"THE DARKNESS AT OUR BACK DOOR": MAPS OF IDENTITY IN THE NOVELS OF DAVID MALOUF AND CHRISTOPHER KOCH

by

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The intention of this thesis is to examine the novels of David Malouf and Christopher Koch from both a post-colonial and a psychoanalytic perspective. My argument is that the sense of displacement and preoccupation with "other" worlds which characterise these novels reflect a national tradition which positions Australian life at the "edge" of a culturally and politically dominant "centre." Such a perspective is not so much geographical as discursive; Australia was first defined, after all, through a European discourse which assumed its own centrality.

Any discourse is codified in language, and in this respect post-colonial themes are related to wider, less politically-specific concerns of alienation and quest for identity. These concerns are readable in Lacanian terms, whereby human desire for a sense of identifying "unity" is recognised as being inextricable from the function of language. Language is the vehicle by which we gain access to the world of the "real," yet because of its role as mediator and its arbitrary and relational nature, language also stands between the speaking subject and the transcendental fulfilment of desire.

In an Australian context, then, environment and society carry the burden of "otherness" which is imposed by a Eurocentric discourse; and in a broader context, a preoccupation with "otherness" marks the lack or absence which is intrinsic to all social discourse. The novels of both Christopher Koch and David Malouf describe a world of fragmentation and shifting signification, but offer this world view in different lights. In Koch's novels, shifts in the construction of identity, both personal and national, only illuminate an irresolvable tension between the desire for unity and the actuality of division. In Malouf's novels, on the other hand, a world view of fragmentation and ambiguity opens human consciousness to imaginative possibility: life is at the "edge."

STATEMENTS

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text or notes.

I am willing to make this thesis available for loan and photocopying if it is accepted for the award of the degree.

Amanda Nettelbeck

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A modified version of Chapter 2 has been published in *Kunapipi* 11. 3 (1989) as "'The Mapping of a World': Discourses of Power in David Malouf's *Fly Away Peter*." A modified version of Chapter 3 has been published in *SPAN* 29 (October 1989) as "The Pattern of Power: Discursive Conflicts in David Malouf's *Child's Play*."

ABBREVIATIONS

Works of Christopher Koch and David Malouf

A David Malouf, *Antipodes*
AIL David Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*
ASW Christopher Koch, *Across the Sea Wall*
BI Christopher Koch, *The Boys in the Island*
CP David Malouf, *Child's Play*
CTG Christopher Koch, *Crossing the Gap*
ES David Malouf, *12 Edmondstone Street*
FAP David Malouf, *Fly Away Peter*
GW David Malouf, *The Great World*
J David Malouf, *Johnno*
HHA David Malouf, *Harland's Half Acre*
TD Christopher Koch, *The Doubleman*
TP David Malouf, *The Prowler*
YLD Christopher Koch, *The Year of Living Dangerously*

Reference Texts

AF Henry Handel Richardson, *Australia Felix*
E Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*
FMH Peter Carey, *The Fat Man in History*
TTI Randolph Stow, *To the Islands*
TWH Henry Handel Richarson, *The Way Home*
V Patrick White, *Voss*

Full references to these texts will be found in the Select Bibliography.

FOREWORD

It has been suggested that post-colonial writing and theory are, in their resistance to institutionalised norms of form and content, involved in an overlapping relationship with postmodernism.[1] This is not to suggest that one is merely a localised instance of the other. The focus of this thesis is on post-colonialism and I do not intend to conduct an extended analysis of postmodernism. However it is useful to note that postmodernism, as Ihab Hassan claims in his book *The Postmodern Turn,* acts to examine and to "reconceive" the "powerful cultural assumptions" of any (Western) society (84). The post-colonial project, on the other hand — formed as it is within a specific social and historical context — works within the political framework it challenges. Nevertheless, there is a nexus between the two movements in their deconstructive roles, in their mutual concern with what Gareth Griffiths calls "the accidental, the apparently contingent, the less (or more) than logical, the fact refusing to be contained, the fortuitous occurence, the 'random' event, the unplaceable object (in time or in space)" ("Being there, being There," 133). Such concerns take the focus away from what has always been, in Australia's last two centuries of colonisation, a search for national definition. Within a truly *post* - colonial mentality, the preoccupation with defining a "distinctly Australian experience" should be not central but comfortably invisible. To use John Matthews' phrase: "One does not *make* a clearing. One *is* a clearing" ("Lifeboats for the Titanic," 36).

In Australian writing, however, the shift from colonial self-consciousness to post-colonial unself-consciousness has not been an altogether clear one. Unlike some other post-colonial nationalities, who have been able to throw off the weight of imperial influence to reassert the validity of their own culture, political system and language, post-colonial Australia — and it is important here to recognise that this term is itself politically biased, referring as it does to the politically, socially and economically dominant group of *white* Australians who are both victims and perpetrators of different acts of marginalisation — has no pre-existing systems to reassert. Rather, it has a culture, a political framework and, most importantly, a language which are grounded in a European ancestry, in imperialist imports. The colonial concerns with "identity" and "place," with

their suggestions of displacement and of loss, therefore spill over into post-colonial concerns.

Nevertheless, one thing that has developed from post-colonial patterns of thought is the postmodern acknowledgement that, no matter how important a sense of nationalism may be to the people it serves, it cannot "exist" as an entity in and of itself. Rather, it occupies a cultural position within a chain of cultural positions, and therefore only has status through a relationship of relativity. In the opening paragraphs of his book *Inventing Australia,* Richard White writes:

> There is no real Australia waiting to be uncovered. A national identity is an invention . . . When we look at ideas about national identity, we need to ask, not whether they are true or false, but what their function is, whose construction they are, and whose interests they serve. (viii)

White's remark suggests another reason, besides inter-cultural relativity, as to why national identity is questionable as a stable concept. The very notion of "national identity" presupposes an equitable and unshifting society to which it can apply. But as White continues: "Every powerful economic interest likes to justify itself by claiming to represent the 'national interest' and identifying itself with a 'national identity.' In this view of the world there is no room for class conflicts, and sexual and racial exploitations are also obscured" (ix). For Australian nationalism in particular, which was forged upon a frontier mythology of white masculine power, the idea of 'national identity' becomes all the more problematic.

The colonial question of determining "identity" then becomes, in a post-colonial context, the question of *identifying* the discourse(s) through which we operate. Within Australia's culture the discursive hierarchy determining social and political power is quite complex. On the one hand, post-colonial Australia is involved in an inter-discursive struggle to de-polarise the relationship between the sociopolitical "centre" and its relegated "margin," to destabilise the very notions of centrality and marginality that have so far maintained Australia's position of subordination to Europe. Yet on the other hand, within the national discourse which emerges from this struggle, other centre/margin relationships have developed regarding gender and race.

Since any discourse is codified in language, language can be recognised as not only a highly political construction but also, in that political dimension, an insidiously pervasive one. As Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak writes, in her book *In Other Worlds* :

> The problem of human discourse is generally seen as articulating itself in the play of, in terms of, three shifting 'concepts': language, world, and consciousness. We know of no world that is not organized as a language, we operate with no other consciousness but one structured as a language — languages that we cannot possess, for we are operated by those languages as well. The category of language, then, embraces the categories of world and consciousness even as it is determined by them. (77-78)

Language, then, emerges as the inventive force which both constructs and expresses world and consciousness. As a cultural construction, however, language — like the discourses it vocalises — is necessarily arbitrary and relational in nature. Every signifier (or term) has meaning, not through any given link to the world of the "real," but according to its position within a chain of signifiers. Herein lies the paradox of language as a social tool: as the organiser and expresser of world and consciousness, language speaks for the only "real" we can access; because of its definition as a system of negative relationships between terms, however, language denies access to the "real" as a verifiable concept.

As a legacy of discursive limitation, the awareness of alienation and loss that marks life at the "edge" becomes not just an Australian or even a colonial dilemma, but the concern of every culture that functions through language. Yet it is more understandable that the perceived "margin" should examine the terms of its marginality than that the perceived "centre" should question its centrality; as Malouf says, "the people at the centre just think of the centre, they don't think of there being an edge out there" (Copeland interview, 435). The questions of alienation and lack, which are more readily submerged within a "naturalised" or dominant discourse, therefore become the vocalised concerns of colonial discourse. It becomes the responsibility of post-colonial discourse, then, to redress the imbalance of perception that is implicit in this inheritance. A post-colonial discourse should function, not to reverse the hierarchy of discursive power, but to question the authority of any discourse, to point out the relative nature of all meaning.

In theme and in form, the novels of David Malouf reflect this concern. Language plays an important role in each of his novels as the means by which, both magically and

ritualistically, the world is created. But in Australia, says Malouf, this process of creation has been complicated by the fact that we inherited a language which

> has not devolved out of a long cultural history in this particular place — as is true of Italy or England. What we had was a highly developed language and names for everything, and a reality in front of us that did not fit . . . It does throw us back on a very keen sense of loss . . . If there is anything like the fall that I believe in, it is that fall which is peculiar to Australia in which the landscape and the language are not one. (Kavanagh interview, 252)

Yet that "fall," which Malouf interprets as a fall into a linguistic "gap," can also be interpreted as a fall into language itself as a systematised declaration of lack. The Lacanian notion of a "fall" from the Imaginary state of unity between self and world to the Symbolic Order of separation through language offers a useful parallel here. Once the pre-lingual infant becomes a speaking subject within the system of language, he or she can never throw off an awareness of division, with its attached nostalgia for that "pre-lapsarian" unity. Nonetheless, an awareness of division is necessary to any world view, for without the acknowledgement of difference and distinction there is no possibility for a structuring of the world through language.

In this respect, the very absences of meaning which are intrinsic to language, and to any world view it organises, take on the paradoxical role of making available a multiplicity of meanings. In Malouf's novels, there is no verifiable "history" of the world, but rather a complexity of private histories (or narratives) which each "write" a unique world. And it is in the spaces left undefined — the "darkness at our back door" (J, 53), the world of the unknown which is located at the "edge" of the known — that language can be "used in some way magically. It is our chance to get past that actual fall to some kind of personal reconciliation between language and what is made" (Kavanagh interview, 252).

The novels of Christopher Koch, too, affirm fragmentation and change as a world view. And like Malouf's novels, Koch's novels use the metaphor of Australian separation to express the more subjective process of what one critic calls "seeking the self through the definition of otherness" (Claremont, 26). Each novel plays upon the myth of the Antipodes (all of Koch's Australian protagonists are acutely conscious of being at the "edge") as a signifier for those unlocatable and unstable dichotomies of human existence: good and evil, innocence and experience, the need to escape and the urge to return,

dreams of the past and disappointments of the present. These dichotomies, however, do not remain fixed as "mappable" dualities, but shift and sometimes merge together.

The definable "identity" which Koch's characters sense as a lack within Australian existence, and which they try to establish by seeking out unifying "centres" (both physical and spiritual) emerges, finally, as an illusory concept, for being human means embracing an array of different, even contradictory, aspects. The only remaining constant is that of desire: desire to close the gap between the expectation of unity and the actuality of division. That desire, of course, can never be satisfied; in Lacanian terms, the speaking subject must always be divided in language, aware only nostalgically of the lost state of pre-lingual unity.

For any society, then, the question is not so much whether these overlapping problems of lack, desire and identity *exist* (for they always do) as how *visible* they are: and perhaps it takes the post-colonial context to open up their broader relevance.

* * *

Chapter 1 deals with the way in which these problems of identity and lack became perceived within an emerging Australian consciousness as the particular legacy of geographical and cultural marginalisation. Yet the "gaps" which the early colonisers read as inherent to the country (and which they inscribed into Australia's literary history) can be recognised as discursive gaps, submerged within the European context but illuminated by the physical and social upheaval of migrating to Australia. Chapter 2 will deal with the sociopolitical power struggle between the imperial and colonial discourses that emerged with Australia's participation in an international event. In David Malouf's *Fly Away Peter,* World War 1 functions as the catalyst of discursive change at a time when Australia was defining its own place among "the big boys in the playground" (Malouf, "Statement," 266).

The pattern of discursive change becomes more introspective in Malouf's following book *Child's Play,* which is the focus of Chapter 3. The de-hierarchising of power *between* discourses which occurs in *Fly Away Peter* becomes, in *Child's Play,* the de-hierarchising of power *within* any discourse which legitimates its own ideological assumptions through history. A more specific power struggle within the notion of intra-

discursive conflict is the subject of Chapter 4: Christopher Koch's *The Boys in the Island* and *Across the Sea Wall* reveal the paradox of a post-colonial yet phallocentric discourse which, despite its own struggle against imperial domination, privileges masculine power (which becomes the norm) over the feminine (which becomes "other") through the Law of the Father in language.

The thesis shifts in Chapter 5 from an examination of discursive lack to an examination of subjective lack. Language, as constitutive of social discourse, must also inevitably be constitutive of the speaking subject. The lack which marks any social discourse as an (either visible or invisible) absence becomes manifested in a notion of subjective identity as the absent other. The frustration of the desire to access the other and therefore to "complete" a sense of subjective identity is discussed in relation to Malouf's *Johnno* and some of his other texts. In Chapter 6 the nature of that desire is examined more fully, and is discovered to be profoundly ambivalent. The fact that the subject identifies with, yet is alienated from, the other gives rise to a double-edged response of narcissism and aggressivity, of needing both to merge with and to dominate the other. The subjective split resulting from the double-edged nature of desire is explored in Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously.*

In Malouf's *An Imaginary Life,* the subject of Chapter 7, it appears as if desire can be negated by the act of discarding language and therefore of denying the subject/object split. Such an act is ultimately revealed as illusory, but in the attempt to live out such an act the relationships between subject and object, between edge and centre, between journey and arrival, can be de-polarised. The transition from the pursuit of unity to the acceptance of lack is the theme of Chapter 8, which focuses upon Koch's *The Doubleman.* Yet the final note of this novel, like that of Koch's other novels, is that of loss rather than of reconciliation; the recognition of fragmentation and absence is not necessarily to discard the desire for stability and unity. A more celebratory approach to the recognition of fragmentation characterises Malouf's *The Great World,* which is explored in Chapter 9. In this most recent of all these post-colonial texts, the imaginative "writing" of subjective and social identity is regarded as a valuable process that should not be underestimated. A complete "map" — either of self or of world — can never be

achieved, but the recognition of fragmentation can offer the opportunity to create a multiplicity of identifying maps. Such a creative process, Malouf suggests, is not only positive in the (re)visioning of world views, but is also vital to the (re)visioning of textual fiction writing.

CHAPTER 1

DEFINITION THROUGH DIFFERENCE: THE EMERGENCE OF A NATIONAL TRADITION

> What an extraordinary thing it is, that I should be here rather than somewhere else . . . Why Australia? What *is* Australia anyway?
> The continent itself is clear enough, burned into my memory on long hot afternoons in Third Grade, when I learned to sketch in its irregular coastline . . . I know the outline; I know the names (learned painfully for homework) of several dozen capes, bays, promontories; and can trace in with a dotted line the hopeless journeys across it of all the great explorers, Sturt, Leichhardt, Burke and Wills. But what it is beyond that is a mystery. It is what begins with the darkness at our back door. (J, 52-53)

Dante's schoolboy vision of his country in David Malouf's *Johnno* does not so much reflect a difficulty in coming to terms with the unknown quality of the Australian landscape, as reveal the fact that questions of geography merely touch the surface of a more complex and far-reaching problem of self-definition, both national and personal. This is a problem which, despite Australia's political and cultural shifts towards post-colonial independence, is rooted in a still-strong colonial memory. The sense of displacement expressed by Dante — of being at an indefinable "here rather than somewhere else" — pinpoints the polarised perspective which is the colonial legacy and which is directed, not inward with the comfortable assumption of "normality," but outward towards the somehow "more real" norm of Europe.

Indeed, the first European colonisers' vision of Australia developed from a negative recognition of what it was not, in terms of their own limited, and now lost, experience. The typical response, from the records of the first settlers, was a sense of confusion and exile from the "real," projected onto and reflected in a vision of the Australian landscape as unnatural and grotesque. Marcus Clarke's well-known account of landscape in his preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon's poems stands as an evocative representation of the attitudes of his time, and as such, sets a precedent for a received view of "antipodean inversion":[1]

> What is the dominant note of Australian scenery? That which is the dominant note of Poe's poetry — Weird Melancholy . . . The Australian mountain forests are funereal, secret, stern. Their solitude is desolation. They seem to stifle, in their black gorges, a story of sullen despair . . . All is fear-inspired and gloomy . . . Hopeless explorers have named the mountains out of their sufferings — Mount Misery, Mount Dreadful, Mount Despair . . . In Australia alone is to be found the

> Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of nature learning how to write. ("Weird Melancholy," ix-xi)

In one sense the landscape invited such a response. Its very *difference* from everything that was "normal" in the eyes of its beholders contributed to its quality of mystery, which evoked fear and alienation as the predominant emotions of the first white inhabitants.[2] It seemed as if the diversity of dense scrub, rugged ranges and vast expanses of barren desert did not invite a sense of harmony but, rather, established the relationship between the environment and its colonisers at the outset as one of a battle for supremacy. Explorer after explorer undertook the challenge to open up the heart of the landscape in the name of human achievement.[3] "Let any man lay the map of Australia before him," wrote Charles Sturt, "and regard the blank space upon its surface, and then let me ask him if it would not be an honourable achievement to be the first to place foot in its centre" (*Narrative,* Vol. 2, 1). The battle, however, was one which men seemed destined to lose. Later, Sturt described Australia's landscape as a treacherous wasteland "in which the ordinary course of nature had been arrested, and over which the wrath of the Omnipotent appeared to hang" (Vol. 2, 98).

The intractibility of the landscape in the face of human attempts to open it up to ready explanation made it appear closed to the very possibility of a decipherable history. The timeless quality which this evoked, making redundant the role of human history, created a sense of mystery within the landscape that, the colonisers felt, could never be tapped. Moreover, as has variously been pointed out,[4] the fact that it was first established as a penal colony, at a time when concepts of crime and sin were inseparable, further enforced the image of Australia as not only a geographical but also a spiritual underworld.

However, such considerations point to the fact that the response from the European settlers to a strange land springs not from the instrinsic nature of the country itself, but from their own position within a politically and culturally informed discourse which assumed its own centrality. This assumption enabled the European discourse to transcribe itself upon the "new" land, complete with preconceived notions of what the world should be like regarding climate, season, flora, fauna. And more insidiously, this assumption carried the weight of social superiority. Or more accurately, the white settlers

assumed a society to be *non-existent* before their arrival in the country, marking out the fate of those first colonisers, the once-predominant Aboriginal people, as "other," as forced to exist only in a space of absence. This doctrine of centrality, within the very construction which provides a society with its codes of knowledge and meaning, arises from the tendency of any discourse to proclaim itself, not as ideological construction, but as definitive and axiomatic.

The operative factor within all discourse is language, and the failure of discourse generally to recognise its own relativity prompts a questioning of language as the basis of all accepted knowledge. It was only at the turn of this century that Ferdinand de Saussure established language as a relational system of oppositions and differences between arbitrary terms — or signs — rather than a natural or inevitable representation of concepts. The sign itself represents the union of the "signifier" (word) and the "signified" (concept); the signifier and the signified do not exist as separate entities, but only as mutually-dependent components of the sign. Because signs are arbitrary components of a continuous system, with no intrinsic link to thought itself, they are defined only by their position of negative relation to each other:

> Instead of pre-existing ideas, then, we find . . . *values* emanating from the system. When they are said to correspond to concepts, it is understood that the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not. (Saussure, 117)

Given that it is from such a construction of meaning that our knowledge of the world is codified — "Languages do not simply name existing categories, they articulate their own" (Culler, 22) — the individual itself can be defined as a "'language animal', a creature whose dealings with the world are characterised by the structuring and differentiating operations which are most clearly manifested in human language" (Culler, 9).

Here arises a dilemma in the role of language as a social tool, for its arbitrary and relational nature inevitably becomes hidden beneath the ideological assumptions which go hand in hand with any system of knowledge. Thus "the distinguishing characteristic of the sign — but the one that is least apparent at first sight — is that in some way it always eludes the individual or social will" (Saussure, 17). So language takes on a curiously

double-edged nature. On the one hand, its powers of construction allow for possession over the external world and are thus the means by which all knowledge is established. On the other hand, there is an inevitable alienating element to language which is located in the irreducible gap between a signifier and the inaccessible "real" to which it refers.

The non-essential nature of language inevitably has implications for any cultural discourse, those "complexes of signs and practices which organize social existence and social reproduction" (Terdiman, 54). In their structuring of the "real" through language, "discourses are what give differential substance to membership in a social group or class or formation, which mediate an internal sense of belonging, an outward sense of otherness" (54). The principle characteristic which surfaces here is that of relativity. In other words, any discourse exists, not as a free-standing entity, but as occupying an ideological position which only has status through its relation to other, potentially contradicting, discourses; which establishes its power, not in response to some given logic, but according to the social/political power structure to which it relates.

Herein lies the political dimension which underwrites all discourse but which Saussurean linguistics fails to recognise. Although a Saussurean approach to language exposes the constructed nature of language, it does not move beyond the assumption of a general ideology as its premise. Indeed, an assumption of the existence, to some extent, of a general ideology is necessary within Saussure's theory of language if the notion of the signified is to have any credibility. Yet as Diane Macdonell writes:

> A 'discourse', as a particular area of language use, may be identified by the institutions to which it relates and by the position from which it comes and which it marks out for the speaker. That position does not exist by itself, however. Indeed, it may be understood as a standpoint taken up by the discourse through its relation to another, ultimately an opposing, discourse. (*Theories of Discourse*, 2-3)

It becomes clear, then, that a discourse which is politically, economically and socially dominant only becomes so because it can presuppose the existence of a "subservient" discourse against which to place itself in opposition. By this notion, "place" itself ceases to be a locatable absolute and becomes a shifting concept. The very distinction between "centre" and "edge," which characterised the colonisers' perception of Australia as a reversal of the norm, becomes a purely relative concept which has no meaning beyond that which is imposed by a particular ideology. In *The Conquest of America* Todorov

writes: "Not only is the earth not the centre of the universe, but no physical point is so; the very notion of centre has a meaning only in relation to a particular point of view; centre and periphery are notions as relative as those of civilization and barbarism (and even more so)" (192).

However, the danger of dominant discourse is that in its apprehension of power it submerges its ideological biases beneath an assumption of universality; in other words, it regards itself as exclusively "complete" while classifying all other discourses — *because* other — as incomplete and therefore subordinate. Indeed, a dominant discourse must by necessity deny equal position to alternative discourses, for to admit the possibility of valid difference would be to destabilise itself, to undermine its projection of a singular world which is defined by the uniformity of language. Furthermore, the language of a dominant discourse does not even allow for the expression of difference. As Richard Terdiman remarks: "We struggle for a language which might express it. But the very fact of its difference makes such a language hard to seize" (141).

It is apparent, then, that the discursive lack which is manifested within the colonial mentality as a vision of polarised worlds is not merely the product of a geographically and socially specific shift, but is the submerged legacy of any social discourse which operates through language. In non-colonial contexts, however, the sign of division and lack — with its promise of difference — is not so visible because those at the politically and socially dominant centre live within the centripetal force of centrality. Because of the heightened awareness of polarity at the relegated edge, on the other hand, the "otherworld" — as the representation of perceived "absence" within one's own world — comes to be seen as the source of potential unity which could resolve duality, a stable centre around which to revolve. As Koch writes: "We were subjects of no mortal country; hidden in our unconscious was a kingdom of Faery . . . a country known at one remove from birth, and waited for as an adolescent waits for love" (CTG, 32). Of course, the elusive "centre" is unattainable because as relative abstraction it can never be located as geographical fact. In a statement that has relevance beyond its Australian context, Malouf remarks: "we are *never* at the centre, because we never know where the centre is" (Davidson interview, 334).

In this sense the "literature of exile,"[5] with which Australia began its literary life and which expresses an awareness of division between two worlds, can be regarded not only as a localised expression of displacement but also as an early and unwitting signpost to a broader perspective of difference and of relativity. By implication, Australia's post-colonial literature can adopt the perspective of difference in order to challenge the authority of any single world view. Literature, after all, is politically and socially empowered by its status as a product of language and of culture.

A brief examination of the various "types" of literature which have emerged in Australia from its colonial past to its post-colonial present can serve to illuminate, not only the discursive shift in Australia's national consciousness, but also a conceptual shift in ways of perceiving the world and the human position within it. My intention, in suggesting a typology of this kind, is not to offer a historical *survey* of Australian Literature, which would in any case be beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, it is to acknowledge the inevitable historical *context* of the colonial and post-colonial experiences, and therefore to make visible the ideological baggage which those contexts carry. And in making that acknowledgement of contextuality, my wider intention is to point out the arbitrary and constructed nature of all codes of reference; to admit that each epistemological and moral system belongs in a network of such systems and is therefore built upon a foundation of relativity.

To point out the historicity of literature is not to suggest that writers necessarily acknowledged or acknowledge their own position within a discursive hierarchy. Indeed, the invisibility of that hierarchy reflects the tendency throughout our literary history to read environment as constitutive of a division between subject and object, desire and fulfilment, belonging and alienation. Not surprisingly, this tendency is apparent in the work of the first Australian writers to gain national acclaim, who wrote about the "new" world in the terms of the old. The way in which a subjective sense of duality and alienation can be translated and inscribed as a quality of environment is evident, for instance, in the work of Charles Harpur and Henry Kendall.[6] This is explicable by the fact that, lacking a supporting poetic tradition of their own, the tradition from which poets like Harpur and Kendall worked was European. The discursive "gap" between the

perceived centre and its distant margin was affirmed even more powerfully in that the formal frameworks these poets favoured were already becoming outdated in the northern hemisphere (Goodwin, 16-17).

Even in the consciously nationalistic literature which flourished in the 1890s and which established the outback as a value in itself, with the nomadic, battling bushman as its hero, the very concept of "outback" implies something which is decentred, marginalised. In focusing a sense of national identity upon the outback, this tradition establishes as a newly-constructed "centre" a landscape which is, as Russell McDougall has pointed out, "structured by absence" ("On Location," 27). The paradox of an "absent" centre which marked the new nationalism is made more profound by the fact that that nationalism was still coined in Eurocentric terms. Henry Lawson forefronts this tradition, as "the first articulate voice of the real Australian."[7] Yet as Richard White points out (102), the urban/outback contrast institutionalised by Lawson is consistent with the English literary culture's depiction of the imperial centre/colonial fringe relationship. In this sense, the identifying nationalism of the 1890s does not so much express a distinctly Australian experience as reflect the very cultural and literary forms it sought to rewrite.

It is significant, too, that this "voice of the real Australian" is a very narrow one. Based as it is upon a frontier mythology of physical struggle and conquest, it is a voice which not only establishes the relationship between environment and humanity as an antagonistic one, but also limits that relationship to a masculine discourse which is meaningful only to men, or more specifically to bushmen. As such, the literary tradition modelled around the values of Henry Lawson's fiction sustains a pattern of alienation or lack which extends further than an approach to landscape.[8]

The Eurocentric influence which shadows this consciously nationalistic literature is again apparent, although in another way, in the polarised vision of Australia's expatriate writers, who could write from within the heart of Australian society yet also from a European viewpoint. However, rather than providing the colonial travellers with what they would consider a perspective of objectivity regarding their native land and the land of their ancestry, such a double vision seemed only to augment the mythology of exile surrounding the Australian experience. Henry Handel Richardson's trilogy *The Fortunes*

of Richard Mahony (1917-25) constitutes a landmark in Australian literature as an exploration of the sense of double exile arising from the expatriate dilemma: the protagonist is trapped within his own divided perspective of the world, a perspective that is both inside and outside a colonial consciousness. Again, this sense of irreconcilable division is attached to landscape. And in another relegation of otherness by an ambivalent masculine mythology, landscape takes on a female form, which plays out the dual roles of mother/whore, nurturer/avenger:

> Now, she held them captive — without chains; ensorcelled — without witchcraft; and, lying stretched out like some primeval monster in the sun, her breasts freely bared, she watched, with a malignant eye, the efforts made by these puny mortals to tear their lips away. (AF, 13)

The instability of Australian society, too — still harbouring the sense that life elsewhere is more "real" — is reflected in the shanty houses which spring up around the gold diggings, the "flimsy tents and drought-riddled cabins you put up with, 'for the time being' . . . And so, whether you would or not, your whole outlook became attuned to the general unrest; you lived in a constant anticipation of what was coming next" (AF, 25-26).

Yet the recognition of impermanence reflects Mahony's conflict not just with his environment — which cannot provide him with stability and protection — but also within himself. Dorothy Green writes in *Ulysses Bound* that personal duality is the key to the novel, and she cites its central preoccupation as the "craving for permanence, the craving for change; the wish to obliterate the self, the wish to affirm it; the longing for death at war with the longing for life" (307). Mahony, then, is destined to be exiled wherever he is, because he can never escape an awareness of the polarities through which he operates. He feels just as exiled in England, and even in his native Dublin, as he does in Australia. He is forced to realise, finally, that the idea of "home" as a stabilising place of unity is no more than an ever-elusive dream; that there can never be any answer to the question that continues to pull at him: "But what next? — what in all the world next?" (TWH, 416).

Christina Stead, as another expatriate writer, evokes in her novels a similarly dualistic vision of polarised worlds. And as in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney,* Stead's novels show human doubts and fears projected onto a country that is perceived as being both physically and culturally marginalised. In *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934), Kol

Blount's questioning of Australia as a place from which to draw a sense of identity is evocative of Dante's challenge in Malouf's *Johnno* : "Why Australia? What *is* Australia anyway?"

> Why are we here? Nothing floats down here, this far in the south, but is worn out with wind, tempest and weather; all is flotsam and jetsam . . . A ghost land, a continent of mystery . . . Its heart is made of salt; it suddenly oozes from its burning pores, gold which will destroy men in greed, but not water to give them drink. Jealous land! Ravishers overbold! Bitter dilemma! And lost legion! Our land should never have been won. (309)

Stead's later novel *For Love Alone* (1945) focuses not so much upon the Australian landscape as upon Australian society as a wasteland. The central character, Teresa Hawkins, is not haunted by the sense of geographical and spiritual displacement which destroys Richard Mahony, but she does feel isolated and trapped within the hollow emptiness of Australian society. Tersea's quest for love — parallel perhaps to Mahony's quest for place — becomes an obsession which she believes can cure this emptiness, and her flight to England comes to be seen as the only way in which the quest can be fulfilled. So once again, the dominant note is that the "treasure-trove of life-wisdom," as Mahony sees it (AF, 351), cannot be realised in the "unreality" of Australia but only in the "reality" of Europe. This attitude is apparent in Teresa's justification for her flight from her homeland: "'I have some kind of great destiny, I know. All this can't be for nothing . . . I have to go, it isn't my fault. I am forced to. If I stay here, I will be nobody'" (285).

The transition from the colonial sense of polarisation to the post-colonial sense of the problematic is visible in the work of other Australian writers who express, not so much a sense of inversion, as a recognition that life at the "edge" serves to illuminate the fact that human understanding and subjective identity is always incomplete. Patrick White's *Voss* (1957), for instance, tells of one man's journey into a landscape so decentred and unintelligible that it is only his own suffering and ultimately his death there which can give the place meaning in terms of human history.

The story of *Voss* shifts between the two worlds of Australia's unexplored interior and the Bonners' house on the fringe of Sydney, structuring a duality which is maintained throughout the novel between wilderness and civilisation, edge and centre. These notions are, however, inconsistent and even contradictory ones. Beginning with the conventional

premise that the explorable wilderness is located on the edge of a central civilisation, the novel proceeds with an ironic inversion of perspective. Sydney, for instance, is the edge to Europe, but is the centre to the Bonners' house on its fringe; the desert is the edge in relation to the Bonners' house, but becomes the centre in relation to Voss's search. The notions of centrality and marginality are made even more problematic by the fact that the natural disorder of the environment always triumphs over the efforts of the civilised world to hold it within the limits of formal structure. Even the Bonners' carefully landscaped garden keeps retreating back into an untameable wilderness:

> The science of horticulture had failed to exorcise the spirit of the place. The wands and fronds of native things intruded still, paperbarks and various gums, of mysterious hot scents, and attentive silences. (V, 156)

Indeed, in Laura's dream/vision, the two landscapes overlap to become one place of terrible journey: "So the party rode down the terrible basalt stairs of the Bonner's deserted house, and onward. Sometimes the horses' hooves would strike sparks from the outcrops of jagged rock" (V, 358).

(CONTINUED NEXT PAGE)

Despite his growing awareness that the discovery of a unified "centre" is an illusory goal, both physically and spiritually, Voss cannot abandon the quest because faith in the existence of the "centre" is faith in the existence of perfection: "perfection is always circular" (V, 198). Yet finally he is content to give up his bodily strength to the sprawling and diffused desert, for it is only in such a sacrifice that he can make his mark there. As Judd — the lone survivor of the exploration — tells Laura:

> The blacks talk about him to this day. He is still there — that is the honest opinion of many of them — he is there in the country, and always will be . . . you see, if you live long and suffer long enough in a place, you do not leave it altogether. Your spirit is still there. (V, 443)

Even here, however, there is an ironic ambiguity which is sustained to the novel's end. Destabilised by his experience in the desert, Judd confuses the identity of Voss with that of Palfreyman, whose own death in the desert is depicted in terms suggestive of cruxifiction.[9]

Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (1958) follows a similar journey of a man's search for confirmation of belonging within a landscape which remains unintelligible and indifferent to human presence. Like Voss, Heriot represents what Helen Tiffin calls "the figure of old-style Empire-white destiny" ("Place and Placelessness," 152) who must come to terms with the environment he finds himself within in order to understand himself. However, even as he loses himself further and further in the vast expanses of the desert, Heriot is destined to remain, like his white contemporaries, "a stranger, cast without preparation into a landscape of prehistory, foreign to the earth" (TTI, 58). Ultimately, Heriot's "arrival" is at the confrontation of his own imminent death in the desert, an ending which provides him, like Voss, with a means of resolving — at least in part — the conflict between himself and the environment in which he feels alien. The desolateness of the landscape is equivalent to the desolateness of Heriot's lost faith in a unifying God, the two merging in the closing line of the novel with his final realisation that "my soul is a strange country."

These themes of disorientation and displacement[10] reflect the difficulties implicit in "reading" Australia from an Anglocentric or Eurocentric perspective; yet they also highlight questions regarding human cause and effect — the means by which identity is constructed — which have applicability beyond the colonial and post-colonial contexts.

For instance Peter Carey's short fiction is not only recognisably Australian in its concerns, but also reveals a postmodern, self-reflexive recognition that human attempts to fix conceptual boundaries upon an illimitable world are arbitrary acts. In "A Windmill in the West," for example, the soldier/protagonist is driven to madness by the dilemma of determining the relation of a supposedly fixed point of "centre" to its endless margin, and of his own position in relation to both. The landscape resists such arbitrarily imposed limits, and the soldier is left struggling against the disturbing realisation that all concepts of fixed dimension have no meaning except as human constructs:

> But now he is unsure as to what he has misunderstood . . . perhaps it is as he remembered: the west is the United States and the east Australia; perhaps this is it and he has simply misunderstood which was east and which west . . . He seems to remember the corporal making some joke about it, but it is possible that he misunderstood the joke . . . He runs his dry fingers over the shiny paper and thinks about the line. If only they had told him if it was part of a circle, or a square, or whatever shape it was. Somehow that could help. It would not be so bad if he knew the shape.
>
> Now, in the darkness, it is merely a line, stretching across the desert as far as the mind can see. (FMH, 62)

In this sense, the dualities which occupy the colonial mind reflect a division which is inherent to the human position. The fact that the relationship beween people and their environment is ambiguous and often ambivalent pinpoints a fundamental paradox in our approach to the world: on the one hand we construct the world, through language, into a framework that has meaning for our own lives, while on the other we search for confirmation of a stability within the world which lies beyond the authority of language and which is therefore external to our own influence. By this notion, *all* systems of knowledge take on an aspect of division and of lack.

The broader relevance of Australia's preoccupation with otherness and its attached sense of alienation and loss is enhanced by the consideration that the notion of the Antipodes as a mysterious, upturned world is evident in the mythologies of ancient cultures. Franz Cumont's account of the Antipodes as a mythological Hades, a netherworld of secrets both wonderful and fearful, stands as an ironic premonition of Koch's Van Diemen's Land of convict transportation:

> Others allowed that it was impossible that the earth should contain subterranean caverns large enough to hold Tartarus, the Elysian Fields and the infinite multitudes of the dead. But they explained that the word subterranean had been misunderstod, that it denoted not the bowels of the earth but the lower half of the terrestrial globe, the southern hemisphere . . . This hemisphere is always

> invisible, — so the ancients might say, — which is exactly the sense of the word Hades . . . It was into this sombre gulf that the wicked were flung; there yawned the bottomless pit in which the demons of the dusky world inflicted eternal torture on the guilty. (*After Life in Roman Paganism,* 79-80)

The myth of Antipodes-as-underworld, then, can be read as corresponding to the ambiguities of what is necessarily, for any society, an inconclusive approach to the "real." James Hillman, for example, in a psychoanalytic approach to myth and its meaning, suggests that entry to the Antipodes becomes a mental process of moving from a material world of tangible fact to an imaginary world of shadow and image, from physical certainty to psychical uncertainty. The result is an awareness of division between the seen and the unseen worlds, a sense of "an interiority or depth that is unknown but nameable, there and felt even if not seen. Hades is not an absence, but a hidden presence" (*The Dream and the Underworld,* 52-53). Such an awareness involves a sense of loss, not only for that "absent dimension" or "hidden presence," but also for the lost unity or security that movement to the psychic "underworld" entails. So underlying the universally persistent theme of search for a lost realm of unity is that of exile from such a world. As Harry Levin writes:

> The history of civilisation itself could be reckoned by an endless sequence of migrations . . . Somewhere in the dark backwood behind them all looms the archetype of a Paradise Lost, a glimpse of a primeval garden or ideal realm from which mankind has been exiled for its sins. The Judeo-Christian tradition has constantly looked back towards that original idyll and towards a Paradise Regained. (*Refractions,* 67)

Particularly as it relates back to a problem of language, the colonial sense of exile and loss as a more visible instance of a broader experience can be read more thoroughly in Lacanian terms. Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst, opens a questioning of the nature and status of language with his thesis on the progressive stages of human psychology. In this sense his theory fulfils the aim of Saussurean linguistics to develop a science that "would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology" (Saussure, 16). Lacan brings to life, only a few decades later, Saussure's belief in semiology as an avenue of psychology that "does not yet exist" but which "has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance" (Saussure, 16).

Prefiguring a discussion of language as the decisive system which determines the position of the individual within society and of a society within the wider world, Lacan introduces the idea of an Imaginary — or pre-Oedipal, pre-lingual — stage of childhood

in which the child recognises no distinction between itself and the outside world. In the first six months of its life, the child exists in a state of dyadic unity with its mother, within which there is no subject/object split, no concept of centre or margin, no sense of division or relativity. Such a state is not sustainable, however, for it allows no place for a structuring of the world, nor for any concept of structure. The child's vision, then, is an undiscriminating, unstructured one in which, as Toril Moi states in *Sexual/Textual Politics,* "there is no difference and no absence, only identity and presence" (99). Perhaps most importantly, there is no desire because there is no awareness of lack.

The acquisition of language marks the entry into the Symbolic Order. In psychoanalytic terms, the phallus, representing the Law of the Father (which is empowered through language), comes between the mother and child, signifying an awareness of difference and thus of separation and loss. With entry to the Symbolic Order and to the Oedipal conflict which this entails, the desire for the imaginary unity comes into being and is subject to repression. Lacan calls this the primary repression and it is this which opens up the unconscious, with its awareness of lack. In an article on the relationship between the Imaginary and the Symbolic Order, Fredric Jameson describes the emergence of the unconscious as "the bar which divides signifier from signified in the semiotic fraction" ("Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan," 362); the pronoun (the subject as first person, as signifier) marks the construction of self-representation with the "I" in language, resulting in a division of the subject against itself. In other words, the discrepancy between subject and object, or between signifier and signified, "corresponds to the coming into being of the Unconscious itself, as that reality of the subject which has been alienated and repressed through the very process by which, in receiving a name, it is transformed into a representation of itself" (Jameson, 363).

The awareness of lack, then, is ever-apparent with the acquisition of language, which functions to distinguish between the individual, who then becomes a subject within language, and everything else, which then becomes "other." Therefore through language, the subject becomes defined in terms of negative recognition, as that which it is not. "The speaking subject that says 'I am,'" writes Toril Moi, "is in fact saying 'I am he (she) who has lost something' — and the loss suffered is the loss of the imaginary identity with the

mother and with the world . . . the speaking subject *is* lack" (Moi, 99-100). Awareness of lack, however, is the human destiny, for to remain in the Imaginary is to avoid language and, by implication, the recognition of one's position within the world; in short, it is to be incapable of living as part of human society. As Lacan says: "If we are to define that moment in which man [sic] becomes human, we would say that it is at that instant when, as minimally as you like, he enters into a symbolic relationship" ("Le Séminaire," 1, quoted Jameson, 362).

Lacan's conception of the lacking subject is made more explicit by his discussion on the inconclusive nature of language. Although he denies access to it, Saussure's very definition of the "signified" assumes its existence as a real and stable entity, a thought or concept which can exist independent of language. Lacan, however, rather than tracing meaning to an ultimate signified, asserts the existence only of a signifying chain: a series of signifiers connected only to each other, where meaning is produced by the varying relationships between them. But because the signifier cannot signify itself, there must always be an element of leftover meaning in any signification which cannot be expressed. The signification of lack becomes the primary signifier from which all others in the signifying chain take their meaning; it is from the awareness of absence in language that meaning can draw its presence, in a negative recognition of what "it" is not. As Lacan writes:

> a signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier. This signifier will therefore be the signifier for which all the other signifiers represent the subject: that is to say, in the absence of this signifier, all the other signifiers represent nothing, since nothing is represented only *for* something else. (E, 316)

Lacan's theory, of all meaning operating through relational friction between signifiers, is elucidated by Derrida's notion of *différance* in language. *Différance* — as a hybrid of "difference" and "deferral" — affirms that meaning in language is defined as much by its absence as by its presence; within a single meaning there is always a shadow of other relational meanings which determine its place within the system. As such, each element in language is

> constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system . . . Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. ("Semiology and Grammatology," 26)

Like Lacan, then, Derrida pinpoints the fundamental flaw in Saussurean linguistics, in that to uphold a rigorous distinction between signifier and signified allows for the possibility of a "'transcendental signified,' which in and of itself, in its essence, would refer to no signifier, would exceed the chain of signs, and would no longer itself function as a signifier" ("Semiology and Grammatology," 19-20). In contrast, it is Derrida's notion of "presence through absence" in language that structures the relational friction which, paradoxically, both allows language to function at all and constitutes its inherently alienating element:

> differance makes the opposition of presence and absence possible. Without the possibility of differance, the desire of presence as such would not find its breathing-space. That means by the same token that this desire carries within itself the destiny of its non-satisfaction. Differance produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible. (*Of Grammatology,* 143)

Thus it is not only a linguistic gap but also a conceptual gap which limits discourse, since language becomes a system which denies, if not the existence then at least the stability of the concept. From this notion, discourse emerges as a construct which is defined as much by the conceptual gaps within its subjective ideology as by the assertions which place it in relation to other (inconclusive) subjective ideologies. Any ideology which argues for an implicit correlation between subject and object, theory and fact, through conditions such as induction or experience as a basis of valid knowledge, is untenable because such an argument presupposes the fixed nature of its founding concepts:

> the whole endeavour *presupposes* knowledge of what a subject, or an object, or theory or fact is. And it *presupposes* knowledge of the conditions under which they can correlate with each other. What validates . . . this 'knowledge' and these categories presupposed in the epistemology? . . . [The] answer is nothing logically can. (Macdonell, 65)

Given the limitations inherent in accessing a stable "real" through language, the Australian experience of alienation and loss can be understood as being symptomatic of a broader problem with human tools of identification: the sense of "antipodean inversion" which marks the relationship of "edge" to dominant "centre" serves to highlight the speaking subject's inevitable awareness of division and lack. In the Australian context, then, landscape and colonial society carry the burden of otherness which is imposed by a dominant Eurocentric discourse; yet in a less politically specific context, a preoccupation

with otherness is the manifestation of a lack or absence which is intrinsic to all social discourse.

Such a problematic gives rise to the theme of subjective duality which pervades the novels of Christopher Koch and David Malouf, as their characters struggle with feelings of discord and estrangement in a world which is more determining than controllable. The concept of duality itself is also a shifting one: any two opposites only have status as such by the degree to which they are different from each other. It is this relative sense of opposition, what C.K. Ogden defines as quantitative, that haunts the people of Koch's and Malouf's novels, for

> It is based on the perception of acquisition and loss — in relation to some need. A need presupposes a lack, the search for a complement or the realisation of a type or ideal, whether conscious or not. (*Oppositions,* 36)

In other words, the conflicts which Koch's and Malouf's characters must confront are measurable by the discrepancy between their expectations of the world and the fulfilment of those expectations. The characters of Malouf's novels focus their awareness of division in a preoccupation with life at the "edge"; they are almost always social outsiders who stand on the fringe of communal life looking in, each requiring and reflecting the surrounding characters in order to establish any single identity. In this sense, the distinction between two worlds is not so much physical as a construction of the mind, involving a tension between the conscious and the unconscious life, the idealisation of the past and the reality of the present, the expectation of worldly unity and the recognition of absence.

The theme of the divided character also predominates in Koch's novels. Each of his major protagonists dreams of an imagined "otherworld," an idealisation which not only reflects a persistent colonial mentality but also points to human incompleteness and desire. Their actions are motivated by the sense that the unifying meaning they seek is just around the corner beyond reach, and they pursue the ideal to an objectified location that is familiar in imagination but mysterious in fact. Like the majority of Malouf's characters, the people of Koch's novels are not extraordinary; they are intelligent but not particularly talented, sensitive but not particularly perceptive. In short, they are non-

heroic characters whose spiritual battles can be traced to the tensions between desire and achievement which everyone must confront.

CHAPTER 2

"THE MAPPING OF A WORLD":[1] DISCOURSES OF POWER IN DAVID MALOUF'S *FLY AWAY PETER*

In an historical analysis of language and the ideology underwriting it, Michel Pêcheux argues that all struggles of perception and belief arise from a relationship of contradictions between and within discourses, since

> thought exists only within a determination which imposes edges, separations and limits on it, in other words . . . 'thought' is determined in its 'forms' and its 'contents' by the unthought . . . [In discourse] the unasserted precedes and dominates the assertion. (*Language, Semantics and Ideology,* 187-88)

In other words, a discourse can be identified not only by what is said but also by what is unsaid within it, and in as much as discourse is culturally-specific, culture itself can be defined as "a complex of competing narratives of which one or other is for the time being dominant" (Chris Tiffin, *Inventing Countries,* 46).

By this definition, any concept of a stable centre within a particular culture or objectified into a particular place is undermined. Indeed, the fundamental notion of "centre" itself can be deconstructed. In *Women and the Bush,* for example, Kay Schaffer follows the Derridean line that any structure — such as national tradition — presupposes a centre of meaning — such as the implicitly Western belief in "origin, essence, truth, reality, being, consciousness and man" (Schaffer, 36) — around which to build that structure. However, the centre cannot be analysed; to do so would be to create another structure around it, and thus to set up another centre, and so on in infinite regression (Schaffer, 35). Furthermore, the idea that every structure must have a centre, as part of an organised whole, denies the play of differences which necessarily accompanies any construct. Of course the idea of an *un*organised structure is untenable; however, as Derrida argues, a centre functions not only "to orient, balance, and organize the structure," but also to close off "the play which it opens up and makes possible" (*Writing and Difference,* 278-79):

> As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements . . . is forbidden . . . Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which

> while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is paradoxically *within* the structure and *outside it* . . . The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure . . . is contradictorily coherent. (279)

However, discourse — as the bridge between the human subject and the outside world — is inextricably tied to the need for centre as the desired location of what Derrida has called "Being as *presence*" (*Writing and Difference,* 279). Derrida has widely shown how this desire for being as presence and its accompanying need for a centre entails a whole tradition of metaphysics, which inevitably has political ramifications in terms of the construction of hierarchies and the exercise of power. This acknowledgement not only opens up the question of national identity as discursive construct, as ideological fabrication, but in turn leads to a whole questioning of knowledge and its basis of power. As Chatterjee asks,

> Is knowledge then independent of cultures? If not, can there be knowledge which is independent of power? To pose the problem thus is to situate knowledge itself within a dialectic that relates culture to power. (11)

For Australia — no longer a colonial country yet still living in the shadow of a Eurocentric consciousness — a power struggle is located between the conflicting discourses of the politically "dominant" imperial and the "subservient" colonial. By implication, it is located in the discrepancy between perceived states of national "experience" and "innocence," which mark out the relative place of a country within the arena of international history.

So a post-colonial nation such as Australia becomes caught up in the dialectic of establishing an independent national identity while struggling with an imperial hold whose code is present in the very systems of language and knowledge which are basic to its own society. Indeed, it has been argued that the concept of nationalism itself is purely a product of the dominant Eurocentric discourse. Chatterjee, for example,[2] draws upon Kedourie's *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* to show that the very consideration of the aspects which mark out a nation — such as language and culture — is part of a specifically European mode of thought:

> Every part of the nationalist doctrine, he will argue, can be taken apart and shown to have been derived from some species of European thought. It is totally alien to the non-European world: 'it is neither something indigenous to these areas nor an irresistible tendency of the human spirit everywhere, but rather an importation from Europe clearly branded with the mark of its origin.' For the non-European

> world, in short, nationalist thought does not constitute an autonomous discourse. (Chatterjee, 8)

Such a view places post-colonial nationalism in the paradoxical dilemma of simultaneously rejecting and accepting the ideological framework of the dominant discourse. In the very activity of asserting its national independence from Eurocentrism, in short, the new nationalism remains subjected to the Eurocentric discourse. The paradox is further complicated by the fact that Australian nationalism has long been influenced — in terms of literature, culture and political structure — by that other post-colonial nation, America (Elliott and Mitchell, xvi, xxiii; Richard White, 63). The "borrowing" of the premises of national self-validation from another counter-discourse creates new relationships of power within the discursive hierarchy.

However, post-colonial writers and critics argue that rather than overthrowing an imposed discourse to establish a new discourse of dominance, the power struggle between two discourses can function to expose the ideological bias underlying *all* discourse, and thereby the status of discourse — and of knowledge itself — as relational rather than essential. The responsibility of such an exposure lies with post-colonial texts taking on counter-discursive strategies which will mark out and dismantle the ideological biases underwriting discourse, and so deconstruct the assumptions from which such binary oppositions as centrality/marginality and dominance/subservience take their strength. In other words such texts can operate, as Helen Tiffin says, to "question the foundations of the ontologies and epistemological systems which would see such binary structures as inescapable" ("Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," 32).

David Malouf's *Fly Away Peter* (1982) undertakes this process in its "mapping" out of the world and, by implication, the various discourses through which it is read. In this novel, war is the symbol which exposes duality and conflict on various levels. In its historical portrayal of war, the novel questions not only colonial involvement in an imperial war, but thereby the power of the political and cultural centre which controls life at the edge. And in so doing, *Fly Away Peter* dispenses with the very notion of centrality which gives the imperial political structure its authority, and reveals a wider field of fragmentation and conflict within human experience.

War, as a central theme, thus not only questions the role of a post-colonial nation and suggests a reassessment of national myths, but it also functions metaphorically to express division and change in social and personal experience. It is significant, for instance, that in Malouf's earlier novel *Johnno,* Johnno and Dante grow up as war children, a detail which overlaps with Dante's later fear that Johnno's "violence was no longer a private disorder. It was a public nightmare" (J, 120).

In setting *Fly Away Peter* during World War I, Malouf takes up the national myth of this war in particular as being a turning point in Australia's history. In the context of this myth, Australia's participation is regarded as a loss of innocence; as an entry to what could be called the world of "experience," the world of the post-Edenic fallen state. In a paradoxical sense, then, Australia's experience of war can be perceived as a claim to a new form of independence, a landmarking of our own place within the wider history of the world. In Malouf's own terms:

> In many ways the readiness of Australians to involve themselves in that unnecessary conflict was a pathetic one — a craving for acceptance from the big boys in the playground that we have not yet outgrown; but it was also a bold claim that we too belong to the history of our times, and a realization, perhaps, that if we are to have a claim to the future we must first enter the present. Most of all it was a claim to experience . . . By forging an experience that had its roots in both places they were redefining, in their own individual lives, all the terms of relationship between the New World and the Old. Australia ever after would be changed for them, but so would Europe, which could now be demystified. ("Statement," 266)

However, it was not until well after the war that the experience faced by Australians at war could be incorporated into the development of a distinct national identity. The whole society was irrevocably altered, but as yet no language existed with which to express the change. The returned soldiers tended to reduce their experiences to terms understandable and acceptable to those beyond the experience. The stories might be told in terms of adventure or of endurance, but always the raw experience itself was unacknowledged, because of the lack of a shared discourse with which to express it. Speaking of his own childhood in a time of war, Malouf writes:

> I had a powerful sense of my storytellers' telling me nothing in the end of what they had really seen and felt . . . They were expressing themselves out of my world. Or perhaps they had reduced the thing, even in their own minds, to the purely conventional terms in which they could most acceptably relate their experiences to themselves. ("Statement," 266)

As a result, rather than resolving the uncertainty of national identity, the experience of war served to accentuate the tensions within the national consciousness, at least until taken up by the imagination of following generations and reworked into the pattern of communal belief as a shared history:

> One of the strange things about Australia after the 14-18 war is that the country was changed, utterly and irrevocably, but the change was hidden, glossed over, because what had most deeply changed it — the experiences of the men who had been to it but also the experience of betrayal, loneliness, loss, of the women who stayed behind — was not openly declared. What mattered most remained unspoken. It was not expressed, it was not transmitted; the society never really came to terms with it. It was changed but it did not understand, in the deepest sense, either why or how. ("Statement," 267)

In an immediate sense, then, Australia's involvement in Britain's war was not so much a mark of new-found independence as a sign of colonial subordination to a still-dominant social and political power, in which language functioned as the instrument of authority. In the pre-war Australia of *Fly Away Peter,* an uncertain balance between an imperial and a colonial discourse is manifested in the maintenance of the class boundaries carried out from Europe and absorbed by the perceived "new" world. Even within the idyllic world of the sanctuary — a natural haven for birdlife which is maintained by both Ashley Crowther, a young landowner freshly returned from Cambridge, and Jim Saddler, a local farmer's son — the boundaries of class, as part of the code of the Empire, still prevail. Jim recognises Ashley instantly as a kind of soulmate, as someone familiar because intrinsically similar to himself, yet he cannot approach Ashley because it "wasn't his place to make an opening" (FAP, 4). The role of establishing a relationship between them falls to Ashley who, despite his natural sensitivity and his skepticism of the political and social biases of the class in which he moves, is nonetheless locked into the discourse of Eurocentrism which assumes imperial power. Ashley is introduced in juxtaposed images of childish helplessness and imperial authority. He stoops under the weight of his grandfather's watch-chain and stumbles over not only his words but also his own boots; still, "he had said 'Well then, you're my man,' having that sort of power, and Jim was made" (FAP, 5).

The divisions of class which maintain the imperial/colonial tension are apparent not merely in the language which constitutes the opposing discourses but also in the ways in which the participants of those discourses play out their respective roles. It is his

awareness of "that sort of power," an awareness which pervades his whole presence, that makes Ashley passable "on that side of the world for an English gentleman" (FAP, 8):

> He spoke like one; he wore the clothes — he was much addicted to waistcoats and watch-chains, an affectation he might have to give up, he saw, in the new climate; he knew how to handle waiters, porters, commissionaires etc. with just the right mixture of authority, condescension and jolly good humour. He was in all ways cultivated, and his idleness, which is what people here would call it, gave him no qualms. (FAP, 8)

The roles of power are only reversed during a boating expedition on the swamp. Here, Jim is in control; his power lies in his knowledge of the birds and most of all in his capacity to name them. Ashley's understanding of the landscape develops from an appreciation and respect of its power, but Jim's affinity with the land is perceived by both young men to be natural and innate. Ashley is the awed observer, feeling transported "not only to another hemisphere, but back, far back, into some pre-classical, pre-historic, primaeval and haunted world" (FAP, 30), while Jim is the natural son of a mythic landscape, "the ordinary embodiment of a figure already glimpsed in childhood and given a name in mythology, and only now made real" (FAP, 31). As such, Jim's claims to the land "were ancient and deep" (FAP, 7):

> They lay in Jim's knowledge of every blade of grass and drop of water in the swamp, of every bird's foot that was set down there; in his having a vision of the place and the power to give that vision breath; in his having, most of all, the names for things and in that way possessing them. It went beyond mere convention or the law. (FAP, 7)

Overhung with protective boughs and bathed in mist, the swamp becomes a symbol of womb-like peace and unity within the sanctuary, and the trip itself becomes "a water journey in another, deeper sense" (FAP, 31). Jim, directing the boat which contains Ashley's friends, is the guide who can transport the travellers into an almost mystical dimension, beyond the restrictions of material existence. The visitors from the big house would be "subdued, tense . . . held on Jim's breath" as he would whisper the names of the birds in a voice that "wrapped the bird in mystery, beyond even the brilliance of its colouring and the strange light the place touched it with" (FAP, 29-30).

As soon as the group leaves the swamp to picnic on hard ground, however, they revert "back to reality" (FAP, 32), to the discursive boundaries which determine their lives. Jim sits apart beneath a tree to eat his home-brought sandwich while the others consume their

picnic spread, and at the end of the afternoon the gentlemen tip him, Jim accepting the shillings in respect to an established set of roles.

In this instance, the discursive code constituting these roles is one that is recognised and adhered to without challenge by each group operating within that code. On the other hand, direct conflict between the imperial and the colonial discourses can be pinpointed in the attitude of Jim's father. In his bitter and resentful approach to life, Jim's father is struggling against an order which he cannot define, but which has nonetheless moulded the pattern of his life. It is a futile struggle, however, yielding only to a destructive and unchanging despair of which even the source is eventually forgotten:

> He had projected for Jim a life as flat, save for the occasional down-turn, as his own. It was inevitable, he declared, 'for the likes of us' . . .
> 'You're a bloody fool,' the old man told him, 'if you trust that lot, with their fancy accents and their new-fangled ideas. And their machines! You'd be better off gettin' a job in Brisbane and be done with it. Better off, y'hear? Better!' And he punched hard into the palm of his hand. (FAP, 5-6)

Jim's father embodies an aggression that is abhorrent to Jim, a side of the conflict between divided aspects of society that is frightening in its power and ultimately destructive; it is hostility "of a kind that could blast the world. It allowed nothing to exist under its breath without being blackened, torn up by the roots, slashed at, and shown when ripped apart to have a centre as rotten as itself" (FAP, 6).

The arrival of war, with all its suggestion of change and inversion, does nothing to dissolve the class structure apparent within society. Indeed the war, as an extension of imperial power, affirms the barriers with added authority. Both Jim and Ashley eventually join up, Jim as a private and Ashley "as an officer, and in another division" (FAP, 57). The primacy of such regimented imperialism is, for those within its control, complete and unquestionable. The soldiers fulfil their duty within the hierarchy, according to the rules, despite instincts which struggle against it. Huddling together in an abandoned trench during a battle in which all sense of orientation and structure as a military force is lost, Jim and his companions find themselves under the spontaneous command of a young officer. Like Ashley, the officer is described in terms which are naturally incongruent with his role. A picture of youthful innocence, he is scarcely more than a boy; round-faced, blue-eyed and, despite the mud, freshly-scrubbed. In

accordance with his role he orders the men forward into the chaos of the battle and , in accordance with their own roles, the soldiers obey:

> 'It's a mistake,' Jim thought, whose own youth lay so far back now that he could barely recall it. 'This kid can't be more than twelve years old.' But when the voice said 'Right men, now!' he rose up out of the ditch and followed. (FAP, 94)

The young officer, too, is a victim of the imperial authority which he must carry out. His place in its pattern is predetermined, and he plays out his given part without choice and to the letter, "as he had learned from the stories in *Chums*" (FAP, 94). When he is killed, immediately after giving his order, it is with his unquestioning naivety intact, an expression of surprise on his round face, his blue eyes protesting "'I wasn't ready. Unfair!'" (FAP, 95).

In this sense, the impact of imperial power is all-pervasive; war, as the symbol of its power, transforms environment and humanity alike. Despite their varied lives all over the world, men are brought together into a horrific, shattered landscape where they become only "the soldier — hard, reliable, efficient . . . The transformation was remarkable" (FAP, 111). Again, language is the instrument of this transformation; it is constituted in a discourse that denies individuality, that determines "the logistics of battle and the precise breaking point of men" (FAP, 109). Within this discourse the soldiers become "'troops' who were about to be 'thrown in', 'men' in some general's larger plan, 're-enforcements', and would soon be 'casualties'" (FAP, 112).

But language, always double-edged, also serves another purpose here. The destructive discourse of imperial power is countered by a more constructive discourse of personal affirmation, springing from the transformative effects of war and based in a shared process of resulting redefinition. Thrown into a "new" landscape, which in an ironic reversal of perspective is the "old" world of Europe, and confronted with their new identity as soldiers, the men must forge a new discourse which can give meaning to the environment in terms of their own experience, involving a process of remapping and renaming:

> Crossing Half-past Eleven Square (it was called that because the Town Hall clock had stopped at that hour during an early bombardment; everything here had been renamed and then named again, as places and streets, a copse, a farmhouse, yielded up their old history and entered the new) you turned left and went on

> across Barbed-wire Square . . . and from there, via Lunatic Lane, into the lines. (FAP, 76-77)

In this world without dimension, beyond time, the soldiers come to realise the extent to which "reality" is not a stable truth but a process of perpetual redefinition. With each definition a new map is formed; not only maps of the external world but also of one's own place within it. Accordingly each soldier possesses, as well as a title of the army's hierarchy, a nickname which marks out his individuality. Ashley, also endowed with a nickname, is given a new identity suitable to the strange environment in which he finds himself. He considers that they all may have been "re-enforcements" and "casualties," but

> They were also Spud, Snow, Skeeter, Blue, Tommo. Even he had a nickname. It had emerged to surprise him with its correspondence to something deep within that he hadn't known was there till some wit, endowed with native cheek and a rare folk wisdom, had offered it to him as a gift. He was grateful. It was like a new identity. The war had remade him as it had remade these others. (FAP, 112)

The naming of "Parapet Joe," a German sniper from the "other side" of the trenches, is an act which breaks through the boundaries of conflict to affirm individuality even among the unseen enemy, and which thus establishes a basis for common understanding between men that runs deeper than national conscience. The process of naming also becomes a means of reassurance for men about to go into battle; a confirmation of their own individuality, of a safe and private life in the face of a wider horror. Language here takes on a magical, ritualistic quality which is located in the words of prayers or nursery rhymes brought forth from memories of childhood, holding at bay

> that other form of words, the anti-breath of a backward-spelled charm, the no-name of extinction, that if allowed to take real shape there might make its way deep into the muscles or find a lurking place in the darkest cells. (FAP, 114-15)

The fear of this void underlying ritualised language, the fear of "the no-name of extinction," is countered — at least momentarily — by the discovery of a fossilised mammoth during the tunnelling of trenches. The prehistoric creature, "Thousands of years dead" (FAP, 98), provides a glimpse into a sense of permanence and equality to the world which renders the different discourses within the power battles of nations meaningless. Buried in the earth since "the beginning," and still lying now "among the recent dead" (FAP, 98), the mammoth speaks "for a civilisation that contained them all, British and German alike, and to which they would return when the fighting was done" (FAP, 99).

In this way the clashing discourses of war, as a process of both destruction and construction, not only point to political power struggles but also reflect wider processes and divisions within the pattern of human experience. Jim's own life follows a pattern of change, moving from a state of self-imposed innocence, sustainable only within the limited "Eden" of coastal Queensland, to an enforced recognition, not only of violence and division but thereby of a wider world, extending across the ocean to "fallen" Europe, with himself as one of that world's many fragments. On one level it is tempting to read Jim's progression through these stages as an adaptation of the Lacanian progression from the illusive Imaginary to the necessary Symbolic Order. Jim is, initially, centred within his womb-like sanctuary; absorbed in the life of the birds and sensing an affinity with them and the surrounding landscape which cannot be articulated, it is only the intrusive impact of war which opens his eyes to the existence of another world. However, the Lacanian parallel stops at the point at which Jim "possesses" the birds through language, exposing the presence of a tension of power even within the seemingly idyllic relationship between a man and his environment. Jim's appropriation of the birds through language, then, uncovers the fact that the potential for violence and division is already contained within the state of innocence itself.

In this sense, the states of innocence (as perceived unity or peace) and experience (as the recognition of violence and division) do not simply represent an area of conflict which has its source in the tension between imperialism (as the authoritive power and the creator of war) and colonialism (as the victim of imperial appropriation). Indeed, the idea that a colonial nation is untouched by violence and division until implicated in the activities of an imperial power is misleading. The very establishment of a colonial nation *as* such must by necessity involve the subordination of whatever existed there, in terms of either culture or landscape, prior to its colonisation. With this realisation the notions of innocence and experience themselves become relative ones, shifting and at times overlapping according to the perspective from which they are viewed. Prior to her involvement in World War I, for instance, Australia may have seemed innocent as a nation within the pattern of international political and cultural power. However, as Andrew Taylor points out ("Enlisting the Birds," 3-4), the violent devastation of the

Aboriginal people, of their culture and of their environment at the outset of Australia's colonisation, and the subsequent denial of any place for the Aboriginal race within the new social order, undercuts any belief in Australia's national innocence in terms of human history.

True to the nature of any discourse, then, the concepts of innocence and experience are constructs which only have status according to their shifting relations to each other; the possibility for the assertion of one is dependent upon the non-assertion of its other. Andrew Taylor makes the point for Australian history in this way:

> If an awakening to the realities of violence is involved in a loss of innocence, it is not that violence is something new to Australia. On the contrary, it is an awakening to something already there: the "loss of innocence," the "fallen" state, was already contained within the "unfallen" or innocent one. ("Enlisting the Birds," 4)

As such, Jim's initial state of innocence is a carefully constructed one. The novel opens with a scenic description of Jim's landscape that is almost artificial in its construction. One senses that this image of a harmonious, innocent world is only so as a created "sanctuary." The qualities of peace and light with which it is imbued are seen through the eyes of an as-yet undefined "he," and their very presence is implied through the subjective intervention of an "unseen hand":

> All morning, far over to his left where the light of the swamp ended and farmlands began, a clumsy shape had been lifting itself out of an invisible paddock and making slow circuits of the air, climbing, dipping, rolling a little, then disappearing below the trees.
>
> The land in that direction rose gradually towards far, intensely blue mountains that were soft blue at this time of day but would later approach purple. The swamp was bordered with tea-trees, some of them half-standing in water and staining the shallows there a tobacco brown. Its light was dulled by cloud shadows, then, as if an unseen hand were rubbing it with a cloth, it brightened, flared, and the silver shone through. (FAP, 1)

Jim's sanctuary, then, takes on more than a literal meaning, becoming a source of safety from the world's harshnesses for Jim as much as for the birds. In fact the birds themselves do not seem to require the protection of the sanctuary. Adaptable to any environment, they repeat their patterns of migration year after year, indifferent to zones of war and the fluctuating lives of men. As the novel's pervasive metaphor for an apolitical perspective *beyond* the conflicts of human discourse, the birds shift continually between polarised worlds, "quite unconscious that [they have] broken some barrier" (FAP, 48). The birds' double perspective, of course, applies not only to their "horizontal" movement

between the northern and southern hemispheres, but also to their "vertical" movement between "the flat world of individual grassblades" and "the long view" from the sky (FAP, 2). Unlike the south- and earth-bound Jim Saddler, each bird retains

> in that small eye, some image of the larger world . . . seeing clearly the space between the two points, and knowing that the distance, however great, could quite certainly be covered a second time in the opposite direction because the further side was still visible, either there in its head or in the long memory of its kind.
>
> The idea made Jim dizzy. (FAP, 20)

On the other hand Jim, cocooned within his sanctuary, resents the intrusion of anything that might bring change or disorder to what he perceives as a stable and harmonious world. Burt's bi-plane in particular, the "clumsy shape" of the opening lines, is regarded by Jim with suspicion and dislike. The machine not only represents the human order of change and progression — the post-Edenic world of experience — but also points towards imminent war, the ultimate symbol of conflict and division. The plane is introduced, through Jim's eyes, as a "big shadow" which dulls the otherwise untempered brightness of the sky:

> It was a new presence here and it made Jim Saddler uneasy. He watched it out of the corner of his eye and resented its bulk, the lack of purpose in its appearance and disappearance at the tree line, the lack of pattern in its lumbering passes, and the noise it made, which was also a disturbance and new. (FAP, 2)

The machine is juxtaposed negatively against the birds to suggest a sense of tension between the human world and the landscape, between the potential of war and natural harmony: "The bi-plane appeared again, climbing steeply against the sun. Birds scattered and flew up in all directions. It flopped down among them, so big, so awkward, so noisy. Did they wonder what it ate?" (FAP, 3).

Nonetheless, despite his apparent innocence, Jim is as much a participant in the dominant discourse, although in another way, as Ashley. On the one hand, Jim often exudes a sense of not quite coping with the expected social discourse for — developed by another race for another landscape — it never adequately expresses his personal vision of the world. Struggling with the rules and expectations of this language, Jim tends to falter midway through his sentences or, more often, simply says nothing.

> ' . . . I work for Ashley Crowther, *Mister* Crowther, I'm his bird man. I keep lists — .' He was shy of making too much of it and made too little. He could never bring himself to say the word that might have properly explained. (FAP, 24)

As a result, Jim displays a disarming lack of self-consciousness. Answering Miss Harcourt's wary "'Who is it?'" when visiting her for the first time, Jim simply says "'Me' . . . as a child would"; then, remembering to adjust to the more acceptable language of distinction and definition, adds his name "in a deeper voice" (FAP, 22-23). And later, watching the dunlin for the first time through his field-glasses, he charms Miss Harcourt with his child-like and unself-conscious intensity.

Ultimately, however, his possession of "the names for things" (FAP, 7) and thereby of the things themselves places Jim in a position of dominance within a discourse of power. The very act of naming represents an extension of the speaking subject into the outside world, so that in naming the birds, Jim "endowed them with some romantic quality that was really in himself" (FAP, 15). Indeed, so powerful is the authority of language that the very singularity of his interpretation of the world gives Jim a position at the centre of a self-created landscape in which he only credits with existence those objects revolving within his field of vision. Catching sight of a previously unseen bird through his field-glasses, Jim senses with childish simplicity that his recognition alone gives the bird its place in his world; if the creature moved beyond the range of his glasses it would, in effect, pass out of existence (FAP, 48). Ironically, the strange bird he sees is a common English dunlin which, from Miss Harcourt's perspective, "come in thousands back home" (FAP, 47). In Jim's mind, however, the bird is a new discovery and its name in his mouth is a new word, imposing upon the dunlin, displaced to the other side of the world, a new identity:

> He took the glasses and stared at this rare creature he had never laid eyes on till yesterday that was as common as a starling.
> *'Dunlin,'* he said.
> And immediately on his lips it sounded different, and it wasn't just the vowel. She could have laughed outright at the newness of the old word now that it had arrived on this side of the globe, at its difference in his mouth and hers. (FAP, 47)

Jim's appropriation of the natural world through language is formalised with his ritual of recording the birds in The Book. The Book (with its connotations of The Bible) takes on an almost religious status in giving "life," in terms of human significance, to that which it names. The spoken word gives identity to an object, but the written word captures that identity in a permanent form. "To write," says Derrida, "is indeed the only

way of keeping or recapturing speech since speech denies itself as it gives itself" (*Of Grammatology,* 142). As such, written language takes on an even greater authority than speech in having the power to raise the imposed identity of an object from momentary reality to what is perceived as transcendental "truth," operating to replace a "present and concrete existence" with "the ideality of truth and value" (142). Yet paradoxically, written language only has status as the supplement of — as "other" to — speech. Indeed, the very notion of a supplement is paradoxical, for it marks both a presence and an absence in meaning. The concept itself, writes Derrida,

> harbours within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary. The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plentitude enriching another plentitude, the *fullest measure* of presence . . . But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of;* if it fills, it is as if one fills a void . . . As substitute . . . it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. (*Of Grammatology,* 144-45)

With written language, then, the alienating element inherent to language is intensified, but it is an element which is disguised by a process of naturalisation: thus Derrida's definition of written language as "that dangerous supplement." As a supplement to speech, written language serves to expose the lack in speech, but in its assumption of naturalised authority, it claims a presence of meaning which is in fact absent:

> speech being natural or at least the natural expression of thought, the most natural form of institution or convention for signifying thought, writing is added to it, is adjoined, as an image or representation. In that sense, it is not natural. It diverts the immediate presence of thought to speech into representation and the imagination. This recourse is not only "bizarre," but dangerous. It is the addition of a technique, a sort of artificial and artful ruse to make speech present when it is actually absent . . . Writing is dangerous from the moment that representation there claims to be presence and the sign of the thing itself. (*Of Grammatology,* 144)

As such, written language becomes a powerful tool of appropriation, overcoming the limitations of time and place and denying the fragmentary, shifting nature of "the real" to give immediate life a fixed meaning. It is this need to fix a particular "reality" into his own time and place that motivates Jim to record the birds into The Book with ritualised care. The process of recording, using his best handwriting with all the proper flourishes, not only gives credence to the identity he has provided the birds with in language, but by that very function, also gives credence to his constructed world and therefore to his own identity:

> This sort of writing was serious. It was giving the creature, through its name, a permanent place in the world, as Miss Harcourt did through pictures. The names were magical . . . Out of air and water [the birds] passed through their name, and his hand as he carefully formed its letters, into The Book. Making a place for them there was giving them existence in another form, recognizing their place in the landscape, or his stretch of it . . . (FAP, 44)

The process of recording the birds into The Book does not only provide Jim with personal affirmation of his own world; by extension, it is a process which functions to perpetuate the dominance of an imperial discourse. Written in the language of the Empire, learned painfully at school "without at all knowing what it was to be for" (FAP, 45), and then passed on to Ashley, as the representative of the imperial discourse, The Book serves to maintain a power structure of which Jim is unwittingly both victim and perpetuator. Before the very creation of The Book by Jim, in fact, Ashley is predetermined as its owner:

> He was proud of his work, and pleased when, each week, he was able to show Ashley what he had added . . . When Ashley and Julia Bell were married at the end of the year Jim presented them with the first of the Books; not exactly as a wedding gift, since that would have been presumptuous, and anyway, the Book was Ashley's already, but as a mark of the occasion. (FAP, 45)

The very openness of Australia to an as-yet-undefined future — the potential contained within the landscape of many things — is a quality which makes the country vunerable to appropriation by the imperial discourse. It is somewhat ironic that, reflecting upon his ownership, Ashley should recognise that the landscape is one "that could accommodate a good deal. That was his view of it. It wasn't so clearly defined as England or Germany; new things could enter and find a place there. It might be old, even very old, but it was more open than Europe to what was still to come" (FAP, 13-14).

So although the process of mapping the world through words, both spoken and written, is important in providing Jim with a definition of the landscape — or at least "his stretch of it" — it is nonetheless a process which limits an illimitable world to a specific discourse within a specific time and place. Jim's state of innocence, then, is a constructed one in which an awareness of its other — in the form of division and violence — is repressed. Just as writing is to speech a "dangerous supplement," a deceptive process which represses its artificial status beneath an assumption of convention, so Jim's state of innocence is a "dangerous" one (FAP, 103), based upon an incomplete vision of the world which represses the otherworld of experience. In this respect, Jim is happy to be

"made" by Ashley; the shift of responsibility provides a childishly simple solution to his reluctance to enter the "fallen" world of experience by making him, in effect, "free of his own life" (FAP, 5). Such an artificial state of innocence, however, cannot be sustained; Jim must travel to an unknown world which will open up the boundaries of his life, and the otherworld of war takes on this function.

The day on which war is announced represents Jim's "last moment of innocence" (FAP, 36), opening up to him a world which, at least consciously, "hadn't even occured to him" (FAP, 36). Previously Jim, and to a lesser extent Ashley, had seen themselves at the centre of a world which radiated out and away from them in endless continuity:

> He thrust his hand out, and both standing now, feet on the ground, at the centre, if they could have seen themselves, of a vast circle of grass and low greyish scrub, with beyond them on one side tea-trees then paddocks, and on the other tea-trees then swamp then surf, in a very formal manner . . . they shook on it. (FAP, 18)

In contrast, Europe is introduced through Jim's perspective as "a mad place" (FAP, 33), an inversion of what is known and "real." With the outbreak of war, however, this outside world — with all its implications, from which Jim has protected himself — enforces itself upon his consciousness. War represents an all-consuming power that cannot be ignored, spreading its shocking influence from the northern to the southern hemisphere, and shifting Jim's own life — in another inversion of perspective — from the centre to the edge of significance:

> He felt panicky. It was as if the ground before him, that had only minutes ago stretched away to a clear future, had suddenly tilted in the direction of Europe, in the direction of *events,* and they were all now on a dangerous slope. That was the impression people gave him. That they were sliding. (FAP, 36)

As with its repercussions on language, war here has both a destructive and a constructive effect. Parallel to Jim's entry to the world of experience is Australia's own acknowledged entry to the arena of international history. Walking along Queen Street, surrounded by the activity caused by the announcement of war, Jim reflects that "the streets did feel different. As if they had finally come into the real world at last" (FAP, 38-39).

The outbreak of war corresponds with Jim's sexual awakening, another aspect of the adult world of experience from which he has hidden. The girl in the saddler's shop who challenges Jim to "join up" is not only questioning his indifference to the war but, with her hard eyes and bitter tone, is inviting him entry to her own knowledge of human

society, with all its divisions and conflicts. This new knowledge goes hand in hand with a new awareness of sexuality: "They might have entered a different day, and he wondered if . . . he only saw the change now because that girl had planted some seed of excitement in him whose sudden blooming here in the open air cast its own reflection on things" FAP, 36).

Jim's perception of the world from now on is coloured by his new awareness. Struggling with a sense of panic in the face of the "dangerous slope," he looks for security in his usual quiet beer at the Lands Office Hotel — "the least rowdy of the Brisbane pubs" (FAP, 37). However he finds the bar full of drunken and noisy men who are all confronting the new fact of war with a mixture of aggression and boisterous jubilation: "They were shouting one another rounds, swaggering a little, swapping boasts, already a solid company or platoon, with a boldness that came from their suddenly being many; and all with their arms around one another's shoulders, hanging on against the slope" (FAP, 37). And later, "round at the Criterion, it was the same" (FAP, 37).

Shying away from the assertive world of men, Jim retreats for safety to the ladies lounge, with its protective velvet drapes and glossy-leaved plants. Even here, however, he cannot retrieve his fading innocence. He meets "a girl — a woman really — with buttoned boots and a red blouse" (FAP, 38), who invites him home with her. Even in this new situation Jim is not entirely innocent, reflecting the fact that within the state of sexual innocence, too, the possibility of its other is contained: "He wasn't surprised, he had known all along that this was where their conversation would lead" (FAP, 38).

Violence again asserts itself when, walking back to the girl's flat, Jim is disturbed by a fight among a group of Aboriginals. The girl's reaction to this scene of violence reveals another form of appropriation to parallel the more immediate one of England assuming Australia's participation in an imperial war. The girl's callous indifference to the scene — indeed the very absence, until this point, of Aboriginal presence not only in the white-ruled township but also in the natural landscape — recalls the barbarism of Australia's early days of colonisation and, in so doing, points to a dominant white-Australian discourse which naturalises its own acts of violence against another culture:

> 'Abos,' the girl said again with cool disgust, as if the rituals being enacted, however violent, and in whatever degenerate form, were ordinary and not to be taken note of. (FAP, 39-40)

It is bitterly appropriate that the Aboriginals' own "war" takes place in a shadowy, almost staged background, having little — if any — impact upon the predominating festivities in honour of imperial war. The fighters act out their "ritual" of violence in the darkness of the fig trees, discernible only by the glow of their cigarettes. A "black silhouette" staggers into the glow of a streetlamp, proving to be a "man with his hands over his face and blood between them," only to be dragged down again into darkness by another figure "hurling itself from the shadows" (FAP, 39). Again Jim is, if unwittingly, a participant in this cultural violence. Through the act of naming the landscape he has claims to it which disregard those which might have preceded him, and in submitting his rights to the land to Ashley, through The Book, he passes on those claims to imperial authority; now, confronted with a disturbing scene of violence, he can do nothing to intervene.

Later that night, back at the boarding house, Jim is woken by an excited crowd parading through the streets, a mixture of civilians and those already in uniform. It is significant that the crowd celebrating war chooses as its symbol a child, "a little fair-headed lad in a kilt" (FAP, 40), whose destiny within the world of division and conflict is mapped out with inevitability. Surveying the scene, Jim "felt disturbed; he couldn't have said why," and he wonders: *"Is this what it will be like from now on? . . . Will I get used to it?"* (FAP, 41). Nonetheless, as with the child, Jim's place within the patriachial cultural order, and more fundamentally his submission to the Law of the Father, is inescapable. This is acknowledged when, immediately upon his return to the sanctuary, Jim starts to nurture "the beginning of a moustache" (FAP, 42).

From this point onwards, *Fly Away Peter* shifts to a new world, dominated by war, in which the vision of the sanctuary as a harmonious and unified world only has place within Jim's memory. The shift is not an instant one, however; Jim's progression down the "dangerous slope" is one which he faces with caution and often with reluctance. Language is again central to this progression, involving a new discourse of which Jim is initially innocent, but to which he soon becomes adjusted. Within this discourse, the migratory birds become the symbol of the force of change, the signal of things to come; "the first *refugees* Miss Harcourt called them — a strange word, he wondered where she

had heard it. He never had" (FAP, 43). Before long, however, the word becomes familiar: "Just a few months after he first heard it, it was common, you saw it in the papers every day" (FAP, 48). Jim's process of writing in The Book, consequently, takes on an even greater importance in confirming the continued existence of the world he knows, and from which he is reluctant to venture. Offered a ride in Burt's bi-plane, for instance, Jim's instinctive reaction is to recoil. To Jim, the machine is a "monstrous cage" which he regards "in a spirit of superstitious dread" (FAP, 51); Burt, with his leather skull-cap and goggles, is transformed into some kind of unnatural hybrid "between a man and a grasshopper," and in offering the same uniform to Jim he is asserting an undesirable "mystery with its own jargon, and its own paraphernalia, the chance of a similar transformation" (FAP, 52). Jim accepts the offer of a "spin" — intended as a gift from Ashley, "he felt he couldn't refuse" (FAP, 50) — but he faces the experience with dread rather than with curiosity:

> New views of things didn't interest him, and he realized, now that it was about to happen, that he had a blood fear, a bone fear, of leaving the earth, some sense, narrow and primitive, derived maybe from a nightmare he had forgotton but not outgrown, that the earth was man's sphere and the air was for birds, and that though man might break out of whatever bounds had been set him, and in doing so win a kind of glory, it was none the less a stepping out of himself that would lead to no good. Jim was conservative. (FAP, 50)

Once in the air, however, Jim recognises the "stepping out of himself" as a positive process, as one which offers him a new view of the world without jeopardising his belief in the old one. It is an experience which allows him to challenge his perspective of things beyond the bounds which he knows:

> But what came to him most clearly was how the map in his own head, which he had tested and found accurate, might be related to the one the birds carried in theirs, which allowed them to find their way . . . halfway across the world. It was the wonder of that, rather than the achievement of men learning how to precipitate themselves into the air at sixty miles an hour, that he brought away from the occasion. (FAP, 54)

With his growing awareness of a world beyond the innocent one of his conception, the stage is set for Jim's decision to "join up," with its double implications of participation. It is still a decision, nonetheless, that is full of ambivalence. Jim recognises that his progress down the "dangerous slope" is inevitable: "The time would come when he wouldn't be able any longer to resist. He would slide with the rest. Down into the pit" (FAP, 55). On the other hand, if he resists the change he will never have a place within

the social order of his generation, will never be able to share in the knowledge shaping the new national consciousness:

> If he didn't go, he had decided, he would never understand, when it was over, why his life and everything he had known were so changed, and nobody would be able to tell him. He would spend his whole life wondering what had happened to him and looking into the eyes of others to find out. (FAP, 55)

The very next day Jim leaves for the war, and for another side of the world. The "pit" which he envisioned in imagination is brought to life in a zone of horrors: of mud and gas and trenches spilling with corpses, where the only living creatures are corpse-fed rats and, far less healthy, weary-eyed men who smell like death (FAP, 78). This is "a new landscape now, newly developed for the promotion of the war" (FAP, 67).

Jim's discovery of this new world affirms the existence of the conflicts he had previously guessed at but always repressed, and places them in a universal — rather than merely personal — scheme. War not only exposes a new side of the world and the divided basis of society, but also exposes a new side to — the divided basis of — human nature. For Jim, it "was as if he had taken a wrong turning in his sleep, arrived at the dark side of his head, and got stuck there" (FAP, 58). Confronted with a wider vision of the world, Jim discovers a dark side to his own character that he had never recognised before, and which now frightens him with its violence. Challenged by a man in his training camp who, significantly, reminds him of his father, Jim finds himself in a "murderous" situation "for which there were no rules" (FAP, 63), but which he needs to face in order to protect his own, now shifting, sense of identity:

> Jim had found himself defending whatever it was in him that Wizzer rejected, and discovered that he needed this sudden, unexpected confrontation to see what he was and what he had to defend . . . They faced one another with murder in their eyes and Jim was surprised by the black anger he was possessed by and the dull savagery he sensed in the other man . . . Jim wondered about himself. When, afterwards, he left a wide circle around Wizzer Green, it wasn't out of timidity but from a wish not to be confronted with some depth in himself, and in the other man, that frightened him and which he did not understand. (FAP, 63-64)

Perhaps, to Jim, the most frightening aspect of the discovery of this violence in himself is the realisation that "he came closer to his father's nature at that moment than he had ever thought possible" (FAP, 63). It becomes clear, then, that war, as a discourse of change and conflict, operates on more than one level: "There were several wars going on here, and different areas of hostility, not all of them official" (FAP, 71). From here on, Jim

recognises that his sense of being at the centre of the "vast circle" (FAP, 18) of the world can no longer apply. The changing landscapes of the war zone are disorienting, always enforcing an awareness that no single vision of "reality" is the only one. Shrouded in a gas-induced mist, Jim's slow movement at ground level through the boundless world of war is reminiscent of his dream-like journeys through the swamplands at home. Here, however, the dream is transformed into a strange nightmare, a "weird landscape as you saw it at belly level of wire entanglements, smashed trees, the knees of corpses, and other, living figures, some quite close, who were emerging like himself from shallow holes" (FAP, 93).

The horrific implications of war, however, do not fully touch Jim until a visit to the military hospital to see Eric — a "pale, sad youth" (FAP, 72), with a babyish mouth and a hankering for cakes and chocolates — whose legs have both been blown away by a wayward shell. Eric's plaintive statement "'I'm an orfing. Who's gunna look after me, *back there?*'" (FAP, 85) opens up, for the first time, an aspect of war that extends beyond the immediate horror of muddy trenches and barbed wire and death. Eric's fate "back there" questions the power of an imperial authority in determining — and destroying — individual lives, without any understanding or regard for what those lives represent.

> The question was monstrous. It largeness . . . put Jim into a panic. He didn't know the answer any more than Eric did and the question scared him. Faced with his losses, Eric had hit upon something fundamental. It was a question about the structure of the world they lived in and where they belonged in it, about who had power over them and what responsibilities those agencies could be expected to assume. (FAP, 85)

The necessity of facing the horror of this irresolvable question marks Jim now as a member of the "fallen" world — "it was as if he had been taken over by some impersonal force" (FAP, 87) — and makes him weep "for the first time since he was a kid" (FAP, 87). Jim's innocence of the days of the sanctuary is now lost forever; he will never be able to go back. Looking back on his past life, Jim realises

> that he had been living, till he came here, in a state of dangerous innocence. The world when you looked from both sides was quite other than a placid, slow-moving dream, without change of climate or colour and with time and place for all. He had been blind. (FAP, 103)

With this realisation, Jim also recognises that his ideal world at home is also marked by violence and senseless cruelty. Although he had admitted that violence did have a place "in what he had known back there," he had not acknowledged it as a natural part of things; it had been "extraordinary" (FAP, 103). With the last shedding of "blind" innocence, however, memories of violence surface which can only be confronted now, in the light of the experience of war. He is reminded of the violent death of his younger brother in a harvesting accident, the image of which can "never be fitted in any language" (FAP, 103); of the kestrel who had been a victim of mindless violence, which had made him weep "with rage and pain at the cruelty of the thing, the mean and senseless cruelty" (FAP, 104): "That was how it was, even in sunlight. Even there" (FAP, 104). Confronting these memories, Jim realises the frailty of innocence against such violence:

> What can stand, he asked himself, what can ever stand against it? A ploughed hillside with all the clods gleaming where the share had cut? A keen eye for the difference, minute but actual, between two species of wren that spoke for a whole history of divergent lives? Worth recording in all this? He no longer thought so. Nothing counted. The disintegrating power of that cruelty in metallic form, when it hurled itself against you, raised you aloft, thumped you down like a sack of grain, scattered you as bloody rain, or opened you up to its own infinite blackness — nothing stood before that. It was annihilating. It was all. (FAP, 104-105)

The recognition of violence and division, however, does not take its form in a vision of hopelessness and despair. The concluding section of the novel suggests that acceptance of the fragmentary and often contradictory nature of the world is in itself a positive process, offering — if not a vision of completion — then at least a wider, more perceptive world view. This view must also involve the realisation that one's own image of the "real" can never be confirmed, at least in the way that one desires, because fragmentation must always override any wider unity. Travelling through an upturned landscape in which scenes of war and domestic civilian life are intermingled, Ashley senses that

> There were so many worlds. They were all continuous with one another and went on simultaneously: that man's world, intent on his ancient business with the hoe; his own world, committed to bringing these men up to a battle; their worlds, each one, about which he could only guess. (FAP, 110)

This scene is consistent with an earlier image of an elderly French peasant digging a war-shattered field for winter sowing. Although in the eyes of the soldiers the act is "a measure of the strangeness of all things here, of the inversion of all that was normal"

(FAP, 106), for the old man it is an act of protecting his right to the land and the identity he draws from it, a means of confirming some kind of continuity in the face of disorientation and change. His activity springs from the same need that motivates Jim to continue recording the pattern of birdlife, even in the battle zone (FAP, 106-107).

Division may be all-pervasive, even taking a bodily effect. Preparing himself for the battle in which he will be killed, Jim thinks of his feet — seemingly detached in the numbness of cold — as having gone home without him; he imagines them walking along the dunes, leaving their bare prints on the sand among gull-feathers and shells. However, from this sense of fragmentation arises a vision of wholeness, not as a harmonised unity but as a sum total of many parts. Launching himself into the battle, Jim feels that "Perhaps he had, in some part of himself, taken on the nature of a bird; though it was with a human eye that he saw . . . he moved in one place and saw things from another, and saw too, from up there, in a grand sweep, the whole landscape through which he was moving" (FAP, 116). Jim's recognition just before death of equality in relativity, and so of a kind of totality within life's fragmentation, is simple but as far-reaching as one man's vision can ever be:

> He saw it all, and himself as a distant, slow-moving figure within it: the long view of all their lives, including his own — all those who were running, half-crouched, towards the guns, and the men who were firing them . . . his own life neither more nor less important than the rest, even in his own vision of the thing, but unique because it was his head that contained it and in his view that all these balanced lives for a moment existed . . .
>
> He continued to run. Astonished that he could hold all this in his head at the same time and how the map he carried there had so immensely expanded. (FAP, 117)

The final vision of Jim is a fantastic one; in a scene that is reminiscent of the old peasant reaffirming his place in the world by digging his field (there are also implications that he is digging a grave[3]), Jim is on his hands and knees with the other dead, digging his way — in soil which is now "rich and warm" (FAP, 128) — back to the other side of the earth. The other side becomes simultaneously both far edge (as Australia is from a Eurocentric perspective) and centre (as "home," the womb-like symbol of birth and childhood). Indeed, the image of digging recurs in various contexts throughout the novel; just as the soldiers at the front, as a group, "dug in and defended themselves" (FAP, 100) against attack, so earlier at the camp, Jim "dug in" (FAP, 72) against his friend Clancy's

persuasions to break the army rules. The recurring image of digging is one that suggests not only a perpetual need to draw some kind of identity from the land, but also to discover and protect a perceived sense of self. "It might be," Jim thinks finally, "what hands were intended for, this steady digging into the earth, as wings were meant for flying over the curve of the planet to another season. He knelt and dug" (FAP, 128).

Jim's last vision of the balance of life's various possibilities, which are constantly changing and requiring redefinition, stands as a prelude to Miss Harcourt's realisation after his death that there can be no answer to her own question "'What am I doing here?'" (FAP, 130), whether she is in her adopted Queensland or her native Norfolk. Hers is a question which, in denying an answer, makes the concepts of centre/edge and dominance/subservience redundant, but which nonetheless allows for the possibility of a future, for the continuation of "the flux of things" (FAP, 131).

Even so, the recognition of life's rhythm, as Miss Harcourt sees it (FAP, 132), cannot be read as a unified or undisturbed process; in her affirmation of "the flux of things" there is an implicit tension between opposing states which is sustained to the novel's end. Her vision, in the last pages, of a young surfer held on the crest of a wave, brings together in delicate balance the seemingly opposing elements of change and continuity, motion and immobility: "the balance, the still dancing on the surface, the brief etching of his body against the sky at the very moment, on the wave's lip, when he would slide into its hollows and fall" (FAP, 133). Miss Harcourt's testimony to some kind of innocence in the face of division and death — embodied in the almost religious vision of the youth "walking — no, running, on the water" (FAP, 132) — is an assimilating one which allows for opposing possibilities. In a sense, then, hers is a vision which denies the necessity of a centralising — and therefore deceptive — discourse.

> It was new. So many things were new. Everything changed. The past would not hold and could not be held. One day soon, she might make a photograph of this new thing. To catch its moment, its brilliant balance up there, of movement and stillness, of tense energy and ease — that would be something. (FAP, 133-34)

In another sense, however, Miss Harcourt's vision is one which leaves the text in a state of profound tension between a recognition of fragmentation and a nostalgia for/idealisation of unity. Even in her moment of insight — the recognition that "Everything changed. The past could not hold and could not be held" — Miss Harcourt's

desire to photograph the image of the surfer, to "catch its moment," is paradoxical. To capture its moment would be to fix that moment in a permanent form and so to arrest it; to photograph movement and tense energy would be to render those elements immobile, flat. To recognise the impossibility of a centralising world view, then, is not necessarily to discard the desire for wordly stability and unity. This is the desire which, in the Lacanian sense, is always present but never satiable, located as it is in what can never be attained. In this sense, desire operates like language. Just as meaning can never have full "presence" in language, so desire for unity can never find full satisfaction because its object, like a signifier, is not a self-contained entity but a construct whose status is determined by the element of absence within it.

Such a consideration contributes to the significance of the novel's carefully ambiguous final lines, which allow for the possibility of a turning to both the future and the past. And in focusing here upon the figure of Imogen Harcourt — who with her given imperial past and chosen colonial future can envisage the world from polarised perspectives — the text maintains its commitment to a balance between paradoxical tensions which, in its refusal to relax, is truly counter-discursive. As such, *Fly Away Peter'* s closing scene — be it an affirmation of continuity/unity or of change/fragmentation — is one in which the potential of its other is already contained; in which the asserted is inevitably shadowed by the unasserted.

> This eager turning, for a moment, to the future, surprised and hurt her.
> *Jim,* she moaned silently, somewhere deep inside. *Jim. Jim.* There was in there a mourning woman who rocked eternally back and forth; who would not be seen and was herself.
> But before she fell below the crest of the dunes, while the ocean was still in view, she turned and looked again. (FAP, 134)

CHAPTER 3

THE PATTERN OF HISTORY: DISCURSIVE CONFLICT IN DAVID MALOUF'S *CHILD'S PLAY*

The dominance of one political and social framework over another and the submerging of difference that this implies is made explicit through war, but it can be more insidiously justified through a general acceptance of the "accuracy" of historical "truth." Yet as Graeme Turner points out:

> History does not simply provide the environmental conditions from which certain dominant modes of behaviour naturally emerge. Rather, the culture is formed *both* by history and its representations. Representation is a discursive mediation which occurs between the event and the culture and which contributes to the construction of national ideologies . . . Its importance is not finally as a reflection, or as a refraction, of the past, but as a construction of the present . . . (123)

Turner's consideration of culture as ideological construction places not merely the development of a society but also the patterning of history within a discursive struggle for power. According to this, history becomes an arbitrary discourse in itself, or as Paul Carter puts it, "a fabric woven of self-reinforcing illusions" (*Botany Bay,* xv), capable of deconstruction. Reconstructed in retrospect, according to Carter, history is created as a stage which displays the chronological unfolding of events. But this process of logical patterning, as he continues, can be dismantled as "the illusion of the theatre, and more exactly, the unquestioned convention of the all-seeing spectator" (xv). Instead, history must be read as a series of random circumstances which are only given signification and intent when taken up by an invested discourse. In other words, history can only emerge *as* history after the event, when already laden with the ideological baggage of the culture which claims it; so it is not history itself which structures events but rather the faith of those who partake in its discourse, and by implication, the object of history becomes not to understand and interpret facts but rather to legitimate ideology. From here it is a short step to Partha Chatterjee's relation of the concept of history back to the concept of nationalism as a specifically European construct:

> The emphasis, again, on history as a distinct mode of thought in which the life of the nation can be represented and indeed experienced is also a European innovation subsequently absorbed into the intellectual life of the new nationalisms

> . . . Modern European intellectual fashion not only decrees that a nation must have a past, it also demands that it have a future. (9)

Given Australia's own lack of "white" history, any sense of past within an emerging post-colonial nationalism had to be constructed, in retrospect, through the medium of the imperial European discourse. And according to the chronological logic of that discourse, a sense of past is necessary in affirming the validity of the present and the possibility of the future. Since it is the means by which any cultural position is justified and naturalised, history then becomes a powerful political discourse which operates not only to reconfirm individuals in relation to the present but also to reconfirm the structuring of a discursive hierarchy and its associated exercise of power.

David Malouf's *Child's Play* — written, significantly, concurrently with *Fly Away Peter* and published in the same year — functions both thematically and structurally to undermine discursive assumptions and thereby to undermine the hierarchising of power through history. In the process *Child's Play,* perhaps more than any other of Malouf's novels, exemplifies his statement that events in history constitute a process which we, as fiction-makers, "re-work . . . each time in the telling" (Baker interview, 247). In writing a text that constantly re-works itself, Malouf makes the point that we are all — whether writers or readers — "compulsive *shapers,* depending on what our culture has given us as a notion of how history should be, and how fiction should be as well . . . People actually live their lives according to the conventions that fiction has created in our culture . . . and our view of reality is shaped of course by what we see as the shape of history" (247).

The theme of war as a force of discursive change, explicit in *Fly Away Peter,* is apparent implicitly in *Child's Play;* the conventional war of *Fly Away Peter* becomes, in this next novel, a battle to establish personal certainty and continuance in the world through the assertion of individual will. On a thematic level, *Child's Play* undercuts a dominant Eurocentric discourse with the narrator/terrorist's story of his planned assassination of the Great Writer, "a rare national treasure and the last great figure of our age" (CP, 40). The age of which the terrorist speaks is, after all, that of the Roman Empire, a founding culture of Western language and society. As such, the Great Writer is the perfect target for a counter-discursive attack on history as fiction; a monument in

himself to "the art of narrative," the Great Writer "has created so much of our world that we hardly know where history ends and his version of it begins" (CP, 40).

It is significant, however, that the conflict of discourses — embodied in the Great Writer/cultural tradition and the terrorist/anarchy dichotomies — does not find its focus in an easily-defined, two-way battle for power but, rather, emerges as a many-layered struggle which takes as its site both external opposition and internal division. The terrorist himself perpetually swings between the need to instigate disorder and the desire for stability; he looks for gaps and anomalies in things yet clings to all that which he sees as "part of the fabric of things and . . . essential to its pattern" (CP, 13). His planned crime unfolds as a complex and unpredictable affair, opening up questions about the sources and effects of personal and political power which are finally as irresolvable as they are multi-faceted. From here, *Child's Play* slips easily to a metafictional level, not only standing as a textual challenge to naturalised discourse but also acting to question its own ideological assumptions (if indeed there are any). It is a text which openly invites deconstruction, posing the question of the text itself writing the centre from the edge, focusing upon the ambiguities within the framework of language — and thus of knowledge — which make the notion of a universal and complete discourse untenable. The counter-discursive status of this text draws its presence from the notion of absence, in setting up a reticulative system of motifs that Patrick Buckridge has called Malouf's "grammar of composition" (Colonial Strategies," 55). Such a system stresses the "presence" of gaps, hybrids, substitutions, metamorphoses within any discourse, and centres, as Buckridge says, on "rewriting, elaborating, reordering and amplifying a range of pre-existing textual materials" (55). In terms of both theme and structure, then, this text is one which ultimately can be defined only by ambiguity.

Ambiguity establishes itself in the first paragraph, finding its place in the temporal uncertainty which will later emerge as a central thematic preoccupation and structural device of the text. The terrorist's opening remark on "my last time at home with my father" (CP, 1) can either refer to the most recent visit or, alternatively, imply the final one, reflecting the terrorist's anticipation of his own death at some point in the future — the point, in fact, at which the text returns with circular finality to this opening scene. The

ambiguity here is sustained by the terrorist's own implied recognition and simultaneous denial of what is to come:

> — a farewell visit is how I thought of it, though with any luck it might not be — I walked alone to an abandoned farmhouse on the other side of the stream that was up for sale at last and which I thought I might make a bid for; a way perhaps of ensuring the future would exist by setting my hand to an official document, a ninety-nine year lease. (CP, 1)

Even in this initial setting there is a suggestion of alternative worlds: the idealised landscape of childhood innocence is underwritten by another, undefined and more sinister landscape:

> I had known the place as a child and always loved it. It stands on a slight rise looking back into the valley, an unusual view that suggests that before there was a farm there the site might have had other, darker uses. (CP, 1)

History itself is established here as a "mystery" whose only significance is constructed from the individual's desire for a meaningful past and a predictable future. The terrorist feels that history — symbolised by the "indecipherable" Etruscan script etched into the stone doorstep of his farmhouse — stands "in a unique relationship to me and that if I shut my eyes and traced the letters with my fingers the darkness itself would reveal their meaning" (CP, 2).

Having set (or rather not set) the scene of his own history, the terrorist provides an introduction of himself that is, paradoxically again, something of a non-introduction. The reader is told that he is twenty-nine years old and male, but the narrator/terrorist excuses himself from offering more identifying details with the polite: "You will understand if I decline to give further particulars" (CP, 4). Even the definition of his place within the narrative is ambiguous; his only concession "I am what the newspapers call a terrorist" (CP, 4) opens up the possibility of other significations, in other discourses.

Indeed, the terrorist often and consciously acts to subvert his own role. The stereotype of the "terrorist" is persistently undercut; he describes himself, for instance, as "gregarious, not at all the brooding melancholic" (CP, 10). Through the development of the narrative he emerges as a sensitive, cultured and articulate character who looks forward to family life and likes to watch the local children, with their scrubbed faces and brightly coloured pinafores, skipping to school (CP, 11). It seems that the terrorist does not find difficulty in reconciling these aspects of his personal life with his professional

role as killer. In fact, like any identity, the terrorist's role *as* terrorist is a self-acknowledged performance, "a rehersal for my final re-emergence" into what he sees as the "richly confusing" life of the streets (CP, 11). Moreover the terrorist's role has no link to any consistent pattern and cannot be traced to any locatable meaning, leaving a gap in the chain of things which cannot be closed. Stephen Woods writes:

> In history, motivation serves to *legitimate* the present in terms of past events. In character, past, present and future actions are legitimated in the character's motivation, and that motivation is seen to cause the events. ("Death of the Author," 323)

So in denying any motivation for his own actions, the terrorist denies history itself as a pattern of logical causality.

> We are . . . young people of good health, clear of spirit, and with no grudges, no phobias, no sense of personal injustice or injury, none of those psychological or physical defects that are so dear to the hearts of journalists and so comforting to their readers . . . What makes us useful as killers is that we have no past. The crimes we commit have no continuity with us. (CP, 17-19)

The ambiguity surrounding the terrorist's identity as terrorist is compounded by his own confused interpretation of his role. He is quick to dismiss the "psychological short-hand" (CP, 66) of critics who would be tempted to find motivation in his crime by reading it in Oedipal terms. But his denial of a psychoanalytic comparison between the two father figures crumples later when, mentally conversing with his father in the last moments before the crime, he realises, "with a little shock, that it isn't my father I am addressing but *him*" (CP, 126). The terrorist's self-contradiction is highlighted by the fact that in determining how his narrative should be read, he falls prey to the paradox of protecting the very authorial sovereignty that his crime is supposed to undermine.

In spatial terms, too, the text sustains its pattern of ambiguity. The terrorist's living place, for the duration of his project, is a "rat's nest" of a building which defies mapping, a confusion of corridors and rooms and "Narrow stairways [which] branch off into darkness at every turning" (CP, 5). This is a world where the notion of "place" has no consistency, where each individual exists blindly without knowledge of their own place within the scheme; as the terrorist reflects, "I have no clear picture of how the rooms and passageways in this part of the building are connected or where my room sits among them" (CP, 5). Place is disorienting, disturbingly apparent with the terrorist's discovery of an old woman who has lost her way in the darkness of a stairwell and can move

neither up nor down. The places of this world are never named but are only identified (not identified) with a letter. The terrorist lives in the Palazzo C.; he works in a "safe" apartment which is housed in a building indistinguishable in appearance from "every other building in this older part of the city" (CP, 14), and there plans for the crime which will take place at an unidentified time at "P., a small provincial town of no particular distinction" (CP, 29).

It is notable that the building in which the terrorist lodges contains — as well as lawyers' offices, the family of aristocracy dating from the Renaissance, and other semblances of order — a language school. The school attracts an international array of students, and the subsequent mingling of identities adds another layer of ambiguity to an already uncertain set of circumstances. Examining the faces of his mixed neighbours, the terrorist considers that although some tenants may be genuine workmen "they may equally be language students, or students of art or literature, or terrorists" (CP, 7). Indeed the very distinction between these identities is a tenuous one; in his preoccupation with the Great Writer, for instance, the terrorist assumes all of these roles.

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Other inhabitants of the building exist in isolation and, like the terrorist, without identity. His only glimpses into these other lives come in the form of a detached hand watering a flowerpot, a disembodied voice, or even more shadowy, a trail of smoke from an unseen pipe. But this world of "obscure privacies" (CP, 8) is cover for the terrorist, providing him with an anonymity which he actively seeks: "I am invisible. Just like everyone" (CP, 9). The ancient courtyard of the building itself is crumbling with damp and neglect. As the landmarks of history, its statues — depicting a hotchpotch of myths and idylls — not only reflect the fragility of outdated tradition but reveal history itself as an illusive/elusive and often confused fantasy; as representative of a specific cultural discourse, the damaged and incomplete statues only serve to mark the gaps, or lack, within that discourse:

> The various classical deities, minus a flexed wrist or with the genitals amputated or half the face gone as in a stroke, rub shoulders with eagles, peacocks, cornucopias, flamelike finials, quartered shields and heraldic beasts both real and fabulous, urns, putti, wingless angels gone green with mould — an analogy, as it were, of our rarest follies and illusions. (CP, 7)

So from the outset, *Child's Play* establishes a pattern of temporal, spatial and personal ambiguities and gaps which act to undercut any assumptions of a stable or locatable "real." From here onwards, the text moves within a web of discursive ambiguities, creating a set of alternative narrative possibilities which clash and vie for credibility. The terrorist, for instance, juxtaposes the sensationalist language of the media with his own language of pragmatism, focusing upon the differences within language which untie the signifier from any fixed meaning and allow it expansion through a range of interpretations: "Our hideout as the newpapers would say (we call it an office) . . . " (CP, 10).

Other, non-lingual signifiers also act to destabilise the "pattern of things," such as the postcards "from the future" (CP, 67) which the terrorist arranges to have sent to his father from London at weekly intervals, and which will probably keep arriving, with their "brief, false messages" (CP, 67) after his own death. In choosing to write to his father from a point several weeks ahead of the present, the terrorist gambles with the "ambiguities of shape and direction that are inherent in our idea of time" (CP, 68). And in so doing, he realises that "I am treading here on holy ground and being as blasphemous

as if I had despatched a series of directives to him in the name of the Holy Ghost" (CP, 68).

Then again, there is the incongruous appearance of "a pair of coral-pink glossy leather sandals" among the "whole row of sensible shoes" (CP, 15) in the wardrobe of Signora Gina Rizzoli, whose apartment provides the assassins with their cover. The pink sandals seem, to the terrorist, "deliberately intended to mislead. What do they represent? A secret weakness, a lapse in taste, a lapse of character?" (CP, 16). So even the private life of Gina Rizzoli (is she a living person or an invention designed by unseen authorities to deceive?) is a double one; the magazines which are delivered in her name every fortnight include, curiously, a gossip magazine of the sort "devoted to the lives of starlets" and a parish newsletter (CP, 16). Such dualities do not go unnoticed by the terrorist, but it "is in the nature of things that I have no answer to these questions" (CP, 16). Knowledge, in fact, is a dubious notion in the terrorist's world; a world in which events do not necessarily follow a pattern of logic, in which even the beholder must be doubtful as to what he sees. "These are observations," he notes, "that may point to none of the conclusions I draw from them" (CP, 20).

The terrorist's inquiry into the questionable nature of the "real" has a more detailed place in the series of photographs which provide him with his research material. The photos, laid side by side, make up a 360 degree image of the piazza where the assassination is to take place. In this printed form, the piazza becomes "a stage-set awaiting events . . . in the light of 'history'" (CP, 29) and the terrorist himself becomes the controller of mapping the future, the master of deconstructing the past. He scrutinises each detail of the photographs with meticulous care as if in absorbing the particulars of this limited world he could assume control of its events and activities.

Certain details, however, defy documentation. The football game, for instance, skips "in violent progress" around the calculated movement of the photographer, who unwittingly overrides the supposed objectivity of the exercise by "following his own needs" (CP, 31). As it is, the "unpredictable flight of [the] ball" (CP, 31) is at odds with the continuous circle of the camera's shots. And as a result, some players recur in altered positions in several shots while others never appear at all, existing "only in the gaps

between shots, like the noise the players were making, their shouts of 'Here!', 'To me!', 'Faster!' which are also absent and represent a deficiency in the photographer's art" (CP, 31).

There are other anomalies, too, which reveal the photographer's attempted documentation of "reality" as an incomplete and weighted discourse. In the process of turning and clicking, a woman has been caught twice by the camera; a statue is bisected so that the horse's head and the rider above disappear into an unaccountable void. The continuity of the photographs is even disrupted by the different "mood" of one of the shots which, with its deserted scene and darker aspect, seems to have "been taken on a different day from the rest" (CP, 34). The mood of the shot, however, comes not from the view itself but from the terrorist's projected perception of it, so far as it bears significance upon his own life. This is the scene which will confront him in the moments immediately after the assassination (when the terrorist himself will be killed), and so the projected mood belongs not to the present but to the anticipated future, representing not only "what I shall see" but also "how I shall feel" (CP, 35). The temporal shift apparent here allows the terrorist to maintain his artificial sense of control, for in projecting an idealised past onto a desired future, he can allow: "I have seen the square already in the light of its notoriety . . . I am nostalgic for what has not yet occured" (CP, 38).

As such, the gaps and inconsistencies of the photographed piazza are a comfort to the assassin for they will allow him, he believes, to slip into and out of that world as he wishes. He envisions himself as the invisible commander of events, able to appear unforeseen into the life of the piazza, commit his crime, and then disappear without trace. The gaps may be imperfections, but they are ones

> that I find oddly re-assuring, since it is into just such a gap in reality (though rather wider, I hope, than a fifth of a centimetre) that I mean to slip in the moments after the crime. Having stepped out of my life to give the event, for that brief moment, the mind, the will, the trigger-finger it needs to come into existence. I shall step out again, as invisible and anonymous as that rider on the horse or our tourist/photographer, whose presence here we must take as given, since these views could hardly exist without him, but who is nowhere to be found in them and cannot be traced as their source. (CP, 36-37)

The terrorist fails to admit, however, that despite — or rather because of — such anomalies, "reality"-as-event cannot be anticipated. In studying the photographs in order to internalise the history of the world they record, the terrorist believes that he can predict

events within that framework. But what he cannot predict are the potential repercussions of events *beyond* the framework. He can only focus upon the photographs *as* photographs. They are subjectively-chosen, frozen fragments of an unseen larger whole; the frame surrounding them is limited; the backgrounds are vague and the featured subjects gaze off to some unknown point beyond the camera's vision. These subjects, with their blurred faces, present mysteries which cannot be deciphered. Their fixed depictions in the photographs — the old woman stooping under the weight of invisible bags, the laughing girl caught with her icecream about to topple from its cone — say nothing of their lives or the possibilities ("too numerous to contemplate" [CP, 37]) of their fates.

The most significant limitation of vision is the curve in the street, running away from the piazza in the second photograph, around which the terrorist cannot see. This curve is, finally, his destination in death, and the terrorist's fascination with it reflects his desire to anticipate his own destiny. Like a human life, the "dark and narrow" street makes a "deep arc" which can reveal "nothing, either of itself or of what lies beyond" (CP, 32):

> No amount of peering or moving up close with the glass will take me further along that street, but I continue to stare at it, as if I could somehow, by sheer will-power, set the woman's stopped figure in motion and follow her round the curve. (CP, 32)

The terrorist's thwarted attempt to clarify some kind of locatable meaning here only accentuates the impossibility of matching art to life, despite the paradoxical fact that we can only achieve a sense of the "real" through the medium of our own fictions. It is interesting that the terrorist recognises but represses his awareness of this paradoxical trap, of which he too is a victim. His simultaneous acknowledgement and denial of the paradox reflects the fact that to recognise the existence of fragmentation and lack is not necessarily to dismiss the desire for unity and personal control. On the one hand, he admits that nostalgia is "in the very nature" (CP, 38) of any representational discourse — be it language, photography or art — since there must always be a gap between representation and what it represents. On the other hand, faith in the "reality" he anticipates is nevertheless "the one indulgence I allow myself" (CP, 38). And within this paradox is another, in that the terrorist's plan to destroy an unbending perception of logic and causality in history is inconsistent with his effort to establish logic and causality as

the means of destruction. It is, after all, through a faith in causality that the terrorist's own position can be not only validated but assumed:

> The event must have a reality that demands my presence. Not only at the moment of its occurence but in these long weeks that lead up to it. The crime must have a logic of which that moment in the piazza is the inevitable outcome. (CP, 87)

Given the loose threads within "that dense tapestry of experience and event" (CP, 87) which is reconstructed in the terrorist's imagination, it is hardly surprising that when he finally enters the square, it is into a confusingly altered world to that of the photographs: "It was like going back to a place of your childhood and finding it familiar but wrong. All the dimensions were wrong" (CP, 139-40); and a little later: "I was a stranger here and had lost all sense of direction" (CP, 144). Having plotted to undermine the stability of traditional order, the terrorist now finds, ironically, that his own "order" is thrown into chaos by the intrusion of the unexpected in the form of the Great Writer's daughter who, in "a spirit of female power and protection" (CP, 140-41), interposes herself between the terrorist and his victim. Most importantly, the daughter represents that paradoxial trap which the terrorist can now no longer deny:

> She was the embodiment, in grey silk, of everything I had tried to exclude from the event and had known all along could not be excluded. How could that be? I had known it and only now saw what I knew. (CP, 141).

This undercutting, not only of conventional order with the terrorist's crime but also of the terrorist's own narrative, leaves no recourse to any reliable or fixed discourse. Gaps will always recur which leave the text in a state of unsteadiness ("I wonder sometimes — to return to those gaps — how far I can trust my senses" [CP, 39]). The terrorist's attempt to follow "the single thread that leads to the Piazza Sant' Agostino and the muzzle of a gun" (CP, 87) is exposed, in true Barthian fashion, as an illusion which is based upon the misconception that any discourse has a stable and essential meaning. As Barthes writes:

> In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled,* nothing *deciphered;* the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. (*Image-Music-Text,* 147)

It is appropriate, then, in this text in which even the narrator must question his own judgement, that all constructions of character should be shifting and ambiguous. The identities, not only of the narrating terrorist but also of his colleagues, are unstable. Antonella is also Graziella; Carla is also Adriana and then again the undefined and fleeting figure of the terrorist's dream. The ambiguity is heightened by the ironic play within the narrative upon the notions of darkness/concealment and light/enlightenment: recognising the dark Adriana as the fair Carla, the terrorist reflects that it "needed her darker appearance for me to see her as she really was" (CP, 136). At the same time, it is only from the inter-dependence of the group of assassins — that five-pointed star — that each can draw a sense of identity. Like a language, identity is not an intrinsic thing but a construction based upon a network of negative relationships. This is, as the terrorist acknowledges, the only "'shape of reality'" (CP, 100). With Antonella/ Graziella's disappearance, the remaining four shift in their identities to accommodate the change. Enzo becomes more aggressively male, Carla becomes a lesser woman altogether, and even the terrorist must now "rethink a whole segment of myself" (CP, 97). Each feels the absence of the others, "in whatever form, as the aching of a phantom limb" (CP, 115-16). The construction of identity from absences, from otherness, is made clear with the terrorist's last crucial realisation before going forward into the Event: "I had the evidence before me but did not know what I was looking for. I was looking for *him*. I ought all the time to have been seeking myself" (CP, 122).

Indeed, the character of the Great Writer — the embodiment of cultural tradition — is also inconsistent. Through his works he "acquire[s] and cast[s] off a dozen different personalities, the jargon of a dozen careers and crafts" (CP, 90). This inconsistency is compounded by the fact that he only appears in the text as a construction of the terrorist, whose own inconsistencies throw the stability of his narrative into doubt. Like the representation of the piazza, the Great Writer features in a series of photographs which the terrorist examines with a magnifying glass in an attempt to pinpoint some kind of traceable identity. Yet the Great Writer assumes a variety of roles, appearing as proud husband, indulgent father, fashionable celebrity, artistic recluse with equal ease. In another shot he appears only as a "distorted shadow" (CP, 52), highlighting further the

elusive nature of his identity. The shifting ego of the Great Writer is "monstrous" (CP, 60), "insufferable" (CP, 56), but it is also one which undergoes "protean transformation and masquerades," which slips "in and out of other forms, other lives" (CP, 60). At the same time, the human ego is a very fragile and transitory thing. In another temporal and sensory inversion, the terrorist "reads" between the lines of the Great Writer's stories to hear "the first pre-echo" (CP, 61) of his cry when his ego — that "tribal vessel in which all our destinies are to be read" (CP, 60) — slips from his grasp with the terrorist's shot and shatters on the cobbles of the Piazza Sant' Agostino at P.

In his Memoirs, the Great Writer writes of his youth lived in the shadow of his older brother, that "tutelary god" (CP, 44) who presided with "solitary glory" (CP, 43) over their younger years, and whose death in the First World War allowed the Great Writer *as* Great Writer to come into existence. The emergence here of a complex relationship of power and control between the two brothers is suggestive of the intricate relationship between the Great Writer and the terrorist. The older boy's death instigates the Great Writer's identity as Great Writer, just as the Great Writer's death will instigate the terrorist's identity as terrorist. Yet, in seeming contradiction, the Great Writer takes on his older brother's fate, loaded as he now is "with the older boy's destiny" (CP, 47), just as the terrorist will take on the Great Writer's fate in death.

To pursue another level of ambiguity, the older brother, as the catalyst of creation, may simply be an invention of the Great Writer. Did the Great Writer become a kind of reincarnation of his dead brother or was he "from the beginning the chosen one in the eyes of the gods?" (CP,47). Scrutinising the Memoirs, the terrorist questions whether the brother as "young god" ever existed at all, thereby unravelling the Great Writer's personal history as a retrospectively-constructed fiction:

> Like everything else about him, the moment of his brother's disappearance remains ambiguous; and one suspects that the elder boy, however attractive he may seem in the photographs, is little more than a literary device for the dramatization of his own leap into life. Genius is sly as well as candid. (CP, 47)

But the stability of the text is even more shaken by the possibility that the terrorist himself is one of the Great Writer's fictional characters. Reading the Great Writer's story of the assassination of a great cultural figure, written nearly a decade before his birth, the terrorist begins to feel that the author has "both understood and accounted for me . . . It is

as if he had . . . taken a quick look down the tunnel of his life and seen me, in the merest flash of a second, standing before him with the revolver in my hand" (CP, 54-55). And in foreseeing him, the Great Writer "has exposed me as a worm . . . because what he has so amply set down is, he believes, the whole of what I am and only the smallest particle of himself, because in comprehending me he has also written me off" (CP, 56).

Is the terrorist, then, narrating his own story or is he part of a story being written by the Great Writer? The question is further tangled by the revelation that the Great Writer's current work-in-progress is called *Child's play*. Its protagonist is the "mirror image" (CP, 88) — the other — of the terrorist. Their movements are paced in perfect opposing symmetry, "since every move he makes into the fullness of his existence is a move that holds me off" (CP, 88). Advancing at the rate of five hundred words a day, this protagonist is the "angel of anti-death" (CP, 89) against the terrorist's "angel of . . . extinction" (CP, 21). In other respects, however, the two become indistinguishable. The Great Writer's protagonist, disguised "with a touch of colour on his cheeks and a spot of it at the corner of his eyes" (CP, 89), merges with the terrorist who, altered by the same make-up, appears to himself "in the ambiguous style of masculinity that actors project and the models in fashion magazines" (CP, 84) — or, one could equally say, the figures of fiction. It is appropriate, then, that like the Great Writer's protagonist the terrorist "has no future," but must finish his existence with his other — his anti-self — in "silence at the end of a page" (CP, 89). As such the Great Writer "fathers" the agent of his own death, turning "his own world inside out" and discovering within a being who belongs "not to the end of life but to the fresh, cruel, innocent, destructive beginnings" (CP, 89).

Sensing an affinity between himself and *Child's play'* s protagonist, the terrorist wonders if his own role as killer is not self-determined but planned by the Great Writer himself "out of his need to complete the business after his own wishes and in his own style" (CP, 121-22). In this sense, the text fulfils the Barthian notion of "the author enter[ing] into his own death," which is the point at which "writing begins" (*Image-Music-Text,* 142). So the work-in-progress, with its "special poignancy" (CP, 79), is not only self-reflexive but also reflexive upon the terrorist's narrative and, beyond that, upon Malouf's own text:

> it is a kind of scherzo in which his deepest themes reappear in travesty, as if, behind all their grandeur, their imperious graspings after the ideal, their noble solemnities, we were invited to see a group of children dressed up in their parents' clothes, the attic finery of a vanished era. (CP, 79)

It is significant that the work-in-progress is constantly revised, and that it is these "second thoughts, qualifications, digressions, inspired elaborations" which, sprouting from the "strong stem" of the initial text, become "the full tree's lovely greenness" (CP, 80).

The question of where authorial control lies within the text is never answered. As such, as Stephen Woods has pointed out (328), the text lives out both thematically and structurally Barthes' structuralist thesis that to "give the text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (*Image-Music-Text,* 147). In this way the writing of the story-teller (the terrorist or the Great Writer?) — and indeed, behind that figure, of Malouf himself — becomes in itself a constant affirmation of co-existent opposites, of the possibility of difference. There is no unity within the text and no promise of unity. Rather, the author (and his critics) write(s) and rewrite(s) the text as he/they go(es), just as the characters write and rewrite themselves and the shifting positions within which they move:

> Impossible in these pages to pin the author down, as his nature turns now this way now that, and his thought moves, in its monumental but oddly quick-footed and quick-witted way . . . endlessly shifting between fastidious disapproval and an almost breathless realization of the enticements of the flesh. (The commentators fly amusingly in both directions, like messengers scattering from a battlefield to announce simultaneously, and by their own lights accurately, both triumph and defeat.) (CP, 49)

Physically, too, the Great Writer is the embodiment of paradox. On the one hand he represents the conservatism of his era, and with "his clipped moustache and skullcap of cropped hair" his appearance is suggestive of "the general of an imperial army" (CP, 42). But a slack chin and dreamy eyes are "signs of weakness, of a secret complicity with the forces of disintegration," which act against "the austerity of the whole" and serve to "complicate the picture" (CP, 48). The parallel between the Great Writer's physical self and his fictions is augmented by the deepening at the bridge of his nose of two lines (physical or textual lines?) "like inverted commas — the imprint of a lifetime's devotion to irony. It is the development of a single theme" (CP, 48). On the one hand, dedication to a single theme denies a multiplicity of readings but, on the other hand, the fact that the

single theme is that of irony opens up the Great Writer's texts — and through him, the terrorist's narrative — to a range of interpretations.

The confusion here of the fictional and the physical provides an effective comment on the carefully constructed nature of the "real," underwritten as that reality must be by alternative but repressed possibilities. Considering the incongruity of the Great Writer's chin and eyes among his face's "sterner characteristics," the terrorist decides that it is as if these contradictory aspects of the Great Writer's physical self

> belonged to the author of what he likes to call his anti-Works, those dark, unwritten masterpieces that are in an opposing spirit to his own but are their shadowy complement. (CP, 48)

Like Jim Saddler's recognition of "the anti-breath of a backward-spelled charm, the no-name of extinction" (FAP, 114), the terrorist sees these anti-Works as the absent other of the known and safe "reality" which is reproduced in fiction, as the possiblity of difference.

From here it is a short step to the terrorist's acknowledgement that his business is not so much the murder of a man as a "war of words" (CP, 91). His crime achieves its reality, not at the moment when the bullet leaves his gun, but at the point when it is reported and given credence through language:

> The true location of its happening in the real world is not the Piazza Sant' Agostino at P. but the mind of some million readers, and its true form not flesh, blood, bullets, but words: *assassination, brutal murder, infamous crime, mindless violence, anarchy* . . . The crime becomes real because it is reported, because it is called an *act of terrorism,* an *assassination* . . . because it breaks into the mind of the reader as a set of explosive syllables. These are language murders we are committing. (CP, 91)

The terrorist's aim, then, is to explode the solidity of the letter, to expose that paradox of language as a marker of both presence and absence in meaning. One is always reminded of written language, in particular — the language of the newspapers towards which the terrorist aims the "reality" of his crime — in Derridean terms as the inversion of "present and concrete existence" with "the ideality of truth and value" (*Of Grammatology,* 142). As such, the "reality" of the written word takes on a more powerful role in the creation of history than the "fuzzy insubstantiality" (CP, 113) of material existence. The subjects of newspaper reports become victims to the credibility of

language, "fighters at the edge of history who have, as it were, broken up in casting themselves against solid print" (CP, 113).

At the same time, the attempt to capture the "real" in any representational form must always fail because of that irreducible gap of meaning in the signifying chain. The living becomes the dead as soon as it passes out of corporeal existence, its figures "already dissolving as they move quickly on out of life" (CP, 113). But, despite its element of lack, double-edged language — the simultaneous creator and forbidder of expression, with its paradoxical function of both liberation and alienation — provides the only access to the "real" that we can ever have:

> Of course the acts we produce have significance only if they are reported. But the very fact of their being reported changes them. As they pass into the public domain they lose whatever they had of flesh and blood and acquire that deadness, that finality, that impersonal and isolating distance that belongs to what has been given over to the tense of retelling: to history, to death. There is no way out of this dilemma. We can only work through a medium which is itself the enemy and whose very nature is to deprive whatever it reports of life and power. (CP, 113-14)

The theme of language as creator of the world of "solidity" is supported through the text by a pattern of recurring imagery which associates the world of things with the world of words. The image of the scripted stone, in the opening pages, is later reformed as a pebble kept from childhood which the terrorist, cut off from all other features of identification, retains as a link to his own history and thereby to a perception of identity. Like he does to the stone with its engraved marks of history, the terrorist integrates the pebble (*as* history) into his own life by rubbing it continually between his hands. As a transitory man in the face of a timeless world, his perpetual smoothing and turning of the stone has changed it no more than "as it might, if I had left it out there, have been worn to the same shape by the sea. (I have intervened and changed nothing!)" (CP, 62). Nonetheless, as an interpreter and therefore an inventor of history, the terrorist reads into the stone "hidden colours . . . of a quite brilliant range" (CP, 62), which open up the imaginative possibility of a variety of worlds, reaching even to "the far side of the universe, invisible to us" (CP, 63). And through the awareness of the potential for different constructions of the world, the terrorist himself feels in touch with the endless possibilities of his own life, "as if I too had been transformed in proportion with it, on the pebble's smooth translucent surface" (CP, 63).

As a child the terrorist had carried the pebble in his mouth like an all-day sucker, imagining it being worn smooth by the words uttered around it. As language — the constructor of discourse — works its changes upon history, the stone is "worn smooth by speech, every syllable, true or false, making its small change in the shape of the thing" (CP, 64). In turn — as history — the stone casts its own "lurid glow" upon language, instigating subtle changes in meaning. It even makes its mark beyond the text itself, throwing open the narrative of which it is a part to new possibility: "I finger it as I write. Does it add its lurid glow even to this?" (CP, 64).

Yet there is still something which is untouched by the shaping power of language, from which the terrorist takes his authority, and that is violence. As Jim Saddler realises in *Fly Away Peter,* the strength of violence is voiceless, wordless. The "disintegrating power" (FAP, 104) of violence is beyond language: "It [is] annihilating. It [is] all" (FAP, 105). In this sense death — as violence's ultimate form — becomes the most destructive yet paradoxically the most unifying of events. One thinks of Jim Saddler running towards death with a knowledge of loss yet with a sense of wholeness. Similarly in *Child's Play,* just as the earlier imagined bankteller confronts "the cool angel of his extinction" (CP, 21) with a mixture of terror and gratification, so the terrorist now caresses the gun, as the "angel of this annunciation" (CP, 123), with a mixture of awe and loving respect. Possession of the gun — with its clean black lines, its inviting grip, its perfect form "so beautifully attuned to its purpose that the purpose itself seems like nature" (CP, 124) — provides the terrorist with access to a power which, through annihilation, moves beyond the determing force of the Great Writer's power through language. With the gun in his hand, the terrorist can feel: "No need for words. The object itself is the message" (CP, 124). At the same time, the gun is the key to the climax and fulfilment of the terrorist's ambiguous but intimate relationship with the Great Writer, the "point of powerful weakness" at which "we might at last make contact" (CP, 128).

It comes as some surprise, then — although by now the reader should be used to the constant inversion of expectation — that the moment of confrontation, the moment towards which the terrorist has been aiming with relentless persistence, comes and goes as a fleeting and undistinguished anti-climax. The real moment of confrontation occurs

only with the intrusion of the unexpected, between the terrorist and the Great Writer's unnamed daughter. *She* receives the bullets intended for her father, as well as his place in the terrorist's now confused attention, and it is the obscured meaning of *her* dying words that the terrorist attempts to decipher. These garbled final words — rather than any of the Great Writer, who dies in silence — take on the "indecipherable" meaning of history itself, harking back to the scripted stone of the opening pages whose meaning the darkness, "if I shut my eyes and traced the letters with my fingers" (CP, 2), might reveal:

> . . . the sounds that came from her open mouth might have been in another tongue. I leant forward a little to try and catch them. 'Bgrrr,' she thundered, 'Tgrrr, dgrrr, mgrrr.!' One part of me was held fascinated with the effort of trying to translate, and I thought that if I closed my eyes and listened in the dark the words might make sense and reveal their meaning to me. (CP, 141-42)

It is only after the moment of potential "contact" has passed that the terrorist turns his attention to the Great Writer. But the event is almost over, and there is none of the shared recognition, the "savage and beautiful intensity" of their "conversation with Death" (CP, 90-91) that the terrorist had anticipated. Almost as an afterthought, the terrorist turns the gun upon the old man, recording only that these third and fourth shots struck him "once in the breast, once in the throat, and he went down immediately" (CP, 142). (It is significant that, with their targets of breast and throat, the terrorist's shots render the Great Writer — now merely an old man — not only lifeless but more specifically voiceless.) Of the "luminous moment" when they stood face to face, "I had no memory at all" (CP, 142-43).

The terrorist's last rushed recordings of the assassination and of his own narrative are projected in a series of inversions. Still lost in the Event, the terrorist feels ironically that "reality, when it impinged, seemed unreal" (CP, 143). And as he tumbles towards his own death, fleeing the police roadblock, he senses — in another temporal inversion — that he has experienced all this before, in the black and white of newspapers, in "*the odd, grainy dimension of what is already history* " (CP, 143).

Like Jim Saddler's death in *Fly Away Peter,* the terrorist's own death is left in ambiguity. Stephen Woods suggests that the narrator's death occurs in a space of absence, in the gap between chapters nineteen and twenty, between the anticipation and the retelling of the Event (Woods, 330). The story, then, continues without his presence

in the text, opening afresh the question of the identity of the narrator. But most probably he is killed towards the end of chapter twenty at the point when the haversack, containing all his worldly goods, falls away. As he slips from one dimension to another in "that reality (that un-reality) that is the war of words" (CP, 91), so the narrative's temporal scheme shifts from past to present:

> I hurled myself into an alleyway, hearing the shots die away behind, and felt what must have been the weight of my haversack fall away from me. *Good,* I thought. *So much the lighter. Now I have nothing.* (CP, 144)

All at once, with suspiciously "no one in sight and no sound of pursuit" (CP, 144), the terrorist finds himself rounding the curve of the street which could not be traced in the photograph, and which has been present throughout the narrative as his own future, his own death. The shutters of the street's building are all "solemnly shut" (CP, 144), and the terrorist's death is assured by the disturbingly futuristic sight of his own getaway car, a blue Renault, which he discovers in pieces in the dirt of a nearby rubbish tip. Paradoxically, this leap into the future implies a reversion to the past, as the terrorist's new "reality" (un-reality) merges with a longing for the safety and simplicity of childhood innocence. In a scene which is reminiscent of the Lacanian nostalgia for the lost Imaginary, the novel ends as it began, with the terrorist eating an apple in the orchard he had loved as a child. In final irony it is now spring, the season of beginnings, in contrast to the autumn season of the opening page; the apple trees themselves, at the outset left only with fruit "wizened to the size of walnuts" (CP, 3), are now heavy with new fruit.

> I began to be breathless, and it occured to me that with my footsteps echoing as they did between the high walls I might attract less attention if I simply walked.
>
> So I walk . . . A little further on and I find orchards on both sides of the road, apple trees lit up with late afternoon sunlight and heavy with fruit. I reach up and take one. Bite into it. Eat.
>
> And in the miraculous assurance of being safe at last, walk on under the early blossoms. (CP, 144-45)

Like *Fly Away Peter,* then, *Child's Play* 's final note is a double one which suggests both fragmentation in its unresolved uncertainty, and unity in its encircling return to the beginning. Yet the very possibility for both readings — each assertion being shadowed by the possibility of its opposite — retains to the end the ambiguity which characterises the text. As such, *Child's Play* becomes a play upon history as an active text, or as Fredric Jameson puts it, as "a-text-to-be-(re-)constructed" (388). The ambiguities of the

text — the unwritten possibilities underlying the pattern of a terrorist who "writes" a Great Writer who "writes" a terrorist — belong finally, in the multiplicity of readings, to what the Great Writer calls the "anti-Works, those dark, unwritten masterpieces" (CP, 48) which stand as the "shadowy complement" (CP, 48), as the unasserted other, of the written text.

CHAPTER 4

MASCULINE DESIRE AND THE "OTHER": INTRA-DISCURSIVE CONFLICT IN CHRISTOPHER KOCH'S *THE BOYS IN THE ISLAND* AND *ACROSS THE SEA WALL*

> Desire motivates the need to define, to classify, to identify, to know the 'I', the nation, the self as a whole entity, a fullness of being. Desire is insatiable. It can never be satisfied. The more man desires — an object, the land, a woman . . . the more he wants. What he wants is forever beyond his grasp. Desire supplements lack. It arises not from the presence of desirable objects but from the absence of a sense of wholeness. The objects, ideas, definitions partially fill this gap. But they are never enough. This is so because desire is focused on an impossible state of being, rather than an object. (Schaffer, 24)

It is through this ever-present desire for "a fullness of being" that history as a pattern of logical causality, despite its inconclusiveness, endures as a notion; that the establishment of "truth" within cultural discourse, despite its relativity, persists as a need. And of course language is the force which constitutes desire. With its capacity to differentiate between the subject and everything that is other, language gives desire not only its focus but also meaning and expression. Schaffer continues: "Language substitutes for the absence of wholeness by constituting the self through an endless play of sameness and difference" (24).

As such, a discourse cannot in itself be conceived as a coherent or consummate ideology. Derrida talks about "discourse as supplement" (*Of Grammatology,* 216), suggesting the double signification of "supplement" as both an acknowledgement of difference (between discourses) and a reminder of lack (within discourse). The language which structures discourse assumes absolutism and disguises lack in its privileging and polarising of meaning; hence the paradoxes arising from language and the discourse it constructs, in which "orientation is a disorientation" (*Of Grammatology,* 216). Inevitably, then, any discourse is wrought both by the challenges it faces from alternative discourses and from the contradictions and gaps inherent to itself. For a post-colonial discourse in particular, this internal division is accentuated by the confusion of cultural and political influences from which it has developed. As Deleuze and Guattari have argued, a discourse is like a rhizome which

> ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive . . . There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 7)

So within the political multiplicity existing in any discourse, language becomes the force of power which hierarchises the social order constituted by that discourse. In this respect, intra-discursive conflict can be traced to the masculine/feminine dichotomy which lies at the base of other cultural tensions. The hierarchising of meaning through the masculine/feminine dichotomy extends not only to the political tension of dominance/subservience, but also to the conceptual tensions of "culture/nature, self/other, subject/object, activity/passivity" (Schaffer, 13).

Given that it is the role of language to mediate between the subject and the external world, entry to the Lacanian Symbolic Order (the individual's confrontation with the world as subject) corresponds with an acceptance of the Law of the Father in language. The Mirror Stage, according to Lacan, sets the infant upon its inevitable path of alienation from the (m)other, and the Oedipal drama is initiated when the figure of the father intervenes to triangulate that division. The language that the subject then acquires is structured by the phallic signifier, the sign of symbolic castration which prevents re-entry to the mother and the dyadic unity of the Imaginary. Existence within the Symbolic Order therefore involves, as part of the awareness of division, both submission to and repressed resentment of the Law of the Father. Regardless of this ambivalence, the subject cannot help but become involved in the network of ethical and epistemological assumptions which structure a sense of cultural identity and which are determined by the Law of the Father. So from the outset, through language, a phallocentric culture is established in which all subjects — whether male or female — only have access to a cultural identity "which takes the masculine as the norm for the self" (Schaffer, 10); in which female speakers become, not subjects in their own right, but only "not-male," or other. Indeed Louis Althusser takes this Lacanian pattern one step further, arguing that even the pre-lingual individual is "always-already" a subject, pre-appointed as it is to a destination within the ideological framework into which it is born, "always-already" marked by the Law of the Father:

> it is certain in advance that it will bear its Father's Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable. Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is 'expected' once it has been conceived. (*Lenin and Philosophy*, 164-65)

In this sense, national identity can be understood in Lacanian terms of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, in as much as it stands as a cultural signifier of commonality and otherness. As a favoured ideal it is imaginary, a construction of desire, which is then given distinctive cultural meaning through language as the symbolic order. But this pattern — which holds true for any nationalist discourse — reveals a dangerous paradox within post-colonial nationalism in particular: a post-colonial culture struggles on an inter-cultural level to overthrow imperial dominance, yet in its own phallocentric structure it supports a dominant discourse which excludes — or at least marginalises — certain elements of its own society in a hierarchy of power. In other words, within the power hierarchy of national/cultural discourse the feminine is explicity denied, only implicity apparent as other, only existing "in a space of contradiction" (Schaffer, 24).

Within Australia's cultural tradition, in particular, in which the pioneering of national identity has been inextricably tied to the predominantly masculine desire to explore, map and control an unfamiliar environment, women occupy the space of lack which is externalised as otherness in landscape. The association of women and landscape in cultural discourse is not new or unusual. In the Eurocentric/Romantic tradition, the feminine is related to landscape in terms of Mother Nature as a nurturing and soothing force. However, this tradition is reversed in the conception of the Australian landscape through the masculine/nationalist discourse. The ambivalent approach of post-colonial nationalism to the notion of otherness results in a dualistic vision of woman/landscape as something to be desired, conquered and claimed, yet paradoxically, as something fearful, hostile and ultimately uncontrollable. Andrew Taylor, for instance, marks out woman/landscape within the dominant nationalist discourse as a conflicting but repressed discourse which therefore assumes images of duality for the male coloniser: "The land, and Nature herself, are what men exercise power over: it is what they penetrate, tame, subdue, control, rape, open up, explore and, of course, possess." Through the tension arising from this power struggle, woman/landscape becomes "alternately inviting and

mysterious, friendly and threatening, open for exploitation and capriciously — even vengefully — malicious" (*Reading Australian Poetry,* 33).

The tensions apparent here arise because it is only through the act of situating women and landscape as other that the male coloniser can establish his identity as the stable subject within a potentially shifting discourse of power. The seat of power taken up by the early colonisers of Australia and maintained since by their descendants depended upon the marginalisation of all elements of difference, not only represented by landscape and by women, but also of course by those first but displaced colonisers, the Aboriginal people. The construction of national identity takes its shape, after all, through a series of dichotomies, ultimately being defined not so much by what it is as by what it is not. So it is only through the subjugation of otherness that the masculine/nationalist discourse can emerge as dominant. As Schaffer writes:

> The land, then, is not only a metaphor for feminine otherness through which man attains a (precarious) identity but also a shifting site of battles — moral, political, religious, economic — invested and traversed by the relations of power/knowledge. (81)

The association of woman with landscape as a suppressed and marginalised element within the dominant masculine/nationalist discourse is a recurring motif in the novels of Christopher Koch. In each of his four novels, women are central to both the physical and the psychological dilemmas of the male protagonists in attaining a sense of "place." As the focus of an ambivalent masculine desire, the female characters appear as symbols of hope idealised beyond attainability, only to become the embodiment of defeat and betrayal.

The protagonists themselves represent the masculine/nationalist tradition, and their experiences of conflict and division reflect the inconsistencies of that discourse. As such, the struggles they face in search of place can be read as the inevitable dilemmas faced by the always-already subject. The apparent transition from innocence to experience (expressed in the first two novels through the experiences of adolescence and in the last two novels through experiences of adversity) is undercut with the exposure of already-existent conflict and complexity within the supposedly untroubled state of innocence. Even the quiet and impassive existence that Koch's colonial innocents want to escape is, like Jim Saddler's innocence, a constructed state, always-already tainted by the shadow

of its other. The protagonists' apparent desire to discover the world of experience in their ancestral Europe is, then, not so much aimed towards entry to the Symbolic Order of social determination as towards re-entry to the lost Imaginary of dyadic unity. The resulting tension between Koch's protagonists and the world in which they move is expressed in each novel through a series of discrepancies between expectation and achievement, between the objectivity of events and the subjectivity of perception.

In *The Boys in the Island* (1958; rev. 1986), Koch's first novel, this tension emerges on the opening page with the child Francis Cullen's ambiguous dream/vision of the Soons. Regarding this dream world which is neither daytime nor night-time, which is both "blank and bright" (BI, 1), the boy is torn between a sense of eagerness for and apprehension of the awaiting future. Dominating the landscape until they disappear over the very edge of the horizon, the Soons stand as the future's symbols; "making the noise of power" (BI, 1), the Soons speak a language that is indecipherable yet determining, and against their power the boy feels small, alien and alone. In the light of this tension between the present of childhood innocence and the future of adult experience, the landscape also has two faces. Juxtaposed against the "brown-grassed flat-land stretching quiet" is "a terrible place: a dark city of black and red iron, and chimneys of terrible masters" (BI, 2).

From this opening dream the narrative moves into what the child Francis remembers as "the sunny playing-time" (BI, 5), an idyllic pre-war, pre-conflict time of golden afternoons and the smell of warm bread. Yet even this world of childhood innocence is consciously constructed. The child is aware of the dangers of harm, but harm is kept locked away on the other side of "the yellow-barred front gate, where his mother would never let him go" (BI, 5). The very image of the yellow-barred front gate, with its double implications of sunny happiness and repression, reflects the illusoriness of the child's innocence. The dream of the Soons, introduced even before the sunny playing-time, acts as a measure of the child's awareness of division, and the presence in his dream of Lad — the ideal projection of himself but the figure who always leaves Francis behind in dream adventures — further suggests this awareness of division. From the retrospective

perspective of experience, then, the playing-time becomes a dream of the lost Imaginary, an illusory world of unity in which the recognition of conflict and division is repressed.

The burden of otherness which this tension of division entails is carried by the landscape, which is always expressed in terms of duality. And the "natural" inhabitants of this landscape are not portrayed as the male protagonists, who gaze at it through alien eyes, but women. Even in the seemingly harmonious world of Francis' sunny playing-time, the feminine is perceived as other and is therefore treated with ambivalence. The girls from the local orphanage Lowlands (a name with mixed connotations in itself, a promise of the longed-for and dreaded future) play games that the watching boy cannot join or understand, and they call to each other in a strange language "of things he could not know" (BI, 7). Even in childhood the girls' lives become fictionalised by Francis into an inaccessible fantasy. In his imagination the girls are kept within a "huge house whose tall grey tower he had seen in a storybook"; they are both ugly and beautiful, and significantly "one of them he believed was a princess" (BI, 6). Calling to him from over the back fence, the girls involve Francis in a mocking, almost sexual banter which increases his confusion and excludes him further from their world:

> 'Hello, Bubba,' they called.
> 'I'm not a bubba,' he said. 'My name's Francis.'
> 'No it's not,' said a big lady-girl with red hair. 'You're our Bubba!'
> 'We all *love* you, Bubba,' said another girl.
> 'No we don't,' said a bad girl with glasses.
> 'Yes we do,' said a girl with blue eyes like flowers, and a small face. She was the princess.
> Then they all fell down from the fence and were gone, back to the fountain and magic rooms in the tower . . . their voices float[ing] back:
> '*Only a bubba ... a bubba ... a bubba ...*' (BI, 7)

In the boy's mind the female world of Lowlands merges with the unknown landscape beyond the fence, but this is a place to which "he had forgotton how to get through" (BI, 7).

Francis' perception of otherness as embodied in woman/landscape is accentuated by his Tasmanian background. Himself a native of Tasmania, Koch constructs the island in this text as a doubly marginalised world, twice removed from the perceived centre of Europe. Through the perspective of a masculine discourse, the island emerges as an isolated, upturned world of paradoxes and ambivalences. Associated with both the alien world of women and the "dark, stone-age people [who] the colonists . . . wiped out" (BI, 8), it

becomes a place whose mysteries the colonising male will never be able to decipher. With the repressed element always threatening to surface, the landscape is described in terms which suggest not only the mysteries of a female body but also the ghostly presence of a dispossessed race. As such, it is a landscape in which Francis is bound to feel displaced:

> And the bush is silent. There is a silence in the island . . . of a land outside history, almost outside time. It is so far south: on the edge of the blank wastes of ice . . . Yet the places of the bush seem to wait: they wait, the dead-quiet eucalyptus gullies, the damp bracken hollows, the dark-haired groves of she-oaks whose grey bark is like the mummified flesh of that [lost] race . . . Forlorn, all marks of men, in the lonely places of the island which still doesn't quite belong to them, nor they to it. (BI, 8-9)

The natural world is juxtaposed against the modern urbanised world which hovers on its fringe, a barrier against the bush and the location of masculine power. However even Hobart, as the world of men, is touched by division. The reminder of the otherness of woman/landscape is ever-present: "the fragrant foreign breath of the country can move in summer down Elizabeth Street, catching at the people on the pavements of midday. The country's yellow grass reaches stray fingers into the suburbs" (BI, 9). And the city itself "is divided into two worlds" (BI, 9), shifting endlessly between the opposing aspects of old and new, bad and good, "otherness and nearness" (BI, 12).

For the boy Francis, growing up within this dual world, otherness becomes a paradoxical signifier of both estrangement and release. His conception of otherness takes on the double aspects which in Lacanian terms are irreconcilable: as the signifier of difference otherness is both alien and the source of potential unity; as the marker of division it both determines the subject's place within the Symbolic Order and creates nostalgia for the lost Imaginary. As such, Francis' dreams of the Otherworld of the future become confused with a nostalgic longing for an idealised past, and in order to have logical credibility, this dual world of the imagination takes on a specific temporal and spatial focus:

> It was a hoarded belief and expectancy regarding certain incredible places, which he heard of in odd tunes, in dreams, and in the murmurings of Lad. He had glimpsed them since childhood: gleaming byways of an illimitable adult world which stopped his breath; and in a future beyond the island, they would all be granted to him.
>
> He was waiting for it. (BI, 39)

For Francis, freshly out of school and standing on the threshold of adulthood, Lutana Rise — the badlands which "rises" above and beyond the tedious safety of his own

comfortable suburb — assumes the quality of otherness in these terms, taking on the significance of both anticipation for the future and nostalgia for the past:

> He had a name for this place; he called it the Otherland. And it seemed to him that he looked across to the Rise over the actual gap of time as well as distance: back to when he was ten years old . . .
>
> Lutana Rise had become unbelieveable to him; it was the edge of a dream-country. It was the child-far past, and it was the future . . . It was a picture to be yearned for, and never real. (BI, 40)

This becomes the site of Francis' initiation into what he sees as a desired but unknown life: the world of workshirts, of beer, of men. The shameful disaster of his first drinking experience in which the boys — with all their affectations of manhood — are scorned by the workmen in the pub, suggests the inappropriateness of the direction which their dream of otherness takes. However Francis will not be discouraged, and he throws himself into this otherworld despite its glaring incongruities with his own life. It represents a place in which he can be "drunk with the liquor of risk; with the idea of the world" (BI, 130).

Most importantly, Francis' initiation into this Otherland corresponds with his initiation into love. Heather Miles, the young girl he meets at the country fair, is the embodiment of the unknown landscape which lies beyond the urban limits. As her Christian name would suggest, the earthly warmth of her body emanates from her thin floral dress, and her hair has the soft scent of gully-ferns (BI, 61). However, with the ambivalence that the otherness of woman/landscape invites, Heather is always described in dual terms. She is both feminine and masculine, child and adult, delicate and coarse. Her wide-set hill-blue eyes have "a strange hint of hardness, coarseness" which is at odds with "her delicate girl's face with its small chin" (BI, 61). Significantly, on the night of Francis' meeting with Heather, the countryside is racked by a storm which shakes him awake. The storm marks his awakening to the world of experience and, correspondingly, ensures that he will never achieve the Imaginary (imaginary) unity that he believes his relationship with Heather can provide.

> Heavy rain was falling on the roof, like all the tears in the world . . .
>
> 'Jesus,' said Lewie's voice. 'Are you awake, Frank? That's the worst thunder I've ever heard.'
>
> Francis laughed.
>
> 'No, that really frightens me, thunder like that,' Lewie said. 'It sounds as if it's busting everything to bits.' (BI, 65-66)

So, on Lewie's motorbike and wearing a leather jacket "like the first garb of manhood" (BI, 70), Francis begins his journey into "the mild but terrible acres of the love-country" (BI, 70). This is a strange landscape which holds an ambivalent fascination for Francis. Its very strangeness, as other, is appealing to him but its empty, burning harshness he finds fearful. Heather becomes indistinguishable from this hard inland country, and even her flowered beachbag, which she carries on their trip to the swimming hole, seems incongruous in her possession. It is the symbol of "a gay beachside life" she has never lived, its flowers "pathetically faded" by her own environment (BI, 77). Francis tells himself that Heather is an unwilling prisoner of this landscape, held captive "in the prison of the country yard" (BI, 90), yet at the same time he acknowledges that this is her element and she cannot be disassociated from it. And in fact he does not really wish her to be, because after all "he was in love not just with a girl, but with the land that held her" (BI, 103).

The boy's mingled expectations of otherness therefore determine his vision of Heather. He sees her only as the construction of his own desire, resulting in a paradoxical discrepancy between the idealised Heather (who seems "real" to him) and the Heather who exists beyond the context of his dreams (who seems unreal). Meeting her for only the second time, Francis discovers that

> Heather's smiling face was as pretty as he remembered. But the actual skin of it, the coarse yet soft texture of her hair, and a small pimple on her chin, disturbed him. It was strange, the live face overlapping the dream one. (BI, 70-71)

When he first touches her, swimming together in the dam, her flesh seems "cold" and "unreal" (BI, 80). The time that he spends with her seems "unreal as though seen through coloured glass" (BI, 82).

Despite his recognition of this disparity, however, Francis continues to regard Heather only in the conventional terms of masculine desire. He thinks of her within the mental framework of clichés, in relation to the current heartbreaker songs or the mythic stereotypes of love. She is "like a girl in a film" (BI, 77) or "a girl in a story" (BI, 90). Not only Francis but also Heather must operate through the discourse of given ideals, which is spoken in the language of masculine desire. Herself the subject of a phallocentric culture, presided over by the Law of the Father, this is the only language to

which she has access. Incorporating all the worst aspects of popular culture, it is a language which serves only to perpetuate Francis' illusion of achieving Imaginary unity by uniting with the other:

> he began whispering to her the words he had heard too many times in bad films and on the radio, but now found he had to say himself: they were like three pebbles dropped in a pool, and he would never be the same now that he had said them and she had repeated them.
> 'You'll never know,' she said fervently.
> He knew she must have got this phrase from one of the hillbilly songs Greendale sang so often; but he was enchanted as though she had invented it especially for him. (BI, 93)

The relationship is of course destined to failure, constructed as it is from the boy's illusive expectations of Heather and of the place she represents. The place of his dreams is not only the strange and limitless landscape where Heather lives but also an imaginative place of adult experience. Their relationship perpetually swings between the worlds of childhood and adulthood, and they live in dread of the very love that they nurture: "too young, half-forbidden, its direction an utter mystery . . . They were in a fever bred by the fear" (BI, 89). For Francis, caught up in all the divisions of adolescence, woman/landscape takes on the significance of unifying knowledge, representing the "foreign country" (BI, 81) to which he longs for access.

All this is apparent from Francis' first visit to the Miles' property, which prefigures the end of their relationship. The disparity between expectation and achievement is reflected in the landscape surrounding the Miles' home: it is flat, barren and sun-blistered, the few surviving flowers withered and sad (BI, 76). Vern Miles, Heather's father, reigns over this landscape and everyone within it. In a world which protects the Law of the Father, Miles' power is unquestioned and all-pervasive. If the masculine desire for union with the feminine reflects a desire to revert to the lost Imaginary of dyadic unity, the Law of the Father — as the phallic power which breaks this unity — must function as the instrument of repression.

Miles, as the embodiment of the repressive Law of the Father, limits Francis' access to both Heather and the land she represents. He guards his role as the harsh master of both, and under his fearful control his subjects seem like trapped rabbits (BI, 86). His vacant sadism is repellent to Francis, but nonetheless the boy finds himself conceding to Miles' influence. Caught up in his own ambivalent fascination with this man's cruel and often

bizzare behaviour (to the extent of allowing Miles to give him an electric shock), Francis is now truly involved in the conflicts and tensions that acquiescence to the Law of the Father implies:

> Reluctantly flattered to be noticed by the blank, unchanging eyes, Francis put his fingers on the knobs. When he jumped, and drew his tingling hand back, Mr Miles's scraping laughter filled the shed again. The boy reddened. He was ashamed for jumping like the others, for laughing at the game of this man he already thought he might hate. (BI, 76)

Yet more disturbing to Francis than the senseless cruelty of Miles is the gradual realisation that Heather herself is not the romantic cliché of his desires but a reflection of her father. She is, after all, subject to the Law of the Father and can only function in the space of absence she occupies within that structure. The suggestion of her vacancy is apparent to, but ignored by, Francis, even during his first visit to Greendale. Under Miles' blank stare, "Heather's face was expressionless, her gaze almost as shallow and blank as her father's" (BI, 86). Francis recognises that the older sister Anne, "with her nakedly sensitive face" (BI, 87), is more akin to himself, but it is Heather-as-Other that he is drawn to, "loving her very strangeness" (BI, 87). Between Francis and Heather, however, there can never be a meeting point. She is a "girl-mask" (BI, 117) which he can beat his fists against but never see inside. Formed by the dominant force of masculine desire, she is like "a doll . . . her face empty: a statue's" (BI, 118), and Francis is forced at last to realise that "Something had gone. There was an absence" (BI, 115). Ultimately, too, it becomes clear that the appealing innocence with which Francis had endowed her ("*Away out at Greendale, a lonely girl . . . is waiting for a stranger; for love . . .*" [BI,68]) is misread. With the arrival of Donnie, the older local boy, Heather exudes an air of adult sexuality that leaves Francis floundering:

> She smiled gaily at Donnie while Francis watched her, and said: 'Hullo, Donnie — where'd you pop from?'
>
> Donnie smiled slowly, elaborately shifting on his feet to take her in. She looked very pretty today, in a bright new floral dress. Francis saw that she was wearing lipstick, and that her hair was cut short, no longer shoulder-length . . . He saw with horror that the expression in her eyes was the same as Donnie's. (BI, 112-13)

And with his changing perception of Heather, Francis' perception of the landscape changes accordingly. Returning to Hobart on the train, nursing the knowledge of failure

and rejection, Francis looks out upon what has become "a nightmare landscape" of "arid dry grass; enduring, beast-patient fence-posts; houses like weary thoughts" (BI, 121).

Unable to achieve access to the other through romantic love, Francis turns his attention instead to a future in the Mainland, once a childhood fascination and again the focus of his obsession with escape from the limitations and disappointments of the "familiar." Of course, his dream of escape is concerned not so much with the limitations of the island as with the painful experiences of the present; it is not the promise of the future he seeks, but the safety of the innocent past. This tension is accentuated by the implicit irony of the shop sign he passes each day on the tram which reads "J. MILES, *Babywear*."

> And slowly he began to revive, thinking of escape and the Mainland.
> He need never read again that sign which said: J. MILES, *Babywear*. He would break free from the hillbound circle of the island: now a mocking prison, its every corner and scene stabbing him with the joke. (BI, 122)

Francis' partner in dream, with whom he plans to discover the world's mysteries, becomes his old classmate Shane Noonan. Together Francis and Shane plan to "run away" (BI, 130) to the Mainland which, they believe, holds the promise of a unifying future. Like Jim Saddler's sanctuary and the terrorist's Event, the boys' "reality" is constructed of names, which are then externalised into notions of "place." By merely saying the words, the boys weave around themselves a web of expectation which carries far beyond the Mainland: "'America; India; Europe!' He had created a spell: the magic names hung in the space of the afternoon room" (BI, 128).

Francis is drawn to Shane by the same evasive "strangeness" which had attracted him in Heather. Like Heather, Shane seems somehow inaccessible and therefore the perfect embodiment of otherness. Like Heather, his attention is turned inward, "his face expressionless and curiously blind behind his glasses" (BI, 123). And again like Heather, Shane is "like two people" (BI, 125): he hovers on the fringe of two worlds, projecting both an adult seriousness and a childlike vulnerability. But it is immediately apparent that Shane will never be able to make the transition from his sheltered childhood to acceptance of the world of experience, the claim of the Law of the Father. Even as a young adult he exists in a state of illusive innocence, protected by a "possessive" (BI, 129) mother. Significantly, his father is dead.

In particular, it is his fear of the adult future that marks Shane from the outset for tragedy. Just as Francis confuses anticipation of the future with nostalgia for the past, so Shane's excitement about fleeing to the Mainland reflects not so much his claimed desire "to wander off into the world" (BI, 128) as his need to return to the idealised Sydney of his childhood. Everything about Shane forewarns of the early death which, with his inability to progress beyond a childhood idyll, seems inevitable. Even a summer afternoon of swimming is transformed into an ominous hint of the future. Shane's association of a sea death with a return to the womb points to his obsession with the lost Imaginary.

The sea especially represents the maternal element of nature, as opposed to the almost "lover" relationship (with its love/hate connotations) between men and the land. Accordingly, it is only in the sea that Shane can throw off his anxious air of reservation "and shout and clown like any other bloke" (BI, 125). Yet it is also in the altered perspective of "the murky, silk-green otherworld of water" that Shane becomes "no longer human" but a "death-white shape . . . a queer fish-thing" (BI, 125) that is disturbing to Francis.

> 'Thought you'd drowned,' Francis called.
> 'No.' Shane bobbed below him, easy on the swell, his face meditative . . .
> 'I'd hate to drown,' Francis said. 'I was thinking when I was under. What a death.'
> 'Would you?' Shane said. 'I wouldn't — I think it'd be a beautiful death. Like being in a womb.
> Francis said nothing. He was a little taken aback at this remark, spoken in such a matter-of-fact voice. Shane was certainly different from other blokes . . . He was extremely serious, even when he fooled, as though everything he did and said had a profound importance beyond the moment. (BI, 125-26)

Later, as the boys make their symbolic run up the hill of Lutana Rise, Shane's hesitant jump over the boundary fence prefigures his last jump onto the Melbourne trainlines and into death. The child-like anxiety with which he faces this challenge — "'Ready? Right. One two three' . . . " (BI, 134) — reflects back upon the fact that he "was running away: simply disappearing from the life that had been charted for him" (BI, 136). The fate that he runs from is that of growing up. It is significant that, running to the top of the Rise, Francis "had left Shane far behind" (BI, 134).

Nevertheless, it is inevitable that for Francis, too, the eventual arrival in Melbourne can bring nothing but disappointment. The tangible reality of this almost-mythic city is a

world that is at odds with the dream. Even worse is the implication that the mystery of Melbourne is reducible to a repetition of familiar Tasmanian suburbia, that the dreamed-of otherworld is nothing more than a shabbier, further-spreading version of the limiting and limited known world:

> Skirted with grass-grown footpaths, the same as in many parts of Hobart, these were the mournful villas of fifty years ago, with mean, fussily decorative front verandahs; the same as he had seen all his life in the older parts of Hobart. Could they be the same? . . .
> *No!* he said. He rejected it, determinedly ignoring it like a spasm of pain . . . But still, at this exact point of time he had dreamed of for years, there was a great doubt, final and unutterable as the darkness of the night itself. (BI, 137-38)

The urban landscape — as a man-made creation, thought of with affinity by Francis — turns out to be just as alienating as the silent, reproachful Tasmanian landscape. In fact the city projects the same indifference that had made men forlorn "in the lonely places of the island which still doesn't belong to them, nor they to it" (BI, 9):

> A fragment of flesh in a bus, carried between cliffs of electric-lit stone, there was nothing he could think. The city did not see him, and he knew that it never would; people didn't matter here, he knew this instantly. (BI, 138)

This is a desolate world, and is all the more devastating because it crushes the will to struggle against desolation. In the industrial districts which lie in the grip of tedium as of a disease, the factory workers dully live out their lives, their "cheerfulness more barren than anger" (BI, 143). Francis also takes on a factory job, following doubtfully in the path of Lewie and Jake, the friends from Hobart who had also chased a misdirected dream of promise and excitement to Melbourne. The three boys share a room in a St Kilda boarding house, whose ever-present grey light ("despair's own colour" [BI, 142]) belies its more whimsical name "Rosebank."

The illusive ideal of the feminine other reappears with the introduction of Keeva, a local city girl who holds the three boys fascinated with her strange combination of sexual appeal and repellent cruelty. The notion of love as a potentially unifying force is parodied in Keeva who, with her name abbreviated to K, prefigures the image of Kali — the Indian goddess of duality, both giver and destroyer of life — which dominates Koch's next novel. Keeva gives lessons in "how to be *cruel*" (BI, 147); with her, love is "a trap against which [one] must guard" (BI, 153).

The failed relationship between Francis and Heather re-emerges in a more extreme, more terrible form between Lewie and Keeva. The idealised expectation of love that Francis had held of Heather becomes, with Lewie, a strange inversion of values in which attraction is based upon cruelty and distrust. His admiration of Keeva increases in direct proportion to her ruthlessness and her police record. Their respect for one another is manifested in insults and the recurring burglary of each other's apartments. For Lewie, love is a dualistic and frustrating emotion which borders on — and sometimes merges with — hate.

> 'You're falling for her,' Francis said. But he knew that it would not be love of any tender and vulnerable sort with Lewie.
> 'No, no, no,' Lewie said, 'you think I'm gunna be a mug like Jake? It's not that. It's — it's *deeper*. Sometimes I hate her guts, but you can't get around it, she's a terrific dame. I've never known a bird like her. But if I let her see it I'm gone.' (BI, 153)

The dependency upon other-as-unity does not only find its focus in the feminine but also in anything beyond the already-defined. Francis relies upon the "double secrecy" (BI, 164) which Keeva emanates to open up to him a new world. Without a belief in this mystery, in the promise of something beyond the limiting immediate, "who was he? Where was he?" (BI, 164). The "landscape of fact" which surrounds him is flat and tedious (BI, 164), and his gaze is held instead "by a dreambound reminder of what he had come here to find — but could not find" (BI, 164-65). This constant juxtaposition of promise and disappointment leads to a sense of duality that is innate and insoluble:

> Promise lay slain on the St Kilda tramlines of Sunday; but even now he could not be free of a suspicion that another city, the city of the promise, lay locked just out of sight . . . He whispered to himself: *'Melbourne, Melbourne, Melbourne,'* — as though the name itself might unlock something. But only melancholy made itself felt, containing the memory of another city . . . the city of a great meaning. (BI, 165)

With Shane's return to Melbourne from Sydney, weary and shabby, the tedium of fact overshadows the dream. His bitterness hints at the truth when he says accusingly to Francis, "'*I've realised that nothing happens*. I wonder whether you've ever admitted that to yourself?'" (BI, 169-70). The dreamed-of city "of a great meaning" is even further undermined by the vision, through night-time shop windows, of "a window-dresser's dream-street," inhabited by beautiful "women of dream" with their long eyelashes and vivid lipstick (BI, 171-72). The window dressing, which the boys gaze at from the other

side of the glass, represents their city of illusions, but in its rose-coloured perfection it is also "empty of life, temperate, sterile . . . its silver trees and buildings utterly remote from the pavements of the real street outside" (BI, 171-72).

Against the difficulty of accepting the failure of the other-as-unity, Shane's subsequent suicide seems easy. His death, approached as a child would approach a daring game — "'*Ready? Ready? Right. One, two, three* . . .' And then the leap (easy) out of life, into death" (BI, 175) — is his attempt to move beyond desire and so "return" to the pre-conscious Imaginary. But as such, his suicide is a denial of his destiny within the adult world: "Shane had refused to grow up. His destination had not been possible" (BI, 175).

Shane's death and the death of another friend in a foolhardy accident shatter the constructed innocence of Francis' boyhood illusions and make him accept the responsibility of the "enemy iron" (BI, 196) world of experience. He recognises finally that "the story of childhood" is "a story whose end doesn't arrive" (BI, 196). Nonetheless, the dilemma implicit in that realisation, the dilemma of the perpetual appeal of the unattainable other, leaves the subject — and the novel — in a state of irresolvable tension:

> It was as though, across the intervening spaces of the valley, where only the moving red tail-light of a car was definite, like the sullen beginning of some perilous expedition, they dared him to come again. Against that prospect, a wind-tormented young eucalypt in a garden tossed its thin body backwards and forwards, as though trying to break free from its roots. (BI, 198)

* * *

Koch's following novel *Across the Sea Wall* (1965; rev. 1982) begins with the same tension on which *The Boys in the Island* finishes, with a dusky scene in which, "very far off, electric stars of an incredible city moved on billowing blackness" (ASW, 1). The setting is again Melbourne, returned to "as though to the scene of an old crime" (ASW, 1). The protagonist, Robert O'Brien, is slightly older than Francis Cullen, but shares his dilemma; even at twenty-three he, like Francis, exists on the edge of the two worlds of innocence and experience: he is "not quite a man, not a boy" (ASW, 57). Like Francis, O'Brien is caught by the desire for that elusive "fullness of being," but the destination he focuses upon as the fulfilment of desire extends beyond the Mainland to Europe.

> When he was twenty-three, he had lived in the expectation of another, impossible life. But he had squandered that expectation, as though it would never

> run dry; and then the other had come to infect him: the frozen, glamorous war-lights, the grim chimneys of the utmost north. (ASW, 2).

Intending to throw off "the smothering blanket" (ASW, 7) of predictable suburban life in Sydney, O'Brien and his friend Jimmy Baden sail for Europe, like "brothers in a fairy tale" (ASW, 4). However, O'Brien's fabulous expectations of this journey are checked by recurring images of limitation. Physical obstacles pervade the novel, standing as constant reminders of the "illusory promise" (ASW, 7) of the other. Flying out of his native Sydney bound for Melbourne's port, O'Brien gazes down upon the glittering arch of the Bridge as at "a steel trap" (ASW, 7), the symbol of his restrictive life of "tender boredom" (ASW, 7). Nevertheless, the world that O'Brien anticipates is not so readily accessible: marking that world from his own, forming a barrier which recurs again and again and which ultimately defines the boundaries of his life, is another obstacle:

> Winking silver lamp-standards out there were minute and fabulous as objects in dreams; towering cumulus clouds glowed static over another country. And the rim of the curve, the concrete frontier between the ordinary and those other territories, was the sea wall. (ASW, 9)

The sea wall as a symbol of restriction — reappearing throughout the novel in other forms such as railway embankments, city limits, beaches — reflects upon the restrictions (both externally- and self-imposed) of O'Brien's own life. Like Francis, who also walks the line between the safety of the innocent past and the demands of "an illimitible adult word" (BI, 39), O'Brien faces his own progression into the foreign world of experience with a mixture of longing and dread:

> He was being raced out of his life, out of his past, out of everything he knew and which had made him; being sped away by this thundering machine. And there was no interruption. There was something appalling about that, and he had wanted childishly to say: *Not so fast.* (ASW, 13)

Nevertheless, in O'Brien's eyes, unseen Europe is objectified otherness, and he is "in love with this journey as others love a woman, or security, or power" (ASW, 8). Ironically, the journey does finally offer all of these things to O'Brien through his fellow passenger Ilsa Kalnins, the lost European heritage she embodies, and his attempted appropriation of her. As a refugee from war-torn Latvia, Ilsa represents the otherness not only of the feminine, but also of the landscape of Europe and its accompanying world of experience. Like Heather, she is presented as an enigma, her foreign face unreadable and distanced "as though she listened to a private music in her head" (ASW, 18). And again

like Heather, in keeping with the ambivalent approach of the male coloniser to woman/landscape, Ilsa appears to O'Brien in images of duality. She is both delicate and coarse, gracefully dignified and comically awkward. She is "childish, but not innocent" (ASW, 88), alternating, in O'Brien's perception, between child, mother and whore. As such, she encompasses all aspects of the masculine positioning of woman/landscape in the "space of contradiction" (Schaffer, 24). Even Ilsa's gender is double, epitomising the masculine/feminine dichotomy; she is "a creature whose sex is both powerful and weak: she is both female and male" (ASW, 129). But although with Ilsa — as with Keeva — "Tenderness was made silly" (ASW, 88), it is her very alienness which makes her real to O'Brien, which makes him see the women "he had known — those stereotypes of his own nationality and kind — as substitutes allowed before the real thing" (ASW, 88).

It is notable that the two meet in the ironing room on the lowest deck of the ship, below the water line where there "was a womb-like warmth" (ASW, 19). Down here, "a warm, female odour rose above the male smells of paint and oil" (ASW, 19). In this womb-like environment, surrounded by the soothing mother-force of water, Ilsa is in her element: here, she seems "larger than life" (ASW, 19). It is she rather than O'Brien who establishes a relationship between them, treating him with a combination of maternal care and sexual invitation he finds baffling. With implications which are reminiscent of the swimming scene between Shane and Francis, the meeting of Ilsa and O'Brien at sea, in the womb of the ship, signifies desire for the lost Imaginary of dyadic unity. Later, as the new group of friends (Robert and Jimmy, Ilsa and her companions) gather at the ship's rail, the sea again becomes the focus of the lost Imaginary, the object of desire. "'Look out into that sea,'" says one of them. "'It is the sea of our dreams'" (ASW, 35).

The ship's first stop is Jakarta. As a place of mysteries it symbolises O'Brien's first taste of otherness, and walking Jakarta's night-time streets with their blazing lights, he is "walking like a child through a half-comprehended book" (ASW, 46). For O'Brien, this place becomes the beckoning city of his imagination, its "electric stars . . . on billowing blackness" (ASW, 1) promising the fulfilment of his dreams. Significantly, it is during this stolen night in Jakarta that O'Brien's affair with Ilsa begins, in "the hot dark of the most foreign night of his life" (ASW, 50). Ilsa becomes, for him, the embodiment of the

otherness that Jakarta represents; but as other, she is always elusive. Their love-making is a struggle on the hotel bed, but it seems as if the very lack of a meeting point between them only serves to perpetuate desire:

> Her head tossed, and she didn't look at him; he no longer saw her face. They had separate searches: they were both straining thieves of some private beauty, and their voices, in the dark, might have come from other people . . . O'Brien was drunk with discovery: she was his first true woman. (ASW, 50)

O'Brien's paradoxical attitute towards Ilsa reflects his mingled expectations of the Europe of her history. Ilsa's continuing maternity despite the abandonment of her child — "'my milk will not quite go. Maybe it is a judgement on me'" (ASW, 51) — has implications, as Helen Tiffin has pointed out ("Asia, Europe and Australian Identity," 330), for the wider relationship of imperial Europe to colonial Australia. As the isolated and forgotton "offspring" of Europe, Australia both accepts and struggles against the dominance of Eurocentrism. As a descendant of Europe's colonial "children," O'Brien too is caught up in the post-colonial paradox of desiring and rejecting the European influence of his ancestry. As a result, the distinction between colonised and coloniser becomes a shifting one. Later, O'Brien's Indian friend Sunder Singh compels him to acknowledge this contradiction:

> 'You see, O'Brien,' he said, 'you bloody Australians don't know what you are. You don't think much of colonialism, but then suddenly you're waving the Union Jack. It's disheartening.' They passed a statue of Queen Victoria . . . [and] O'Brien found himself looking up at the pudding-faced queen with a certain wistfulness. Relic of the Raj, bereft in independent India, she grilled in the terrible heat, a figure of fun, her majesty a joke; and he felt sorry for her, Victoria Regina, Empress of India, perhaps simply because she was familiar . . . (ASW, 96)

Similarly O'Brien is both drawn to the security that Ilsa offers ("with Ilsa out of sight, and her whereabouts unknown, he was gripped by dismay" [ASW, 95]), and finds her unbearably suffocating. This ambivalence sets up a pattern of tension in their relationship which reflects contradictions, not so much in Ilsa herself, but rather in O'Brien's perception of her.

> He worshipped her; but the idea of loving her was somehow ludicrous. She was beautiful yet grotesque; dignified yet alarming. He didn't even know her; and what he felt was less than love, yet more than love. He searched and searched her body, but could never have ease of his hunger for that figure he thought she inhabited. (ASW, 50-51)

In effect, then, Ilsa represents for O'Brien the paradox of desire. The very inaccessibility of her otherness lies at the heart of its beauty. To penetrate the mystery would be to destroy it; to reach the destination would be to nullify the dream. In fact O'Brien never reaches Europe. At this point his ironic journey into the "new" world of ancestral Europe becomes sidetracked by his attraction to the deeper mysteries of Asia. Asia, even more so than Europe, is truly the "special place" (ASW, 67) he seeks; "a place repeated in many ways, multiform, but always instantly recognisable, because it would be undeniably *other* : existing in a climate of otherness" (ASW, 67). Determined to pursue his dream of otherness, O'Brien abandons not only his own but also Ilsa's separate plans — "'Stay with me . . . I'll fix it with the purser. Do you hear me?'" (ASW, 66) — and sets their shared course for India.

The mystery of India beomes, for both, the potential solution to their dissatisfactions. O'Brien believes that they share the same longing "that had made them both run away" (ASW, 67); in fact, their searches differ because they are running away from different things. O'Brien aims to throw off the emptiness of his life at home, the stigma of ordinariness, while Ilsa seeks to escape the violence of her history, the pain of a disasterous marriage, the guilt of an abandoned child. O'Brien guesses at these disparities between them — particularly as he examines the shabby second-hand books she treasures, "the pieces of her soul" which are "like quaint, battered survivals: anachronisms from another age" (ASW, 68) — but he suppresses this awareness. In the days before they disembark in India, locked into the ship's cabin with Sunder and the Australian girl Carleen with whom they plan their journey into the East, O'Brien gives in to his illusions, sinking "into a dimension like hallucination" (ASW, 70). In the private world they create below the waterline he can retreat into a childish sense of unity in which there are no distinctions, "no day and night," but "only [a] changeless, stagey pink twilight" (ASW, 69). The rosy staginess of the setting is an overt self-declaration of illusion, but although O'Brien "suspect[ed] it, even while he enjoyed it, suspecting his own susceptibility to the obvious and vulgar effects by which the girls had created it" (ASW, 70), he nevertheless "gave in to it" until the thought of the outside world "became like the memory of another place and time" (ASW, 70); "dream had become reality, and

reality was that pink cell, that mock-Oriental alcove of their earnest game" (ASW, 74). Even before their journey together has started, then, O'Brien is "beginning already to spin the dream that would lay them both waste" (ASW, 68).

It is while they wait in their "pink cell" for India that Sunder introduces them to Kali, the Indian goddess of duality. The physical vision of Kali is grotesque: with her "blue flesh, four arms, long breasts, wild hair, and a necklace of skulls" (ASW, 101) her image matches her role as cruel destroyer, but she is also the mother and protector of men. Carleen and Ilsa both become associated with Kali within the perspective of masculine fear and desire. Like Keeva, the two women even bear the trace of her identity in name (Carleen; Kalnins). They both earn their living as dancers, just as "life is Kali's dance" (ASW, 72). Carleen, who with her pointless cruelty and empty nasal laugh is a match for Keeva, represents for O'Brien the vacuous ignorance of suburban Australia. In addition her "aggressiveness, her lack of warmth and her obtuseness" make her truly "a daughter of Kali" (ASW, 73), the recreation of Kali's repellent aspect. Ilsa, on the other hand, is regarded by O'Brien as the embodiment of the goddess herself. Her body, characterised by Kali's long breasts, untidy hair and pallid skin, is that of a carven statue. In character too Ilsa reflects, in O'Brien's eyes, all the dualities of Kali. The Ilsa/Kali figure, the "female force" of masculine desire and dread, is one which O'Brien pursues with "fascinated revulsion" (ASW, 114):

> Giant mischief and healing fountain of the female force — double, always double — to which demands for love or mercy were ludicrous! Maternal whore, loose in the universe, her destruction and creation all play . . . with a sort of ecstasy, he would contemplate the Terrible One carved in her seductive aspect: stem-waisted, gourd-breasts swollen with the liquor of creation, astride the pale body of her consort, impaled in triumphant intercourse, conquering Time and Death. (ASW, 114)

It becomes clear, then, that like the relationship between Francis and Heather, O'Brien and Ilsa's relationship — as the construct of O'Brien's expectations of the other — is destined to failure. After all, it is not Ilsa herself who fascinates O'Brien but a dream of her which is most powerful when she is absent or asleep. There is little he admires in her beyond her foreigness, and much he finds abhorent. Just as Francis cannot reconcile, in his vision of Heather, "the live face overlapping the dream one" (BI, 71), so O'Brien cannot reconcile what he sees as Ilsa's dualities: "She was two and they would not be

joined; and he entertained these separate halves in separate parts of his mind" (ASW, 113).

Nevertheless, it is only through Ilsa that O'Brien can objectify the spirit of anticipation which represents "that one possessed moment of first youth, when the soul was like a tunnel through which a huge wind tore" (ASW, 135). Everything else in his life — the safe and predictable Australian lifestyle, the staid career in the public service, engagement to a comfortably conservative North Shore girl — means nothing compared to that ideal dream, which is linked to the lost Imaginary of childhood innocence and unity. All else is merely "the paraphernalia of adulthood, which he was just putting on" (ASW, 135).

O'Brien finally concludes that Ilsa is incapable of offering unconditional love — "Love was a fiction she dreamed about, and couldn't live" (ASW, 138) — yet in fact this is his own lack. He is incapable of loving Ilsa — "he knew now that he could no longer hope to love her" (ASW, 113) — because his vision of her is based upon an unattainable ideal. As a result of the gap between Ilsa and O'Brien's expectations of her, his evaluation of their relationship is an always shifting, often contradictory one. On the one hand, "the mere word love, in association with Ilsa, had the sound of an outlandish joke" (ASW, 113); on the other, "he loved her now like an idea. She had brought back longing, when he had begun to say he was cured of longing" (ASW, 135).

In this pattern of contradiction, O'Brien's response to Ilsa is that of the colonising male confronting an alien landscape: she becomes the "indefatigable enemy" (ASW, 113) whom he must conquer. His role as male coloniser over marginalised woman/landscape emerges most strongly when Ilsa speaks of dancing for money in a striptease club. His fear that this would jeopardise his exclusive "claim" to her body brings his proprietorial attitude to the surface: "it was not her body to humiliate, he thought: and did not know what he meant by this" (ASW, 117). His own confusion here reflects the extent of his desire to "possess" Ilsa; it is a desire for dominance that he fails to recognise and therefore has no control over.

Once again, physical obstacles act to expose the illusive nature of the other-as-unity. The recurring image of the harbour — the metaphor for rest and security, linked to the image of the womb — is always juxtaposed with images of restriction. It is while

walking along the seemingly endless beach by the sea wall at Madras' Marine Drive that O'Brien mentally turns his back on Ilsa (his perception of her "betrayal" is really his own betrayal). Later, when he makes the decision to leave her in India, they struggle together on a railway embankment, Ilsa finally disappearing from view over the top "which was cut off flat against the white sky" (ASW, 119).

Had O'Brien recognised Ilsa's own sense of lack instead of merely regarding her in terms of his own, he would have seen that she could never fulfil his desire for the unifying other because she too is "a refugee, forever on the edge of journey" (ASW, 67). In an ironic inversion of O'Brien's journey, Ilsa has in fact fled to Australia as a war refugee in an attempt to escape the risks and instabilities of post-war eastern Europe. Although O'Brien sees in her a Europe to which — as a once-colonial son — he has been denied access, Ilsa's Latvia has been subject to violent imperialist intrusion. The cultural marginalisation which O'Brien senses as a post-colonial legacy has, then, been lived out in all its violence by Ilsa. Early in their relationship she tells him "'I am a displaced person'" (ASW, 52), but he reads this as an aspect of her appealling otherness rather than as a declaration of lack. In his eyes she epitomises "the Europe he remembered only in his soul" (ASW, 135), yet Ilsa herself rejects this connection. When he asks her, on only their second meeting, "'Where are you from?'" she replies "'I am from Melbourne'" (ASW, 27). She has no desire to return to the Europe of her childhood, a war-torn world of conflict and distress. Australia suits her, and she looks towards the security of marriage and children from which O'Brien had originally fled. In recognising this familiar need and dependency in Ilsa, the dream of the unifying otherworld dies for O'Brien:

> So the Europe of her past was longed for only by him. And he understood her now: vagrant, war-child, forever displaced. War had uprooted her while he had been safe in his father's house: she had been seared by that tremendous violence of which he knew nothing . . . And in some way that he would never understand, she was dead as a woman. Dead; yet full of life: her final death would not occur. He had depended on reunion with her body to solve this death; but it had not. Lust, drained of everything that was not itself, had proved too feeble to live . . . (ASW, 139)

With the death of his dream, Ilsa now seems to O'Brien "a woman bred in continuities of pain and disaster he was not equipped to deal with; who demanded a charity and largeness of heart he was incapable of offering" (ASW, 140). Her accusation of his

betrayal — "'You are empty. *Nothing*. Empty shop'" (ASW, 140) — is reminiscent of the Indian shopkeeper who had offered "everything for nothing" and whose confiding voice, hushed "like someone in possession of a secret" (ASW, 91), had seduced O'Brien. O'Brien wants everything for nothing; he cannot give of himself for fear of jeopardising his dominant position, his tenuous autonomy. Ultimately, then, it is not the Australian man but the European woman who must fill the marginalised space which is relegated to her by the contradictory power of masculine desire; in fact O'Brien, as one of the "world's innocents" (ASW, 128), has the final security of retreating back into the safety of ignorance:

> He stroked her back, in an empty attempt at comfort. And he told himself that her despair, like so much else about her, was essentially absurd, and would pass like the tantrum of a violent child. He began to prepare the words that would persuade her to stay until morning.
>
> She had thought to come to harbour with him; but she had not. It must have happened many times before. She would never come to harbour; she was forever displaced. (ASW, 140)

In an encircling return to the beginning, which recalls the structural "reversions" of *Fly Away Peter* and *Child's Play,* the novel closes with O'Brien's vision of the Bay's curve, its "winking metal standards marching into their fable of distance" (ASW, 141). O'Brien has changed; yet his acceptance of the lacks and unfulfilled expectations of the world of experience is still tainted by "the hum of memory, the reek of dreams" (ASW, 141). Desire — the supplement to lack which is therefore "focused on an impossible state of being" (Schaffer, 24) — remains insatiable, and, in an ironic play upon the novel's title, the sea wall remains uncrossed.

CHAPTER 5

FRUSTRATION OF DESIRE: THE SHIFTING SUBJECT IN DAVID MALOUF'S *JOHNNO* AND OTHER TEXTS

Desire for a stabilising "centre" is not only rooted in discursive ideals of cultural truth, historical causality and even patriarchal authority; it is also rooted in the subjective notion of identifying "selfhood." In *Reading Lacan,* Jane Gallop ties the problem of self-knowledge to the problem of knowledge of the other:

> If the subject's desire comes from the Other, the subject does not know what she desires but must learn it from the Other. The desire to know what the Other knows, so as to know what one desires so as to satisfy that desire, is the drive behind all quests for knowledge. Outside the knot, there is no desire for knowledge and thus no impetus to know. (185)

Gallop's interpretation of subjective desire elaborates upon Lacan's statement that "desire becomes bound up with the desire of the Other, but . . . in this loop lies the desire to know" (E, 301). The Lacanian concept of the other encompasses all that which represents the lost unity of the Imaginary, but in its very role as (m)other the other must always frustrate desire, for it can never fulfil the demand of absolute unity for the subject. The subject is thus caught in a perpetual dichotomy of subjugation to and alienation from the other. In this sense, it is the very inevitability of lack in the other that lets loose desire, because desire springs up in that gap between need and illimitable demand:

> Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand becomes separated from need: this margin being that which is opened up by demand, the appeal of which can be unconditional only in regard to the Other, under the form of the possible defect, which need may introduce into it, of having no universal satisfaction . . . (E, 311)

Thus the problem of the unsatisfiable demand on the other opens up questions not only about the discourses in which we operate but also about the definition of "self." Like any discourse, the self — with all its moral, political and cultural baggage — is subject to the inconsistencies of language. The nature of self, like the nature of the discourse through which the individual relates to the external world, is always and necessarily inconclusive because its only expressible form is as a speaking subject partaking in social discourse.

Indeed, an awareness of the self-division and therefore of personal lack that this destiny entails is established even before the subject becomes constituted as such within the

Symbolic Order of language. Such an awareness takes place in the transition from a pre-lingual to a speaking state, in the Lacanian Mirror Stage. Lacan defines the Mirror Stage as a process of identification, stressing the self-consciousness which occurs when the subject assumes an image. It represents the stage in which "the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject" (E, 2).

This "primordial form" of the subject represents the development of the ego prior to its social determination. The Mirror Stage, then, gives the pre-lingual child a sense of its own body, as distinct from the external world. Yet this "body ego" is always alienated, always fragmented; the child, gazing at its own image in a mirror, sees another child with whom it identifies but from whom it is nevertheless detached. So the ego is, from the Mirror Stage onwards, set in a direction of division which is never resolvable, which can never quite fulfil the process of *le devenir* (coming-into-being), which always marks an unbridgeable gap between the subject and its image of itself. The ego "symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination" (E, 2). That destination is, of course, entry to the Symbolic Order of language, which functions to define the subject in terms of lack, as that which it is not.

For many of the characters of Malouf's *Harland's Half Acre* (1984), the struggle to discover the terms of self-definition is a vain one. Language becomes for them a system of confusion which only serves to accentuate their sense of alienation. They speak in clichés and colloquialisms in a futile attempt to provide themselves with a "place" in language and thereby in their world. They rattle off conversation in a perpetual, aimless stream, afraid of stopping or even of slowing down in case the gaps underlying language — those gaps which mark their own world as an incomplete and inconclusive construct — are exposed. There is Clem Harland, who attempts with his falsified, self-aggrandising tales to establish a definable sense of identity:

> talk to Clem was its own reality. It was to him what drink had been to others of the Harlands, or cattle, or land. He made himself up out of it. He made the world up out of it. His cloudy speculations, the odd questions he put, the tales he told of experiences that had come to him at different times and places, were flesh and spirit to him because they touched on what he was most deeply moved by, the mystery of *himself* . . . He was deeply puzzled by himself and went in hope that one of his listeners might see a point in what he had to tell that would turn him, in his own eyes, from a vague and shadowy figure to a clear one. (HHA, 5-6)

There is also Aunt Roo, whose talk is as mechanically endless and flamboyantly excessive as the gaudy sequined costumes she spins out continually from her treadle sewing machine. What is significant about Aunt Roo's chatter, as with Clem Harland's, is the open frankness with which she attempts to force personal fiction into fact, "the boldness with which she challenge[s] disbelief" (HHA, 89). And the fact that her fantastic untruths provide the foundation for a sense of self reflects the Lacanian paradox that the subject can only draw from "narrative and fantasy" in any attempt "to reintegrate his or her alienated image" (Jameson, 353):

> Her lies didn't make sense. They were so calculated, so outrageous in the freedoms they claimed from the actual, as to create a dimension of their own in which mere questions of accuracy and all moral questions of right and wrong were of no significance. Aunt Roo in full flight — possessed by one of her fantastic untruths — was her real self at last . . . (HHA, 89)

The sense of self-division, which is made explicit in the confusions of language, is most extreme in the character of Uncle Gil. Returning shell-shocked from war to a world that has no access to his experiences, Uncle Gil might reach the brink of articulation, but lacking an outlet in any shared discourse, can only find release in an explosion of garbled language-signs. Uncle Gil's dilemma reinforces the notion that it is language which creates the subject; or in Lacanian terms, "language speaks the subject" (Gallop, 43). Such a confused outburst is understood only for its fearful violence and therefore thwarts any more fruitful communication.

> The sounds as they tumbled over one another and flashed and bubbled and exploded in what would soon be a rage, were terrifying to me because they made no sense. Ordinary words such as we all shared and used without question had become parts of another language, and Uncle Gil was possessed by them and became another person. His fingers jerked, his body was clenched or flung about like a puppet's, spit flew from his lips; he would clasp me by the shoulders and shake me bodily with the effort of getting the sense of what he was saying out of his head into mine. I understood only the emotion and struggled to get free of it. (HHA, 95)

Besides being the constructors and reflecters of language, the characters of *Harland's Half Acre* establish identity by projecting a chosen role. However even these roles — undercut as they must be by the possibility of difference — are often shifting and confused. Aunt Roo works hard at maintaining her theatricality but it is a style with many forms, "a whole series of *ingénue* roles and voices that she had picked up from the pictures" (HHA, 88). Similarly, Frank Harland's friend Knack takes his named (and

unnameable) identity from his shop of second-hand knick knacks, a jumbled parody of lost societies.

> These fragments of broken households were the stuff of Knack's business. All the elements of several rooms, from different periods and levels of society, had been thrown together . . . Everything was higgledy-piggledy, a parody of settled existence that suggested some final break in the logic of things or a general disruption in which every stick had worked loose or floated free of its old use and meaning and would acquire a new one only when it was resurrected into a second (or was it a third?) life. (HHA, 105)

In this sense, the subject can be read as being constituted of a variety of narratives — of which one is sometimes dominant, or of which several are simultaneously confused — for which language, itself a system of gaps and often of contradictions, offers no stabilising centre. Only the repetition of ritualised narrative can provide a tenuous sense of security in a shifting world, but such rituals depend upon aquiescence to limitation. Aunt Roo's husband Ashes, for instance, renews himself "at the source" by raising his native flag every morning (consulting his watch at the breakfast table), and takes comfort in the fact that his vision of the world can thereby be reduced to the size of a boiled egg in a china cup (HHA, 198). In a more extreme way, Tam Harland lives in fear of moving beyond the safety of ritual, only leaving the house of his father for that of his older brother, and growing into a pudgy middle age with all the characteristics of childhood still intact. Even Phil, the novel's sometimes-narrator, thinks at one time of devoting himself to the study of Latin and Greek because "I liked the idea (or thought I did) of a language that had stopped growing and was past change. I thought it might be safe" (HHA, 196-97).

It is only the painter Frank Harland who revels in the openness of meaning. The very way he acknowledges the inexpressibility of things by leaving his sentences unclosed ("'It was —'"; "'It's —'," [HHA, 208;209]) reflects his respect for life's mysteries. Nevertheless, he too constructs his own identity — what there is of it that is definable — from his paintings, which themselves reconstruct the enlivening power of the natural world. As such Frank's sense of self, as for every character, is derived not from something essential to himself but rather from an endlessly shifting, violently dynamic external source.

> Some of the storm's electric violence had got into him as he lay huddled under his tent, holding fast to a raw pole of it and feeling the vibrations go down through

> him, the strokes of power. Out of a black sky a palpable force had hauled and tugged at the pole, trying to wrench it from his grip and out of the earth; and only the earth had held steady in the black din . . . when he struggled to his feet and went out it was morning, the first light of creation; astonishingly pale and clear with the slick of new birth on everything . . . (HHA, 208-209)

Phil's ambivalent relationship with Gerald Harland typifies the dependency upon the other which develops for the decentred subject. Phil and Gerald are in many ways binary opposites — the one self-assured and comfortable in the world of men, the other rather weak and uncertain — but as opposite characters each compensates for the absences in the other. Yet the balance between them is disturbed by the fact that both are in love with the same girl. At the time when Phil meets them, Gerald and Jacky have already established a close friendship. However Phil's jeolousy, focused on Gerald as the obstacle to his desired relationship with Jacky, could equally result from his claim to, but exclusion from, Gerald-as-other:

> They had a language I could not fathom. It unnerved me.
> Geraldn'Jacky.
> I hated the ease with which their names, welded into a single breath, could be rolled off the tongue . . . This glib linking of the two, this creation of a joint person with a single being, maddened me. It was as if the names were themselves powerful, and once linked must inevitably bring their owners together as well. Each time I heard it, that single breath of five syllables, I would wince and feel betrayed. (HHA, 139)

In the end, however, it is not Phil but Gerald who suffers most for his dependency upon the other. Caught up in the web of his private perceptions, Phil does not even realise that he has become Gerald's most intimate friend and confidante. Viewing events through the haze of his own cynicism, Phil cannot recognise Gerald's needs nor respond to his appeals for help, and ultimately must bear some of the guilt for his suicide.

The theme of self-construction through a dependence upon the external world, so clearly visible in *Harland's Half Acre,* arises consistently in Malouf's work. In his novella *The Prowler* (1982), a suburban community is thrown into chaos when a prowler — only ever half-glimpsed and therefore freely interpretable — breaks into the private lives of others, violating the personal worlds of his "victims" with his unsanctioned and ambiguous presence. He crosses the delicate line between the inner world of subjective privacies and the outer world of objective "truth," exposing that line as an interpretable construct. After all the prowler is, by definition, "one for whom the lines exist to be crossed" (TP, 185).

The story opens with an assurance of the multiform nature of the "real," reminding the reader of the unstated possibilities which always lie beneath the seemingly clear-cut surface of things. "There is more goes on in this suburb," the narrator promises, "than meets the eye. But naturally" (TP, 181). Once the prowler enters the black and white "reality" of the newspapers — what the terrorist in *Child's Play* acknowledges as "that reality (that un-reality) that is the war of words" (CP, 91) — he is suddenly "everywhere" (TP, 183). With subtle consistency, through which the internal and the external become interwoven, the prowler works, "little by little, to change the fabric of our lives" (TP, 184). And the community, finally, comes to depend upon the prowler as the defining factor which establishes its identity as a community:

> What did we do with ourselves before there was the prowler? What did we talk about? He is as much part of our lives now as the milkman or the newsagent. Every suburb has its prowler and we have ours. (TP, 184)

The reader never discovers whether the prowler is, within the context of the story, factual or fictional. However, this query becomes increasingly irrelevant as the prowler gradually assumes mythic proportions, extended by the communal imagination into a creature which takes every conceivable form. The myth represents something different for each person, a measuring point for personal identity, as the prowler takes up the space of some fear or desire or unqualified anxiety in each individual life.

> Are there, quite simply, three prowlers of different ages? Or are the women's memories in some way inaccurate — or not so much inaccurate as so creative, so deeply stimulated, that they have added to their experience and remade it, so that what they reproduce is not what they saw . . . but sensed, or heard, or smelled, and the translations are clichés, they derive from the common pool of their reading or from the movies. What the identikit pictures provide us with is not the composite picture of a prowler . . . but a picture of the man these women fear most, or know best, or most long for, or have dreamed of once on some remote occasion and forgotton. (TP, 190-91)

The prowler moves easily in and out of others' lives, and it is "no coincidence that if we treat these pictures as caricatures, the man who most resembles the victim's assailant is often a member of her own family: a father, an uncle, a brother-in-law, a son" (TP, 191). Every member of the community senses an interconnection with the prowler, whether as his vicim or as the victimiser himself. Many confess to his "crimes," begging to be convicted; these are the men "who are laden with guilt, who hope that punishment and conviction for one crime, even if it is not their own, will be sufficient and will relieve

them of dread" (TP, 212). With final ambiguity, the commonly constructed criteria for identity waver and crumble as Senior Detective Pierce, simultaneously fulfilling the roles of respectable citizen, tough cop and solicitous parent to his motherless sons, recognises the prowler in himself. With this collapse of the distinction between the hunter and the hunted — *"I know too much . . . Confess! Confess!"* (TP, 215) — the worlds of internal fantasy and external reality shift and merge.

The dilemma of establishing some form of definable identity is complicated within a post-colonial discourse in particular, which constructs national and therefore personal identity from a standpoint of double alienation: not only is that sense of identity affected by the conflicting influence of and rebellion against the imperial discourse, but also by the hierarchising of power and privileging of certain elements within the counter-discourse. Malouf's collection of short stories *Antipodes* (1985) in many cases reflects this complex tension between subject and object, between language and the "real." There is, for instance, the adolescent narrator of "Southern Skies," who is caught in loyalties divided between his European heritage and his Australian childhood. He can only come to terms with his position in the world by gathering together the responses of others and eventually aligning himself with the "norm." He infuriates his mother with his deliberately rounded vowels and his carefully developed slang, succeeding, "almost beyond my own expectations, in making myself indistinguishable from the roughest of my mates at school" (A, 9).

Perhaps more disturbing is the case of the Aboriginal labourer in "The Only Speaker of his Tongue," who as the last member of an exterminated race is denied the opportunity to speak his native language. Compelled to communicate from the standpoint of subordination given him within the "new" dominant discourse — "'Yes, boss, you wanna see me' — neither a statement nor a question, the only words I have heard him speak" (A, 71) — he has lost forever his own ancestry, his own history and culture. Like the feminine, the native Aboriginal discourse is given place in the masculine/nationalist discourse of post-colonial Australia only as an unstated gap. It is with horror that the Scandinavian lexicographer who narrates the story recognises the extent of this man's

loss, for it is through language that identity is constructed, that the link between past, present and future is maintained.

> I would like to have him speak a word or two in his own tongue. But the desire is frivolous, I am ashamed to ask. And in what language would I do it? This foreign one? Which I speak out of politeness because I am a visitor here . . . and he because it is the only one he can share now with his contemporaries, with those who fill the days with him — the language (he appears to know only a handful of words) of those who feed, clothe, employ him, and whose great energy . . . has set all this land under another tongue. For the land too is in another language now . . . The first landscape here is dead. It dies in this man's eyes as his tongue licks the edge of the horizon, before it has quite dried up in his mouth. (A, 70)

With fear for the fragility of his own world, the lexicographer retreats to the privacy of his hotel room to repeat feverishly to himself the words of his own language, "as if it were only my voice naming them in the dark that kept the loved objects solid and touchable in the light up there, on the top side of the world" (A, 72). This ironic inversion of the awareness of displacement, in which the once-dominant Eurocentric perspective is made questionable by the now-dominant post-colonial perspective, reinforces all the more powerfully the inconclusiveness of language, and therefore the destiny of the subject as decentred. Nevertheless, the desire for centre, however insatiable, is always present and becomes focused in the other as the elusive yet ever-desired source of self-completion. The two protagonists of Malouf's first novel *Johnno,* which I shall now turn to, follow this pattern of dependency upon the other by endlessly chasing the possibility of self-definition through external sources which can never satisfy that desire.

* * *

In *Johnno* (1975), to some extent, Dante and Johnno (like Phil and Gerald) can draw a sense of self-definition from their friendship, each measuring himself against what is other in his counterpart. They reflect opposing drives, as Johnno rebels against all the rules which Dante upholds in his resolute pursuit of order. Johnno's excesses are the means by which Dante can even more firmly entrench his own notions of moderation. Johnno's aggressive hatred of Brisbane, for instance, is the catalyst that confirms all the more doggedly Dante's own sentimental nostalgia for the place. Johnno's fierce claim that "'I'm going to shit this bitch of a country right out of my system'" (J, 98) makes Dante all the more "determined . . . to make life reveal whatever it had to reveal *here,* on

home ground, where I would recognize the terms" (J, 109). In turn, Dante's conservatism serves to drive Johnno to greater heights of excess.

But finally, the other can never satisfy the subject's desire for wholeness because it too is inevitably touched by division and lack. Johnno's life becomes a masquerade of endless possibilities as he adopts and then discards a variety of roles. Helen Daniel remarks that Johnno aims "to 'bend' reality" ("Narrator and Outsider," 191), yet the "reality" that Johnno plays with is already bent; or rather, it is by necessity flexible and dynamic. Like Aunt Roo and Clem Harland with their impossible talk, Johnno does try in one sense to force personal fantasy into fact. However, again like these characters, he is trying in another, deeper sense to pinpoint some kind of locatable centre which, of course, can never be mapped. It is understandable, then, that Johnno's dilemma of self-division becomes externalised into a geographical dilemma of centre versus margin; he attempts to escape his sense of physical and psychological isolation (perceived by him as the result of being Australian) by travelling to Europe. But although his search for direction — a sense of place — takes on a global scale, Johnno can never escape an awareness of the polarities of existence within the Symbolic Order.

Ultimately, the only constant in his life is his relationship with Dante, yet this too is an often tense, often shifting relationship. On the one hand, Johnno rages against Dante's obstinate conservatism, yet on the other he is attracted to what he perceives as Dante's calm content, his untouchability (J, 154). But even more importantly, the relationship is lacking — wrought by failures in perception and misunderstandings — because Dante also suffers the fate of the Lacanian subject. He too depends upon Johnno as the measure of his own identity, which is in itself an unstable thing. He too is torn by division; despite his conservatism, for instance, he secretly harbours "some notion of being a rebel. Of sneaking over, as it were, to Johnno's side" (J, 39). The two boys fulfil Dante's mother's recitation (though not in terms of her intention), "'Show me your company . . . and I'll tell you what you are'" (J, 19); yet as Dante freely admits, "I didn't frankly know what I was" (J, 19).

It is hardly surprising, then, that the balance of responsibility within this relationship of dependency shifts and lapses. Initially it is Johnno who sets the terms of Dante's identity, even to the point of bestowing upon him his undesired name:

> I hated it but the name stuck. At the very moment when I was most in doubt about who I was, or where I stood, I had developed a new identity and now not even the name sewn into my gym things was true . . . (J, 49)

Dante recognises that Johnno's confirmed "wildness" is the factor which determines his own "wishy-washy" niceness (J, 48). After all, "If Johnno was not Johnno where did any of us stand?" (J, 47). The example which Johnno sets (crazy; clown; ratbag; anti-social [J, 15-16]) becomes to Dante the warning that keeps him within his own safe world of ritual routine, of rules and regulations which, as Dante notes with characteristic irony,

> not only trained you in the best behaviour, [but] also taught you discipline, and discipline was character-building . . . Doing what you didn't like doing gave you moral backbone . . . Moral backbone was what prevented people, when they grew up, from drinking and gambling and getting into debt. Children who lacked discipline grew up spineless and had false teeth. (J, 38)

Johnno, however, tires of his given role as "bad company" (J, 48). He takes up athletics, well-knit and relaxed as he jogs around the oval under the eyes of admiring girls; he starts doing his own homework, eventually starring as the science teacher Soapy's best pupil; he throws off the image of outrageous buffoon to become "a reformed character" (J, 46). And with Johnno's change Dante's previously-unquestioned vision of himself fragments, leaving him in chaos.

> I had used him as a marker . . . Now all that was changed. I didn't know where I was. What made me most resentful, I think, was his refusal to stay still. I had found for Johnno a place in what I thought of as *my* world and he refused to stay there or to play the minor role I had assigned him. He had suddenly developed qualities of his own, complexities I hadn't allowed for. (J, 48)

With the emergence of his new identity Johnno can almost be read as a Golden Boy, one of the little group of "the handsome, the athletic, the socially assured, who had been marked out for *success*" (J, 56). However, on the brink of acceptance into this elect category, he rejects the role "with a deadly hatred that could only have its origin, I decided, in something he had discovered in himself" (J, 56). The paradox of the other again asserts itself; both desired and loathed, it is ever-present as the shadowed opposite of whichever role is dominant.

Perhaps it is the recognition of this shadowing effect that attracts Johnno to "the darkness at our back door" (J, 53) which Dante prefers to suppress — "Too big to hold in the mind!" (J, 53) — or ignore. There are his persistent visits to the brothels which, just beyond the immediate vision of suburban respectability, are "Hidden away behind a ten foot corrugated-iron wall" (J, 78). There is also his awed belief in the all-pervasive Organisation, determiner of wars, revolutions and depressions, the cause behind every historical effect. Johnno believes in the Organisation as others maintain religious faith; he is, in the end, seeking an absolute among the multiple possibilities of life and this is "the only thing that would explain it all . . . The unfairness of things. The absurdity" (J, 77).

It becomes apparent that the balance of dependence has shifted; it is now Johnno who waits for direction, requiring some sort of conspiratorial allegiance from Dante which could provide him with self-confirmation. This is something, however, that Dante will not or cannot offer. Johnno's trips into the absurd fly in the face of Dante's still-persistent hope that the world is a readily mappable place. As Dante sees it, Johnno deliberately puts himself through "a crash course in the disintegration of consciousness" (J, 86). It is "a systematic programme" (J, 86) aimed at destroying the myth of the conventional "real." Yet this is the myth to which Dante conforms. He believes in rationalism, in the objective world; he is, as Johnno says, "intimidated by objects" (J, 87). Now, confronted with Johnno's "revelation" of the Organisation, Dante can only "look skeptical" and "shrug [his] shoulders" (J, 75-77).

In their visits to the brothels, too — during which Johnno feeds his appetite for excitement by antagonising the Madam then fleeing from imaginary police — Dante's skepticism is the counter-force to Johnno's enthusiasm. He enrages Johnno "by refusing to cooperate in the fantasy at the very moment when his own excitement could brook no qualification" (J, 81), but Johnno's rage is all the more intense because he *needs* Dante's participation in order to complete the personal fantasy.

> 'For God's sake,' he'd yell as I dawdled behind, 'for God's sake, Dante, what are you doing? The police are coming. Do you want us to get caught?' I would force myself into a half-hearted trot. And when I slowed again to little more than a fast walk he would lose his head completely: 'You bastard, you fucking shit! You *want* us to get caught. They'll be here any minute, I tell you. I can hear the siren!'
>
> But I couldn't make myself run any more. It was too silly. And the game was over anyway. (J, 81)

For Johnno, the line between fact and fantasy is an indistinguishable one, but it is a line that Dante tries to keep intact: "what Johnno called life bore an uncanny resemblance, it seemed to me, to what the rest of us called 'literature'" (J, 84). Dante's need to maintain the distinction between fantasy and some sort of realisable "real" makes him consistently reject Johnno's invitations to adventure and risk. In this sense, as Peter Pierce points out, Johnno becomes Dante's "surrogate risk-taker; he contrives and enjoys the routine existential torments of that age . . . which prudent Dante mainly observes" ("Malouf's Fiction," 527).

As an indication of those "existential torments," Johnno's plunge into the flooded river after a nightime walk through Brisbane's streets prefigures his later suicide. It is significant that, against his invitation to "Come on in!" (J, 102), Dante sticks obstinately to the bank, once again abandoning Johnno to an empty glory. In this sense Johnno's plight is reminiscent of that of Shane Noonan, who would rather drown — "'I think it'd be a beautiful death. Like being in a womb'" (BI, 126) — than confront the blankness of a world which is so far removed from his image of it. And just as, underwater, Shane becomes "a death-white shape" (BI, 125) which is strange to Francis, so Johnno and Dante must always watch each other from opposite sides of each situation.

> 'Are you coming?' He stood there, impatient. 'Well, are you?'
> Silhouetted for a moment against the play of lights on the water, he shivered at the first touch of coldness at his heels, then jack-knifed neatly and was gone . . . It was too late now to get myself out of my clothes and follow. It would be too deliberate, nothing at all like his free, unselfconscious plunge . . .
> 'Piker,' Johnno taunted in the darkness.
> Sullenly, I waited on the sidelines for him to come out. (J, 102-103)

Nevertheless, Johnno's presence is necessary for Dante to be able to confirm the validity of the expectations he holds of himself. In Johnno's absence Dante finds that "All my prospects had simply shrivelled into nothing like burning cellophane. All those inner resources I had been cultivating turned into a vacuum inside me" (J, 110). Johnno's flight to Africa deprives Dante of the unrealised element in himself; without Johnno he is lesser, "immobilized from within" (J, 110).

Yet despite the necessity of his presence in Dante's life, Johnno's own dependency upon the unsatisfying other remains unchanged. Years later when Dante visits him in Greece, Johnno reveals that he had been the notorious firebug, reported in all the local

newspapers, who had set fire to Brisbane's churches. His reliving (or invention; the distinction is unimportant) of the story is a means of reaffirming, in his conspiratorial fashion, the self-identity that had lapsed in Dante's absence. Dante in fact recognises that Johnno "might even have been trying, for my sake, to rediscover some idea of himself that he could only fully realize through my presence. He was playing up to my vision of him" (J, 131). Dante, however, still caught within the bounds of his own cynicism, denies the identity which Johnno wants to resurrect with his "failure to respond" (J, 137):

> I felt mean. As if I had cheated him of some larger dimension of his own improbable existence. Johnno's story was less a confession, I thought, than a rehearsal. I had just rejected one of his finest scenarios. (J, 137)

Johnno's consistently thwarted need to pursue an identity manifests itself physically. Denied an outlet, the various possible roles of his life weigh down an ever-growing body. By the time Dante finds him in Greece, after three or four years apart, Johnno "had filled out and was almost plump, as though he had begun to realize in the flesh his own larger possibilities, and was growing to fill them" (J, 131). Johnno's physical expansion, however, does not compensate for the unfulfilled possibilities of his life. Several years after abandoning his search for tranquility in Greece, having come back full circle to Australia, Johnno is sick and sluggish:

> He was emormous. Larger than life. Perhaps three stone heavier than he had been in Greece . . . Gross, dishevelled, his flesh flabby and yellow behind the miner's beard. Coarsened but un-tanned by the sun. (J, 146)

Faced with Johnno's return to his detested Brisbane, Dante wonders: "What sort of defeat of his expectations, what moment of panic, had brought him back full-circle, the long way round from Brisbane to the Condomine, via the Congo, Paris, London, Hamburg, Athens?" (J, 148-49). But despite his asking of the question, Dante still cannot grasp Johnno's needs or motivations. He and Johnno stand at opposite poles, and "I found no way of reaching him" (J, 149). In a relationship of dependency, then, the other must ultimately fail as a source of self-completion, because underlying the potential of the other is always the promise of lack. It is significant that both boys grow up in the shadow of their status as "war children"; the rifts with which they begin life are not only social but personal, and can never be healed.

As narrator, Dante sets the theme of personal division by relating his own family history with all its internal wars. As a retrospective story, the novel stems from Dante's return to the place of his childhood upon the death of his father, an event which leaves his mother to rummage through the now-empty rooms of her life. But with the acknowledgement of mutual dependency between his parents, Dante also implies a history of personal divisions. An incongruous convergence of roles is apparent in the father, who painted flowers on silk at the same time as he followed his passions as a boxer and as a member of Brisbane's toughest rugby push (J, 4). As "a mixture of knockabout worldliness and the most extraordinary innocence" (J, 73), Dante's father is a character who exemplifies Derrida's theory of *différance,* supposing, within the play of differences, those "syntheses and referrals which forbid . . . that a single element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself" ("Semiology and Grammatology," 26). The same kind of mix is apparent in the mother, the myriad pieces of her life jumbled together in the dressing table like "the ruins of an abandoned empire" (J, 7). Division arises again when it becomes clear that Dante's childhood was one in which cultural oppositions forged a delicate compromise, his mother's English primness countering the emotional excesses of his father's heritage.

With the introduction of his own history of personal shifts and divisions, Dante acknowledges himself — at least implicitly — as an unreliable narrator. He feels his way uncertainly through the web of events, often failing to perceive the full significance of crucial episodes until after the facts. The irony which touches most of Dante's reconstruction of his relationship with Johnno becomes his most defining feature. But paradoxically, it is the one which, in its play upon ambiguity, ensures that the subject — and his text — remain unsettled. Dante's incomprehension is evident in the opening pages, when he discovers in an old school photograph, for the first time, a bespectacled Johnno (he had never worn glasses) posing with the Stillwater Lifesaving Team (he had never been a member), while the young Dante himself stares out unwittingly from the front row. It is only twenty years after the event — years which include Johnno's death — that Dante realises that the glasses and the pose

> were a disguise, a deliberate bending of the facts. A trick set up as carefully that afternoon as Mr. Peck's camera, to preserve something other than the truth, and

> to make someone like me, nearly twenty years later, stop and look again. A joke with a time fuse. (J, 11)

And looking back on their shared history, Dante sees only now that Johnno "was always one jump ahead" (J, 11):

> Clever as I was, cool and unshockable as I liked to think myself, he had the knack of turning me into a staring idiot, caught without warning as one of his jokes went off bang in my hand or some new piece of outrageousness left me floundering on the sidelines, unable either to follow or turn away. (J, 11)

However, it is not only his belated understanding that reveals the element of lack in Dante's character, but also his perpetual underestimation of Johnno's needs or depth of feeling. At school, despite the fact that "I had known him longer than the rest" (J, 18), Dante is ready to dismiss Johnno as a foul-mouthed bully who is bad at French. "If there was anything more to him than that," he claims, "I had no way of perceiving it" (J, 17). Again it is only in retrospect, after his first schoolboy visit to Johnno's house, that Dante realises his shame in stealing the screwdrivers and toy jeep for Johnno's approval. Rather than displaying his own sympathies with rebellion and anarchy as he had hoped, his act openly declares his low opinion of Johnno's integrity. And afterwards, while Dante burns with embarrassment, Johnno "was quieter and more generous than I would have thought possible as I chatted on about the pictures I had seen during the holidays and the girls I had met at Surfers . . . he surprised me yet again" (J, 44).

It is characteristic that Dante never fully appreciates the extent of Johnno's love for him, and when confronted with one of his rare displays of affection, is left floundering once again in embarrassment and confusion:

> Suddenly I was caught in a Dostoievskian bearhug. 'Goodbye Dante,' Johnno sobbed, close to my ear, and he was gone . . . Awful! Awful! Awful! I burned with embarrassment. I had just stood there, stiff and unresponsive. Maybe in the shock of the moment I had even pushed him away. That would be typical! I tried to recall the moment. What was the last thing I had been thinking before it happened? But it was all a blur. (J, 104-105)

Even when Johnno later tells Dante: "when we were at school, I used to think of you as the most *exotic* creature — so strange and untouchable. Like a foreign prince" (J, 154), Dante's response is one of shock: not only for the nature of Johnno's image of him, but for his own lack of recognition. His vision of their shared past is turned "upside down, inside out, to reveal possibilities I could never myself have imagined," and to the last he is left wondering: "Was the joke on him or on me?" (J, 154).

Johnno, too — with or without Dante's support — can never discover the sense of completion he seeks, except as momentary illusion, because he is forever held in check by that inherent element of lack. It is significant that the glasses he wears in the Stillwater Lifesaving Team photograph are mere frames; like the geography of the place which the boys trace for homework and the lives of the tracers themselves, the glasses represent an outline without a centre. Johnno's joke of the glasses reflects upon the ambiguity of his entire existence, upon his paradoxical fight for extended possibility yet against randomness.

It is appropriate, then, that this first image of Johnno is a dual and ambiguous one. He is noticed for his "familiar, unfamiliar smile" (J, 9), and unlike the other boys who all stare with assumed confidence into a "rectilinear future" (J, 9), he gazes diagonally out of the set frame, "his eye on — what?" (J, 12). Similarly in the classroom, like the punctuation marks which Soapy integrates into his speech, Johnno is always "off-stage, but never quite absent" (J, 14). Like *Harland's Half Acre*'s Aunt Roo, Johnno's discernible style lies in his theatricality, but it is a multiform style which evokes a paradoxical response of both horror and delight in his peers (J, 16).

Dante thinks of Johnno, in his moments of inaccessibility, as "flicking idle pebbles across a pool, far away in the centre of himself" (J, 104). Yet the pebbles never break the surface; the "centre" which Johnno seeks is, like the depths of the pool, unfathomable because located in so many different things. Lacking a stable identity, Johnno adopts the second-hand role of whichever fashion moves him most at the moment. He becomes the shaggy, wild-eyed Dostoievskian figure of his favourite literature, the political fugitive in flight from the vengeful power of the Organisation, the substitute lover who listens from the closet while his mistress entertains other clients. Under the influence of his Russian reading he turns for spiritual salvation to the Russian Othordox Church until the local Russians, suspecting him as an "agent" or a crackpot, threaten him with the police. He then turns wholeheartedly to the Greek Orthodox Church until the Greek priest, alarmed by the sight of Johnno grovelling among the ants in self-abasement, also threatens to call the police. Even Johnno's very rejection of imposed roles becomes a role in itself: that of the enigmatic rebel. Dante comes closest to understanding Johnno, in fact, when he

recounts Johnno's vain pursuit of his "soul," which flutters about the room, focuses itself in a medley of objects, and refuses to be pinpointed.

> It was inclined to wander. Locating itself, it seemed, in his funny-bone, or the hollows of a molar, or in an appendix that flared and puffed up like a dragon on its island, then slept again for another seven years. There were days when he lost track of it altogether. He would barge about a room as if some invisible air current were tossing him at will. The soul would have broken out of his body altogether and set up residence in a one-bar radiator where it glowed with menace, or gone buzzing about over the treetops in a model aeroplane that some schoolkid was playing out on a string. (J, 85)

Ultimately then, Dante's vision of Australia as an outline which lacks a definable centre is equally applicable to himself and Johnno. He and Johnno maintain various rituals around which they carry out their relationship (certain pubs, certain places, certain jokes) but in the end Dante fails to know Johnno as much as he fails to know his own mind. The subject is just as unmappable as was the continent to its colonisers. And of course it is Dante's schoolboy perception of his position on the now-established map — "*Arran Avenue, Hamilton, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, the World*" (J, 49) — which opens up the question of his and Johnno's position as subjects within the preconceived Symbolic Order, always-already destined to an ever-shifting relationship with everything beyond themselves.

As such, the subject's tenuous sense of identity is drawn not only from others but also from place. The sense of existing on the edge of life rather than at its centre is objectified by the boys, and Johnno in particular, as a geographical dichotomy between Australia and Europe. Yet as Martin Leer remarks, the experience of life at the edge is "simply the human condition" ("At the Edge," 11), an inevitable aspect of existence as a subject within the Symbolic Order. This precarious edge, Leer continues, is "the edge of the self where inside and outside meet and sometimes interpenetrate by a process of osmosis." By implication it is "a moveable edge where everything is being rearranged and redefined . . . where we begin to make comparisons" (11).

Given that a sense of identity is tied to spatial dimensions, Dante wonders about the local vagrants who appear "from nowhere" (J, 62) to wander the city's daytime streets then, when darkness falls, return again to nowhere. They are placeless, existing only in one of reality's many gaps, and Dante is haunted by the question of how they fell through the world of solidity into the undefined space they inhabit:

> How, I wondered, had they fallen out of that safe and regular world that the rest of us took for granted as if it was the only world there could be? . . . Life suddenly seemed utterly mysterious to me. What were the mechanics of survival? What did you have to do to stay afloat? (J, 62)

Dante's answer lies in the recognition that identity, as a sense of *being in* the world, is dependent upon external supports — such as people and place — which partake in and give credibility to the narratives of "self." In this respect Brisbane becomes a powerful force which moulds Dante and Johnno, although in different ways. Dante agrees that Brisbane is a "shabby and makeshift" city (J, 83), but its distinctive character allows him to feel that he holds a position in a unique and special place. And against "Johnno's assertion that Brisbane was absolutely the ugliest place in the world, I had the feeling . . . that it might even be beautiful" (J, 82-83). For Johnno, however, Brisbane is the objectification of the lack he suspects in himself:

> Brisbane was nothing: a city that blew neither hot nor cold, a place where nothing happened, and where nothing ever would happen, because it had no soul. People suffered here without significance. It was too mediocre even to be a province of hell. It would have defeated even Baudelaire! A place where poetry could never occur. (J, 84)

Yet regardless of Dante and Johnno's opposing feelings for their hometown, Brisbane nonetheless becomes inextricable from themselves. Place defines the perception of identity and identity defines the perception of place. It is appropriate, then, that Dante and Brisbane should change simultaneously, until

> the Brisbane I knew had its existence only in my memory, in the fine roots it had put down in my own emotions . . . I could see my own reflections in its mirrors. And Johnno's as well. (J, 127-28)

Finally Johnno rejects Brisbane for what he perceives as the centre of Europe, and after two stagnant years Dante follows, "vaguely disturbed that Europe might after all be about to do what Brisbane had refused to do, break the spell that had been over me" (J, 111). He joins Johnno in Paris which, significantly, is both the heart of European cultural and intellectual life and a city of paradoxes and conflicts. Slogans of ACTION FRANCAISE and the hammer and sickle cover the walls. While Jean Paul Sartre-like figures animatedly discuss philosophy in Paris' cafés, the conspicuously wealthy and the conspicuously poor mingle in the streets. Paris is at war, and the personal division the young men recognise in themselves takes on a wider scale. For Johnno, "violence was no longer a private disorder. It was part of a whole society's public nightmare. He was

free of himself" (J, 120-21). And for Dante, the always-suppressed awareness of conflict surfaces with an unexpected force:

> With the flush of adrenalin, the realities of the world I had stumbled into, which up till now I had accepted with equanimity — it was so ordinary, the sandbags, the barbed wire had seemed as much a part of Paris as the bookstalls along the quay — suddenly slammed home. (J, 120)

Johnno and Dante's experience of the uprisings in Paris represents the return of "childhood nightmares" (J, 120); it brings back the memory of a war which has seeped its way across the world even to safe and peripheral Australia. For Dante especially, a degree of Jewish ancestry makes the nightmare even more apparent, and in the face of this awareness, all his assumptions about his own safe position within a particular time and place become shaken.

> It was as if I had suddenly found myself in Europe in the wrong decade — when the Jewish grandmother on my mother's side who had died six years before I was born would have been just enough to make me too a victim of the times. I had broken through into my own consciousness; and Paris — Europe — was a different place. (J, 120)

It is perhaps because of the ever-present evidence of division at all levels in Paris that Johnno rejects it — "'This fucking town is a nightmare!'" (J, 115) — for dreams of other idealised places that could provide a sense of self-completion. There is Spain, for instance, offering "big breaths of country air and thirty-mile hikes in the sun" (J, 123). Ultimately there is Nepal, promising spiritual absolution: "'You go there,' he told me dreamily, 'and you're immediately purified'" (J, 123). Yet as Dante comments, with his usual irony: "Of course there were other possibilities — as many almost as there were countries" (J, 122-23).

But finally place — like friendship — fails to provide a sense of stability for the shifting subject. Johnno himself points out the tenuousness of spatial certainty when he makes a joke of the Italian prophecy that "the world would end today, with a flood, right now, at twelve o'clock" (J, 141). The prophecy may have been fulfilled unnoticed by everyone, Johnno claims, for after all there exists no stable world with which to compare a non-world.

> 'How do you feel, Dante? Can you feel the difference? . . . It all looks exactly the same. Exactly! Not a scrap of difference. Maybe it all happened ages ago. Ages! How would we know? How would we ever know?' (J, 142)

Accordingly, Dante returns to Brisbane as to a place of unchanging certainty, only to find that the "real" Brisbane of his childhood has altered, relegated now to memory and "history." And so too with himself: to his surprise, the young man of that earlier time (surely the same as now?) is publicly classed as an "expatriate," an identity that is disturbing to Dante in its deviation from his own recognition of himself. He grows "increasingly restless and ill at ease" (J, 145), and it is while feeling troubled by the way the "ghosts" of his past overlay themselves upon the present, that he runs unexpectedly into Johnno, also returned to Brisbane. Somehow shamefaced at the failure of his younger claim that "'at the end of seven years I'll have squeezed the whole fucking continent out through my arsehole'" (J, 98), Johnno looks "put out, as if I had discovered him in a deception" (J, 145). Yet Johnno fails to recognise that he can never escape Brisbane: it is as much a constructor of his sense of self as is Dante. And indeed, upon their reunion, Johnno is anxious to revive the image of his youth that Dante's presence legitimates.

The two arrange an evening of reliving the exploits of their youth, but time and personal shifts have wrought irreversible change, "and though we tried hard enough, the evening failed to catch fire" (J, 147). This meeting — importantly, their last — recalls Johnno's lack of success, playing the firebug, in setting fire to the last of his churches. The same dismal failure of what was intended as a grand gesture — "'I would have done nine altogether to make a cross, but the rain set in and I had to leave one whole arm off'" (J, 137) — is indicative of their entire relationship. It is notable, too, that it is churches that Johnno sets fire to: the action is not merely a gesture of rebellion against the rigidity of cultural tradition and conformity, but also a gesture of frustration and desperation in a quest for some sort of stable faith. In this respect religion fails him — apparent from his ridiculous episodes with the Orthodox churches — yet so does Dante, consistently disapproving the various narratives of his life to leave him silent, sodden and morose (J, 149).

The impossibility of taking refuge in the luxury of nostalgia is assured by the altered face of Brisbane and the loss of the landmarks of their youth. The Greek Club has moved, and the brothels have disappeared altogether. The animals of the Garden's

menagerie, whose calls had been prominent in the background of all their exploits, have been "exterminated." The old pubs have been "revitalised" with glazed brick facades, while whole blocks of sprawling weatherboard houses — Brisbane's most distinctive feature — have been excavated to make room for carparks. If either of them had sought to establish some kind of consistency in their lives through a return to the places of their youth, "Brisbane itself had taken measures to prevent us" (J, 147).

In one sense, however, the life-consistency that Johnno had both fought and desired is established through his death. At the eleventh hour — "About eleven the next morning he called. He sounded clear-headed, almost his old self. . ." (J, 149) — Johnno retracts from what appears to be a suicide pact with two fellow workers. Yet less than a week later he is dead, drowned in the river Condamine. In death his life runs back towards its beginnings. It is The Mango, the old schoolfriend whose persistent shadow "Johnno had tried so hard to lose all those years back" (J, 150), who re-emerges to drag his body from the water. It is the Condamine, "whose course we had drawn in so often on our homework maps" (J, 151), which swallows him up. Significantly, the Condamine is submerged for half of every year, becoming at those times "a few glittering waterholes in a channel of ridged white sand, flowing furtively underground" (J, 151). Now the river resurfaces to absorb Johnno like a ghost of his past, suppressed throughout his long and frustrated quest for self-liberation but figuring in his life even in its absence. And in the battle of wills between the assertive individual and the indifferent environment, who is the successor? Dante thinks of Johnno's seven year plan on the private extermination of Australia; yet "it was Johnno who was gone. Australia was still there, more loud-mouthed, prosperous, intractable than ever" (J, 152).

The posthumous arrival of a letter from Johnno affects Dante like a silent reproach.

> Dante,
> Please please come. Or we could go to Stradbroke for the weekend. Why don't you ever listen to what I say to you? I've spent years writing letters to you and you never answer, even when you write back. I've loved you — and you've never given a fuck for me, except as a character in one of your funny stories. Now for Christ sake write to me! Answer me you bastard! And please come.
> love
> Johnno (J, 154)

Written in desperation, Johnno's letter reflects his sense of isolation. Never given credibility by Dante, he must always remain the shifting subject until he seeks resolve in

death. And for the first time, Dante recognises the tone of this letter as the same as that of every letter he has received from Johnno over the years. Exuding resentment and hurt, each is a plea for some kind of response which would confirm Dante's acceptance of him but which Dante never gives: "'One of my native boys will walk all night to deliver this,' he had once written me from his camp on the borders of Rhodesia. 'And you won't even bother to reply. He's worth a dozen of you.' It was true. I always owed him an answer" (J, 153).

Perhaps, then, it is Johnno's obvious need, rather than his provocative independence — "'I'm just here for the sex, what are you here for?'" (J, 56) — that attracts Dante to him. In this respect, Dante's sense of "lack" becomes the greater, supplemented only by drawing upon Johnno's need of him. And in the light of this revelation, the novel's epigraph from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* takes on new importance:

> I have great comfort from this fellow. Methinks he hath no drowning mark upon him; his complexion is perfect gallows. Stand fast, good Fate, to his hanging! Make the rope of his destiny our cable, for our own doth little advantage. If he be not born to be hanged, our case is miserable.

However, it is Johnno who has the final triumph of creating a mystery of his death, and in so doing, of subverting the newspaper world of fact to fulfil his own chosen role. *The Courier-Mail* — the reported sphere "of incontrovertible event" (J, 153) — classes Johnno's death as accidental drowning. Yet later, when Dante talks to Johnno's other, always-hidden friend Bill Mahoney, the event opens itself up to ambiguity and even to contradiction:

> 'You're satisfied it was an accident?'
> He stared ahead as if he hadn't heard my question. Sucking at the pipe. 'Of course,' he said after what seemed an age, 'it's what the inquest *decided* . . . An open and shut case.' . . .
> He looked at me, smiling, and I suspected him, ungenerously perhaps, of playing with me.
> 'And that's all?'
> 'N-no, it's not all. It was also an accident that couldn't have happened. Impossible, in that particular place.'
> So there we were again. (J, 163)

Ultimately, then, Johnno retains in death some of the mystery that had dominated his life; like the multiform fictions of his life, his death is "explicable, at last, only as some crooked version of art" (J, 164). In one sense, the ambiguity surrounding Johnno's death implies that the circle of one's life can never be closed, the split never healed. Despite

Dante's assertion on Johnno's absorption back into the landscape of his childhood that "The pattern had been achieved" (J, 151), the controversy of his death thwarts any attempt to complete the story of his life. But in another important sense, it is only in this ambiguity that Johnno can finally escape the dilemma of "himself":

> For what else was his life aiming at but some dimension in which the hundred possibilities a situation contains may be more significant than the occurrence of any one of them, and metaphor truer in the long run than mere fact. How many alternative fates, I asked myself, lurking there under the surface of things, is a man's life as we know it intended to violate? (J, 164-65)

It is significant that, for Dante, the most lasting image of Johnno becomes his "false disguise" of the Stillwater Lifesaving Team photograph (J, 170), a tangible reminder that the divided subject can never achieve more than an illusory wholeness. And Dante, too, is haunted to the end by uncertainty and confusion. Considering again the question of whether Johnno's death was accident or suicide, he is left still wondering: "I didn't know. He could have. I just didn't know" (J, 160). Johnno's favourite schooldays catchcry — "'It's all lies'" (J, 170) — not only applies in its obvious sense to his own life and death, but also applies to Dante's telling of his life's tale. The closing textual joke is that his story, as a recollection of events, can never claim completion because the "truth" it recreates is a shifting and unfathomable thing. Given the element of lack that this implies, the subject can be defined only by artiface and ambiguity, illuminating Dante's final realisation that

> Maybe, in the end, even the lies we tell define us. And better, some of them, than our most earnest attempts at the truth. (J, 170)

CHAPTER 6

AMBIVALENCE OF DESIRE: THE SPLIT SUBJECT IN CHRISTOPHER KOCH'S *THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY*

It is already given that the subject is divided by an inherent element of lack, and therefore by an insatiable desire for (re)unity with the other. But the nature of that desire, which establishes itself during the Mirror Stage when the infant recognises its own image in terms of fragmentation, can be recognised upon closer examination as being deeply ambivalent. In relation to that original division of the Mirror Stage, Fredric Jameson writes:

> Whatever else the mirror stage is, indeed, for Lacan, it marks a fundamental gap between the subject and its own self or *imago* which can never be bridged . . . The mirror stage, which is the precondition for primary narcissism, is also, owing to the equally irreducible gap it opens between the infant and its fellows, the very source of human aggressivity; and indeed, one of the original features of Lacan's early teaching is its insistence on the inextricable association of these two drives. (353)

Gazing at itself in the mirror, the infant both *identifies with* and feels *alienated from* its own image. In the subject's recognition of itself, then, the Mirror Stage is the instigator of primary narcissism. But in the irreducible gap it opens between the almost-already subject and the other, it is also the source of primary aggressivity. These two drives — the narcissistic and the aggressive — henceforth become inseparable in the subject's approach to the other. As Jameson continues:

> How could it indeed be otherwise, at a moment when, the child's investment in images of the body having been achieved, there does not yet exist that ego formation which would permit him to distinguish his own form from that of others? The result is a world of bodies and organs which in some fashion lacks a phenomenological center and a privileged point of view . . . (354)

So Lacan defines the role of the inseparable connection between narcissism and aggressivity as forming not only the the subject's ego, but also the subject's response to the external world. "Aggressivity," he writes, "is the correlative tendency of a mode of identification that we call narcissistic, and which determines the formal structure of man's [sic] ego and of the register of entities characteristic of his world" (E, 16). This identification of "self" through the identification of otherness begins the process of alienation in which the subject is set upon its destined path of dualtiy. And that duality

now has a double form: on the one hand it represents the subject's awareness of lack in itself and the insatiable desire to overcome that lack through unity with the other; on the other hand it represents the subject's ambivalent response to the other as the focus of both identification and rivalry. Lacan explains the subject's ambivalence towards the other as a triangular structure between the subject, the other, and a shifting object of desire:

> This form will crystallize in the subject's internal conflictual tension, which determines the awakening of his desire for the object of the other's desire: here the primordial coming together (*concours*) is precipitated into aggressive competitiveness (*concurrence*), from which develops the triad of others, the ego and the object . . . (E, 19)

David Malouf's *Johnno* follows the subject's (Johnno's) attraction to the other (place, religion, but particularly Dante) as the imagined solution to the lack he senses in himself. Yet because the stability of the other is also undercut by ambiguity and lack, the subject's desire remains insatiable and the desired sense of "self" remains shifting and incomplete. Christopher Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously,* like *Johnno,* traces the subject's fascination with the other as the unattainable object of desire. Koch, in fact, pinpoints the nature of Lacanian desire when he describes what he sees to be the ongoing dilemma of "the human psyche" (CTG, 134): "It's the longing for a sweet and satisfying drink, held just beyond reach when thirst is tormenting. It's a tedium that promises ecstacy, and yet holds terror and despair at its centre" (CTG, 136). It is not surprising, then, that in Koch's third novel the nature of desire is double-edged, marked by a paradoxical need both to merge with and to appropriate, to overcome, the other.

This ambivalence of desire, in which the drives of narcissism and aggressivity are intertwined, is featured in the novel's two main characters. Through their friendship, the Chinese-Australian cameraman Billy Kwan and the English-Australian journalist Guy Hamilton make up for the personal "gaps" in one another, in much the same way as do the excessive Johnno and the moderate Dante. In the cultural ambiguity of their personal histories, and in the tenuousness of their positions as part of Jakarta's foreign press during Sukarno's trouble-torn reign, Billy and Guy share a lack of certainty regarding their "place" in the world. Like Robert O'Brien and Johnno, these two characters justify their sense of lack as a quality of existence in Australia. It is in order to escape this existence — vacuously dull to Guy and scathingly intolerant to Billy — that they both

come to Indonesia. Their relationship is destabilised, however, not only by the element of lack which divides each (reminiscent of Johnno and Dante's dilemma) but also by fear: the fear of threat that difference can evoke, of jeopardising a dubious sense of control in what becomes a shifting struggle for the power of autonomy.

The ambiguities of this sort of "double self-division" are manifested physically in the novel's opening pages, where both Billy and Guy are defined by elements of the incongruous. Billy's pea-green eyes are at odds with his otherwise Chinese features, as is the serious and intelligent face with the comical dwarfed body (YLD, 5). Similarly, Guy's rather coarse, bulbous nose marrs an otherwise refined handsomeness (YLD, 11). This physical incongruity also applies in their relationship: paradoxically, Billy and Guy are both exact opposites (the one short and ugly, the other tall and handsome) and, in the eyes of the narrator Cookie, the uncanny mirror of each other. The "elusive physical likeness between this utterly unlike pair" (YLD, 10) sets the stage for what becomes a complex pattern of multiplying division within the novel, which works on both a personal and a national level. As Billy tells Guy, "'You're a hybrid, old man, and so am I. It shows in our physical appearance. Scots ancestry makes you a mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Celt. I'm a mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Chinese. But I think it runs a little deeper than that'" (YLD, 83).

In a personal sense, each character is described in terms of division. Guy Hamilton is both malleable and inflexible. His outward role of pragmatic loner is underlaid by a romanic strain, "the secret vulnerability of the invulnerable" (YLD, 65). His "claims of non-attachment" (YLD, 65) are contradicted by the personal effects he carries from city to city — a framed print, a beer mug, a pair of antique hairbrushes — which he unconsciously touches and straightens from time to time as if to reassure himself of the tangibility of his world. His "relaxed yet guarded" (YLD, 66) approach to life reflects an ever-present air of unfulfilled expectation, of unresolved tension, which springs from a persistent awareness of lack. Like Koch's younger protagonists Francis Cullen and Robert O'Brien, Guy is

> one of those people who are secretly waiting for something more: that vast and glorious happening, delicious as speed, bathing everything in gold, which perhaps never comes at all. (YLD, 66)

The character of Billy Kwan is marked not merely by a duality but a multiplicity of personalities. The ambiguity of his identity springs, in large part, from the cultural confusion of his heritage. However, as with Johnno, the dilemma of determining identity "runs a little deeper than that," and like Dante with his unresolved question of Johnno, leaves Cookie wondering: "who did Billy truly wish to be?" (YLD, 68).

> Perhaps, with his archaic slang and Public School accent, his 'old ma-an' drawled in mockery (of himself or of us?) he played an upper-middle-class Australian or Englishman of the pre-war era. Yet sometimes he played a special role as an Asian: he was to go through Confucian Chinese and Japanese Zen phases. It was as though, since his race was double and his status ambiguous, he had decided to multiply the ambiguity indefinitely. In the Middle Ages he might have found his true function as a *vagrans*, a wandering scholar. (YLD, 68)

Billy's shifts of allegiance through a variety of religions — from Methodist to Catholic to Muslim ("'that's even purer'" [YLD, 96]) — is reminiscent of Johnno's vain search for self-completion through faith. The bewildering changes of both characters — "they happened as you watched" (YLD, 96) — reflect a drive towards spiritual purity which can be traced to the desire for the lost Imaginary.

These ambiguities of identity are cemented by the fact that, like Dante, Cookie is an uncertain narrator, struggling with his own sense of lack. His role is that of "father confessor" (YLD, 58) for Guy and Billy, and indeed for most of the other journalists within the Western-dominated Wayang Club; yet divorced, a lapsed Catholic, and out of touch with the physical and ideological landmarks of his youth, Cookie is marked with his own self-confessed doubts and weaknesses. On more than one occassion, when touched by a warning sense of imminent trouble or change in events of significance, he "put[s] the feeling aside, as we nearly always do such warnings" (YLD, 99). At other times, his credibility is undermined by his own uncertainty. Just as Dante's narrative occasionally slips into ineffectuality — "it was all a blur" (J, 105) — so Cookie's recollection of events sometimes passes through "a blurred period" (YLD, 89). Yet in this novel, no single character is untouched by lack: the secret and even public sexual frustrations of Wally O'Sullivan, Kevin Condon and Pete Curtis all attest to the insatiable nature of desire. As foreign journalists, they all share "a life without continuity, without a centre" (YLD, 58-59).

The ambiguities in characterisation are supported on a structural level by the narrative scheme. On the one hand, Cookie — as a journalist reconstructing a series of events as recorded in the files of Billy Kwan — establishes a narrative style which demands a literalist reading. But on the other hand, the shifting text-within-the-text format of Malouf's *Child's Play,* in which the terrorist/narrator "writes" the Great Writer who "writes" an alterable history, is also apparent in *The Year of Living Dangerously.* The narrator R.J. Cook (an anglicisation of C.J. Koch?) rewrites, with new layers of ambiguity, the already ambiguous text of Billy Kwan, thus destabilising both the subject and the text that he writes. The recurrent textual symbol of the *Wayang* — the Javanese shadow play — accentuates this shifting structure with its implications of the play-within-the-play. And all the conflicts of the characters are contained in the two-sided drama of the *Wayang* : between the *Wayang* of the Right and the *Wayang* of the Left there is "constant conflict" (YLD, 205). As Koch writes: "We are all actors, it seems, on some insubstantial stage, whose identities . . . may at any moment dissolve" (CTG, 120).

Yet each character is divided not only by the element of lack within himself, through which the other becomes the object of desire, but also by the ambivalence of his response to the other. Guy and particularly Billy reflect a tension between the need to belong and the need to control which are the two sides of desire. Billy's admiration of Guy stretches to worship, but his intense interest is double-edged. On the one hand, he is attracted to Guy by the qualities that complement his own: the two characters are, after all, alter-egos, each reflecting what is lacking in the other. In the secret files that Billy keeps on everyone and everything within his range of access, Guy is his "giant brother," a reference which is traceable to "the ancient dwarf-figure Pelles" of Celtic mythology, who is "'split into two men — a knight and his dwarf squire'" (YLD, 117).

On the other hand, Billy sees Guy as a rival who needs to be controlled. This other aspect of desire is again apparent in his files, which are so obsessively thorough in the mapping of their subjects that Cookie wonders if Billy "wanted to file the world" (YLD, 108). Billy, in fact, does create his own world in the files, and it is a world in which he is the *dalang,* the puppet-master of the *Wayang:*

> *Here, on the quiet page, I'm master . . . I can shuffle like cards the lives I deal with . . . Charting their course on blind paper, I own them, in a way! They can*

> *lock me out of their hearts, dear Friend, but not out of their lives. They are tenants of my secret system, whether they like it or not . . .* (YLD, 109-10)

This need to make tangible records, of which he is the writer and keeper, reveals in Billy both a dangerous sense of control over others and a more desperate sense of loss and alienation. The subjects of Billy's files are "transfixed like butterflies"; yet as Cookie suggests, the files "chiefly chart the shoals of Kwan's own torment" (YLD, 109). This recognition colours, in retrospect, the initial formation of Billy and Guy's friendship. When Guy offers Billy a working partnership, Billy's response is "one of almost fatuous pride. 'I've chosen a good instrument,' he said" (YLD, 36). At the base of his eager aquiescence to Guy, then, is always the desire to control the terms of the relationship. "'I can be your eyes,'" (YLD, 36) he tells Guy, suggesting not only a partnership but also an appropriation, an intervention of will aimed at determining what and how much Guy will be able to "see." Guy's lack of emotional perceptiveness makes him vunerable to manipulation by Billy:

> Not selfish in a petty way, [Guy] nevertheless preferred the odourless, ethereal tensions of the world and his job to other people's emotions — with which, perhaps, he was mostly at a loss. And so he was often calmly unaware of their true natures, intensities, and needs, floating and dissolving around him.
> All this made him the perfect vessel for Billy Kwan's purposes. (YLD, 38)

It is not only through the power of film but also through the power of language that Billy asserts his influence. Just as Jim Saddler fixes meaning by reciting the names of the birds in *Fly Away Peter,* Billy uses Guy's name "frequently, as though to establish possession" (YLD, 16). And just as Jim formalises his appropriation of the birds by writing their names into The Book, so too Billy captures and holds his subjects by writing them into the files. However Guy, too, is self-motivated in the establishment of his relationship with Billy. Billy is a good cameraman with desirable contacts, while Guy is a newly-arrived reporter with no social or political footholds. For Guy's purposes, Billy is both useful and entertaining, and so his appeal to friendship "would not be rejected — provided it didn't lead to any great embarrassments" (YLD, 38).

This pattern of personal division, and the ambiguities of desire it evokes, is also apparent in the novel on a national level in the political and social turmoil confronting Indonesia. Jakarta, as the novel's setting, is in a state of KONFRONTASI, both against the NEKOLIM ("neo-colonial imperialists") — represented by the foreign journalists —

and within its own social hierarchy. In this respect, Koch's story of Indonesia as a nation struggling against the restraints of colonialism is a relevant one for an Australian novel. Koch says of Indonesia: "Like Australia, it's in certain ways a country of second-hand" (CTG, 23). Like much Australian literature, *The Year of Living Dangerously* is a text concerned with life at the edge as opposed to the perceived centre. The very relationship of edge to centre, even as a relative contruction, is one of division with — for those at the edge, at least — an implication of lack. As such, Indonesia is "'like all colonies — like Australia . . . one remove from the cultural source, there's a slackening — something missing'" (YLD, 97).

Furthermore, the basis of Indonesian culture is — again like that of Australia — pluralistic, involving a "grafting" of other cultures (CTG, 23). The result is a form of what John Thieme terms "cultural schizoprenia" ("Remapping the Australian Psyche," 456), the heritage of any colonial or post-colonial nation. With its mixed history, then, Indonesia's society is already imbued with the deep-seated conflicts and contradictions which characterise the figures who move within it.

Heading the hierarchy of this complex society is the figure of Sukarno who, as the representative of his nation, is a profoundly divided character. Sukarno reflects the "double face" of Indonesia: "its enormous hopelessness, its queer jauntiness" (YLD, 59). With his combined Muslim and Hindu heritage, writes Billy in his files, "*he unites in himself the two great religions of Java. A double man, a man of dualities!*" (YLD, 132). Born on the sixth day of the sixth month of 1901, Sukarno's very birth suggests both the goodness of future glory that the century's first year promises, and the danger of the devil that the double six implies. He is a man, Billy concludes, of "*twin personalities, hard as steel, or poetic and sentimental*" (YLD, 132).

As a figure of division, Sukarno is both *Bapak* (father) and *Bung* (elder brother) to his people (YLD, 9). His authority is therefore that of the Law of the Father, with its dual provocation of both submission and repressed resentment. Because of that dual provocation, human aggressivity is linked in its source to the subject's ambivalence towards the Law of the Father, springing from a primal jealousy of the (m)other which comes into being during the Oedipal drama.

However, that ambivalence becomes focused upon not only the figure of the father — who, after all, must also be submitted to — but also, as the father's heir, the figure of the elder brother. The brother is the figure who, as sibling, is the mirror of the subject; he is also the figure who, as rival for the parents' love, is the object of envy. Lacan cites St Augustin's tale of the pre-lingual child, pale and with an envenomed stare, observing his foster-brother at the mother's breast: here are apparent "the psychical and somatic co-ordinates of original aggressivity" (E, 20).

In Malouf's *Child's Play,* the big brother — through his death — allows the Great Writer access to the Law of the Father and its powers; yet as the father's favourite he is, even after death, the image of threat. As such, the brother figure both initiates the subject into, and witholds the approval of, the Law of the Father. Again, in *The Year of Living Dangerously,* Billy regards Guy as his "giant brother," the image of both identification and rivalry. Bung Karno's influence, however, is more powerful than that of merely the elder brother. As Indonesia's political figurehead and self-made cultural hero, Sukarno is also "the Big *Bapak"* (YLD, 12): the Law of the Father itself. Wally's satirical recitation of Sukarno's roles — Mouthpiece of the Indonesian people; Main Bearer of the People's Suffering; Supreme Commander of the Mental Revolution (YLD, 12-13) — is more than a dismissive parody: in the eyes of the Indonesian people, "'the Bung is a god'" (YLD, 12).

Indeed, Sukarno has "*created* this country" (YLD, 13). And as the instrument of the Law of the Father, language is the key to the establishment of his authority. In fact, Sukarno develops a new language which is relevant to his reign, creating "a world divided between the NEFOS — New Emerging Forces — and the OLDEFOS — Old Established Forces" (YLD, 8). His speeches lie at the heart of his popularity, wooing the people "while the *Bung* warmed his ego at the blaze" (YLD, 9).

In this respect, Sukarno takes on the role of Malouf's Great Writer as the writer of history, with its "web of self-reinforcing illusions" (Paul Carter, *Botany Bay,* xv). However, just as Sukarno is writing one history of Indonesia, the NEKOLIM journalists are writing another which absorbs and re-interprets Sukarno's version. The reporters are both the users and the possessors of language, drawing upon the power that language

provides to reduce Indonesia's political and cultural strife to the "newsworthy" element suitable for Australian popular consumption. As such, the post-colonial discourse of Australian nationalism subjugates its fellow post-colonial discourse of Indonesian nationalism. "'Spiritually,'" Billy notes with unwitting significance, "'this place is still a colony'" (YLD, 97).

The Lacanian concept of aggressivity as the other aspect of identification thus takes on an ironic twist in the notion of nationalism as a hierarchy of power. Struggling to throw off the imperialist influence of Europe, Australia absorbs that very influence into its own nationalist discourse in order to assert political power in Asia. Wally and Pete's sexual exploitation of Indonesia's poor reflects this assertion of power. As the French correspondent Henry Bouchard ironically comments to the Wayang Club, "'Culture is always a useful prostitute, no?'" (YLD, 177). One thinks, too, of Koch's previous novel *Across the Sea Wall,* in which the distinction between colonised and coloniser is a shifting one. Sunder Singh accuses O'Brien of contradiction when he says, "'you bloody Australians don't know what you are. You don't think much of colonialism, but then suddenly you're waving the Union Jack'" (ASW, 96).

There is an imbalance here, however, in that the members of the Wayang Club recognise and abhor Sukarno's developing tyranny, but not their own role in the power play. While Sukarno becomes more and more egocentric — spending national funds on phallic monuments to celebrate his own personal and national power, yet escaping from the polluted, slum-ridden capital to his opulent palace in the hills — the foreign journalists themselves retreat to the cool, gold-walled world of the Wayang Bar, to which Indonesians are denied access. There they dissect the affairs of the nation while KONFRONTASI rages in the outside heat. As Guy's Indonesian assistant Kumar later tells him, just before he leaves Indonesia at last for Europe:

> 'The misuse of this country's wealth has caused misery of which you really know nothing. But you don't have to care. You can go to another country, and write other stories there.' (YLD, 288)

Kumar's earlier accusation of Guy — "'you people do not care about us, you only pretend to'" (YLD, 176) — is not only a personal but also a national one; it is an accusation of hypocrisy in what has become an altered code of domination. Thus the

fundamental rivalry between self and other, which is the other aspect of narcissism and is founded upon an awakened awareness of relativity, becomes the basis of opposing discourses of nationalism. As Fredric Jameson writes, it is

> appropriate to designate this primordial rivalry of the mirror stage as a relationship of otherness: nowhere better can we observe the violent situational content of those judgements of good and evil which will later on cool off and sediment into the various systems of ethics. (Jameson, 357)

The national struggle for dominance is complicated by the figure of Colonel Henderson, the British Military Attaché based in Jakarta. Always exuding an assumption of British superiority beneath his careful, militant correctness — he is "the classic, almost cartoon type of British Army officer" (YLD, 48) — Henderson embodies the dominant discourse of Eurocentric imperialism. The "cold authority" (YLD, 48) he breathes is, like Sukarno's, that of the Law of the Father. Yet while Sukarno feeds Indonesia with a national psyche which is self-reflective, the very presence of Henderson in Jakarta as cultural mediator recalls Indonesia's colonial past. The uncertain balance of relations between the post-colonial and the imperial stances is made more uncertain by the role of the once-colonial foreign journalists in "reading" Jakarta's events. Guy, for instance, selects and re-writes Indonesia's crisis under the guise of objective reporting; his cultural loyalties, however, make this process questionable. Despite "his claims of non-attachment" (YLD, 65), Guy retains "a deference" (YLD, 63) for Henderson, together with a nostalgic belief that the "British Empire was better" (YLD, 65). In this respect, the swimming race between Henderson and Guy — imperial father against colonial son — becomes an event of considerable importance. Henderson's strength wavers, yet despite his own desire to win, Guy allows him victory.

It is notable that Guy spent the formative years of his childhood in Singapore, a then-colony of imperial Britain. All his nostalgia for Europe, then, springs not only from his Australian position as a colonial son (one thinks of Robert O'Brien's or Johnno's global search for a sense of place) but also from his once privileged and now lost position as a member of the imperial race. Guy's attraction to Indonesia, in this light, takes on new significance. In a professional sense, this overseas posting offers him the opportunity "to make good" at a time of his life when "failure (for the ambitious) can scarcely be afforded" (YLD, 30). In another sense, Indonesia promises a return to the Asian world of

his childhood, one in which he held a position of assurance. Yet paradoxically, it is only in Asia that he can rediscover "childhood's opposite intensities: the gimcrack and the queer mixed with the grim; laughter and misery; carnal nakedness and threadbare nakedness; fear and toys" (YLD, 20). This is a world, in other words, in which the distinctions which divide the adult mind can be broken down.

It is hardly surprising, then, that Colonel Henderson bears a physical resemblence to Guy's dead father, representing to Guy his own "dead" heritage of imperial authority; the very closeness in name (Hamilton/Henderson) accommodates this connection. All the ambivalences and rivalries between father and son that are characteristic of the Oedipal drama are played out in this relationship. It is significant, for instance, that Guy and Colonel Henderson later become rivals for the love of one woman. In the struggle for national "place," however, the wayward colonial son — both rebellious of authority and appealing for acceptance — is rejected by the imperial father. The joking banter between Guy and Henderson — a prelude to Guy's defeat in the swimming race — is loaded with implications of this struggle:

> 'I'm afraid I'm no great diver.'
> 'No? I thought all Australians were good at swimming.'
> 'Well, maybe that's what's wrong. I was born in England.'
> 'Really? But surely all British journalists are barred here now?'
> 'I'm on an Australian passport — I spent most of my life there.'
> 'Ah. Too late then — you're a colonial.'
> 'You mean you won't have me back?'
> 'Afraid not. You're a convict, aren't you?'
> This silly banter had an odd poignancy for Hamilton, even an element of pain. They bobbed, facing each other, their faces made naked as those of boys by the water. (YLD, 51)

The overlap between the assertion of power on a personal and a national level is also apparent quite explicitly in the figure of Billy Kwan. Like Guy, he is burdened with the heritage of two worlds, neither of which he belongs to. Yet his claim that, as a cameraman, he is "recording history visually" (YLD, 19) carries the suggestion of individual assertion, even cultural appropriation, in a world which denies him place. Billy's assertion, however, is undercut by his own unwitting emphasis on history as a (re)workable narrative. The images he catches with his camera reflect a process of subjective selection, and the camera itself is a tool of appropriation, functioning to "box"

Indonesia's crisis for foreign news. As such, the very "history" that Billy records is in itself a volatile, dynamic one.

In his attempt to fix "reality" on film, Billy is reminiscent of Malouf's terrorist, who grounds his premises of the "real" in the photographs of the piazza. The ultimate failure of both characters to mark history with their own "events" — both focused in the (attempted) assassination of a powerful cultural figurehead — reflects the notion of history itself as an interpretable "discourse" and therefore the impossibility of stabilising the "real." Their attempts, however, point to the persistent need of the subject to "make" history, and in so doing, to make one's mark upon an otherwise meaningless world.

This world — a confusing one of divisions and ambiguities — becomes the stage on which the main characters play out their relationships. Most important, perhaps, is the triangular connection which forms in Billy's mind between himself, Guy and Sukarno. This is a complex relationship which involves not only a personal play for power but also an overlap of identity. The puppet figures of the *Wayang,* whose "shadows are souls" (YLD, 123), hold symbolic meaning for each character. Guy is Arjuna, the divided prince; he is "'a hero, but he can also be fickle and selfish — that's his weakness'" (YLD, 82). The puppet Semar is "'special'" (YLD, 82) to Billy, for he is the "'dwarf who serves Arjuna. But he's also a god in disguise — the old Javanese god Ismaja'" (YLD, 83). And Sukarno is Vishnu, the god of many faces, "'who acts as charioteer to the hero Arjuna — and also as a dwarf, in Hindu myth'" (YLD, 82). The mythical world of the *Wayang* therefore suggests an interweaving of identities which Billy then pushes much further. After introducing the puppets to Guy, Billy tells him:

> 'you're honest. A true Capricornian. That's why we get on together; I'm Gemini — the same sign as Sukarno. He and I have two faces — the hard and the sentimental . . . You and I make a good team because we complement each other . . . I say — have you realised we even *look* alike?' (YLD, 83)

Billy's motivation in forcing the connection of identity is made explicit when he says to Guy: "'It's rather a bore to be *half* something, you see, old man'" (YLD, 85). Yet while Billy seeks to overcome an awareness of displacement and loss through a connection to Guy and Sukarno, Guy's own solution to his sense of displacement is to deny it altogether, and this denial in itself marks him with another element of lack. Despite his rejection by Colonel Henderson, Guy's retort to Billy's assertion of similarity through

displacement is: "'I *am* English — there's no confusion about it. I'm sorry — I'd like to share your problem, but I don't'" (YLD, 83-84). And his response to Billy's insistence upon an astrological link between them is, like Dante's constant response to Johnno's appeals to a shared world, one of skepticism: "'Lord, don't tell me you believe in astrology'" (YLD, 83). The image of Billy's *membeo* bird fiercely seeking an exit from its cramped cage (YLD, 87) is, in this sense, applicable to both Guy and Billy. Guy seeks an escape from Billy's enforced intimacy, through which Billy links them by a mutual lack that Guy denies, while Billy, through his association with Guy, seeks an escape from the "cage" of his stunted body and his frustrated mind.

If the overlap between narcissism and aggressivity in Billy is apparent as a somewhat desperate response to Guy Hamilton, it appears more sinister in his attitude towards Sukarno. Sukarno's impassioned speeches are characteristically ambiguous, either symbolising his dedication to his people or prefiguring his greed for personal power. Billy can barely contain his emotion as he recites from Sukarno: "'Then for me, fire isn't hot enough, ocean isn't deep enough, the stars not high enough!'" (YLD, 98). Such a strong response to Sukarno's words holds personal significance for his following comment to Cookie:

> 'Sukarno and I are the same astrological sign, you know. Sometimes I almost feel we share the same identity.' He lifted his chin proudly, and half closed his eyes; his face suddenly had an expression of extraordinary, grandiose arrogance. 'I could have been him,' he said quietly. (YLD, 98-99)

These remarks, suggesting not only a sharing but also a conquering of the other, illuminate his diary entry, directed to Bung Karno: "'*Are you, in some aspects, Dwarf Semar? You who love the Wayang must sometimes think about Semar — who is the old Javanese god Ismaja, transformed into a dwarf and a clown. Your people say Ismaja could still rule the world . . .* '" (YLD, 132). In this light, the fervent exclamation Billy scribbles into Guy's file — "*He is myself! I should have been him. Why not, God? Why not?*" (YLD, 186) — also describes his response to Sukarno. His later definition of Sukarno's egotism — "'when he speaks to the people, it's a dialogue with his alter-ego'" (YLD, 216) — holds more personal relevance than he realises, for it is a definition that structures his own relationship with Guy. It becomes clear, then, that each of these male characters — Sukarno as dictator; his acolyte Billy as manipulator; Guy, with his display

of professional control masking an underlying personal lack — live out Lacan's statement that

> it is by means of an identification with the other that [the subject] sees the whole gamut of bearing and display, whose structural ambivalence is clearly revealed in his behaviour, the slave being identified with the despot, the actor with the spectator, the seduced with the seducer. (E, 19)

At the heart of the tension between narcissism and aggressivity in Billy and Guy's relationship is the figure of Jill Bryant. As the feminine other, the object of masculine desire, she evokes a response in them that is again double-edged. She represents the lost (m)other of the Imaginary, the supplement to personal lack, and the two men become rivals against each other for her love. On the other hand, in their identification with each other, they both dismiss her, assert masculine control over her. As such, Jill embodies the masculine positioning of the feminine other in the "space of contradiction" (Schaffer, 24).

It is not surprising, then, that like the female characters of Koch's earlier novels, Jill is defined in terms of division and contradiction. She is both cautious and extroverted in the company of others; there is in her "a well-controlled nervousness her humour would mostly hide" (YLD, 50). And "although she smiled easily her eyes were always troubled, holding a constant, sea-dark sadness under her gaiety" (YLD, 114). Like Heather Miles and Ilsa Kalnins, Jill's dualities spring primarily from the construction of her identity by the force of masculine desire. As Kay Schaffer writes:

> Women, and other groups who are assigned to the margins, negotiate their place in culture as both Man and not-man at the same time. Woman is included in Man as a universal; she is also not-man and specifically feminine, that is, different and inferior in relation to the universal category. Women have no access to feminine desire. Our identity and subjectivity are formed within the definitions of masculine desire which encircle us. (Schaffer, 24)

Yet, of course, that imposed division is doubled because masculine desire itself is double-edged. Jill warns Guy of the double standards which structure men's vision of female sexuality, yet Guy too will eventually follow those divided paths of idealism and cynicism, of personal shame and projected blame, which characterise the masculine desire of the feminine other. He is initially attracted to Jill because she represents for him the lost landscape of his birth. She embodies "an England of winter concert-going, of yachting in summer on the Norfolk Broads: a past not his, but one that a wistful corner of

his mind said should have been" (YLD, 139). Just as O'Brien seeks an imagined Europe through his relationship with Ilsa, Guy looks to Jill "for an England that had never been his and had never, in fact, existed" (YLD, 139).

The "waif or nymph"-like quality that Guy sees in Jill (YLD, 120) allows him to idealise her; in his mental image of her she takes on the elusive quality of "an old drawing" (YLD, 120). He fails to see her — as he fails to see himself — as an individual divided by personal weaknesses and needs. Rather, he sees her as the objectification of a lost ideal of childhood unity. Because Guy's attachment to Jill is built upon "the poignancy of the past" (YLD, 144), he cannot come to terms with her own desires and sense of lack. Like O'Brien, who cannot reconcile Ilsa's sexual history with the image of the unifying (m)other, Guy finds it impossible "to put the two halves of [Jill] together. How could this Arthur Rackham nymph, his English Alice, be Pete Curtis's 'very good lay'?" (YLD, 140). However, the lack which these male characters perceive in their lovers in fact points to their own. The image of the woman, writes Kay Schaffer,

> is man's double, what he fears in himself. She is caught in his representations, as his Other. Thus, Woman becomes the source and origin of man's failure. His fears of inadequacy can be blamed on her imagined betrayal. (149)

Jill, then, becomes the marginalised figure in a specifically masculine discourse, through which the dominant male characters reaffirm their positions of power. It is significant that, like the culturally marginalised Indonesians, Jill avoids the Wayang Bar. Billy, in particular, is genuinely attached to Jill, but his assumed "ownership" of her — "'Jill's a nice little thing — I'd like you to meet her '" (YLD, 46) — is one of the means by which he asserts his influence with Guy. And Guy takes part in this exclusively masculine discourse when he responds to Billy's question "'How did you like my little Jillie, old man?'" with: "'She seems a nice little thing. Very pretty. I envy you'" (YLD, 86). The terms of their conversation endorse not only the trivialisation but also the appropriation of Jill's character. Later, Billy will "give" her to Guy, and they both assume her subservience when Billy says: "'I know she'd follow you eventually, if you decided to marry her'" (YLD, 152). In this light, the image of the caged bird, which immediately follows their conversation, takes on a new dimension of significance: Jill is caught at the centre of both the rivalry and the complicity between the two men.

This triangular relationship — like the one between Guy, Sukarno and himself — has been deliberately contrived by Billy. His dominating role is augmented with the "fatherly" tone he takes with Guy on the issue of Jill (YLD, 135), and the offering of his bungalow for their *rendez vous* — "'I'll lend you the key'" (YLD, 135) — enhances his control. Guy's angry comment at the discovery of Billy's files — "'The little bastard's playing God'" (YLD, 150) — adds weight to Cookie's suspicion that Billy's lending of the bungalow is partially motivated by the opportunity it affords to spy upon the lovers (YLD, 144). Watching from behind the locked door of the garden house, Billy can in one sense carry out his desired relationship with Jill through his alter ego.

Against Guy's sexual relationship with Jill is Billy's platonic relationship with Ibu and her children (although even this assumption is made ambiguous in Cookie's narrative [YLD, 130]). Billy's self-imposed influence upon Ibu's life — his visits with gifts and financial offerings — represents another form of control. Ibu becomes, for Billy, the embodiment of Jakarta's poor, and his interest in her dilemma allows him to live out the idealised role of Sukarno as protector of the people. Billy's proprietorial assumption of the role of the Father, however, is softened by a genuine and unselfish desire to alleviate the suffering of extreme poverty. Both drives — the inward-looking and the outward-looking — are apparent in his file on Ibu: "*I can't take her out of that hut — but I will transform it . . . and change her life where she sits: a bed, chairs, medicine for little Udin, clothes*" (YLD, 131).

Given that Billy's own sense of identity and self-worth is inextricable from the worth he perceives in the already-divided characters of Sukarno and Guy, the conflicts which eventually lead to the breakdown of these relationships seem inevitable from the outset. As Kevin Condon says, in retrospect: "'Billy had these standards he wanted everyone to live up to. They were impossible, of course'" (YLD, 230). Billy's increasing fears about Sukarno's blind egocentrism ("*Why Sukarno, if you are a true son of God, can you no longer see the danger you are courting?*" [YLD, 134]) parallels his increasing disillusionment with Guy ("*You have changed: you are capable of betrayal*" [YLD, 179]).

It is not surprising, then, that Sukarno's betrayal of his people — symbolised for Billy by the death of Ibu's infant son Udin — corresponds to Guy's betrayal of Jill (and consequently of Billy) in sacrificing her confidence to enhance his own career. Guy's story of an ex-fiancée's suicide over his desertion prefigures this betrayal. Characteristically, this former lover was also English, a symbol of his lost heritage, yet his emotional immaturity — both then and now — makes him incapable of offering equal love. In this respect, Guy embodies Lacan's perception of the disguised role of aggressivity within the social order. "The pre-eminence of aggressivity in our civilization," writes Lacan, "would be sufficiently demonstrated already by the fact that it is usually confused in 'normal' morality with the virtue of strength" (E, 25). It is what he regards as personal strength — a ruthless self-sufficiency which denies lack — that prevents Guy from embracing love and reaching emotional maturity.

The unexpected announcement of Jill's pregnancy complicates Guy's ambivalence towards her: his desire for her, as a nostalgic return to a lost past, is at odds with her demands upon him for mature commitment. Retreating from the responsibility of decisions, Guy leaves Jakarta for Central Java to cover a story on the Long March. The conflicts he fears to confront in his personal life are everywhere evident in the countryside. Signs of violence — not just political, but innate — mark the landscape. Like Jim Saddler, who must recognise the existence of violence even in his idyllic sanctuary in order to enter the world of experience and responsibility, Guy realises that covert violence "was stitched into every acre of this tapestry of peace" (YLD, 200). This realisation, and a brush with death when he becomes the object of hatred to an angry mob, give him the maturity to regard the future with a sense of responsibility, rather than to cling "to an irretrievable past" (YLD, 286).

Even here, however, his assumption of decisive control in the acceptance of responsibility maintains Jill's position as marginalised. She is still the silent other at the centre of his and Billy's now-explicit antagonism. Guy assumes dominance over Jill when he tells Billy upon his return to Jakarta (importantly, Jill is absent): "'I know about the baby. I want her to have it. I'm going to marry her'" (YLD, 234). Billy, despite his retort that life is not "'a game of Snakes and Ladders,'" makes an even greater

assumption of dominance over both Jill and Guy with his response: "'I gave her to you. I took her back. I decided you weren't worthy of her. That's all'" (YLD, 235).

Their battle over Jill reflects the conflicts they confront both between each other and within themselves. Billy follows his declaration with: "'There are only two sorts of men, Hamilton — men of light and men of darkness. You were incomplete . . . But you *were* a man of light, and that's why I chose you'" (YLD, 235). However, Billy's philosophy is in itself incomplete. Not only Guy but also himself and the other figures of his private *Wayang* play are incomplete, incorporating aspects of both "light" and "darkness." Billy's belief that "'Desire, lust, then anger: that's the sequence of events for the sensual man, and for our whole society'" (YLD, 236) sums up the pattern of desire and frustration that marks the split subject and the subject's approach to the world. This frustration — involving the frustrated desire for both submersion into and assertion over the other — is apparent in Billy's last and desperate communication with Guy before his death:

> 'I banked everything on you. You seem to think I just got you stories . . . Stories! Is that what life's about? . . . I put you on course; I made you see things; I gave you the woman I loved, who loved you . . . *I created you!*' (YLD, 237)

Billy's subsequent death, like Johnno's, is clouded by ambiguity. While hanging a banner of protest from the seventh floor of the hotel where Sukarno will appear for a formal reception, Billy falls to his death. The official declaration is suicide; Guy suspects that he was killed by Indonesia's security force. Regardless, his appeal — "SUKARNO, FEED YOUR PEOPLE" (YLD, 249) — is rendered futile: Sukarno is late, as usual, and will never know of the incident. In death, then, the uncertainty that characterised Billy's life is maintained, and his grand gesture of personal assertion is undercut by opposing powers.

After Billy's death, Cookie leaves for his posting in Delhi, and Guy remains alone in Jakarta. Glancing back at the airport terminal, Cookie considers that Guy "looked self-sufficient yet somehow forlorn behind the wire: a beautifully-dressed prisoner" (YLD, 262). Once again Guy's duality is made explicit: behind his appearance of self-sufficiency is an incompleteness. Because of the irreducible gap between his given limitations and his own expectations, Guy will always remain a prisoner of himself.

Cookie's vision of him behind the wire recalls the image of Billy's bird, beating in vain against the bars of its cage. After Billy's death the bird escapes, just as Guy is now freed from the demands of Billy's will. This freedom, however, only accentuates the gap in himself: "A part of himself now seemed damaged by this death" (YLD, 286).

The PKI's staging of a military coup in September 1965 brings the accumulating conflict to a head, and seems to hold the promise for Guy of fulfilling that yearning for the "vast, ultimate event which would change everything" (YLD, 274). His eagerness for that totalising experience, however, makes him foolhardy: overstepping the line between the permissible and the forbidden, he tries to enter Sukarno's palace and is blinded by the rifle butt of an angry soldier. His attempt to enter Sukarno's realm is the attempt of the rejected son to override the Law of the Father, yet it is not Sukarno he aims to challenge but Colonel Henderson. It becomes clear that Guy's rashness springs not only from "his lust for that final event, intense as an ascetic's lust for visions," but also from Henderson's contemptuous dismissal of him earlier that day (YLD, 276).

Significantly, it is Colonel Henderson who saves him from the Indonesian soldiers; they give way to the authority of the "clipped, arrogant voice" which "pierces all other sounds" (YLD, 278). Nonetheless, Henderson's unsympathetic response to Guy's injury recalls his earlier disregard towards him in the swimming pool. Even now, Guy's resentment is countered by his need of approval. Safe (but still an outsider) at the British Embassy and left in the perpetual darkness that his injury imposes, Guy's ambivalence towards the Law of the Father surfaces again:

> Hamilton resolved to ask the Colonel for no further favours. But he still waited for him to pay another visit. He remembered as a small boy waiting in bed for his father to come and say good night, dreading, on occasions when he had committed some offence, that his father might not do so. It was like that now. Resentful though he was, he still waited for the creaking boots, the sound of the coldly cheerful voice.
>
> But the Colonel never came again. (YLD, 284)

Guy drifts into sleep and dreams of a man "of great cruelty and power" (YLD, 285) — a man physically resembling both Sukarno and Henderson — who protects a place from which he and Billy are excluded. Denied the security of nationality and the sense of given dominance that it carries, Guy and Billy — brothers and rivals — are compelled to fight each other. The conflict of Guy's dream is irresolvable because it is an extension of that

fundamental process of alienation which begins in the Mirror Stage and defines the subject thereafter. In this respect, Guy is left always to wander in the realm that the Hindus call *akasa:* "the dark which has no end" (YLD, 271). In another sense, his maiming marks a new insight for Guy. His dream gives him a clearer understanding of Billy's drives and of his own role in Billy's expectations. As a result he recognises his responsibility to Jill in a less egocentric light, and determines to catch the flight that she will be taking to England. In sacrificing the sight of his injured eye to accomplish this, he gains a different kind of "sight."

Finally, however, the persistent sense of lack that dogs Guy — springing in an overt sense from the knowledge of displacement — can never be overcome. Indeed, his new maturity allows him to acknowledge that the place of belonging that had fed his nostalgia for the past had never, in fact, been his; that the only place of belonging could be the isolated country — in his mind, at the very periphery of the "real" world — which he had always rejected and never understood:

> Children of the north, the cabin crew were now nearly home: mentally already in Athens, Amsterdam, Paris, as the north's autumn clarity surrounded their capsule. And Hamilton watched them with calm wistfulness: their Europe would never be his. He would always be a temporary resident; in the end, the other hemisphere would claim him. (YLD, 295)

The novel closes on the note of midnight, summoning up again all the unresolved questions of *akasa* : the dark which has no end. Like Malouf's Dante, Guy will always be haunted by that "darkness at our back door" (J, 53). And the "darkness" which springs from a lack of national identity reflects the much more pervasive yet irresolvable dilemma facing the divided subject of attempting to identify the dark and indefinable areas of the "self"; as Billy tells Guy early on: "'All is clouded by desire, Arjuna'" (YLD, 82). In this sense, Dante's final realisation that "even the lies we tell define us" (J, 170) supports the narrator Cookie's acknowledgement — an acknowledgement that applies both to the subjects he speaks for and to his own incomplete narrative — that always "a doubt remains. No one tells us the whole truth" (YLD, 185).

CHAPTER 7

NEGATION OF DESIRE: THE LACANIAN "REVERSAL" IN DAVID MALOUF'S *AN IMAGINARY LIFE*

> Subjectivity — like objectivity — is an effect of *différance,* an effect inscribed in a system of *différance* . . . [This] confirms that the subject, and first of all the conscious and speaking subject, depends upon the system of differences and the movement of *différance,* that the subject is not present, nor above all present to itself before *différance,* that the subject is constituted only in being divided from itself, in becoming space, in temporizing, in deferral . . . (Derrida, "Semiology and Grammatology," 28-29)

Derrida's belief in the constitution of the subject through *différance* parallels the Lacanian notion that "the problem of being cannot be separated from the relation of the subject to the Other" (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 170). In other words, an awareness of "being" can only arise with an acknowledgement of distinctions, of the existence of the other, and therefore with an awareness of the associated element of lack. Yet nostalgia for the non-egoistic, pre-Symbolic unity which the infant enjoys prior to the awakening of "self" — the unity of the Lacanian Imaginary — will always preoccupy the subject and perpetuate that insatiable desire which, as Kay Schaffer writes, "arises not from the presence of desirable objects but from the absence of a sense of wholeness" (24).

For Ovid — the exiled Augustan poet and now narrator of Malouf's fictional *An Imaginary Life* — the "problem of being" is a haunting one. Like so many of Malouf's other protagonists (Johnno, the terrorist, Harland), he wrestles with the ready assumptions of his world, seeking instead an opening of life's "alternative fates" (J, 165). His efforts lead him into crisis when, for "[his] irony, [his] little impieties" (AIL, 27), he is banished from Roman society to Tomis, the primitive community of the Getae tribe, bordering the Black Sea. This is the extreme edge of the known world.

In an obvious sense, then, *An Imaginary Life* weaves itself around a theme which is at least implicitly apparent in all of Malouf's texts: that of exile. Yet like Johnno, the terrorist, the Harland brothers and many of the characters of *Antipodes* who are all aware of a sense of exile even in their homeplace, Ovid senses exile not so much as a physical dilemma (which is apparent in and of itself) but as a psychological one. His physical exile only serves to make him aware of another form of exile, which is from a sense of

belonging in the world, from a sense of harmony between world and "self." This is the exile, in other words, from the Imaginary. In this light, a sense of exile is to some extent necessary: any notion of "self" can only be constructed from the recognition of division between oneself and everything that is other; yet this same recognition of division generates a feeling of loss, of exile from some prior harmonious state.

In its theme of exile, this story of classical Rome is closely related to the Antipodean myth which colours so much Australian literature. The commonly portrayed dilemma of living at the edge rather than at the perceived centre — the dilemma which O'Brien, Johnno, and Guy use as justification for the dilemma of their sense of lack — is played out here by the author of the "Metamorphoses" in a way which destabilises the whole notion of centrality. The "metamorphosis" of the Roman Empire into modern Europe — Tomis is now the Romanian city of Constanta and Rome is no longer the world's focal point of social and political power — illustrates the way in which a centre and its corresponding edge can alter. Yet even within the context of Ovid's narrative, a whole series of overlapping centres and edges emerges according to Ovid's shifting perception of the world. Rome is initially the cultural "centre" to Tomis, which in turn becomes for Ovid the "centre" compared to unknown wilder places (what home, for instance, do the barbarous Dacian raiders come from when they thunder across the frozen river each winter?), and finally these wilds themselves become Ovid's "centre" in his reconciliation with the earth.

In Ovid's progression towards finding that sense of place in the world, a pattern emerges which seems the direct inversion of the Lacanian progression from the Imaginary to the Mirror Stage to the Symbolic Order. And central to Ovid's "regression" from the Symbolic Order back towards the Imaginary is the figure of the unnamed Child, a pre-adolescent wild boy whom Ovid and the village men discover in the woods surrounding Tomis. Here begins the real metamorphosis of Ovid who, as the representative of the Symbolic Order, caught within the alienating system of language, is countered against the Child, representative of the Imaginary state of unity with the world.

Unfamiliar with any kind of human society and untrained in the language of distinctions, the Child has grown up assuming a harmonious, overlapping relationship

between himself and the natural world. He recognises no subject/object split, having "not yet captured his individual soul out of the universe about him. His self is outside him, its energy distributed among the beasts and birds whose life he shares . . . He has no notion of the otherness of things" (AIL, 95-96). Repeating the cry of a wild bird, for instance, the Child's sensation is not that of merely imitating the creature but of actually becoming it, in that moment of sharing its language. Ovid, on the other hand, encouraging himself to view the world as the Child does, is "immediately struck with panic, as if, in losing hold of my separate and individual soul, in shaking the last of it off from the tip of my little finger, I might find myself lost out there in the multiplicity of things and never get back" (AIL, 96). Their different roles — Ovid's within the Symbolic Order and the Child's within a continuous Imaginary — are apparent before the physical introduction of the Child, even before Ovid's "journal" begins, in the nostalgic prologue:

> *The child is there. I am three or four years old. It is late summer. It is spring. I am six. I am eight. The child is always the same age. We speak to one another, but in a tongue of our own devising. My brother, who is a year older, does not see him, even when he moves close between us.*
> *He is a wild boy.* (AIL, 9)

Ovid, progressively becoming older, confronts the imaginary (Imaginary) child, who "is always the same age." The older brother, who moves between them, signifies Ovid's own certain development within the Symbolic Order. It is significant here that the brother, progressed one year further into the world of distinctions, cannot see the Child. The image of an imaginary childhood companion, visible to no one but the infant, is a familiar one. Yet in this context, it is an image that is not only retrospective, reflecting Ovid's nostalgia for a lost childhood, but is also anticipatory, prefiguring his movement "backwards" towards the Lacanian Mirror Stage. In this sense, the Child who returns so often to his dreams is not only a remembered comfort of childhood but another, as-yet unseen image of himself.

At the outset of his narrative, however, Ovid still regards the world from the limited and regulated perspective of the Symbolic Order. The unfamiliar landscape in which he finds himself reflects his state of mind, appearing to his disoriented eye only leaden, oblique, desolate. Most of all it matches his sense of inescapable oppression:

> I have found no tree here that rises amongst the low, grayish brown scrub. No flower. No fruit. We are at the ends of the earth . . . The river flats, the

> wormwood scrubs, the grasslands beyond, all lead to a sky that hangs close above us, heavy with snow, or is empty as far as the eye can see or the mind imagine, cloudless, without wings.
> But I am describing a state of mind, no place.
> I am in exile here. (AIL, 15-16)

The ironic play upon the notions of endings and beginnings here is missed by Ovid himself: the "ends of the earth" also represent what he later recognises as the raw beginnings of things. This unwitting irony suggests a further irony, since it was for his subversive irony that Ovid was banished to this place. So the key to his response to his new environment lies not with the nature of the landscape but with language. Beyond the application of his native Latin, this world has no sense or meaning for Ovid. The landscape itself becomes "a vast page whose tongue I am unable to decipher, whose message to me I am unable to interpret" (AIL, 17). Language is what gives the Symbolic Order its order; cut off from his own language, Ovid is in true exile. Like the Scandinavian lexicographer of "The Only Speaker of his Tongue," Ovid repeats familiar words to himself to keep his own world and his place in it alive. Without access to the language of the Getae, he is "as isolated from the world of men as if I belonged to another species" (AIL, 17).

As the narrative progresses, a series of languages emerges. In their increasing simplicity — from Latin to the Getic tongue to the "language" of childhood — these languages symbolise Ovid's reconciliation not only to the place of his exile but, beyond that, to the earth itself. As such, these languages serve to mark his gradual transformation from existence within the Symbolic Order to "rediscovery" of the Imaginary. Heading the hierarchy, not only in terms of the social and political power it carries but also in terms of its role as mediator of the world, is Latin, "that perfect tongue in which all things can be spoken, even pronouncements of exile" (AIL, 21). Latin is, more than other languages, "a language for distinctions, every ending defines and divides" (AIL, 98). It is, in this sense, truly the language of the Symbolic Order, both expresser and forbidder with its admittance of the existence of lack.

Connected to Latin is the double-edged language of irony, which pervades the narrative in both a literal and a structural sense. The seeming incongruity of a classical Roman poet narrating a post-colonial novel dissipates when it is recalled that Ovid's irony — source of his expulsion — had served to undermine the imperial discourse of Roman rule and to

provide his readers with a glimpse of alternative possibility. Moreover, by its very nature, irony is the instrument which not only subverts a specific social and political power but also questions the structure of knowledge through language that gives any discourse its authority. Irony is, as Avis McDonald comments, "the trope that subverts the other tropes, that recognizes the arbitrariness of the connection between signifier and signified, between word and object, and denies the intimacy of interior connection asserted by symbolism, by synecdoche" ("Beyond Language," 49). Yet ultimately, in his role as writer, Ovid must submit to that which he subverts. As a speaker of the Roman tongue he must to some extent perpetuate — even as he satirises — the ideologies it represents. And herein lies the other structural irony of this text: a text which writes its theme of the breakdown of imperial language — and ultimately of all language — in that other imperial language, English.

Countered against Latin is the language of the Getae, which Ovid at first finds a "barbarous guttural tongue" (AIL, 20). Yet in being a simpler language which cannot express the sophisticated abstractions that Latin allows, the Getic tongue requires the participation of the senses in forging a connection, however arbitrary, between the word and the thing it represents. Watching the village women grind the seeds that flavour their food, for instance, Ovid realises that he knows the seeds' names, "from having used them for the beauty of the sound itself in poems I have written" (AIL, 21), but has had no idea of what they look like and cannot recognise their individual tastes. The women, on the other hand, know the seeds' shapes and colours and tastes, and can translate the experience of those qualities through their names. In this sense, Ovid comes to believe, the Getic language is more able than Latin to present "the raw life and unity of things . . . Somehow it seems closer to the first principle of creation" (AIL, 65). It is a language which speaks not so much "the smallest nuances of thought" (AIL, 65), as does Latin, but rather the universally familiar "tunes" of feeling: "This one, I know, is tenderness; this regret, this anger, this an old man's tune for soothing a child . . . " (AIL, 21).

As he becomes familiar with this new language, Ovid's perception (construction) of the world alters accordingly. Like Jim Saddler and the Great Writer, Ovid realises that he can use the magical ritual of language to give the world, and his own life, meaning. It is, after

all, "our self we are making out there, and when the landscape is complete we shall have become the gods who are intended to fill it" (AIL, 28). As such, it is not only a new image of the world that Ovid celebrates when he rejoices in the flowering of spring, but also a newly-discovered dimension of himself, formed in language and manifested in the environment:

> Scarlet. A little wild poppy, of a red so sudden it made my blood stop. I kept saying the word over and over to myself, scarlet, as if the word, like the color, had escaped me till now, and just saying it would keep the little windblown flower in sight . . . Scarlet. Magic word on the tongue to flash again on the eye. Scarlet. And with it all the other colors come flooding back, as magic syllables, and the earth explodes with them, they flash about me. I am making the spring . . . out of the secret syllables as I place them like seeds upon my tongue and give them breath. (AIL, 31-32)

The final "language," which the Child represents and which haunts Ovid in his dreams, is not a language in any true sense, in as much as it evades the function of any language to express differences. It is what Ovid sees as the language of childhood, a wordless communicative form which is free from binding structures and which expresses, not distinction, but oneness with the external world. This is the language of the Imaginary, and as such it is one to which Ovid, as speaking subject, is denied access. Only in an unconscious state like sleep can he catch an evasive glimpse of what it would be like to recall this "tongue":

> The true language, I know now, is that speech in silence in which we first communicated, the Child and I, in the forest, when I was asleep. It is the language I used with him in my childhood . . . a language my tongue almost rediscovers and which would, I believe, reveal the secrets of the universe to me. When I think of my exile now it is from the universe . . . The language I am speaking of now, that I am almost speaking, is a language whose every syllable is a gesture of reconciliation. We knew that language once. I spoke it in my childhood. We must discover it again. (AIL, 97-98)

These, then, comprise the series of languages which correspond to Ovid's changing perception of the world and of his place within it. As he adopts each progressively simpler language — abandoning his unshared Latin to learn the Getic language and finally the "language" of the Child — so his regression through the Lacanian pattern of human development "devolves." The Child — as the image both of what Ovid once was and of what he can again become — is of course a vital figure in Ovid's reversion to the Mirror Stage. Yet his first movement in this direction occurs before the introduction of the Child, in the unconsciousness of dream. Only in the night time world of dream can

Ovid momentarily discard the cynicism, arising from the awareness of division, that rules his waking life. He dreams of the "original" gods (AIL, 23), in whom he does not consciously believe. One of these "creatures" confronts him (AIL, 24), and through the dream-state which makes things real, he senses that

> I heard on the flow of its breath a sound whose syllables I could interpret. Once again, it was the tune that I recognized. As if, having no language of my own now, I had begun to listen for another meaning.
> I put out my hand, touched it.
> And something came out of the depths of my sleep towards the point where we stood facing one another, like a reflection rising to the surface of a mirror. It was there, outside me, a stranger. And something in me that was its reflection had come up to meet it. (AIL, 24-25)

Ovid's recognition of himself in the "god" of his dream is a step back, towards both the creation of himself and the origin of all humanity. As such, it is also a step towards his reabsorption into the wider world. Soon afterwards, Ovid is taken by the men of the village on a hunting trip into the forest. The party begins with a ritualised riding through the funerary mounds of their dead, and Ovid follows the local horsemen in their ceremony of throwing grain and shouting to ward away evil spirits. He is reminded of his dream of the gods, and as he joins the Getae in their long wordless cries he feels a sense of freedom from his Roman heritage, which now makes his divisive Latin redundant.

This incident represents a significant turning point for Ovid in that it signifies more than an unconscious relinquishment of his native tongue. Firstly, it recalls him to the deaths of his father and brother, bringing to the foreground the Oedipal drama — with all its ambivalence towards the Law of the Father — that is initiated in the Mirror Stage, with its first recognition of difference. Ovid's paradoxical submission to, yet rebellion against, patriarchy is evident not only in his response to Augustus, as the father of Roman law — "No more patriotism. No more glorification of men at arms" (AIL, 26) — but also in his relationship with his natural father. He is torn between an anxiety to fulfil his father's expectations and a resentment of the weight of those expectations, and in ultimately rejecting his father's authority, Ovid must carry his own guilt "like a cold draught upon my back, even in sunlight" (AIL, 46).

Tied to this sense of guilt is the death of his older brother, whom Ovid must now replace as the father's heir. This event is important in enforcing upon the young Ovid not

only an awareness of loss but also a realisation of his role under the Law of the Father. As for the Great Writer in *Child's Play,* the death of his older brother allows Ovid's identity (as writer) to come into being, marking out his place in the adult world. Thus the substitution of younger for older pinpoints that tension between the world of childhood and the world of adulthood, with its connecting realisation of lack (it is important, in this sense, that both brothers die on the threshold of manhood). The motif of the dead brother also carries to other of Malouf's texts. In *Fly Away Peter,* the death of his younger brother spurs on Jim's acknowledgement of violence and loss, and thereby of the rules of the Symbolic Order. The deaths of the narrators' closest friends in *Johnno* and *Harland's Half Acre* function similarly, if not to push the ready-grown protagonists into the adult world, then at least to remind them of life's losses and limitations.

But now, taking part in the shouting ritual among the funerary mounds, Ovid is able to reconcile himself for the first time to the deaths of his father and brother. His sense of freedom is not only from his Roman past but also from the guilt of repressed resentment that is associated with the Symbolic Order under the Law of the Father. Yet the process of reconciliation which is sparked by this ritual applies not only to these deaths, but also to Ovid's own death. In shouting to the spirits of his father and brother and so in "let[ting] them back into my life" (AIL, 46), Ovid realises that "I was finished with the dead. Free, at last, to prepare a death of my own" (AIL, 47). In this sense, the retrospective desire for the lost Imaginary can also be seen as an anticipation of death.

For Lacan, language and death both represent "that margin beyond life" (E, 301), able only to imply something (the "real" and its ultimate state of death) which to the subject will always remain inaccessible. Marked by the phallic signifier — the signifier of lack, of symbolic castration — language creates a universe of representations which becomes, to the speaking subject, "a defect in the purity of Non-Being" (E, 317). Through the castration complex, "the purity of Non-Being" becomes tied to the Freudian notion of *jouissance,* the forbidden enjoyment of reunion with the (m)other which in "its infinitude . . . brings with it the mark of its prohibition" (E, 319). Since *jouissance* and death both represent that inexpressible something "whose limits cannot be overcome" (Benvenuto

and Kennedy, 179), "non-being" becomes, paradoxically, the origin of "being," the focus of desire:

> Death becomes the origin of the subject's life — not of the imaginary life of the ego, for which death merely represents a danger, but of what desire strives after. Death is the 'beyond' of desire, the forbidden, i.e., death is equivalent to enjoyment, jouissance. The unconscious strives to express what is forbidden to the speaking subject — jouissance and death. (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 180)

Hence Ovid's melting of the distinction between endings and beginnings: "I have," he says, "seen the end of all this, clearly, in imagination: the earth transfigured and the gods walking upon it in their bodies' light. And . . . I know how far we have come because I have been back to the beginnings . . . You can have no idea how far we have come, or how far back I have been to see all this" (AIL, 29-30).

Following the ritual in the burial ground, which becomes Ovid's initiation into the earth-oriented culture of the Getae and a step towards his "source" in death, the men move further into the forest where Ovid (and, significantly, *only* Ovid) sees the Child for the first time. In this encounter, the Child takes on the role both of the wild boy, the figure beyond the familiarity of human contact, and of the familiar but forgotton secret companion of Ovid's childhood. In facing this unfamiliar yet familiar vision — "Was the vision real?" (AIL, 49) — Ovid is confronting the vision of his own younger self. This movement into the Mirror Stage, which in the Lacanian pattern involves the relinquishment of unity with the (m)other and the acceptance of division, represents instead for Ovid a step towards the rediscovery of that unity and the relinquishment of division. That night Ovid again has a dream, in which the Child appears as his mirror image:

> As in that earlier dream I am face to face with something that is not myself or of my own imagining, something that belongs to another order of being, and which I come out of the depths of myself to meet as at the surface of a glass. Is it the child in me? Which child? Where does he come from? Who is he? (AIL, 52)

No physical contact is made with the Child at this point, and another year passes, with its annihilating winter and re-inventing spring, before Ovid and the huntsmen can return to the forests. Ovid's immediate dream of himself as a pool of water, reflecting the outside world and then merging with it, prefigures his reabsorption into the wider world.

> I am a pool of water. I feel myself warm in the sunlight, liquid, filled with the blue of the sky; but I am the merest broken fragment of it, and I feel, softly, the clouds passing through me, their reflections, and once the suddenness of wings .

> . . And softly, nearby, there are footsteps. A deer . . . Its tongue touches the surface of me, lapping a little. It takes part of me into itself, but I do not feel at all diminished. The sensation on the surface of me is extraordinary, I break in circles. Part of me enters the deer, which lifts itself slowly, and moves away over the leaves. I feel part of me moving away, and the rest falls still again, settles, goes clear. (AIL, 61-62)

Ovid's image of himself here recalls the image held by Dante of Johnno flicking pebbles across the pool of his "self" (J, 104). The pebbles skip the surface of Johnno's pool, just as the deer can lap the surface of Ovid's pool without diminishment, because "selfhood" — located as it is in so many different things — is always unfathomable. The image of "self" as a liquid thing — never stable and therefore never definable — is a recurring one in these novels. The moment when Ovid finally crosses the given boundaries of his life, represented by the river Ister, harks back again to Johnno's drowning in the river Condamine. In one sense, their "return" to the geographical "womb" represents a coming of full circle; but in another sense, the return to the earth via water is not a mark of self-completion but a confirmation of the fluidity of a life.

It is significant, then, that in Ovid's dream of himself as a pool of water the Child also comes to drink. Not only does Ovid see himself reflected in the Child, who embodies the promise of his return to the Imaginary, but the Child too sees himself reflected in the pool. The recognition of his own body-image heralds his transition from the Imaginary to the Mirror Stage, and this dream-encounter is repeated physically when, upon waking, Ovid sees the Child standing before him. Their eyes meet in recognition, which for Ovid marks the rediscovery of a lost past and for the Child marks an awakening of both identification with and suspicion of the other. In that instant the Child loses the innocence of his undivided harmony with the world. "Something," senses Ovid, "as we face one another in the darkness, has passed between us. We have spoken" (AIL, 63). For the first time the Child recognises the existence of two worlds, and for a crucial moment stands uncertain as to which world he should fly to: "back into the woods, or into whatever new world he has smelled and touched and taken into himself that comes from us" (AIL, 63). He retreats into the darkness of the woods, but his introduction to the Symbolic Order — to "the world of men" (AIL, 119) — has already begun. The following season, Ovid knows, "there will be no need to hunt him. He will seek us out" (AIL, 63).

The following year, encouraged by Ovid, the village men capture the Child and carry him by force to Tomis. The Child's relinquishment of his previous unity with the mother/earth is therefore marked by all the violence that the Law of the Father can summon in the imposition of its power. The physical violence of imperialism making its stamp (so evident in the war-world of *Fly Away Peter*) merges here with the psychological violence of alienation and loss that introduction to the adult order can involve (one thinks of Johnno, Gerald Harland, Koch's Shane Noonan and their eventual suicides). So begins the lengthy process of drawing the Child out into the world of *différance*. Noting the changes in him, Ovid senses "that something I will have to call his mind has been engaged, and has started to move out into the room . . . Some process of reaching up out of himself has begun of its own accord" (AIL, 79).

The following period, during which Ovid keeps the Child with him in his room, eating and sleeping and working opposite him, marks the Child's transition through the Mirror Stage — a phase of both eager curiosity and distrust — into the world of distinctions. When the Child timidly touches Ovid's hand, it is with that awareness of recognition which first began with their eye contact in the forest. Ovid's questioning of this new responsiveness accentuates the Child's progression through the Mirror Stage — as an awareness of self — towards what Lacan calls "that point where the real journey begins" (E, 7):

> Is he beginning to feel at last for some notion of his own being? Is it, for him, like touching his reflection in a glass? Has he, I wonder, any conception of what his own body is, what it looks like, what dimensions it possesses, how it displaces its own small part of the universe? Is it his body he must imagine first, and only after that come to a knowledge of what he is? (AIL, 79)

So Ovid's own journey towards a rediscovery of the lost Imaginary — the unconscious desire for which motivated the Child's capture, with its paradoxical element of violence — is initiated only at the cost of the Child's loss of that state. In other words, the Imaginary state which Ovid seeks to rediscover through the Child is necessarily submerged in the Child once he is brought into human contact. In this respect, the time of their tenuous co-existence in Ovid's room represents a vital turning point for both; for the time being they see each other in more or less equal terms through the reflection of the

Mirror Stage, but from now on they will teach one another to move in opposite directions, each taking the direction from which the other has come.

As the Child, under Ovid's influence, progresses further along the path to the Symbolic Order, so he displays more and more that "restlessness of mind, of body, that is the stirring in him of renewed life" (AIL, 80). Necessary to this transformation is Ovid's decision to teach him the speech of the Getae. Language is, of course, the mediating system of signs through which the subject comes into being *as* subject. As Ovid recognises: "Speech is the essential. I have hit at the very beginning on the one thing that will reveal to him of what kind he is" (AIL, 92). Yet attached to the decision to teach the Child language is a difficulty which Ovid never quite overcomes. On the one hand, he is caught up in the need to show the Child "that he is made as I am, that he is a man" (AIL, 92). On the other hand, he is loathe to destroy the unself-consciousness which had initially drawn him to the Child and which can teach him to rediscover his own ease with the world. The eradication of that unself-consciousness not only marks the Child with an awareness of division, but also marks Ovid ("What have I done?" [AIL, 73]) with a new source of guilt. Perhaps it is significant, then, that with the approach of winter the Child's language lessons decrease and then cease altogether. Later — too late — he utters his first (and only) human word. Rather than a cause for joy, this event only serves to jeopardise his and Ovid's place among the Getae, confirming the dangers and divisions of "the world of men" (AIL, 119).

In his contact with the Child, by contrast, Ovid finds himself "more and more often slipping back into my own childhood" (AIL, 82). This retreat is not merely backwards to a forgotton or rejected past, but is also inward, an entry into "the dimensions of my self" (AIL, 95). And in his retreat, Ovid relives his childhood discovery of the divisions of power which pinpoint the first casting off of innocence. This is the point at which, as a child, he recognised the distinction between the worlds of men and women, of masters and slaves. His remembered impressions of the women's world to which he once had access are nostalgic, idyllic ones of bare legs, spontaneous laughter, soapsuds and sun. However, the image of the servant-girl leading the boy-child around the tub by the prick (AIL, 85) summons up all the more disturbing struggles between these worlds, which are

brought to life in the Oedipal drama. The sexual power game is complicated by the fact that this girl is also the father's mistress. Here, in the secrecy of her own realm, she can assert her power through his son, "the little heir to all this world" (AIL, 85). The women's world, then, is one of "golden beauty and cleanliness" (AIL, 84), but it is also one of mysterious power.

Ovid's recollection of the secret power of women takes him one step further towards re-entry to the (m)other. However this is a step which, however unwittingly, has already been taken with his exile to Tomis. Unlike Augustan Rome, Tomis is a realm where the Law of the Father is ultimately subservient to the power of women. Ryzak is headman of the village and guardian of Ovid. Nevertheless, behind "his male prerogative, established in law, lies the darker power of the women" (AIL, 100). Despite his outward show of authority in physical strength, Ryzak's spirit quails before that of his mother who, as the keeper of village magic and worker of its charms, draws her strength not from man-made law but from the earth itself.

This is the world to which Ovid is determined to return. Yet here he slips into a pattern of illusion which he cannot now overthrow, for the awareness of polarities which makes possible his "choice" of worlds is the very quality which makes impossible his "return" to a state of unity with the universe. That very determination — "I must drive out my old self and let the universe in" (AIL, 96) — suggests its own illusoriness; it represents not a natural or uninvested response to the world but rather a concerted effort, a decision based upon the recognition of alternatives and motivated by desire. And the focus of Ovid's desire is the "true language" (AIL, 97) of childhood, that wordless state in which everything "hums in sympathy" (AIL, 104).

Changing circumstances within the power structure of the tribe create the opportunity for this final stage of Ovid's transformation. The Child's utterance of a local word while in the throes of an unknown fever is regarded by the Getae as a sinister omen, and Ryzak's corresponding death (presumably by rabies,[1] but linked by Ryzak's superstitious mother to the Child) compel Ovid and the Child to flee to the empty steppes beyond the river Ister. The river represents the point of Ovid's final metamorphosis, for in crossing it he must push beyond all the limits of his life. Yet, as Ovid recognises: "The

land I am about to enter is not entirely unfamiliar" (AIL, 137); it is a realm which promises the recovery of the state of unconscious innocence, abandoned since childhood. The crossing of that final boundary — paradoxically both outward from his recognised existence and inward to some earlier, hidden existence — is seen by Ovid as a step that must be taken if the circle of his life is to be completed. It is a step, he feels, that has been fatalistically present throughout his life, that no matter how wide the circle arcs, must be returned to:

> However many steps I may have taken away from it, both in reality and in my mind, it remained, shifting its tides, freezing each season, cracking up, flowing again, whispering to me: *I am the border beyond which you must go if you are to find your true life, your true death at last*. (AIL, 136)

Any distinction here between the notions of beginnings and endings is problematic. Death is "the last reality" (AIL, 141) which becomes synonomous with the recovery of the lost Imaginary. On the other side of the river, Ovid finds himself in a timeless, placeless landscape, in whose immensity the notions of distance and destination have been swallowed up, "as the days have been swallowed up by the sense I now have of a life that stretches beyond the limits of measureable [sic] time" (AIL, 144). In this journey of rediscovery the Child is the leader, directing Ovid "further from the last inhabited outpost of the known world, further from speech even, into the sighing grasslands that are silence" (AIL, 145). Removed from the alien community of Tomis, the Child withdraws from a final entry to the symbolic world to become, rather, the instrument of Ovid's escape. Guided by the Child, Ovid feels ever closer to that initial but lost state of unity with the world:

> I am entirely reconciled to the process. I shall settle deep into the earth, deeper than I do in sleep, and will not be lost. We are continuous with earth in all the particles of our physical being, as in our breathing we are continuous with sky. Between our bodies and the world there is unity and commerce. (AIL, 147)

And the last vision of the Child, before Ovid's narrative melts into the unconsciousness of death, is a unifying one in which he merges with both the sky above and the earth below. Gathering snails in the stream, the Child is framed by the sun, which touches his shoulders, while around his ankles the stream ripples and "shakes out its light" (AIL, 151). It is in this final vision that Ovid finds the fulfilment of his own life:

> He is walking on the water's light. And as I watch, he takes the first step off it, moving slowly away now into the deepest distance, above the earth, above the water, on air. (AIL, 152)

His impression is reminiscent of Miss Harcourt's vision at the close of *Fly Away Peter,* when in watching the surfer "walking — no, running" (FAP, 132) on the waves she discovers continuity (again, water reflecting the flow of life) in change, and comes to understand Jim's death as a kind of recovered unity with the world. Yet *An Imaginary Life* takes the notion of unity-in-death a step further than *Fly Away Peter*. Jim is left digging through the earth back to his life's "centre," which is also its beginning. Ovid's narrative, however, closes at a point which seemingly completes the cycle of his journey and, in so doing, leaves behind all distinctions:

> It is summer. It is spring. I am immeasurably, unbearably happy. I am three years old. I am sixty. I am six.
> I am there. (AIL, 152)

Surely, however, Ovid's "arrival" is premature. Death is the ultimate object of desire, but, as the point at which consciousness ends and the subject ceases to be, it is also the ever-forbidden experience. Indeed, death is only sustainable as the object of desire *because* it must remain "the 'beyond' of desire, the forbidden" (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 180). As the desired state which could complete the circle of one's life, death stops just short of fulfilling that completion because, unmediated as it is by subjectivity, it is "the object which always *escapes the subject"* (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 176). The fact that Ovid's arrival must be communicated by the written word is, of course, a forgivable necessity of the text, but it serves nonetheless to accentuate the illusoriness of any belief in unmediated experience of the world.

In this respect, the very title of the novel takes on an ambiguous duality: Ovid's Imaginary Life can be read as being ultimately pre-Symbolic and, paradoxically, as being elusive (imaginary) of that pre-Symbolic state. With this ambiguity in mind, one can only wonder about the fate of the Child, left wandering off into the "deepest distance" of the landscape. With Ovid's death — the cessation of his contact with humanity — he is presumably free to return to his previous state of harmony with the world. But having been introduced to a world constructed by difference, and having wrestled in his fever with the spirits of two worlds to finally find within himself the capacity for human speech, he is destined to carry with him his new knowledge of division and therefore of

loss. His reabsorption into the wilderness as a holistic process, then, must be as illusory as Ovid's discovery of unity between self and world at the point of death.

It is notable that other of Malouf's novels also end with the protagonists' deaths in highly ambiguous terms. Unlike Ovid's death, which comes in peaceful silence, the others' deaths are all stamped with self- or man-induced violence, combining the mark of the Law of the Father with the return to the (m)other. Johnno's death by drowning could be either a tragic accident or a desired return to his "source." Jim's death in war allows him to dig through the earth back to his life's centre/beginning, and the terrorist's death during his own act of terrorism returns him to an idealised childhood landscape. In this sense, Malouf's novels reflect the Lacanian notion that "the 'other' of life, the negativity to be overcome, non-being (in Freudian terms the death drive) paradoxically becomes the centre of life" (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 179). Held within this paradox, Malouf's subjects — each in his progression towards unity through life's fragmentations — remain in a state of profound tension.

Yet despite the impossibility of embracing death as the ultimate unifying experience, Ovid — through the circumstances of his death in the vast, untamed steppes — is able to play out the "anarchic, ephemeral" desires of a lifetime to dance "the tightrope over the abyss" (AIL, 26-27). The circle of his life may never be complete, but in walking the tightrope between two polarised points — speech and silence, centre and edge, origin and destination — Ovid can walk a line where anything is possible. And this, Malouf's texts seem to suggest, is perhaps enough.

CHAPTER 8

ILLUSIONS OF DESIRE: ADMISSION OF LACK IN CHRISTOPHER KOCH'S *THE DOUBLEMAN*

> To enter into the Symbolic Order means to accept the phallus as the representation of the Law of the Father. All human culture and all life in society is dominated by the Symbolic Order, and thus by the phallus as the sign of lack. The subject may or may not like this order of things, but it has no choice: to remain in the Imaginary is equivalent to becoming psychotic and incapable of living in human society. (Moi, 100)

The Lacanian conclusion that to remain in the Imaginary is to invite disorder, and therefore to be incapable of living in human society, is paralleled by Koch's statement that "if you actually make illusions more important than reality, you will be drained of vitality; you will lose your ability to live" (Thieme interview, 22). Elsewhere he comments: "either to lose yourself in fantasy, or to lose yourself in grief, is a sort of destruction . . . human beings cannot afford to enter too far into fantasy" (Mitchell interview, 143).

Desire for the Imaginary, however, is not quenched by the necessity of succumbing to the Law of the Father. The recurring preoccupation of Koch's protagonists with achieving "fullness of being" — apparent in their nostalgia for the past, in their need for "place," in their desire for the feminine other or an imagined otherworld — reflects the persistent theme in his texts of what he regards as an undiscoverable "place beyond the real"; a non-geographical place which could offer "a feeling of completeness," but which always evades the searcher (Thieme interview, 20). That place is, in Lacanian terms, the illusive Imaginary of dyadic unity, the interpretable focus of insatiable desire.

The Doubleman, Koch's latest novel to date, returns to this theme with a story that is more explicitly about illusion and its role in human desire than its predecessors. If a reading of *An Imaginary Life* reveals the impossibility of reverting to the Imaginary state, *The Doubleman* emphasises the danger of the attempt. And in its exploration of the nature of insatiable desire, this novel brings together the various manifestations of otherness that have arisen elsewhere: the other as alter-ego or mirror image (*Harland's Half Acre, Johnno, Child's Play, An Imaginary Life, The Year of Living Dangerously*); the other as real or imaginary landscape (*Fly Away Peter, Johnno, An Imaginary Life,* all

of Koch's texts); the feminine other (all of Koch's texts and, in their suggestion of the mysteriousness of the female world, *Harland's Half Acre, Child's Play, An Imaginary Life*).

The novel's two epigraphs prefigure these predominant concerns by focusing upon the sense of division and loss that an awareness of otherness implies. The notion of the Doubleman as shadowing other, as alter-ego, informs the first epigraph, taken from Kirk's *Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fawns and Fairies;* like Johnno to Dante, Gerald to Phil, Guy to Billy and the Child to Ovid, the Doubleman takes the role of brother or companion. The second epigraph is from Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* in which an awareness of division and lack is translated as a betrayal by the feminine other. The perceived fickle nature of women, however, is recognisable as the objectified lack of masculine desire. This thematic focus upon the ethereal, distorting Faeryworld shadows the novel's concern with the dilemma of lack and insatiable desire, setting up a tension — between self and other, present and past, fact and fantasy — that pervades every action.

The predominant symbol of the novel is that of paralysis. The narrator Dick Miller is struck with polio in pre-adolescence (that tenuous threshold between two worlds), and his physical disability comes to signify the spiritual crippledom that goes hand in hand with an obsession with nostalgia and illusion. In the early days of his illness, Dick is bed-ridden in the womb-like "Red Room" of his grandfather's house. It is here, separated from the outside world, living "a life at one remove" (TD, 22), that his addiction to the "Otherworld" begins. Like Guy Hamilton, Robert O'Brien and Francis Cullen, Dick feels that he is

> made to long for something else; something maddeningly vague: some absolute escape, some icy ecstacy found in far, pure reaches of the air. I want to get outside and run and run; to fly on the icy winter wind. I don't know what else to do with my longing. (TD, 31)

The otherworld has its focus, for Dick, in the legends of Faery, tales of an ancient, supernatural race who enchant humans with their ways, only to leave them with burning discontent and illimitable desire. But the otherworld also has another dimension, with its implications of a return to the lost Imaginary. With his illness, Dick sees that "I had entered a world *without penalties*. In fact, I had re-entered infancy, here in the Red

Room, and the price had been a parody of my original birth" (TD, 21). Even the sounds and voices beyond the Red Room speak a "code I couldn't decipher" (TD, 22).

Dick's disability functions, in some ways, like Guy's: it gives him insight to another perspective of things. Yet this insight is, for Dick, also destructive. Guy's eye injury, paradoxically, allows him to "see" more realistically the circumstances of his life; Dick's paralysis, on the other hand, becomes the manifestation of his inability to remove himself from a world of illusion. His illness initiates a process of re-birth, but it is "a birth into the life of dream" (TD, 24). The boy's natural development towards acceptance of the adult world, then, has been not only paralysed but reversed. Like Ovid's reversion to the Imaginary, however, this reversal is founded upon illusion. The toy theatre, through which Dick plays out the lives of his cut-out Faery figures, only shows — like the Javanese *Wayang* — a contrived shadow of real life.

And herein lies another, more egocentric aspect of the appeal to illusion. Billy Kwan's fascination with the shadow plays is tied to a need to be the *dalang* : the master of destinies in a world which denies him "place." Similarly, Dick's retreat into a world of myth barely disguises a fear of the "crude, ordinary world" (TD, 25) of adult uncertainties and disappointments. In the world of the toy theatre that he creates, he is in control: he pulls the strings to make his cut-out figures move, and places around them a frame whose dimensions he alone defines. The ideal of rediscovering a unifying place, then, is corrupted by the nature of the desire which focuses upon that ideal: underpinning desire for the other is the mingled narcissistic and aggressive drive not simply to join with but also to possess the other.

Paralysis, in this respect, functions not only to point out Dick's "birth into the life of dream" but also to stress the dangers that living in the past can invite. "All enthralment," Dick will later acknowledge, "is an arrested past: the prolonged, perverse childhood from which some souls never escape" (TD, 63). In this way, the past becomes not the object of nostalgic idealisation but rather something to move beyond. The terrible history of Van Diemen's Land becomes the focus of this message. Just as in *The Boys in the Island,* where the Tasmanian landscape still hangs heavy with the reproach of the lash (BITI, 8-9), Dick Miller's Tasmania is touched once more with "the fusty odour of fear" (TD, 34):

"The leg-irons and the lash of a hundred years before still hung near, like bad dreams; now, suburban and respectable under your new name, you found your children in irons once more, tormented by pains more searching than the lash" (TD, 16). The past, this text seems to suggest, is never completely innocent; its being constructed as a lost ideal is an illusive process which only serves to illuminate division, both past and present.

This irreconcilable tension between a desired ideal and the phenomenal world is, once again, interpretable as a quality of landscape. Like *The Boys in the Island* and *An Imaginary Life,* which both open onto an alienating landscape, this novel begins with an image of landscape as dualistic other. On the one hand, it emerges as the focus of objectified dread. The scene of Dick's Christian Brothers' education, which absorbs the novel's opening paragraph, recalls Tasmania's prison history: "The bruise-coloured steeple of St Augustine's was visible for miles around on the hill of South Hobart: a watch-tower over a camp of fear" (TD, 11). Yet, with all the ambivalence that the other carries, the same landscape is also the focus of longing. Mount Direction, which the boy views from his balcony, becomes "the sign of an amazing Beyond . . . It lies sleeping at the gateway of light, and across its double top, where I pick out the tiny heads of gums on the eastern sky, there is another, distant dimension, signalled by a strange green tinge low in that sky at evening" (TD, 47).

It is through this dualistic landscape that the young Dick moves, hampered by his (symbolic) disability. Yet the duality of Tasmania is not only apparent physically in the landscape ("In the upside-down frame of the Antipodes, it duplicates the Atlantic coast of Europe" [TD, 32]); the shadowing effect is also cultural. In the Tasmania of the 1940s, embroiled in a European war yet distant from it, the knowledge of division — and the subsequent longing for "elsewhere" — is not just a personal but a social phenomenon:

> Tasmanians, I suppose, were rather like the prisoners in Plato's cave; to guess what the centre of the world was like — that centre we knew to be twelve thousand miles away — we must study shadows of the wall . . . clues to the other hemisphere we might one day discover. (TD, 33)

Dante's wondering at the "extraordinary" fact that he "should be here rather than somewhere else" (J, 52) is matched in *The Doubleman* by the narrator's question: "Who were we, marooned forty-two degrees south? Why were we here, and not there?" (TD, 33).

The shadowing effect of an unseen culture accentuates another hidden dichotomy in this quiet society. Just as scenes of social violence with the outbreak of war belie Jim Saddler's assumption of the innocence of his world, so the social history of Tasmania — a history of violence and tragedy that no-one wants to claim — shadows its passive existence.

> At the place called Hell's Gates, on the savage West Coast, a penal settlement so terrible had been created that convicts had murdered each other to secure the release of hanging . . . Van Deimen's Land had also removed a whole race: the few aboriginals . . . who had once lurked in the bush like dark, accusing wraiths . . . When transportation ended, the native-born colonists changed the island's name to obliterate the dread; to make it normal. As clean, young Tasmania, it would start anew, the horrors forgotton.
> But were they? (TD, 34)

Dick, too, is touched by this false sense of innocence, in more than his illusive "re-birth" into a life of dream. Despite his mother's denials, Dick discovers that his maternal great-great grandfather was an Irish political prisoner, transported in 1848, the year of revolts. This hidden heritage — making conflict and power struggle the shadow of his safe, peaceful childhood — is paralleled on the paternal side of his family with a German ancestry. The family name, Miller, was anglicised from Müller during the first world war with Germany, little more than two decades previously. The changed name — like the denial of convict heritage — reflects the need to escape conflict and violence. Such conflict, however, is inescapable; with his altered name and suppressed ancestry, Dick is always-already the split subject, divided even before his birth. As Dick knows in one part of his mind, even a seemingly passive world has a shadowing other aspect, and so "is not entirely innocent" (TD, 31).

Ever-present in the background of this childhood world is the stern figure of the Law of the Father, brought to life in Dick's paternal grandfather Karl Miller. Just as the Great Writer and Colonel Henderson are the physical embodiment of the Law of the Father (the one resembles "the general of an imperial army" [CP, 42] and the other the classical "British Army officer" [YLD, 48]), so too Karl Miller, with his short-clipped moustache, his Prussian-blue stare and his propensity to play military band music on Sunday mornings (TD, 26-28), appears in every way the upholder of patriarchy. His son is dead (killed in the war) and his daughter-in-law, who still lives under his protection and influence, regards him with an ambivalent mixture of "respect and resentment" (TD, 26).

Karl Miller is kindly but firm with the boy, and his role as household patriarch, as well as his Germanness, stands as a constant reminder of division.

Juxtaposed against Karl Miller is the enigmatic Broderick, who becomes Dick's mentor in his journey into illusion. As the signifier of both the authority of the Law of the Father and the dangers of the otherworld of illusion, Broderick emerges as a profoundly divided and ambiguous figure. He is both "enigmatic" and "intriguing," and it seems to Dick "as though Broderick wasn't a man at all, but an abstraction" (TD, 62). He is both appealing, with his dark good looks and confiding smile, and disturbingly sinister. He is a man who seems to carry "a secret wound" (TD, 13), and in his presence Dick finds "a wave of intense cold crawling up my back, reaching my neck and tingling there like ice. I had experienced this before only rarely, in situations of threat or danger" (TD, 14). In this important sense, Broderick exposes as fictional the reconstructed innocence of the otherworld-as-Imaginary.

These two men become the figures of influence in Dick's life; yet while the grandfather's authority is legitimised by respectability ("the town had many rock-solid monuments to his success, his name being carved in some of their foundation stones" [TD, 26]), Broderick's power is less visible, more insidious. Despite his reservations regarding the man, Dick is drawn to Broderick by his own fascination with the otherworld; Broderick's suggestion that "the universe is double" (TD, 125) gives credibility to Dick's obsession with Faery. Broderick's influence takes on a much more sinister dimension, however, with the emergence of his belief that the material world is controlled by "the Demiurge" (TD, 265), a malevolent force of many identities whose power, it is implicitly suggested, can be harnessed for personal use. Talking to Dick in the basement of the bookshop where he is the accountant, Broderick initiates Dick into a world which paradoxically requires loss of innocence yet a cementing of illusion. In his underground study — "cave-like, without windows" (TD, 128), both womb and grave — Broderick becomes the signifier of both re-birth and death.

Parallel to the double influence of Karl Miller and Broderick is Dick's affinity with the two young men Brian Brady and Darcy Burr, who signify the supplementing other. Brian, as the elder cousin to an only child, emerges as the figure of the elder brother for

Dick. (In Billy Kwan's Celtic legend, the "giant brother" of Pelles' ancestor is named Brian, or Bran [YLD, 117].) Like Johnno, Brian stares out from his school photograph with an air of expectancy, looking towards a special future "into which he will escape" (TD, 39). And like Johnno for Dante, Brian is Dick's other who lives out Dick's own unrealisable dreams of adventure and risk. He is the "secretly idolized and envied" figure (TD, 40) who defies authority and convention (he is expelled from school, for example, for assulting the ruthless "Navvy" Kinsella), to which Dick — like Dante — succumbs.

The two cousins are both introduced to Broderick's influence when they encounter him in Sandy Lovejoy's Harrigan Street junk shop. Unlike Knack's shop of antiquities in *Harland's Half Acre,* which mixes and re-works the histories of many societies, Sandy's dark and dirty place reeks of ill-health, and has the "grave-smell" (TD, 57) of a suspended past. It is here, too, that the cousins meet, and form an intimate triangular relationship with, Darcy Burr. Unlike Brian, who with his athletic build and clear blue eyes is the image of good health, Darcy Burr's thin and pasty-faced appearance suggests not only a morbidity of character but something more alarming; his "beak-like" nose and "feral cat" eyes (TD, 58) mark him out, like Broderick, as a creature of prey. While Brian exudes the physical health that might have been Dick's before paralysis altered his life's course, Darcy stands as a warning of the ill-health that an obsessive dream and distorted ego will bring.

Within this triangle, each pairing uncovers a special relationship which excludes the third. Dick and Brian are bonded by blood, and share a history into which Darcy can never enter. Dick and Darcy, as students of Broderick's philosophy, are drawn together by a mutual obsession with the otherworld. But perhaps the most revealing relationship, in terms of its effect upon Dick, is the one between Brian and Darcy. Both boys are taught guitar by Broderick, and forge a partnership which takes them from back-street pub gigs as a folk duo to national fame as the "Rymers." Dick's response to the partnership between these two — each of them supplementing something in himself, but together finding a success which excludes him — is an ambivalent one of pride and resentful jealousy.

Each of these individual relationships, in fact, is imbued with ambivalence; the other — as the object of both identification and threat — evokes a paradoxical response in the lacking subject. Brian exemplifies a down-to-earth simplicity, an unconscious appreciation of life in its immediacy, which Dick, restrained by his crutches and self-imprisoned among his fairy tales, both yearns towards and despises. It is hardly surprising that Dick's first glimpse of adult love is from the position of observer, watching the relationship form between Brian and the housemaid Hazel. His mixed reaction to their relationship recalls Phil's response to Gerald and Jacky in *Harland's Half Acre*. His jealousy arises, on the one hand, from his own desire for the girl-as-other. Hazel, with her farming background and far-seeing green eyes, is like Heather Miles, the representative of the otherness of woman/landscape; at the same time, with her wraith-like body and ethereal quality — "here and yet not here" (TD, 76) — she is like a Faery figure of Dick's dreams. Yet on the other hand, Dick's jealousy springs not just from desire for Hazel but from her privileged position with Brian, the other with whom he identifies but from whom he is excluded. Similarly, some years later, Dick grows to fear the developing relationship between Brian and his own wife Katrin; like Phil with "Geraldn'Jacky," the loss that he stands to face is not only that of his love but also that of his supplementing alter-ego. His response to this threat, as a result, is a double one: "I wanted to kill Brady, but I couldn't even hate him; it was futile, somehow; like hating a part of myself" (TD, 335).

Dick's relationship with Darcy Burr, too, is defined by the opposing responses of need and dread. Darcy's vision of personal power (he is truly the disciple of Broderick) is a more explicit version of Dick's own need to control. Just as Sukarno lives out, in egocentric tyranny, the private fantasies of Billy Kwan, so Darcy's plan to build the Rymers into a source of personal fame and fortune is an exaggeration of Dick's own obsessive possessiveness. And just as Billy is ultimately repulsed by Sukarno's egotism, so too Dick shrinks from the quality in Darcy that he fears in himself. One recalls Dick's own suspicion, recognised in childhood but suppressed, that "Elfland is not entirely innocent" (TD, 31): underwriting the innocent appeal to the otherworld for unifying

wholeness is the more sinister desire— exemplified by Broderick and his acolyte Darcy — for power and possession.

Darcy recognises this shared desire for control, and the cajoling, conspiratorial tone he takes with Dick — "'We can make it happen, you and me. The others'll be our instruments'" (TD, 248) — recalls Billy's appeal to Guy for sameness. His very name of Burr — the weed-like seed that is abrasive and sharp, yet clinging — reflects his role in Dick's life. In his relationship with Brian, however, Darcy's need to manipulate is less convivial, more explicit. Given that both young men function to supplement opposing aspects of Dick's character, it seems appropriate that the relationship between Darcy and Brian should be both more intimate (they not only work but also live together) and more tense than either's friendship with Dick. Brian's passivity is exploited by Darcy, who regards him in much the same way as Dick regards the cut-out figures of his toy theatre. In this light, the unexplained disappearance of Brian's girlfriend Rita — the marginalised singer who holds no place in Darcy's scheme of greatness — has sinister implications.

The other, as both supplement to self-lack and the object of ambivalence, is interpretable in Dick's life not only as Brian and Darcy, as alter-egos, but also as the two women whom he loves. As in Koch's earlier novels, the two predominant female characters of *The Doubleman* are placed by the force of masculine desire in an impossible role. They become, from the perspective of this desire, "the divine female force" through which "we could liberate ourselves; we could achieve communion with the Abyss. And then we could rediscover the older Mysteries" (TD, 266). The role of liberation, communion and rediscovery is, in effect, the role of the (m)other in the return to the lost Imaginary. However, like the unknowable Australian landscape, with its hold over "the power-places" (TD, 267), women are interpreted as a double-edged force. Darcy's plan to lead his followers to the "places of power in the desert" (TD, 316) has Voss-like connotations in its implication of both self-sacrifice and self-renewal. And like the desert landscape, women are positioned on that perceptual borderline between the promise of renewal/unity and the threat of loss/the unknowable. "From a phallocentric point of view," writes Toril Moi,

> women will come then to represent the necessary frontier between man and chaos; but because of their very marginality they will also always seem to recede into and

> merge with the chaos of the outside. Women seen as the limit of the symbolic order will in other words share in the disconcerting properties of *all* frontiers: they will be neither inside nor outside, neither known nor unknown. It is this position that has enabled male culture sometimes to vilify women as representing darkness and chaos . . . and sometimes to elevate them as the representatives of a higher and purer nature . . . (167)

As the figure at the centre of his first adolescent experience of love, Deirdre Dillon is constructed by Dick as an imaginary ideal, longed for but inaccessible. For him, her otherness makes her the mythical Titania, queen of the Fairies. Like Koch's other female characters, however, Deirdre is defined always in terms of ambiguity, recalling to the foreground her own element of lack. A "shape-changer" (TD, 93) who shifts continually between opposing aspects, Deirdre plays the alternating roles of child, mother and seducer. Her quality of agelessness, as well as her preoccupation with the "yellowing myth" of the past (TD, 94), make her both "ancient and young," a thought that "repels" the younger Dick (TD, 97). Yet despite the anomalies that he suspects in her, Dick is determined to hold Deirdre as the living representative of the illusive otherworld of his desire.

Deirdre, in fact, encourages this fixation. Also caught up with an empty longing for life elsewhere, Deirdre is herself lost in an illusive world of impossible dreams. Her desire to escape the "crude, ordinary world" of conflict and disappointment is focused in an ideal of lost childhood innocence. This is an ideal which is not diminished but accentuated by her unsuccessful marriage to the much older, dominating Michael Dillon. Her attraction to Dick is based upon what she sees as the innocence of his adolescence, as well as the crippledom that she, in one sense, shares. Her effect on Dick is to complete the process of his paralysis; in his imagination, she is "only partly real, and yet more important than reality; she drained reality of its savour" (TD, 120). Only later will Dick learn that the mythical Titania is also Artemis: with the dual nature of Kali, she is "both virgin huntress and goddess of childbirth . . . Like the fairy woman of legend, she promised fruitfulness and ecstasy — but only at one remove, never in reality" (TD, 130).

Indeed, the ideal of innocence that Deirdre nurtures is revealed as illusory by the ever-present tension in their relationship between platonic love and overt sexuality. Her inconsistencies — "She was like a nubile girl playing sexual games; our delight must always be mingled with guilt" (TD, 93) — only serve to accentuate the conflicts from

which she tries to hide. For Dick, too, the construction of Deirdre as ethereal ideal is undermined by the adult sexuality which she exudes, and to which he responds with both desire and fear. In his later dream of Deirdre, "longing became nausea . . . Desire and dread were the same" (TD, 318). And again, the duality which characterises masculine perception of woman is translated into a dual perception of landscape. Arriving at Greystones, where he will have this first affair, Dick regards the outback landscape in terms of female sexuality, with the associated response of desire/distrust:

> I had always seen the countryside as sexless; but now I saw that the land was not innocent, any more than the island itself was innocent. Half-seen shapes of lust and fear lurked in the sulking green bush, where I wandered about alone; and at times I caught the land looking at me out of the corner of its eye . . . Alone in such places, with warm smells of salt and seaweed rising from the ground, I would unexpectedly find my groin hollowing, and images of naked girls would arrive. But no live bodies were here; only the giant, warm body of the land . . . (TD, 74-75)

And soon afterwards, picnicing with Deirdre in the unfamiliar bushland beyond his uncle's house, Dick imagines that

> an immense change was overtaking the landscape. Not sunset, nothing so gaudy and obvious; the island's long summer twilight, subtle and profound. Everything was slowed and transfigured by a deceptive, honeyed radiance that minute by minute made each object unnaturally distinct; and a huge tension began. (TD, 91)

Dick's perception of the otherworld alters when he meets Katrin Vilde, the girl of "unknown Europe" (TD, 192) whom he will eventually marry. Like Ilsa Kalnins, Katrin is a post-war refugee who has settled in Sydney in the hope of forgetting the conflicts of war. In another inversion of the centre/margin and imperial/colonial dichotomies, Katrin's native Estonia has been the scene of invasion and fragmentation, and now post-colonial Australia is the safe harbour for her displaced people. Again like Ilsa, Katrin's primness is countered by her secret motherhood, and her experiences of the adult world accentuate her otherness in the eyes of the sheltered Dick.

It is notable that Dick and Katrin meet in Sydney, the "city of heat and daydreams" (TD, 155), where both have arrived in their pursuits of different dreams. Katrin, like Ilsa, seeks peace and stability after the divisions of war-torn Europe. Dick, like Koch's younger Tasmanian Francis Cullen, goes to the mainland seeking a focus for his longing of "something else; something maddeningly vague" (TD, 31), and Sydney represents a more literal otherworld than the shadowy realm of Faery. For Dick, the cityscape of

Sydney is touched with the same strange, honeyed light of otherness (TD, 147) that had coloured his perception of the bush landscape where he had picniced with Deirdre. As such, the "shadowing" effect of one landscape upon another — an effect that is geographical and cultural in Tasmania's memory of Europe — springs, in this context, from the overlap between the mindscape of empirical perception and the mindscape of the imagination. There are, consequently, two cities for Dick; there is the "real one" of everyday routines and disappointments and there is "an impossible cityscape of ethereal encounters" (TD, 155):

> The real one is no less strange; but who's to say that the other city doesn't exist somewhere — that city glimpsed in the mind? In those first weeks of my arrival, there were two Sydneys: a mythical Sydney lay somewhere in the heat, out beyond the verandah's arches. (TD, 155)

In his new life here, Dick is "waiting for things that could never materialize . . . the true and deceitful were merging; present and past blurred into each other" (TD, 158). And it is in this dual landscape, in which the perceivable world of the everyday is shadowed by another, absent world, that Dick's love affair with Katrin begins. Through Katrin, that absent world is objectified. In marrying Katrin, Dick is taking to himself the European history that he had always known in imagination but had never experienced:

> I'd married Europe as well, I thought . . . Loving her, I loved lost Dillingen, and the sub-Arctic city of Tallinn where I could scarcely hope to go, locked as it was behind the Iron Curtin . . . Speaking Estonian, she became another; fleetingly, I was no longer in Sydney, but in a medieval town on the Baltic. (TD, 240)

Like the world of Faery, Europe represents the realm of the past, the missing other, the absence in everyday life. In Dick's dream of the frozen lake, the night after his meeting with Katrin's family, the otherworld of Faery and the otherworld of the lost Northern hemisphere — both frozen in time and in the imagination — become merged:

> I skated on and on into the blackness, where the only lights were stars: freed into the utmost North, the world's highest rim, beyond all human comforts; freed into the territories of my fate: the outland of fairies; furies; gods. (TD, 181)

Yet, characteristic of the subject's response to the other, Dick's relationship with Katrin — like his relationship with Brian, Darcy and Deirdre — is touched by ambivalence. As the colonial son with a double-edged attitude towards his forebears, Dick realises in his dealings with the Vildes that

> I was reverting to type, among these refugees: a member of one of the most insecure tribes on earth. I secretly saw them as representative of old, subtle Europe, beyond my scope; I respected and yet mistrusted them . . . (TD, 181)

Dick's two-fold response to Katrin's otherness is founded not only in the imperial/colonial but also the masculine/feminine dichotomy. Like Robert O'Brien and Guy Hamilton, who construct their loves as child- or nymph-like ideals and then cannot come to terms with their sexuality, Dick is nagged by fears of "secret promiscuity" in his prim Katrin (TD, 239). Such fears are suppressed in the happy early days of their marriage, but surface again when Katrin joins Brian and Darcy in the Rymers as a singer. Yet the fear that Dick turns into sexual jealousy of Katrin and Brian's increasing closeness is, in large part, the fear of losing personal control of the world around him.

Dick is not only Katrin's husband but is also, in conjunction with Darcy, the creator and director of the Rymers. Incorporating the ancient balladry of Faery legend into the popular folk style of the 1960s, Dick and Darcy can bring to life, in musical form, the illusory otherworld of their mutual obsession. And with his influence as a producer for ABS, Dick is truly in a position of determining power. Taping the Rymers' music for a television series, Dick is once again playing with his self-made toy theatre:

> the Rymers are very good indeed, and below the flickering, multiplied blue images of my creation, I sway and hum now in fervent communion . . . *I've put them inside the frame,* and a magic is taking place; they're more than themselves now, Katrin, Brian and Darcy. I concentrate on calling the shots . . . (TD, 270)

Dick's obsessive need to give his "fantasies flesh" (TD, 261) on stage, and so to "contain" all the players "in my own life" (TD, 222), is reminiscent of Billy's private *Wayang* play. For both, the figures they manipulate are not cut-outs or shadows but are real, and the power relationship that this implies reveals the dangerous aspect to their obsessions. Yet motivating this need to appropriate is the desire for personal autonomy which springs from the recognition of alienation, of loss. Just as Billy's attempt to keep his subjects "transfixed like butterflies" attests only to "the shoals of [his] own torment" (YLD, 109), so Dick's need to keep the Rymers "inside the frame" reveals his own world as one of "tensions within tensions" (TD, 268). In one of his later dreams, Dick's fear of losing Katrin to Brian and control of the Rymers to Darcy is translated into a fear "of invisibility; voicelessness" (TD, 304). Once again, then, language is instrumental in the process of establishing a basis of power, of establishing a sense of self. Dick's fear of

losing his control over the others' lives, and therefore of losing meaning in his own life, is manifested in his dream as a loss of meaningful speech: "I would helplessly speak, but no one would listen. I would not really exist" (TD, 304).

The double nature of desire — the need to belong which spills over into the drive to appropriate — reflects the double nature of the otherworld which is the focus of that desire. Like the *Wayang* of the Left and the Right, the Faery Otherworld is divided into the two aspects of "dark and light" (TD, 263). These two aspects correspond to the two worlds of Hades and Elfland, the fearful and the innocent worlds which are personified, for Dick, in the figures of Broderick and Deirdre. Yet it is "impossible to know which zone one might find oneself in" (TD, 263) because they are not diametrically opposed but are overlapping, merging: the innocent Elfland is located underground, and yet "that was where the dead were, wasn't it?" (TD, 263). One recalls the construction of Deirdre and Broderick as profoundly divided characters, and in fact Deirdre will later become a disciple of Broderick's through the influence of Darcy. Like the otherness of landscape, and like the otherness of the women who come to represent it from the perspective of masculine desire, the otherness of Faery reveals a "double world: enchanted and endlessly sweet, its savours never failing; or else dim wastes without hope, where shades went drifting in endless loss" (TD, 264). Like the Lacanian Imaginary, then, the various otherworlds of Koch's novels emerge as ideal dreams which imply the satisfaction of unity, yet which in their inaccessibility promise only the recognition of loss.

An unwillingness to confront and accept the inevitability of loss — to relinquish, in Lacanian terms, the Imaginary ideal — leads, the text implies, only to the paralysis that nostalgia and illusion breed or, worse, to tragedy. Deirdre Dillon's attempts to cling to lost childhood seem, in her increasing middle age, no longer poignant but merely ridiculous. Despite her self-parodying comment that "'I'm a middle-aged frump'" (TD, 280), she still retains the tone "of a clever little girl" and the childish expression of "blank, wide-eyed solemnity" (TD, 282). In order to keep the past alive for herself she must revive it for Dick too, and so she emphasises his helplessness as she does her own. Against Katrin's almost angry assertion: "'*You* aren't crippled . . . You scarcely limp at all'" (TD, 182), Deirdre tells Dick: "'You've still got your limp'" (TD, 280). With twelve

years distance between them, however, Dick no longer sees Deirdre as the fairy queen but only now as a "fairy nurse":

> she offered nothing but the thin milk of dream, in which there was no nurture, but merely addiction. Adult love threatened her; she cared only for the callow or the handicapped, and I had been both. (TD, 285)

Deirdre's step-son/frustrated lover Patrick stands as a warning reminder of what Dick might have become. A lover of things past (Greek mythology, jazz legends), Patrick recalls, even as he nears thirty years of age, "the sort of blond small boy who'd won baby shows, and now found the world a little difficult" (TD, 290). The childhood world of pretence and teasing games in which Deirdre and Patrick wrap themselves is, however, betrayed by the physical symptoms of their troubled adulthood. Despite Patrick's boyish looks, a pudgy, glossy complexion and heavy pouches under his eyes point to his hopeless alcoholism. And behind his wide, appealing smile, Patrick's expression seems touched by "some private anxiety" (TD, 290). Deirdre's beauty, too, is "coarser" than Dick remembers from adolescence, and he wonders if her blonde hair is dyed (TD, 280-82). He cannot suppress a sense of dismay at "what Time has done to the body of the Elle Maid, making her death-white and voluptuously swollen: a creature of Earth" (TD, 325). Like the deaths of Johnno, Gerald Harland and Shane Noonan, which attest to these characters' inability to accept the disillusionments and limitations of adulthood, Deirdre's untimely death seems inevitable. Her life, like the lives of these others, "rambled towards no destination, no final point" in a self-enclosed state in which "it wasn't dream that imitated life, but life that imitated dream" (TD, 319).

Against the "thin milk of dream" that Deirdre offers, Katrin offers a support to Dick's life that is as substantial as the "heavy Estonian rye bread she'd never let the house be without" (TD, 335). Her value, however, lies not in Dick's initial construction of her as idealised other but rather in her recognition and acceptance of division and loss. Like Dick, Katrin is the lacking subject; in an inversion of his experience of marginality, she tells him of her own childhood sense of a world elsewhere: "'there was always another country out of sight. I used to think it was just past the edge of Dillingen, where the road went'" (TD, 192). For Katrin, it is not central Europe but her lost Estonia that becomes the absent world, the "lost Paradise; it was a landscape that glowed with impossible

loveliness, with the crystal, transcendent light of the ultimate North" (TD, 207). However, despite the loss of her country, her parents and her innocence, Katrin follows the philosophy of her grandfather Andres Vilde that "almost anything could be endured . . . if discipline and a plain knowledge of consequences were maintained" (TD, 210). Her ability to be "realistic and even cynical about the inevitable weaknesses of human beings" allows Katrin to emerge from "the vortex of the century's greatest disasters with her tranquil hopes, her capacity for joy, her self-respect untouched" (TD, 210).

Underlying Katrin's stoicism, nonetheless, is a strong dependence upon Christian faith which is encouraged and supported by the elderly Vilde. For Dick, as for the young protagonists of Koch's other texts, the other takes many forms (a place, real or imaginary; a temporal sphere; a woman or a male alter-ego) which can never satisfy desire. For Vilde, on the other hand, desire for the other causes a spiritual ill-health that can only be overcome by embracing Christian faith. This is a belief that he interprets in terms of his own experience of war and loss:

> 'The Nazis were very much interested in witchcraft — paganism. Naturally; they had denied Christ, now they had need of the Other . . . Giving up the rituals that are God's, we go back instead to other rituals . . . rituals that lead always to sickness, and to blood.' (TD, 237-38)

Vilde's philosophy, in fact, points to a wider Christian humanist ethic that underpins the novel. As the keeper of the family and the upholder of tradition, Andres Vilde is the reconstruction of Dick's own grandfather Karl Miller. Both men represent a society whose rules are based upon a combination of pragmatism and traditionalism. As models of social and religious conservatism, Miller and Vilde are the staunch guardians of familiar patriarchy. Countering this narrative strain is the Faery narrative, which is split into its different aspects of Dick's "innocent" ideal and Broderick's more sinister otherworld. In its exploration of two different belief-systems, then, *The Doubleman* takes as its founding structure a clash of discourses. "It's my belief," Koch comments in relation to *The Doubleman,* "that almost everybody wants revelations, either through direct religious experience or through drugs or through excitement or through something" (Mitchell interview, 146). And the shifting nature of these discourses — with their capacity to attract and repel — reflects the shifting nature of the divided subject: "there are

demonic tendencies within us," continues Koch, "just as there are angelic tendencies within us" (146).

This pattern of dichotomy is supported by the retrospective narrative voice, which serves always to point out the irreconcilable gap between present and past, experience and innocence. Dick's is not an uncertain narrative, as are Dante's and Cookie's, but a knowing one which speaks from the other side of event and consequence. Even this voice of experience, however, is touched by an element of uncertainty in its acknowledgement of the shifting nature of "truth." "Later," narrates Dick of Darcy's conspiratorial appeal for power, "I'd recall this remark with some dubiousness; now, like everything else, it seemed the simple truth" (TD, 248). Yet "truth," of course, is never simple, and even Dick's retrospective response from the standpoint of knowing narrator is coloured by the ambiguity of "dubiousness."

Nevertheless, despite the ambiguites of "truth" and the anomalies of the "real" that are left unresolved, this text does seem, ultimately, to suggest some kind of countering force to human lack. Dick's emergence from his state of paralysis can only occur with his relinquishment of the otherworld-as-ideal and his acceptance of the present world of frustrated expectation and regret. This is a step that he takes, however, only after rediscovering (even if only momentarily) the religious faith of his childhood. Wandering by chance into a Mass in progress, Dick joins in with the spoken rituals of faith: "'*Hail, holy queen, mother of mercy; hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry. . .*'" (TD, 339). On the one hand, then, Dick's renunciation of illusion may merely be the displacement of one focus of otherness for another. On the other hand, the dualistic influences that affect Dick's life (Miller and Vilde/Broderick; Brian/Darcy; Katrin/Deirdre) can be read as representing a single force whose different aspects signify the dual states of spiritual health and ill-health. And confronted with this choice — interpretable in Lacanian terms as acceptance of the Symbolic against clinging to the disordered Imaginary — Dick is finally able to renounce his dreamworld:

> Out above the ocean, the white half-moon persisted; the crone, Eurybia. The cold name shone briefly from the bottom of memory: a forgotten toy; something from my boyhood at Trent Street, with no more glamour.
> And I knew now that it was all gone — like Harrigan Street and Broderick, and the district of Second-hand. (TD, 352)

Yet even with Dick's final resignation to the "crude, ordinary world," problematic as that resignation might be with Dick's supplementing resort to Christian faith, the dilemma of insatiable desire still remains. Like Koch's three preceding novels, *The Doubleman* 's final note is one of loss rather than of reconciliation; of unresolved tension between the scope of desire and the actuality of event. In this sense, each of Koch's novels implies — with the shifts and even contradictions that characterise any construction of identity, either national or personal — that desire for "some nameless revelation" (CTG, 118) is the consistent impulse of human life. "And that impulse," Koch says, " . . . the Edenic urge, the longing for paradise — that impulse is one of the highest we have" (Mitchell interview, 151).

CHAPTER 9

INVENTION OF NARRATIVES: THE IDENTIFICATION OF SELF AND WORLD IN DAVID MALOUF'S *THE GREAT WORLD*

> The world was so huge you could barely make your mind stretch to conceive of it . . . Yet whole stretches of it could be contained as well in just two or three syllables. You spoke them — it did not have to be out loud — and there they were: *Lake Balaton, Valparaiso, Zanzibar,* the *Bay of Whales*. And among these magic formulations, and no less real because it was familiar and he knew precisely what it represented, *Keen's Crossing* . . .
>
> So there it was: his own name, Keen, making an appearance in the great world. On a map, along with all those other magic formulations . . . There was a mystery in this that he might spend the whole of his life pondering, beginning at the kitchen table here; except that it was just one of the mysteries, and he knew already that there were others, equally important, that he would have to explore. (GW, 196-98)

In David Malouf's latest novel to date, *The Great World* (1990), Digger Keen's recognition of his own "place" on his school map of the great world is reminiscent of Dante's schoolboy vision, in Malouf's first novel *Johnno,* of his "extraordinary" position of being "here rather than somewhere else" (J, 52). Like Digger's, Dante's is a vision which relegates everything that lies beyond his ability to name it as "a mystery" (J, 53). However, the sense of displacement that underlies Dante's question of "Why Australia? What *is* Australia anyway?" (J, 52) is not shared by Digger. The difference in their attitude to place is explicit even in the nicknames they bear: Dante's connection to the classical European poet contrasts Digger's identification with the pioneer figure of Australian national consciousness. Such a distinction illuminates the fact that Digger's ability to reconcile the gap between perceived notions of centre and edge, of presence and absence, springs from the fact that there is "a tie, a deep one, between the name as he bore it and as the place did; they were linked . . . because his name was on it, or *its* name on him" (GW, 198).

Thus language is once again affirmed as the creative force which provides an explanatory narrative that "links" the speaking subject to the world. The Symbolic Order, through which language speaks, may enforce lessons that are difficult to accept — as *The Doubleman*'s Dick Miller and his predecessors in Koch's earlier novels discover — but above all it allows for a discriminating viewpoint and therefore for a place of identification for the subject. In a discussion with Paul Carter on the relationship between

language and place, David Malouf comments: "the medium through which we finally understand things and make them available to ourselves as areas of action is language itself — the articulating of spaces is what allows us to move" ("Spatial History," 173).

The desire for the other which characterises the speaking subject and which is initiated by an awareness of lack also, by necessity, acknowledges the possibility of difference. And without the possibility of difference, no structuring of the world can occur at all. Such a notion recalls Derrida's discussion of the decentred structure, whereby the very process of "orient[ing], balanc[ing], and organiz[ing]" a structure is dependent upon "the play of its elements inside the total form" (*Writing and Difference,* 278-79). So because of its play of differences within its capacity to structure, language allows for a creative potential to invent the world. "You let these names fall into your head," Digger senses, "and, by some process of magic, real places [come] into existence" (GW, 196). In the same way, then, that "the magic names" for imagined places summon up the places themselves for Koch's adolescent characters Francis and Shane (BI, 128), or the "magic syllables" sprouting from his tongue invent the spring for Ovid (AIL, 31), Digger's ability to "put [things] into words" opens up to him a world of "extraordinary possibility" (GW, 30).

In its concern with the mapping of place through language, *The Great World* explores, by implication, the making of history. (One thinks of the terrorist's claim that the Great Writer, through the creative power of his narratives, "has created so much of our world that we scarcely know where history ends and his version of it begins" [CP, 40].) As a form of the mapping process, history — what Paul Carter calls that "fabric woven of self-reinforcing illusions" (*Botany Bay,* xv)[1] — becomes a means by which a space (geographical or temporal, personal or communal) is defined. As such, the making of history is by definition a *subjective* process, both in its capacity to accommodate various perspectives and as a product of the speaking subject's dependence upon language.

In fact a series of histories emerges in *The Great World,* just as a series of languages emerged in *An Imaginary Life*. In its focus on Australia's participation in the second world war and the subsequent state of Australian society, the novel describes a linear history of communal experience, of verifiable event. The history of "fact," however, is

just "one version of it" (GW, 165). Underlying this shared knowledge of the world, and running parallel with it, is "our *other* history" (GW, 284): a private history of subjective perception. This is the "hidden" history (GW, 283) which speaks for what is not always recordable: "all those unique and repeatable events, the little sacraments of daily existence, movements of the heart and intimations of the close but inexpressible grandeur and terror of things" (GW, 283-84). This is the history "that goes on, in a quiet way, under the noise and chatter of events and is the major part of what happens each day in the life of the planet, and has been from the very beginning" (GW, 284). One's private history has its own terms and takes place in its own time, but is accommodated into the greater one of communal coherence: "it had to be fitted to the time the rest of the world was moving through or you wouldn't know where you were, outside your own sack of nerves" (GW, 164).

Shadowing these concurrent histories is the unrecognised history of alternative experience. In order to implement a notion of the world — either in its private or, especially, in its public form — it is necessary to "write over" whatever preceded it. For Anglocentric Australia, of course, such a process involved the suppression and denial of Aboriginal history, culture and naming rituals. Acts of naming, it is recalled, are crucial in the determination of a sense of place. As Paul Carter says:

> the act of naming didn't come *after* a place was found: it was actually through the act of naming that a space was delineated as having a character, something that could be referred to. ("Spatial History," 173)

The code of reference on which this process of naming is based is a very specific one, one that is immediately relevant to the culture — or the individual — who names. The naming of place, Carter continues, "then reflects on the language which is used" (175). For colonial Australia, that language was imperial English which, with its written authority, superceded the Aboriginal oral traditions.

On a personal level, too, a sense of private history can "rewrite" place. For Digger, the name "Keen's Crossing" creates it *as* a place, just as another, older name might have created that very patch of land, but in another way, for predecessors of the landscape. But in Digger's own mind the Crossing came into being at the moment when his grandfather's first axe-blow met the land. That meeting point — the "crossing" of man

and land — announced the beginning of "a connection that was unique in all the world" (GW, 199).

> What had Keen's Crossing been, he wondered, before his grandfather stopped here and claimed the crossing and built the store? Did it have any name at all? And, without one, how had anyone known what it was or that it was here at all?
> It *had* been here . . . But it was not Keen's Crossing. It wouldn't have known that there *were* any Keens, to drive their horses across the river and cut down the first tree and make a camp. It hadn't been waiting.
> But then the two things met: his grandfather's axe and the hard trunk of one of its trees, and the first letter of a syllable cut into it. (GW, 198-99)

Yet despite the power of naming as a way of constructing a sense of place, there always remains a point at which the world itself avoids such appropriation. The Crossing is characterised by its name, not only because the older Keen's first axe-blow fell there, but also because the place marks the best point at which to cross the river. The role of Digger's family there is, in fact, to control the Keen's Crossing ferry. In later years, however, the Crossing ceases to be a point of crossing and instead becomes "a dead end. The highway had moved a mile downriver and there was a bridge, a three-spanner, high above the stream" (GW, 228). Later still, Digger's mother Marge Keen is compelled to admit defeat against a place she had tried to mould and make her own. In the end, she is as ephemeral as her dreams are against the land's resistence to being held:

> Gibbons. That was the name she had been born to.
> 'My God,' she thought, looking about at the spiky heads of the blackboys, 'where is she? Where's Marge Gibbons?' . . .
> She began to pluck at the wool of her bedjacket. Little bits of pink fluff blew about in the air and joined the light little seeds and balls of pollen that were streaming and tumbling. The wind could not tell the one from the other of them. (GW, 245)

However, the element of ambiguity in the process of naming is not just the means by which the world resists possession but is also the key to language's creative potential. This ambiguity — the ability of naming to "write" place against its inability to fully appropriate place — reflects the capacity of language for *différance*. And it is within the scope of difference and deferral in meaning that one can invent one's own narratives of self and world.

For Marge Keen, as for Johnno, the process of writing one's own life's fictions is a matter of course. "It was all to be *made*," she knows, "and what she made would be hers" (GW, 17). Yet while Johnno seeks alternatives to a single fate through the act of fictionalising, Marge seeks affirmation of a single fate. This need to limit and close off

the story of her life as a means of validation finally destroys the very thing she tries to affirm. After all, story-making and -telling only survive *as* processes on the premise of difference. Yet for Marge, the possibility of difference, of alternative, reeks of an instability in the world that she has never been able to escape.

As a young orphan in England, Marge invents a childhood for herself and her young brother Bert to compensate for their lack of one. She hopes that the "constant telling and retelling" of her stories "might take life in [Bert] and become memories of his own" (GW, 12). And it is through this invention of shared "memories" that she can assure herself "that she was not alone in the world" (GW, 12). For this orphaned girl without a history of her own, the name of family is of supreme importance. It represents "a kind of place, a place in time. Turn your back and walk away from that and you lost all hold on the line of things" (GW, 20). The fact that Digger's father Billy Keen comes from a place that bears his name makes him instantly attractive to Marge: the name signifies the existence of roots, both in linear history, that "place in time," and in the earth, in a tangible place that can be pinpointed on a map. So it is for the name and the place it signifies that she marries him: "Family names on a map were solid; they rooted you in things that could be measured" (GW, 14).

The measuring of her life in terms of material acquisition becomes the primary objective of Marge Keen. Her energy is focused in "making and gathering" (GW, 21), and finally, she imagines, when everything that has been gathered has gone into the making of her life, "she would sit grandly content and justified in the midst of it, her children and grandchildren about her and each item at last in its place . . . recognisably and tangibly itself" (GW, 20). Marge's notion of narrative-invention, then, is based upon a premise of limitation rather than of difference. It is not until shortly before her death that she realises that some place else — some place as large and imposing as Sydney — had been visible all the time from the bluff behind the Crossing, "just thirty miles from where she was. She could have gone up there and looked at it any day of her life" (GW, 15). As her husband acknowledges, too late, "when she got hold of a thing she hung on to it" (GW, 14).

Ultimately, however, Marge's attempt to cement "the life she was making" (GW, 22) fails. Her greatest fear of everything "getting away" (GW, 29) comes true as her husband and then her children leave, and lastly the Crossing itself, with the store she has spent a lifetime establishing, is made redundant by the highway's extension. Yet worse than the gradual dissipation of her life's story is her own final realisation of its mean limits:

> Now that it was about to occur, the thing she had dreamed of, the descent of peace and the gathering around her of all the objects of her life, she did not want it, any of it. She did not want her life — the fifty-four years, so many days and days and the disappointments and defeats and little silent triumphs — to be made visible at last and piled up around her so that she had to say: 'So this is what it comes to.' (GW, 245)

Billy Keen, in contrast, represents the movement of constant change, of difference. Marge's world of boundaries and limits imposes upon him "a tameness he could not endure" (GW, 13). Her "fanatical" respect for the authorities of family history and a place of belonging is countered in him by what she regards as an "almost criminal indifference" (GW, 19). Billy's "natural element" is a world of "risk, up to the very edge of extinction," in which his "animal energy [has] scope" (GW, 13). Such a world is accessible to him through war. Allowing for "that intensified pitch" (GW, 13) of life that is only possible when death is always close, war offers "a glimpse of what a man might be" (GW, 22).

Billy's attitude, however, allows no room for narrative-making. He has "no tales of his childhood to tell," and in fact "might never have had one" (GW, 19). The stabilising forces of continuity and structure — of place, family and history — are meaningless to him; the very notion of "orderliness made him uneasy" (GW, 21). Finally he breaks away to drift from war to war, seeking always that thrill of running "the risk of extinction" and knowing that, "most of all then, you were alive" (GW, 22). Still, he feels that his rootlessness might have been overcome "if he had someone who knew what he was on about when he wanted to talk" (GW, 22).

The act of narrative-invention is more sustaining among the Australian soldiers of the second world war. As in *Fly Away Peter,* war functions here as a catalyst of change, compelling the men constantly to redefine what is "essential" to themselves. As such, they develop an approach to the world that, in its accommodation of both continuity and change, falls somewhere between the polarised world views of Marge and Billy Keen.

The sudden alteration of their status as soldiers to prisoners of war, due to a betrayal in another place by the commander of another kind of war, makes Digger and the others realise that the movements of the world are unpredictable, that "events do not always cast a shadow before them" (GW, 42). And as prisoners of war, the men unexpectedly find that the "time they were in, like the unenclosed space of the camp, was limitless. Without boundaries it had no meaning" (GW, 111). Their terms for things, too, become redundant as they move further into a world where their familiar, taken-for-granted phrases and colloquialisms had "lost all meaning" (GW, 155). War creates a world "where ironies were commonplace" (GW, 134). Yet irony, it is recalled, is the tool of subversion and carrier of ambiguity for which Ovid was banished from Rome. As such, irony implies the possibility of difference.

So the stage is set for the making of a meaningful "space" in which the prisoners can move. First of all, a sense of communal structure is retained by the fact that each man is bonded to the others simply by "being, in the easiest way, one of a mob" (GW, 58). As a communal consciousness, the soldiers adopt Marge Keen's "spirit of making and gathering" (GW, 21), (re)constructing an unfamiliar world by accumulating the "symbols of civilised life," making it meaningful in the terms "of where they had come from and what they were" (GW, 44). Such a process, of course, is not unfamiliar to the Australian consciousness. Because of "the provisional nature" of the Australian landscape, Malouf argues, its inhabitants "are always walking a little bit into something unknown" ("Spatial History," 179):

> They tottered, they clanked with relics, the accumulated paraphernalia (anything that could be upended and slung across a shoulder, or unscrewed or wrenched off) of a world that had exploded in fragments around them, and would have now, in the spirit of improvisation, to be reconstructed elsewhere — on the move if that's what it came to. But they were experts at that. They were Australians. A good many of them had been training for it all their lives . . . What was contained in [these miscellaneous oddments] — and in a way that was very nearly mystical — was the superior status, guaranteed, of those who had invented them and knew their use. Civilisation? That's *us*. (GW, 44-45)

Individually, too, the soldiers affirm a sense of "self" by revising and retelling the details of personal history. This process of creation through memory and invention "could be extended forever . . . and gone over endlessly, and what you called up became a magic formula for keeping yourself in the world or for wiping yourself, temporarily,

out of it" (GW, 148). It is a process that has to do not so much with the chronicling of events as with what will "*work*" (GW, 148). The material that comprises a narrative of this sort is gathered from many sources: the number-plates of cars once owned; the names of the girls one has "done it with"; the words of songs or of nursery rhymes; the smell of soap on a Queen's Birthday holiday; the feel of the leather seat in the Vaux or Buick; the taste of popcorn at the cinema (GW, 148-89). These lists — based perhaps in past events but imbued by memory with innovative flourishes and new significances — are what prop up a world where the "walls between things [are] breaking down" (GW, 158).

The relationship which develops between Digger and Vic Curran during the war, and which continues for the rest of their lives, reveals an aspect of dependency in this act of narrative-making. But although the very fact of their relationship contributes to the ability of each to "know" himself, Vic's lack of success against Digger's success in making a personal "spatial history" pinpoints a fundamental difference between them. For while Digger senses inevitable lack — the gaps in one's knowledge of things, the spaces between definable boundaries — as a source of creative potential, as space in which to move, Vic feels it only as a negative absence. His attitude is founded in his inability to invent his own life's sustaining narratives; instead, he seeks self-confirmation elsewhere, in the tangible facts of other people's approval and material success.

Vic belongs, as Digger sees, to the world "out there" (GW, 249). And in the world out there, "to *be*" means *"to be known"* (GW, 287). Vic needs "witnesses to his life. Not to his achievements, anyone could see those . . . but to those qualities in him that would tip the balance on the other, on the invisible side" (GW, 251). Without such witnesses, in other words, Vic is invisible; like Johnno, he requires the confirmation of others as a means of self-validation. Most of all, Vic is attracted to those who distrust him; his appeal to friendship with Digger is motivated by the knowledge that Digger, at least initially, "couldn't stand him" (GW, 48). His attempts to win over the people who suspect him most barely disguise his vunerability, which is manifested in a search for "a truth that could not be mocked" (GW, 107).

Vic's efforts to buy the approval of others (it is notable that Digger's "simple" sister Jenny is not fooled) reflects his urgent faith in the material world. At the POW camp, for instance, his attempt to break into the tight triangle of friendship between Digger, Mac and Doug takes the form of a gift of condensed milk. It is equally appropriate that his opening gesture of communication is the offered rumour that the "Japs" will exchange the prisoners for Australian wool. Vic, in fact, proves to be like the physical paraphernalia the soldiers accumulate: "hard to shake off" (GW, 48).

While Digger accumulates memories, Vic hangs on to what is tangible. This becomes focused in two and a half yards of white cotton thread, tied in a loop as if to avoid loose ends. He "was keeping it, come what may," because "it was the last thing he possessed . . . If he lost it he would be done for" (GW, 151). Vic's fixation with the thread is reminiscent of the terrorist's attachment to the pebble in *Child's Play,* which he carries with him as a link to his own history and therefore to a sense of identity. Both men feel that they can integrate themselves into a life that is affirmable and recordable by rubbing their possession between their hands.

After the war Vic becomes a successful businessman, a buyer and seller of things. In this respect, he is a follower of Marge Keen's "religion of *getting"* (GW, 21). And like Marge, his approach is not motivated by material greed but by the need to "hang on" in the world (like Marge, too, Vic has no family history that he considers worth keeping). His every-morning ritual of using an egg cup to symbolise abstract business ideas reflects his need to move in a world that can be seen and touched. As part of this ritual, Vic's clearing of space on the breakfast table prior to discussion — one can "judge how large or risky the idea was by the extent of cloth he laid bare" (GW, 253) — creates a *physical* space in which to fill abstract notions. Just as Ashes' vision of the world, in *Harland's Half Acre,* is reducible to the size of an egg cup (HHA, 198), so Vic's ritual is a way of shifting between the physical and the abstract so that the one can make sense of the other.

Ultimately, however, Vic cannot keep up with the world's shifts; his break with his son Greg is one of the things that attests to this. Unable to reconcile his own life's various possibilities, he continues to feel "for the contours of an existence, some other one, that his body might fit more neatly. . . [and] that was continuous with something in himself

that he was afraid of losing contact with yet could not grasp" (GW,317). On the morning of his heart attack, he is aware not of "the space he was in but the space that was inside him . . . Something like a stone had fallen a huge distance in there" (GW, 313). The absence he feels as a void inside him, and which he dies with, is the absence of an answer to his persistent question: "'If the world is like this and I have never properly got hold of it, what *have* I got hold of?'" (GW, 287). His unanswered need for a "hand you can reach out for" (GW, 288) is recalled with the image, at his death, of his outflung arm reaching out and finding only the earth.

Digger, on the other hand, is more successful in the invention of his own spatial history because his link to the world — the "hand" he reaches out to — *is* the earth. The unique connection between himself and Keen's Crossing that is forged in a name allows him to make sense of his own "appearance in the great world" (GW, 197-98). Like Jim Saddler's position within the sanctuary ("feet on the ground, at the centre . . . of a vast circle of grass and low greyish scrub" [FAP, 18]), Digger is grounded by "the soles of his feet" to "this one particular bit of the globe . . . [to] all the individual grains of dust and twigs and dead leaves that made up the acres of the place" (GW, 198). At the same time, however, Digger has a pragmatic outlook which is accommodating to the possibilities of change, of difference, of otherness. "'You're all right, Digger,'" the Aboriginal boxer Slinger tells him once, "'Maybe yer a blackfeller on the *other* side a' yer skin'" (GW, 57). Digger is amazed by Vic's vision of the great world "as a nail to be struck squarely on the head" (GW, 297); such a vision demands a quality of steadfastness to the world that Digger knows cannot exist. His own approach is to adapt to life as it presents itself, acknowledging that there are always alternatives, "equally important, that he would have to explore" (GW, 198).

Digger inherits the "spirit of making and gathering" from his mother; his "gift" is his ability to capture and retain information and weave it into a pattern through which he can move. But although he "was a collector, as she was . . . his room was of another kind, and so were the things he stored there" (GW, 115). While Marge creates a vision of the world that is limited to the small space of it that she fills, Digger creates a vision that is as far-reaching as Jim Saddler's final sense, just before death, of equality in relativity, of the

balance of possibilities the world can offer. And in the realisation of this vision, it is Digger's capacity for imaginative invention — allowing him to contain the great world inside his own head — that is his enabling strength.

> [There was a] difference between what [his mother] called reality, or duty, or fate — she had different names for it on different occasions — and a hunger he had . . . for something that began where her reality, however clear and graspable it was, left off . . .
>
> What it had to do with was the sheer size of the world, and the infinite number of events and facts and objects it was filled with. Things you could touch and smell, but other things too that were just thoughts; which were real enough, and could even be put into words and turned this way and that, but you couldn't see them.
>
> There was no set of scales in existence that could measure all that . . . but your head could. That's what he had seen. Your head. Which was the same shape as the world, and really was the world, only on an infinitely small scale . . . (GW, 27-28)

Throughout the novel, a rich imagery of gaps and spaces between boundaries, with a corresponding sequence of lines and threads, expresses this process — effected most powerfully by Digger — of utilising difference in the act of narrative-making. The notion of gaps and spaces may be enabling, as with Digger's shooting days with his father where "the stopping and starting, the intervals given over to getting a bird and bagging it, imposed a rhythm . . . that was good for storytelling but also for talk" (GW, 26). The notion of gaps and spaces may also be negative, illuminated by Marge's fear of "dropp[ing] out of the world" (GW, 19) or Vic's disturbing sense of having fallen into "the wrong life" (GW, 316). The very double-edged effect of these areas of tension, however, reflects their capacity to represent the possibility of difference. In this sense, the emerging pattern of gaps and spaces in the novel functions as a kind of language, its element of ambiguity recalling language's status as both expresser and forbidder. Lines and threads, on the other hand, can bridge gaps and cross spaces. Marge's attachment to the linear line of family history and Vic's grasp on the cotton thread are the means by which they keep themselves stabilised in the great world. The imagery of lines and threads, then, represents the various processes of narrative-writing, the processes by which the great world is made meaningful.

These two corresponding bodies of imagery take both a physical and a conceptual form in *The Great World*. The novel opens with an image of Digger and Vic fishing in the river

which runs past Keen's Crossing, positioned on that borderline "just where the bank shelved to the stream" (GW, 3).

> The river was wide, this side of it sunlit, the other in shadow. Digger had a line out and every now and then he jiggled it, but he wasn't fishing . . . What he was concentrating on now was the other feller's talk. The line was a bluff to make the talk or the listening easier. (GW, 4)

Their physical position on the bank between land and water allows the men to effectively "straddle" the boundary between their sunlit world (what is seen, known, present) and the shadowed world (what is unseen, unknown, absent). Similarly, Digger's fishing line — cast out into a realm that is silent and invisible — helps to bridge the communicative gap between himself and Vic. Elsewhere, too, the physical relationship between spaces and lines symbolises a coming to terms with the fact of *being in* a vast and interpretable world. Digger, for instance, "was happiest when he was *straddling the line* of a roof with the whole river-country laid out below him; in summer expansive and glittering, on early mornings in winter *trailing a line* of heaped cloud between its forested bluffs" (GW, 230; my emphasis).

But perhaps the most significant of these physical lines, because most complex in its implications, is the railway line which Digger, Vic and the other Australian prisoners of war construct, and which will become the historically infamous Burmese railway. The men are placed in a work-camp which falls somewhere between the Malay and Burmese borders: it is an indefinable space where the "map of it was not clear," where "the line they were on was as yet an imaginary one" (GW, 130). Their task is "to make it real: to bring it into existence by laying it down" (GW, 130).

The men's laying of the line adds to the body of communal linear history; they make a history that will become not only a part of Australian national consciousness but also a reminder of international guilt. Yet the laying of the line also contributes to "that *other* history"; it gives the men their own line to walk on in a place that does not otherwise reflect their presence there. The making of this line is both a daily torment to them and the catalyst of new self-discoveries; the work, the heat and the rains are killing, but the process allows for changes in "their vision of themselves" (GW, 131), from which "there was something to be learned" (GW, 133). And once again, these two histories — the

personal one and the continuous thread of shared event — are co-existent: "Eventually all the bits of it would link up" (GW, 130).

The railway line not only forges two kinds of history and creates a link between them, but also bridges a gap — both geographical and temporal — between two different worlds:

> Back where they came from they had belonged, even the slowest country boy among them, to a world of machines . . . Once you have learned certain skills, and taken them into yourself, you are a new species. There's no way back.
> Well, that was the theory.
> Only they found themselves now in a place, and with a job in hand, that made nothing of all that. It might never have been. They had fallen out of that world. Muscle and bone, that was all they had to work with now. An eight-pound hammer, a length of steel, and whatever innovative technology they could come up with on the spot for breaking stone. (GW, 130-31)

The men, then, not only find themselves in an unfamiliar country for which they had no map — "their knowledge . . . was limited to the patch of jungle that shut them in" (GW, 130) — but also in a world of the pre-technological past, a world that their own homeland has left behind. They know, however, that the line they build will bring trains, those machines from the future, and that the gap between two times and two conceptions of the world will then be healed:

> So, if they could only finish the line and link up all the sectional bits of it, they would have made a way back out of here to where they had come from: the future. When the engine came steaming round the bend, its heavy wheels perfectly fitted to the track, the sleepers taking its weight, its funnels pouring out soot, they would know that time too had been linked up and was one again, and that the world they had been at home with was real, not an unattainable dream. (GW, 132)

For Digger, the Burmese railway provides a link across each of these historical, geographical and temporal gaps. Early on in the narrative we are told:

> Not far from the Crossing was a bit of a branch line that had once served a mining village back in the hills. It ran for twelve miles through cuttings, round sheer hillsides, and was little more now than a playground for kids who liked to walk its rails like a tightrope with outstretched arms . . . Digger loved the line, as they called it. (GW, 25-6)

So like Ovid, who in "dancing on the tightrope over the abyss" (AIL, 27) can walk a line of possibility between two poles, Digger — in laying the Burmese railway with the other men — can walk a line between two worlds, two times, and two histories. It is a line that takes him from the immediate horror of the jungle back to the Crossing, to his past childhood, to that "*other* history."

Other kinds of physical lines can bridge conceptual gaps. Mac's sharing of Iris' letters with Digger, for instance, deepens and cements the link of friendship between them. Later, when Mac is killed, Digger inherits the letters, which provide him with an escape from the world of war; they represent "one of the ways, just one, of getting back" (GW, 145). In this sense, the letters — the very *textual lines,* which give words and names a written authority — take on a mystical power:

> Reading took time. That was the important thing. Constant folding and refolding had split the pages, and in the continuous damp up here the ink had run and was hard to read. Each time he took them out, especially if his hands were shaking and wet, he ran the risk of damaging them. But he liked the look of the unfolded pages, their weight — very light they were — on his palm. Even the stains were important. So was the colour of the ink, which differed from letter to letter, even from page to page of the same letter, so that you could see, or guess, where Iris had put the pen down in mid-sentence to go off and do something. So what you were reading was not just words. (GW, 145)

In the case of the letters, then, the notion of spaces is also constructive, for the process of reading *between* the lines is just as vital as reading the lines themselves. Digger is reading "not just words" but also the gaps between them which speak silently of a life. Years later, after the war, the letters Digger receives from Vic's wife Ellie speak of another life beyond his own at Keen's Crossing. Although he no longer needs the "lifeline" of escape that Iris' letters provided during the war, Digger's correspondence with Ellie offers a way of running a thread between two lives, of affirming one's own life through a connection to the other.

A similar but even more powerful experience occurs for Vic and Ellie with their rediscovery of one another, as adults, during a family game of hide and seek celebrating Vic's return from the war. Ellie hides behind the curtain (their future relationsip is prefigured in the way it "rose and fell like a veil, brushing her face" [GW, 223]); Vic is poised in the doorway which is, like the curtain/veil, a borderline between two states. The link between them is initiated when, at first unobserved by him, Ellie witnesses the private, unseen side of Vic which expresses all his vulnerability, this unfamiliar image shadowing the other familiar one, "as when a bright light has imprinted itself on your eyeball and remains for long seconds after you have looked away" (GW, 224). Aware then of her presence, Vic is relieved by her recognition of his secret face, "as if a weight had been taken from him" (GW, 224). For a long moment they stand suspended between

the known and the unknown, the inside and the outside, "neither in the game nor quite out of it" (GW, 223-24), until Vic takes Ellie's wrist and so closes the space between them.

Other corresponding gaps and lines emerge in the novel which take a purely conceptual form. Vic's attachment to the cotton thread during the war years, for instance, is matched on a conceptual level by Digger's dream at the work-camp of the thread that ties him to his mother and Keen's Crossing. The imagined thread is that of a favourite jumper, now gone, which "he had worn through four winters and slept in, and which had his smell on it" (GW, 137). Like the railway line, the woollen thread runs between two worlds, two times, and two conceptions of "self" to maintain a form of continuity within vast change. During the same fever, Digger imagines that his body alters its form yet, even with these outward changes, he is still grounded in his own sense of spatial history; his dream of eating his dog Ralphie's bone — alive as it is with maggots — is a way of eating the earth itself, of keeping it alive in him and therefore of keeping himself alive. He comes out of his fever "feeling refreshed and fed . . . 'I'll live,' he thought, 'this time. I'll live'" (GW, 138).

This "lifeline" to the earth is one point of coherence in a shifting world of war where even the most familiar symbol of "self" — the physical body — is fragile and unpredictable. Corresponding to the changes in their vision of things, the men's bodies are so changed by disease and malnutrition as to become unrecognisable even to themselves.

> You got to be an expert at last on the tricks it could play, this body that was so crude and filthy a thing but was also precious and had to be handled now with so much delicacy . . . Their bodies had gone berserk and were dragging them back to a time before they had organised themselves into human form and come in from chaos. (GW, 141-42)

Yet despite the uncertainties of their lives as prisoners of war, there is still a line of continuity which is "the one that went downward, straight down through you into the earth" (GW, 144). This is the "thread of sanity" that runs through the different kinds of madness to provide, "in all the twists and turns, a clear straight line into life" (GW, 154). One day, Vic — "in one of those moments when he had fallen out of space into mere time" (GW, 144) — looks up to see "coming from the opposite direction but in the same

line, so that they must inevitably collide if one or the other did not leap aside, a figure he recognised" (GW, 144). The figure is himself, "far off in a moment that was years ahead and which he was, it seemed, inevitably making for" (GW, 144). This physical vision of his own lifeline affirms for Vic, even if fleetingly, a promise of continuity in the face of ambiguity, absence, fragmentation.

Time-keeping is another way in which that promise of continuity can be maintained in an unstable world. The temporal gaps which the men sometimes fall into — such as the brief moment of "animal fury and darkness" when Mac is killed, and which seems "an age" (GW, 122) — expose the arbitrary and therefore fragile nature of human order. The "methodical" (GW, 163) tracking of time, however, offers of way of bridging those gaps and giving "form" to what is otherwise a shifting abstraction:

> It mattered to Digger that this bit of order should be maintained in his life. In a place where so much had been taken from them, perhaps permanently, this business of time-keeping, which was after all something the Japs had no control over (it was between you and the sun) represented a last area of freedom to him, a last reminder too of what had been essential to the way they had lived back home.
>
> It was no small thing, this capacity to place yourself accurately in time, this bit of science it had taken so many centuries to get right. It was worth holding on to, gave a form to what otherwise might run right through your hands. (GW, 163)

An even more tenuous line is the fine one — its fineness accentuated all the more in the POW camp — between a mere physical life and everything else that one considers human; between being merely "meat" (GW, 123) or a complex creature of mind, imagination, "spirit" (GW, 156). And related to this line is the equally tenuous one between life and death. When Mac is killed in an incident with the Japanese guards that is sparked by Vic, Vic realises that there is always a "gap" (GW, 124) between one's life and one's fate; on this occasion, when in rebellion he opens that gap and "Madness was loose" (GW, 122), Mac unconsciously steps in to fill it. During this crucial moment — "for what seemed an age, they were outside all order and rule, in a place of primal savagery" (GW, 122) — Digger recognises the existence of this fine line and their own wavering balance upon it:

> He saw very clearly then what they were at this moment: meat, very nearly meat. One flash second this side of it.
>
> 'There is a line,' he thought. 'On one side of it you're what we are, all nerve and sweat. On the other, you're meat.'
>
> All herded together and with the breath knocked out of them, they were right on the line. Things could go either way with them. Only when the Japs stopped yelling at one another, and rushing about in a panic, and began to move again at a

> human pace, and they were allowed to unlock themselves from one another and lift their heads, would they be back again on the right side of things.
> For Mac it was too late. He had already been pitched across, and was lying over there somewhere . . . but further than that too, in a dimension, close as they all were to it, that was already beyond reach. (GW, 123)

As one of the bearers of the dead from the shanty hospital to the cremation ground, Digger is more aware of this line than most of the men. The place in the jungle where the dead are burnt on bonfires represents the borderline between existence and non-existence. This is a place in which there is "no space" available to "stand upright and take on the sensations of men"; if one spoke, the words "would have blown back damp against your mouth" (GW, 157). In other words, it is a place where humanness stops:

> To enter here you too had to become one of the dead, at least in spirit — the place demanded it . . . You were in the antechamber here of the next world . . . at the furthest point now from where you had come from, wherever it was, and could bring no human qualites with you. The place did not recognise them, had never known them from the beginning of time. It was a primeval place of a vegetable dampness where nothing human had yet been conceived. (GW, 156-57)

This is, in many ways, the "pre-historical, primaeval and haunted" landscape of Jim's sanctuary (FAP, 30), the "infinite" landscape of Ovid's exile (AIL, 15), and even the "untouched" landscape of the Crossing, which "hadn't been waiting" for human arrival (GW, 198-99). In this sense, landscape still carries the unfathomable mystery and, as Vic sees it, the terrible otherness of a world "that had no need of you":

> Everything you looked at or touched, the long strips of bark that peeled back to show glossy colours, the squiggles on a trunk that were little lives, birdcalls that came out of the scrub, ker-*whip*, ker-*whip* — all these gave you the same message. Come on in if you like, but you might as well not for all the difference it will make. (GW, 36)

As a landscape where "nothing human had yet been conceived," the cremation ground in the jungle is truly the marker of the line between a sense of *being in* the world and a sense of being "ghostly" (GW, 36).

The great world, then, does not itself offer meaningful links which can close the spaces opened up by constant change. These links must be invented through the various processes of narrative-writing. As a marker of change and conflict, war both exposes the gaps between things and allows new kinds of narratives to come into being which can bridge those gaps. In this novel, however, there are many other wars apart from the international one which Digger and Vic fight. Jenny's war with the magpies, for instance, reveals a familiar war between the human and the natural worlds. While the birds'

persistence in the face of human change is a source of comfort to Jim Saddler, for Jenny it represents a lack of human control. She fears the way the magpies "strutted about as if they owned the place and were just waiting to take over" (GW, 4-5). And although this is "her fiercest and most continuous" of wars with the natural world, Jenny has others. There is her war with the feral cats (inherited from her mother), and with the wayward garden which, if "let go," runs wild and uncontrollable (GW, 5). These are only "her open wars"; there are others which "she had to be cunning about" (GW, 5). These other wars, between genders and generations, open up other gaps through which discursive conflicts are emphasised.

Despite the nature of these wars, or areas of tension, two primary tools of defence emerge in the novel which enable each character to create a link between themselves and a shifting world. One of these tools is, of course, language. With his stories, Digger is Jenny's interpreter for "a world that would always go too fast for her or come to her in forms she could not comprehend" (GW, 29). Brought forth from his own imagination, his stories are "what made the world real to her" (GW, 30). For himself, too, Digger's ability to capture these imaginative possibilities in words is what gives him a position in the world, an identifying recognition of what it means to be "himself":

> Coming to the edge of some extraordinary possibility, he would let himself claim it, put it into words; if he didn't, the force of it, huge and expanding in his head, might make him go flying off from the centre of himself. (GW, 30)

The other tool of defence in a fragmented world is the element of choice. It is in the ability to choose that a sense of self and pride in self is founded: "Whatever you could be deprived of, by bad luck or injustice or the rough contrariety of things, there was this one last thing . . ." (GW, 153). As Jenny knows, when in the novel's last pages she has to pick the "bad luck" scone out of a batch of thirteen, one has to "make a choice and choose right, by instinct. If you started worrying about mistakes, you'd make one" (GW, 322). Life is always shifting, always capable of alternative, but it is saved from chaos by the element of choice. Choice is the link that creates a line between events, which are otherwise merely random possibilites. And the lines between events are what make up a notion of history, of continuity within the processes of difference. This is what Digger

sees, having "long since come to the conclusion that his perplexity about life, which did not prevent him from living it, was essential to him" (GW, 296):

> Even the least event had lines, all tangled, going back into the past, and beyond that into the *unknown* past, and other lines leading out, also tangled, into the future. Every moment was dense with causes, possibilities, consequences; too many, even in the simplest case, to grasp. Every moment was dense too with lives, all crossing and interconnecting or exerting pressure on one another . . . that made up a web so intricate that your mind, if you went into it, was immediately stuck . . . (GW, 296)

* * *

The corresponding imagery of spaces and lines in *The Great World* recalls Malouf's other texts, including the semi-autobiographical *12 Edmondstone Street* (1985), a collection of sketches of which each is, at some level, about the mapping of the world, the determination "of space and dimension" (ES, 8). The first sketch, about Malouf's childhood in Brisbane at 12 Edmondstone Street and taking the text's title, traces the development of the child's sense of place from that first map he ever reads: the house. The house is both the microcosm of society and the symbol of the individual body; as such, it determines — with all the associated ambiguities and shifts — both a sense of outward space and a sense of "self."

The Front Verandah has a status which warrants its capital letters; as threshold to both the house inside and the world outside, it runs a line through a shifting space: "Verandahs are no-man's-land, border zones that keep contact with the house and its activities on one face but are open on the other to the street, the night and all the vast, unknown areas beyond" (ES, 20). In contrast to the line of the verandah is the space of the under-the-house, that wedge of darkness between house and earth which represents "the underside of things" (ES, 46), the "dark within" oneself (ES, 47), the scope of possibility:

> There is room for error here, for movement, for escape. So you crawl down here when the ordinary feet and inches of the house, its fixed times and rules, will not fit. Or when *you* won't. There are no clocks down here. There is not even language. They have not yet been invented. To come down here, up under the floorboards and the life of rooms, is to enter a dream space, dark, full of terrors . . . but full as well of the freedom and mystery of a time before houses — the old-new, gloomy-glad world . . . where bodies, with no awareness of space or time, expand, contract, float, lapse into dreaming. (ES, 46-47)

Later, the under-the-house is described as "a world of silence" which "cast[s] us back on our own capacity for invention" (ES, 129). The under-the-house, then, is a place of inventive potential which is capable of shifting significations. One thinks of the

"cavernous" under-the-house in *Harland's Half Acre* (HHA, 144), which is for Tam Harland a place of private contemplation, a place of "comfort" (HHA, 170), but is for Gerald Harland an "underworld" that is "full of threat" (HHA, 145). It becomes, in fact, the scene of Gerald's suicide, and the rope that he uses to hang himself becomes the line that divides the otherwise "open space" (HHA, 144) he cannot deal with, that creates the recognisable and fixed border he *can* understand between life and death.

Central to the other sketches, too, is the notion of creating meaningful spaces by drawing one's own "lines." In "A Place in Tuscany," Malouf describes his own walk around the Tuscan village of C. as a camera crew films his progress. The presence of the camera externalises the already subjective process of map-making, of creating the landscape from direct perception as one moves within it: "We are creating our own topography. The real village is dissolving, becoming imaginary, as my walk goes deeper into the world of fiction" (ES, 90). Like the terrorist's translation of the piazza through photographs or Billy Kwan's translation of history through film, the progress of the camera crew, and of Malouf's own journey, reveal the borderline between the "real" world and "the world of fiction" as an indeterminable one.

The third sketch, "A Foot in the Stream," speaks of a journey to India, a land that is "immemorial, endless, indestructible" (ES, 110). Because of his sense of disorientation there, the traveller recognises the relativity of the "lines" we make — history, culture, social truth — with which to make sense of that "wall of darkness" (ES, 122). Even "the language of human gesture," he sees, "is not universal" (ES, 121). Yet this experience of another landscape, another culture and another language offers a kind of freedom in the acceptance of difference:

> It is difficult to explain the sense of freedom I feel at being for a moment outside history *as we conceive it* . . . To step out of our own culture for a time does not relieve us of history, or of the human nature that flows from it; but *it does make history relative* . . . (ES, 113-14; my emphasis)

In the final sketch, "The Kyogle Line," the young boy embarks upon the first long journey of his life, and in this and other ways it becomes one "that would take me over a border" (ES, 125). One thinks here of the Burmese railway in *The Great World,* and of its capacity to cross spaces which are not only geographical but also temporal and conceptual. Aware that there is "a border to be crossed" (ES, 126), the boy is hungry for

that place "somewhere, on the far side of what I knew, [where] difference began" (ES, 127). The journey along the railway line, then, anticipates the child's process of giving meaning to as yet undefined spaces, as well as allowing him to recognise difference. Along the way, he crosses different kinds of borders which allow him to forge a series of maps: of the changing landscape of "geological forms" (ES, 127); of his own relationship with his father, whose "world was foreign to me" (ES, 129); of cultural relativity, so that the crowd on the station platform, confronted by the vision of Japanese prisoners of war, senses a "vast gap of darkness . . . a distance between people that had nothing to do with actual space" (ES, 131). This is a journey, in other words, which "would take more than the sixteen hours the timetable announced and bring me at last to a different, unnameable destination" (ES, 134).

Ultimately, then, "the darkness at our back door" (J, 53) remains indefinite. The terrorist's search for "the single thread" in "that dense tapestry of experience and event" which could lead to an affirmation of "logic," of "inevitable outcome" (CP, 87), can never have an ending. Lines exist as multiple — "the least event had lines, all tangled" (GW, 296) — because they are subjectively created; each story passes a thread of meaning through an open space. But because spaces are undefined until subjectively written — "the place is not there before the writing of it" (Carter, "Spatial History," 179) — story-telling must always be incomplete, meaning must always be relative. And this applies, of course, not only to the conceptual writing of life's narratives but also to the textual writing of fiction. As the narrator of "A Medium" comments, in the multiplicity of narratives that make up *Antipodes:*

> There is no story, no set of events that leads anywhere or proves anything — no middle, no end. Just a glimpse through a half-open door, voices seen not heard, vibrations sensed through a wall while the trained ear strains . . . to measure the chords — precise, fixed . . . but also at moments approaching tears — that are being struck out on an iron-framed upright; and the voice that names them your own. (A, 160)

AFTERWORD

In one sense, as novelists, Christopher Koch and David Malouf stand together somewhat awkwardly. Despite the often surrealist content of his novels, Koch is conservative in his literary style, favouring artistic unities to promote a traditional humanist message. He disapproves of what he sees as a trend "towards dehumanisation" in the contemporary novel ("Who Wants the Novel?", 10), a trend which he links to

> experiment for its own sake: always the sign of a minor art form. That old clown surrealism has been run on stage again, and we have a trivialisation in which time sequences and commonly perceived reality are disarranged, and personality and character almost cease to exist. (10)

To avoid this "fragmentary, easy writing" (10), Koch suggests, is the task of the "real novelist" (11). Although he acknowledges that the "line" of common reality "can be very tenuous . . . very fluid" (10) and that "identity is dubious" (Mitchell interview, 148), he nevertheless argues for some "simple rules to hold on to" (Mitchell interview, 147), for otherwise "why should we care, and why should we believe? . . . [The] writer must care, if he's [sic] to move us" ("Who Wants the Novel?", 10). Koch maintains, then, that any "work of literature is a social act" through which the "tie with a shared reality must be maintained," by which "the search for worth and validity in human beings and human society" must be affirmed" (11).

Malouf, on the other hand, experiments in his novels with the very slippages and gaps in time sequences, in perceived reality and in characterisation that Koch regards as a "trivialisation" of humanism. Relating the act of writing — not only of novels but also of life's fictions — to his own metafictional text *Child's Play,* Malouf acknowledges that the process of narrative writing is "something like what [the terrorist] was doing with the broken-up photographs of the square. When you had them altogether you would get a total picture, but there would always be gaps" (Kavanagh interview, 256). "Both fiction and history," he comments elsewhere, "tell us that there's always a chronology, a line, and people keep wanting to know which line it is you're on. But while that might be *our* shape of reality, it's not neccesarily so" (Baker interview, 248). In the process of writing *beyond* social reality — "The real present is always a mess, a confusion, a mixture of forces" (Shapcott interview, 30) — the writer becomes "a kind of terrorist" (Baker interview, 255);

the literary forms which Koch sees as being bound to "the creation of character and dramatic momentum" ("Who Wants the Novel?", 10), are, in Malouf's vision of writing, "open to us in any way we want to use them" (Baker interview, 255). Such a vision, however, does not reflect the trend "towards dehumanisation" that Koch refutes. *Lack* of stable form, says Malouf, is the "essence" not only of fiction but also of the event and experience it (re)constructs:

> I like loose ends. I like the things that didn't ever come to anything as well as the things that did. What I want to create is the sense of our being in the moment in all its confusion. (Kavanagh interview, 247)

However, despite these novelists' differences in approach to the function of writing, the fact that their work can be paralleled indicates the pervasiveness of certain concerns in the Australian novel. An awareness of lack, the frustration of desire for a stabilising "centre" and the shifting significations of historical "truth" are not only the preoccupations of Koch's and Malouf's characters, but also recurring features of the Australian literary tradition. Such a consideration links the two authors as writers (both in its literary and in its most literal *creative* sense) of Australia. As Koch says, in a comment that recalls Malouf's concern with the invention of spatial history, "a country and its landscapes perhaps don't fully exist until they've been written about — until poets and novelists create them" (CTG, 106). The recurrence of these shared concerns, however, raises questions not merely about colonial and post-colonial dilemmas but also about the broader psychoanalytic effects, in any society, of each subject's necessarily relative — and therefore inconclusive — relationship to the "real."

The notion of inconclusiveness, both politically specific and socially broad, is implicit in the textual tensions which structure the novels of these two authors. Koch's narratives, for example, express a tension between a reconciliatory/Christian humanist and a fragmentary/relativist position. *The Boys in the Island* and *Across the Sea Wall* both end with a tension between an affirmation of ultimate "discovery" (BI, 196) through the terms of experience, and an affirmation only of the "forming and re-forming" of "structures of winter mist" which protect "their enormous secret" (BI, 198). *The Year of Living Dangerously* allows for Guy's acquisition of maturity and of his desired "centre," in the form of Jill/England, but also acknowledges the "temporary" status of his peace (YLD, 295); the novel's final note of midnight recalls the narrator's recognition that the notion of

unconditional truth is a misconception (YLD, 185). In *The Doubleman,* too, Dick's ultimate rediscovery of a unifying Christian faith is countered by the persistence of illimitable desire, and the drug-induced confusion in which Dick closes his narrative contributes, in fact, to the prevention of narrative closure.

This same tension between closure and non-closure informs Malouf's novels, in which the potential for both an essentialist and a fragmentary reading is balanced. In *Fly Away Peter,* the final scene of Imogen Harcourt's vision leaves the text in a state of tension between a recognition of fragmentation and a desire for worldly unity. A similar balance is apparent in *Child's Play,* which stands as a metafictive challenge to historical realism and all the assumptions of unity it carries, but which ends with a circular return to its idealised beginning of childhood unity. In *Johnno,* Johnno's reabsorption into the landscape of his childhood, through death, is both a gesture of unity and a subversion of any attempt to locate the "truth" of his life. *Harland's Half Acre,* too, offers the irony that the most successful character in achieving self-understanding, Frank Harland, only does so through acknowledging the openness of all meaning and the impenetrability of life's mysteries. *An Imaginary Life* explores and questions the arbitrarily constructed nature of that most classic language, Latin, but concludes with the affirmation of a "true" language of childhood whose "every syllable is a gesture of reconciliation" (AIL, 96-97). Even in *The Great World,* there remains a tension between Vic's return to the "nest" of the earth — in which he lies "like a baby" (GW, 323) — and his inability to grasp hold of anything stabilising, apart from a small stone which matches the hollow space inside himself. Perhaps the clue to this recurring dichotomy can be traced to the presence, in Malouf's novels, of both a post-colonial radicalism and a Romantic aestheticism. Whether such textual tensions are conscious or not is unimportant; what is significant is that these structuring tensions in Koch's and Malouf's works reinforce the necessary ambiguities and ambivalences of the themes they deal with.

For both writers, then, the tensions of centre/edge, past/present, self/other, innocence/experience, departure/return do not so much maintain a series of binary ideals (whether geographical, temporal or subjective) as invite a process of de-polarisation. From a post-colonial standpoint, such a process breaks down the polarised relationship between Australia and Europe from which Australia has long suffered. Questions like Dante's, in

Malouf's first novel: "Why Australia? What *is* Australia anyway?" (J, 52); or the narrator's, in Koch's latest novel: "Who were we, marooned at forty-two degrees south? Why were we here, and not there?" (TD, 33) are not ones that require — or are even capable of — answers, for no stable terms exist with which to ask or to answer them. Rather, such questions signify the undertaking of a journey which supersedes any destination. This is a journey into "the sea of our dreams" (ASW, 35), which takes the subject not only across geographical and discursive borders, but also across imaginative ones. As such, it is a journey which invites a (re)interpretation of the myth-experience. In Koch's novels, the Australian protagonists' exposure to the unfamiliar myths of Hinduism (*Across the Sea Wall*), of the Javanese *Wayang (The Year of Living Dangerously*), of Gnosticism (*The Doubleman*),[1] allows for the recognition of alternative cultural and subjective meaning. In Malouf's novels, the dismantling of the colonial myth of imperial centrality (*Fly Away Peter, Johnno, An Imaginary Life*), and even the socially broad myth of historical realism (*Child's Play, The Great World*), allows for the opening of new spaces of meaning, for the invention of new myths.

Nonetheless, the shared recognition in Koch's and Malouf's texts of relativity between cultures, and between the discourses that speak them, is reached from different perspectives. The sense of division between two worlds, which determines the making of "place," is more profound and more disturbing when those worlds overlap (as with Koch's "ghostly negative image" [CTG, 100] of England transposed onto Tasmania in *The Boys in the Island* and *The Doubleman*) than when they are uniquely different (as with Malouf's description of the inimitable Queensland tropics in *Johnno* and *Fly Away Peter*). So the sense of *nostalgia* which underwrites the recognition of relativity in Koch's novels springs from the fact that the perceived "line" between the known world and the imagined otherworld is a fine one; as such, the sense of loss for the absent other (in all its forms) remains unrelieved. In Malouf's novels, on the other hand, the world of the "edge" (and again, these edges take many forms besides the geographical) is to be pursued because of its very *departure* from familiar myths. The edge represents the border line between known limits and unformed space; as such, it is the point at which imaginative invention begins.

Christopher Koch and David Malouf are both post-colonial authors whose novels not only reflect the concern of Australian writers with the patterns and structures which constitute national definition, but — in an extension of the same impulse — also express a far reaching concern with the tools — such as myth and myth-making language — from which subjective identity is forged. Yet while Koch's characters never quite seem to discard that sense of "waiting for everything to happen" (BI, 39), that "expectancy of some nameless revelation" (CTG, 118), Malouf's characters seem able to incorporate the lack of completion in their lives into a positive and productive world view. This more easeful and celebratory accommodation of life's uncertainties and identity's shifts can be summarised in the attitude of Aunt Connie at the close of *Harland's Half Acre* (HHA, 230):

> it had to do . . . with the small lost person at the window, so unsure of herself and which house she was in, which life, but happy for a moment to be there, and offering, out of long years, nothing more than this . . .
> '. . . I'm happy just sitting. It's such a lovely party. I'm glad they asked me, aren't you?'

ENDNOTES

Foreword

1 The critical approach to this notion is divided. An assumption, to some extent, of the overlap between post-colonial and postmodern thought is apparent, for instance, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *The Post-Colonial Critic*. Other critics argue against such an overlap. Simon During, for instance, claims in his article "Postmodernism or Post-Colonialism Today" that "the concept postmodernity has been constructed in terms which more or less intentionally wipe out the possibility of post-colonial identity" (112). Bill Ashcroft, et al., in *The Empire Writes Back,* or Gareth Griffiths, in his article "Being there, being There," talk of post-colonialism and postmodernism as independent and different movements but with some shared aspects.

Chapter 1

1 On the theme of "antipodean inversion," see Richard White, *Inventing Australia,* 16; Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768-1850,* 158-204; F.G. Clarke, *The Land of Contrarieties,* 154; Ross Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise,* 91.

2 On the European and early colonial response to landscape, see the above references as well as Brian Elliott and Adrian Mitchell, *Bards in the Wilderness,* xix-xxiii; Bruce Clunies Ross, "Landscape and the Australian Imagination"; Anna Rutherford, "The Land as Protagonist."

3 On the response of explorers to landscape, see Robert Sellick, "The Epic Confrontation: Australian Exploration and the Centre, 1813-1900: A Literary Study."

4 See, for instance, Anna Rutherford, 11; Ross Gibson, chap. 2; Richard White, 16-28; F.G. Clarke, 1-19.

5 A large body of critical work has been published in this field, and these references are only several from an inconclusive list. See, for instance, Ross Gibson; Brian Elliott and Adrian Mitchell; Andrew Gurr, *Writers in Exile;* Frank Moorhouse, "Regionalism, Provincialism and Australian Anxieties"; Judith Wright, "Australia's Double Aspect"; Robert Sellick, "The Cartography of Exile"; Vincent Buckley, "The Search for an Australian Identity"; Chris Tiffin, "Nationalism, Landscape, Class in Anglo-Australian Fiction."

6 For instance, Harpur's "The Creek of Four Graves" and Kendall's "The Glen of Arrawatta" describe both a sense of monotony and the already dual sense of the sublime in landscape. Although Kendall's poetry expresses an easiness with coastal landscapes, the sense of distrust and disorientation apparent in his poetry of the inland reflects the psychological dilemma of coming to terms with the "unknown".

On the use of the sublime in early Australian poetry see Brian Elliott and Adrian Mitchell, xxii.

7 Kay Schaffer cites this statement (*Women and the Bush,* 34) from the dust jacket of Manning Clark's *In Search of Henry Lawson* (1978), where it appeared without the attribution of either author or source.

8 On the marginalisation of women in Australian nationalism, see Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police.*

9 Confronting the natives with "nothing, except, he could honestly say, that he did love all men" (V, 342), Palfreyman dies, like Christ, with a spear wound to the side. Later, speaking of Voss who was in fact beheaded by the Aboriginal boy Jackie, Judd says "'I cried, I tell you, after he was dead. There was none of us could believe it when we saw the spear, hanging from his side, and shaking'" (V, 444).

10 My purpose here is not to provide a comprehensive overview of Australia's literary tradition. These few texts are only representative of a much larger body of literature which draws upon similar themes.

Chapter2

1 This title is taken from David Malouf's article "A First Place: The Mapping of a World."

2 On this point, see also Richard White, ix.

3 "*A grave it must be,* Jim thought. When the man plunged his spade in for the last time and left it there it had the aspect of some weird, unhallowed cross" (FAP, 105).

Chapter7

1 This is suggested by Ryzak's symptoms (seen by the mother as the workings of an "animal spirit" [AIL, 129]), which take hold soon after he has brought home a wild puppy for sacrifice. Examining his body, the mother finds "a half-circle of small teeth marks on his wrist, almost healed now — the wound through which the beast has entered" (AIL, 129).

Chapter9

1 On the relationship between Carter's notion of spatial history and Malouf's *The Great World,* see also Philip Neilsen, *Imagined Lives: A Study of David Malouf,* chap. 6.

Afterword

1 In an interview with Adrian Mitchell, Koch says: "What *The Doubleman* deals with at bottom is Gnosticism. Nowhere in the book do I actually name that system of thought, but it is Gnosticism that Broderick and Burr are talking about . . . Principally I am interested in it as a system of dualism" (Mitchell interview, 139-40).

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RIDER

Colons replace fullstops before quotations on pages: 46, 49, 50, 55, 70, 79, 84, 86, 87, 90, 98, 99 (2), 101, 103, 105, 106, 107, 112, 114 (2), 116, 122, 147, 159, 176, 183, 184, 187.

Spelling errors:
page 100, line 12: jealousy; not jeolousy
page 119, last line: duality; not dualtiy
page 122, line 23: occasion; not occassion