

# Colonial Psychosocial



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*Reading William Lane*

By

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*To Katarina*



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*the antipathy and hatred we feel for the offender, even when we cannot be certain who it is – the whole knot of shifting and intensely sensitive reactions to an alien touch – proves that we are dealing here with a human propensity as deep-seated as it is alert and insidious.*

– Elias Canetti *Crowds and Power*

*[The press] is not a servant – how could a servant demand and receive so much – it is the event. Once again the instrument has run away with us. We have placed the person who is supposed to report outbreaks of fire, and who ought doubtless to play the most subordinate role in the state, in power over the world, over fire and over the house, over fact and over fantasy.*

– Walter Benjamin *One Way Street*



## INTRODUCTION

It was a sweltering summer in Brisbane. Vance Palmer describes how Sydney Jephcott and Francis Adams were sitting comfortably together on a Brisbane veranda; they were talking and gazing idly out onto the dusty roadway when Jephcott was startled by the sudden appearance of a ghastly apparition. He saw ‘*something* limping’ at them ‘from the front gate’ and squawked in fright: ‘Here comes Mephistopheles for one of us’. Shuffling toward them, from ‘limp to lips – and higher – hell-fired eyes and sweat-snaked locks, was the Tempter!’ At Jephcott’s alarm Adams hissed back: ‘Damn your eyes, Jephcott, shut up! It’s Billy Lane. Hope he didn’t hear you’. As this weird figure went upon his mad way, Adams settled back and remarked to Jephcott that it was funny he had never noticed Lane’s ‘family likeness till you spoke, but it’s there most undoubtedly’.<sup>1</sup>

In 1885 William Lane set foot on Australian shores for the first time. He would have cut a queer figure in his habitual Assam coat, snake-buckled belt and heavy knotted tie; he leaned on a walking stick and somewhere about his person would surely be a big meerschaum pipe. He was a slight man who wore a walrus moustache and little round spectacles that focused a pale blue stare. Once he arrived in the colonies, he settled first in Brisbane and began vigorously contributing to the political and print culture of the period. He would move up and down the Australian east coast, back and forth from Britain, to Paraguay and finally to New Zealand. On hearing of his eventual death, fellow journalist Harry Taylor wrote a sketch of Lane coloured with Christ-like comparisons:

The man through whose burning faith was launched the most remarkable and significant attempt at the reconstruction of society ... and who, in the unbounded devotion which he inspired in the breasts of simple men, was, more than any man I have ever known, like One of whom it is recorded that at his behest his disciples left all and followed him. (123)

Taylor’s Messiah juxtaposed with Jephcott’s Tempter neatly captures the paradox that the figure of William Lane presents. And a study of these contradictions in his life and work leads one into a story which is as peculiar as it is illuminating. By re-evaluating his influence on late colonial Australia with a sustained examination of his fiction, journalism

and politics, I seek to highlight the ways in which he encouraged uneasy obsessions in the cultural imaginary, amplifying uncertainties and resistances which connect with a far wider topos of divisive thinking.

The first of six children, Lane was born in Bristol in the September of 1861. He came into the world with his right foot bowed by talipes, yet he was a precocious child who proved himself a gifted pupil at the Bristol Grammar School. By age eleven or twelve he was earnestly participating in the violent political agitation of the 'Orange Cliques', which, as Lloyd Ross relates in the only lengthy account of Lane's early life, 'smashed windows and broke up rival meetings' (26). His family lived in modest circumstances – circumstances which rapidly deteriorated. His father, an Irish Protestant, worked as a nurseryman and landscape gardener, and at the height of his career employed twenty men. However, he preferred to conduct his business affairs at a local drinking house and his uninhibited imbibing swiftly sunk the family into poverty. In light of such a lesson, the young William promised his mother he would abstain from alcohol, a promise he kept, and which was to figure significantly in his later dreams of a perfect society. After his mother's death a former teacher gave Lane enough money to work his passage to Canada. At sixteen he arrived in Montreal where he took odd jobs such as linotype operator and printer's devil, and by the age of twenty he was working as a reporter.

By twenty four he was a journalist in Detroit. This was the time of the violent upheaval of the Great Railway Strike in which militant industrial action was crushed over the dead bodies of hundreds of workers, while the press hotly propounded concepts of 'civilisation' and 'anarchy'. On July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1883 at Algonac, Michigan, he married nineteen-year-old Anne Mary Macquire, who had been born in Edinburgh. In 1885 the couple sailed with their daughter for England, although they did not linger long, losing little time before embarking for Australia with Lane's brother John. They were following two younger brothers, Frank and Ernest, who had travelled out to the colonies the year before.

Once in Australia, Lane swiftly began navigating the shoals of colonial politics. In Brisbane he became an active participant in the trade union movement and, as an increasingly popular columnist, he wrote for the Brisbane paper *The Worker* and helped found *The Boomerang* newspaper in 1887, becoming both its editor and leader writer. Ross's biography *William Lane and the Australian Labor Movement* (1935) revels in his antics as a journalist; it lingers on stories such as Lane posing as a drunk and allowing himself to be arrested in order to report on his treatment and the conditions within the jailhouse. Lane – who in Ross's laconic prose quickly becomes 'Will' – is presented as a lovable rogue with deep

sentiments and compassion. He had a 'sincerity and charm of manner' which, Ross writes, 'won for him a toleration that became rare in Australia' (36); for some period at least, Lane was Australia's 'most popular political writer' (18).

In 1889 Lane was involved in the creation of the Australian Labour Federation, a formation of Queensland unions in Brisbane. Ross emphasises Lane's 'enormous influence' on the early Australian trade unions, describing a vital atmosphere and a youthful political stage on which new actors, '(n)ew leaders were coming to the front' (48). Ross argues that these powerful new political players were pushing themselves forward on the basis of ideas they were getting from Lane's writing: they 'listened to Lane's hints as a group of youths in a High School might listen to the suggestions of a class captain' (49). He makes the point that the ferment Lane helped create not only 'persuaded hundreds, and perhaps thousands' (367) of his contemporaries to take up his ideals, but also that his influence crossed into later generations, and 'continued to have a leavening influence on later times' (366). In a period that has since echoed through Australian cultural history, Lane had a potent influence upon influential people. He used his writing to encourage support for the worker's strikes of 1891 and his novel, *The Workingman's Paradise* (1892), was written to raise funds for unionists jailed during the physical and political confrontations, alongside outlining his principles to the world. The narrative, driven by ideology and styled as social realism, wandered colonial Sydney and mused on utopia.

In the early 1890s Lane founded the New Australia Co-operative Settlement Association. In 1893 more than 200 of its members travelled with him to Paraguay to establish a colony called New Australia. The New Australians scratched out a communal society in the jungle, a settlement which suffered many trials, eventually dividing into two separate colonies. Lane himself finally left Paraguay deeply disillusioned. He took his family to Auckland in 1899 where he wrote for the conservative newspaper *The New Zealand Herald* until he died in 1917. In *The Nervous Nineties* (1991) John Docker provides this succinct summary of Lane's contradictory character:

Lane – from the womb to the tomb a wandering Englishman, radical journalist, pro-unions, pro-mateship, pro-women's rights, pro-temperance, pro-European white supremacy, utopian socialist, puritan, colonial adventurer, journalist again, later-in-life conservative. (133)

Lane was indeed restless. He never stayed in one place long – never stayed still – he was always moving on to the next thing. Those who knew him

recall him forever pacing living rooms, animated by a vitality that often had him up all night, writing, talking, drinking copious cups of tea and smoking countless pipes. Always composing articles, stories, treatises, rants and harangues, he also suggests a kind of unsettled hypergraphia.

The critical studies of Lane and his work have largely been part of an ongoing assessment of cultural nationalism in late nineteenth century Australia. Perceptions of him have shifted with the tides of historiography, but he has always been seen as a figure implicated in the making of Australian history. Scholars have placed his gender and racial politics in relief or focus particularly on his relationship with socialism and utopianism; some of the earliest signs of Australian feminism have been found in Lane's work, and he has been credited with contributing to the cultural climate in which the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Australian union movement were born. Many discussions of Lane have been palliative, dismissing his racism as merely a reflection of the ideas about racial purity which were held by the Australian labour movement and then fostered in the wider population when it was organised into the ALP. In further studies he has been placed under more severe scrutiny, highlighting his repressive gender politics, the extraordinarily vehement combination of racism and nationalism in his writing, and the dubious nature of his socialism. In his reading of the body of critical work surrounding Lane, Andrew McCann points out that for the most part it focuses on 'the pedagogical dimension of Lane's politics, ignoring the performative, mythic dimension' (10). While I wish to consider the historical residue of his pedagogy, I also want to consider this 'phantasmatic' dimension of his writing.

This study re-evaluates his work and influence by exploring texts which have received little critical attention, suggesting these examples of late colonial literary life and culture were part of a discursive space which exerted a divisive pressure on Australia's social imaginary. It highlights the ways in which Lane's work encouraged a narcissistic preoccupation with purity driven by a fear of contamination, an obsession which helped maintain and legitimate race and racial violence within the colonial psyche. Approaching Lane from this perspective uncovers not only a persistent national fantasy at play within attempts to define individual and collective identities in Australia, it also suggests Lane's influence on the calibration of this fantasy. Through Lane I develop a way of approaching the historically situated and discursively shaped anxieties which are embedded in political rhetoric, deliberate interventions of the media, and the aggressive lexicon of everyday racism. Shaping cultural fears into structures of language and narrative was not, however, merely a local

phenomenon. Lane allows us to see how the peculiarly racialised and spatialised expressions of settler colonial politics are part of a far wider trajectory of 'race thinking'. I suggest his poetics and politics represent one instance in which we can see the European race politics of the twentieth century incubated in the outposts of Empire.

Historians first presented Lane as a radical nationalist, socialist, Marxist, and the commanding figure in the Australian labour movement in the late nineteenth century. In 1909 Andrew St Ledger predicted historians of the future would find that socialism in Australia 'sprang fully armed from the brain of one man – William Lane' (5). Palmer's *Legend of the Nineties* (1954) makes Lane central to a discussion of early nationalism and the legend of a decade 'in which the genius of this young country had a brief and brilliant first flowering' (9). In *Radical and Working Class Politics* (1960) Robin Gollan argues that Lane strove to 'wed the Labour movement in Queensland to the socialist ideal' (105). On the other hand, Grant Hannan's essay 'William Lane - Mateship and Utopia' (1970) suggests that Lane was only a moderate socialist who became a 'utopian'. Lane's writing, according to Hannan, 'served only to crystallize many of the amorphous ideas and political feelings which had hitherto washed around in a Victorian bath of sentimentality' (184). While this may be a fair point, it should not be used to dismiss the catalytic power of Lane's writing. And although Hannan is right to argue his work and biography reveal an ongoing personal search for an idealised space, he mistakenly suggests Lane was never an advocate of violence.

These early histories largely ignore the striking vehemence of Lane's racial politics. Humphrey McQueen corrects this in *A New Britannia* (1970), which uses Lane to forward an argument about the centrality of racism to the social and political origins of Australia. McQueen accurately labels Lane 'an authoritarian racist who conceived of himself as a latter-day Messiah' (196). Verity Burgmann's *In Our Time* (1985) continues this unmasking of Lane; she too presents an unsympathetic picture, described by Docker as a 'systematic, detailed and developed garrotting' (135). McQueen levels a further accusation at Labor leaders who, instead of 'combating racism as a tool of oppression ... have almost invariably articulated and reinforced it ... purveying the filthiest lies, and inflaming fears' (37). Lane, whose racially driven writing contributed to the rise of Labor and the labour movement in the late nineteenth century, was arguably an influential purveyor of these 'lies' and 'fears'.

Michael Wilding's introduction to the 1980 facsimile reprint of *The Workingman's Paradise* presents a lighter portrait; his extensive reading of Lane's biography, the novel, and its social, political and literary

context, has been seen as somewhat of an apologia for Lane. Docker, for instance, describes it as an attempt to ‘calm the swelling tide of historians’ distaste’ (139). The partial success of this attempt can be seen in John Kellett’s article ‘William Lane and New Australia: A Reassessment’ (1997), which dismisses Lane’s racism, referring to it with the off-hand comment that ‘given the dominant ethos of the times it would be truly remarkable if Lane was not a racist’ (16). Like Kellett, Wilding also argues that Lane was not any more a racist than those of his time; however, criticising this perspective is not to ignore the useful detail of Wilding’s work. His ‘Introduction’ entertains a number of suggestive speculations, particularly the under-considered point that an often submerged religiosity pervaded Lane’s life and work, forming an ever-present undercurrent to his politics.

Vance Palmer too elides Lane’s racial politics and instead makes him foremost among the late colonial ‘utopians’. Kellett extends this by suggesting that Lane’s expedition to Paraguay has a coherent place in a ‘long tradition of international utopian socialism’, and that he should be seen as ‘a socialist visionary foremost, and only incidentally and briefly an Australian’ (1). Thinking of Lane as an incidental Australian is useful, particularly in light of the influence he cast over the country and the connection between his ideas and social and political perspectives that were forming internationally, but Kellett’s diagnosis of visionary socialism is open to question. Lane has, as Kellett and Palmer’s work indicates, been consistently related to studies of Australian utopianism; this is not surprising considering that his writing was always filled with dreams of a social paradise, an ideal he attempted to make real in Paraguay. However, remarking on Lane’s settlement, Wilding makes the more critical observation that ‘Lane’s scheme was not a utopian retreat, but an attempt to produce a vanguard for the revolution’ (59).

In ‘Romanticism, Nationalism and the Myth of the Popular’ McCann points to Lane’s use of the ‘phantasmagoric culture of the nineteenth century city, in which collective dreams are figured in the deceptive materiality of public spaces and popular spectacles’ (11); he suggests that the irony of the novel’s title itself alludes to the ‘slippage between paradise and forms of popular deception’ (11) and its form suggests ‘a colonial modernity, of which Lane’s nationalism is a powerful expression’ (12). I extend this account of Lane’s phantasmagoria – a notion that refers to hallucinatory textual effects in which images generated in the collective imagination are mediated by forms of modern urban entertainment. What this invites, suggests McCann, is not simply a dismissal of Lane’s ‘utopian’ thinking, but instead a way of viewing the ‘utopian itself as



intrinsic to modernity's dream-like surfaces' (11). McCann's reading assists in outlining the crucial connection between the textual effects of Lane's work, and its relationship with the rise of colonial modernity. While Lane has been positioned centrally in Australian literary and political history, critical discussion of his work has been largely concerned with his ideological legacy. There is little deep analysis of the textual world he created; in this study I seek to correct this.

Collected together, the readings of Lane's life and work present a contradictory portrait; he was a man of paradox. However the disturbed obsessions that this produced in his writing are coeval and continuous with broader social pathologies. The overdetermined quality of his rhetoric helps highlight a cultural engagement with increasingly pathologised ideas about race, identity and difference. My use of the term 'pathological' draws from the work of Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, who follow Gregory Bateson's awareness of 'important continuities' between what is 'considered "normal" and what is declared "pathological" in a given society, forcing us to recognise the "normality" of the pathological as well as the pathology of the normal' (217). Lane's articles and fiction give us a perspective from which to consider the pathology of the 'normal' within Australian culture. The popular, populist spectacle of his writing put into relief certain irrationalities structuring the social and political imaginary.

Rereading the tangled history of his life and work, I see Lane as a charismatic figure whose first manifestation was as a rabid preacher coughing forth racist bile, powered by an idiosyncratic agitation, a violent internal heat which drew converts to him. Later he emerges as an aspirant dictator, the leader of a group he goads into travelling to South America to an isolated patch of the Paraguayan jungle to settle a colony based on blood purity and dreams of domination. In either manifestation, I argue that Lane can be seen as the disseminator of what Edward Said describes in orientalist discourse as, 'short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury' and 'antagonistic debate whose goal is a belligerent collective identity' (xvii). Thus the anarchist Larry Petrie, one of Lane's contemporaries, wrote of his fervid zealotry:

He is a madman, a knave seized with the madness of ambition, overpowered with a sense of the divinity of himself and his mission, and for that he will barter truth, justice and the whole world plus the handful of bigots he terms the faithful. (cited Whitehead 315)

This book is not, however, the biography of a madman, it is instead an example of how a figure such as Lane can be used to identify and understand signs of a wider condition. I suggest Lane reflects the

psychology Theodor Adorno describes in his early study *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950); like the authoritarian, Lane's prejudice 'was of the politico-fascist brand, distinctly colored by paranoid fantasies' (611). The qualities Adorno identifies match Lane's behaviour: he spread 'moralistic invective' (762), had a distrust and intolerance of ambiguity, and was obsessed with attempts to make strict differentiations between those who are outside and those who are within. These 'irrational symptoms', as Adorno describes, do 'not appear to affect the "normality" of those who show the symptom' (618). Drawing out the pathology of the 'normal', Lane produced some of the most bizarre discursive spaces of late nineteenth century Australia. Traversing these spaces provides a peculiar perspective from which to re-examine the politics and rhetorics – bred at the ends of empire and within early modernity – that colour the late colonial print culture.

Late colonial literary production had a distinct influence on the Australian social imaginary. Fears and fantasies find their way into popular entertainments, into texts that have often been marginal to critical discourse and literary analysis, but which have been crucial in sustaining the society's uneasy preoccupations. In Lane's case, his popular sketches of city life entertained and unsettled his readers with a spectacle of imagined contaminations, new urban spaces overrun with the exotica of foreign bodies and the press of unfamiliar crowds. What emerges in reading Lane's work is how it exerts its influence through the production of popular effect, literally enacting the uncertainties and debasement of the modern world through superficial heightening and overdetermination. In this way the psychic experience of the society – its dreams and fantasises – became mediated by forms of popular culture, the spectacle of modernity and a developing urban reality. Lane's discursive world is linked with the spectacularised world of popular entertainment, but also to what McCann calls the 'dream-life' of the colonial city, and the materialisation of collective desire. An immersive reading of Lane's work reveals its hallucinatory qualities, and allows an insight into the persuasive and insidious force of perspectives developed in the popular reading matter of the colonies. I argue that his work and influence can be used to identify a particular vocabulary, certain images and effects, ideas and words which continue to frame Australia's ideas about itself.

In this book I suggest that Lane was one voice responding to a colony forged on prejudice. Long before Lane's arrival white Australia had developed an apprehensive culture; it was always aggressively uncertain about its edges. The symbolism in one of Captain Arthur Phillip's earliest acts – the building of a gun battery designed to deter imaginary invaders at

Dawes Point on Sydney Harbour – is perennially re-enacted in the defensive fantasies of an unsettled culture. And the articulations of these fears have a distinctly spatial quality; in Australia the ‘act of settling’, as Paul Carter writes in *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987), ‘was not a matter of marking out pre-existing boundaries, but one of establishing symbolic enclosures’ (168). This ‘act’ has been rehearsed again and again; these anxieties and uncertainties – thrumming away as counterpoint beneath the collective psyche – persist. In the period in which the Indigenous inhabitants were imagined as a dying race, and the colonies were groping toward some sort of coherent nationhood, Lane not only drew from, but amplified, Australia’s spatial and racial anxieties.

In Australia fears of invasion and contamination have always been bound up with an (often latent) awareness that the European occupation of the continent was itself an invasion. As McQueen speculates in *A New Britannia*, ‘perhaps it was the memory of the ease with which the British invasion of Australia was accomplished that kept alive the fear of a further invasion in the minds of Australians’ (45). The anxiety associated with the acts of invasive white settlement produced a culture with an exaggerated preoccupation with spatial threat; colonies constructed without clear borders or battles established a community obsessed with the transgression of boundaries. Meaghan Morris evokes the mnemonic nature of this ‘white panic’:

Phobic narratives of Australian national space clearly worry over the possibility of at least one specific form of historical repetition ... the coast is a permeable barrier against waves of *over*-population rolling in from the future ... This figure operates most powerfully in a register of paranoid anticipation. However, it also carries a pressing mnemonic force (saying that invaders will come by sea, we admit it is we who came by sea) that secures a chain of displacement: something we did to others becomes something that happened to us and could happen all over again; on the beach, we replay our genocidal past as our apocalyptic future. (247)

Morris points to a highly spatialised repetition of ‘phobic narratives’ that imagine the future in terms which reverse and replay a violent past. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this process might be seen as a missed encounter with the real, bound to a trauma that barely registers, but continues to shape national identity. In the late colonial period these anxious spatial fantasies were fashioned into various forms of textual production and consumption. I argue the work of William Lane can be read as an early and influential contribution to these ‘phobic narratives’.

In some respects these spatial anxieties are the symptoms of all settler societies, yet the specificities of location determine and inflect ways of negotiating otherness; Australia's particular historical context embedded its 'register of paranoid anticipation' in a tenacious manner. In the period leading up to federation and the white Australia policy racially restrictive immigration policies were not unique: New Zealand, North America, Canada and many European states all had discriminatory poll taxes or Acts which legislated against – particularly Chinese – immigration and naturalisation. There was, however, one particular feature which made the Australian experience distinct; it was the only country that achieved sovereignty directly through the rhetoric of racial purity and spatial denials of the other. Within the foundational premise of Australia there was a convergence between a racialised ideal and the self-conscious rhetoric defining the nation. This convergence formed entrenched psychosocial symptoms; for example, the belief that there were certain 'Australian' values which only particular people could hold, and which were culturally alien to others.

In Lane's work the Chinese are the most vilified, but they seem also to have exerted a peculiar fascination upon him. In response, this discussion of his work makes much reference to his representation of Chinese people in Australia. While it would be advantageous to juxtapose Lane's lurid descriptions with the contemporary perspectives of actual Chinese people living in this time, this is not an easy task. As Kathryn Cronin describes, 'historians interested in the first Chinese Australians are entirely dependent upon the contemporary observations of hostile Europeans who were unfamiliar with Chinese language and customs' (*Colonial Casualties* 1). So my aim here is not in any sense to offer a description of Chinese communities in late colonial Australia. Instead this study explores a discursive space that dealt in fantasy, but which rendered an imaginary realm real for those caught in its thrall; I examine the rhetoric and textual effects Lane used to create this space – a space saturated with inimical portraits of Chinese people and customs. Throughout the discussion I use the convenient terms 'Chinese' and 'white', while being well aware of the myriad differences within these groups.

In Australia's 'phobic narratives' there is a persistence of ideas about the constitution of social and geographic enclosures in which some are deemed not to belong. As I have already indicated, these cultural fantasies and phobias have a certain spatial quality, and as David Sibley points out in *Geographies of Exclusion* (1995), 'many social problems can be profitably spatialized' (xv). Sibley suggests a nation's organisation and representation of real and metaphoric spaces is where the nation's anxieties

are most clearly revealed. My analysis, then, will keep returning to Lane's representations of space – representations that both promoted racial horror and reinforced a dominant culture's authority and social power. Moreover, as Marc Augé argues in *A Sense for the Other* (1998), the idea of an 'identity crisis' is in fact 'a crisis of space' and a 'crisis of otherness' (109). In other words, a nation's anxieties about its identity are essentially about space. Foregrounding the spatial qualities of rhetoric such as Lane's provides a way of understanding Australia's preoccupation with, and aggression toward, alterity.

An uneasy colonial culture approaches space like an agoraphobe; implicit in it is a desire that pulls between exposure and suffocation, isolation and the crowd. From either position there is a fear of being hunted. As Paul Carter describes in *Repressed Spaces* (2002), this is a 'double condition': '(t)he two states seem to be phases of one anxiety, which expresses itself in an oscillation between the desire for contact with the other and a fear of it' (*Repressed Spaces* 32). I suggest this oscillation or 'double condition' also describes the anxious condition of Australian race politics. Due partly to its colonial reverberations, Australian space phobias are racialised, sexualised, and yoked to national myths. This is seen most clearly in rhetoric which deploys images of contagion and contamination – which stress permeability, division, restriction and degeneration – of the body, particular places, and the nation itself. An examination of Lane's ideas highlights some of the ways in which tropes of bodily, moral, and social contamination are worked into the lexicon of the popular imaginary.<sup>2</sup> I argue that the anxieties and uncertainties traced through his work can be read as the symptoms of a kind of collective prophylaxis. The spectre of contamination indexes Australia's spatial anxiety, which is registered in attempts to preserve the fantasy of a nation defined by its purity and ordered settlement. The ways in which Lane's writing honed this fantasy help to illustrate how the poetics of pollution bolsters the politics of exclusion.

These spatial preoccupations produce a certain kind of violence in the culture and encourage a climate where expressions of identity can erupt in a lexicon of aggressive, fearful expressions of defense and racial hatred.<sup>3</sup> Ghassan Hage highlights a 'paranoid mode of belonging' (2) and the 'pathological nature of nationalism consumed by worrying' (23) that mark Australian cultural history; locating Lane within this history, I suggest he contributed to the spatial and racial politics of Australia's 'paranoid nationalist imaginary' (*Against Paranoid Nationalism* 32). In *Dark Side of the Dream* Hodge and Mishra describe how the society is fractured by its inability to break away from a schizophrenic condition implicit in the

suppression of its colonial past. 'The Australian psyche', they tell us, 'is organised around this fissure, it *is* this contradiction, and typically it projects an inarticulate, egalitarian Orientalist, a racist republican' (xiii). It is this fissure, this contradiction in the Australian cultural memory, which Lane both embodied and opened wide. In these terms a study of his writing helps illuminate the psychic reality of social fantasy.

I focus on the idea of fantasy in part because fantasies provide a framework through which we see reality; they are the avenue through which otherwise inexpressible sentiments are expressed. In *States of Fantasy* (1996) Jacqueline Rose argues that fantasy should be 'at the heart of our political vocabulary', and comments: '(l)ike blood, fantasy is thicker than water, all too solid' (5). Fantasies interdigitate with the social and political, they amalgamate and distort; they are often psychical facades which cover over some kind of trauma. Fantasy fills out an empty place, a void, that which cannot be fully symbolised; they orientate desire, but are also protective and defensive responses which attempt to cover a fundamental lack. The fantasies I examine here are in part an attempt to elide the realities of colonial violence and dispossession, what Slavoj Žižek has called 'the real of a violence founding the system' ('The Missing Link of Fantasy' 46). Žižek's 'The Seven Veils of Fantasy' (1998) can be used to illustrate the way the fantasy of an ideal Australia operates: 'instead of a full rendering of the antagonisms that traverse our society, we indulge in the notion of society as an organic Whole, kept together by forces of solidarity and cooperation' (190). This vision of unity, however, sustains what Žižek calls a 'traumatic kernel' at its heart. In the Australian context, Hodge and Mishra argue that 'the inexhaustible fascination of Australians with this cultural blank' suggests 'the shadow of a deep and complex secret that conceals and in this way constructs the true identity of Australians' (217). This shadow, concealed by the fantasy of coherent identity, can be recognised in both individual and cultural phenomena.

The fantasy of wholeness creates what it attempts to conceal, producing a disturbing residue which must be kept at bay.<sup>4</sup> In Lane's writing we can see how the desire for an idealised national whole is constantly irritated by the surfeit these collective fantasies produce. The 'traumatic kernel' resurfaces in the fear and fascination generated around those the culture marks as other, the ethnicities who do not keep to themselves, who do not fit – that troubling surplus to which Lane constantly returned. The fantasy of unity and purity which he helped shape can be seen as the society's attempt to manage its own excess, an impossibility which results in an aggressive preoccupation with alterity.

From this perspective Jennifer Rutherford's *The Gauche Intruder* (2000) provides critical groundwork for my analysis of Lane and his propagation of a 'white Australian fantasy'. *The Gauche Intruder* turns our attention to a 'fantasy of the nation and the moral field that supports it' (10); it reveals the aggression which paces the fantasy of a good, pure Australian identity. Rutherford introduces us to the idea of the 'Australian Good', and the argument that the moral codes which define this 'Good' – concepts such as the 'fair go', the cult of the battler, and the egalitarian rejection of a visibly hierarchical society – are, in Australian history and cultural production, continuously undercut by acts of aggression. She describes: 'the fantasy of Australia as the homeland of the good neighbour. The good neighbour can only be found within a small hand-held mirror, and if we slip outside the mirror's frame, aggression is waiting for us' (8). The idea of the 'Australian Good' enables us to see the violence that underpins the rhetoric of purity, goodness and wholeness which was disseminated by agitators such as Lane. As such, his acts of discursive aggression have a place in a lineage of conceptual and physical violence. His phantasmagoria of a nation plagued by contaminating difference preserved and honed the paradox of good, ordinary, Australian people, who subsequently have an aggressive instinct toward the touch of the unknown.

Rutherford describes how the fantasy of an immaculately moral nation camouflages and authorises aggression. I suggest that William Lane's writing allows us to see how these 'fantasies of the good' conceal 'aggression at both a national and local level: an aggression directed both to an external and internal Other' (*The Gauche Intruder* 10). What becomes clear in his work is that white Australia's fear of invasion and contamination is shadowed by collective idealisation. As Rutherford suggests, this 'consistent fantasy' of Australia as 'a good and neighbourly nation' obscures 'the Australian legacy':

dispossession of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, the White Australia policy, the assimilation policies of the twentieth century, a pronounced antipathy towards and intolerance of the feminine, and a continued cultural policing of traits that metonymically carry the stain of difference. (12-13)

I argue that Lane contributed to ways of thinking which reinforced this legacy. His contributions to Australian culture enable us to see an instance in an unbroken continuum of divisive racialised and sexualised politics, aggression toward difference disguised behind a fantasy of plenitude and purity.

My study acknowledges the racism that was central to the construction of a national psyche, but it attempts, through localising a nexus of related factors around the figure of William Lane, to provide a reading which is sensitive to the nuances, specificities and idiosyncrasies of this condition. This is not merely a reiteration of the fact that the racism that permeated Australian culture in the late nineteenth century continues to do so. Through Lane's racial politics and representation of racialised space, I attempt to highlight the pathology and paradox in the collective fantasies of normality. Lane and his work can be seen as representing a particular moment in which the colonial encountered modernity, in which the forces of insecurity and aggression that marked the next century were incubated. While I identify local peculiarities, I argue that Australia should not be seen as somehow separate, but rather part of the far broader international development of twentieth century race politics.

I begin by introducing Lane's *Boomerang* newspaper and its vociferous contribution to Australia's late colonial popular press and print culture. The newspaper allows us to see Lane as an effective propagandist, deeply implicated in the cultural transmission of a particular set of social strictures. In the second chapter I consider Lane's novel "*White or Yellow?*" *A Story of the Race-war of A.D. 1908*, which was serialised in 1888. I place the novel in the context of Western invasion narratives of the nineteenth century, looking at the race riot it helped inspire, the writing of the crowd, and the anxieties engendered by the uncertainties of modern urban spaces. I discuss Lane's representation of the urban masses in order to illustrate a colonial response to the modern crowd. In late colonial Australia images of crowds were evoked in discourses urging national cohesion, but also in metaphors of 'swarming' parasitic multitudes. While associated with processes of democratic reform, the modern crowd also became a phenomenon which altered the urban terrain; it introduced the indiscriminate touch of strangers, alienating concentrations and conglomerations, and abrupt acts of violence. Lane's images of urban crowds reveal the logics of spatial disposition and the anxieties and aggression which surface when racialised groups are seen to appropriate certain spatial powers, or to 'contaminate' certain spaces.

The third chapter considers Lane's 'Daylight and Dark' series in the context of a colonial Mayhew-esque mode of writing the city, a style mimicked in Australian texts such as Marcus Clarke's 'Lower Bohemia' and John Stanley James' 'Vagabond Paper'. The 'Daylight and Dark' pieces, written in a period which was shaping the spatial poetics of the city, demonstrate how Lane's racial fears were fused with the anxieties bred by modernity. They have an air of surveillance, and suggest a watcher



wandering the city recording and policing the activities and characters hidden within it. With this in mind, I briefly juxtapose Lane with Walter Benjamin's *flâneur*, drawing out colonial differences in ways of approaching the constant 'shocks' of the city. I also discuss Lane's 'Daylight and Dark' piece, 'Opium Smoking in Brisbane', which used the combination of opium and otherness to feed fears of collective degeneracy. I consider how the intoxication of the drug and city is linked with ideas about urban alienation, strange crowds, crowded architecture, and the sensation of being 'crowded out'. I link opium with the sexualising or eroticising of these spaces, discussing a popular fascination with what was seen as the perverted sexuality of another race.

Chapter four extends these ideas by examining the themes of somatic contamination, sexual defilement, and physical deformity. Lane tapped an obsession with the maintenance of social purity and elevated unease about miscegenation, racial degeneracy and cultural regression. His journalism and fiction played a key role in amplifying, and co-ordinating, these 'bodily' threats in the popular imaginary. I argue that Lane's writing contributed to the hypochondria of identity in Australia. This condition results in attempts to firm up the boundaries between different bodies and cultures, and in the process, projects a fiction of wellness and wholeness that polices even the apparently normal subject. I link these ideas with both Mary Douglas' study of the 'rituals of defilement' societies use to keep their borders and internal lines clear, and Julia Kristeva's 'essay on abjection', in order to explore racial anxieties about things 'out of place'. The expression of this horror in Lane's work indexes broader concerns about the composition of the social order. He organised his readers' desires around the repudiation of impurity, attempting to preserve the fantasy of an idealised self by rendering foreign elements abject, and by deploying a spatial logic which separates those who do or do not belong.

Chapter five first focuses on Lane's novel *The Workingman's Paradise*. It considers the rise of Lane's influence and the novel's political agenda. I argue that the narrative indicates the collapse of Lane's belief in a perfectible Australia. *The Workingman's Paradise* develops the possibility of a degenerative decline in the white population, a sense of national enfeeblement. I describe how in response Lane proposed to found a colony in Paraguay called New Australia; he drew together a group of white Australian volunteer colonists and set sail to conduct what was arguably an invasion of indigenous lands deep within the South American jungle. The story of his disastrous settlement is well documented. My reading, however, concentrates on Lane's writing leading up to and during

the first year of the colony, which was published in *The Journal of the New Australia Co-Operative Movement*.

The final chapter looks to Lane's last years in Auckland, writing as 'Tohunga' in *The New Zealand Herald*. The Tohunga articles are collected in a volume published after Lane's death; these last pieces, many written during the First World War, are marked by an obsession with both idealism and brutality. I argue that Lane's late writing puts into relief the notion that aggression shadows anxieties about belonging, and how latent within the identification with place is the idea or manifestation of violence. He suggests warfare as the path to a perfect society, and taps broader phenomena in which discourses that proffered progress towards ideals, the drive to create new and virtuous communities, camouflaged violence, and a dangerous kind of moral aggression. I conclude by drawing together the threads of the argument and, with brief reference to various contemporary events and popular discourses, I suggest that the thinking which Lane's writing helped breed persists. Beyond his considerable sway in the latter years of the nineteenth century, his influence feeds out into larger preoccupying cultural anxieties. In various guises, the politics, propaganda and social fantasies I identify remain present in Australian society.

Australian literary and cultural history has filtered the divisive impact of Lane's influence. Moreover, it has failed to locate this influence as a social and political flashpoint in a complex and interconnected trajectory. The study that follows explores the phantasmagoric space of Lane's writing in order to highlight his influence on a social imaginary historically continuous with the racialised practices of colonialism, to consider a cultural engagement with increasingly pathologised ideas about race, identity and difference, and to open avenues for exploring the spatial regimes and collective fantasies which support and define them. I argue that an immersive reading of Lane's work offers up a set of persistent themes whose outlines can be traced beyond his time. His writing and ideas represent one instance in a much wider pattern. They can be seen as an example of how the racially driven violence of subsequent political formations was intimated in the colonies, and continues to exert an influence on the everyday racism of the contemporary world.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CASTING *THE BOOMERANG*

*OMNIPRESENT, ever waiting,  
Looking for its prey,  
Never missing, ever 'slating'  
In a stunning way,*

...

*Dealing stinging blows it  
Goes upon its way;  
Rogues (you may suppose it)  
Are its certain prey.*

– 'Larry' 'The Boomerang' *The Boomerang*

*Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang,  
a vortex of summons and repulsions.*

– Julia Kristeva *Powers of Horror*

Sometime after William Lane's death, Harry Taylor found himself travelling through Central Queensland with a 'cultured Irishman' who had once resisted 'succumbing' to Lane's influence. Pausing in the recently flooded 'shifting town' of Clermont, this Irishman recalled the power Lane had once had over working people. The praise he reserved for Lane suggests how the writer's work influenced his milieu:

Parnell was the only man I have known in modern history who succeeded in impressing his personality on others as Lane did ... every bushman you met was merely a mouth piece through which Lane talked. They had absorbed him, and when they argued on any social question you knew at once it was not their own thoughts they were uttering but Lane who was speaking through them. (124)

The politics, social theories and peculiar perceptions found within his writing were apparently slowly soaking into the society growing around him, whether it knew it or not. At a time of tumult, when the 'bushman' was a symbol of antipodean independence, Lane was the arch-manipulator

who ‘spoke through them’; he would be read aloud in labour camps that seethed toward industrial action by those who, as Palmer describes, had ‘memorized his articles and would give them forth as recitations’ (79). It is this influence on the perceptual apparatus of his contemporaries that undergirds this first chapter.

The place where one could be most thoroughly saturated by Lane’s influence was within the pages of his ‘omnipresent’ *Boomerang* newspaper. From the outset the paper had cast itself as a predator – a wild creature ‘looking for its prey’, waiting to ‘deal stinging blows’ (16:6) – which had come to mesmerise its audience. Lane created *The Boomerang* in late 1887, and as a forum completely under his control, it became an effective medium for transmitting his thoughts into the popular mind. He was also editor of the *Queensland Worker* from its inception in 1890; scholars such as Yarwood and Knowling imply that it was here that Lane wrote his most influential journalism (221). However, I suggest that Lane was at the height of his powers when he had full control of the pages of *The Boomerang*, during a few crucial years in the late nineteenth century. During these years *The Boomerang* paralleled the influential *Sydney Bulletin*, which has received much critical attention from Australian cultural histories. Composing everything from news items, to fiction, to political diatribes, gossip pieces, opinion pages or editorials, Lane used *The Boomerang* to pour his ideas into the moral marrow of the colonial print culture.

These days, copies of the paper are delicate things. The specimens I have been able to view are kept pressed away in the archives of libraries’ special collections. They have that dry musty smell. The thin brittle pages are browning and often torn and have to be turned carefully. A year’s worth of weekly editions is bound together in folios, which themselves are crumbling and need to be propped up on a soft cushion. The type is tiny; like many papers of the time, its limited pages are tightly crammed with articles. And it was a highly illustrated publication; from the first cover – with its caricatures of colonial characters overseen by a monolithic Indigenous figure striking a pose reminiscent of a Greek sculpture – it was drawn with increasingly lavish and detailed pictures. While in places the print has worn back to its outlines, the ink used for these images is often preserved, still a deep deep black. The images are often beautifully drawn and often unadulteratedly violent. The content of Lane’s paper itself was wide-ranging; amongst racing and election news one finds poems by people such as Francis Adams and Brunton Stephens, contributions from A. G. Stephens and the ‘signed articles’ of prominent citizens. The paper was also peppered with advertisements – from magic cure-alls to

announcements for lectures, or new Australian wines supposed to be a 'safe cure for diseased blood' (26:2) – advertisements which were often as richly illustrated as the paper itself. Sitting with the paper – peeling back its pungent pages from first to last – is a strange immersive experience in which one enters a space filled with beguiling images and words, and driven by an intense and unrelenting vision.

The elaborate front pages are always dominated by the newspaper's title, with the curlicues of its distinctive lettering licking around a boomerang shape decorated with mock-Indigenous designs. Beneath this header every cover announces *The Boomerang* as a 'live newspaper, racy of the soil'. Through such devices the newspaper strove to create a white 'indigenous' identity for its readers. It projected an autochthony that ceased to 'cling like a parasite to the hoary ruin of British Imperialism' and produced instead, 'everything – children, parents, a national prosperity, art, literature – even *daily newspapers* – racy of the soil', which conveyed the 'lofty aspirations' that 'throb deep down in the hearts of the colonial youth and thrill with a life that the austerest [sic] critic cannot dim or even touch' (*Boomerang* 32:3). Lane's use of *The Boomerang* as both title and motif for his nationalist newspaper is similar to the aesthetic appropriations of The Australian Natives' Association (a non-indigenous organisation restricting membership to the white native-born), which emerged in the 1870s and was in the habit of decorating its halls with Indigenous symbols in order to present a purely 'Australian' style.<sup>5</sup> Indigenous people themselves occupied an ambiguous position within the pages of *The Boomerang*. In the relatively few mentions they receive, they are variously portrayed as degraded but childlike innocents, uncivilised brothers, wandering cannibals, or as the feral defenders of Australian soil. Bruce Scates describes how the newspaper was at once 'a trenchant critic of Aboriginal people and culture and their unexpected defender, it was vicious and humanitarian, patronising and confused' ('We are not ... [A]boriginal ... we are Australian' 36). One *Boomerang* article reports that

Roast Chinaman is a greater delicacy to our aboriginal brother than the luscious [sic] white timber-grub or the spring 'possum. Even the town blackfellow, civilised by a long course of colonial rum and plug tobacco, earning his precarious livelihood by casting boomerangs over the tin roofs and smoking chimneys of Brisbane, even this remnant of a decaying race seems to contemplate the oily Mongolian with the air of an alderman gazing on green turtle. (16:12)

The original inhabitants of the country were in a different category to races such as the Chinese; they were largely depicted – with a tone of reassuring

melancholy – as the dying remnants of a noble but savage race. Appropriating symbols of their culture, *The Boomerang* reinforced the idea that Indigenous people were a race on the verge of vanishing; Lane used them to aestheticise a new white ‘indigeneity’ which he imagined somehow springing full of life from the soil. This type of gesture is not peculiar to late colonial culture; in search of identity and place, white Australia continues to appropriate Indigenous cultures for its names, motifs and symbols.<sup>6</sup>

Even within the early months Lane’s newspaper increased its reach at a surprising pace; in May of 1888 *The Boomerang* printed a small article celebrating ‘A Quarter-Million Boomerangs’. Across six months and twenty six issues, the newspaper had sold ‘over 250,000 copies’, and had ‘found its way into every nook and corner of this immense colony’ (27:5). Scates’ study *A New Australia* (1997) supports this boast: ‘From 1887-1891, Lane enjoyed unrivalled prominence as a labour journalist. His two papers, the *Brisbane Boomerang* and then the *Worker* were amongst the most widely read of any labour journals’ (179). The ultimate reach of the weekly newspaper is difficult to measure and it should be remembered that *The Boomerang* was a Queensland based publication. Late to follow the southern colonies, Queensland was experiencing the last upthrust of radicalism in nineteenth century Australia.<sup>7</sup> The intense politics of the north eastern reaches of the continent led Francis Adams to wonder whether Queensland could be paralleled with the ‘bilious and fiery genius of the Southern States of America’ (cited Jones 80). While a fraught comparison, there was certainly a hot tempered quality to the ways ideas were expressed in Queensland. There was a distinct sense that in the northern colony society was still something fluid. Brisbane, as Vance Palmer suggests,

was a centre of radical thought, or at any rate of radical ferment. Even its politics, with men like Griffith and McIlwraith facing one another, moved on a slightly higher level than those of the other colonies ... newspapers threw open their columns for discussion of the most eruptive ideas. (80)

So as has been remarked, there was a volcanic quality to the society laying claim to this part of the world. Lane and his paper fed this ‘radical ferment’ with words, defining a powerful discursive space which made the population, to quote Taylor’s ‘cultured Irishman’, his mere ‘mouth pieces’. His influence suggests that the ‘Brisbane of those days harmonised with the mood of William Lane’ (Ross 33). While Queensland had its own idiosyncrasies, it seems to inflate, intensify and draw in the jumble of themes, influences and ideas which were crucial to the period; while