

KOALAS

There are no koalas in Canada. Other species, breeding and hungry through the centuries, inhabit this vast area so pink upon the map. Other species lend colour to different places in the Canadian geography, provide it with myth and markings, with ecological and literary problems, with an identity of sorts. Other species, but no koalas.

A country is that which it contains, dead or alive, present or past. Can it not also be defined by that which it *does not* contain, by that which is absent from its boundaries? An island is an absence of the water around it, a lake an absence of land. Could Canada not be defined as an absence of koalas?

This oversized country breathlessly stretching from one ocean to the other is everything its inhabitants have recorded since the first tribe slept on its newly-trodden soil; it is also everything they never saw here. This then is Canada: an absence of eucalyptus trees, of dagger-shaped leaves, of the Southern Cross glittering through an opening between branches, of a wind of red ashes, of the medicinal smell of dusk, of the silent scuttling of koalas among the boughs.