On The Western Line:
The Impact of Central Queensland’s
Heritage Industry on Regional Identity

By

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the ways in which regional communities appropriate their historic icons of the past, integrating these ‘markers of identity’ into the wider socio-economic context. It notes how nostalgia and the collective memory, together with a strong sense of place are reflected in celebrations which honour national and local historic characters and events, and observes the ways in which isolated rural towns reconcile their new tourist image with their pioneering past. It will be argued that the concepts of nation and national identity are increasingly being challenged by the need for a social and cultural identity which belongs to the local community. A range of diverse cultures and heritage sites has been studied in order to analyse the dilemmas facing local, outback, and Indigenous communities in reconstructing a regional identity today.

The Heritage Trail can be seen as a symbolic rite of passage, and this thesis is indeed a personal journey divided into two major components. First, it takes the form of documentary, a visual component consisting of three video films which capture the heritage tourism product along the Tropic of Capricorn. On the Western Line documents the author’s journey on ‘The Spirit of the Outback’ from the central coast to Winton and Kynuna, the home of Waltzing Matilda in far western Queensland. Two further historical productions The Legend of King O’Malley and The Triumph and Tragedy of Tommy Wills record local and national narratives, which both deliver a controversial picture of federation politics and pioneer settlement, colonial sport and frontier war, each focusing on a regional perspective within a wider national vision.

The second, written component reflects upon the role of the documentary maker in recording a social history of these diverse communities. It examines the auteur/director’s own perceptions of regional identity, and the oppositions and ambiguities of reality are juxtaposed with legend and myth. This essay explores the different layers of meaning inscribed within central images of cultural tourism such as: the Stockman’s Hall of Fame at Longreach; the Australian Worker’s Heritage Centre at Barcaldine; local museums at Mt. Morgan and Emu Park; the Dreamtime Cultural Centre; and the South Sea Islanders’ Sugar Trail. Following Bennett and Bourdieu’s work on museum visitors, the author’s preliminary survey of tourists seeking Capricornia’s increasingly popular heritage destinations is discussed. In conclusion, it can be argued that the rapid growth of Central Queensland’s cultural centres, local museums, and bicentennially funded outdoor art and ‘unusual’ monuments, has produced new sources of income in a community desperately seeking to survive. The cultural tourist has become a major producer of the heritage industry which impacts strongly on regional identity.
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DECLARATION

I certify that all of this thesis is an account of the research conducted by me, except where other sources are fully acknowledged by footnotes or referencing, and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any University.

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