

Christopher Lee: What Colour are the Dead?

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Title: What Colour are the Dead? Madness, Race and the National Gaze in Henry Lawson's 'The Bush Undertaker'

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The early reception of Henry Lawson's work saw both the work and the artist produced as the Nation on the basis of a narrative gaze which eschewed imaginative embellishments of its object. Lawson's objective, unemotional, and realistic treatment of typically Australian scenes in the 1890s were celebrated as a National art and then transposed into a National knowledge. This process was part of a direct contestation of Imperial authority as it was deployed through another set of knowledge which produced the country as a colony of the Empire. According to one reviewer, Lawson's art 'throws a strong vivid flashlight upon Australian life, and the literary photographs ... which are thus presented to mind, must do much to correct false and create fresh impressions of Australian life among all who are amiably or earnestly interested in learning what our National Characteristics are and towards what they may be tending'.¹ Lawson's work then becomes the authorised document of the Nation through its production of a knowledge of the object of the Nation — a knowledge authorised by the objectively real gaze which fixes that object as the real, the authentic, and the true.² This notion of a form of nationalism which authorises itself through the deployment of a positivist knowledge of the Nation which is in turn authorised by the real or fixed location of the Nation as object takes on interesting implications when we look at it in the context of Homi Bhabha's theorisation of fixity and the stereotype in colonialist discourse. In 'The Other Question' Bhabha explores the concept of fixity (integral to colonial discourse's 'ideological construction of otherness') through 'its major discursive strategy' the stereotype. The durable authority of this form of knowledge, he argues, lies in its paradoxical vacillation between 'what is always in "place"', already *known*, and something that must be anxiously repeated'.³ For as the 'fixed', or the known, the stereotype represents (or is represented as) the privileged object of a colonial discursive authority — an authority rarefied and invigorated (via the stereotype) through the just and reasonable reflection of its own epistemological gaze. While as the 'anxiously repeated' the stereotype is encoded with the threat of duplicity — the deflection of the self-affirming gaze of colonial authority — a threat which functions as an invitation for a vigilant form of surveillance which continually fixes and re-affixes the colonized subject as the authorised and authorising object of imperialist knowledge.

What I want to do in this article then, is to examine Henry Lawson's 'The Bush Undertaker' as an encounter between the subject of an emerging Nationalist epistemology in 1890s Australia as it is deployed through the objectively real narrative gaze, and the object which it seeks to fix in the interests of an authorising and enabling regime of Truth. Bhabha's theoretical argument provides an important context for this examination, but it needs to be said that as a settler country Australia cannot slip neatly into his theorisation. The colonial/colonized opposition which Bhabha works in his paper, for example, is re-situated in my own as a National/colonized opposition which is itself set within the context of an Imperial/National binary. I am more concerned with explaining the discursive engagement of the national-settler subject with the indigenous other in the terms of a National versus Imperial contestation of power, than I am with pursuing the implications of Bhabha's theorisation of the colonial manipulation and deprivation of the colonized subject.

I propose approaching my interrogation of the boundaries of the realist Nationalist gaze through the representation of the mad or the weird in the story. It is after all the weird or the mad which by definition stands outside both the real and the rational, and which offers both the binary opposite, which reflects the rational as the real, and the duplicitous mysterious other, which threatens from the beyond. It is through the signification of the weird or the mad in 'The Bush Undertaker' that the National gaze can be seen to encounter the ambivalence of the stereotype, which paradoxically offers in the same discursive moment both its dissolution and its reinvigorated deployment.

In an article which deals with the representation of madness in ‘The Bush Undertaker’, Brian Matthews describes the story as one in which ‘there is a strange shifting between the starest realities and a weird lonely other-world in which objects and landscapes assume some other significance or are momentarily held in a strange new light’.⁴ This ‘strange shifting’ is the device with which the weird, the eccentric, the mad is deployed throughout the text and it occurs through inconsistencies which arise through the limitations of the different gazes of the narrator and the hatter. The narrative gaze is the vision of the ‘starest realities’. It is described through the discourse of the objective gaze and characterizes the positivist epistemology of the Nation produced through the *Bulletin* (and other publications) of the 1890s. The hatter’s gaze is split between the real and the weird, the rational and the mad, and emerges via both his personal monologues and the descriptions of the narrator. What distinguishes the two from each other then, is that while the possibilities for knowledge or the rules of formation for the narrator’s discourse appear clear, the possibilities or rules for the hatter’s are not. What the narrator knows, and how and why he knows it, is *known*; but the hatter’s actions and motivations are elusive.

The hatter’s discourse is presented purely in the form of monologic conversations with inarticulate receivers (the dog and the corpse) and the soliloquy (self). This discourse opens the text (“ ‘Five Bob!’ ”) and is modified as it progresses by the intervention of the narrative voice. The narrative voice provides the details necessary to interpret/understand/read the import/significance of the hatter’s discourse. The narrative gaze encoded as it is in the discourse of the national-real is thus placed in a position of power over the discourse of the hatter.

The ‘weird’ is introduced early into the story through the monologic discourse of the hatter with the dog. The hatter’s habit of treating the dog as an interlocutor is distinguished by the lack of modifying irony on his part. There is an accepted discourse between humans and animals but it is a discourse which signals the recognition of its own illusion through the device of irony. The deployment of irony allows at once the illusion that the inarticulate is nevertheless cognizant, while at the same time it distances itself from a position which it knows to be illusory, weird, perhaps even ‘mad’ (talking to oneself is after all one of the cliché signs of madness). The absence of this irony in the hatter’s discourse indicates a person who has lost the ability to make this distinction and undermines his rational credibility.

With the proposal to exhume the blackfellow the hatter’s discourse moves more securely into the world of the ‘weird’: “ ‘I’ll take a pick an’ shovel with me an’ root up that old blackfellow,’ ” mused the shepherd, evidently following up a recent train of thought; “I reckon it’ll do now. I’ll put in the spuds.”⁵ This paragraph opens up a split in the enunciative subject of the hatter’s discourse — a split between those enunciations which fulfil the rules of formation of the narrator’s discourse and those which don’t — a split between those motivations which emerge clearly and unambiguously from the transparent world of the real, and those which remain obscured by the opacities of the weird and the mad. While the references to the cooking of his meal represent statements in accordance with the rules of the narrator’s objective realist discourse (that is, statements which are consistent with the possibilities of knowledge of the Nationalist gaze), the exhumation proposal does not. The final clause of the first sentence is zeugmatic and links the two. Its referent might well be either the skeleton or the meal. The narrator follows by clearly distinguishing between the two, but while he appears to be capable of distinguishing between the referents for this statement, he is unable to supply the motivation for the exhumation. For the narrator, the referent must be the meal because the motivation for the exhumation lies outside the rules of formation of his own discourse, outside, that is, the possibilities of his knowledge. This limit to the narrator’s knowledge (and therefore control or power) is clearly indicated by the narrative supplement to the hatter’s proposal: he was ‘evidently following up a recent train of thought’. For the narrator, located as he is within the clearly defined possibilities of the real (the National), this is logical. But it remains conjecture. The narrator does not *know*, because he is confined by the external gaze of the objective. What is the hatter’s train of thought? What is the purpose of the exhumation? What are the motivations behind the hatter’s action? It is from the space left vacant by the absence of these answers, the space beyond the comforting, real, truthful, fixed gaze of the Australian narrator, that the signification of the eccentric or mad emerges.

The hatter’s expedition of exhumation is an exercise which the narrator can *describe* but not *know*. The narrator is not privy to the motivations of the hatter and this lack of knowledge allows the hatter to elude the control of the narrative voice. The narrative voice copes with the subversive implications of this

transgression by failing to show any signs of curiosity or concern over the elusive motivation for the hatter's actions. The narrative discourse is the objectively real and therefore has no interest in that which can't rightly be validated by the observer's external gaze. What the narrator sees is what any *Australian* present would see. The gaze perceives the 'real' (which is of course the *Australian*). The 'other' side of the real is the unreal, the speculative, the imaginative, the romantic, the female, the imperial and the mad. The 'other', therefore, has no validity within the gaze of the National and the real. It is the distinction between these binary values which locate the boundaries of the National gaze.

The confinement of the narrator's gaze is a strategy of survival. It survives the subversive implications of its lack of knowledge by banishing the objects of the unknown as the other. That such a banishment allows the deployment of power through the other — a power which may even exceed that of the real — is accepted and negotiated by the mythologisation of the powerlessness of the real as the National. The narrative gaze reduces its scope to the purely visual in an effort to demarcate a territory which is small enough to police. The mode of relation which polices this territory is the stoic heroic subsequently embraced by cultural mythologists as the National character.⁶ The national-real gaze of the narrator is a gaze which so fears the (other) madness associated with its failure that it fixes itself upon the obvious, the apparent, the superficially real. The objectively real gaze of the *Australian* narrator is, consequently, a cringe — where the cringe is the mode of relation of the stoic heroic — that anxious objective realist gaze epistemologised and mythologised as Nation.

The cringe of the narrative gaze is revealed through the signification of the weird in the text, because the weird emerges as a significant if elusive power within the narrative economy. The signification of the weird is not merely confined to the eccentricities of the hatter described above. During the exhumation expedition of the hatter the production of the weird shifts from the elusive motivations of the eccentric bushman to those of the eccentric bush.⁷ This shift occurs when the hatter's attention is drawn to what eventually turns out to be the remains of his friend Brummy by the movements of a startled goanna. The recovery and relocation of this corpse is then repeatedly interrupted by the increasingly disturbing reappearances of this goanna. The weird is now produced through the device of this mysterious goanna and the frightened hatter's fumbling attempts to explain it — attempts which act as a foil to the narrator's disinclination or inability to do so — a foil which once again reveals the cringe of the narrative gaze and the contingency of a mode of knowledge confined to the visual.

This shift of the signification device of the weird within the text, the shift of focus, that is, from the dubious exhumation of the skeleton to the disturbing recovery of the corpse does not mean that the two are exclusive. The eccentricity of the hatter (exhumation and monologue) articulates with that of the bush (corpse and goanna) in such a way as to implicate the hatter in the mysterious actions of the goanna. This relation of the weird associated with the hatter and that associated with the Bush occurs at the level of both the sign and the narrative.

At the level of the narrative the weird emerges through the monologues of the hatter and the obscure purpose of the exhumation before coming to lodge in the figure of the goanna. The monologue, exhumation and the goanna are the textual devices of the weird (conversation, plot, character). The point of intersection of these devices is the figure of Brummy's corpse. The expedition leads ultimately to the discovery of Brummy's body. It is the first appearance of the goanna which initiates this discovery. It is at the moment of the identification of the corpse that the hatter's monologue transfers from the dog to his friend's remains. The periodic and increasingly significant reappearances of the goanna are then cued by the hatter's monologue with the corpse. The signification of the weird thereby shifts from the dubious relationship between the hatter and the skeleton, through the bizarre relation of the hatter to his friend's corpse, to the ultimately significant connection between the goanna and Brummy's corpse.

This narrative shift is reinforced at the level of the sign. When the hatter first mentions exhuming the skeleton he describes it as 'that old black-fellow'. On unearthing it he is startled by a 'great greasy black goanna' which transfers his attention to the 'blackened carcass of a sheep'. This sheep then turns out to be the mummified remains of a man: 'There was nothing in the blackened features to tell aught of name or race, but the dress proclaimed the remains to be those of a European' (p. 53). The boots identify the corpse as Brummy. When returning both skeleton and corpse to the hut the hatter is then repeatedly disturbed by

the reappearance of the ‘black goanna’, or a ‘flock of black gohanners [sic]’. Upon his return he stows the two sets of remains and retires for a sleep. He is woken when ‘it was dark’ by strange noises. These noises emanate from ‘a black object’ on the roof which when shot turns out to be ‘a great black goanna’. Black then, becomes a sign which forms a metonymic chain of the signs of skeleton, corpse, Brummie, night, and goanna — signs which we find located within an elusive (weird or mysterious) semiotic which is other to that of the real.⁸

An examination of this metonymic chain in the context of its insertion within the narrative establishes the significance/signification of the ‘other’ or weird semiotic which eludes both the narrowly delimited gaze of the narrator, and the fumbling attempts at comprehension of the hatter. When the hatter exhumes the ‘supposed blackfellow’s skeleton’ the narrator describes his attempt to identify it: ‘When he had raked up all the bones, he amused himself by putting them together on the grass and by speculating as to whether they had belonged to black or white, male or female. Failing, however, to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion’ (p. 53). When the hatter discovers Brummie’s corpse the narrator again indicates the importance of its identification: ‘There was nothing in the blackened features to tell aught of name or race, but the dress proclaimed the remains to be those of a European’ (p. 53). The whiteness of the blackfellow’s skeleton prevents its ‘satisfactory’ identification while the blackness of the ‘European’s’ corpse hinders its verification. As signifiers of death both the skeleton and the corpse defy the distinguishing categories of race; categories which are part of the string of binaries (for example, flesh/skeleton, person/corpse, life/death, reason/madness, known/unknown, white/black, day/night, man/woman, man/blackfellow) which discursively construct a Nationalist discourse of identity articulated through an epistemology of the visual. The signifiers of death, the skeleton and the corpse, are signs from the semiotic of the weird and their dismantling of the white/black racial binary which is constitutive of the discourse of identity, the discourse of the visually real, the discourse of the narrative gaze, the discourse of the Nation, displays the discriminatory operations which empower that discourse.

To demonstrate this the handling of the blackfellow’s skeleton and the white-man’s corpse needs to be examined. Although the skeleton is never ‘satisfactorily’ identified it is treated as indigenous, presumably because of the method of its burial (‘a little mound of earth, barely defined in the grass, and indented in the centre as all blackfellows’ graves were’ (p. 53)). Similarly, in the case of the corpse, the identification of first race, then person, is accomplished through visible cultural signifiers (clothes and footwear). This discrimination between the remains (white skeleton as black and black corpse as white) establishes a conflict or contradiction within the text between the treatment of the different remains; for while the remains are distinguished at the level of the narrative (blackfellow vs Brummie) they are associated at the symbolic level through the black metonymic chain (black skeleton, black corpse).

The distinction between the different sets of remains is the basis of their different treatment. While the hatter treats the skeleton as an anthropological curiosity, he treats his friend’s corpse rather differently. This difference raises once again the issue of the hatter’s motivation for the exhumation. How the hatter treats the skeleton provides the only textual evidence for why he treats the skeleton. As described above, the first mention of the exhumation is through the textual deployment of a zeugma which associates it with the hatter’s dinner. The hatter metaphorically feeds off the skeleton. In describing the hatter’s successful exhumation the narrator uses the colloquial discourse of the miner: ‘he bottomed on payable dirt’ (p. 53). This old mining phrase associates the skeleton with objects of individual and material gain. In fact, metaphors of profit or commerce frequently occur in association with the hatter’s discourse. The discovery of Brummie’s body, for example, continues the hatter’s prospector associations with human remains through the exclamation: “‘Me luck’s in for the day and no mistake!’”. The hatter clearly means to gain (materially) from the recovery of the skeleton. The association of material gain with the disturbance of a site conventionally deemed sacred is integral to the establishment of the hatter’s madness.⁹ The representation of the hatter’s madness is tied to a mining image of the white man removing something valuable from the land. The association of these metaphors of profit with signatures which are more usually the objects of discourses of the spiritual — signatures which are in fact identified through their opposition to the material or commercial — is integral to the signification of the weird in the story. After the hatter discovers the corpse to be the remains of his friend he undergoes a slow process of coming to terms with the implications of his friend’s death. Initially at least, his behaviour towards the corpse is inappropriate. Remember that the hatter’s monologues with inarticulate receivers provide textual instances of the signification of his

eccentricity. The hatter's continual banter, directed as it is towards the grotesque remains of a mummified body, betrays an inappropriate or weird reaction to the situation. The hatter's reaction to Brummy's remains, like his reaction to the skeleton, is characterised by his inability to conceive of the spiritual implications of death.

The hatter's weird behaviour, however, is not permitted to go unchallenged. Upon recovering Brummy's corpse his obtuse and eccentric monologue is repeatedly interrupted by the combined disturbances of the metonymically linked signifiers of the weird: the skeleton, the corpse, and the goanna. When the hatter discovers that the corpse is in fact the remains of Brummy he recognises that there is an accepted convention with regard to the handling of human remains: “I expect I'll have t' fix yer up for the last time an' make yer decent, for 'twont do t' leave yer a-lyin' out here like a dead sheep” (p. 53).¹⁰ It is because Brummy's remains are human that they require burial. This treatment recognises a distinction between the human and the non-human on the basis of a peculiarly human value which exceeds both the material and the visual. From this point on the hatter's monologue represents a fumbling attempt to understand the implications of this spiritual value; implications which have their own ramifications for his treatment of the blackfellow's skeleton.

As he returns to his hut his journey is marked by repeated difficulties with the transport of both sets of remains. He begins with Brummy over his shoulder and the bones in his hand but is troubled by the reappearance of the goanna and has to stop to recover. This time he attempts to place the remains together by packing ‘the bag of bones on his shoulder under the body’ (p. 54). This arrangement proves uncomfortable and he is forced to stop yet again to recompose his load: “The thunderin' jumpt up bones is all skew-whift”, he said. “‘Ole on, Brummy, an' I'll fix 'em …” (p. 54). At this point the goanna, whose mysteriousness is further established through Five Bob's reluctance to ‘sick 'em’, returns again to trouble the old man. The appearances of the goanna are significant because they occur at moments when the hatter's reflections are particularly and inappropriately materialistic. The first occurs when he is returning with the desecrated skeleton. The second follows his thanksgiving for the leftovers of Brummy's bottle, speculation over the financial viability of using his shirt to bind the corpse and the observation that: “I ain't a-spendin' such a dull Christmas arter all” (p. 54). The third after his problem of carrying the two sets of remains together. The significance of these disturbing reappearances of the goanna, cued as they are to the hatter's material bias, emerges when the hatter eventually kills the reptile: ‘Then the old man saw it all. “The thunderin' jumpt-up thing has been a-havin' o' me,’ he exclaimed. “The same cuss-o-God wretch has a-follered me 'ome, an' has been a-havin' its Christmas dinner off of Brummy, an a-hauntin' o' me into the bargain, the jumpt-up tinker!”’ (p. 56). The relationship between the goanna and the corpse reproduces that between the hatter and the skeleton — remember the zeugma which links the hatter's exhumation with his Christmas dinner. This parallel again focuses attention upon the hatter's materialism. The idea of the goanna feeding off the corpse is repugnant. This is of course one of the reasons why the corpse can not be left lying out in the Bush ‘like a dead sheep’. The use of ‘hauntin’ to describe the disturbing effect of the goanna on the hatter then becomes particularly appropriate. Haunting is after all the return of the spirit of the dead to trouble the living because of actions which prevent their successful transition into the afterlife. The goanna haunts the hatter because of his desecration of the blackfellow's grave; a desecration which is not admitted to the hatter's perceptions because of the restriction of his gaze to the superficial and the material. It is a desecration which is obscured because of the racist binary which organises the discourse of the real and the National, and reduces the aboriginal to the nonhuman and the material, the suppressed halves of a series of binaries which identify the values of Nation and self.

The goanna, however, is not the only instrument of the hatter's haunting. From the moment of its initial discovery Brummy's corpse has its own disturbing influence on the old bushman — remember that at the symbolic level of the text the corpse is linked to both the skeleton and the goanna. When first discovered ‘the shrivelled eyes [which] seemed to peer up at him from under blackened wrists’ caused him to step ‘back involuntarily’ (p. 53). The difficulties the hatter has in trying to carry together the corpse and skeleton have already been described above. When the hut is reached the hatter ‘dump[s] the corpse against the wall, *wrong end up*’ with the result that it falls and strikes the hatter a ‘violent blow on the shoulder … The shock sobered him’ (My emphasis; p. 55). The replacement of the body right end up displays the corpse's face which again frightens, or rather ‘shocks’, the shepherd: ‘The shepherd was not prepared for the awful scrutiny that gleamed on him from those empty sockets; his nerves received a shock, and it was some time before he recovered himself sufficiently to speak’ (p. 55). It is the gaze of the dead, the other, which finally silences

the ramblings of the old man. The skeleton, the goanna and the corpse of his friend are significant. Their significance troubles but eludes the hatter. The significance of the other, the dead, the weird, the mad, is that the material, the real, the National is prescriptive, contingent and insufficient. It is the withdrawal into the visual, the physical, the superficial and the obvious, and it fails to explain the imaginative, the spiritual, the other, the *human*. Brian Matthews writes that Brummy's 'death has become important and significant to him, separated from his peculiar dealing in bones and bodies by confused memories of Brummy, and by some perception, however vague, of the deep significance of the event ...' (Matthews, p. 254). This significance is the significance of the other, the significance of the spirit, the significance of the mad, and, paradoxically, because it reveals through its opposition the inadequate cringe of the narrator, the significance of the sane. But while the disturbances of the goanna and corpse have led the old man to some form of limited awareness of the existence of an-Other epistemology to that of the National-real, there is no engagement with this other knowledge.

This is born out by the editorial changes made through the various editions of the story from 1892 to 1901. In the 1892 version the story concludes: "... dus ter dus, Brummy." Then he sat down and buried his face with his hands. And the sun sank again ..." (qtd. in Roderick, *Commentaries*, p. 28). This version implies, as Roderick indicates, 'that the hatter was emotionally overcome by the religious solemnity of the occasion' (Roderick, *Commentaries*, p. 28), that is, that the hatter finally reacts to the spiritual implications to which he had been previously blind. Lawson, however, altered this passage for its 1894 publication in *Short Stories in Prose and Verse* to read: 'He sat down on a log near by, rested his elbowson his knees and passed his hand wearily over his forehead — *but only as one who was tired and felt the heat*; and presently he rose, took up the tools, and walked back to the hut. And the sun ...' (My emphasis; p. 56). The change removes the implications of the hatter's final enlightenment which are present in the 1892 edition. They 'deliberately flatten the tone' to place a greater emphasis upon the pressure brought to bear by the 'weird' upon the real. The National accentuates this pressure because it is this pressure which signifies the maddening influence of the Bush. The hatter's resistance to this pressure is a resistance to the power of another knowledge. It is the mythologisation of this resistance as the National which produces the stoic-heroic as the identity of the Nation.

The hatter's inquiries into the implications of Brummy's death therefore cease with the internment of the corpse. They do not extend to the haunting goanna or to the blackfellow's skeleton. If the 'confused memories of Brummy' provide the shepherd with a 'perception ... of the deep significance of the event' then, it is an awareness which fails to identify the discrimination which constructs the black, the goanna, the skeleton and the dead (i.e. the values which articulate with the corpse in the semiotic of the other) as other in the process of asserting the dominance and identity of the real and the National. The hatter's fumbling movement towards an understanding of the implications of death acts not just as a foil to the eccentric, weird, mad (material), racist treatment of the skeleton, but to the inability/disinclination of the narrative gaze to investigate and incorporate the same knowledge. The cringing gaze of the narrator cannot view or recognize this knowledge because it is the suppression of the semantic values of this other semiotic which provides the dominated binaries which construct its own narrow but controlled semiotic, the semiotic of the stoic-heroic, the semiotic of the Nation.

The banishment of this level of symbol, this discourse of the weird, the other, from the end of the story is described by Matthews as 'a measure of Lawson's control ... that he does not allow such reflections to pervade the end of the story; this may have given the ending an air of mystery or symbolism which it is plainly not intended to sustain. He seals it off, as it were, firmly but tolerantly.' (Matthews, p. 254). This is significant, for the banishment of the discourse of the weird is 'a measure of ... control'. It is the movement of the discourse of the narrator, the discourse of the objectively real, the Australian, to reassert control or power over the narrative which has so clearly demonstrated the contingencies of such control. It is the action of an hysterical cringe to the threat of values outside its own emblematically charted territory. The position of power which the cringe gives to the narrator of 'The Bush Undertaker' is arbitrary, political and conditional. It rests upon a dominance which is purchased through the discriminative suppression of that which for the purposes of a politically expedient identity is established and held as other. The narrative voice banishes the subversive discourse of the other, the realm of the spiritual, the weird, the mad, that world 'in which objects and landscapes assume some *other* significance or are momentarily held in a strange new light that promises but never quite yields insights' (My emphasis; Matthews, p. 251) with the conclusion:¹¹ 'And

the sun sank again on the grand Australian bush — the nurse and tutor of eccentric minds, the home of the weird, and of much that is different from things in other lands' (p. 57). It is a banishment by acceptance. The weird, the other, is the mad and the eccentric of the 'grand Australian Bush'. The environment of the Nation is therefore that of the mad and the eccentric, and it is the stoic-heroic disengagement with this environment which identifies the character of the Australian Nation — a character identified not merely by its resistance to the bush; but by its resistance to an-Other knowledge. My reading of Lawson's story, however, is not intended to be one which stops at the exposition of a limited realist epistemology of the Nation. The point which is to be grasped here is that it is precisely this limitation which becomes its strength. For as the other by, which the National-real locates itself, moves from its fixture, it triggers its re-affixment — a process which iterates and reiterates the stereotype of the other and the epistemological system which it enables. It is therefore through the contingency of the National epistemology that it generates its *effectivity* — an effectivity which is directed as much against the rival Imperial as it is towards a mutually contested colonized subject.

NOTES

1. P.M., 'Henry Lawson's Prose', Rev. of *While the Billy Boils*, by Henry Lawson, *Champion*, 5 September 1896, in *Henry Lawson Criticism 1894-1971*, edited by Colin Roderick, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972), pp. 59-60.
2. Christopher Lee, 'Man, Work, and Country: The Production of Henry Lawson', to be published in *Australian Literary Studies*, 15 (1992).
3. Homi Bhabha, 'The Other Question', *Screen*, 24.6 (1983), p. 18. My emphasis.
4. Brian Matthews, "'The Nurse and Tutor of Eccentric Minds": Some Developments in Lawson's Treatment of Madness', *Australian Literary Studies*, 4 (1970), p. 251.
5. Henry Lawson, 'The Bush Undertaker', in *Henry Lawson: The Master Story-Teller: Prose Writings*, Vol 1 Collected Prose, edited by Colin Roderick (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1984), p. 52. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
6. See, for example, Kay Schaffer's discussion of the Australian Nationalist tradition in *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 85-91.
7. It also originates there in the 'suitable' bush location and ends there as 'the sun sank again on the grand Australian bush ...'
8. The significance of both the chain of black signifiers and the meal-exhumation connection are confirmed in Alan Lawson's discussion of the story in 'Lawson and Australia', a paper presented at Griffith University Brisbane, 23 Mar. 1987.
9. Considering the coverage given in the press recently to Aboriginal attempts to retrieve for burial the stolen remains of their ancestors, the old shepherd's obsession with profit and the association of this with the discovery of the bodies, in particular the first one, leads me to the conclusion that what the shepherd is about in exhuming the skeleton is the commercial sale of the remains to an anthropologist, a medically related industry, or even the macabre type of shop described in Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* (see Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, edited by Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 130). It appears from a survey of the medical journals of the time that the only systematic supply of medical skeletons to medical schools came from France but this fact doesn't preclude the possible sale of a few stray bones to an interested outback anatomist, anthropologist, or some colonial contemporary of Mr Venus (I am indebted to Dr. Bryan Gandeva for this information). Such a sale is I believe consistent with both the historical context and the construction of the exhumation within the text. It is also supported by a comment which Colin Roderick makes in his biography of Lawson but on which he fails to elaborate: 'Dan [Angus] had a macabre sense of humour and once bought Lawson's skeleton for beer money' (*Colin Roderick, Henry Lawson: A Life* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1991), p. 302.).
10. Roderick makes note of the different versions of this sentence in the editions from 1892 to 1896 and prefers this version on the basis of Lawson's preference. The other versions are '... like the fool yers allers was' 1892; '... like carrion' 1894; and that quoted above, 1896. See Colin Roderick, *Henry Lawson: The Master Story-Teller: Commentaries on his Prose Writings* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1985).
11. Note that, according to Roderick, the final phrase: 'and of much that was different from things in other lands' was omitted from 'all posthumous editions' of the story. He restores it in *Henry Lawson: The Master Story-Teller*, since

Lawson clearly restores it for *The Country I Come From* (See *Commentaries*, p. 29). The omission places less emphasis on the particularly Australian character of the events. It might be seen as an attempt to reduce the local element of the story so as to place more stress on the universal.

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