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# Reading the City, Walking the Book: Mapping Sydney's Fictional Topographies

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English

August 2013

# Preface

I hereby declare that, except where indicated in the text and footnotes, this thesis contains only my own original work.

# Acknowledgements

Thanks to my fellow students and academic staff in the English Department for their assistance and constructive criticism, particularly Post-Graduate Co-ordinator, Associate Professor Vanessa Smith.

Thanks also to my friends and family for their encouragement, technical assistance and good will.

To my supervisor Dr Peter Kirkpatrick, poet and literary historian, I owe a debt of gratitude not only for the stimulation provided to me by the depth of his knowledge of and love for Sydney and its literature, but also for encouraging me to ‘go astray’ creatively while always keeping the main academic path in view.

To my husband Tim Fahey, fellow urban walker, my heartfelt thanks for your support, patience, multiple critical readings and cups of tea.

# Abstract

This thesis locates itself on the contested double ground of Sydney's fictional and material topographies. My purpose is to read and write the city's spatio-temporal dimensions through four novels: Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934), M. Barnard Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1947), Patrick White's *The Vivisector* (1970) and David Ireland's *City of Women* (1981*).* Deploying a hybrid methodology informed by critical and creative approaches to the city in literature and modernity, the thesis investigates the manifold ways in which the novels draw on Sydney's material topographies to shape and structure their narratives spatially, not only in an abstract and symbolic sense but through the materiality of urban places. Each novel thus creates a city which offers new perspectives on the relationships between text, place and writer. My approach and methodologies draw on J. Hillis Miller's work on literary topographies, in particular novelistic creations of figurative maps. This textual approach is complemented by Walter Benjamin's conceptualisation of the modern city as a landscape to be read critically with a 'topographical consciousness' which I interpret as a set of modes for reading the city as text and the text as city. Intertwined with these literary and material approaches is an 'on the ground' methodology for 'walking the book'. Influenced by Benjamin and borrowing from the Surrealists and the Situationists, I reconceptualise the *dérive* or urban drift as a critical and creative practice for literally and figuratively walking fictional and material Sydney. Through juxtaposition and interweaving of creative non-fictional *dérives* with analytical and interpretative chapters, I seek to enact Benjamin's art of straying in the city as the thesis, through its circling thematic movements, creates its own topographies. Reading the city and walking the book I conclude, allows familiar urban spaces to be imaginatively and critically opened up as past, present and future, the fictional and the material, collide and re-assemble into new configurations: alternative cartographies.

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# Introduction

That street washed with violet
Writes like a tablet
Of living here; that pavement
Is the metal embodiment
Of living here[1]

Kenneth Slessor

Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance – nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling … Paris taught me this art of straying.[2]

Walter Benjamin.

[1] Kenneth Slessor,'Last Trams' in *Poems* [First published as *One Hundred Poems* 1944] (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1969), 95.
[2] Walter Benjamin,'A Berlin Chronicle', *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, Peter Demetz, ed. and intro., Edmund Jephcott , trans. (New York: Schocken Books [1978], 1986), 8-9.

# Introduction

This thesis locates itself on the double ground of Sydney: its material and fictional landscapes; its contested topographies. My purpose is to read and write these spatio-temporal dimensions of the modern city through four novels: Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934), M. Barnard Eldershaw's [Marjorie Barnard and Florence Eldershaw] *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1947), Patrick White's *The Vivisector* (1970) and David Ireland's *City of Women* (1981). In each novel, I argue Sydney is a presiding literary presence, and each has a central concern with the experience of modernity in an antipodean city at varying stages of its struggle to emerge from a residual colonial past. Each text takes risks with language and form and I am interested in tracing these innovations within the contexts of the multiple material geographies of modernism.[3]

Deploying a hybrid methodology which borrows conceptually and theoretically from various critical and creative approaches to the city in literature and modernity, I aim to show that these novels have the potential to make the city a text, not simply a representation, but a creation which brings with it new perspectives on the relationships between text and place and opens up other possibilities for re-imagining urban geography. Among other related areas, I investigate the manifold ways in which each of the fictive cities draws on the landscapes and topographies of Sydney to shape and structure narratives spatially, not only in an abstract symbolic sense, but through the materiality of urban places: buildings, streets, houses, gardens, the harbour, the sea, the bush. To paraphrase Philip Mead, through such re-readings of the local, I attempt to understand and articulate the complexities of imaginary places in the literary texts, and their recursive relations to the multi-faceted experience of actual, lived places.[4]

Two thinkers have been most influential in helping to frame my approach: American literary critic and theorist, J. Hillis Miller (b.1928), and German-Jewish philosopher, literary critic, urban wanderer and cultural historian of the materiality of modernity, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). I will briefly indicate what some of these core ideas are and how they inform the approach and methodologies of this study before proceeding to a more detailed and nuanced account.

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[3] Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester UK: Manchester University Press, 2003).
[4] Phillip Mead, 'Nation, Literature, Location' in Peter Pierce, ed., *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature* (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 551.

Hillis Miller in his 1995 book *Topographies* investigates sets of relationships between landscape and topography in literary works including novels.[5] Literary critics and theorists, he argues, do not pay as much attention to landscape and descriptions of places as they do to other narrative features such as time and character and this raises questions for him which also resonate with this thesis. Some of these questions cluster around the function of landscape and cityscape 'descriptions' in novels and whether they go beyond providing realistic settings and metaphorical adornment. Other questions focus on how the materiality of the landscape which pre-exists the novel becomes a set of fictional topographies and how these then operate within the narrative, in particular, how figurative maps are created through the movements between places. Of particular interest to this thesis are the kinds of stories which are generated by particular landscapes, the figures which rise up from them, and the nature of the signs which gather around them and travel through the narrative. In 'City as text' below, I will expand on the implications of Hillis Miller's ideas and how they have influenced my approach to concepts of the city as landscape, map, plan and topography.

While to some extent acknowledging the materiality of landscape and its representation in other forms such as maps, photographs, plans and paintings, Hillis Miller's focus is on the literary – the textual, figurative mapping created within the novel – not on the material, nor is his concern with the modern city. To complement such an approach, I turn to the writings of Walter Benjamin, in particular those which focus on his experience of cities. He centralises the notion of the city as landscape, which emerged with the growth of the modern city in the mid19th century, a notion important to this thesis in that it suggests the necessity of experience and practice for navigation: the observant walker must learn to identify and read the city as topography.[6] Benjamin was obsessed with the 'thingness' of cities as places of historical experience in industrial civilizations and through his walks and subsequent writings on Berlin, Naples, Marseilles, Moscow and especially Paris from the 1920s to 1930s, he developed habits of reading 'things' as if they were texts, of 'going through' a metropolitan topography as if it were a revealing record of historical forces.[7] It is from such complex and diverse studies which encompass cities and the materiality of modernity, that I postulate a conceptual and theoretical framework for 'topographical consciousness', interpreted in this thesis as a set of modes and perceptions which inform my methodologies for reading city as

[5] J.Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (California: Stanford University Press, 1995), 18-22.
[6] Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 1996), 25.
[7] Demetz, 'Introduction', *Reflections,* xxxviii.

text and text as city. I proceed in a 'quasi-Benjaminian fashion'[8] by walking Sydney's streets literally and figuratively, my reading of the novels and writing about them imbued with a topographical consciousness, another mode of mapping the city. These methodologies are further influenced and enhanced by a re-envisioning of the modernist city figure of the *flâneur*. Through a consideration of the literary tropes of the walker and the voyager, I propose a composite figure more suited to antipodean Sydney as a mode of reading the myriad literal and figurative passages that link the fictive and material cities. This approach and the methodologies which support it will be examined in detail below in 'Reading the city'.

Intertwined with reading the city, are methodologies for 'Walking the book' and here I am influenced by Benjamin's 'art of straying', or becoming lost in the city[9]and other Surrealist influenced walking practices. Of most interest to me is the *dérive* or urban drift in which walking becomes a critical and aesthetic practice for subverting and re-figuring city spaces, for 'reading against' the dominant rationality of maps and plans. The *dérives* are central to my approach, underpinning the analytical and interpretative chapters on each novel while also releasing creative potential, new modes of reading through the action of walking: a spatial investigation of the city as text and the text as city.[10]

There are four *dérives* included in this thesis, interleaved between the four analytical and interpretative chapters. Each walk is documented by photographs thus providing a set of overlapping visual maps of the city. With one exception[11] all the photographs in this thesis were taken within the particular context of each *dérive* and they support my archiving of the city and my anachronistic reading, by showing the city's 'emergent and disappearing forms of life and architecture at all times'.[12] As the purpose of the photographs is not illustrative but subjectively cartographic, they are not specifically identified in text: a list is provided separately on page 325.

[8] This phrase is borrowed from Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).
[9] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' in *Reflections*, 8-9.
[10] I am influenced here by Christel Hollevoet's essay 'Wandering in the City *Flânerie* to *Dérive* and After: The Cognitive Mapping of Urban Space' which introduces the catalogue of the exhibition *The Power of the City and the City of Power* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992), 25-56.
[11] Photograph of the missing model of Rayner Hoff's sculptural group 'Crucifixion of Civilisation', designed for the Anzac Memorial but never cast, see title page of Chapter Four, 274.
[12] Jeremy Tambling, *Going Astray: Dickens and London* (Harlow: Pearson Longman), 2009, 12.

I now turn to a more detailed introduction to the theoretical and conceptual thinking which underpins this thesis commencing with 'City as text' followed by 'Reading the city', 'Walking the book' and concluding with 'Reading the texts'.

**City as text**

> There are few things more pleasing than the contemplation of order and useful arrangement, gradually arising out of tumult and confusion … By degrees large spaces are opened, plans are formed, lines marked and the prospect at least of future regularity clearly discerned, and is made the more striking by the recollection of the former confusion.[13]

In this thesis, I am engaged in various modes of mapping Sydney which draw on the figurative maps created in each of the four novels as well as those created by my own walks in the material city, some of which re-enact the major scenes of walking in each novel. However, the city also has a prior historical existence in maps and plans of various kinds which seek to impose other kinds of order and I begin my discussion of the city as text with them. In the words of social archaeologist Denis Byrne, in 1788 when the ships of the First Fleet arrived at Sydney Cove, the colonial cadastral grid made an 'instantaneous' appearance in what was until then the Aboriginal landscape. As part of the imperial machinery, it assimilated colonial terrain to metropolitan terrain by imposing the same generic grid of counties, parishes, and rectangular 'holdings' onto it.[14] With England's cartographic language inscribed upon it, the landscape of colonial Australia was thus put in immediate dialogue with the landscape of England.

Sydney or 'New Albion' thus began life as the dream city of Arthur Phillip, the first governor of the colony and captain of the First Fleet. His vision, as the journal extract above shows, was greater than its planned destination as a penal settlement, a dumping ground for England's criminals and dissidents. Phillip did more than dream: a map of Sydney dated July 1788 is the first attempt at an urban plan for the city.[15] As geographer Denis Cosgrove observes, urban space and cartographic space are intimately related. City maps are 'bearers of urban meaning and character' to the extent that 'the map becomes to some degree the

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[13] *Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay,* Second Edition, 1790, 103-4. Quoted in Max Kelly and Ruth Crocker, *Sydney Takes Shape*: *a Collection of Contemporary Maps from Foundation to Federation* (Sydney: The Doak Press in Association with the Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, 1978), 3.

[14] Denis R. Byrne, 'Nervous Landscapes: Race and Space in Australia', *Journal of Social Archeology*, (2003), 3, 169-193.

[15] Kelly and Crocker, 4.The map is titled 'Sketch of Sydney Cove Port Jackson in the County of Cumberland New South Wales, July 1788.The coast line by William Dawes, the Soundings by Captain Hunter.'

territory'.[16] He also points out that conceptually, (as was the case with Phillip's plan), the map has often preceded the physical presence of the city and served to regulate and coordinate its continued existence. However on Phillip's resignation, the dream city collapsed entirely, his plans were never implemented and attempts to overlay and enforce a rational planning grid onto the organic, lawless growth of Sydney were largely unsuccessful. Following Phillip's departure at the end of 1792, the wholesale land-grabbing by powerful and wealthy individuals that was to characterize Sydney's development well into the 19th century began: the officers took up lots where and how they wished in the town and, in Marjorie Barnard's words, ' the streets wound round them as best they could.' Hundred acre estates, 'veritable medieval manors' were set up, including that of Commissary Palmer, The Farm, at Woolloomooloo. The land was free and so was the convict labour. It was not until the arrival of Governor Lachlan Macquarie at the end of 1809 that some semblance of order was restored to the city. Barnard refers to this 17 year period between Phillip's departure and the arrival of Macquarie as 'colourful, dark and brilliant, retrogressive and progressive, full of anomalies; fortunes were made and degradation heaped on degradation.'[17] This disorderly narrative of Sydney as Max Kelly and Ruth Crocker show, can be read through its maps dating from 1788 to 1901.

Among the urban legacies of this time were the twisted, narrow roads, some of which led nowhere. William Street was one of these as it impinged on the properties of the rich and powerful who lived in the vast houses and gardens along the ridge and on both sides of Woolloomooloo Hill. Another legacy as urban historian Paul Ashton argues, is 'the accidental city',[18] one in which *laissez faire* rules, with constant piecemeal development and redevelopment the order of the day, a race between chaos and planning. Architect Peter Tonkin challenges this 'myth' of Sydney as unplanned, 'a great setting ruined': each bit of Sydney was planned by someone, he declares, 'except perhaps the meandering cattle track of George Street. It's just that there never was a dictator to impose the grand vision required to put it all into a comprehensible whole'. Sydney is a 'messy, polyglot, diverse city that accommodates a vigorous and energetic population, not a dead and formal piece of design'.[19] It is Tonkin also who suggests that ultimately Sydney's name derives from that of Dionysius,

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[16] Denis Cosgrove, 'Carto-city', *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 169.
[17] Marjorie Barnard, *Sydney the Story of a City* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1956), 5.
[18] Paul Ashton, *The Accidental City: Planning Sydney Since 1788* (Marrickville: Hale and Iremonger, 1993), 9-12.
[19] Peter Tonkin, 'City of Dionysius', in Peter Emmett, curator, *Sydney: Metropolis, Suburb, Harbour* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 2000), 3-4.

youthful god of wine, vegetation and wild pleasure:'The Sydneys, [the family of Viscount Sydney] seeking links to a Norman past, claimed it was an Anglicized version of Saint Denis, the mythical saint invented by the early church to replace the pagan god. Is Centrepoint his thyrsus?'[20]

As Hillis Miller observes, novels have a close relationship to the landscape from which they draw and to its prior representations in diverse forms of spatial mapping. 'The text of the novel and the real landscape may be thought of as elements in a series' where the actual landscape exists not only in itself but as if it has already been transposed into photographs and maps, these 'real maps' are in turn remapped in the texts of the novels.[21] As I argue in this thesis, Stead, Barnard Eldershaw, White and Ireland, in creating their fictional cities play with, contort and subvert the existing authoritative maps and plans of the city to reveal the disorder – the tumult and confusion – which constantly threatens to erupt into everyday life. The 'figurative mapping' in their novels thus draws from Sydney's colonial past as well as the changes to the city's fabric in the 1920s (*Seven Poor Men of Sydney*); the 1930s and 40s (*Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*); the early 20th century to the 1960s (*The Vivisector*); and the 1970s (*City of Women*). As I show in this thesis, each novel reveals a particular perspective on the urban landscape of the time and also creates a new landscape, a new text.

Hillis Miller writes that there is no landscape without its story: the stories that novels tell of the figures which rise up from the landscapes are not so much placed against the background of the scene as generated by it. Topography originally meant the creation of a metaphorical equivalent in words of a landscape; then it came to mean the representation of a landscape according to the conventional signs of some system of mapping. Finally the name of the map was carried over to name what is being mapped: topography remains the study of a place, while a topographical map demonstrates geometrically the contours of an area. As I interpret Hillis Miller's ideas, landscape pre-exists the fictional work which draws from its features to create (generate) its own topography: the novel is thus a 'figurative mapping' of the existing material landscape.[22] What is being mapped I suggest, are the contours of stories. Questions then arise which cluster around the nature of the stories generated by the landscape of Sydney, the places which appear in the topographies of the novels and how they are related to

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[20] Ibid., 180, note 6. Centrepoint Tower is now known as Westfield Tower. It is an intrusive feature of the cityscape and often appears in the *Dérives.*
[21] Hillis Miller, 19.
[22] Ibid., 18-22.

each other and to the landscape which generated them. One of the ways in which I approach such considerations is through the notion of rhetorical and narrative topographies.

Topography combines the Greek word *topos* or *plac*e with the Greek word *graphein* or *write*. *Topos* refers to both a place in discourse and a place in the world. The idea of topography – in both senses of the word – is connected to the ancient Greek art of memory, remembering things by locating them in a 'memory house', and connecting places in the physical environment (physical *topoi*) to stories and parts of discourse (rhetorical *topoi*). In Paul Carter's reading of Australian explorers' journals, landscape emerges as an object of interest in so far as it exhibits narrative interest, with shifts in narrative direction being signalled to the reader by the presence or absence of particular landscape features, such as rivers or mountains: these also provide a dramatic means of punctuating the narrative.[23] Topography thus serves a rhetorical purpose and plays a crucial part in structuring the narratives of the journeys. The maps and the written journals of the explorers, argues Carter, were thus mutually constitutive of both symbolic and material space.

Similarly I suggest, the writers of the fictional works of Sydney which are the subject of this study also choose particular topographical features which may be landscape forms such as the valley, slopes and ridge of Woolloomooloo Hill or features of the built environment such as churches, railway stations, statues and memorials, and certain streets, and the narrative points at which they make their appearance or re-appearance. This narrative topography connects the material city with its textual counterpart, and shapes the novel spatially. Certain aspects of the cityscape are of interest to the writers for aesthetic, biographical, political, or emotional reasons and these are chosen for inclusion and others are left out, or transformed, relocated, re-named, even forgotten or repressed, perhaps erased. The aim is not only or simply realism or verisimilitude but narrative form and the generation of story. These topographic features sometimes appear as thresholds of encounter or passages of transformation. Some places return repeatedly, such as the sea cliffs and The Gap in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, and the Anzac Memorial in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*: characters may feel compelled to return to such places, often sites of the urban uncanny. Some places seem to exert a 'magnetic pull' across the terrains of the four novels, including: St Mary's Cathedral and Cathedral Street; Hyde Park; the Domain; the streets of Woolloomooloo; the Archibald

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[23] Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1987). See in particular, 75-76; 90-93. In order preserve the spatiality of events in his journals and maintain narrative interest, explorer and surveyor Thomas Mitchell invented rhetorical features (and thus viewpoints), 112-117.

Fountain; Garden Island; the Art Gallery of NSW. While the same places may recur across the four novels, they create different readings. The very spatiality of the modern city thus gives form to the narrative structure in that the main stimulants to action are each book's localities and these sites are displayed as important stations of a 'plot' that is, in this thesis, redefined in terms of walks through the city.[24]

Narrative topographies also create spatial relationships and patterns of association between 'groups' of sites which may borrow from the material topography, or may be unique to the fictional one. There is, I suggest, a 'logic' of association (or disassociation) which the fictional narrative topography upholds for readers, forming a pattern or 'map' which links multiple sites of experience. As I discuss below, it is through methodologies for walking the book that I seek to discover the patterns of association between such places in the material and fictional topographies.

Some topographical aspects may appear rarely during the action of the novel, but may haunt in other ways through memory, trauma, desire – these may be personal, individual and intimate, and also collective, shared, public. Additionally, as Hillis Miller suggests, within each topography and in different ways the reader may encounter the atopical, the unmappable, 'the place that is everywhere and nowhere, a place you cannot get to from here'. Such an 'unplaceable place', hidden by the topography may he suggests, be the 'encrypted place' which generates the stories which play out in the topography[25] and in my readings of the four novels I pay attention to such places. In *The Vivisector* for example, it is the ancestral ring which appears to encrypt the 'unplaceable place' as it travels through the narrative in various guises, appearing first in the box of relics in the Surry Hills slums and at the end in the 'Cutbush circle' in the Art Gallery of NSW.

I now turn to consideration of the city as text in terms of how its landscapes are viewed, and how such 'topographical viewpoints' are used to shape the fictional narratives.

In a geometric map of the city, there is no specific viewpoint, for the view is everywhere and nowhere at the same time: the city loses its three dimensionality and becomes nothing more than a surface, marked and unmarked. Panoramic images fix the viewer in a single spot, or in

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[24] Anke Gleber, *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flânerie, Literature and Film in Weimar Culture* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1999), 18.
[25] Hillis Miller, 7-8.

a series of overlapping spots, from which the appearance of the city slowly unfolds in a kind of narrative circuit – rooftops, steeples, streets and parks have a hidden potential narrative waiting to be discovered. Such aerial views of the city are a form of visual entertainment where the driving forces are aesthetics and narrative rather than pragmatism and accuracy.[26]

The modern city is thus a visual experience, saturated with images, a spectacle. The city panoramas and bird's eye views that became increasingly popular in the late 19th century are themselves fictional forms, attempts to master the city, to give a whole view, something that became increasingly difficult as the city became more complex and labyrinthine. In such views locations lose their particularity in the sweep across the city, and from that distance no people are visible. Such a top-down overview has been regarded suspiciously either because it suggests an unwarranted totalizing gaze, panoptic in its visual ambition, which erases differences, or because abstraction and loss of perspective are thought to be anti-humanist.[27]

This is the position of Michel de Certeau who privileges the walker in the street against that of the voyeur: looking down at Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre he feels lifted out of the city's grasp, his elevation transforms the bewitching world by which one is 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. Such a text he considers, allows one to read as a 'solar Eye, looking down like a god': to experience the 'lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more'.[28] To de Certeau, the ordinary practitioners of the city, the walkers, make use of spaces that cannot be seen: their walking creates an urban text, a network of moving intersecting writings, thus evading the totalisations produced by the god's-eye view and the controlling rationality of city plans.

As urban visual geographer Douglas Tallack and others have pointed out, the view from above is more complicated than this – the panoramic sweep is also a search for a point of view on, and therefore knowledge of, a city, literally throwing up new challenges as it expands: picturing in a bird's eye view encourages a bid for a structural knowledge of the city. The city as subject is not fixed in a point of view from which everything becomes obvious, rather the reality of the city is explored in all its contradictoriness, its dynamism and

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[26] Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in 19th Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 21-22.
[27] Douglas Tallack, '"A Sense, Through the Eyes, of Embracing Possession" (Henry James). Bird's Eye Views of New York City, 1880s-1930s' in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, eds., *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 112-125.
[28] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 92-93.

its inherent instability.[29] The view at ground level is thus not necessarily more legible than the view from above – there are also spaces which are difficult or impossible to read.

The narrative structure of each of the four novels, I argue, is shaped by such multiple shifting positions or vantage points and by more mobile perspectives gained through moving around the city. Topographical viewpoints are thus chosen positions of proximity – closeness/distance – within the narrative topography, and shifts in the narrative point of view or consciousness can be initiated by shifts in the topographical point of view and vice versa. In *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* and *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow,* for example, recurring panoramic views link multiple sites of experience across time and space. In *City of Women*, the narrative alternatively opens out and closes in as the narrator moves between the panoramic views of the city skyline to the interior of her room, to walking/mapping the streets of the city. Topographical viewpoints also encompass sightlines: in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* these are often long, looking over a distance to the city or out to sea, whereas in *The Vivisector* they are short, creating a narrative which is more personal, intimate and interior, framed by the narrator's own perceiving eye.

Having suggested some of the ways in which the city can be viewed textually as a landscape, I now turn to conceptualisations of the city as landscape to be read, in particular, through my interpretation of Benjamin's topographical consciousness.

## Reading the city

> To construct a city topographically – tenfold and a hundred fold – from out of its arcades and its gateways, its cemeteries and its bordellos, its railroad stations … just as formerly it was defined by its churches and its markets. And the more secret, more deeply embedded figures of the city: murders and rebellions, the bloody knots in the network of the streets, lairs of love and conflagrations.[30]

In his writings on 19th and early 20th century European cities, Benjamin replaced an historical approach with its linear tracing of events by metropolitan 'archaeology' and a topographical consciousness.As Peter Demetz observes: 'In his imagination … space rules over time; his "topographical consciousness" shapes experience in architectonic patterns, in neighbourhoods, and in particular in urban districts the borders of which have to be crossed in

[29] Tallack, 2005.

[30] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, trans. (Cambridge Mass., London England:The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), [C1, 8], 83. Hereafter referred as *Arcades.*

trembling and sweet fear.' [31] In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin's method was to proceed from historical and literary texts as he had done before in his images of cities and by collecting materials through his 'endless flâneries' – archiving Paris in the 1920s and 30s through walking the streets, in particular surveying the obsolete, decaying 19th century arcades, 'paying attention to the individual things which intrude in an unaccustomed and non-schematic way, significant periphera, things which do not fit with the usual lot and therefore deserve particular, incisive attention'.[32]

In this thesis I proceed in a 'quasi-Benjaminian fashion' in which topographical consciousness is interpreted as a conceptual strategy, a set of modes and perceptions by which what is latent in the material landscapes of the city can be discovered and read back into the fictive landscapes of the four novels, and vice versa. Thus reading the city as text and the text as city is a recursive process, a series of *flâneries*: the art of straying. Each novel as I show in the chapters to follow, responds differently to such a way of reading, as does the material city in the four *dérives* which interleave the chapters.

My interpretation and utilisation of topographical consciousness draws on several of Benjamin's key ideas, the central one being the 'dialectical image'. Clustered around it are other related concepts including: thresholds as zones of transformation and energy; the city as locus for mythologies of modernity; and the dream houses of modernity in which a 'world of secret affinities opens up'.[33] These concepts, like topographical features, appear and re-appear in this thesis and can be read and re-read in different ways: I offer a brief discussion of them below, beginning with the dialectical image.

Benjamin's view of history was as a non-linear, non-narrative form, to be disrupted, fragmented, blasted out of its sedimentary periodization and opened up to the present moment.[34] He offered a complex idea to encompass this in the 'dialectical image': a spatialisation of time; a fragment which creates the mosaic of history and breaks up and interrupts notions of historical progress by a sudden interruptive shock of juxtaposition, the principle also of the montage. Susan Buck-Morss, in her work on Benjamin's dialectics of seeing, argues that the concept of the dialectical image is overdetermined and cannot be given

[31] Demetz, xxxviii.
[32] Gilloch, 9.
[33] Benjamin, *Arcades* [R2,3], 540.
[34] Anastasia Graf, 'Reading/Writing the Dialectical Image –Walter Benjamin and Osip Mandel'stam', *Paroles Gelees*, UCLA French Studies (Spring 2004), 21 (1), 31-37.

a fully systematic interpretation.[35] Her view (which informs this thesis), is that it describes images and objects produced by a new mode of production – industrial capitalism – in which the old is intermingled with the new and the archaic interacts with the modern[36] as seen in the jumbled mass of out-of-date objects crammed in the Paris Arcades. Such images are 'wishful fantasies', collective dreams, and Benjamin's goal was not merely to represent the dream as did the Surrealists, but to dispel it. Dialectical images were to draw dream images into an awakened state, and awakening was synonymous with knowledge.[37] As Benjamin has stressed, the dialectical image is 'experienced' and I suggest that a confrontation with such an image can occur through reading the city as text. In *Dérive* II, for example, my encounter with the mythological figures of the late 19th century Sir Arthur Phillip Memorial Fountain which seem to rear up against the glass and steel towers of 21st century corporate Sydney has the qualities of such an image. In the fictional city of *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, the writer Knarf experiences the revolutionary awakening of a dialectical image in the ruins of the Anzac Memorial.

As I show in the chapters to follow, through juxtaposition and montage, the notion of the dialectical image can provide insights into reading the historical layering of the material city and therefore into how the city's topography has been fictionalised, often through 'spatial moments' when time appears to stand still within a particular place. Such an approach is particularly suited to the four novels in this thesis in each of which the linear narrative has been replaced by modernism's spatialising notions of temporality 'which overlap, collide, and register their own incompletion'.[38] Conducting oneself as such an 'archaeologist' of the metropolitan requires modes of perception including that of paying attention to city thresholds, myths, and urban phantasmagoria, reading the city as a text through its buildings and streets, as well as the intimate personal and public collective memories which have been laid down in the cityscape .

The 'zones' of urban thresholds were a central figure in Benjamin's writings on cities: 'Transformation, passage, wave action are in the word *schwellen* [thresholds] … and etymology ought not to overlook these senses.'[39] I argue that the fictional cities of Sydney are rich in threshold experiences and these often occur where the natural environment – the sea,

[35] Buck-Morss, 1990, 67.
[36] Ibid., 148.
[37] Ibid., 261.
[38] Tim Armstrong, *Modernism: A Cultural History* (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2005), 9.
[39] Benjamin, *Arcades* [O2a, 1], 494.

the bush, the still wild places of the city – lies alongside the built environment. In my reading, I also look out for the seemingly marginal figures in the fictional urban landscapes, and I seek to attend to what they have to say about the city. Such figures – human, plant, animal, thing, spectre – often appear at the edges of the urban narrative, and at thresholds literal and symbolic. By their nature, these figures also constitute the temporal-spatial circumstances in which dialectical images can arise.

Topographical reading is also concerned with 'the myths of modernity': French Surrealists recognized the metropolis as the locus of myth and it was Louis Aragon who coined the term. Myths of modernity, unlike classical myths, do not arise from the compulsions of nature, but rather pay homage to the creations of humankind: the commodities, buildings, and machines of the cityscapes.[40] Benjamin drew on this Surrealist concept of the metropolis as the principal site of the phantasmagoria of modernity, the new manifestation of myth and the 'new nature'. Railway stations, department stores, museums and arcades are among Benjamin's 'dream houses of modernity': inspired by the dream of progress, they are profound forms of the phantasmagoria of the modern epoch. Benjamin considered that what he termed the fantasies of the epoch remain sedimented in these and other city buildings and through them we can experience the traces of the past, the landscape of consumption.[41] Such residual relics and layers of modernity – observed through leisurely walks in Sydney's cityscapes – can be 'excavated' by the 'archaeologist of the metropolitan' in a reading of the city as text as did Benjamin in the arcades of Paris.

To read with such a topographical consciousness also means to look for the individual and collective memories that are sedimented or buried in the material and fictional landscapes of the city. Svetlana Boym terms these 'unintentional memorials', and Benjamin 'the bloody knots in the network of the streets, lairs of love and conflagrations'. Such a common corpus of emotional landmarks suggests multiple narratives cannot be completely mapped[42] but can guide an exploration of 'the hybrids of past and present'.[43]

Reading the city as text and the text as city also draws on the figures of the urban walker, and the *flâneur*. The trope of the walker has a long literary history however it is pre-dated by that of the voyage and the voyager in works such as the *Odyssey*, later to be re-worked in James

[40]Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant* [1926], Simon Watson Taylor, trans.(Great Britain: Picador, 1987), 132; 137.
[41] Gilloch,124;129.
[42] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 52.
[43] Ibid., 31.

Joyce's urban novel of walking *Ulysses* (1922). Such walking and wandering figures pass in and out of literary fashion, discarding some meanings and forms while accumulating others, however both the *flâneur* and the voyager have been remarkably persistent and I turn next to a re-conceptualisation these figures in my reading of the city.

The *flâneur* of the late 18th to early 19th centuries has remained a constant figure into 21st century culture, re-worked and re-envisioned, a moving, multilayered palimpsest,[44] a mode of reading the modern city. The tropes of the voyage and the voyager, on the other hand, have become unfashionable if not ideologically unsound: they suggest the conquering of territories for Empire under the guise of adventure, where the quest for knowledge and exploration of 'new worlds' opens up new markets for capitalism. However, my re-envisioned composite figure of the *flâneur*/urban voyager, resists the dominance of capitalist spatialisation of the modern city through the very nature of her gait which is not defined by speed, goal directed economic purpose or utilitarianism, but by loitering, hesitation, meandering and straying: resistantly drifting against such dominant paradigms. I lay out the methodologies for realising this 'on the ground' reading in the discussion below on 'Walking the book'.

Both text and city open up to the *flâneur* as a walking mode of perception of urban modernity. In Benjamin's words:

> Landscape – that, in fact, is what Paris becomes for the *flâneur*. Or, more precisely: the city splits for him into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room.[45]

A textual significance is thus ascribed to the art of taking a walk: the city becomes a text, the book of the street unfolds its program as a way of walking that names a process of reading which in turn, formulates an art of seeing as reading.[46] The *flâneur* also 'writes' the city, bringing back material from her walks which can be fashioned into poems, articles, reports, stories, novels, even academic theses. Through these written works, the *flâneur* attempts to render the city's complex spaces, pressing crowds and rapid pace of change more legible, or conversely, to demonstrate the insane illegibility of modern city spaces and life. The *flâneur* is thus multi-functional, 'a complex and versatile figure not tied to time, place and status but an analytic form, a narrative device, an attitude towards knowledge and its social context'[47]

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[44] Chris Jenks, 'Watching Your Step: the History and Practice of the Flâneur', in Chris Jenks, ed., *Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 142-160; 148.
[45] Benjamin, *Arcades* [M1, 4], 417.
[46] Gleber, 10-11.
[47] Jenks, 142.

and I add, a set of textual and narrative strategies for reading and writing the city's topographies.

Buck-Morss argues that 'the *flâneur* becomes extinct only by exploding into a myriad of forms 'the phenomenological characteristics of which, no matter how new they may appear, continue to bear his traces as in ur-form'.[48] The urban voyager I suggest, inhabits one of these myriad forms, or is perhaps the *flâneur's* antipodean alter ego or avatar.

Like the *flâneur*, the figure of the urban voyager arose from 19th century cities such as London when the city emerged as a landscape to be traversed via 'voyages of discovery', as in Thomas De Quincey's nocturnal ramblings through London where the city becomes a landscape of passage.[49] Under the influence of modernism, the voyager became uncoupled from the sea and the sea-faring past, expanding the boundaries to include the modernist urban wanderer. The voyage moved into the city itself, encompassing a more complex social and spiritual involvement with urban realities. This expanded modernist mode thus opens out to include the voyage into and out of solitude and despair; the sense of city-continuities and discontinuities; the (often fruitless) search for growth and new experiences and the re-imaging of these from the 'voyager back streets' into poetry and prose.[50] In the more traditional literary figure of the voyager, inner lives take on the outer landscapes of desert and sea, whereas in reconceptualising the urban voyager figure as a mode of reading the modern city and the modernist text, it is the topography of the city – its streets, lanes, buildings, open spaces – which is psychically transformed and reconfigured.

The urban voyager is, like the *flâneur,* in some respects an outdated, old fashioned figure. However it is this very obsolescence which makes both figures such rich modes for apprehending the shifting spaces of the post-industrial, late capitalist modern city, for reading the 'dreams of progress' and the 'residues of modernity' laid down in the buildings and landscapes, comprehending the ways in which, to use Lynda Neade's words, modernity leans

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[48] Buck-Morss, 1990, 101.

[49] 'Some of these rambles led me great distances … And sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye upon the polestar, and seeking ambitiously for a north-west passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and headlands I doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems as alleys, such enigmatical entries and such sphinx's riddles of streets without thoroughfares … I could almost have believed at times, that I must be the first discoverer of these terrae incognitae, and doubted whether they had as yet been laid down in the modern charts of London'. Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater and Other Writings*, [1821] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 47-48.

[50] Thomas Shapcott, 'Developments in the Voyager Tradition of Australian Verse', in Chris Tiffen, ed., *South Pacific Images* (University of Queensland, Brisbane: South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, 1978), 93-106.

upon and is haunted by the figure of the past.[51] In their 'modern antiquity' the *flâneur* and the voyager thus offer conduits to the experience of Benjamin's dialectical image.

These intertwined figures will accompany me on the textual tours of the city as a pose, a performance, at once literal and imaginary, a metaphorical methodology and a sensibility that actively, resistantly and subversively reads the city.

The voyage and the voyager can also be read as metaphors for Australian modernist writers in a broader sense. Andrew Thacker, in considering how the quotidian experience of moving around the metropolis provided a key impetus to experimental forms of modernist writing, argues that it is the *voyageur* rather than the *flâneur* which allows us to develop a more nuanced account of the spatial history of modernism,[52] one which folds in colonial and post-colonial modernist writers who voyage 'in' to the metropolis as did Christina Stead and Patrick White. Sylvia Lawson conceptualises such a metaphorical voyage in terms of the paradox of being colonial:

> Metropolis, the centre of language, of the dominant culture and its judgements, lies away in the great Elsewhere; but the tasks of living, communication, teaching, acting out and changing the culture must be carried on not Elsewhere but Here. To know enough of the metropolitan world, colonials must, in limited ways at least, move and think internationally; to resist it strongly enough for the colony to cease to be colonial and become its own place, they must become nationalists.[53]

In varying ways and to lesser and greater extents this paradox haunts and drives the four novels with which I am concerned in this thesis as Stead, Barnard Eldershaw, White and Ireland wrestle with uneasy, often hostile attitudes to the project of Australian nationalism, and of Empire. Their novels (and to some extent, their literary lives) are further unsettled by the ambiguities and ambivalences of relationships with the Metropolis of Elsewhere, often London, but also the other great cities of Europe with their rich and long literary heritages.

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[51] Writing of the almost continuous process of demolition and construction in London in the 19th century, Neade uses the term 'the archaeology of modernity' to 'reveal a constitutive truth of the history of the modern': that 'modernity leans upon and is haunted by the figure of the past.' While the present declares its breach with the past, it does not go away, but is a spectral presence in the development of the new. This can be read in photographs and paintings of the cityscape (and in the material cityscape) which juxtapose old, partly demolished buildings with new ones under construction. Such a juxtaposition, 'forbids one to feel at home in the new age', as the old disturbs the confidence of the new. Nead, 32.

[52] Thacker, 7.

[53] Sylvia Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox: A Strange Case of Authorship* (Australia: Penguin Books , 1983), ix. Jules Francois Archibald was an extraordinary figure, editor of the Sydney *Bulletin* and a literary larrikin of significance who combined Australian nationalism and Francophilia, inventing his own French ancestry. He died in 1919, leaving money for the Archibald Fountain in Hyde Park. See *Dérive* II, 109

Writing of the complex relationships between Australian modernism and Empire, Bill Ashcroft and John Salter consider ‘the peculiar cultural dynamic generated in a colonised society from the moment of colonisation’ which in turn, generates a push ‘to discover a creative articulation of Australian difference’.[54]Such a dynamic is driven not only by Lawson’s paradox of being colonial, but also by the broader paradox of modernity described by Marshall Berman as the realization that the human freedom and liberation enabled by the forces of modernization are constantly threatened by the totalizing tendencies of those forces towards increasingly oppressive forms of rationality and standardization.The paradox of modernity yields dynamic tensions between the exhilarating possibilities of modernization and a profound sense of loss. This tension defines the experience of modernity.[55]

Such paradoxes and tensions I seek to place within a mode of critical reflection on the modern tradition that Boym conceptualizes as the ‘off-modern’ where the adverb *off* ‘confuses our sense of direction … makes us explore sideshows and back alleys rather than the straight road of progress’. The off-modern also makes room for 20th century modernists such as Stead, Barnard Eldershaw, White and Ireland who come not from ‘edge cultures’, but from ‘ec-centric’ traditions, those often considered marginal or provincial with respect to the cultural mainstream. Boym extends her conceptualization of the off-modern into what she terms ‘edgy geography’. ‘This is a logic’ she writes, ‘that exposes wounds, cuts, scars, ruins, the afterimage of touch. Its edginess resists incorporation and doesn’t allow for a romance of convenience … the off-moderns are edgy, not marginal.’[56]

In drawing from the city of Sydney, these four writers derive creative energies by cultivating rather than resolving the contradictions of modernity – thus revealing that modernity is a chronically unstable, precarious but also exhilarating existence. Their novels – creative articulations of Australian difference – are, I argue in this thesis, generated by the peculiar cultural dynamic of Sydney, read through its fictional and material topographies, its ‘edgy geography’.

[54] Bill Ashcroft and John Salter, ‘Modernism’s Empire: Australia and the Cultural Assumptions of Style’, in Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby, eds., *Modernism and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 294.
[55] Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).
[56] Svetlana Boym,‘The Off-Modern Mirror’, *e-flux journal* #19, 10/2010. http:www.e-flux.com/journal/the off-modern-mirror/ (no page nos.). Accessed 20 October 2012.

**Walking the book**

In my reading and walking practices, to leave the city of one novel and enter that of the next is to encounter the familiar made strange and the strange familiar. The urban terrains of all four novels overlap and intersect to varying extents and to the walking reader the fictional and the material cities haunt each other. Roland Barthes writes of reading that occurs while 'looking up from your book'. Such reading is 'at once insolent in that it interrupts the text, and smitten in that it keeps returning to it and feeding on it'. He calls this other text, the 'text-as-reading'.[57]This process occurs hauntingly while walking the book and reading in place: as I look up from my reading at the material cityscapes of the 21st century, I read yet another text, another city. 'Walking the book', I suggest, is not only a method for traversing and navigating the material and fictional city landscapes but also a creative and subversive act which has the potential to reveal Sydney's hidden topographies and to engender new ways of seeing and experiencing changing urban spaces: a path becomes a sentence, each walk becomes a narrative as the many criss-crossing paths create a 'walkscape'.[58]

Precedents for the literary practices of 'walking the book' and 'reading in place' exist in the field of ecocriticism where they are used extensively to research relationships between nature writing and the physical environment. Ecocriticism starts with the landscape, and maps the literature on to it: an understanding of place is considered essential to a sensitive and informed reading of the text. The study of place/sense of place is moved from the periphery (where it is merely the setting) to the centre of consideration thereby shifting reading positions. This place based reading requires not only a knowledge of the imaginative literature, but also the places themselves which can be gained in various ways: by habitation, by walking the ground/book, reading in place, through the study of historical and scientific texts, and a combination of some or all of these.[59]

While I am influenced by such an approach, I have formulated my own set of urban practices for walking the book, looking initially to the 'schooling' provided by French Surrealists André Breton and related others which perhaps have their fullest literary expression in Aragon's *Paris Peasant*. The Surrealists envisaged a mode of walking the city in which

[57] Roland Barthes, 'Writing Reading', *The Rustle of Language*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 29-30.
[58] Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Rossello, 2004).
[59] Robert Zeller and C.A. Cranston, 'Setting the Scene: Littoral and Critical Contexts', in C.A. Cranston and Robert Zeller, eds., *The Littoral Zone: Australian Writers and their Contexts* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2007), 7-30.

disorientation enabled entry into a fictional, oneiric world: walking in such a manner revealed the repressed memories of the city, its collective unconscious. Benjamin was also influenced by the Surrealists in his own walking, in particular seeing the montage-like possibilities of the city through the concept of the 'profane illumination' which he describes as 'a materialistic, anthropological inspiration' and 'an intoxication, a moral exhibitionism that we badly need'.[60] The profane illumination was to engender Benjamin's own concept of the dialectical image. In Paris in the 1950s and 60s, the Lettrists who later morphed into the Situationists[61], a small group of left wing urban artists, were influenced by such ideas into developing their own walking practices including the urban drift or *dérive* through which they sought to rupture what they considered to be the rationalist paradigms controlling their city.[62]

The *dérives* are central to my approach, underpinning the analytical and interpretative chapters on each novel while also releasing creative potential. The performance of these passages through the varying ambiences of urban terrains enact the contingencies of city life, informing my reading strategies at every level and drawing the reader through the narrative topographies of the thesis. Central to the *dérives* is the practice of *détournment* – diverting, hijacking, re-routing[63] – which can be applied to any aspect of urban life including maps, streets, billboards, monuments. Its complex Benjaminian 'other' is the dialectical image, in which past and present fuse into an insightful spatial moment of revolutionary perception. In the *dérives* I am open to such experiences of the city as the *détournment* and the dialectical image which in turn inform strategies for a textual reading of the four novels.

The *dérive* is not simply a vehicle for chance encounters nor a procedural operation: it is an intervention, a planned mode of experiencing the city across designated spatial fields with specified entry and exit points which also remains open to the aleatory and the oneiric. In the spirit of the Surrealists and the Situationists, I have both 're-appropriated' and refashioned some of their practices. First, I use each novel as a map: that is I literally walk the narrative, following its streets, entering its public places, passing by its buildings, and puzzling out its

[60] Benjamin, 'Surrealism', *Reflections*, 179-180. Benjamin was later to develop his concept of the more politically charged 'dialectical image' from the Surrealist 'profane illumination'.
[61] Who in turn in the 1960s, became the Situationist International, a much more politically oriented group who rejected the earlier artistic 'situations' created in Paris. Guy Debord was influential in all three groups. See Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998).
[62] See in particular, Hollevoet and Sadler.
[63] *Détournement* is most simply translated as 'diversion', however as Sadler points out, this causes a loss of the nuances encoded in the original French – 'rerouting', 'highjacking', 'embezzlement', 'misappropriation', 'corruption' – all acts implicit in the Situationist use of society's pre-existing aesthetic elements. Ibid., 17.

impasses, detours, forgotten places: the art of straying, of getting lost. Read in this way, each book thus acts to 'defamiliarise' me: Sydney is my home city, but to follow a book in such a manner is a confusing and disorienting process which, as the Surrealists and Situationists believed, can then open up new revolutionary possibilities for seeing the unfamiliar in the familiar.Second, walking the book makes visible the narrative topography of each novel and its relations to the material topography, not only the particular places, but the relationships between them, suggesting also the myriad ways in which the novelistic terrains as a group intersect and overlap: a form of experimental mapping. I am also influenced here by Boym's concept of the 'biographies' of memorials – the debates and controversies around them – which might be as important as their form[64] and I open this up to include other places in the city – reading the streets, buildings and parks through their 'geo-biographies.' As Michael Sheringham suggests, to 'expose the hidden histories of familiar monuments is to defamiliarize the city we thought we knew, and to wrench us out of the present, into an intermediate zone of overlapping time scales'.[65] Third, the *dérive* throws a different light on the places which were charged emotionally for the writers in their own lives in the city, and suggests 'ambiences' which I then trace back into the fictional topographies.

Such investigations may also reveal patterns of association between urban places lost through the passage of time but which still exist in the fictional topographies. These 'drifts' – figurative and literal – are not therefore aimless wanderings, but voyages of discovery in the manner of De Quincey.

I envisage the urban drift then, as literal and figurative wandering: [66] an attempt to advance productively into new territory by wandering away or straying from or beyond accepted norms and conventions of literary criticism. In the mode of the Situationists drifting against the dominant paradigm of the rationalist, functionalist, technological city, I too am moving against a dominant literary paradigm, one which reduces 'place' in fiction to mere setting, background or scene, or which favours the symbolic, abstract analysis of space. I choose instead to read through the centrality of place, to see the city as an archive, a repository of 'written traces enshrined in topographies' in which the 'literary palimpsest and the urban

[64] Boym, 2001, 79.
[65] Michael Sheringham, 'Archiving' in Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart, eds., *Restless Cities* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), 9.
[66] I am influenced here by Julia McCord Chavez 'The Gothic Heart of Victorian Serial Fiction,' *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, (Autumn, 2010), 50/4,791-810.

palimpsest go hand in hand'.[67] Like the Situationists, I am 'unashamedly re-reading meanings onto the streets'[68]of the city, looking for those often unplanned places and features of the topographical landscape which seem capable of transforming urban consciousness.[69] This thesis thus extends beyond the four novels into the material, physical world of the city, past, present and future: such walks, undertaken as a research method, deliberately overstep limits to create alternative cartographies of the city.

**Reading the texts**

In accordance with such an approach and following that of Hillis Miller,[70]the chapters on each of the four novels rather than being sequenced chronologically are juxtaposed spatially. I begin with Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934), followed by David Ireland's *City of Women* (1981), Patrick White's *The Vivisector* (1970) and finally, M. Barnard Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1947). The novels are thus torn out of their historical contexts and re-placed, set in dialogue with each other: as in the novels themselves, linear time is disrupted and new constellations allowed into being as the thesis creates its own set of topographies.

Each chapter however, follows a similar structure beginning with a contextualisation of the production and reception of the novel, and a delineation of the theoretical and conceptual path that will be taken in each. Following Hillis Miller and influenced by the *dérives*, I have allowed each text to suggest this path which is intertwined with reading with a topographical consciousness. The novels are further contextualised through an outline of each writer's relation to Sydney. Rather than linear biographies, I turn spatial locations into biographical passages,[71]directing my attention towards local attachments to place, to the intersections between writers' lived narratives and their creations of the city, the ways in which they not only inhabit the city, but it inhabits them.[72] This approach folds in places of composition, what Umberto Eco somewhat scathingly calls 'episodes of literary fanship.'[73] However, my

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[67] Sheringham, 13.
[68] Sadler, 88.
[69] Ibid., 95.
[70] Hillis Miller writes that the chapters of his book exist as a 'strange spatial array … through which various lines of exploration … are possible by following different paths of relation. Each chapter can be related to the others by a multitude of different conceptual and figurative links', 6.
[71] A phrase borrowed from Gleber.
[72] My sources are primary and secondary: writers' letters, articles, essays, memoirs, diaries and biographies.
[73] Eco writes about readers – including himself – who go looking for the houses, streets, etc. where writers lived and/or those which appear in their fictional works. These are, he writes, 'episodes of literary fanship – which is a pleasant activity and moving at times, but different to the reading of texts.' As I show in this thesis, these

intention is not the creation of a literary geography or literary guide, nor am I concerned with tracing the verisimilitude of the fictional representations of the city. My interest lies in reading the complex shifting connections between writers and their city through the emotions and memories which arise from and are laid down in the urban landscape and in tracing these into the fictional topographies of the novels. Such 'bio-geographies' of writers attempt therefore to understand the spatiality and temporality of emotions as they coalesce around and within certain places: the emotional relationality of people and their environments.[74] The city as a set of urban places can thus be understood as being constituted within an emotionally charged middle ground.

In my close textual readings, I begin by addressing the entry into the fictive city through particular places and threshold figures. Jacques Derrida's essay on Prague poses the question 'What is a *threshold*, for a city? A gate, walls and administrative border, a natural enclosure, the limits of a customs post? Is it enough to speak of the threshold to speak of the identity of a city?'[75]He suggests that the city can sometimes be found *at the threshold* – not simply inscribed within the figure of the threshold, but at the very threshold of a new figure, of a still invisible configuration which it must provide for itself. Derrida is not talking here about cities in fiction, but these ideas have been influential in considering the textual strategies writers use to usher readers over the threshold of the city into the fictional spaces beyond, and how these entry thresholds and the figures that mark them reverberate throughout the narrative.

Detailed interpretative readings of each novel constitute the main part of each chapter, bringing literary analysis and theoretical perspectives together with the dialectics of reading and walking. Through the four interleaving *dérives* the material city is brought into contact with the fictive city, linking the cities spatially, not through a definitive map or set of signposts, but rather through 'erroneous wandering, away from the straight track, not far away but usually out of sight of it'.[76]

In Chapter One 'Mythical visions in the modern city', I read Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* through the form of the 'old tale', one which borrows from Charles Dickens

'episodes' are also a form of reading which I prefer to call 'acts', including them within my walking and reading of the city. Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 84.

[74] Liz Bondi, Joyce Davidson and Mick Smith, 'Geography's Emotional Turn', in Liz Bondi et al eds., *Emotional Geographies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

[75] Jacques Derrida,'*Générations d'une ville*/Generations of a City,' in John Knechel, ed., Rebecca Comay, trans., *Open City* (Toronto: Alphabet City, Vol. Six, 1998), 12-27.

[76] Robert Harbison, *Eccentric Spaces* (Great Britain: Andre Deutsch, 1977), 8.

and more significantly, from myths, fairy tales and the gothic. As I show, the mytho-poetic visions that constantly arise come not only from Sydney and its surreal dreamscapes, but also from the natural environment surrounding the city where the ancient and primeval lie alongside the new and the urban; natural forces are juxtaposed with the political and psychological giving rise to the ‘strange, archaic tales’ which run parallel to the everyday and the banal. I explore how vantage points shift from panoramic views of the city, its varied topographies and the broader political turmoil of the international seamen’s strike, to close-up, almost claustrophobically intense views of the outer and inner lives of a group of young men and women, as they struggle to survive in a city undergoing social, political and economic change. The narrative is tracked topographically as it constantly swerves from the social realist to the mythic and into the modern urban gothic: Stead’s Sydney appears as a hybrid, gothicized space, both a city and still a ‘settlement,’ wild and ordered, imbued with a sense of impermanence, its inhabitants out-of-place, ontologically unstable.

Following in the footsteps of the novel’s manic walkers, I first investigate the myths of modernity through ‘textual tours’ of the ‘political terrain,’ sites of radical activity around the southern end of the city. I map the seamen’s strike on to this terrain and trace its significance through the narrative. Intertwined with the political terrain are the places in which passions – often of mythical propensity – arise in the city. Love, deathly and monstrous, and thwarted sexual desire are among the powerful passions which Stead maps onto the city’s topographies and I track the places in which such intense emotions arise, tracing the psychic burdens they leave behind:  individual, social, cultural and historical. Stead’s city, I argue, generates its own myths from the stories which arise from its politically and emotionally charged landscapes.

The carnivalesque inside-out world of David Ireland’s radically transgressive novel *City of Women* is the subject of Chapter Two. In this novel, Sydney has become a futuristic utopia, an enclosed deviant community from which women have expelled men to the Edge of the City. Of the four novels in this study, it is the one in which walking and writing the city are most closely aligned: the ‘patchwork’ narrative being created from letters written by narrator Billie Shockley to her absent daughter or lover recounting the tales of the City. To walk through the streets of Ireland’s novel in her footsteps takes the reader through some of the same terrain as *Seven Poor Men*: Woolloomooloo, the Domain, Hyde Park, St Mary’s Cathedral. The narrative opens out and closes in as Billie moves from her window looking at

the constantly shifting views of the city to the interior of her room where she writes the stories of the City, to walking the streets.

I contend that readers enter *City of Women* under the sign of subversive carnival logic as invoked by the unspoken but permeating presence of Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade and the threshold figure of Bobbie the leopard. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualisation of the literary carnivalesque I conceptualise a modern urban carnivalesque aesthetic which operates topographically in the narrative through several intertwining modes: what Bakhtin calls 'anatomical localisations' in which topographies of body and city are mapped onto each other; the topsy-turvy movements of inversions and uncrownings of male and female hierarchies; and the 'beastly places' where inversions and boundary crossings occur in animal and human relationships. It is Ireland's modern urban carnivalesque aesthetic I argue, that allows this subversive re-imagining of urban space and perception within the familiar metropolis.

From Ireland's city of 'monstrous women' I move to that of the 'monstrous' Hurtle Duffield, successful artist, sexual predator, and searcher for the divine, with whom in Patrick White's *The Vivisector* we experience life in Sydney from the end of the 19th century to the 1960s. The narrative is rich in thresholds usually located in places which are on the edges of the urban in various senses: rocky gorges in the bushland fringe; weed infested 19th century parks and decaying mansions; seawalls and harbour ferries. I read these and other threshold places through the uncanny, drawing on Freud's 1919 essay and also on more recent interpretations including that of Anthony Vidler's urban spatial uncanny.[77]

*The Vivisector* is about the dead, and 'ancestors' of various kinds haunt places and objects in the city, which return repeatedly in the narrative structuring it spatially. White's Sydney is entered through the figure of a box of relics which in several guises circulates throughout the narrative, its uncanny re-appearances associated with the anxiety of dubious ancestry: Hurtle's and that of ex-colonial Sydney, built over the remains of indigenous peoples. I trace the appearances of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* through topographical readings of three uncanny houses: Sunningdale at Rushcutters Bay; Hurtle's Paddington house; and the 'Sydney Tudor' house of his lover at Vaucluse. Next I turn to urban sites of public encounters, erotic and apocalyptic, and trace the threads that connect them: the rocky gorge;

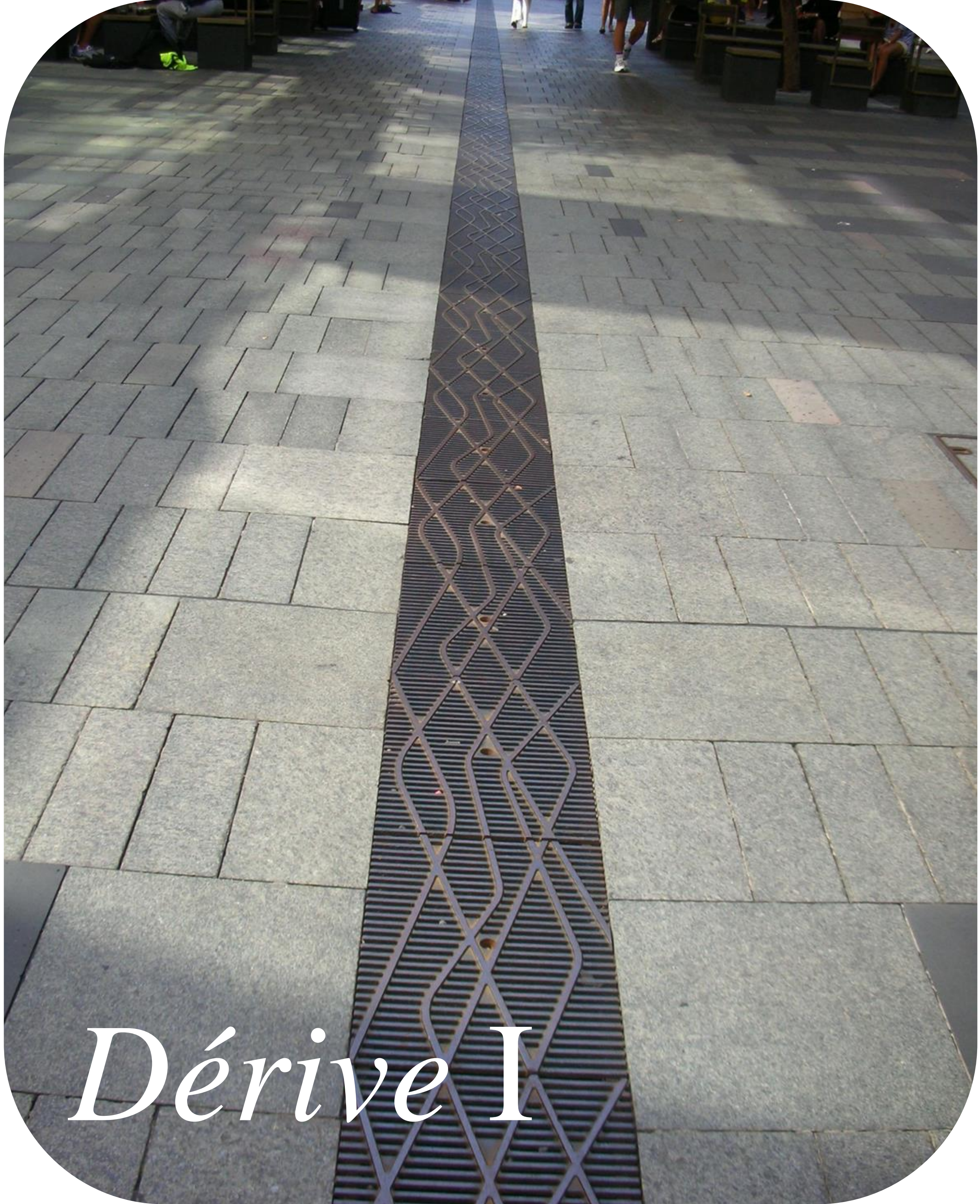
[77] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).

the Gash; the Manly ferry and the State Gallery. I focus on how the narrative has increasingly moved 'beyond the frame' and my conclusion offers a re-conceptualisation of the edges of the urban as places of release, a potential for another order.

The whiff of the apocalyptic that hangs over the previous three novels materialises in M. Barnard Elderhaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* as this 'textual tour' through Sydney's fictional topographies is brought to a close with the destruction of the city by its own citizens. The novel also has something perhaps larger and more profound to say about Australia than the other three novels, including its global relationships and colonial legacies which, as Barnard Eldershaw suggest, have planted the seeds of its own destruction. The novel shares with *Seven Poor Men* a sense of crisis, of the need to take political action, intensified by the Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War. It also shares a terrain with the other three novels, in particular Woolloomooloo, not the valley as in *Seven Poor Men* and *City of Women*, but the ridge at the top of William Street which runs south to Surry Hills, Hurtle Duffield's childhood home, and north to Kings Cross and Rushcutters Bay.

Like *City of Women, Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* presents a dark, violent futuristic dystopia which takes the experimental form not of a city within a city, but of a novel within a novel. Its dual narrative shuttles back and forth across the spatial and temporal zones of Sydney from the early 1920s until its destruction in the later part of the $20^{th}$ century, and a retro-futuristic rural Commune in the $24^{th}$ century. These two fictional worlds of urban modernity and rural communalism intersect, overlap and intertwine in disturbing and fantastic ways. Knarf, the $24^{th}$ century writer of the $20^{th}$ century Sydney novel and Ord, his archaeologist friend, are voyagers between these worlds, and it is through a series of voyages through the ruins of modernity that I read this novel's topographies, focussing in particular on Darlinghurst/Woolloomooloo Hill, Kings Cross, and the Anzac Memorial.

In addition, my topographical reading moves between two dialectical ways of seeing and comprehending the city: the close-up 'ruin gaze,' and three spatio-temporal panoramas. The panoramas take in the four centuries of Australian history as projected on the landscape around Commune Ten; a busy night at Central Station in the 1920s; and the view of Sydney burning from the top of the AWA Tower. Through the ruination of Sydney I argue that Barnard Eldershaw ultimately offer us a new way of seeing, a Benjaminian awakening into the space of history in which the city of Sydney is reconfigured as a 'prophesying place' warning of the possibilities of a dystopian future.


Dérive I

*Dériver:* to drift or drive, as a ship, with wind or current.

*Oxford English Dictionary* [78]

He drifted about with her and the Folliots, because a fluid personality passed more easily through that unstable society.

*Seven Poor Men of Sydney* [79]

[78] The entry word is the verb 'derive'.There are 4 distinct verbs *dérive*r in French of which this is one .*Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd ed., 1989), 500.

[79] Christina Stead, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* [1934], (North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1981), 59. Page references are to this edition and will be referenced parenthetically in the text. Henceforth referred to as *Seven Poor Men.*

## *Dérive* I

The *dérive* is a drift, an aquatic metaphor for a series of fluid, spatio-temporal movements through the city which are not without direction or a vague purpose and which are sometimes 'predictable but sometimes turbulent'.[80] In this first *dérive*, my passage is not through the city, but around the sea-cliffs, beaches and paths of South Head, the city always within sight on the western horizon. The modernity of its glass and steel towers rising from the harbour performs a gothic doubling with the ancient sandstone cliffs as they rise from the Tasman Sea. This opening between North and South Heads was the entry point for the invasion of Port Jackson by the First Fleet on the 26 January 1788 which in turn, created the city of Sydney: the terrain is marked by these events and also bears the lighter more elusive signatures of the indigenous people who lived here. My plan is to walk from Watsons Bay wharf to Christina Stead's former house at 14 Pacific Avenue, through the village which she re-named Fisherman's Bay, taking the bush track to the tip of South Head. From here, I re-trace Michael Baguenault's own drifting and wandering from the rock pools and platforms below inner South Head, along the cliffs of Outer South Head to The Gap, the Signal Station, Macquarie Lighthouse and finally, Rosa Gully.

At ten am on a grey steamy February morning, I catch the first ferry from Circular Quay to Watsons Bay. A cool southerly change had arrived the day before after a week of high temperatures, it was starting to rain, and most of the small group of passengers sheltered inside for the half hour voyage. Ferries to Watsons Bay began in 1854 and a full commuter and tourist service was run until 1933 when trams and buses took over.[81] In *Seven Poor Men,* the daily commuter trips from Fisherman's Bay to Circular Quay work to structure the narrative connecting the Bay with the city through the bursts of activity and noise associated with a ferry departing and arriving at the wharf: whistles, shouting, running, waves roaring under the cliffs and the transitions that are made

[80] McKenzie Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Street:The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International* (London, New York: Verso, 2011), 22.
[81] Robyn Dericourt, *South Head and the Origins of Watsons Bay* (Sydney: Watsons Bay Association, 2011), 44.

by those returning from their urban workaday worlds to the domestic life of the village and the turbulent life of the sea.

> The kitchen lights were shining over the green; warm odours of meals floated in the air, full of spray, and darkness was escaping from its hill prisons, from the troughed water and from the sky of spent storm clouds. The telegraph lines sang loud … 'Your cousin was found dead outside the Gap this morning. On the rocks, washed up.'(252)

In the Bay, complex sets of spatial relations are played out through the various emotional and psychic responses to its landscapes and to the city beyond. For Joseph, Michael and Catherine Baguenault, the Bay holds out the hope of home and belonging but as Stead shows, this is not to be relied upon: the cosy domesticity of the little cottages with their shining plates on the dressers, smell of tea cooking and smoke rising, can suddenly fall away exposing the jagged rocks and monsters lurking in the abyss, and 'the misery of life spread too far'(253).

> The hideous low scarred yellow horny and barren headland lies curled like a scorpion in a blinding sea and sky (1)

Thus does Stead open the novel, and as I stand on the wharf, I look across to South Head. Photographs of the headland and Watsons Bay taken in the early 20th century do show such a barren environment, almost devoid of trees with only a few houses, one of which may be Stead's former home, standing forlornly on the edge of the bay. Today, the headland is dense with trees and bush, the result of a regeneration program, and of course, with houses: this is one of the most expensive places in Sydney. I wonder if the 'scars' in the landscape caused by the shelling practice of the old military base are still visible.

From the wharf, I walk north along the beach where many small boats are drawn up on the sand. On such a grey misty morning, it seems deserted, and I can feel time dissolve. Even when Stead lived here in the 1920s, the Bay was already a popular tourist destination and the days of the ramshackle fishing community she creates in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* were nearly over. In 1911, a *Tourists' Guide to Watsons Bay and Vaucluse* was published – attractions included the Hornby and Macquarie Lighthouses, the South Head Fortifications,

The Gap, already well-known as a suicide location, and the Signal Station. Ferries and trams drew visitors to the area – hotels, Tea Rooms and restaurants opened.[82]

As I walk along the concrete promenade, I conjure up the evening picnic held by Governor Lachlan Macquarie and his party in 1811 at what was then called Camp Cove, 'where the native fig tree spreads its foliage into an agreeable alcove'.[83] It was during this picnic that Macquarie named the sheltered bay in honour of Robert Watson. Previously, the beaches inside South Head were known generically as 'Camp Cove' after the two nights that Captain Arthur Phillip and his reconnaissance party spent there while looking for a more favourable place to settle than Botany Bay. Watson had sailed in the First Fleet on the *Sirius* and later became a signaller on South Head. In 1805 he was appointed pilot and lived in the bay which was later to take his name.[84]

[82] The tram line opened in 1903 and closed in 1960 to be replaced by buses.
[83] Claire McIntyre, *On the Edge: Deaths at the Gap* (Charnwood, ACT: Ginninderra Press, 2001), 12.
[84] Ibid. Dericourt also notes that 'Watsons Bay village remained the location of pilots until 25 November 2008 when the reduction of commercial shipping in Port Jackson led the Sydney Ports Corporation to relocate to Millers Point the pilot's base at Gibson's Beach on the south of Watsons Bay', 47.

At the end of the beach, I take a narrow lane and a few turns later, arrive at Stead's former home at 14 Pacific Avenue. It is up for sale and open for inspection, and even an urban drifter is welcomed in by the agents. The house, which faces the Bay, has undergone several major renovations and a fire since Stead's father David bought it in 1917. It was then a dilapidated two storey weather board house, built around 1880, and its previous owners had included a steam boat proprietor, the keeper of the Hornby Lighthouse and a Harbour pilot.[85] Stead, a second-generation Australian of working-class origins and a naturalist and pioneer conservationist, changed the house's name from Brighton to Boongarre 'after an aboriginal chief who had lived in the area'.[86] The name most likely can be attributed to the well-known and influential Bungaree, who was from the north, Broken Bay, in the vicinity of Pittwater where he was born around 1770, and who came to live on the northern shores of Port Jackson in 1814 with his group.[87] The destructive impact of European settlement on the lives of Aboriginal people living around Port Jackson, together with the devastating effect of the outbreak of a smallpox-like disease in 1790, meant that surviving Aboriginal clans often moved to other areas and, as in the case of Bungaree, were drawn to the settlement of Sydney. In addition, he and his respected wife Cora Gooseberry, together with other members of his band, camped in places around South Head.[88] In 1815, in recognition of his services, which included that of leader of town Aborigines, Governor Macquarie gave him the title of 'Chief of the Broken Bay tribe.' He died in 1830 and was buried at Rose Bay – his grave is lost.

As archaeologist Val Attenbrow observes, it is difficult to establish the names of the clans who occupied particular areas in and around Port Jackson as information can only be drawn from the written accounts of the members of the First Fleet and others who followed them. It appears that the traditional owners of the harbour area around Watsons Bay were known as the Birrabirragal clan, a name associated with the rocky reef near the harbour mouth,

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[85] Gordon and Valich, *Architect's Site Plan, 14 and 14a Pacific Street*, November 1997, Local History Research File: Catalogue Record 137876. Documents held at Woollahra Local History Centre.

[86] Rowley notes that King Boongarre is described in P. Cunningham, *Two Years in New South Wales*, London, 1828, vol.1, 41- 43.The pages in Cunningham to which she refers describe an Aboriginal who is clearly Bungaree, which has also been spelt 'Boongaree'. Hazel Rowley, *Christina Stead: a Biography* (Port Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia,1993), 35; 569, note 1.

[87] For information on Bungaree and his wife Cora Gooseberry, see Melinda Hinkson, *Aboriginal Sydney; A Guide to Important Places of the Past and Present* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press,[2001] 2010) ,45-46; Val Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past : Investigating the Archeological and Historical Records* (Sydney: University NSW Press, [2002] 2010), 27; Dericourt, 20-21.

[88] Dericourt notes that the plague of 1790 caused a definitive break in Aboriginal settlement of South Head, 21.

(Bir-ra-bir-ra) now known as the Sow and Pigs.[89] There remains a continuing legacy of their material culture before the period of European settlement which can be seen in the archeological evidence uncovered in middens, cave shelters – some of which have paintings in them – and rock engravings.[90] In the first year of settlement, Governor Phillip commented on the rock engravings which stretch along the cliff top at South Head: this was the site of the earliest reports by Europeans of Aboriginal art in Australia. Subjects include humans, bandicoot, kangaroos and wallabies, and marine fauna – fish, whales and sharks, as well as geometric shapes, 'carved upon the rocks'.[91]

As I walk around Boongarre, now an elegant, spacious house, I feel out of my territory. Potential buyers are commenting unfavourably on the upstairs bathrooms; one remarks to the agent that 'the rooms are a bit poky' and he discusses extensions. When Stead lived in the house, she had an upstairs back bedroom and from here she could see the signal mast on the cliffs behind. Her *alter ego*, Teresa Hawkins in *For Love Alone* (1944), can also see the mast out of her window: for her as for Stead, it is a symbol of escape, of the voyage into the wider world. For Michael Baguenault in *Seven Poor Men* however, the mast is a maleficent figure in his narcissistic landscape, complicit in his suicide. From the upstairs verandah – enclosed in Stead's day – I look out through the misty, silver light over the garden and across to Watsons Bay beach and wharf. To the west, the city is barely visible, North Head has almost disappeared in grey fog and the horizon line has vanished. As I pass through the sitting room on my way to the garden and the bay, I scan its book-lined shelves for Stead's work: prominently placed on a coffee table is Hazel Rowley's biography.

[89] Attenbrow, 28.
[90] Much of the excavation and documentation of these sites has been done by Australian Museum archaeologist Val Attenbrow. See also Dericourt; Architectural Projects Pty. Ltd*, Watson's Bay Heritage Conservation Study,* May 1997. Document held at Woollahra Local History Centre.
[91] Dericourt,15. These can only be seen from the harbour.

We had moved to Watson's Bay, to a harbourside house with a good natural swimming bath … surrounded by fallen sandstone boulders … We swam there and the boys made friends of the fishermen and the watchman on the dredge in the bay. It was a fine place for children.[92]

The garden, which slopes down to the harbour, retains the design and some plantings of David Stead's third wife Thistle Harris, a biologist and pioneer wild life educator. The large trees include a coral tree, a canary date palm, and two fruiting Port Jackson figs. Thistle lived in the house from 1939 until her death in 1990 and left it to the National Trust, who, controversially, sold it in 1991 to a private buyer. As I walk outside I consider the memorialisation of writers through the preservation of their homes. There have been other missed opportunities in Sydney, most notably that of Patrick White and Manoly Lascaris's house at Centennial Park which was auctioned to a private buyer in 2004 after Lascaris's death, its furniture, paintings, possessions, likewise auctioned and dispersed. Is visiting writers' houses and the places and landscapes of their fictional works simply 'literary fandom', or a form of voyeurism, or is it another reading experience? And what is wrong with literary fandom?[93] While the house at Watson's Bay has changed since Stead lived there, it is still recognisable, and its surroundings saturate her writing, shaping narrative form and character, not only in *Seven Poor Men*, but also *For Love Alone* and *The Man Who loved Children* (1940), regarded as perhaps her greatest work, about which she writes:

> By a magic that I came by by accident, I was able to transport Watson's noiselessly and as if by an emulsion or a streak of mist to the Chesapeake; and truly, the other place is not there for me anymore.[94]

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[92] Christina Stead, 'A Waker and a Dreamer', *Ocean of Story*: *The Uncollected Stories of Christina Stead* (Ringwood,Vic.: Penguin Books, 1986), 490.

[93] Stead's former house was sold for $10.2 million dollars. In 2011, a controversy was to erupt after the new owner, a celebrity footballer, proposed demolishing the front garden in favour of a 'glass structure' and swimming pool. Regrets were also expressed by Australian and international writers and other Stead fans that no respect was shown for the site and that the house and garden of a prominent writer (and also two pioneer conservationists) was not preserved as a national heritage property. Kelsey Munro, 'US literary star backs Australian writer', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 May 2011, 1.

[94] Stead,'Another View of the Homestead' *Ocean of Story*, 515.

While her childhood home, an 1850 colonial mansion at Bexley, survives having been bought by Rockdale  Council in 1970, it is preserved primarily as a house museum of the colonial period, not as a memorial to her as a writer.

In the garden I meet an elderly relative of Stead's who has come for nostalgic reasons, having stayed at the house as a child. She does not share my interest in the features of the garden which are fictionalised in *For Love Alone* – the stone seat, the little gate, the rock swimming pool – it is the 'big book', Rowley's biography, not the fictional works which holds her attention.

> And then for long years I had a nightmare, that I was back at Watson's without a penny saved for my trip abroad, my heart like a stone. [95]

In March 1928, a few months before her twenty-sixth birthday, Stead sailed out of Sydney Harbour bound for London, adventure, and the great world – her family had gathered at South Head for a final farewell, holding up a large white sheet to capture her attention.[96] She lived a wandering life, writing out of London, Paris and New York, and did not come back to Australia for 40 years, deciding to settle permanently in Sydney in 1974. Thistle Stead rejected her request to share the home of her youth at Watsons Bay: the wanderer had finally returned but there was no place for her.

> The Wanderer, once he has started out in the company of the Wraith, the tramp and his whisperer, does not look over his shoulder. He does not think of where to live, somewhere, anywhere; anything may happen … by thirty all is not done, neither the shames nor the lucky strikes … he marries a stranger, loves an outlaw, neighbours with many, speaks with tongues. So that should he cross the high bridge of air, sometime, going homewards, he is also on the outward path.[97]

I leave the house and drift through the narrow, deserted streets of what was once the village of Watsons Bay: most of the 'fishermen's cottages' such as that inhabited by Joseph Baguenualt and his parents in *Seven Poor Men*, are now restored and renovated, painted pastel colours and the effect is charmingly contrived, a modern picturesque in which it appears that the disturbing and the troublesome has been erased.

[95] Ibid.
[96] Rowley, 69-70; Chris Williams, *Christina Stead: A Life of Letters* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1989), 60.
[97] Stead,'Another View of the Homestead', 518.

A small, peeling weatherboard house is flying a skull and cross bones flag; a sign on a gate warns of the *chien lunatique* within and an old woman in dressing gown and slippers chats over her front fence to a young woman with a child. The gardens are lush with hibiscus and I walk over huge, creamy white frangipani flowers through the perfume of pittosporum hedges. As I make my oneiric way towards Camp Cove beach and the path to South Head, the rain begins to fall more heavily and I realise that I have taken a wrong turn and am re-tracing my steps to Stead's house. Although this a small area, the streets seem to twist and double back on each other, and in the soporific atmosphere of a late summer weekday, the ambience turns to one of melancholic inertia. In this mood I decide to abandon the *dérive*.

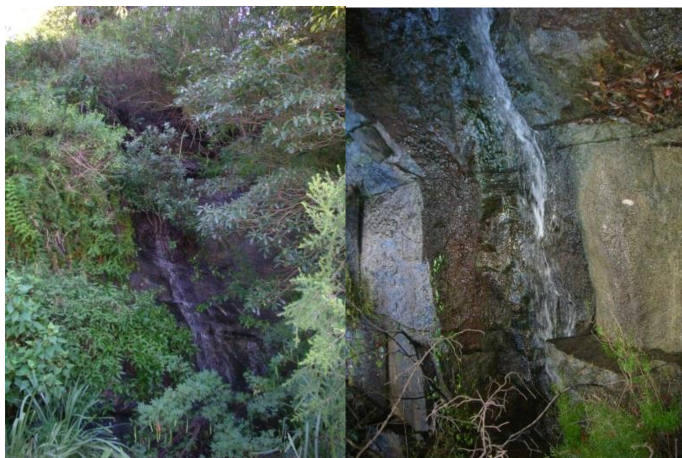
> A suicide at the Gap was a commonplace affair. Everyone knew why a person committed suicide: if it was a man, because he couldn't pay his bills or had no job; if a woman, because she was going to have a baby. The boat chugged into town through the glaze of the harbour on the darlingest, dazzlingest day of spring. (70)

It is not until six months later in early September that I return to Watsons Bay to continue this *dérive*, catching the ferry on a dazzling Spring morning – exactly the time of year in which most of *Seven Poor Men* takes place. Weather is central in shaping the narrative: days are usually hot and sunny, punctuated by violent storms which erupt across the

city and the Bay, correlatives for the inner lives of Michael and Catherine Baguenault, who seem to carry the weather with them.

> Michael … walked through the military reserve where the barbed wire fences are tangled and broken. He circumvented the hill full of ditches, grassy trenches and doors into the hill and came to Lady's Haul. A warship entering the harbour straits saluted the port: the hills reverberated and the dolphins plunged. Michael went through a gate and by a broken grassy descent to the shale platform under the inner light … In storms, the whole platform is a sheet of foam, broken by the slaty ebb and all the cries of the deep in the plunge of the decuman. (224)

This time, from the Watsons Bay wharf I walk straight up Military Road past Robertson Park and turn down Cliff Street north-east to Camp Cove. On my right, the cliffs rise up in a tangle of overgrown weeds and shrubs, the land once used by the School of Artillery and now part of the Sydney Harbour National Park. In the early days of the colony, South Head was chosen as the location for a signal station, lighthouses and a Harbour pilot service, and also as an obvious place for fortifications for the defence of Sydney against attack. As early as the 1830s, the colonial government began to reserve the headland for defence purposes – the School of Artillery near Gap Bluff had its own practice batteries from about 1895 to 1938.[98] The headland is marked and 'scarred' also by the remains of the batteries built from 1871 to 1876 under supervision of Colonial Architect James Barnet: sandstone blocks were used to make parapets and platforms, and pits and storage rooms were hewn out of solid rock. In 1927, close to the period of *Seven Poor Men*, guns were mounted to defend Sydney Harbour: one was at the Signal Station and two at Inner South Head, and the military closed the area to fishermen. Second World War defences maintained artillery at both Inner South Head (the Hornby batteries), and near the Signal Station. This last battery was dismantled after the war. The heavy rain over the past week has caused creeks and rivulets to pour down the cliff: the air is full of the sound of rushing water as springs burst forth, a figure Stead uses for the buried passions of the Baguenault family (2-3).



[98] *Watsons Bay Heritage Conservation Study*, 73, 77; Dericourt, 52-53.

I pass the entrance to HMAS Watson, the Royal Australian Navy's principal warfare training centre, which replaced the military base and occupies most of the headland. The fences that are so easily ignored and transgressed by the local inhabitants in *Seven Poor Men* now present a formidable barrier complete with severe warning signs and surveillance cameras

In my drifting I pay attention to these material legacies: the scars on the landscape; fortifications from over a century ago which may remain visible; the 'grassy trenches' and 'doors into the hill.' Michael spends the last few days of his life shuttling between the Bay and the city, and, as I step in and out of fictional and material landscapes, I sense the traces of what he saw and felt, the strange beauty, the 'brokenness' of things.

From the eastern end of Camp Cove beach I take the path up the hill along the peninsula of South Head. A warship is leaving the harbour and I stop to watch near the last remaining gun – a nine inch rifle muzzle loader dating from the 1870s – which oddly now targets the city.

Gazing around, I notice below the cliff in the bush a tall board painted with an Aboriginal Wandjina figure – perhaps this is a marker for the rock carvings: it is only accessible by scrambling over rocks at the water's edge. The inlet is overgrown but also cared for – broken branches have been piled up and palm leaves expertly woven into a kind of shelter. On the rock wall at the back of the inlet is a handprint in the style of Aboriginal rock art. It is recent as is the Wandjina figure painted on an old surfboard – perhaps this is a newly created clandestine memorial that marks older rock carvings now erased by the sea. The many other diverse marks suggest a complex narrative graven in the landscape: brick walls, crumbling foundations, old timber set in the rock platform. I scramble back up to the South Head path.

> Before his mind's eye flashed a great banksia in full dark leaf, the sun shining, the green waters of a still bay with steeply sloping shore, glistening rocks and sand the colour of Mae's skin. Sliding through the water he saw the pale body of a slender woman and a dark head pursuing her. (50)

The cliffs along Inner and Outer South Head are a sexually charged landscape of torment and pleasure for Michael, his sensual responses warped by anxiety and intense, unbearable loneliness.The banksia are in full flower: almost every golden cone has a wattle bird feeding and a grey heron emerges from the bush to walk gracefully along the path ahead of me before disappearing again. The path now runs between two quite different ambient zones: on the harbour side is the nudist beach, Lady Bay, representing the disorderly and ludic, and on the other is the orderliness of the naval base protected by a high wire fence topped with barbed wire. In the 1911 *Tourist Guide*, reference is made to the beauty of 'Ladie's Haul Beach' as it was then known. In its clandestine days, Lady Bay was accessed by an iron ladder set into the cliff wall and now that it is legally nudist, by stone and iron stairs. 'Lady' swimmers, of

whom there are usually very few as it is a mostly male enclave, no longer have to be hauled up on ropes.

At the tip of South Head, I experience a moment of metaphysical sublime, of dissolving into earth and sea, sky and sea. Knarf experienced such intoxication in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, visiting from the 24th century and experiencing this view from above:

> The panorama of the coastline, the great procession of treeless headlands north and south, green, brown, bronze, dust, smoke in diminishing tones … the voluminous blue of the ocean , the jewel-like harbour, the Centre so compact where once a great city had sprawled, invaded his brain like an intoxication of light.(*Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow,*14)

Stead's evocation is dramatically prosaic: the entry through the heads in *Seven Poor Men* signifies the international modernity of Sydney in the 1920s when it was one of the greatest ports of Empire. Anchors clatter into the bay as the liners wait for the port doctor and a quarantine clearance: they are from 'Singapore, Shanghai, Nagasaki, Wellington, Hawaii, San Francisco, Naples, Brindisi, Dunkirk and London' (2). Today, all is quiet, the sea empty, except for one small boat heading out on a fishing trip, a whale watching tourist boat, and, on the horizon, a container ship on its way to the working port of Botany.

Daniel Southwell, a young midshipman who entered Sydney Harbour on the *Sirius* on 26 January 1788, wrote a description retrospectively on 27 May in his journal, keeping in mind the tastes and interests of his potential readership in England:

> The land on all sides is high and covered with an exuber'n of trees; towards the water, craggy rocks and vast declivity are everywhere to be seen. The scene is beautifully heightened by a number of small islands that are disper'd here and there, on which may be seen cham'g seats, superb buildings, the grand ruins of stately edifices, etc., etc., which as we passed were visible, but at intervals the view being pr'ty agreably interrupted by the intervention of some proud eminence, or lost in the labyrinth of inchanting glens that so abound in this fascinating scenery.[99]

Marjorie Barnard cites his words in her 1947 book on Sydney as evidence that Europeans were unable to comprehend the landscape. In her view, Southwell's imagination instinctively tries to break down what he sees, so alien to his English eye, and Barnard comments that 'even ruins would have been better than nothing'.[100]Architect Philip Cox takes a different perspective, placing Southwell's imaginative response to the sculptural quality of the sandstone outcrops and headlands within the context of a city built, like many before it, out of the immediate landscape: in Sydney's case, the exposed shelves of living sandstone. He considers that Southwell's romantic 'embellishments' look forward to the future when the imagined castles of rock were a reality, a picturesque architecture, in the form of gothic sandstone houses on harbour headlands and bays, including Carthona on Darling Point, and the 'toy' gothic Fort Denison, both of which I had seen from the ferry.[101]

[99] *Journal and Letters of Daniel Southwell*. Entry for May 1788. www.http//gutenberg.net.au/eBooks12/1204411h/html. Accessed 15 March, 2013.
[100] Barnard, *The Sydney Book*, 10.
[101] Philip Cox, 'Architecture', in Gary Deirmendjian, ed., *Sydney Sandstone*. (Sydney: Craftsman House, 2002), 96.

The tip of the headland is marked by the Hornby Light, now fully automated[102] and the grassy hillocks are marked by the remains of stone fortifications and trenches some of which have a distinctly mythological aura reminiscent of ancient tombs or burial mounds.

The path ends here at the naval base and I can go no further so I turn back and re-trace my steps along the peninsula to Outer South Head and The Gap.

> There is the Gap, an indentation in the sea-wall, at the foot of which is a shale platform, standing out in the waves, a place for fishing at the low tide. The Gap is dangerous for shipping on a dark night … Here have been wrecks, and here is the favourite suicide spot of the city. (69)

[102] Named in honour of Admiral Sir Phipps Hornby, Commander-in-Chief of the British fleet and built in 1857-1858, in response to the need for a lighthouse closer to Inner South Head following the loss of lives and two ships in 1857. The *Dunbar* struck the rocks on or near The Gap and 121 out of 122 aboard were killed. A few months later, the *Catherine Adamson* was lost and 21 killed.

The road Macquarie built from Sydney to South Head had by 1812 become a favourite site for a drive for the citizens of Sydney. It provided ‘a beautiful avenue of recreation, either as a pleasure ride or promenade, that attracts the wonder … of the passengers’, the ‘smooth and level course’ of the road invited them onward into an area which only 12 months before ‘exhibited’ a wild that was almost impenetrable.[103] In 1830, another road was built to South Head which follows the coast east from Kings Cross and is known as New South Head Road.

> With quiet long strides up and down the hills of Darlinghurst, Elizabeth Bay and Double Bay, Michael went, smelling fresh gardens, looking at the little house-holds behind lace curtains under silk lamps. Trams rattled past and soft-running cars; going out towards the Gap. (245)

On the night of his suicide, sometime in the mid to late 1920s, Michael Baguenault walks along New South Head Road from the city to The Gap, a distance of around 12 kilometres, This walk is saturated with anxiety – that of being followed, of the need to get quickly out of sight, of strange, other-worldly visions. Michael’s walk has its precedent. In her study of deaths at The Gap, McIntyre records a night in 1923 when 16 year old Roland Kentwell walked from Market Street in the city to The Gap and jumped to his death. His 14 year old friend, Phoebe, went with him to talk him out of his plan, but he was determined. The reason is not known.[104] The first recorded death at The Gap was that of a woman who threw herself off in October 1863. As McIntyre’s study shows, The Gap quickly became a favoured place to commit suicide and continues to be one of Sydney’s most notorious sites. For many reasons including under reporting, the number of deaths is not really known. Official figures are 12 people a year while others are as high as 50.[105]

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[103] *Sydney Gazette*, 8 August, 1812 quoted in Dericourt, 42-43.
[104] McIntyre, 54.
[105] *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported on 6 October 2008, that 120 people had leapt to their deaths over the last decade ; and on the 22 June 2010, 10, that the figures were around one person a month. However, Malcolm

I sit on a bench overlooking The Gap considering its lethal attraction. Perhaps as McIntyre suggests, people were initially drawn to the place because of its reputation as a beauty spot. It is always written about in those terms: 'the hottest suicide spot in Australia'; 'tragedy amid the beauty at The Gap'; 'Gap hot spot' etc. Or does the place itself have a kind of power? Surrealist Louis Aragon, drifting with his friends one night around the wild Parisian park the Buttes-Chaumont, visits the Suicide's Bridge 'which, before metal grilles were erected along its sides, claimed victims even from passers-by who had had no intention whatsoever of killing themselves but found themselves suddenly tempted by the abyss'. [106] In his book on the Blue Mountains, Martin Thomas describes the perception of residents of the upper mountains that their locality exerts a magnetic force on potential suicides, most of whom are not local to the area. He considers how these suicides were specific to the topography, involving leaps from cliff-tops – often from scenic sites of tourist interest – and poses the question as to how we can regard a landscape in which the freedom to fall is so readily available.[107] This question is perhaps even more pertinent to ask about Sydney: few large, densely settled cities in the world offer such an extreme landscape so close and available. These dark thoughts are interrupted by the appearance of a pod of humpback whales breaching off Outer South Head, on their migration down the east coast to the Southern Ocean.[108] Nature unhomes the city as tourists climb over the fence and stand on the cliff edge to take photographs.

Turnbull writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 24 March 2010 suggested it was closer to 50 people a year. In 2011, a special fence, lighting and surveillance equipment, CCTV cameras, signs and emergency phones were installed.

[106] Aragon,'A Feeling for Nature at the Buttes-Chaumont', *Paris Peasant*, 151.

[107] Martin Thomas, *The Artificial Horizon: Imagining the Blue Mountains* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press [2003] 2004), 210.

[108] Sydney Harbour has also become a rest stop along the way for many of the 14,000 to 16,000 humpback whales that make the migration each year.

From the ocean, I turn around to view the city panorama on the western horizon. The barren headland that Stead described is now so covered with dense bush that from this perspective, the city and the eastern suburbs are completely hidden. As I move to another vantage point, the city rises from the harbour, the cross on the steeple of the little church silhouetted against the glass and steel towers of the corporate world: time appears to stand still in such a dialectical image.

> One looks down along several headlands, all bleak, low, with surf at the foot, into the stormy south. (249)

My passage is along the cliff path towards the Signal Station and its flagstaffs, Macquarie Lighthouse in the distance. A little way past The Gap, two young people climb over the fence and sit on the very edge of the precipice, dangling their legs in the void as they begin a picnic.

The first flagstaff, one of the key navigational devices and services to assist the safe passage of ships in Sydney Harbour, was erected on South Head in 1790 as a landmark which might be seen from the sea and which would also communicate the news of ships' arrivals to Governor Phillip at Sydney Cove. In the 1840s, semaphore replaced flag signalling and in 1858 the first telegraph line in NSW was opened which connected the Signal Station with the Royal Exchange building in Bridge Street. The Signal Station continued in use until its closure in 1990, replaced with surveillance by remote video cameras connected to the Ports Authority Tower.[109]

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[109] *Watson's Bay Heritage Conservation Study*, May 1997.

> It was not this young woman alone who had come back to him suddenly with all the poignancy of his richest summer, but his weakness and failure in all respects. He walked along the high cliffs, where he walked up and down the asphalt path, an increasing pain urging him along. He climbed up to the flagstaff at the signal station. (40)

For Michael, the signal mast and station are the materialisation of a mental landscape.[110] The mast embodies the technological uncanny and becomes transformed into a malevolent force which seems to lure him over The Gap. In the fictional topography of *Seven Poor Men*, the distinction between the literal and the metaphorical blurs and slips as the world is made strange and the past returns in disturbing forms. It is along these cliff top paths, in a gothicised landscape, that Michael encounters his past selves, like apparitions

> Above him rolled the pale limb of the wheeling light, hooded in flying spray as it turned out to sea. Next was the flagmast through whose loose strings the wind roared.(249)

Macquarie Lighthouse, on the highest point of the South Head ridge, 277 feet above sea-level, is another gothic figure in the novel's topography. It evolved from fire beacons lit in huge cauldrons, which proved unreliable during storms. The first lighthouse, known as the Macquarie Tower, and designed by convict architect Francis Greenway, was completed in 1817 and the light was 'the most modern available at that time'.[111] As Ian Hoskins puts it, the tower 'demonstrated decisiveness at the periphery of empire'. [112] The first Keeper of the Light was Robert Watson, harbour master and pilot. In 1883 a new lighthouse was built to accommodate a larger light and the old one demolished. Initially, it brought considerable technological change and was powered by an electrical current. The lighthouse was fully automatic in 1976, and de-staffed in 1989. [113] It is now, like the flagstaff and Signal Station, a heritage building.

The cliff path ends just past the lighthouse and I must take to the streets of suburban Vaucluse on my way further south to Rosa Gully at Diamond Bay. It is perhaps near this

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[110] Sheringham, 8.
[111] *Watsons Bay Heritage Conservation Study*, 20.
[112] As Hoskins observes, Macquarie regarded Sydney as a major port long before such recognition from Britain's Colonial Office. Ian Hoskins, *Sydney Harbour: A History* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, [2009], 2010), 91.
[113] Dericourt, 49.

point, where New South Head Road joins Old South Head Road that Michael pauses on his walk:

> On one side were the dunes, on the other side the links, on both sides the waste of water. He stood between two heights. The sand blew in his eyes. The black sea and the black harbour seemed to threaten the neck of land; he could hear the long surge over the sandhills. (245)

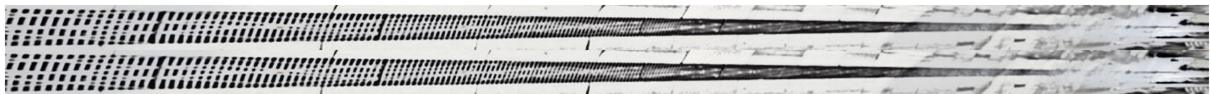
I walk down the deserted streets which resound to the surge of the sea and after several more turns in an unremarkable terrain, I enter a different set of spaces.

Romantic feelings of the moody sublime arise as I gaze down into Rosa Gully and at the broken, jagged rocks tumbling into the sea. However, such feelings cannot be sustained, subsumed by the blank windows of the houses and apartments lined up on the edge of the abyss. In this multi-layered landscape, I sense the spatial disorientation and vertigo experienced intensely by Michael as a child when he is forced by his father to climb down Rosa Gully as a cure for his dizzy fits.

Here, I am on the ground of the modern gothic where the primitive powers of ‘old nature’ erupt into the new suburban environment, in turn rendered strange and disturbing. The fault lines of the modern city – the concern of *Seven Poor Men* – crack open as boundaries between the literal and the metaphorical blur, and the ancient sandstone cliffs offer another form of the gothic’s sinister labyrinthine castles and ruined houses.

I look back towards South Head and North Head in the distance and consider the drifting passage I have created through the shifting ambiences of fictional and material topographies. Inconclusive and hesitant as this *dérive* has been, an attempt at a map has been made, the first of several yet to come in the creation of the textual topographies of this thesis.

I leave this place behind, turn away from the sea and make my way back to the road and the bus to the city.



# Chapter One

## Mythic visions in the modern city:

## Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*

Miles away, south-west, between the side-drops of Bradley's Head and Shark Point, the city sat in miniature, glittering, without a trace of smoke. Blue-blooded spring was everywhere.

*Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (68)

This City now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning: silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air. [114]

William Wordsworth

[114] William Wordsworth, 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 2 1802', *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford UniversityPress, 2000), 285.

## Mythic visions in the modern city: Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934)[115]

Christina Stead, the eldest of seven children, was born in Rockdale in 1902, the same year Australian women won the vote, and died in Sydney in 1983. *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* was her first novel, written before *The Salzberg Tales* but published after it in the same year, 1934. Stead borrowed the title from a tale of Charles Dickens, *The Seven Poor Travellers,* reflecting the influence that this writer has had on Australian urban fiction[116] as well as her own taste for the 'old tale' which she forces into new configurations, out of which, as I argue in this chapter, emerges the storied, mythical city of Sydney. *Seven Poor Men* is also a book which fosters literary wandering reflecting Stead's own cosmopolitan, peripatetic life: her relationships and attachments to Sydney are reconfigured nostalgically in the topographies of the novel. The wandering text itself becomes thus becomes city-like[117], embodying modernist concerns with tensions between mobility and displacement on the one hand, and dwelling, home and the relationship to place on the other.

Early in the narrative Sydney presents itself mythically 'in miniature', a literary allusion to another city, the London of Wordsworth's poem and the city in which Stead began the novel a few months after her 'escape' from Australia in 1928.[118] She always maintained that she wrote *Seven Poor M*en in London when she was in poor health, 'something I had to do before I died',[119] however, she actually re-wrote and substantially revised it over the next few years while living in Paris, including a major revision in 1934 prior to its publication. Stead was thus familiar with both London and Paris when she wrote *Seven Poor Men* and while there are few direct references to London and none to Paris, both cities haunt the narrative as desirable cosmopolitan doubles, 'Metropolises of Elsewhere' to the Sydney of 'Here.'[120]Such doubling – a recurrent gothic motif in the narrative – embodies the anxiety of becoming: for

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[115]Christina Stead, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* [1934] (North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1981) Page references are to this edition and will be referenced parenthetically in the text. The novel will be referred to as *Seven Poor Men*.

[116] See for example, Brian Kiernan, 'Sydney or the Bush: Some Literary Images', in Jill Roe, ed., *Twentieth Century Sydney: Studies in Urban and Social History* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1980), 148-165.

[117] Julia McCord Chavez – see the Introduction to this thesis, 22.

[118] 'Interview by Ann Whitehead', in R.G. Geering and A. Segerberg, eds., *Christina Stead: Selected Fiction and Non-Fictio*n (St Lucia, Qld.:University of Queensland Press, 1994), 221.

[119], Stead, 'A Writer's Friends' in *Ocean of Story,* 498.

[120] See quote from Sylvia Lawson, in the 'Introduction', 18. Hazel Rowley quotes Nettie Palmer's observations on 'the colonial attitude' in 1930: 'Waves of uncertainty sweep over us. Is this continent really our home , or are we just migrants from another civilization, growing wool and piercing the ground for metals, doomed to be dependent for our intellectual and aesthetic nourishment … on what is brought us every mail from overseas?' Rowley, 64.

the culture and for its individuals who do and do not recognize themselves in the emerging hybrid society of 1920s Sydney. They are in Kiernan's words, 'haunted by an awareness that Sydney is merely provincial'.[121] The city is thus presented on the first page provisionally as a 'settlement', and its uncharted territory is the subject of the novel's figurative mapping. Stead's epistemologies of place cluster around this double movement of escape and return, of remaining in one place versus escaping from it, of simultaneously desiring to stay and longing to leave, of emerging and falling back. The very landscape of Sydney embodies these movements: in one of many wild storms 'The trees raged in the park, which is always turning back to wilderness' (317). As I argue below, the narrative incorporates the experience it seeks to describe in its restlessness, constantly swinging between the poles of the city and Fisherman's Bay.

*Seven Poor Men* does not follow a linear path although, like Patrick White's *The Vivisector,* it also begins at the end of the 19th century and appears at first to follow the life of one character, Michael Baguenault. However, although the fate of the Baguenault family is central to the novel, Stead has a more ambitious plan: her subject is modern Sydney, primarily from the mid to late 1920s. The narrative correspondingly shifts backwards and forwards from bird's eye, panoramic views of the city, its varied topographies and the broader political turmoil of the international seamen's strike, to close up, almost microscopic views of the outer and inner lives of a group of young men and women, as they struggle to survive economically, socially and emotionally in a city undergoing rapid change. It is also I suggest a novel of cultural hauntings: the dispossession of the Aborigines and the legitimacy (and permanency) of white ownership of the land; the legacies of a convict past and the anxieties that cluster around modernity and emerging national identities. The narrative is also shaped by the uneasy relationship between the powerful and extraordinarily beautiful natural environment which, at the time of the novel, was still in many places wild, and the built environment of the city and its near suburbs which, as the novel progresses, steadily encroach.

Stead's novel marks a decisive separation between pre-World War One Sydney and the city of the 1920s. Challenges to Empire and existing power structures are embodied in the international seamen's strike and the growing political power of the unions and these changes

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[121] Kiernan, 164.

are traced in one of the novel's narrative threads, ostensibly that of social realism informed by Marxism. Other narrative threads – the passionate, gothic and mythic – are twisted and tangled together: at times the city and its inhabitants seem to retreat to an older existence, one in which fate in the form of naturalist determinism predominates, embodied in the 'bad blood', dubious ancestry, illegitimacy and degeneracy of the Baguenault family, particularly the younger generation, all Australian born.

Michael and his half-sister Catherine Baguenault are urban voyagers, drifting or manically walking through the streets of the city and continually returning to seek refuge in their childhood home at Fisherman's Bay. Michael is described by Stead in her cast of characters in Dickensian terms as a 'ne'er-do-weel'. A product of the times and place, he is a visionary and a failure at being modern, unable to act until he commits suicide jumping over The Gap. Catherine is a New Woman, 'poor by choice', passionately involved in left wing activities that centre on the Labor Party and the seamen's strike, but also, as I argue in this chapter, something of an urban gothic heroine and enchantress as demonstrated in her extreme passions and the mesmerising visionary tales she tells. She, like Stead's Sydney, is excessive, and she comes to embody the 'wandering gothic heart of the city'[122] which lies beneath the modern surface.

In response, Sydney's landscapes become gothicized through particular places, buildings and motifs: the sea cliffs; St Mary's Cathedral; the body of the suicide; voices which speak up out of the dark. The natural environment – particularly the harbour and open sea – also introduces the unhomely, the strange, the apparitional. The city seems to retreat at these borderlines into a mythical almost primeval time epitomized by the gothic motif of the giant fish which appears twice: at the beginning of the novel, in the form of a dead shark on the beach, caught with a meathook after devouring the leg of a swimmer (69), and later, just before Michael's suicide, in the form of a giant blue groper on the reef which evades capture by the fishermen of the Bay who are later to retrieve Michael's body from the same reef (225).

The mythic visions that arise in *Seven Poor Men* thus come not only from the city and its dreamscapes, but also from the natural environment, where the ancient and primeval are set beside the new and the urban; natural forces are juxtaposed with the political and

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[122] I have borrowed part of this phrase from Julia McCord Chavez.

psychological giving rise to the ‘strange, archaic tales’ which run parallel to the everyday and the banal. Thus, the narrative constantly swerves from the social realist to the mythic and into the modern urban gothic. As John Paul Riquelme suggests, otherwise realist narratives can merge with the gothic to form a kind of ‘narrative double’, which ‘brings the Gothic into a modern embodiment by insisting that the truth about social realities is carried in those Gothic elements and that the Gothic is inseparable from the realistic’.[123] The gothic and the realistic elements of a narrative, Riquelme argues, can be brought together as two different universes, thus creating a dual narrative. The jagged and fragmentary form of Stead’s narrative experiment does not compose itself quite so neatly, and as I show in this chapter, the correspondences between the gothic and realism are shifting and ambiguous, sometimes dialectical, but often jarring.

As this introduction to the novel indicates, *Seven Poor Men* presents problems to its readers and critics due to Stead’s use of the grotesque, the surreal and the fantastic side by side with the realities of daily life. In a 1938 essay on the book, M. Barnard Eldershaw were troubled by this: ‘The historical mingles with the imaginary, the real with the unreal in bewildering confusion, and the author behaves as if both worlds, or all worlds, were of the same value … large madnesses and small jostle one another.’[124] Joan Lidoff, writing 40 years later, encapsulates much of the response to the book: *Seven Poor Men* is ‘political in intent, but in execution, mired in fantasy’.[125]Stead regarded her novel as a work of social realism.[126] Later in life she argued that she was a naturalist having been brought up as one by her scientific father, thus aligning herself with the 19$^{th}$ century realist writers, particularly Balzac who she greatly admired.[127]

[123] John Paul Riquelme, ‘Toward a History of Gothic and Modernism: Dark Modernity from Bram Stoker to Samuel Beckett’, *Modern Fiction Studies* (2000), 46/3, 595.
[124] M. Barnard Eldershaw, ‘Christina Stead’ [1938], in Margaret Harris, ed., *The Magic Phrase: Critical Essays on Christina Stead* (St Lucia,Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 2000), 28.
[125] Joan Lidoff, ‘“Home is Where the Heart is”: The Fiction of Christina Stead’, *Southerly* (Dec.1978), 38/4, 363-375.
[126] In an interview accompanying a review of *Seven Poor Men* in *The Australian Women’s Weekly* (March 1935), Stead describes her book as follows: ‘[It] is not so much a novel, I suppose, as a cast of characters battling through daily life, as much passion being expelled on the small accidents of daily life as on any one of the great tragic themes; … I have not forgotten Sydney during my absence – the climate, the importance of the Labor Movement in everyone’s daily life; the type of society which is near to being a one-class society, the importations into social and national life from England. To me, of course, this Australian society, even as it stands, is much preferable to English society, hideous with its class divisions, evident even in the Labor Movement here.’Quoted in Chris Williams, 107.
[127]Rowley, 30.

It seems to me that there are several possible reading positions. *Seven Poor Men* can be regarded simply as a flawed realist novel, the first effort of a young writer who is not yet in control of the genre. A sectarian reading of the book sees it as a precursor to novels of socialist realism, thus imposing a reductive pattern[128] which ignores the fantastic and visionary aspects, paying attention to, for example Winter's didactic communist rhetoric and not Michael's apotheosis. Other readings consider how the visionary, the fantastic and the realistic work together as a modernist innovation within the 'genre' of urban fiction, to create a new text of the city. It is this option which I choose to take: such a reading brings together the gothic and the modern, the surreal and the urban, in an investigation of the myths of modernity, drawing on the concept of the metropolis as the principal site of what Benjamin terms the phantasmagoria of modernity, the new manifestation of myth. I turn now to a brief discussion of the theoretical and conceptual approach I take to these 'knotted threads of myth and modernity'[129] as they are woven into the city and the text.

**Myths of modernity**

The city created by Stead's narrative topography constantly struggles to emerge from its past into modernity: the form of the 'old tale' does not fit with the new world, and it is this lack of fit which fragments and disrupts the narrative, and is I suggest, a deliberate strategy on Stead's part. The mythological visions arise from this 'lack of fit', from the cracks and fissures which literally and figuratively open up in the city landscapes. These visions are both ancient and modern: set in motion by modern technology – the signal mast – and ancient forces – the Aboriginal bull-roarer. They can arise in the noise of the printing press where Baruch Mendelssohn appears as a 'dark angel'; in St Mary's Cathedral where Joseph has a pantheistic vision of the endless sea; and in the streets of the city itself. Following Benjamin, the modern metropolis is thus unmasked as the site of the phantasmagoric and the mythic, 'the residues of a dream world'. [130]

As Gilloch observes, Benjamin's attitude to the mythological in the modern was complex and ambivalent. Myths, he considered, embodied fallacious thought in that human life was seen to be dominated by fate and the blind, omnipotent and uncontrollable forces of nature. The

[128] Peter Demetz makes a similar critical comment on reductively selective readings of Benjamin's works. Demetz, xxxv.
[129] Gilloch, 109.
[130] Ibid., 111.

temporal rhythms of nature, its endless cycles of renewal and decay hold sway over human consciousness and human beings are doomed to endless repetition. Modern mythology inverts this, presenting itself as the 'new nature', the end of myth through rational thought, science and technology – however, the destructive energies of myth proliferate in the modern world in new guises.[131]The promises of progress, Benjamin suggests, manifest themselves in the phantasmagoria of modernity as human beings worship new gods – their own products – in commodity fetishism, and seek to exploit and enslave nature.

As I show in this chapter, Sydney emerges through such mythical visions of modernity as Stead brings the city together in unprecedented ways. Her putative subject may be social realism, but her style is modernist, not a synthesis of realism and modernism but an uneasy, constantly shifting set of relationships and juxtapositions. This tension creates the strangeness and power in her novel. At particular narrative points, Stead destabilizes the city and the text for an instant leading to 'shocks' for the reader which emulate the daily shocks of city life: her narrative mode may be often realist but the effect is phantasmagoric. It is, I suggest, through the places where the struggle between the old and the new is occurring, where things don't seem to fit, that the mythical visions emerge.

In the next section of the chapter, I map Stead's emotional geographies and suggest how these relate not only to the creation of the topographies of *Seven Poor Men* but also to the ways in which it is couched as an 'old tale in the new world'. I then consider where and how readers enter Stead's city in particular, through the threshold figures of the signal mast and the bull-roarer which also act to generate mythic visions. I thus pay attention to what happens on the periphery of the narrative and of the city and, following Benjamin, to what lies alongside, 'the individual things which intrude in an unaccustomed and non-schematic way, things which do not fit with the usual lot and therefore deserve particular, incisive attention'.[132]

My reading of the city as text and the text as city explores two intertwined and tangled narrative terrains: the political and the passionate. In the first, I explore the political concerns of the novel by mapping the social realist narrative strand of the seamen's strike across the southern part of the city, following the criss-crossing movements of Catherine, Joseph, Tom

[131] Ibid., 9-12.
[132] Ibid., 9.

Winter, the Jewish-American intellectual Baruch Mendelssohn and the *déclassé* English couple, the Folliots. I then turn to an exploration of the passionate topographies of the city – the places in which intense emotions arise and which bear the traces of these emotions and their psychic burdens – individual, social, cultural and historical. In both these terrains, I pay attention to the nature of the mythic visions that arise and how they manifest themselves in 1920s Sydney. The city which emerges from this reading, I conclude, is reconfigured as a storied city, a new text on which the potentialities of myth are inscribed.

**Writer and city**

> There is no place in the estuary, though, so suited for an old tale as this fish smelling bay, first in port. (2)

Stead often expressed her love for old tales, and she wrote many: folk tales, fairy and ghost stories which often feature the strange, the fantastic and the uncanny within a modern space. In writing of such old tales, Benjamin points to the two archaic types of story-teller: the traveller, often a sea voyager, and the person who has stayed at home. He suggests that the figure of the story-teller gets its full corporeality when the two overlap and interpenetrate and the lore of faraway places intimately combines with the lore of the past 'as it best reveals itself to the natives of a place'.[133] In *Seven Poor Men*, Stead writes as a native of the place and as a voyager, her experiences of life in metropolitan London and Paris in the late 1920s and early 1930s, including the rise of Fascism and Nazism, cast a shadow over the Sydney of the mid-1920s, pointing forward to the Depression and the Second World War. However Stead does not occupy such a dual story-teller role easily, and this tension is reflected in the novel's narratorial voice: it is never clear where the narrator is speaking from, and the often distanced and mocking attitude to the novel's characters and events jars with the sense of intimacy, sympathy and close connection to place. Simon During observes of Stead as a political novelist, that she writes 'from outside the outside'[134] and such a view could account for the compelling strangeness that the narrative voice imparts to the novel.

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[133] Walter Benjamin, 'The Story-teller: Reflections on the Works of Nicolai Leskov', in Hanna Arendt, ed. and intro., Harry Zohn, trans., *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 83-110.
[134] Simon During, 'World Literature, Stalinism and the Nation: Christina Stead as Lost Object', *Exit Capitalism: Literary Culture, Theory and Post-secular Modernity* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), 57-94.

In considering the ways in which the landscapes of Sydney are emotionally and psychically charged for Stead and how this may be traced in the fictional topographies of *Seven Poor Men*, I turn to Benjamin's enigmatic but richly evocative suggestion that 'the thing' sinks into the life of the story teller in order to bring it out of him again, and that traces of the story-teller cling to the story the way the hand prints of the potter cling to the vessel. It is, I suggest, the emotional attachments and psychic burdens of Stead's life in Sydney that are the source of 'the thing' that sinks into her as a story-teller: the tracks and traces of this 'thing' can thus be seen clinging to the narrative of *Seven Poor Men*. As she has said, her life in Sydney left her 'deep bitten'.[135]

Stead's biographers Chris Williams and Hazel Rowley have documented Stead's 25 years living in Sydney and it is clear that the places she knew well and in which she suffered and also experienced great joy, are those which she has chosen for the terrain of the novel: Botany Bay and Watsons Bay, her Sydney homes; Woolloomooloo where she taught; the University of Sydney where she studied; and Circular Quay where she got off the Watsons Bay ferry and walked to her job in a hat factory near Central Station. Perhaps the most significant places for Stead around which her memories and emotions coalesced were Botany Bay and Watsons Bay.

Her mother died when she was two and after her father David Stead re-married, she lived for the next ten years of her childhood in a colonial mansion in Bexley, one of the original sandstone houses dating from 1850, set on a hill looking out to the Pacific through the headlands of Botany Bay.[136]While her position in the family as the only step child engendered a sense of exclusion that caused her great suffering, Stead was also entranced by the free, physical life in the semi-rural area around and the natural beauty and power of the sea and its dunes. In later life, in Paris, London and New York, some small thing would trigger Stead's memory of this house and the 'whole landscape of childhood' would rise up before her, leaving her almost breathless with nostalgia.[137] I suggest this house re-appears several times in fictional form: re-located to Fisherman's Bay as the gothicized ruined house in the first chapter (4-5); as a whitewashed old house on the cliffs which Michael sees as an

[135] See following page.
[136]18 Lydham Avenue is now a house museum. Stead visited it in 1979 and found it greatly changed. Rowley, 565, note 67.
[137] Stead, 'A Waker and a Dreamer', *Ocean of Story*, 492-3.

avatar of this ruined house just before he commits suicide (247), and as the haunted, convict-built house which appears in one of his visionary landscapes (271).

In 1917, for financial reasons the Stead family was forced to leave Lydham Hill and move to Boongarre at Watsons Bay. While the actual house does not appear in *Seven Poor Men*, the kind of free, physical lives that Stead and her step-siblings enjoyed saturates the novel, particularly the childhood of Michael who does not ever get over it, seeking always to recapture it until his death returns him permanently to the sea. Stead lived at Boongarre until her departure for London in 1928 – the emotional rift that this caused, particularly with her father, was never to be fully healed. When asked in an interview in 1974 which place of the many in which she had lived did she remember most fondly, Stead replied that it was Sydney, because of the associations of childhood.[138] However the emotional afterlife of her time growing up in Sydney haunted her and made her reluctant to return. In a letter to her father's third wife Thistle Harris from New York in 1939 when she was working on *The Man Who Loved Children,* she referred to her home life at Boongarre as 'so atrociously wretched … that I do not want to see Australia …Yes, I could live in Victoria, or Queensland, or go outback … but I do not want to see Sydney, nor my family, nor anyone connected with the old days. I'm not unforgiving – how could it be so when no-one is to blame? – they just made an etching out of me, I am deep-bitten.'[139]

Stead passionately desired to 'escape' from Sydney to the metropolitan centres of London and Paris for reasons which were entangled with her unhappy family life particularly her troubled relationship with her father, and a belief that this still in many ways colonial city did not offer someone like her much of a future. As Rowley notes, it was not for love alone that Stead left Australia despite ostensibly following one of her university lecturers to London: 'she was more in love with what he represented: wider horizons, the experience of European culture, the flight from a world she knew instinctively to be narrow and parochial'.[140] She felt a displacement of the self most of her life in Sydney, which then was played out in her internationally peripatetic life, writing at a spatial and geographic remove: in her fiction, she favoured those who 'escaped', the wanderers and voyagers of whom she was one.

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[138] Ann Whitehead, 'Christina Stead: An Interview', *Australian Literary Studies* (1974), 3, 230-48.
[139] *A Web of Friendship: Christina Stead Selected Letters 1928-1973*, R.G. Geering, ed. (Australia: Angus and Robertson, 1992), 90.
[140] Rowley, 65.

**Entering the city**

Readers enter Stead's Sydney by crossing the invisible sea border marked on one side by the 'barren headland' of South Head and on the other by North Head under which lies the Quarantine Station and its 'bleak graveyard'. Fisherman's Bay, 'a military and maritime settlement' is tucked under the cliffs on the harbour side of the southern headland: the domestic life of its poor and obscure residents constantly interrupted by the searchlights and gun practice of the camp while liners from all over the world pass by their decayed cottages, ruinous fences and fishermen's shanties.

Sydney is thus simultaneously a modern global maritime city located on the trading lines of Empire and within the grand imperial narrative, and a ramshackle, down at heel, poverty stricken backwater. There may be ocean liners in the harbour but the population at this entry point are living on the margins, the socio-economic and geographical periphery of the city. A once grand house, now collapsing, invaded by bats, cockroaches and rats and home to scruffy verminous families, its orchards and gardens overgrown, sits close to Fisherman's Bay. It is not so much a picturesque ruin, as a kind of failure of settlement depicted in gothic motifs: its crevices and cracks crawling with insects. It appears that Sydney, the first white settlement of Australia, is simultaneously falling back into decay as it becomes modern: the ruined house, relic of the convict era, interrupts the myths of progress and permanence as does Stead's use of 'settlement' rather than city.

The entryscape reveals the established economic colonial structure embedded in the landscape: the military base; the signal mast which represents 'the global reach and exchange between the maritime city and trading partners of empire';[141] and the economic and social fault lines running through the city. The domination of Empire and the forces of 20th century capital as embodied in the shipping trade are to be challenged within the novel by the class struggle embodied in the seamen's strike, a narrative thread which will be discussed in more detail below.

Certain aspects of the landscape are marked for the reader's attention, in particular the signal station on South Head with its great mast on which flags flutter and globes swing relaying

[141] As Hoskins notes in his history of Sydney Harbour.

ship movements and storm warnings. In the landscape of Stead's city, the signal mast is a vertical of power, its vertiginous height greater than other verticals that cluster around: the spire of the Catholic Church,[142] the Norfolk Island pines[143] and the lighthouse itself:

> In dark nights, from the base of that enormous spectral pole which points up any distance into the starry world, one looks down on the city and northern harbour settlements…and on the unseen dark sea. (1)

This mast is at the threshold 'between the rocky cornice and the sandy seafloor'– it marks the limits of the land and the spatial borders of Empire in which there is apparent order and control, and the open sea in which the wild takes over. The mast – and its landscape – are invested with myth, but it is an ambivalent, shifting figure and through it, Stead's Sydney appears a hybrid space. A city and yet still a 'settlement' it is both wild and ordered, imbued with a sense of impermanence; its inhabitants out-of-place, ontologically unstable and suffering the vertigo of modernity.

The signal mast re-appears several times in the narrative, each time accompanied by a rhetoric of excess: for Michael it is associated inextricably with the anguish of sexual frustration and anxiety, one of the many forms of urban anxiety which I discuss in more detail below when mapping the passionate topographies of the novel. When his attempts to seduce Mae Graham are unsuccessful, he returns to the sea cliffs, a kind of compulsion which has its origin in a vertiginous attack as a child while climbing down Rosa Gully: 'In its mast and yards he saw the sign of his future, a monstrous pale tree, bitterly infinite … a splinter sterile and sapless, a kind of scarecrow, a rack for cast vestments, a mast castaway: underneath the sea ran'(40). In Chapter Eight, the mast appears again as Michael climbs the cliff paths to end his life by jumping over The Gap: 'all through the early morning the strings of the giant mast cry out a melody in triumph over the spirit lost'. The mast is a place of encounter with the modern, a technological symbol, and a mythic force which compels Michael to return, powerless against fate. It has an historic presence, one which does not signify home but rather instability: it is at once gothic and modern.

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[142] These verticals embody the hierarchies of which Joseph speaks near the end of the book: 'There are – as they say in the Bible – hierarchies and hierarchies over me economically and intellectually, and I shall never rise against them'(316).

[143] *Araucaria* or Norfolk Island pine was an emblem of the colony, a spatial marker and sentinel tree, also used to hang convicts in one of Michael's gothic visionary landscapes. The tree also plays a significant part in shaping the topographies of *The Vivisector* to be discussed in Chapter Three.

Another figure present at the threshold of the narrative is that of the bull-roarer, seemingly peripheral in the landscape of the city but which, as I read it, initiates the entry of mythic visions of a different nature to those of the signal mast.

> Michael's father had a bull-roarer, a vane on a cord, which when whirled in the air produces a loud whirring and shrieking noise. It is used by Australian blacks in their initiation ceremonies …. he took out the bull-roarer into the backyard and whirled it round and round his head, while its shrieking got louder and louder, and let it die down, like a dying wind, and rise again, like a wind howling in a crevice. (8)

Accounts of members of the First Fleet of the early days of the colony include references to the roaring and whistling sounds of the bull-roarer. As archaeologist Val Attenbrow observes, it was a sacred object often only allowed to be seen by initiated people. The loud humming noise was said to be the voice of Dramulan, a supreme creative being who created the bull-roarer.[144] I suggest that this figure carries weight in the narrative, creating movement which is not linear, but circuitous, repetitive and vertiginous. Significantly, the bull-roarer is mentioned by name a second time in Kol Blount's memorial hymn to Michael, thus explicitly connecting personal and cultural hauntings: 'He … heard the dogs and far-off and groaning in the ear of the initiate fresh from trials and vigils in the bush, the bull-roarer'(307). This figure thus acts to structure the narrative and encrypts the individual and collective secrets of the city. It admits the uncanny, the unhomelike, into the domestic lives of the Baguenault family and into the city itself by calling up the spectres of illegitimacy: Michael's and that of the colonial city founded on the dispossession of the indigenous inhabitants.

In *Seven Poor Men*, a ritual object has become a toy for children to play with and yet it retains its powers within Stead's city, returning in various guises. Initially, it encrypts the secret of Michael's birth: his biological father is not his mother's husband but a man called Bassett. When Michael plays with the bull-roarer he induces vertigo, falls down and begins to chatter hysterically. His putative father, seeking to cure him of such 'weakness', makes him (and Catherine) descend the cliff at Rosa Gully. Catherine springs down but Michael freezes halfway, 'almost dead with terror and vertigo'. His furious father has to carry him the rest of the way on his back as 'the waves dashed and whistled in the narrow cleft'. As a result of this terrifying experience, Michael is compelled to return again and again to the cliff edge where he experiences animal-like surges of excitement.

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[144] Attenbrow, 128-129.

Mircea Eliade and others, drawing on anthropological parallels, suggest that myths and fairy tales were derived from or give expression to initiation rites or other rites of passage such as the metaphoric death of an old, inadequate self in order to be re-born on to a higher plane of existence. Initiatory scenarios suggests Eliade – even camouflaged as in fairy tales – are the expression of a deep need in a human being. Every man wants to experience certain perilous situations, to confront exceptional ordeals, to make his way into the Other World – all this can be experienced on the level of his imaginative life by hearing or reading fairy tales.[145] Michael's playing with the bullroarer (itself associated with initiation ceremonies) is followed by his failure to pass the test of climbing down Rosa Gully. Immediately after this experience Michael confronts his mother in a failed attempt to make the family spectre speak: 'Am I your son?' He does not know why he says this: 'I can't believe I'm anybody's son. I feel I just grew out of myself' (7-8).

Following Hillis Miller, Rosa Gully can be read in the topography of the novel as the location of the primal scene that calls Michael 'into being as what he is'.[146] It is not until he is much older that he discovers through eavesdropping on his mother and a visiting Catholic priest that he is illegitimate.[147] On the surface Michael appears to be exultant that he is fatherless, that the 'orchid king' as he contemptuously calls him is not his real father. Some critics have taken Michael at his word however there are clues throughout the narrative that show Michael has been destabilized by the lack of a father, that generational damage has been done through this secret.

The shrieking and roaring sounds of the bull-roarer and its whirling movements not only conjure up Michael's personal phantoms, but also evoke the cultural hauntings of a city built over the lost places of the indigenous peoples. These 'visitations' occur at the edges of the urban where the built, modern environment of city and suburbs (the 'new nature') lies alongside that of the bush ('the old nature'). In the new house his parents have built in the bush suburb of Wallawee on the North Shore, as dawn breaks, adolescent Michael hears the

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[145] Quoted in Bruno Bettleheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Penguin, 1988), 35.
[146] Hillis Miller, 206.
[147] When Michael is 12, his father inherits 5000 pounds from a friend, Bassett, 'a retired surveyor and amateur astronomer, who was a little queer in his last years and built himself a hut in the bush on the North Shore in order to work out a system of divination by movements of the planets.' This is Michael's biological father. The money enables the family to move up and out, from Fisherman's Bay to Wallawee, and also makes them wealthier through investments.

continued droning of the metropolis and the ribanded shrieks of freight engines labouring towards the city (12). Such often terrifying sounds recur in other contexts including one of Michael's phantasmagoric visions in the desert where a roaring sound is followed by the rushing past of a bizarre, whirling horde, part gothic fantasy and part modern phantasmagoria. The wind shrieks and roars in this vision as it does in the many storms over the city, and the sound repeats in the booming waves of the open sea which in turn echoes in the caverns under Fisherman's Bay. All, I suggest, can be traced back to the bull-roarer which set them in motion.

The bull-roarer is an historical presence and also a figure of both the colonial uncanny and the urban uncanny: it is out of time, it brings in the unhomely, the disorderly into family life and the seemingly modern, rational city. In addition, it interacts textually with the signal mast to structure the narrative. The signal mast is static, fixed in place, a figure of colonial, maritime regulation and modern forms of communication. In contrast, the bull-roarer, originally the voice of a god, introduces a whirling motion which leads to sensory disintegration. Under the influence of these two figures, the movement of the narrative changes from centripetal to centrifugal as the characters are first drawn into the centre of the city and the narrative, and then spun out from it in various ways: by ship, through suicide, to the asylum. The bull-roarer is of its place, but not its time: it haunts, disrupts but also energises, bringing into the city the old myths which will not pass away but continue to collide with those of the 'new nature' of modernity as embodied by the uncanny modern technology of the signal mast.

These threshold figures introduce mythic visions into the narrative and through a close reading of the political terrain of the novel, I now consider in more detail the nature of the old and new myths that arise and the contradictory forces they embody, which as Stead shows, can both pull Australia towards progressivism and urban modernity and thus away from dependence on England and Empire, while also pushing the country back into colonial subservience, conservatism and the mythical past of the pastoral utopia.

**Political terrain**

The seamen's strike is a recurring narrative thread of social realism which also encompasses and gives rise to mythopoetic visions. Modernity presents itself as rational, enlightened, technological progress which signals the end of myth, however Stead uses the strike to expose and destabilize modernity's own myths which coalesce around the stability of Empire and the continuity of capitalist power. Such myths seek, as do older ones of the power of nature, to dominate and control human actions by presenting as fate 'a state of affairs which is man-made and which can therefore be undone by human beings'.[148] These old and new myths collide in the political life of the city as they do in the wilder environment of the sea cliffs at Fisherman's Bay. Consequently, the ostensible social realism of the seamen's strike and the related political activities is undercut narratively by the gothic, the blackly comic and the grotesque.

Represented on the level of social realism in the narrative, the striking seamen are the 'very tail of the workers, ignorant, wretchedly paid, put-upon and misled, and now, owing to the strike, almost starving'(174); they are 'in great misery and sleeping all over the place, many in the streets' (145). As the narrative progresses, they become pawns in the political power struggles between the Labor Party factions – the Seamen's Union is also rife with conflict. Rolled into their blankets at night to sleep on benches in Communist Hall they also appear as enigmatic, mythical figures aligned with the sleeping 'hutted' people of the Bay, 'like dry leaves fallen from the heavenly tree'(*Endpiece*,318).

Stead appears to have drawn from the events of the  international seamen's strike of August-November 1925, which started in England when the wage of British seamen was cut by ten per cent, then spread to the Dominions: South Africa, Canada (a speaker at the strike meeting in Chapter Six is Whiteaway, a Canadian), New Zealand and Australia.[149] On 20 August, 1925, over 1,000 British seamen met at Communist Hall in Sydney and voted unanimously to strike in all Australian ports until their wage cuts were restored. Virtually all the ships were

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[148] Christina Britzolakis, 'Phantasmagorias: Walter Benjamin and the Poetics of Urban Modernism', in Peter Buse and Andrew Storr, eds., *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1999), 83.

[149] Australian seamen did not have their wages cut – due to Arbitration, they were better paid and had better working conditions than their British counterparts who were paid 40 per cent less than the Australians. Baruch Hirson and Lorraine Vivian, *Strike Across the Empire: The Seamen's Strike of 1925 in Britain, South Africa and Australasia* (London*:* Clio Publication, 1992).

strike bound and the seamen locked out with nowhere to eat or sleep. While Australian seamen were considerably better off than their British counterparts, there were still conflicts over working conditions with the government who had the power to deport anyone who was not Australian born and who tried to 'disrupt' the trading and industrial life of the community.

Historically, the international seaman's strike was a representative aspect of the loosening of ties between metropolis and colony, begun after the break-up of empires as the result of World War One. Fissures in the imperial landscape had started to open in the 1920s despite Australia's move to dominion status which as historian John Williams writes 'diffused breakaway sentiments and made it possible for the ex-colonials to indulge in beliefs or even fantasies in an exclusive domestic nationality, while offering them another shared nationality secure in a uniquely powerful and well protected trading and cultural block.'[150] In *Seven Poor Men*, lined up against the forces of capital and Empire there are a few subversive and progressive groups including the communists – Winter, one of the poor men and a communist says there are only about 2,000 'trueblue Communists in the Commonwealth', which was probably an exaggeration[151] – socialists, radical unionists, the Labor Party, still in disarray after its split in 1916 over conscription, and worker's education organizations such as WEA. Stead shows these forces in action by compressing them into the seamen's strike.

In the narrative topography of *Seven Poor Men*, the political activities, most of which are related to the strike, are mapped on to the southern part of Sydney, the area around Central Station, Haymarket and the Darling Harbour goods yard. In the 1920s Sydney was still oriented to the south rather than to the north as it is today and its major retail area centred around the Haymarket and Central Station precinct with its large department stores: Grace Brothers, Marcus Clark and Anthony Hordens. It was the opening of the underground railway in central Sydney in 1926 followed by the Harbour Bridge in 1932 which caused the commercial focus of Sydney to shift further north.[152] The area stretching south from the Town Hall through Hyde Park to Redfern Terminus[153] had had a history of radicalism dating from the late 1890s as Graeme Davison has documented: it was the focus of activities of the

[150]John F. Williams, *Quarantined Culture: Australian Reactions to Modernism*, 1913-1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 178.
[151] Historically, Australian communists did not play a major role in the seamen's strike of 1925.
[152] Graham Jahn, *Sydney Architecture* (Sydney: Watermark Press, 1997), 79.
[153] The predecessor of Central Station built in 1855 between Devonshire and Cleveland Streets.

'overlapping circles of secularists, republicans, land-reformers, feminists, and socialists which together comprised Sydney's infant "counter culture"'.[154] In 1888, the foundation stone for the Trades Hall on the corner of Dixon and Goulburn Streets was laid, and two years later the Trades and Labor Council was involved in the settlement of the national maritime strike of 1890.

To read the city as text through its political topographies is to become aware of how much has been lost since the 1920s, in particular the loss of the direct, distinctive and intimate relationships between the city and its port which existed from the early days of settlement at Sydney Cove. As Peter Proudfoot observes, the development of port facilities determined the form of the city and shaped the urban landscape.[155] In *Seven Poor Men* the working port, now all but vanished, is intricately woven into the novel's topographies. The harbour's bays – Walsh Bay and Darling Habour – are thriving, bustling areas of wharfage involved in maritime trade and commerce. Woolloomooloo is a crowded community of local and international maritime workers who are an integral and visible part of Sydney life.

Sydney remained a port city until the 1970s when technological change began to shift activity to Botany Bay and Port Kembla and the city began its transformation from working port to leisure harbour. The waterfront industry has departed and been replaced by residential development, hotels and a casino. Most activity on the harbour is now centered on leisure and tourism: cruise ships, tourist boats, yachts and waterfront restaurants. Even the harbour pilot has gone.[156]

In the political terrain of *Seven Poor Men*, the patterns of association between buildings, streets and the working harbour survive. This terrain is mapped by the movements of the characters between the WEA Clubhouse, walks to strike meetings at Communist Hall and the Trades Hall, visits to a trade union leader's house and cheap meals in the ill lit greasy chain restaurants as workers stream towards Central Station, trams grind up the ramp, and trains shunt in the Darling Harbour goods yard.

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[154] Graeme, Davison, 'Sydney and the Bush: An Urban Context for the Australian Legend', in John Carroll, *Intruders in the Bush*: the *Australian Quest for Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 117; 'Map 2: Radical Sydney in the 1890s', 114.
[155] Peter Proudfoot, *Seaport Sydney: the Making of a City Landscape*, (Sydney: NSW University Press, 1996).
[156] As Hoskins notes in his history of Sydney Harbour

Rawson Place was a short street pushed through from George Street in the early 20$^{th}$ century to link up with the new railway station at Central. In their social history of the places, people and 'unruly episodes' of radical Sydney, Terry Irving and Rowan Cahill suggest perhaps a little hopefully, that Rawson Place with its concentration of offices of radical organizations was in the 1920s 'a nerve centre of the revolution'.[157] Its radical groups inhabited three imposing buildings which included Rawson Chambers; the Trades Hall was a short distance away in Goulburn Street. In the 1920s, 393a Sussex Street was the headquarters of the Communist Party of Australia and at 395 Sussex Street was the Communist Party Hall[158] where in *Seven Poor Men*, the seamen meet and sleep during the strike and are addressed on separate occasions by Fulke Folliott and Tom Winter. Stead re-locates the WEA Clubhouse from 449 Pitt Street to Rawson Chambers. In Chapter Six, Joseph meets Winter here prior to walking to Communist Hall for a strike meeting. As poor working men they are out of place amongst the swirling noisy rabble of teachers, trade unionists, university students and general hangers-on. However the WEA, the Technical College where both Joseph and Winter are studying, and also the workers' lectures on physics at the University of Sydney a short tram ride away, offer new ways of considering the workers as students of the world with the possibilities of a wider intellectual life than that of the domestic round**.**

Most of the socialist and Marxist rhetoric comes from Baruch and Winter who, despite his relentless dogmatism, is as Joseph recognizes in the book's final chapter, 'a reasonable, raw and sane friend' (304) and the only one to go to gaol for his activism. Baruch, a Jewish-American intellectual and printer by trade has access to money and influence through his influential American relatives. In the Haymarket streets close to the Technical College Winter confronts him with the lack of political organization of intellectuals like him (Baruch doesn't belong to his union, but claims instead to be a 'Union man'). 'Yew'll be a scholar and yew'll leave us behind' argues Winter. In the face of Winter's well informed attack, Baruch can only respond with the insipid 'I'm a natural communist, everyone is my brother.' Winter is suspicious of all intellectuals: 'We been betrayed too often. It's too easy for yew fellers to pass over into the other camp, an' be a barrister, a writer, a historian, a clever journalist'(124-125). This is in fact what Baruch does, moving to America to serve as secretary/political

[157] Terry Irvine and Rowan Cahill, *Radical Sydney: Places, Portraits and Unruly Episodes* (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2010), 144.
[158] Terry Irvine and Lucy Taksa, *Places, Protests and Memorabilia: The Labor Heritage Register of NSW*. (Sydney: Industrial Relations Research Centre, 2002), 124 .

advisor to a powerful industrialist who ‘foresaw a more highly mechanized industrial system’, a place ‘fixed’ for him by his Uncle Herman (179).

It is while walking to Communist Hall for a strike meeting that Winter tries unsuccessfully to recruit Joseph to the movement. Joseph is a poor working man and ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’ is an abstract idea in which he cannot locate himself, plus he considers that the majority of Australian working men do pretty well: ‘They have homes, they go to the races, they drink beer’(169). Winter rails against the Empire, the shadow of colonial control which ‘blights the wheatfields’ and directs profits back to ‘Whitehall’. Rather than his arguments, it is Winter’s passionate ideas that impress Joseph coming as they do from ‘a plain, poor working man like him’. The narrative takes a sudden swerve into the phantasmagoria of modernity and the gothic erupts in Winter’s rhetorical outpouring of consumer products, a ‘whole host of strange creatures’ which Joseph and others like him will never see. These ‘gargoyles, griffens, bloodsuckers, flitterbats and ghouls’ of consumer culture include gramophones, bath-heaters, radiators, wireless sets and electric stoves. The speculative and the Marxist, the gothic and the real, collide forcefully on the city street. Joseph is terrified but energized as he tries to ‘reconstruct his shattered “job” as the atom of an economic world’ (175).

Stead always claimed not to be polemical, and as this reading shows, in *Seven Poor Men* her stance towards Marxism swerves from what appears to be supportive to the mocking, satirical and blackly comic. When poor Joseph, exhausted from his day’s work and attending a strike meeting is dragged off to the house of the Miner’s Union leader, he expected to see ‘a monk’s cell decorated with pictures of labour-class heroes and martyrs and a Trades Hall Vatican of books’. Instead, he is disappointed to find an ordinary middle-class home with muslin curtains, bric-a-brac and a crying baby who goes by the name of Jacob Karl Marx Ross (175). While Joseph continues to be the object of much teaching by Baruch and Winter, the result is not a political transformation, but rather an acceptance of his fate in the world. By the end of the novel, he has come to know where he stands as a ‘letter of ordinary script’ on to which events are printed, an image taken from the press where he worked: ‘History is at a standstill with me’ (316).

The strike is however, grim reality for the seamen who, while meetings go on around them at Communist Hall, are sleeping on benches with ‘bits of blanket and variegated rags over

them' while their families try to survive without an income. The narrative follows the power struggles between rival unions over conciliation versus calling a general strike: conciliation is the outcome, and the seamen are forced back to work having lost their wages and gained nothing.

The narrator mocks the ineffectiveness of the radical activities of the city while at the same time memorializing the attempts to effect change for all workers as represented by the seamen. While the strike is an aspect of the social realist mode of the novel, through it the temporality of the narrative takes on the timelessness of myth. Over Chapters Three-Eleven, Stead appears to roughly follow the chronology of events of the August-November 1925 strike[159] howeve, these events appear to be compressed into one month of spring, September, also the mythical time of sacrifice. Sometimes it appears that the events of these nine chapters take place over a few days and sometimes over years, or that time has been frozen. The strike thus operates in the narrative to literally block action by controlling freedom of movement out of Sydney to other countries, intensifying the sense of cultural isolation and individual alienation and therefore increasing the desire to 'escape'. It is a metaphor also for the failure or inability to take action while recognizing that torpor itself is a kind of force.

This inability to act, of being at the mercy of fate, is embodied in most of the Sydney characters with a few exceptions. These include not only communist Winter who goes to gaol on a charge of sedition and inciting to riot for a speech he made to the striking seamen, but also the manic urban trickster Tom Withers and con man, drug dealer and swindler, Montague – although it could also be said that these two are urban types caught up in cycles of endless repetition. American Baruch and the English Folliots are able to act, not only because of money and contacts, but as Baruch says towards the end of the narrative when he and the Folliots are about to leave for America and London respectively: 'we must both realize that we are makeshifts … We are not workers … and it's touch and go whether we'd sell out for a nice home and quiet life, if we thought the Capitalist system was going to last our life time' (284).

This metaphor of 'frozenness', the inability to take action, extends also to emotional lives: charismatic Kol Blount is paralysed by a childhood accident and sits immobile in his chair

[159] As documented by Hirson and Vivien.

while Michael, his passionate, monstrous love, is frozen by the futility and failure of his life. Catherine is a romantic given to poses, a gypsy queen, but stifled by her own masochistic pride and the burden of Michael's obsessive love for her: her manic voyaging around the city's dark places in search of some kind of purpose or significance only leads to an asylum. Joseph is 'bound forever to the same turntable' (78) while Baruch, the dearest creature in all the world to him, is 'dying to go' (142), waiting for a boat back to America. The strike thus acts, in modernist terms, to arrest and prevent smooth motion in the narrative thereby making the familiar strange.[160]

The strike is also a source of mythic visions which undercut and destabilize the political terrain as Stead sets the lyrical, timeless city beside the political realities, creating the jagged, disturbing narrative which I noted earlier. In Chapter Seven, the little group of friends travel on a launch up the Lane Cove river to the pleasure grounds: as they return to the strikebound harbour, the sun sets in a 'pomegranate sky; the smooth river was like cloth of gold' and the launch is decorated with lighted lanterns along the roof. This lyrical, golden mood suddenly darkens as their launch chugs between the fleet of ships tied up in the strike. 'Savage sailors' on one ship bound for the islands are dancing around a brazier and they scream out to the girls on the launch 'making obscene signs with their dark thin hands, their vertebrae and ribs standing out in their starved bodies … Lascars in dirty rags hung over the high pontoon decks.' They see 'an island trader putting out with scab labour picked up around the wharves'[161] and react with a mixture of the political and the gothic. The strikebreakers are 'A queer lot of men, castaways in a swarming harbour, a ship of the damned.' At this point the narrative swerves again introducing the disembodied voice of a revenant 'from a shadow aft' which speaks dully and despairingly of joining a 'lost ship' and living with the lowest of the low who have 'no responsibilities and are absolutely not wanted here: exiles.' It is Michael, whose body may or may not have already been seen wrapped in a tarpaulin at the Bay. Catherine cries out that suicide would be better than being a class traitor, Michael responds that he has no class and is a man alone. His 'posturing' is scorned by the little group of friends who are happy to leave him for a party at Kol Blount's house (197-198). Later in the narrative as Michael wanders along the sea cliffs towards The Gap where he will commit

[160] Tim Armstrong, 100.
[161] The seamen's strike was racist as the narrative reveals. Australian seamen faced competition from poorly paid Asian labour and although a few realized that the answer was to unionize all seamen, most supported a 'White Australia' policy denigrating and attempting to exclude all blacks and Asians from Australia.

suicide in the early hours of the morning, he notices the liners preparing to leave: 'The harbour, freed from the strike, lived again' (247).

As this exploration of the political terrain shows, Stead's Sydney is not easily constrained into the narrative strand of realism: the seemingly rational surfaces of urban modernity are constantly ruptured and spilt by the visionary. The pleasure trip to Lane Cove reveals the narrative doubling which I discussed earlier in which the gothic lies beneath the apparent realism and erupts into it as do the 'dirty lascars', figures also of the urban uncanny which like the bull-roarer, bring with them into the ex-colonial modern city the 'returning' fear of the primitive, the *unheimlich.*

In the next section of this chapter, I deepen my exploration of the city as text and the text as city by mapping Sydney's passionate topographies, looking also for signs of the gothic wandering heart of the city which, like Catherine, has no 'fixed address'. Under the influence of the threshold figures of the signal mast and the bull-roarer, this wandering takes a circling movement, a continual return and departure to the same *loci*, the same figures, the same places, often from a different direction, a shifted vantage point: in Stead's city, there is continual movement but little progress.[162] I begin with a discussion of how life in the modern city shapes body, mind and emotions drawing on the work of Georg Simmel, and relating his ideas to the more extreme, visceral passions evoked by the city in *Seven Poor Men* and driven by anxiety. I then move to a reading of the contours of city and story which move incessantly between interiors and exteriors. First I follow Catherine as she criss-crosses the city, driven by rage and in pursuit of love, from the offices of the *International Worker* newspaper to the open spaces of the stormy Domain, and on to Baruch's little flat in Woolloomooloo. I next trace Michael's last days of life as he moves from the Bay to the city and on to the Folliot's house on the upper North Shore which I read as a dream house of modernity. These paths lead to the final gathering of the little band of friends in the garden of the asylum at Forestville (Gladesville) where the narrative seems to have reached its limits and begins to break up under its own visionary strain.

[162] Gilloch, 20.

**Passionate topographies**

> Who can tell what minor passions running in the undergrowth of poor lives will burst out when a storm breaks on the unknown watershed? There is water in the barren hills and when the rain comes they spurt like fountains, where the water lies on impermeable rocks.(2-3)[163]

*Seven Poor Men* is a visceral novel which plays on the senses and nervous system of the reader as does the lived experience of the city itself on the characters. As I have shown above in the discussion of the political terrain of Sydney in the 1920s, despite the post-war hedonism and 'live for the moment' atmosphere many of its poorer and working-class citizens were already beginning to experience the effects of the Depression to come. Such effects are played out topographically in city and body, strongly influenced by Stead's own self-denial as she struggled to save her fare to London. Everyone appears to be ill and usually hungry, even starving, as if consumed by the city and their passions, the existential and psychic burdens causing them to suffer from exhaustion, fevers, vomiting and hangovers.

The damage to the bodies of the poor is also the result of living in capitalist modernity: Winter's foot is encased in a high boot, damaged in an industrial accident, and he has tuberculosis; Kol Blount is paralysed after a fall as a child, his family being too poor to seek proper medical treatment. Like Stead herself, the main characters of the novel subject themselves to punishing regimes. Catherine deliberately starves herself, organizing for the seamen's strike and working for other socialist causes until she is too ill to go on; Baruch is nauseous from working in the heat and feverish from his desire to understand and thus alleviate the suffering of the poverty-stricken people he lives among; Michael suffers from shell-shock, goes on drunken binges and is alternatively aggressive and apathetic as he drifts around the city. Catherine says of him that he 'eats his own flesh'(154), however she also expresses her passions destructively: her manic, obsessive work drives her to an asylum where she cuts into her wrist with a knife in order to show Baruch, who she loves and who is leaving the city, the bone beneath the flesh.

[163] In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche, a strong influence on Stead, writes of such passions: 'All of us harbour concealed gardens and plantings; and, to use another metaphor, we are, all of us, growing volcanoes that approach the hour of their irruption; but how near or distant that is, nobody knows – not even God'. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* [1882], Walter Kaufmann, trans. (New York: Vintage Books 1974), 84.

While obsessive behaviours can be the subject of modernist novels, such visceral passions are of a Victorian, gothic intensity, rather than the cooler, almost affectless states favoured in modernist fiction where the inhabitants of large cities are plagued primarily by alienation, emotional disconnection and ennui. I suggest that Stead maps such 'old' passions onto Sydney as another way of indicating the city's struggle to emerge into modernity while falling back into an older, mythical, even primitive past.

The Baguenault family as Stead writes in the opening pages, lived a narrow humble life at Fisherman's Bay, but when disaster fell on it 'its inner life, unexpressed, incoherent, unplanned like most lives, then became visible as a close and tangled web to the neighbours and to itself , to whom it had for so long remained unknown'(2-3). The passions of the obscure inhabitants of Sydney are thus marked as spatio-temporal, of the moment and the place; individual and social, playing out in and shaped by the topographies of city and body.

Both Georg Simmel through his sociological study of the modern city and Stead in her creation of the fictional city, are concerned with the adaptations and adjustments which individuals make or fail to make to the forces that lie outside, the social structures (and living environments) which promote particular ways of behaving and feeling.[164] Simmel argued that those who live in cities experience an intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli. Extra mental energy is required for the rapid telescoping of changing images and often violent stimuli which need to be grasped in a single glance. The metropolis thus creates these psychological conditions – with every crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicities of economic occupational and social life. In the face of this daily maelstrom of stimuli, city people must become what Simmel termed 'blasé' or to use a more recent term 'affectless', in order to avoid the constant emotional reactions either to sensory events or to others, 'especially those whose emotions are powerful, unpredictable'. Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts in a rational manner, thereby protecting the inner life against the domination of the metropolis. A kind of 'economy of the emotions' (my term) can develop which is essential to survival if the individual is to avoid becoming 'atomized' by city life.

[164] Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' [1903] *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), 324-39.

It is clear that many of the characters in *Seven Poor Men* – most particularly Catherine, Michael, and Kol Blount – are unable to develop this 'blasé outlook'. Michael indeed becomes atomized, and readers witness his self disintegrating as he walks along New South Head Road to The Gap to commit suicide, along the way encountering and being buffeted by the shocks of the city – voices, strange stories of rape and poltergeists, policeman, sexual offers, cars and trams rattling past. Catherine is almost but not quite defined by her rage and her enraged rhetoric. Unlike Michael, she sees her life as emerging in the city which offers her, as a radical New Woman, possibilities and opportunities. Catherine is also cast as an urban enchantress or witch who can morph in a second from 'a person who got excited by caucus decisions' (144) to being overwhelmed by rage: 'A black shadow disengaged itself from her heart  and flew up into her head , shouting hate, hate, disgust' (149). Kol Blount expresses his passion for Michael to the group of friends and leaves them 'shaken': 'What is love? It is the pest in a city … One is in love with a monster … too intimate too powerful to be human. To love you must disassociate yourself from humanity, as with all great passions. But why should I say all? There is only one'(62). Kol's convulsions of grief on hearing of Michael's suicide send his paralysed body into shivering contortions transporting him to the most primeval times when 'beasts howled on the remote rim of the world … horrible forests, black, mountain-perched, mossy, cloud-soaked at the end of existence, began to toss'(261). The sophisticated, cosmopolitan European Marion Folliot, who has been given the task of telling Baruch of Michael's death, is by contrast, appalled by Kol's 'primitive' passions and considers that 'their life was nothing but a dream, the whole world, their fever, their failures'(260), a comment that seems to also apply to most of the Australians in the novel. In this scene as in many others including that of Michael's suicide and the asylum garden, the language of modernism reverts to something older which hints at strange ancestral forms lurking beneath the rational surface – the wandering gothic heart of the city.

It is with such irrational and instinctive passions that Stead is concerned and these are underpinned by anxiety which pervades the city, consumes the inhabitants and spreads far and wide among social groups, becoming a mode of being in the world. This is expressed in the narrative through both the gothic and the uncanny which demonstrate the insecurity of this relatively newly established city itself which is not quite at home in the world. The natural environment of Fisherman's Bay with its sea-cliffs, storms and huge waves, 'unhomes' the city as do also figures (and passions) of the 'primitive' past and the colonial past which invade the city. People's emotional lives are similarly subject to extreme anxiety

which comes from these and other sources related to living in a modern, capitalist city undergoing change. Most of the characters are subject to sexual frustration and constrained and troubled by gender insecurities. While Catherine is sexually aggressive, she is also vulnerable: she does not want marriage but is desperately lonely. In her manic city walks, often at night, she seeks out dangerous places such as Victoria Park close to the University of Sydney – where Baruch always feels his passions rising. Catherine goes there alone often followed by men who take her for a beggar girl (144). Her fraught sexuality and morbid fears of the abject maternal body are expressed in various random urban encounters, including a grotesque sexual act she witnesses from Baruch's window in which 'a Chinaman was rolling in the dirt of the backyard with a filthily dressed middle-aged woman'(214). This is doubly disturbing as it is interracial, thus arousing fears of contamination. Later in the streets, she sees the same woman, now walking with a sailor, and with a large, round maternal belly. This encounter is mapped on to another in a refuge for vagrants in which she has ended up after losing herself walking the city and where she stares fixedly at a breast-feeding mother. Such experiences lead her to the despairing realization that 'I've fought all my life for male objectives in men's terms. I am neither man nor woman, rich nor poor, elegant nor worker, philistine nor artist'(214).

Identities are further destabilized by fears of madness and 'bad blood' which circulate in the modern city, centred on colonial anxieties concerning ancestry and racial purity which found expression in the science of eugenics. Stead's father was a proponent of this program of 'controlled breeding' which flourished in the mainstream of social thinking from the late 19th century until the 1940s. As Armstrong observes, for some modernist writers, eugenics was part of a 'crisis rhetoric, suggesting an imperiled inheritance'.[165] In *Seven Poor Men*, the narrator stresses Joseph's small stature, almost stunted, his crab-like walk, and his white, aged face. Catherine considers him old before his time with 'a submerged face … he is beyond salvation.' She sees in him 'the refinement and senescence of all parts through the decay of the family blood'. Joseph thinks that she can't settle down because of something in her blood (91). Michael's mother worries that 'he's like that Bassett, that crazy Bassett'(91), his biological father, whose second wife tried to have him certified. In turn, Michael's family has benefited from a 'tainted' inheritance from Bassett . At the end of the novel, Catherine commits herself to an asylum to rest, escaping the agitation and painful uncertainties of her

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[165] Tim Armstrong, 74-77.

life in the city. Thus the uneasiness aroused by Michael's 'tainted' ancestry, fears of the loss of the patriarchal line and rightful inheritance, together with the hints of his incestuous relationship with Catherine, become entangled with myths of the racial and sexual purity of Empire, and fears of its 'contamination'.

Writing of European cities, Simmel argued that the resistance of the individual to being levelled, swallowed up in the social-technological mechanisms of metropolitan life, involved a struggle against the weight of historical heritage and external culture. In a city such as Sydney which is of the New World and struggling to emerge in its own right from colonialism, the cultural anxiety of the continual process of becoming is intensified for the individual. As Catherine says to Baruch 'There are cuirassed guards waiting to hack us down at every thinning of the bush, so we try to escape … Stability is the only character we never have' (150). American Baruch says of Australian Joseph that he is a marked one who does not exist, but can come to life: 'his strange, delicate, translucent mind, is a larva of a mind'(152). Michael and Catherine's endless often manic walking is a bodily expression of this 'out-of-placeness' and it also serves as a narrative strategy to create connections and relationships between various places in the city which bear a cultural as well as individual weight. Such literal and figurative 'wandering', as Chavez observes in regard to Victorian serial fiction, encapsulates the loose, digressive narrative structure favoured by the gothic genre, which in turn can reflect the textuality of the city itself. Drawing on these ideas, and influenced by Benjamin's 'topographical consciousness', I now follow some of these fractured paths through the passionate topographies.

Chapter Five opens in the offices of the *International Worker* newspaper on a hot and humid afternoon. A southerly buster is expected, one of the storms which constantly interrupt the narrative: the indifferent natural world counterpoints that of the human passions, the storms run their courses, but frequently the passions of the human world do not. As the tedious tasks of the office roll meaninglessly on, the power of the storm – a long torpedo cloud – takes over: a glass vessel falls to pieces, doors bang, pictures rap. As in the narrative and the city itself, the ordinary, realistic everyday world of things lies in an uneasy, jostling relationship with the powerful, mythic forces of nature. As one her many (non-paying) jobs, Catherine assists Fulke Folliot on the newspaper and it is in this office that she overhears the little circle of friends – Marion Folliot, Heinrich the photographer and Fulke – discuss her and Michael. They are like twins but he is a shadow of her, 'the shadow of a vagabond on a wormy wall'

and one of ‘the derelicts left by the flood-tide of the war’. Catherine confronts the chatterers with blazing eyes and a torrent of enraged rhetoric, accusing them of tearing each other to pieces ‘and all in kindness’. Michael, she says in a ringing voice ‘burrows into the earth, and he might go too deep. I fly off the handle. You’re killing us both!’ (132).

At five o’clock, the narrative shifts from this fraught, claustrophobic interior to the wilder, open spaces of the ‘wooded Domain’, one of the recurring places in the novel, where Fulke and Catherine go for a walk, possessed by the power of the storm. Fulke dramatizes his political activities while Catherine, who is in love with him, acts out her despair: ‘You struggle and struggle for years to make a place for yourself, to work out your destiny, to justify yourself, and at the end, nothing’s right. You find yourself in a false position, even with your friends, your co-workers’ (135).

For Catherine, the Domain and the raging storm provide an opportunity for seduction: she exults in the rain, drinking the driblets of water coming from the rock and they both lie on the grassy slope, sopping wet. Fulke jokingly suggests a swim and Catherine too eagerly agrees suggesting they could dry themselves in one of the small, unoccupied caves. Fulke is repulsed by her open sexual advances and, in fear of her reproaches, hastily leaves. As so many times before, Catherine has gone too far and wants to throw herself in the water. As the rain and the tears pour down her face, she cries out ‘I am so insupportedly lonely’ (137). She begins to wander again: down Macquarie Street, across Hyde Park to her cold room in an old building in Elizabeth Street, and after drying herself, to the strike meeting. She then returns home and gazes out of the window across the park towards the Cathedral and Woolloomooloo where Baruch lives. He will be her next attempt at seduction: ‘I must see someone new … and they say he is ardently interested in economics’ (137).

In the passionate topography of *Seven Poor Men*, the Domain is a complex place richly layered with meanings, imbued with the sensual and the spiritual, a place of darkness, fear and death, but also of possibility, of consolation, of renewal and perhaps of transformation.[166] It is a place of wildness at the limits of urban experience, a threshold from which the city’s inhabitants and the characters draw energy, and which arouses sexual passions. In the final chapter, the Domain re-appears as a place of spiritual power, of transcendent experiences.

[166] I visit the Domain in *Dérive* IV.

Like the figure of the signal mast high on the cliffs, the Domain folds in the influences and iconography of the Christian, the pagan, and the pantheistic; it is inhabited by dryads as well as the evil subterranean emanations of Michael's nightmares.

On a warm, moonlit night after some drinks at a rough sailor's pub in Woolloomooloo, Joseph,Winter and Baruch climb the stone steps into the Inner Domain to farewell Baruch who is leaving for America. Against a backdrop of the modern industrial city port in which a cargo boat is coaling and loading and the workshops on Garden Island are working full blast with hammering and tapping, the smoke from a fire of garden refuse calls up a visionary sacrifice to the sun god and by association, Sydney, 'our radiant city' (313). Winter, out of gaol, very ill and now recast as something of a seer, tells of hearing music created by the wind blowing through a lightning struck tree, a kind of natural Aeolian harp, a dryad almost: 'you know our climate and living out of doors, and the simplicity of the people, make for an animistic belief' (313). It is to this multifarious, mythical, modern city that they direct their prayers – the place where Joseph feels most a man. Although the narrator is mocking this desire on the part of the obscure men of Sydney for an ancient past, as before in the narrative realism gives way to the visionary and the mythological, the reader is destabilized and the city takes on a new configuration.

Close to the Domain is Baruch's flat in Woolloomooloo, not far from the old public school (in reality, Plunkett Street) and therefore within the terrain of Billie Shockley, narrator of *City of Women* and the subject of the next chapter. 'Poor by choice', his flat barely furnished unlike the fashionable décor of the Folliot's house, Baruch lives alone among 'the native and immigrant poor'. His window commands a city panorama: the Inner Domain, the Art Gallery, the spires of St Mary's Cathedral and the Elizabeth Street skyline, and to the right, the wharves of the German, Dutch, Norwegian and Cape lines. From his window Baruch also observes and relishes the vital, yelling and bawdy neighbourhood life swarming with children, women blousy and painted, worn and tired, boxers parading past with local belles and poor Chinese sailors and loafers looking for women in the chop suey gambling and lodging house. Baruch admits this urban world of littered streets, grimy and swollen bodies, the whole suffering burden of poverty-stricken, unrewarded lives into his room, and this fires and feeds a fever. Through his study, observations and political beliefs he hopes to understand and solve this, to in some way relieve people of their misery (139-140). This inspires a utopian vision both marvellous and mocking, as from his window he sees another

gleaming city above all this ‘as on an adamant island, where the erudite lived and put the world to shame, told the truth to princes, and wrote tracts to enlighten the slaves’ (138-139). This visionary city recalls the miniature city of Sydney seen from Fisherman’s Bay on a Spring morning at the start of the novel. Baruch is also in love with Marion Folliot, and when Catherine erupts uninvited into his room intent on seduction, he is working on a sketch and a ‘gloss’ addressed to her.

At first Catherine talks of politics and the Folliots while taking out the pins in her hair and letting it fall down. When she notices the love letter to Marion on Baruch’s desk, she bursts out into a passionate rage and attacks him as an intruder into Australian life, bent on destruction: ‘The full and golden grain of our most charming traditions fall before you’(149). When she calms down Baruch advises her to escape, to go abroad and ‘get a real cause to fight about.’ But for Catherine escape is not an option: like Joseph, she is bound on a turn-table, fated to stay and work out her destiny in the antipodean city.

After Michael’s death, she re-visits Baruch’s flat with Joseph, driven by the need to recount Michael’s strange visions before she enters the asylum for psychoanalytic treatment. She has secrets to tell which transform Baruch’s room into a mythical realm with herself as an urban enchantress. Baruch is in her thrall, drawn in by the ‘strange tales’ as Catherine’s ‘powerful tragic sense changed the small room, even in their eyes, to a theatre … And this, hardly believing, he called CATHERINE’S NARRATIVE’ (264).

These tales straddle time and space compressing a whole world of dreamscapes into the confines of the little room in 1920s Woolloomooloo, mythical visions in which the modern jostles with the ancient, and the real with the surreal. Catherine ostensibly re-tells a series of Michael’s ‘voyages’ including a trip across the Great Divide into a strange desert where a storm conjures up a horde of goblins, sharks, and other relics and grotesques of memory and experience leaving him disoriented, evoking the bull-roarer he played with as a child. These gothic phantasmagoria connect to the modern urban phantasmagoria of Michael’s unsuccessful attempts to engage with modernity as a young man when he took an interest in the drug traffic, the white slave trade, medicine and venereal disease; bought handbooks on the care of dogs, home plumbing, French polishing, wireless telegraphy and later found a job in an advertising firm downtown. He found he had a knack for it as his mysticism of the past aided him (23).

Another visionary tale takes place just after Michael's return from the war in 1919 'when he felt re-born', and as I trace in the discussion below on the Folliot's house, is directly related to his war experiences. In this tale, a link is made between the mechanical violence of modern warfare and the cruelty of the penal settlement of Sydney. Early one morning Michael awakes to the sea mist, recalling the same mist which 'crawls over the gunners' tents with sudden drops' and he decides to go by train to Brisbane Water, north of Sydney. He tries to find shelter from the usual violent storm that accompanies him in an old house built of rough-hewn blocks, long ago quarried by convicts. In front of the house is an old *araucaria bidwilli* pine, where a convict was hanged or beaten to death: this again points towards the signal mast, another symbol of Empire and the 'tree' which witnesses Michael's death. The bull-roarer also haunts this scene as a 'loud wild yell' seems to come from the tree or house which dies down into a whistling and a sigh: 'My blood stopped running: I thought to look upon the materialized face of horror … That cry of inhospitality and solitude is still in my ears' (270-271).

Despite himself, Baruch, the rational American-European intellectual, comes under the influence of this antipodean mythologizing. He begins to fall in love with Catherine but it is a strangely parasitic almost cannibalistic emotion: as they talk, 'they grew more corpulent spiritually, they felt stronger, they grew to their full height'(276), as if they have grown fat feeding on Michael's corpse. In the imaginative world created by story in Baruch's room, Catherine appears as a Circe of the antipodes who by the power of narrative which places herself at its centre, has been able to win Baruch's love. Fairy tales usually have happy endings, however those that Catherine narrates are myths which do not. She will still commit herself to the asylum as Baruch cannot provide her with the haven she needs: he is leaving the antipodean city for the wider world and, symbolically, makes 'a stiff European bow' in farewell.

Another set of relationships is played out between the exterior landscape and the interior of a building in the 'white night' that Michael spends at the Folliot's house a few days before he commits suicide. Their house, like a romantic fairytale, is on the Upper North Shore, high up in a valley surrounded by turpentines. It has already made several appearances in the narrative and seems to exert a kind of force field which draws people to it, offering vicarious participation in the Folliot's glamorous, free lives. Catherine often goes to stay there and it is plain that despite her declarations against the prison of marriage, she craves to live the life of

Marion Folliot in this modern, elegant house. Michael finds her there one day ‘standing like a statue in the shaded front room … smelling of red roses, with a book of Confucius’s poems in her hand gazing at a head of Eros in pastels which hung on the wall’ (258). Baruch has also been seduced by Marion and by the house itself as he admits: ‘Up there, it is too nice … I have been there in their valley, but uninvited’(151).

At the time of the novel the spread of the suburbs to the upper North Shore had just begun. The lower North Shore had been settled in the first years of the colony and provided timber for Sydney’s buildings which was shipped down the Lane Cove River. The railway line from Hornsby to St Leonards was opened in1890, and extended to Milsons Point in 1893: trains ran through to the city only after the opening of the Harbour Bridge in 1932. In the 1920s the upper North Shore, previously home to large orchards and farms, became increasingly popular with those seeking a place to live where ‘the bush was undisturbed’ (54). For Michael’s parents, this meant the new suburb of Wallawee (in reality Warrawee, an Aboriginal word meaning ‘stop here’). This is mid-way between Turramurra (‘big hill’) and Wahroonga (‘our home’). The Folliot’s house is most likely at Wahroonga as they live on the rail line a few miles beyond Wallawee (227). When Michael seeks refuge there, his approach to the house is described in almost ‘knightly quest’ terms : ‘He followed a large gully, half-cleared of its turpentines and eucalypts along the bed of a small stream … and went on up through flowering scrub to the lower fence of a descending orchard and private wilderness he knew well’ (227).

Little critical attention is usually paid to the Folliots who have been dismissed with the words that Stead uses: ‘pioneers of middle-class defection’ (58). Baruch considers them to be romantics who have enjoyed all their splendid adventures with the police and frontier guards, getting off scot free because Fulke’s father is a ‘rich amateur collector of paintings’ and Marion’s people ‘are high in the Government service in England’. To the inhabitants of ex-colonial Sydney, they represent the attractions of the moneyed European cosmopolitan life with its paintings, music and literature, its sense of adventure and freedom, and the associated modes of feeling which both Marion and Fulke invoke, sometimes respond to, but do not share.

The Folliots and their house may appear to be peripheral in the narrative, on its edges as the house is on the edges of the urban, however a topographical reading reveals complex

connections within the figurative map of the novel. As in Baruch's Woolloomooloo flat, a visionary world is compressed within the living room as Michael re-lives his wartime experiences while outside a storm rages, and the violent past of the North Shore is conjured up in the figures of tramps – descendants of bushrangers and wood poachers.

The Folliot's house can be read therefore both as a place within the passionate topographies of the novel and as a production site of mythologies of the modern. Stead, in writing of an emerging city still very much located within a natural environment, creates a set of myths of the modern which draw on both nature and the built cityscape. In her hybrid myths, the modern 'things' of the 'new nature', what Benjamin calls the cult of the commodity, confront, jostle and collide with the animate and inanimate things and forces of wild and 'old' nature. In *The Arcades Project* writes Gilloch, Benjamin 'seeks to trace the archaic and the most ancient in the heart of the site of modernity, to discover mythic forms and compulsive repetition precisely where progress, enlightenment, and novelty proclaim themselves most loudly.' Surrealist motifs to which he was drawn are also of key concern in this episode in the Folliot's house: sleeping, dreaming and awakening. Dreams are collective, utopian, 'a refuge for those desires and aspirations denied to humanity in material life' and for Benjamin, the edifices and objects of the metropolis are utopian wish images, frozen representations or objectifications of unfulfilled desires.[167]The dream-houses of modernity for Benjamin were the 19$^{th}$ century buildings of Paris such as the arcades, existing in the 20$^{th}$ century and thus, in their afterlife, containing the vestiges of and primary clues to the mythic character of modernity. Such buildings and the out-dated consumer products still remaining can be 'read' for the traces of past epochs, the phantasmagoria of modernity.

It may seem a long way from the Paris arcades to the newly built villa among the turpentines, but I suggest that the house and its artefacts can also disclose the dreams and nightmares of modernity. Unlike the buildings of which Benjamin writes, the Folliot's house is not yet a ruin of modernity, but it contains such ruins through the dreams, memories and hallucinations of Michael, and it is also built on ruins – not of other buildings, but of the ruination of the natural environment, and of the original indigenous inhabitants of the North Shore whose lives were destroyed.

[167] Gilloch, 105.

The storm which pursues Michael to the house has its psychic double which plays out amidst the modernist décor and fetishized objects of the sitting room with its grand piano on which lies the music of Gounod's *Funeral March of the Marionette* and *The Internationale* (227). Among other fashionable objects is an 'obscene' etching on the wall, a cushioned bay window and polished walnut table: 'a reading-lamp gleamed on the hexagonal side of two brass candlesticks placed on the marble mantelpiece … and two long-stemmed champagne glasses, greenish with black, dancing figures'.[168] Michael drags out Fulke's books – all modernist classics – Fraser's *The Golden Bough*, psycho-sexual works by Havelock Ellis, Freud and Kraft-Ebbing.

As he begins to pick out old, obscene war songs on the piano in 'his fumy brain memories began to assort themselves into a dream of a night such as this that he had passed in a deserted house near Bapaume during the war'. Such a house recurs in the narrative: as the ruined house at the Bay, and also the convict-built house at Brisbane Water from which had issued a wild yell (271), perhaps an echo from the war. Inside, the house is haunted by the war, while outside the storm thunders and the street is haunted by the colonial past when the North Shore was a violent and lawless part of the settlement. Tramp-like figures appear: 'blowing to tatters, the lamp-light tossed from cheek to cheek onto three rugged, whiskered faces'. Michael recognizes them as members of an old family of wood poachers, who 'had done bushranging in the old times', their family almost destroyed by ongoing gang feuds (229).

In the slippages of time and space that follow, the sounds of the outside world of real time – running footsteps, voices, rain, and noisy gusts of wind battering and chattering at the panes – are transformed into the heavy roar of guns as Michael relives his war experiences back on the front line in the hurry and confusion of the retreat near Bapaume.[169] Michael did a simple thing; 'he ran away and miraculously escaped', the only one to survive of the band of eleven soldiers who had been 'the only brothers he could ever hope to have', here re-experienced as an hallucinatory, apocalyptic warscape:

[168] A very different set of objects to those Michael collected as a young man, to create 'a shock in a suburban bungalow '(263). These included Durer and other medieval prints as well as a grotesque wooden replica of a peasant Christ.
[169] In the battle of the Somme, there was a huge loss of life to capture the town of Bapaume.

> the dark smoke-black warriors of Satan rising from the mud surrounding them, shouting inaudibly, waving their arms tall as forest trees, horribly blown out and lacerated, some with their eyes gouged out, each with a gun cocked. He could not run back to them now over all the space of ground and all these years. He had run too far; better to stay where he was … It was enough to have come here through the rain in the crack-up of the earth. (231)

As his consciousness returns to the present, the modernist interior of the Folliot's house takes on its own nightmarish landscape: shadows flicker across the cornices, the carpet, the polished floor and the waxed piano tail: 'Something in the room continually whisked out of sight'. Michael's torment over what he perceives as his cowardice is exacerbated by his inability to share the secret with anyone, not even Kol Blount. His final vision of the bodies of the dead soldiers, their skulls 'cracked by the roots of wheat … emptied out – pollen dust, golden' foretells his own death, his skull cracked open on the rocks below The Gap.

While Michael calls himself a coward and then excuses this on the grounds of 'I'm neurasthenic'(232), he is far from the familiar modernist figure of the urban neurasthenic, but rather in the company of other fictional shell-shocked returned soldiers. These include Septimus in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) whose suffering takes the form of insanity ending in suicide, and Chris Baldry in Rebecca West's *Return of the Soldier* (1918) who suffers loss of memory and sexual potency. Stead can be seen here as challenging the heroic creed of the bushman soldier which dominated Australian war-time literature.[170] A popular heroic prototype was the soldier who not only survives the ordeal of fire, but positively revels in it, 'chuckling as he makes another kill'.[171]Michael bears some resemblance to the protagonist of the 1932 war novel *Flesh in Armour* by Leonard Mann who is neither a bushman or larrikin, but a socialist-sympathizing, introverted school teacher, isolated by his inability to meet the Anzac ideal. He becomes a self-confessed coward, has a breakdown and commits suicide. However Mann was also preoccupied with identifying the 'distinctive nationality' of Australians, and as Robin Gerster notes, it is the nationalistic hubris which destroys the coherence of the novel.

Stead thus unsettles the nationalistic myths which, in the late 1920s when she left Australia, were just beginning to cluster around the idea of Anzac, and the related myths of the rational

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[170] As Robin Gerster writes, of the poets, only John Le Gay Brereton attacked the mindless chauvinism and Frank Wilmot condemned the glamorization of warfare. Robin Gerster, 'War Literature, 1890-1980', in Laurie Hergenhan, ed., *A New Literary History of Australia* (Australia: Penguin Books, 1988), 341-344.
[171] Ibid.

progress of modernity. The house contains not only the luxurious, intellectual and artistic products of capitalist modernity, but also admits the violent forces of Empire which enabled them to come about: not only through the War but also the destructive processes of colonial settlement. These 'worlds' of past and present, real and surreal, jostle with each other as Michael's traumatic recall of the War sets the dual landscapes of Bapaume and the Somme and the eucalypt valley of the upper North Shore 'swirling around each other.'[172] His passionate anguish and despair takes on a different cast after this episode at the Folliots, which can now be read in the deeper context of the effects of World War One on collective modern memory. Paul Fussel writes of soldiers' sense of guilt over acts of cowardice and cruelty as another agent of vivid memory in which scenes and moments 'marking one's own fancied disgrace' are endlessly recalled. In this 'lunacy of voluntary torment', the discrete images take on coherence and something like narrative relationships'.[173]

In the white night at the Folliot's house, I suggest, Stead innovatively establishes narrative relationships which connect the individual soldier's trauma with that of the wider culture through the jostling of past and present, the real and the unreal, the gothic and the modern, thus showing the connections between the myths of Empire and modernity and the old myths of the power of nature and fate: the new nature collides with the old. The covert presence of the figures of the signal mast and the bull-roarer can be sensed in the modern house carved out from the wild bush surrounded by the roaring storm.

## Storied city

In the novel's final chapter, the little band of friends gather to farewell Baruch and the Folliots at the asylum where Catherine has committed herself and also it appears, to mark the end of their youth and the death of Michael. As before in the narrative topography, we find ourselves close to the fault lines of modern urban space.[174] Everyone except Joseph appears half mad as they take it in turns to tell a tale begun by Fulke Folliot of a mythical city discovered by shipwrecked sailors. Catherine picks up the story and re-works it into a history of the world culminating in a quest to decipher a black stone inscribed with 'a magic phrase' written in 'an unearthly tongue'. Baruch interrupts her at the point at which the meaning of

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[172] Geoff Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme (*Great Britain: Phoenix [1994] 2009), 93.
[173] Paul Fussel, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 328-330.
[174] David Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2007), 72.

words may be revealed with a nonsense phrase of his own. He in turn is interrupted by an inmate, a madman who tells an apocalyptic tale in which the world becomes a surreal dreamscape of horror, death and destruction, the final hurly burly ruled over by 'Disorder, Lord of the Earth'. This insane vision is not too far away from Michael's hallucinated warscape and also prefigures the real events to come in the next war: the past haunts the present as does the future. The madman's tale invokes a passionate fit of despair from Catherine who reads it as being of her own life.

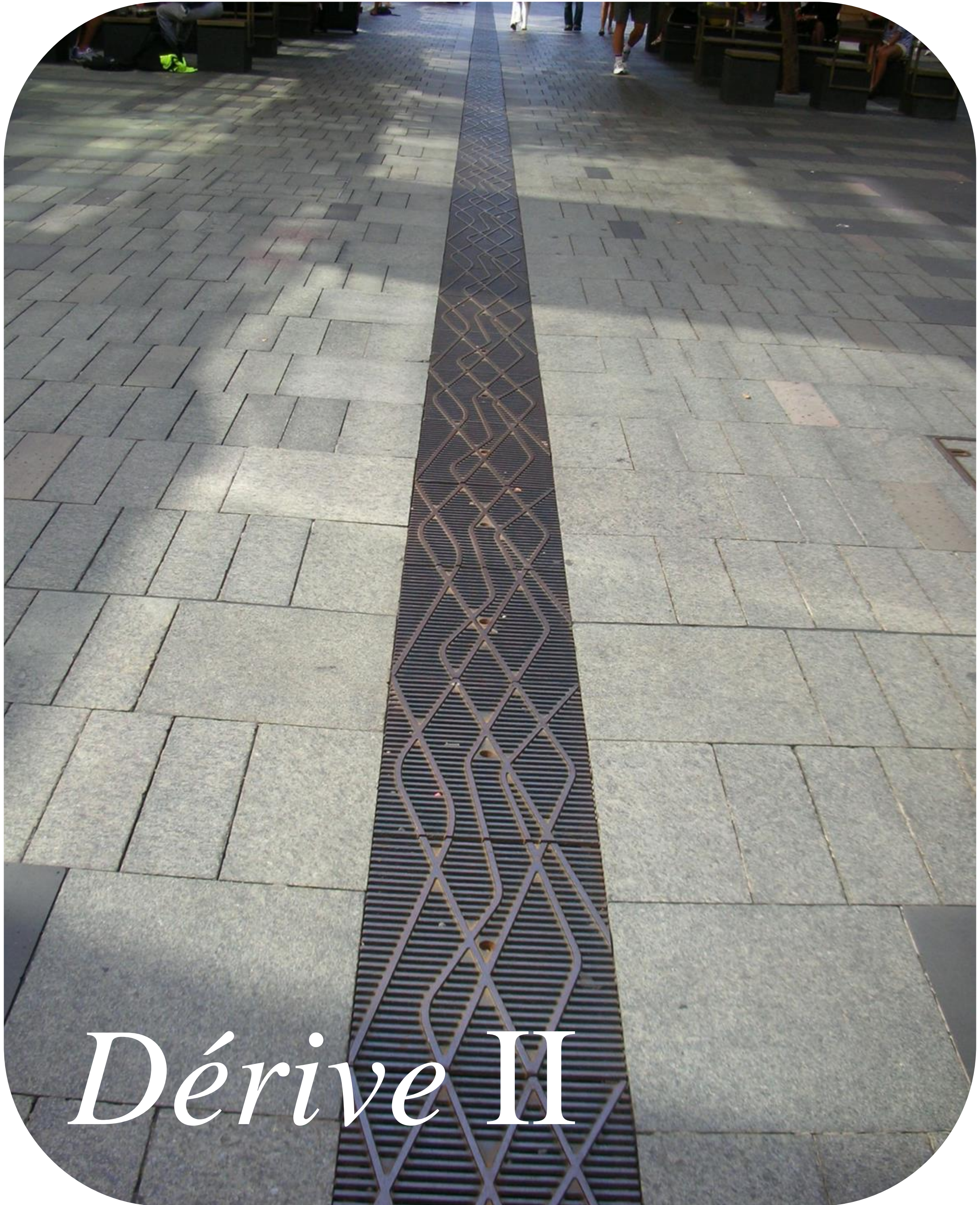
It seems that the narrative is breaking down, splitting apart under the weight of the disorder when Kol Blount begins to intone his 'In Memoriam', 'written for us all', but begun after Michael's death. In both the 'In Memoriam' and the earlier 'Catherine's Narrative', the fictional frame of the novel almost breaks open as readers are addressed directly as fellow citizens of a city undergoing metamorphosis.

Blount's 'In Memoriam' takes the form of an extraordinary poem which re-tells and re-casts the history of Australia from 'the dim ante-glacial world' through to the attempted destruction of the Aborigines and the colonization by pioneers, to the dreary present. Kol reconfigures Michael as the incarnated spirit of the land, continuously re-born over the centuries until finally, 'in the over-populated metropolis' he sits glumly 'in a hare-brained band and speculates upon the suicide of youth' (308). Blount ends with a passionate outburst against the failed project of Australia, a place which cannot work out its own destiny but must sicken and die from eating the regurgitated ideas from the old country. Australia is a 'ghost land, a waste land, its heart is made of salt: it should never have been won'.
The friends disperse shaken by Kol's passion and rapture, although Baruch sees it as a performance. Narratively, it appears the novel has nowhere else to go: those who were drawn into the city have been flung out, dispersed. The myths of fate and destiny have triumphed and the city has wound down into senescence and torpor. As Baruch says 'I am tired with so much walking, I am all impatience to be gone' (310): but it is not yet the end of the narrative, or the city.

In the *Endpiece* Stead brings us back to the beginning, to Fisherman's Bay, but in so doing she shows the potentialities of myth. As Gilloch and Britzolakis observe, Benjamin recognised the figurative and creative potential of myth as story. Joseph, the dull, stunted working man, is re-born as both the stay-at-home story teller and the Dickensian 'traveller',

hurrying home through the storm and wind to his little house and waiting wife at Fisherman's Bay. Overhead is a marvelous, non-anthropocentric vision of a giant golden net of threads, perhaps the web of Maya, in which are caught mythical beings who 'move and gesticulate with old motions lost in memory'. Joseph recognizes this dreamscape of the past and wonders 'Why were we so shaken then?' The heavens open for a second and Michael appears before the titanic wind with stars in his hair, his home the cosmos: for an instant, a hidden topography has been uncovered.

The long sight lines of the roaring Pacific sea and the sweeping ray of the lighthouse off South Head give way to the quotidian city 'seven miles away' where 'signs swing and windows rattle' and the homeless poor huddle under the bridges. Joseph sits in his humble house by his warm stove and begins to tell his wife the story of the seven poor men, but it is another version of the storied city. The tensions that have played out in the novel and city between the old and new myths, between mastery over nature or domination by it, between modernity and the archaic, have not been resolved: Dickensian order has not been restored. Instead, Sydney and its inhabitants emerge re-configured and renewed through story, through the potentialities of myth. The novel has likewise been re-configured as a contemporary expression of a much older form thus enabling Stead to explore concerns which go far beyond those of her own day.


Dérive II

All cities are geological; you cannot take three steps without encountering ghosts bearing all the prestige of their legends. We move within a *closed* landscape whose landmarks constantly draw us toward the past. Certain *shifting* angles, certain *receding* perspectives allow us to glimpse original conceptions of space, but this vision remains fragmentary. It must be sought in the magical locales of fairy tales and surrealist writings: castles, endless walls, little forgotten bars, mammoth caverns, casino mirrors.

Ivan Chtcheglov[175]

What for others are deviations are, for me, the data which determine my course.

Walter Benjamin[176]

[175] *Formulary for a New Urbanism*, (1953). http://www. library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/1. Accessed 30 November 2010.
[176] Benjamin, *Arcades* [Convolute N, N1, 2], 456.

## *Dérive* II

This passage through the city takes in some of the contingent zones of *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* and *City of Women*[177] as I walk the ground in an experiment in spatial juxtaposition, constructing situations by readings from the novels, creating assemblages and montages, possibly *détournements* – 'rearrangements of what was already there, to prophesy a new city.'[178] Although there is a planned route devised for this experimental mode of walking the book and reading the city, I recognise that the 'contradictions between chance and conscious choice' will recur and are unlimited: [179]deviations are my data. I plan to enter this passage at Circular Quay, the same point from which I embarked on my first *dérive*, following up a vague notion that the Tank Stream still flows into the Quay. I will then wander through the streets to Lachlan (Macquarie) Place, the location of the *Seven Poor Men*'s Tank Stream Press, and from here make my way through the city to St Mary's Cathedral, Hyde Park and on into Darlinghurst and Woolloomooloo. My exit point for this *dérive* will be at the top of William Street, Kings Cross.

> The stream below the bitumen and concrete whispers in the city's subconscious of that other long history: the one about wonder, admiration, sensual pleasures, and yearning.[180]

I walk towards the Quay, 'botanising on the asphalt', looking for a marker on the pavement, part of an installation which follows the original course of the Tank Stream creating a path through the city. I find it on the corner of Alfred and Pitt Streets: it marks where the stream originally entered Sydney Cove in 1788.[181] The Tank Stream determined the place of the original settlement: it is a chthonic element of the city, a topographic formation which continues to run under Pitt Street, enclosed in a stone tunnel, part of Sydney's storm water drainage system. The vertical of the marker points to the place where the stream emptied into Sydney Cove before its topography was altered by infill: it is cut across by the words of

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[177] David Ireland, *City of Women: a Novel* (Ringwood, Vic.: Allen Lane, 1981). All references will be to this edition. Page numbers included parenthetically in text.

[178] Greil Marcus, 'Imaginary Maps of the Real World', in Elisabeth Sussman, ed., *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International 1957-1972* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1990), 134.

[179] Ibid., 139.

[180] Grace Karskens, *The Colony: a History of Early Sydney* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2009), 543.

[181] *Tank Stream – Into The Head of the Cove,* a series of art works in the form of footpath installations created by Lynne Roberts-Goodwin in 1999 which follow the original course of the stream, forming a path which can be walked from Circular Quay into the heart of the city.

Watkin Tench inscribed on the footpath and I squat down to read them, an obstacle to the flow of foot traffic:

> Into the head of the cove on which our establishment is fixed, runs a small stream of freshwater, which serves to divide the adjacent country to a little distance, in the direction of north and south.
>
> Captain WT of the Marines, Jan. 1788[182].

Sydney is a submarine city, its buildings created from the sandstone which forms its topography of hills, cliffs and gorges, in turn formed by the movements of water. In *Seven Poor Men* and *City of Women*, water is a pervasive presence shaping the narratives as it flows through inner and outer topographies of city and people. The narrator of *City of Women*, Billie Shockley, is a retired water engineer who has lost her daughter or lover or both: her sadness and grief spatialise the city, intertwining and merging outer and inner topographies:

> My engineer is lost to me, my whole life gone down the drain … Far down below the surface we lived, once. We were the deepsea people. Our roof was the interface between the pressure of caressing water and the dangers of the empty air. The storms of the ordinary world didn't reach down there, only gentle currents rocking us. (1-2)

She longs to be 'an artesian water drop' which has been under New South Wales for thirty thousand years rather than a woman whose life is short-lived and salt tears most of the time (31). Perhaps water will also shape this drift through the city? Or perhaps other ambiences, forces of movement and 'passional' attractions will come into play.

I look up from the pavement: the sightlines from the Tank Stream marker to the Quay are almost completely blocked by the pylons and concrete of the elevated railway lines and above them, the Cahill Expressway[183] which divides the city spatially as once did the Tank Stream. A cruise ship is moored at the Quay, the *Pacific Jewel* of the P&O line, and the concourse is crowded with passengers and their wheel-on baggage, waiting to embark. Billie Shockley watches such liners sailing towards the Heads from the window of her East Sydney flat: the

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[182] Ibid.

[183] The railway was opened in 1956, and the expressway, which caused even more damage, in 1958. There was a great deal of protest from Sydney's citizens about both, to no avail. Sydney Cove, the city's 'most emblematic place' remains cut off from the harbour and the city. Lawrence Nield, 'The Squaring of Circular Quay' in PhilipThalis and Peter John Cantrill, *Public Sydney: Drawing the City* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales and Faculty of Built Environment, University of New South Wales, 2013), 178-183.

*Fairsea* and her sisters, the Russian cruise ships, the *Minghua*, and the new P&O liners. She remembers the old *Arcadia*, leaving Sydney for the last time in the evening on its way to the ship-breaking yards at Taiwan. Through binoculars she could see people lining the cliffs on North Head: 'and I was sad that a piece of the world I knew was going and not coming back. Not ever coming back' (93).

I step out of Billie's sadness and loss into the glittering morning and the leisure zone of the Quay, mingling with cruise passengers who, in their brightly coloured 'play' clothes and pulling along red travel bags, enact the dramas of their own departures. The *dérive* cuts across the city's division of time and space into work and leisure zones and does not make use of the city spaces for any purpose other than wandering and looking. I am a malingerer, I waste time, my gait consequently is hesitant, often interrupted, and has a light tread.

Joseph Baguenault is a commuter, the Quay for him and for others on the ferry from Fisherman's Bay is a work zone. He arrives on an unseasonably hot morning in early September. As he walks to work at Lachlan (Macquarie) Place with the crowd of office clerks he takes short steps with legs slightly apart, his gait carefully contrived to hide the holes in the soles of his shoes and prevent his trouser cuffs from rubbing together and becoming even more worn. He has not been paid for several months and feels himself on the verge of becoming a tramp: his shoes are held together with wire and when he sits down, his knees show through the thin, worn fabric of his trousers. When he returns to the Bay at the end of his work day, he is a grotesque figure, wearing 'the uniform of misery'. The children mock him, chanting a derisory song and Joseph knows its meaning:

> 'You are rubbish thrown out by men, and we are allowed to play with you, no one even has a salvage interest in you.' The Clown of the Universe had produced a man in his image. (96)

To 'go on the tramp' is to travel around as an itinerant, looking for work, in Henry Lawson's words, 'on the perish', the miserable fate awaiting many of Sydney's people in the Depression years, including Harry Munster in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*. Benjamin writes of how the 'architecture of the pavement' is read differently by those who are tramps as they may have to sleep there. I think also of those who are looking for cigarette butts, 'bumper-shooters' as they were once known, reading the pavement, scanning it intently, and walking routes where smokers are likely to have been. In Sydney, due to regulations controlling smoking, there are fewer butts thrown on the street and those who are scavenging must often search in the butt holders of the rubbish bins.

Words like 'tramp', 'scavenger', 'vagrant', 'vagabond' and 'loiterer' which also describe ways of walking, have almost passed out of everyday usage – such people are now generalized as 'homeless' and/or 'unemployed'. 'Beggar' survives still as there are a small number in the city stationed at street corners where there is heavy foot traffic, their stories written on a piece of cardboard, a cap or box placed next to it for money and often an animal or bird companion. They sit cross-legged on the pavement, the crowds swirling around: a regular at the corner of Castlereagh and King Streets next to the luxury stores of Prada and Hermes kneels in a position of abjection, his forehead pressed to the pavement. In such modes, they are a relatively recent phenomenon and questions of their 'authenticity' are periodically raised in the city: most passers-by ignore them, considering them to be part of an organised network and not 'genuinely' in need. They make the pavement their place, a temporary home, a room in the street.

As Joseph walks with the swirling crowds towards his work place, he is pleasantly distracted into reverie: by the blue sky above the new bank buildings, the hyacinths, roses and sweetpeas in the florist's shop which remind him of his mother's garden at Fisherman's Bay, and the display of boxed luncheons: sandwiches, a cheese tart and a piece of fruit, expensive delicacies to Joseph who had with him as usual, 'his hunks of bread and meat paste wrapped in newspaper in his pockets'(71). As I walk in his footsteps the short distance from the Quay to Macquarie Place, I notice the large meals being eaten at 10 am in the outdoor cafes and at the Ship Inn: huge plates of steak, salad, chips and pasta. Seagulls fight over food scraps left on tables, and a grubby white ibis scavenges efficiently in the slots of an enclosed rubbish

bin, its long curved beak perfectly adapted to extracting a bag of food. Sydney is alive with the physical presence of animals, birds and insects: not only in the public places of streets and gardens, but invading buildings, houses, and as in *City of Women*, the very bodies of human beings.

> The climactic points of the city are its squares: here from every direction converge not only numerous streets but all the stream of history. No sooner have they flowed in than they are contained; the edges of the square serve as quays, so that already the outward form of the square provides information about the history that was played on it.[184]

Macquarie Place, established in 1810, is the oldest urban space in Australia, its triangular shape responding to the natural topography of the original shoreline of Sydney Cove and the Tank Stream. The obelisk was erected by Governor Macquarie in 1818 as the geographic centre point of 19th century Sydney, marking the place from where all public roads were to be measured, a function it performed for over 190 years. Designed by convict architect Francis Greenway in the Georgian style, it and Macquarie Place symbolized Macquarie and his wife Elizabeth's vision for an elegant, planned Georgian town, one which far exceeded the views of the British Government of the colony as merely a penal settlement. In the history of the city, it is a place of transition.[185]

> The place is cool and old, surrounded with old bonds, warehouses and shipping offices … and bounded on one side by a large sombre Government building. (71)

This building, which plays no role in Stead's narrative other than this brief appearance, is the Lands Department Building at 23-33 Bridge Street, built in 1876 of Sydney sandstone from Pyrmont and designed by the Government Architect, James Barnet, who also designed the General Post Office in Martin Place and extended Customs House, now cut off from Circular Quay by the Cahill Expressway.

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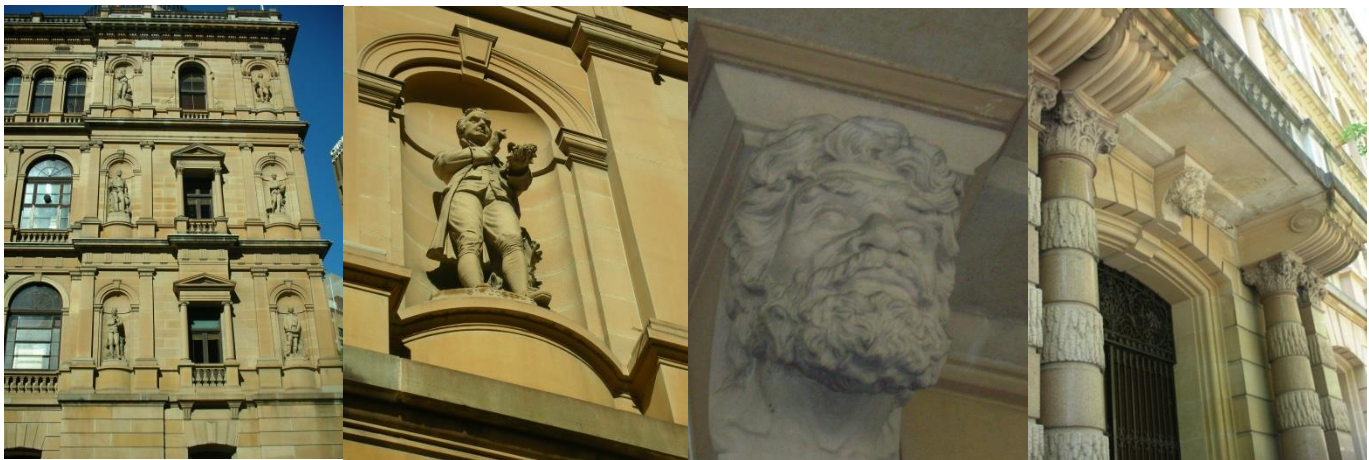
[184] Benjamin, *Arcades* [M 9, 4], 435.
[185] http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID. Accessed 12 April 2013.

I catch ‘the scent of a threshold’,[186] enticed by the ‘tutelary spirit’ over the Public Entrance, an allegorical head with a necklace of fruit and flowers, neither inside the building or entirely out in the open. Like the sculptural figures on the outside, the head occupies a niche under the pediment creating a sense of the interior, of the room as street and the street as room. I have often passed by this building but never yet entered it or given it more than a passing thought: now it draws me in.



As I cross the threshold, the guardian of the building steps out from behind his small cedar desk – I can go no further than the elegant foyer – the whole building, as a sign informs me, is under video surveillance. The guardian gives me some brochures[187] and I learn I am in the home of early map making in Australia. The brochure stresses the ‘shared history’ of white settlers and Aboriginal people, some of whom guided the white explorers in their ‘discoveries’, and recounts the lives of significant Aborigines Bennelong and Pemulwuy. The language of ‘settlement’ and ‘invasion’ sits uneasily together, unresolved, perhaps unresolvable. Around the corner at the Gresham Street entrance is another threshold figure – the head of an unknown and therefore unnamed Aboriginal man.

The building was planned to be modern with four iron staircases, and lifts worked by water power: ‘In the internal fittings of the building, all the best modern arrangements for heating,

[186] Benjamin, *Arcades* [M1, 1], 417.
[187] *Sharing Our Early History: The Heritage of the Department of Lands Building,* Brochure, Marketing Branch, Department of Land and Water Conservation, May 2002; *Lands Department Building, Bridge Street Sydney,* 8 page booklet.

light, ventilation, and for communication by speaking tubes'. However, the most compelling feature of the building is on the outside where there are 12 niches on each of the four sides, designed to be filled with 'statues of men who have distinguished themselves in exploration of the colony, thus leading to its development, or of legislators, responsible for promoting settlement in the lands explored.' Only 23 niches have been filled including all 12 on the Bridge Street side facing Macquarie Place. The almost life-size occupants of the niches are explorers, surveyors and past premiers. Included among those on the Bridge Street frontage are Sir Joseph Banks, botanist; Sir Thomas Mitchell, explorer and Surveyor-General; Dr Ludwig Leichhardt, naturalist and explorer; Admiral Sir Arthur Phillip, founder and first governor; and explorers Matthew Flinders and Captain Charles Sturt. As historian Paul Ashton puts it the building celebrates and commemorates 'these men who helped push the frontiers deeper and deeper in Aboriginal territories'.[188]

These sculpted colonial heroes and the heads over the entrances create a sense of being watched, surveyed from the vantage point of the 19th century, and of being in a place which is a context for remembrances and possibly, debates about the future. The sculptures and perhaps the building as a whole are not simply architectural metaphors for reading the text of the city rather they can be read by urban dwellers and drifters as 'projections of contested remembrances'.[189] The presence of these sculptural phantoms is more pervasive than that of the surveillance cameras which a Sydney City Council sign warns are present in Macquarie Place. Neither I nor a group of Council workmen cleaning up in the park were able to identify the location of the cameras.

> A wide old doorway opened beside a tobacconist's shop and over it was a name, white on blue, 'Tank Stream Press, Ground Floor'. (71)

In the fictional topography of *Seven Poor Men*, the Tank Stream Press is in an old house, once private but now rented out to several establishments. The building usually smells of printer's ink and the shared toilet, but on this spring day 'The warm air drifted in through the street-door bearing odours from the park and the Botanic Gardens' (72). Such breezes also waft through Billie's city, into the Cathedral Street pubs and through the window of her flat

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188 Paul Ashton, 'The Past in the Present: Public History and the City of Sydney', in Tim Murray, ed., *Exploring the Modern City* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales and La Trobe University, 2003), 6.

189 Boym, 2001.

in East Sydney. One night she leaves the windows wide open: the night is fragrant, and ‘a salt sea wind dug into her looking for anything in the way of a soul and finding some poor frayed thing, lifted it up’ (*City of Women*, 40). Baruch also enjoys such a breeze, sitting, like Billie, in the window of his flat in Woolloomooloo ‘sniffing the rich air which came partly from the wooded Domain, partly from the wharves’ (*Seven Poor Men*, 142).

> Category of illustrative seeing … he composes his reverie as text to accompany his images.[190]

Joseph is prone to daydreaming and reveries. As he works on the press the ‘coloured spokes and plates whirling past on cars in the street were confounded with the wake of the morning’s ferry, and the oily eddies at the side, with flakes of blinding light, like a dragon in plate-mail’(82).With his hands busy at the machine, ‘his mind floated out over the harbour and wove invisible skeins in the invisible fine air … He thought of sailing outside the heads and going to the old countries, where the morning sun gilded domes, palaces, royal parks and hives of cities … He looked at the ugly letters on the yellow and blue cover of the magazine, and saw between them the bright features of an elzevir Utopia’. Joseph ‘re-reads’ and dreams the city through the fonts of his printing world and his mind escapes the miserable conditions in which he works and the uncertainty of his future:

> There was a great A in red, shovelling coal into the furnace-mouth made of a black M, and G in glue was marching off the page. (73)
>
> ‘Orta recens quam pura nites’ the legend of the New South Wales coat-of-arms which he saw on the Bent Street Library when he passed to go to the Cathedral.[191] (82)
>
> A red knight on a green horse rode through an iron-brown and steel-blue countryside: it filled the eye and mind with flame. These Germans, thought Joseph, understood that letters were not letters alone; they gave them characters. (84)

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[190] Benjamin, *Arcades* [M2, 1], 419.

[191] ‘Newly risen, how bright thou shinest’, the motto originally suggested for the Garden Palace built to house the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879-80. The Garden Palace was completely destroyed by fire, but the motto remained being adopted as the state motto. David D. Jones, *A Source of Inspiration and Delight: the Buildings of the State Library of New South Wales Since 1826* (Sydney: Library Council of NSW, 1988), 147.

Stead is not interested in the memorials to the colonial past but in the everyday ways of inhabiting the city by following and deviating from the rules: tales of urban identity; stories and myths of urban life. The Tank Stream Press is a nodal point in the city's fictional geography. Not only is it the workplace of most of the poor men, the site of political struggles and sordid dealings in drugs and fake antiques, but it also gives rise literally and figuratively to the scripts of the city: catalogues, brochures, posters, advertisements, labels in shop windows and on consumer goods, mottos and name plaques. Joseph's reading of the scripts he sees around him and their presence in his memory surrealises the cityscapes.

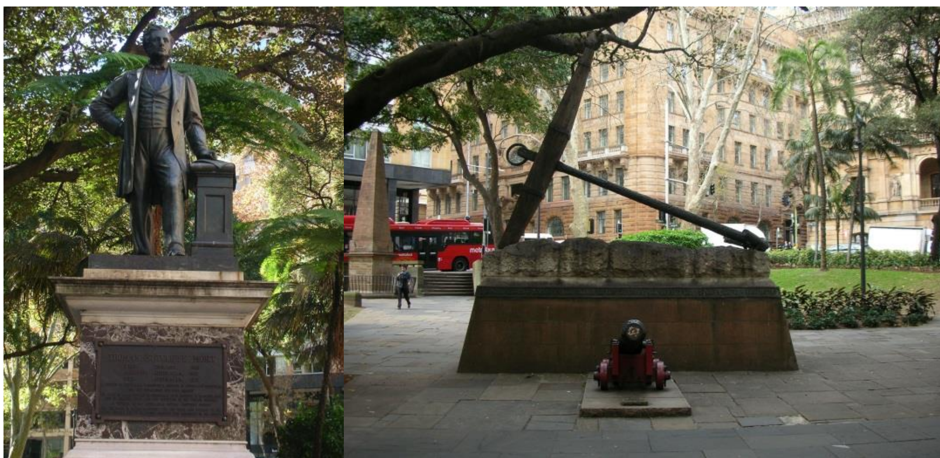
In *City of Women*, Billie constructs her city letter by letter until it becomes a labyrinth from which she cannot find her way out. Inserted in these letters ostensibly written to her absent daughter are snippets and fragments from the replies she receives: parodic songs from her past and the graffiti, shop signs and advertisements read on her city walks.

> Someone had sprayed up on a brick wall:
> THE FUTURE IS HERE.
> IT WORKS; WE DON'T. (16)

In William Street, late one night, Billie sees the tiny old woman who remembers the son she thinks is dead by reading the brass name plates of dentists and estate agents as if they were plaques to his memory, 'touching the letters and after hours phone numbers reverently'(86).

> These 'fossil remains' dotting the metropolitan landscape open up a world of secret affinities.[192]

For such a small area, Macquarie Place Park is almost oppressively crammed with relics and memorials, accompanying inscriptions and notices regulating behavior in public places. It resembles a room in a museum: the city and the open air are entwined concretely through the monuments to colonial imperialism – 'topographic vision entwined with allegorical meaning'.[193]



Many of Sydney's monuments such as the obelisk memorialize the emergence of the city out of tumult and disorder. Others memorialise those now perhaps forgotten, such as the larger than life size bronze statue of Sir Thomas Sutcliff Mort, business man and pastoralist, pioneer of the wool industry and refrigeration.

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[192] Benjamin, *Arcades* [R2,3], 540.
[193] Ibid. [P1a, 2], 518.

Viewed from the 21st century, dressed in full Victorian paternalistic grandeur, he cuts a bizarre and grotesque figure: his back turned to the obelisk, he gazes south across Bridge Street to other more elegant city heroes on the Lands Building. Theatrically placed in the centre of the triangle is a submarine relic, an enormous wood and iron anchor, salvaged from the *Sirius*, flagship of the First Fleet, after it was wrecked off the coast of Norfolk Island in 1790. I thought of *Sirius* at anchor in Sydney Cove in 1788 where now the *Pacific Jewel* was berthed taking on tourists and pleasure seekers, who, like Joseph, and perhaps some of the First Fleeters, had dreams of Utopia. In front of the anchor is a cannon, another submarine relic of the final voyage of the *Sirius*, salvaged and re-used as a signal gun at South Head before coming to its present location in 1907 at the same time as the anchor.

> Things which find no expression in political events, or find only minimal expression, unfold in cities: they are a superfine instrument … to the living, historic vibrations of the air.[194]

There are various other relics of past civic action, which proclaim the dimensions of moral and physical order.[195] These include an ornate iron drinking fountain and an underground Art Nouveau men's lavatory, both no longer functional (the lavatory building is filled with sand). Fountain drinkers were provided with a biblical text and instructed to 'Keep the pavement dry.' On two sides of the iron canopy are the former Arms of the City of Sydney which also appear in various parts of the Sydney Town Hall in George Street, including the tympanum above the entrance.

In 1938, when Sydney was celebrating 150 years of settlement, the Sydney Council gave the following interpretation of the Arms:

[194] Ibid., [M 9, 4] 435.
[195] Shirley Fitzgerald, *Sydney 1942-1992* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1992), 41.

> A savage, or aborigine, the original holders of the country; and a sailor in eighteenth century dress, possession of the site being taken by an armed naval landing party in 1788 … MOTTO – 'I take but I surrender.' The English naval landing party took possession from the aborigine, and in turn surrendered it to that growing nationality of which the settlement of the City of Sydney was the foundation.[196]

In the 'modern' abstracted version, adopted in 1996, which features an anchor entwined by the Rainbow Serpent, the human figures have been removed along with the motto which has been replaced by 'City of Sydney'. The human struggle for survival and dominance has been erased as has the recognition that the land was taken by force: the original Coat of Arms is now part of the collective repressed memories of the city to be encountered only by those who read such relics in the fabric of the city itself.

Monuments are versatile and mobile – they can move around the city, accumulating meanings, creating affinities, changing the ambience of spaces. They are at the mercy of changes in fashion, demolition and re-building. An elegant Doric 'water temple' or fountain on the western corner of Macquarie Place which provided water to residents, was designed by Elizabeth Macquarie and James Greenway and built in 1820. It caused controversy at the time as it was regarded as extravagant, a 'temple round a pump'.[197] In an act of vandalism, it was demolished in 1887 to make way for the statue of Sir Thomas Mort.

In his longed-for lunch hour, Joseph follows his pathways of reverie up to Macquarie Street 'which is fine and broad and looks over all the Harbour and down to the sea', on his way to St Mary's Cathedral, and I also drift this way anxious to escape the claustrophobic atmosphere of Macquarie Place and the surveillance of its crowd of relics and monuments. It is pleasant to come out into such an open space of long sight lines and vistas across the Botanic Gardens and the Domain to the harbour. Macquarie Street appears several times in Stead's narrative, traversed in different emotional states. In the final despairing days of his life, Michael inscribes his farewell onto the city walking from Elizabeth Street down Macquarie, past the Mint and Sydney Hospital, through the Domain to the Harbour, 'mud-coloured at present with the constant wind and tide running in'(237). His walks on these last days map the city from places of colonial grandeur and  seats of power, to the squalid, poor

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[196] *Greetings from the City of Sydney, Australia 1788-1938* (The Municipal Council of Sydney, 1938), 11.

[197] http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID Accessed 12/04/2013.

but passionately alive suburbs of Paddington and Woolloomooloo. Like Catherine, he seeks out such places; like Billie, he maps his psychic wounds on to the city.

The business world knows how to make use of the threshold.[198]

A walk along Macquarie Street today reveals the collective memories and dreams of the city as ‘far off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment’.[199] The street is a place in itself, a narrative path through the mythological topography of the city. On the eastern side lies the Botanic Gardens, and as I gaze out over the green sweep towards Farm Cove and the harbour beyond, I catch again the scent of threshold magic. On a whim, caught up in the web of urban dreams, I cross over to the Palace Garden Gate. In 1879 Sydney held the Great International Exhibition, a grand urban spectacle to mass consumption which was staged in the Palace Garden Building, a vast construction of iron, glass and wood that was built in six months – its architect James Barnet. The building and its contents burned to the ground in 1882, and the gate is its memorial which, like so many monuments in the city, has been moved several times before coming to rest in 1962 in its present position. On top of the main gate is a representation of the dome of the Palace Garden Building, and on top of the sandstone piers are representations of the towers.

As I am heading towards St Mary’s, I think of the Palace Garden as a ‘technological cathedral’, a dream house of modernity, in which were displayed the new gods of mass consumption. Borrowing from the mystic symbolism of medieval cathedrals which contained the city and reached up with their spires to the City of God, the Garden Palace also contained the entire city, ‘the people, their artefacts, everything, rising on its height above Sydney,

[198] Benjamin, *Arcades* [C2a,3], 86.
[199] Ibid. [M2,4], 419.

crowding the skyline'.[200] Its destruction was in some ways the sudden end of a dream of metropolitan modernity for the colonial city, which is perhaps why it vanished rapidly from collective memory – as if it had never been. Or is Sydney a city which easily and deliberately forgets?

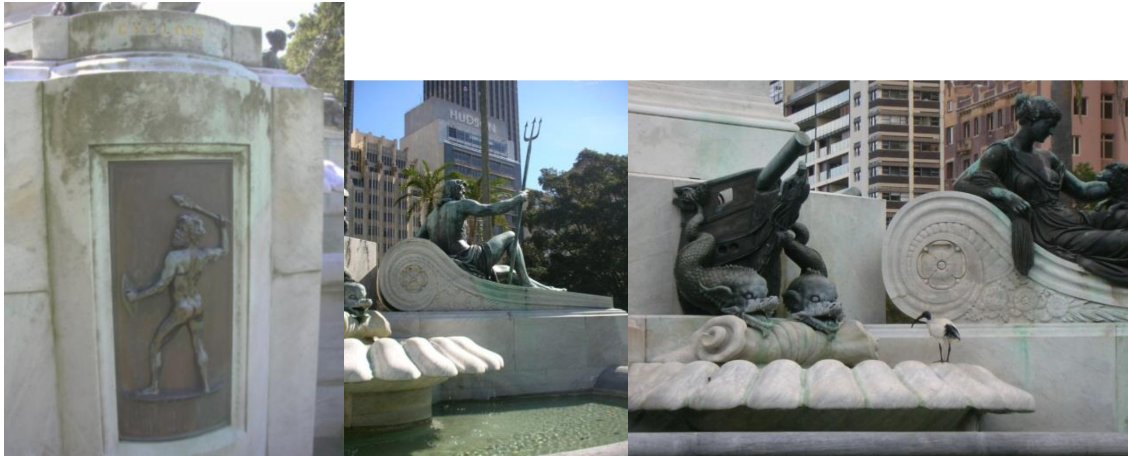
I pass under the gate thinking of it as a threshold which marks access to the past, hoping for a transformation. I am confronted with a visual surprise, almost a shock: a spectacular set of gigantic figures lolling against a background of the steel and glass palaces of corporate Sydney. Either I have never noticed it before, or I have forgotten it. The signboard tells me it is Sir Arthur Phillip's Memorial Fountain, installed in 1897 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. This exuberant monstrosity, a fountain of bronze and Carrara marble, appears to erupt from the landscape of the Gardens. It is initially overwhelming in its size and the plethora of architectonic emblems: semi-naked ancient mythological figures represent allegories of commerce and imperialism: Neptune for navigation; Cyclops for mining, and two goddesses, one for commerce and the other, bare breasted and nursing a sheep, agriculture. Three marble bas-reliefs on the central column represent justice, patriotism and education. At ground level, each mythological figure rests on four bronze bas-reliefs of Aboriginal hunters. At the summit of all this stands the bronze statue of Phillip, four to five metres high, facing north-east, away from his dream city New Albion, gazing out towards the harbour and the point of arrival of the First Fleet, in his left hand the British flag, in his right a scroll.

> Lucidity came to me when I at last succumbed to the vertigo of the modern.[201]

In the company of a white ibis, I circumambulate the fountain, first reading it against the background of the modern mythology of progress as a set of hierarchies culminating in the erect, virile, Enlightenment figure of Phillip. I take another turn as the ibis splashes about in

[200] Helen Proudfoot, 'The Dream and the Great Fire: the Poetry of Exultation and Destruction', in Peter Proudfoot et al, eds., *Colonial City Global City: Sydney's International Exhibition 1879* (Darlinghurst: Crossing Press, 2000, 217-229.
[201] Aragon, 129.

one of the vast shells, and try another Benjaminian reading, one in which magic, myth and enlightenment are arranged in relation to one another, not as consecutive stages of historical development but through their juxtaposition, creating 'non-synchronous' relationships. Are these, to borrow Louis Aragon's words, some of the gods of the street which I have failed to recognize? While they are out-dated and obsolescent, they represent the Enlightenment system of classification which continues to underpin 21st century capitalism.



The fountain is a dream structure in the city's topography: its location within the landscape of the Botanic Gardens, close to the threshold of the Palace Garden Gate and on the border of Macquarie Street and corporate Sydney, creates disturbing affinities between the world of modern technology and the archaic symbol world of mythology. Billie Shockley's companion leopard is perhaps no more of an exotic intruder in the antipodean city than the figures on the fountain.

As I approach the southern end of Macquarie Street, St Mary's Cathedral rises up from College Street like a sandstone cliff. It recurs across the topographies of all four novels, not only I suggest because of its commanding presence in the cityscape, but also because of the odd sets of spatial relationships it creates. In 1820 when the land was granted by Governor Macquarie, it was on the wrong side of town, on the outskirts, and adjacent to the convict barracks. The land also had a steep slope which meant the cathedral had to be built facing south instead of the customary west. [202]

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[202]Historical and architectural information is drawn from essays and documents in P. J. O'Farrell, ed., *St Mary's Cathedral Sydney 1821-1971* (Surry Hills: Devonshire Press, 1971) ; Thalis and Cantrill, 142-143.

This is the third church on the site, the previous two having burnt down: the 'old St Mary's' went up in flames in 1865. Due to its grandiose design and the corresponding lack of funds, the present cathedral was a 'work in progress' for over four decades opening in 1928 when Hyde Park was being ploughed up for the construction of the underground railway, and finally completed in 2000 when the stone spires were set in place. St Mary's keeps company with the pagan Archibald Fountain and the 'peoples' common' of Hyde Park, sharing borders with the wilder reaches of the Domain with its rocky shores and caves inhabited by tramps and vagabonds, and with the often unruly suburb of Woolloomooloo.

In the narrative topography of *Seven Poor Men,* St Mary's is experienced as an interior, a huge room of the city. It is a place of lunchtime reveries for Joseph – the light which pours through the high windows on the western side becomes a recurring image of his own inner life. It is also a haunted place: as a child, in the company of Michael, he saw Catherine there in the shadows and sensed the savage passion of their incestuous love. After Michael's death Joseph feels his presence in the Cathedral and, overwhelmed by the sense of his and others' failure and the hypocrisy of the religious attitude to life which yet allows someone like Michael to die with no more attention than to a dead dog, he loses his faith. Later accepts his fate:

> I will be thrown away when I am used up … There are – as they say in the bible –hierarchies and hierarchies over me economically and intellectually and I shall never rise against them … I am a machine. I am the end of my race. (316)

In *City of Women,* St Mary's is an ambiguous presence, a landmark that is only seen from the outside, 'the towered shape', part of the city skyline which Billie can see from the window of her flat. In *City of Women's* patchwork narration, the cathedral becomes associated with the random often violent events of everyday life: a priest passing by in Cathedral Street 'counting out her prayers' (17) is followed by the story of a corpse covered in cockroaches, found on a seat near the ventilation outlet of the underground parking station in the Domain, just across the road from the cathedral. The entrance to the station and the grassy hill which surrounds it is, in the carnivalesque topography of *City of Women*, both a ludic place to which Billie often returns, and one of darkness, a hell mouth. The pealing of the cathedral bells sounds to Billie like a shriek of fear and becomes an accompaniment to the recounting of yet another horrifying tale of sadistic crimes against women committed by Jack the Zipper.

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Due to the slope of the site, the main entrance is elevated above Cathedral Street and the building appears to lift itself higher in the air as it turns to face Oxford Street, William Street, and Kings Cross.[203]The extension of the church gave Cathedral Street its odd kink: an expressway now severs the street from its other half which runs into Woolloomooloo and up the hill to Kings Cross. From the vantage point at the top of these 37 steps, flanked by two life size bronze statues of members of the cathedral hierarchy Cardinal Moran and Archbishop Kelly, I look out over the broad paved terrace underneath which are the pools, gym and cafe of Cook and Phillip Park Aquatic Centre. From the 1920s until the 1990s, Cook and Phillip Park hosted one of Sydney's most prestigious lawn bowling clubs. To the east lies the terrain of *City of Women* – Darlinghurst and the pubs of Cathedral Street – which I will enter via a detour through the ambient zone of Hyde Park, another site saturated and layered with complex and ambiguous meanings of the orderly and the disorderly.

Hyde Park was initially a common set aside by Governor Phillip in 1792, and named after the park in London by Governor Macquarie in 1810. The southern area, now the site of the Anzac Memorial, was once the 'fighting ground' for Sydney's indigenous people, designated thus by Governor Phillip, and the scene of bloody ritual combat. Hyde Park was also the colony's Race Course, and later a shrubby hideout for various nefarious activities before becoming a fully landscaped park in 1927, following the construction of the underground railway.

In his 1952 essay 'A Portrait of Sydney', poet Kenneth Slessor mourned the loss of that wilder park prior to this civic makeover: 'darkened like a sacred wood by the unruly branches, spendrift leaves and rebellious roots of a swarm of Moreton Bay figs' until it was 'combed bare of that kind of impertinence' by aldermen and engineers who replaced the trees

[203] Monsignor C. J. Duffy, 'The Ethos of St. Mary's' in O'Farrell, 46.

with the geometrical patterns of lamp-globes perched on concrete posts.[204] In Slessor's view, the 'old' Hyde Park was destroyed to be re-created as a controlled, ordered, modern civic space.However such a civic vision of this space is destabilized, *détourned* – hijacked by the exuberant paganism of the Archibald Fountain, unveiled in 1932.

Jules Francois Archibald was an extraordinary figure, editor of the Sydney magazine the *Bulletin* and a literary larrikin of significance who combined Australian nationalism and Francophilia, inventing his own French ancestry. He died in 1919, leaving money for an open air symbolic memorial by a French artist which would commemorate Australian and French soldiers of World War One.. The French sculptor Francois Sicard devised a complex of basins with jets of water radiating behind Apollo and playing on the other mythological figures of an elegant, sensual Diana, and a muscular Theseus wrestling the Minotaur. The neo-classical male nude sculptures influenced by the Art Deco style which then signalled the modern, were the first to appear in Australia.

The Sir Arthur Phillip Fountain is a public performance which enacts the virility of empire building and the imposition of order over the land. The Archibald Fountain however, creates a sense of intimacy in the centre of a public place. The naked figure of Apollo, his bronze flesh gleaming with water, introduces into the city a masculinity which is sensuous, playful, even vulnerable: no wonder perhaps that in the 1950s and 60s, the fountain became a homosexual beat. In 1952, Slessor wrote that the Archibald Fountain, only 20 years after its installation, was disused and the statuary bird-stained: 'What could be a lovely trinity of bronze and stone and splashing water is now allowed to lie in neglect…[Apollo's] dolphins turn indignant tails as they dry leap in water that is never there.' Slessor's explanation is that 'It is suspect', its pagan figures resented by officialdom. He considers that, like nearly all the statuary in Sydney, the Archibald Fountain is misplaced: it was meant to adorn a woodland, and instead, 'it is dumped nakedly in the middle of a waste of synthetic park.'[205] Perhaps another reason

[204] Kenneth Slessor, 'A Portrait of Sydney' [1952], *Bread and Wine: Selected Prose* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1970), 9.
[205] Ibid.

for the fountain's neglect lay in the continuing after-effects of the Depression and the Second World War: until the 1960s many parts of the city appeared neglected.

The park, fountain and cathedral together compose a set of urban spaces which recur in the cityscapes of *City of Women* and also *The Vivisector* and *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (the fountain was not built when Stead wrote *Seven Poor Men*). It seems to me that, in its close proximity, the exuberant, playful, pagan Archibald Fountain *détourns* St Mary's Cathedral. When viewed from the side with the cathedral behind, Apollo the sun god who is beneficently gesturing to the east with raised arm and hand, also appears to be simultaneously pointing to the Cathedral's altar. Another reading is that Apollo, the god of light, order and form is gesturing towards the outrageous disorder and metamorphism of Dionysian Kings Cross, Sydney's Rabelaisean 'other' where in *City of Women*, boundaries are blurred between genders, between the human and the animal, and the streets are full of darkness, sexual energy and violence set in motion by the inversions of Ireland's urban carnivalesque. Kings Cross is set high on Woolloomooloo Hill overlooking not only the city below but also St Mary's Cathedral: a spatial inversion.

> In my City, everywhere I walk I've been before: the ground knows me. (26)

I walk south through the central avenue of Hyde Park and pause at the statue of Captain Cook, who gazes north to the gateway of Sydney Cove. I read Cook's gesture ambiguously, as a wave of farewell as I leave behind the terrain of monuments to virility and empire building or as a parodic gesture of welcome, ushering me into the city of Rabelaisian carnivalesque. The telescope he holds takes on voyeuristic possibilities, or perhaps can be read in terms of the phallic imagery of the carnivalesque as a 'slap-stick'.

> Out of my window … I look across to the brown cathedral, the deep green foliage of the Sydney Domain, below me the school, across again to the steel-blue harbour, the pastel colours of Woolomooloo terraces. It's a Corot morning. … All I see moving are three barefoot runaway girls going east and two derelict women west on William Street, and an old tramp sleeping on newspapers on a bench in the sun in Remembrance Garden. Disorder, decay, ruins … Where's Bobbie? Where did you come from Bobbie darling? She has no way of telling me … Escape from a circus? (6)

In 1977, Ireland moved from 7 Elizabeth Street to the St James building at 6 Stanley Street, on the corner of Yurong Street in East Sydney, the model for Billie Shockley's flat. From her window, Billie, in the role of omniscient narrator, is magically able to see in all directions, not only down into Cathedral and William Streets, but north-east to Garden Island; north to the Heads (with binoculars); west across the park to Centrepoint Tower and the city skyline; south to the statue of Captain Cook; east to Crown Street and the car park of what may be the nightclub Jools. She can also see beyond the city, to the suburbs of the Edge, the location of

the surreal and horrific Funnel Valley, a hell mouth into which leopards drag women and devour them among the machines.

> After lunch, we'll go for a walk past the corner house where women used to wait, in the old days, in the doorway, with an electric heater turned on and visible in the hallway to lure the poor, lonely men inside for a few dollars in their pockets … the coffee shop, Bill and Toni's … past the old 'Save the Whales' signs, 'Ban Uranium', 'Solar not Nuclear' – all the slogans we can remember that failed to protect us; walking up hills, turning down lanes we haven't seen for months, remembering old houses where friends used to live, corners we rounded wondering what we'd see next until my legs get tired and I broach the subject of going back home.(109)

For Billie walking is an act of recollection: the streets evoke other walks and also memories, often painful. She is a kind of 'collector' of the ephemeral, of intangible memories and tangible objects in the streets which open out into other psychic meanings for her:

> In the gutter was a piece of flex, such as they fit to electronic irons. I wonder what its history was. Had it been used to terminate some loved one? To hurt a child? Or someone who welcomed the surprise and surge of warmth that pain brings? (16)

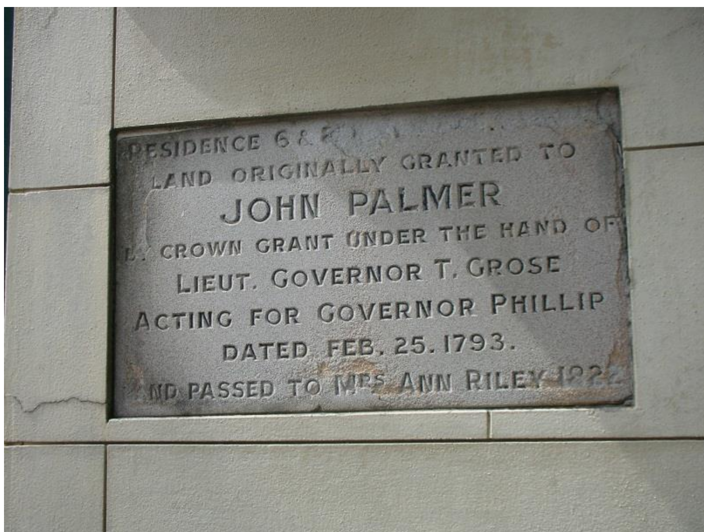
The act of walking becomes a central metaphor of the text as her inner self alternately merges with the obsessively and elaboratively patterned map of the streets, and is threatened with atomization and disintegration.

To walk with Billie as part of this *dérive* is therefore a disorienting and disturbing experience. I follow her with leopard Bobbie on a leash up Stanley Street past the colourful cafes full of daytime folk chatting and eating, past Bill and Toni's still serving its cheap spaghetti accompanied by big flasks of orange cordial as it has done for decades, to the corner of Bourke Street. At this point, sometime in the past, a clown was painted on the back of the corner terrace, dressed in motley, an anarchic and ambiguous figure of indeterminate gender, of laughter and tears. For years, the clown was representative of the city: a tutelary spirit; a trickster; a lord or lady of misrule. Like Billie's slogans, this unprotected fragment has now utterly vanished under a glass and steel renovation.

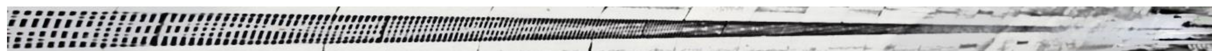
From Bourke, I turn left into William Street and the ambience changes abruptly as I cross

over at the lights at Palmer Street: a sense of threat, of psychic damage. The lost clown recalls the grotesque deaths of *City of Women* denizens Old Gwen and Joan, lovers in their sixties, 'both killed crossing William Street up the hill from the pub one Thursday night', their bodies run over by three cars. Ivy's niece makes *papier mâché* life size figures of them which are set up in the *Lover's Arms* beer garden: 'For weeks their hollow corpses sat there, married' (47) until they melt in the rain and are burnt in a ritual funeral (or Dionysian) bonfire. I head west down William to Yurong, and turn right into Cathedral Street which now, due to changes in the city's fabric, has no real beginning and, like William Street, travels to no destination.

During medieval carnivals, the spiritual and moral authority of the church over the lives and bodies of the people was overturned and debased through subversive laughter and the excesses of the grotesque body – eating, drinking, and fornicating. At the corner of Yurong and Cathedral Streets, I look back to the spires of St Mary's Cathedral which, like the medieval cathedral on which it is modelled, looms over the streets of Woolloomooloo, 'both conscience and scourge of the sinful below.'[206] From this vantage point however, its moral authority is destabilized by the domination of the secular spire of the monument to consumerism, the Westfield/ Centrepoint Tower – perhaps the symbolic thyrsus of Dionysius?[207]




Close by is Riley Street and the plaque which records the original grant of land to the Commissary General John Palmer in 1793. He called the farm he built 'Woolamoola' or 'Walla-Mulla', based on what may have been an Aboriginal name for the place. Palmer sold his grant to Edward Riley in 1822 who, like so many before and after in Sydney, made his fortune from property speculation. The foot track from Hyde Park was named Woolloomooloo Street in 1831, but in 1905 the City Council received a petition asking that the name be changed to Cathedral Street 'because the word [Woolloomooloo] evoked connotations of violence and discouraged people from visiting the area'.[208]



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[206] George Farwell, *Requiem for Woolloomooloo* (Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971), 17.
[207] Tonkin, 'City of Dionysius', in Emmett, 180, note 6.
[208] Farwell, 17.

Walking up Cathedral Street, I am conscious of passing through varying atmospheres: the quotidian realities of a particular city space. It has always been a neighbourhood of narrow streets, lane ways and *culs de sac*. Slessor writes of its 'tabular map of narrow streets dwindling away to Crown Street and Surry Hills',[209] a pattern that structures and shapes the sense of narrative confinement of *City of Women*, a place physically and psychically cut off. Today this sense of a self-contained, inward looking quarter, a complete micro-environment, creates a special ambience, intensified by the overhead viaduct of the Eastern Suburbs railway which cuts across the suburb diagonally from north-west to south-east, creating visual barriers and blocked vistas, but also other urban spaces, oddly shaped little parks scattered underneath. There are few walkers here as Woolloomooloo maintains its unsafe reputation.

At the intersection of Crown and Cathedral, just past the Office of the First Fleeters, is the 1856 East Sydney Hotel, perhaps a model for the Lover's Arms. The interior is lit by red

[209] Slessor, 1952, 7.

shaded lamps: outside in the sun are the only other drinkers, two old men, locals. The pub is up for sale advertised as 'the last country pub in Sydney'. Trish Muller and her husband have been the publicans since 1978 and Trish recalls David Ireland drinking there. The East Sydney was not a gay pub but there was a popular Saturday night drag show which the Mullers inherited from the previous owner. At the time, the hotel had a diverse clientele of judges, artists, writers and locals.[210]

Further up the hill, at its intersection with Cathedral Street, Palmer Street morphs into an eight lane expressway, the Eastern Suburbs Distributor, thick with traffic even in the middle of a weekday. It slices Woolloomooloo into two zones physically and visually further cutting the suburb off from the city to the west and creating small, dead end streets which are difficult to access: the preferred terrain for a *dérive.*

On the other side of the expressway, in the south-west corner, is the Matthew Talbot Hostel for homeless men and in Cross Lane a few men sit on steps in the sun smoking. It is quiet and otherwise deserted with an atmosphere of melancholy; the small parks under the railway viaduct occupied by men 'sleeping rough'. In his requiem for Woolloomooloo written in 1971 when demolition looked certain in favour of vast high rise buildings and expressways, resident George Farwell wrote:

> To dismiss the Loo as a slum has never been properly justified.Traditionally, at least since the 1860s, it has been independently working class; with workshy or drop-out elements as well. At one time or another it has been a haven for all manner of classes, callings and types; gypsies, displaced Aborigines, poets, artists, gunmen, conmen, philosophers, whores, drug addicts and drug smugglers, visa less immigrants, seamen jumping ships. There was a period, between the two world wars, when it had overtones of Gorki's lower depths; when it was unsafe to walk around after dark; few but prostitutes and standover men were discernible under street lamps; and coshes, razor blades and knuckledusters were common persuaders.[211]

The particular ambience is also created by the sense of vagueness about just what Woolloomooloo is: historically, its boundaries and alignments have shifted 'in perplexing ways'. To Farwell its accumulated textures and associations come also from its neglect: even in the 1960s, it had a divided personality, a sense of alienation, of remaining outside the rest of the city:

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[210] Personal conversation with the publicans on 12 November 2011.
[211] Farwell, 17.

> Underground, underworld, what went on in its silent streets, along the waterfront, down the back lanes or behind lace curtains was not deemed to be the concern of mere outsiders. And that, in recent times, meant anyone from the other side of William Street, foreigners all.

The climb up Cathedral Street comes to an end at a topographical boundary – the sandstone cliff that lies beneath Kings Cross and Potts Point. This area was once known as Woolloomooloo Hill and, in the early to mid19th century, the site for grand villas and gardens: 'a high status area … which would serve as both example and chastisement to the debased population of Sydney Town'.[212] It was later re-named Darlinghurst although Woolloomooloo Hill stuck for a few more years.

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[212] Under the rule of Macquarie's successor Governor Darling. Fitzgerald, 32.

The Old Fitzroy Hotel[213] on the corner of Dowling Street and perhaps a model for the fictional Conqueror's Arms, is over 100 years old. Like the East Sydney Hotel, during the day it is quiet, intimate and personal, patronised by small groups of locals perhaps recounting some of the pub yarns threaded through *City of Women*. Opposite is a fenced area overgrown with weeds and shaded by tall trees, one of those indeterminate spaces that occur in the city – neither park, nor waste ground, which nevertheless has lives of its own. A vegetable garden has been started, some cactuses are growing in plastic tubs and it is a refuge for feral animals that scavenge a living in the city. Billie is an unreliable narrator – perhaps a fabulist – and her leopard Bobbie may or may not be a feral cat.

I walk north along McElhone Street following the sandstone cliff, aware of the spatial otherness of the street: short, narrow lanes of terraces with their luxuriant gardens in pots end abruptly at the cliff face. I climb east up the Hills Stairs to Brougham Street, then up the very steep Butler Stairs to Victoria Street. In Woolloomooloo's early days, the only way to access the top of the cliff was by such stairs hewn into the rock, 'whose flags have been trodden into concavities by a century and a half of toiling feet'.[214]

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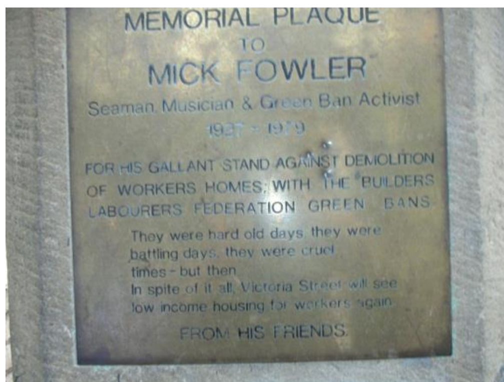
[213] Formerly known as the Revolving Battery Hotel.
[214] Slessor,'A Portrait of Sydney', 7.

From the Butler Stairs there is a narrow vista west to the city, one of the few vistas available in this enclosed area. In the 19th century, excavations into the cliff to enable houses to be built above in Victoria Street created new visual forms which hint at Roman ruins and the hidden secrets of the city: time is telescoped. At the top of the stairs is a memorial plaque to a local




man, Mick Fowler, seaman, musician and Green Ban activist, one of many who fought against the demolition of Victoria Street by developers in the early 1970s. Juanita Neilsen, another activist in this battle, was murdered, perhaps in 1975, her body never found. On a door in the laneway at the back of the Fitzroy Hotel is scrawled *Juanita Lives*!

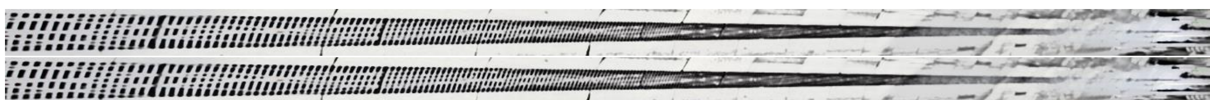
The ambience changes abruptly in Victoria Street which is thronged with backpackers, aimless strollers, dog walkers, cruising cars. Customers in the cafes and bars spill over on to the pavements: the street opens out as I walk south towards the Cross.

The *dérive* reaches its exit point at the intersection of six streets on the top of Woolloomooloo Hill: the panoramic city is laid out for the viewer to claim possession. The view from this vantage point reveals and conceals: St Mary's is almost swamped by the concrete and glass towers of the marketplace; Woolloomooloo is hidden, retaining its secrecy, its urban otherness.

This is a charged space: of pleasure, play and disorder in the material and fictional cities. Billie stands here, leopard on a leash, her back to the Coca-Cola sign, a carnivalesque figure who conjures up the first Mardi Gras Parade in 1978. Refused entry by police to Hyde Park, the motley crowd of dykes, drag kings and queens, leather men, Carmen Mirandas and other disorderly merry makers sang and danced their way up William Street, to be met at the top of the hill by three police squad cars in front of the Hyatt Kingsgate. A riot ensued in Darlinghurst Road where police threw punches and arrested over 50 people and the crowd responded by hurling garbage cans and bottles, has become a Sydney legend, an urban myth. In excessive carnivalesque tradition, the forces of authority were debased, uncrowned and (eventually) overturned.

In March 2012, Mardi Gras month, the top of the hill was the site for a visitation from new and visibly potent gods of the street: a visual representation of the myths of modernity; a wishful fantasy, a collective dream. Could this be read against the other dream images encountered in this *dérive* as an assemblage, a constellation of meaning, perhaps a dialectical image, from which the dreamer wakens in the space of history?

> We have neither guaranteed recipes nor definitive results. We only propose an experimental research …That which changes our way of seeing the streets is more important than what changes our way of seeing paintings.[215]



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[215] Guy Debord,'Towards a Situationist International, June 1957' in Ken Knabb, ed. and trans., *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley California: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 23.

The world inside out: carnivalesque in David Ireland's *City of Women:A Novel*
Chapter Two

‘Come in’, I said. As if she were human.

*City of Women* (140)

In the world of carnival, all hierarchies are cancelled.[216]

Mikhail Bakhtin

[216]Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Helene Iswolsky trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 251.

# The world inside out: carnivalesque in David Ireland's *City of Women*: A *Novel* (1981)[217]

David Ireland's seventh novel *City of Women* was published three years after the first Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade through the streets of Darlinghurst and written while Ireland was living close to the heartland of gay and lesbian bars, pubs and clubs at 6 Stanley Street East Sydney, the model for the block of flats in which Billie Shockley, the narrator of his novel lives. However, he does not map the topography of *City of Women* on to these subversive pleasure havens which were predominantly grouped around Oxford Street – from Hyde Park through Darlinghurst and up to Paddington – and William Street up to Kings Cross.[218] Rather he chooses the pubs of Cathedral Street Woolloomooloo, a working-class area, which in his fictional city maintains its links with the penal settlement of Sydney's colonial past and I suggest, by association, with the disorderly and unruly convict women who find their 20th century equivalents in the *City of Women*'s 'gender deviants'.

Sydney, as Julie McCrossin observes in *Queer City: Gay and Lesbian Politics in Sydney*, was founded as a penal colony with the British naval tradition of the lash as the response to homosexuality, and deviance in women of any kind was met with a combination of corporal punishment and sexual assault. However, the city also has a 'gutsy history of defeating deep-seated legal and sexual taboos'.[219] Ireland's mordantly exuberant city is shaped by such violent traditions and their modern counterparts, as well as by the politics and pleasures of Sydney's feminist, lesbian and homosexual cultures and communities of the 1970s, a time of intense social and political upheaval in Australia. *City of Women* shares with *Seven Poor Men* and *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* a strong critique of capitalist modernity – Ireland, however, is not overtly political. Rather than a call to action, he chooses to map the 'wounds' of modernity – sexual violence, alienation, loneliness, meaningless work – onto the bodies of the women in the City[220] and on to the City itself.

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[217] David Ireland, *City of Women: a Novel* (Ringwood, Vic.: Allen Lane, 1981). All references will be to this edition.Page numbers included parenthetically in text.
[218] A 1980 map showing the concentration of gay venues in Kings Cross and Oxford Street is included in Clive Faro with Garry Wotherspoon, *Street Seen: A History of Oxford Street* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2000), 242. It is interesting to compare this to the sketch map which appears inside the end papers of the first edition (1981) of *City of Women* which covers a similar terrain.
[219] Julie McCrossin, 'Foreword', in Craig Johnston and Paul van Reyk, eds. *Queer City: Gay and Lesbian Politics in Sydney* (Annandale: Pluto Press, 2001), v.
[220] I will capitalise 'City' when I am referring to Ireland's fictional City.

In juxtaposing *City of Women* with *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, it is not my intention to make comparisons between the novels as responses to times of radical change, but rather to look for affinities or correspondences, and the first of these appears in the titles. Stead's implies a focus on men when the most compelling character is a woman, and one who is extreme, excessive, often out of control in her rebellion against the conventions of the time. Ireland's title with its suggestion of a futuristic feminist utopia in which women live without men is, as I argue in this chapter, also about masculinity. Both novels in different ways reach back to Sydney's penal and colonial past which haunts the city and erupts into the narratives. In reading with a topographical consciousness, I ask the city for the form and the form for the city. In Stead's novel this is encompassed by the gothic wandering heart of Sydney and the mythical visions that arise from the landscapes, often in the form of strange tales. In *City of Women*, which is also 'written' into being by Billie Shockley, I look to the spirit of carnival and the grotesque realism of the carnivalesque. The cities created by Stead and Ireland are recognisable to each other and also radically different: both are violent, excessive and animated by the power of Sydney's lyrical and often disturbing beauty and both embrace concerns which go far beyond those of their own day, their 'truth content' released only after the fact, in that reality which becomes a medium for their survival.[221]

In his novels Ireland is deeply interested in deviants and transgressors of all kinds, those who are 'unmoored', who violate conventions and disrupt social order, and in the ways in which Australian culture has both produced and attempted to control and regulate such apparent marginals. In *City of Women* his focus shifts from the masculinist order in deviant communities which dominated earlier novels *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* (1971) and *The Glass Canoe* (1975),[222] to that of a post-industrial femininist order. Sydney is re-imagined as a futuristic, separatist utopia from which men have been expelled and into which readers are drawn, compelled by the fantastical visions of the narrator Billie Shockley, retired water engineer, ex-wife, mother, lesbian, sometime 'drag king' and heavy drinker, as she tells herself stories in order to live.[223]

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[221] Susan Buck-Morss, 'The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering', *New German Critique*, (1986), 10/39, 99.
[222] Ireland won the Miles Franklin Literary Prize 3 times: for *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* (1971), *The Glass Canoe* (1975) and *Woman of the Future* (1979).
[223] Joan Didion, *The White Album* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1979), 11.

> My dearest, darling Bobbie, I am writing to tell you about some of the people who live round about. (8)

The novel takes the form of a 'patchwork tale' (65) in which each 'chapter' is ostensibly a daily letter or 'story' from Billie to her absent daughter (or lover), Bobbie. These fragments of the City's mosaic create a kind of miniature narrative map which does not guide the reader but confuses and leads her astray. The chapter titles take the names of the City's inhabitants, events, responses to the daily round, places, psychic states or dreams including: *The Lover's Arms; Ronnie; Halfwits, Beggars and Cripples; Safety of the Hexagon; Slaughter in the Pet's Home; Brain Rape*. Some people, places and events recur, others are seen only once. The chapters are thus loosely connected – not in a linear fashion, but juxtaposed in a jagged and disturbing manner. The narrative slides from murder, mutilated corpses and prisoners on death row to the mundane, banal, everyday domestic details of nappy washing and caring for pets and thence to the cosmic contemplation of the universe, with little if any transition. It is the City that stitches the narrative together through the medium of its extraordinary narrator, a poet of the streets in the tradition of Baudelaire and the Surrealists, a type of *flâneu*r, often walking with her senses deranged by alcohol and grief.

In the chapter that follows, I propose to enter this City through the spirit of carnival as embodied in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade[224] first held in 1978, an event which marked major social and political change as David Malouf recognises in his 1998 Boyer lectures. He traces a 'spirit of play' in the making of Australian consciousness using Mardi Gras – the performers and the audience – as a metonym, an expression of the carnival spirit which by embracing darkness and disruption, 'deals with disorder by making a licensed place for it and with the threat of fragmentation by reconstructing community in a spirit of celebratory lightness'. Sydney's Mardi Gras he considers, retains much of the ancient roots of carnival: in the spirit of mockery let loose and its vulgarity and flaunting of flesh, it 'recovers for us, within the complexities and divisiveness of modern living, a sense of wholeness.'[225] Ireland does not specifically refer to Mardi Gras, but it has, I argue, an unspoken, powerful fictional presence, one which is much darker, more violent and less about the sense of

[224]Henceforth referred to as Mardi Gras'.The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade has now been continuously running since 1978 (except for 1980) and has become an international tourist attraction, a fully commercialised operation which also retains it political slant. In 2012, the words 'Gay and Lesbian' were dropped from the title ostensibly to make the parade more inclusive and also to attract a wider range of corporate sponsors. It appeared that Mardi Gras, once subversive, had been absorbed into the mainstream. However, as from May 2013, the name has been changed back to that of the original.

[225] David Malouf, *A Spirit of Play: The Making of Australian Consciousness* (Sydney: ABC Books, 1998), 115.

wholeness that Malouf ascribes to it. Instead, Ireland turns to carnival for its ambivalent outrageousness; its subversive, disruptive potential which may be transformational, purely destructive, or both.

As my reading of the novel shows, the carnivalisation of Sydney through the futuristic utopia of *City of Women* allows Ireland to mount an assault on the domination of Australian culture by traditional masculine mythology while also demonstrating how pervasive such a mythology – and history – is. Parodic relics of this 'sterile male culture'[226] live on in the women who inhabit the Cathedral Street pub, the Lover's Arms, a community enclave within the City:

> No-one from these parts of Sydney was going to turn her back on history, which went back to the first days of our little colony. And the history of a goodly number of the people of the Lover's Arms went back to the first inhabitants of the colony. And a goodly number of the early inhabitants, brothers and sisters and mothers and uncles and fathers of those inhabitants finished their existence on the end of a length of tough rope and they weren't about to drink with an executioner. (148)

While Ireland draws a connecting thread from the cruelty and brutality of the penal colony through to contemporary Australian male behaviour, he also shows that the expulsion of men from the City does not bring about a radically different way of life. Rather than a feminist utopia where women are free of such male domination, the City appears to be yet another type of penal colony. Figures of the prison with its inmates, brutal warders and surveillance underpin the rhetorics of urban space in *City of Women* as they do in most of Ireland's urban fictions. The pub, bastion of Australian heterosexual masculinity,[227] in Ireland's fictional cityscapes becomes a kind of voluntary prison as he makes clear when discussing his 1976 novel, *The Glass Canoe*: '… to get the pub up as a little citadel and increase the sense of isolation of the people from the rest of society in this little eddy, I've cut their laterals that connect most of them with their parents, their friends and their relations … I've falsified it to get them all together'.[228]

I suggest that a similar set of spatialities operates parodically within the narrative *of City of Women* in that the City itself is another of these 'little citadels' and nested within it are the

[226] As Billie calls it.
[227] Women were 'not allowed' into the public bars of hotels until the mid-1970s. Feminists carried out 'raids' on segregated bars in Sydney including the Manly hotel in 1973.
[228] Mark McLeod, 'Interview with David Ireland', Macquarie University, Oct.1980, *Kunapipi*, Vol 3/1, 1981, 64-75, p71

'citadels' of the pubs of Cathedral Street. As Billie observes, it is no use complaining about the violent and outrageous behaviour of the (female) denizens of these pubs 'to our own police or public servants; they were just as much outside our day-to-day society as their counterparts [men] were in any possible enemy territory'(29). The women about whom Billie writes are thus both 'inside' and 'outside' the City of Women and, in addition, I suggest that the antecedents of the Cathedral Street pubs can be traced back to Sydney's Female Factories, early to mid19th century penal 'experiments' in which convict women were incarcerated and disciplined to conform to societal – and therefore gender – norms.[229] Such places, as historian Joy Damousi documents, were also charged erotically for the males who visited them to gaze with fascinated horror at the spectacle of imprisoned women whose 'vociferous laughter and play – dancing, chanting and playing tricks – undermined the exercise of power'.[230] Some women rejected attempts to impose the norms of female behaviour – which included marriage and a domestic family life – as do *City of Women*'s violent and outrageous women. While Ireland has been seen as simply another of these male voyeurs visiting his self-created 'female factory' under the guise of the authoritative writer, the novel is, as I show in this chapter, a more complex, subversive and shocking enterprise, one which exceeds the narrowness imposed by such a reading and which opens Sydney out to subversive places of a deeply disturbing nature.

## The world inside out

Through the City and its 'little citadels', Ireland parodies inner city separatist feminist and lesbian hierarchies as the 'inside-outside' world of carnival, influenced by the tales of Rabelais. Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World,* uses the term 'carnival' to encompass the diverse manifestations of folk culture associated with medieval and early Renaissance times which included ritual spectacles, pageants, feasts, fairs and varied open air amusements involving the participation of giants, dwarves, monsters, trained animals, clowns and fools. Such practices mimicked, parodied, and travestied the serious rituals of the institutions of the time, primarily the Church, and a second world was built outside of officialdom in which medieval people lived for given parts of the year: the world and human life thus took on a double aspect, both serious and comic. This second life of carnival – to a certain extent a

[229] The Female Factory at Parramatta operated from 1821 until 1847; as Damousi notes, women were sent to Emu Plains under similar conditions although a specific 'factory' was not built to house them and the experiment was short-lived as it quickly became a prison brothel. Joy Damousi, *Depraved and Disorderly: Female Convicts, Sexuality and Gender in Colonial Australia* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press,1997).
[230] Ibid., 4.

parody of extra carnival life – Bakhtin calls ‘the world inside out’.[231] Carnival thus offered subversive spaces for ordinary people in which the official world and its language was inverted through practices which were based on laughter and ‘uncrowning’: ‘The king’s attributes are turned upside down in the clown; he is king of a world turned inside out’.[232] For Bakhtin ‘debasement’ is the fundamental principle of what he terms grotesque realism: all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of the dense atmosphere of the material bodily lower stratum or else combined with its images.[233]

Bakhtin’s description of carnival resonates with Sydney’s Mardi Gras which I discuss below in ‘Entering the City’. As I observed earlier, Ireland turns to carnival for its subversive potential which may be transformational, purely destructive or both. There is a dynamic connection between the celebration of carnival and the terror of the abject, and Ireland’s vision of carnival spirit’s constant oscillation between the positive pole of light, gaiety and laughter and the negative pole of darkness, violence and death, structures and drives the narrative.

Bakhtin argues for the evolution of a literary genre, the carnivalesque or grotesque-realism, which exercises the same function as carnival – to offer the chance of a new outlook on the world, ‘to realise the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things’.[234] The essential principle of grotesque realism is ‘degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of the earth and the body’.[235] Bakhtin traces the movements of this genre historically into Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, a novel which Ireland has acknowledged as being of great significance to him,[236] and further into other darker varieties which reacted against cold rationalism and the didactic and utilitarian spirit of Enlightenment. In more modern forms of the genre, the grotesque acquired a ‘private chamber’ character becoming ‘as it were, an individual carnival marked by a vivid sense of isolation’, [237] a description that resonates with *City of Women*. In such literary forms, carnival spirit ceased to be concrete, and bodily laughter was no longer a joyful and triumphant hilarity, its positive regenerating power

[231] Ibid., 11.
[232] Ibid., 370.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Ibid., 32.
[235] Ibid., 29-30.
[236] In a meticulous, handrawn map of the town of ‘Lost River’ from his 1997 novel *The Chosen*, Ireland names 4 adjacent streets Cervantes, Sterne, Montaigne and Rabelais. Literary Papers, ML MSS 4233, ADD-ON 2147, 6 (7), Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.
[237] Bakhtin, 37.

reduced to a minimum: it took on the melancholy character of destructive laughter.[238] With the introduction of terror and fear 'Our own world becomes alien. Something frightening is revealed in that which was habitual and secure'.[239] Terror is no longer represented by comic carnival monsters, who were laughed at and so defeated, rather the modern versions of grotesque realism sought to fill readers with fear of the world – darkness and not light.

In *City of Women*, Ireland writes within his own particular vision of what I call the modern urban carnivalesque. Laughter is only sometimes the gay joyous laughter of Rabelaisian carnivalesque. The many cruel jokes that the women of the City play on each other and on animals, and the monstrous porno-horror figure of Old Man Death/Jack the Zipper turn on destructive humour, the deriding of the whole world, where all reality is turned into something alien and terrifying. The radicalism of such humour causes the ground to slip from under our feet.[240] Bakhtin refers to Victor Hugo's declaration that the grotesque is everywhere, on one hand the formless and terrifying, on the other hand the comic, the buffoon like:'The essential aspect of this form is the monstrous; the aesthetics of the grotesque are to a certain extent the aesthetics of the monstrous.'[241]

Such aesthetics inform those of the modern urban carnivalesque which I conceptualise in this chapter as operating across three intertwining areas. First, I take up Bakhtin's concept of 'anatomical localisation' whereby bodily boundaries are blurred so that the city takes on features of the grotesque body and vice versa. This topographical reading traverses wounds and holes, invasions and expulsions, and junk. I next read the inversions and uncrownings performed across the hierarchies of male and female, exploring the urban locations in which such 'events' occur, and the resulting emergence of multiplicities of masculine femininities including the 'drag kings' of the Cathedral Street pubs. Boundaries and borders are also blurred and crossed between the human and the animal and I read these through the 'beastly places' in the city and the significance of Bobbie the leopard as a threshold figure of possible transformation.

This chapter argues that Ireland connects to the positive pole of life affirming carnival spirit through the cosmic and ludic spaces of the city itself, and in my concluding discussion I suggest Billie's wandering urban poetics, her surreal visions of the modern city, and her own

[238] Ibid., 41.
[239] Ibid., 38.
[240] Ibid., 42.
[241] Ibid., 43.

refusal to end the masquerade, hold out a fragile promise of renewal of sorts. Nevertheless, in Ireland's modern urban canivalesque aesthetic, the gay, bright world of carnival struggles unceasingly against what Bakhtin considers to be the essential trait of modern grotesque: what is hostile, alien and *das unheimliche,* as our own world – and the city of Sydney – is transformed into something alien.

*City of Women* is a disturbing and often extremely offensive work. It has been out of print for decades and is now largely forgotten. Even Geordie Williamson in his recent push for Ireland's return to the Australian literary canon, fails to mention it.[242]When it was published it provoked a range of negative responses, mostly of outrage that a male writer had presumed to write about women – particularly feminist and lesbian women – from the inside, with what was seen as misogynistic loathing, disgust of female bodies and sexuality, and a voyeuristic delight in sadistic mutilations and rape.[243] Ireland was perceived less as a radical experimental writer, the winner of three Miles Franklin awards, and 'more as a middle-aged white male' whose fictions were 'apparently rife with political lapses'. Williamson is not writing specifically of *City of Women*, but the comment is pertinent. As he goes on to argue, Ireland has uneasily occupied both past and present moments: 'He was too iconoclastic on his arrival and too conservative for what came after.'[244]Ireland writes within the literary tradition which is modernist, masculine, urban and working-class argues Williamson, which in my view, makes *City of Women* an even more courageous, offensive and outrageous enterprise, one which takes such a tradition, subverts and carnivalises it. As this chapter shows, Ireland attacks with equal gusto the brutal absurdities which flow from the imposition of male and female hierarchies within closed and insular communities: the 'little citadels'.

Ken Gelder has criticised *City of Women* as a simplistic mapping of the suburban male pub values of *The Glass Canoe* onto inner city lesbian separatists.[245] Helen Daniel reads it as a novel about the ambiguous sexual identity of Australia where women re-enact the brutal male past, a fantastic creation by Billie Shockley in which the women who surface one by one in the narrative are all Billie.[246]For Gelder *City of Women* 'is an "abject" novel, engaged in a

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[242] Geordie Williamson, 'David Ireland', *The Burning Library: Our Great Novelists Lost and Found* (Melbourne:Text Publishing, 2012), 138-156. Page 140 mentions all his novels except *City of Women*.
[243] See for example Meaghan Morris, 'Something's Amiss in the City of Women', *Financial Review* , 7 August, 1981, 31; Jenny Palmer, 'Ireland's Women', *National Times*, 9-15 August, 1981,72-73.
[244] Williamson, 141.
[245] Ken Gelder, *Atomic Fiction: the Novels of David Ireland* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1993), 85.
[246] Helen Daniel, *Double Agent:David Ireland and His Work* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books, 1983), 130.

continual renegotiation of the boundaries it lives by'. What he terms 'the neurosis' of *City of Women* 'stems from Billie's ongoing attempt to expel or repress men … It is as if writing and expulsion go hand in hand.'[247] In his reading, the crossing of boundaries produces the abjection that Julia Kristeva describes in *Powers of Horror*. The abject condition as Kristeva conceptualises it, is a kind of horror which follows the failure or unwillingness of the subject to accept or recognise the contradictory responses to that which the body expels – spit, shit, blood, semen, pus and other discharges – including those which come from the ultimate object of horror and disgust, the corpse. The abject is 'something rejected from which one does not part', a horror that violates 'identity, system, order' thus revealing the fragility of such forms.[248] Kristeva's reading of carnival, while sharing common concerns with that of Bakhtin – ambiguity and ambivalence and the centrality of the materiality of the body – is essentially concerned with the inner world. While I draw on Kristevan notions in this chapter, my concerns tend more towards the 'inside-out' world of carnival and the carnivalesque as it plays out across the topographies of city and body, and with the possibilities of renewal and transformation.

*City of Women* is largely driven by the negative implications of the Bakhtinian carnival: comic exuberance always being shaded by the threat of the monstrous and the abject.[249] The clown, the buffoon, has her dark side but can also offer a new outlook on the world, one which, as I suggest in this chapter, is embodied in the masculine women and 'drag kings' of Ireland's City. M. Keith Booker argues that abjection and the carnivalesque are two sides of the same coin, representing different and potentially transgressive reminders of aspects of life that the dominant culture seeks to systematically repress. In abjection, we are reminded that we are animals and must die, in the carnivalesque we are reminded that we are animals and therefore might as well live while we can. Booker argues that they both are common to us all and therefore 'tend to deconstruct all systems of social hierarchy'.[250] Similarly, David Danow following Bakhtin, argues that both the positive and negative poles of experience are inextricably connected: 'A positive, life-affording potential … will be shown to exist in uneasy alliance with a corresponding affinity for its fugitive negative realization.'[251] These views inform my topographical reading of Ireland's urban carnivalesque aesthetic – an

[247] Gelder, 1993, 86-88.
[248] Julia Kristeva, 'Approaching Abjection', *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)
[249] Ibid.
[250] M. Keith Booker, *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature: Transgression, Abjection, and the Carnivalesque* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), 14.
[251] David K. Danow, *The Spirit of Carnival:Magical Realism and the Grotesque* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 2.

exploration of the interaction between the oscillating poles of darkness and light, abjection and renewal across the zones of the City.

In taking such a carnivalesque approach, I am therefore swerving off in new directions, taking detours and diversions and often going astray, influenced by Ireland's view of change, the underlying principle of the world of carnival, as sexual license is its prevailing manifestation. While his fiction, including *City of Women,* has been criticised for its nihilism and chaotic violence as Daniel points out, his novels have enormous vitality and gusto, a celebratory delight in the very diversity of life and the constancy of its change: 'Nothing is fixed or final … Everything is shifting and changing and I swim around in that … Why do we need solid moorings? We are all afloat in a sea … Change and permanence take from each other but even attempts to slow change are absorbed into the sea.'[252] The constant change and fragmentation of Ireland's novels are part of this process: 'a little push here, a spurt of creativity there, random event, running off at a tangent'.[253]

These last words resonate with Ireland's emotional geographies and I turn now to his relationships with Sydney and how these play out in the fictional landscapes of *City of Women.*

## Writer and city

> Lots of people are writing from the world and it's fair dinkum stuff straight off the street. I'm not that sort of novelist. I want to give it an eccentric, off-to-the-margin view, perhaps an angle people haven't thought of. [254]
>
> The events of my life are unremarkable – perhaps then I shall be able to reproduce the atmosphere of my times all the better.[255]

Ireland was born in 1927 in Lakemba, a suburb 15 kilometres to the south-west of Sydney. Unlike the other writers in this study, he came from a working-class background, both in regard to his family and education (he initially left school at 15), the kinds of jobs he did and the milieu in which he often moved. While he has been described as a 'proletarian' writer, [256] he does not espouse any ideological set of beliefs or political orthodoxies – the violence

[252] Daniel, 5.
[253] Ibid., 17.
[254] McLeod, *Kunapipi,* 75.
[255] David Ireland, *Notebooks*, 1979, 158, *David Ireland Literary Papers*, ML/866/75, 2(2), Mitchell Library. The notebooks are boxed in roughly chronological order from the early 1960s until the first years of the 21st century.
[256] 'David Ireland … has written two of the few great proletarian novels in our literature: *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* and *The Glass Canoe* .This is working class without the dogma, expressionist rather than social realist'. Peter Pierce, quoted in Stephen Romei, 'The Great Unknown,' *Weekend Australian Magazine*, (7-8 April, 2012), 26-29.

inflicted on and by the working-class characters in his novels he describes as ‘pre-Marxist’, of ‘more or less a Christian derivation’. Such violence is driven by anger: ‘It’s in me but I’ve also encountered it in so many other men – it’s like a monster that is waiting to be let loose in the men in the bar … I don’t do that [get drunk and fight] but I do feel those things.’[257] In *City of Women*, this same anger-driven ‘monster’ has been let loose among the women as they go about living ‘male’ lives.

Ireland has lived a peripatetic life, most of it in NSW, changing addresses frequently, not surprisingly acquiring the reputation of being difficult to track down – in reality and in his fiction: Daniel likens her study of Ireland’s work to being in ‘pursuit’ of a subversive novelist, a ‘double agent’. As a child he also lived in many Sydney suburbs usually on the edge of the bush: ‘A lot of my growing up was done alone. We moved so much to different suburbs. But I never felt lonely, being alone.’ He has said that he purposely puts his characters in situations where they are on their own to see how they react.[258] It was from the edge of the bush that he remembers as a child looking down to the lights of the city 48 minutes away by train.[259] In all his novels, the remnant ‘edges’ of bush, marginal patches of natural growth, particularly grass, and water in all its forms, become a narrative emblem or recurring motif of place within industrialised and urbanised landscapes. In *The Flesheaters* (1972), a patch of tall grass becomes for narrator Lee Mallory ‘the uncut forest’ with ‘animals moving around in its obscure, mysterious depths’ (2); Meatman, the narrator of *The Glass Canoe*, works on a golf course and ‘liked the trees and the curve of the fairways and the dull silver dew … and the world was fragrant with cut grass (19); Billie Shockley constantly walks the Domain, Botanic Gardens and Hyde Park, her ludic spaces in the City, particularly the grassy hill near the entrance to the Domain underground parking station where she takes off her shoes and ‘plays’ with her leopard Bobbie.

In his book length study of Ireland, Gelder observes that he ‘always uses *Australia* as a frame for his work: his fiction is never set anywhere else. It constructs communities which operate within that frame in various ways, allowing Ireland to suggest through them what Australia might be’.[260] While Ireland writes from within this broader frame, he is very much a Sydney writer – initially making the suburbs of the west and south-west his fictional terrain, suburbs

[257] Ken Gelder, ‘Interview with David Ireland’, July 1991 (unpublished), *David Ireland, Further Papers*, 1987-1992, MLMSS 4233, Add-on 2017 2(3), Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.
[258] Belinda Giese,‘Interview with David Ireland, 26 August, 1985’. *Notes and Furphies*, no.20, (April 1988), 20, 15.
[259] Daniel, 8-9.
[260] Gelder,1993, 19.

which are closely connected historically to the early days of the colony. In *The Flesheaters,* Parramatta, its river and surrounding suburbs, is the location for Merry Lands, the vast, shambling institution housing outcasts and those suffering from the disease of 'terminal unemployment';[261]the Shell Oil refineries at Kurnell on the shores of Botany Bay where Ireland worked as a personnel officer and catalytic cracker are fictionalised as Puroil in *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner;*[262] The Mead in *The Glass Canoe*[263] draws on the suburbs of Northmead, Westmead, Parramatta and Lidcombe, where the Canarvon Golf course on which Ireland worked was located.[264] In his adult life as father to four children, he lived in Winston Hills, a suburb 28 kilometres north-west of Sydney, bushland until its development in the 1960s, and which inspired the suburbs of *A Woman of the Future*. Winston Hills is adjacent to Castle Hill, the suburb in which Patrick White lived for 18 years and fictionalised as Sarsparilla in his novels *Riders in the Chariot, Solid Mandala* and his play *Season at Sarsparilla*.

While *City of Women* is set within the heart of Sydney, it also speaks to the suburbs. Andrew McCann writes of the compulsive need in Australian cultural and intellectual life to escape the banality of the suburb for the sexual excitement and fantasy of modernity which appears to be offered by the teeming metropolis.[265] Ireland however, does not have such a need to set up the suburbs in an oppositional relationship to the city as places of intense ennui, boredom and stifling conventionality, inhabited by 'dismal suburban zombies.'[266]His fictional suburban terrains pulse with violence, manic energy, exuberant excess and a strange beauty blurring the real with the surreal and the fantastic. *City of Women* mocks the demonization of the suburbs, the western suburbs in particular, and the accompanying sense of moral and intellectual superiority of those who live in the 'inner city'. The suburbs are named 'the Edge of the City', a panorama Billie views with fear and horror from her window:

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[261] Merrylands the suburb is named for  the former English home of Arthur Todd Holroyd who acquired land in the area in 1855.
[262] In notebooks of this period, notes are written on the back of staff payroll and overtime claims and pasted in. *Literary Papers*, ML/866/75.
[263] 'The Mead was our territory, the Southern Cross our waterhole'. Northmead (ie North Meadow) and Westmead were initially part of the domain of Government House in Parramatta. The land was subdivided between 1859-1889 creating the suburbs of Northmead, Westmead (today still light industrial) and Winston Hills. Named after Winston Churchill, in the early days of Sydney's settlement, it was the site of model farms. Today there is little natural bushland remaining.
[264] In Ireland's papers there is a photo of him on his International tractor, mowing the grass. On the reverse is written 'Carnavon Golf Course , 1971'. *Literary Papers*, 1987-92, MLMSS 4233, Add-on 2017.
[265] Andrew McCann, 'Introduction: Subtopia, or the Problem of Suburbia', Andrew McCann, ed., *Writing the Everyday:Australian Literature and the Limits of Suburbia*, Australian Literary Studies, 18/4, 1998, vii-x.
[266] David Nichols,'On the Outskirts of Town: the Suburbs Get a Bad Rap but Most of Us Live There', *The Australian Literary Review,* 7 September , 2011.

> It is late at night. Across the harbour the far suburbs are slabs of darkness pricked by streetlights and tiny lit windows. Here in the City – which is my home because it is alive in me - the escalators have all stopped … Centrepoint is lit from below; the Hyatt sign is on; the Gazebo is white; the Art Gallery roof is all light. Black at the top of William Street is the Coca Cola sign. It is the end of the day out there past our City limits for the bewildered , arrogant young, the hordes of late night TV watchers, secretive freaks and fetishists, insomniac homosexuals, dirty minded wives, lecherous politicians, masturbating husbands, anguished intellectuals. Even the derisive derelicts are asleep. (30)

Billie fled the suburbs and her husband when her daughter graduated and they began to work together as engineers. She meets up with him again in the surreal and visionary pages near the end of the novel when the City metamorphoses into a rural fringe 'settlement' from Sydney's colonial past where starving women consume her husband and leopards consume them. The suburbs are haunted by the past: Billie's own memories, and the collective memories of the City itself. Ireland thus extends his geographical reach beyond the suburbs into the City and back onto and into the very body itself, tracing visceral topographies of alienation and belonging, love and loss.

In 1973 Ireland moved to live and write in the city, visiting his family in Winston Hills on weekends and moving to the block of flats at Stanley Street East Sydney in 1977. In the 1980s and 90s, he moved around and lived between many places including Manly, Winston Hills, and a property outside Goulburn, before coming to settle in Bateman's Bay on the NSW South Coast in 1995.[267] Today, he lives in a northern beaches suburb in Sydney.

Ireland is clearly reluctant to give any linear sense to his life, or to his fictional works: the individual he says is 'a unique assemblage of influences and part characters, a constellation' which cannot be contained in a linear structure. However, although perception is piecemeal, 'behind the myriad components of the world are countless strings of connection'.[268] This approach is relevant to the writing method used in *City of Women* and one which resonates with that of Walter Benjamin in his writings on 19th and early 20th century European cities and also *The Arcades Project.* Both writers endlessly walked the city gathering observations and encounters – of street life, buildings and the archaeology of the changing city. These observations together with scraps of information, research, newspaper cuttings, advertisements and photos, were filed on cards in boxes and collated in notebooks. Both

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[267] Biographical details of Ireland's life are scarce, and this information has been gathered from newspaper articles and his literary papers: ML/866/75. It would appear that the move from the city/suburbs to the country also changed the terrain and concerns of his later novels to the pastoral: *Bloodfather* (1987) and *The Chosen* (1997). However, he also lived in Goulburn on and off between 1977 and 1982.

[268] Quoted in Daniel, 8.

writers then drew on these collections to compose their works of the city: Benjamin wrote in the 1920s and 30s of 19th century Paris; and Ireland in his fictional works, of late 20th century Sydney. Ireland's notebooks – some in old diaries, others in small books covered in the same stick-on blue plastic patterned in gold squiggles – are in tiny, cramped writing, with scraps of magazine and newspaper articles pasted in and written over. He was particularly drawn to lists of all kinds whether of football league tables, *Top Forty* pop songs or his own lists of words, names of places and people. These fragments jostle against each other in notebooks, on index cards and the backs of envelopes.

In the patchwork, fragmented topography of *City of Women* which has the qualities of montage, following Ireland, I pay attention to 'the strings of connection' and 'the intervening spaces' between fragments which in turn, reveal what Benjamin describes as 'the more secret, more deeply embedded figures of the city: murders and rebellions, the bloody knots in the network of the streets, lairs of love and conflagrations'.[269]

Two of these 'deeply embedded figures' – the carnival parade, and Bobbie the leopard – mark the threshold and I now turn to an examination of how readers are ushered into the City, and to the ways in which these figures continue to shape the narrative.

**Entering the city**

> I'd been down to Cathedral Street where my favourite watering hole is, and came home on the shoulders of four hefty heroines, a little insobrious. Insobrious? Yes, damn it … The holy bottle left me full as a fart. Each of the four clad in recessive jeans (there I go again) had a corner of my platform.They provide it for me on public occasions when I've wandered too far into drink: a square board on which I sit cross-legged as on a magic carpet, singing, beating time to music only I can hear, or addressing a multitude that seems to have gone home … As our procession swung off William Street, up Yurong, I was roaring out:
>
> Bums, bellies and tits
> Bums, bellies and tits
> Nothing so pleasing
> As constantly squeezing
> Bums, bellies and tits.(5)

In carnival tradition, Billie Shockley's drunken progress through the streets borne aloft on a platform travesties divinity, recalling images of the Virgin Mary carried during church festivals, and speaks to the Mardi Gras parade through those same Sydney streets.

[269] Benjamin, *Arcades* [C1, 8], 83.

The creation of the Mardi Gras is a story which belongs to Sydney – it is difficult to imagine it in any other Australian city. It was born out of political protest and played a part in the battle to achieve homosexual law reform in NSW by mobilising ever larger numbers of homosexual men and women on the city streets, thus bringing a human face to the argument for reform.[270] Initially, a small group of activists had proposed a street parade, similar to the traditional forms of political protest of the time modelled on gay rights marches in America. However, Ron Austin, a member of the Gay Solidarity Group, suggested a Mardi Gras, a fiesta and fancy dress parade with street theatre, bands, mime, singing, dancing, and outrageous costumes. In the spirit of carnival, the first parade ended in a riot, a violent confrontation with authority as the NSW Police charged a crowd of 1,000 -2,000 at midnight in Darlinghurst Road. Thirty men and 23 women were arrested and charged with taking part in an illegal parade (under the Summary Offences Act of 1970). Further arrests were made in street demonstrations and near riots in the following weeks but most charges were eventually dropped and Mardi Gras has continued to be held every year.

By 1980 it was becoming clear that the parade was developing into a major event in its own right with the potential to attract a much wider range of people. The 1981 parade marked a shift away from militancy and confrontation towards a celebration of gay visibility and diversity.[271] While there was no further police violence, tensions arose out of stances towards gender and sexual difference, and the forms that political action should take: complex political issues had emerged.[272] Some lesbian activists and members of 'wimmin's groups' were angry that the emphasis of Mardi Gras was on celebration not on militant protest, and there were accusations of sexism. Trouble also brewed in feminist groups with lesbian radicals calling on heterosexual women to 'stop sleeping with the enemy' and proclaiming that 'all men are rapists.'[273]

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[270] Carbery, 24.
[271] Ibid., 35.
[272] Carbery, 32.
[273] See for example, Jill Johnston's *Lesbian Nation:The Feminist Solution*, (1972) , which espouses a vision of women living lives independent of men in a separate nation and 'Was Lesbian Separatism Inevitable?', Interview with Jill Johnston, *The Gay and Lesbian Review World Wild,* 2011 http://www.glreview.com.issues/13.2/13.2-johnston.php Accessed 22 October 2011. Julie McCrossin, presents a critique of such separatist beliefs in 'On Lesbian Separatism –Women, Wimmin, Womyn, Whippets'. Last modified 30 March 1999. http://www.takver.com/history/womyn.htm . Accessed 22 October 2011.

The ‘doctrine’ of the City as espoused by Billie is a recognisable parody of feminist separatist ideology of the time:

> In us are gods we didn’t believe in; the past, the future, time; a richness we have allowed to develop because we locked ourselves away from their sterile world , their blunt and piglike minds, their instinctive hatred and exclusion of freedom in its many forms …We are different from our enemy: we have no need to impress ourselves on objects; we have different attitudes to property and to owning things; we don’t need the sort of life they would inflict on us. We are one family and many families. (29-30)

Around Sydney during the late 1970s and early 80s, a few short-lived women-only ‘communes’ were set up, while bars, pubs and clubs offered women-only dances and entertainment featuring bands such as The Clits and The Stray Dags. It is among such tensions and conflicts between pleasure and politics, ideology and desire, safe havens versus visibility on the streets, freedom and control, that Ireland locates his parodic, separatist utopia in which the female is the symbol of youth and the future .The unspoken presence of the Mardi Gras parade and its related activities within the urban cultures of Darlinghurst, Paddington and Kings Cross thus acts as a threshold figure which permeates and shapes the narrative topographies of the fictional *City of Women.*

Bobbie the leopard is another carnivalesque figure which structures the topographies of the novel. She enters the City and scratches at the door of Billie’s flat one January night. Nothing is trivial as Billie says later in the narrative, and readers can pick up a clue here from the Roman god Janus who presided over the entrance to the year, and having two faces, could look back to the past and forward to the present. Janus kept the gate of heaven and is therefore the guardian of gates and doors and also of city streets and avenues.[274] Janus, as Danow notes, is also a figure for the literary canivalesque spirit of inversion and reversal.

Bobbie’s origin is unclear. Perhaps, Billie muses, she has escaped from a circus, a carnivalesque setting traditionally associated with the disruption of hierarchies. Bobbie also bears the signatures of the lower stratum of the carnivalesque body – she has a characteristic leopard smell and a kind of sweat comes from her fur, leading Billie to wonder if sweat is ‘the faintest tincture of shit.’ Later in the novel, Billie remembers the night ‘Bobbie the Second’ came to her in terms of a pregnancy: ‘I felt so hollow, so dry inside in places where I should be overflowing. An ache of emptiness, under my ribs, was exactly her shape … “Come in”, I said. As if she were human’ (140).

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[274] *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Sixteenth Edition (London: Cassell, 2001), 630.

Bobbie thus represents the positive pole of carnivalesque reversals. Despite her gaping jaws and needle sharp incisors (indications also of her openness to the world), she is capable of restraint when faced with the bestiality of humans. She embodies the spirit of play and transforms the city into ludic spaces – the Botanic Gardens, Hyde Park and, repeatedly, the little grassy hill in the Domain: 'We keep off the path and head towards the swings and seats and the two stone ladies. The water from the bubbler is cool'[275](116). Billie takes off her shoes and Bobbie hunts a cricket in the grass. On another occasion, Bobbie plays with a willie wagtail close to the car park's underground entrance, one of the novel's hell mouths, and Billie is filled with delight, a sense of carnival gaiety and renewal: 'There are such marvellous things to see and be part of on this crusted, puddled, iron ball of ours'(15).

In an interview with David Ireland shortly after the publication of *City of Women,* Sheridan Hay asked him 'What is it with leopards? A beast of the desert (Central Australia) in *Woman of the Future*, and wandering around with Billie in the city?' His reply is both evasive and revealing: 'Why leopards? Only because they're beautiful animals.The idea came from seeing pictures of them in some *National Geographics* that I picked up from a shop down in Pitt Street – at fifty cents each'. [276] This is a Benjaminian moment – the chance encounter with the relics and by-gones in city junk shops which brings him into contact with an exotic world: a wild creature which has, however, been categorised and catalogued. As I observed earlier, Ireland kept extensive notebooks and it is from these often unrelated, fragmentary pieces that he, through juxtaposition, creates his montage-like text. The image of the leopard has thus been torn out of its context to become part of the assemblage that is the antipodean *City of Women*. In choosing the leopard, Ireland wanted as a symbol something completely exotic: 'I didn't want a kangaroo or a wild dog or anything like that … I wanted something from a comparable place, and Africa in the last century was the home of the leopard and was called the Dark Continent'.[277]Ireland is mockingly referring to Freud who famously described women's sexuality by this term[278]

[275] The 'stone ladies' or sphinxes are urban relics from the demolished garden at Clarens, Potts Point. See *Dérive*s III and IV.
[276] Sheridan Hay, 'Interview with David Ireland', *Science Fiction Review* (September 1981), 9/3, no. 3,109-116.
[277] Hay, 114.
[278] In *The Question of Lay Analysis* [1926] Freud wrote: 'We know less about the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distinction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a "dark continent" for psychology'(212). Freud borrowed the expression from the African explorer Stanley's description of the exploration of a dark forest – virgin, hostile, impenetrable. http://www.endnotes.com/psychoanalysis-encyclopedia/dark-continent Accessed 13 October 2011.

Under the influence of these threshold figures, I now turn to a close reading of the city as text and the text as city through the urban carnivalesque aesthetic as it plays out across the narrative topographies through anatomical localisation; inversions and reversals; and beastly places.

**Anatomical localisation: topographies of body and city**

> Just as I was putting my pen down a breath of new blossoms came riding through my window … a signal, a request, part of the conversation the world is having with me … Another warm breath from the north entered. I breathed it in deeply, welcoming its passage into my body. (97)

In *City of Women* bodily topography is closely woven with the topography of the City which is, I suggest, constructed like a grotesque body and acquires bodily features which can be transformed and merged. In his discussion of Rabelais, Bakhtin calls this 'anatomical localisation':[279]'anatomical fantasies' were mapped onto specific localities existing in the landscape of Rabelais's material world which included particular and well-known landscape features such as holes, rocks, stones, rivers and valleys, some of which exist today and continue to bear their literary connections.[280] Rabelais located his stories in the intimate and familiar world in which he lived, using historical stories that were well known: he minimised the general, and favoured the particular with each object called by its own name.[281] Similarly, Ireland constructs his narrative topography from the city he intimately knew, using the existing names of streets, buildings, gardens, monuments and other urban features as well as specifically locating them within the cityscape. As Billie walks, inner and outer topographies, memory and dreams, merge into the surreal: the city metamorphoses fantastically, and then returns to its everyday materiality. As Magdalena Maczynska observes, the boundaries between the fantastic and the realist are tenuous [282] as are those between bodies, objects and landscape in anatomical localisation.

In an interview with Gelder in 1991, Ireland responded to his question regarding the gender ambiguity of Lee Mallory in *The Flesheaters* who has sexual relations with men and women by saying that it was an open question – '[b]ecause it doesn't matter where the borders are it seems to me'.[283] Danow following Bakhtin, notes the human preoccupation with the question of borders, suggesting that the carnivalesque is animated by a certain, perhaps periodic,

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[279] Bakhtin, 357.
[280] Ibid., 342;347.
[281] Ibid., 445- 448.
[282] Magdalena Maczynska, 'This Monstrous City: Urban Visionary Satire in the Fiction of Martin Amis, Will Self, China Mieville, and Maggie Gee', *Contemporary Literaure*,( Spring 2010) , 51/1, 58-86.
[283]Gelder, 'Interview', July 1991.

human need to dissolve borders and to eliminate boundaries, so that there might be an element of carnival play with death and the boundaries of life and death.[284] Hence the carnivalesque is designed to allow one extreme to flow into another, to provide for one polarity (the official culture) to meet and intermingle with its opposite (the unofficial culture). As Sydney's topography is progressively carnivalised, the borders, boundaries and limits of the city and the body become unstable, blurred and breached.[285] Through her writing, Billie attempts to police and maintain the boundaries between the fictional City and the 'real' city but this task proves almost, but not quite impossible, as the text itself begins to morph and transform, taking on the topographical features of the grotesque body and city.

Through a series of shifting spatial oppositions – street level and panoramic views; inside and outside; domestic and public; built and natural; city and suburbs – the cityscape is carnivalised, becomes distorted and unstable as it shrinks and expands often dwindling to a miniature depending on Billie's topographical viewpoint and psychic state. These shifting spatialities are disturbingly mapped onto bodies. When Billie visits the elderly miser Donna McDevitt in her Darlinghurst terrace house, her eyes project a miniature city 'a street perspective receding from me, each house frontage diminishing to a narrow rectangular sliver of masonry in the distance, and at the end blending unselfconsciously with a line of tombstones clearly discernible at the end of the road. I guess I was once in Lidcombe looking towards Rookwood Cemetery'(13). On another visit, Donna's eyes reveal a bush settlement in a valley near Wiseman's Ferry, a relic of the colonial past which points forward in the narrative to the site of the terrifying hell mouth, the Funnel Valley.

*Wounds*

> My engineer says I have wounded her with a special wound,
> And only strangers can heal her.
> Time has wounded me
> Wrinkles and trenches have made my face a stranger.
> Youth! I've forgotten its name.
> And she says she's wounded. (132)

Wounds (of the body, psyche and earth) are a central emblem of the narrative topography as they are in the carnivalesque world of Rabelais where they demonstrate the openness of the

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[284] Danow, 25.
[285] Kristeva writes of 'the fragile borders … where identities (subject/object etc.) do not exist or only barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, object.' *Powers of Horror*, 11.

grotesque body to change and transformation. Billie 'walks' her wounds: every path she takes in the City revives memories of her lost loves and youth, and reminds her of her current discarded status as 'junk' in the city, displaced in her work by computers, an aging and lonely woman but one who resolutely refuses 'to forgive life for what it has done to me' (103).

Wounds of the body and city can thus be read as personal and individual – the loss of a lover or child – or historical and cultural – the severing of people from their land, the lost geography of places. The past haunts the present, read in the layering of the city, in what is exposed in the urban 'body'. On a walk Billie passes construction works in Bourke Street where women are working twenty metres down in the excavation, penetrating sandstone walls: 'material no humans had seen before … When the past does bob up, they piss it off … The past is different from what they think. It's not buried, it's all around us.We're all archaeologists, if only we can see'(21). Billie is talking simultaneously of the archaeology of the city and her own personal archaeology: through the apertures of wounds and holes, access to the past is kept open to alternative interpretations, rather than closed off by other more powerful discourses. Billie keeps her wounds open – in the Bakhtinian carnivalesque (and in Kristeva's abject) the grotesque body is thus open to possible change and transformation.

*Holes*

When Billie transgresses the City borders by venturing a long way outside, the landscape metamorphoses into the terrifying surreal dreamscape of the Valley of the Leopards or the Funnel Valley: here as elsewhere in the novel, spatial and ontological instability are equated. The valley appears twice towards the end of the narrative, initially as a dream, and prefigures the final confrontation between fiction and 'reality'. At the bottom is a carnivalesque hell mouth, shaped like a funnel ending in a hole: the landscape thus shares features of bodily apertures – the gaping mouth, the womb, the anus. As women slide and tumble down the valley, they are seized by leopards, dragged into the hole and devoured. In the second appearance of the valley, Billie and Bobbie are given a lift back to the City by her husband Gordon (who fails to recognise her), but the familiar streets again morph into the Valley. The road down 'sweeps like a skirt' in a corkscrew motion as space and time, body and landscape turn back on themselves. It could be the early days of their marriage or the early days of the settlement of Sydney when there was not enough to eat. Gordon leaves Billie at the bottom of the valley then becomes lost in the spiral and is captured, killed and eaten by starving women. As Billie draws closer to the hole, she can see 'down there all the machines; smooth rows of

machines, a whole city of them, rank on rank, file after file, making little noise except a quiet contented hum' (164). Leopards drag the women to the machines, where 'a kind of arm from the machines passed in front of the human faces … wiping them clean'. After this, their struggles ceased, the women became limp, like meat: 'All flesh is meat in the city of machines'.

This monstrous landscape morphs again, shrinks and expands, this time into a cosmic vision of a young woman's belly. The hole – the mouth of hell and death – becomes her navel, the symbol of birth and renewal: 'The breasts came into view, the head bent forward, the mouth opening and closing; she was singing'. The landscape is now the body of Bobbie the lost beloved, and people play in her shallows and walk along her belly: 'Shells sang, starfish swirled slowly round, blue-domed crabs marched in ranks; in deeper waters sharks sped … The sea lapped her limbs, salt water pooled again on her chest, swirled round the hills of her naked breasts … But what of the vast interior, the dynamic, hot recesses of her workings – the chasms, fissures, crevasses? What tides pulled there?'(165). This carnivalesque reversal offers through anatomical localisation an image of renewal and transformation, one in which, as often in the narrative, water is a powerful emblem.

The grotesque body is never completed – it is always in the act of becoming. It is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body: 'the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world'.[286] This is why, argues Bakhtin, the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the mouth, bowels and anus, the phallus and, we need to add, the vagina. The grotesque body is thus not a finished form in a stable world of finished forms (vegetable or animal): 'Instead, the inner movement of being itself was expressed in the passing of one form into the other, in the ever incompleted character of being'.[287] As Kathleen Rowe puts it: 'The grotesque body is above all the female body, the maternal body, which, through menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation, participates uniquely in the carnivalesque drama of 'becoming', of inside-out and outside-in, death-in-life and life-in-death.'[288]

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[286] Bakhtin, 317.
[287] Ibid., 32.
[288] Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman:Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University Texas Press, 1995), 33.

*Junk*

Women's bodies undergo other topographical mutations which are not transformational and which debase them into urban junk as Ireland represents the damaging effects of post-industrial consumer capitalism and its technologies on the human body and emotions. While some women have factory jobs or other physical work formerly associated with men, most have moved into bizarre, parodic 'service' type junk jobs in management and training, on the fringes of the para-professional and the lower levels of bureaucracy. The grotesque changes in the bodies of women in the City are manifestations of the damage inflicted by a society in which human relationships on all levels are warped and made absurd, doubly so in the dystopia of *City of Women.*

Jennifer Ezzy is one of these grotesques: obsessed by consumerism, she becomes what she buys and grows into 'a plateau person' who hasn't climbed at all and is still standing on the featureless plain where she started. Blackly comic jobs and the concomitant psychic and bodily damage they cause include: a designer of throwaway food who has muscle crumble; a social ethics observer with incipient knee strangles; and an animal mental-health checker who suffers from labial blast 'which had a long and respectable folk history'(73). Helen Grbevski, 41, is a legal rights missionary to the illiterate who is held back by a philosophical objection to legal rights ('equality is a poison') and has tit abatement. Boundaries between bodies – the inside – and the outside world break down in other ways rendering the women abject. Big Jill becomes her disease, as cancerous lumps extrude from her body and spread over its whole surface: 'She looked like one large irregular cancer in human shape'. She then takes to spitting and the women at the Lover's Arms call her Hotplate: 'She was that thing that she tried to spit out'(135). The truly appalling Catto shits everywhere and spits constantly: 'She spat with a grimace, as if she loathed the taste of her own spit' (151). The enraged, continually disgusted Coral Bree, a marginal therapies designer, suffers from anal corruption and exhibits 'A marvellous instance of mood in its material aspect': a cloud of fine particles of disgust was attached loosely to her head like a scarf (70).

As in the Rabelasian carnivalesque, dismembered body parts and comic corpses litter the cityscape. Most of the deaths are violent: by suicide, 'pointing the bone', or murder. 'My best friend's a graveyard' is the mournful cry of the depressed giant Helen Svenssen who has escaped from a circus: she meets her end 'shot in the gut by rogue males near Darling Harbour.' The first corpse appears on page five (Wanda Hinckley beaten up in a disco, who

crawled home to City Tatts to die) and is followed thick and fast by many others. These include Linda Blatt, a work habituation leader, who drops dead in Martin Place, and days later is exhumed from her grave by her pub mates in order to retrieve a winning lottery ticket from her suit pocket: 'She didn't look too bad'(23). Death is violent but also comic: corpses are mere carcases, discarded junk. Ireland thus carnivalises death through the principle of laughter as corpses become part of the endless cycle of birth, decay and, perhaps, renewal.

*Invasion/Expulsion*

While men were expelled from the City sometime in the past, they continue to invade it and women's bodies, in various comic and horrific guises including the helicopter which carpets the City with love letters (YOU NEED LOVE; I NEED LOVE); amplified sound beamed all over the City which often took the form of 'desperately heavy breathing with an insistent heartbeat'(29); and the porno-horror figure of Old Man Death/Jack the Zipper, the ultimate transgressor of bodily borders. As Ella, (herself a murderer), who lives in a cave on the Woolloomooloo shore and keeps a male watchdog, 'breed human', says to Billie 'Nothing can keep males out'(27). In turn, Billie warns her that she can be expelled from the City for harbouring a male. Expulsion is thus a recurring narrative emblem for bodies and geographical and spatial borders as is its inverse, invasion, penetration and rape. In a grotesque carnivalesque image, sex with a man is 'penetrating not the gate of love but the white-anted portals of some ghastly Luna Park' (46).

In Old Man Death, also known as Jack the Zipper, Ireland allows a wanton destruction of borders. He is a topographical figure, a futuristic evil clown who signifies the dismemberment of the female body and society. His outrageously grotesque mutilations travesty separatist women's fears: he 'rapes' victims via incisions or wounds he cuts in their bodies, first in legs and arms, then progressing to the heart and finally the brain. Ireland goes close to the limits here of bizarre behaviour, of offensive and grotesque images which are also comic, uncrowning urban fears through the transgressive thrills of porno-horror gothic. Through Jack the Zipper Ireland offers another parody of the predatory nature of capitalist consumer society which can turn anything into a product for sale. [289] Determined to become a celebrity, he actively solicits media attention using tactics such as writing letters to newspapers and mounting a photographic exhibition of his mutilation murders. As his fame

[289] Ireland anticipates by a decade the monstrous serial killer of women Patrick Bateman in Brett Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991).

grows, the women in the city become implicated in turning the attacks into entertainment. After the assault on Lola Beach, who survives, both she and Jack the Zipper demand public attention: as Lola tells Billie, she hopes to get into the *Guinness Book of Records* (118).

Jack the Zipper is also a figure for Ireland, the male writer who attempts to 'get inside' women, bury his seed and sew up the wound: 'A needlework specialist'. Billie wants to 'read 'the sutures, to find out how the wounds were sewn up, what kind of thread was used, in order to determine if the crimes were committed by the same man (109). Here, the patchwork text itself, its 'wounds' sewn together and unstable, almost appears to metamorphose into a grotesque body, a kind of allegory of the acts of reading and writing.

Death and decay and its opposite, renewal, are found in the recurring images of burial and buried seed, the most offensive being that of Old Man Death's 'brain rape' where 'Semen was found planted deeply in the brain'(155). This brutal, death-embracing vision is counteracted by the peach seed: 'Two – three years ago when I was bitterly sad I planted a peach stone in a pot on the roof'. Perhaps 'planted' is too gentle a word' as Billie pushed the seed into the earth as an intrusion, an aggressive action, a punishment for her misery. Surprisingly, it sprouted, and is now two metres high with knobby buds, and blooms at the end of the narrative. Love, Billie considers, is a fruit you plant (59).

Ireland, it seems to me, is experimenting with Bakhtin's idea of a new bodily canon in all its historical variations.[290] While (modern) genres present an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body shown from the outside as something individual, the bodily canon of *City of Women* features bodies which are not finished or complete, but which undergo often drastic mutations through disease, old age, sexual practices and as a result of the jobs that the women hold. These bodies, like the grotesque bodies of the carnivalesque, protrude, bulge, branch, sprout; orifices are not sealed off but gape, leak, swallow, suck, expel; and borders are not closed off between bodies and the outside world as in the smooth finished body. In Ireland's grotesque bodily canon it is questionable if the women, in carnivalesque terms, regenerate, as their bodies are fed to the leopards in the city of the machines, part of the endless cycle of predation and consumption, the end product of which is junk, a comic and macabre image of the corpse.

[290] Bakhtin, 320.

Danow suggests that part of what makes the term 'monstrous' so applicable to 20th century literature is the re-figuring of the grotesque image, which in Bakhtin's terms reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, of growing and becoming. The modern re-figuring eliminates the twin concepts of growing and becoming, instituting instead the notion of the unfinished metamorphosis: 'the idea, perhaps of something aborted, left incomplete, in disarray, partially destroyed, not quite dead [which] emerges as *final* and triumphant'.We are left argues Danow, not with the ambivalence of the carnivalesque concept of the death of the old being linked to regeneration, but with an absence of regeneration and no corresponding image of a reborn world. We are in the unrelenting grip of one extreme of the two polarities Bakhtin identifies, that of the dark pole of negativity which embraces death not life.[291]

While this would appear to apply to *City of Women*, I suggest that through 'anatomical localisation', the novel does hold out a possibility of regenerative potential through the weakening of the limits or boundaries between the external world and the grotesque body. The events of the grotesque sphere are always developed on these boundaries and as it were at their points of intersection.[292] As one body offers its death, the other offers its birth, but they are merged in a two-bodied image as are Billie and her daughter/lover/leopard Bobbie, and, topographically, the hell mouth of Funnel Valley and the seascape of Bobbie's naked, fecund body. To be human says Billie, 'is to be always in a state of development' (52). Like the grotesque body, the City is also always in a state of development, of weeping and laughter: 'the weight of life and its curses'(138).

### Inversions and reversals

> *City of Women* is a kind of *Glass Canoe* in drag.[293]

> If the drag queen takes what is artificial about femininity (or what has been culturally constructed as artificial) and plays it to the hilt, the Drag King takes what is so-called natural about masculinity and reveals its mechanisms – the tricks and poses, the speech patterns and attitudes which have been seamlessly assimilated into a performance of realness.[294]

Carnival is concerned with change, with transformations, and in the carnivals of the late Middle Ages to the early Renaissance, these were enacted symbolically and literally through

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[291]Danow, 35-36
[292] Bakhtin, 522.
[293] Mark McLeod, 'Criteria'. Radio Program reviewing *City of Women*, 7 November 1981. *David Ireland Literary Papers*, Sound Archive, Mitchell Library.
[294] Del Lagrace Volcano, Judith 'Jack' Halberstam, *The Drag King Book* (London: Serpents Tail, 1999), 62.

inversions and uncrownings of the established hierarchies. As Bakhtin documents, such rituals often involved violent and extremely offensive behaviour including the election of mock kings who were then beaten almost to death, the flinging or squirting of urine, vomit and excrement at passersby, and the performance of mass using excrement and urine as the host and sacraments. Such anarchic excesses of the grotesque body thus 'debased', contradicted and uncrowned the spiritual, abstract authority of the Church and State over the fleshly body and inverted the binary oppositions between male and female, human and animal. Although Ireland's novel is ostensibly futuristic, as I have been arguing, it is profoundly influenced by the social changes occurring in Sydney at the time of writing and these social conflicts figure in the grotesque body. As I discussed above, women's bodies leak, eject, explode and are dismembered in opposition to rigid systems of discourse and gender classification – such systems deny diversity in the body and its fleshly desires in favour of authoritarian, patriarchical hierarchies. The political dimensions of carnival are thus played out through the excesses of the grotesque body which are deeply festive and utopian.

Informed by ambivalence, the *City of Women's* carnivalesque aesthetic disrupts binary gender boundaries as the alternative voices of women uncrown the authority of the official culture of men. Conversely, the reversals and inversions which parody the patriarchal discourses are also used to parody those of feminist separatism which, Ireland seems to be suggesting, is merely substituting one form of authoritarian oppression – or isolated 'citadel' – for another. As I argue below, the subversive potential of *City of Women* is that it parodies gender: the category of the masculine is destabilised by introducing masculine women and this brings about a confrontation between male and female masculinity. In the narrative, male and female hierarchies are not simply inverted or reversed but undertake multiple sets of movements – wrong side out, bottoms up, inside out, topsy-turvy – as the old male world which has seemingly been destroyed is offered together with the new (masculine) female world and is represented with it as 'the dying art of the dual body': male/female;old/young; love /loss of love; power/powerlessness.

This 'carnival logic' manifests itself in a range of contradictory movements across the textual spaces of the city whereby comic 'uncrownings'and 'reversals' are in continuous process: males are the 'other side' of females and their displacement turns the world inside out and upside down. Women in turn are uncrowned – by each other in their mimicking of male culture, and also by the return of men in various guises which introduces not only sexual desire for male bodies, but the fear of male power over women. Such inversions re-map the

city turning streets, parks and gardens into ludic spaces and 'uncrowning' male monuments such as that of Captain Cook in Hyde Park. His statue is bathed in a garish green light, and his upraised left arm is an empty gesture: drunken revellers sprawl at his feet after the food carnival.

As I noted earlier, the uncrowning of the male hierarchy takes place most often in the 'home' of Australian heterosexual male culture – the pub. Women have commandeered the watering holes of Cathedral Street: the Lover's Arms, and the Conqueror's Arms, and around the corner, the Worker's Arms. It appears at first that the brutal, libidinous, communal pub culture of *The Glass Canoe's* Southern Cross pub has been directly mapped onto the female equivalents: they are in male drag. However, in uncrowning feminist and lesbian separatist beliefs in the differences between men and women by showing women behaving in the same ways as men, Ireland is also, in Judith Halberstam's words, offering 'brands of masculine display' which expose male privilege. [295] Forms of 'male masculinity' – which are mostly working-class in *City of Women* – are made available for parody, imitation and possible transformation.[296] Women make a spectacle of these forms and brands, thereby appropriating male power. As carnivalesque 'drag kings', they turn masculinity into theatre, a performance, a masquerade. Boundaries between masculinity and femininity become blurred and permeable: through the grotesque body, gender becomes open to possibilities of transformation.

One such brand of masculine display is the traditional pub ritual of the meat raffle at the Worker's Arms. Billie buys two tickets and wins the prize – a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes which she attempts to hand back. Reluctantly, it is taken away, perhaps to be raffled again. In turn, the normalisation of maternal culture is uncrowned: the baby is the equivalent of the meat tray.

Another masculine brand is sex as a communal activity (as it is in *The Glass Canoe*), an entertainment which involves 'captured males'. Billie wonders how women could think 'crude reprisal was a way to combat our everlasting enemy'. One such event on the dark side of the carnivalesque involves the brutal pack rape of a male hitch hiker picked up by the immensely strong Ronnie and her pub mates on their way to the races at Newcastle. The male (always referred to as 'it') is raped by 18 women until he slips into a coma, and is dumped by

[295] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 245.
[296] Volcano and Halberstam, 71.

the side of the road. In carnivalesque reversal, the rapists are uncrowned as they have all 'copped a load' from the victim (31-32). Another communal sex event in the positive spirit of carnival is the 'Apollo Orgy' which involves not a captured male but a performer who has been hired by the local bowling club committee to raise funds. In this performance of male and female masculinity, there are progressive inversions – first of the male who is in the hands of more 'potent' women who can in fact out perform him, and who is attracted to Jill, 'a female Hercules to his Apollo'. Her nickname is 'Meataxe'[297] and she is known for daredevil raids into enemy territory where males are damaged (83). As the masquerade continues, this inversion is reversed, and women are uncrowned as they begin to feel sexual attraction towards the male. The orgy climaxes with a naked fight set off by Ivy's jealousy of Apollo and Big Jill. In turn, Billie's women-only world is destabilised as she remembers her husband Gordon and wishes his body was with her – there is only empty space now: 'I got rid of him to give all of myself to Bobbie, to reality. And the real Bobbie ran away' (85).

Halberstam argues that making a spectacle of masculinity appropriates it [298]and women's sexual organs it could be said, appropriate the status of the phallus by being made visible and attributed with a potency and power that transcends that of men. Jill's vagina is visible to all in the orgy scene, referred to as her 'apparatus' and compared to the mouth of an octopus; she is physically stronger than Apollo. Winkie is so called because she could make her vagina 'wink' at males (111). Some of the diseases which afflict the women in the city are inverted versions of male potency problems such as labial laxness and clitoral slump.

Pub fights erupt constantly, but as Billie says of a particularly violent fight at the Lover's Arms, 'men do this sort of thing much better, when they use gloves and ritual that is. Men can do it so coldly, or seem to; precisely and without hate' (29-30). 'We are different from our enemy', Billie keeps assuring us (and herself), but the signs of this 'difference' are increasingly blurred and ambivalent. In another comic inversion, which parodies both male discourses about women and separatist discourses about men, Billie explains why men can't possibly fit in the City of Women. They are, she concedes, 'something more than rejected women', but 'If you're nice, if you let them go first, if you wait for them to speak, if you say nice things, congratulate them, ask their opinion, then you are lower than they; you're

[297] A joke on the nick-name of the narrator of *The Glass Canoe*, Meatman, Meat for short referring to his large penis. Jill however has an 'axe' to dispose of such 'meat.'
[298] Halberstam, 255.

weak.They can't form communities; they don't want with-ness, they want command; they won't ever live in peace' (41).

Ireland – in the carnival tradition – is a deeply offensive writer who is concerned to flatten all hierarchies. In a particularly grotesque and comic 'uncrowning' of Georgina Washington, the first woman Governor-General, Ireland parodies Australia's subservience to England and also to America which continues unabated even with a woman in this role. In an overt nod to carnival traditions, Georgina opens the National Folk Idiom Library where she is insulted by an eight year old girl wearing a badge of the Broken Hill Breakaways, 'the alternative feminist government of that once male city' who calls Georgina 'an old cunt'. This verbal attack completely uncrowns Georgina from 'her eminence' as a 'quasi-male' and she progressively begins to disintegrate in a riotously comic and offensive manner ending up as a piece of carnival 'junk':

> Her royal blue quasi-military jacket crumbled and tore … her bra splintered like a tree in a storm; the semi-military trousers split asunder; her shoes shrank; the vice regal body disappeared … and all that was left was an old vulva unprotected, slipping and flapping along the street … until someone finally picked it up and wrapped it in newspapers … and left it in a gutter for eventual burial at the rubbish tip.

The category of masculinity is parodied in the semi-military clothing of Georgina recalling any number of men also 'masquerading' in such uniforms. *City of Women* carnivalises gender through such inversions of the hierarchical opposition between men and women providing opportunities for the uncrowning of male patriarchal discourses as well as those of feminist separatists through dialogic interaction and linguistic subversions.

As I noted above, carnivalesque inversions do not follow a simple linear direction – there are multiple, multidirectional transgressive movements which also, I suggest, allow the emergence of multiplicities of female masculinity. In earlier novels, particularly *The Flesheaters* but also *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* and *The Glass Canoe*, Ireland shows masculinity to be an unstable category. In *City of Women*, through the carnivalisation of gender and the corresponding tumble of inversions, Ireland introduces not only the parodic appropriation of the masculine through mimicry – the drag kings – but alternative female masculinities: the inhabitants of the City of Women present a range of these.

Perhaps the king of them all is Ivy – the landlord of the Lover's Arms and the Conqueror's Arms which are also known as Chez Ivy. She is a sexually ambivalent, carnivalesque figure of abasement and renewal: a very strong, tall, and tough woman, able to compete with and

defeat men sexually. In her youth, she 'sucked four guys dry before breakfast' (11) and in the Apollo orgy, she sexually outperforms (uncrowns) the hired male, and, as he sits on her lap, she towers over him demonstrating a right punch. She is also in love with Linda, the young, strong TV mechanic, and was a youthful love of Billie's. Towards the end of the novel, she becomes a figure of renewal which I discuss in more detail at the end of this chapter. It is her carnival laughter which resounds around the Lover's Arms as she coins the name for the macabre killer-rapist of women – Jack the Zipper – because of his needlework skills in sewing up the hideous wounds he inflicts.

Ireland may have had Dawn O'Donnell, a lesbian, former butcher and champion ice skater, in mind as the model for the fictional Ivy. She was a significant figure in Sydney's gay and lesbian commercial bar and club scene from the 1960s until her death in 2007, often credited with having turned Sydney's Oxford Street into the gay capital of the southern hemisphere. In addition to various bars and bath houses, she ran Capricccio's, a gay nightclub and theatre on Oxford Street and in 1974 took over a nightclub in Crown Street re-named Jools.[299] Life size nude statues of women stood outside its opulent exterior and Billie Shockley refers to these and the club although not by name, in one of her letters:

> I stayed up late writing this, thinking of you. The night light is still on in the yellow building; the car park outside the nightclub – the place with the nude statues that remind me of you except your feet are broader when you stand – is lit up with headlights as another home-going person is finished cruising for the night. (97)

The bar Chez Ivy also existed, named after its founder Ivy Richter, who in 1962 was persuaded by Claudia, a drag queen, to turn her existing bar in Oxford Street Bondi Junction into a bar which attracted a diverse clientele of camp men and women.[300] Drinks were served by drag queens in bunny girl outfits and women also came in drag. Ivy remembers a butch crowd of lesbians, who were sometimes known as the police, and the night the juke box caught fire and everyone had a good time with the firemen.[301]

As I suggested earlier, Billie is herself an ambivalent figure embodying the masculine and the feminine. In her role as narrator of the stories of the City, she polices the boundaries,

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[299] Jools was gutted by fire in 1977 at a time when arson – including fires in various lesbian pubs and bars – was not uncommon in Sydney. O'Donnell went on to open Patches disco in Oxford Street in 1976 and then the lesbian bar Ruby Red's on Crown Street. She was linked with underworld figures such as Abe Saffron although the extent of this entanglement is still not known. Rebecca Jennings and Sandra Mackay, *Out and About:Sydney's Lesbian Social Scene 1960s-1980s* (Sydney: Pride History Group, 2009), 31.

[300] Rebecca Jennings, 'Lesbians in Sydney', *Sydney Journal*, (June 2009), 2/1, 29-38, www.dictionaryofsydney.org.

[301] *Out and About*, 7.

commenting critically on women who are not wholly 'within the City', that is, followers of separatist doctrine. These include trans-gender Lonnie, a large young woman 'who'd been one of them until she'd had an operation … She'd been a woman for five years , but still hadn't settled down … Nothing could stop her old male habit of chaffing and leg-pulling and she wasn't aware of it' (43). She also is critical of Linda who recounts her adventures on a trip to Bega and appears to Billie to be re-enacting the male camping trip. As Billie listens, she waits for a smile that would reveal Linda is aware of this but she waits in vain: 'Was she re-inventing not only male adventures, but male phrases and a male outlook? Was there some balance she was leaning towards without being aware of it? I shivered slightly remembering the male past, the brutal and boring past.' (108)

Through such inversions and reversals, Ireland explores a range of female masculinities which are sometimes parodic and playful in the positive spirit of carnival, but more often swing towards the dark, bitter and violent pole. Through these parodic movements and a series of spatial oppositions, male and female hierarchies are subverted, reversed and transgressed, upending 'systems' of gender categorisation in Sydney (and Australian) society of the 1970s, and, perhaps, pointing forward to the fluidity that is now possible: gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, intersex.

I now consider the ways in the city is carnivalised through the blurring of borders between animal and human, and the places and spaces in the urban landscape where this occurs.

### Beastly Places [302]

> Their open and shameless vice must not be told.Their fierce and untameable audacity would not be believed. They are the pest and gangrene of the colonial society – a reproach to all human nature – and lower than the brutes, a disgrace to all animal existence. [303]
>
> The engineer … said we were animals … We live in a world that I am proud to be animal in. (36)

As I have been arguing, *City of Women* carnivalises gender categories through the complex, figurative mapping of inversions and reversals which, enacted in and across the spaces of the city – public and private – subvert and contort, defamiliarise and surrealise inner and outer topographies. Similarly, the novel carnivalises the categories which divide the human from

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[302] This term is used by Phillip Armstrong in *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), and also is the title of the book edited by Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert, *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places:New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (London and New York:Routledge, 2000).

[303] James Mudie, *The Felonry of NSW* (1837). Mudie is describing his visit to a female factory. Quoted in Damousi, 37.

the animal, and which insist that the human species is above that of the animal, or, as in James Mudie's words quoted above from his 1837 report on 'The Felonry of NSW', that unruly, sexually active, 'undomesticated' women are below the animal. At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested threads of connection between Ireland's separatist City and the Female Factories in which convict women were incarcerated in Sydney's early days, drawing from the work of Damousi who includes the quote from Mudie's account of his visit to one factory in which he is pleasurably appalled and offended by the behaviour of women. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives two definitions of 'beastly' (among others) which are relevant to this discussion: 'of the nature of living creatures (including man); animal, natural, carnal' and 'of or pertaining to the lower animals (as opposed to man); merely animal, bestial'. Ireland moves between and plays with these meanings. In the fictional topographies of *City of Women*, animals live at the blurred borders of the carnivalesque which are often transgressed, destabilising human subjectivity.

'The first rule, Bobbie … is to guard your humanity'. Billie is addressing the leopard Bobbie in the context of the cruel 'jokes' that Catto plays on dogs, inserting fire crackers in the mouth of one and the anus of another, and lighting them. Ireland inverts concepts of what constitutes humane behaviour in relation to other living creatures, and again and again, he attributes irrational aggressiveness to humans not animals.[304] Ireland thus explores the thresholds that exist between the animal and the human, and in so doing, he inverts hierarchical relationships, questioning what it may mean to be human and to be animal in modernity. Towards the end of the novel, when the limits of the fictional world is stretched almost to breaking, Billie ponders her assumption that Bobbie the leopard can't read: 'I don't know what other animals are capable of.' It is in this use of 'other' that we can see Ireland's inversions at work as he breaks the frame of 'normal' animal-human relationships in modernity as he does gender relationships.

In almost every derelict space in Sydney as in most cities, there is evidence of the lives of feral cats. Bobbie, it appears at the end of the novel, was one of these, not an exotic intruder from Africa, but 'a big, yellowy thing … reminded me of a wild animal, I thought it might have been a Tasmanian devil' (167). Feral cats occupy a zone somewhere else on the domestic-wild spectrum: they are potential pets, but also embody wildness and are

[304] Carrie Rohman, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (New York: Columbia University, 2009), 142.

unsettling, unhomely, because they contradict the idea of the cat as a domestic pet, close to humans.

Many city animals – the wild,[305] the illicit, the tame, the feral – find refuge in 'beastly places', spaces in the city in which they are not visible and which subvert the principle of the city as modern civilization *per se*.[306] City animals, birds and insects learn to survive and live their lives within the tamed urban environments such as around the fountain in Hyde Park where new growth from the pruning of roses provides spaces where small birds can land 'between the thorns': even blue wrens are back in the park having been missing for years (38). Billie's city walks render these animals visible, whether they are birds of the wild such as the family of pelicans which fly under the Harbour Bridge; Duke, the caretaker's pet corgi resisting the end of the freedom of his walk by resolutely 'facing the detour'; a dog giving birth on the street outside the Pet's Home; or the screaming animals on the killing line in the abattoirs. Many of the human inhabitants of Billie's city live like illicit feral animals in their own beastly places such as the caves in the Domain on the shore of Woolloomooloo Bay, or dying alone and outcast, on a bench covered in cockroaches. As Suzanne Koch who runs the Pet's Home for animals picked up off the streets explains: 'being on the streets is demoralising for both people and animals … Maybe it's the sight of shelter and homes all round, with only the outside walls to be seen and all that light and warmth way inside, unreachable' (141). In an inversion of this, Billie, when confronted by the cruelty and brutality of humans such as the murderer Ella, abjectly and comically wishes to metamorphose, to retreat to the animal world: 'I was a small Australian animal, exposed to attack and a long way from my burrow. Also I was losing fur.' (28)

From her window at night, Billie notices the possums down on the grass in Hyde Park looking for scraps in the rubbish bins. The Botanic Gardens are also alive with movement as small animals forage among the plants, climb trees and hunt, while bats 'set out on a night flight south and a little east, to the many hectares of Centennial Park ... They come over past my building … and if I put my head out of the window and make little squeaks at the top of my voice, they sheer off and sometimes turn right away. At night the air quivers visibly, making lights dance about on the northern shore; the dark grips me; I am grateful.' (28) Billie

[305] I am using 'wild'here to differentiate the spaces in which the animals of the *City of Women* live: the tame or imprisoned animals which live in domestic spaces, zoos, farms, abattoirs; the wild creatures which live less restrained lives (by humans) in parks, gardens, the harbour etc.; and the semi-wild or feral which live in 'inter-spaces'. Bobbie the leopard is the exception – as Billie says, she is a 'Poor ferocious creature – wilding out of place – trapped in a City of Women' (158).

[306] Phillip Armstrong, 190.

is a comical, clownish figure here in her attempts at non-language, inter-species communication. It is also a dark moment as she is confronted by the abject, in Kristeva's words, 'those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*'.[307] Conversely, in Ireland's urban carnivalesque, animals, insects and birds which connect to the earth and sky, often signal an upward, positive movement in the otherwise seemingly endless tumble down into darkness and despair. However abject her desire for 'inclusion' into the night world of the living others may be, the 'dancing lights' over on the north shore of the harbour also signal here, as they do throughout the novel, the upward movements of the positive, life-affirming aspect of the carnivalesque. The darkest of the downward inversions in the *City of Women* are those associated with meat to which I now turn.

Carnival originally meant the farewell to flesh (meat) and Mardi Gras or fat Tuesday was celebrated on the day before Ash Wednesday, a time for riotous feasting prior to the abstinence of Lent. Ireland carries this association over into his version of the carnivalesque in which the darkest and most death embracing downward inversions occur in the endless cycle of predation. This cycle is compressed into the literal and metaphorical notion of meat, and also meat as the 'modern deposition that regards living things as abstraction' – commodities and raw materials.[308] Instances of the cycle of hunting and predation range from the microscopic world of the insect – a flea plunging into the flesh on the back of Old Georgina's Siamese cat – to the crow on the roof of the school digging its beak into a tiny dead body in the guttering (63) and miserly Donna McDevitt, who boils dead animals, including her own dogs, and feeds them to her pets (12).

In a tumble of inversions and reversals men are figured as meat, the objects of pack rape and possible castration by Big Jill's 'Meataxe'. In turn, women become their meat, not only through the macabre sex murders and mutilations of Jack the Zipper with his horrific parodies of the sexual act, but also through the smell of roasting pork which permeates the city as men attempt to 'torture' women (29), an inverted pun on the repeated mantra that 'men are meat in the City of Women'. In the symbolic order of the City, 'Love's a cannibal: when it's eaten another, it feeds on itself' (10). Men and women may prey on each other, but, as the Valley of the Leopards demonstrates, everyone in the city is meat to the machines.

[307] Kristeva, 12-13.
[308] Rohman, 185.

Ireland juxtaposes the cruelty of industrialised killing of animals in abattoirs[309] with that of the 'slaughter' of unwanted pets in Pet's Homes and also with the killing of prisoners on death row. He makes this normalisation of killing visible through grotesque realistic detail. The 'meat' that results from this 'processing' of live creatures becomes junk, part of the waste and rubbish produced by and in the City and, as such, part of the carnivalesque netherworld, in which many of the women themselves become junk ravaged by sexual and work related diseases and tossed aside when they are no longer useful in their work or too old to be sexually attractive (to other women). Abattoirs, pet's homes, prisons, zoos are thus all 'beastly places' in the cruel, disgusting and dirty sense of the word, places which use the technological apparatus of modernity to murder the human and the non-human alike. The Meat Murderer, also known as Old Man Death and Jack the Zipper, utilises this same apparatus on his victims: first an immobilising dart, 'the types vets use'; the sharp knife 'to open the flesh of the female'; the surgical knife for the incision; the suturing of the wound (78).

Pets also present another aspect of the blurring of borders between animal and human. Urban animals, suggests Griffiths, are the 'strangely familiar', *unheimlich.* Wildness in cats in particular is unsettling as it contradicts the idea of the cat as domestic, a pet animal close to humans and at the same time, a source of desire, and repressed longing for intimate contact with nature.[310] In the City, pets are not totally subservient to their owners, retaining a 'primitive', anarchic spirit: Duke the corgi runs into Billie's bathroom and snatches a washer to enjoy the female smell (36); Jean D'Arcy's cat Strangeways constantly escapes her hugs and kisses (62). Pets such as these as Huw Griffiths argues, resist categorisation and retain some of their 'wildness', even when confined within the domestic space. Pets and other urban animals – ferals, wild creatures (including insects) – can embody deeply rooted desires and fears to humans: they are from the 'outside', by coming 'inside' they may break spatial taboos, and bring with them beastliness, that which is disgusting, fearful, defiling, not-human.

Despite her admiration of Bobbie the leopard, Billie is also ambivalent about her. Most of the women in the City treat their pets with a mixture of cruelty and affection (as men treated them) and although Billie is not cruel, like the other women who allow pets into their domestic spaces, her affection cannot be separated from the need to dominate. Marriage,

[309] The NSW State Abattoirs operated in Homebush (now the Sydney Olympic Park ) from 1907 until closure in 1988.
[310] Huw Griffiths, 'Feral Cats in the City' in Philo and Wilbert eds., 56-70.

children and a shared domestic life with a man is viewed as subservience, almost slavery, and yet in the City women establish the same relationship with their pets. Mouse's tale of her marriage and motherhood as a prison is juxtaposed with Billie's visit to the jeweller to pick up Bobbie's silver collar and chain (110).

Bobbie, in all her manifestations as leopard, pet, substitute for lost daughter/lost love, walking companion, and visitor from another fictional world, is both a figure of escape and of entrapment. Whose creation is she? Who or what does she enfold? In the last pages of the novel, Billie howls in abject despair: 'Sometimes I feel that all I need is my little place to shelter and look out the window, and my two Bobbies: one on a lead who walks everywhere with me, and the other at the end of this letter's journey ... Oh, if there's a God anywhere, help me! Help me to never come to terms with this loss! Never to forgive life for what it has done to me! Never to love the sword that has pierced me!' (102-3). Is it loss then that creates the City?And would a loss of this loss lead to a breakdown of the City and therefore of its creator Billie?

After another male attack on the City and women's bodies with which it is equated, Billie drifts towards the boundaries of the fictional City of Women (and *A Woman of the Future*) that she and at another remove, Ireland, are creating. On their last night walk through the Domain 'Four-footed Bobbie' looks up at Billie and then at the full moon: 'Her eyes shone strangely. Enough to make me shiver … But maybe I'm not myself today. And the reason? Because I'm Bobbie.' As Rohman suggests, the autonomy of the human subject, the sovereignty of humanness is dependent on our difference from animals, our disavowal of them – an animal's otherness is especially acute because it does not speak our language.[311] There has been a series of slippages – the world has turned inside out – Billie has not learnt to communicate with Bobbie, but perhaps with her self, by internalizing Bobbie in all her complex meanings. The escape to the western desert of Australia in *A Woman of the Future,* appears to have ended in the back streets of Sydney's Darlinghurst as the metamorphosis of young woman into leopard has ended the cycle of becoming. Has the spirit of carnival brought about such tranformations? Or is this another reversal?

[311] Rohman, 185.

**Debasement and Renewal**

> It's a sunset city. The tall buildings are silhouettes in the familiar shapes I know and love so much, and when I get an angle on the farther shore of the harbour, bits and points of light are picked out by the sun, and one by one, and often several at a time, windows catch the sun and throw a blinding reflection right into my face and I have to turn away dazzled. (119)

*City of Women* is an extraordinary novel culminating in reversals of the most radical kind: gender; human; animal; fiction; reality. The women in the City, the drag kings, can be read as a rhetorical device to symbolize anarchy and unbalance naturalistic conventions leading to a narrative which often veers into confused surrealism or intimations of violence and disorder. In the view of some readers and critics, the violent and macabre images of sexual reversal push the novel into a muddled and murderous fable, pervaded by a fearfulness which unbalances the narrative. The bizarre and threatening images become so potent and pervasive that the narrative itself threatens to become a victim of its anarchy and disassociation.[312] Billie and the women of the City (her monstrous creations) are theatrically aggressive, they recklessly defy sexual and social mores (even those of their women-only community) and this leads to a sense of chaos and instability in the landscapes of the City itself: an almost biblical feeling of doom, of the City about to be destroyed, razed, toppled assaults the reader. This is the dark pole of the carnivalesque around which a great deal of the novel swings and several times as I have shown, the writing almost breaks under the strain, and in the final pages, this appears at first to happen.

In the carnivalesque, debasement and renewal follow and precede each other ceaselessly. While *City of Women* appears to be mired in debasement and women seem incapable of any growth and transformation other than the monstrous, there are also moments of renewal, brief though they may be, and there are recurrent emblems of the narrative topography itself that signal a swing towards the positive, life affirming poles of carnival. Youth and children are such emblems as is the breeze from the north bringing flowers and their perfume and spring itself. The geographical direction of *A Woman of the Future* was to the west, the desert at the heart of Australia into which Alethea, after her violent imaginative transformation into a leopard, disappears. *City of Women* faces towards the warm, tropical north: it is on the north coast that Billie's daughter works as an engineer, so every breeze carries memories of her.

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[312] Peter Ackroyd, *Dressing Up:Transvestism and Drag: The History of an Obs*ession (London:Thames and Hudson, 1979), 147. Ackroyd is writing in general of literary images of male and female transvestism and drag, and I have been influenced by his discussion in my reading of the final part of *City Of Women*.

In city walks and panoramic views from her window, Billies passes by and sees children – at school, playing hopscotch, gossiping in the playground – and considers they are the future, even though this also means they are the future criminals and police (15). As I have suggested above, particular places in the city offer themselves as recurring ludic spaces where Bobbie the leopard plays with butterflies and crickets, or gives rides to sick children: Hyde Park, the Domain, the Botanic Gardens, the swings and 'stone ladies' near the Art Gallery are all places of renewal. Throughout the narrative, the changing views of the cityscape provide carnivalesque renewal: it is the golden light of the sun which turns even the rampantly commercial Centrepoint Tower into a wondrous beacon of gold.

In the second last letter, Billie walks through a familiar ludic space – the Archibald Fountain in Hyde Park – which offers renewal in the form of a grotesque dance by a group of hideous old women with 'whiskers untrimmed and white spittle', one of whom looks like a merry clown attempting to chew her sandwich with naked gums. They are making a game of catching a man with a net, the man being played by the shabbiest and smallest one: 'Along with all their torsions, abatements and declines, they laugh uncontrollably. The truth will set you free, I want to say to them … but it means nothing, words mean nothing, no more than their game means' (158). All the women continue to laugh uncontrollably, the communal laughter of carnival which dispels the fear of death and renders it a ludicrous monster. Billie however, continues with her morbid thoughts of death and decay, the body once again conflating with the landscape. Old people are as ruined as an old bay in which children once played but which has now been laid waste: 'old memories minus their labels are half buried in the discoloured sand, and the place stinks, it is dying'. These dark images are dispelled by the entrance of a young girl in singlet and shorts riding a red tractor and mowing the cascading grass in the park with flashing blades: 'Like me, Bobbie can smell the cut grass; we both lift our heads to catch the full sweetness of it '(161). This life affirming image is followed by that of the blooming peach tree in the pot: the seed that Billie planted has produced a tree with 17 flowers. The blossoms recall Ivy who she once loved, 'standing under the red glow of the tavern lights, her face had the same pink bloom on white skin under black hair and brows'. Billie turns to her budding and blooming peach tree: 'How absurd that I, an old tree, should be stirred by a spring' (166).

In the final pages a struggle ensues between Billie's fictional City, and the 'real city' which exists outside her window. At the beginning of the narrative when Bobbie the leopard knocked, Billie opened her door and let in the carnivalesque. This time, when her daughter

and husband are knocking, she refuses to open the door to the 'outside' world and continues to 'write' the scene as if it is about someone else. Billie does not want to leave the *City of Women*, she tries to 'unhear' her daughter's voice, and that of her husband who ominously says she should be put in a home. Her daughter calls out 'Mother, let go!' but Billie refuses: 'I'll never surrender to what has happened'. After they leave, Billie looks out the window and sees men in the city streets. She has entered a nightmare: the city melts and mutates, heaves and swells as it pours through her window. It is only by shutting her eyes (unseeing), that she is able to restore her city to its normality. The sun which was 'merciless' during her breakdown, is now warming her as she looks around at the familiar view of 'city skyline, Domain, harbour, Woolloomooloo, with all my usual affection beaming out on my loved City of Women (the city of women is love), and north … to that heaven on the coast where my Bobbie is. I'll never let go'. She chooses to return to the old rituals and starts to write 'this letter', plans a walk with Bobbie, and a drink at the Lover's Arms in Cathedral Street (171).

In his interview with Ireland, Sheridan said the ending was a 'cop-out'. Ireland himself has, in his usual misleading fashion, suggested that the ending reveals the truth of the story; that it is all Billie's fiction: the leopard was a feral cat, the City of Women did not exist other than in her perceptions of the city. I referred earlier in this chapter to Gelder's views of the domination of the abject in *City of Women.* In his reading there are no carnivalesque transformations or renewals, rather the novel 'empties itself out' as it comes to an end with 'no-where else to go.'[313]

I suggest another radically ambivalent topographical reading which borrows from Bakhtin's view of the modern novel as a genre that, by definition, is never complete, always developing, spilling over its borders and destabilizing its own form by subjecting official discourse (that of the conventional novel and the reader's expectations) to defamiliarisation and laughter. In ending the book this way, Ireland 'uncrowns' the reader. Through his modernist inversions of the form of the novel, he creates the new out of the old: nothing is fixed or definite; change is the principle of carnival. The novel is itself like a grotesque body, open and unfinished, subject to mutations and transformations. He breaks the frame of the narrative as he breaks the frames of gender, body and city, human and animal. The novel is another assemblage, a montage, a set of juxtapositions, a patchwork, even junk.

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[313] Gelder, 1993, 25.

The multiple movements and gestures of carnival assert themselves against linearity – not only of the novel but also, defiantly, of conventional ways of life. Billie chooses to continue living in the City of Women, to remain inside the 'second world of carnival', of masculine women and drag kings. Outside is the world of conventional life – 'the old male order' – where she would be a grandmother and at the mercy of her son-in-law's desire to put her in a home. Instead, she remains inside, defiantly transgressive as she re-creates and rescues her beloved City of Women in the face of the conforming pressures and conventions of normalized heterosexual society. Her fictional city is an imaginative creation, a new world fashioned from loneliness and encompassed within a little citadel. The masquerade of carnival is not over: Billie has succeeded in carnivalising reality:[314]she is one of the drag kings for whom the game never ends.[315]

'Drag' is a liberating travesty, a turning of the world inside out – in carnival performance and in the modern urban carnivalesque aesthetics of *City of Women*. It breaks down the sexual code, causes disorientation which in turn can lead to new knowledge and the perception of affinities, available only after the inversion and destruction of conventional gender roles.[316] In *City of Women*, Ireland 'carnivalises' social relations – between men and women, women and women, humans and animals, city and its inhabitants – 'without being any less historically or socially conscious than Bakhtin'.[317] In this topographical reading of *City of Women*, I have tracked the multiple forms of disintegration and recombination across the carnival zones of Sydney, and as mocking laughter echoes around the pubs of Cathedral Street, the city 'emerges, like a Mardi Gras parade, as somehow being in excess of the route followed.'[318]

[314] Danow, 105.
[315] Volcano and Halberstam, 41.
[316] Influenced by Ackroyd, 45.
[317] Efraim Sicher, *Re-reading the City, Rereading Dickens:Representation, the Novel, and Urban Realism* (Brooklyn, New York: AMS Press, 2003),19.
[318] Michael Hurely, 'Sydney' in Johnston and van Reyk, 243.