MARIA TERESA SAVIO HOOKE AND SALMAN AKHTAR (eds.)

**The Geography of Meanings: Psychoanalytic perspectives on place, space, land, and dislocation.**


Maurice Whelan

The editorial task of collecting the writings of eight people and presenting them as a readable whole is a daunting one. Sometimes the end result reads as if the theme has been stated and each contributor heads off in their own direction. We also get the collections where the writers go inwards as if they are heading towards the centre of the earth—we read a dense, repetitive tome. A successful format, and one admirably achieved in this volume, consists in the writers circling the central issue, putting their individual stamp on the topic, wandering into unexpected areas and returning to weave their thoughts into the fabric of the editors’ direction.

Apart from valuable pieces by both editors, Maria Teresa Savio Hooke and Salman Akhtar, and a foreword by Paul Williams, there are eight contributors: Thomas Wolman, Kate Grenville, Bain Attwood, Eve Steel, Craig San Roque, Stuart W. Twemlow, Nicholas A. Twemlow and Jim Telfer.

Each human being comes to life from the body of his/her mother. Every person and every group of people depend for their subsistence on the body of the earth, mother earth. ‘Look after the land; they’re not making any more of it,’ wrote an Irish emigrant to his friend back home. This concern with the land and how we need it and what we owe to it, permeates these pages. In 1788 when white people came to a land that is now called Australia, a great fracture occurred: the spiritual connection with the land was broken and those people who had walked it and lived on it and cared for it were deemed not to exist at all. *Terra Nullius*. Empty. Nothing.
Around this core issue the various writers roam and think and speak to us. The implications of denial are explored and we are offered the instruments with which we can think about the problems that follow from dispossessing a people, denying their ownership, dismissing their culture, being blind to their spirituality. The history of this meeting of different peoples is examined in these pages, including the point that many early settlers were deprived people (from Scotland and Ireland) themselves driven out from their homeland, deprived of the necessities of life, desperate to survive and with little time to stop and think that they were doing to the ‘natives’ what had been done to them.

There is a wealth of thinking that has been employed in the making of this book. Apart from the richness of the content the standard of writing is very high making the reading of it a rewarding experience. A volume like this is best read as one might read a collection of poems, one at a time. Listen to each writer as a distinctive voice. Allow their thoughts and their particular style to permeate your consciousness. You will be taken on many tours and offered new perspectives on the land and its people, past and present.

In times when we are all acutely aware of the effect we have on mother earth, and climate change is the great challenge of the moment, and with a government strong enough to offer an apology to the dispossessed people of this continent, this book is deserving of a wide readership.

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