Dystopian Screen Media Overthrows Utopic Conventions: The Australian Landscape as an Enigma

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Abstract:
From Joan Lindsay and cinematic master Peter Weir to Ted Kotcheff and Warwick Thornton, over past decades authors, screenwriters and filmmakers have produced films that depict the vast Australian landscape—simply referred to as *terra nullius* during colonial times by settlers literally confronting a continent vastly different from anything they were culturally and geographically accustomed to—as mysterious, impenetrable and ominous. Just like the dark cold of Scandinavia lends itself perfectly to contemporary Nordic Noir, the Australian New Wave or Australian Film Revival of the 1970s and 1980s saw the release of films that encapsulated the eeriness of this largely rugged, arid and windswept continent, which opens up possibilities for anything to happen within those very, limitless, territories. This article analyses Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), Kotcheff's horror flick par excellence *Wake in Fright* (1971); "the best and most terrifying film about Australia in existence" and with a TV-series remake in 2017, and Thornton's more recent portrayal of Aboriginal misery and poverty *Samson and Delilah* (2009) set against a hostile urban backdrop, from a Foucauldian perspective. In its theoretical framework it also draws primarily on Freud. *Heterotopia* is used as a term to refer to strange, bewildering spaces that are disturbing and undecipherable—also described as "an unimaginable space, representable only in language, and as a kind of semi-mythical real site" (as articulated in Knight, 2017, 141). Foucault's concept is applied in a cinematic context and used in conjunction with Freud's notion of the *uncanny* as a feeling of uneasiness; or, as has been explained in his seminal text "The Uncanny" (1919), "that class of the terrifying that leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar."[1] We argue that these eerie, fear-induced screened narratives represent a nation whose weather-beaten, freedom-loving yet at heart anxiety-ridden people are most definitely a product of their environment.

Keywords: Dystopia; Australian Outback; Australian New Wave; Colonialism; Foucault; Freud

1. Introduction and research focus

This article, an abbreviated version of which was presented at the EASA Naples University conference "Australia as a Risk Society: Hope and Fears of the Past, the Present and the Future," 29 March-1 April 2021, is concerned with the power of the media to convey new thoughts and perspectives on the way we view and assess our past and present through on-screen narratives. In analytical focus are three Australian films, all major cinematic feats, that have firmly established themselves within contemporary film history. They all bring to attention aspects of Australian culture that reflect the nation's history and past and its many traumas with regard to colonisation, attitudes to, and ordeals among the indigenous Aboriginal people, as well as the strained relationship between occupier and the land. Ted Kotcheff's timeless *Wake in Fright,* Peter Weir's critically acclaimed poetic yet Gothic whodunnit *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (both

[1] It was first published as "Das Unheimliche," in *Gesammelte Werke*, XII, Imago Publishing, London.

screen adaptations defining works of the New Wave movement or The Australian Film Revival,"[2] an art film movement described as "mostly period films defining nationhood not only by its current mythologies and realities, but by locating the discourse on the meaning of the Australian nation in the colonial past and during the first years of independence" (Haltof 46-47)), and Warwick Thornton's more recent representation of life in remote Aboriginal communities in unconventional love story *Samson and Delilah*, share commonalities relating to identity and belonging, as well as settler relationships with the so-called *terra nullius* they took possession of. The films also explore anxieties linked to how Australia in colonial times seemed to suddenly have become unfamiliar to itself (see Gelder and Jacobs 171) and highlight the complex relationship between colonisers and the occupied land they used as their vast playground; to dispose of as they wished.

This article draws on Freud's notion of the uncanny or a feeling of uneasiness or 'Unheimlichkeit' defined as an atmosphere that "surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and unescapable where otherwise we should have spoken of 'chance only'." Ricoeur would later equal the term to a sense of alienation and estrangement with the surrounding space ("the realm of emptiness," Ricoeur 149). 'The uncanny', a concept first introduced by Freud, will be applied to the following film analyses and used with reference also to the historical past. The notion of the uncanny is at work in films where characters struggle to fit in and have a complex attitude to their environment. They are both in awe of and repelled by a landscape that changes, in an instant, from accommodating to ominous and bewildering. Familiar with the surrounding space yet not at all, the characters are strangers in a wild territory with which they sometimes feel little affinity, which they largely seek to dominate, and which they are fearful of. Often at the mercy of their environment rather than the other way around, the characters end up surrendering to a landscape that pulls them in and of which they become a part. Held captive within the seemingly endless space of the vast and windswept, wide open plains of Australia, they are also captivated by this continent—a nation still open for interpretation and which is old yet young enough from a settler's perspective to leave room for exploration not only of the land but also of one's own identity as it is influenced by and affected by this land. The following Foucauldian quote becomes relevant in the upcoming partly colonial analysis which is primarily concerned with the spatial aspects of the three films in focus:

> The space in which we live, from which we are drawn out of ourselves, just where the erosion of our lives, our time, our history takes place, this place that wears us down and consumes us, is in itself heterogeneous. In other words, we do not live in a sort of vacuum, within which individuals and things can be located, or that may take on so many different fleeting colours, but in a set of relations that define positions which cannot be equated or in any way superimposed. (Leach 331)

With reference to this, we stress that the overpowering Australian landscape that comes to the fore as a character in its own right in the films analysed, contains mythical elements in a film like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, and in part also in *Samson and Delilah*, which are intrinsically

[2] David Stratton expands on this important period in Australian cinema in *The Last New Wave: The Australian Film Revival* (Stratton). And two decades later, Józef Marok Haltof would write that "The New Wave films were mostly period films defining nationhood not only by its current mythologies and realities, but by locating the discourse on the meaning of the Australian nation in the colonial past and during the first years of independence" (47). Without doubt, the New Wave cinema holds a lasting fascination.

connected to the physical environment that exists for real, all the way from the past up to the present moment. Heterotopia, when applied to the upcoming film analyses, refers to partly imagined spaces that, in fact, exist in real life and affect the human element within that setting. As such, the different emplacements or sites called heterotopias (from Greek *heteros*, 'another', and *topos*, 'place', see Johnson 77) differ from utopias which, although aspired for, exist solely in one's imagination.[3] Still, in the three films the heterotopic elements are not entirely dystopic either as the on-screen landscapes attract the characters and draw them in, thereby partly verging on the utopic, as in the initially picturesque scenes from the Mount Macedon picnic grounds in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Rural Australia, as represented in all films, holds a lasting fascination with characters and spectators alike. Both on and off screen these alternatively vast and expansive, alternatively rugged, densely vegetated and mountainous territories are wild and hostile yet irresistibly alluring. Forever subject to change, the Australian landscape takes on multiple meanings and the characters are either wary of and irreverent towards, possessed by, or able to identify with these spaces—a land that affects them to the core. All three filmmakers seem to suggest that the only way for their characters to get by on this imposing continent, is if they can find a way to turn the unfamiliar into familiar or heterogenous spaces. As has been held, with regard to the strangeness of place and the coining of the word 'Outback' as a way to refer to a land starkly different from the familiar; a space not readily classifiable, "for British colonisers arriving in Australia in the 1870's, terra australis was not only a distant land, but a moral and spiritual antithesis" (Drahos 149). Ann McGrath, in turn, notes that "Outback represents a space away from settlement, a wilderness. Its own terminology, the 'back', a space 'outside' defines it as 'other'. An "intrinsically colonial" term, it is a measurement of space in terms of European appropriation" (McGrath 114).

The three films analysed in this article highlight the problematic relationship between the settlers (representatives of a colonial power) and a land vastly different from the tamed and reigned in, neat and orderly landscape back home. The continent of Australia or what would become known as 'terra australis nondum cognita', as mentioned earlier, would have been confronting and liberating all at once: a large southern landmass, overwhelming in its territorial vastness. Its governance changed drastically when it was turned from a place claimed by nobody but shared between Aboriginal tribes to whom the idea of taking possession of the land was as foreign as man being superior to nature, to a colonial power under the cultural influence of England—a territorial extension to this occupying state on the other side of the world and where, in the imagination of white settlers, Australia "had been (and continues to be) invented before its advent" (Richard White qtd. in Stadler et al. 5).

The upcoming film analyses must begin with references to the aforementioned idea of 'terra nullius', or 'no man's land' (something not unique to Australia, it must be noted) and also to the alienating notion of the uncanny (as originally defined by Freud). The dehumanisation of Australian natives during colonial times catapulted these people into a dark and violent chapter of our national history that has left traumatic repercussions and shaped the identity politics of this nation. This includes controversies surrounding the celebrations of much contested Australia Day (aka Invasion Day). It has been held (a claim that has later been contested) that the Aborigines were classified by a flora and fauna act all the way up until the amendment of the constitution in the wake of the 1967 referendum. The dehumanisation of Australian natives

[3] As explained, "Foucault focuses on those places that bear a strange relationship to other places by suspending, neutralizing or reversing those relationships by imagining them, reflecting or conceiving them. These other places cannot exist in utopia, aka places that don't actually exist, and so he names them heterotopia" (see "Summary of Michel Foucault's 'Heterotopia'").

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2. Terra Nullius included in critical debate

Australia as 'terra nullius'—where the continent has been depicted as void of inhabitants; the natives relegated to the margins, existing outside the frame while the settlers occupied centre stage—has been written about at length by critics and historians alike and was a term also used by James Cook in his 18th-century journal; with highly detrimental effects. Works of importance in this context are *Imagined landscapes: Geovisualizing Australian spatial narratives* (Stadler et al.), which provides a spatial analysis of the Australian landscape and draws partial connections between colonial Australia and the outside world; *Seeking the Centre: the Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film* (Haynes); outstanding analysis "Fear and Loathing in the Australian Bush: Gothic Landscapes in *Bush Studies* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock"* (Steele), where the author refers to colonial Australia as "The Great Australian Emptiness" (36); *Australian Cinema After Mabo* (Davis and Collins); "Camera Natura: Landscape in Australian Feature Films" (Gibson); *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (Gelder and Jacobs) and their interrelated journal article from 1995; "Travels to a Distant Past: The Mythology of the Outback" (McGrath); as well as Marek Haltof's culturally informative book *Peter Weir: When Cultures Collide* (1996). Finally, Tom Drahos' *Coolabah* article "The Imagined Desert" (2013) is likewise important in its references to the Outback, 'terra nullius', and the idea of land demarcation or place-mapping—and particularly how these concepts apply to his analysis of *Wake in Fright*.

The earlier and more general term 'terra incognita' as hitherto unexplored territory or land that had not yet been mapped out and documented, is also closely interconnected to the way 18th-century Australia (if we take the arrival of the First Fleet in Botany Bay, 1788, as a point of departure)[4] was seen as a Gothic place of bewildering difference; the diametric opposite or very antithesis to European culture and apparent sophistication. The denomination 'Australia' came about upon completion of the circumnavigation of this vast southern territory, by English explorer Matthew Flinders. With the publication of his book chronicling his journey across waters in 1814, the term 'Terra Australis' would be used instead but the name officially reverted back to 'Australia' in line with the preferences of Flinders himself.[5]

As regards the Gothic aspects of the Australian landscape, covered in literature and film alike, Gerard Turcotte writes that

> Long before the fact of Australia was ever confirmed by explorers and cartographers it had already been imagined as a grotesque space, a land peopled by monsters. The idea of its existence was disputed, was even heretical for a time, and with the advent of the transportation of convicts its darkness seemed confirmed.

[4] Paul Arthur calls the great landmass of settler Australia, "an alluring enigma in the European imagination centuries before its 'discovery' and colonisation ... [w]hen British settlers finally arrived in 1788 they brought with them a vast store of prior expectations and images, based both on actual reports of explorers and on historical myths which persuasively moulded their way of seeing the unfamiliar land and its people" (Arthur 37).

[5] The different ways of referring to this extensive southern landmass are explained on The National Library of Australia homepage: https://www.nla.gov.au/faq/how-was-australia-named

> The Antipodes was a world of reversals, the dark subconscious of Britain. It was, for all intents and purposes, Gothic par excellence, the dungeon of the world. (1)

Not until the 'Mabo decision' on 3 June, 1992, would the situation change, at least on the surface, for the indigenous people. They would after a history of exclusion, including the lack of recognition of their existence in the first Australian Constitution of 1901, receive a status as people and individuals in their own right—no longer included under flora and fauna, nor seen as savages—even monsters (the blatant racism expressed on the ground, then and still, is sickening).[6] With what promised to be a ground-breaking legislation passed in the aftermath of Torres Strait Islander Eddie Koki Mabo contesting the hitherto largely undisputed notion of 'terra nullius' and the idea that the European settlers had colonised previously empty land, the denomination was changed from 'terra nullius' to territory 'settled and uninhabited' (see Galloway). As explained, "Mabo and his followers challenged the authority of the Queensland government to claim not just sovereignty but also ownership of the land comprising their ancestral home" (Galloway). The Mabo decision, by which some Aboriginal people retained ownership of the land has, key in hand, not been followed through to a satisfactory degree even if Prime Minister Paul Keating's wording in his Redfern Park speech the same year as Mabo, would signify at least an attempt to take responsibility, address and rectify what had long been left uncorrected and undealt with.[7] Little can be done to compensate for past atrocities by British colonisers towards the so called 'blackfellas'; wiped out in staggering numbers and many of them uprooted and disappeared as part of the Stolen Generation (a rather feeble national apology for past injustices was issued by Kevin Rudd in 2007). Many inequalities remain to this day. The lingering culpability for past wrongdoings translates into what Stephen Carleton calls "national shame, guilt or trauma [that] continue to haunt us" (12).

The battle for sovereignty or at least increased independence on a legislative, financial, and societal level continues for many Aboriginal groups in Australia. Nevertheless, this watershed moment in contemporary Australian socio-political history, which has been described as "the moment when *all* of Australia might become available for Aboriginal reclamation" (Gelder and Jacobs 171), has led to a gradual shift in the national mindset. The Mabo Decision would also trigger the nationwide use of Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of the traditional custodians of the land. Even if this paying of respect to 'elders past and present' is more of a formality than something that has come with any major recognition of Aboriginal people, the Australian attitude towards its natives is changing and becoming more inclusive, a far cry from, e.g., the momentary focus on an Aboriginal man in *Wake in Fright* who is both physically and culturally removed from the white collective. In Kotcheff's film there is a both direct and indirect disregard for the value of the surrounding land; a land whose inherent mysticism cannot be rationalised. The landscape ultimately reigns superior and mirrors the free and indomitable spirit of the people who dwelled here pre-colonisation.

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[6] Aboriginal woman Linda Burney (born 1957) recalls being taught "my people were savages and the closest example to Stone Age man living today." See: https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-australia-aborigines-vote-idUKSYD21914220070524

[7] According to Henry Reynolds, "[m]ore troubling is that it took Australian courts until the 1992 Mabo decision to provide some limited remediation, but not reparation, for one of the greatest land grabs in modern history." See: https://theconversation.com/henry-reynolds-australia-was-founded-on-a-hypocrisy-that-haunts-us-to-this-day-101679

Even if the Mabo Decision would bear no chronological relevance to the New Age cinema of Kotcheff and Weir, Australian cinema in the aftermath of the Mabo decision and beyond, has pushed the discourse about Australian nationhood to a head and refined the idea of 'home' from both a settler and indigenous perspective. Importantly, Felicity Collins and Therese Davis, authors of *Australian Cinema after Mabo* (2004) write that:

> Influential writers have analysed the anxiety and ambivalence which seem endemic to Australian nationhood and to Australian cinema. However, the cultural impact of the Mabo decision (and the peculiar forms of anxiety about the nation's past and future to which it has given rise) has not yet been analysed in terms of cinema. (7)

From the perspective of today and key in hand, we know that Australia's imperialist past has triggered issues not wholly dealt with, which continue to trouble and haunt the national consciousness. In the cinema explored here, 1900s colonial anxiety in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is likewise felt in *Wake in Fright* and in a film as recent as *Samson and Delilah*. It becomes a lingering state of being and an oppressive sentiment through which the characters respond to the world around them. Incapable of relating to the land as an equal or a space to adapt to, the characters find themselves at a crossroads between one world and the other, where Otherness indeed takes over. This feeling of estrangement and alienation in relation to the surrounding landscape is partly due to the characters' inability or unwillingness to let go and step away from themselves, allowing for a more symbiotic interconnection with the land of which they are, or should play, a part. This reminds, again, of Foucault's notion of the heterotopia that has the power to juxtapose "in a single real place several spaces, several sites [or emplacements] that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 25). As will be highlighted in the upcoming first two film analyses, the spatial incompatibility of two worlds existing side by side (either brutal and hostile or restricted and colonial) but never quite meshing, spills over into character behaviour where the protagonists are, similarly, at odds with their surrounding environment—a land about which they know unnervingly little still, nor do they make an effort to bridge the cultural, and 'natural', divide. As 'the uncanny' takes over, partly as a result of this both painful and hostile disconnect, "it derives its terror not from something extremely alien or unknown but—on the contrary—from something strangely familiar, which defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it" (Morris 307).

Image 1: Credit Mia Boe. Terra Nullius 2020 Acrylic on Linen.
https://sundaysalon.com.au/products/terra-nullius-2020

3. Freud, Ricoeur and the uncanny, and heterotopic spaces as mirroring yet also stepping away from reality

Freud thinks of the uncanny as having "two considerations"—namely a "class of morbid anxiety … irrespective of whether it originally aroused dread or some other affect" and, viewed from a different perspective, "something familiar and old—established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression" (Freud 13). Providing their own Freudian reading, Gelder and Jacobs interpret 'the uncanny' as something gone from "local, homely, familiar," to a space which "can work upon place (benignly or otherwise) to render it unfamiliar … the uncanny experience arises out of the inability to reconcile, or to imagine a 'relationship' between, the familiar and the unfamiliar" (177). In the films analysed in this article, 'the uncanny' can be interpreted as a version of the Gothic—when applied in a colonial context. As noted by Gerry Turcotte, "[i]t is certainly possible to argue that the generic qualities of the Gothic mode lend themselves to articulating the colonial experience inasmuch as each emerges out of a condition of deracination and uncertainty, of the familiar transposed into unfamiliar space" (1).

Ricoeur's appropriation of similar Gothic notions as a complex sense of otherness presenting "degrees corresponding to the degrees of differentiation and distantiation of the past in relation to the present;" an "otherness [which is] at its height in the feeling of strangeness" (39), and Foucault's poststructuralist discourse on various types of heterotopic spaces that mirror yet differ from utopia, are applicable to an analysis of *Wake in Fright*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, and *Samson and Delilah*. Specifically, we shall be drawing from the heterotopic metaphors relating to the colony, the ship (also called 'the heterotopia par excellence'[8]) and the garden, as well as that of the urban space. While the filmic plots in focus unfold during different time periods, the screened landscapes have in common the notion of the exterior or external taking over; a setting where the human element is far inferior to the surrounding space. The uncanny enters the picture in all three films, which emphasise the power of the land to fascinate characters who either surrender to it and in a trancelike state become engulfed by it (*Picnic at Hanging Rock*), or adopt an identity in relation to the land that is brutal, violent and devoid of any sophistication and emotional intelligence, as a way to survive in the vast space that surrounds them while they tackle their everyday reality by becoming as empty in feeling as their physical environment is desolate (*Wake in Fright*). The protagonists in *Samson and Delilah*, in turn, stand apart from the non-indigenous characters in the first two films, as native to Australia. As such, they feel intrinsically connected to the territory in which they live. Despite their poor and squalid Outback living conditions, they experience a deep sense of belonging with the surrounding place and space and relate to the landscape on a spiritual level. And yet, the uncanny enters also Thornton's film where it becomes apparent within city limits, translated into urban malaise felt so strongly by the characters that it pushes them to the brink of insanity. Their mental stability is severely tested in a harsh and hostile environment that leaves no room for spirituality; a survival of the fittest in a sick society.

The title of Thornton's film makes not so indirect references to Christianity and colonial power—a point in common between the three films analysed. As has been clarified, *Samson*

[8] Foucault explains that the ship is a "floating part of space, a placeless place, that lives by itself, closed in on itself and at the same time poised in the infinite ocean, and yet, from port to port, tack by tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies, looking for the most precious things hidden in the gardens. Then you will understand why it has been not only ... the main means of economic growth … , but at the same time the greatest reserve of imagination from our civilization from the sixteenth century down to the present day" (Leach 7).

and Delilah, "is more than a biblical allusion. It is also an ironic residue of this particular colonial history: Old Testament names such as Samson and Delilah are commonplace in Aboriginal communities in Central Australia, especially those that began as Lutheran missions" (Davis).

The film selected for awards at 14 film festivals, eleven of which were international,[9] is focused on a young Aboriginal couple whose onscreen ordeals affect the viewer almost viscerally. After having initially left the rural Outback behind in search for a sense of salvation and new beginnings in Alice Springs, they do not reach catharsis until they have ultimately abandoned a city that has left them further dependent on substance abuse, stripped of their identity, lost and battered. They make their way back to their roots, to a familiar territory marked by the footprints of 'elders past and present'.[10] Having survived trials and tribulations also within their native community, in the final scenes of the movie Samson and Delilah are reproached by the village elders, but even so they rise above, regain their footing and feel a sense of belonging back home as they adapt to and become one with the land; man/woman/nature coming together within a state of peaceful co-existence. Thornton's ending sees the young pair having managed to leave behind the heterotopic urban space of 'otherness and opposition' (Wood). They are finally back where they belong.

4. Filmic analyses: heterotopic elements infiltrate the screen narratives

The three films are herewith analysed from a spatial and cultural perspective. In focus is also the heterotopic aspects at work in all of them. Each film holds an allure for audiences then and now and leaves a lasting impact through powerful images, an effective soundtrack (and sometimes lack thereof) and sociocultural and ideological symbolism that is deeply educational in character. As viewers we become aware of the almost subliminal elements in all three films, particularly in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Samson and Delilah* which connect us with white Australian and Aboriginal cultures on a spiritual and mythical level.

We begin by looking at Kotcheff's Australian-American co-production *Wake in Fright*, released the same year as Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout*—which "uses a narrative of the marginalised (Aborigines, children, animals) as a canvas for his exploration of the meaning of 'civilization'" (Forscher 33).[11] A movie by a Canadian filmmaker, *Wake in Fright* nevertheless shows a strong directorial awareness of and familiarity with the Australian Outback and ascribes protagonist status to the landscape; its impact on the individual trapped within it so intense that the feelings of entrapment travel from the screen and enter our own psyche. With this film Kotcheff would set the trend for an upcoming late 1970s-1980s surge in screened representations of the Outback[12] ("the arid interior which comprises the bulk of Australia" and a term that has been attributed to 1890s novelist Rolf Boldrewood) (Frost 709). It was a type of

[9] See https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/the-screen-guide/t/samson---delilah-2009/20947/

[10] Note that 'acknowledgment of country' is increasingly common in public discourses as a way to symbolically address and pay respect to Australia's First Nations people and custodians of this land—including its significant elders. Thus, past, present and future interconnect and the tribute to the nation's indigenous tribes extends across time and also, in a way, across space.

[11] Likewise comparing the two films, John Scott and Dean Biron write that they contain an element of "gothic of disorientation, isolation and desolation" and capture the "competing emphasis between rural idyll and rural horror" (315).

[12] These are, e.g., *Sunday too Far Away* (1975), *Mad Max II* (1981), *Roadgames* (1981), *Razorback* (1984), *Crocodile Dundee* (1986), and *Ground Zero* (1987), shot in Flinders Ranges (South Australia), Broken Hill (New South Wales), Nullarbor Plain (Western Australia), Kakadu (Northern Territory), McKinlay (Queensland), and Coober Peedy and Woomera (South Australia), respectively (Frost 712).

cinema that claimed this vast and comparatively empty open space populated by a mere 5% of Australians today, as part of its destination branding (see Frost 709) and that portrayed "natural environments as a spectacular backdrop to action, …uncomplicated indigenous lifestyles and … the interaction and struggle of man with the environment" (Riley and Van Doren 273). Kotcheff's filmic forerunner partly falls into the latter category, with its focus on a man captive in a hot and dusty environment from which there is no apparent escape. An uncomfortable watch, the film generates feelings of unease among viewers until today. It is timelessly relevant from a behavioural and psychological perspective and was ground-breaking at its release, in its 'unvarnished portrait of Australia' (see Godfrey), and its representation of the ugly aspects of Australian Outback mentality. Kotcheff, and Kenneth Cooke in his 1961 novel on which the movie is based,[13] confronts us with the harsh reality of man as affected by the surrounding land.

Wake in Fright goes under the title *Outback* on its US film reels; Americans competing with Australians over this term used as part of both nations' destination branding. Called a classic outback thriller, a "psychological thriller film" and "a classic Australian film which has achieved cult status" (Restoration of Australian film *Wake in Fright*) it won the approval of Weir's fellow filmmaker Martin Scorsese yet failed to leave a major impact at the Australian box office at its release in 1971 and "closed after only a week in Brisbane" (Galvin, NSFA). Raffaele Caputo, in an interview with Kotcheff, explains the national audience reception as follows:

> *Wake in Fright* was unkindly received by Australian critics and public alike, the bone of contention being its representation of an outback male society whose interests are limited to drinking hard, gambling hard and fighting hard, with a shameless enthusiasm for blood sports thrown in for good measure.

Met with all the more praise and accolades at the Cannes film festival the same year, *Wake in Fright* was nominated for a Palme D'Or. It has since been received positively, partly thanks to its 2009 digital restoration after "a chance discovery of the film in America" (Restoration of Australian film *Wake in Fright*), which brought it back to life, whereby it again screened at Cannes and was once more viewed in a favourable light; particularly by then Head of Cannes Classic Department, Scorsese who was deeply impressed with the movie:

> *Wake in Fright* is a deeply unsettling and disturbing movie. I saw it when it premiered at Cannes in 1971, and it left me speechless. Visually, dramatically, atmospherically and psychologically, it's beautifully calibrated and it gets under your skin one encounter at a time, right along with the protagonist played by Gary Bond. I'm excited that *Wake in Fright* has been preserved and restored and that it is finally getting the exposure it deserves. (American Cinematheque)

The 2017 adaptation of the film into a television miniseries left a further impact also on Australian audiences; the film's cult status now solidified once and for all. What is it about this raw and seemingly profoundly Australian film and the book it is based on that so fascinates national and foreign audiences alike? How come this gut-wrenching representation of Outback brutality in the middle of a vast openness, this negative portrayal of a "macho, insular, alcoholic and violent culture" (Frost 720), has left such an impact? Including on southern European audiences whose cultural sophistication contrasts starkly with the uncouth mentality and

[13] See also https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jul/24/the-australian-book-you-should-read-next-wake-in-fright-by-kenneth-cook

behaviour of the males on screen; their apparently sole role in the local community to drink and get drunk, abuse and revel in their own degradation and misery? Meg Labrum of the National Film & Sound Archive provides an answer when she calls it "a really powerful story. It was well produced at the time. It's got some amazing Australian Outback scenes, but it's also grim, its brutal, it's got horrible, horrible aspects to it about the … mean mateship with the Outback" (Restoration of Australian film *Wake in Fright*). The remote Outback, a seemingly endless vastness, is in Tom Drahos' words "hardly a place, but a narrative. An imagined realm, it consists against a backdrop of cultural memories and horror stories" (Drahos 148). The Outback exerts a fascination on visitors 'since times eternal'.[14]As Warwick Frost explains, in a study that draws on interviews with tourists and quantitative data, the Outback, "the arid interior which comprises the bulk of Australia," appeals to tourists, who attain "deeper, more spiritual experiences in the Outback" (710). Further, "these tourists were strongly motivated by the desire to both test themselves in difficult environments and to experience some sort of transition" (710). It has also been held, with regard to Uluru or Ayers Rock—sacred site par excellence—that it "had become a pilgrimage site, particularly for those interested in New Age philosophies and religions" (Frost 711).

In her landmark text "Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film" (1998), Rosslyn Haynes, in turn, writes that "the imagining of the Outback involves the paradoxical reconciliation of its hostility and attraction" (Haynes qtd. in Frost 709). This again corresponds with Freud's original notion of the uncanny as an "'unheimlich place' which is the entrance to the former 'Heim' of all human beings, to the place where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning" (15)—a place that has since through repression been relegated, if not to the corners of oblivion, then at least to a place deeply embedded in our psyche and where the uncanny re-enters our consciousness triggered by external events or happenings which become internal. Anneleen Masschelein, also with reference to Freud, calls the uncanny "a special shade of anxiety, which can be experienced in real life or in literature, caused by the return of the repressed or by the apparent confirmation of surmounted, primitive beliefs" (54).[15]

Shot on location in Sydney and Broken Hill, with its rather simplistic but effective story set to a large extent in Bundanyabba (or 'The Yabba'), a screened representation of Broken Hill, *Wake in Fright*[16] introduces us to jaded and disgruntled schoolteacher John Grant sent to the 'Aussie' Outback for work. His temporary stopover in Yabba (Koori for 'to talk') sets in motion a plot circular in development rather than subject to any clear narrative progression. Central to the story described as a "portrait of an ugly Australia that became a cinema classic" (Godfrey), is the moral degradation and demoralisation of the main character. He goes from, what one might call, a refined snob to poor slob as the primitive acts also of his 'mates' escalate into a hedonistic orgy of drinking and killing; a loud and boisterous bunch of men who come together in the name of booze, raucous behaviour and animal abuse to satisfy their sadistic urges and their need to feel empowered at the callous sacrifice of the national emblem the kangaroo, slaughtered *en*

[14] 'Eternal' is an appropriate word given how old the Australian continent is; originally the landmass of Gondwana before what would become New Zealand, or 'Aotearoa' in Maori, gradually broke away during a process of separation that would last more than 20 million years.
[15] Providing a Freudian interpretation, Noam Israeli writes that "[t]he uncanny aims to deal with a notion of familiarity and threat that manifest itself through the same event, person or object" (379).
[16] Both book and film bear similarities with William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) as far as perverted human behaviour under a scorching sun is concerned, and likewise has much in common with more recent Australian horror flick *Wolf Creek* (2005).

masse at dusk. Images that shake viewers to the core reflect the brutality of characters who are ultimately at a loss in this vast semi-wilderness and who seek to control and dominate the land and gain power over it as a way to make up for their own inadequacies. The kangaroo takes on symbolic connotations and the iconic scene above becomes a visual spectacle with elements of the carnivalesque; sad, pathetic, and ultimately demasculinised men devoid of positive character traits and as eager to subjugate the land and any living creature dwelling on it as were their colonial ancestors, and who derive pleasure from an act of sadism at the sacrifice of an already endangered species.

Nicholas Godfrey interprets the film from a partly colonial perspective and this scene in particular. He writes:

> Where colonialism attempted to 'tame' the 'savage' land, Kotcheff's film shows the hostile landscape inevitably turning its inhabitants bad. Nowhere is this more evident than in the film's climactic kangaroo hunt, during which the inebriated men ride out into the night and partake in the drunken slaughter of kangaroos. ("National Nightmare" 118)

An analysis of two additional scenes serves to further highlight the fraught relationship between man in *Wake in Fright* and the far western rural Australian land of Broken Hill, Bundanyabba, and surrounds. The first scene sets the film in motion while the second is inserted at an important narrative junction that will mark the turning point of the male protagonist and his imminent fall from grace. In the very opening shots of *Wake in Fright*, Kotcheff's skilled manoeuvring of the camera and wide-angle representation of the landscape through a 360-degree camera pan contributes to what has been called the film's "striking sense of documentary authenticity" (Godfrey "National Nightmare" 117)—a notion of blending of filmic genres which pulls the viewer in and fuses reality and fiction. The additional soundtrack by John Scott adds to the feelings of desolation.

Using an elevated wide shot, Kotcheff presents us with the barren and desolated landscape surrounding the Tiboonda schoolhouse where the viewer is about to see Grant at work. A train line cuts through this external vastness, a huge nothingness where civilisation is restricted; no sign of life detected until the initial establishing shot is replaced by scenes from inside the school building. The human element, even the bustling class of school kids about to go on their summer break, is secondary to the external setting, and the silent landscape through which they all travel reigns superior—words only momentarily breaking the silence.

The other iconic scene of the movie worth singling out as an example of an effective contrast between exterior and interior—or what from a Foucauldian perspective could be seen as the juxtapositioning in a single real space of different spaces and locations that are incompatible with one another (Leach 334)—depicts the local pub of Bundayabba (with the Yelonda/ Silverton Hotel serving as shooting location).[17] Here, the "isolation of the film's [nocturnal] exterior landscape" (Godfrey "National Nightmare" 117) contrasts starkly with the crowded interior of this central drinking hole. Kotcheff packs the location with "a claustrophobic crush of humanity" (Godfrey "National Nightmare" 118) and using a craning shot conveys a sense of "aggressive hospitality" (as uttered by Gary Bond in *Wake in Fright* 25:59). Thirty-three minutes into the movie we see Grant go from polished schoolteacher to emotionally inept brute, soon corrupted by community perversions. Taking on the role of spinner in a heads and tails

[17] For details, see: http://www.australian-cultural-atlas.info/CAA/listing.php?id=144#narrative1

tossing game, Grant's imminent feelings of anxiety are first conveyed through frenzied and dizzying swivelling camera movements and, subsequently, a high angle shot which illustrates the solitary position of the male protagonist as he is framed by throngs of men—loud and boisterous, eager to make a killing.

This, and the two aforementioned scenes can be inserted into a Freudian and also Foucauldian framework. When it comes to the former, the male brutes in *Wake in Fright* are, in a sense, castrated, demasculinised and constantly subjected to feelings of 'Unheimlichkeit'. And when it comes to a Foucauldian reading, Kotcheff's dark external space of the kangaroo hunt, and the internal crammed space of the bar are, in their own ways, claustrophobic places which bear symbolic commonalities with the prison—discussed in *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*). According to Foucault, "[t]he prison, the darkest region in the apparatus of justice, is the place where the power to punish, which no longer dares to manifest itself openly, silently organizes a field of objectivity in which punishment will be able to function openly as treatment" (256).

Image 2: Credit SBS. 19 December 2014:
https://www.sbs.com.au/movies/article/2009/06/12/making-wake-fright-part-two

In Kotcheff's aforementioned scenes, one might similarly argue that the characters whose on-screen ordeals we are voyeuristically privy to in *Wake in Fright* are trapped—mentally and physically. Stuck in a circular narrative and with no possibility to escape, they are similarly kept hostage by and within their own sick minds: numb, dumb and inebriated they fail to break away from their state of captivity. While they give free reign to their sadistic and pleasure-seeking urges, the men in focus are reduced to mindless individuals in an environment that offers no respite or relief. Kotcheff "takes the audience on a ride through the alcoholism, misogyny and violence of outback culture" (McCallum) and the main character barely escapes the living nightmare at the end of a narrative that sees him remain in the outback, no resolution in sight.[18] If Foucault's notion of punishment can indeed serve as effective treatment in the specific case of *Wake in Fright*, it is ultimately up to the characters to treat themselves. The punishment for their actions is their very inability to escape.

[18] As noted by Frost, in *Wake in Fright* "[t]ime and space are bendable" … and "the hero's attempts to leave keep bringing him back to Broken Hill" (722).

The refined Australian is in Weir's screen adaptation of Joan Lindsay's novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* replaced by a group of well-behaved students at an all-girls private boarding school in Mount Macedon, Victoria. Vestiges of colonialism are embedded in this fine portrayal of privileged members of white Australia at the time. Narratively and cinematically, references to colonial powers come across particularly effectively in the first part of the film, as explained by Kathleen Steele (2010). Analysing Lindsay's original book symbolically and likewise providing a Foucauldian reading of the text, Steele argues that the Englishness of the physical surrounds and the college itself suggests establishment (35) and that the obsession with time and tradition we see among Europeans in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* correlates with Foucault's assertion that the "present epoch will perhaps … be the epoch of space" (Foucault qtd. in Steele 43) because "the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than time" (Foucault 22). In book and film alike, the characters are soon removed from the orderly British comfort zone within which they feel a reassuring sense of familiarity—a recreated slice of England and English lifestyle where even nature is restrained and restricted. This colonial insistence on reinventing European 'sophistication' on completely foreign, rugged territory covered in bush, corresponds with Foucault's theory of space seen as "an institutionalized demarcation of structures of power" (Leach 329), and where the possession of land signifies an effort to exercise control over a place which is painstakingly sought to make sense of.

In anticipation of the collective picnic excursion by horse and cart to the Rock on Valentine's Day, 1900, protagonist Miranda exclaims that she "can't wait to get out into the country" (Lindsay 10). This comment is particularly ironic given the fact that the characters are already in the country (see Steele 35). Foucault compares the garden to a carpet "where the world in its entirety achieved symbolic perfection" (Leach 5). In his view, the garden is the smallest fragment of the world and at the same time represents its totality (5). In Lindsay's book, Foucault's garden, whose function is likewise to "create a real space—a space that is other" (Sudradjat 34), is symbolically represented by the grounds around Appleyard College where the female students fit right in—even if it is just a matter of time until the outside world collides with this impossible utopia out of context with neighbouring native reality. The aforementioned initial scene that will set in motion the action that becomes the story about *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and invite the uncanny into the narrative, corresponds with Ross Gibson's comparison of landscapes and his definition of history as a "an arbitrary system of meaning." He writes:

> To white sensibility most of Australia is empty space, devoid of inhabitants, architecture, artefacts. It hasn't been incorporated into the symbolic order, except as a signifier of emptiness, a cultural tabula rasa, a sublime structuring void louring over all Australian culture. Compare Terra Australis with England's green and pleasant(!) land. Every Old World hectare has been ridden over, written over, inscribed into an elaborate, all-engrossing national culture. (47)

In *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, European fear of the unknown is applied in a colonial context and both book and film challenge the idea of Terra Nullius as a space uninhabited and readily obtainable by British settlers. In the very first chapter of Lindsay's novel the students (all but one), two female tutors (Miss McCraw and Mademoiselle de Poitiers), and driver Mr Hussey embark on the drive to Mount Macedon briefly described earlier. As the horses pulling the carriage make their way through neighbouring Woodend, the preliminary admonishment by College Principal Mrs Appleyard that "the Rock is extremely dangerous. You are therefore forbidden any tomboy foolishness in the matter of exploration, even on the lower slopes" (Lindsay 13) leaves us with a sense of foreboding and Miss McCraw, in turn, will soon also

remind us of the overwhelming power of nature, and of the relative insignificance of British history compared to the imposing age of Mount Macedon and Hanging Rock:

> Only a million years ago. Quite a recent eruption really. The rocks all round – Mount Macedon itself – must be all of 350 million years old. Siliceous lava, forced up from deep down below. Soda trachytes extruded in a highly viscous state, building the steep sided mamelons we see in Hanging Rock. And quite young geologically speaking. Barely a million years. (Weir)

The college left in dust, the short drive to the Rock is one of travel through time and space. As the group leaves familiar territory behind and enters the unknown, the civilised European garden is but a mere memory and the wild landscape of the Australian bush takes over. With that the illusory power of colonial order and authoritarian rule fade away and in the passing over into a new realm, time and place, the Gothic and uncanny surreptitiously shape the destiny of the characters. Already mid-way through book and film the status of the college principal has been undermined as the school is haunted by a tragedy that forever ruins its reputation. With an evocative soundtrack by George Zamfir, the haunting sound of the pan flute leaves a melancholic impression in a visual narrative that opens with the image of the painting *At the Hanging Rock*, by William Ford (1875), whereby it seamlessly transitions into Weir's cinematographic representation of 'The Rock'. The initial images of a peaceful, almost pastoral idyll contrast starkly with the subsequent representation of the rock as all the more ominous and eery, verging on the uncanny as harmony and a sense of bliss on a sunny day of picnic to this volcanic mamelon collides with chaos. The monolith holds three girls captive as they climb the outcrop; two of them never to be seen again. It appears they have been taken hostage by this bewildering and powerful jagged geological formation that seduces visitors and plays with their imagination.

Indeed, the uncanny permeates the mystical narrative of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Joan Lindsay would pass away without ever fully revealing to what extent her story might have been based on real events. And Weir himself, who once said "[i]t really is a story that captures our country" (McCulloch 157) experienced feelings of unease as he read the text that inspired, and perhaps also haunted, him; feelings "directly linked to something which doesn't have all the answers supplied" (*Picnic at Hanging Rock*: Director's Cut). The ghostly presence of another or something other in the story takes on mythical connotations, the prehistoric outcrops of Hanging Rock commonly known as a sacred place for Aboriginal people, a place they themselves, however, are wary of. Coincidentally, Warwick Thornton, himself of Aboriginal background and left impressed by *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, once said, matter-of-factly, that "the film spoke volumes about whitefella misunderstanding of our country and their place within it and I guess that was its intention" (Thornton). This statement again reveals the cultural divide between England and the vast landmass encountered in the Antipodes in colonial times, as well as the frustrated efforts by white settlers to subjugate territory that was too wild and free to be easily fitted into a European mould. Johnny Milner importantly refers to *Picnic* as a seminal landscape-Gothic film (see 96), where the represented landscape is "active, observing, waiting" (97) and he notes that "the soundtrack plays an important role in highlighting the landscape's status as unstable terrain" (96).

Picnic at Hanging Rock seems to suggest that European settlers, who literally and also metaphorically journeyed on the at once utopic and heterotopic placeless place of the ship, fluidly making their way to Australia, never quite managed to tame the foreign landscape. On the contrary, the wild, open space that apparently belonged to no one, or the *terra nullius* (a

flawed term) that they encountered as they first set foot on the continent, kept controlling the coloniser rather than the other way around. This is both the case in Lindsay's narrative and, to a certain extent, similarly reflective of off-screen reality. In Weir's screen adaptation, the landscape breaks free from the pictorial mould within which Ford sought to insert it. An ancient territory that had long been left to breathe without human interference, it had been met with a mix of awe and apprehension on the part of the Aboriginal people living in the area.[19] Under the later influence of colonising forces, also this part of Australia was subjugated (a Victoria named after a monarch wanting to leave a mark on the land for times eternal). Nevertheless, that has not been the case with Mount Macedon and Hanging Rock, specifically; a place where time stands still and where visitors then and now are under its spell—for better or worse. Peter Pierce explains:

> Both novel and film of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* want the human dimension of the lost child story to be reduced to a puzzle without answer, to the scrabbling of people across a vast, animate, indecipherable landscape, or their disappearance into it. And yet in doing so, Lindsay and Weir have perhaps returned the story of lost children that they tell and retell to its symbolic origins: to the anxious suspicion that Europeans do not belong in this country; that therefore they should go back to England, or escape into another time, or simply vanish. And in vanishing, whatever else they have intended or accomplished, or been compelled to do, these lost children have forever escaped from childhood. (164)

If *Wake in Fright* is unsettling in its focus on men devoid of emotions, sucked into a vortex of self-destruction and abuse of the surrounding land and its animals, in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* the horror element in a story told in an unnervingly slow yet steadfast manner, is encapsulated within a both alluring and fearful landscape—a space neither reliable nor identifiable as it shifts constantly, never constant or predictable. In the third film analysed in this article, *Samson and Delilah*, winner of a Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 2009, Thornton delivers a stark and convincing portrayal of two individuals not lost in their natural environment but, rather, acutely misplaced within the artificial, man-made urban space where they search for a new life in the hope that it will lead to prosperous new beginnings. In this respect his film differs from the previous two in that it highlights the Aboriginal deep connection with the land, a place that was never no man's land to them but, rather, a place to learn from and engage in dialogue with. Set in the Northern Territory, the film reflects on the legacy of colonial trauma. The character focus is on two Aboriginal youths momentarily rejected by their local community even if they enjoy a close, almost spiritual, connection with the land and the region in which they live. Petrol-sniffing Samson, his name seemingly indicative of heroic acts to follow, spends his days ignored by his peers, a life where every day is one long period of nothingness; hours spent existing but not being seen. Delilah, in turn, fulfils the mission of taking care of her grandmother or 'Nana'—an Aboriginal elder steeped in indigenous traditions and a skilful artist even if she enjoys little monetary reward for her work. When the elderly woman passes away, Delilah is held accountable and accused by the village elders for not looking out for her closest surviving

[19] With specific reference to Hanging Rock and Mt Macedon, the prehistoric outcrop is said to have had an imposing impact also on the Wurundjeri tribe dwelling in the area pre-colonisation. As Janelle McCulloch explains, "[t]he monolith was on Wurundjeri land but it touched the borders of these tribal territories, and the Wurundjeri exercised a custodial responsibility on behalf of the surrounding tribes. They all used the lower slopes for tribal and inter-tribal gatherings, trade talks and initiations. But the top of the rock was said to be haunted by evil spirits. And the Wurundjeri, like most of Australia's Aboriginal peoples, preferred to keep their distance from the dead" (xvi).

relative. The narrative soon transports the viewer away from rural Australia to the dusty urban environment of Alice Springs where instead of finding a new sense of purpose the protagonists end up lost and, literally speaking, off the beaten path.

Image 3: Hanging Rock or Mount Diogenes. The Macedon Ranges. Photography ©Jytte Holmqvist: 1 January, 2019

As was the case with *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, also *Samson and Delilah* emphasises the pull of the land and the deep spirituality of rural Australia but this time the narrative perspective is that of the indigenous people themselves. At ease in their native environment, despite the communal judgment that Samson and Delilah face on their final return home, their misplacement happens within city limits—with Alice Springs portrayed as a soulless place of degradation and lost hope. Their urban struggles strengthen the bond between the two, with Delilah, after it is suggested that she has been exposed to physical abuse,[20] finding the strength to rescue Samson and bring him back to 'outback safety.' "An earth mother in the making" (Ide), she brings him out of their urban entrapment—their life in the city a temporary choice, not "an unchanging reality" (Wood) —and back to the scorched land of the Northern Territory, which provides the space they need to commence anew.

Image 4: Making of *Samson and Delilah*: Credit: http://samsonanddelilah.com.au/

[20] Therese Davis writes: "There [within city limits], the rhythms of life spiral into repeated cycles of violence and deprivation: homelessness, hunger, physical and verbal abuse, and, for Delilah, rape."

Met with favourable criticism at the Zurich film festival and "stunning success in Europe" (666), *Samson and Delilah* left viewers inspired by its ultimate message of hope. Oliver Haag writes:

> The film … shows that the protagonists have not been crushed by drugs and violence but come out as survivors–survivors of a world that is partly a legacy of white colonialism. Yet, in many respects, the film is not primarily about social problems (as part of this legacy) but rather about intergenerational conflicts, agency, friendship and hope for a young generation. The survival of the self-determined couple stands in the film's centre, in which white people do not play a pivotal role. (668)

Despite its heavy subject matter, at the core of *Samson and Delilah* is ultimately a message of hope and the Australian Outback offers some sense of solace in the final scenes; a place no longer as harsh as it was initially portrayed. In focus is not so much societal concerns even if this film about intergenerational conflict can readily be analysed from a trauma studies perspective. Rather, the connection with the land is at the heart of a story that concerns itself with native people in native territory.

While in the context of urban Australia, Samson and Delilah's stay in the "white town" shows the viewer "the compounding traumatising effects of racism and exclusion" (Ryan-Fazileau 4), the rural landscape becomes a home to return to, not a place that pushes them away—this in stark contrast to both *Wake in Fright* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* where it appears the landscape rejects the settlers and refuses to be colonised. The European becomes an "outsider, unable to truly comprehend the Australian environment and consequently in peril" (Haynes qtd. in Frost 718). The windswept Outback in *Wake in Fright* remains untamed at the end of a narrative that sees the characters unable to break free from their own journey into self-destruction and whose lingering trauma affects them on a both personal and communal level. Weir, in turn, leaves us with a story with an open ending, questions left unanswered, and the secret of the Rock left intact.

5. Concluding remarks

With this in mind and on final reflection, Ricoeur's psychoanalytical appropriation of Freud's initial concept of the uncanny as a feeling of "not being in one's place, of not feeling at home" (149), be it within a territory that refuses to be subdued or in the artificial urban space, lends itself well to a comparison of the three films explored in this article. The gothic takes over and interferes with the settler mentality that seeks to dominate a land that is either too wild, too mythical or too spiritual to be dominated. A character in its own right, the landscape in all three films reigns superior at the end of a story where the individual in *Wake in Fright* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* becomes a pawn in nature's game rather than the other way around. Only in *Samson and Delilah* is the balance between the land and those dwelling on it finally restored.

Image 5: Photo credit Jason Roberts, Alamy. Published in *The Guardian*, 24 July 2020.

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