G’day, Gothic!

The British Gothic, *Cloudstreet*, and Contemporary Australian Consciousness

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Introduction: G’day, Gothic!

Ask any American what Australia means to them and watch the usual associations form. “Kangaroos,” they say, “and koalas, the outback. Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree, Crocodile Dundee, and crikey.” In a land Down Under, surfers crest on immaculate waves and the sun sets strong through a stunning sea of cloud. “G’day, mate!” rings through clean, crisp air, and the only island, country, and continent on Earth operates as a Great Southern idyll: Terra Australis, once Incognita, but now known and loved, is a tourist’s heaven, a safe harbor for refugees, and a unique habitat for creatures strange, great, and small. But beneath the clichés, a hidden narrative progresses. Ancient Aboriginal rock art glistens on cliff sides in the Kimberley region of Western Australia; two-hundred-year-old prison barracks rot away on the southern coast of Tasmania. A historical cast of characters—comprising Aborigines, convicts, military men, and European explorers—haunt the Australian shores, alive in lore, but smothered by a collective national silence. Beneath the crystalline waters of a carefully filtered Australian history exists a gothic undertow, its current sweeping geographically northward and historically backward to the centuries-long, worldwide reign of the British Empire. Consciously, contemporary Australians reject and repress this subliminal pull, unwilling to acknowledge the traumatic, shameful circumstances under which their country was established as a British penal colony in 1788. Unconsciously, however, contemporary Australians divulge this gothic undercurrent, allowing the “convict stain”—a “moral blot soaked into [their national] fabric”—to seep out from beneath a deliberate culture of silence into their works of art and literature (Hughes xiii).

Tim Winton’s 1991 novel Cloudstreet, widely regarded as the definitive—if not the best¹—Australian novel, portrays both the sunlit surface and the shadowy depths of Australian

¹ Tim Winton’s Cloudstreet was the recipient of the 1992 Miles Franklin Literary Award—awarded to the “Novel for the year which is of the highest literary merit and which must present Australian Life in any of its phases”—and
consciousness. Set primarily in suburban Perth, Western Australia, *Cloudstreet*—its title referring to the house in which its core characters live, work, and grow—is a literary microcosm of contemporary Australia, capturing the historical events that have shaped both national and local Perth culture, such as the Battle of Gallipoli, World War II, and the murderous spree of the “Nedlands monster”; encapsulating the archetypal traits of Australian character, including “mateship,” endurance, good humor, and larrikinism; and, most importantly, acknowledging and illustrating the gothic undertones that are routinely suppressed by the Australian public. Although odd to the foreigner, this “sublimation” of Australian history is not baseless, random, or inexplicable (Hughes xiii). Since the British imposed it upon the Australian continent in 1788, the gothic mode, loosely defined by Romantic scholar Marilyn Gaull as “the terror, the sense of helplessness, of being manipulated by forces—natural, supernatural, psychological, social, historical—one does not understand,” has been internalized by Australians (Gaull 255). Now, over two centuries since the coincidentally concurrent publication of the first gothic novel, the advent of penal transportation, and the mental and physical construction of Australia as Britain’s Great Southern dungeon, the legacy of the British gothic tradition is becoming manifest in contemporary Australian consciousness. Employing gothic themes of fate and superstition, the power and sublimity of the elements, ghosts and possession, and life and death, Tim Winton weaves the social and cultural fabric bearing the convict stain into an alternative solution to a blanket of historical silence: He creates an artistic medium through which we—his readers, was named the “number one Australian book to read before you die” in a December 2012 competition held by Australian ABC TV’s *First Tuesday Book Club* (The Trust Company; Books+Publishing). *Cloudstreet* was also voted the most popular Australian novel by the Australian Society of Authors and named the nation’s favorite novel in the Australian Book Review, and has been implemented as required reading in secondary schools and universities across Australia (Williams).

2 Larrikinism—a distinctly Australian sense of rowdiness and cheekiness—is among the traits that comprise the ANZAC legend or spirit, which refers to the shared values and characteristics of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps of World War I (Stanley, “The ANZAC spirit”).
transported aboard a frigate of imagination from the real world to the narrative world of
*Cloudstreet*—can finally see and understand the Australian gothic.  

### The British Gothic: Terror of Crime, Mind, and Landscape Anew

By definition, the gothic is a historical and geographical term, alluding specifically to the
Germanic tribesmen who sacked Rome in the fifth century. To the eighteenth-century
Neoclassical mind, the gothic meant “brutish architecture and intellectual stagnation,”
broadening over the course of the century to describe any practice, setting, or story that was
“more appropriate to an oppressive or even ‘feudal’ age or culture” and therefore out of place in
an Enlightened Britain (Mighall xv). But to many citizens of eighteenth-century Britain, gothic
art and literature—a contributor to European Romanticism—afforded a welcome respite from a
society “that in its enlightenment had chosen empirical over transcendental truth” and that, in
spite of its supposed advancement, remained mired in political and religious “degeneracy” and
“corruption” (Gaull 228). In all of its danger, glamour, and fantasy, the gothic mode came to
serve as an emotional outlet for the Enlightened mind, a “means of escaping from…elementary
moral restraints” (Gaull 233). When Horace Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto*, widely
regarded as the first gothic novel, in 1764, he may have opened this escape route prematurely to
a society that “still preferred regulation to self-expression” (Gaull 227). With the publication of
acclaimed gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe’s first book in 1789, however, the gothic attained
mainstream popularity, just as, thousands of miles away, military officers, surveyors, and
convicts of the First Fleet to Australia were establishing a penal colony—a real-life “gothic mode
of correction” against the backdrop of an utterly gothic landscape (Mighall xv).

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3 For more information on the burgeoning field of the Australian gothic from the perspective of Australian scholars, refer to the works of Gelder, Steele, and Turcotte, listed under the “Further Reading” section below.
Terrifying in its vastness and isolation, and home to grotesque creatures and obstinately “Ignoble Savages,” *Terra Australis Incognita*—the “Great Southern Continent” whose existence was first postulated by classical geographers—remained unexplored and thus “imaginary” to the majority of the Western world until 1770, when Captain James Cook landed on its east coast (Hughes 48, 52). From its great southeast to its northernmost tip, Cook and his crew charted and explored Australia, gathering a “staggering quantity” of botanical samples, hunting their first kangaroos, and enjoying “sparse contact” with the “happy,” yet suspicious Australian Aborigines. Over the course of forty thousand years, the ancestors of the Aboriginal Australians had migrated into Australia from Southeast Asia across now-sunken land bridges, settling nearly every habitable area of the continent. In 1770, the roughly three hundred thousand Aborigines who populated Australia were separated into autonomous tribal factions, but shared a complex mythology and a universal devotion to “country,” or ancestral land that requires physical and spiritual custodianship. In spite of the Aborigines’ deep and undeniable connection to *Terra Australis*, the British ruled the Great Southern Continent—finally demystified upon Cook’s return to England—to be *terra nullius*, or “no man’s land,” and proceeded to formally claim it. Thus, the Southern Continent—long speculated to be a Dystopia, the evil, immoral counterpart to the civilized North, and an “oceanic hell”—was renamed New South Wales and thoroughly de-gothicized by educated, Enlightened European men (Hughes 43). Ironically, less than two decades later, it was these same men who would re-gothicize the continent, “demoniz[ing] Australia once more by chaining their criminals on its innocent dry coast” (Hughes 44).

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4. Asian trading forays into northern Australia occurred sporadically, but unbeknownst to European powers, and the Dutch East India Company’s seventeenth-century ventures into Van Diemen’s Land (renamed “Tasmania” after Dutch explorer Abel Tasman in 1856), southwest Australia, and the land adjacent to the Torres Strait were unsuccessful and thus not publicized.

5. Cook thoughtfully observed that the Aborigines were “in reality…far happier than we Europeans,” being undisturbed “by the Inequality of Condition” (Hughes 54–55).

South Wales would become, in essence, Britain’s repressed subconscious—its metaphorical and literal dungeon.

But who was Enlightened British society looking to repress, and why was Australia deemed the most desirable dungeon? Mirroring the alternately tempting and terrifying nature of the gothic novel, the British criminal class—a subset of the mob or “swinish multitude”\(^7\) known, in less derogatory terms, as the English working poor—was a source of both interest and contempt amongst the upper echelons of society. Although this “rabble” accounted for one in eight Londoners,\(^8\) they remained largely invisible to the upper classes, who lived in the planned, picturesque, and privatized West End of London while the lower classes were restricted to the crowded tenements and slums of the East End. Stricken by the occupational diseases and labor lawlessness of the burgeoning Industrial Revolution, many members of the urban proletariat were compelled to turn to crime in order to remain clothed and fed. Furthermore, in conjunction with the skyrocketing birthrate\(^9\) that England and Wales experienced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the stresses of Industrialization caused the mob to become synonymous with mass unemployment. The macrocosmic discontent that resulted was exacerbated by England’s lack of centralized police force and hopelessly overcrowded prisons,\(^10\) until, to the overwhelmed British government, only one solution remained: to transport the criminal class from the civilized, occupied world to the “no man’s land” at the end of the world. Thus, in

\(^7\) In the words of Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke, respectively, as quoted in Hughes.

\(^8\) Statistician Patrick Colquhoun recorded this number in his 1797 *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*. The validity of his survey is questionable, however, as Colquhoun considered gypsies, scavengers, and “harlots”—an umbrella term for prostitutes and any unmarried woman living with a man—as equally criminal compared to forgers, muggers, and thieves.

\(^9\) The overall population tripled from six million to eighteen million people between 1740 and 1851, and the population of London doubled between 1750 and 1770.

\(^10\) England had no centralized police force until the passing of the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829. Law enforcement was left to the jurisdiction of parish watchmen and local police wards in conjunction with a “graduated scale of rewards for information,” with magistrates at the top of the hierarchy (Hughes 26). Furthermore, as the popularity and credibility of the public hanging waned in the late eighteenth century, the few prisons that England did have became hopelessly overcrowded, their centuries-old infrastructure providing insufficient space for segregation by gender, gravity of crime, or age.
signing the Transportation Act into law in August 1784, the British Empire agreed, fundamentally, to send the “malignant others” of London’s East End “from one disagreeably fabled land to another”\(^\text{11}\) (Hughes 38, 25). The slums of London’s East End “seemed a foreign country of crime”; Australia, in receiving its criminal inhabitants, literally became “a foreign country of crime” (Hughes 25). In defiance of Captain Cook’s efforts to tame the land through renaming and mapping it, Australia, in absorbing the very same class of people who Enlightened English society had a “fascination with…alongside a simultaneous impulse to banish,” absorbed English fears, insecurities, and suppressed desires (Joyce 8). Thus began the spread and seepage of the convict stain—and, with the departure of the First Fleet to Australia in 1787, the true beginning of the Australian gothic.

**Perth and Possible Worlds: Narrative Transport to *Cloudstreet***

At present, Perth, the capital of Western Australia, is an example of aesthetic aspiration and industrial progress—a perfect balance between parkland and skyscrapers, the site of burgeoning industries and sustainable development, and a magnet for tourists, immigrants, students, and professionals. In spite of its ambitious development projects and city-worthy population of 1.9 million people,\(^\text{12}\) Perth remains, in many ways, rural-minded and repressed, as described by *Cloudstreet* character Toby Raven:

> Perth is the biggest country town in the world trying to be a city. The most isolated country town in the world trying to be the most cut-off city in the world, trying desperately to hit the big time. Desert on one side, sea on the

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\(\text{11}\) Penal transportation also allowed the British Empire to preserve the Royal Prerogative of Mercy—the “royal pardon,” or reprieve from the death sentence, which King George III, who reigned over the course of initial Australian colonization, took very seriously; eradicated the need for the renovation of existing prisons; increased the productivity of the British Empire, since criminals could mine Australian resources; and asserted British dominance in the Pacific, keeping Indian trade routes open and undermining the French and Dutch maritime powers.

\(\text{12}\) According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the population of Greater Perth reached 1.90 million people in June 2012.
other. Philistine fairground. There’s something nesting here, something horrible waiting. Ambition…. (Winton 289).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “philistine” refers to an “uneducated, unenlightened…aesthetically unsophisticated” 13 people, known, in contemporary Australian slang, as “bogans.” 14 Generally, Sydney and Melbourne dwellers regard Perth—located over two thousand miles of desert away from the nearest city—as a “fairground” of bogans, unable, in spite of its thriving industries, to ever truly advance to east coast standards. Stigmatized, isolated, and home to the “unenlightened,” Perth is a modern-day East End, the unlucky recipient of the same biases that plagued eighteenth-century London. Coincidentally, the harbor town of Fremantle—the oldest part of the Perth Metropolitan Area—was also the recipient of the last convict ship from Britain. In the 1850s, as eastern Australian lawmakers were mobilizing to abolish penal transportation, Western Australia, in contrast, was only just beginning to exploit convict labor, which it gladly accepted until 1868. That year, at the urging of the increasingly populated, vocal, and resource-rich eastern colonies, 15 the British Empire ended penal transportation nearly eighty years after it had begun, recognizing that even “fictional domains”—as the Empire still desired Terra Australis Incognita and its inhabitants to be—“can acquire a certain independence, subsist outside the limits of actuality, and sometimes strongly influence us” (Pavel 84).

But how are fictional domains constructed, and, if their construction is successful, how do these worlds “acquire a certain independence” from the imaginations of their owners? According to philosopher and linguist Umberto Eco, narrative texts themselves are “machine[s]...
for producing possible worlds,” and the characters who inhabit these worlds are, in turn, capable of pioneering new worlds, opening up infinite new realms of possibility with every thought or decision (Eco 246). In his book Fictional Worlds, Thomas Pavel develops Eco’s ideas further by exploring “fictional domains,” or “inconsequential constructions of our minds” established to “expand our perception of fictional responsibilities” (Pavel 75, 84). Although fictional domains often originate from innocuous or recreational pursuits such as novel-writing or daydreaming, these very same domains become dangerous when they are constructed with dubious intent and applied to the real world. In the case of Australia, the fictional domain imagined is the “oceanic hell” of the Antipodes, where the beings which the British desired to “fictionalize” into nonexistence could be transported out of sight and out of mind. The result was an eighteenth-century version of the idiom “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil,” an ideal England in which the criminal class and Ignoble Savages were not seen, not heard, and not spoken of until, over time, their undesirable realness faded into the fiction of a far-flung continent. Today, Australians, conditioned not to see, hear, or speak of the “evils” of their country’s founding, inadvertently allow this eighteenth-century imagined world to live on beneath the blanket of the Great Australian Silence, a term coined by anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner to describe Australia’s collective forgetfulness and ignorance of its own rich past. Perth, as Australia’s most ambitious, yet maligned “town…trying to be a city,” is a twenty-first-century East End, figuratively insulated by historical silence and physically insulated by distance. It is, consequently, the ideal world in which to set the quintessential Australian novel, and the ideal setting for readers to experience the Australian gothicized consciousness.

16 Stanner introduced the term in his 1968 Boyer Lectures to describe white Australians’ tendency to “forget” or “ignore” Aboriginal Australian history and culture. The term has since broadened to include all forms of Australian collective forgetfulness, including the convict legacy.
Like eighteenth- and nineteenth-century penal transportation between the “real” world of Britain and the “imagined” world of Australia, narrative transport—defined by social psychologist Melanie Green as “the processes that occur when a reader encounters a text”—bridges the gap between two possible worlds, one literally constructed into being by society and the other metaphorically constructed when a “person’s mental systems and capacities become focused on the events occurring in the narrative” rather than those occurring in the real world (Green 324). According to psycholinguist Richard J. Gerrig, narrative transport involves six metaphorical elements, the majority of which can be applied to both convict transport and narrative transport to Perth and the world of Cloudstreet. First, “someone (‘the traveler’) is transported” by, second, “some means of transportation” as, third, “a result of performing certain actions” (Gerrig 10). In the case of the British criminal class, convicts were literally transported by boat to Australia as a result of crimes committed and biases against their social status; readers of Cloudstreet, in contrast, voluntarily depart for Western Australia, “abandon[ing] the here and now” in favor of embarking upon the Dickinsonian “frigate”\(^\text{17}\) that is the book’s plot (Gerrig 12). Similar to travelers who journey between physical countries or cultural realms, readers “assume certain new characteristics…as a consequence of undertaking the journey,” adapting local customs—or experiencing narrative norms, such as Winton’s tendency in Cloudstreet to switch between verb tenses and points of view—“with the illusion of effortlessness” (Gerrig 11, 13). Although, as per the fourth element of narrative transport, “the traveler goes some distance from his or her world of origin,” rendering, fifth, “some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible,” readers are less likely to notice their distance from or the inaccessibility of the real world if the text they are experiencing has a high “level of artistic craftsmanship” and adheres to a consistent narrative format (Gerrig 10–11; Green 13). Cloudstreet, with its vivid imagery, juxtaposed

\(^{17}\) Gerrig references the following Emily Dickinson quote: “There is no Frigate like a Book.”
horror and humor,\textsuperscript{18} and inclusive syntax—specifically, its lack of quotation marks around dialogue and “effortless” transitions between characters’ and narrative points of view—is expertly crafted and consistently compelling. Equally well-crafted was the British Empire’s construction of a gothicized Australia, a world so morally and physically distant from England that for convicts to return was implausible and to access was impossible. This debilitating distance impedes the occurrence of Gerrig’s sixth and final element of transport, which states that “the traveler returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey” (Gerrig 11). On the one hand, readers of Cloudstreet, although they are emotionally “changed by [their] journey” into Winton’s work, are free to ascend to the level of reality after having “descend[ed] to the level of fiction” (Gerrig 14). The convict class, on the other hand, was not so fortunate, as the world to which they had been transported was beyond the boundaries of their own imaginations, leaving their world of origin unobtainable. Although the similarities between penal transportation and narrative transport diverge at this sixth element, the physical system of convict transport is critical to understanding narrative transport to Australian works of literature. In Pavel’s words, “to read a text means already to inhabit [its] world” (Pavel 74), a world that, in the case of Australia, has been mapped and defined in accordance with the British gothic mode. More specifically, to read Cloudstreet is to begin to understand and to “inhabit” modern-day Australia.

\textit{Cloudstreet and Consciousness: The Gothic Beneath the Great Australian Silence}

Tim Winton’s Cloudstreet, published in 1991 by McPhee Gribble, an imprint of Penguin Australia, is the literary lens through which to observe the nature and evolution of Australian consciousness and the possible worlds it is capable of producing. Like water, the overarching

\textsuperscript{18} For example, see Winton’s description of the Nedlands Monster under the heading “Him” in Cloudstreet, p. 381.
metaphor in *Cloudstreet*, consciousness ebbs and flows, sublimating one detail in this instance, tossing trauma to the surface in the next, and safeguarding secret inhabitants at its very depths. A close reading of crucial scenes throughout the novel reveals the three layers of Australian consciousness—its sunlit surface, its twilight zone, and its midnight depths—and how each of these layers was informed and remains affected by the British gothic tradition. Eighteenth-century British readers internalized the dreams, fears, and fantasies of gothic literature; eighteenth-century British lawmakers projected these sentiments onto the criminal class and the Antipodes. These gothic projections were absorbed into the social fabric of the convict class and the physical landscape of the Australian continent, leaving a burgeoning nation to grapple with a metaphorical moral stain. Today, the gothic undertones remain, cast down and out, sublimated and silenced, but perniciously present, and all-too evident, in the themes, characters, and settings—the world—of *Cloudstreet*.

Set on the banks of the picturesque Swan River, the opening and closing scenes of *Cloudstreet* bookend the intertwining stories of the Pickles and Lamb families, reveal the duality inherent to the world of *Cloudstreet*, and demonstrate the three layers of Australian consciousness. Sam and Dolly Pickles, parents to Rose, Ted, and Chub, inherit “a big empty house” at Number One, Cloud Street, in the Perth suburbs and leave their home in the northern Western Australian city of Geraldton to occupy it; Lester and Oriel Lamb, parents to Mason (Quick), Samson (Fish), Hattie, Elaine, Red, and Lon, become the tenants of Number One, Cloud Street, when they relocate to Perth from Margaret River, a southern Western Australian town (Winton 35). Both families are compelled to leave their respective hometowns and journey to the

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19 Given the importance of the ocean in Australian geography and identity, the names of these layers are adapted from the real ocean layers referred to in oceanography. For more information, refer to the Ocean Portal at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History: http://ocean.si.edu/ocean-photos/ocean-layers
20 The Swan River, an important feature of Perth’s geography, flows through the city of Perth and adjacent to the suburbs mentioned in *Cloudstreet*, before emptying into the Indian Ocean near the port city of Fremantle.
city after suffering tragedies: Sam Pickles loses four fingers, and his mining job, in a boating accident, and Fish Lamb sustains brain damage after nearly drowning. The presence of both families in Cloudstreet—as Number One, Cloud Street, becomes affectionately known after the Lamb family establishes a successful market on its front porch—is integral to the existence of the house as a “complex structure” or “dual structure,” a narrative world, constructed by Winton, that links “two or more universes in a single structure” (Pavel 56). As the foundational structure of the novel, Number One, Cloud Street, is split throughout the book between the secondary universes of the Pickles and Lamb families, between light and dark, and between the natural and supernatural. The division between the owners and the tenants of the house is a literal, vertical split, with the Lambs behind one wall and the Pickles behind another; the division between light—free will, consciousness, and the mundane—and dark—fatalism, the unconscious, and the supernatural—is a hazy, horizontal split, alternately accessed and repressed by both families throughout Cloudstreet. After twenty years of interacting within the walls of this “enormous, flaking mansion with eyes and ears,” the characters of these secondary vertical universes become figuratively unified through friendship and literally unified through the birth of Quick and Rose’s son, Harry Lamb, creating the opportunity to banish the horizontal divide between the spiritual and secular universes as well (Pavel 57; Winton 47). Although “works of fiction more or less dramatically combine incompatible world-structures, play with the impossible, and incessantly speak about the unspeakable,” Winton’s rich, imagery-driven description of the “complex structure” of Number One, Cloud Street, renders the secondary universes—and their ultimate reconciliation—as vivid as reality (Pavel 64). Readers of Cloudstreet can enjoy Winton’s feat of “manag[ing] to put together heterogeneous sets of fictional worlds in [a] unified, beautifully varnished text”; furthermore, by exploring the “tension between texts and worlds,” they can
experience a complex imagined universe “that is genuinely possible relative to the real world,” and, thus, all the more applicable to the real-life, tripart Australian consciousness (Pavel 46, 62).

Between the complementary, “beautifully varnished” scenes on the Swan River, the plot of Cloudstreet—its title reflecting the horizontal split between the clouded unconscious and the routineness of real world fixtures—parallels the history of the exploitation and settlement of the Australian continent. At first, the “great continent of a house…paralyses…with spaces and surfaces,” its “big emptiness” originally the property of a “very respectable [old Anglican] woman who had cheated several people in order to get it”—the personification of the land-grabbing British Empire (Winton 35, 41). Dissatisfied with her “six bedrooms and a library, with grounds full of fruit trees and fragrant shrubs,” she, at the local priest’s suggestion, establishes a mission for Aboriginal girls with the aim of “mak[ing] ladies of them so they could set a standard for the rest of their sorry race”—a goal that resembles, uncannily, Britain’s demonizing of the Australian Aborigines and its attempts to rectify the “degeneracy” and “corruption” of the criminal class through penal transportation and labor (Winton 36; Gaull 228). Although the old woman—like a prison guard—“lock[s] the house up at night,” “track[s] down” the unhappy children when they escape, and schools the girls in English respectability, she is forced to shutter her mission home when she finds, one evening, a “girl dead on the floor from drinking ant poison” (Winton 36). Like the British Empire at the conclusion of penal transportation, the woman is monetarily exhausted by her years of effort to “civilize” her wards and figuratively exhausted by their “criminal” defiance, an emotion that is evident, even from beyond the grave, in the “twisted death snarl of the poisoned girl” (Winton 36). Although she abandons her misguided missionary purpose, the old woman’s legacy of cruelty taints Cloudstreet permanently: She dies while playing a piano located in the heart of the house, and “her nose
hit[s] middle C hard enough to darken the room with sound…until rigor mortis set[s] in” (Winton 36). Like the Australian continent absorbing the British-imposed convict stain, the room in Cloudstreet “soak[s] her up,” and the ghosts of the woman, Aboriginal girl, and the British “gothic mode of correction” coalesce into a haunting microcosm of the twilight zone of Australian consciousness (Winton 36; Mighall xv). Set against this spiritually and historically gothicized backdrop, the Pickles and Lamb families’ twenty-year relationship and ultimate unification is a metaphor for an ideal Australia, one in which descendants of convicts, Australian Aborigines, and immigrants can live openly and in harmony, the “dreamy briny sunshine” washing away the shadowy cobwebs of history and dissipating the trauma of the “close, foetid galleries of time and space”—specifically, the shadows and trauma internalized by the “complex structures” of Number One, Cloudstreet, and the Australian continent (Winton 1, 3).

The dual opening and closing scenes of Cloudstreet—mirroring the “dual structure” of the eponymous house—begin with a description of the sunlit surface of the Australian consciousness, a layer that is very similar to the romanticized view of Australia held by foreigners. On the edge of “the beautiful, the beautiful the river,” the Pickles and Lamb families “sprawl and drink,” enjoying a “clear, clean, sweet day in a good world in the midst of our living” as they “skylark and chiack about”21 in celebrating twenty years of living together (Winton 1–2). In the “shade pools of the peppermints,” however, “another crowd has gathered…the dark and the light, the forgotten, the silent, the missing” (Winton 2, 422). These semi-visible spirits of deceased convicts and Aborigines, arising from the twilight zone of Australian consciousness, watch the living “from the broad vaults and spaces [that]…never cease to be,” making for a scene that is “a sight to behold. It warms the living and stirs the dead. And

speeds the leaving” of Fish Lamb, the silent, omnipresent embodiment of the depths of the Australian consciousness (Winton 3, 423). Trapped throughout the novel in a virtual purgatory between life and afterlife—“like he’s half in and half out,” in “another stuckness altogether” as a result of his near-death experience—Fish makes his great escape from life and fulfills his destiny of drowning in Cloudstreet’s twin beginning and conclusion, epitomizing the struggle of Australians’ deep-set trauma to break the surface of consciousness and shed its subliminal chains in “a flicker, then a burst of consciousness on [its] shooting way” (Winton 69, 2). Although the option of coping with trauma—whether it is the convict stain, the geography of a gothicized continent, or, in Cloudstreet, a boy struck dumb by the proximity of death—is avoided throughout the novel and in contemporary Australian consciousness, Fish, the embodiment of the internalized gothic mode, seeks acknowledgement in order to gain a chance of “healing all the rest of [the] journey” (Winton 2). His persistence serves as a lesson: The only way to resolve trauma at the national level of contemporary Australia and the personal level of the Lamb and Pickles’ families is to address it, not to smother it beneath the all-too comfortable blanket of the Great Australian Silence.

While discussing Cloudstreet with Rose Pickles, secondary character Toby Raven alludes to the divergent, gothicized threads, peoples, and traumas of Australian history when he says, “Ah, the mysterious home. I always wanted to see where all these gothic strains come from” (Winton 293). In analyzing the critical scenes of Cloudstreet, Toby’s wish—and the wish of social scientists, cultural anthropologists, and historians—is granted: the gothicized surface, twilight, and depths of Australian consciousness are made accessible and apparent to readers, and available for reconciliation by Australians, through the lens of Tim Winton’s Cloudstreet.
“The Shifty Shadow”: Fate, Free Will, and God

Central to Romantic scholar Marilyn Gaull’s definition of the gothic mode is “the sense of helplessness, of being manipulated by forces—natural, supernatural, psychological, social, historical—one does not understand” (Gaull 255). From the very first chapter of Cloudstreet, this terrifyingly ambivalent facet of the gothic becomes manifest, but under a new name:

He called it the shifty shadow of God. All his life [Sam Pickles] paid close attention to the movements of that shadow…to see it passing, feel it hovering, because…it was those shifts that governed a man’s life and it always paid to be ahead of the play. If the chill of its shade felt good, you went out to meet it like a droughted farmer goes out, arms wide, to greet the raincloud, but if you got that sick, queer feeling in your belly, you had to stay put and do nothing but breathe and there was a good chance it would pass you by. It was as though luck made choices, that it could think (Winton 10–11).

“Dark luck,” “a creeping chill,” “Lady Luck”—whatever name it assumes at any given point in the narrative, the shifty shadow that Sam Pickles describes bears an uncanny resemblance to the British Empire (Winton 8, 11, 15). While the British government used Enlightenment-era ideology and strict moral regulation to exercise power over its citizens at home, the Empire used its mapping of Australia as a grotesque, gothic space to control its penal labor abroad, leaving convicts—and their descendants, such as twentieth-century Sam—to wonder whether, in being transported, they had been sentenced to “some outpost of Hell itself” (Winton 13). Like colonial subjects at the mercy of a distant, exploitative, and unsympathetic imperial power, Sam believes that he and the characters of Cloudstreet are at the mercy of a type of luck that does not change, but “moves,” its light “shinin” on the subjects that it can most easily exploit, its shadow “fallin” on the individuals who cannot serve it adequately, and its seesaw constantly “tippin,” manipulative of all and loyal to none (Winton 20, 247). The shifty shadow is the embodiment of the legacy of the British gothic, simultaneously usurping the free will of post-colonial citizens...
and filling their heads with “terrible, boiling dark…the confusion, the feeling,” and the residual trauma of the gothic mode of correction that contemporary Australians cannot address or “put a name to” (Winton 14). Readers of Cloudstreet—whether they are foreign or Australian—experience this trauma vicariously, their heads filled with “the confusion, the feeling” inspired by Winton’s narrative, as they, “like actors performing roles…, give substance to the psychological lives of characters” such as Sam (Gerrig 17). While the characters of Winton’s fictional world are at the mercy of the choices of the shadow, readers of Winton’s work, however, have the power to “bring both facts and emotions to bear on the construction of the world of the text” (Gerrig 17). Thus, readers can feel and observe the effects of the gothic mode, participating in Cloudstreet without falling prey to the fates of its characters.

Although Sam—like the disciple of an unfeeling god—bows to the whims of the shadow throughout the majority of Cloudstreet, his deviation from blind worship is the force that propels the plot forward, bringing the possibility of the union of the Pickles and Lamb families of Number One, Cloud Street, into being. Similarly, readers, in advancing from passive skimming of the novel to active emotional involvement in the lives of its characters, enrich the plot further, their own experiences informing their perceptions of Sam’s actions. Despite recognizing the ominous “scent of his father,” a deceased water diviner, when he awakens in his shoddy work quarters off the coast of Geraldton, Sam rises, “whistle[s] through his teeth at the shiftiness of it all,” and thinks “today [isn’t] his day to be worried” (Winton 9). He is, unfortunately, “dead wrong,” and discovers this unhappy fact when the shifty shadow, descending in the form of a rogue cable, catches his glove and causes his fingers to be crushed between the cogs of a winch (Winton 9). As “madness [rises] behind his eyes”—the same madness that had been “out on

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22 The story begins with Rose Pickles looking out west from Champion Bay, the site of Geraldton, Western Australia, to where Sam works as a miner of guano (bird excrement) for phosphate (fertilizer) in the Abrolhos Islands.
these sea rocks [and imposed on the Australian continent] since whitefellas had first run into
them”—four of the fingers of his right hand “fall to the deck and dance like half a pound of live
prawns,” changing Sam’s perception of luck and his family’s path through life profoundly and
permanently (Winton 13). In that moment, Sam, like the members of the British criminal class
selected for transportation, experiences the intense loss—“the surprise of it, the absolute shock of
it”—of a crucial part of his identity (Winton 168). No longer can he enjoy, effortlessly, simple
pleasures such as “another night’s fishing” or “a beer by the fire”; no longer could convicts,
displaced and imprisoned at the hands of the British Empire, enjoy the company of their families
or the comfort of the only world they had ever known; and no longer can readers, affected by the
humorously horrifying imagery of severed fingers “danc[ing] like half a pound of live prawns,”
retreat to reality unchanged by their journey into the narrative (Winton 13). Henceforth, Sam
loses his motivation to resist the invisible, omnipresent power of the shifty shadow, resigning
himself to “the hopelessness of knowing” that he cannot “beat [his] luck” or change his fate,
much like the erosion of morale that a prisoner may experience over time (Winton 167, 169).
Ignoring the petitions of his daughter, Rose, to “be your [own] luck” and to “do things for
[yourself], not wait for everyone else to change things,” Sam offers himself as a sacrifice to his
ambivalent god and subsequently becomes the shifty shadow’s tool and scapegoat, coming to
bear, like the collective Australian consciousness, the scars of incarceration, colonization, and
exploitation by a higher or imperial power (Winton 169–170). As a result, Sam personifies the
twilight zone of Australian consciousness throughout Cloudstreet, acting as a medium between
the sunlit surface of the country—including the patriotism and stubbornly Australian values of
the Lamb family—and its darkest depths—specifically, a traumatized Fish Lamb and the spirits
that haunt the house that the Pickles come to inherit. Sam is representative of the visible seepage
of the convict stain, the “moral blot” that has escaped out from under the crushing force of the Great Australian Silence, and he serves as a reminder of Australia’s colonial indebtedness to the British Empire.

In certain periods of Australian history, however, Australia’s indebtedness to Britain was not begrudged; rather, it was expected and willing upheld, even after the nationwide termination of penal transportation in 1868. According to Australian historian Peter Stanley, the majority of Australians were ambivalent toward the idea of Australian nationalism and considered themselves, prior to the First World War, “Australasian Britons” and citizens of a “proud junior partner in the Empire” (Stanley, “Australia in World War One”). Because this sentiment preceded the Battle of Gallipoli—the defining moment in Australian history and the basis for the foremost national holiday, ANZAC Day— it has, along with other once-truths that are now considered irrelevant, been collectively forgotten. In Cloudstreet, this sublimated feeling resurfaces in the form of the antithesis to the shifty shadow: the “Hairy Hand of God, otherwise known as Lady Luck…shinin that lamp on ya,” like “gold in [your] veins,” giving “you what you want” (Winton 99, 101). These instances of good fortune—rare, and at the cost of years of bad luck, suffering, and unhappiness for both real-life convicts and the fictional Pickles family—is a reward for steadfast, loyal service, whether that service be to the British Empire or to the shifty, shifting Lady Luck of Cloudstreet. When Sam, pursued by debt collectors and having been forced to borrow money from his tenant Lester Lamb, feels the light of Lady Luck’s lantern fall upon him in the following passage, it feels like a “blessing,” “like manna” (Winton 271). Much to Lester’s worry and his debt collectors’ disbelief, Sam rushes to the local race track to bet on a horse and capitalize upon his whimsical change in fortune:

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23 Celebrated on April 25, ANZAC Day commemorates the bravery of the First World War’s Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (who are described in Footnote 2, above) and remembers the sacrifices of all veterans.
[Sam] tries to decide what this feeling is like, being the lone man, the onehanded man, the man pushing on into the darkness of the rest of them. Like Christopher-bloody-Columbus, that’s how it feels, he thinks; sailin out, knowing you’re not gonna get to the edge and fall off the bleedin map, at least not before you bump into a whole continent of treasure with the angels on your side…. Sam’s heart almost explodes with devotion (Winton 271).

Having served the shifty shadow of God loyally—and to a fault—throughout his time in Perth, Sam is rewarded with Earthly pleasures: monetary good fortune that he distributes amongst the residents of Cloudstreet, an echo of the coveted Tickets of Leave granted by the British government to select convicts prior to the expiration of their sentence. But this unusual windfall and Sam’s blind devotion to the shades of Lady Luck obscure his reason, leading him to misinterpret his role in a world governed by fate. Although in his love for gambling, a type of “divination that set[s] his whole body sparking,” he may feel like an imperial explorer, he is not truly the one doing the mapping, and his “pushing on into” an unexplored darkness is hardly guaranteed to yield treasure or angels (Winton 11). Sam is merely the inhabitant of a gothicized continent, and “what is Gothicized constantly changes…depend[ing] on how each culture chooses to represent itself” (Mighall 286). Britain chose to represent Australia as a prison, constructed from the values of a gothic mode of correction for the purposes of resource-extraction, the domination of trade routes, and the disposal of supposedly criminal peoples; Australia has grappled with this imposed identity ever since, trying, like Sam, to “decide what this feeling is like, being the lone man”—the most geographically isolated inhabitable continent—and “the onehanded man”—the country with the most well-documented, yet traumatic founding. Australia is, like Cloudstreet, a “dual structure”: The magnitude of its geographical isolation is amplified by the literal isolation of Perth and the physical, vertical dividing line between the families of Cloudstreet; the trauma of its founding is reflected in Sam’s
fear of “fall[ing] off the bleedin map” and the metaphorical, horizontal split between the spiritual world and the mundane.

Although the legacy of the British gothic in contemporary Australia takes many different forms, it is omnipresent in *Cloudstreet*, serving as one man’s Lady Luck and another man’s shifty shadow of God. It is the oppressive ghost of the old woman who first owned Number One, Cloud Street, appearing to Sam and Fish one day in the heart of the house as the “most vicious-looking old bitch [they’d] ever seen in [their] life” (Winton 343). The woman watches Fish—the embodiment of deep-set Australian trauma—sob because “she [the subjugating power of British colonialism] won’t let me play!” (Winton 344). Sam—literally tinged by the convict stain in the form of Fish’s tears—pacifies him, taking Fish by the shoulder and saying sympathetically, “I know how it feels, son” (Winton 344). Additionally, the legacy appears as the “shadows vibrating on [Quick Lamb’s] wall,” animating the pictures of unhappy, unfortunate people that Quick cuts from the newspaper and uses to decorate his room in order to remind himself that “he is alive, he is lucky…and his [nearly drowned] brother is not” (Winton 90, 61). At night, the shadows “dance in their ragged borders,” threatening to escape from the confines of the Australian unconscious and taint the residents of the house with “sin and corruption and damnation” (Winton 61, 140). Lastly, the legacy of the British gothic appears as the same “thick unending drone of middle C” that rang out when the old woman died and her nose hit the piano (Winton 335). Although Fish routinely performs “weird piano fugues” upon the instrument in an attempt to obscure the “quiet unbroken sustained note,” which vibrates like “an electrical current” through the house’s musty air, his efforts—the work of the Australian unconscious to sublimate the sound into nonexistence—are futile (Winton 377). The dark sound of middle C is the soundtrack to which the shadows upon Quick’s wall dance, and its sound waves emanate
horizontally throughout the house, filling the Pickles and Lamb families with a familiar “sense of helplessness, of being manipulated by forces…one does not understand” (Gaull 255). The shifty shadow of God is the conductor of this “electrical current” of suffering—the gothic mode—and the orchestrator of the fates of the characters of Cloudstreet. In parallel, the British gothic performs on the macrocosmic, real-world scale, “darkening” Australian history with the drone of post-colonialism and casting a shadow that deepens the darkness of the convict stain. Readers of Winton’s work comprise the audience of this literary and historical performance, and their participation allows them to be transported across time, space, and possible worlds until they are able to experience the great “darkening” dance of the legacy of the British gothic for themselves.

“The Big Country”: Land, Identity, and Nationhood

In response to the British Empire’s gothicizing of the continent and the realization that they could never truly understand the land in the way that the Aboriginal Australians had, contemporary Australians constructed their own country and culture—a “mind country,” in the words of Oriel Lamb—and superimposed it upon the Australian continent (Winton 232). Australian nationalism—initiated by the First World War’s Battle of Gallipoli, the nascent nation’s first truly unifying and all-encompassing event—is, like servitude to the shifty shadow of God, a religious endeavor, requiring a satisfactory amount of believers and an equal amount of sacrifices in order to operate. After nearly losing their son, Fish, to drowning, Oriel and Lester Lamb lose their faith in Christianity and become servants of nationalism, attempting to “replace [their] mind country with a nation” instead (Winton 232). The tangible result of this change of faith is their shop, Lamb Smallgoods, on the porch of Number One, Cloud Street, established in order to cater to the needs of their fellow Australians. Soon, the shop becomes a “regular feature
of the street, a pedestrian intersection, a map point,” a space to exchange news, buy local
Australian goods, and hear Australian songs sung by Lester Lamb, a veteran of the Battle of
Gallipoli and a “friend of the Anzacs” (Winton 59). While the Pickles’ side of the house—a
secondary universe within the “dual structure” that is Cloudstreet—assumes the appearance of
“an old stroke survivor” due to its paralysis at the hands of the ambivalent shifty shadow, the
Lambs’ half of Cloudstreet positively “foments” with the ANZAC spirit:

The house vibrated with hustle these days, groaning laborious as a ship
with those Lambs going at it night and day, singing, working, laughing…. You’d think they were carrying the nation on their backs…. Stinking dull work, the labour of sheilas, at best, with all that smile and how do you do, sir, but you had to admire them for it. They were just scrub farmers green to town, a mob of gangly, puppet-limbed yokels but they moved in like they’d designed the house themselves. Making luck, the hardest donkey yacker there is (Winton 59, 76).

As Sam Pickles looks curiously on, the Lambs, his tenants, prove Rose Pickles’ earlier advice to
her father correct: even if you are a “scrub farmer,” “green to town,” and a “gangly, puppet-
limbed yokel,” it is doubtless that “hard work makes good luck” (Winton 75). While Sam,
indifferent toward nationhood, awaits the instructions of a higher power to nearly no good
fortune whatsoever, the Lambs “believe in [their] country” and work tirelessly to construct it,
successfully building an Australian national identity from the tenets of the ANZAC legend and
the collective memory of the Battle of Gallipoli (Winton 149). Consequently, the half of
Cloudstreet that the Lambs occupy begins to look like it has been “designed” by the Lambs
itself, its nefarious origins and spirits of British imperialism—the old woman—and Aboriginal
suffering—the mission girls—obscured by pillars of patriotism and by “glorious memories of
manhood and courage” (Winton 144). Although the ANZACs are “what the Lambs believed
in”—and comprise what the Lambs, as proud patriots, figuratively package and sell to their
customers—the nationalistic façade that Lamb Smallgoods spawns and constructs is incapable of being maintained indefinitely (Winton 144). The impermanence of the Lambs’ nationhood, like the proven fiction of *terra nullius*, can be attributed to its very foundation: The same melancholy landscape that characterizes the countryside of Lester’s past—as described in the following passage—lies beneath the house and the families’ feet, out of sight, but not out of commission:

I’d look out across the hills, the karris, the farms and dead crops, and you know the whole flamin country looked sad. All the plants with their heads bowed looking really browned off. And you know, I used to hear it moan. Not the wind; the ground, the land. I told meself it was the horse, but inside I knew it was the country. Moanin…. You think maybe we don’t belong here, like we’re out of our depth, out of our country? (Winton 231).

The source of the moaning of “the ground, the land” that Lester describes is multifaceted: first, it is the superimposed, residual drone of British imperialism and the gothic, a macrocosmic echo of the middle C that permeates Cloudstreet. The deep sadness of “the hills, the karris, the farms and dead crops” is a testament to the sublime, an integral aspect of the eighteenth-century gothic mode that is described by Romantic scholars as “a landscape that stimulates spiritual awareness” with its “melancholy, superstition,” and natural ruin (Gaull 232). The moaning of the countryside also reveals the memory of an ancient people, the Australian Aborigines, whose tens-of-thousands-year-old custodial relationship with the land was severed upon the arrival and spread of the British across the continent. Interestingly, the “sad” scene that Lester observes—“all the plants with their heads bowed looking really browned off”—would not exist if the Aborigines were still allowed to practice their most notorious tradition: fire-stick farming,24 or the planned burning of tracts of forest to facilitate hunting and to eliminate the threat of bushfire. Fire-stick farming rid the land of “dead crops” and “browned,” flammable vegetation, promoting open

canopies and grazing areas for uniquely Australian species such as the kangaroo. Firing, in a sense, regulated nature, safeguarding the Australian landscape from assuming a “wild and irregular” gothic appearance and sublime characteristics such as “obscurity,” “vastness,” and “difficulty” (Gaull 232). In the centuries since the arrival of the British and the forced termination of Aboriginal firing practices, Australia has—literally—become a “whole flamin country,” extremely susceptible to wildfires of sublime proportions as its bush grows rampant, dry, and untamed. Thus, when Lester asks, on behalf of his European–Australian brethren, whether they are “out of [their] depth, out of [their] country,” the answer—from his wife Oriel, whose mother and sisters died in a bushfire, and from the Australian Aborigines, whose attempts to counteract the gothic mode appear as sporadic words of warning and wisdom throughout the book—is a resounding “yes.”

Although the glow of Australian pride emanating from the “mind countries” of the Lambs outshines the “wild and irregular aspects” of the physical country, the suffering of the landscape remains visible to the Aborigines, whose ancient sense of custodianship to the continent perseveres to the present day. Soon after the Lambs establish their shop, an Aboriginal man appears at Cloudstreet with a bundle of chopped wood to sell. Although Lester invites him inside to meet Oriel, the man proves unable to accept Lester’s invitation to enter the house, the whites of his eyes “seem[ing] to vibrate” as he looks “about all the time from wall to ceiling to floor” (Winton 62). Ultimately, the black man retreats “as if moving back in his own footsteps” and flees Cloudstreet, leaving the wooden props “just inside the door” (Winton 62). This incident illuminates the secondary, dark, spiritual universe—a sublime land, or the Australian unconscious—that exists beneath the buoyant façade of Australian nationalism that the Lambs have constructed. Although it is invisible to Lester and Oriel Lamb, the land is so integral to
Aboriginal history and heritage that the black man leaves his goods behind in offering to the Lambs, the current custodians of the tract of land upon which Number One, Cloud Street, sits.

In addition to the Aboriginal man, two other characters—Fish and Quick Lamb—are able to see and interact with this melancholy and superstitious landscape. As each brother grapples with the same traumatic experience in relation to his own identity, individual readers, voluntarily “descending to the level of [Winton’s] fiction,” also experience the sublimated aspects of the Australian unconscious “in consonance with their own identity themes,” relating to the trauma that the characters have experienced in his or her own way (Gerrig 14, 22). Although Fish Lamb represents the deepest, darkest depths of the Australian unconscious, he is “mostly quiet,” unable to express the trauma he has endured to his fellow occupants of the world of Cloudstreet (Winton 70). The only two forces that can communicate with him consistently are “wind and sound,” the former originating at sea before sweeping across the sublime landscape, while the latter stems from the nationalistic façade of Australian consciousness. In an attempt to unify the deep-set “moanin” of the land that Lester describes with the sunlit surface of nationhood, Fish “moans along” to hymns and national songs; as the wind coming off the ocean runs over the country and through his ears like “going music, blood music in his temples,” he struggles to relate his suffering to his family in a language that they can understand (Winton 70, 423). Similarly, Fish is attuned to the imperial drone of middle C that emanates from the piano at the heart of Cloudstreet, and he alone attempts to counteract it, unleashing the power of the suppressed Australian unconscious—nearly fictionalized out of existence by the Great Australian Silence—in the form of “thundering” piano music (Winton 145). This performance of noise provides an opportunity for readers of Cloudstreet to participate in the narrative, the descriptions of Fish hammering relentlessly upon the instrument “possess[ing] sensory qualities in the absence of
external stimuli that provoke the relevant senses” (Dadds 90). This vengeful music stimulates the minds of the readers, permeates the dual sets of universes that comprise the “complex structure” of Cloudstreet, and “scares the hell out of” Fish’s older brother, Quick (Winton 145).

Haunted by the “terrible noiseless moment” when Fish became trapped beneath his father’s fishing net, its material “floating across him like the angel of death,” Quick, like the reader, sees, straddles, and grapples with the three layers of Australian consciousness throughout the novel (Winton 60). Quick participates in the nation-building, bustling activity of Lamb Smallgoods and faithfully attends his father’s vaudeville performances at the Anzac Club; he engages with the semi-visible spirits of Cloudstreet, provoking them in his pasting of miserable characters and newspaper clippings on his bedroom walls; and he keeps a protective watch over Fish, the focal point of his trauma and a stark reminder that he is alive and well while his brother—formerly “the handsome kid, the smart kid who made people laugh” (Winton 60)—has been literally and psychologically drowned. Ultimately, the pressure to reconcile the divergent layers of Australian consciousness proves too strong for him to resist, and Quick breaks from the “infantry” that is his nationalistic family, “going bush” in an attempt to make peace with the same enigmatic, gothicized land that has forsaken him and his brother (Winton 146, 144).

In deviating from the complex narrative world of Cloudstreet, Quick, mirroring the transformative experience of the reader, voluntarily leaves his home in Perth and flees, “by some means of transportation,” to the Western Australian outback (Gerrig 10). Like readers of absorbing fiction, Quick deliberately “goes some distance from his…world of origin,” making almost all “aspects of the world of origin”—Cloudstreet—“inaccessible” (Gerrig 10–11). Over the course of the years that he spends as a kangaroo culler in the Wheatbelt,25 Quick realizes that

25 The Wheatbelt, the region of Western Australia extending outwards from the Perth Metropolitan Area to the outback, is known for pastoralism, mining, and agriculture.
“from ground level, the wheat is the whole world, but in the air, or beyond air and sky, the wheatbelt is just that, a strap of land surrounded by the rest of the world” (Winton 195). Although he has “adapt[ed] willingly to [the] local conditions” of the outback and immersed himself in the nomadic lifestyle of the Wheatbelt, the “rest of [his] world”—the world of his brother, his parents, and the sunlit, twilit, and darkened universes of Australian consciousness—is waiting for his return to the reality of Cloudstreet (Gerrig 11). The country itself seems to long for narrative resolution as well, as evidenced by the appearance of one of its custodians—a hitchhiking “Aborigine in a pinstriped suit”—alongside the highway upon which Quick is driving aimlessly one day (Winton 209). The man, like a successful author, directs Quick to the world of Cloudstreet “with the illusion of effortlessness,” offering Quick bread, wine, and the mysterious ability to drive from the heart of the outback to Perth without once stopping to fill the gas tank of his truck (Gerrig 13). Like Winton does for readers of Cloudstreet, the Aboriginal man crafts a means for Quick to be transported back to the narrative of familiar characters and unresolved problems by asking—inexplicably—to be dropped off at Number One, Cloud Street. Although Quick refuses to disembark with the Aborigine in that instance, “laugh[ing] fearfully and gun[ning] the Dodge away” (Winton 210), he is forced to face his fate and rejoin the real world of Cloudstreet eventually, just as readers must inevitably resurface from the emotional distance and escapism provided by fictional worlds.

Quick’s “mind country”—informed by the waters that nearly drowned Fish, the powerful nationalism of his parents, and the sublimity of the ancient countryside—is inextricably linked to the world and narrative of his family and friends at Cloudstreet. Like his mother and father, Quick must make his own luck, not wait for salvation in the form of the unsympathetic “Hairy Hand of God”; unlike his parents, however, he must acknowledge the power of the Australian
landscape and its ancient inhabitants, not sublimate them beneath an oppressive sense of nationalism. As the epitome of the complicated and gothicized Australian identity, Quick must address the warring secondary universes that are inherent to the “complex structure” of his country by attempting to reconcile its peoples into one history and one world. Only then can the gothic “sense of helplessness, of being manipulated by forces…one does not understand” be purged from the land, and only then can the social fabric bearing the convict stain and the spilled blood of the Australian Aborigines be woven into one cohesive history (Gaull 255). With his country spread out before him and his family assembled behind him, Quick has the power to pull back the blanket of the Great Australian Silence, revealing the trauma sustained and internalized by the Australian unconscious. This brave act of correspondence between the Australian consciousness and unconscious would illuminate and alleviate the “tension between texts and worlds,” allowing readers to create a universe “that is genuinely possible relative to the real world” (Pavel 62)—and all the more applicable to real-life Australia.

“The Beautiful, the Beautiful the River”: Water, Purgatory, and the Unconscious

Alongside a “sense of helplessness,” the sublime, and terror, the “mysteries” of suffering and injustice are inherent to the eighteenth-century gothic mode, as they cannot be explained away by the empiricism of Enlightenment-era science or philosophy (Gaull 255). In Cloudstreet, Fish Lamb is the personification of the lively ANZAC spirit until—mysteriously, unjustly—he is captured by the same “wide, wrinkled, glimmering” waters that imprisoned the Australian convict class (Hughes 603). Prior to this near-death experience, Fish enjoys mateship with his brothers and sisters; endears himself to girls, teachers, and neighbors through displays of larrkinism and cheek; and is a constant source of good humor, “wit and alertness” (Winton 27).
He is beloved even by Quick, who knows that his brother is “smarter and better looking than him, and that people love him more,” and Fish is the reason that Oriel feels “prouder than the British Empire” as she watches the men of her family walk out into the seemingly innocuous waters of Margaret River one evening (Winton 27–28). But like any colonial power, the British Empire is jealous of its subjects, and it becomes threatened by the intrinsically Australian—and uncomfortably “mobbish,” and dangerously foreign—traits that Fish possesses. “Like it’s a cloud, an idea, just a rumour of water,” the unjust legacy of British imperialism swoops down on the scene, intent on transporting Fish—like a convict—from the “disagreeably fabled land” of Australia to the more permanent dungeon of death:

Fish will remember. All his life and all his next life he’ll remember this dark, cool plunge where sound and light and shape are gone, where something rushes him from afar, where, openmouthed, openfisted, he drinks in river…. Oh, I remember. Mesh against the face, the cage of down and up and the faint idea of light as the cold comes quicker now out of the tunnel, that strange cold feeling that’s no longer a stranger. Fish feels death coming unstuck from him with a pain like his guts are being torn from him. Fish is having his gizzard, his soul torn away and he feels his fingers in the mesh, reaching up for anything, his…someone’s…and then he’s away (Winton 29–30; Hughes 25).

In a perversion of the Anglican baptism, the shadow of the British Empire smothers Fish beneath the rejuvenating waters of Margaret River, holding him captive as the Australian trauma of penal transportation, the British terror of the other, and the gothic “sense of helplessness, of being manipulated by forces—natural, supernatural, psychological, social, historical—one does not understand” possess his body (Gaull 255). His soul, ripped away from its Earthly vessel, is sentenced to an indefinite term in purgatory, doomed to watch “from out of time and space” and through “long glass planes of separation and magnitude” as the Godfearing parents he has involuntarily left behind “beat the water out of him,” screaming and praying to Jesus Christ to
“bring him back” and “raise him up” (Winton 164, 30). Although the wish of the Lambs is granted, it is on the terms of the apathetic “Hairy Hand of God,” and is thus restricted to the opportunities available under a sky that is “the colour of darkness, starless, mute,” where “everywhere, everything [is under the] net” of British imperial influence (Winton 29). While the body of Fish Lamb is revived as a mentally retarded, emotionally traumatized young man, the soul of Fish Lamb becomes ensnared beyond history, beyond the worlds known to his family in an indescribable place that cannot be accessed by literal or penal transport. It is, however, accessible by readers of Cloudstreet, who, experiencing the “dark, cool plunge” into a fictional world that cannot be seen, heard, or felt, but, rather, “possess[es] sensory qualities in the absence of external stimuli,” become caught beneath the descriptive net of Winton’s words and “transported into the realm of the narrative” (Dadds 90; Green 317).

As a result of the mysterious, unjust event that leads to Fish’s suffering, the “Lambs of God” abandon their Christian faith in favor of making their own luck, of constructing and superimposing their own world onto a reality where “the disappointment has been too much” (Winton 47). In doing so, they inadvertently alienate Fish and repress the trauma of his near-death experience, causing him, upon their move to Perth, to seek solace in the heart of the house, in the “no man’s land” between the Lamb–Pickles, spiritual–secular, and dark–light dual sets of secondary universes where an Aboriginal girl committed suicide and the former owner of Cloudstreet died while playing the piano. His eyes blackened—representative of his soulless body—and his identity cleaved in two “across the planes” of existence, Fish is polarized across the different layers of Australian consciousness, his body receptive to the spirits of the house, to the sound of the land, and, limitedly, to the desires of his family, as his bodiless soul—like the objective reader—hovers in a superstructure over the “dual” or “complex structure” of the house
at Number One, Cloud Street (Winton 164). “Those who’ve gone before do not lose their feelings, only their bodies,” the soul of Fish counsels his empty body and the reader, his frequent switches between first-, second-, and third-person narration granting the audience the opportunity to respond to the characters of Cloudstreet “from out of time and space” and through “long glass planes of separation and magnitude” (Winton 164). “I stare out from behind the sideboard mirror and see you there, Fish,” the bodiless soul of Fish says: “I don’t forget” (Winton 164).

Although the bond of mateship between Fish and Quick is severed following the tragedy that takes place in Margaret River, shadows of their former relationship reappear throughout Cloudstreet, hinting at the possibility of reconciliation between Australian consciousness and the unconscious. In one such instance, Quick and Fish relive the maritime experience of penal transportation, having been wrongly urged by their father, who, in a fit of optimism, purchases a boat, to row the long distance from the port town of Fremantle to the beach near their home in the interior Perth suburb of Crawley. After an extended spell of silence out upon the water, Quick and Fish break through the oppressive quiet—a microcosmic Great Australian Silence—by singing until the “whole boat is full of their songs,” crowding out the imperial drone of middle C (Winton 114). Eventually, the boat begins “vibrating the way it’d hum if they hit rapids,” and Quick—along with the reader—experiences transportation to a destination that is above and beyond the “complex” and “dual structure” of Cloudstreet and that is, in its unity of sea, sky, and spirits, exactly the opposite of a gothicized “oceanic hell”:

Quick opens his eyes to see Fish standing up in the middle of the boat with his arms out like he’s gliding, like he’s a bird sitting in an updraught. The sky, packed with stars, rests just above his head, and when Quick looks over the side he sees the river is full of sky as well. There’s stars and swirl and space down there and it’s not water anymore—it doesn’t even feel wet. Quick stabs his fingers in. There’s nothing there. There’s no lights
ashore now. No, there’s no shore at all, not that he can see. There’s only sky out there, above and below, everywhere to be seen…. Quick knows he is dreaming. This is a dream (Winton 114–115).

Gently, his arms outstretched to meet the water-turned-sky, Fish assumes control of the small vessel from Quick and turns it toward a new destination: the world beyond reality, beyond the secondary universes of Cloudstreet where his soul—and the repressed soul of Australia—is unconfined and bodiless. The unifying power of Fish and Quick’s bonding experience upon the river—an echo of the ANZAC emphasis upon mateship, and a promise of the narrative resolution to come at the end of the novel—makes transportation to the heavens possible, giving Quick and the reader the opportunity to “stab [their] fingers in[to]” the dream of reconciliation, of an Australia united across cultures and time under the stars of the Southern Cross.26

Momentarily, Quick partakes in this ideal world, giving himself to the “sky out there, above and below,” and relinquishing power to his brother, the embodiment of sublimated desire, repressed trauma, and a divided Australia. But when Quick begins to “strain to stay awake, to see, to see” and to try to retake control of the boat, this starry, ideal world fades, leaving the boat “skimming, full of hiss and bounce” upon the winding river and the Australian unconscious once again suppressed out of reach (Winton 115). As Fish begins to sob, having been forced to internalize the legacy of the British gothic once more, Quick “knows the old misery again but he doesn’t let himself break” (Winton 115). To break is to admit weakness—and to admit weakness is to acknowledge the yet unresolved trauma of the Australian unconscious. At this early point in the plot, so soon after the injustice inflicted upon the Lamb family in Margaret River, Quick is not ready or able to reconcile the three layers of Australian consciousness, and Fish is not prepared to sacrifice his Earthly body in order to be reunited with his departed soul. But as the storyline of

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26 Formally known as Crux, the Southern Cross is the constellation portrayed on the Australian flag. It is used similarly to the North Star in navigating the southern hemisphere and plays a prominent role in Australian Aboriginal astronomy.
each character progresses, the possibility of reconciliation between the sets of conflicting secondary universes or “incompatible world-structures” becomes clearer to the inhabitants of Cloudstreet, to the people of Australia, and to the readers of the novel—much like “stars and swirl and space” do when clouds part in the night (Pavel 64).

As the plot of *Cloudstreet* draws to a close, Rose Pickles marries Quick Lamb, who has returned from the outback “changed by the journey” (Gerrig 16), and she gives birth to their son in the haunted room at the heart of the house. The metaphorical and literal union of their families—respectively, the servants of the shifty shadow of God and of Australian nationalism—exorcises the ghosts within Cloudstreet once and for all, eliminating the horizontal duality of structure between the spiritual and secular worlds, and uniting each family’s vertical secondary universe into one cohesive world structure. Harry Lamb, the infant, henceforth assumes the role of “baby” of the Lamb and Pickles families, symbolizing the opportunity for Australians to raise a united, reconciled generation of citizens. Similarly, Harry offers the chance for Australians to be freed of their sublimated trauma at last, providing Fish—the personification of this trauma—with the opportunity to mature from a suppressed child to a man “long enough to see, smell, touch, hear, taste the muted glory of wholeness and finish what was begun” (Winton 420). Thus, as the reader witnesses the narrative threads of *Cloudstreet* and the macrocosmic ties of history being addressed and weaved into a cohesive whole, Fish grows hungry for the water, for the opportunity to achieve reconciliation between his lost soul—the true Australian identity, a flicker of which animates his brother Quick—and his possessed, grotesque man-child body—the gothicized Australian continent. Before he makes the great leap of faith between these two worlds, Fish gazes at his reflection in the beautiful waters of the Swan River, “the soft winy
country with its shifts of colour, its dark, marvellous call” observable to the reader alongside his mirror image below:

What are you thinking, Fish? Do you feel that you’re going, that you’re close?…. I stare back at you in the puddles on the chilly ground… I travel back to these moments to wonder at what you’re feeling and come away with nothing but the knowledge of how it will be in the end. You’re coming to me, Fish, and all you might have been, all you could have hoped for is turning for you like the great river, gathering debris and nutrient and colour from every twist and trough of your story without you even knowing. The house is clear, the people are coming to things day by day and it’s all that’s left. No shadows, no ugly, no hurtings, no falling down angry. Your turn is coming (Winton 403, 423).

From the “puddles on the chilly ground” to the “green mass” of the Fremantle wharf, from the crashing of waves upon the Western Australian shore to the banks of “the beautiful, the beautiful the river,” water, like the suppressed Australian unconscious, plays both an imprisoning and freeing role in the plot of Cloudstreet and the history of Australia (Winton 108). Without the vastness and the power of the ocean that encompasses it, the Australian continent would not exist as we know it; without the mapping of oceanic explorers such as Captain James Cook, the transoceanic judgment of eighteenth-century British lawmakers, and the penal transportation of tens of thousands of convicts across one of the greatest oceanic distances in the world, the Australian consciousness would not exist as it can be observed and engaged with by readers of the works of Tim Winton. Like readers being transported to the primary and secondary universes of Cloudstreet, historians “travel back to these moments” throughout Australian history and “wonder at what [these historical figures were] feeling,” of how it all “might have been” if Terra Australis Incognita had never been found, if the convict system had never been conceived and implemented, and if the mysterious British gothic had never been thrust upon the continent. But what is done is done, and all the parts of the “great river” of life—the “debris and nutrient and
colour from every twist and trough”—have carved a path to this particular end. This end is the possibility of resolution through reconciliation—“no shadows, no ugly, no hurtings”—of the three layers of Australian consciousness, each layer constituting a secondary universe within the “complex structure” of Australian culture. The peoples of Australia and the characters of *Cloudstreet*, through moments of reflection such as the instance Fish partakes in above, have been coming to this conclusion more and more often, “day by day.” The readers of Tim Winton’s *Cloudstreet* can see it, in sight, in mind, “from out of time and space” as they are transported through Gerrig’s six metaphorical elements to a uniquely Australian narrative world (Winton 164). Now, says Winton to his home country, “your turn is coming”—that is, if his country is willing.

**Conclusion: Resolution Through Reconciliation**

Ask any Australian what Britain means to them and watch the usual associations form. “Pommies are whingers,” they say, “but we celebrate Queen’s Day, are part of the British Commonwealth, and still have the Union Jack on our own flag. We are separate, but equal; we are different, but our values are the same.” But holidays, symbols, and values are not all that Britain and Australia share. Although many Australians deny its existence and denigrate its importance, Australian history is inextricably linked to British imperialism, and the three layers of Australian consciousness—its nationalistic surface, its spiritual and sublime twilight, and its traumatized depths—have been permanently affected by Britain’s imposition of penal transportation and its gothicized mapping of the supposedly empty Australian continent. “If you create a nation from an idea and then plant it on some plot of land that you’d like to think is a

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27 These general responses were compiled from memories of my own interactions with Australians during my time studying at the University of Western Australia in Perth in Spring 2013.
fresh field, the fortified hamlet you construct will most likely seem the full world,” writes Ross Gibson in his account of Marine Lieutenant William Dawes, resident astronomer and surveyor of Sydney’s fledgling penal colony in 1788 (Gibson 14). Dawes, who rigorously documented the Australian landscape and its peoples, was the first person to map the Australian interior, as described by Gibson:

Imagine [Dawes] starting a map of where he thought he was, right then and there. In time and space. The first thing to notice on his map: the blankness all about him. Which is the harbour water—true. But he might have seen blankness in his mind first of all…. He might have started with his own bewilderment, radiating out from his interrogative place here on the observatory bluff (Gibson 26–27).

Like his home country of Britain, Dawes initially\(^\text{28}\) regarded Australia as a blank slate, a *terra nullius* that would serve as the ideal dungeon—both literal and metaphorical—for the unwanted citizens of the British Empire. And like Dawes, non-Australian readers, in approaching the foreign settings, plot points, and themes of *Cloudstreet*, must grapple with the “blankness in [their] minds first of all” until they can find a mental “observatory bluff” from which to understand and figuratively partake in the action. This process of joining the “realm of narrative” and “see[ing] the action of the story unfolding before them” is—as described earlier—“narrative transport” (Green 317). In capturing the geography of the Australian continent, Dawes opened the Antipodean new world to the possibility of increased penal transportation; in capturing the intrinsically Australian setting and characters of *Cloudstreet*, Winton adapts this same world for the possibility of narrative transport, granting readers the chance to perform the narrative of *Cloudstreet* alongside the characters “in consonance with their own identity themes” (Gerrig 22).

The happy outcome for foreign, casual readers is the opportunity to travel to Australia without

\(^{28}\) Dawes became one of the sole British military men to learn the Eora Aborigines’ (the ancient residents of modern-day Sydney) language, and he later returned to England to campaign for international abolition of the slave trade and fair treatment of all peoples.
leaving their own worlds, a journey facilitated by Winton’s skilled use of syntax, metaphor, imagery, and humor. The more important outcome—for literary critics, Australian studies scholars, and readers who are willing to mentally compensate for a “greater departure from the real world” (Gerrig 14)—is the opportunity for people to experience the gothicized Australian consciousness and its connotations for themselves.

In *Fictional Worlds*, Thomas Pavel inadvertently summarizes the lingering legacy of the British gothic in Australian consciousness when he writes, “Since we need an alien space in which to deploy the energy of the imagination, there have always been and always will be distant fictional worlds” (Pavel 148). Dissatisfied by the restraints of moral regulation and the strict empirical truths of the Enlightenment, eighteenth-century British citizens turned to gothic literature for emotional and mental escapism; resentful of the “malignant otherness” of both the criminal class and the Antipodean Aborigines, the British Empire fictionalized these “others” entirely by banishing them and restricting them to a continent that—being out-of-sight and out-of-mind—was a “distant fictional world” in itself (Hughes 38). Since its founding, this continent has been forced to grapple with the “gothic mode of correction” that defined its first Western peoples and decimated the population of its Aboriginal peoples; overwhelmingly, this continent has chosen to repress the legacy of the gothic mode, blanketing the trauma of the convict stain beneath the supposed safety of the Great Australian Silence. But the power of the unconscious—and its ability to fuel “the energy of the imagination”—should never be underestimated. The result is literature such as Tim Winton’s *Cloudstreet*, which, at its most basic, is the history of Australia encapsulated within the space of a “distant fictional world.” This space is safe; this space is comprehensible. But this space, filled with the traumatic energy of the Australian
unconscious, longs for historical resolution in the vein of the narrative resolution that Fish Lamb ultimately achieves through suicide.

Although Tim Winton’s seminal work has not yet been used to analyze the Australian gothic, the gothic and gothicized themes, settings, characters, and narrative worlds of *Cloudstreet* are inherent to its identity as Australia’s favorite novel and the “number one Australian book to read before you die.” It has “wormed its way into the hearts of [over] 500,000 readers” in Australia alone (Williams), become a standard on every Australian student’s reading list, and remained consistently in print in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States since its publication. It is also, inarguably, a literary microcosm of contemporary Australian consciousness. And when, with the help of great works such as *Cloudstreet*, the Australian nation finally does “burst into the moon, sun and stars of who [it] really [is],” confronting its convict past, abolishing its Great Silence, and retaking, retelling, and reconciling Australian history as its own, I will encourage you to ask any Australian what Australia means to them (Winton 424). The answer will not be, “We do not have a history,” or, “All we have to offer are kangaroos and koalas, crocodiles and clichés.” The answer will be, “Yes, we have a history, and, like that of any other nation, it is flawed…but it is ours nonetheless.” And this overdue admission will prove stunningly similar to Fish Lamb’s triumphant words at the conclusion of *Cloudstreet*:

Works Cited


http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/australia_01.shtml


Further Reading


