

PREFACE/SYNOPSIS

This book is concerned with the complexities of defining ‘place’, of observing and ‘seeing’ place, and how we might write a poetics of place. From Kathy Acker to indigenous Australian poet Jack Davis, the book touches on other writers and theorists, but in essence is a hands-on ‘praxis’ book of poetic practice. Using essay, journal entry, ‘review’, and *commentary* on writing and ecology, it examines issues of belonging and displacement from many angles. Arguing for a ‘polysituatedness’ of presence in which all places we have been part of (lived in, visited, ‘stayed in’, ‘inherited’ through parents and grandparents, even imagined) become enmeshed with a sense of belonging (or not), the book posits an alternative model for participation in community and landscape. It does this in the context of a worldview of ‘international regionalism’, in which international lines of communication are seen to enhance regional-ity. Considering modes of belonging and community (‘agoras’) in conjunction with issues of isolation, the book traces a journey from ‘home’¹ at Jam Tree Gully in wheatbelt Western Australia, via a range of personal experiences and intertextual interactions/readings with other works, to Schull, in West Cork, Ireland, where a consideration of belonging and land is read through ancestral displacement via famine and the politics of empire. However, this is not a work of history, but of subjectivity as it affects ‘ways of seeing’. It is also about the ‘making’ of poems out of ‘place’, and questions the politics of making and the politics of place. Displacement, but with constant, renewing and ‘replacement’.

The book attempts to create new ways of writing and reading place, without getting stuck in the mud – that is, it’s a ‘real-world’ take that crosses field-guide and critique. Subtextually, the book is an enactment of my well-documented process/belief/theory known as ‘international regionalism’. How do we belong to a place? How do we communicate with where we’ve come from?

1 In Robert Frost’s ‘The Death of a Hired Man’ from *North of Boston*, Mary says: ‘Home is the place where, when you have to go there,/ They have to take you in.’ But Warren responds ‘I should have called it/ Something you somehow haven’t to deserve.’ I cannot answer for the veracity of either comment!

The book is in seven sections:

1. **On place itself** – this section presents a series of definitions and personal backgrounding of research and creative endeavour in the field. Place, agoras, ‘international regionalism’, displacement, collaboration, activism, ‘polysituatedness’, theoretical underpinnings are all considered and contextualised. Further, a redefining – even rejection – of the word ‘place’ itself is explicated in detail. Activism in the context of the Noongar writer Jack Davis and a personal move towards concret(ion) poetry are discussed. This section finishes with a personal ‘encounter’ with the nineteenth-century Western Australian bushranger Moondyne Joe, in whose zone of influence we live and on whom I collaborated on a book with the late Professor Niall Lucy.

2. **Where we are** – a manifesto of polysituatedness with considerations of Alfred Tennyson’s poem ‘The Kraken’, an extensive and ‘close’ reading of Jack Davis’s life and poetry texts in the context of *the polysituated*, and a tangential but relevant engagement with Socrates and animal rights. This section also con/tests aspects of Marc Augé’s *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*.

3. **Displaced acts of writing** – this section is not about definitions but about illustration. Why craft is an ineffective measure of the poem, how spirituality and the poem dialogue, a series of commentaries on ‘reading’ texts from childhood to the present day with an emphasis on creating an experimental novel when I was a teenager, and tracing its unusual history through to its recent publication as it moved through different zones of intactness and rehabilitation, an ‘introduction’ to collaborating on a collection of Persian poetry and how not being in Iran affects this process, a biographical overview of the nineteenth-century poet Auguste Lacaussade (La Réunion and France), and finally a long piece on McKenzie Wark’s and Kathy Acker’s intense email correspondence that came out of a brief physical interaction and the displacements (alluded to) that emerge from this.

4. **Displacements in reading texts** – this section includes reading of writers of place such as Ouyang Yu (historical-social-cultural geographies), the mysterious and elusive Charles Walker, the great Australian short story writer Henry Lawson, Peter Carey (*True History of the Kelly Gang*), Lisa Gorton (*The Life of Houses*), Western Australian poets John Masteer and Barbara Temperton, a reading of an anthology of Asian-Australian poetry, and a brief comment on Native American poet, Janet McAdams.

5. **Emplacement** – issues of migration, ‘return’ and belonging are explored through the Irish-Australian nexus, with a focus on animal rights, ‘nature’ and human presence in ‘landscape’. This is what I see as the gravitational (off-) centre of the book. Journal entries are interspersed with essays considering diverse but interconnected issues, always coming back to the idea of ‘place’,

ranging from questions of ‘storage’, ‘irredentism’, the Australian Jindyworobaks (white appropriators of ‘Aboriginal Australia’ in the 1930s–1950s), Travellers and ‘nomadism’, and the issues behind writing ‘local’ poetry from ‘outside’ and ‘reversioning’ *The Tain*.

6. Weirding place/Anti-bucolic – ‘Below the surface-stream, shallow and light’ – transferences of weirding place: through the eye of Randolph Stow’s ‘Still Life with Amaryllis Belladonna’ we approach and reproach the pastoral and arrive at a reading of *STILL Moving* by Marc Atkins and Rod Mengham; *and* Working with Thurston Moore on the poems of *A Remarkable Grey Horse* and ‘New Stuff’: *Et in Arcadia ego*, not; *and* Eclogue failure or success: the collaborative activism of poetry – working with Charmaine Papertalk-Green.

7. Appendices – a radical ecological manifesto and ‘answers’ to ‘deleted questions’. This brief section contains background ‘data’.