Dialectics of Space and Place in the Australian Novels, *Indelible Ink* and *Five Bells*

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Abstract

Through the lens of spatial studies expounded in human geography, this paper aims to investigate the dynamics of space and place in the metropolitan context of two twentieth-century novels set in contemporary Sydney titled *Indelible Ink* (2010) by Fiona McGregor and *Five Bells* (2011) by Gail Jones. The characters' interactions with city spaces and places will be studied to examine the effects of spatial experience on their lives. Inter-related notions of sense of place, place identity, and topophilia are analyzed in the light of theories expounded by thinkers including Yi-Fu Tuan and John Agnew. This is complemented by an examination of the impacts of landmarks as iconic public spaces on the characters employing Christophe Den Tandt's ideas regarding the urban sublime. One of the conclusions the paper reaches is that characters of both novels fail to establish or maintain stable bonds with places of their dwelling or city spaces, as a result of which, their sense of place and their inner peace and security are disturbed. When place identity is undermined, they suffer from a sense of dislocatedness and placelessness.

Keywords

1. Introduction

Life unfolds in space, and human beings would not be able to define their lives outside of a certain spatial modality. Man lives in place, associates others with it, and dies in it. Edward Casey states that "Nothing we do is unplaced" (1997: 9). Comprehension of spatial poetics and space-place dynamics, particularly within the grand stage of the metropolis, enhances the understanding of human identity. To this aim, this paper analyzes two novels concerned with contemporary metropolitan life in Sydney. Ever since urbanization gained momentum in the nineteenth century, numerous works of literature have depicted cities not only as backdrops for the stories, but as active agents in the making of characters' identity. The continued fascination with urban life can be easily recognized in many contemporary novels including *Indelible Ink* (2010) by Fiona McGregor (b. 1965), and *Five Bells* (2011) by Gail Jones (b. 1955).

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Fiona McGregor is an Australian writer, essayist, and performance artist who has gained increasing acclaim for her boldness in addressing sub-cultural issues in her novels. McGregor's critical reception in literary circles grew internationally when her latest novel *Indelible Ink* was shortlisted for several awards winning the Age Book of the Year Award in 2011. The author has been applauded by critics including Jennifer Hamilton who praises McGregor's *Indelible Ink* for being "the richest and most complete evocation of Sydney" that presents "an exhaustive cataloguing of the city in all its guises" (6). Hamilton further reveres the narratiove as a masterpiece for the encompassing scope of the peregrations of the novel's protagonist meandering through the metropolis. Such qualities make the narrative "an intensely contemporary novel, exploring the current urban anxieties and feelings of helplessness associated with environmental decline" (10).

The novel traces the life of a family in Sydney with the central character called Marie King who is a fifty-nine-year-old divorcee and mother of three children. She used to lead an affluent life in the suburbs, but is now faced with financial limitations and debts. Consequently, she has to sell the family house and bid farewell to the garden she cherishes dearly. Confused and lost, she starts to explore new sites in the city with no definite destination in mind. When she comes to a tattooist's palror, she whimsically decides to get a tattoo. However, after the first flower design is engraved on her skin, she continues getting more and more floral tattoos until her body resembles a canvas with a garden painted all around it. Such experiences lead her to a whole new path and reconsiderations of steadfast definitions in her mind regarding the meaning of family, womanhood and life. As she discovers other parts of the metropolis which are in sharp contrast with her former environment, she undergoes a profound identity transformation.

Gail Jones is another acclaimed Australian novelist, short-story writer, critic and a member of the academia at Western Sydney University. Jones has been internationally recognised and nominated for several literary awards. She has won the Nita Kibble Literary Award in 2012 for *Five Bells*. Jones is widely known and praised for her precise, incisive reflections on the contemporary Australian way of life depicted through the lives of her characters. Her fascination with the city's vitality and how its geography shapes one's consciousness are best reflected in *Five Bells*. Mirroring Guy Debord's concepts, the narrative illustrates how the false reality "mediated by a convergence of mass media, advertising and popular culture, is given physical form by the environment of the modern city" (Bradley). Set in the present day Sydney, this novel follows, over the course of one Saturday, the story of four characters that converge at Circular Quay, home to the iconic Opera House and the Sydney Harbor Bridge. The narrative demonstrates particular interest in the city and urban spaces as represented through the characters' minds. Jones simultaneously portrays the present spatial experiences the characters undergo as they explore the Quay, and delves into their past memories of lives filled with grief and loss.

Employing spatial studies, this paper attempts to investigate the nature of the metropolitan characters' perception and experience of urban spaces by addressing questions such as how characters interact with the city, or how place identity and sense of place affect the characters' lives. Equally significant to the study is an investigation into the concept of Yi-Fu Tuan's (b. 1930) topophilia and how it functions more as a destructive rather than a constructive emotional bond with space. Finally, the paper addresses the issue of how encountering iconic landmarks creates the experience of urban sublime. Insightful concepts on this phenomenon developed by Christophe Den Tandt (b. 1959) have been used in comparing the experiences of the urban sublime with the natural sublime to illustrate how both generate overwhelming flows of sensory responses that leave indelible marks on the minds of the beholders.

2. Literature Review

For about half a century, space and spatial considerations have asserted a focal point in theoretical thought reflected in the frequent uses of terms and phrases such as *spatiality* or the *spatial turn*. One of the most outstanding re-considerations of space was put forth by Henry Lefebvre in his seminal book *Production of Space* (1991) (originally published in 1974 in French) where he looks beyond geometric conceptualizations of architects and urbanists to reveal that space is not a static entity to be mathematically metricated; rather, it is a dynamic social product (30). Space, Lefebvre argues, is both a precondition and a production of social interactions (31). The wake of philosophical discourses that followed this renewed interest also brought about more frequent applications of the spatial theories to literary works.

Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space: Style, Landscape, Perception (2008) by David James offers theoretically well-balanced analyses of concepts of space and place. James argues that literary fiction can be seen as "emblematic of socio-geographical issues and forces, or as an adjunctive resource for assessing the way place has been turned into a cultural product," emphasizing that urban space stands as a dialectical point of interest at the forefront of eco-critical discourses (20-21). Also focusing on British literature is Holly Prescott's *Rethinking Urban Space in Contemporary British Writing* (2011). She proposes the multifarious agency of urban space. She develops ways of reading that allow space to emerge as an effective and narrative agent that can deeply determine the human subjects, sometimes against their will.

To date only a few academic articles have been written specifically on the selected novels under study; however, the ones that are most closely related to the present study include the followings. In "Rewriting Redevelopment: The Anti-Proprietorial Tone in Sydney Place-Writing," Jennifer Hamilton focuses on how literature actively produces place, instead of merely describing it. Having selected four contemporary texts set in Sydney, including *Indelible Ink*, she investigates tensions in the proprietorial regime that

governs place in this metropolis and asserts that literature can demonstrate resistance towards corporate place-making strategies by constructing an anti-proprietorial, and decolonial mode of relation to place (1). According to Hamilton, McGregor's narrative incurporates the hypothesis that "the settler-colonial project of invading and dispossessing people whose culture is founded on material land relation, remains a fundamental part of the contemporary cultural obsession with ownership," which unltimately produces a sense of loss and alienation (2). McGregor's work describes the commodification of place as problematic and offers alternative ways of relating to and interacting with place (10).

Applying a feminist approach which focuses on the private and public places, Lyn Jacobs examines the space of the garden in her article and considers the transformative potential of gardens as places of cultivated solace, and as "liminal locations between private and public arenas that permit transgression" (437). Jacob studies the link between the garden in *Indelible Ink* and body design created through tattoos. The article concludes that the novel "charts tensions between ephemeral and indelible experience," where the former is expressed through the transitory materials of plants, skin, inks, and paper (444).

Concentrating on the suburban settings, Belinda Burns employs postfeminist theory to investigate the concept of home, and the possibility of suburban feminine transformation within selected works including McGregor's. Burns argues that McGregor has offered a more realistic depiction of modern domestic life than the retreatist narratives which regard the suburbia as a location with feminie limitations. Her article addresses issues such as whether the characters' transformations lead to a re-imagining of the suburbia devoid of this widely-shared misconception. Burns asserts that the female protagonists, as mothers, are "tethered to their suburban environments" (167). Regadring *Indelibe Ink*, she states that Marie King's metamorphosis is made excrutiatingly difficult due to her "almost spiritual sense of belonging and contentment to the garden she has nurtured for decades, and to her family home" (168). Nevertheless, as Marie finds for herself "a surrogate home" at the tattooist's, Burns concludes that "home is not fixed, but it is something forged, a site of psychic belonging, rather than uncontested blood allegiances" (169).

Focusing on concepts expounded by the Situationalists in *Five Bells*, Robert Dixon contends that the characters are engaged in urban drifting in that they seek out "aesthetic situations and surrender to the tidal undercurrents of history and memory concealed beneath the banal surface of modern capitalism" (6). Dixon regards the characters as psychogeographers (in Debord's term) who "route maps as they allow their memories and passions or chance encounters to affect their passage through Sydney" (7). He emphasizes that Circular Quay is an ideal space for a dérive, since it evokes "a perpetual invitation to the voyage" (8). The writer adds that historically the Quay is both the place of departure for overseas journeys and arrival for newcomers to Australian. Similarly, Jones's characters embark on ferries in this harbor taking trips around the location (9).

Jaroslav Kushnir reads *Five Bells* through the lense of diaspora and transnational identities, and argues that Jones breaks free from the classical pattern in diasporic narratives whioch revolves around a sense of "nostalgia for an irretrievable past" (466). In contrasat, the characters in this novel experience space in a new way that allows for "a stimulus for the transformation of their cultural identities connected with the new land, Australia, and its culture," which consequently transforms it into a "cosmopolitan and transnational, rather than a fixed and unified space" (470). Kushnir asserts that Jone's depiction of Australia as a transnational space reflects alterations in diasporic literature in the twenty-first century. The resistence manifested by the characters towards integration into a new cultural space combined with their rejection of their past lead to cultural and social isolation and despair (471). Elaborating on the concept of the transnation, Kushnir states that the author depicts the cultural identity of her characters as it is constructed by the cosmopolitan compulsion of such a city as Sydney, wherein "gradual transition from the diasporic to the transnational is represented by several characters showing various stages of this self-realization" (477).

3. Methodology

The critical spatial studies originate from interdisciplinary collaborations between human geography, critical social theory, sociology and urban studies. Within this theoretical paradigm, the paper explores the manifestations and implications of the two quintessential concepts in human geography, space and place, and investigates how characters are affected by their spatial positioning. This approach aligns the present work with descriptive and qualitative researches concentrating on characters' interactions with place and their perceptions of spaces of urban agglomeration. The concepts of space and place are undividable as two sides of a coin, and are best comprehended when studied together. Aiming to examine their dynamics in literary contexts, this study owes much to Tuan and John Agnew (b. 1949) who have expounded on the notions of sense of place, place identity, and topophilia pertaining to the core concepts above, and to Den Tandt for his definitions of the urban sublime.

4. Differentiation between the Concepts of *Place* and *Space*

Space and place are inter-dependent and neither can be fully comprehended in singularity. However, space is the more abstract concept which lacks specific emotional connotations. It only comes to life as a meaningful place when human subjects invest it with memories and associations. Place, on the other hand, is a way of being, seeing, perceiving, and understanding the world (Cresswell 2015: 31). The perception of place is configured only through being in that place. It denotes an inextricable active setting with which human subjects may develop profound psychological and emotional bonds. As such, it becomes a subcomponent of one's identity. Tuan proposes that to transform into place, space acquires subjective values endowed upon it by human individuals once

they get familiarized with it. When this bond is created, place promises stability and protection against the openness, and threat of space (1977: 6). He adds that if space is "that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place" (ibid). For Tuan, what differentiates place from space is the connection and familiarity human subjects develop towards it giving it personal values.

The role of place is commonly prioritized since one's identity is established within and with respect to it. "Place is not founded *on* subjectivity, but is rather that *on which* subjectivity is founded" (Malpas 1999: 34). A person does not have a preexistent subject that apprehends certain spatial features of the world; rather, "the structure of subjectivity is given in and through the structure of place" (ibid). Human subjects cannot construct the meaning of a place without first being in that place. As the experiential basis of existence, place is given primacy in the construction of meaning in society on a broader scale.

5. Sense of Place in *Indelible Ink*

Sense of place refers to the emotional connection or interaction that a human subject engages in with an otherwise cold, solid space. Individuals have this sense of place towards their homes, particularly about their childhood home. They are constantly trying to appropriate spaces into places to establish emotional attachment. If such attempts fail, the individual experiences placelessness. *Indelible Ink* demonstrates a fascination with this notion from the opening passages where characters are represented in terms of their relation to the place. The spatial focalization starts at smaller personal spaces and spans slowly outwards to the neighborhood and then further on to the city. The main character, Marie, has a deeply rooted sense of place accumulated through years of life in her current house in the suburbs. That she will soon have to sell the house and move elsewhere creates a sense of dislocatedness that is reflected metaphorically in her state of inebriety and confusion. A vital factor in the development of sense of place is its capacity to provide meaning. After her ex-husband left, taking his stuff with him, the place she knew as home is transformed into space with fragmentary significations or meanings. Consequently, sense of place for her has been undermined, leaving her striving to re-produce a meaningful place, to reterritorialized this space, and to reclaim it.

Marie's case may well represent a larger-scale universal phenomenon. Agnew argues that a commonplace sense of placelessness underlies Western societies in the twenty-first century as local cultures are eroded by forces of globalization which produce homogenized global spaces. He asserts that *placelessness* is replacing *place* in the modern world where the latter is fading away in an increasingly homogeneous standard sameness. Such conformity creates alienation rather than a sense of belonging (2011: 319-320). A similar trend is detectable in the suburbs where the early chapters of *Indelible*

Ink are set. The suburbs are being transformed in shape and social fabrications, which is a potential threat to the ones who cannot adapt themselves and would soon feel out of place. The transformation undermines their constructed identity whose spatial anchorage and point of reference is under threat of being erased, leaving them airborne. Agnew asserts that place, which provides the setting for social rootedness and landscape continuity, often raises nostalgia since it is frequently associated with the past; whereas space is mostly linked to the present and future since it awaits the process of meaning-making. Therefore, place is "nostalgic, regressive or even reactionary, and space is progressive and radical" (2011: 319). In *Indelible Ink*, nostalgia is expressed when conversing about the family house, the garden and how fresh it used to be before the drought, and the old suburbs.

Multiple factors are involved in the production of space and often natural and urban elements combine to do so. This is true about Marie's place which is located at the cove where geographic features add greatly to the meaning the pace holds for her. For instance, she frequently swims in the harbor to alleviate her pain, and thus the water element enhances the meanings she attaches to the place. The view from the shore reflects the combination of urban-natural components "Across the harbor lay the tall buildings of the city, Renzo Piano's acute angle dominant. The reserve was a dry yellow, the sky and sea a dirty grey, and all the yachts in the cove were still" (111). In the excerpt, sickness and deterioration are connoted by the visual imagery conjured through 'dry yellow' and 'dirty grey'. The 'dominant' newly constructed towers designed by Piano with their 'acute' sharp angles are no solace to her eyes either.

5.1. New Streets, New Spatial Experiences

Nearly uprooted, Marie is forced to re-orient herself, and re-map her life. She tries to break free from spatial parochialism by exploring the city to devise new cognitive maps of the urban spaces wherein her new life may unfold. Wandering through the maze of the streets, she finds herself in unknown locations, a condition which adds to her confusion since she lacks the urban literacy to *read* these spaces. Seeking a spatial anchorage, she goes to a restaurant located on the top floor overlooking the city and harbor. Unknowingly, she has sought a panoramic view as such that might enable her to locate her spot on the cognitive city map and find a spatial anchorage to lessen her sense of *placelessness*. Unable to locate a point of spatial reference, she leaves and resumes exploring the streets.

In spatial studies, streets are regarded as assemblages that represent a myriad of discrete things, from immobile ones like buildings and trees to the mobile ones of cars, pedestrians, or even goods on display. The assemblage is dynamic; trees and people grow and die, buildings are constructed and demolished. "It is the flows of life, traffic, goods

and money that give the street its intensity and its sense of place. All places are assemblages" (Dovey16). An important component of the street assemblage is the threshold space continually produced by entrances and doors that function as in-between spaces defining the inside and the outside while belonging to neither. Such liminal spaces either invite or reject visitors depending on the implicit social codes. When Marie chances upon a tattoo parlor, she undergoes *liminoid* experience for a few moments as she distinguishes an implicit sense of exclusion from such places that are socially deemed to be inappropriate for people of her social class. After a moment of pause, she chooses to transgress and trespasses into the place wherein she selects a design and gets a tattoo.

Getting a tattoo in indelible ink on her body represents an initiation into new communities. The fact that even the title of the novel is *Indelible Ink* highlights its significance. When asked about the occasion of the tattoo, she replies, "I don't know. My freedom. I'm free for the first time in forty years" (23). The act generates a change in her reading of the city. On the one hand, the metropolis stops being a source of angst, and streets come alive and terraces offer their sundry colors. On the other hand, the monotone of the suburbs strikes her for the first time as she passes by the buildings in her car staring at "the repetition of bays in dull concrete," wondering to herself "Why did everything had to be the same? Why this preference for neutrality over color?" (24). Since she cannot add colors to the environ, she opts for transforming her skin into a canvas to paint floral tattoo designs on. She has appropriated her body altering it into a symbolic garden from which only death does her part. Her skin has become a spatial palimpsest upon which she is engraving and encoding her new identity that is more compatible with the people she associates with at the second tattoo studio.

5.2. Place Identity

In recent decades, the inter-connectivity of place and identity has received extensive attention in human geography. Place identity refers to "those dimensions of self that define the individual's identity in relation to the physical environment through a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioral tendencies relevant to a specific environment" (Proshansky 1978: 155). Place identity describes the subjective feeling of identification with a place. One of the most significant components of place identity is home, especially so for the metropolitans where it is the ultimate place of intimacy to which they retreat from the overwhelming outside commotion. However, this archetypal image is frequently challenged in novels including *Indelible Ink* where such a notion is revealed to be but an illusion. The safety of home lasts only for fractions of time before it is disturbed by the slightest threats. It becomes the arena where different personal and social forces collide. The characters constantly strive to realize the ideal image – a struggle that generates angst and psychological imbalance.

In *Indelible Ink*, on the one hand, Marie fights to retain control and claim the place; while on the other hand, the economical and communal forces are pushing her out making her feel as an outsider inside her once-owned territory. In this power arena, the subject's identity is at stake. The fatal threat is foreshadowed by recurrent descriptions of the conditions of the garden which is suffering from drought and other problems. For instamnce, the trees in front of Marie's house are dying of a fungus infection that has bared them down to skeletons. In the meanwhile, as she strives to keep the garden fresh, negative emotions towards it start to develop: "Sometimes this place felt like a beast, groaning to be fed and groomed. She resented it" (30). This is the second time such a feeling is revealed directly towards her own space. It intensifies the sense of confinement an individual may feel within her private space. Later, her senses of loss and loneliness are intensified when her bed is likened to a wasteland: "She lay awake in the wasteland of bed" (31).

Eventually, she decides to sell the house and announces this first to her son Clark who has mixed feelings about it. On the hand, he is happy, on another he feels it is tragic: "It would be like cutting off a lifetime's tress of hair, too difficult to maintain, devastating to relinquish. It would be the end of an era" (34). It can be inferred from such passages that the characer's identity transformations are directly steered by the level of attachment, compassion, or resentment she holds towards her place (both the house and the garden). In other words, place identity is a great determiner of her subjectivity. Moreover, her place identity that used to be anchored in that house, has gradually entered a state of volatile flux.

Place is dynamic and expands beyond its mere physical locality to include objects, memories, scents, and changes that have imprinted their effects upon it. It also includes a temporal aspect wherein the history of the locale as well as the personal history of the occupants may be integrated. In *Indelible Ink,* the suburbs have a history of their own existing from before the King family moved in and persisting until after they will move out. Those who occupy the area will try to adjust their place identity in accordance with the paradigm set forth by the suburban codes of accepted lifestyles. The place identity is prevalent to the extent that the ones who accept it get molded by it, and even reinforce it on others, whereas those who would defy it are rejected by the majority and often excluded from the former's communities. In such communities, place functions a priori label of identity. Returning to the narrative, Marie would have most willingly remained a member of this community safeguarding her place identity had it not been for the external forces that push her out. That she continues to tend to her garden until the very last days of her life, represents her most desperate attempts to remain rooted in that place.

As the last resort, Marie decides to establish new spatial ties away from the suburbs, and seeks a new place identity elsewhere. When she explores other parts of the metropolis for the first time after years of suburban confinement, she realizes "how little she had known of the world beyond her territory, how confined she had been. And she felt afraid, and lonely. And excited" (62). Now that she is denied possession over the physical garden and the house, she begins to rebel and transgress the accepted norms of her former social class. She attempts to construct a new identity either by roaming the city seeking to fit into other communities or by changing her body image. In fact, her skin becomes the outward badge of identity upon which she subversively creates and inscribes her new identity. She boldly shows off floral images that have been tattooed all around her body as if it were her new garden. This symbolic garden is the one which can be taken away from her only by death.

5.3. Topophilia

Tuan defines topophilia as "the affective bond between people and place or setting which though diffused as a concept, it is vivid and concrete in terms of personal experience" (Tuan 1974: 4). Pertaining to home, topophilia transforms this place into "a field of care," Tuan maintains. He further asserts that a house is a place due to many reasons: "It provides shelter; its hierarchy of spaces answers social needs; it is a field of care, a repository of memories and dreams" (Tuan 1974: 164). Home is meant to generate compassionate bonds with its inhabitants.

In *Indelible Ink,* the topophilia that has taken form in Marie after so many years and many memories in that place is so overwhelming that "the shift [is] so much more than corporeal" (52); she can hardly sever her soul from the place. When eventually the destructive power of an attachment so deeply rooted surfaces to her, she analogizes the house to an albatross: "her treasure was also her albatross and the impulse to destroy was all bound up with the impulse to preserve. The sadness of losing it contained also relief … As much as I love it here the place has become a burden" (178-183). The realization that she must "adapt or perish" (179) dawns upon her too late when her cancer is beyond treatment. In a similar vein, her passion for horticulture stands for her attempt at getting permanently rooted in that place. Her situation is symbolically mirrored in a beloved banksias tree that unnoticed to everyone was being slowly gnawed away by pestilent fungi. The tree eventually crushes down to the grounded, uprooted. The extract below personifies the tree as an old man perishing:

> Walking back up to the house, she heard the banksia groaning and thought
> as she turned how uncanny it sounded, like a creature crying for help, and
> as she stood there watching, the tree slowly fell. It was a surreal and
> frightening sight, the old man banksia falling towards the harbor with a
> groaning woody shriek, dropping dead before her eyes. It was over quickly.
> Vertical one minute, horizontal the next. (117)

Both the banksia and the garden yielding to the drought reflect her failure to manifest her dream of permanent rootedness – a dream which is forever deferred. Desperate, she resorts to get more tattoos, mostly in floral designs except for a large moth tattooed on her back. The moth, often symbolizing death, also echoes with 'the winged chariot' drawing up nearer. The very last tattoo, left unfinished amid her chemotherapy sessions, is an angophora which to her is the most beautiful tree in Sydney (228). When the house is eventually sold, Marie's fate is sealed. In the final passages, she is described as injecting an overdose of sedatives to herself intended to put her into eternal sleep.

6. Urban Landmarks in *Five Bells*

The city is a construction in space that always offers more to explore than what the senses receive. It is never experienced by itself, but in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it, and "the memory of past experiences," in Kevin Lynch's term (5). Landmarks are significant components in urban experience that also contribute to its *legibility* (Lynch 8). Discernable from certain vantage points, landmarks are easily identifiable and differentiated from their surroundings with their distinctive spatial features. If the city is a text to be read, then landmarks are the highlighted lines in the analogy. They are the focal points of signification agglomeration that require extra effort from the mind to entangle and decipher them if the city is to be legible.

The individual exposed to the urbanscape is not a mere observer of the spectacle but is himself a participant in and a component of it. The individual's perception of the urban phenomenon is not a sustained and complete one; rather, it is fragmentary, partial and mixed with other concerns. The observer's emotional state works as a filter through which he perceives the urbanspace. Therefore, one single urban space produces different mental images for each observer. The mental image functions as a continuous anchor for the lives of dwellers in a particular city, notwithstanding whether they take delight in it or not. The city's legibility is determined by the visual quality and the clarity of the cityspaces. When a city is legible, Lynch argues, "it can be visually grasped as a related pattern of recognizable symbols" (3). In other words, legibility is attained when the city districts, landmarks or pathways are easily recognized and yield a coherent, overall pattern. It is a determining factor empowering metropolitan to cope with the complexities of urban life, without which they experience anxiety or even terror.

Such aspects of life in a metropolis are brilliantly portrayed in *Five Bells* which revolves around the characters' experiences of Sydney's Circular Quay. The opening paragraph reveals how a globally renowned locus, having accumulated symbolic values and collective memories, affects a character's reception: "*Circular Quay:* she loved even the sound of it… she knew from the lilted words it would be a circle like no other, key to a new world…With a trampoline heart she saw the Bridge to her left" (1). The extract depicts Ellie's mental state as she encounters the iconic urbanscape. A legible

environmental image provides a sense of emotional security, whereas a distorted and illegible one disorients and induces fright (Lynch 5). To render this engineering construct with daunting grandeur legible, Ellie associates it with familiar mental images. The Bridge (since it is double and looks both ways) invokes Janus, the mythical two-faced god of bridges (2).

6.1. Encountering the Urban Sublime: Euphoria or Dread

Part of experiencing the iconic landmarks relies on the global representations and the pre-fabricated images of them. Urban landmarks, usually gigantic constructs ostentatiously displaying the combined power of human imagination and technology, produce similar effects as the natural sublimes by triggering an experience of awe accompanied by either euphoria or distress depending on the perceivers' mental state.

In *Five Bells*, the architectural structure of the Bridge is associated with the natural sublime and given supremacy over humans who look like "silhouetted ant forms" climbing its steep bow (2). The Bridge is "stamped against the sky" with its "coherence, the embrace, the span of frozen hard-labor" (ibid). Ellie is dwarfed and awed before the architectural landmark that has attained sublime qualities. Although the sublime is frequently seen as a Romantic flare, the contemporary urban experience induced by such encounters has rejuvenated the concept in spatial studies. The sublime creates an aesthetics experience of the extreme type, "a supernova of sensations" (Roncken 9). The individual experiences the extremity of sensations at either end of the emotional spectrum: the ecstatic at one end and the oppressive at the other. When the complexity or the enormity of the urban sublime is unfathomable to human mind and imagination, it induces fear which subsides and settles within moments (ibid). The sense of awe having subsided, Ellie reverts her attention to the ongoing life around her before another supernova of sensations is aroused by the next sublimated structure, the Sydney Opera House. Perception occurs as she compares it to familiar natural elements; for instance, a white moon with "serious stillness" (3). She also captures it in a photograph as if to aid herself fathom the sublime by freezing, framing, and minimizing it in a snapshot.

While the urban sublime instigated euphoria for Ellie, it induces distress in the second character named James DeMello, the "obstinately unjoyful" one (4). Upon arrival, he occupies himself with visual details like café umbrellas, and arrays of souvenirs to delay the inevitable encounter with 'it' – the iconic Opera House that is looming in the short distance. The instant it assails his vision, he swiftly subverts his gaze onto its miniature replicas sold at stalls in order to distance himself from the sheer power of the sublime. Despite the dread it instills in him, he cannot resist the drag of desire its presence exerts for his recognition and acknowledgement.

Den Tandt argues that that the sublime is generated when "reason produces an idea of infinity that cannot be objectified by understanding and imagination" (127). In this light, urban landmarks, including the architectural, the industrial, and the technological, obtain sublime qualities since they "spark off epiphanies about multitudinous humanity" (127). While emphasizing that the urban sublime can be the object of fascination or terror, Den Tandt, further proposes that it interweaves two strands of discourse: "oceanic metaphors that evoke magnitude and urban-industrial gothic that stirs accents of abject dehumanization" (126). In *Five Bells*, James associates the iconic landmark with marine beasts such as sharks. "Its maws opened to the sky in a perpetual devouring" (4). To him, the darker archetypal collocations of the oceanic are aroused along with an accentuated abject dehumanization.

The reaction to the sublime is determined by the subject's mental state. Regarding James, the dehumanizing power of the phenomenon threatens his selfhood. Although he draws terror-mingled pleasure which makes it irresistible for him to neglect the cityscape and the architectural sublime, it is the deeper level of alienation triggered and intensified by the encounter that will push him eventually towards his final act of suicide. Recalling the wide-open jaws of a shark he had seen long time ago, James superimposes that memory onto the structure that is posing the same "inadmissible, unspeakable threat" (6). "Death was like that," he remonstrates, "shaped in ivory triangles" referring to the triangular chambers of the Opera House (ibid). The abject dehumanization is extended as he postulates "Death was the limp panic of imagining oneself as raw meat. Or even less than that; just a shape to be ravaged, just a drifting, edible nothing in blood-blurry water" (ibid). This representation resonates with Den Tandt's argument that the materiality of the spatial constructs resists abstract representations.

Combined with the cultural-psychological background, spatial constructs become fragments in a profusion of urban stimuli whose full comprehension surpasses the observer's perceptive capacity (128). Building on Den Tandt's conceptualization, Circular Quay with its sublimated buildings stands as a clear example of a representational breakdown generated by an excess of signifiers and stimuli with no available determinate signifieds. In the absence of determinate signifieds James is forced to compensate for this lack by tapping into his subjective store of mental images and metaphors to grasp the power of the sublime and tame the frenzies of speculation exerted by the Opera House and the Bridge. Overwhelmed by the unyielding speculation frenzies, he retreats to a café.

6.2. The Necropolis

James is shackled to his past, tormented by the guilt he feels for a pupil who drowned on a field trip under his supervision. He sees dirt and decay all around, and this subjective inclination prevents him from being actively engaged with the present moment. Consequently, he fails to develop any sense of place, and nowhere is a field of care to him. A stranger to the sense of topophilia, he is instead submerged in topophobia. When

he looks out from the window into the "canyon" of the street below, he sympathizes with the estranged, non-belonging city dwellers, feeling a sense of "camaraderie" with "the desperadoes of the city … the lost and wandering…. The deprived. Country guys like him, maybe, who found this city … way too overwhelming" (28). The sound of sirens denotes an abundance of crimes, accidents, blood, and death. James used to dwell in a small town, then moved to London, and is now in Sydney, but he feels placeless in them all.

In the metropolis, individuals are constantly confronted by the intensification of stimulation produced by rapidly altering images. "The sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions" consume great mental energy (Simmel 410). Every time an individual walks the streets, the city requires him to accommodate to the fast and complex metropolitan rhythm of events. If metropolitans cannot adapt, they would be overwhelmed by the avalanche of stimuli. Amid the urban crowds, "the bodily proximity and narrowness of space makes the mental distance only the more visible," (Simmel 418). James's condition echoes this statement. When James reluctantly steps outside, he feels lost in the madding crowd, and his sense of un-belonging is accentuated by the metropolitan onrush of stimuli: "the ugly mixture of geometric steel, the plate-glass of sparkling skyscrapers, the rude banners of retail," the roar of traffic and the rumble of an airplane in the sky (34-35). The hegemony of uniformity of modern high-rises oppresses him so much that he feels as if the whole central of Sydney is crumbling down on him.

Lack of place identity has disintegrated him. His sense of orientation is dysfunctional and the urban space resembles a maze in which instead of a Minotaur, legions of hunched bodies and beggars besiege him. Such mental associations transform the metropolis into a necropolis filled with death and decay. His quest for "a haven to rest within" (127) is doomed. Inebriated and confused, James buys a random ticket and boards a ferry aimlessly. To avoid the crowd, he goes outside on the back deck where he slips over the railings (semi-intentionally) and drowns. His final place is a no-place under the water.
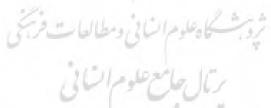
7. Conclusion

Place and the bonds one establishes with it are factors that may not be reduced to the social, the natural, or the cultural in isolation. Place is an entity that binds all these other elements together, or even produces them to a degree. Therefore, spatial trauma could be a devastating force as seen in the cases of the characters studied. While one character perished because of an overwhelming place attachment and topophilia, the other is agonized by topophobia and utter sense of placelessness which eventually led him to his doom. As demonstrated in *Five Bells*, an individual who fails to establish a sense of belonging is branded by perpetual diaspora and dislocatedness. On the other hand, *Indelible Ink* illustrated how a character's attachment brings her inescapable immobility.

Even though the character started to explore new districts in the city, she always returned to her place; that is, her home and its garden. Her attempts to grow a new mobile garden on her own body by tattooing floral patterns proved to be fruitless and even deleterious. Although a certain amount of place attachment is necessary for the establishment of the characters' identity, excessive emotional attachment proves ruinous.

Under the present conditions of life in the metropolises, home in its abstract conceptualization could be threatened by a myriad of external forces, and if the individual is too deeply attached to the place, its loss would instigate a personal uprooting. If the characters had been able to practice 'the art of letting go' (releasing a place or the past), they might have survived the impacts of their life events. Yet, they both sought ultimate placelessness in death. The main characters in both novels foster a feeling of desiderium that leaves a permanent void in their hearts. Marie's profound anxiety over the lost home and garden can be seen as a root cause of her fatal cancer. Similarly, James is consumed by guilt combined with a sense of loss. He is constantly thinking of the places and events of the past – never able to let go. Perpetually reliving in the past, he suffers from non-attachment to present places.

The paper also concludes that as demonstrated by *Five Bells* (and to a lesser degree *Indelible Ink*), in confrontations with the urban sublime, each of the characters perceived it through his or her subjective mental lens. They transposed their prefabricated mental images onto urban spaces. The contradictory impressions produced by the same space demonstrated that observers' minds determine the quality of their experiences in a metropolis. It was also seen that the overflow of perceptive stimuli can accentuate the characters' fragmentation. Briefly put, mind is where the ultimate production of space takes place.

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