs both. It details the collaboration with D. H. Lawrence and reduces the author to an aside in her autobiography. It witnesses the colonisation of text and author by the bush-and-pioneer archetypes of the Australian legend and the editor’s smug feminist revisions. It is an anuvad of the cultural memes Mollie inherited, yet also inserts the guerrilla tropes and metaphors she invented in order to remember and resist. This reluctant memoir, her final

⁶² The RSL is acronym for Returned and Services League of Australia. Initially formed as the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia in 1916, it remains today a support organisation for men and women who have served in the Australian Defence Force. Its patron is the Queen of England. The badge suited Mollie’s imperial, military and nationalist leanings. For more details about RSL, its history, motto and symbols, see their webpage titled *RSL National*.

Mollie went as far as Melbourne in 1950 in order to attend an anti-nuclear Peace Conference. See her letter to Eileen Turner. 8 June 1950. MN 186. MS 2271A/43. Battye Library, Perth.

⁶³ Skinner, M.L. *The Fifth Sparrow*. TS 1396A/64. 73.

Henceforth, I refer to this unedited typescript of Mollie’s autobiography as TS in this chapter and the next.

⁶⁴ Lawrence, D.H. “Preface to *Black Swans*.” *The Boy in the Bush*. Ed. Paul Eggert. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1990. 377. Print.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Australian aboriginal life-writings like Doris Kartinyeri’s *Kick the Tin* (2000) on the atrocities inflicted on children of the stolen generations in government homes or Kim Scott’s *Benang* (1999). The latter novel hopes to salvage absented histories of generations of Nyoongar families torn apart and “bred out” by government policies of “protection”.

published book, blurs non-fiction with imaginary homelands, as did her first novel *Letters*.

Mollie's life-narrative, as gathered from a comparative, collective reading of published and unpublished versions of *The Fifth Sparrow*, of the masked testimonial *Letters*, as well as the archival collection of her papers,⁶⁶ might enable us to peel off some of the silences from her published autobiography which disguises names and brushes under the carpet episodes of pain, ugliness and love. Her father Colonel James Tierney Skinner was Deputy Commissary for Perth and Fremantle when he met and married Jessie Rose Ellen Leake, daughter of George Walpole Leake of Perth. In 1878, the office was handed over to the local government and James Skinner and his family went to Ireland with the British Forces. He was a captain of the 18th Royal Irish Regiment and one of the last officers to have charge of the imperial troops in Australia. Her mother's family, the Leakes, were among the earliest in the colony and belonged to the upper ten families in Perth. She counted among her relatives George Leake, Premier of Western Australia in 1901, Bishop of Perth Henry Parry, Lord Mayor Henry Parker and numerous other influential people. Mollie would never be able to forsake the link with aristocracy, even when such families were fading at the turn of the century with the rise of the pioneer-led, egalitarian Federal nation.

Mollie's damaged vision generated a personal para-real which mixed memories, uncertainties, impressions and imagination, a quality Lawrence proscribed as too cinematic. Though very young when she left Australia for England, she insists on her homesickness "for my own country" (FS 7) and the sunlit Swan River, wildflowers, rainbow-plumed birds or green bush, a collage probably created in retrospect. Her parentage and peripatetic life with her military father "doing his bit for Queen and Country" (15) are depicted in the opening chapters of *The Fifth Sparrow*. The second of seven siblings, her childhood years spread over Scotland, Ireland and England; she and her brothers Bob and Jack were left to fend for themselves while her carefree mother joined her husband in campaigns across the world.

The military connection shaped Mollie since childhood; it informed her version of nationalism and peculiar pride. She concedes that she and her siblings had forever been "complexed" by "military appearances to be kept up".⁶⁷ In *The Fifth Sparrow*, she takes pride in all-round praises of Australian troops being compared to the armies of old Rome "in bearing, courage and physique" (FS 100) during the First World War. She had been an Army Nurse, wore her RSL badge with pride and vicariously fulfilled her desire of serving at the front

⁶⁶ Mollie Skinner's papers are available under MN 186, Acc. 1396A and 3940A, held by the J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History at Perth.

⁶⁷ Skinner "D.H. Lawrence and M.L. Skinner" TS 1396A/90/3. 13.

through adventures of her nurse protagonist of *Letters*, ostensibly stationed at France. War remained a terminal paradox; it took its wages, costing her the life of her beloved and the ruin of her brothers. Bob was posted missing in France during the First World War, while her rebel brother Jack returned with a disfigured face, ear and mouth and a slouching frame from Gallipoli, broken by war. Gallipoli, the failed Anglo-French campaign during the First World War, often paraded as a seminal (white) Australian bildungsroman enshrining war, empire and militarist values, had scarred her for life. At Gallipoli she lost her lover Dr. Anthony Corley, a character censored out of the published version of *The Fifth Sparrow* by Durack and retrieved by Kearns. Framed in the photograph of the 11th Battalion taken on the steps of the Great Pyramid of Cheops, Captain Corley survived the initial landing but was shot through the heart several weeks later at Sniper's Post.⁶⁸

Yet, when Lawrence condemned the torture and stupidity of war at the sight of Jack with his bandaged face, incapable of either life or love as Lawrence saw it, Mollie half rose in defiance.⁶⁹ Two of her Australian protagonists, Tucker and Kit Smith of *WX – Corporal Smith* (1941), are generic war-heroes though direct combat eludes them in the text. They are assigned respectively with Anzacs in the First World War and the Australian troops in Cairo and Libya during the Second. Having spent most of the First World War years in India, she imagined war as a liberating pretext to porous models of Australianness rooted in cross-cultural translations, in fiction like *Tucker Sees India* and *WX – Corporal Smith*. Besides channelling her pain and pride, war turns objective correlative for Mollie's memories of India and the poetics of an apar Australianness, planted ironically in the lack of violence as exclusions.

The other trope Mollie cherishes and Durack underplays is that of male attention. Mollie details the attention she received from various men in her autobiography, starting from Will Boyd, the adolescent Scot admirer. As an aged Quaker, she remembers with delicious mischief a train trip to the Friends' Yearly Meeting in the eastern states:

My friends wanted me to take their arms but I wouldn't. I bumped and stumbled along behind them. At every town there were porters, again and again I felt their warmth and strength. . . . Then she laughed, 'How good, how kind the men were. But their women did not like it. They did not believe me. Thought I was putting it on. And it gave me quite a kick. Even for an old woman like me.' And there was a lovely devil in her eyes.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Kearns Thesis 71-72.

⁶⁹ Skinner "D.H. Lawrence and *The Boy in the Bush*" TS 1396A/90/1. 4.

⁷⁰ Pell, Olive. "Mollie Skinner." *Celebrations: Bicentennial Anthology of Fifty Years of Western Australian Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Grant Dibble and Phillips Dibble. Nedlands, Western Australia: UWA Press, 1988. 60. Print.

Her love for the Irish Dr. Corley, Government Medical Officer at Wagin, surfaced in a sentence in her typed manuscript, with the name changed to Rory: “I think it is time to confess that I had lived in the joyous exhilaration of loving and being loved, and that we were parted”. Mollie admired his “Irish humour, his integrity, honour and sensitiveness” (TS 72). Kearns retrieves from *The Fifth Sparrow* manuscript her seven month long affair with Dr. Corley before he was transferred to Fiji in December 1906. Durack, editing in the 1960s at the height of the gender revolution, deleted all references to ‘Rory’ in her edition, in an effort to remake Mollie in the image of the unmarried feminist with little time for men.⁷¹

Mollie had earlier discarded marriage and procreation as an option, since she did not want to “pass on to my child my lip and tendency to go blind. It wasn’t worth the risk” (TS 64). She did not deem herself fit to breed a physically and eugenically immaculate national specimen. It must have whetted her desire to produce instead a pioneering book on pioneers, besides being the professional midwife. The decision to remain unmarried did not lead Mollie to discourage men, as Durack would have us believe. The editor removes the details of her relationship with a CID officer in India or her coy hint that many men did not seem to notice her physical imperfections. When Mollie numbers her “special swains” (TS 192) in India as a Minto nurse – “seven men with seven cars” in one week – the editor intervenes as caustic censor, “Dear Mollie as the femme fatale! Doesn’t really ring true” (TS 196).

“No one believes me,” Mollie rues prophetically in her manuscript (TS 193). Her life and literature, at least in her early works, became a hunger for validation. Devastated by Corley’s marriage (Kearns 66) and inspired by the Hand to specialise in her profession as nurse for the sake of the nation, she set off for a midwifery certificate from London in 1908, where she grew an intense relation with Sybil Daune: “I loved her as I had never loved a woman before, and I was never to love anyone again in quite the same way” (FS 79). Sylvia Martin in her essay has studied the relation from a feminist, lesbian perspective and read Mollie’s sudden departure from England as an escape from her closet homosexuality. Joan Newman suggests as much in her paper. While such a contention may be partially valid, both have premised their proposition

⁷¹ Kearns 57-58.

Spinsterhood as a feminist vocation around the turn of the nineteenth century has been explored in Sheila Jeffreys’ *The spinster and her enemies: feminism and sexuality*. London: Pandora Press, 1985. Print.

The author contends that spinsters were the bedrock of the feminist movement in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and that the stereotype of the sexually inert spinster was wielded as an anti-feminist weapon.

Sylvia Martin in her essay “Mollie Skinner, Quaker Spinster and the Witch of Wellaway” cites American lesbian feminist writer Judy Grahn who claims spinsterhood as a lesbian domain that helps preserve women’s freedom of self-expression beyond family life, irrespective of the presence or otherwise of actual sexual encounters.

on the edited version which focuses on her relations with Sybil and several other women from London and Perth such as the openly lesbian artist ‘Jane’, or Nellie Beakbane, while systematically erasing the allusions to men. Having denied herself opportunities of heterosexual sex and knowing her love to have been married to another, Mollie’s attraction to Sybil could also be read as emotion sublimated, as Kearns suggests.

Unlike in *The Fifth Sparrow*, Mollie was free to detail the nuances of her relationships with men and women, realistic as also fantastic, in *Letters of a V.A.D.*, which did not demand the modest half-truths considered convention for the autobiography of a Victorian colonial female of decadent gentility. She resurrects many of her dead or wasted beloveds in her India-based novels. Dauneey who recently died becomes “my one and only (soul-knit) sister” (46) to whom the nurse-narrator addresses her letters in the epistolary fiction. In *Tucker Sees India*, Tucker incarnates her brothers ruined or lost in war. Yet he triumphs, and with impeccable ease, in every role assigned to him by the World War-embroiled Raj, ranging from secret agent to dog-catcher and rescuer of a kidnapped white girl from a Pathan lair. He wins, almost in spite of himself, the Kaiser-i-Hind medal that Mollie had so narrowly missed (TS 199).⁷² This war-hero defers the trauma of real war beyond the text. Dr. Corley is twice-born as the “young Irish doctor” Tucker “liked immensely at first sight” (97). India performs her desires and does a Lazarus on her brothers, lover, Dauneey and buried selves.

Mollie returned to Perth “drawn to it [Western Australia] as an Aboriginal is drawn to his spirit country – or was it that the Hand on my shoulder was pushing me back where I belonged” (FS 80). The nation and her axiomatic rootedness are cast as panacea. Perth was perched safely away from the temptation of Dauneey’s presence; it did not demand work in the slums as proof of devotion. She could pen here instead a textbook on midwifery and preface it with a plea for funds as aid to Dauneey’s slum work. It piously publicised her platonic bond with Dauneey and her profession: “Oh! Mothers of Australia, will you send help to your poor brave British sisters in the slums? If you will write to “Hands Across the Sea,” Maternity Nursing Association, London, S.E., we can put you in touch with a family and if you send help we will tell you how it is spent”.⁷³

Mollie’s dream to be a nurse was inflicted by the Australian egalitarian ideal. Nursing, she thought, would bring the fifth sparrow closer to the Biblical standard of loving the

⁷² Mollie recalls: “Miss Lamb did not like Miss Skinner who had been recommended for the gold King of India medal, though she did not get it owing to personnel changes in British Administration” (199). Durack omits the passage; she did not judge Mollie’s witness to be authentic enough.

See Skinner, M. L. *The Fifth Sparrow: an Autobiography*. N.d. TS 1396A/64.

⁷³ Skinner *Midwifery Made Easy* 11.

neighbour, since her literal neighbours “did not want to be loved – by me at any rate” (FS 20). She equated her personal despairing need of warmth and recognition with the nationalist creed. Australia by this time flaunted its pioneer nurses like sister Munroe “to whom Florence Nightingale passed the Lamp” (154). Munroe had been both in charge of a government hospital at Wiluna on the isolated peak of the goldfields as well as in France in 1915 with the A.I.F.. Mollie wished to carve a career based on that of the Nightingales Munroe or Dauney; it might earn her a place in the footnotes of pioneer narratives, she thought. As devoted bush nurse and midwife, she aspired to mother cocky bushmen like Joe Strut mentioned in *The Fifth Sparrow* to virile health and graduate into being as much of an insider to the outback and its narrative paeans as explorers, bushrangers and the new breed of Australian socialist storytellers.

Notwithstanding, nursing could never become the redemptive macro-narrative of Mollie’s life. Except in India, where as a wartime nurse in summer-scorched Delhi, she was showered with prestige and attention from military personnel, the profession brought her harrowing harshness, manual labour and disillusionment. She could not survive the duties and discipline needed of an ordinary probationer at the Metropolitan Convalescent Home for Children in London in 1897. Boils broke out on her neck and her parents quickly removed her to the Royal Hospital for Women and Children in Waterloo Bridge Road, where she trained with less workload on payment of a guinea a week. Back in Australia, she started working as a private nurse, an experience paralleled to serving as a domestic servant in those days. A woman she nursed from a nouveau riche family threw a tea-party to show off her nurse “from one of the Old Families” (FS 37). Nursing became a euphemism for humiliation. She seemed fated to serve under a series of ruthless matrons intent on disgracing her, from sisters-in-charge at the Metropolitan Convalescent Home to Miss Lamb who ruled the Hospital for Officers at Bombay. Fiercely independent, Mollie successively left the private nursing homes at Wagin, Jardee and Katanning in Australia and their domineering doctors.

The nursing home Mollie rented at Perth and ran at profit was exploited by some doctors as a centre for abortion and adoption of illicit children. Sybil Dauney’s death provoked her guilt of complicity; she left this “dangerous ground” (85) and thirty pounds a week at Perth to return to the ill-paid slum midwifery at London and continue her dead friend’s legacy. “I was going to make a saint of myself in the slums of London which everyone would say was noble even if ill-advised”, she observes in wry retrospect (91). The trip was a disaster. Mollie could not bear nursing in slums. She literally collapsed and had to be transported to India. Later, she took long breaks from the convalescent home cum guest house at Darlington to write *The Boy in the Bush* or take *Black Swans* to London.

Mollie could not find fulfilment in nursing. It hurt her social and artist's pride. The concluding chapter is less about "the love of mothers, and a tenderness in myself for little babies" (FS 168) than a deliberation on resigned self-exile from writing, given Lawrence's unimpressed critique of *Eve in the Land of Nod*, a novel she had based on an Australian nurse's experiences in the gold-mining outback. Nursing had finally acquired relevance as an anecdotal tool, a storytelling wand, legitimising her narration of the nation. The unpublished novel *My Aunt Jo (A Story of Bush Nursing)*, earlier titled *So I Opened the Window* (1947),⁷⁴ narrates the bush from the outback nurse's perspective, as does the short story "The Hand" in Nettie Palmer's anthology.⁷⁵ *The Fifth Sparrow* brims with anecdotes on eccentric doctors and outback patients. India, with its furiously faithful orderly Lahorie, an enigmatic fakir, sixty envious lynx-eyed British sisters and a bevy of patients-turned-suitors, provided a rainbow repertoire of tales from her nursing career; she casts a nurse as narrator-protagonist in *Letters of a V.A.D.* As a profession, however, Mollie suspected nursing to be inherently common, beneath her upbringing and unworthy of her talents; despite her claims in *The Fifth Sparrow* and the suitability of nursing as a female profession fit for Australian nationalist prototypes, she was incapable of content as a jobbing nurse.

"Love and the opportunity to write" (FS 50) were twin ever-elusive priorities in Mollie's life. Writing nursed her bruised self though she could not take it up as a fulltime profession, plagued by the fear of penury and the commercial failures of her fiction. *The Hand* and *Voice* had always directed her to become a full-fledged writer or at least a paid philanthropic journalist like Muriel Chase. She read it as the redemptive arcane purpose of her life. Her mother discouraged writing as a masculine profession and considered a typewriter selfish and unnecessary but she took little notice. Besides contributing to the *Daily Mail* in Britain, Mollie wrote prize-winning stories for the Perth-based *Western Mail* and an English journal *The Hospital and Nursing Mirror*.

In Australia, as mentioned above, she wrote columns for the *Morning Herald* since 1903 and articles and fictional sketches for *The West Australian* in a series titled "Adventures of a Nurse in Australia" at around the same time, under the pseudonym Echo. She invented the nurse as the female larrikin. Mollie had attempted the role in life, in India and the bush. She

⁷⁴ Skinner, M. L. *My Aunt Jo (A Story of Bush Nursing)*. Novel entered for the Commonwealth of Australia Jubilee Literary Competition, 1951, at Sydney. TS 1396A/69. Batty Library, Perth. Earlier titled *So I Opened the Window*, the novel (TS 1396A/76) was written for the Sydney Morning Herald Prize Competition 1947 under the pseudonym "September". The manuscript was returned, along with results of the competition.

⁷⁵ Skinner. "The Hand." *An Australian Story Book*. Ed. Nettie Palmer. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1928. 216-222. Print.

admired those who could pull off nursing as a global gypsy tour, like her friend Miss Henderson at Bombay (FS 101), the “New Woman” who joined as an auxiliary every corps for the required six months during the First World War and had already waltzed through France, Egypt and Serbia. The Adventures of Echo “were considered quite valueless” (FS 50) once the series was exposed as fiction, but Mollie recreated the nurse-picaro in the character of Trudy, the romantic British female adventurer with whom Tucker keeps getting entangled in India and who, like Miss Henderson, aims to serve at exotic Mesopotamia during the War. When she lost the job as journalist, she had to temporarily give up writing.

Mollie’s trip to England in 1908 sought a distance from her lost love Corley, but she cites two other reasons for the odyssey besides that unspeakable misery: “I was unable to write when anywhere near Mother and I loathed private nursing” (69). India hosted her first novel and gave meaning to her quest for meaning and dignity. Anyway, steeped in Biblical metaphors, she interpreted Lawrence’s arrival at Darlington in 1922 and their exchanges on writing and the “fourth dimension” of the bush⁷⁶ as a Gabriel-visit that professed blessed fruit. She might be capable of the first truly Australian novel after all. The sacred promise exacted its price. Lawrence twisted the conclusion of *The Boy in the Bush* to suit his moral and aesthetic design; the novel caused scandalous ripples in Australia. Relatives and critics construed Mollie’s novel as the betrayal of family values as much as of Australianness. She spent much of her thwarted literary career trying to heal the wound; bush stereotypes like the reckless swagman or the gifted larrikin were cast as heroic protagonists in *Black Swans*.

Scripting a nationally approved saga of white settlement of the “Golden West” (FS 166) became Mollie’s anguish and the much awaited liberating epiphany for some part of her career: “Western Australia was a wide, empty and still largely unknown State, far, far away from European centres of culture, but it was mine; I was born of its travail and loved it. If only I could write about it and its people!” (FS 162). Various unpublished manuscripts – *Noise of Swans: A saga of the West* (c. 1933) for example,⁷⁷ the novel that pretends to be the paraphrase of a diary given to her by descendants of early settlers, anticipating the format of *Where Skies Are Blue* where Mollie casts herself as editor, or “Shades of our first settlers”,⁷⁸ an article on East Perth Cemetery and the early settlers buried there, “corrected” and donated by Mary

⁷⁶ Lawrence, D.H. “To Anna von Richthofen.” 15 May 1922. Ed. D.H. Lawrence and James T. Boulton. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Vol. v. 238. Print.

In the letter Lawrence continues, “the white people swim like shadows over the surface of it [the landscape]. And they are no new people: very nervous, neurotic, as if they don’t sleep well, always with a ghost nearby”. Mollie believed that her perception of Australia echoed this vision.

⁷⁷ Skinner, M. L. *Noise of Swans: A saga of the West*. TS 1396A/70/1-3. Battye Library, Perth.

⁷⁸ Skinner. “Shades of our first settlers.” Corrected copy, with notes. N.d. TS 3940A/63. Battye Library, Perth.

Durack – perform her frustration across genres. Mollie became a member of the Fellowship of Australian Writers (FAW), received the Commonwealth Literary Pension from 1934 and continued to write till old age. But she knew she had aborted the promise of her first meetings with Lawrence or Garnett.

Writing after all could not make Mollie an insider to contemporary literary fashions of the nation. It could not moult away her lifelong margins and whisk her to the centre of belonging and authenticity as an up-and-coming author. Henrietta Drake-Brockman and Katherine Sussanah Prichard, the latter a founder-member of the Communist Party of Australia, emerged as fresh female icons of the Australian literary canon. Mollie with her many migrations of error and romantic faith in the need for self-realisation, however failed and fragmented,⁷⁹ was hailed as the locally toasted outcast to the new nationalist discourse of epic communal travails that had surged as the signature of white settlement narratives in the Antipodes.⁸⁰ She could be safely othered as the anachronistic romantic who needed weeding of her manuscripts to match the modernist conventions.

Or Mollie could be read as the Quaker nurse and asexual spinster who had absurdly metamorphosed into that scandalous favoured mortal, a Lawrence collaborator. Her fiction illustrated what Australian literature should not become, according to Vance Palmer in his outraged review of *The Boy in the Bush*. Or, paradoxically, of what it should, since Nettie Palmer included the short story “The Hand” in her representative national anthology of fiction, *An Australian Story Book*. Mollie’s autobiography refracts Australian society through the prism of her dreams, failures and the reception of her works. For the Palmer tribe, she performed the veritable equivalent of Deakin’s India. She could be fantasized as an infinitely flexible other who had turned totem and witness of the violence and absences that defined early twentieth century nationalist imagination for the Antipodes and triggered its literary stereotypes and agents,⁸¹ slipping into the role Deakin had assigned India in his scheme for the Australian

⁷⁹ Philip Shaw explores shades of the eloquent ‘I’ representing the authentic, integrated self in much of Romantic literature and its subterranean fissures, suffering and madness. See Shaw, Philip. “Death Strolls Between Letters: Romantic Poetry and Literary Theory.” Ed. Geoff Ward. *A Guide to Romantic Literature: 1780-1830*. London: Bloomsbury, 1993. 25-40. Print.

⁸⁰ Susannah Prichard’s fiction or Mary Durack’s pioneer narrative *Kings in Grass Castles; Sons in the Saddle* (1959) could be cited as examples.

⁸¹ Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra contend that the so-called ‘typical Australian’, an itinerant Caucasian rural male of no fixed address and his ‘typical’ space, the Bush, would paradoxically amount to an exile of most Australians from the national imaginary. The bushman/bushranger is a highly ambivalent figure. While uncomfortably close to certain sets of marginalised Australians, like the mad, the criminals or the dispossessed, his image is premised on the absence of women, Aborigines and Asian migrants from the national domain. Ironically, middle-class Australian males, otherwise absented by this icon, are conspicuous consumers of the stereotype. The authors think that the image only performs the tension endemic in self-images of what they term

Federation.

Mollie's autobiography peaks into climax with the much-hyped collaboration with Lawrence and his letters to Skinner; it ends with his death. For both self and her contemporary colleagues and academics, Mollie's life had lost its sheen as public signifier post the meeting and the book. The rest can be gathered from her letters, archives of Friends' Society in Western Australia, cues in her literary works and Kearns' thesis. Katherine Susannah Prichard, an atheist, communist and close friend of Mollie, inspired her to play the earthy Australian nurse as narrator, silencing the elite, conservative, Christian stance. Mollie took the hint and in 1928 penned an article titled "Lone-hand Nurse" in the socialist newspaper *Australian Worker*.⁸² Her subjects now ranged from *Nurses Never Cry* and *Our Great Grandmothers*, a series of sketches of pioneer Western Australian women like Lady Forrest and the first female botanist Mrs. Molloy from the continent, to *Out Beyond the Fences* by "Cue", *The Outback Men or Well Now, Really* by "Saltbush", an unfinished biography of John Forrest and a rejected radio series on Captain Cook titled *The Unknown Land*.⁸³ These unpublished manuscripts, written mostly from the comforting purdah of bush-inspired pseudonyms, signal her insecure ardour to engage with pioneers, the outback and other literary, socialist concerns of the day. She tried to be friendly with other FAW colleagues but her supposed lack of erudition and elan made her ill at ease; she could not reconcile being an Australian worker, writer as well as self-conscious member of the outdated and impoverished West Australian gentility.

For Mollie also defends the writing of her life-account by playing witness and raconteur of a vanishing age. The opening chapters of *The Fifth Sparrow* are devoted to the Western Australia of her ancestors which lingered till her youth. Her stories obsess with the trinity – the upper ten families in Perth, pioneers and women achievers. Lawrence had urged her to use imagination and Malcolm Fraser's Western Australian Year Book to create the newly minted white nation's heady pioneer-and-frontier fable. *The Boy in the Bush* shocked and failed Mollie as fiction; Lawrence had transformed the plot without her knowledge or permission. *The Fifth Sparrow* could be read as her late attempt at a redeeming non-fiction on an equivalent theme,

as a "schizoid nation" (Preface ix-xx). For more discussions on the image, its connotations and contradictions, see Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream*.

⁸² Skinner, M.L. "A Lone Hand Nurse." *Australian Worker* 15 November 1928. Print.

⁸³ Skinner, M. L. *Nurses Never Cry*. N.d. MN 186. TS 1396A/71. Battye Library, Perth.

Skinner. *Out Beyond the Fences*. "A biography of Robert Johns – his original notes retold by Mollie Skinner. Robert Johns is in real life Mr. Percy Timperley." N.d. MN 186. TS 1396A/73. Battye Library, Perth.

Skinner. *The Outback Men or Well Now, Really*. A novel by "Saltbush". N.d. MN 186. TS 1396A/74. Battye Library, Perth.

Skinner. *The Unknown Land*. "A radio serial in eleven episodes by "Windilya"." 1938. MN 186. TS 1396A/78. Battye Library, Perth.

though Mollie retained the autobiographer's license to remember, forget and "fabricate".⁸⁴

The text stages Mollie's struggle to forge a national identity that could house an uneasy plural – the British landed gentry that comprised the earliest settlers in Perth and Fremantle and lived in stately colonial style, the explorers, cartographers, squatters and pioneers who settled the land and emerged as new heroes of an equality(for whites only)-obsessed nation and the women who could pull off the miraculous fusion of beauty, adventures and a vision with thrilling love-matches and happy endings, unlike Mollie. The reader is regaled with the caustic wit of 'Leakiana', a cycle of anecdotes then circulated across Perth in the name of her maternal grandfather George Walpole Leake, the first Crown Prosecutor of the state and later Police Magistrate. Her aunt's husband Cecil Clifton, Under Secretary for Lands and Surveys, had made the pipe organ for the local Anglican Cathedral with the help of an Indian joiner, "Hookham Chan" (FS 25). Achievements and eccentricities of other illustrious relatives by birth or marriage are dutifully catalogued.

Such old world heroes luxuriating in leisure and colonial whims had to make way for the 'real' pioneers of Western Australia who had hard-earned their wealth and fame, or else Mollie risked absolute exile from the tribe of new nationalist writers and their egalitarian utopia.⁸⁵ Pioneers from various castes and creeds gather in the text. "Strange identities" – the nouveau riche from the goldfields – had started to invade the demography and cityscape of Perth and could no longer be disowned as "mere nobodies" (35). Her "hardy, courageous and self-sacrificing" timber-milling pioneers at the jarrah forests of Jardee and their women with "inherent stamina, fortitude and joyful courage" (104) in *The Fifth Sparrow* embodied the

⁸⁴ Mollie's family termed as "fabrication" her art of interpolating stories/white lies in everyday life (FS 89). It flavoured her fiction and autobiography as well. In *Letters of a V.A.D.*, she sets her life-inspired epistolary fiction in the French frontier which she had never visited, instead of India where she had mostly served during the war. In *The Fifth Sparrow*, she codes names, elides herself but narrates yarns of all-round male attention along with the anecdotes of her close relations with famous pioneers – men and women. "Fabrication" possibly corresponded to her partially seen synaesthetic world in which fantasies twined with memory and braided frustrating realities.

⁸⁵ Mollie was writing her autobiography in the early 1950s. She might have remembered Vance Palmer who had earlier condemned *The Boy in the Bush* as un-Australian and anthropomorphized the "Australia of the spirit" in *Meanjin* 1942, when the white settlers apprehended that their worst fear, that of the Japanese invasion, might finally come true:

"If Australia had no more character than could be seen on its surface, it would be annihilated . . . But there is an Australia of the spirit, submerged and not very articulate, that is quite different from these bubbles of old-world imperialism. Born of the lean loins of the country itself . . . it has developed a toughness all its own. Sardonic, idealist, tongue-tied perhaps, it is the Australia of all who truly belong here. When you are away, it takes on a human image, an image that emerges, brown and steady-eyed from the background of dun cliffs, treed bushlands and tawny plains". Qtd. in Turner, Ian, ed. *The Australian Dream: A Collection of Anticipations about Australia from Captain Cook to the Present Day*. Melbourne: Sun Books, 1968. 304-305. Print.

During and post the Second World War, the Australian 'national character' was increasingly conceived in terms of democracy, egalitarianism and social justice. For a detailed discussion, see White "Growing Up" *Inventing Australia* 140-157.

Palmer ideal. John Winthrop Hackett, the Irish-born editor of *The West Australian* moulded the community outlook in favour of women's suffrage and a "passion for culture" (41) and married the charismatic Deborah. Here was a furiously individualistic yet community-oriented pioneer. Alfred Carson, the first mechanical engineer to come to the West Australian State with his maverick innovations – that of an inflammable gas from blackboy trees which he stored in bullock bladders and used at home, for example – swelled the tribe of individualist herd-heroes paraded in *The Fifth Sparrow*. F.M. House at Katanning had been doctor and naturalist to a party led by surveyor Fred Drake-Brockman across the uncharted north-western Kimberleys. During long exchanges, House conjured up for Mollie the vast empty savannahs dotted with wild Aborigines, indomitable pioneers and dazzling flowers.

Mollie seemed to admire most John Forrest (1847-1918), the explorer-turned-first-premier of Western Australia who became Federal Cabinet Minister and was rumoured to be raised to British peerage when he died. She vicariously shared the romance of his expeditions and traversed the vast, little known Australian landscape over tea and stories. The haughty and delicate Lady Forrest nee Margaret Hamersley added the allure of glamour and aristocracy: "Mother said it was Margaret who taught John good manners and gave him any culture he possessed" (FS 38). "Jarrah Jack's" expeditions were part of his complicated courtship with Margaret. There could be no better model for Mollie's pioneers and paradox than her depiction of this new-age knight who had spun his own pedigree and rags-to-riches story, and won a high-born damsel and British peerage in the bargain.

Vivacious and gifted women who could topple knights and transform the world comprise the third set in her national canon: they seem to belong to Virginia Woolf's female tradition lifted beyond the literary and transplanted on cloud nine to the colonial context. Margaret Hamersley was not just John Forrest's lady-love. She was a talented pianist and perfect hostess and created a special gallery of her botanically perfect paintings of the unique West Australian flora. Deborah Vernon Drake-Brockman, daughter of a leading surveyor and member of the pioneering Bussell family, was yet another blazing beauty, rebel, horse-rider and philanthropist. She converted molesters of young women into welfare officers and married the enigmatic Mr. Hackett who did not belong to one of the first families of the State but later became the illustrious editor of *The West Australian*. She was anointed director of various mining companies and finally became the Mayoress of Adelaide.

Mollie revels that she had once been confidante and intimate friend of 'Deb', "the lovely, wild girl who galloped with me through the bush and told me of her love for the great man who was to set her feet on the path to fortune – and to fame" (45). Mollie zealously scripted her

vague connections with female journalists and welfare-workers such as Muriel Chase who, along with the rest, was young, beautiful, cultured and a “reformer born” (47). The legacy came full circle with Mollie’s mother, “a streak of Australian sunshine, with soft sun-tanned skin” (9), one of the most beautiful women in Perth during the early days of settlement, who lived like a deposed queen in her bankrupt old age and from whom Mollie sourced most of her elite connections despite a troubled relation.

The above clique of classically ravishing, wily, well-bred and wealthy female pioneers could irk espousers of a democratic Australia like Palmer or the class-allergic feminists like Mary Durack. Mollie compensates with inventories of Australian women of achievement in all fields from diverse backgrounds towards the end of her book, including authors Katherine Susannah Prichard, Henrietta Drake-Brockman, Mary Durack, illustrator Elizabeth Durack, potter Jean Ewers, the first female Member of Parliament in Australia Edith Cowan, and botanist, artist and writer Emily Pelloe (162).

Yet the apparent angst of fidelity to accepted codes of Australianness could not restore the tag of authenticity to Mollie’s text. Mary Durack added annotative details on Perth society of the times, checked facts and sequence in the manuscript and deleted the details, personal and public, that remained uncorroborated, as illustrated in the case of ‘Rory’ her beloved.⁸⁶ It transformed the text; a critic complained of the “iceberg quality” of the published version.⁸⁷ Besides, in ironic awareness of her hunger to be validated as the first truly representative author from Western Australia, or at least a faithful chronicler of its early days, Mollie seems to have embraced Australian nationalist myths and legends at their face value, without the in-built irony or attack. Such a Gulliver⁸⁸ anuvad of nationalist myths and legends rendered the flavour of fantasy to her autobiography. She had textually recreated “my own country” as “a sort of nostalgic longing for fairyland”.⁸⁹

The Australian legend, defended by Russel Ward in his eponymous book of 1958, investigated as an ideological trick by Richard White in *Inventing Australia* (1981) and queried

⁸⁶ See, for example, the footnotes in pages 25, 27 and 30 of *The Fifth Sparrow* or Durack’s condescending confidence in the foreword: “Mollie had not, at the best of times, been much worried by such details as dates and sequence. . . . It was to Marjorie Rees . . . that I went for advice on the necessary editing and with whom I worked in checking facts and sequence and deleting repetitious material” (xv).

⁸⁷ *Australian Book Review* December 1972: 36. Print.

⁸⁸ I have used Gulliver, the name of Jonathan Swift’s protagonist in his famous eighteenth century parody of travellers’ tales, as a qualifier, for Gulliver, as many scholars contend, plays on “gullible”. The character of Gulliver possesses the happy gift of never questioning or looking for the subtext/countertexts of what he is told.

⁸⁹ Skinner, M.L. Qtd. in Marjorie Rees. “Paper on Mollie Skinner.” Meeting of the Fellowship of Australian Writers. 30 Aug. 1955. Address. MN 186. TS 3940A/3/9. Battye Library, Perth. 2.

by other authors and historians,⁹⁰ projects a bushman or masculine rural worker, Anglo-Celtic and Australian, who could be flexibly recast as Anzac/digger, the iconic national type. “Each of these terms,” Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra contend, “forms a bipolar continuum with its opposite, and together they point to the major fissures and sites of conflict in Australian life, across divisions of gender, region, class, race and nationality” (173).

Mollie lived a martyr to this legend. As a genteel half-blind spinster who spent her childhood and youth in England and could never quite fit the norms, she was already excluded from its orbit. Her brother Jack, on the other hand, fulfilled every qualifier of the legend. A rebellious boy in his youth, he had gone to the bush to make his own future, though their father secretly feared that he “might be going to the dogs outback” (FS 30). Jack had worked as jackaroo, farm-hand and gold-digger in the north-west. He embodied the official “typical Australian” enshrined by Ward and war correspondent and historian C.E.W. Bean: “[Jack] mixed with the scum, ran foot races, gambled, drank, did double shifts on a windlass and spent what he made drinking and shouting his mates” (32). When the war came, he joined the forces like a textbook Anzac, with empty pockets but “the joy of living” in his heart (86); the war sent him back with a disfigured face, a pension of ten shillings a week and a double set of false teeth. He died young and bankrupt, prospecting at Bullfinch and Mollie had to threaten to print in newspapers the disrespect of the Repatriation Department for a Gallipoli veteran, in order to make them pay his funeral bill. Few knew better than Mollie the devastation of living up to the Palmer-prescribed nationalist myth, so righteous in its regard of the 1890s Lawson tradition. Besides, she knew the cost, material and psychological, of trying to live the legend as a bush-nurse.

In a letter dated 3 December, 1928, Lawrence had suggested that Mollie should make her manuscript of *Eve in the Land of Nod* “a little more inward and personal. Don’t make your Nurse Leigh quite so sprightly – make her loneliness a bit more poignant. Put in more of the ugliness – and the pain of the ugliness – more of the rather repulsive quality of people of that camp sort. Don’t be so swimmily sympathetic and rather school-teacherishly good. And you might make a *real* book of it, much better than *Black Swans*” (emphasis added) (FS 169).

⁹⁰ “The various writings alluded to suggest a pervasive unease among historians, sociologists and literary critics with many of the radical nationalist assumptions about the character of Australian society and the origins of its allegedly distinctive egalitarian political culture”, notes David Walker in *Dream and Disillusion* (207). He cites H. P. Heseltine, Peter Coleman, R. W. Connell, Warren Osmond and Humphrey McQueen among other dissenting thinkers who doubted and debated the viability and reality of the Australian legend through the 1960s and 1970s. McQueen, for example, argued that Australia was a closed and repressively homogenous society, where the racism and materialism of Victorian England had intensified due to the geographical proximity to Asia (206).

Caught between contending realities, her own and the popular versions, Mollie could not afford to accommodate Lawrence's version of being "real". She would then script a scream. Already unhoused by the legend, she feared exile from the domain of Australian authorship for busting the myth of struggle-addict bushmen and pioneers. As *The Dark Side of the Dream* insists, such stereotypes of Australian heroism had been far removed from the reality of national life in any tense:

For there is no doubt that the Australian stereotype is nothing like the majority of Australians, today or even in the past . . . the discrepancy has not arisen late, nor has it been not noticed. . . . At exactly this period [the 1890s], according to a study of the history of incarceration in Australia by Stephen Garton (1988), the population of lunatic asylums was dominated by male rural labourers and itinerant workers: arrested by the police for being classic examples of the Australian legend. . . . Those who produce and consume the Australian legend are normally middle-class urban dwellers. Their identity as Australians is not constructed by identification with the legend but on the contrary by a common pattern of repudiation of it. The legend is offered as an object for the gaze, not as an ideal to be imitated. (172-173)

According to Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, the knowledge of this myth as non-real is an open secret and performed in classic texts like Henry Lawson's "The Drover's Wife" (1892) which alludes to the bush ethic but casts the outback woman as saviour of the masculine ideal, since her husband is absent and males other than her eldest son Tommy –whether a 'gallows-faced swagman' or a 'stray blackfellow' – are presented as vicious or contemptible. Barbara Baynton's "The Chosen Vessel", first published in the *Bulletin* as "The Tramp" (1896), could be read as a sequel to Lawson's story, and builds on a grim subversion of the bush ethic/legend, in which the shearer's wife is raped and brutally murdered by a swagman (169-170). The Australian legend comes stitched to its critique and the knowledge of its unviability.

This embedded subversion should come as no surprise. According to Slavoj Žižek, every legal order or every order of explicit normativeness is sustained by the "obscene underground" of its unspoken underpinnings which very often comprise the precise obverse of the enshrined norm. An effective strategy of dissidence or a critique of ideology, then, would amount to a literal performance of the explicit ideological text, by taking "the ruling ideology more seriously and literally than it took itself by way of ignoring its virtual unwritten shadow".⁹¹

In her anuvad of the dominant Australian legend in *The Fifth Sparrow*, Mollie modelled

⁹¹ Žižek, Slavoj. "Tolerance as an Ideological Category." *Violence* 140-177. 170-171.

this mode of dissidence: she transgressed by presenting the stereotypes as literally true. Her pioneers, whether at Jardee or Kimberley, are heroic material. Even the bushmen of Katanning are unironic cut-outs from the Palmer standard of brawny raw inarticulate maleness/goodness: “Many of the bushmen I encountered in the south-west were of similar calibre and toughness to those Dr. House had met in the north. I was filled with admiration of their courage and courtesy though some were very rough diamonds indeed . . . And how grateful they were, stammering their awkward thanks as they went on their way” (65). It seems Mollie of the filmed vision, in her post-*Boy in the Bush* urge to narrate unadulterated Australianness, had chosen to remain an outsider to the open secret of the underground parody that legitimised the Australian legend. Her explorers like the would-be baron Lord Forrest materialise as invulnerable epic characters out of knightly romances, untouched by anxiety or failure in their lonely expeditions; destined for laurels, they are as self-assured as Don Quixote in his exploits. As Mollie notes in “Our Great Grandmothers”, “Then [at the end of his exploration through the desert West to East] he [John Forrest] had to go to England and Europe to receive those honours from scientists and scholars and ministers and kings”.⁹²

Mollie’s overt surrender outed Australian nationalist myths as fantasy. The alarming innocence of realism sans irony, when applied to Australian legend/s of pioneers and bushmen in *The Fifth Sparrow*, robbed them of their apparent reality, especially since they ran parallel to the darker narratives of her and Jack’s lives devastated in living the ‘Australian’ way. Small wonder then that the autobiographical manuscript could not find a publisher till the 1960s; its narrator was too naïve a literalist for comfort. In her apparent acceptance of the axiomatic reality of Palmer’s nationalist stereotypes, Mollie made that reality suspect and unravelled Australianness as potential terra incognita open to other possibilities. Through much of her earlier texts, as in *Black Swans*, *The Boy in the Bush* or *Men Are We*, she walks the razor-edge of the delicate real/unreal balance. Only since *Tucker Sees India* does she manage to shed the masque of realism, to explore an Australianness that bleeds limits of the real/non-real, the permitted and the proscribed and several other binaries in its constellation of pluralities.

Besides her secret subversion of nationalist norms, Mollie tinkers too with women’s traditions by weaving personal fantasies into her text. Most of her female pioneers like Deborah Hackett or Lady Forrest are fey princesses lifted from medieval romance; they land in the Antipodes to be courted and wedded to their pioneer husbands.⁹³ Osmotic as they are, fantasies

⁹² Skinner “Our Great Grandmothers – Women of Note” 5-6.

⁹³ Mollie muses in “Our Great Grandmothers”, “At the same time Margaret [Lady Forrest] from the age of fourteen held the glamour of a star. . . Her mother was said to be a Royal child rescued from the Palace of

provoke participation and at times, usurpations from varied quarters. Much of her fiction and autobiography, seething with the hyper-real Australian types and legends, come to host voices like those of domineering Durack in *The Fifth Sparrow* or the prophetic Lawrence in *The Boy in the Bush*. Critics and editors have hijacked her texts to their -isms and laboured to ‘reform’ the author to an ideologue of their times and prisms.

Of Skinnerana and Ventriloquisms

The most remarkable revision of Skinner’s position and her autobiography was undertaken by Mary Durack. The genesis of *The Fifth Sparrow* was layered and collaborative, as detailed by Rees in her address on Mollie. But for Rees, the manuscript might not have come into existence. At Howarth’s request, Mollie started writing it in her seventies as her partial eyesight deteriorated. She wanted Rees to type the manuscript. Each chapter was thrice processed in the making: her draft was retyped and returned with suggestions in red ink by Rees. Mollie would cope with the suggestions and send the manuscript back for retyping. After a few chapters thus scripted, Mollie went blind. Nonetheless, she typed the manuscript and sent it to Rees who was faced with the task of turning an unkempt cottage-garden into a horticultural feat:

My job was to decipher the typing, cut repetitions, and generally tidy up. I felt rather like a gardener let loose in a beautiful old-fashioned garden. To reduce its rambling, charming untidiness to the geometrical precision of a suburban plot would be the work of a vandal, but it did need a bit of weeding here, a spot of staking-up there . . . hacking one’s way through a tangle of confused manuscript and coming upon beautiful bits of writing, like suddenly finding clumps of fragrant stocks, and daffodils and forget-me-nots.⁹⁴

The re-writing was difficult since the script had to be read out to Mollie who was very deaf by this time. Yet she remained invested in *The Fifth Sparrow*, stayed at Rees’ home in order to re-write with her aid and recovered from serious illness and a major operation to complete the book. It initially ended with Mollie meeting Lawrence. Later she decided to include her association with him till his death and her own life during that period. Her blindness now lightened by short, foggy-visioned spells, she continued writing newspaper articles, short

Versailles. Whether or not, Margaret had the fire and spirit of old French aristocracy in her walk” (1-2). Her sketch of Margaret braids idyllic romance with pioneering cartographic explorations conducted by competing suitors Maitland and Forrest in order to win the fair maid. Mapping the land parallels husbanding the woman and the fairytale romance-and-adventure gets sacralised as part of national mythology: “The love of Margaret and John lasted all the days of their lives. Such love as hers believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things and she was his inspiration. Their love and courage, as well we know, raised the status of their country” (6).

⁹⁴ Rees “Paper on Mollie Skinner” 9.

stories and several talks for the ABC, having finished the autobiography.⁹⁵ Mary Durack's claim that her revised version of *The Fifth Sparrow* is "as Mollie, given time and sight, would have wished it presented" (xiv) is untenable, given that she had invested time and energy to write and rework the manuscript with Rees' aid and outlived the completion of the project. Had she so wished, Mollie could have rewritten her autobiography in her last years.

The Fifth Sparrow, completed in 1952, could not find a publisher: the manuscript devolved to the FAW. In 1969, as an erstwhile president of FAW, Durack took charge of the manuscript and ventured to make it publishable (Kearns 24). Durack's editing policy claims the right to ventriloquize on behalf of Skinner. Her condescending foreword to *The Fifth Sparrow* apologises for Mollie's fascination with the mystical and occult, references *The Boy in the Bush* as the apocalyptic event in her life, and is self-congratulatory in the way the "problem" (ix) i.e. the manuscript has finally been sorted. She had decided to install Mollie as a quaint curio in the Australian feminist tradition. In the process, true to the legacy of her squatter-ancestors, Durack performed the pioneer on Mollie's manuscript, settling the haunted, digressive and eclectic bush-scape of her memoir into civilized sameness. The disturbing tangle was scorched and weeded, excerpts regarded as "gold-mines" of her writing specimen retained and her script colonised to the national convention of 1960s women's liberation movement in Australia.

Kearns maps the results in her thesis. According to her, Durack recast a romantic, spiritual elitist quester's narrative into the modern progressive mould. She ignored the confusion of Mollie's conversion from her genteel colonial roots to the democratically sanctioned role of bush-nurse in her desperation to remain relevant for the new nation. Durack ironed out her excesses: "The self which was Mollie at her too snobbish low and the self which she exhibited at her too spiritual high, had to make way for a mean 'self' which exhibited less movement from one extreme to another" (Kearns 28). She expunged out of the text what she considered to be Mollie's fiction. Her romantic affair with Corley and flirtatious encounters with other men were deleted, along with her jokes. Many of her mystical experiences were absented. Mollie's resentment of her physically fit and formally educated siblings and instances of her intense class-consciousness were censored. Her wail at being unloved and unsuccessful, for example in the following confession, was removed: "I realized I was hanging round the door of my third decade . . . that I must have love and that it evaded me. Where I had gone wrong, I thought, everything I tried to build slips away in the sands of time" (TS 106).

⁹⁵ Rees "Paper on Mollie Skinner" 10.

The cumulative impact, Kearns concludes, has been one of levelling, “a levelling of tone, and a levelling of the dissonances between Mollie’s interpretive paradigms and Mary’s” (Kearns 30). Durack had attempted a subtle transformation at another, literary/generic level as well. Mollie’s autobiography countered most dictates of contemporary nationalist discourse, being “oblique, contemplative, old-fashioned, Christian, female, colonial and reflective of an emotionally religious point of view” (Kearns 102). Australian post-war nationalist literature in the late 1940s and 1950s was neatly obsessed with the reverse tropes. As Richard White observes, the dominant type of the ‘Common Man’ during the period had a radical and sexist streak; Ned Kelly had been canonised.⁹⁶ Nationalist literature was supposed to be secular, outback, virile, aggressively masculinist and Australian. *The Fifth Sparrow* manuscript highlighted national types, yet as shown above, the autobiographer’s voice self-reflexively subverted the nationalist literary axioms. Durack retaliated by forcing the manuscript into the conforming grid of a desexualised female pioneer’s bildungsroman, colonising Mollie’s life and memoir in the process.

While constructing the imagined optimum Mollie, Durack had inserted in *The Fifth Sparrow* her voice and comments to substitute Mollie’s, masquerading her bewildered tragedy as failed author and lover to be nationalist, feminist fulfilment in playing the self-sufficient midwife who had decidedly vanquished heterosexual love. This feminist avatar of Mollie – Durack’s signature in the autobiography – gained currency among critics. Donna Coates in her article “Guns ‘n’ Roses: Mollie Skinner’s Intrepid Great War Fictions” (1999), reads *Letters of a V.A.D.* and *Tucker Sees India* as uniquely feminist Australian war novels. She reads Mollie as the iconoclast among Australian First World War fiction writers, male and female. Australian female war-authors like Mary Grant Bruce, Mabel Brooks and Ethel Turner set their female protagonists on odysseys to war-fronts in England, France or Egypt. Notwithstanding, the services these characters render at those exotic locales are domestic. Turner’s Brigid digs up cabbages at a home for refugee children and Brooks’ protagonists serve in the canteens or sing for troops. War releases them from home geographically but ends up reinforcing cultural definitions of the docile gender. Their ventures feature as passive footnotes to the Anzac master-narrative of resilience and heroism of the male soldier in the trench. Female authors homogenise the voices and presence of women in their war-triggered fiction, representing them as passive, tame tourists who dare/care not question the carnage, pity or politics of war: “Volunteer work is essentially diversionary, something to fill in the time between sight-seeing

⁹⁶ White *Inventing Australia* 154.

excursions. . . . By taking their [female] characters travelling, writers use the war as a temporal setting only; they write during the war, but avoid writing about it”.

Coates discovers an exception in Mollie, *Letters of a V.A.D.* being the only wartime novel she had found that dared to disrupt the traditional heterosexual romance plot. It is a female bildungsroman which signifies the end to female passivity and subordination. Skinner’s protagonist R.X. narrates war from the inside and breaks the taboo of silence and invisibility war offices counted upon women to obey during wartime, projects nursing as a skilled vocation rather than vicarious motherhood, praises the English and Anzacs equally instead of merely illustrating Anzac myths and, most importantly, chooses to remain single despite being proposed by several men. In letters addressed to “little sister”, her Catholic nurse and mentor, R.X. reveals secret desires and fears, providing the sole example of gynocentrism in Australian war fiction during the period.

Yet Coates was disturbed at the “maddening omissions and ambiguities” that veiled the novel: “Among the gaps are notices of what country R.X. nurses in, what years she serves or even what nationality she is”. The gaps are clues to an alternative reading of the text. Events narrated in *Letters* are semi-autobiographical; despite the unspecified location and years, they invoke Mollie’s memories of the First World War. Like the nurse-narrator, she had her soul-sister in Sybil Daune and had lost both lover and brother in war. While R.X. served “well within the range of shot and shell”, she had served the war-years in India and at the base camp at Jardee, distant from the frontier. Mollie transferred to the front the narrator modelled closely on self, realising in fiction her desire to feature in the unfolding national sacred of the Anzac. India masquerades as France and the author, in her R.X. guise, corrects in fiction the reality of not having been able to join the Australian Imperial Force at the front.

Far from being Coates’ classic feminist rebel who condemns violence, Mollie yearned to belong, as character and storyteller, to the mainstream nationalist war-narrative. War promised to earn her the passport as insider and celebrated interpreter of the Australian life and types. It became metaphor too for her psychological devastation, since in *Letters* she explored the exile of failure and loss amidst death and abandonment where neither her ‘sister’ nor any male lover can keep company. The text and its unspecified setting map her social alienation as R.X. blurs truth and fiction, being Australian and British, landscape and mindscape, self-fostered and nation-inflicted fantasies in a dystopic odyssey through warped space and time. After all, *Letters* is hardly the triumphant bildungsroman Coates claims it to be. It moans defeat and exhaustion. On the brink of losing her only friend, her ‘sister’, R.X. plumbs darkness at the end of her letters: “I think I must be breaking down, or something – I cry so easily and cannot sleep,

and I could not even write to you last week” (300). The epistolary novel stands out, but in a way not envisioned by Coates. It encodes an autobiography mapping testimonials of despair camouflaged as war-fiction.

In *Tucker Sees India*, her only novel set openly in the subcontinent, Coates sets up Mollie as a brave pioneer in parodying the Anzac myth. Tucker is a hair-dying, false-teeth wearing disguise-prone Anzac who “faints at the sight of blood, freely admits he’s a coward, and doesn’t see the point in killing anyone”; he is automatic antithesis to the blood-thirsty sabre-wielding Anzac of contemporary Australian war-fiction. During his India sojourn, Tucker takes up odd assignments usually reserved for women, such as arranging flowers and midwiving children. Coates highlights how he literally misses the boat, the troopship that sails from Bombay to Egypt, and thus skips Gallipoli altogether. She projects him as the querying counterpoint who proves that “many Australian women and men were appalled by the violence, the bloodshed, the utter waste of human life, sentiments rarely, if ever, uttered by other women writers”. Susan Cowan, in her chapter contrasting colonial and post-colonial Australian perceptions of India, similarly insists that Tucker, the underdog antihero and reluctant enlistee in Australian war-efforts, finds imperialism imponderable. He is endowed with “the quintessential characteristics of the laid-back Australian, a rascal, filled with curiosity, challenging authority. He exploits his position by turning his so-called tour of duty into a touristic journey, evading the military, seeking cultural opportunities and trying to fathom the mystery of India and its people”.⁹⁷ Cowan curiously absents *Letters of a V.A.D.*, let alone other texts, from Mollie’s India-inspired oeuvre. Both her and Coates’ arguments fail to explain subversive, conflict-allergic Tucker’s rush at the end of the text to rejoin his regiment and battle in Egypt, or his loyal, albeit unconventional, services to the Raj in India throughout his stay.

During his stay in India, Tucker behaves in a consistent ‘womanly’ fashion, arranging flowers, nursing the sick, picking up the kinds of subservient non-combative assignments often reserved for women during war, even performing as midwife. He turns not to his mates, but to his nursing sister Penny for advice when he misses the ship and cross-dresses as a toothless Indian ayah in a train to save himself from Pathan rogues. An androgynous male in the colonial text cannot however be labelled a routine Victorian feminist stratagem. Rather, Tucker and his author’s apparent undermining of gender roles could be construed as classic Romantic

⁹⁷ Cowan, Susan. “Connecting with India: Australian Journeys.” *Wanderings in India* 138-148.140. Print. Also see, Cowan. “Glimpses of India: a military dekko.” *Explorations in Australian Literature*. Ed. Jaydeep Sarangi and Binod Mishra. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2006. 42-50. Print.

appropriation of the “outlands to which women had been banished”.⁹⁸ As Richardson argues in his chapter “Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine”, assimilation of the “feminine” in the androgynous avatar of the perfect/hyper-male is a Romantic device; it enables such fantasy-forgers to exclude and finally bypass the females, as epitomised in Victor Frankenstein’s project to create life from cadavers.

Tucker keeps meeting the adventurous Trudy and her daughter Ann and participates in their escapades. But his self-sufficiency is invulnerable; towards the end of the novel, he chooses to slip away from India and his attraction for Trudy. His marriage is incidental, even irrelevant. He is close to Penny his sister and privy to the thoughts and secrets of Ann and Trudy, yet perhaps the role of a confidant only inoculates him against their charm. He nurses a woman in labour and midwifes twins in a fiercely orthodox Afghan household. Tucker could be read both as spoof Anzac and an ultra/androgynous male who fuses in the soldier the nurse-sister and his author, thereby suspending the latter’s existence.⁹⁹ Read from this angle, he embodies yet another of Mollie’s attempts to absent herself by fusion with a fictive version of her brother Jack – this time knighted, not devastated, by the war.

Coates terms Mollie as “the only Australian woman wartime writer who refused to be a dutiful myrmidon and conform to the standards and preoccupations that patriarchal society had defined for her”. Both *Letters of a V.A.D.* and *Tucker Sees India* use war as pre-text for examining themes like self, nation and the Australian hero. Instead of looking at the two texts as atypical wartime fiction, I study them in continuum with Mollie’s other works, as her India-based novels in which she explores selves, dreams and her plural models of Australianness. That she casts her Australian hero Tucker as a loyal digger, however truant, reveals her desire to participate in the preoccupations of emergent Australian nationalism, despite the subversions.

While operating within the feminist theoretical framework, Joan Newman in her essay “Constructions of the Self: Mollie Skinner” (1991) is more sensitive to Mollie’s confusions and contradictions. She traces in *The Fifth Sparrow* Skinner’s struggle with “both the social and the narrative forms available to her as an Australian woman writing in the 1950s”; the

⁹⁸ Richardson, Alan. “Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine.” Ed. Anne K. Mellor. *Romanticism and Feminism*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988. 13-25.15. Print.

⁹⁹ According to Alan Richardson, images of male nursing recur throughout Romantic literature, with poets like Shelley literally appropriating the role, to the extreme of trying to breast-feed the child: “Peacock maintained that the refusal of Shelley’s first wife, Harriet, to breast-feed their child Ianthe paved the way for their later separation; Shelley was so put out that “at last, in his despair, and thinking that the passion in him would make a miracle, he pulled his shirt away and tried himself to suckle the child”” (18). In his role as midwife, that too in an early twentieth century Afghan tribesman’s household where purdah rules were sacrosanct, Tucker and his author might be interpreted to approximate the Shelley act.

autobiographical self defines itself in terms of and remains circumscribed by gender, class and nationality (79). Her achievement as nurse and author could not compensate for the alleged lack of beauty or spinsterhood in the colonial society of the late nineteenth century and Mollie was keenly aware of this: “the narrative negotiates not only the narrator’s pride in this [her difference from others], but also her frustration that it was not otherwise . . . the mythology of femininity is part of the narrative’s ideology, despite the character’s resistance to various manifestations of it” (80). Newman astutely observes the language and anecdotes to be non-ironically imbued with patriarchal ideology which regularly absents narratives unspeakable in that idiom. Sexual exploitations of a very young Mollie and her brother by some local boys, for example, are merely hinted at. Like most other critics, she also presupposes Mollie’s sexual orientation to be towards her own sex, illustrated in her affinity for Daune and in the despair of the London-based lesbian artist Jane whom Newman interprets as her unrepressed alter-ego.

According to Newman, Mollie read the conflict and restrictions imposed by her gendered position in terms of differing national ideologies, those of England and Australia, despite her allegiance to both: “The Australian nationalist myth of rugged individuality implies a promise to Mollie who desires the freedom from class and gender oppression of the old world” (84). Unlike Coates, Newman’s Mollie poses no virago threat to patriarchal gods and Godots but remains rather an investor in Australian nationalist myths, however masculine or exclusive they may be. She seeks in return refuge and acceptance which does not come easily from either mother or motherland:

The [desire for] warmth and welcome might then be seen as a metonymic displacement [from distant mother] onto a motherland which offers warmth and security. Skinner’s restlessness for much of her life, living and working in Britain, India and various county towns in Western Australia, suggests that it took many years to find this security, even in Australia, the land she regarded as home. (84)

If freedom and individuality are nationalist myths accessible only to the male, Mollie complies and casts her laconic larrikin from the Australian bush, Jack Grant or Tucker, in the image of her younger brother Jack. Newman’s Mollie is much more ambivalent than Coates’. In “Constructions of the Self” she is achingly torn between reluctant rebellion and the drive to conform and is ready to fuse “something of the persona she constructs for herself” (86) in her chosen males, be it Jack or Lawrence. She seems oblivious to the irony of occasionally adopting a masculine persona for her narrator in *The Fifth Sparrow*. She signs off her autobiography with one of Lawrence’s poems. Apparently, it alludes to his death, the end of her book and the intrigue of their collaboration. In surrendering her voice so readily to that of others in her

autobiography, Mollie seems to legitimise the tradition of ventriloquisms on her behalf. Newman eventually turns out an enthusiastic co-creator in the same tradition, given that she takes the reformed print version of *The Fifth Sparrow* as authentic and bases her paper and verdict on it, without consulting the Battye library manuscripts which might have led her to revise her understanding of Mollie's ambivalence.

Sylvia Martin maps Mollie's gender dilemma as author and narrator in the paper titled "Mollie Skinner, Quaker Spinster and 'The Witch of Wellaway'", yet another feminist perspective on the author. It suggests "an alternative, more complex Mollie Skinner to the woman of the conventional portrait" (202), with reference to Durack's edition of *The Fifth Sparrow* and the short story "The Witch of Wellaway". She reads Skinner's personal crises and loneliness as the inability to accept her woman-oriented feelings. Writing and sexuality are taken to represent the disturbing aspects of her self: "Always anxious to be approved of and respected . . . she associated her sexual feelings and even, at times, her ambition as a writer, with the Devil and temptation" (208). Martin argues that Mollie had tried to contain the sexual in the spiritual – an antidote she also recommends to Jane with whom she draws a subtle parallel – and thus sought to balance her conflicting desires to love and conform to social mores. The conflict is a central concern of "The Witch of Wellaway" in which the narrating "I" assumes the distanced perspective of an older woman's witness of her experience as a young nurse.

In "The Witch of Wellaway", the nurse apparently aligns herself to the doctor in the outback hospital and the male authority he suggests; in the process she must deny her feminine subjectivity or sexuality, a point reinforced by repeated references to her clean white uniform symptomatic of positional power in a patriarchal setup. Isabella Abdul, the 'witch' with an outlandish hybrid name, is no aged mythical crone but a powerful, handsome woman who fascinates and repels the nurse and embodies an open threat to patriarchy and the nurse-narrator's asexual identity: "She smelt like a goat and put my clean white uniform in jeopardy".¹⁰⁰ She empowers the women of the village by giving them access to money – their husbands' hidden caches – and knowledge of their husbands' clandestine activities in lieu of payment, defying male-crafted socio-economic currencies. Isabella laces grace with violence: the half-caste boy who put out the eye of one of her corellas with a catapult is punished in a similar fashion. The narrator secretly admires Isabella and is at risk of dangerous intimacy with her when "the witch" seeks her out in order to implicate her in a spell she casts. Scared to take the plunge into that subversive female world, the nurse reverts to the non-gendered uniform at

¹⁰⁰ Skinner, M. L. "The Witch of Wellaway." *The Bulletin* 22 Feb. 1956: 20.

the end of the text. Martin reads in the witch Skinner's latent ambition to transgress the patriarchal binaries of masculine/feminine and good/evil. Yet the author, like the nurse-narrator of the story, was unable to take the final leap and reject the dominant discourses of her time.

Sylvia Martin's formula owes its critical DNA to Durack. But Martin may not have been entirely off the mark. For a while at least, Mollie seems to have found it easier to disown the Isabella tropes of transgression, metaphor and magical aggression and collude instead with prescribed norms of normalcy in order to pen a "real book"¹⁰¹ which would enable her crossover to the masculine privilege of freedom and social prestige in Australia. A book like *The Boy in the Bush*, co-conceived with Lawrence, for instance.

Terror and the Triad

In an interview on his debut film *Herbert* (2006) based on Nabarun Bhattacharya's Sahitya Academy award-winning eponymous Bengali novel published in 1997, veteran theatre director Suman Mukhopadhyay comments on the character of Herbert Sarkar, the protagonist of the subversive fiction and its film adaptation:

There's no semiology by which we can fully decipher him. He is an elusive entity. He is too much of a misfit to belong in this rational world. Covered from head to toe by indelible signs of otherness, signs which refuse to be put under erasure, Herbert is bound to be alienated wherever men come together and build a social whole. And this "difference" ceaselessly intervenes, interrupts steady flows, and makes messy all a-priori designs. The society and the state keep him outside of history and for the same reason he remains irrepressible, he "returns" again and again to point towards the unrealised potentials of history.¹⁰²

Herbert the orphaned and involved outsider and an anachronism to his city unfurls a world of parallel windows and mirrors for reading Mollie. He is imagined as the signature of erasures, the exiled histories, defeated silences, memories and upheavals that hover at the edges of the marketed simulacra of Calcutta, from 1950s to the 1990s. Mollie, though not a fictional character, could be read as a sign of the forgotten and the muted. She re-traces the hidden, silent and anarchic – all othered spaces in Australianness which return to rip its tamed past and flaunt a tense of banished connections. In India, with its long history of oral compositions, receptions and transmissions, the *anuvadak* claims the creative license to translation as

¹⁰¹ Lawrence advises her on how to write a real book in his letter dated 3 Dec. 1928. Qtd. in FS 169.

¹⁰² Mukhopadhyay, Suman. Interview by Deepa Ganesh. "The outsider and his city." *The Hindu*. The Hindu, 7 Apr. 2006. Web. 26 Aug. 2013.

rewriting/appropriation rather than a colonial repetition of the original.¹⁰³ Like Herbert, Mollie refuses to be tethered to a cause or ideology – feminist, socialist or nationalist. As midwife and anuvadak of others’ Australianness, she “makes messy all a-priori designs”, whether dictated by a Lawrence or a Palmer, and resists the colonisation of her texts.

A living ghost invisible in his own house, Herbert repositions himself as an entrepreneur-medium capable of dialogue with the dead. A spinster of cleft lips and tense relations with her family, a jobbing nurse at unrest, an author whose first novel had failed and who would be subject to multiple rejections by public and publishers through her life,¹⁰⁴ what was Mollie but a troubling shadow in her own texts and society? *The Boy in the Bush*, *Black Swans* and *Men Are We*, investigated in the following sub-sections, seek to reduce Mollie and her Australias to a subterranean ghost presence. Bewildered by Lawrence’s ruthless rewriting of *The Boy in the Bush*, Mollie his anuvadak retaliated in *Black Swans* with a strategy Ashis Nandy posits as survival techniques adapted by colonised Indians during British rule: “Only the victims of a [colonialist] culture of hyper-masculinity, adulthood, historicism, objectivism, and hypernormality protect themselves by simultaneously conforming to the stereotype of the rulers, by over-stressing those aspects of the self which they share with the powerful, and by protecting in the corner of their heart a secret defiance which reduces to absurdity”¹⁰⁵ the victor’s self-assured superiority. The “secret defiance” surfaces with Mollie’s subversive tenets of being Australian in *Black Swans*, a text ostensibly intended as an offering to the Palmer standard.

The Lawrence Factor and The Boy in the Bush

My section on critical receptions of Mollie does not mention the voluminous critics’

¹⁰³ Translation in the Indian literary context has been termed “new writing” by Sujit Mukherjee.

See Mukherjee, Sujit. “Translation as New Writing.” *Translation as Discovery*. 2nd ed. Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1994. 77-85. Print.

Such a ‘transcreation’ assumes “symbiotic intermingling of the original with the translation, of the tradition with the individual genius”. It retells/repeats, but with “sufficient indisputable originality for it to be regarded by everyone as an autonomous free-standing creative work of the first order”, as in Tulsi Das’s sixteenth century Avadhi anuvad of *Ramayana*, the *Ramcharitmanas*.

See Bassnett and Trivedi 10.

¹⁰⁴ The four collections of papers related to M.L. Skinner at the Batty Library – 1396A, 2271A, 2282A and 3940A – list many letters of rejection. Here are a few examples. D.H. Lawrence wrote that he did not like *Black Swans* and felt sad about it, in a letter from Spotorno dated 10 April 1926 (MS 1396A/31/16). In 1938, the Australian Broadcasting Commission rejected the play she had submitted entitled “Fear” (TS 1396A/14) and regretfully returned *The Unknown Land* since it would not make good listening material (TS 1396A/15). “The Witch of Wellaway” and “The Peel Venture” were similarly turned down in 1948 and 1954 respectively. In a letter dated 7 Sept. 1939, Jerold Wells, director of The Repertory Club, Perth, wrote critically of her play *Tickets of Jim* which he returned (MS 3940A/18). The *Sydney Morning Herald* paid for the serial rights of her novel *Behold Thy Son* (1947) but never exercised their right of publication. The story “The mother-in-law” was submitted for the American market and subsequently rejected (TS 1396A/130).

¹⁰⁵ Nandy *The Intimate Enemy* 100.

corpus on *The Boy in the Bush* though it focuses on an overwhelming majority of Skinnerana. The text features as traditional pretext in discussions on D.H. Lawrence and Skinner, his “Australian Catalyst”.¹⁰⁶ This chapter and the next, with their focus on Skinner’s Australia and India, aim to re-engage with her beyond Lawrence. Mollie’s association with Lawrence shot her to notoriety in West Australian literary circles; the over-documented influence eclipsed her literary career and made and marred her as author. *The Boy in the Bush* was her first novel on Australia; she could never escape the work or the intervention of Lawrence in that work, comprising an awry twist in the plot. It seasoned her in the pain and possibilities of betrayal, for *The Boy in the Bush* birthed co-eval betrayals; Lawrence betrayed her values and hopes of redemption with his revision even as Antipodean critics branded the text as Mollie’s betrayal of their nation. This episode in the making of the inauthentic Australian is pivotal to the life and writings of the Indian Mollie Skinner. Henceforth, betrayal becomes value in her routes through Australianness, across her anuvadic and exilic texts.

Some Lawrence critics, notably Paul Eggert his Cambridge editor, have reclaimed *The Boy in the Bush* as pure Lawrence dubbing Mollie as the incidental plot-provider and halo-hunter:

This [the rewriting of Mollie’s *The House of Ellis* as *The Boy in the Bush*] was to be his major literary occupation from September to November 1923 and in January 1924. He did not, as Mollie Skinner believed, dash off the novel in a fortnight. He devoted as much time to it as he did to *Kangaroo* or *The Lost Girl* . . . a study of all the extant manuscript material, early printed editions and Mollie Skinner’s contemporaneous writings leads inevitably to one conclusion: that *The Boy in the Bush* merits the description, a ‘Lawrence novel’.¹⁰⁷

According to Eggert, Lawrence recrafted Jack Grant the protagonist in the image of a Rananim seer of the same tribe as Don Ramon Carrasco in *The Plumed Serpent*.¹⁰⁸ Ramon wanted to restructure Mexican society along revitalised patriarchal lines, Rananim being the name for a utopian colony of community living Lawrence had envisioned since 1914, but did not implement.¹⁰⁹ *Western Australian Year Book For 1902-1904* (Perth 1906), Malcolm

¹⁰⁶ The epithet is an excerpt from the title of an article by Harriet Gay, “Mollie Skinner: D.H. Lawrence’s Australian Catalyst.” *Biography* 3.4 (1980): 331-347. Print.

¹⁰⁷ Eggert, Paul. Introduction. *The Boy in the Bush*. xxiv-xxv.

¹⁰⁸ Lawrence, D. H. *The Plumed Serpent*. London: Martin Secker, 1926. Print.

¹⁰⁹ For further details on D. H. Lawrence’s Rananim, see George J. Zytaruk, ed. *The Quest for Rananim: D. H. Lawrence’s Letters to S. S. Kotliansky, 1914-1930*. Montreal and London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1970. Print. The book contains fifteen letters mentioning “Rananim”. Lawrence dropped the plan of creating such a community before it could be put into practice.

Fraser's optimistic account of settler achievements, inspired Lawrence to imagine north-western Australia as a potent site for cultivating the Rananim ideal. "You should write of it", he had urged Mollie, "I would if I stayed. The settlers – men and women with their children arriving here, dumped on the sand with the surf behind them, a few merchants, a few soldiers, a few packing cases into which they crept for shelter after chucking out the pianos . . . longing for achievement, hungry for land, their cattle starving, their women scolding, homesick but full of courage, courage carrying them forward" (FS 113). Jack's rejection of the old habits, injunctions and ideas of Perth society echoed Lawrence's hardening dislike of England and Europe at the time. The centaur figure at the end of the novel, in which Jack found oneness with his horse Adam as he rode away from the conformist fossil society of Perth, offered a symbolic way out and sculpted Lawrence's ideal horse-man.¹¹⁰ The novel implanted his vision in Mollie's surrogate fiction.

When she first met him at the guest house in Darlington, Leithdale, Mollie had not seen herself playing midwife to Lawrence's Australian dream. She had taken him to be a godsend to approve her writing, he assured her that she had the divine spark. *Letters of a V.A.D.* published post-war due to paper shortage had sunk without a trace and the publisher refused to have anything more to do with her.¹¹¹ Katherine Susannah Prichard was unable to locate a copy in Perth in 1924.¹¹² Pressed by public curiosity, she recounted in several papers the "absurd reality"¹¹³ of the encounter with Lawrence, with minor shifts in detail; it had acquired for her mythic proportions and the invincibility of a dream.

Mollie had scarcely heard about Lawrence when he arrived at Leithdale with his wife Frieda, brought there by a wealthy friend since they "wanted to get into the bush, but not too far away".¹¹⁴ At Leithdale they knew him only as "a traveller, a novelist of sorts".¹¹⁵ Someone had given him a copy of *Letters*; he read it and sought her out for an interview in the washshed, where she was caught with an armful of white woollen socks. Not being the politically aware ahead-of-the-curve 1970s feminist Coates imagined her to be, Mollie had offered to do

¹¹⁰ Lawrence enumerates the qualities of his idol centaur in the magazine *Laughing Horse* 10 (May 1924): "First of all, Sense, Good Sense, Sound Sense, Horse Sense. And then, a laugh, a loud, sensible Horse laugh. After that, these same passions, glossy and dangerous in the flanks. And after these again, hoofs, irresistible, splintering hoofs, that can kick the walls of the world down". Qtd. in Eggert Introduction xxxii.

¹¹¹ Skinner, M.L. "DH Lawrence and *The Boy in the Bush*." MN 186. TS 1396A/90/1. 8.

¹¹² Skinner. "M.L. Skinner: the West Australian Author who Collaborated with D.H. Lawrence in his Latest Book 'The Boy in the Bush'." *Women's World* 1 Dec. 1924: 41. Print.

¹¹³ Skinner. "DH Lawrence and Mollie Skinner." MN 186. TS 1396A/90/2. Battye Library, Perth. 2.

Other papers which explore her relation with Lawrence include TS 1396A/90/1, 1396A/90/3 and 1396A/90/4.

¹¹⁴ Skinner, M.L. TS 1396A/90/3. 2.

¹¹⁵ Skinner. "DH Lawrence and *The Boy in the Bush*" 1.

the washing for him while he turned the mangle and they fell into a discussion on her potential as an author. Earlier, she had tried to defer the conversation when Frieda reported how disturbed Lawrence was that Mollie could write and did not care. She had lost heart with the failure of *Letters* and resolved not to be leashed back again to her secret ambition by a patronising author, however humiliating her current station as nurse and housekeeper might be: “I had nothing to give this frail seeming man, nor he, I thought, anything to give me”.¹¹⁶ Impressed by what he had read, Lawrence strongly suggested that she must “splash down what you see. . . . There is no limit to what you could do, if you stick to reality”.¹¹⁷ She insisted, “I’m so poor that it’s [writing is] dangerous. . . . I’m unlucky. I can’t get anything off” (7).

Lawrence convinced Mollie that she had been chosen to write a novel on the white settlers of Australia dotted with “these gaunt aboriginal trees, these purple rocks with the fauna on its hind legs, and flora strange” (8) and should not bury her talent in a napkin (FS 116); she could be the first representative author from the Antipodes. Such an appeal from an established author back Home was more than Mollie could resist. She read in his visit the machinations of the Hand: “He seemed part of the orange trees, the glow from the burning fruit cast a halo round his sun-lit hair. He was not a man but a spirit” (11). The liminal ambience – the wash-shed perched on the edge of civilization with the silent bush crouching just beyond – allured her to believe in Lawrence and aspire to narrate Australia: “It [an aura which envelopes visible perception] rose then. Lawrence had cast his magic, and in that atmosphere *The Boy in the Bush* began”.¹¹⁸ Mollie had begun to read in Lawrence a sublime projection of her self. He seemed to share her unspeakables in his response to Australia. In one version of her memoir of Lawrence, she recounts:

From my bed on the back verandah behind the honeysuckle trellis, I saw him wandering like an elf up the track to disappear in the moonlit bush. . . . I wondered if he would hear the drums and flutes so mysterious muffled, that I often hear even from my bed; or the call of the kangaroo, no one else spoke of – the Roo!Roo!Roo! wafted on the still night air. Or meet mysterious gliding ghost figures melting into the dark shadow from gleam of star or moon light.¹¹⁹

In *The Fifth Sparrow*, she recorded a variant. Here Lawrence asks, “Do you hear the kangaroos calling softly when everything is still? Roo! Roo! Roo!” And she says, “It’s odd,

¹¹⁶ Skinner “D.H. Lawrence and *The Boy in the Bush*” 2.

¹¹⁷ Skinner TS 1396A/90/3. 6.

¹¹⁸ Skinner “D.H. Lawrence and *The Boy in the Bush*” 3.

¹¹⁹ Skinner “D. H. Lawrence and *The Boy in the Bush*” 9.

but I do, and odder still that you do. People say it's my imagination, that roos don't call" (FS 112). An "invisible wire" linking her to Lawrence in mutual access to the "spirit of the bush",¹²⁰ Mollie felt destined by divine intervention to author another novel, more ambitious than *Letters* and unquestionably Australian.

But who would be the hero of this yet-to-be-born novel for which Lawrence had promised a publisher? Mollie's brother shambled past, a walking symbol of those wounded and wasted by war, with a terrible face, mouth and ear wound, past love, marriage or family sympathy. He impersonated Mollie's fear of impotence. Barbara Kearns enlists the many parallels which triggered Mollie's identification with her brother: "His face was 'crucified' as hers had been. . . . Like Mollie, Jack had always been a thorn in the flesh of their mother. Like Mollie, Jack's life had been compromised by appearances to be kept up" (Kearns 82). Lawrence saw in him a model for the boy in the bush. She protested: "to write of those I knew immediately would bring hell's fire on my head; that I could not bear not to be loved by those about me; that everything I wrote made them scoff, which was why the V.A.D. was published under a nom-de-plume; that I was scared of writing what went on about me" (FS 115). But the power to remake/rebirth, especially the trajectory of her life and her brother's, intoxicated her. Unlike *Letters*, this new novel was going to be no elegy, but a personal and secret renaissance. She and her brother could be phoenix-born as the heroic arch-Australian homo fictus¹²¹ Jack and Mary Grant, with only the surname changed.¹²² They would no longer be singed and fringed by the "typical Australian" myth in life, perhaps they could finally be redeemed in the eyes of their mother and society.

Fired by Lawrence to write "from the tender life of the heart",¹²³ Mollie took leave from her guest house routine, having broken a bone in her ankle, and wrote the book she titled "The House of Ellis" by March 1923 in the seclusion of her accident and sent it off to Lawrence. It featured two women in love with Jack: the plain and virtuous Mary and the sexy but dissolute Monica. The hero chooses Mary over Monica; Mollie is able to pull off a triumphant love-affair, at least in fiction. But Lawrence had no intention to gratify Mollie; he had already cast her as the midwife of his Australian novel ghost-written by a local. He describes the plot in the

¹²⁰ Skinner "D. H. Lawrence and *The Boy in the Bush*" 13.

¹²¹ The term "homo fictus" has been used by E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) to refer to fictional characters, in relation to that alien yet kin species, the homo sapiens situated in the physical world. For further details, see Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Penguin Books, 2005. 63. Print.

Her brother and she having been marked as failures among homo sapiens, Mollie might have considered their rebirth as triumphant fictional hero and heroine in her novels a legitimate fantasy.

¹²² That Mollie based the characters of Mary and Jack in *The Boy in the Bush* on herself and her brother has been noted too by Kearns in her thesis (82).

¹²³ Skinner "DH Lawrence and *The Boy in the Bush*" 7.

manuscript he received: “Monica went to the bad and disappeared, among the tears of the family. Jack set off to find her: got lost: and “came to” with Mary gazing lovingly upon him. In that instant he knew he loved Mary far, far more than Monica. In fact, his love for Monica was a dead bluebottle. Mary and Jack happy ever after, virtue rewarded, finale!”

Lawrence found the plot immoral: “Monica left in the lurch, sympathy streaming towards the virtuous long-neglected Mary . . . If a man has ever cared for a woman enough to marry her, he always cares for her”.¹²⁴ He twisted the tail of the novel, deciding that the protagonist should bigamously marry both women rather than inexplicably reject one of them (FS 128). In the transformed plot, Jack Grant, the protagonist who struck gold unlike Jack Skinner, married Monica and took her to the north-west but later returned to claim Mary at Perth. Mary refused but Miss Hilda Blessington, a shy delicate aristocratic young woman, promised to join him soon at his Rananim in the north-west.

Mollie was devastated. She said she wept.¹²⁵ Lawrence had given the book a new title, *The Boy in the Bush*, and colonised her Australia to his fantasy of the frontier land with a fourth dimension which would bring forth into the world fresh angry prophets in the line of the Old Testament so as to fulfil his mission of the redemption of European civilization. He had transformed *The House of Ellis* and drawn the “hardly Australian” jacket on the American edition of *The Boy in the Bush* – a huge kangaroo peering at a bare-chested boy with a Mexican sombrero (FS 168), icon of the translation of the text to Lawrence and his Mexican ranch where he was living during this period. Even in fiction she, her brother and her debut representation of Australia/Australianness had been mangled. “Jack, the hero I had drawn, would never have ridden a snorting stallion amongst the old shellbacks, intent on seducing their daughters,” she protests in her autobiography (FS 128). Mary could not secure her man, like Mollie. Far from siblings turned to heroes, the novel backfired, in her family and in Australian literary circles.

But the collaboration had its blessings for Mollie. She was thrilled that her book “was reviewed by the best papers” in London (FS 142) and that at last she was released from authorial gender signs/stigmas. None of the critics dubbed the novel as woman’s writing; most did not doubt that Lawrence’s collaborator was a male. “M.L. Skinner was a riddle,” Mollie exulted in the critical receptions at London (FS 142). *The Weekly Westminster* had proposed that Skinner did not exist and the *Bookshelf* maintained that he was indeed a ‘he’. She had been able to veil her sex and pull off a cross-gendered performance as the androgynous, anonymous

¹²⁴ Lawrence, D.H. Preface to *Black Swans. The Boy in the Bush* 378.

¹²⁵ Skinner, M.L. “D.H. Lawrence and “The Boy in the Bush”.” *Meanjin* 9.4 (Summer 1950): 260-263. 260. Print.

yet charismatic collaborator. She would repeat this pattern of empowered invisibility in *Tucker Sees India*, with ‘femininity’ and bits of her own self infused in the protagonist. Mollie occasionally made Tucker perform on behalf of those absented from the mainstream Australian type, such as women; the authentic hero playing medium to the excluded staged her apparent surrender to and ultimate caricature of the absurdity of exclusions defining the Australian national imaginary and iconography.

Lawrence had alienated Mollie from *The Boy in the Bush*. Yet she could not shed the baggage of either the fiction or her association with the famous author. She revelled in the brush with the great writer and cherished the relation despite the bruises. When Lawrence arrived at Darlington, she had partially written *Black Swans*. He read the unfinished manuscript and urged her to set it aside for a novel on pioneers. *The Boy in the Bush*, which he revised “taking your [Mollie’s] inner cue, to make a rather daring development, psychologically”¹²⁶ had made her an untouchable as per the emergent indices of Australian literature laid down by Palmer and *The Bulletin*. She promised Palmer that she would not betray his cause of literary nationalism in her forthcoming *Black Swans* and begged him not to rubbish her along with Jack Grant:

I say, Mr. Vance Palmer wait a bit. Wait for my *Black Swans* – give me a chance. Say what you like about *Black Swans* . . . but give the “appalling crudity” of “M.L. Skinner’s skeleton,” a chance . . . I only ask for a chance. And please I am an Australian and how can you not follow life. . . . Of course one never writes to reviewers: it isn’t done, but I *had* to – just to ask you to judge me on *Black Swans* because it is Australian without Lawrence – and – and all that.¹²⁷

Given the pressure to prove her patriotism, she could not abide by Lawrence’s suggestions for *Black Swans*. He thought that it would be better to situate the story near Perth or Albany, instead of a fantastic neverland where Mollie had transplanted her characters: “all that adventure in the N.W. is not very convincing”.¹²⁸ It should be shaped as a tragic love story, he recommended, in which the love of the girl is divided between the Irish convict and a young gentleman equal to her in social stature; above all, he wrote in another letter, “Always write *what you want* to write”.¹²⁹ Mollie chose not to follow. Her book was a “dud”.¹³⁰ To top it all,

¹²⁶ Lawrence, D.H. Letter to M.L. Skinner. 1 Nov. 1923. Qtd. in FS 125.

¹²⁷ Skinner, M.L. Letter to Vance Palmer. 10 February 1925. Vance and Nettie Palmer papers. MS 1174/1. Folio 2650. National Library of Australia, Canberra.

¹²⁸ Lawrence, D.H. Letter to M.L. Skinner. 2 Sept. 1923. Qtd. in FS 123.

¹²⁹ Lawrence, D.H. Letter to M.L. Skinner. 13 Jan. 1924. Qtd. in FS 127.

¹³⁰ Skinner “D.H. Lawrence and “The Boy in the Bush”” *Meanjin* 261.

Lawrence was disappointed; according to him it had too much dramatics and stayed on the surface.¹³¹ *Black Swans* brought no joy for Mollie: the Australian critical reception remained as harsh.

Not always to her knowledge, Lawrence continued to play the Hand that revised her scripts, if not the visiting angel implanting themes. When in 1925, Skinner submitted a short story titled “The Hand” to the London-based literary journal *The Adelphi* and the editor John Middleton Murry sent it to Lawrence for revision. He complied: “I send back the Mollie Skinner article – rewrote the first four pages, and cleared the rest a bit. . . . If you print M. Skinner’s article with my editing, *don’t* mention me to anybody – not to her. Just let her think your office did the editing”.¹³² As noted above, the story was included in Nettie Palmer’s 1928 Australian short story anthology.

In 1928, Mollie sent to Lawrence *Eve in the Land of Nod*, yet another attempt at an ur-epic on white settlers’ Australia with herself masked as Eve. An illness-and-criticism plagued Lawrence wrote meticulous notes all over the manuscript but refused the request to collaborate: “I can’t do with it as I did with *Boy in the Bush* – that was a tour de force which one can do once, but not twice. . . . How can I re-create an atmosphere of which I know nothing? I should only make silly howlers. I suspect you of making a few”.¹³³ Eggert terms such apologetically minimal intervention as “creative editing”, since Lawrence had deleted and restructured material to provide clearer plot links and foreshadowings and occasionally rewrote entire passages of passion or introspection.¹³⁴ Mollie wrote a later version incorporating some of the advice and emendations.¹³⁵ Still, she complained, the unpublished manuscript “lies on the shelf neglected with his handwriting growing dim”,¹³⁶ her bitterness over a neglected novel sublimated into the outrage of a Lawrence fan.

Lawrence initiated in Mollie’s texts what the Oxford-honed Chacko of *The God of Small Things* termed “The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves”.¹³⁷ In several of her books, she played witness, martyr and addict to that war. War had shaped her void and being. It shaped

¹³¹ Lawrence. Letter to M.L. Skinner. 10 Apr. 1926. MS 1396A/31/16. Battye Library, Perth.

¹³² Moore, Harry ed. *Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence*. Vol. II. London: Heinemann, 1962. 869.

Qtd. in Eggert “Lawrence, The Secret Army, and the West Australian Connexion: Molly Skinner” 125. Print.

¹³³ Lawrence, D.H. Letter to M.L. Skinner. 3 Dec. 1928. Qtd. in FS 169.

¹³⁴ Eggert Introduction li.

¹³⁵ Two typescripts – 1396A/63 and 1396A/63/2 – of *Eve in the Land of Nod* are available at Battye Library in Perth. The first contains Lawrence’s alterations in his own handwriting; the latter is Mollie’s revised text based partially on those recommendations.

¹³⁶ Skinner “D.H. Lawrence and *The Boy in the Bush*” TS 1396A/90/1. 7.

¹³⁷ Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: IndiaInk, 1997. 53. Print.

childhood through her military background, exacted a price with the Anzac campaign and now danced its tandava as a subterranean, barely contained metaphor in many of her early texts, barring the India-based works in which war pretexts¹³⁸ mirrors and healers for the self and salvages the banished possibilities of Australianness.

Lawrence had demanded “just plain stark reality”,¹³⁹ a choric refrain from the later day nationalist brigade as well. “Reality” however is an infinitely mutant, militant signifier notorious for normalizing the dominant imagination to the violation/invisibilisation of others. The pressure to conform to certain ‘realities’ charred Mollie’s faith in the ‘real’ she lived; unwitnessed, unmemorialised, it could slither in the triad only as a hint of guerrilla storytelling at war with voices and versions ostensibly adapted in the text – be those voices Lawrence’s or Palmer’s. *The Boy in the Bush* onwards, she would partially disown her text and be locked into a posture of bitter apology till the publication of *Tucker Sees India*: “There was nothing else for me to do [than allow Lawrence to recast *The Boy in the Bush*]. I was quite unknown, living in the backblocks earning my living as a nurse, and he did praise the work so much. . . . Besides it was a definite offer, take it or leave it . . . naturally I sent a wire agreeing”.¹⁴⁰ Mr. Aldington in his Lawrence sketch “Portrait of a Genius, But” depicts her as an inexplicable shadow in his career.¹⁴¹ Post the Lawrence experience, she had curled herself into a shadowed non-body, a refugee in her own texts.

Mollie’s encounter with Lawrence and their collaborative book evoked an ambiguous response from her contemporary Australians. They resented the text which imported its Australians from England, yet envied also the author’s legitimisation by the trail-blazing Lawrence arrived from Home. They thirsted for recurring narrations of the real-life meeting. Their reaction modelled a classic post(-)colonial condition: Australia’s complex chords with England, its fury at the absolute asymmetry in the relationship into the wake of the twentieth century, the struggle for autonomy as a Federation, a First World War alliance/dependence sealed in suspicion – with the British playing upon Australian fears of being abandoned to face Japan alone in the Pacific, so that in 1911 the Australian Prime Minister and Defence Minister secretly committed to arrange an expeditionary force for imperial deployments, gambling on

¹³⁸ “Pretext” though used as a noun in modern English, has been derived from the Latin verb “praetexere” meaning “to disguise”. I have here used “pretext” as a verb, scarcely a neologism since it is used in a connotation aligned to the etymological roots.

¹³⁹ Skinner “D.H. Lawrence and Mollie Skinner” TS 1396A/90/3. 11.

¹⁴⁰ Skinner “D.H. Lawrence and “The Boy in the Bush”” *Meanjin* 260.

¹⁴¹ Qtd. in Skinner “D.H. Lawrence and “The Boy in the Bush”” *Meanjin* 277.

British reciprocation in safeguarding white Australia against a feared Japanese invasion¹⁴² – and yet a hypnotic thrall when it came to recognition from Home, that undisputed original across the seas. With her British-Australian protagonist Jack Grant, Mollie rendered herself an unwitting hostage to seething metanarratives of the nation in the Antipodes and Australia’s ancient love-hate tangle with England.

Yet *The Boy in the Bush* flaunted extreme fidelity to supposed Australian archetypes. Bill Ashcroft contends that notions of the European sublime sacred have been contested and transformed in Australian artistic and literary representations since the 1840s. While British artist Joseph Addison’s horizon back Home focuses on the utopian and picturesque possibility of space, the excess of space unleashes a dystopian terror of absolute displacement for the freshly (un)settled white colonials “intimated by the ‘psychic line’ of the Australian horizon”.¹⁴³ Lawrence and Skinner’s bush faithfully evokes this terrifying sublime, as opposed to the European Romantic’s Arcadian sublime: “The immense liquid gleam of the far-south moon, following, following [Jack Grant through the bush] with a great, miraculous, liquid smile. That vast white, liquid smile, so vindictive! And himself, hurrying back to camp on Lucy, had known a terrible fear. . . . The immense, gleaming, liquid, lusting white moon, following him inexorably, and the bush like white charred moon-embers” (182).

Ashcroft further contends that Space had overwhelmed History with its European yoke in Australian imagination. The numinous, the unrepresentable and the awesome became projected onto the incomprehensible vastness of Australian space; this newborn sacred was appropriate to and emerged from Australian place, specially the bush (23). The uncanny bush hosts Jack’s initiation into a lonely Old Testament-inspired spiritual paradigm, beyond gossamer British Christianity. After murdering Easu the “brutal and retrogressive” colonial bushman (67) and his arch-enemy, Jack loses himself in the bush in his quest for Monica. He almost dies in the quest and is twice-born and rebaptised, as it were, by the bush: “And the baptism is the blackness of death between the eyes, that never lifts, forever, neither in life nor death. You may be born again. But when you emerge, this time you emerge with the darkness of death between your eyes, as a lord of death” (307). It marks his rite of passage into a “dark-anointed” regeneration (308); nursed back by Mary to life, Jack rises from the womb of the

¹⁴² For an account of how the British manipulated white Australia’s colorphobia, especially its obsession with an apprehended Japanese invasion/colonisation, compelling it to raise an expeditionary force for the empire in the wake of the First World War, see

Walker, David. “Rising Suns.” *Australia’s Asia* 73-95. 88. Print.

Also, Cochrane “The Politics of Popular Memory, or, The Art of National Forgetting” *Best We Forget* 211-229.

¹⁴³ Ashcroft, Bill. “The Sacred in Australian Culture.” *Sacred Australia: Post-Secular Considerations*. Melbourne: Clouds of Magellan, 2009. 21-43. 26. Print.

bush as the bushman incarnate, an initiate in its dark epiphany.

Even before the bush resurrects Jack and claims him as its own, his mate Tom has mentored him in its idiom, ethics and professions. Tom trained him in the bush chores of shearing, kangaroo and possum snaring, getting sandalwood and manna gum, sinking wells and felling timber and in the whitefella's¹⁴⁴ anxious argot comprising words like jinker, swab, swaggy, chow, lag, Waltzing Matilda etc. Tom and Leny of the Ellis household are his true blue mates. Tom makes the relation obvious, when he reproaches a comatose Jack: "Are y' desertin' us, Mate?". And the narrator intervenes to assert: "It was the Australian, lost but unbroken on the edge of the wilderness, looking with grim mouth into the void, and calling to his mate not to leave him" (309). Besides, Tom is also a marvellous coo-ee-ster and Jack pays spontaneous homage to this "national call"¹⁴⁵ when he first hears it: "It seemed to Jack this sound in the bush was like God. . . . Like the call of the bodiless soul, sounding through the immense dead spaces of the dim, open bush, strange and heroic and inhuman. The deep long "coo" mastering the silence, the high summons of the long "eee"" (99). Tom's coo-ee is his summons to the first kangaroo hunt where like a hard-wired bushman, he physically grapples with and finally kills an old male kangaroo single-handed.

Jack possesses the mystery and stillness of the bush and shares the aboriginal philosophy towards land and life:

Everything seemed to be spinning to a darkness of death. . . . He could understand that the blacks painted themselves like white bone skeletons, and danced in the night like skeletons dancing, in their corroborees. That was how it was. To dance humorously to the black verge of oblivion. . . . Let death take me in a last black embrace [Jack prays].

¹⁴⁴ I have used "whitefella" in an allusion to Germaine Greer's title "Whitefella Jump Up: The Shortest Way to Nationhood" in *Quarterly Essay* Vol. 11 (August 2003). In the essay, Greer suggests that embracing aboriginality and becoming a whitefella – a term that alludes to the derogatory "blackfella" historically reserved for aborigines by colonials – are the only ways in which Australia can fully imagine and heal itself as a nation. She wants to include the Aboriginal web of dreams and kinship into the Australian legend. I have tinkered with Greer's term to also suggest that the bushman had always been settler Australia's iconic whitefella, a signifier claiming for its insecure fresh-arrived settlers an aboriginal's marginality and intimacy with the land, even before Greer had coined the term. Being a whitefella in this sense evoked pre-supposed usurpations and erasures, of aboriginal presence and the white history of oppression and usurpation for instance, and an ethics of aggression ironically undreamt of in the Greer model.

¹⁴⁵ In the entry titled "Cooee", Richard White refers to the term as a national call and aural-visual symbol easy to reproduce, connected to the bush and the traditional landscape in national sentiment: "Indeed in the nineteenth century, teaching a 'new chum' the long drawn-out 'cooo' sound, followed by a sharp rising 'eee', was a kind of initiation into colonial life" (45). The sound had been appropriated from the aborigines of the eastern coast, the Eora people, who used it as a communication and navigational technology and in rituals associated with initiation, meeting and mourning. The new white arrivals who initially used "cooee" as a means of establishing cross-cultural contact with the aborigines, soon appropriated it as their exclusive signifier for bonding and belonging as well as for the settlers' fresh-cultivated bush culture, bush etiquette and bush craft. For further details, see White, Richard. "Cooee." *Symbols of Australia* 45-52.

Let me go on as the niggers go, with the last convulsion into the last black embrace. (226-228)

The character illustrates what Hodge and Mishra term the white Australian identity-fashioning strategy of legitimising the illegitimate. According to them, the prior rights of the Aboriginal peoples are the largest barrier to the non-Aborigines' sense of their right to be in Australia. Constructions of Australianness have deferred to and incorporated the basis of this competing right: "the new possessors must claim to know and love the land as much as those they dispossessed".¹⁴⁶ Jack Grant embodies that claim. He is expatriate, explorer, swagman and pioneer fused into one. In whichever other way he might militate against stereotypes, Jack impersonates the unabashedly masculinist Australian bushman passionately endorsed by Palmer, among others.

The bush in the text houses polyvalent realities, such polyvalence of the bush being a signature of normative Australianness in Hodge and Mishra's paradigm.¹⁴⁷ It is at once real and unreal. When Tom and Jack ride through the bush and its flame-spark flowers, bright birds, the scent of rain and eucalyptus, it mirrors their familiar reality of billy and tucker. Yet the "mysterious, vast, unoccupied" land oozes an alternative uncanny surreal with its "strange inaudible calling, like the far-off call of a kangaroo" and reason-wrecking shadows (239). Jack can hear in it the heave of a "strange, dusky, gum-smelling depth of potency that had never been tapped by experience" (240). The land accommodates doubled time, a primitive frontier age and the pioneers' tight-bud future envisioned by Jack. It doubles too as the absented woman in Australian national iconography, awaiting occupation, untouched, with her "strange unknown wells of secret life-source, dusky, of a strange, dim, aromatic sap which had never stirred in the veins of man" (240).¹⁴⁸ The multiple realities, masks and mirrors of the bush make it a mythic and pervasive Australian presence hovering on the edges of language, knowledge, the phantasmic and the real. It frames the Australian legend and *The Boy in the Bush*.

Distance and travel, its competing correlate,¹⁴⁹ are intrinsic to this legend. Explorer, swagman and expatriates all belong to the orphan-tribe of travellers. Hodge and Mishra read distance as a complex signifier: "it is in fact a kind of absence, the space between two

¹⁴⁶ Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* 144.

¹⁴⁷ Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* 147.

¹⁴⁸ On the gendered representation of land as a surrogate for the absented woman in Australian national iconography, see

Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* 164.

I briefly touch on the politics of the land-woman equation as an Antipodean trope, made explicit in Mollie Skinner's *Black Swans*.

¹⁴⁹ While travel presupposes distance, it performs the desire to eliminate that distance between terminals. I have thus termed it as both a correlate and a rival of distance.

significant points, the space constructed as empty by the emphasis on the points” (151). The obsession with distance in the legend becomes a function of the expatriate desire for “home” as terminus and an image of the deferral of that desire, inscribing the absence of Europe on the visible landscape. Hodge and Mishra then trace a counter-category in the increasingly dominant twentieth century Antipodean iconography of absolute distance without destination, which they maintain is a “quintessentially Australian” format (152). Travellers in this category, like Lawson’s swagman, are not gnawed by the angst to assimilate and carry off the land to the imperial centre. Though theoretically an expatriate, Mollie’s Jack Grant anticipates this nomad genre where desire is defined by distance without destination and the transgression of home, and limits it encodes:

Gradually [as Jack travels through the bush with Tom] the road became a home: more a home than any homestead. . . . Gradually they got further and further, geographically, mentally, and emotionally, from Wandoo and all permanent associations. Jack was glad. He loved the earth, the wild country, the bush, the scent. He wanted to go on for ever. Beyond the settlements – beyond the ploughed land – beyond all fences. That was it – beyond all fences. Beyond all fences, where a man was alone with himself and the untouched earth. (239)

How could, then, *The Boy in the Bush* with so many ‘Australian type’ birthmarks rouse such wrath in its local reception? Did Palmer fume since it was classbound and colonial? Jack, though proud of his British race, reserve and breeding, finally and fully disobeys the dictates of class, Home and colony with the courage of the leader of a self-established commune which actively disowns genteel Perth codes. Perhaps the nationalist critics could not forgive Jack the terminus of his odyssey, given that he arrives at this terminus through an arduously Australian pilgrimage. Mollie’s Jack had begun as an aloof expatriate “British to the bone” (17), but in Australia he “felt as if the old world had given him up from the womb, and put him into a new weird grey-blue paradise, where man has to begin all over again” (95). As a twice-born in the bush, he had been designed by Mollie to lapse into the nomadic revelry of pure Australianness and achieve *the* paradox, an Australian type with stellar social status.

Lawrence intercepted with his goal. In the restructured plot, Jack would not be a triumphant nomad. He would invent the “strange, wild, ash-coloured country with its undiminished sun and its unblemished moon” (185) as a heart of darkness, a haven for the lords

of death invoked to challenge the “great paleface overlay” of western civilization¹⁵⁰ in this untamed land: “Jack looked west, into the welter of yellow light [of an Australian sunset], in fear. . . . There were vaster, more unspeakable gods than the gods of his fathers. The god in this yellow fire was huger than the white men could understand, and seemed to proclaim their doom” (153). Mollie’s protagonist, converted to the Lawrence ideal in the latter half of the text, resolves to be a dark lord of death, keen on unrooting the white overlay: “Let me be a Lord of Death, since the reign of the White Lords of Life, like my father, has become sterile and a futility. . . . Let me go that other great road, that the blacks go” (228). He would raise his own Kurtzdom¹⁵¹ in Australia beyond “the edge of the white man’s world” (309), based on the life-and-death loyalty of men and his unashamedly polygamous intentions towards women. In this “vaster, alien [non-European] world of the undawned era” (309), he would raise “a new race on the face of the earth, with a new creed of courage and sensual pride” and claim earth-royalty over them, like Abraham or Saul (359).

Such an end to Jack’s routes through Australia was unacceptable to local critics, including the cosmopolitan and egalitarian Palmer. The protagonist of *The Boy in the Bush* threatens ‘whiteness’ as a core racial and socio-cultural value in what was imagined to be the last pure white citadel. The betrayal seemed worse since the threat came not from threatening others, such as Asians and aborigines, but from a text authored by a white Australian, featuring an Anglo-Saxon protagonist as the icon of Australianness. Mollie’s ambition to author an Australian text was subverted by Lawrence’s interpolation of a private fantasy as Jack’s final address. He inadvertently initiated in her texts the game of authenticity.

¹⁵⁰ Lawrence made this observation on Mexico in mid March 1923. He was relieved to find that there the “great paleface overlay [of Western culture exported through colonies] hasn’t gone into the soil half an inch. . . . And the peon still grins his Indian grin behind the Cross . . . He knows his gods”. Lawrence, D.H. “A.U. Revoir, U.S.A.” April 1923. *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence*. Ed. Edward D. McDonald. New York: The Viking Press, 1936. 105. Print.

For the inner sickness of American and Western civilization, Lawrence imagined a cure inspired by a lost religion; distant Mexico, and interchangeably Australia, could model uncorrupted settings for his utopic visions. I have shown before in this chapter how Lawrence translated Mexico to Australia in the jacket illustration of *The Boy in the Bush*. The bare-chested Australian boy wears a Mexican hat while a kangaroo gazes at the absurdity.

¹⁵¹ The word “Kurtzdom” is my neologism derived from the name of Kurtz, the quasi-mythical protagonist of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899). He wields absolute power over black and white alike in a pocket of the British empire in central Africa, the spatial ‘heart of darkness’. Though initially deputed on an imperialist project, Kurtz soon abandons the rules of the game to preside over ‘unspeakable rites’ of the natives and live, love and rule in an autonomous way, as a demi-god who overwhelms his subjects and colleagues across colour and gender with a holy terror. Jack Grant’s vision, too nebulous to be fully paralleled to the Kurtz territory, approximates Kurtz’s power and enigma in the subversion of imperialist tools and in the grey dream of a colony within a colony where he could terrorise, transgress as also exorcise the “horror” of whiteness and empire.

More Surrogate Fiction: Mollie's Other Australian Fiction pre-Tucker

Finding herself the renegade author in Australian literary circles, Mollie ostensibly chose to yield to dominant stereotypes of representing the nation in her fiction that immediately followed *The Boy in the Bush*, namely *Black Swans* and *Men Are We*. Lawrence had cultivated his anti-West prophecy with her signifiers of Australianness in *The Boy in the Bush*; in a bid to recover authenticity, she yielded to the prophets of nationalist literature who seemed to have hijacked her next two texts. A debate on Mollie's hypocrisy could be turned to a simultaneous text on Australian self-doubt regarding contesting conceptions of the nation. *Black Swans*, the novel that followed *The Boy in the Bush*, witnessed a war between her ideal of Australianness and pre-scripted formats. It oscillated between genres apparently estranged – a female bildungsroman and a pioneer novel on Anglo-Saxon males staking their claim on the continent.

Palmer “wanted Australian literature to develop a manly attachment to bush settings and the sweaty world of hard male work. He called his first book *The World of Men*. . . . Palmer abhorred the idea of a literature centred on drawing rooms and chattering women in evening dresses. That was neither manly enough nor Australian enough for him”.¹⁵² Despite its claims of realism, the Palmer model was neither supported by reality nor was it an inclusive fantasy. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Vance Palmer and some of his contemporary intellectuals – playwright Louis Esson (1879-1943), poet Frank Wilmot (1881-1942) and dissident Minister of Religion Frederick Sinclair (1881-1954) – dreamt of forging for Australia its very own national culture. As David Walker shows in *Dream and Disillusion*, they felt betrayed and alienated in post-First World War Australia which refused to conform to their socialist ideals, including the dream of a sentient national commune: “their view of Australian society was falsified, for they diminished their opponents and enlarged their supporters. . . . Paradoxically, the search for a national consciousness that was supposed to broaden and deepen the writer's understanding of his society produced a narrowness of focus and a sweeping distaste for many of the values which influenced the wider society” (126-127).

Having been proved a false prophet of future Australia, Palmer invented in the mythical 1890s and a curative outback life the “dreamtime” of white Australia¹⁵³ and an elegy for his anachronistic aesthetic and political convictions. Failure the non-formulaic term was not Mollie's forte alone. Closer to her than he imagined, Palmer was haunted by ghosts of dead

¹⁵² Walker *Not Dark Yet* 90.

The memoir explores the author's family histories in the matrix of post-Second World War Australia's national culture, obsessions, silences, myths and fears.

¹⁵³ Palmer, Vance. *The Legend of the Nineties*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1954. 172. Print.

dreams and an imagined past:

Although Palmer's ideal of an original new democracy receded, it did not disappear, but was transformed into the dream of what Australian society might have become if it had honoured the spirit of the 1890s. As the reality of this hope died, the dream of what might have been and of what might yet be if Australians underwent a change of heart, grew more alluring. Palmer could not reconcile himself to urban Australia nor rid himself of the legend of the 1890s.¹⁵⁴

Out of sync with the complex realities and concerns of post-War urban Australia or the wave of contemporary literary modernism, Palmer's fossil convictions, aesthetic and political, were embalmed and enshrined as the inviolable myth that played at authentic Australianness and crafted a cycle of perennial deceptions in the creation, dissemination and consumption of national self-representations. Set in the 1850s, *Black Swans*, with its male protagonists and a plot on pioneers, acquiesced to this myth. In her retelling or anuvad of Palmer's dream, however, Mollie projected types and tropes absented from the dream in *Black Swans*, exposing the lacunae and reductive bias of the 1890s legend which denied diversity in Australia with its dogma-driven focus on station life and the elemental bush.

Tim Rafferty, a young Irish orphan convicted without crime or trial and deported to Australia, is born for the bush. He is an insider to its trials, mysteries and malice and an initiate in the rituals of native corroborees. With his bush-honed uberman skills, he rescues the protagonist Letty in her childhood from an aboriginal camp. He inhabits the sweaty world of hard male work and yet possesses multiple local and Asian languages. He is capable of conversations with Bapoe the Malay seaman and Sampow the Chinese cook in their tongues. He is no outsider either to the aboriginal's "guttural tongue" (59) and shares indigenous intimacy with the bush and the "numberless secrets of bush lore" (71) picked up from the indigenous prisoners at Rottnest.

Tim sets up camp in an unknown, untamed stretch of north Australia aided by the labour of aborigine Fridays; land and sea readily yield him wealth. He "scented gold and found it" (280), traded oyster-shells with Chinese merchants, sold fisheries on the reef and finally gifted the well-stocked Edenic estate, Golden Valley – his ripe labour – to his beloved Letty and her husband Peter. This benevolent Heathcliff had promised many years ago to build her a paradise on the edge of the bush where it turns littoral. He sublimates his desire for her in the heroic feat of husbanding the Australian scape: "I had to make good for the sake of a real princess. To

¹⁵⁴ Walker *Dream and Disillusion* 196.

work for a princess will give heart to a man” (310). Tim readily assimilates skills and secrets from the potential threats to white Australia. He learns wrestling tricks from a Japanese coolie, sleight of hand from a wily Hindu on board a Malay ship and masters water-divining from the natives. Like Tucker, he is a consummate actor and distracts natives by posing as the zebra-striped ally of evil spirits during a corroboree.

Though an adept in the ways of others, Tim unlike Jack Grant has his heart/whiteness in the right place. He is righteously ethnocentric and horrified at the thought of miscegenation. “These wretched blacks had no ideas of precept and principle”, he asserts (98), and terrifies them into bonded labour at his settlement during the adolescent escapade to an unknown island with Letty and Peter. Inventing the aboriginals and Asians around him as Australian stereotypes, he commands the ever-opiated ever-compliant Sampow (107), a “heathen and a Chinee”, to disguise himself as a naked aborigine in order to save Letty during a crisis, while Tim must refuse the role out of racial pride: “I’m Irish, and I’ll not demean me country goin’ unclad like a heathen. You are more often naked than not; you don’t mind, you optical delusion that ye are!” (111). The outcast saint-convict is pure pioneer material “made for colonizing, for battling against odds, making the best of a bad matter, mastering elementals and keeping up a brave heart in desperate circumstances – and this is what the country needed” (82).

Tim, the outlaw who escaped jail to emerge as a reformer-pioneer, is the romanticised marginal hero: “Often ‘tis but the earth I have for floor, and the sky above for roof, the lugger’s my home” (333). He struggles too for the rights of underdogs, since he leads the combine formed for the abolition of miners’ wrongs and drafts a petition that results in a legislation protecting miners’ rights in the eastern colonies. His character has references to Robinson Crusoe and Ned Kelly.¹⁵⁵ Paradoxically, this Kelly avatar never flinches from his allegiance to the aristocratic settler gentry, symbolised by his beloved Letty and her fiancé Peter who have both been living in England since their adolescence. So unqualified is his devotion that when

¹⁵⁵ Ned Kelly (1855-1880), the Irish-Australian bushranger, thrives as an ambivalent hero in popular culture as also as a symbol of Irish-Australian resistance against the British colonial authorities, with his exploits celebrated across the arts, in music, fiction, biographies and cinema. His *Jerilderie Letter* (1879), a much-cited piece of subaltern self-assertion in Australian literature, documents the various incidents that compelled his career as an outlaw, narrates his view of his activities and the treatment meted out to Irish Catholics by the police and the English Protestant gentry. Some mythologize him as an icon of Australian national identity and resistance against British colonial ties and tyranny. Ned Kelly had possibly inspired the characterization of Tim, with whom he shares his Irish Catholic roots and the appeal of an outlaw dispensing justice to the subaltern, though not the oxymoronic fidelity to wealthy aristocrats such as Peter and Letty. For further details and a bibliography on Ned Kelly and his cultural impact, see Hobsbawm, E. J. *Bandits*. Ringwood: Pelican, 1972. Print. Mc Qilton, John. *The Kelly Outbreak 1878-1880; the Geographical Dimension of Social Banditry*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1979. Print. Jones, Ian. *Ned Kelly: a Short Life*. Port Melbourne: Lothian, 1995. Print.

Peter hits him across the face in blind suspicion of his relation with Letty, he accepts with “I’ll take your horse, Mister Peter, sir” (334).

The nationalist Palmer-appeasing stereotype of Tim could not be finally inoculated against Mollie’s fantasies. Nostalgia for Home/England and class-consciousness yet again infected her apparently keen-to-conform model. Letty realises that Tim is “not of a class to look at her” (346) and chooses for her spouse Peter, son of the Western Australian Governor, “a new and smart creation turned out of an English public school and university, and developed to perfect manhood by a hard training in the British Army – haughty and handsome and arrogant to a degree . . . this fine aristocrat of a young man!” (306). Content to play indulgent godfather to this young couple, Tim relinquishes his role as Peter’s potential rival in love and Letty transmutes him to a non-disruptive, even spectral *deus ex machina* to be invoked and dismissed at will: “[The otherwise jealous] Peter would be pleased when he found out that Tim was just a serving, shadowy, love-form, oscillating round them both” (338).

Tim and Peter, both of whom are “the right sort to come out here and pioneer” (283), perform Mollie’s trope of binary Australian heroes repeated elsewhere, for example in the cop and outlaw, Bob and Steve, of *Where Skies are Blue*. However, while Tim and Peter seem to represent warring alternatives in Mollie’s version of the ideal male Antipodean, Bob and Steve perform obverse possibilities of Australianness in their rhythm of reciprocated empathy. Illustrious digger Tim is legally an outlaw while Peter, the proudly dogmatic puppet for staging Mollie’s race-patriotism, is “far more English out of his country than he ever seemed in it” (283) and has been trained for the British army. They inhabit the antipodes of criminality and nobility as well as the extremes of the socio-economic divide; one is a non-literate Irish prisoner charged falsely with his mother’s murder and unhoused in the bush, while the other has been raised at Home and trained to uphold the British traditions and propriety.

Peter and Tim impersonate doublets embedded in routine representations of Australianness of the time. Peter embodies the newly arrived white lawmakers of the land charged with aggression and the ardour to discipline, while Tim the virtuous convict is designed to serve and mentor the ruling class in the colony. While Cain, Letty’s favourite in the Bible, reminded her of Tim, *Black Swans* does little to uphold the Cain narrative¹⁵⁶ of convicts’

¹⁵⁶ In an allusion to Jose Saramago, I have here used Cain, the firstborn of Adam and Eve, first human murderer and protester against god, who was banished from His presence and lived in the land of Nod [Genesis 4.16], as metaphor and qualifier for texts, protests and exiles which interrogate fictions of the empowered in any age and medium. Incidentally, Land of Nod remained one of Mollie’s favourite phrases for Australia and featured in *WX – Corporal Smith* (162, 164) as well as in the title of *Eve in the Land of Nod*. Besides the reference to the history of white settler Australia as a penal colony, “land of Nod” foregrounds nomadic exile in the margins away from Home, “nod” being the Hebrew root of the verb “to wander”. The phrase accommodates Mollie’s nostalgia for

resistance against the injustice and cruelty “of a vindictive system of justice that discriminates against the poor and the Irish”, a resistance that conflated politics and poverty in the context of nineteenth century Australia.¹⁵⁷ A criminal who has committed no sin, Tim is contained instead as token convict in the official Australian consciousness and the dark penal histories displaced by fantastic genres of romance and melodrama. Ambivalent and yoked to his double Peter, this “docile delinquent”¹⁵⁸ is made to bear the baggage of the English middle-class. He performs the nationalist obsession with crimes barely committed and their catastrophically excessive punishments in an antiworld where the victim must expiate for the systemic guilt and violence against him.

Mollie’s exposition of cleavages in myths of Australianness, as performed by her protagonist binary Peter and Tim, is by no means exceptional, according to Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra’s study of the Australian hunger to “double-think”, as seeded in the national images of convicts, bushrangers and criminals.¹⁵⁹ They contend that in many texts representing nineteenth century Australianness such as Charles Harpur’s *Stalwart the Bushranger* (1867) or Marcus Clarke’s *His Natural Life* (1874), the cast-list is full of split or doubled forms in which each character carries its self-cancelling shadow. Sometimes, as in Rosa Praed’s *Outlaw and Lawmaker* (1893), the eponymous bipolar personas converge in the split personality of a single character, in this case Morres Blake, Colonial Secretary by day and Captain Moonlight a bushranger, by night.

Mollie, in her anuvad of the tradition, crossed the threshold. Unlike Hodge and Mishra’s examples, both her male doubles – the conformist and the transgressor – survive and remain pivotal to plot and text till the very end. One wins the woman and is gifted an estate by the other who settles the land, trades across the neighbouring seas and continues to imprint his presence, however hauntological, in the lives of the other two protagonists. The faultlines in the Australian nationalist images of bushman and convict and the obverse, secret colonial fascination with imported authority break out through these unlikely equals, both obsessed with

centred England and her simultaneous celebration of iconic Australian wanderers like the swagman, the explorer and the bushmate. Mollie crafts Australianness as a gift of exile, as evident in *Black Swans* and her later texts like *Tucker Sees India* and *Where Skies Are Blue*.

For Cain’s voice which confronts official history/religion with a “no”, see Saramago, Jose. *Cain*. Trans. Margaret Jull Costa. London: Harvill Secker, 2009. Print.

¹⁵⁷ Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* 127.

¹⁵⁸ Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* 137.

¹⁵⁹ Connections between crime and punishment in Australian literature and their shifting meanings as a metaphoric resource in historiography and in society are studied and their hidden anguish explored, in the chapter titled “Crimes and Punishments” of *Dark Side of the Dream* (116-142). The phrase “double think” appears in the concluding page of the chapter.

the female protagonist Letty.

Letty's gender was her first disqualification in the bid to become an authentic Australian. Mollie tried to correct the contentious love triangle of *The Boy in the Bush* by reversing the motif in *Black Swans*, so that the girl must now choose between her admirers. It helped neither heroine nor text. Unlike Baynton's "chosen vessel", Letty does not render the violence that waits to leap at Australian women just beneath the skin of cosmetic legends. Nor is she the abstracted, angelic keeper of literary stereotypes. As often in Mollie's oeuvre, Letty performs a war between personal fantasies and national metaphor. Always on the run from the carceral discipline of an early settler society, home and marriage, she is her author's wicked dream-child and her impossible story scripts the alternative autobiography Mollie had perhaps always wanted to live, in vain. The original Australian female outlaw, she runs away to sea with a convict and is in her elements as explorer and bushwoman. Prior to their escape, she teaches Tim "much bush lore" including the knowledge of its herbs and birds (33) and is equal partner in their travails and heroic adventures, when both are held hostage at the illegal Malay fishing lairs in the uncharted north. Nationalist tropes like the explorer or the bush could not, however, catapult Letty to the cult status of a female larrikin, an oxymoron in Australia. Mollie needed India as context to make this subversion viable in Australian fiction; she introduced a female version of the unattached picaro protagonist in the flamboyantly irrational and perennially suspect traveller/conwoman Trudy in *Tucker Sees India*.

Mollie's characters, more so the woman protagonist of *Black Swans*, also serve as a museum of her many selves, possibilities and memories both curated and created. Tim, for example, is as "highly psychic" (105) as she knew herself to be. He can perceive the presence of menacing spirits of long departed convicts and soldiers when he chances upon an abandoned convict station in an unknown island. In his resolve to possess and husband Letty, Peter inherits Mollie's self-confessed jealousy. Letty, besides being as wild, feminine and fiercely free as the incorrigibly Victorian Mollie wished herself to be, fascinates every male she meets during her voyage from England to Australia and within the colony – a witch-charm her creator could hardly claim for herself in life, except during the stay at Delhi. Like Mollie, she spends her adolescence and first youth in England, before returning to Australia. The otherwise carefree girl abruptly ventriloquizes Mollie's life-spelt darshan¹⁶⁰ of a woman seared and betrayed by love:

¹⁶⁰ The noun "darshan" which etymologically refers to the act of seeing in Sanskrit, could be rendered in English as philosophy, realisation, penetration or deep focus.

Men, they wanted you, to take and possess you . . . An alarming thought. They took you into the mangroves or somewhere equally secret and dreadful and possessed you. An alarming and yet an alluring thought. All maidens seemed to be enticed, and not to really mind walking on the edge of the secret place. And yet shrank from being taken – the less well-nurtured shrank less perhaps – but they all came and walked on the edge of the secret place, and though they shrank they wanted to be taken; and their mammas wanted them to be taken, into the mangroves, or another secret place, out of which they never returned with the same wild, sane, free step with which they went in. (251-252)

Letty yet again metamorphoses into a be-purdah¹⁶¹ Mollie when she muses on the loss and betrayal of love, in an inexplicable digression from her epiphany of a deep, even domestic, passion for the devoted husband Peter:

her [Letty's] love would be a continual tug at her heart for the rest of her life, a terrible tie – yes, terrible, you couldn't get away from it – ever. . . . However the man turned out after you had discovered his external life and appearance – which had been but a cloak to cover his soul, you would love him with this pain that is so poignant, because he had possessed you in body and mind. Even if he had done so under cover of a subterfuge, he would still hold the secret of your soul that you had given him as a gift. (337)

She seems to share Mollie's romantic precept of eternal self-surrender to the beloved once loved even if the affair turned acid, as it did with Dr. Corley.

But Letty exceeds being a window to Mollie's autobiographical excursions or icon for a possibility of Australianness erased. As much an adept in Australian land and waters as the wallaby and the black swan, she belongs to this land with its "new-earth vibrations" (327) and is paralleled to the local flora and fauna. She seems to have been born into the secret indigenous wisdom of local berries, roots and birdspeak which even Tim must learn from her. It is in Australia that a restless Letty attains the end of her bildungsroman – spiritual depth, love and healing – removed from the curbs and conventions back Home. "Herself, like a blossom-bud, was starting to burst into flower" in the land of new beginnings (327). She is the land, as mysterious and untamed as the "long lonely shore, unsullied, crystal, prenatal as a wild swan's egg" (297), both land and woman waiting to be finally settled by either of the charismatic

¹⁶¹ "Purdah", assimilated in standard English vocabulary according to the Oxford Dictionary of English, derives from Persian and Urdu "parda" meaning "veil" or "curtain". The Persian negative prefix "be-" when prefixed to purdah, means "unveiled". The chapter seeks to associate Mollie uninhibited with the India motif in her texts; in fiction and life, she seems to have least hid her self, politics and notions of a pluralist Australian nation in an Indian, or India-inspired matrix. Mollie unveiled could perhaps best be translated as "be-purdah", an adjective of Indian origin.

See "Purdah." *Oxford Dictionary of English*. 2nd ed. 2005. Print.

pioneers of *Black Swans*. Peter and Tim are united in their urge to stake all for land and Letty.

In the long years of Letty's absence, Tim uncannily transfers his idolisation and erotic intensity for her to the continent: "The country gripped him. He loved its wildness, its careless freedom [Letty's character traits]. He took it to his heart, as his own country, and it became burnt into the very essence of his soul" (281). Undercutting her apparent surrender to dominant national tropes, Mollie made explicit an unacknowledged open secret in the dominant construct of Australianness – the equation of land with the usually absented woman in the male settler's phallogocentric universe in which he must possess and exploit both. According to *Dark Side of the Dream*, the brilliant study of exclusions and guilt in white Australian history, literary texts and myth-making, the woman made invisible in the national stereotype reappears as the gendered land, "on which the 'Australian' works his will" and violence.¹⁶²

Representations of land and waters in *Black Swans* prove to be a game-changer. Mollie's Australia features a boundless ocean looming in the north in this text. Tim, Letty and Peter's adventures unfurl at sea when she tries to take Tim in a boat, away from his sentence at Rottneest Island. The ocean frees them from their ghettos, limits and social apartheid and enables their intersection and transfusion with other lives, experiences and ethnicities. They encounter a Malay fishing proa manned by the Chinese and the Malays who were prohibited in their traditional fishing grounds over which the British, and later Australian, governments declared proprietorial rights ever since white settlement. The "illegal" proa rescues them but they escape. The sea hurls them back to northern Malay, and later, to the aboriginal camps where Tim recruits his rainbow colony comprising "the whole gang, children, Chinaman, niggers, Banyon, baby and all" (154). The Malay camp turns out to be a great smuggling depot where trepang is caught, cured and sold at Port Timor-Lavet, a Chinese-Malay centre. It inspires Tim's entrepreneurship and he earns his first capital by selling a "little fish 'mine' [in a secluded northern reef] to a Malay merchant in Port Darwin" (95), in signature colonial ownership and exploitation of his environment.

The ocean makes Tim rich. He gains his fortune by trading cured trepang, pearls and shells with Chinese merchants. It separates his routes from those of his adored Letty and Peter who must now be returned to 'civilization', after the brief exposure. When as adults they return from England across the seas, he settles them in the safe southern wattle-rimmed Golden Valley, an ideal breeding-ground for horses and fertile farm of lemon, saffron, citron, sulphur and amber, situated on the brink of the sea. The valley melts into sands and deep ocean waters

¹⁶² Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* 164.

“the most delicious green . . . [and] beryl and aquamarine” (382), as multi-hued as the peoples who had navigated it for centuries. The ocean intertwines these lives and races and scripts their trials, connections, betrayals and interlinked destinies. It maps non-exclusive images of the nation segueing into multiple intertwined, ocean-riding others in *Black Swans*, an unnerving cartography given the dominant isolationist imaginary of Australianness.

As Ruth Balint contends in her paper “Epilogue: The Yellow Sea”,¹⁶³ the Australian seascape in the north had for centuries sustained alternative myths, memories and histories of the continent and its maritime connections with Asia, unsettling for the white settlers. The ocean signified unmoored distance from their supposed cultural roots, “the solid [Western] world of laws and civilisation” (345). It also threw open bridges with the immediate northern neighbours in South-East Asia. The northern waters were seen as a lurking and polluting threat to the nation’s territorial integrity. To the Anglo-Saxon Antipodean, the northern coasts represented aberrant “spaces where the edges of the island nation seemed to lose their [cherished] solidity and begin to fray and unravel” (359). This fragile littoral zone replete with invasion anxieties could potentially mutate into Asia translated, they feared, and replay the chilling theatre of dis/possession, eviction and forced migration, this time leaving in its trail the inverse tragedy of white aborigines and Asiatic masters.¹⁶⁴ The sea surged as a site of silenced hi/stories of the northwestern coast of Australia which also happened to be the southern tip of an ancient naval trade route across the Indian Ocean and Timor Sea to south-east Asia and China. The naval trade included Australia in the global economy and predated European occupation of the continent:

the extensive trade in marine produce, particularly trepang, bound northern Australia into a global economy and intercolonial networks long before the arrival and settlement of the British . . . The seas to Australia’s north were once the continent’s original gateway to the world, linking it to the Indonesian archipelago, to India and China, and to various important ports along the way. (347)

Ironically, almost all marine products – pearls, shells and trepang – collected in Australia’s northern waters between at least the seventeenth and twentieth centuries ended up in China, popularly perceived as settler Australia’s yellow peril. This commerce, like that other hushed large scale export, of opium produced mostly in Bengal Presidency under the rule of

¹⁶³ Balint Epilogue *Australia’s Asia* 345-365.

¹⁶⁴ As Greg Lockhart observes in “Absenting Asia”, “the irrational projections of the settler destruction of Aboriginal Australia or some avatar of it . . . constitutes . . . [the] perception of the Asian menace” (*Australia’s Asia* 289-290).

English East India Company during the early nineteenth century to China,¹⁶⁵ generated much colonial wealth for the empire.

Keen on playing loyal to a national identity anchored to the fictive terra nullius, a newly federated, terrestrial white Australia sans oceanic links with Asia, their memories and implications,¹⁶⁶ Mollie blundered. In her Australia unpartitioned between land and sea, she retrieved and foregrounded forbidden connections. Her contemporary *Age* journalist Ambrose Pratt's novel *The Big Five*¹⁶⁷ or Charles H. Kirmess's *The Commonwealth Crisis*¹⁶⁸ presents a phobic fantasy of the liminal north lost to other races and cultures – the savage Malays, aborigines or the wily Chinese and Japanese. In this exclusivist matrix, the lost land could only be reclaimed by unrelenting Anglo-Saxon race patriots. Mollie tinkers with stereotypes of the threatening other endlessly rehearsed in these jeremiads, and ends up accommodating them as staples of her non-exclusive north.

The neglected “empty north”¹⁶⁹ with its aborigines, slinking Malays, miscegenation, fluid

¹⁶⁵ The much-hooded connection between opium, produced in India under the monopoly of the British East India Company and exported to China during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the wealth siphoned off the subcontinent by the British Raj during this period has inspired Amitav Ghosh's Ibis trilogy, *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2015). Besides these well-researched novels, one can look up the following sources for details on the politics and economics of opium trade in British India: Ghosh, Amitav. Interview by Angiola Codacci. *Amitav Ghosh*. *L'Espresso Magazine*, 24 Nov. 2011. Web. 11 May 2012.

Also see, Farooqui, Amar. *Smuggling as Subversion: Colonialism, Indian Merchants and the Politics of Opium 1790-1843*. Rev. ed. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005. Print.

¹⁶⁶ The need to disown the connection seems to have somewhat abated in the recent years. The thirteenth meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) consisting of twenty member-states was held on November 1, 2013 at Perth, Australia's Indian Ocean capital. In this meeting, Australia took over as the chair of the organisation for the first time in its eighteen year history, succeeding India. A joint statement issued by the foreign ministers of Australia, India and Indonesia, the new vice-chair, focussed on conservation and the sustainable use of oceanic resources. But it also committed to an engagement with peoples dotting the rim of the ocean and a new weave of old and diverse ties once threading the entire zone: “India, Australia and Indonesia are committed to . . . harness the diverse strengths of our region. We are confident that Indian Ocean regional cooperation is entering a significant, and indeed exciting, new phase. The commitment of member-states during our meeting, reflected in the attendance of foreign ministers from Australia, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Singapore, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka and Yemen is perhaps the most significant demonstration of recognition that in the 21st century, the Indian Ocean region will play a vital strategic and economic role”.

See Khurshid, Salman, Julie Bishop and Marty Natalegawa. “Putting out to sea a new vision.” Op-Ed. *The Hindu*. *The Hindu*, 2 Nov. 2013. Web. 15 Nov. 2013.

¹⁶⁷ The fiction was serialized in *The Lone Hand* in 1907-1908. Also see *Anxious Nation* 118-120.

¹⁶⁸ It was serialised in *The Lone Hand* from 1 Aug. 1908 to 1909. Also see *Anxious Nation* 120-121.

¹⁶⁹ The phrase is taken from the title of the ninth chapter, “Beware the Empty North”, of David Walker's *Anxious Nation*. The chapter engages with dominant alarmist stereotypes of northern Australia vulnerable to Asian invasion, generated and disseminated in the south-eastern centres of national power and culture like Sydney or Melbourne, during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The ‘empty north’ according to them urgently needed white colonies with a race-building mission, before it could invite occupation by the emergent Asian neighbourhood with its teeming millions. For more details, see Walker, David. “Beware the Empty North.” *Anxious Nation* 113-126. Mollie's Tim, though the colonial master, threatened ‘Empty North’ propagandists and their racially exclusive development agenda with his non-white settlement.

borders, alternative affiliations and Asia-centric economy was delineated and legitimised in *Black Swans*. Banyon, the dead aboriginal chief's compassionate wife and later a member of Tim's crew, is of mixed race, born to a Malayan mother and a white father. Her presence points to the existence of a multi-racial, polyglot population in the cosmopolitan northern ports; they lived and traded in these maritime settlements, defying political and cultural shadowlines and the official history of the continent. These sea-facing port cities shared more commonality through their maritime functions with other East Asian ports across the Indian Ocean rim, than they did with the Australian centres of power thousands of miles south. Tim had been a trader at the northern city of Broome, a principal pearling port in the Indian Ocean trade route during the nineteenth century, connected to China, Japan, Malayasia and Philippines. Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, Filipino and Sri Lankan merchants and sailors together constituted the majority in this city.¹⁷⁰ In 1852, before he turned into a gold-digger, Tim had travelled to Hong Kong and the Fiji Islands for commerce.

Mollie's convict hero, though a collage of male stereotypes, has his money 'tainted' by the sinister sea-facing north which continued to use indentured Asian labour long after the rest of the settled land had accepted white Australia in practice and politics. The Asia-oriented maritime economy and distance of the northern littoral from Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney ruptured homogenous nationalist narratives of an uncontaminated, unified Australia. The dominant isolationist outpost narratives with their east coast bias in history and geography, usually projected the northern seas and shores as treacherous barricade, the "back door"¹⁷¹ open to illicit entry of expunged shadows such as exiled memories and coloured migrants.

Tim's location, as well as that of Letty and Peter in their adolescence, tarred their and their author's loyalty to official maps and -nesses of belonging. Mollie could salvage her

¹⁷⁰ Balint 350-351.

Also see Shnukal, Anna, Guy Ramsay, and Yuriko Nagata ed. *Navigating boundaries: the Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait*. Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004. Print.

¹⁷¹ Balint has studied the implications of the metaphor "back door" for the north, in Australian fiction and historiography in her chapter "The Yellow Sea" (352). Also see

Gothard, Jan. "Introduction: Asian Orientations." *Studies in West Australian History* 16 (1995). Print.

In its Asia phobia, the metaphor inverts and re-orientates Australia in relation to Asia, reading the pre-colonial "gateway" – the Indian Ocean and the northern shores – as "back door". White Australians followed this estranged, "upside down" old-world European cartography in imagining the continent, an instinctive allegiance that subverted their alleged intimacy with the country and its surrounding land and seascapes. For a discussion of Australia conceived as the "antipodes"/upside down Alice world in European and later white Australian paradigms, one may see, for example,

Stead, Christina. *For Love Alone*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1945. 1 (Qtd. in Balint 345).

Or look up the upside down map drawn by John Hunter who was captain of the *Sirius*, the flagship to the first fleet of white settlers that arrived in New South Wales, Australia, in 1788.

Hunter, John. "Chart Shewing the Track of the *Waaksamheyd* Transport from Port Jackson in New South Wales to Batavia in 1792." Map. 1793. *Antique Mapart Australia: Early Australian Maps 1500s to 1800s*. Apr. 28 2012. Web. 13 May 2012.

Australias perhaps only through India, once a pivotal member of the Indian Ocean trade that thrived across Egypt, India, East Africa, Syria, Morocco and Spain in the medieval world prior to the chilling import of European imperialism in South Asia and the beginnings of Portuguese pillage and militant monopoly of Indian Ocean trade routes since the sixteenth century.¹⁷² Many of its richly diverse port-cities across the western coast in Gujarat, Mangalore and Calicut had received regular visitors from China, Sumatra, Ceylon, the Maldives, Yemen, Cairo and Iran, some of whom stayed back and married in the region.¹⁷³ Perhaps Mollie could shore ruins of her self and her nation's banished pasts only in a muted, marginalised Antipodean universe that mirrored the pre-colonial, maritime, fringe histories of India, both worlds and histories having been rendered peripheral, even invisible, by an imperial historiography pivoted on conquest and colonisation. In this richly confused and frequently vandalised subcontinent, she found a secret-sharer of her viraha for absented models of Australianness; it gifted her courage and cunning to plant the subversions in her anuvad of mainstream -ness and nationalism in her triad.

Mollie's Australianness – and Australia itself – in *Black Swans* turns opulent metaphor for her complexities, contradictions and chameleon dreams. The old jail at Albany ostensibly signifies “the sense of unconstrained liberty” (333), yet looms as one of the first Australian scapes Letty confronts from sea (273). The carceral contains their lives in Australia; Tim, Letty and Peter find themselves imprisoned in Australia, whether in white settlers' jails or by the aborigines. Every stereotype, apparently upheld, is subsequently turned on its head. The continent, alternatively labelled as “the land of Far Away” (247) or “a lost gods' land” (248),

¹⁷² Since the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Indian Ocean trade which carried exports from India, Burma, China, Maldives through Cairo, Alexandria and Venice to the rest of Europe “was the motor of the international economy” (*The Imam and the Indian* 176). In a South Asian past that eerily mirrored a much-forgotten strand of Australian history, the thriving inter-continental trade and centuries of dialogue continued through the pre-colonial period. Since 17 May 1498, when Vasco da Gama arrived at Calicut on the western coast in his first voyage to India, the Portuguese had tried to eliminate with bombs all competition and an ancient, alternative trading culture in the Indian Ocean, where none had thought to claim ownership of the ocean routes prior to their arrival. The Portuguese victory in the battle of Diu in 1509 against a transcontinental fleet hastily gathered by the Muslim potentate of Gujarat, the Hindu ruler of Calicut and the Sultan of Egypt irreversibly banished a plural trading ethic of cooperation and compromise and substituted it with the colonial metaphysic of violence, exclusion and exclusive possession. The battle proved decisive and ushered the beginning of the European scramble for colonisation in India. For further details of the Indian Ocean trade routes or the pre-colonial history of maritime commerce in the subcontinent and its annihilation, see

Ghosh, Amitav. *In an Antique Land*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal and Permanent Black, 1992. 286-288. Print.

Also see Ghosh, Amitav. “Empire and Soul: a review of The Baburnama.” *The Imam And The Indian* 107.

For an account of the encounter between the Portuguese and the combined fleet under the king of Gujarat Bahadur Shah and the latter's failed military strategy, see

Ali, Syed Mujtaba. “Jale Dangai” [“In Waters and on Land”]. *Rachanabali [Anthology]*. Vol. 7. Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh, 1999. 43-46. Print.

¹⁷³ Ghosh *In an Antique Land* 243.

morphs at times into a jail from Letty's reel of escape from the real. From spaceless eternity, it is then returned to a time warp and seems to project both the past and the future, parallel to Mollie's India hosting multiple tenses and possibilities for Tucker in *Tucker Sees India*.

Australia in *Black Swans* heaves with memories, storytellers and oral historians like Mrs. Ellis who "drenched and deluged them with information, family history" and local anecdotes of eccentric pioneers (295). Yet the ancient story-heaving continent quakes too with the terror and ecstasy of an unwritten page in *Black Swans*: "With the greatest ease you could turn down every one in the wide world and blot them out [in Australia], like turning down the leaf of a book" (297). For Australia is also the land of new births, "a womb of time waiting for other generations" (301) which tests the love and friendship of Mollie's young protagonists and transforms into a site of self-knowledge and re-birth. The trials plumb the trio's depth dimensions; Peter overcomes his jealousy and Letty her unrest and reluctance to recognise and accept their love. All three of them are twice born into an alchemic "new spiritual life" (375) in Australia; this amniotic nest sets them free from the tense undercurrents eroding their bonds.

The subtitle "Rara avis in terris nigroque simillima cygno" of *Black Swans* literally means "a rare bird in the land, and very like a black swan" and is quoted from Juvenal's *Satires* (VI.165) composed circa 82 CE: it turns out to be a satirical commentary on Mollie's imagined nation in this fiction. She possibly intended black swans, the rare bird of the title and subtitle, to become the proud logo for Western Australian nationalism as represented by her trio. But Juvenal's "black swan" signified the impossible, since the black swan in Europe had traditionally been a metaphor for that which could not exist. In Book VI, Juvenal used the phrase to render the (im)possibility of finding a worthy woman in Rome. The subtitle seems to have boomeranged to mock Mollie's protagonists – in particular the female – and her narration of the nation as untenable and fantastic, a verdict seconded by D. H. Lawrence and the poor public reception of the novel in Australia. The title and subtitle pre-empted her defeat in the authenticity game.

Alternatively, the book could be read as a black swan event¹⁷⁴ that exposed gaps and

¹⁷⁴ I have not used "black swan event" in absolute fidelity to Nassim Nicholas Taleb's model and meaning as proposed in his 2007 book *The Black Swan: the Impact of the Highly Improbable*, which defines such outlier events by their rarity, extreme impact and retrospective predictability in the domains of history, science, technology and finance. In the present context, I have adapted the term to connote evidence/contentions which disrupt long-held myths and certainties, just as Dutch explorer Willem de Vlaming's "discovery" of black swans in Western Australia in 1697 exposed the absurdity of Juvenal's axiom. The Taleb model, along with the history of the black swan as metaphor, its mutant meanings and the certainty of fragility and fissures in any thought system, have been discussed in Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. "The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable." First chapter of *The Black Swan*. *New York Times*. New York Times, 22 Apr. 2007. Web. 13 May 2013.

fissures in Mollie's contemporary mainstream routines of thinking Australianness. *Black Swans* sinned most in being an outlier in conformist guise. Like Thomas Sterne who exposed as fantastic the literary conventions of realism by their application in extremis in *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767), Mollie transgressed in her extravagant conformism to Australian nationalist stereotypes along with intermittent interpolations of the banished/vanished that unravelled those types as purist fantasies rooted in silencing, expulsions. The disturbing, even incendiary hybrid needed as non-exclusive, forgiving and translational/transnational a location as India, to be planted and cultivated in all its shades and fruits. No wonder *Tucker Sees India* and its hero performing the paradoxes of Australianness at a spectacular distance, were received well in Australia; both Katherine Susannah Prichard¹⁷⁵ and Henrietta Drake-Brockman¹⁷⁶ suggested having it made into a film. The film and India might at last translate Mollie's Australia as comic fiction without the troubling cargo of black swans.

Men Are We (1927), a slim book of sketches on the Warrup tribe, then appeared to be safe bait to its author. Mollie claimed to reiterate in first person a few episodes from her idol bush-nurse, Sister Munroe's experiences with aborigines; nothing could possibly go wrong now that she had merely anthologised stories received from a successful woman who fit admirably into a national type. The book opens with verbal cartoons of the pathetic but wily Warrup clown Wadji who barter stories and insiders' gossip of the tribe for the nurse's shoes and jam. The female narrator plays amused anthropologist of such "sub-human" subjects, much to the presumable delight of the white audience of *The West Australian* where the sketches were first published.¹⁷⁷ But soon she disrupts the prescribed limits between otherness and intimacy, and begins to inhabit the life-histories and sufferings of Weebie, Widgebee and Weemuella, all Warrup healers and witches to be shortly dispossessed by the white settlers. After all, the indigenous people take her, with her "skill in magic" and medicine (19), to be one of that witch-tribe.

The veil of indulgent indifference at comic anecdotes is rent with the concluding narrative of hideous hurt and exile, "The Bandicoots". It narrates the story of Yallaberrie, the woman forced to wed the medicine-man who destroyed her family – her previous husband and

For a usage of the term which is aligned to mine in this chapter, see Nagaswami, Vijay. "The Shrinking Universe: Kolaveri of the black swan." Opinion Column. *The Hindu Sunday Magazine*. The Hindu, 18 Feb. 2012. Web. 13 May 2013.

¹⁷⁵ Prichard, Katherine Susannah. Letter to ML Skinner. 27 Oct. 1937. MN 186. MS. 1396A/11. Battye Library, Perth.

¹⁷⁶ Drake-Brockman, Henrietta. Letter to ML Skinner. 2 Nov. 1937. MN 186. MS 1396A/12. Battye Library, Perth.

¹⁷⁷ Skinner *The Fifth Sparrow* 161.

beloved daughter and sons. The author's autobiographical self intervenes: "There is some complex in me that yearns over those who suffer lovelessness. It is bad enough not to be able to get it, but to suffer from not being able to give, that indeed is dreadful. It withers the nerves and fossilises the soul" (20). The book ends with the horror of an aboriginal exodus, since they are unable to cope with the white technologies of violence. Yallaberrie's young and beautiful daughter-in-law is captured in the presence of her friends by a settler, an alien "bad, wicked wizard" (31) for the aborigines; her baby dies in her husband Wajoora's arms; Wajoora is killed by white men's "sticks that spat lightning" (32) and the Warrups decamp and flee. The encounter between local tribes and settlers is decided by the invincible logic of the bullet, displacing the humour, assurance and symmetry of exchange promised in the first story. Threatened with the fury of racial annihilation, the cartoons turn tragic. Mollie the anuvadak had failed her assumed mission of literary nationalism, yet again in *Men Are We*. She would survive the mission and recover into pluralist, chaotic, Indian variants of Australianness in her novels that remember exile, yet transform that map of pain into a rite of re-birth.

India in Mollie Skinner's Exilic Novels

Exile as Mollie's Hyphen between India and Australianness

“Exile”, etymologically derived from Latin “exilium” meaning “banishment”, currently connotes a more ambiguous displacement, one “from their native country, either from choice or compulsion”,¹ or alternatively, the state or a period of absence, forced or voluntary, from one’s country or home.² In his book on the Indian diaspora, Vijay Mishra twins “exile” with the “impossible mourning” of the diasporic imaginary: “All diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way. Diasporas refer to people who do not feel comfortable with their non-hyphenated identities as indicated on their passport. . . . They are precariously lodged within an episteme of real or imagined displacements, self-imposed sense of exile”.³ Notwithstanding the residual heartbreak over dislocation and loss seeded in the word, “exile” as an eventually liberating episteme of displacement etched Mollie’s models of Australianness and their embedded India contact, except in her anuvadic texts where she found herself exiled as author and wrote back to re-invent her role as an anuvadak, i.e. heartbroken loyalist or playful iconoclast.

Exile from successive homes and anchors had shaped Mollie’s trauma and texts. She found herself an outsider to the role of Victorian beauty or household angel, the literary cliques of London or Australia or to the habit of an idolized nurse in Australia. She had already been exiled from the life of her married lover Dr. Corley and some of her own earlier works like *The Boy in the Bush* (1924) or *Black Swans* (1925). In *Letters of a V.A.D.*, *Tucker Sees India* and the two post-*Tucker* publications, *W.X. Corporal Smith* and *Where Skies Are Blue* – all novels that cross over into the realms of autobiography and biography – her self and Australias ripen in exile. I term these novels exilic. Exile had cracked open her universe and outed her despair and margins in *Letters of a V.A.D.*; in *Tucker* and the post-*Tucker* fiction, she turns it into a transformative exi(s)tentia category for characters twice born in an openness to multiplicity, impurity, differences and others within and in excess of the nation and the self. They thrive in diaspora, cross-cultural exchanges and linguistic Babel. The hurt of exile bleeds into the curiosity and unknowns of unscripted travel. And displacement leads to shifting scapes⁴ of self-

¹ “Exile.” *Oxford Dictionary of English*. 2nd ed. 2005. Print.

² “Exile.” Def. 1a and 1b. *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary*. Web. 31 March 2014.

³ Mishra *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* 1.

⁴ “The suffix –scape”, according to Arjun Appadurai, “allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes . . . [scape] also indicate[s] that these are not objectively gained relations . . . but rather that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts

discovery, anticipating the smudged boundaries of displacement, exile and travel in post-colonial territory.⁵

India in plural avatars remains embedded in her exilic novels; it becomes medium and mediator for the exilic epistemology of Mollie's Australianness that remembers and laughs at anchors and, forever unhoused, hosts the epiphany of alternatives. Exile in the subcontinent during her four year stint as nurse of the Lady Minto's Nursing Service in various hospitals of British India, from 1913 to 1917, had given Mollie much coveted social respect and the intimate distance needed to narrate her past and its forbiddens. It set her free to narrate her plurals in a phase of darkness marked by the death of her mentor and friend, the English nurse Sybil Dauney, and Dr. Corley in Gallipoli. Besides providing the unacknowledged and overt contexts respectively for *Letters of a V.A.D.* and *Tucker Sees India*, it is invoked in numerous echoes in *W.X. Corporal Smith*, ostensibly set in Libya during the Second World War. *Where Skies Are Blue*, her last book published in her lifetime, is located in the Australian bush and parades a motley crew of unhomed⁶ insiders mostly displaced or in transit. They discover Australia as a gift of exile and themselves, the bush and 'authentic' Australianness, as sites radioactive in their potency for transmutation, plurality. The exilic wisdom of multiple possibilities that elude any fixity, planted at last in the Antipodes in this text, have been transplanted from her characters' and their author's odysseys elsewhere – an adverbial resonant of India in Skinner.

Australianness and the Sea of Stories in post-Tucker Novels

The 1940s, specially the post-war period, was rich in cross-currents and confusion when it came to Australia's relations with Asia. The Atlantic Charter, signed in 1941 and vigorously supported by the Labour government, upheld the right of all peoples to self-determination. Australian enthusiasm for the US military occupation of Japan since August 1945 signalled the traditional "popular and political support for Western dominance in Asia".⁷ Public opinion also supported the decolonisation of Indonesia or Dutch East Indies once Indonesian nationalists

of actors". He posits –scapes as mutant building blocks of various imagined worlds, including the nation. Mollie's characters arrive at plural -scapes of Australianness built on travel and translation.

See Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Public Culture* 2.2 (Spring 1990): 1-24. Rpt. in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Whearshaf, 1993. 328-329. Print.

⁵ The CFP for the IACLALS Annual Conference 2015 explores ways in which the terms "exile", "displacement" and "travel" need to be critically nuanced beyond the etymology-induced binary of forced and voluntary movements, in order to investigate dis/locations in a late capitalist globe. See "CFP for IACLALS Annual Conference 2015 on Space, Place, Travel, Displacement, Exile." *IACLALS*. Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. Web. 5 Oct. 2014.

⁶ I have used "unhomed" in this context as a qualifier for those displaced characters in Skinner who are at home with not having/seeking a fixed forever home; the Australian bush releases them into this exi(s)tentia condition.

⁷ Sobocinska, Agnieszka. "Hearts of Darkness, Hearts of Gold." *Australia's Asia* 173-197. 174.

declared independence in 1945. In an industrial action termed the Black Armada, the Australian Seamen's Union declared a black ban on all Dutch shipping to Indonesia since the 1945 declaration of independence; it greatly assisted the survival of the new Indonesian Republic. The Labour government of Australia opposed Dutch measures to squash the movement for decolonisation in Indonesia, during discussions on the issue at the United Nations Security Council in December 1948:

the Australian delegate, Colonel Hodgson, introduced amendments to an American resolution in order to stiffen the terms against the Netherlands, whose operations in the Indies [Indonesia] he described as worse than Hitler's invasion of Holland in 1940, and he spoke of expelling the Dutch from the United Nations if they failed to obey the cease-fire order. . . . Australia became the only fully participating western country among the nineteen Asian and Pacific nations which met at Delhi [in January 1949] to devise a collective approach to the Indonesian problem.⁸ (142)

In 1945, the Communist Party in Australia had supported national independence movements in China and Vietnam, though "'counter-revolutionary warfare' remained a major state enterprise through the period of decolonisation. The Australian Army conducted such warfare in the Malayan Emergency and the Confrontation with Indonesia (1950-1966) . . . [and] in Vietnam (1962-1972)".⁹ R. G. Casey, the Australian Governor of Bengal from 1944-1946, assured in 1947 that "India is a blank on the map in most people's minds";¹⁰ with independence from the British in 1947, the subcontinent no longer remained the blank to be blanked by the Raj, economically and politically. Post-colonial Asia – with Burma (Myanmar), Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Philippines having declared independence in the late 1940s besides India, Pakistan and Indonesia – in the post-war world threatened to make Australia a Pacific pariah if it chose to still hinge onto the outpost narrative, its racism and exclusions. In response to the rapidly decolonising neighbourhood of the late 1940s and 1950s, it was urgent to mint afresh "the sincere Australian" as the new kind of European in Asia and Australia's own imprint in the region. The sincere Australian was uncompromised by empire and innocent of history, and capable of new vocabularies of post-war racial etiquette, frankness and goodwill when it came to understanding Asia, reformulated in Australian politics as "our neighbours" post colonies.¹¹

The legend of the 1890s as the hermetic core of Australianness had been dissented earlier,

⁸ Reese, Trevor R. "Socialism at Home and Nationalism Abroad (1945-1949)." *Australia in the Twentieth Century: A Short Political Guide*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1964. 142. Print.

⁹ Lockhart "Absenting Asia" *Australia's Asia* 284.

¹⁰ Casey, R.G. *An Australian in India*. London: Hollis and Carter, 1947. 115. Print.

¹¹ Walker "Soul Searching" 16 & 18.

at least since the late 1930s. Hartley Grattan felt in 1937 that “Australia drifts. She awaits a cue. And there is no-one to give it”.¹² According to him, Palmer’s conception of the continent was not in sync with its probabilities. In 1943, Brian Penton similarly dubbed the legend the “lotus-land fantasy”¹³ of self-protective mobs content to drift in the legend of a free-thinking, uncorrupted Australian mind, capable only of “spineless timidity in the face of authority”.¹⁴

The Antipodean nation was anxious to cultivate an Asia-friendly persona beginning from the 1940s, paradoxically in order to preserve its White Australia policy;¹⁵ in this context Mollie redefined Australia as a polyphonic mosaic in her post-Tucker fiction, *WX – Corporal Smith* (1941) and *Where Skies Are Blue* (1946). *Tucker Sees India* had been a moment of personal decolonisation; she had finally arrived at original, mongrel models of Australianness that thrive in diaspora, contact and chaos. The two novels, post-colonial at least in the personal context, freed her from the role of an anuvadak at war with her texts. Mimesis shades into fantasy in these novels as Australia metamorphoses into a sea of stories with divergent perspectives, narrated and lived by multiple characters and many voices from diverse racial backgrounds; bonded by *mamatva*, the stories and characters grow unafraid of contamination and corruption. “The Sea of Stories”, a phrase that features in the title of this sub-section, alludes not just to Salman Rushdie’s book dedicated to his son Zafar – *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*¹⁶ – but also to *Kathasaritsagar*, the largest existing compendium of tales from the Indian subcontinent, written in Sanskrit and attributed to Somadeva who lived in Kashmir in the eleventh century CE. Rushdie had invoked *Kathasaritsagar*, translated in English as the “Ocean of the Streams of Stories”, as a metaphor for the magic of plurality and paradoxes unleashed in the text and title. Mollie’s Australia erupts as the *kathasaritsagar* of her post-Tucker novels; it was her India-triggered cue to imagining the nation and its –nesses as robust in their receptivity to others with their discontinuities and differences, given the emergent post-colonial neighbourhood.

War and Mamatva in WX – Corporal Smith

Nations, as James Clifford suggests in his Prologue to *Routes*, are communities imagined as much by crossings as by untangled stasis: “Cultural action, the making and remaking of identities, takes place in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressive intercultural frontiers of nations, peoples, locales. Stasis and purity are asserted – creatively and violently –

¹² Grattan, Hartley C. “Australia Awaits a Cue.” *Current History and Forum* 47.3 (December 1937): 75. Print.

¹³ Penton, Brian. *Advance Australia – Where?* Sydney: Cassell & Co., 1943. 2. Print.

¹⁴ Penton 12.

¹⁵ Walker “Soul Searching” 17.

¹⁶ Rushdie, Salman. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. London: Penguin Books, 1990. Print.

against historical forces of movement and contamination”.¹⁷ War became Mollie’s route to roots; it provided her an itinerary to retrieve selves and nation as the “map of longing with no limits” in transnational/translational contexts.¹⁸ Her fiction based in Australia, whether *The Boy in the Bush*, *Black Swans* or *Men Are We*, had remained an anomaly in the contemporary Australian literary scene, hardly able to assert legitimacy in the dominant currency of virulent nationalisms. Her liminal model of Australianness peaked in authenticity in cross-fertilisation, travel and translation, at borders of disjunction and discovery which fell apart into alternative realities, paradoxes, multiple exiles, wicked mirrors and various other nonequivalents.¹⁹

War was Mollie’s hieroglyphics for these forbidden – and redemptive – possibilities in uncharted unknowns. It was code, too, for her peaceful years in India. India, after all, had enabled her to curate broken selves in *Letters of a V.A.D.* and create her unabashedly diasporic pukka Australian (anti)hero Tucker. In Mollie’s world, war opened doors to non-exclusive possibilities of Australianness etched in Indian ink. Inspired by the enthusiastic reception of *Tucker Sees India* in Australia, Mollie attempted her final war fiction, *WX – Corporal Smith*, on the games and exploits of Australian soldiers, army doctors and nurses of the Imperial Army of the Nile in Cairo and Libya in the Second World War during which she had actually been assigned a nursing post at the Moore River Aboriginal Settlement in Australia. In this text too, as in *Tucker*, Mollie built on exilic, fluid and multilingual models of Australianness that bled boundaries between self and the other and departed from the traditions of exclusion in Australian war-literature and journalism invested in blood-icons. Her Libya only thinly veiled her India, the consistent metonym for plurality and non-exclusivity in her oeuvre.

In *Not Dark Yet*, the memoir that interweaves familial and national histories and memories, David Walker recollects his maternal uncle Charles Eric Bourne’s battalion association during the Second World War; he had served in the A.I.F. at Tobruk, New Guinea and Borneo from December 1940 to October 1945. Bourne and his battalion, the 2/43rd, were not impressed with the Middle East: “All about them was a contemporary reality that many,

¹⁷ Clifford, James. Prologue: In *Medias Res. Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997. 7. Print.

¹⁸ The phrase is quoted from the third part of USA-based late Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali’s “The Country Without a Post Office”, written as a shahid (“The Beloved” in Persian, ‘witness’ in Arabic”, etymologies laid down in Agha Shahid Ali’s “Ghazal”. *The Country Without a Post Office* Part IV. 47-48.) of Kashmir, his imaginary homeland dyed fire. His role approximates Mollie’s desire in the Australian context. For details, see Ali, Agha Shahid. “The Country Without a Post Office.” *The Country Without a Post Office: Poems 1991-1995*. Indian ed. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 2000. 25-28. Print.

¹⁹ Clifford uses the term “nonequivalent” in the Prologue of his book to explain “travel” as a portmanteau of translational terms, overlapping yet diverse: “diaspora,” “borderland,” “immigration,” “migrancy,” “tourism,” “pilgrimage,” “exile” (Prologue 11).

perhaps most, found squalid and backward. Few Australian soldiers of either war came away from the Middle East with a high opinion of Arab cultures or Islam” (187). During this period, best-selling Australian travel writer Frank Clune (1893-1971) visited the region as honorary commissioner of the Australian Comfort Fund. *Tobruk to Turkey: With the Army of the Nile* (1943),²⁰ based on his free travel and collected guide books, voices the popular Australian response; the Arabs are dubious and Cairo, a city of touts, taxis and trollops. Many soldiers serving in the Middle East told Cecil Beaton, the British photographer and author working for the Ministry of War in North Africa, that the region was a “wasteful, heartless and purposeless theatre of war”.²¹

WX – Corporal Smith chooses to revisit these documented realities in order to recast war as an index of possibilities, of *mamatva* for the other and othered models of Australianness – the *mamatva* being Mollie’s Indian inheritance, as explored in the previous chapter. Barney the curator of his mates’ collective memories of war, Rex the amateur anthropologist and cartographer who carves maps on “scrub, and soap, and even playing cards” (149), or Captain Smith the doctor disguised as private corporal, are diggers at home in the world. They admit Abdul their polyglot Libyan driver, guide and interpreter in their inner mate circle. And he in turn pledges: “I will do anything for you. Call upon me if you want any help” (122). Mollie revisited the myth of Australian mateship to extend its orbit across the shadowlines of race and language. Abdul guides his Australian mates through local deserts and valleys to the den of Bedouins who had stolen an ambulance and its Australian team of doctor and nurses in order to save their warlord Sheik Sofo el Wali’s sick son. One of the kidnapped nurses is Kit Smith’s beloved Janice.

During the secret rescue mission of the small group of mates, Kit reckons a mirror in the Arab stranger: “Abdul looked at Kit with the rare understanding of all free men, and Kit knew that Abdul . . . had the power of seeing into the deep places in you, and understood what you couldn’t put into words” (210). In uninhibited intimacy, he confesses to Abdul his past torments and anguished escape from the identity of a doctor, episodes carefully guarded from his Australian friends. Kit reposes his faith in Abdul and urges him to take him to the Bedouin leader: “And to show you I trust you because you are a true Moslem, trust me because I am a true believer in my own way. So, if you can, take me to those who rode under the shelter of this sign [the cross]” (211). Abdul reciprocates as an equal: “I will lead you. It [the cross] is a

²⁰ Clune, Frank. *Tobruk to Turkey: with the Army of the Nile*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1943. Print.

²¹ Beaton, Cecil. *Near East*. London: B. T. Batsford, 1943. Qtd. in Walker *Not Dark Yet* 194. Print.

sign of true religion between you and me, for our religion is not intolerant of any other” (211). They meet in the shared creed of empathy and respect for the other.

War as metaphor for her India memories and plurality induces such introspection and ‘aberrant’ connections with strangers and enemies in *WX – Corporal Smith*. During the final phase of his venture to reach Janice in Sofo el Wali’s camp, Kit prays along with his Bedouin camel driver to Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate (228). When the Italians are defeated in a skirmish with Australian troops, the joyous Arabs on a treasure-hunt among the ruins of war are compared to small children in a carnival or a flock of geese “hissing and scrambling and arguing over their booty” (200-201), rehearsing orientalist kitsch of the East as infantile. Yet in a departure from Western (neo-)imperialist certainties, Kit recognises the suitability of local structures for Senoussi Bedouins instead of an inflicted Westphalian political model: “Meeting members of the Senoussi who cared not a damn for [Western] democracy . . . and yet, theirs was a true democracy – they worked out their lives in unity with each other. In their own traditional way . . . they had truth, they had courage and plenitude in life. What was wrong in that?” (226).

The sight of a dying and defeated young Italian, allegedly an enemy, sets an epiphany raging in Kit. He learns his swadharma as healer, a role he had so long escaped in disguise and despair: “His work was to heal, to tend the sick, to comfort the dying, to ease the ills of the flesh. . . . Never again would he be self-conscious, sex-antagonistic, cowardly with moral cowardice” (110). War becomes a crucible for soul churning. Kit re-births himself as Dr. Royd Smith and recovers his shantih²² and identity; assisted by Janis, he successfully operates on the appendicitis of Sofo el Wali’s dying child and saves his life. The symbolic “holy rite” unites the lovers (234), bails the ambulance team out of crisis, redeems Kit as the Wizard of Oz among his mates (224) and ensures a crucial strategic victory for the Australians. The elated Bedouin leader hands over his Italian captives and grants them safe passage to the coast under guard of the Australians before the Germans arrive.

In its martial dimension – as “ghastly business” (106) – war in *WX – Corporal Smith* remains an episode of exotic romance inspiring music and poetry (61), a virtual game with the “bang and shattering of bombs, the roll of guns and whizz and burst of mighty sounds co-mingled” (61) and hardly any visceral exposition. In vacationing mode, the Australians play a football match with their “brave new toys”, the Field Service helmets (86), leap in their skins

²² I have used the Sanskrit word to connote “The Peace which passeth understanding”, T. S. Eliot’s translation of shantih in his annotation of the concluding line of *The Waste Land* (1922).

to join the action at Tobruk and Derna and win each round, given their epic gallantry: “so vigorous was their onslaught that the Italians made little attempt to withstand it, but fled back from ridge to ridge, pursued by the Australians” (104). Much of the action of the novel unfolds outside the army and the front. With a mysterious wound in his jaw, Kit is safely billeted in town for most of the war and has to imagine the bombs while lying in picket. Even in the thick of war, he turns to Barney’s diary for a distanced memoir of their present experiences. War has been tamed to an exotic fantasy vicariously relished, a “magic-lantern slide show on the screen” (198) or, alternatively, to wry anecdotes in Barney the storyteller’s diary: “Nearly all their [the Italians’] tanks were lost, but they let us have a lot of bursting onions from their guns. . . . Gee! Whiz! Bang! We found ourselves surrounding the Italian Commander. And he said to ours, ‘I surrender’” (105). As gathered from concluding pages of the diary that narrates and novelizes war, a group of Australian cobblers are hailed as “heroes from Libya” (242) all right, but only due to their truant escapade which ends up in the rescue of a kidnapped Red Cross ambulance team and the accidental capture of Italian hostages held by Bedouins, rather than for military chores of valour.

War rather becomes a rite of passage to a brave new world of Australianness as a crossroads where different Australias intersect and meet. The group of Australians represented in *WX Corporal Smith* are neither hermetic nor do they exclusively brim with bushmen morphed into diggers.²³ Captain Winter, the young effeminate rose-hued British intelligence officer well versed in Arabic and Bedouin rites and customs, glides through the hills as he leads Australians Kit and Bill on a secret trek to a Bedouin settlement. In adoration of his mountaineering skills and helping hand, Bill adopts him as honorary mate with the epithet “a wallaby up the shale” (165). According to Graham Seal, the image of the digger was crafted during both the world wars “not only in contrast to the enemy they fought, but even more perhaps, against their wartime allies”.²⁴ Camaraderie among Captain Winter and Kit and Bill supplants the traditional rivalry with ancestral friends, implanted in the term “digger”. Winter,

²³ According to Graham Seal’s chapter on the origins and use of the term “digger” in Australian nation-making, the idealised figure of military nationalism impersonates the bushman in uniform and inherits his values and ambivalence, even though many members of the first AIF did not come from the bush, “contrary to a popular and persistent myth” (125). Like the bush hero, the fabled digger is represented as “tough, resourceful, anti-authoritarian and a bit of a larrikin who likes to drink, smoke, swear, brawl and gamble” (122) and shares the baggage of “his naive xenophobia and his rowdy larrikinism” (127).

See Seal, Graham. “Diggers.” *Symbols of Australia* 121-127.

Skinner inhabits and exceeds the above tradition of imagining the digger. Her Australian foot soldiers in this novel employ bush skills and nous to survive and triumph in the deserts of Libya. However, only a few are bushmen and almost all, open to the local strangers and Italian enemies.

²⁴ Seal “Diggers” 121.

like Abdul, is accepted as an insider.

Solicitor in civil life Private Charles Guthrie, Andrew the sensitive architect who hates war and reads “a symphony in stone” in the Blue Mosque of Cairo (10), university student Rex, Bob Brown of the oil company, Captain Kit Smith the doctor disguised as private corporal and wise fool and curator of stories Barney crowd the remarkably motley group of Australians besides regulars from the bush, like war-addict squatter Fatty Cornwallis, Jock the gambler and jockey and Bill who unloaded sheep on the wharves. Rex is learning Arabic. He translates an Arabic song for Kit and educates his friends on Bedouins and the history of the Barbary Coast which stretches across the coastal regions of present day Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya in North Africa. He reels off anecdotes of mirror-encounters in 1803 between Mr. Eaton, the American Consul of Tunis, and the ruling Turkish pasha of Barbary, revisiting them in the context of the unfolding World War; Eaton had held Derna for several months but the skirmish ended in a truce concluded by the United States. Like Tucker, many of Mollie’s fictive Australians in *WX – Corporal Smith* travel across languages at ease. They turn keen students of the Arabic language, histories and people, defying reported realities of the Second World War. Farley, the doctor in the ambulance stolen by Bedouins, knows Arabic and Italian. Andrew, the ambulance driver, learns Arabic and serves as an interpreter for Sofo el Wali; even Jock claims to have picked up “a lot of Pharaoh’s language m’self” (54). Inspired by her India, Mollie imagines an understanding of Asia into a condition of Australianness.

“Languages being a secret weapon” (90) in *WX – Corporal Smith*, war hoods Mollie’s investigation of Australianness through the prism of translation and dialogue in conflict zones. Almost every other Australian and Libyan musters a few words of greeting in Arabic and “Inglisi”, let alone accomplished polyglot interpreters Farley, Andrew, Abdul, anthropologically inclined Rex and the British officer Winter. Mollie’s Australians marvel at the multi-religious and cosmopolitan character of Cairo. “There are as many buildings to God – mosques, temples, synagogues and churches – in Egypt as there are ti-trees at Fremantle”, observes Kit (32); to his amazement, the less-educated Senoussi Muslim Abdul quotes Jesus in the English he had picked at a Jewish school of Benghazi, Libya. Elsewhere Abdul discourses on the Jewish, Turk and Greek populations of Libya with Rex and Guthrie. Kit and Barney listen to Arab and Scottish music and enjoy Italian food in a polyglot city of Libya where the army is rested; Barney flirts with both the French and Italian patroness of their billets. Mollie’s North Africa re-affirms representations of the multiple demographies, languages and cultures that had for centuries overlapped and conversed in these and neighbouring historically cosmopolitan regions, as depicted in Amitav Ghosh’s re-creation of twelfth century Egypt,

Syed Mujtaba Ali's Cairo of the 1930s and Orhan Pamuk's childhood Istanbul of the 1950s.²⁵

Nor is Islam staged as the regular monstrous orient, a foundational stereotype for orientalism according to Edward Said.²⁶ Abdul explains to Kit, "It [Islam] tries to approach ethical and artistic perfection in any form. It aims at excluding all but Allah from our thoughts. Thus it is that we exclude strong drink from our lives, and keep the body healthy by abstemious living" (211-212). Kit learns from him the local Senoussi fable of an anachronistic conversation between Christ and Syed Muhammad ibn Ali as-Senoussi (1787-1859), founder of the Senoussi sect of Islam: "Our founder say to Jesus 'Where do you learn wisdom?' Jesus say 'Allah has taught me wisdom . . . With the help of Allah I learn to purge myself from what I abhor in others'" (8-9). Mollie is aware that the Koran specifies Christ as a prophet, for Abdul narrates other fables intertwining the Senoussi with Jesus, thus proposing heterodox, dialogue-intense

²⁵ Amitav Ghosh's (1956-) *In an Antique Land* excavates intertwined histories of India and Egypt, Muslims and Hindus and Jews and the cosmopolitan trading culture between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean dating back to at least the twelfth century CE. The merchants of Masr – "Masr" being signifier for modern day Cairo as well as Egypt – gathered from all over Africa, Asia and Europe and "consisted of a group of people whose travels and breadth of experience and education seem astonishing even today" (55). The Egyptian Jew and Muslim merchants travelled between India, Syria, East Africa, Morocco, Spain and Cairo and commanded a startlingly diverse network of business and personal associations across religious, social or geographical divisions – from Hindu Gujaratis of the 'Vania' or trading caste to the landowning caste of Tulunad in Mangalore, Brahmins in Tamilnad and Muslim traders in the subcontinent. They had mastered a trading argot for transactions in India along the coast of the Indian Ocean, a language "possibly compounded largely of Perso-Arabic and north Indian elements" (281) and as hybrid as the Judeo-Arabic dialect used by Egyptian Jewish merchants during the period, a medieval Arabic transcribed in Hebrew script and liberally peppered with Hebrew and Aramaic (103).

Syed Mujtaba Ali (1904-1974), the polyglot scholar, professor of German and later, of Islamic culture at Visvabharati University, Santiniketan, and author of brilliant travelogues, essays and short stories in Bengali detailing intersections of cultures, attended Al Azhar University at Cairo after completing his PhD from Bonn University, Germany, in 1932. He has written several essays on the richly diverse peoples and layered histories of Cairo, as well as on the warmth and uninhibited range of the regular heated debates and conversations on all conceivable issues among friends – Greek, French, Coptic Christian, Arab Muslim, among others – over endless rounds of coffee at cafes dotting the entire city, Ali having been a raconteur-member at some of these sessions in the 1930s. See

Ali, Syed Mujtaba. "Adda" ["Conversations"]. *Panchatantra. Rachanabali [Collected Works]*. Vol. 1. Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh Publishers, 1984. 75-85. Print.

Ali, Syed Mujtaba. "Cairo." *Panchatantra* 7-10.

Orhan Pamuk (1952-) remembers Greek and Armenian being spoken besides Turkish on the streets of Istanbul, when he was a child: "[With] the violent rise of Turkification . . . most of these languages disappeared [from the streets]" (216). For memories of the thriving plurality of cosmopolitan Istanbul till the 1950s and the cultural erasures and deaths of pluralism that followed, see

Pamuk, Orhan. *Istanbul: Memories and the City*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005. Print.

²⁶ Said (1935-2003) posits that Islam everywhere as the "bad Orient" provides one readymade axiom for Oriental Studies (*Orientalism* 99). Perceived by medieval Christian thinkers as a heretical threat based on doctrinal imposture of Christianity, Islam in the western world-view has pre-dominantly served as an image to be exorcised, at best a "pseudo-incarnation of some great original (Christ, Europe and the West) they were supposed to have been imitating" (62). For Said's arguments on the oriental construction of Islam as a province of European imagination and insecurities since at least the seventeenth century, see Said, Edward. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978. Print.

variants of Islam.²⁷ Sealing wells in villages – a common Italian military practice during the Second World War – is against the rules of the Koran, observes Captain Winter (168). Mollie departs from phobic western habits of imaging Islam as a savage militant monolith. Her Australianness unpartitions Muslims and Christians in West Asia and re-imagines, reinstates them as partners in dialogue.

Given the transnational context of exchange and friendship, translation and translators remain pivotal in Mollie's exilic novels. Exchanges between Australian and Libyan peoples and scapes are mediated and shaped by the Tucker tribe of translator-picaros, very visible in *WX – Corporal Smith*. Translators have the notorious privilege of tweaking, even re-casting meanings: "Their words will be in your hands and you can make them mean what you will", quips Moyna, the astute wife of boatman Fokir of the Sundarbans in Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide*, urging Delhi-based suave translator Kanai to morph communications between Fokir who knows only Bengali and the American cetologist Piya who has hired his services.²⁸ Jock in Mollie's novel proposes an inventory of customised semantics in Australian Arabic: for example, he takes "backsheesh" to mean "something for nothing" and "impshee yalla" as "go on" (9). Rex decides that "i' cha la" means "nothing matters" (9). "Inshallah" however, is approximately rendered as "god willing" and the Persian word "bakshish" can be variously interpreted as a gift or small bribe for services, or as a charity to beggars. For Bill and Barney, "Ya rasjel", Arabic for "o man", mutates into "ya rascal" and "salaam aleik" becomes interchangeable with "smart alic" (122).

Rex quotes maxims from the Koran – sometimes faithfully, as in "Nothing counts but Allah. . . . He made the world, and all that's in it" (151), and sometimes with impish mutations. When Kit, Barney and Rex suspect a figure shadowing them in the dark side streets of a Libyan city, the latter masks his comment as a wildly distorted excerpt from the Koran: "'From the evil whispers of the slinking Devil. Who whispers into the heart of men. From among the djinns and men,'" said Rex, quoting the first verse from the Koran" (119). The opening verse of the

²⁷ The narratives Abdul weaves around Jesus feature in Danish journalist Knud Holmboe's (1902-1931) *Desert Encounter: an Adventurous Journey through North Africa* (pp. 64 and 74) which details the Italian colonialists' atrocities on Arab Muslims in Libya. By narrating the fables, Ahmet Ali, a Senoussi Bedouin in the text, explains to Holmboe the Sufi tenets followed by the Senoussi. In these parables from *Desert Encounter*, Mollie on her part inserts the founder of the sect and the Senoussis as participants in an imagined anachronistic dialogue with Jesus in *WX – Corporal Smith*. For further details, see Holmboe, Knud. *Desert Encounter*. 1931. *Knud Holmboe: A Martyr of Freedom of Expression*. Web. 4 Nov. 2013.

²⁸ Moyna does not want Fokir and Kanai to connect in their shared love for the river; she banks on Kanai to exploit their lack of a shared language and deepen the abyss of non-communication. On the possible corruption and vulnerability of translations and translators, see Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2004. 257. Print.

Koran, Sura Al-Fatiha, which Rex has attempted to mimic in the last instance, praises “Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful” urging him to guide believers to the straight path.

Rex invents Arabic proverbs like “Apricots, apricots, they will come again” (147) and Kit coins the hybrid phrase “fantasia khalas” assuming it means a “festive occasion” (229). I can only decipher “fantasia khalas” as the end of this oneiric narrative on unfettered relations with outsiders, “khalas” in Arabic meaning something that is irrevocably finished. Mollie’s Australians tease a playful patois out of the Arabic they learn and their Australian English, exhibiting an Antipodean aptitude for affection and irreverence and a subcontinental openness to anuvad of words/worldviews which work on and transform their own.²⁹ Arabic and Persian words in common parlance in India, like “wadi” (valley), “kismet” (fate), “kubbah” for “khabar” (news), “effendi” (lord or master), “sirdar” and “bakshish”, pepper the text; Mollie seems to have outsourced much of her Arabic from Urdu or Hindustani – a confluence of Persian, Sanskrit, Arabic and the local language Hindi – widely spoken and written across northern India pre-partition. Along with Mollie’s Australians, India seems to have been translated to Libya.

Fable and language are not the sole points of intersection between Libyans and Australians; the Australian bush, too, is exported wholesale to the deserts of Libya in *WX – Corporal Smith*. During their frequent transportation to war outposts across Libya and throughout the journey to rescue Janice and recover the stolen ambulance, the Australians live intimacy with the local landscape. Libya is interpreted and narrativized via analogy. They might have got lost in the odyssey to rescue Janice, but for their bush skills and “bushman’s eyes” with which they pick up “the tracks of some wheelless caravan or another” (213). Bill is reminded of the bush as he navigates the hummocks and wadis with Winter and sings “waltzing Matilda”³⁰ while bedouining on foot with Abdul and his mates in the desert. Even the scholarly

²⁹ Brilliant mathematician, historian and creative Marxist D. D. Kosambi (1907-1966) laments this faculty of assimilation as “characteristically Indian in attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable, in its power of gulping down sharp contradictions painlessly” (207) in his seminal study *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965. Print.

³⁰ “Waltzing Matilda”, termed Australia’s unofficial national anthem with multiple variants in unpublished, published and oral forms and based on lyrics written by Banjo Paterson in 1895, centres on a swagman rebelling against squatters and troopers, whose ghost lives on by a billabong. The rather grim song about an anti-establishment swagman preferring death to surrender, was commercialised around 1902 as an advertising ploy for Billy Tea imported from India by James Inglis and Co. since 1887. With the word “jolly” added to “swagman” in the opening line as part of the ploy, the defanged song, along with tea and billy, came to embody the curio and mythology of the bushman, his habits and lingo, as well as the ironies in imaging Australianness. For further details on the history of inventing “waltzing Matilda” as a symbol of nation making, see “Who’ll Come A Waltzing Matilda With Me?” *National Library of Australia*. National Library of Australia, n.d. Web. 1 Nov. 2013. Also see Harper, Melissa. “Billy.” *Symbols of Australia* 83-89. 88. Print.

Rex is moved: “This country’s not unlike the inlands at home, is it? I can see one or two swaggies who are now extremely happy waltzing Matilda” (146).

Several national symbols like the swagman and other popular Australian stereotypes feature as regular refrains. Barney coo-ees to his cousin Janice and “the bush flower” (47) immediately responds; cobbers Kit and Barney improvise the mopoke³¹ whistle as the call between them. Despite the censored news in local papers or radio, the Australian gang can gage the latest situation of Italian troops amassed in Libya through “the old silent bush wireless system of communication” (53). Laconic and unbroken by war, they play textbook diggers to the hilt and joke about their wounds, teaming up as cobbers. The dour Scots they replace in old Italian trenches cannot dampen “the usual Australian quip and joke” (190). Independent yet loyal to their tribe and the British Commonwealth, the Australians routinely perform the alleged national character by refusing to be easily moulded to authority and discipline. When Captain Wavell commends them as glorious troops, Fatty responds with the scorn and pride typical of national identity in digger lore: “We jest are! Nobody calls roos glorious animals, do they? They just are **roos**” (85).³²

Kit returns with pain and an undetected bullet in his jaw from the battle of Derna; the mates spread a feast for him, having “understood with that love which is beyond the love of women, what he had suffered and was suffering still” (91). Barney embodies the spirit of mateship and hides for his crony some biscuits and a can of goat’s milk buried in the sand, when Kit cannot chew the daily ration. Falsely implicated in stealing and torching a luxury car, Kit in his turn prepares to surrender in order to save the guilty drunken mates of his platoon. He – and perhaps his author too – hold as pukka ‘Australian’ the qualities of courage, resourcefulness and resilience in appalling conditions embodied by the diggers and emergent from the bush: “Australians are of a new birth – of a new nation. . . . they rose from a collective consciousness of reality in harsh, dry lands, that they would conquer only by activity, common sense, resourcefulness, initiative, and infinite patience” (226).

³¹ “Mopoke” or “morepork”, as well as “boobook”, refer to a small Australasian owl with a characteristic double hoot; the names are imitative of its call. Kit and Barney improvise the “mopoke whistle” as an exclusive secret code between them, in order to advertise their mateship and belonging to the bush as whitefellas.

“Boobook.” *Oxford Dictionary of English*. 2nd ed. 2005. Print.

³² A related yarn from the digger cycle, narrated in Graham Seal’s chapter, images a distinctively Australian identity against the national identities of others:

“‘Halt! Who goes there?’ ‘Ceylon Planters’ Rifle Club.’ Sentry – ‘Pass, friend.’

A little later – ‘Halt, who goes there?’ Answer – ‘Auckland Mounted Rifles.’ [‘Pass, friend.’]

As the next person arrives – ‘Halt, who goes there?’ Answer – ‘What the – has that got to do with you?’

Sentry – ‘Pass, Australian.’”

See Seal “Diggers” 124.

Unlike the guerrilla war between mainstream nationalist tropes and a personal imaginary in *Black Swans*, symbols of Australianness in currency converge with Mollie's nomadic formulae wandering from text to text in the syncretic mythography post-*Tucker*, including in *WX – Corporal Smith*. In these texts, characters that rehearse popular national stereotypes of the time perform her private patterns as well. Some of them exhume her dreams, secrets and selves. Royd Smith, the charismatic, absurdly beautiful doctor protagonist who escapes his identity under the alias Kit and joins the army as an Australian private corporal, inherits his fictive DNA from Mollie's brother Jack and lover Corley the physician. Like Jack, he has a bullet buried in his jaw and can swallow nothing but fluids at the front. It remains medically undetected for a while and he comes dangerously close to the slur of malingering.³³ But Kit is healed, unlike Jack, and finally hailed as a quirky hero in his original avatar as medicine man, reflecting the latent softer element of digger culture. Corley is resurrected in Smith's healing powers and in his indispensable role as an army doctor despite the disguise.

Both Kit with his "infernal good looks" (50) and Greek goddess Janice exude temptations for the opposite sex, this motif being one of the author's favoured fantasies; it was introduced in the character of the nurse-protagonist in *Letters of a V.A.D.* War and war-hospitals are invented as liberating arcadia for nurses and the soldiers given to flirting, like Norma and Barney. The formula figures elsewhere, in *Letters* and in the unedited India chapter of the *Fifth Sparrow* manuscript. A love story provides the apotheosis in *WX – Corporal Smith*, as in *Letters*, *The Boy in the Bush*, and *Black Swans*. Kit's self-discovery in the deserts of Libya is kindled by his connection with Janice. In communing with her, he finds the answer and supreme motive of his existence. He knows that, irrespective of his guise and role, Janice will be "waiting for him . . . as she had always waited and always would, from one former life to this and onwards to the next" (129). This is more Mollie than Kit and she inserts in their transcendent love a metaphor of disaster, the secret signature of her devastated life and affair ruined: "They were as two swift motor boats that had met and crashed" (139). Kit chooses to travel alone the last lap of his route to Sofo el Wali's camp and reaches the edge beyond "sound reasoning" (208). His uncanny intuition, shared with Mollie, foretells the presence of Janice in the camp; the lone journey translates into a pilgrimage to the beloved.

³³ In her memoirs of D.H. Lawrence, Mollie recollects the British author disparaging war and the "stupidity" of its voluntary victims like her brother Jack, whom he reads as an exemplar of self-destruction: "that gallant figure shambling, half of the face a mask – a jaw wound wasn't it? Can't even chew properly . . . Your mother told me – she's half ashamed of him. . . . They said he was malingering when they couldn't find the bullet festering there. That chap couldn't mangle – I would have known – so he went out again to fight till he had to be lifted by his comrades when he fell from weakness". See Skinner, M.L. "DH Lawrence and the Boy in the Bush." MN 186. TS 1396A/90/1. 4-5. Print.

Like Tucker in *Tucker Sees India* or Tim of *Black Swans*, Kit performs myriad roles with élan. He is a “born sport” as certified by Barney (130), natural climber, expert at playing cards and cricket and lucky gambler, the “pop” who calms and entertains his comrades at war (198), doctor and the “knave of hearts” with a Tuckeresque passport into the being of strangers like Abdul and the Bedouin village elders. But above all, Mollie casts him as a Romantic quester navigating the delirious maze of identities in search of self. Andrew discovers in him a fallen angel and Janice compares him to Abraham’s son Isaac who meekly submitted to slaughter. Kit, however, is crucified by the searing knowledge of his betrayal of the nation “by running from his obligations and duties to it [as a doctor]”. Through the travails of war and an intense self-dialogue on the way to his holy grail Janice, he finally resurrects himself through the transformative power of love and healing and chooses to reveal himself as a healer: “He knew he had found himself and despair was emptied out of him” (227). The deserts of Libya inspire and witness the re-birth. Royd Smith is twice born into a self-fashioned identity, like Jack Grant in the bush, Tim and Lettie in the northern seas and coastal lands and Tucker in India, before him.

Identities are made as fluid as the words/worlds which tend to nest in their obverse – such as the interchangeable “rasjel” and “rascal”, “inshallah” and “impshee yalla” – in the arshinagar³⁴ or mirrorscape of *WX – Corporal Smith*. Australians relax in local cloaks or gelabiya when they stop at Abdul’s village en route to Janice kidnapped. Kit in a customary Bedouin garb slips into character as a local; the marabout or holy man of the village is impressed and pays him special attention. Another group of fierce unlettered Bedouins suspect the uniformed Australian team of rescuers to be Italian spies. They are saved when Barney accidentally interrupts with “me history book” (217) – his dairy – which he bore during his war itinerary, aiming to take notes on the Bedouins’ appearance. The Bedouins take the book to be a copy of the Koran. In excruciating Arabic accent, Rex at this point correctly chants the first verse of the Koran that he had so notoriously twisted in his previous recitation and manages to mellow the Arab tribesmen.

³⁴ The term “arshinagar”, literally rendered as the city of mirrors, is metaphor for the baul’s desired destiny of self-knowledge. It recurs in songs by Lalan Fakir (1774-1890), a legend in the baul-fakir tradition of Bengal, and has since been metonymic of the cult. Mirror in the baul tradition stands for the self, bauls being a sect of itinerant mystics who meditate on oneness with the universe through love and meditative self-composed songs or those learnt from the guru, which they play on their ektara or a one-stringed musical instrument. They disown divisions of caste and creed and remain grounded in the notion of non-exclusive humanity. Bauls flourished in eastern India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and their songs, if not the ethics and philosophy, remain a vibrant part of the contemporary Bengali popular culture scenario. They absorbed both Hindu and Muslim religious concepts and terminology; some of their core precepts e.g. understanding and acceptance of difference or the primacy of self-knowledge, overlap with sanatani Vedantic philosophy.

During their conversation with the Bedouin chieftain Rahma Musa, the Australians smoothly masquerade as Muslims, sprinkling sentences with w'alla and inshallah. Norma and Janice, the two white Australian nurses interred in Sofo el Wali's harem so that they might heal his son, are not only not violated; they are accepted as surrogate mothers to the sick child by other women in the harem, including the young mother of the child. Mollie's universe in *WX – Corporal Smith* arrives at an arshinagar where a few stereotypes unravel and the self discovers its mirror in the other; the text becomes site and quest for an expanded understanding of Australianness. A war-novel births models of being Australian that do not violate, partition or absent, turning outsiders to insiders instead.

A riot of transformations at multiple levels – of the author who sheds her fear and guerrilla subnarratives from the earlier texts, and of her characters and their Australianness – shades the text of *WX – Corporal Smith*. Violent contexts could sometimes embed cues to unlearn violence. In her post-*Tucker* novels, Mollie creates selves and Australias teeming with possibilities of otherness; the anarchy of plurals spurs the genesis of a fecund model of Australianness shaped by translations, openness and fluidity, in the image of Mollie's subcontinent. This model, interrogating Palmer's prescribed exclusions and his male race patriots idealised as bushmen,³⁵ awaits acceptance as Mollie's imprint in Australian literature; it re-instates her autonomous voice as an unforgettable author of unpartitioned Australias crafted through creative dialogue across seas, languages and continents in the early twentieth century.

Finally, Polyphony

In *Where Skies Are Blue*, a text that jumps genres, Mollie finally plants home her plural model of Australianness built on a culture of reciprocity and the right to be understood. The book is listed as a biography by the National Library of Australia and Mitchell Library at Sydney. FAW President and author John K. Ewers informs in the 1946 introduction that the stories belong to a constable who served in the Williams district of Western Australia around sixty years ago: Skinner “has had access to the constable's reminiscences and has rendered the narrative into readable English”. Her veil of pseudonyms rent, Mollie appears as editor of a startlingly heterogeneous yet apparently authentic version of Australianness homespun in the

³⁵ In the Introduction to their seminal anthology on Australian responses to Asia, editors David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska contend that various archetypes of the Australian nation-state, including the iconic image of the bushman as “the idealised race patriot best equipped to repel invasive Asia” owe a good deal to the continuous formative presence of Asia near the centre of Australian national history since at least the late nineteenth century (11). See Walker, David and Agnieszka Sobocinska. Introduction. *Australia's Asia* 1-23.

bush. Unlike her literary colleagues who ruthlessly edited, colonised and judged her fiction and autobiography, Ewers claims that Mollie intervened with neither the narrative nor its form: “she has retained that naive sincerity characteristic of a man unskilled in writing, whose pen scarcely does justice to the fullness of his own memory. . . . [Steve] might well have been a tour de force at the hands of a skilled writer. The author, who possesses the skill, has here chosen to present him as she found him in the reminiscences of his anonymous friend”.³⁶

Could the text be construed as staid biography of an anonymous young constable in Western Australia? Mollie’s papers, preserved at the J S Battye Library of Perth, yield no documented records of the aforesaid “reminiscences”. The absence of evidence and the form of the narrative blur borderlines between fiction and non-fiction. *Where Skies Are Blue* could be read both as local history and as a series of picaresque sketches selected from at least partially fictitious adventures of a reluctant constable. The ostensible biography of a man intersects with Mollie’s reinvention of the text and the bush as incubators of pluralism and otherness – rasas³⁷ of Australianness in this work. And the accommodating editor might be read as code for ripe author who defies dictates of the uniform or a single voice in imagining Australianness, and re-thinks authenticity by revisiting national icons as well as raking impurities in crafting the collage of the nation. Several motifs and types in *Where Skies Are Blue* allude to the Mollie Skinner narrative cycle.

Constable Robert Johns alias Bob, the first person narrator, belongs to the tribe of Skinner’s travelling insider-outsiders who, like Tucker in India, cannot help playing the hero. He must patrol and spy in the bush, his mission being to arrest the absconding bushranger Steve and bust an illegal liquor racket. The tour of surveillance soon turns into an intimate exploration

³⁶ Ewers, John K. Introduction. *Men Are We*.

³⁷ “Rasa is juice”, explains the Jummapur-based Indian painter Nirad Das in the summer of 1930 to Flora Crewe, British poet and his model for a portrait, “Its taste. Its essence. . . . *Rasa* is what you must feel when you see a painting, or hear music; it is the emotion which the artist must arouse in you.”

See Stoppard, Tom. *The Indian Ink*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995. 29. Print.

Rasa, a core aesthetic precept for all arts in Bharata’s *Natyashastra*, is a metaphor derived from food and its taste and consumption. Rasa renders the lasting taste, beauty and experience of an artistic text as internalised by its receiver or rasika: “Rasa is the cumulative result of vibhava (stimulus), anubhava (involuntary reaction) and vyabhichari bhava (voluntary reaction) . . . along with the different bhavas (emotions) the Sthayi bhava (the pervasive emotion/experience) becomes a ‘taste’/rasa . . . because it is enjoyably tasted, it is called rasa. . . . sensitive spectators after enjoying the various emotions . . . through words, gestures and feelings feel pleasure etc. This (final) feeling of the spectators is here explained as rasa”.

See Bharata. “Rasa.” *The Natyashastra: English Translation with Critical Notes*. Trans. Adya Rangacharya. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1996. 53-63. 55. Print.

The polycentric world of *Where Skies Are Blue* with its carnival of characters, adventures and possibilities of Australianness, finally arrives at the rasas of otherness and inclusion. These rasas do not belong to the traditional octet listed in *Natyashastra* nor to the ninth rasa of acceptance and serenity – shantih – as detailed by Abhinavagupta in *Abhinava Bharati*, his commentary on that text. These are my additions/interpolations in mapping Mollie’s routes through India to her Australianness.

of the bush and camaraderie with its inhabitants and the scape. Bob knows he belongs to it, with an access to the “bush wireless” (155) of communication and knowledge to match Steve and the other mates: “I was always ashamed of uttering feelings about the bush, thinking that I only felt this love for it; that it was unmanly to feel joy in such scents and sights . . . But now I know that it is this love of nature that brings men into the bush to throw their all into it, that they may become part of it and wish for nothing more” (117). As they travel incognito, Bob and his colleagues are offered shelter, mateship, smoke, liquor, billyfuls of tea, food or a game of cards by the wildly diverse bushmen and women they encounter, including the fowl-ridden black-bearded farmer Mr. Snook living in a vermin-infested tent, the eccentric young aristocrat Archie Harwood who at last finds a home in this “upside down side of the world” (59) with his profound disregard of conformism, the broke kangaroo-hunter’s daughter Diana or even Blister, member of the illegal whisky racket.

Bob shares with Tucker and Smith his power to connect and make himself an insider among his new-found mates across classes; he takes to other hides with Tuckeresque ease. In his imaginative engagement with the lives of others and a grasp of their humanity, Robert Johns metamorphoses from routine constable to epic storyteller of the bush who curates variations and individuated identities and chooses not to forget: “Well, I didn’t do anything. But I have remembered” (159). The policeman claims a bushman’s right to horse-race and gamble, and wins a mount from the hinterlands to the Williams police-station by laying a bet on a young colt freshly broken in. While on the trail of liquor racketeers, he suggests to his colleagues the guise of alcoholic kangaroo-hunters loosened in the bush with their blueys: “We started acting out our parts by making ourselves very dirty and bloody, letting our hair and beards grow any old how, assuming the slouching gait of the typical hunter, spitting and chewing tobacco and cutting plug into our hands” (94). They speak the bush Australianese that becomes “jest a ‘roo hunter” (99), act crazed by liquor addiction, grill kangaroo meat and boil for a group of ruffian sly-grog smugglers the local version of Irish stew – a kangaroo tail soup with a handful of herbs, a carrot or two, some pepper and salt. Bob stuns too as skilled assistant and cook in the kitchen. He and another colleague knock as swagmen at the kitchen door of a wealthy homestead. They wash up trays, chop wood and prepare the suet, peel potatoes and scrape carrots for dinner, lift joints out of the oven, polish the silver and sharpen the knives, all in exchange for a portion of the leftovers post-dinner; in the course of the evening, the parlour maid parts with crucial information on secret routes of the sly-grog trade.

Besides Tucker’s flexibility in roles, Bob exudes his vulnerability and charm when it comes to women. During his adventures, he feels “heart-bitten” (83) by several women, among

them his girl, Steve's daughter Hoppy, the lovely witch Diana who nestles up to him and proposes marriage to escape her despair and poverty and wilful orphan Sally Mars whom he rescues from the aborigine tribal leader Kimber's den. "I turned to question the girl; and then forgot Hoppy", he confesses, "The maid was so beautiful that my heart turned over" (82). This twice-born Eve "risen again in the bushlands" (89) fiercely mocks Mac Tavish the preacher who demonises her and cannot resist stalking her. She fears being returned to the correctional home she had escaped as a child. She tempts Bob with elopement but he has learnt from Tucker the art of disentangling with tender irony: "I bade her not to mock my coat, for I had great sense of its sanctity and of my own integrity" (88). The sanctity of uniform though, does not forbid him to help Steve escape jail and law elsewhere in the text, or to get the liquor racketeers discharged without serving their sentence, or to leave the regal Miss Pepper non-implicated in the illegal liquor business despite proof that she is a mastermind in the racket. She was his "love at first sight" (119) and had saved him, in his guise as kangarooer, from being mauled and killed by her hired rogues.

Bob stands up to the hypnotic eye of power; "I am not friends with the sergeant", he knows (3), and sometimes refuses to obey the chief. He shares, though, Tucker's rapport with the well-placed; his uncle happens to be the superintendent of police in the colony and lends weight to his urge to lead an investigation into the large-scale production and distribution of unlicensed liquor near construction camps on the new railway line. The inadvertent heroes Tucker and Bob are twinned in their relish of mystery and uncanny intuition for secrets and crime; none flinch in precarious situations when their disguise is doubted. They rescue the kidnapped with strange finesse and the inscrutable often unravels before them in sly coincidences. Bob chances upon a cache of hidden bottles of whisky in a clay pit steeped in murky water in the bush. He decides to comb the outback homesteads en route and when a colleague ridicules him for his obsession with exposing the racket, a drunken magpie proves right his hunch and directs them to the quiet liquor still run by the masterminds Miss Pepper and Fred Zenberg.

Neither Bob nor his precarious trickster counterpart Steve provides the pivotal continuities with *Tucker*. Continuities with the chaotic Indian milieu of that novel resonate in the polyphonic playful universe of *Where Skies Are Blue*, which mines possibilities for the nation in the impure, absurd and openly ambiguous – terra hitherto incognita in imaging Australia. Tucker of the fluid identities had once set out from Australia as an unwilling soldier of the imperial forces during the First World War and discovered a home for his odyssey and fluidities in India. He returns to the Antipodes, his exilic experiences of the subcontinent

reincarnate in the rainbow diaspora of *Where Skies Are Blue* and ripened too in the exilic wisdom of uncertainties and relative truths; the bush carries in its womb a welter of India memories and releases the text from anguish with received types and the 'truth'. As in *Tucker Sees India*, Australianness turns into an enchanted adventure of enquiry and digressions with a sleuthing game as frame narrative.

Bob and Steve are locked in an eternal pursuit-and-elude game in the bush – the pretext to their adventures and encounters with various characters. Occasionally they mock the imperative of verisimilitude in a novel, shelve the game and camp together in the wilderness, “me [Bob] lighting the fire, and he producing a fowl that he spitted over it [sic], me making the damper and he cooking it in the ashes” (42). They inhabit opposite sides of the law-and-order border and smudge the borderlines. Steve the bush lawyer is trained by Bob in loopholes of the law and uses them to earn his acquittal. People in the bush consult and pay Steve for advice in matters related to land holding and lawful rights, while Bob at times gives legal counsel to those caught on the wrong side of law. They are kin in identities shed and exchanged. But Bob is no mirror to Steve or the liquor racketeers, though he secretly supplies a dozen bottles on their way to the gaol at Perth and manipulates the faulty wording of the warrants to get them all discharged. The gifted sleuth hunts down the racketeers and forces them to shut their business. He resolves not to arrest or imprison Steve when he flees from jail but tracks and contains him nonetheless.

Through Steve, Bob learns *mamatva*³⁸ for another dimension of Australianness: “I could see it all, and he drew my heart out of me. A strong free man he was, living up to the life in him. Afraid of no one, dependent on no one. He would never be ruled or shackled. I wouldn't take him even if I could” (43). He has discovered in self both the cop and mate and nurtures the ambiguity, as does Steve the bushranger-lawyer. Both the characters and their homeland Australia spill incalculable stories and possibilities. Mollie has radically recast the traditional cop/criminal binary of Australian mythology as secret mates and the signs and gatekeepers of local pluralism.

The Australian Legend (1958) by Russel Ward, echoed and canonised in texts, transmits received wisdom on the binary. The book quotes the *Bulletin*, ballads, gazettes, newspapers

³⁸ I do not use “*mamatva*” as an equivalent of “compassion”, since “compassion” etymologically means “to suffer with (someone)” and connotes a certain condescension towards the sufferer. “That is why the word ‘compassion’ generally inspires suspicion,” concludes Czech novelist Milan Kundera, “it designates what is considered an inferior, second-rate sentiment that has little to do with love”. See Kundera, Milan. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. New York: Harper & Row, 1984. 19. Print. “*Mamatva*” as a critical concept has been detailed in footnote no. 14 of the previous chapter (p. 217) ; it suggests openness to alternatives and perspectives that exceed or may sometimes unsettle and defy the self.

and individual observers to typecast the nineteenth century Australian police force as stock villains on the Sydney stage and in life – “corrupt, besotted, cowardly, brutal and inefficient” (156) – and the bushrangers as their professional and mythicized opponents. Since ex-convicts or convicts comprised a large part of the constabulary in New South Wales and Victoria through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the profession came to bear the stigma of betrayal of co-prisoners and friends. Ward concludes that an entrenched distrust of policemen characterises the nation; constable-baiting remained a major theme with radical and nationalist journalists towards the end of the nineteenth century (159). After 1880 when Ned Kelly was hanged, bushrangers had largely ceased to pose a socio-political threat to the state and were confiscated as metaphoric resource. In the essay “Imprisoned Voices: Forgotten Subtexts of Colonial Convict Fiction”,³⁹ Michael Auckland plumbs the dark susurrus in convict author James Tucker’s documentations of police, wardens and the transportation system in his ostensibly conformist fiction on individual reformation, *Ralph Rashleigh* (c.1845). Though keen to avoid official displeasure, the text ends up projecting most inspectors and overseers as violators who brutalised powerless inmates; Ward’s verdict stands corroborated in fiction.

Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra read in the citizen/criminal binary of Australian fiction a metonym for the schizoid nation and its guilt of erasures;⁴⁰ they read the warder/prisoner doublet of implacable foes Rufus Dawes/Maurice Frere in Marcus Clarke’s iconic convict novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874) as the prototype of convict myth. Mollie’s bushranger Steve doubles as a convict imprisoned in the lock-up on unproved allegations and is often on the run; as a captive, he is indulged not only by Bob but by the sergeant as well, who ensures Steve’s freedom on the day of the horse-racing carnival with an assignment outdoors. Law-enforcers and lawbreakers etch the borders of the Australian canvas in *Where Skies Are Blue*; their classical opposition reinvented as secret collaboration and mamatva preludes other crossed borders. By breaking with traditions of representation of a core binary in nationalist mythology, Mollie sets the stage for parading and interrogating other axioms of Australianness. The axiom of uniform icons and definitive borders of silence, for example.

Bob shares with the alleged ‘editor’ of the work an ungrudging admiration for English aristocrats who settled in Western Australia along with their eccentricities and memories of England, though he refers to them by acerbic nicknames socially bestowed. A gentleman baptized “Dandy” by his mates is passionate about horses; he and his trained race horse Jester

³⁹ Ackland, Michael. “Imprisoned Voices: Forgotten Subtexts of Colonial Convict Fiction.” *Westerly* 46 (2001): 136-151. Print.

⁴⁰ Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* 133.

feel desolate away from Home. They are not penal transports, dislocation from England throbs nonetheless as the never healing wound of exile.⁴¹ The local blacksmith accepts him as a “matie” and shares his obsession with horse, race and gambling; Dandy has begun to belong to his second homeland. Archie Harwood, the second aristocrat to cross the young constable’s routes through the bush, wears his coat upside down with legs through sleeves and mentors Bob in the bush ethos: “Don’t sir me; man to man in this country” (58). The half-dressed honourable Archie entertains his lonely guest with yarns over breakfast and helps him find the well and water his horse; Bob finds in him a unique companion who interrogates all conventions and does not hesitate to champion Steve the bushranger.

Bob must also take tally of the stock in the selection of Sugar Candy, “the son of a belted earl”. The latter regales the constable of “discoloured eyes and lubber lips” (54) with tales tucked away in the bush – the secret pastoral of Prince George of Wales, later King George V of England, for instance. The ship carrying the royal British princes was being repaired at Albany after a stormy passage round Cape Leeuwin, as recorded in the Year Book of 1881. The raconteur reveals the unrecorded rest to his rapt auditor – how he had whisked off Prince Albert and Prince George along with their tutor to his settlement in the bush and the boys revelled in living incognito. The bush unleashed the notorious George and he was untraceable for three days, till Steve – who had earlier intercepted Sugar Candy and his royal guests on their way and raised a toast with a crowd of bushmen to the younger Prince George as the future king – discovered him, at home in a remote shepherd’s hut. Bob the rival storyteller “never swallowed all this whole” (57). Nonetheless, all the travellers – louts and hardened criminals, bushrangers, diasporic British aristocrats and even the royals let loose on an accidental vacation – find a locus for their latent plasticity or switch of identities in the bush of *Where Skies Are Blue*, Mollie’s metaphor for the pluripotent Australia that she had translated from Tucker’s India.

Those in travel/travail in the bush thus belong to multiple, though fluid, registers. Neither are all of them British nor imperial loyalists. Bob discovers a German refugee family in a picturesque wooden house near an ancient gum tree; they claim to be clock and cartwheel menders, owners of an apple orchard and British but the sleuth is able to detect their accent and

⁴¹ Prof. Vijay Mishra, in his book on the Indian diaspora, hinges his understanding of the diaspora on the “never healing wound” (114) and “impossible mourning” (9) of those displaced; the book is a cautionary interrogation of the happy diaspora. Mishra arrives at the persistent agony of unending longing for a lost locus and the shock of loss as markers of the diasporic imaginary. Dandy would qualify as a member of the diaspora in his conceptual universe.
See Mishra *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora*.

a cider still hidden in the stable. Irish bushrangers and workers in the text, another set of icons far removed from the clutch of nostalgic English aristocrats, share none of Steve's affinity with royalty. They flaunt archetypal disdain for all forms of British authority, in particular for the police. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra read the Australian images of convict and bushranger as "potent organising principles for the Irish community", rooted in their alternative mythology and oral texts of resistance against British injustice and cruelty in the nineteenth century penal colony.⁴² Thus when constable Bob and a colleague in disguise confront an Irish gang of illicit liquor traffickers in the bush, one among the gang introduces himself as Ned Kelly. Irish workers about to board a train to work grow hostile when they see a coach carrying three men in police uniform. Keen on a brawl, they jump from the train yelling "'Rush 'em!' 'Put the boots in! 'Show 'em how an Irishman can throw a rock!'" (136). The stone-pelting crowd cannot be quelled till the sergeant pushes Bob into a wrestling match with one of the Irish mates dubbed "Soldier" and constable Bob emerges victor and a fighter.

Despite Hodge and Mishra's proposition or Russel Ward's neat contentions,⁴³ the bushranger, convict and an embittered working-class do not exhaust Mollie's organising principles for the Irish community. The category "Irish in Australia" loses its uniform in *Where Skies Are Blue*. Instead of being perpetually banished to ghettoed shadow worlds of prisons, protest, defeat and the outlawed, her Celts surge in other avatars defying b/orders. The Resident Magistrate of the Williams district is an Irish gentleman; he "drank and swore like an old aristocrat should" (9), according to Bob, and let "drunks and disorderlies" go with a caution (34). On racing day, he arrived with a trumpet on his shoulder and immediately postponed all court hearings. When pressed not to postpone the case against Steve already on remand for stealing a pair of Mr. Bolland's horses, he delivered a whimsical sentence of six months hard labour without seeing the prisoner. Pat and Tim, two poor Irish mariners-turned-farmers, share

⁴² Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* 123.

The authors cite the Australian bushranger as an instance of Eric Hobsbawm's "social bandit", a spectacle of resistance constructed from below (131). Given that iconic bushrangers like Jack Donohoe (1806-1830) and Ned Kelly were Irish and represented the subclass of Irish convicts transported or otherwise punished in wild excess of their alleged crimes, the 'criminal' career of a generic and presumably Irish bushranger had political overtones and a large measure of popular support among the working-class poor. Irish-Australian convict balladeer Frank the Poet or Francis MacNamara (1811-1861) renders the popular support for Jack Donohoe's anti-British, anti-authoritarian defiance in the formulaic phrase recurring in various versions of his celebratory ballad "The Wild Colonial Boy": "He'd [Donohoe] scorn to live in slavery or be humbled to the crown" (132). The bushranger myth was later co-opted as a metaphor, romanticised and endorsed "from above" (135), in the works of Charles Harpur and Rolf Boldrewood for instance.

⁴³ Ward Russel. "Celts and Currency." *The Australian Legend* 46-70. Print.

Ward contends that "a disproportionately large majority of Irish convicts and immigrants were very poor working people" (53) and carried across the oceans their anti-British attitude; according to him, their marked dislike of authority, particularly of soldiers and policemen, proved contagious and infected the native-born Currency lads, at least in the pre-Gold Rush era.

neither the Magistrate's moods and methods, nor the bushranger's addiction to subversion of state laws and authority. They have no agricultural implements and work the soil with their hands. But they play on a flute and a concertina for Bob whom they gladly invite to their hovel and offer fried kangaroo steaks and eggs. Over food and songs, they recollect memories of their arrival in Australia in a hazardous voyage across the seas, when their ship had been wrecked near Albany and most of their fellow-mariners died. Pat and Tim had survived, swam ashore and decided on a new life, as farmers, in this land of second chances.

A few other Irish farmers in the text do not constitute the wretched of the earth. The Foggartys, for instance, are the first in the district to build a barn with a floor. Bob attends as an accidental guest at the wedding revelries of their 'white' daughter to the handsome mulatto Jim, though Mrs. Foggarty confides to her uninvited guest that she rues this wedding with "the contemptible interbred fellow" (121). The constable nearly faints to discover that Mrs. Foggarty is an aboriginal. She had married for love but counters her settler husband with great pride, "I am a pure Australian . . . But God knows what you are, Dan Foggarty, seeing that you came from overseas, in one of Her Majesty's ships!" (122). The text weaves immigration and miscegenation as spores of Australianness, spores that cross-fertilise and subvert Ward's archetypal outback of isolation and travel as patrol against various ominous outsiders/invasers. *Where Skies are Blue* also disrupts the pact of silence around the original theft of white immigrants who dispossessed aborigines of their home and land.

Constable Robert Johns shares Mrs. Foggarty's horror at her daughter's love for a coloured "half-caste" man. He can at best bring himself to tolerate the "inoffensive", that is, brutalised aborigines in a large government-run encampment (78). But they refuse to betray information on Kimber, the black cattle-stealer wanted by police and the leader of an unassimilated tribe bearing the dog totem. When at last he traces the tribe in a spot of "unknown land vivid with nativity" (79), the policeman unleashes the white conqueror's alien terror, galloping his horse into a peaceful, unsuspecting crowd. He scatters and scares them, sets everyone screaming, fires in the air and threatens to kill their dogs if they do not surrender Kimber.

As the gun-toting agent of unabashed imperialism, Bob believes in naked force to uproot "the law of the wild" along with the lives and traditions of defeated aborigines; he must transplant the "new law" of Queen Victoria (80), even if it enslaves and decimates the first inhabitants of the continent. He uses the casually offensive rubric "lubra" for aboriginal women and his initial abhorrence for Sally Mars and her intimacy with aborigines gives way to pity only when he remembers her "white blood" (82). A silent Kimber is handcuffed and chained

to the horse, a silence he shares with a less resistant aboriginal, the “civilised native” in tweeds (69) who weeps over the tragedy of two white orphaned girls, Nora and Hannah, and helps them bury their father murdered by his wife. But he cannot speak, being deaf and dumb.

Where Skies Are Blue articulates the enormity of this silence/violence. In *A Secret Country* – an investigation into the black holes of silence that contain official Australian historiography and the national “story half-told” (2) – journalist John Pilger traces systematic erasures of indigenous Australians from land and history, through massacre, disease or state ‘protection’, in what seems to be an unending one-sided state-sponsored war/welfare: “the indigenous people of Australia . . . had been banished into a silent absence. . . . ‘Dispersal’ was a euphemism for mass extermination”.⁴⁴ The otherwise charming, even subversive, narrator-protagonist Bob is complicit in this massive oppression and criminalisation of aborigines as sub-human fauna. He fails to listen to their anguish but his perch of enlightened superiority is undercut, even ridiculed, by Mrs. Foggarty’s pride in her indigenous identity.

In Mollie’s multifocal Australia performing the *anekantavada* I mention in the introduction to the thesis, aboriginal presence is made visible in multiple possibilities of rage, failure, resistance and reconciliation, along with the white crime of dispossession. The relationship between the two is not beyond redemption in *Where Skies Are Blue*, where Bob the violator and assimilationist shows the courage and ambivalence to break the taboo and articulate the crime committed by him, his people and government, a crime waiting to be whitewashed by endemic amnesia: “I thought how near to God bushmen are . . . even black men. . . . He [God] gives His gifts to the freemen who roam; and they take what they need and no more; take of their fellow, too, what is just and right that he offers. The early settlers did not realise this when they took the aboriginals’ land. But the brave aboriginal did” (103). As if in expiation, Bob concludes his narrative with the anecdote of a young white Australian boy who invites home two “aloof and lonely” indigenous youths as guests during Christmas (158). The guests, accepted within the charmed circle of the family, if only for a day, sing carols, hold

⁴⁴ Pilger, John. “A Whispering in Our Hearts.” *A Secret Country*. 27.

The book aims to understand Australia’s history from the angle of the lives of the oppressed and investigates the consequent debasement of the oppressors’ society: “A nation founded on the bloodshed and suffering of others eventually must make its peace with that one historical truth” (3).

In a searing article published in *The Guardian*, Pilger reports that surveillance and mass removal of indigenous children from their families continue unabated as part of the Australian Government policy to this day, the insidious racism of the policy screened by euphemisms like “reconciliation”, “welfare” and “stronger futures”. The practice, a chilling human rights abuse, is aligned to the theft of thousands of mixed-race children from their mothers by welfare officials, giving rise to the 1970s stolen generation – survivors of a notorious assimilationist policy that aimed to “breed out colours”.

See Pilger, John. “The mass removal of Indigenous children from their parents continues unabated – where is the outrage?” *theguardian.com*. The Guardian, 21 Mar. 2014. Web. 5 Apr. 2014.

hands with others round the Christmas tree, share the sumptuous dinner and receive presents at his home. Brought up as orphans by Bishop Salvado's Mission and stolen from their environment, they are keen to embrace the white register of existence. Yet the boy's token gesture to these pliant others could be read as a beginning to acts of kindness, conversation, healing and thus a reversal of the violence and exclusions that tend to gather at the edges of Bob's narration.

The bush translates accretions of contending perspectives, changing identities and rich confusions of Mollie's India to an Australian context. It moors and uproots, intoxicates human trespassers with flaming flowers or a beauty pure and benign, only to morph shortly into a planet of unknowns and eeriness. Alone on his horse, Bob navigates for days deep into the heart of the bush. Once while on such a tour, four year old Alfie invites him to a homestead, idyllic with its sheep dip and bush fence, cow sheds and stables, vegetable gardens and honey kegs, blue orchids and a water hole. The bush could spring other surprises. The seasoned adorer finds parts of the looming scape, as also the haunts of unassimilated tribes, closed to settlers or their 'civilisation', and perhaps even hostile: "It was difficult, fearful country. Huge, unexpected rocks popped up on the tablelands, taking on the appearance of "giant hands," "dog's heads," "sleeping beauties," and "widow's peaks." . . . I wanted to go no nearer to it" (43). The unpredictable bush in *Where Skies Are Blue* betrays idioms of belonging designed for the bushman of the Palmer-and-Ward embalmed Australian legend; it hosts the maudlin as well as the macabre. It is home not only to romanticised bushrangers like Steve – a staple of the legend – but to murderous ruffians and criminals, "the biggest set of evil-looking men" (125) to cross Bob's way during his adventures, who once nearly slay him along with the innocence of the legend.

The bush invokes and radically revisits icons crafted around the settlers' nationalist mythology, querying their limits and at the same time situating them amid a jostle of freshly-minted, and occasionally contrapuntal, types absented from the white settler canon of imagining Australianness. Women and indentured labour constitute two such traditionally absented zones. Women – ranging from the disconsolate Anna Louisa Urn driven to anguish after killing her murderer husband to desperate Diana, defiant Sally Mars, Foggarty's indigenous wife, the prophetic old hag or the Protestant Mrs. Sanders who resolves to provide her deceased Catholic husband a decent burial as per Catholic rites despite hostility from both the churches – crowd the bush and the text of *Where Skies Are Blue*. These women, however, do not provide the normative settling effect, nor do they espouse domesticity and

respectability.⁴⁵ Quite a few are as much part of the “nomad tribe” as the men in the bush.⁴⁶ Norah, Ann and Miss Pepper lead or are actively involved in the illegal liquor network. The action and opinions of women in the novel parody conventions voiced by the constable-narrator, e.g. his prejudice against miscegenation and the existence of unbroken aborigines, or the Victorian kitsch of white ladies being “as innocent of evil as babies unborn” (40). The polyphonic presence of the women contests the ubiquity of the male bushranger as the haloed voice from outback, as do Liza and Paddy, a couple who had been brought out in Australia as servants of a rich family but had worked out their “indenture” and now owned a small farm.

The bush in *Where Skies Are Blue* embeds ambivalence and afterlives. Here, nicknames are rampant and almost everyone could be, or is, someone else. Bob and Steve inhabit many roles. The lovely, aristocratic Miss Pepper is a shrewd gangster of the illicit liquor network as well as passionate lover who has secretly married the Jewish Mr. Zenberg. Oyster, named after his bald head, is not as innocuous an owner of a boarding-house as he seems to be. He has a stake in the liquor racket. Most characters, like the honourable Archie, have shed another life in England or Ireland. For these translated twice-born, the bush becomes a gift of exile built on care, deep knowledge and empathetic access of others. Not a carceral regime – indeed its very antithesis in the travelling state and its freedom to roam and re-make granted to almost every character save Kimber – the bush gathers home cast-out spores of a very diverse, and sometimes heterodox, diaspora: “officers who had been cashiered, parsons who had been unfrocked; political failures (we called them radicals), or sports who had come to grief on the turf” (60). The white settlers of this home-in-diaspora – the bush as a signifier of Australianness in *Where Skies Are Blue* – had dispersed the aborigines. The guilt of that dislocation and the trauma of the indigenous people are made visible in the text which finally arrives at non-exclusive, locally un/moored national models no longer defined by blanks.

The bush here is translated as an afterlife of Mollie’s India in *Tucker Sees India*; the chameleon site inherits the fluidities, anarchic pluralities and appetite for difference. With her crowd of bushrangers, cops, gentry, small farmers, thugs, women, Irish and aborigines of

⁴⁵ In his paper titled “Australian Odysseys: Modern Myths of Travel”, Richard White contends that through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, within Australia – as elsewhere – mobility was defined as masculine and settling down as feminine, notwithstanding exceptions and accommodations: “Caroline Chisholm’s campaigns in the 1840s to encourage female migration to the colonies were based on the conviction that women had a settling effect; that as “God’s police” they would end men’s incessant roaming and tie them down to family life” (415).

See White “Australian Odysseys” *Reading Down Under* 409-418.

⁴⁶ In 1893 Francis Adams, an Englishman, had identified itinerant bush-workers as the “nomad-tribe”, “the one powerful and unique type yet produced in Australia” (165).

See Adams, Francis. *The Australians: A Social Sketch*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893. Print.

wildly varied pursuits and social backgrounds, Mollie reinvents the iconography of Australianness as a semantic river, a confluence of many histories and possibilities, with the bush as its site and objective correlative.⁴⁷ The fast-expanding railways of the 1880s had invaded its inviolate cocoon; the consequent churning, rued the local blacksmith, ruined older professions like harness-making or blacksmithy as well as the old world. The canon co-exists with myriad underdogs inserted in Mollie’s unsettled iconography, all situated in the ever-changing, rail-webbed bush and suggesting as well the variety as the vulnerabilities of the routes – traditional and alternative – to re/-thinking Australianness and the histories of inventing the nation with the black holes. Katherine Susannah Prichard⁴⁸ and Henrietta Drake-Brockman⁴⁹ wrote to Mollie on how much they had enjoyed *Where Skies Are Blue*; the paradoxes of being Australian could at last be brought home.

Storytelling and Mollie’s Years in India

Mollie arrived in India in 1913, for a trip to Kashmir with her cousin Monica Gough. At the time, she was in grief and unrest; Sybil Daune her idol was dead and nursing in London slums seemed a blind end, dreams of creative authorship had been sluiced out and she found herself receiving cheques from publishers solely for her textbook on midwifery. “My spirit was then almost broken and my body too”, ceded Mollie (*FS* 92). India gathered her failures. She discovered in the colonised subcontinent and its ruins a site of catharsis where lost narratives, banished selves and forgotten people could be remembered and 317arrativized, thus de-sanitising stories of her life and Australianness. India unleashed Mollie the author. Adored as a nurse, possibly for the first time in her life during her stay in India, she began at last to come into her own and craft a creativity that could navigate the untidy indeterminacies of co-existence, reclaiming a hidden story arc for self and her exclusion-oriented nation.

⁴⁷ In his essay “Hamlet and his Problems”, T. S. Eliot coins the critical term “objective correlative” for “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked”. See Eliot, T.S. “Hamlet and his Problems.” *The Sacred Wood*. London: Methuen & Co., 1920. *Bartleby.com*. Web. 6 Apr. 2014.

A work of art in Eliot’s critical paradigm thus becomes objective correlative for its *rasa* or *sthayi bhava* and the bush in *Where Skies Are Blue*, the objective correlative for Mollie’s ripened *rasa* of Australianness. Eliot had studied Sanskrit under scholars Charles Lanman and James Woods for at least three years during his sojourn at the University of Harvard between 1908-1916. For further details on his knowledge of Sanskrit and its influence on his critical concepts and poetic oeuvre, see Srivastava, K.G. “Eliot’s knowledge of the Sanskrit Language.” *Critical Explorations*. New Delhi: Radha Publications, 2010. 177-186. Print.

⁴⁸ Prichard, Katherine Susannah. Letter to ML Skinner. 15 Jan. 1947. MN 186. MS 1396A/33. Batty Library, Perth.

⁴⁹ Drake-Brockman, Henrietta. Letter to ML Skinner. 6 Jan. 1937. MN 186. MS 1396A/25. Batty Library, Perth.

Mollie landed at Calcutta, toured Kashmir and served as nurse at Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Bunu, Malakand Fort, Lahore, Old Delhi, Bombay and Mhaw, an itinerary Tucker retraces in the eponymous novel. While making her inaccessible to pressures to conform, her years and routes in India also seasoned Mollie in the terror of mirrors; she began to ease into her defeats and solitude. Despite her British colleagues' envy in the Raj-run hospitals and the devastating news of Dr. Corley's death at Gallipoli which she received during this period, Mollie had found the subcontinent "beautiful, alluring, soul-satisfying" (TS 187) in its echoes, chaos and palimpsest of other tenses and lives.⁵⁰ She recovered into the liminal that spills incorrigibly across thresholds, and began to narrate her encounters with ghosts, patients and Minto nurses in the same breath. Her chapters on India in *The Fifth Sparrow* manuscript came for heavy censorship from Mary Durack, in the latter's crusade to cure and curate them for rational, feminist and nationalist grids. Nowhere else in her autobiography had Mollie been more tameless, or more unapologetic in querying illusions of the prescribed masquerading as real.

Mollie adopted an uninhibited anecdotal narrative style in her twin India-based chapters in *The Fifth Sparrow*, titled "Great" and "Small" in the manuscript and changed to "Indian Interlude" and "The Gilded Cage" in the published version. The polarities of the chapter titles in the manuscript perform her engagement with paradoxes seminal to her situation in India. In India she was pampered. A colleague and cousin, Sister Evelyn, spoilt Mollie with Paris clothes she would not wear more than once or twice in the same society; in India Mollie could at last move in elite circles on her own identity, albeit sometimes in borrowed clothes; her patient General Robert Scallon advised the authorities to appoint her as in-charge of the Hindu Rao hospital; men adored her and took her to Delhi parties as first lady; her name was recommended for the prestigious King of India gold medal though she narrowly missed it "owing to personnel changes in British Administration" (TS 199). India, however, did not spare her acid memories and routine humiliations. The English Minto nurses, her "sixty lynx-eyed enemies" (FS 95), grew increasingly envious and hostile. A social climber from the Raj 'mem' dom accompanied her to Australia and, appalled at the sight of Mollie's bankrupt mother and wounded corporal brother, "went home to spread the news that Delhi's pet canary was nothing but a mudlark" (TS 198). Miss Lamb of the Hospital for Officers at Bombay decided that Mollie must be put

⁵⁰ For example, Mollie nuances "Old Delhi", the imperial awning term conjuring a uniform unshaped pre-British past for the ancient cosmopolis, with her knowledge of the older and layered memories and histories that hover in the city that had been razed and resurrected multiple times across millennia – "not that it [old Delhi] is old, since there are ruins of nine previous Delhis" (TS 188). It has been removed by Durack during editing. For a well-researched, imaginative re-creation of several of those cities and the voices and views of a few notorious and anonymous Delhiwallas across centuries, see Singh, Khushwant. *Delhi: A Novel*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1990. Print.

in her place; she tortured her with perpetual night duties and threatened her with suspension on negligible pretexts crafted by orderlies at her command. And Mary Durack banished many of her anecdotes from the edited publication, anecdotes which whispered a suitor's devotion, rumoured an old bitterness or blurred boundaries between the real and the fantastic, for instance.

Mollie listed violence, public and personal, raging during her stay – riots and insurrections for political independence that shook Delhi in 1915-16 and the personal unspoken malice of envious colleagues at Hindu Rao, which finally made her ill – “it was more psychic than active”, she concluded. Durack deleted the latter detail, just as she expunged Mollie's memory of unheeded ghosts, as when Mollie confessed to have walked through “the shade of an Indian nobleman who haunted the Hindu Rao” (TS 195). For Mollie, the dead lived and watched and patients became “sheeted ghosts in the beds” (TS 200), uncanny confusions and layered tenses that Durack refused to indulge as editor. A queer mark sprouted on her forehead – the mysterious mark Tucker would inherit from his author as an insider's passport – and orderly Lahorie told his favourite “Miss sahib” that none could harm her since “you have the holy mark” (TS 195). The editor intervened to rationalise: “In India things like that take on a special significance and I felt a certain reassurance in his assertion” (FS 99).

Mollie claimed no such enlightened distance from Lahorie and his beliefs, or from India. Her courage to step across the limits of realism to interpret her outsize realities unleashed and at home at last in the subcontinent, parallel her role as subversive mythminter for the Antipodean nation through her oeuvre. She imagined Australianness as a Rabelaisian carnival of multiple murmurs and mutating myths, open to fresh, subversive illustrations of non-exclusion – such as her female explorer, translator picaros, mongrel bushwomen and men, among others – and repossession of older myths in circulation. She re-crafted Anzac Tucker, for example, as wily Odysseus – liar, trickster, disguise-artist, heart-seeker, traveller and storyteller⁵¹ – rather than the raging Achilles, as was fashion in Australian journalism and literature of her times.⁵²

⁵¹ Besides Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, one could look at Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad* for an incisive insight into the plural and sometimes contradictory myths and representations of Penelope and Odysseus.

See Atwood, Margaret. *The Penelopiad*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2005. Print.

⁵² Sarah Midford explores constructions of the Anzac at Gallipoli – located across the Dardanelles from Troy – which linked a mythical Hellenic past and the Australian present and future. The Anzac was idolised as an incarnation of the epic heroism of Achilles or Agamemnon in war speeches, poems, diary entries and exhortations by C. E. W. Bean, situating Australia within the European continuum while simultaneously translating for the nascent nation a foundational European epic narrative of tragic sacrifice and endurance. See Midford, Sarah. “From Achilles to Anzac: Heroism in the Dardanelles from Antiquity to the Great War.” University of Western Australia, Crawley. 2-5 Feb. 2010. Lecture. Web. 16 Apr. 2014.

Mollie recounted with relish how Lahorie had once persuaded her to try and feed a dying patient who defied medicine, sleep and drink; he was convinced that “no one die while you nurse them” and sat down cross-legged clutching the tray till she complied (FS 97). When the patient spewed at Mollie the egg and milk forced into his mouth, the bearer hid his face in anguish; he could not bear to see his miss sahib “polluted” (FS 98). Mollie reciprocated the affection and did not take either Lahorie or the unknown fakir who warned her of danger from her female British colleagues as exotic strangers. She shared their defeat and idioms of resistance – an alleged weak grasp of realities and epistemologies inflicted from elsewhere – as well as their scepticism of the tyranny of the rational. Mollie, along with Lahorie, the fakir and other subcontinentals, had coded the spiritual and the psychic as dialects of dissent: “Only in spiritualism has the omnipotence of thought – and, hence, the political potency and moral vision of the dominated – been retained in our [Indian] civilization”, contends Ashis Nandy.⁵³ Mollie evoked Omar Khayyam⁵⁴ in support of her faith in an overarching divine design and found refuge and healing in “the Spiritual Light which the least of us can have for the asking . . . Mohammedan, Hindi, Christian, seemed to be aware of this in India” (TS 188). The sentence

⁵³ Nandy *The Intimate Enemy* 97.

In Antony Copley’s book on the engagement between western classical music and public life in the twentieth century, the author similarly explores spirituality in music as the composers’ signatures of dissent when confronted with authoritarian political regimes. See Copley, Antony. *Music and the Spiritual: Composers and Politics in the 20th Century*. New Delhi: Primus Books, 2014. Print.

⁵⁴ Omar Khayyam (1048-1131 CE), a Persian polymath extensively read and translated across the Indian subcontinent, has made fundamental contributions in philosophy, algebra, geometry, astronomy and poetry. Edward Fitzgerald’s (1809-1893 CE) immensely popular volume *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1859), a free translation/adaptation of his Persian quatrains to the kitsch of orientalia, such as a carefree love of wine and the beloved, turned Khayyam into the iconic pet poet of the East for the British empire and Western literary culture in the nineteenth century, and eclipsed his contributions as a major mathematician, astronomer, philosopher and mystic outside the Persian-speaking regions.

Interestingly, Mollie here does not remember Khayyam for his allegedly hedonistic rubaiyat in translation. She alludes to his philosophy as a Sufi mystic, less visible in the West but propounded in his treatises on existence like the Arabic “Al-Risalah fil-wujud”, where Khayyam stresses that all things come from God, and privileges self-purgation and intuition over the discursive methods in unveiling knowledge.

Mollie had read Fitzgerald’s volume; the semi-autobiographical nurse-narrator in *Letters of a V.A.D.* quotes quatrain 545 from his translated compilation while rendering her Kafkaesque trials with officialdom: “The moving finger writes and having writ . . .” (269). Her knowledge of Khayyam and the parallels in their respective spiritual perceptions, however, seem to have gone beyond Fitzgerald, as rendered in the following elusive and censored lines – “Perhaps the Hand pushed her – who knows? It is only He, as Omar has it, who knows about it all. He knows. He knows” (TS 196). Could it have been Lahorie who quoted local Urdu translations of Khayyam directly rendered from Persian and Arabic and generated in India as an act of resistance to the British imperial project of translation-as-occupation?

For a discussion on the politics of translation in the context of empire with reference to Khayyam, Fitzgerald and subsequent Indian translations of the rubaiyat, see Bassnett and Trivedi 8.

For a perspective on Khayyam beyond the image disseminated by Fitzgerald, see Nasr, Sayyed Hossein and Mehdi Aminrazavi. “Umar Khayyam”. *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 1: From Zoroaster to Umar Khayyam*. London: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2007. 474-484. Print.

performs her moments of identification with the stricken, colonised Indians which Durack considered wise to exclude from the edited version.

The influence and identification with India and Indians refused to wane. It birthed Mollie's bi-cultural protagonists like Tucker and Corporal Smith and her cross-pollinated models of Australianness rooted in exile and others. It lingered too, in the scream that imploded in *The Fifth Sparrow* manuscript, but was edited out of Durack's sanitised, publication-worthy, righteously rational version: "It seemed to me now that all the pleasant paths I wished to tread were guarded by an angel with a flaming sword. Was it honour I sought? I gained no honour. Was it love as the Lady of the Lamp on some battlefield? I saw no battlefield. Was it self sacrifice? I was not called to sacrifice myself. . . . It all came to mediocrity" (TS 199). Mollie could bring herself to bare her despair in the India section of her autobiography; she remembered the subcontinent as the womb in which she could bring herself to revisit, resurrect the failures and possibilities banished, in her debut novel *Letters of a V.A.D.* penned during the war years in British India.

Stories unplugged in Letters of a V.A.D

While she lies dying, Thamma, as the narrator called his grandmother in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*,⁵⁵ storms in a tirade against emigrants like her granddaughter Ila who had slunk away to the West where they did not belong. Only blood icons may birth and legitimise nations, she had learnt from the partition of the subcontinent, and Ila betrayed the code of blood and borders:

Ila has no right to live there [in England], she said hoarsely. . . . Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood. . . . War is their religion. That's what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood. (77-78)

Thamma's axiom on national stakes, memories and borders drawn in martyrs' blood resonated with "the bleeding of the [Australian] nation" during 1914-1918, to use David Day's phrase.⁵⁶ The Anzacs at Gallipoli in the Turkish peninsula were sacralised as blood icons that

⁵⁵ Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*. 1988. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995. Print.

⁵⁶ "The Bleeding of the Nation 1914-1918" is David Day's subtitle for his thirteenth chapter "Now we know what nations know" on Australian investment and icon-making in the First World War – a rite of passage into righteous nationhood, finally securing the white settlers' anxious "claim of moral proprietorship over the continent" (209) and a place among the more experienced, martial nations of Europe. See Day, David. *Claiming a Continent* 197-211. Print.

legitimised the nascent bildungsroman of white nationhood in the Antipodes, even though the slaughter of young Australians was appallingly higher on the Western Front, at the battles of Fromelles and Pozieres in France in July 1916, for example. Gallipoli had gifted an enemy – the alleged coloured Asian foe from a recurring national nightmare – and war erupted as the heady test of nationalism, so as to forge an Australia of borders, war memorials and forgetting of much besides.

On New Year's Day, 1915, two Turkish nationals killed four Australians among an unsuspecting holiday crowd in the New South Wales mining town of Broken Hill, before they were in turn hunted down and killed. In retaliation, "the frustrated townspeople" invented enemies everywhere and "marched that night on the German club, loyally burning it down, before turning their attention on the camp of Afghan camel drivers who luckily were protected by police and soldiers" (Day 202). Across Australia, Lutheran schools and German clubs were closed down, German town names were changed,⁵⁷ thousands of German Australians rounded up into detention camps while others discovered themselves as aliens whose movements needed to be watched by the state under draconian provisions of the 1914 War Precautions Act. In his poem on the Gallipoli landing, Banjo Paterson voiced Thamma and commemorated a nation baptised in war: "The mettle that a race can show/ Is proved with shot and steel,/ And now we know what nations know/ And feel what nations feel".⁵⁸ While enchanting with the Anzac spell, he chose to forget that besides Australians, there were English, French, Senegalese, Gurkha and Indian troops at Gallipoli.⁵⁹

Mollie did not forget. *Letters of a V.A.D.* teems with the English, French and Gurkhas, besides the Australians who feature in a war-hospital, rather than in the trenches. Anzacs raise but a fraction of the forest of voices that gather in the text. Rather than pose as strident patriots and warriors, they represent mates and raconteurs who remember and tell stories. Gurkha and

⁵⁷ For example, Bismarck near Hobart became Collinsvale and Germantown near Geelong became Grovedale during this period. See

Alomes, Stephen, and Catherine Jones, eds. "War and Nation." *Australian Nationalism: a Documentary History*. North Ryde, New South Wales: Angus and Robertson, 1991. 163-181.169. Print.

⁵⁸ Paterson, Banjo. "We're All Australians Now." Open letter to the troops at The Dardanelles. 1915.

PoemHunter.com. PoemHunter – The World's Poetry Archive. Web. 18 July 2014.

⁵⁹ Cenotaphs, tombs and war memorials dedicated to Unknown Soldiers (such as those memorializing the Anzacs across Australian territory or the Anzac cemeteries at Gallipoli) are saturated with ghostly national imaginings and constitute the most arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism, according to Benedict Anderson: "This is why so many different nations have such tombs without feeling any need to specify the nationality of their absent occupants. What else could they be *but* Germans, Americans, Argentinians . . . ?" His observation, intensely applicable to Anzac war memorials in Australia, shows how such memorials are raised as much to remember as to erase and re-imagine. See Anderson, Benedict. "Cultural Roots." *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983. 09-36. 09-10. Print.

English comrades who fought beside them and died, sometimes in an attempt to save them, are part of the Australians' story cycles. For the nurse-narrator of *Letters*, war paradoxically emerges as an escape from the exclusions of nationhood and patriotism; the book betrays routines of nation-making laid out by C.E.W. Bean or Paterson in their invocations of the Anzac. Bean, a creator/curator of the Anzac myth, had transferred his adoration of the archetypal Australian bushman onto the Australian soldier of the First World War:

The bush still sets the standards of personal efficiency even in the Australian cities . . .

The Australian was half a soldier before the war; indeed throughout the war, in the hottest fights on Gallipoli and in the bitterest trials of France or Palestine, the Australian soldier differed very little from the Australian who at home rides the station-boundaries every week-day and sits of a Sunday round the stockyard fence.⁶⁰

As Donna Coates shows in her paper "Guns 'n' Roses: Mollie Skinner's Intrepid Great War Fictions", Great War women writers from Australia like Gladys Hain, Mabel Brookes, Ethel Turner, Mary Grant Bruce and Chrystal Stirling had towed Bean's line in their valorisation of the Antipodean warrior and his love of combat. For their diggers, war remains yet another "dangerous (male) sport" in exotic locale, while women in this kind of wartime fiction remain sated with vicarious fulfilment, provide a gaping audience for the heroes' antics as well as the tourists' adore-ready gaze. They must be tamed as ever to their pre-scripted societal role as puppet caregivers, at home and in the world.

Mollie did not sleepwalk her novel through these chores of genre. As Coates observes, she had learnt of the outbreak of war only in April 1915 at Hindu Rao and thus would have missed "exemplary reports on the Anzacs' fighting prowess emanating from overseas by correspondents C.E.W. Bean, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett and John Masefield". Mollie was left to design a 'war novel' interperfumed with India. The locus of *Letters* being a hospital, war is translated from public obsessions with maps, weapons and xenophobic rhetoric to the uncertain, intimate terrains of hurt and healing. This hospital, "nearer to the Front than any other big Hospital" (64) and a proxy for the various hospitals in which she had served in India, becomes a twilight edge between death and births, faith and despair, desire and desolation; it blurs and bends borders and triggers the step across thresholds.

It is here that her characters craft war as a "gift of exile"⁶¹ which paradoxically returns

⁶⁰ Bean, C.E.W. "The Story of Anzac." *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*. Vol. I. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1921. Print.

⁶¹ Professor in English and thinker C D Narasimhaiah explored the term "gifts of exile" in his eponymous paper; he traced positive accretions around the idea of exile in aesthetic and epistemological traditions of India, a perspective alternative to "intimations of being banished, alienated, uprooted, disembowelled and in all cases of

them to an imagination of otherness and solidarity with various others. Temporarily removed from their native locations and intimate goals of prejudice, the characters from varied nations and backgrounds along with the nurse-narrator Rose tell stories and listen to them, share social spaces, engage in intersectional dialogues, empathise and heal in transnational camaraderie and realise that perhaps there was nowhere they indelibly belonged. The home-and-away dichotomy is turned on its head. Multiple dialects circulate in the text and several characters like the Red Cross man and the narrator have uncertain origins, while others like comatose Tuck who miraculously recovers, gain plural addresses. Exile or separation becomes less of hurt-words in this context; the concepts were not stigmatised in classical Indian aesthetics, ethics and ontologies either, as explored by Prof. C. D. Narasimhaiah in his essay “Gifts of Exile”. Panini planted separation/estrangement as an existential relation with origins and centres – as one of the seven *karakas* or relations of action – in his text on grammatology.⁶² India had honed Mollie in “gifts of exile”; across her oeuvre, the theme serves as a secret cue to the subcontinent that had set her free from Australia of the borders. Seen from the observatory of this theme, even a “war novel” could be reclaimed as a palimpsest of stories narrated by multiple orphaned characters – stories that eluded the territory of shadowlines – and India and Australia presented as the moveable feast⁶³ across maps and novels.

The collective exile of war in *Letters of a V.A.D.* enables a narrative of “big wounds, and . . . little wounds . . . great pains and little pains” (114) and invents a war hospital as the site of *samatva*.⁶⁴ The narrator’s sufferings channel Mollie’s humiliations as a nurse, edited out or minimised in *The Fifth Sparrow*, but the novel catharsizes and puts that trauma in perspective,

being deprived and dispossessed”, connotations embedded in the Latin root “exul”. He contends, with examples from Indian and other literatures, that “time out” in a space away from one’s native roots may empower with an expansion of spirit and transcendence of “the egocentric predicament of man”.

See Narasimhaiah, C.D. “Gifts of Exile.” *A Sense of Exile: Essays in the literature of the Asia Pacific region*. Ed. Bruce Bennett and Susan Miller. Crawley: University of Western Australia, 1988. 57-65. Print.

⁶² The ablative case, marked in English by prepositions such as “from”, is called “apadan karaka” – the case of movement away from – and is defined by Panini as “dhruvam apaye apadanam” (*Ashtadhyayi* 1-4-24), i.e. that which detaches from the ordinary point of reference (“dhruv”) belongs to the ablative case. In this epistemological system, then, separation and migration are integral to the grammar of syntax, and by extension, to the grammatology of relations with various homes; it is intrinsic to the human condition and connections. Apadan karaka relates to the same life-process as diaspora but seeks to understand the dislocation without the pain map.

⁶³ The phrase “moveable feast”, taken from the title of Ernest Hemingway’s memoirs of his time in Paris, evokes a site that remains portable as a collective of memories, longing and metaphor and continues to sustain and nourish, irrespective of cartographies and spatial/chronological distance. In his essay “The Diaspora in Indian Culture”, Amitav Ghosh explores the idea of a similar, infinitely reproducible India and its varied sites that continue to proliferate in the memories and imaginings of generations of its diaspora.

See Ghosh “The Diaspora in Indian Culture.” *The Imam and the Indian* 242-250.

⁶⁴ The Sanskrit term “*samatva*”, discussed in footnote no. 3 in the previous chapter (p. 213), signifies the quest to understand and inhabit othered situations and perspectives in a desire for equity. It has been referred to as both *rasa* and *yoga* in Abhinavagupta’s *Tantraloka*.

as Rose witnesses mutilated soldiers and their narratives hovering at the limits of laughter, darkness and redemption. *Letters of a V.A.D.* gives war-and-nation narratives a turn. Instead of reinforcing the addiction to borders, it interprets war as a context to mine absented narratives in the making of self or the nation; this precludes the trope of silences and borders unsettled, as recurrent in her later works. Written under the pseudonym of R.E. Leake, possibly to avoid the censure of family and people who might recognise themselves in the fiction, the novel taps the power of anonymity to explore alternatives in imagining war and the nation. The nurse-protagonist finds herself free to narrate hurt and desires, or to adore the patience, humour and stories of her English, Irish, Australian and French patients and comrades at hospital. War and the consequent displacements in the novel return her to Mollie's freedom, her distance from virulent nationalist machismo and her taste for exceeding borders cultivated during the India days.

Rose vents with relish in her letters, in "one big long grumble" (20) how her female colleagues despise her completely, harrowing episodes identical to the author's experiences with British nurses at the Hindu Rao Hospital and mostly expunged from the edited version of *The Fifth Sparrow*. Yet the despair and fear of rejection are laced with humour; the narrator playfully admits that she is yet to master the saintly charity of St. Theresa "who ate rotten eggs and smiled over them" (20). A particularly notorious colleague nicknamed "the Bloodless One" (22) embodies the hostilities; this chaste Anglican colleague, obsessed with hatred and the rhetoric of boundaries, plagues Rose and is keen to know if she is a papist. She makes the deck steward throw overboard some of the narrator's belongings during their overseas journey to the war front. "I cannot say a nice word about anybody" (27), revels the narrator in wicked joy, for the giggling nurses holed up with her in the ship end up starving her; they usually forget to pass the dishes served by stewards who materialise rarely anyway.

On arrival, the "Bloodless One" assigns the protagonist on perpetual night duty and she finds herself caged in "perfect wilderness" (34) in a new and hostile ward, and the patients in panic with their night nurse changing. The hospital, situated in the estate of a local nobleman, relives Mollie's dark memories of her days as nurse at Maharaja Gaekwad's palace converted into a makeshift war hospital for officers at Bombay. In her autobiography, she labelled it "The Gilded Cage" where the sister-in-charge Miss Lamb had punished her with regular night duty. She reaped the loneliness: "How I longed for home during those long night watches".⁶⁵ Mollie

⁶⁵ Skinner *The Fifth Sparrow* 101.

uncorks her humiliations in India through partly autobiographical ordeals of the nurse-narrator as well as through those of her alter-ego, the young nurse Fluff keen on banter and marriage.

Fluff is cast as the “average woman” with longings that the narrator dares not voice till she breaks, at the very end of the novel: “The average woman does not want to work for her living continually. She craves for love, marriage and children: for dependence and protection”, reasons Rose on behalf of Fluff in letters to her “soul-sister” (218). Fluff has apparently joined the V.A.D. to recruit a husband, unlike Rose who quells her angst of loss and desolation through service. Fluff is routinely harassed, too, by orderlies starkly recalcitrant, a routine Mollie had borne in India: “The tea they brought her was beastly; the medicine glasses dirty; thermometers lost; Reports ridiculous; calls unfounded, and so on – all, all carried out with that ingenuous innocence that only orderlies know how to put on” (56). The narrator “almost added my tears to hers, so deep was my sympathy” until the mysterious Red Cross man, a character openly in disguise, takes on the orderlies and threatens to pummel one among them, ending the nuisance.

For Rose, the text becomes a self-reflexive exercise in healing through storytelling. The “Bloodless One” accuses the nurse-narrator and upstarts like her of having robbed “the medals off . . . [the] breasts, the bread out of . . . [the] mouths” of the coterie of four-years trained, certificate-worthy experts like her (236). In a spurt of jealousy, Rose’s female colleagues finally gang up to report against her; an episode of Kafkaesque monstrosity unfolds as she is summoned to the Headquarters and officially reprimanded on the basis of charges such as being “slack with the subordinates; and talkative to the patients” (271). She learns the absurdity and terror of the situation: “There is no reasoning with the powers that be – “They” are as unassailable as Divine Providence” (269). Nonetheless, undercurrents of personal bitterness do not mow her; she sprinkles her account with anecdotes of the other nurses’ heroic feats during the war. She and her colleagues attend on the horribly mangled and often perform medical miracles, curing the deranged or critically ill; they keep constant vigils, soothe and heal, sometimes bending rules: “I have felt myself soothe; I have seen Criss-Cross quell a demented spirit more than once, and the Red Cross man bring sleep. I have seen more than this, and experienced it too, but it won’t go into words” (205).

Mollie inserts female nurses as indispensable actors in her war narrative, making visible yet another black hole in dominant memorialisation of the First World War, especially in Australia. As Donna Coates observes:

In permitting us to enter the forbidden zone [the domain of war] with her, R. X. is a dangerous woman, for she breaks the codes of silence and invisibility war offices counted upon women to obey in wartime. She and the other nurses singlehandedly save the lives

of several men, yet according to the rules of the war game, their actions must pass unacknowledged and uncommemorated. Letters of a V.A.D. records the nurses' courageous deeds for which they will receive no medals.⁶⁶

The war narrative, written in India, suffused with memories of the subcontinent and situated in a locus of perennial transit and separations – a war hospital – enables the author to shed another rind of unspeakables and navigate the “sea of pain”, “mist of horror” and “blinding rain of tears” (83) that deluged soldiers of the war. Rose's vocation makes her a witness to others' terrors, hopes and fears. She begins to grow sceptic of the mythologies of war and patriotism and wonders if the wounded, shell-shocked soldiers “so bored, so tired, and so white” indeed want to return to the front: “Do they *want* to be “mended” and go back? *They* would all say “*Yus*”; yet it must be so awful in the trenches . . . they never seem to laugh, or talk much. They are woefully silent” (65). A haughty, wry Anzac she adores blasphemes steadily in long drawn-out breaths and passes it off as prayers from childhood when he is brought under the knife without chloroform; his edgy humour and laughing, darkling eyes serve as antidotes to his pain and loss, just as stories and prayers kindle others in the hospital. The patients “tell their stories often, to drown their pain, and we let them, for there is something divine and healing in sympathy”, knows the narrator as she listens (205). *Letters of a V.A.D.* becomes the house of a hundred stories, most of them pivoted on “the value of suffering, the use of failure, the need of pain” (200) – the ethic and aesthetic of this text as well as the narrator's dharmik⁶⁷ quest.

An Irish Catholic soldier Shan O' Shaunassy inspires Rose with the courage of his faith and forbearance. The badly mutilated O' Shaunassy who will never get well and has none left at home, bears his torment in silence and prays with a rosary for his dead and ailing friends and comrades. He believes that the pain sacralises his prayer, making it “worth so much more” (88), and narrates to Rose a strange meeting with his dead friend and fellow soldier Pat, who pleaded that he pray for him, while Shan lay in trembling agony on the operating table. The narrator, herself a refugee from personal despair, doubts and desolation, is moved by O' Shaunassy's Catholic faith in the Holy Mother and Holy Church, which so inspires compassion for others and immunes him against loneliness. She discovers her French patients to be “as patient, as cheerful, and as unselfish, as our British Tommies” (93) and finds herself “becoming

⁶⁶ Coates, Donna. “Guns ‘n’ Roses: Mollie Skinner's Intrepid Great War Fictions.” *Southerly* 59.1 (Autumn 1999): 105-121. Web. 4 Sept. 2011.

⁶⁷ The term “dharmik” signifies “of or related to one's dharma” i.e. an ecology of ethics, logic and actions that aims to sustain the self in empathetic, imaginative continuum with its worldwide web of connections. In *Letters of a V.A.D.*, Rose seeks to anchor herself in selfless suffering and renunciation.

quite Popish” under their influence, as she quips in a letter (85). Her patients initiate Rose in routes that spill over borders, whether those be of self, faith, nationality or territories of the living and the dead. It all comes down to the training in transgressions Mollie had inherited from India and rehearsed in her pre-censored chapters on the subcontinent in the *Fifth Sparrow* manuscript, as investigated above.

Rose does not claim herself to be an Australian at any point in *Letters*, though she shares their compulsion to supplant the names of colleagues with chosen nicknames. The Australians refer to their mates as “Cornstalks”, “Crow-eaters”, “Gum-suckers”, “Sand-groppers” (221), echoing Rose’s practice of alluding to her peers as “Fluff”, “Mouse” or the “Bloodless One”. Her admiration for the deeply bonded Australian troops who seem to muster simultaneous currents of thought and a single collective voice at will, co-exists with her respect for the Irish, Gurkha, French or even the haughty British. In one of her letters to the beloved soul-sister, Rose renders the dying moments of the “splendid wounded” young officer and aristocrat Sir Galahad, a “flower of England’s garden” (178) who retained “all the formal coldness and hauteur of his race” (180) till the end. Moved by the simple courage of the serene boy as he died, she enters him in her gallery of saints (185) and morphs him to her haloed “White Knight” (197).

In India and in *Letters*, the novel penned in India, Mollie could posit her variant of Australian nationalism nestled in imperialist loyalty. Like Mollie’s Tucker from *Tucker Sees India*, some of Rose’s favourite Anzacs retain roots and remain well-connected in England, removing thus the rivalry and barely-hidden tension in the Australia-England relationship during this period. Comatose Tuck for instance, a rugged colonial whom the narrator helps recover to drifting memories of a home and daughter in Australia, an aboriginal maid and the incense of burning gum and pine cones, discovers that he has inherited a baronetcy and grand estate at Kent, as one of the last surviving heirs of the illustrious Urquhart Kellys: the rest of them had been killed in war. He might have married a squatter’s daughter and settled in Australia but his bronzed neck and arms and years in the outback do not make him outlandish in England; he has homes in both.

Mollie had been uninhibited in riding across worlds and limits in India. And Rose resists barricades that birth and blight the other/s. “We go into other people’s countries and march about criticizing their houses and manners and customs, and cannot even let their religion alone”, she rues, since the white man’s inventory of contemptibles in the colony only stokes an identical politics of exclusions among those he others: “No wonder Hindus object to allowing people into their temples – or is it Mahommedans” (22). Though the narrator seems to have

been assigned as wartime nurse at someplace else, her abrupt allusion to Hindus and Muslims as the alienated others exposes Mollie's buried cue to the subcontinental frame of the text as well as her narrator's keenness on plurals and the apar.

Just as Rose's imagination and empathy knows no national identities and her own country is never specified, so does she become a ready pilgrim across the porous frontiers of faiths and cultures. Brought up as a Presbyterian, tutored at a Protestant school and a student of the English Catholic movement, Rose finds an intense bond with the Catholic sister whom she holds as a beacon in "the shining path of self-sacrifice, of self-immolation, and of virtue" (309); she addresses all letters to her. Breaking rules of the Presbyterian and the Protestant traditions in which she had been raised and born, Rose adores a painting of Virgin Mary in a little church near the war-hospital. And one sunset, in a moment of lonely prayer at the altar, she has an epiphany of the Virgin with the body of her Son as the Host, inviting Rose to "take eat" (259). The pieta becomes her refuge in a phase of heartbreak and confusion and offers her the chalice of suffering in love and service for her dharmik quest.

In *Letters of a V.A.D.*, Rose finally confesses to a transgression of "the Love Laws . . . The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much".⁶⁸ She loves the colonel, a man she thinks forbidden since he is married with two daughters, though divorced now from his unfaithful wife. The colonel has long resolved to marry her. "I am glad the colonel took no notice of my protestations. It was lovely to be loved, embraced, kissed. Have I sinned? . . . I don't care", she argues in a letter (240) but steadily refuses the partnership she has imagined impossible from the very beginning. She shudders and cracks under the weight of the isolation and loss this transgression invokes. But her courage to live its memories and the terror of its pain in her letters releases her into a cycle of rebirths when she can shed or shape her selves and roles, leave or step into a multitude of narratives and initiate her route to the dharma of self-effacing love and service.

This journey, sculpted in collaboration with the departed or separated, steps across the final threshold of the living and the dead. Mollie wrote *Letters of a V.A.D.* in India, in the shadow of death, exile and departures. Sybil Daune's death in 1911 haunts the text; the narrator's beloved Catholic sister, made in the image of Daune, is reported to have fallen ill towards the end. Rose seems prescient of her death in the vision where the Catholic sister enters to guide Rose in charity and humility before bidding a tender farewell: "Dear, I must leave you. Pray for me, if . . . you . . . please" (311). The Red Cross man is killed while trying to stop a

⁶⁸ Roy *The God of Small Things* 33.

mule wagon from stampeding the Gurkha troops at breakfast. For Rose, he incarnates her beloved Catholic sister's ideal of a life lived and sacrificed in service with "no rest, and no praise, and no thanks or acknowledgement at all!" (229). He continued attending to patients despite bullet wounds in his neck and foot and rescued many of the horribly injured from trenches, without letting them recommend him for distinction. Rose saved his life when he was once washed up by the sea, wounded and unconscious, and feels connected to him as his secret life-giver. She stands aghast by his corpse when the Australians bear his body in.

The rejected colonel also leaves for the front. The narrator is crushed and overwhelmed: "That [the estrangement from the colonel], and you being ill, and the Red Cross man, and the patients whom I love, who are departing" (256). She had met her soul-sister and then joined as nurse, when hounded by the deaths of Tom her brother and his friend Philip, her betrothed. The parade of deaths and departures rips the narrator out of the benign banal of allotted frontiers, whether of nation, faith, love or the living, and kindles her quest for selves, stories and territories across. In the last letter to the friend she apprehends dead, Rose emerges as "a calm, strong, quiet Red Cross nurse" (312) preparing for a relief expedition with the Head of the V.A.D. to an "uncertain indefinite place" where the work will be "hard" and life "trying", "further away" from all familiars (274), yet another relay of the routes of her beloved sister and the Red Cross man. The dead continue to inspire text and travel as her tools of loneliness and rebirth.

India had kindled text and travel, exile and death, as Mollie's modes of un/making self and nation outside allotted frontiers. It became for her the house of a hundred stories and offered her the storyteller's license of fabrication and hypocrisy. Now at last, in her debut novel written and covertly set in British India, Mollie could unleash her deaths, doubts, hierarchy of heartbreaks and fantasies – all freedoms in excess of the modest bounds of a Victorian female autobiography. In *Letters*, both Tom and Philip had been killed in war in France, a devastation that revisits the death of Bob, Mollie's brother and that of her forbidden love Corley; Rose's tragic love for the colonel rehearses Mollie's affair with Dr. Corley who had then married another. *Letters* becomes less a war-novel than a veiled testimonial. The narrator performs her author's uncertainties and anguish of love and doubts that would be purged out of *The Fifth Sparrow*, the official autobiography published as liberation-happy feminist bildungsroman customised to the 1970s. Rose is unsettled by a "tremendous argument about marriage, divorce and celibacy" with one of her male colleagues (38) and writes of her want of faith in religious rigidities (37), unlike Mollie who does not dare rake such disturbing issues in *The Fifth Sparrow*. Finding herself an invisible stranger in an exotic land envied and humiliated by her

female colleagues, Rose realises “I have no place here, and make no friends” (47), reliving the resentment and rejections of Mollie’s British female colleagues at the Hindu Rao Hospital.

Yet the “here”, this thinly veiled subcontinent, erupts at last as a liberating site of self-expression, creation and even desolation for both narrator and author. Rose moans over the absence of home and children (287): “I want sympathy – I want love and friendship” she hungers (188), voicing Mollie’s unspoken, and increasingly unspeakable, dreams. And when all of those who loved – the colonel, the Red Cross man, the “soul-sister”, O’ Shaunassy, Tom and Philip – had left, she breaks down and implodes in a scream that haunts the *Letters* and echoes Mollie’s unspeakable desolation during the First World War: “Everything has been taken away from me, everything, and I don’t know why” (303).

So uninhibited does Rose grow in this site of self-expression that she begins to image it as the objective correlative of her condition. She can hear the birds in the park twitter her angst over deaths and departures in their argot: “the doves here mourn most distinctly in this wise . . . ‘T’cuckoo is dead,” while the others answer “He’s so-o cold – He’s so cold”: This is not in the least like the usual, “Coo-oo-yer” – “Coo-oo-yer” (160). However, the birds also seem to chirp less tragic lines like “He kist m” (231), for *Letters of a V.A.D.* does not only incubate failures and exhaustion. Her location as well as the text birth Rose the (letter-)writer, just as India had birthed Mollie as novelist. Writing becomes a tool for disinhibition, catharsis, self-fashioning and subversion for the narrator and her author; it heals and releases them into plural possibilities of narrating nations, selves and others.

Rose’s undisclosed location not only makes her script epistles but gifts the much coveted authority as well. Like Mollie at Hindu Rao, she finds herself in charge of the “Female portion of the outfit” (188), when a senior nurse is temporarily transferred to a makeshift Officers’ Hospital. Despite her avowed embarrassment, Rose basks in her exalted status, freshly acquired power and privileges linked with upward mobility in the imperial caste-system which allots tents in the park as boarding for nurses, makes the orderlies camp in the stable and lodges only select members of the medical staff in the house: “The Staff is delightful, and the work a joy, and also I have moved up to the house and that is so comfortable, and luxurious, after the tent” (190). She cautions Fluff and Shack, her obdurate colleagues, for negligence of duty and plays the incharge to the hilt. Everything falls apart shortly after, when the Bloodless One arrives to relieve her of the charge, pushes her back to the tent and connives with the ruffled nurses to lodge a complaint against her at the Headquarters, where Rose is officially summoned and reprimanded. Her euphoric rise in professional status may have been transient but the adoration of almost all her male colleagues and patients is not. “I like the men so much better than the

women”, she quips (12), and the men reciprocate. Rose’s liberating site of service during the First World War – an allusion to Mollie’s India – thus fulfils yet another fantasy of her author, one Mary Durack had censored out of the published version of *The Fifth Sparrow*.

In her letters, Rose cannot help preening on the number of men who court her. Mouse the young doctor tries to hold her hand, her patient Tuck seeks her out as the confessor and confidant who might salvage his life and memories, the Black Man, a senior surgeon, wants her as his belle and even the angelic, impersonal Red Cross man showers attention and counsels her in moments of anguish and pain. The intense, reserved colonel who fits Rose’s prototype of a “British gentleman” (171) seems to materialise out of a knightly romance. He embodies the narrator’s dream of a lover passionate to protect and possess her: “I love you, and you will learn, if you do not already, to love me, simply because I care so much . . . You belong to me. I’ll claim you soon” (239). Their love pre-empts the recurrent motif of apocalyptic affairs in Mollie’s oeuvre, like the relationship of Kit and Janice in *WX – Corporal Smith*.

The narrator’s location in *Letters* does not however clone Broinowski’s amoral “Illicit Space”, the staple coloniser’s fantasy in which Deakin had sought to contain India at one point. In excess of the halo of authority, authorship, or even the love, attention and flirtations of a bevy of men, her frontier site finally surges as the happy Elysian field of friendship, enquiry, exchanges and unafraid dialogues, meditations, debate and dissent on issues that disturb her and the others, the others in conversation including people like her soul-sister and the colonel, or erstwhile strangers like O’Shaunassy. Her location unfolds for Rose “another [Elysian] plane here below, where one can meet other souls, piercing, as it were, beyond materialism, and sporting in mysterious fairy fields of friendship. Here it is always fair; sunshine and rain are both as sweet; it is full of sadness, yet joy abounds; and peace and good fellowship are there for ever” (242-243).

The alternative space seasons her in “sat-tarka”⁶⁹ or the mode of argument and introspection that translates and inhabits other perspectives, outside the frontiers of one’s immediate interest and familiar vectors of identity and analysis. Abhinavagupta terms “sat-tarka” the best form of yoga or concentration/connection.⁷⁰ Rose internalises and expounds in

⁶⁹ The Sanskrit term “sat-tarka” could literally be rendered as “true/honest debate/analysis”; it refers to an epistemological method that seeks to access, imagine and inhabit plural, even opposed, voices and views in order to arrive at non-exclusive engagement with the subject at hand as understood from multiple angles, in all its related dilemmas and queries. The method embeds an epistemic-political humility in acknowledging the debatability/ lack of certainty of any position or conclusion upheld for the time being in an argument, including one’s own. In *Tantraloka*, Abhinavagupta cites “sat-tarka” as one of the six yogangas (III 101) – features of yoga – in his revision of the eight yogangas as laid down in Patanjali’s *Yogasutra*.

⁷⁰ “Tarko yogangam uttamam” (*Tantraloka* III 102).

her letters divergent views, including those of the devout O' Shaunassy, Herbert the arrogant orderly, the sister, the Red Cross man, the Catholic priest who refuses to convert her to Catholicism, her colonel, Fluff turned hostile by her unrequited love for the Black Man, the Australian larrikins and British aristocrat corporals. "Sat-tarka" might have stoked the narrator's raging doubts and multiplied her roles, splinters and selves, but this subcontinental epistemology also invokes the political imaginary of plurality and otherness that dyes *Letters* and all of Mollie's other, later novels. Even *The Boy in the Bush* and *Black Swans* could be read as Mollie's anuvad and sat-tarka with D.H. Lawrence and Vance Palmer's ideas of Australianness.

That sat-tarka and the argumentative narrator thrive in tropical rather than French soil is occasionally betrayed, as when the narrator comments on the climate: "Although it is winter time it is fine and bright, and not at all cold, and so one can be out with pleasure almost all the day long" (268). In a more direct allusion, *Letters of a V.A.D.* details Indian participation and Australia-India connections in the First World War which is currently widely understood as a European war, resolved to the benefit of European empires. The war and its battlefields were global however and profoundly affected Asia and Africa, not least by providing soldiers and civilians from the colonies an inadvertent international exposure to contemporary ideological-political movements like anti-imperialism and communism. Men and resources were marshalled on an astonishing scale from the British empire. The empire's biggest contribution was by India. It included "3.7 million tonnes of supplies, over 10,000 nurses, 1,70,000 animals, 146m pounds of Indian revenue, and political support".⁷¹ The Indian Army, the largest volunteer force, also comprised the biggest non-British component of the British fighting forces. It provided 1.1 million troops to serve overseas, of which over 74000 were killed and 80000 were held prisoner: "These forces not only protected the northwest of India, but also buttressed British garrisons in Egypt, Singapore and China, as well as contributing to seminal battles of the Western Front, such as the Somme and Neuve Chapelle".⁷² The Indians who fought for the British empire earned a staggering 13,000 gallantry medals in the process. The courage and exploits of the Gurkha troops from India and their camaraderie with the Australians are poignantly rendered in *Letters of a V.A.D.*

Rose is impressed at the drill of the Gurkha regiment, "little sinuous brown men almost as broad as they are high" (220), in tune with their bagpipe music. They are followed by the

⁷¹ Joshi, Shashank. "A European war, fought by India." *The Hindu* 5 August 2014, Kolkata ed.: 6. Print.

⁷² Joshi "A European war, fought by India" 6.

Australians, “giants on the whole” (221). She tumbles out forgotten anecdotes of the Gurkha-Anzac bond during the War: “The Gurkhas and Anzacs fraternized in a marvellous degree at Gallipoli. No one quite knew why. “Little brother.” “My-big-brother-from-over-the-sea.”” (221). One of her Anzac patients recalls being saved along with his friend by a Gurkha, when both were awaiting death in a trench with lethal wounds. He died in the attempt: “a bullet got the little Gurkha straight in his heart as he stood there, and he crumpled up like a concertina under me . . . my word that hurt . . .” (227). But the Anzacs refuse to forget the Gurkha mate and insert him as a hero in their digger lore. One of the wounded Australians had at first sight mistaken the Gurkha to be the ghost of (indigenous) Australia (226); other, ghosted spaces, species and times leach as well into the Australia and Australians of *Letters*.

The Australians Rose meets during her assignments are neither all Anzacs nor males. Many of them are remarkably young, trained female nurses serving overseas during the war. Nor are Mollie’s Anzacs in the *Letters* mere keepers of the Australian ideal of military nationalism. India had secured for Mollie the license and distance needed from regular Antipodean war propaganda to recast Australian warriors as a more devious tribe, that of the storytellers. The hospital resonates with their healing jokes, stories and camaraderie. Rose represents them as the “great lank men from the land of gold, so touchy, so irreligious, so terribly independent in theory” (62); she is moved by their much-mythicized mateship, simplicity and penchant for fun amidst trauma. The egalitarian Anzacs have a terrifying method of “counting out” in a single voice, anyone of whom they disapprove or who happens to dictate them (98). But they disrupt stereotypes and include non-Australians like the Red Cross man and Gurkha mates as insiders within their close-knit circle, forging thereby a non-exclusive group of mates. In a further departure from their mythologized chauvinism, they accept the female narrator as an insider, perhaps privileging the solidarity as storytellers over gender difference, and share yarns with her in their argot. Some of these anecdotes about dandy British officers ambling at the front armed in monocles, cane and naive curiosity, are then transmitted as part of the narrator’s repertoire. The Anzacs, for instance, had adapted a question by one such innocent officer – “What are you doing heah?” (101) – as their “battle-cry” and comment on the black comedy of war and its innocent bosses.

Stories – of the Anzacs, the narrator and her other patients – tumble breathless in *Letters of a V.A.D.*; they are medium for polyphony of the plural voices and perspectives. Each character, whether a patient, the colonel, the muted Red Cross man or Rose, brims with a cascade of stories – some hidden, others hinted at and the rest half-told. Stories rip apart the silences around a uniform, militarist imagination of Australianness and its others and surge

instead into myriad alternatives; as digression and compulsion, they create a climate of heterodoxy. *Letters* can be read as Mollie's *ur-kathasaritsagar* – the sea-of-stories that would become her signature in imagining a non-exclusive Australia, especially in fiction since *Tucker Sees India*. In India, Mollie could at last gather the courage to conceive her loquacious rebellion against the cult of silence and absence definitive in forming dominant notions of the Federation.⁷³ Rose dispossesses the plot of its centrality and routinely sidles into digressions. "I write this pointless story because it came along" (206), she notes, as she tucks in an injured soldier's tale of survival amid other anecdotes. Her narratives translate the Indian, interminable style of storytelling that meanders yet enchants, a style rendered in English in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and espoused in his Foreword to that novel: "we [Indians] tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story".⁷⁴

Stories in *Letters* are a centrifugal value. They embed polyphony – trace of the subcontinent, the site of its writing – belong to multiple narrators and exude diverse rasas. The narrator considers herself the master storyteller or dramaturge and refers to her patients as puppets in her little show (247). This position is undercut, for the patients' stories often interrupt and braid with her own and she knows moments of humility as omniscient narrator and sutradhar. Her affair with the colonel is finally featured as a knightly romance, albeit blighted. The chivalrous colonel is "the vision of a knight betrayed and broken, beaten and battered, who rises again with lance set and courage undaunted" (171); she imagines he must have been a "fairy prince of a father" (172) to his daughters from the broken marriage. Besides the knightly romance her stories also perform the darkness of desolation and humiliations, though several of the comic anecdotes recount lighter moments with her patients or flirtations of colleagues along with their quirks. She shares the Anzacs' in-circle jokes and at times transcribes them for her soul-sister.

Her patients' tales too parade rainbow shades. These tales may curate wounds and loss, like those reeled out by patients brought numb with pain on the operating table or the Anzacs rescued by the Gurkha. They may seek to salvage some peace and refuge from the hellscape at

⁷³ In his chapter "The Argumentative Indian", Amartya Sen connects the "peaks of loquaciousness" (3) in the Indian epics and other classical subcontinental treatises with the well-rooted subcontinental traditions of "argumentative heterodoxy" (13) that protect, preserve and even celebrate reasoned dialogue, provocative difference and the plurality of alternatives.

See *The Argumentative Indian* 3-33.

⁷⁴ Rao, Raja. Foreward. *Kanthapura*. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1970. 6. Print.

the front, as O' Shaunassy does through his narratives. Or they may swell ripe with humour and tenderness for their comrades and nurse, as modelled in the Anzacs' anecdotes and fraternity with their fellows in hospital, with whom, Rose claims in her epistolary narratives, they were "positively co-agentic" (96).

Some characters are pregnant with stories woven in mystery, since they resist being told. The story of the unidentifiable good-looking patient who cannot remember his past after recovering from coma, for example. He poses a puzzle to Rose who plays amateur investigator in order to piece together his identities. A "penny novelette" of suspense unfolds (122), till the narrator identifies him as Tuck or Terence Cecil Urquhart Kelly the squatter who had tried tea gardens in Canada, married and been a settler in Australia, was posted missing during the war and has finally inherited the grand estate of the Urquhart Kellys in Kent as one of their last heirs alive. Rose helps Tuck regain his memory and the penny novelette within the novel rushes to a happily-ever-after. But the dark gloom and awe that loom around the Red Cross man are never dispelled. The narrator cannot access the past lives of this attractive fortyish man – a master of multiple accents, from an Oxford slant to the Australian drawl. Nor can she locate him in any specific "profession – nor art – nor craft" (58). His rough persona and heavy ammunition boots contradict his graceful voice, hands, manners and humility. His alleged suicide attempt, too, ill fits his resolve to serve and suffer silently or to anchor others who are in unrest. This man of the piercing, unfathomable look wells with other worlds and leavings and despite her investigative streak, the narrator fails to resolve his stories or punctuate them with an all-enlightening plot: "What is the secret of the man – this sadness, or sin of his?", she muses in helpless bewilderment (118).

Alternatives and plurality resonate too in the multiple dialects in which stories are narrated by storytellers and protected and circulated in *Letters*. O' Shaunassy and the Anzacs flaunt Irish and Australian variants of English respectively in their narratives. The orderly Herbert vents in cockney his protest against institutionalised hierarchies and inequity in the army barracks: "For goin' out an' doing 'is bit an' 'is dooty, that there general . . . 'll get a 'undred thousand quid, and a hearl's belt . . . whilst we – we gets a bob a day and confined to barricks for spendin' it if we gits the chanst. Is that fair, I asks? And I gets no answer to my questing" (81). Nor does a dialect remain the exclusive domain of any one particular group or speaker/s. Several characters in *Letters* are polyglots and own several dialects, even languages – another motif of fluidity and multiplicity to be restored later in Mollie's oeuvre with *Tucker Sees India*. Tucker inherits this legacy and is fluent in Urdu and English; he too, like Rose and some of her colleagues and patients, belongs to the keen tribe of travellers homed in between

multiple languages and cultural registers. The narrator and the Red Cross man converse in Latin besides regular English; Tuck or Terence can understand French. Rose hears the Red Cross man speak quite common English along with the erudite Oxford and Biblical variants, as well as Irish, Scots and Australianese, depending on his audience. In a dialogue with Rose, even the timid English doctor Mouse mouths the robust Australian idiom, to “return to our mutttons”, instead of “getting back to the point” (140). Almost each character performs other voices in the text.

Letters of a V.A.D. is written in dialogue with a number of intertexts, their diversity yet another index of its embedded polyphony. Besides recurring references to the Bible – a steady co-text for the narrator in her rage and despair – it alludes to a range of Victorian texts, from Rudyard Kipling’s pious “If” (1910) and Coventry Patmore’s resigned if heartbroken “A Farewell” (1878) to snippets from Harry Graham’s dark comic verse in *Ruthless Rhymes for Heartless Homes* (1898) and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865); Fitzgerald’s translation (1859) of Omar Khayyam’s quatrain “The moving finger writes and having writ/ moves on” (269) features as ironic comment on the absurd tyrannies of officialdom. Rose seeks succour in Robert Browning’s lyric “The Guardian Angel” (1842) in her desolation and ends her letters by quoting from Francis Thompson’s intense “Hound of Heaven” (1893), a poem of devastation and dissolution into the devoted divine, sent by her Catholic sister. “It seems as if my life were written in those burning words”, she reels (309), haunted by those lines of absolute surrender to the “Designer infinite” supposed to provide anchor and telos to her tempests, terror, quest and the text.

The diversity of intertexts that stage the chorus of *Letters* is only matched by the range of roles performed by several characters. Some of the wounded soldiers prove to be enchanting storytellers. The narrator refuses to be closeted to universal motherhood by her profession: “Why, I am everybody’s mother!” she exclaims indignantly (139) and rather chooses to be friend and secret-sharer for the soldiers. “They [her patients] call me anything from Missus to Matron”, she proudly counters the Bloodless One (158) and heals, circulates stories or takes up detective work in order to restore the identity of her amnesiac patient. The Red Cross man too is visibly a man of many parts; he could be cast as a navy or a priest, an Oxford scholar or an orderly, a saint and a sinner. These characters, especially Rose and the Red Cross man, seethe with alternative identities and vocations, another fictive gene that gets transmitted to Tucker, Mollie’s Australian hero who is capable of as many avatars in India.

Indeed *Letters* could be read as a rite of rebirth, many of its characters – many of them ripe to be reborn – being travellers twice-born and pregnant with traces of elsewhere and

disparate past lives. The colonel had left his family for years to be in South Africa and Malta as a member of the Army Medical Corps: “the Colonies had roused a restlessness in him he could not overcome”, even though it had cost him his wife (173). Tuck had spent years in Canada and Australia before coming upon the estate in Kent. The narrator had herself travelled to the “uttermost parts of the earth” (255) leaving her Catholic sister and the routine darkness of bereavement. In the process, she rebirths herself as writer and healer and midwives a number of the characters at hospital into second lives. Early on in the text, Rose resuscitates the drowned Red Cross man and stitches a lethal wound in his scalp; she feels like a mother, “as if he belonged to me” (48). She gifts Tuck his past and a fresh life, by helping him out of amnesia. She resuscitates a diphtheria patient when he had stopped breathing and watches him come alive under her care.

These second lives and the novel witness Mollie’s resurrection from her defeat and wounds, as a storyteller of alternatives in India. More than the obvious autobiographical allusions to her years in the subcontinent, it is the non-exclusive, often dissenting, alternatives modelled by the characters and their pluralities, including the storytelling woman-befriending Anzacs, that transplants Mollie’s India to her debut novel. In *Letters of a V.A.D.*, the author retraces the forgotten and explores the less heard appeals – of transgressions and cross-fertilisations – in the making of individual and national identities. This route across limits and thresholds comes full circle in crafting the Australian nation and its unlikely, India-based hero in *Tucker Sees India* – a later novel that recovers from ascriptions of her anuvadic triad and builds on the exploits of a happily displaced war-fearing polyglot Anzac picaro.

And the Watershed Moment, Tucker Sees India

Tucker Sees India becomes trope and turning point in Mollie; it models the many-voiced “multiverse”⁷⁵ and tribe of travelling insiders who access and remain critically intimate with the text of the other. The twin motifs – of the richly diverse multiverse and the Tucker tribe of Australians twice born in exile and housed in ecologies of the apar – would remain constant in Mollie’s post-*Tucker* novels, *W.X. Corporal Smith* and *Where Skies Are Blue*. The motifs sown in Tucker’s India point to “a cemetery of missed opportunities” in imagining the nation⁷⁶ and

⁷⁵ I chanced upon this remarkable word denoting a potential multifocal political imaginary contrapuntal to “universe” – etymologically “turned into one” – in Shiv Vishvanathan’s article titled “Debating the conversion conundrum” published in *The Hindu*.

See Vishvanathan, Shiv. “Debating the conversion conundrum.” *The Hindu* 24 December 2014, Kolkata ed.: 6. Print.

⁷⁶ Milan Kundera has used the phrase “cemetery of missed opportunities” as a metaphor for the plurality of alternative possibilities that the mainstream novel has hardly explored in the history of the novel. See

rehearse alternatives to the dominant inquisitional model of Australianness bent on witch-hunts and dispossessions in various forms in nascent years of the Federation.⁷⁷

Post *Letters of a V.A.D.*, Mollie had briefly tried to root her Australians in *The Boy in the Bush* and *Black Swans*. Jack the exiled English boy in the bush went out to strike roots in Australia as its archetypal pioneer, swagman and explorer rolled into one. Lettie, Peter and Tim the Irish convict too resolved to start afresh in this old continent of new births. Yet they remained unhoused. Jack, branded by his subversive quest for a personal, non-European Lawrentian utopia on the edges of the white world, was estranged from genteel contemporaries in Perth within the text and ferocious nationalist critics outside; Lettie, Tim and Peter were similarly outcast by their connections with the sinister sea-facing north receptive to colours and contamination. Since *Tucker Sees India*, Mollie returned her fictional Australians to an exile that springs adventures, connections and the contingent as currencies in a world that queries the limits and invasion scares held seminal to imagining this fresh-forged outpost nation. Exile in this world breeds an epistemology of memories, fluidities and fusions that fashion a self/nation interperfumed with others, the pain in the etymology of “exile” finally morphed to an acceptance of uncertainties, intimacy and departures.

In terms of reception, *Tucker Sees India* marked a departure in Mollie’s graph as an author: critics were impressed. She was flooded with correspondence from the Workers Art Guild, the West Australian Writer’s Club, literary agents, friends and colleagues, including Katherine Susannah Prichard and Henrietta Drake-Brockman, all of whom insisted on how much they had enjoyed *Tucker*.⁷⁸ In *Tucker the Thukeh/Mugger* as he calls himself (254)⁷⁹ –

Kundera, Milan. “The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes.” *The Art of the Novel*. Trans. Linda Asher. London: Faber and Faber, 1988. 3-20.15. Print.

I have here used the term to foreground less visible possibilities of the Australian nation as explored in the works of Mollie Skinner, both novel and the nation being twin functions of narration and imagination.

⁷⁷ For example, Deakin’s dream of making a White Continent of Australia, investigated in the second chapter of my thesis, was premised around 1901-1902 on aboriginal “evanescence” and the exclusion of traffic with all coloured immigrants – yellow, brown or copper-coloured.

⁷⁸ See the letters numbered 1396A/4 to 1396A/12, 1396A/30 and 3940A/16 in the archival collection of papers related to M.L. Skinner – MN 186, Acc. 1396A and 3940A – at Battye Library, Perth.

⁷⁹ “Thukeh”, ostensibly the Hindustani version of “Tucker”, plays on “thug”, literally one who deceives, though “thug/thuggee” also refers to one of a “fraternity of ritual stranglers [and plunderers] who preyed upon travellers along the highways of 19th century India”, causing much embarrassment to the British Raj.

See Ganesan, V.B. “The lore of Thuggee and how the British ended its reign.” Rev. of *Thuggee: Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth Century India*, by Kim A. Wagner. *thehindu.com*. The Hindu, 22 Sept. 2014. Web. 27 Dec. 2014.

“Mugger”, the second alternative offered by Tucker, denotes “but” in Hindi and thus his perennially shifting locus between multiple roles, positions and definitions. But “mugger” plays on Sanskrit “makar”, a generic term for the “crocodile” or other marine predators; makar is metonymic of the river Ganga imaged as a deity riding the makar in Indian mythology. The names which Tucker laughingly gives as his to the snake-charmer embed the plurality and range of his possibilities; his intimacy with India connects him to its fringes like the thuggee as well as to the sacred fauna like the makar.

the actor-deceiver (Thug/Thuggee) whose existence rides on the unsettling “but”, as “mugger” means in Hindustani – Mollie harnesses the pluripotency of a myth that possesses and re-interprets older myths of the Australian male hero while proposing fresh interventions and betrayals. I contend that Mollie’s Tucker constitutes no “popular modern antonym” to the Anzac, as Coates and Cowan categorise him to be. In an original intervention, the author presents him as a “synthetic whole” who impersonates the Anzac as well as his treacherous alternatives.⁸⁰ For Tucker acts Odysseus, Krishna, fakir and nat⁸¹ in India, besides the bewildered Anzac.

Tucker and his avatars

As discussed above, the Anzac was normatively read as an incarnation of raging Achilles the honour-bound, in the First World War Antipodean project of crafting Australia as the custodian of supposedly perennial European values under threat in Europe because of the War. Mollie recasts Tucker who has missed the ship carrying his regiment to Egypt and remains forever in transit between cultures, identities and stories, as a kin of Odysseus the reluctant warrior and a “man of many devices”.⁸² Though forever in transit, he craves the “homeward path” like Odysseus,⁸³ visiting his mother and wife in dreams (254) and carrying snapshots of his family in his pocket (145). Like Odysseus too, he strives to at least return to his company – the Australian regiment – but is tossed by adventures and assignments from one location to another within the Raj, including Bombay, Rawalpindi, Malakand, Peshawar, Swat Valley, Dargai – one of the termination points of Indian Railways under the Raj – another railway head Bannu, Amritsar and Delhi, an itinerary he mostly shares with his author.

This root-hungry wanderer is also a habitual storyteller who uses “wonderful lies” (14) as survival weapon to bail him out of crisis, like Odysseus the “fruitful in false invention, persuader of men and deluder of women”.⁸⁴ He deftly spins a yarn to convince the Departmental Officer-in-Charge, by his miraculous streak of luck a British cousin Reggie, as to how he missed the ship while trying to help a friend. For Mrs. Cornwall alias Trudy, he invents himself as private secretary to a fantasized race horse owner Mr. O’ Leary and pretends

⁸⁰ In *The Intimate Enemy*, Ashis Nandy proposes an alternative to the popular modern thesis-antithesis binary; he proposes the non-exclusive or “synthetic whole”, rather than a fragmented, furious antithesis/antonym, as counter to the thesis: “The true ‘enemy’ of the thesis is seen to be in the synthesis because it includes the thesis and ends the latter’s reason for being” (99). Tucker could be read aligned to this logic.

⁸¹ The Sanskrit term “nat” applies to a dancer, sutradhar or actor adept in rendering the nine rasas i.e. any human condition and experience for the audience; Shiva is termed “nataraja”, the end all nats seek.

⁸² Homer. *The Odyssey*. Book I. Trans. S. H. Butcher and Andrew Lang. 1879. Introd. Gilbert Highet. New York: Modern Library, 1950. 7. Print.

⁸³ Homer *The Odyssey* 1.

⁸⁴ Atwood *The Penelopiad* 106.

to be a seasoned survivor in India, though it has actually been a beleaguered first encounter. Chameleon Tucker manages to dupe even German agent Winsor, becoming for him gambler Tommy Dick Smith. He makes and casts away stories as easily as he steps into them, just as he eludes all identities, hides, uniforms and awards that might curate him to their linear narratives or stereotypes. Like Odysseus, he learns the minds of men and women⁸⁵ and enchants them with his visibly concocted histories. Reggie and Trudy, among others, can see through Tucker's eyewash and yet choose to trust and privilege him. He masters the hearts of all which makes him close to still another mythical hero from another space – Krishna, etymologically “one who attracts”, the India-based devious divinity of love and deceit who played debonair shepherd, lover, king, statesman and charioteer to his radically divergent sets of adorers and friends.

None seem immune to Tucker the Krishna's charm and warmth, insider that he is amid myriad sections and locations. His gift for friendship wins him confidantes and comrades among locals and sahibs alike, including Ali Din Baba – the English doctor's bearer at Malakand Fort and a casteless “mixture of Japanese, Afridi and Hindu” (47) – who stains his skin a local brown and bestows a long-term alternative identity for lurking invisible amid the fierce Afghans and Afridis of Peshawar, Bannu and Rawalpindi. Ali Din also shares over the fire insider's stories, of Pathans and the restive north-western borders of British India during the First World War, baptising him into an intimacy with Indias waiting under the skin of the Raj. Tucker's other friends comprise the lonely Scottish doctor of Malakand who enlightens him with his rudimentary anthropological perspectives on India – its histories, Vedic and Moghul, myriad gods, multiple religions and their convergent philosophies of kindness to the stranger and holy men, the logic of Indian names and titles – and sends him an ayah's costume as safe cover in the region; the web of highly-placed British cousins lavish in praises and ready to trust him with confidential assignments; Ali Mohammed, the Afghan-Australian camel-wallah nicknamed Allie Sloper by his Australian mates, who returned to Kabul having participated in the gold rush at Coolgardie and accompanies Tucker to a den of Pathans as part of the joint mission to rescue the kidnapped British youngster Ann; the British Colonel posted in Delhi and Tucker's fellow-flaneur in that ancient city of myriad pasts; Lahorie the Muslim orderly of perfect etiquette at Hindu Rao hospital on loan from Mollie, who provides Tucker with local gossip and forbidden stories of Delhi seething with political unrest against the British

⁸⁵ Homer *The Odyssey* 1.

during the First World War;⁸⁶ snake-charmer Ramavasti who bonds with Tucker over their shared agility with reptiles and shares his food; and even the South Indian Hindu student who “spat upon the face of British rule” (247) and planned to hurl a bomb at the Viceroy. Tucker aborts the plan but refuses to give evidence against the student, holding the bond of friendship sacred over the Raj. His orbit of friends made across differences of colour, class, religion, age, language and politics and their readiness to accept him as one of their fraternity perform the richness of plurals that Tucker mines in selves and India during his exile.

Women of course cannot resist this Krishna from the Antipodes. The spirited Daisy May determined to elope with Allie Sloper into Afghanistan treats him as natural ally in the project severely resisted by British officers of the Raj. When he midwives the twins of a Punjabi zilladar’s wife, the young, heavily chloroformed girl in purdah chooses to repose her faith and life in him rather than in the familiar old dai in the room: “The girl caught his arm, her expressive eyes thanking him worshipfully” (218). Even the caste-conscious Eurasian lady who otherwise despises a private’s uniform is swayed by “the natural reaction of all women to Tucker’s charm” (138). She begins a conversation, seeks out Tucker as protector against local Pathan tribes during the ferry trip to Bannu, trusts him with her child Edward and deigns to share breakfast on the ferry. Tucker indulges some of the women. He responds to the wild hunger for attention and adventure in Trudy’s forlorn teenage daughter Ann and takes her, cross-dressed as private corporal, on a secret trip to the den of the dancing girls of Peshawar, rescues her when she gets kidnapped by the Pathans and helps her mend the tragic affair with Harry Blythe, a miserable young architect adrift in New Delhi who had earlier fled England and their star-crossed love. Tucker facilitates their elopement and Blythe and Ann promise him a friendship “to the uttermost limit” (294).

It is however Trudy with whom Tucker gets tangled in a waltz of linked destinies in the Raj, Trudy the tameless picaro who matches him in her unpredictability, “her casual ways, her undercurrent of determination, and the mystery of her movements” (251). Tucker proposes

⁸⁶ The First World War, besides its global geopolitical impact, directly stoked anti-colonial sentiments and movements in India. As the economic and political climate declined in British India during this period and the move towards self-government faltered, political turmoil and revolutionary activities, such as those of the Ghadar revolutionary movement, increased. As Vedica Kant observes, “That the colony [India], which had so willingly contributed to the war effort, was now being treated with such repression [as enacted in the March 1919 Rowlatt Act which sought to extend indefinitely the wartime restrictions on the civil liberties of Indians] only spurred on the nationalist movement”. The World War had exposed numerous soldiers and civilians from India to global ideas and movements like the 1917 Russian Revolution which had forever weakened the notion of the empire. It was in this context that an unarmed crowd gathered in Amritsar’s Jallianwalla Bagh on April 13, 1919 and were subsequently massacred and Gandhi launched his first mass civil disobedience movement. See Kant, Vedica. “Taking up arms for the men.” *The Hindu* 21 December 2014, Kolkata ed., Magazine sec: 2. Print.

marriage in jest to Trudy and confesses his love in earnest. Trudy stuck in a marriage of convenience to her Austrian husband reflects that perhaps she too loves the quicksilver Tucker. But trains wait, both must depart – Trudy to Mesopotamia and her quest for freedom and identity outside marriage, Tucker to Bombay, and then to Egypt – and Tucker elides the appeal of her “fathomless femininity” (325) with a sly mythic allusion: “I’m just a pawn in the hands of Vishnu” (324). Krishna incidentally is an avatar of Vishnu, the sanatani divinity supposed to sustain life and remove obstacles. Tucker the prankster problem-sorter of the Raj, with his spell of charmed access to all men and women and his imminent exits, seems to have been cast in the shadow of the Krishna of subcontinental folklore and medieval Bhakti literature – Ashis Nandy’s “soft, childlike, self-contradictory, sometimes immoral being” who is simultaneously “an androgynous, philosophically sensitive, practical idealist”.⁸⁷

Trudy initially scoffs at Tucker as an oldish secret service agent who “lives in India doing women’s jobs” (30). As explored in the previous chapter, this androgyny performed in occupation and cross-dressing could be read as a Romantic representation of the *Übermensch* who hijacks “feminine” gender-roles and eludes the females. Alternatively, it could also be read from the non-Western, subcontinental paradigm of power claimed through divine gender-fluidity as held in “the great and little traditions of saintliness in India”, which imagine androgyny to be greater than either *purusatva* (maleness) or *naritva* (the feminine principle).⁸⁸ As Ashis Nandy posits, the ability to transcend the man-woman binary is held to be superior to either gender in these traditions, androgyny being an indicator of godly and saintly qualities; Shiv is imaged along with his consort Gauri as *ardhanarisvara*, a god half man, half woman. By owing to his feminine possibilities – as performed through token ‘feminine’ roles and disguises and especially through his sustained insistence on the principle of non-violence and his much-avowed aversion to blood in the backdrop of a raging World War – Tucker opens up to “protective maternity and by implication, to the godlike state of *ardhanarisvara*”⁸⁹ while in India. Throughout the text, his courage and activism chooses to preserve rather than violate, whether s/he be Ann or the seditious South Indian student revolutionary, subverting Western norms of war and masculinity. And Tucker is in turn magically protected throughout his Indian adventures.

Mollie’s Tucker invites as palimpsestic a reading as her Australias; there are no end to his layers and their pollination with others. In Tucker, Mollie mints a myth of Australianness

⁸⁷ Nandy *The Intimate Enemy* 23-24.

⁸⁸ Nandy 52-53.

⁸⁹ Nandy 54.

that thrives in exile and yet breeds no dispossession; rather it inhabits intersections, kindles bi-cultural interpretations and restores possibilities of porous, plural Australia/s exiled from the official history of the period. The text of *Tucker Sees India*, like its eponymous character, exceeds linear loyalties or a uniform generic locus; it is as much an odyssey or picaresque fiction as a fakirnama. Besides Odysseus and Krishna, Mollie fuses in Tucker the anonymous fakir he meets in a railway station en route to Rawalpindi. The fakir gifts him his legacy – routes-as-roots and a mark on the forehead, marker of the third eye and door to the multitudes of alternative realities that seethe in India as well as Mollie’s Australia.

As he walked down the train to his compartment, Tucker met a silent old man with cupped hands at the door. Moved by the man poised in his sightless calm, Tucker resolved to give him his only rug procured with difficulty for the freezing night. The man reached up and softly touched his forehead before vanishing into the crowds without taking the gift. Next morning Tucker wakes up to discover “a mark about as big as a two-anna bit right in the centre of his forehead” (26). It is the mark of a holy man that cannot be erased, as babu Dehra Shar, his escort till Rawalpindi, reckons with awe. The ancient man has baptised him in the sacred, in ways of love, understanding and connections across all shadowlines. And Tucker too finds himself playing the reluctant yogi (etymologically “the connected one”), the inadvertent fakir – the one mark-as-identity that survives his adventures, chaos and flux in India.

The holy mark weaves a magic circle around Tucker that protects and enchants. Dehra Shar the wily babu gives up fleecing Tucker on every pretext and, in a moment of repentance and reverence, offers to teach him Urdu free of cost. Allie Sloper readily accepts Tucker the Australian with the brown skin and the holy mark as an intimate, and invites him to make his home in Kabul. The British chief of the CID suggests that he “look on it as a touch from the gods” and proposes to lend him some yogi books (105). And a snake-rhythmed nautch-girl in Peshawar lays her head in the dust at Tucker’s feet, praying for a blessed male child before the holy man. Lahorie indulges in Delhi bazaar gossip with Tucker and assures him that none, even among the politically restive Delhiwallas who bristled to shoot some of the resident whites, would hurt him. Inoculated by the mark, Tucker rubs shoulders, invisible and anonymous, with motley locals who swarm in the ghettos and underbellies of Delhi, including its Hindu shopkeepers, absurdly poor scavengers, conjurers, fakirs, rope-twisters and snake-charmers. It is here that he befriends the student revolutionary planning to kill the Viceroy; as wary of caste-pollution as Lahorie, he condescends to converse with Tucker owing to the mark. In a few days, Tucker turns “as simple and subtle as a native” (266), ripe to sieve sensational bazaar gossip and newspaper scandals circulating in the seamy polyglot galies (by-lanes) of Delhi from the

actual seditious plots.

The mark, the one constant that tattoos Tucker even as he exits the “game of the Raj”⁹⁰ to join his mates in the regiment, refuses to remain a mere parodic totem of safe passage through India. It morphs instead into a metonym of his rite of passage to fakiri, Arabic “fakir” etymologically signifying “the poor” or “one who does not seek to possess”. Tucker possesses little else but his body – a tenet of fakiriana⁹¹ – and remains an amused witness to the roles, positions and uniforms regularly foisted on him in British India: he flows free of its fear of violence and the corresponding violence of fear. Having botched the student’s attempt at assassination, he decides for once to shed all identities, assignments and cycles of suspicion and promptly walks away, having bequeathed his minimal belongings to the doorkeeper of the lodge. Routes and the contingent harbour his fluid identities, just as they house the wandering fakirs who defy uniforms and do not look to charter or claim;⁹² Tucker finds his India sojourn sacralised to a “pilgrimage” that transforms him⁹³ and ironically defines and layers his routes-and-mates-oriented Australianness.

A moment of empathy and unconditional giving of his then most prized possession, the blanket, to an unknown mendicant in greater need had qualified the Anzac for the halo of holiness. The accidental fakiri grows on him and Tucker begins to accept the human stripped of all identities as an absolute value,⁹⁴ making caste hierarchies of the Raj and all other superstructures of division – regarding race, religion and geopolitical boundaries – dysfunctional in his orbit. His circle of mates extends ad infinitum as he counts among his friends cunning, obsequious Hindu babus like Dehra Shar and the frenzied student revolutionary antipodal to Shar, besides the police superintendent of Delhi, the superintendent’s targets of suspicion Trudy and Ann, fierce independent Kabuli Pathans like Ali Mohammed, snake-charmer Ramavasti and the Eurasian child Edward. He helps and heals many of those he meets en route in India, like Ann or the Punjabi zilladar’s wife. The routes to

⁹⁰ Tucker remembers his adventures and assignments in India as “a game he’d been playing” (326), when the Bombay Express hauls out of station and he finally prepares to leave the subcontinent.

⁹¹ Aversion to worldly possessions is one of the fundamental traits of a fakir; in a parable, a Sufi guru explains to his disciples that a fakir is one who owns nothing but his body.

See Sen, Surajit. *Fakirnama*. Kolkata: Gangchil, 2009. 168. Print.

⁹² A sufi or fakir inhabits various locations and uniforms though he is identifiable with none; his identities tend to infinity.

See Sen *Fakirnama* 175.

⁹³ Skinner *Tucker Sees India* 247.

⁹⁴ For a glimpse of the traditions, practices, ethics and aesthetics of fakirs in India, who seek to worship, love and serve the human as divine, and reject the discourse of divisions and discord between one community and another, see

Sen *Fakirnama* 131-143.

his accidental Indian pilgrimage alchemise for him the colonised, picturesque “terra nullius” with stray native figures into heaving hurtscapes of ravaged lands and peoples, as at Bannu. The unfamiliar land exceeds being “an object of colonial fear and desire, utility and aesthetics”.⁹⁵ Mollie makes Tucker of the holy mark metamorphose a Raj assignment of espionage into the fakirnama of exploration and imaginative empathy with the human condition in its myriad possibilities, a promise that veins too through her models of Australianness. In the multiple roles, stories and tenses he rebirths and weaves together, Tucker as storyteller, actor and the unknown factor constantly quests to self the other and other the self.

“I refuse to put it together – away with the pieces”, fumes Tucker (59) at the unsolvable jigsaw puzzle that seems to him to be India along with its teeming millions comprising the Sikhs, Rajputs, Brahmans, Muslims and babus as well, each sect brimming with its own castes and hierarchies. Yet Tucker, perpetually pregnant with other selves and roles across gender, race and generations, is no less a plural-spilling enigma who teases attempts at final solutions. His age is indefinite and his unmade-up appearance ambiguous: his hair has grown “absolutely white” while his “eyebrows and lashes remained black” (300), he wears false teeth and a wig. His skin is not too pukka, it has been burnt to “a becoming tan” (300) during his India sojourn. His hide and make-up is ready to host multiple tenses: he can be regimented as neither young nor old. Nor does his skin parade a particular race, since Tucker the nat travels dyed/tanned and masks and unmasks with infinite agility. He acts in turn the food inspector of regiments, orderly at Hindu Rao hospital, Eurasian private, mad mullah, Australian yogi capable of bouts of trance, Christian missionary at Bannu, also a Pathan warrior with his skin dyed brown, shrewdly intuitive amateur investigator, chauffeur to a colonel, dhoti-and-turban clad Asian among sly Delhiwallas, seasoned guide through Delhi and Fatehpur Sikri for sahibs and memsahibs, toothless desi ayah cross-dressed in local female attire, midwife in a Punjabi zilladar’s zenana, flower-arranger, auditor of bank accounts and mad-dog-catcher. We marvel at this free-floating host of myriad roles and wonder if he even has a shiftless face beneath his masks.

A flaneur addicted to old Delhi, Tucker witnesses other lives and tenses well in him as he haunts the ruins of the multiple ancient cities of “this hub of many empires” (188) with their desolate forts, palaces, halls and mausoleums: “Don’t tell me I ought to see Agra and how much better that is. . . . I feel that I must have lived, walked and talked here [in Delhi] before

⁹⁵ Arnold, David. Introduction. *The Tropics And The Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science 1800-1856*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005. 3. Print.

Agra was built. I must be an incarnation of Humayun” (186). Each day, he wakes up in the morning hearing the call to prayer from the Jama Masjid, listens to the “regret in the stones” for the pre-colonial “life they knew” and hungers to know more about these “fine buildings and the lives they were built to adorn” (185). Unlike Deakin, he is not anxious to annex Moghul architecture blanked of its histories and people as fossil footnotes to white Australia, or to the British empire triumphant in its arrogantly utilitarian architecture of railways, irrigation canals and the postal service penetrating and mapping India. Nor does he need to evacuate the present and peoples of India in order to accommodate the kitsch of curio-ed orientalia. He is as much at home at the tomb of Humayun the defeated⁹⁶ as in the cluster of tiny villages surrounding Delhi and enclosed in mud walls, with women laughing at the well in their traditional costumes. Tucker reads the subcontinent as a prayag⁹⁷ of braided tenses and realities and steeps himself in an ecology of otherness to imagine p/re-births in Delhis of multiple tenses and epistemologies, sculpting a poetics of belonging that exceeds the colonial, or the histories it cared to document and charter.

A storyteller’s passage through India

Stories are Tucker’s currencies of connection in his topsy-turveydom. He is ready to reel off Moghul anecdotes, such as Akbar’s passion for elephants (185) or that childless emperor’s pilgrimage to the Sufi saint Shaikh Salim Chisti’s dargah on a hill near Sikri, an Agra village where Akbar had raised the new Moghul capital Fatehpur Sikri (277), literally “the victory city of Sikri”, on the birth of his son Salim aka Jahangir, namesake of the saint.⁹⁸ Tucker transmits some of these tales to Trudy and Ann and Lord Ham, the latter being the suitor foisted on Ann by her parents. Other narratives – ranging from those on local customs, Moghul warrior-kings, French mercenaries-turned-desi-nawabs and their Muslim begums, Hindu myths and gods to underground whisper cycles on restless Pathan tribes at the north-western frontier of the Raj

⁹⁶ In his historical research-based fiction *The Enchantress of Florence*, Salman Rushdie’s Akbar muses on his way back from a military victory: “Nowadays it was all victories but the emperor knew all about defeat. Defeat was his father. Its name was Humayun”.

See Rushdie, Salman. *The Enchantress of Florence*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2008. 36. Print.

⁹⁷ A Sanskrit term for the confluence, considered sacral, of several rivers e.g. the Ganga, Yamuna and invisible Sarasvati at Allahabad.

⁹⁸ For further details on emperor Akbar’s favourite pastime of taming and riding unruly elephants, see the following excerpt from a translated version of Abu’l Fazl’s *Akbarnama* Vol. II 50-53:

Abu’l Fazl. “In an Elephant Fight (1561-62).” Trans. H. Beveridge. *Episodes in the Life of Akbar: Contemporary Records and Reminiscences*. Ed. and Trans. Shireen Moosvi. New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1994. 23-26. Print.

For emperor Jahangir’s memoir of his birth and the coeval foundation of the new Moghul capital Fatehpur Sikri by his father Akbar, as well as of Akbar’s devotion for Shaikh Salim Chisti, see the following excerpt from Jahangir’s *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* :

Jahangir. “A Son’s Reminiscences (1607).” Trans. A. Rogers & H. Beveridge. Moosvi 121-122. Print.

and tremors of anti-British agitations in Delhi – he receives from friends across race, religion and caste like Ali Din and the Scottish doctor at Malakand fort, canny bazaarwallas in the Delhi by-lanes, Lahorie of the Hindu Rao Hospital, or his fellow-flaneur the Colonel who strolled with him amidst the ruins of old Delhi, for Tucker’s friends are storytellers, most of them.

Stories, flowing past censors and borders, constitute rites of passage and mutation. They need to be heard, disseminated, dislocated and recast through re-telling in many tongues. Also, stories are seeded with other stories as possibilities and departures. They find a home in Tucker the unhomed who does not seek to possess a forever role, identity or position in the Raj. The picaro-protagonist’s ever shifting routes and possibilities during his subcontinental sojourn morph him into an accidental yet incisive storyteller of India, quite unlike the tribe of aspirational Australian translator-interpreters of the subcontinent envisioned by Deakin, who would compete for inclusion in the English intelligentsia as authentic brokers of the Indian Orient. The meta-role sets Tucker free from maps, castes and the coloniser’s mask. As accidental storyteller not entirely motivated by empire, he cultivates layered realities of the subcontinent – including the mythic and the unchartered – which often elude the coloniser’s routine obsession over cartographs of conquest/progress and documented names and facts.

Tucker accepts the folkloric reality of Akbar’s Hindu wife ‘Jodhbai’, for instance, though Lord Ham curtly corrects him with a history lesson – “Jodhbai was . . . [Akbar’s] son’s wife!” (277) – and Salman Rushdie images Jodha as the “imaginary wife”, “the non-existent beloved who was real” for Akbar.⁹⁹ Tucker accepts local lore, hearsay and imagination as narrative, even epistemic values that must pollinate and occasionally unsettle chartered History with their alternative versions. His routes and storytelling, unlike Deakin’s, are not complicit with the empire’s compulsion to erase, grid and annex, or with the settler colonial i.e. second-hand imperialist’s angst to belong to that project.

Though recruited in the service of empire during the First World War, Tucker is no imperial traveller armed with “the gaze” that seeks to survey, investigate, order and penetrate, “as exercised by the white male explorer, missionary, administrator, or itinerant naturalist”.¹⁰⁰ The storyteller resists the colonising ethos, reluctant to appropriate subcontinental scapes to an imperial imagination, experience and exploitation. He does not seek to understand or transmit India via analogy with Australia: “He tried to explain it [his fascination for North-West India] at first by saying it was very like some parts of Australia, but when they came to the lower hills

⁹⁹ Rushdie *The Enchantress of Florence* 27.

¹⁰⁰ Arnold *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze* 29.

surmounted by strange fortifications and walls and then . . . caught glimpses of gaunt summits beyond, he had to abandon any thought of analogy” (117). During his travels, Tucker does not seek to coagulate India into “a possessable, a translatable territory”,¹⁰¹ an empire project that had so occupied Deakin. Unlike Deakin or Hingston, this fictional protagonist carries no Max Mueller, *Lalla Rookh* or other self-consciously oriental work as template for mediating his India. India for him constitutes neither metaphor nor philosophical idea but a cluster of spaces personalised, like Delhi and Fatehpur Sikri. Unlike Deakin, Tucker is not driven by the desire to charter the length and breadth of British India and enlist its attractions and abominations in order to pull off an anxious imperialist survey.

Nor does Tucker share the romantic, imperial imperative to censure, moralize and “improve”, or reduce India to an outline of names – “metaphorical word-places”¹⁰² on which to inscribe his passage and the triumphant developmental cartography of railways and irrigation canals,¹⁰³ displacing the older one of ruins. During his un-cumulative, un-centred travelling without maps or plans except the immediate assignment imposed by a Raj official, Tucker repeatedly fails to register the names of local railway stations, even of those where he boards off the train: “Somewhere he changed trains . . . Tucker had long ago given up trying to learn the names of stations he passed” (137). Names are not for him an epistemological strategy or invincible tool of possession, as they were for British imperialists in the colony: “As a matter of fact he never troubled to discover the name of this place, though he returned to it later. Names bothered Tucker, though language was easy to him” (74). His routes are open-ended unlike Deakin’s anxious missionary map of perambulation. They unfold in active engagement with multiple, sometimes alternative roads, and the horizon.

Tucker travels mostly by train and ferry and counts road-making Smith as one among his several illustrious British first cousins spread across the Raj, yet he does not erase the precolonial routes from his ken, as was norm among the many architects of empire.¹⁰⁴ As he rides a tonga with white ponies racing down the new white road from Dargai to Malakand, both

¹⁰¹ Carter, Paul. “An Outline of Names.” *The Road to Botany Bay*. 1-33. 33.

¹⁰² Carter uses the term to explore the meanings, accidents and historical resonance in the act of place-naming.

See Carter, Paul. “Introduction: A Cake of Portable Soup.” *The Road to Botany Bay*. xiii-xxv. xxiv.

¹⁰³ Pre-colonial architectural ruins across the subcontinent had often been dubbed “fatalistic, massy, and monstrous” by overwhelmed British travellers in the first half of the nineteenth century; to their empire-ridden “improving” mindset, the new architecture of docks, canals and railways, modelled after an improved and industrious Britain, would be more useful and thus finally outstrip the disturbing, defeated ruins.

See Arnold *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze* 78 & 89.

¹⁰⁴ As to how pre-colonial routes through land and rivers were mocked as “mofussil engineering” by British imperialists and outstripped between 1780 and 1914 by the fresh-laid routes of roads and rails and their colonial capitalist circulation regime of goods and peoples, see Ahuja, Ravi. *Pathways of Empire*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009. Print.

frontier locations, Tucker observes the parallel older route coiled in neglect round a smaller hill – “the old pilgrims’ road, he was told later, down which Alexander had marched” (46). Later in Delhi, at that point the heart of the Raj, he explores forgotten subterranean routes and tunnels that criss-cross the ancient city, retracing an alternative cartography of passages under erasure in colonial India. “I’ve found a secret passage down an old well leading to the city, it comes out by an old mosque”, he shares with a nonchalant English policeman, “Not been used for centuries – except by bats” (204). For him India remains a land of unfinished maps. And his routes through India turn, like his journey, exploratory: they open up the possibility of going back, of turning a private passage into a road, of endless journeys, arrivals and departures. Tucker, for example, travels from Bombay to Malakand through Rawalpindi, but on his return journey to Bombay, the train is held up by Pathan raiders and later gheraoed by the army at an unnamed station, and he is re-directed to Rawalpindi through Peshawar and Bannu.

Railways and irrigation canals, otherwise disciplining technologies for wielding extensive control within the Raj, ironically unleash routes to the contingent for Tucker. His train journeys spring wild adventures, as when he knocks out two Afridis – incidentally on the government wanted list for sedition and murder (91) – lurking in Trudy and Ann’s cabin en route to Rawalpindi, or when he abruptly gets off a train from Bannu to Rawalpindi and unearths a cache of smuggled weapons stashed by a German agent in order to stoke local unrest against the British. Khan Pathori, farmer and friend to Tucker, abducts Ann as British hostage, only to ensure that the irrigation canal is routed through his land in lieu of her release. Pathori’s desperate measure exposes the arbitrariness that seems to bedrock the colonial master’s inscrutable developmental architecture, when seen from the affected Afghan farmer’s perch, and throws Tucker’s odyssey into further tangles.

For, along with mate Allie Sloper who wants to settle a personal blood feud with Pathori, Tucker treks mapless through “nightmare rocks and hillocks” of the Khyber Pass (127) and finally tracks Ann down to an inaccessible Pathan lair. His routes through India – unpredictable, diverse and without template – invoke the dominant twentieth century Australian iconography of the explorer traversing absolute distance without destination, a quintessentially Australian format according to Hodge and Mishra, as detailed in my previous chapter.¹⁰⁵ Besides reinforcing his role as the pukka Antipodean explorer at home in nomad roads, Tucker’s travels in the subcontinent could also be read as metaphor for Australianness

¹⁰⁵ See Hodge and Mishra *Dark Side of the Dream* 152.

For a discussion on the explorer’s nomadic routes without destinations as an increasingly dominant sign of Australianness in the twentieth century, see p. 273 in the previous chapter.

as a palimpsest of multiple, vulnerable “roads, footprints, trails of dust and foaming wakes”,¹⁰⁶ each route or narrative trail ready to be recycled, revisited, reversed or left untrodden for the moment.

An Australian in the Raj

Despite his roles in flux, the one identity Tucker chooses to retain as a relative constant while criss-crossing British India is that of an unsullied Australian. Through his escapades, he remains for his Raj superiors “a chap from the bush seeing India” (119) i.e. the self-professed larrikin from the Antipodes. The coin he carries has “emus and roos [kangaroos] both sides” (152) instead of the King of England’s bust embossed on one side, as is norm for Australian currency. Tucker mostly plays the materially indifferent Australian caught in the Raj machinery and unperturbed by all the crises brewing within the Raj. Complacent in his bouts of drinking and gambling, as well as with his flair for horses and outdoor sports, he banks on his unfailing humour to bail him out of regrets or desire, and occasionally switches to Australianese as when he uses “cracking the egg” (304) for “solving a mystery”. When Tucker’s friend, a senior official in the police, elects him as the guest of honour for a Viceregal party, he makes no mistake as to where he belongs: “I was born in Australia and hop on my two hind legs, my two front ones are perfectly useless for anything but rubbing” (303). He remains an intimate outsider to the Raj; at the end of the novel, Tucker with his emu-feathered hat slips out of the chaosmos of India to join his mates of the Australian regiment posted in Egypt.

Tucker, however, performs spectacularly in every chance errand passed on to him in the Raj and proves indispensable for much else; Mollie bequeathed him with the chances and agency that had eluded her and her brothers Jack and Bob in life. When a train is held up at night by a group of Afridi raiders near Malakand, he snips the telegraph wires so as to alarm the military and enable them arrest the gang; he sniffs out smuggled firearms and the German agent who smuggles them along the north-western borders of British India, and ends up saving the Viceroy’s life from a bomb hurled by the politically agitated Hindu student. Occasionally he plays an adept in the chores, spectacle and routine gossip of the Raj and luxuriates in its privileges, such as a tonga, white ponies and liveried Pathan orderlies waiting to receive him

¹⁰⁶ I have quoted Paul Carter’s phrase for his seminal book on the making of Australian space as history. *The Road to Botany Bay*, he proposes, is “a prehistory of places, a history of roads, footprints, trails of dust and foaming wakes” (Introduction xxi). I have here co-opted part of the phrase as an epistemological tool for reading/receiving Australianness, especially in terms of the collage of routes and possibilities opened up by Tucker.

at Dargai, or the dak bungalows with their bearers, chota hasri,¹⁰⁷ bathroom annexe, ready baths and good tiffin dotting his journey. He can smoothly blend in that pukka sahibs' enclave, the recreation room of the Club House with its drinks and game of billiards. Or animate the Cambridge-educated aloof maharajah of Kashmir at a Viceregal party with the statistics of cricket matches played in 1904-05 between England and Australia, rehearsing that collective colonial fixation – cricket,¹⁰⁸ a core component in what Alison Broinowski terms “the magnetic [imperial] amalgam of cricket, Kipling, tea, the sea route to Europe, a succession of state governors, the British Missionary Society, and the Theosophical Society” linking Australia and India.¹⁰⁹

Like Deakin, Tucker stands moved by a lonely cemetery of British martyrs for empire, near the remote outpost of Malakand fort. Assuming the coloniser's axiomatic superiority, he can also afford to laugh at the desolation of an Indian nobleman's destitute mansion thrown open to the public; its broken, sculptured animals and abject attempts at imported respectability, suggested by the grim porch and ormolu clock, kindle the comedy of colonial mimicry instead of exotic romance. He remains equally astute, too, about the parodic potential of a Kiplingesque sahib ghetto even before he sets foot in one.

The Peshawar military station he conjures up for Trudy during his first railway trip across India differs little from vignettes of Kipling's Simla,¹¹⁰ that scandal-and-party prone colonial bubble brimming with memsahibs, English homesteads and partitions from the ruled: “A big military station close to the city, and a club where the band plays, and they dance every afternoon, and everyone keeps spanking horses and ladies ride in rickshaws” (31). He can

¹⁰⁷ A bearer brings Tucker a tray with chota hasri at a bungalow in the Peshawar Cantonment (82). “Chota hasri” or “chota-hazry”, derived from Hindustani “chhoti haziri”, was Raj lingo for the “little breakfast” taken by sahibs in the early morning, before or after their morning exercise; the term was originally peculiar to the Bengal Presidency.

See “Chota-Hazry.” *Hobson-Jobson*. 2012 ed. Print.

¹⁰⁸ In the introduction to an anthology of stories on Australian encounters with India, editors Bruce Bennett, Santosh K. Sareen, Susan Cowan and Asha Kanwar enlist “English language, democratic institutions and the inestimable game of cricket” as imperial legacies crucial to the Australia-Indian bilateral relationship despite the changing world of the early twenty-first century.

See Bennett, Bruce, Santosh K. Sareen, Susan Cowan and Asha Kanwar. Introduction. *Of Sadhus and Spinners* vii-ix. vii.

In another article published on the eve of the ICC Cricket World Cup 2015, Australian High Commissioner to India, Patrick Suckling, upheld cricket as the binding national obsession “deep in both our DNA”, and as “fundamental, enduring and valuable” for the bilateral relation.

See Suckling, Patrick. “Two nations, one obsession.” *thehindu.com*. The Hindu, 13 February 2015. Web. 22 May 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Broinowski *The Yellow Lady* 38.

¹¹⁰ See for instance stories like “Consequences” or “Three And – An Extra” for sketches of Simla, the summer capital of British India between 1864 and 1939, in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, Kipling's anthology on the Raj. Kipling, Rudyard. *Plain Tales from the Hills*. London, 1888. *gutenberg.org*. Project Gutenberg EBook, 3 Nov. 2008. Web. 22 May 2015.

however see through the colonialists' apparatus of nominal control over the region and is able to access the hollowness and futility of that aspiration to control. Thus, despite the enchanting "garden parties, gymkhana, durbars, point-to-point races, rifle-range parties, riding, picnics and sports" routines of an imperial Delhi vibrant with the military and civilian elite during springtime (197), Tucker chooses to remain a non-stakeholder in the game of the Raj. He resists several tempting offers of permanent official positions or fixed locations in the Raj for fear of getting classified and contained in its maze of networks and official castes/hierarchies. Ripended in the wisdom of zeroness, he plays an accommodating joker of cards, the amused outlier ready for any assigned part: "make no mistake, I'm a drifter, a wash-out, a nuisance to society, with no permanent place or value anywhere" (105), claims Tucker, quite as rid of caste as Ali Din.

The liminal, exilic protagonist erupts as a miraculous nodal point for both the centre and its margins; he wanders in the interstices and engages both. The Viceroy shakes his hand very hard and lavishes praise at a Raj party: "you have travelled India for nearly three months, and at almost every step have shown yourself a brave, generous, patriotic subject of the Empire. Finally, to me, personally, by no means the least of your gallant actions, by saving my life" (312). At the party, Maharajahs and Begums compete to grant him favours including hunting passes and freedom of movement in their princely states. Tucker's social celebrity in Delhi is Mollie's vicarious wish-fulfilment; besides, it revisits her years at the Hindu Rao as nurse and toast of the Delhi elite. Sahib and yet at home among fringed natives such as snake-charmers and bazaar gossips, irreverent empire-sceptic servant of the Raj, brilliant waster with sheer luck and no ambitions though haunted by failures like the Emperor Humayun,¹¹¹ deferred Anzac offered the Kaiser-i-Hind medal by the Viceroy, an Anzac who happens to abhor violence¹¹² and subverts the mythicized national trope of the ruthless warrior even while vividly waiting to re-join his regiment at the front, staunchly Australian and homesick, compulsive "bag-trotter" (312), the egalitarian bushman with a genteel pedigree – Tucker ripens in contradictions and finally skeins together his author's paradoxical preferences in his delicious lightness of being.

Mollie's original Australian thrives in India, at the intersection of multiple languages and

¹¹¹ In a bout of melancholy at a high-profile garden party in Delhi, Tucker reflects on his existence and regrets the world he had thrown away in the whim to remain unhouse and without caste: "All at once Tucker felt overcome by his failure with life. He should be up there amongst the burra sahibs. He had thrown away all his opportunities of making a name for himself, he was drifting about like the winds that blew him, purposelessly, uselessly" (237).

¹¹² Though a soldier, Tucker has an "objection to killing people": "I'm ready to die as a soldier should, but not to send others to face the gates of Jerusalem" (13).

cultures. In India – a site metonymic of hybrid, sometimes hidden realities and miscegenation through the text – Tucker is finally able to carve out Mollie’s imagination of Australianness as a semiotic river ribbed with impurities and alternatives, the river of dynamic mythography revisited by all of Mollie’s fictional protagonists post *Tucker*.

In his resolve to be only “demi-semi-military” (124) and a social zero with unpredictable powers and no masters or scripts, Tucker turns indispensable yet disruptive for Trudy as well as for his British employers in India. “I’m not going to pretend I can make head or tail of your actions, Smith”, surrenders the nonplussed C.I.D. chief keen on recruiting him in a gazetted position (103). Tucker refuses to be trained and tamed to the “pukka political agent” (134), for sometimes this unsettling pluripotent zero grows third-eyed into the India that looms beyond colony, “feeling very remote from his fellow-whites” (181) and their fragile superstructure of the Raj teeming with comic officialese, protocols, obsessions and abbreviations.¹¹³ A Rawalpindi night rouses him to “the great secret stir of alien life around them [which] made any thought of the handful of white officers and soldiers, who ostensibly sat in authority over it, curiously irrelevant”. “What did they understand, these whites, of the forces they held in check?” he marvels, thinking of the Raj and its absurdly microscopic existence in the subcontinental matrix (181). For Tucker finds himself woven in an ancient web of connections – colonial and pre-colonial, of blood and beyond – with India; he finds himself being crafted in conversation with a motley crew of unhomed insiders from the past and present, his predecessors and friends from the subcontinent.

Tucker’s grandfather, a judge in the Raj, had placed all his sons in the British Army and most of their children – Tucker’s cousins – had come out to India. On his first accidental tour across India, Richard Smith, A. I. F. Light Horseman, alias Tucker lands in an orbit of high-profile Raj Smiths – “Bombay Smith, Bannu Smith, Udipur Smith, and so on” (118) – keen to recommend him for confidential assignments in British India, such as tracing German spies in the north-western frontier or delivering by hand a secret despatch to the Malakand fort. Beyond the family circle, Tucker chances upon former mates among the local Afghans like Ali Mohammed alias Allie Sloper whom he had met in Australia when young and encounters yet again in India. He even unearths an unnerving double in Adam Smith, another Smith of Indian

¹¹³ Tucker, for instance, blithely stumbles through abbreviations such as A.S. which could stand for anything as he suggests with his signature irreverence – “Assistant surgeon . . . Astute sergeant. Assigning superintendent!” (211). For an inventory of some of the abbreviations, office hierarchies/castes and other official absurdities that continue to characterise the IAS (Indian Administrative Service), postcolonial avatar of the ICS (Indian Civil Service), see Upamanyu Chatterjee’s edgy satire *English, August: an Indian Story*. London: Faber and Faber, 1988. Print.

fame besides being a fellow soldier and his predecessor wanderer in India from a century ago, though apparently no relation of his.

Adam Smith who lies buried at a cantonment tomb in Delhi, shares with Tucker an unhomed insider's critique of the British empire. L. F. Smith, brother of Adam Smith, had included that critique in his book on the early nineteenth century Raj, and the critique is cited as a self-reflexive nod in *Tucker*, Mollie's novel on early twentieth century British India. As a young officer quotes to Tucker from L. F. Smith's book at the Viceregal party (311), Adam was disturbed at the ethic and aesthetic of an empire founded "for the sole purpose of raising a people of customers". Tucker echoes his predecessor's unease with the commercial absolutism of an engorged empire, "Sadly I agree with him, for although I hate war, I also hate commerce. I'm very old-fashioned" (311). India jolts him out of the prevalent fashions of nation or self, cast in the politics of pillage and rapaciousness constituting empire and confronts him instead with an infinite of alternatives possibilities. Tucker sees his ghosts and mirrors paraded in still other centuries in India, among outsiders to the Raj. He reads his reflection in Thomas Hariana, for instance.

Thomas Hariana, as Tucker learns at the party, was bag-trotter turned Rajah of Hariana. He had first arrived in India around 1800 as quartermaster of a British man-of-war. He then deserted and flourished on a fief granted by Begum Sombre (1750-1836), Meerut-born Hindustani widow of Sombre alias Walter Reinhardt (d.1778), the Catholic French mercenary and adventurer who gained power and fief by "fighting first on one side – French, English, Moslem – and then the other" (308).¹¹⁴ Thomas had married Marie, a French dependant on the Begum; when he finally left India, he had also left his offspring to the Begum. This version of Thomas Hariana's story being circulated at the party was touched with colourful Raj gup. For George Thomas was no Rajah of Hariana but an Irish warrior-wanderer who had entered Begum Sombre's army at Sardhana near Meerut since 1787; he rose to lead the army and became the Begum's chief counsellor. In 1792, Thomas had left her service in acrimony and joined the Marathas but returned to rescue her from ignominy and torture by rebellious soldiers,

¹¹⁴ German fortune-seeker Sombre alias Walter Reinhardt had come to India as part of the crew on a French ship which he immediately deserted on reaching ashore. He then served in quick succession with the French army, the English East India Company and the army raised to rout the British by Nawab Mir Qasim of Bengal, among others. After a tumultuous career under various masters on the cusp of the British colonisation of India, Sombre finally received the jagir of Sardhana near Meerut from Mughal Emperor Shah Alam in 1772; the jagir was settled on him for the upkeep of his private army then serving with the Mughal minister Nazf Khan. In Sardhana, Sombre settled with his beloved wife, the Hindustani Begum Sombre, a Muslim lady who inherited her husband's jagir, led his army and converted to Roman Catholicism in 1781, three years after the death of Sombre.

See Bandopadhyay, Brajendranath. *Begum Sumroo*. 1917. Kolkata: Towards Freedom, 2012. 1-9. Print.

reinstalling her as the ruler of Sardhana in 1795. As token of her gratitude and friendship, Begum Sombre now offered her favourite companion, the Frenchwoman Maria's hand in marriage to Thomas. An admirer though no paramour of the Begum, Thomas did not rejoin her service. Nor did he leave India but died in 1802 at Bahrampur. Begum Sombre then adopted his destitute family and later employed George Thomas' son John Thomas in service at Sardhana.¹¹⁵ Fired by party anecdotes, Tucker recreates George Thomas as Thomas Hariana the accidental Raja and drifter – one of the Tucker tribe, as rootless as he and as prone to perform or shed myriad identities.

In the jostle and argument of alterities unveiled by India, Tucker recognizes Moghul emperors too as his precursors. While it was not unusual for British imperialists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to share the bond of imperial sympathy with Moghuls,¹¹⁶ Tucker traces a self-image in Humayun the failed, forever in flight. He also seems to be able to access and proximate Akbar the pilgrim-king and traveller who not only waited on mystic Salim Chisti near Sikri but finally shifted the Moghul capital to the newly raised Fatehpur Sikri to be near the saint's abode; both Akbar's eldest surviving child Salim and his capital were deemed twin fruits of the emperor's pilgrimage. Akbar, king and nomad, finally abandoned his beloved Fatehpur Sikri to migrate with court and army to Lahore in 1585 and still later, to Agra in 1598. Tucker, also the wanderer, mines India as a site of fluid identities that rides metamorphoses and triggers impossible unions, as well as parades p/re-incarnations, hybridity and miscegenation. It is the site of a million transits and awakenings, where Irish Thomas can turn desi Rajah of Hariana and then as abruptly leave that situation, at least in Tucker's variant of the story, in other words a site in sat-tarka with its inversion – white Australia as locus of the nationalist violence of purity.

Of cross-dressings, crossovers and other plurals

The text of *Tucker Sees India* is replete with disguises, fluid identities and cross-dressing. Besides Tucker's cross-dressing and perennially shifting appearances, Ann dons the guise of a young male on more than one occasion – as private corporal on a nocturnal tour of Peshawar with Tucker and as bookish babu in a soiled dhoti when eloping with her forbidden love Blythe to the princely state of Kashmir, a destination suggested by Tucker. Ali Din who dyed Tucker brown to help him travel incognito, is equally elusive about his own identity. He refuses to be categorised as either “Mohammedan or Hindu” claiming instead, “Nay, I am all things” (55).

¹¹⁵ Bandopadhyay *Begum Sumroo*.

¹¹⁶ Dyson, Ketaki Kushari. *A Various Universe*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978. 28. Print.

Identities, affiliations grow flexible and plural in *Tucker Sees India*. India of the text acts as shadow narrative to the more triumphalist stories of a white Australia of borders and dispossessions, morphing instead into the heartspace and healing space that connects, even unites despite social prohibitions and sanctions. Thus a Hindustani Muslim begum became beloved and spouse to the European Catholic Nawab Sombre in the late eighteenth century. Ann and Blythe find each other again in Delhi and Tucker helps them elope, disregarding Trudy's furious opposition to the love match. Tucker also certifies his Afghan friend Allie Sloper as "a decent sort of chap" with manners learnt in Australia, lending support to Daisy May's resolve to cross the boundaries of British India into independent Afghanistan with Aussi Mohammed alias Allie Sloper. She had been wife to a Scottish sergeant in Central India; tired of the children from his first marriage as well as of the man himself, Daisy had abandoned the marriage and opted for the status of the wife of Mohammed within the Raj. And in India, she gains courage to eventually quit the protection of the Raj and cross over with Allie Sloper.

Daisy knows Mohammed to be a teetotaler because of his faith in Allah and yet considers him culturally a Christian and Australian since he shares Tucker's English accent and "boils tea in a billy" (82). Despite the racial taboo attached to her choice of partner and outraged objection from the chief of the C.I.D. to the passage across borders, Tucker helps her defy British protection and extract a pass to Afghanistan. He thus enables one more mixed race marriage in India that complicates "the dominant narratives of difference, distance, misunderstanding and conflict" between cultures.¹¹⁷ The partnership with Daisy mirrors Aussi Mohammed's earlier marriage to his late white Australian wife. Mohammed's son from that marriage – "like his father in appearance, but like his Australian mother in disposition" (123) – had been raised in Australia and had joined a Christian mission to learn dispensing, on return to Peshawar with his father. Unlike in early twentieth century Australia, miscegenation seems no taboo in *Tucker Sees India*;¹¹⁸ it flourishes as symptom and metonym of the hybridity/flux

¹¹⁷ I have quoted the phrase from Kate Bagnall's chapter titled "Crossing Oceans and Cultures"; it explores Australia's engagement with Asia through the complex history of marriage and partnerships between white women and Chinese men in Australia between the 1860s and 1930s, with special reference to the white wives' experiences during their sojourns in China, their husband's homeland. The chapter further studies the anxious response of Australian and British Governments to this discouraged phenomenon. Australian women lost their legal status as British subjects when they married Chinese nationals (137). Bagnall's article serves as a revealing co-text to Daisy May's marriage to an Afghan in British India and her plan to travel to Afghanistan. See Bagnall, Kate. "Crossing Oceans and Cultures." *Australia's Asia*. 120-144. 141. Print.

¹¹⁸ As to the fear of the ideologues of White Australia around "A Piebald Australia" for the future and its alleged threat to the outpost nation and white masculinity in the first decade of the twentieth century, see Allen, Margaret. "Betraying the White Nation: The Case of Lillie Khan." *Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Construction of an Identity*. Ed. Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus. Melbourne, Victoria: RMIT Publishing in association with the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2007. 80-88. 84. Print.

seminal to identities in Mollie's India and her India-inspired model of an other Australianness since *Tucker*. Besides Allie Sloper's beloved son, stock Eurasians with their "sing-song chee-chee" (77) crowd the text, ranging from scornful railway officials to vain women and their adoring children like Edward and his dark-skinned, fair-curled sisters. These "Borderline folk", to quote Kipling,¹¹⁹ add one more shade to the palette of subcontinental diversity/hybridity that so enthralled Tucker and had dyed Mollie's sketch of unabashed miscegenation in the Australian bush of *Where Skies Are Blue*.

Exotic India, and beyond

Tucker finds the non-colonial, exoticised India enchanting in its picturesque staples such as the snake-charmers and cobras, opulent ware shops of Chandni Chowk with their rich-hued rugs, exquisite carvings in ivory and jade and intricate embroideries on display, Moghul ruins strewn across Delhi, the "queer, ebullient, midnight, Eastern throng" in railway stations (21), "still and unsullied" landscapes like Swat Valley "jewelled in the rare morning – jade set in turquoise" (49), mirror to the Jewel in the Crown, or a polyglot Peshawar twilight magical in its "strange jumble" of theatrical buildings, purple shadows, narrow cobbled roads, vendors and teeming bazaars, along with the half-lit silhouettes of dapper Sikhs, turbaned Arabs, dancing girls and women graceful in sarees and burkhas. Added to these are Tucker's opiate gaze into Rawalpindi nights potent with "constant whispering and humming and, every now and then, the beat of wild drums" (181) – aural images alien to the coloniser – the Peshawari caravan and camels bearing dark-skinned, heavily-bearded men "extraordinarily picturesque in their brightly coloured garments" (118), and the locals at Bannu colourful in their diverse, often caste-specific costumes ranging from variegated armless coats, sheepskin belts and woollen caps to pugris, plaid shawls, skirts, turbans, silk, desi sandals or European boots, besides the immaculate British-mimicking outfit of aloof babus. The staples co-exist with the colonial stereotypes of lispng Eurasians, whirling dervishes who self-lacerate, caste-wary bribe-thirsty blundering babus, patriarchal Punjabis ready to disinherit sons who have no male heirs and murder-and-kidnap lusting Pathans and Afridis spectacular in their twirling talwars and blood-curdling cries.

For a detailed account of the general social aversion to miscegenation studied in the context of the childless marriage of Sikh Australian businessman Otim Singh in 1906 to Susanna Buick, daughter of a prosperous settler farmer in Kangaroo Island, see

Allen, Margaret. "Otim Singh in White Australia." *Something Rich and Strange: Sea Changes, Beaches and the Littoral in the Antipodes*. Ed. Susan Hosking, R. Hosking. Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2009. 195-212. 204. Print.

¹¹⁹ Kipling, Rudyard. "His Chance in Life." *Plain Tales from the Hills*. Project Gutenberg eBook.

Tucker, though, treks beyond chartering the seduction of routine orientalia, its spectacles and stereotypes. Oriental stereotypes are as easily paraded in *Tucker Sees India* as they are debunked. Ali Din defies stereotypes of warring Hindus and Muslims by identifying with both. Nor are the Pathans staged as unalloyed monsters, for Ali Din informs Tucker that in feud, these ruthless tribals not only spare the lives of women but also treat them well, unravelling yet another myth of misogyny circulated in phobic colonialists' literature on the East (55). The locals in the novel do not always oblige as cartoon abductors of women; they disrupt by playing friends and rescuers of the abducted, as when Ali Mohammed and his men help locate and rescue Ann from Khan Pathori's den. Even Khan Pathori, the Pathan driven to desperate measures by opaque Raj schemes and whims regarding the course of the irrigation channels, surprises with his non-exclusive ethics. Ali Mohammed remembers him as a refuge for wayfarers and holy men irrespective of creed: "Pathori not stoop to ask of sect", he vows (126). In *Tucker Sees India*, India morphs into a locus clearly in excess of what Broinowski terms the coloniser's orientalist fantasy of a dehumanised "Adventure Zone" (38); the subcontinent kindles Tucker's insight into its multivalent realities waiting to break out of the exotic skin.

For example, Tucker's first exposure to the nautch girls notorious as subjects of erotic fantasy/aversion in colonial accounts of India¹²⁰ occurs in a religious procession on the streets of cosmopolitan Peshawar, rather than in the normative kotha or dancing-hall. His response is consequently more in the turf of sublime aesthetic than the erotic. The aura of the nautch girls' dance in the procession becomes less a salacious rite of seduction than the sacred art of surrender. They become for him "creatures of grace and complete unselfconsciousness" (93) and he, an incidental human audience of their performance for the gods. When Ann demands to watch a nautch on her secret nocturnal trip through Peshawar with Tucker, the guide at first takes them to the exotic lair of dancing male dervishes who whirl around, ready to pierce

¹²⁰ In Ketaki Kushari Dyson's *A Various Universe* (1978), a study of the journals and memoirs of British men and women in the Indian subcontinent between 1765 and 1856, the author observes that the nautch-women or professional dancers of northern India have been minutely described in many of the journals; "the cabaret quality of the entertainment provided by them" continued to fascinate most viewers, "though eventually it became fashionable to register a more puritanical reaction" (81). Mrs. Sherwood, among others, was disturbed by the influence of these women on her countrymen. She imaged the nautch girls as witch-rivals to the English wife and based her anonymous novel *George Desmond* (1821) on the erotic magnetism of a Kashmiri dancer for a young Englishman (81-82).

For a parallel discussion of dance performances by nautch girls as a perennial nineteenth century erotic oriental interest, even for white women who travelled in India during this period, see the excerpt from Anna Harriette Leonowens' fascinated account of the nautchnees who "began to whirl and float and glide about in a maze of rhythmic movement, fluttering and quivering and waving before us" (72) in Ghose, Indira, ed. *Memsahibs Abroad: Writings by Women Travellers in Nineteenth Century India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978. Print.

Tucker, though possibly witness to a nautch similar to that which so captivated Leonowen, locates it in the sacred rather than the colonial matrix of the illicit Orient; in this he departs from norms of empire.

themselves with skewers in their *divangi*¹²¹ for *fana* or dissolution in the divine. In *Tucker Sees India*, various subcontinental dance forms resist their axiomatic colonial association with female prostitution or the illicit Orient and erupt instead into alternative pluralities. Dance in this matrix could be read as much as a sacred aesthetic or sufi rite of self-dissolution as an intricate cabaret of allure performed by dancing houris who offer drinks in sleazy dens, or by the more sophisticated *nautchnees* of hypnotic rhythm cunning in their capture of opulent clients from dance halls.

Just as *Tucker Sees India* explores layered perspectives on subcontinental dance outside the colonial apparatus, so does Tucker cultivate a non-binarist insight into the revolutionary movements for independence against the British across early twentieth-century India. Unlike his employer and friend, a senior official in the Delhi police, Tucker refuses to remain constantly phobic about an insidious underground preparation for “a second mutiny – the beggars are ripe as bursting figs for it” (164); he protects from the police his Hindu revolutionary friend who had attempted to murder the Viceroy. Yet he does not sympathise with the armed revolutionaries and their ideology, as a few contemporary Irish leaders of Home Rule in India such as Annie Besant tended to. Tucker might not be an initiate in the *sanatani* pantheon of deities, for he confuses Buddha, the one icon Australia imported from India, as a member of the Hindu trinity comprising Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the dissolver. But he makes no mistake in identifying the fanatic religious fervour that anchors the revolutionary zeal of the brahmin student who was readying to kill the Viceroy.

The student holds steam to be a reincarnation of Vishnu and lectures Tucker on Buddha as an avatar of the trinity: “When he came, the Trinity allowed themselves to be forgotten for a while so that belief should sweep over the hills in the name of their reincarnation, Gautama. Buddha fulfilled his mission, which was theirs. And now Buddha is in truth forgotten in Hind” (248). In his intellectual universe, the revolutionary has managed to assimilate a technology of speed and cross-caste mingling like the steam-engine or an anti-Vedic movement like Buddhism into the mainstream pollution-wary Brahmanical orthodoxy. Tucker listens and arrives at a prescient understanding of the dominance of majoritarian culture and concerns that underlay many of these movements for independence;¹²² his dialogue with the student helps

¹²¹ The Persian term connotes unselfconscious passion.

¹²² In his incisive 2014 article on the continuities between parties and politics in pre- and post-independence India, Faisal Devji contends that present day Hindu nationalism, with its “insistence on the dominance of majoritarian culture and concerns” can be read as “the most appropriate heir of a concept of secularism that had always been populist in its argumentation”. He posits Hindu nationalism as a social movement since pre-independence; in the absence of a distinctive theory of state, it continues to make claims on public and political

him escape the parochial nets of siding either with the empire or its opposition, the rabid nationalists, even as he navigates the sea of shifting, contesting realities with myriad time-lags that make India.

Nine Delhis and the two Flaneurs they Haunt

Tucker Sees India excavates Delhi, for example, as microcosm and palimpsest of the multiple centuries, cities and realities that have imprinted both city and the subcontinent and resist forgetting. As Tucker and the Colonel saunter together through the Red Fort, Dewan-i-Am, Dewan-i-Khas, Jama Masjid, Moti Masjid and many other ruins sprawled across the city, their shaded gates, graceful pillars, slender minarets and domes, filigreed marble screens and the faded blue and gold of mosaic in precious stones transport the two flaneurs to other tenses. Even the Colonel, so translated, can hear “the old histories live on in the marbles, [the] agonising treachery, forgotten festivals, cries of triumphant invaders and moans of the conquered, laughter of kings and soldiers, the sighs of beautiful women” (186).

It is, however, no singular uniform history that may lay claim on Delhi; its pasts are incorrigibly plural. At least “nine cities of Imperial Delhi” (188), variously named Indraprastha – “the first city of Delhi built by the Pandavas”¹²³ – Siri, Lal Kot, Mehrauli, Shahr-i-Nau, Tughlakabad or Shahjahanabad, had been raised and razed at that ancient site through millennia. And all these Delhis – be it the Pandavas’ capital Indraprastha from *Mahabharata*, the Tomara Rajput monarch Anangpal’s eighth century citadel of red sandstone Lal Kot, Alauddin Khilji’s Siri or Ghiasuddin Tughlak’s Tughlakabad built in the fourteenth century – continue to haunt the cityscape and its flaneurs with their polyphonic dreams and memories, just beneath the skin of the British imperial capital of India.

It is thus that Tucker and the Colonel, Delhiwallas by choice, find themselves storytellers to alternative, even competing narratives of the city, their time travel turned differential. While the Colonel prefers the Qutub Minar and other monuments of triumph of a ruthless Delhi raised by conquerors Qutubuddin Aibak, Sultan Altamash, Babar, Akbar and the triumph of the

imagination on cultural and demographic rather than constitutional grounds. In thus politicising social life, Hindu nationalism according to Devji remains “heir to the whole history of nationalism in colonial India”. See Devji, Faisal. “Nationalism as antonym of communalism.” *The Hindu* 19 December 2014, Kolkata ed.: 8. Print.
¹²³ Singh *Delhi: A Novel* 105.

Singh’s novel recreates several centuries of the histories of Delhi from fictional and historical records as chronicled by its anonymous and famous witnesses, among them citizens and invaders, including Nizamuddin Auliya’s adorer Musaddi Lal, invader Nadir Shah, the untouchable Sikh Jaitoo who lived during Aurangzeb’s reign, emperor Aurangzeb himself, last Moghul emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar in 1857, the dispossessed refugees of Partition post-1947 and the narrator, an aging promiscuous columnist and guide through the ruins of late twentieth century Delhi. The book remains a Delhiwalla’s lovelorn meditation on his estrangement and affairs with the city and its multiple pasts.

Nicholson and Hodson-led British army that had quashed the 1857 uprising and exiled the last Moghul Bahadur Shah Zafar, Tucker is moved by the melancholy grandeur of a twilight Humayun's tomb, darkling signature of defeat and erasures. Fragments of myriad Delhis unfold before them as part of an uncentred, infinite yet interconnected multiverse. The fragments/arguments get fluid and magical in their ever-sifted possibilities etched in myriad outsiders' and citizens' memories, histories and desires which remain entangled in fierce dialogue across tenses even as they make the city, as text and texture. The Colonel conjures up his Delhi as "the one below the ridge, made historic by the mutiny" (188) – a city and its breached walls museumized as memorial to the 1857 military triumph of the British Raj and its Anglo-Saxon martyrs. Tucker's version departs from the Colonel's Deakinian dream by inserting other, pre-colonial histories embedded in the deserted Delhis of crumbling forts, tombs, stepwells, pillared halls or the corrosion resistant iron pillar from the Gupta period dating back to the early fifth century CE. Yet both Delhiwallas find their dreams dispossessed in the futuristic "new Delhi" designed by Edwin Lutyens since 1912 as the newly shifted capital of British imperial power in India.¹²⁴ This Delhi of modernist architecture has decidedly banished "the fort, the old tombs, or the monkeys in the park" (189).

Not that Delhi becomes metonym for a time-warp or inevitably describes a loop in the past or future. Its present is as plural as its other tenses. Besides being the capital of the Raj and habitat of the ruling elite, Delhi even during the First World War had been settled and secured by its snake-charmers, acrobats and magicians. The city opens doors to other cities seeded within. Tucker learns that Delhi could be as raucous and Rabelaisian as it is regal and lonely; in its seedy side-streets, the perfidious Delhiwallas "waxed fat with laughter at the innocent . . . foolish burra-sahibs" who were as regularly fleeced by their syces, khansamahs and bearers as they systematically plundered the subcontinent (245), though on a giant scale. Its gift of doors and cues to alternative realities adds a mythic dimension to Tucker's Delhi; in token of its pluripotency, he reinscribes Alauddin's Gate, one of the four gates of the old city of Shahjahanabad, as "Aladdin's Gate" (249).

Of myths Indian and Australian, and a puranika

Myths embed an elsewhere, for they speak with a forked tongue. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes argues for suspicion in reading or receiving myths. Myth, he contends, is depoliticized speech; as parasite figure, it thrives on the difference between the image/form it rides and the concept it elects to propagate through the image. It empties reality and history, banishes traces

¹²⁴ Calcutta had been the capital of British India from 1857 to 1911.

of the contingent and becomes the locus of an unceasing haemorrhage of meaning from the image or narrative it apparently projects. In its desperation to purify, embalm, justify and naturalize the signification inflicted on an otherwise layered, shifting image, a myth may only maim and immobilize: “it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences”.¹²⁵ It masks values as facts, reducing realities to absurdly innocent kitsch ready to be conserved and consumed as Nature – now stingless, changeless. Barthes identifies myths as a force of stasis; they prohibit man against inventing himself and replace him with his “motionless prototype”.¹²⁶

The duplicity of myths that Barthes cautions against, the fissures that must open between the image, its projected signification and its silenced histories and seething possibilities, could also be read as birthmarks of a liminal location. This thesis, in examining such categories as angst, kalpana, trans-, travel, translation and so on, and in its very choice of research domain, obsesses and insists on the binary-smudging liminal. How then could it resist the myth? For, unhoused in either polarity of several binaries, myths inhabit the liminal. They too remain suspended in the no man’s land between a repetitive core and the ceaseless pressure to change, distort, deconstruct and appropriate it to diverse socio-political moments.¹²⁷ Myths constitute a double structure, altogether historical and ahistorical, according to Claude Levi-Strauss.¹²⁸ Ernst Cassirer explores in them the fusion of two contradictory and incompatible elements: the elements of magical and technical thought.¹²⁹ Poised on the edge between the chartered and the unknown, the compulsion to name as well as to narrate an ideational complex that exceeds signifiers, myths straddle language and literature systems and finally resist formulation as either, argues Albert Cook.¹³⁰ They are a place of haunting voices, ripe to betray centres and singulars, and thus rich in a “network of possibilities”,¹³¹ of interpretations and adaptations unborn, stillborn. Myths release, from the prison of solipsistic narratives and the singular versions of history.

In a shift from Barthes’ angle on myths, Ashis Nandy¹³² reads in the myth’s potency for

¹²⁵ Barthes, Roland. “Myth Today.” *Mythologies*. 1957. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972. 109-159. 143. Print.

¹²⁶ Barthes *Mythologies* 155.

¹²⁷ Sundararaghavan, Padma Malini. Preface. *Fictionalising Myth and History: A Study of Four Postcolonial Novels*. By Sundararaghavan. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2013. v-vi. Print.

¹²⁸ Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1976. 210. Print.

¹²⁹ Cassirer, Ernst. *Symbol, Myth and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer*. Ed. Donald Philip Verene. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979. 253. Print.

¹³⁰ Cook, Albert. *Myth and Language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. Print.

¹³¹ Gould, Eric. *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. 35. Print.

¹³² Nandy *The Intimate Enemy* 55-63.

pluralism a multiverse of open choices and reversibles. Myths are contemporary, he contends, and amenable to intervention, unlike history. Always also rooted in the here-and-the-now, they elude final solutions and in their proliferating variants, play complicit with the collective or individual hunger for change, interpolations, re-inventions and disruptions. Past being flexible and amorphous in the multiverse of myths, they may be suitably recast to pre-empt alternatives in other tenses. The mythical imagination then becomes a potent carrier for radical possibilities, without an apparent disjunction between the past and its present.

Mollie's Tucker is an exemplar of such possibilities and ruptures; he models the Anzac de-mythicized as the war-lusting hyper male and re-mythicized instead as traveller, translator and myth-maker of the subcontinent. For his British audience, Tucker translates and transmits myths associated with Fatehpur Sikri, even as he freely interpolates or goes on to cultivate some of them. He retrieves with relish Jodhabai, Akbar's fabled Hindu wife and beloved celebrated in popular culture, even as her existence is doubted by historians in general and by Lord Ham in this novel. For them she might as well have been "an impossibility, a fantasy of perfection"¹³³ moulded from the theft of histories of the emperor's other wives. Tucker recasts the history of Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's beloved city, yet also a city abandoned during his reign on his express command. Departing from facts, he links the decline of that "lonely, beautiful, deserted magic city" to the death of Akbar, their fates exquisitely stitched together in his fresh-crafted myth. Tucker re-grafts the much-mythicized Salim Chisti as a saint visited by local women who prayed for male children. Chisti and his shrine are famed to have attracted all sorts of seekers and the "little threads of silk and cotton" (277) at his mausoleum at Sikri had not all been tied by pilgrim mothers, as Tucker imagines. His slant on this aspect of the myth and miracles of Salim Chisti inserts him in that Sufi's legacy, for Tucker now begins to wonder if the nautch-girl he blessed had indeed borne a son. The myth of a guru, albeit initially reluctant, has cast its halo on him.

Himself a re-invented myth, Tucker's mythical imagination does not rest with re-crafting and translating narratives or characters located in the historical past. His range is cosmological, and gods possess his stories. He invokes Vishnu as preserver of the pliant; Trudy is promised that Vishnu "leads you if you don't look" (324). Siva he interprets as the Destroyer who moves his devotees to desire, resolve and then prepare to be razed by the struggle uptide and heartbreak. Tucker has grown not only an insider, but a puranika¹³⁴ to Indian myths. Like a

¹³³ Rushdie *The Enchantress of Florence* 46.

¹³⁴ A puranika is a composer, compiler or narrator of purana, "purana" etymologically signifying the old or the timeless in Sanskrit. Imagined as a continuous and dynamic narrative process in the sanatani tradition, the

puranika, he accesses, interpolates and transcreates, even as he translates timeless deities of the sanatani trinity to his stories in order to sound a timely caution to Trudy against recklessly following her ambition of worldwide travel as a Red Cross nurse and rousing British suspicion in her World War trail.

Tucker flits across time frames with the ease and habit of a puranika. Three levels of time permeate his mythmaking, the periods of reference switching between the present, the historical past and cosmic time. As in a purana, the “grand cosmological scheme provides a comprehensive framework for situating the historical events” and the present in Tucker’s narratives.¹³⁵ He synthesizes the cosmic and the contemporary. His re-telling of Mughal pasts, too, is located in the synthesist puranic framework. As in a purana, he blends myths, history, legends and hagiography with a personal streak of humour and philosophy, as when he recounts the miracles of Salim Chisti, circulates stories about Akbar, his wives and his city, or conjures up Humayun the failure as his kin in temperament and transits.

Tucker’s narration of the past is overtly non-chronological and selective; unlike the Western facts-and-timeline anguished History, it tends to idealization and abstraction of specific figures and episodes. The tendency to idealize and project humans in their possibilities rather than poverty, moors the purana and puranik narratives such as Tucker’s in a dharmik matrix. Situated in a malleable pluralist universe of should-be’s-and-could-be’s, rather than in the singular rigour of what-is, the purana opens doors to the “republic of imagination”¹³⁶ and could morph into a crucible of the alternative. It then grows fecund in the potential for re-interpretations and subversion, without flaunting deviations from, or re-creation of, tradition/s as disruption/discontinuity.¹³⁷

purana braids at least two time frames – the cosmic cyclical and the linear historical. Within this vast non-exclusive ambit, it ranges from the process of cosmic creation and dissolution to shifting, partially historical accounts of significant events and beings. Its eclectic synthesist framework, built on accretion and adaptations of earlier historical traditions and compositions, remains open to proliferation, interpolations, myths re-told, re-interpreted or created, and the inclusion of contemporary updates; as a genre, the purana is multi-generic and integrates cosmology, genealogies, histories, free-wheeling fiction, idealization, future-oriented possibilities, ethical reflections and an interrogation of dilemmas confronting situations in life and the human condition.

¹³⁵ In his book *understanding itihasa*, Sibesh Bhattacharya explores an alternative to Western historiography in the Indian philosophy of history as embedded in itihasa and its more expansive correlate, the purana. He investigates the conceptual and analytical universe of itihasa-purana to arrive at a historiography and cosmology that is pluralist, perspectival, sometimes non-chronological and always ethical, as evident in the selective narration – and abstraction/idealisation – of only those past events that are deemed worth remembering and documenting as exemplars. For Bhattacharya’s reflections on the universal paradigm of the purana, see Bhattacharya *understanding itihasa* 39.

¹³⁶ This striking phrase is the title of Azar Nafisi’s 2014 volume published by Viking on the indispensable role of fiction and the literary for a republic, in counterpoint to Plato’s position.

¹³⁷ *Shunyapurana* (i.e. the Purana of Void), for example, attributed to Ramai Pandit and first composed in the eleventh century CE probably in Mallabhum, corresponding to the area in and around Vishnupur in the Bankura district of West Bengal, gives an idealised account of the syncretic practices that still connected the local Hindus

As a puranika of subcontinental pasts and cosmology, Tucker grows seasoned in the contingency and fluidity of all myths that colour and finally craft human realities. The passage through British India has alchemised him to a puranika. The role also kindles his insight into radical possibilities of Australianness, such as an alternative mythology located in a dharmik, synthesist puranik matrix instead of the exclusivist universe addicted to purity and the threat of invasion, pollution.

Tucker discovered India, and especially his beloved cities like Delhi or Fatehpur Sikri, as non-centric spaces receptive to being reimagined to make them his. Delhi he images with an “Aladdin’s Gate”. Fatehpur Sikri wakes to a “lonely, beautiful, deserted magic city” (277), as Tucker guides Trudy, Ann and Lord Ham through the Buland Darwaza, gateway of Sikri, into the shrine of Salim Chisti, the grand mosque, stables, courts and private palaces, and does not leave out the Pachisi Court designed as a cruciform board, where Akbar was famed to have played using live pieces. As he narrates these cities, he transforms them into host sites for plural tenses, aesthetics and politics. The subcontinental cities in their turn mutate Tucker from cosy flaneur and guide to the unlikely pilgrim to a querying kalpana of Australianness. Tucker finds his India metamorphosed into a magical transit, a tirtha ready to initiate his third-eyed query into the Australian nation-state, its myths and their limits and alternatives.

“Tirtha”, etymologically threshold or ghat in Sanskrit, connotes a journey/pilgrimage to an alternative paradigm of being and possibilities; “kalpana”, etymologically the power to build or compose, tends to “imagination” when translated and is premised on the hunger for alternative realities. Both “tirtha” and “kalpana” are liminal, directional vectors; they embed a passage to elsewhere. Like “tirtha”, kalpana too operates at the interface, in the in-between zone of smudged borders; an amphibious, medial category in philosophy, it mediates between traditional binaries like sensation and thought, the generic and the specific, the psychological and somatic, the subjective and the objective.¹³⁸ “Kalpana” in the context of commons could burgeon into a political category, as Benedict Anderson who delimited nations as functions of communal imaginings might have concurred.¹³⁹ As tirtha to Tucker’s querying kalpana of

and Muslims, with the arrival of Islam in the region. The text offers a code for translation of several deities from the sanatani pantheon to their Islamic avatars: “Ganesh became Gazi/ And Kartik Kazi/ Munis [sages] none other than fakirs” (160) [my translation]. Instead of a phobic vision of conversions as violent rupture with local belief systems and worldviews, *Shunyapurana* offers a syncretistic code to reading the translation of a section of the local populace from Hinduism to Islam in continuum with the sanatani cosmology and puranic traditions. See Chattopadhyay, Bhaktimadhab, ed. *Shunyapurana*. Kolkata: K.L.M. Private Ltd., 1977. Print.

¹³⁸ For a philosopher’s exploration of kalpana as a political category suspended between binaries as well as an epistemology for accessing alternative possibilities, see

Chakrabarti, Arindam. *Tin Kaal [The Three Tenses]*. Kolkata: Gangchil, 2014. 91-97. Print.

¹³⁹ See Anderson’s definition of the nation in Anderson *Imagined communities* 6.

Australianness, India hosts and projects Mollie's interrogation, revision and multiplication of Antipodean myths, edging towards a politics of non-exclusive, pluralist possibilities, an incorrigible *anekantavada* for her nation.

Enter women, in Australian mythography

In *Tucker Sees India*, women for instance begin to play an increasingly visible and indispensable part in this spectrum of possibilities. Tucker in his larrikin lightness of being might have left mother and wife and the private spaces of home and intimacy in Australia, in order to join the apparently all-male matrix of war and camaraderie in Egypt. He might have even played the autonomous androgyne pregnant with life-fragments from Mollie and her brothers. In India, though, his routes inevitably intersect with those of women, many of whom claim space in the public, and thus traditionally masculinist, realms of nation-building, including war. These women educate Tucker and the reader in the less aggrandising, and more inclusive, democratic and egalitarian nationalisms. According to economist Prabhat Patnaik, the latter variant of nationalisms, in contrast to the aggrandising, imperialistic and exclusivist European version, emerged during the anti-colonial movements in India as a socio-political phenomenon *sui generis*, "the like of which the world had not seen earlier".¹⁴⁰

As the defeated city of Troy was about to be torched and its surviving women enslaved by the Greeks, Euripides imaged Andromache, bewildered widow of deceased Trojan hero Hector, wailing out her obedience hitherto to all the social fatwas that weigh a woman's virtues in terms of her exile from public space: "All the accomplishments that bring credit to a woman I strove to put into practice in the house of Hector. In the first instance, in the matter where a woman gets a bad reputation (whether she attracts criticism or not), namely, not remaining indoors, I suppressed my longing and stayed in the house".¹⁴¹ Trudy stands a pariah to this perennial moral paradigm for women. She loves to travel alone and has resolved to serve her nation in war, not by silence and invisibility, but as a Red Cross nurse serving across the globe. Her nationalism, though, is suspect. As an Englishwoman married to an Austrian officer fighting against England during the First World War, she finds herself an outsider, even outcast, subject to constant surveillance in British India given her German connection. Tucker is initially attached to her and her daughter Ann as an informant by the Raj officials, though later he refuses the role.

¹⁴⁰ Patnaik, Prabhat. "What it means to be 'national'." *thehindu.com*. The Hindu, 26 Feb. 2016. Web. 8 Mar. 2016.

¹⁴¹ Euripides. "Trojan Women." *Electra and Other Plays*. Trans. John Davie. London: Penguin Books, 1998. 199-200. Print.

Trudy's routes across India converge with Tucker's but unlike him, she is thwarted by rebuffs and endless measures of surveillance/securitisation. She smuggles herself into Raj parties instead of being invited to them and yet remains dauntless in the desire to prise a pass into Mesopotamia from British high officials in India, in order to be able "to fit up an ambulance" there (242). She seeks an identity beyond motherhood and the marriage of convenience. Having finally acquired the pass from the Commander-in-Chief at a garden party, Trudy sets off on her own for Mesopotamia, an exilic dream she privileges above her role as mother to Ann or the moments of tender togetherness with Tucker.

In her questionable allegiances and suspect nationalism, Trudy performs bits of Mollie. Her author used to take pride in her genteel British link but found her notion of an Australia nested in the empire increasingly irrelevant, even unacceptable, for a virulently nationalist Federation in the wake of the twentieth century. *Tucker Sees India* could be read as an act of overt recompense, aiming to rehabilitate the pukka Australian larrikin in Indian soil. "Having married an alien", namely one of the enemy, Trudy finds herself similarly fringed. She is ranged with potential "anti-nationals" by the British in the Raj, and she too grows keen to compensate with "love of country" (299). Like Mollie, she performs as an underdog committed to redeeming her self, her variant of nationalism and the subversions seeded in both.

"[British] Women's travel [across the British empire] was, after all, an individualistic strategy of escape that reflected the values of the bourgeois construction of self and not a politics of gender solidarity", argues Indira Ghose.¹⁴² The pleasures of independent travel for English women in the Raj in the nineteenth century were often predicated on the pleasures of imperialism – "the privileges [including safety] offered to English women in regions under the control of colonial rule".¹⁴³ Trudy's travels and their telos in India collude with colonialist structures of power, even as they constitute a simultaneous rite in subversion by undermining official habits of suspicion and proscriptions, as well as the gender premises of travel and power in the colony – hitherto coded as implicitly male. Her collusion with and betrayal of the imperial/national ideology of Pax Britannica parallels Mollie's ambivalence when it came to the dominant, inevitably masculinist Australian nationalism.

Through the character of this non-Australian in India, then, Mollie first inserts the possibility of an unattached female picaro, as well as the feminine "other", in an otherwise masculinist Australian mythography. Trudy haunts Tucker with her transgressions, unabashed

¹⁴² Ghose, Indira. "Women and Travel." *Women Travellers in Colonial India*. 127-145. 139.

¹⁴³ Ghose *Women Travellers* 160.

locus in fringes, unafraid transactions with the centre, her web of charm and a radioactive presence potent in unpredictability, risk and mystery. At least during the course of his sojourn in India, she induces a shift in his evasion of women and enables the text's interrogation of an Australian nationalism made of exclusions – of women from the male public sphere and its nationalist discourse, to begin with.

The head nurse Tucker meets at the elite Hindu Rao Hospital, who also happens to be Lahorie's favourite "miss sahib" and a friend of his sister Penny, is no adventurer or party-raider, unlike Trudy. Tucker spots her standing by herself on the fringe of a group of people at a club dance in Delhi. Yet this Sister, modelled at least partially on Mollie's position, performance and experiences at the Hindu Rao, does not merely nurse selflessly or cast away her caste in the Raj by personally feeding and sponging patients, a duty officially assigned to orderlies at the Hindu Rao. She plays a visibly political role on behalf of the empire in quelling anti-British agitation and potential insurrections among the local staff at the Hospital, as Tucker learns from Lahorie when posted there as a Red Cross unit. She chooses to personally perform many of the menial tasks for the newly arrived patients, sahibs "of low blood and foul tongue from the fort hospital" (203), thereby shaming her caste-wary local subordinates into compliance. With Lahorie as her translator into Urdu, she reasons with the bearers and khitmutgars (servants) on questions of caste, pollution and unequal pay of British and Indian soldiers serving the Raj, even as anonymous characters lurk in the compound trying to pass off a revolver to shoot the British bank-manager, and the khansamah in charge of the hospital canteen threatens to poison the food if no one listens to their complaints.

Lahorie asserts that the Viceroy would have pinned a medal on his miss sahib, if he had only known, and Tucker informs the police that "the head sister is the only one holding them [the Indian hospital staff] from a riot" (204). Through the reticent Sister's experiences, Mollie smuggles into the text some of her personal encounters with seething anti-colonial resentment and violence in India during the First World War, encounters editor Mary Durack would censor from her official autobiography set to validate its posthumous publication as a Lawrence panegyric.¹⁴⁴ Simultaneously, Mollie casts the Sister as a political player for the British nation and empire in moments of crisis, a pro-active role appreciated by her adorers Lahorie and Tucker.

¹⁴⁴ For instance, in her manuscript of *The Fifth Sparrow*, Mollie remembers how during her tenure as a Hindu Rao nurse, "a bank manager who had taken us to the Club the evening before was shot dead in his office next morning", a section deleted from the published version. See Skinner, M.L. *The Fifth Sparrow*. MN 186. TS 1396A/64. Batty Library, Perth. 195.

It is however Penny, Tucker's sister and nurse posted in Assam during his journey across India, who represents the vivacious, resourceful Australian woman in the novel. She does not make an appearance in the text and yet refuses to be erased, since none who know her can contrive to forget her. On discovering himself stranded in Bombay, Tucker first sends her a telegram seeking advice; she connects him to their highly placed British cousins in the Raj. Major Reggie, one of these cousins, wants to know if he is like Penny, as trustworthy and witty, before handing him the confidential letter to be personally delivered at the remote Malakand fort. The head nurse at Hindu Rao fondly remembers Penny her colleague galvanising a prim and proper evening at the club in Assam by beginning to dance on her own; soon the commissioner clapped, the men came flocking round for dances and the commissioner's wife could no longer continue to preside and patronise. In Penny, Mollie fuses Trudy's love for fun and adventure with the head nurse's quiet political acumen, for Penny is also held in high regard by her Raj cousins.

In her paper "Contesting Australia: Feminism and Histories of the Nation", Gail Reekie contends that "women have, symbolically and materially, carried the burden of an essentially sacrificial relationship to the "nation" in Australia",¹⁴⁵ that the nation as a public, masculinist sphere can only be constructed at the expense of women. "We can see in First World War Australia", she continues, "how critical was a sexually differentiated heroic status [accorded to the Anzac/digger] to the preservation of the nation" as an exclusive, masculinist sphere.¹⁴⁶ Mollie reverses this refusal of women, gender and the feminine in what Prabhat Patnaik terms the aggrandising European, here European outpost, version of nationalism. Through Trudy, the Hindu Rao Sister and finally Penny – all three women independent, dynamic and an influence on Tucker – Mollie does not merely visibilise and re-insert women in imagining Australianness. Crucially, she embeds the subcontinental version of an alternative, non-exclusive nationalism, a phenomenon "sui generis" which developed in early twentieth century British India in the wake of anti-colonial struggles according to Patnaik, as exemplar for the constitution of Australian nationalisms.

War, violence and anrsamsya

In *The Shadow Lines*, both the luminously beautiful Mayadebi who was young and alive in England on the eve of a World War and the young male narrator of the text are certain that England had chosen her finest hour in a war; even the left-wing Alan Tresawson with the

¹⁴⁵ Reekie, Gail. "Contesting Australia: Feminism and Histories of the Nation." *Images of Australia* 145-155.

¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴⁶ Reekie "Contesting Australia" 152.

wizened face cannot mistake the “exhilaration in the air” in England and Germany with the World War looming.¹⁴⁷ The doctor Tucker meets at the Christian mission of Bannu too is intoxicated with the exhilaration: he cannot wait to join action at the Front, “[For] the Great War draws a man, one feels one must do one’s bit” (157). That nations and their heroes are made in war was not an isolated maxim of Australian provenance. It was a sacred tenet of Edwardian militarism, as historian Henry Reynolds illustrates, and was circulated throughout early twentieth century Europe, the United States and the British dominions.¹⁴⁸ While in 1907 the British Colonel F. N. Maude held war to be a necessary cleansing fever that purged the “foulness of the body national and patriotic”,¹⁴⁹ Lord Frederick Roberts, British military hero and commander in chief until 1905, declared that without war, “a nation is in risk of running to seed” and that war provides its test and cure.¹⁵⁰ Prussian militarist Heinrich von Treitschke voiced identical opinions from the other side of the looking glass on the eve of the First World War: “Only in war does a nation become a nation”, he wrote, and its martyrs should be deified as heroes.¹⁵¹

Though British officials had to repeatedly manipulate the Australian fear of Japan in order to ensure an Australian expeditionary force for imperial deployments in the imminent European war¹⁵² – the First World War – the Anzacs and their landing at Gallipoli were quickly catapulted to ur-myths in Australian national mythology, identity and memory, in keeping with European militarist trends and in anticipation of Pacific race-wars. Besides C.E.W. Bean, newspapers like the Hobart *Mercury* exalted the Gallipoli landing to a moment of baptism into nationhood for Australia: Australians had finally become a “blood brotherhood in the best sense”, it chorused.¹⁵³ Magazines such as *Lone Hand* cultivated the war hero as the apotheosis of Australian manhood. As late as in 2015, the Australian commemoration of the Gallipoli

¹⁴⁷ Ghosh *The Shadow Lines* 66.

¹⁴⁸ Reynolds, Henry. “Are nations really made in war?” *What’s Wrong with Anzac?* 24-44.

¹⁴⁹ Maude, F. N. *War and the World’s Life*. London: Smith Elder, 1907. 5. Print.

¹⁵⁰ Qtd. in Reynolds “Are nations really made in war?” 34.

¹⁵¹ Gowan, Al, ed. *H von Treitschke, Selections from his Lectures on Politics*. London: Gowan & Gray, 1914. 24. Qtd. in Reynolds 35.

¹⁵² As Greg Lockhart observes in his chapter “Absenting Asia” (*Australia’s Asia* 269-297), “given the 60,000 Australians killed in the [First World] war, it would have been most impolitic to explain that the AIF had been sent to fight Germans and Turks in the hope that Britain would protect the country against a Japanese invasion” (278). Greg Lockhart and David Walker’s chapters in *Australia’s Asia* (Walker “Rising Suns” 73-95) investigate the crucial role of the Australian fear of Japan in precipitating their military expeditions on behalf of Britain during the First World War. One could also look up the following book on this issue:

Mordike, J. *We Should Do this Thing Quietly: Japan and the great deception in Australian defence policy, 1911-1914*. Canberra: Aerospace Centre, 2002. Print.

And lately, Cochrane, Peter. “The Politics of Popular Memory, or, The Art of National Forgetting.” *Best We Forget* 210-229. 224-225.

¹⁵³ Qtd. in Reynolds 30.

landing in its hundredth anniversary across media modelled the “tsunami of remembering” as well as the politics of memory and forgetting that had helped the evergreening of the Anzac and his battle as sacrament for the nation.¹⁵⁴ Yet, with an Anzac protagonist – however reluctant/co-incidental – ready at hand, Mollie chooses to fade out the battles and frontiers, those habitual theatres of war as well as irresistible iconography for the Australian nation, from the wartime novel *Tucker Sees India*. Could it have been only to give her brother Jack, partly incarnated in Tucker, a second chance?

Tremors of war as a multivalent signifier amplified across plural directions in Mollie’s life and works. As investigated above, it exacted a price from Mollie in the loss or wretched plight of her brothers. Yet it also morphed into her medium for exploring absented possibilities of Australianness rooted in conversations across spaces and cultures including Asia, as in *Letters of a V.A.D.* or *Where Skies Are Blue*. War in these novels provided the objective correlative for her memories of India, just as it turned into secret metaphor for her subterranean subversion of the righteously “Australian” narratives imposed by D.H. Lawrence and Vance Palmer on *The Boy in the Bush* and *Black Swans*. In *Tucker Sees India*, Mollie does not craft her war-narrative as another heroic narrative of origin sent to legitimise the founding of the Australian Federation and its communal solidarity. War instead becomes her pretext for shifting the locus of action from the ontic or spectacular physical violence of suffering and destruction to the systemic, ontological violence of empire¹⁵⁵ operative in India. Competing lusts for empire among nations in Europe had arguably precipitated the First World War. India enabled Mollie to not distract her readers’ attention from the true locus of trouble, the empire; here at last she could situate and meditate on violence in its all-pervasive, invisible ontological

¹⁵⁴ Both the Anzac and the Gallipoli landing have had contested histories. In the 3rd Foundation for Australian Studies in China (FASIC) Conference on “Contested Histories and the Politics of Memory”, held on 23rd and 24th October 2015 at Shanghai, Australian broadcaster Geraldine Doogue used the phrase “tsunami of remembering” to interrogate the lavish 2015 national commemoration of Gallipoli, a strategic failure that had involved huge loss of men. Peter Cochrane, her co-speaker on the panel “Remembering World War One”, argued that the collective memory of Gallipoli in Australia promoted by the creative industries thrives on an amnesia of global and international politics of the day; its overwhelming celebrity today is sustained by the erasure of contexts and trans-continental macro-narratives that had made Gallipoli possible in the first place. Doogue, Geraldine. “Remembering Gallipoli 100 Years On: Grief, Patriotism and Embracing Complexity.” 3rd FASIC Conference. East China Normal University, Shanghai. 23 Oct. 2015. Speech. Cochrane, Peter. “The Erasure of Contexts: Why Gallipoli Matters.” 3rd FASIC Conference. East China Normal University, Shanghai. 23 Oct. 2015. Speech.

¹⁵⁵ Heidegger in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* deploys the notion of “ontological” violence that pertains to the creation or founding gesture of every new communal world of a people; this all-pervasive, ontological violence that imposes a certain “disclosure of communal being” and the world, then grounds every other form of violence immanent or sporadic to that “communal being” i.e. society – from the ontic or absurdly visible physical violence to the “essencing” violence of language, or the violence involved in sustaining social constellations and relations of authority. Qtd. and extensively debated in Zizek, Slavoj. “Fear Thy Neighbour As Thyself!” *Violence* 40-73. 68-71.

avatar, removed from the battle-front and unfolded in myriad shades and layers – including the social and political relations of enforced domination – across the Raj.

Tucker, for example, finds the British imperial bosses in India hostage to a hermeneutics, not even of suspicion, but of horror bred by the violence they had systemically unleashed in the colony. They are beset by ghosts, of 1857 and suspected German agents allegedly fomenting political unrest along the frontiers of the Raj during the World War. General Smith sends Tucker to personally deliver a letter to the Malakand fort in the north-western frontier, since he fails to trust the local units guarding the borders of the British Raj. According to his intelligence reports, German agents have infiltrated the tightly guarded borders and they persist in provoking Pathans to desert their frontier posts and join Turkey in the World War, thus taking up arms against the British. The colonialists cannot exorcise the ghost of the German agent they perceive everywhere as the enemy within, at the borders of British India and in the early twentieth century local political movements for independence against the British that raged across the subcontinent. At their dogged insistence, Tucker is finally able to locate one, a German disguised as a Calcutta-based piano-tuner who supplies weapons to Pathan and Mashud tribes along the border, thus materialising the worst fears of Raj officialdom.

As for 1857, Dipesh Chakrabarty observes that for the colonialists it had come to be codified or memorised into a general form of insurrection, waiting only for triggers to be reactivated.¹⁵⁶ Not only does Tucker's immediate superior, a British policeman, read in the early twentieth century unrest for swaraj a preparation ripe for re-staging 1857, he discloses to Tucker that British officialdom had charted possible escape routes through secret passages in the old fort, and "every officer knows whom to protect and how to get the women to safety" (204), if there occurred a repeat of 1857 in 1914.

Despite such elaborate strategies and mechanisms of control, the dominated cannot be entirely quelled. Impotent, raging violence of the colonised stalk the Raj and erupt in sporadic bursts in *Tucker Sees India*, whether it be amidst the incessantly insurrectional Pathan and Mashud tribes of idyllic Bannu in the north-western frontier or among the restive resenters of Delhi, including the local hospital staff and student revolutionaries haunting the city's underbelly. Tucker can gauge the tension pervading relations between colonisers and the

¹⁵⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty thinks that "1857 produced much panic on the European side" shared by many non-combatant Indians. Though it is hard to find a continuous account of the effect of this panic, or its memory, on the colonial officialdom in the years following 1857, he cites some indirect pieces of evidence: "the communist leader and writer P C Joshi recalled that when Keir Hardie came to India in 1907, "the year of the 50th anniversary of the 1857 uprising", Hardie noted "in what jitters the British administration were"" (53). See Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Remembering 1857: An Introductory Note." *1857: Essays from Economic and Political Weekly* 45-55. 52-53. Print.

colonised from the snippets of conversations he overhears everywhere, including in a train to Rawalpindi, between two British soldiers. Two of their officers had been sniped and killed while on a gaming venture and they lust for revenge, dreaming of hanging the local Muslim murderers “in pigskin to ensure their eternal damnation”. The rebellious tribes of the north-western frontier are demonised as jihadis programmed to “think they’ll play round with the ’ouries in ’eaven for ever after cos they plugged two honest English gentlemen!” (45).¹⁵⁷

Tucker finds these tribes narrativised as violent marauders given to abduction of women – including an Indian Christian and a Hindu girl devoted to music, lately at Bannu – and only nominally controlled by the colonial authority. He perceives the paranoia pivoted on white “women and children” – that phrase exempting British men in colonial India from sanity, according to Forster¹⁵⁸ – when Ann gets abducted by Pathans, the ultimate outrage in British colonial imaginary, or when the British police officer confides about secret escape routes charted for their women and children should there be a repeat of 1857, and even at a high-profile garden party in Delhi. Tucker observes the Indian army officers queued while being introduced to the British women by their military husbands at the party. He wonders about the formation of the line by Indian officers and concludes it was so that they were not “left by any chance alone with a [British] lady” (236). The racial tension and sexual jealousy that Tucker reads in the situation alludes to what Indira Ghose terms the “rape myth” i.e. the myth of pathological lust of the native for white women, circulated in 1857 and sustained thereafter as “one of the main pillars colonial self-legitimacy ... built on”.¹⁵⁹

As Tucker travels through a Raj embroiled in incessant war with the people and haunted by 1857 and its echoes, he begins to query the customary valorisation of violence, in both its spectacular and systemic variants. Instead, he becomes an exemplar of what might be termed

¹⁵⁷ This stereotype about Islam and its alleged fundamentalists – that Islam incites its followers to commit terror attacks and suicide bombings on non-believers with the lure that soldiers and martyrs for the faith would each be served by seventy-two virgin houris in their afterlives in heaven – is aggressively circulated today in the media-propagated globalized war against Islamic terrorism.

In his paper investigating suicide, philosopher Arindam Chakrabarti contests the circulation; he contends that both Quran and the Hadiths unambiguously condemn suicides in all situations, and suicide-attackers cannot be exempt from the ambit of their condemnation.

See Chakrabarti, Arindam. “Maribar Holo Tar Sadh” [“And she longed to die”]. *Bhatkaporer Bhabna Ebong Koekti Atpoure Darshanik Prayas [Thinking about Food and Clothing: Essays in Quotidian Philosophy]*. 2nd ed. Kolkata: Anushtup, 2014. 71-102. 81-82. Print.

¹⁵⁸ Forster, E.M. *A Passage to India*. London: Penguin, 1979. 162. Print.

¹⁵⁹ Indira Ghose argues and illustrates that sexual jealousy of British males regarding “the craze of white women for running after black men” constituted a visible connection in the colonial constellation: “Despite all assertions to the contrary, it seems sexual attraction between the races was not a one-sided affair” (95).

By constructing a case of rape of a white woman by a native as “hallucinatory”, E.M. Forster subverts one of the axioms of colonial discourse and its patriarchal agency in *A Passage to India*, according to Ghose (96). See Ghose, Indira. “‘Mutiny’ Writings by Women.” *Women Travellers in Colonial India*. 88-104. 95-96.

anrsamsya, a core concept of *Mahabharata*¹⁶⁰ espoused by the dying doyen of the Kuru clan Bhishma, among others, as a cardinal value to be followed by the sensitive, thinking would-be monarch Yudhishtira (“Shantiparvan”:12.164.11 and “Anushasanaparvan”:13.5.1-31). “Anrsamsya”, a multivalent signifier, can approximately be rendered as “non-cruelty”, a medial term suspended between the violence-nonviolence binary according to Sibaji Bandyopadhyay,¹⁶¹ a term that recognises the ubiquity of violence even as it chooses to cultivate passive resistance and self-reflexivity about violence/violations. In his passive resistance to the brutal hierarchies of the Raj and its cult of surveillance, as well as in encountering alleged enemies, Tucker eschews violence as far as practicable though that does not prevent him from throwing out of the train two violent stealthy intruders in Trudy’s cabin.

“Anrsamsya” as a conceptual category, however, is in excess of the negative form of non-cruelty; there is an “indeterminate ambiguity” to it given competing constructs of the concept in *Mahabharata*, as Bandyopadhyay suggests.¹⁶² Certain moments in the epic conjoin anrsamsya to anukrosha¹⁶³ which translates to a general grammar of ethical care, as in Bhishma’s dying counsel to Yudhishtira, or when Yudhishtira in the final stage of his life cites anrsamsya as the reason why he cannot abandon the dog, his lone companion, in order to enter the Celestial Abode (“Mahaprasthanikparvan”:17.3.7-17). Anrsamsya is then alchemised to a positive form, pulsating with the tenderness and empathy of anukrosha. Bhishma further amplifies “anrsamsya” as the attribute of one who lives by the ethics/aesthetics of equitable distribution and exceeds hidebound loyalty to communal identities (12.164).¹⁶⁴

Tucker’s plural identities, his gift of empathy for myriad characters from diverse backgrounds espousing equally varied politics, and compassion in giving away his bare possessions in India, such as the prized blanket in a freezing train compartment, make him an eminent exemplar of anrsamsya as an imaginary of alterity. The text takes after its protagonist

¹⁶⁰ Anrsamsya is cited as the supreme dharma (para dharma) eight times in the *Mahabharata*, with the competing concept of ahimsa (non-violence) being cited only four times, as established by Alf Hiltebeitel in the statistical tally-sheet of his 2001 book *Rethinking the Mahabharata*. In his 1987 article on the concept of anrsamsya, Mukund Lath too explores the “supreme significance” of the term in the epic. For a discussion on the frequency and complexity of the term in the *Mahabharata* with reference to Alf Hiltebeitel’s book and Mukund Lath’s article, see

Bandyopadhyay, Sibaji. “A Critique of Non-violence.” *Three Essays on the Mahabharata: Exercises in Literary Hermeneutics*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2016. 267-307. 269-270. Print.

¹⁶¹ Bandyopadhyay “A Critique of Non-violence” 271-273.

¹⁶² Bandyopadhyay 274-275.

¹⁶³ “Anukrosha”, etymologically rooted in the notion of “crying out that follows (anu) someone else’s cry (krosa)”, connotes empathy and understanding of others’ pain and anguish; it is repeatedly upheld as a cherished value in the *Mahabharata*. See Bandyopadhyay 275.

¹⁶⁴ For an exploration of the politics of equity and imagination of alternative realities as embedded in the concept of anrsamsya, see Arindam Chakrabarti’s commentary on the concept in “Bhatkaporer Bhabna” [“Thinking about Food and Clothing”]. *Bhatkaporer Bhabna Ebong Koekti Atpoure Darshanik Prayas*. 37-38.

and de-centres violence and militarization bent on the invasion of homelands of Asian neighbours, as foundation myths and pivot for the phobic national script of White Australia. Rather it foregrounds anrsamsya as an alternative politics of imagining Australianness as a plural, with the slant placed on conversations, translations, refractions, displacements and digressive stories as epistemologies for accessing and connecting with others, including the Asian other. *Tucker Sees India* then turns into a polyphonic mosaic of as many stories as characters, their voices, bhashas¹⁶⁵ and cline of Englishes jostling for space along with Tucker's.

Of various Englishes, a Babel and Translation

The novel is thus peppered with Tucker's escort in train, the betel-chewing Dehra Shar's obsequious babu English. Dehra Shar speaks as tangled and pedantic a jargon as the Maharajah's Indian secretary who too seeks "recompense" from Tucker on every pretext. Again the Eurasian's "chee-chee" English brims with "snook" (snake) and "poppa" (183), both babu and Eurasian being stock, parodic representations of what Homi Bhabha terms "colonial mimicry".¹⁶⁶ Besides the mimic English of these mimic, and perhaps also mocking (desi) sahibs, the text abounds in Urdu-speaking Lahorie and Pushtu-speaking Ali Din's unabashed minoritisation of English with phrases like "eat the air" (49, 200), literal translation of a regional idiom into the Queen's language. Lahorie's English freely flaunts Urdu lexicon like "ooltapoolta" (jumble) and "dastur" (decorum), and one can even retrieve from the text a maharanee capable at best of a broken patois of English leaning heavily to Urdu. Tucker the translator switches multiple registers of English: he seems at home in Australianese and also grows to be an adept at colonial English, the latter being a hybrid rich in Hindustani and other Indian bhashas and much spoken by the colonial sahibs. He generously sprinkles his sentences with "kubber" (news), "ek dum" (a gulp) of whisky, "tamashah" (joke/ skit) and so on. His idiom, however, might turn biblical in keeping with the sentimental, as when he assures Ann of his affections though they must soon part (165), or he might bewilder with a close mimicry of babu English, at once formal and hilarious.

In *Tucker Sees India*, hybridized English does not remain the privilege of a few characters who smuggle in untranslated desi words; the entire text is narrated in an English of contact,

¹⁶⁵ "Bhasha", connoting language in Sanskrit and in several modern Indian languages, is used in English to refer to regional Indian languages as contrasted with English; in post-colonial translation studies, "bhasha" has come to supplant the traditional term "vernacular" which etymologically denotes the language of the slaves.

¹⁶⁶ Homi Bhabha defines colonial mimicry as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha "Of Mimicry and Man" 126. Emphasis in the original.). Qtd. in Ghose, Indira. "Coda: Gazing Back." *Women Travellers in Colonial India*. 146-157. 147.

cultivating a linguistic ecology of adulterations, confluences and conversations with other languages strikingly proximal to the ever-expansive lexicon of both colonisers and the colonised in the globalised world of early nineteenth century colony, trade, travel, diaspora and war as represented in Amitav Ghosh's *The Sea of Poppies*.¹⁶⁷ Words like bundobast, dooroost, chota hasri, rassildar, chowkidar gymkhana, khansamah, bus hogya, tonga waller, budmash etc. pepper the entire text of *Tucker*, modelling colonial English with its ever whetted appetite for other words/worlds, as also the post-colonial possibility of translation as a fertile coming together, instead of a one-way "bearing across" for consumption by the language of empire.

It is thus that translation as the currency for cross-fertilisations in Mollie Skinner's novels, especially in her late fiction, includes the absence of translation of various words and phrases, dialects and eccentric argots. This play in plural dialects and languages in Mollie's oeuvre begins with *Tucker Sees India* which not only ubiquitously features Hindustani words as part of its English but also highlights the possibility of Babel, and India, as rich metaphors for polyglot, polyphonic conversations. Several characters like the bilingual babu Dehra Shar, Tucker himself, the hospital staff at Hindu Rao, chowkidars posted at the club house, the raneer or Khan Pathori who speaks Pushtu and Arabic, shift to languages other than English at certain moments during Tucker's travels through India. These conversations, mostly reported in English by the narrator and yet at times left untranslated, foreground polyglossia as a fecund possibility for forging non-centric collectivities.

The British officers and a Scottish doctor posted near the north-western frontier of the Raj claim knowledge of Pushtu and an understanding of the Afridis, though they possess but a smattering of Urdu, Pushtu and English; for Tucker's benefit, the Scottish doctor ventures to do India in translation from an anthropologist's angle. Tucker however does not claim or seek an anthropologist's dominant agency of knowledge for presently marginalised/colonised civilizations like India. He prefers becoming a learning subject inclined to "learn from below", performing Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak's proposed model of epistemic humility especially for a metropolitan global agent wading into comparative studies.¹⁶⁸ Instead of relying on the empire's informants and their translations for connecting with India in all its linguistic diversity, he prepares to learn Hindustani or Urdu, a hybrid language, through conversations

¹⁶⁷ Ghosh, Amitav. *The Sea of Poppies*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2008. Print.

¹⁶⁸ In *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Chakrabarty uses the phrase to suggest a political alternative to the globally dominant metropolitan academic practice of reducing languages and literatures of the South to mere objects of cultural study, whether in area studies, comparative literature or cultural and ethnic studies. According to her, the dominant global agent of knowledge needs to re-fashion herself as a learning subject inclined to "learn from below" (15), displacing the non-differentiated, translated other huddled on the fringes of a violently concentric, globalized world with the linguistic and cultural diversity of a planetarist, non-centric polyphony (16, 97).

with Dehra Shar and a local shoe-maker early into his journey through the subcontinent. Dehra Shar speaks in Urdu to him and Tucker replies in English though each understands the other, anticipating bilingual or polyglot dialogues without translation. The babu initiates him into the language faster than a primer, for soon Tucker is capable of a personalised, halting variant and can afford to laugh at the “impossible Hindustani” of English or Scottish orderlies and their lack of communication with the locals (178).

Bilingual or polyglot characters such as Lahorie, Tucker or Dehra Shar, are thus most at home in *Tucker Sees India*. They exist at the interface of two or more languages and irrespective of their formal professions, serve as invaluable translator-interpreters and go-betweens playing on words and meanings of the helpless monoglots. Lahorie translates his miss sahib’s English for the Urdu-speaking local staff at the Hindu Rao Hospital and Tucker becomes the indispensable translator-mediator for his superior, the sergeant, at a Delhi garden-party, since no sahib there can speak the local “lanwich” as fluidly and conversationally as he does (229). These translators, ripe in betrayals of authentic lexicon and semantics in their mediation between languages/cultures, anticipate the tribe of translator-picaros who invent and tweak words in Mollie’s later novels such as *W.X. Corporal Smith*. The *Tucker* translators, including the omniscient narrator, customise words and phrases, re-inventing or displacing signifier and/or signified even as they translate. Thus “maidan” (open space) becomes “mardan”, “bunnia” (trader) comes to signify “lawyer”, “woo jarsty hie” displaces “yeh jabardasti hai” (that’s coercion) and “seedar jow” (“siddha jao” meaning “go straight”) is rendered as “go to the right” in the narrator’s play with Anglicised Hindustani. Tucker tweaks the signification of three sculpted monkeys, each with its hands over the eyes, ears and mouth respectively, to mean “I see not”, “I hear not” and “I speak not”, adapting the monkeys as chorus on his personal context; traditionally, however, the postures signify the resolve to refrain from seeing, hearing or speaking evil. Meanings are thus lost and re-created through numerous slips in translation in *Tucker Sees India*. In a release from the translator’s tether of fidelity to the original, Mollie aligns her narrator and characters with the unabashed anuvadak or transcreator engaged in mediation/conversations as creation and play. Mollie the author and anuvadak is unleashed at last, beginning with this novel.

India, as I have investigated in the introductory chapter, has been no singular for Australia between 1890 and 1950. Globally too, it has remained incorrigibly plural, in more ways than one, with various versions mapped, and in the making, by its myriad witnesses and students. Mollie’s India, as I try to show in this chapter and in the previous one, unlocked Australianness from the surfeit of certainties cultivated in the exclusionary, masculinist iconography and

politics of the nation that continued to image itself dominantly as an outpost till at least the early twentieth century. It released Australianness from the xenophobic, isolationist berth of the Anglo-Saxon outpost in an Asian neighbourhood and relocated it in the post-imperial, post-colonial ethics of friendship, planetarity and translations. Mollie's India projected Australianness as a pluralist enterprise deliberately left unfinished and thus a space always in the making – bleeding borders, open to the kalpana of radical possibilities, protective of provocation and difference and existing in a tarkasamsara, in dialogue with and as part of the Asian constellation.

Conclusion: The Past as a Node of Genesis, or Whither do we go from Here

After the pachyderm chapters, I now rest my case with a taut and tiny conclusion. The extremities of writing length should also be in conversation, I thought, not to speak of the relief of contrast. The subsections here briefly represent my research findings, explore the possibilities of further research germinal from the thesis and aspire to situate the research in our current context.

Findings from the thesis:

The first chapter lays down the post-/comparative, interdisciplinary, trans-tending premise of the research, along with the historical framework to reading Indo-Australian entanglements between 1890 and 1950. It details the debates surrounding Australianness during the period and the influence of trans-factors such as England/Home, Europe, Asia and India in shaping and shifting the shapes of this -ness. The dominant vision seems to have been one of an uncontaminated outpost nation settled in futuristic anticipation of a racially revitalized avatar of the Anglo-Saxon as the coming man and dedicated, finally, to the cause of Europe to be phoenixed in a land imagined as innocent of history and empire. The vision was woven into the shadow-narrative of a looming fear of the whites being aboriginalised, should there be a repeat invasion and dispossession of the settlers, this time by the teeming millions from neighbouring Asia. I find Australianness to have been a much more contested, complex and fluid cluster of competing imaginaries than is suggested by this unitary image, made of partitions from divergence, isolation/purity, despairing translation away from Home while also adrift amidst the heaving, Asia-polluted seas.

Caught between history and geography, black and white, colonised and the coloniser, empire and the post-imperial, Asia and Europe, belonging and exile, Australia as a settler nation has had liminal locations. I use the amphibious, binary-eluding category of “angst” to investigate its layers, hungers and fears during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the introductory chapter, angst is explored in multiple dimensions in the context of Australianness, together with “-ness” and its alleged centrifugal counters, “trans-” and the “neighbour”. Sally Percival Wood recommends fresh beginnings for Indo-Australian relationships. The past of imperial vintage comes beset with mutually ignorant, even ludicrous stereotypes, she contends. Yet I find Australia’s India between 1890 and 1950 a rainbow palette, the neighbour with a difference, an ideological hazard, the tarkik apar inducing alterities to imagining Australianness in excess of empire diktats. I design entry points in the

introduction for restoring, researching these elusive narratives, the fragile histories of Indo-Australian conversations and interconnections which could speak to the present and postal tense of the relation. And I use terms, categories and a theoretical framework that freely appropriate from both Western metropolitan and Indic traditions, so as to tease out readings of this obscured palimpsest of interconnections, provocations that exceed the imperial/orientalist template. Terms such as exile, translation, angst, essencing jostle with tarka, tarkasamsara, kalpana, rasa, samarasa, tirtha, anrsamsya etc., and thinkers across space and tense ranging from Heidegger, Roland Barthes, Derrida, Homi Bhabha to Abhinvagupta, Sibaji Bandyopadhyay and Arindam Chakrabarti converse in the course of the thesis. Applying Indic categories to other tenses, locations and texts illustrates creative criticism in the other direction, contrapuntal to the academic chore, now normativised, of consuming Western theories to decode India-based data and texts. My critical-theoretical praxis attempts to break out of this epistemic colonisation and the absurd asymmetries of knowledge-production and its conversion to capital in a neocolonial globe.

In the second chapter, Alfred Deakin, policy-maker and proponent of white Australia, turns out to have been entangled with India, and not only in 1890 during his eighty day visit to British India. He designed this visit as a simultaneous pilgrimage and anti-pilgrimage to the subcontinent, to British and pre-British Indias respectively, and it erupted to disturb him beyond his design. Deakin published two books based on his India explorations and adventures. He had not seemed equally keen to publicise some of the other shadow-narratives of his engagement with India which I explore in this chapter. His ur-pilgrimage to that place of his youthful dreams and lifelong reading lists had happened earlier, as it were, with a book he wrote as a medium when younger. Advertently a re-writing of *A Pilgrim's Progress*, Deakin's *A New Pilgrim's Progress* is replete with anuvad from the Upanishads. Despite fear of the contamination of colours and the Immigration Restriction Act, Deakin had stitched India to his white Australia in multiple ways. He transplanted the national iconography of the secular sacred from India to the Antipodes comprising Anglo-Saxon heroes of 1857 who pre-empted the Anzacs for instance and simultaneously, the Buddha. India grew a witness and trustee of the alterities he chose to silence from the Australian national imaginary at the time. And it emerged a metonym for the trauma and capital of translation as politics and epistemology, translation which proved crucial to Deakin as a settler colonial, both in terms of self and the nation.

If Deakin's triumph in forging/barricading white Australia had been wracked with the tension performed by his lifelong responses to India, Mollie the marginal's failure to author an

‘authentic’ Australian novel to live up to the grids of nationalist critic Vance Palmer or of D.H. Lawrence, can be read from another space and time, as an index fecund in the absented possibilities of Australianness. The third chapter explores her anuvadic texts, texts in which she allegedly rendered others’ domineering versions of Australianness and yet, like a co-creating anuvadak, ended up weaving her departure and subversions into the apparent surrender. She outed the Australian legend as an exclusivist fantasy with her alarming innocence, even as she visibilised the exclusions, e.g. the tabooed northern seas as a site of troubling contact with Asians, the absented woman as a potential larrikin figure or the logic of the bullet in aboriginal dispossession. The chapter reads her posthumously published autobiography, aligned to her anuvadic fiction in tropes of ventriloquism and colonisation, as a work heavily censored and colonised by its feminist editor when compared to the manuscript. Mollie had failed, yet again, to fit into the feminist or nationalist grids of her editor. I argue that her years in India when she authored her debut novel, dyed and designed Mollie’s war and peace with Australianness. Colonised India had been her source of courage and cunning in the sly ontologies of survival and ultimate decolonisation from set templates of evoking the nation and its -ness in her anuvadik works. As writing site and context, covert or overt, for much of her published fiction, India had turned secret-gatherer for her defeat, humiliation and versions of Australianness invisibilised from an exclusionary, often repetitive and aridly masculinist (white) Australian literary canon and mythology.

The fourth chapter foregrounds exile and translation as functions of forging a crossover nation such as Australia, in what I term to be Mollie Skinner’s four exilic novels. Both the terms “exile” and “translation” gain a turn in the context. Exile becomes a gift, a liberating epistemology forging a connect to new formations instead of retaining the rote of a mourning rite over departures. Translation dons a postcolonial avatar to become the non-centric craft of dialogue, cross-fertilisation, even solidarity of her Australian protagonists with various unlikely others mapped across the differentials of colour, religion, language, gender and region. Mollie breaks free of her contemporary monoglot race-tense template of Australianness, imaged by the inarticulate white bushman on patrol over the outback. As translator-picaros, many of her Australian protagonists in the exilic novels find themselves at home in multiple languages and locations across borders. Three of the novels are set in context of the World Wars. Yet the “war novels” are reclaimed as a palimpsest of stories narrated to heal and to remember, circulated by a diverse diaspora with plural addresses and dialects. The site of action is shifted from the frontier to intimate spaces of hurt and healing such as the war-hospital in

Letters, or travel through cities in British India including Delhi and Amritsar in *Tucker*. Instead of being trapped within the cast of ruthless weapon-wielders, her Australian warriors in *Letters*, *Tucker Sees India* and *WX – Corporal Smith* make a storytelling tribe of unlikely Anzacs keen on plurals and the apar. Mollie Skinner revisits, interrogates, multiplies the iconography of Australianness as a semiotic river ribbed with impurities and alternatives.

All four exilic novels erupt into a carnival of crossovers, be it in terms of genre, the play of multiple dialects and languages, transit, migration or miscegenation. In their heteroglossia, contextual settings, autobiographical parallels and the plurals of stories and identities, these novels surge as explicit afterlives of Mollie's years in India. And when at last she returns her Australians – now an exilic, heterogenous tribe of the translated twice-born – to the Australian bush in her last novel, *Where Skies Are Blue*, it emerges the objective correlative for her India and grows a polyphonic home to her exilic Antipodeans, even as they fashion a nation interperfumed with others. I pepper the chapter with Indic categories e.g. samatva, mamatva, rasa, anrsamsya, tarkasamsara, purana and puranika to access the translational imprint of India on Mollie Skinner's routes-rooted model of an Australianness ripened in the exilic wisdom of possibilities. All these categories are moistened with the labour of engagement with various others and driven by the anguish and ethics of imagination, empathy, receptivity, epistemic humility and the desire for equity.

Of germinal possibilities:

“Possibilities” is an enticing term, a web inviting enmeshment. Having been enmeshed in that web as ethics and imaginative politics through my research, I limit myself in conclusion to the obvious, immediate, mundane possibilities, rather corollaries emergent from this thesis. Why chase after the vestiges of a vanished reality, not heeding to Sally Percival Wood on the past of Indo-Australian connections? The present and the past cannot be disjoined; a susurrus of narratives from both the tenses huddle to haunt attempts at any apparent disjunction. This study belongs to the weave of the overt and the invisibilised that stitched the two nations in a phase of their colonial past and could provide the texture to their post-colonial dreams. It could inspire research in connections and continuations not only in forging Australian identities then and now, but in the craft of a multi-layered, rainbow-palette Indo-Australian bonding as well. The occasional, headline-grabbing aggression of white Australians against Indian immigrants may be traced back to the survivalist anxiety once implanted through the White Australia policy and the aligned questions around insecurity, belonging, receptivity to other cultures and competing world views, as evoked in the oeuvre of Deakin and Skinner.

The study is limited to settler Australian responses to India between 1890 and 1950. Yet such a domain evokes the correlate areas of Australian perceptions of Europe, specially England, during the same period. The Australian traveller's images of England – ranging from the colonial cringe to nationalistic defiance – could serve as a referral point for comparing the white bushman's ideological burden in discovering India. Andrew Hassam's *Through Australian Eyes: Colonial Perceptions of Imperial Britain* on different dimensions of the colonial Australian's firsthand experiences of Britain could be the starting point for an interesting off-shoot to my research. The obverse perspective comprising an Indian traveller's views of Australia could provide a further research query. Margaret Allen's essay ““The Chinaman Had No Fault Except That They Were Chinese”: An Indian View of Australia in 1888”¹ provides a refreshing narrative of an Indian's encounter with Australia in the late nineteenth century, reversing the gaze studied in the thesis.

India has apparently changed a lot between then and now. Have Australian literary perceptions of India kept pace with the change?² There is currently a hum around the potential of Indo-Australian partnerships, given the escalating tensions between China and the US with Australia wedged in-between and consequently, the regained strategic and economic currency of the “Indo-Pacific” idea for Australia.³ Must such partnerships be limited to trade and strategy? Re-mapping the future involves looking back at pre-maps, in this case of Indo-Australian exchanges and intertwined narratives. How did India lurk and peep in Australian narratives during the Raj? How does it speak to contemporary Antipodean projections of the subcontinent? What are the borrowings, redrawing, translation – in the etymologically revised

¹ Allen, Margaret. ““The Chinaman Had No Fault Except That They Were Chinese”: An Indian View of Australia in 1888.” *Australia and India Interconnections* 202-217. Print.

² “Is the new Australian writing about India itself a form of intellectual tourism? Or is it, perhaps, a recycled form of the literary exotic: an antipodean variation on the currently popular theme of Raj revival?” wonders Graham Huggan in his essay on the tourist gaze in literary representations of India in recent Australian fiction. Huggan, Graham. “Transformations of the Tourist Gaze: India in Recent Australian Fiction.” *Westerly* 4 (Summer 1993): 83-89. 88. Print.

For a review considering such literary representations to be “more rounded, complex, and sometimes ambivalent” in Australian fiction of the latter half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century, see

Bennett, Bruce. “Australian Encounters with India: Short Prose Narratives since the 1950s.” *Australia and India: Convergences and Divergences* 18-36. 18.

³ Hall, Ian, Ruth Gamble, and Shabbir Wahid. “Mining Facts in the Evolving Australia-India Relationship.” La Trobe Asia, La Trobe University and Asialink, The University of Melbourne. The Cube-ACMI, Melbourne. 19 Mar. 2019. Event.

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sense of being “carried across” time – in the image-clusters used to evoke India, say, in Alfred Deakin’s *Temple and Tomb in India* (1893) and contemporary multicultural Australian author Inez Baranay’s *With the Tiger* (2008), published from India? Has that future arrived where a deeper connect and mutual knowledge is possible for India and Australia? If so, what can we learn from the lacunae and promises of the Deakinian blueprint and Skinner’s dissident version for such a relation? It is such links between the past and the post that my thesis aims to kindle, in excess of the script of imperial formulae and comforting archetypes of the provincialized, pariah other. India begins to loom as that anomalous category – the en/gaging neighbour who could unsettle, engage and provoke possibilities of re-creating the Australian nation as a space flexible, plural and always in the making, in conversation-constellation with diverse others, yes, even between 1890 and 1950.

And the current context:

The research does not rest with the past or a mere season in Indo-Australian relations. Along with comparative studies, it speaks to India Studies and mutating notions of nation and the trans-factors that etch its -ness. By India Studies, I do not only allude to the Indic categories evoked in this thesis, or the epistemic humility and labour of engagement sans otherization that they connote and compel. I suggest the possibilities of “India” the signifier and nation, then and now. Like Australia, India too could be seen as a tarkasamsara of contending imaginaries, recessive and dominant. In an age when violence surges as the exclusionary, boundary-bending spillover in trans-spaces, dragging the dispossessed, exorcised and their shadow-narratives in its wake, could trans-categories like tarka and kalpana, that speak the language and ethics of alterities and the un-centred, be made redundant in imagining the nation?

As observed through this research with reference to Australianness, a nation may be seen as the function of a formative set of trans-factors, even when ostensibly, and overwhelmingly imagined in terms of the unitary and its kin categories such as isolation, withdrawal, supremacism, removal, translation-as-corruption and so on. The thesis explores the role of India in stoking a set of trans-factors rooted in receptivity, liminality, conversation with counter-narratives and listening to silences, polyglossia and translation-as-polyphony for plural un/makes of Australianness between 1890 and 1950, a period when white Australia had been officially committed to purity, race revitalization or the prohibition of colour contamination. Could the idea of the nation today be restored to a differential creatrix with its formative set of trans-factors aligned to an imaginative hunger for alternatives, possibilities?

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