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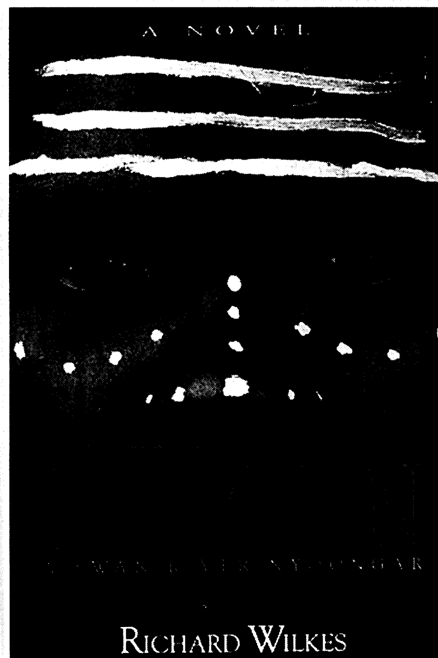

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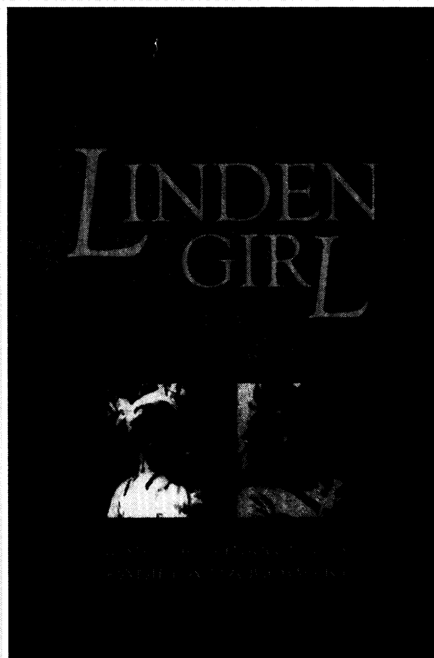

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ANDREA GAWTHORNE

A Long Line of Streets

"You girls come from a long line of Streets," says Father as soon as grace is over. The shades are drawn to keep out the sun and the fan drones in the background.

"Oh Father," says Louise. Her name is a humiliation. Louise Ethel Street. Street St. Nudgewong. Australia. The World.

Envelopes are the worst, Louise knows people in post offices all across the country are laughing at them. They are named; family, home and street for her great-grandfather, founding resident and egotist. It is a school joke.

"Louise," warns her mother with a sharp edge to her voice and a flash of warning in her eyes.

"I'll tell you about Uncle George. He was a Street." Father worries a piece of gristle from his teeth and places it on the edge of his plate. Lately he is steeped in family history.

"George, the eldest of my father's four brothers, was famous throughout the whole district. Do you know why?" asks Father. Mary shakes her head. Younger daughter and sycophant she listens with rapt attention to all of Father's tales.

"He was born with a double row of teeth."

Beyond the gravy boat covered with linen Mother winks and rolls her eyes at the two girls. Mary frowns but Louise, as usual, prefers not to notice.

"A double row of teeth! He could bite the heads off snakes and lift dinner tables off the floor with those teeth."

"They don't come like that anymore," Father spoons butter soaked peas into his mouth.

Louise writes her name in the gravy on her plate. Louise Ethel Street, she writes. Louise Ethel Street. Street St. Louise Ethel St.

"If I abbreviate my name to St then I can be called Louise Ethel Saint," she observes.

"You're no saint," says Mother.

Louise glares. No, her mother doesn't consider her a saint. To her mother she is just another chore to be incorporated into the daily tasks; sweep the floor, bake the bread, do Louise's hair, wash the dishes, mend the clothes, send Louise out to play.

Father continues his story. "Once, on the way home from the pub it rained so hard that George tacked an old piece of corrugated iron onto the top of a wagon wheel, hoisted it over his head by the axle and went whistling down the street. Dry

as a bone."

"Before he died he taught me how to ride a motor bike," says Mother unexpectedly. "That was before you girls were born." She notices Louise playing with her gravy.

"Have you finished with that food?"

"Yes Mother."

"Then put your plate on the sink and go outside and play."

Louise plays on the footpath with other children where they skip rope, play hopscotch, or throw a tennis ball. They are warned to play where they can be seen; like dishes, thinks Louise. Mother locks the screen door so she isn't disturbed. Because Mary frightened them once with a bout of rheumatic fever she is allowed to stay in her room and play secrets with books and dolls.

Sometimes, if Louise knocks on the door of the room at the end of the verandah, Father lets her into the house. He calls this room his study and uses it to write his memoirs, in stilted longhand, into old exercise books.

* * *

"I always thought you were more your father's than mine," says Mother as she helps herself to salads and meats on the sideboard. She speaks quietly as if telling Louise a secret.

"Only Father gave me any attention," Louise responds, "and then only if I listened to his stories." Mary stands behind them eavesdropping. Suspecting, as always, that Louise's complaints will include her.

"Family stories are important," she says, "they provide a broader perspective."

"On what?" asks Louise.

"On who you are. Anyway, all you ever wanted was Our Mother of Perpetual Succour." Mary has never married, her hair is straight and grey and there is a middle-aged smugness about her that Louise dislikes. A smugness that says she will get her own way. No matter what.

This is the first visit Louise has paid Mother or Mary in almost a year. And only because Teresa, her middle daughter, has moved out here to study. To be near Grandma, she says. Louise is surprised at how much she misses Teresa and how she needed to see her. But now she's here, on familial grounds, she feels tired and slightly bored.

Perhaps it's jetlag.

"Did I tell you what Grandma did?" asks Teresa as they sit down to their meal. It is Sunday dinner. Shades are drawn and the air conditioner hums in the background.

All of Louise's children are named after saints. Anne, Teresa and Bernadette. She's left the other two at home, in another state, with their father.

"I had a visit from the police yesterday," says Mother, startling Louise back to attention.

"Whatever for?"

"Someone tried to steal her handbag as she opened the front gate," Teresa explains.

"I was not afraid of the police," says Mother. They were young and handsome. She found them amusing, their earnestness and the way they tried to look around

corners when they thought she wasn't looking.

"I gave them a cup of tea and we talked about fishing and football."

"The police told her to put bars on her windows," says Mary.

"Grandma and I are going to go to self defence classes together," adds Teresa. She stares at her grandmother with adoration. Louise has seen this look before. It is beyond her comprehension. What do they see in her that I miss, she wonders, apart from deafness, irascibility and loud noise.

"It's good to have Teresa so close," Mary stares at Louise as if in accusation. "I tell Mother to make sure the screens are locked when she's home by herself."

Mary lives in the next street.

"She used to lock us out when we were children. I hated not being able to come inside when I wanted," says Louise.

"I don't remember that," says Mary.

"What did she say?" asks Mother, loudly.

"That you used to lock us outside," says Mary.

"Louise! I most certainly did not."

She glares at Louise, raises an eyebrow, rolls her eyes. Louise sighs. It was a long flight. Her mother's hair is a silver grey halo around her head. She looks old.

"I have twenty two hairs growing out of my chin," Mother guesses Louise's thoughts.

"Mum. I'm trying to tell you what she did. You aren't listening," insists Teresa. Teresa plans to use the room off the verandah as a study. Louise looks at her daughter and smiles.

"What did she do?" she asks.

"Hit him on the head. As he was running away Grandma picked up a rock, took aim, threw, and hit him square on the back of the head!"

Teresa laughs with the excitement of it.

"Hit who?" She seems to be the only one not sure of the plot.

"Oh Mum, you never pay attention. She hit the man who tried to take her handbag. He dropped it too."

"The police were surprised at her strength," says Mary.

"I used to ride a mother cycle," Mother shouts at Teresa.

"Did you know that?" asks Teresa. Louise shakes her head. It occurs to her that her mother is becoming a legend. A living legend, to have her deeds related around dinner tables. Perhaps even written into someone's memoirs in a room at the end of a verandah.

The jetlag disappears. She laughs and raises her cup of tea high into the air in a toast to Mother.

"To the Streets," she says.

"The long line of Streets," says Mary, remembering.

"Ethel Street, Street St," says Mother, loudly.

"Louise Ethel Street," says Louise, "Street St. Louise Ethel Saint."

They begin to laugh.

"You all laugh the same," says Teresa, not wanting to be left out. "You wrinkle up your noses, and they go white in the middle."

KATHY HUNT

Donna's Room

"I had a girl
and Donna was her name." (Richie Valens.)

When Donna was born, just born, wet and warm, her mother asked the nice Tamil doctor a rhetorical question: "Is she alright?" "Yes", he said, "but she has twelve fingers and twelve toes". Donna's mother was an optimist then. She thought he was joking, in an Indian sort of way. When she could see for herself, she thought unexpectedly of Anne Boleyn; her extra fingers and her long sleeves. The doctor continued his stitching, dropping the heavy scissors at intervals onto her tender stomach. Donna's mother wanted to say something about this but she was too weak, and soon she was losing far too much blood. A woman with a hangover and a cigarette came from pathology and, slowly and unsuccessfully at first, tried to find a vein. Litres and litres of blood were needed to bring Donna's mother back from the blunt edge of applied provincial medicine while a nurse held the baby and confessed in an unguarded moment to bashing her own. No one remembered to put a birth notice in the paper but somehow, out of all the 70's names, Donna was Donna, named after the song. After two operations she no longer had twelve fingers and twelve toes but she had started to rock in her cot, on her hands and knees, backwards and forwards. Overnight guests cursed her. Neighbours thought, perhaps, that her parents were sexual athletes. She would even rock sitting up in the car, creating a rhythmic driving imbalance which made her father stop constantly and check the tyres. A paediatrician advised them to keep her busy on trips; playing games; coloring in. Donna, he said, was going to be tall.

"Oh, Donna,
oh, Donna."

The man followed Donna. On foot. In his car. In sunshine, when her hair glowed and lifted on the wind, arching away from her face as she walked in long measured strides towards the life of the streets.

She wore black, long black second-hand evening skirts and dresses of taffeta and

silk. They obscured her feet so that she appeared to glide. In the rain she lowered her head and moved as nuns do, the fixed folds of her clothing reminding him of statuary and the medieval.

Sometimes in the opportunity shop he came up close behind her, close enough to smell her hair, fragrant, floral, close enough to hear her talk and laugh. Around them anthologies slumped exhausted against the shelves and wire hangers poked like bones through the tired stitches of crocheted cardigans. He watched her buy more black skirts and dresses made of slippery satin and papery lace. Her bracelets met in tiny chimes as she chose. Her wrists were small.

She told her father about the man who was following her and the police questioned him and warned him. The man was very quiet and then he said: "La Belle Dame sans Merci". The sergeant recalled a hot speech night long ago, a tight tie and a ballad out of context. "There is only one thing worse than a pervert," he told a puzzled new recruit, "and that is a poet."

The man was encouraged to seek psychological help, and the girl went away to live in the city where black is unremarkable and the quick swish of taffeta cannot be heard.

"Oh, Donna,
oh, Donna."

On Saturday nights in the city Donna dressed in black and went out to the clubs to dance on her scarred feet. The rhythm born out of damage was the rhythm she answered to still, drawing it up from the ground, inhaling it like oxygen. Wrapping herself in the sinewy cloak of its waves she danced, her spirit in its element, her body tall and golden, flashing, flowing on the floor like a chiffon hologram. People stared and applauded. Primitive and visible grace is a rare thing. The clubs offered to pay her.

Donna's course started in February: Fashion Design and Production. Only the very lucky and the very talented were accepted. Donna was taught by people who had new cars and superannuation. These people knew that the organized and accredited manufacture of famous fashion designers was highly unlikely. Accordingly a heavy production component had been built into the syllabus and in this way the tutors could sunbake in Bali and frolic in Fiji knowing that they were at least providing a steady stream of tailors to a badly-dressed and grateful nation. In due course the entirely artificial concept of academising this art would be lifted from diploma to degree and supported by the flying buttresses of expediency. Donna was unaware of this. For weeks and weeks she sewed on shirt collars. One day the class visited a factory where they watched other people sew on shirt collars. There was no design. There was no taffeta or silk. Donna found the scissors hard to hold.

"And Donna,
Where can she be?"

You can't see the floor in Donna's room. It is covered in material, mainly black. At times the sun touches a thread of gold or a silver sequin. Donna likes to sit here amongst her clothes. Humming, she gathers them around her and deep in her dark nest the silks whisper to her and the satins sigh. On the edge of her world the lace froths around taffeta rocks and falls back foaming into corners dragging its velvet ribbons.

People ask her mother: "What is Donna doing?"
Donna is looking for work. Applying for jobs. At the interviews she looks across the desks at the bloodless origami faces above the bluestone suits. Something is wrong here.

"What is Donna doing?"
Donna is sitting on a couch, eating. She is becoming blurred and indefinite. Last night she brought a man home and he stood vomiting in the hall.

"What is Donna doing?" People are always asking.
I think she's fading. I think she's fading.

Donna's father dreams that she is waiting for a train. Carriage after carriage goes by but nothing stops for her. She begins to run and slowly catches up. Finally, as the platform ends, she jumps in with the driver.

Arum lilies grow in Donna's garden. Their milky mouths yawn and their tongues poke ochre. Donna picks them and places them in water. The long bodies lean, green and seemingly languid, refracting, against the glass. The cool blank faces curve and peak, ending in fine spirals. Donna has a paint box and a brush. In the afternoons, in her terms of color and light, she paints the smooth organic fabric of the lilies. Blue and purple run together, and yellow shines in their shadows. Donna's lilies are different from the rest.

NICOLETTE STASKO

'Sowing Seeds at Nite'
after Ian W Abdulla

In Gerard
the days are so hot
they scorch your eyeballs and even breathing
is hard work
out in the fields
our tractor moves slowly
like a big insect cutting
the earth
we are slow too
caked in red dust
the sun angry as a hornet
rubbing its red legs together
but at night
the sky is sweet and warm
as the breath of a mother
soft as the belly
of an animal
and the tractor moves faster
spitting out seeds that shine
like little eyes
in the dirt
a shower of shining eyes!
when I paint
the sky is black
thick black like tar
I paint the stars
bright yellow
bright as the seed shower in the light
and the chugging tractor
smoke pouring from its stack
millions of them!
as many yellow stars

as I can fit
lighting up the sky
no moon
we don't need a moon to see
we are getting
that good

ELIZABETH SMITHER

Cycle Race

High above the city a siren rises
Then a yellow car is located travelling
Fast along a Sunday street.

Now comes a marvellous thing:
A line of left-handed brackets
(((((((((one behind the other.

These are the cyclists, bending
Over their handlebars, backs
Curved like the sun on their wheel rims

Trying to catch up to the siren
Which will be impaled on a straight line
They will cross, a dash—

ELIZABETH SMITHER

Irene's Spa

In swimsuits, since the city is so close
(Though we look down on it it might look up)
We sit in the spa pool, like a cup

Of blue water or a tiny lake
Enclosed in a room with window panes
And young growing vines, again-

We do it every time I visit
Skirting subjects which remain
Deep and blue and plain

As our bodies' elongated reflections.
My white toes stretch out and glow
Our lives surround us, enclosed

In a compass, we circumnavigate
To turn the bubbles on or off
Say it's too hot or not.

KIRSTY SANGSTER

Photograph of the Old Marc Chagall

Marc Chagall. Your face is a collage
of your own imaginings.
Kindly and playful.
In the tender hollows beneath your
cheekbones lie dancers, poets and coupled lovers,
the peasant trudging to the field.
Your eyebrows are the shore-lines of mountains and steppes,
where half-crazed musicians play to frozen tides and
women in flimsy dresses trace patterns of snow.

Your hands look soft. They fit lovers
together so sweetly
like painted Russian dolls from the village.
One within the other, within the other.
Turning them around and upside down. Opening
their faces up, to be softened
by light.

Behind your eyes, the kantor
walks. A solemn wrap of black cloth
and kabbalah, not passing judgement,
making the dark a holy place. Where

even girl suicides fall down and into love. Deep
and meridian-blue coloured. Their hips and breasts
resting in the curl of the angel's body
like the shell's own spiralling bone,
complete and full of grace.

JOHN KINSELLA

Prologue

The line suffuses
the variegated purples
& reds becoming a deeply
sulphurous yellow
in the shallows.
I tell my son
that when I was young
I was obsessed with chemical
reactions, the clarity
& exposition
of interactions.

Gunbower Road Jetty

Where as a thirteen year old
I was stabbed & thrown into the

grey-brown water, my bike
anchoring me to the grey silt.

Now these grassed banks
that choke & narrow an always

thin beach force you onto
its freshly laid planks

on their squat Buddha pylons.
Yes, here I come to meditate.

Paperbarks, childhood sentinels,
exquisitely grotesque & almost

begging to be flayed alive;
fat wooden boats limp

at their moorings, though the day
too sharp for indolence.

Heron patiently point out vandals
in speedboats wrecking the surface,

dizzied by the flurry & crazy
mixing of ripples, light, and furrows

not showing it, though the bow waves
eventually driving them from their mounts.

Shibboleth that will not depress
the sad pollution of a relationship

cast like a life-buoy from a jetty
perched over waters almost too shallow

to need it, and the tide high.
And time dragged thinly the heron's

trailing legs lith lith lith
against the shadow of a breeze

or hissing slightly through burley cages
lodged between the planks; across

the river the furthest bank burns
with the frantic peak-hour traffic.

A rank of nasturtium flowers clinging
to the slopes expects to spark

as the day warms up and the micro-shape
of gunbower road jetty equivocates.

Rookwood Street Jetty

T-shaped with money to back it up,
all Esplanades seem wealthy,

though poorly kept & camouflaged
against the glare, this is the touch,

the simple life? Cormorants perched
on mountains of corrosive shit

mock clean cruisers moored a little
way out, lobbying with lazy sheets

the deceptive cross-hatched airs
that shape these waters and their

palisades of estuarial birds & paperbarks!
Long-planked, the endless map

suggests residents and polite couples
visiting via bikeways will one day

look much further than a closely
"distant" bank. This, for me, is absence,

and the river's gentle curve is wrecked
by this small jetty's subterfuge.

My incantations and expositions
will not bring you back.

Carmon figuratum

The shape is in the maybe or mightbe
of the words and not the layout or plan

as the page has little to do with this.
Scan lines and shape will emerge

like a boat sailing out of the gloom
of coloured dots, a kind of perceptual

testing ground that has you focussing
on some distant point to realize
it's there, right in front of your face.

envoi / Recollection

The line suffuses
the variegated purples
& reds becoming a deeply
sulphurous yellow
in the shallows.
I tell my son
that when I was young
I was obsessed with chemical
reactions, the clarity
& exposition
of interactions.

John Kinsella interviews Peter Porter regarding collaboration between Peter Porter and Arthur Boyd

Peter Porter, Australian poet and author of numerous volumes of poetry (his most recent being *Millenial Fables* (OUP 1995)), and Arthur Boyd, Australian artist, have collaborated on four illustrated volumes of poetry — *Jonah* (1973), *The Lady and the Unicorn* (1975), *Narcissus* (1984), and *Mars* (1988). The following interview, conducted by West Australian poet John Kinsella who has himself written poems related to paintings, was recorded at Porter's London residence in 1993. The interview explores the nature of Peter Porter's artistic relationship with Arthur Boyd and the mechanics of composition from the poet's perspective.

How did the collaboration come about in the first place?

Well as general example of an onlie begetter in this, Arthur has been a close friend for years of the English publisher, Tom Rosenthal, and Tom collected a lot of Boyd pictures and at some point — must have been in the late sixties — Tom suggested a kind of collaboration between Arthur and myself. I'd known Tom, not all that well, mainly through English literary activities of one sort or another — we've both done reviews on the radio and that sort of thing. And Arthur had been at that time approached by a quite a lot of people to work with him. You can never tell when an artist really will take up somebody's work and work with it happily. I was quite surprised when I first collaborated on *Jonah* because I had met Arthur a couple of times and we hadn't really got on very well because I, in a show-offish way, had said something nasty about Michelangelo which he thought was just the worst possible taste. Not only that, but he also thought it was typical of a literary man, showing off and talking about something he doesn't know about.

In fact, I had very strong opinions about Italian Renaissance painting but that doesn't mean that my opinions were worth anything in particular. But then when we came together and Tom — Tom was very amusing about this — I have recorded some of this in an article I wrote for *Westerly* but ... this story I will tell you now is a recapitulation of that and it's perfectly true. Tom thought that a good idea would be to do a William Blake-type collaboration, except that William Blake collaborated

with himself! And we would use a Biblical story because Arthur had already done his illustrations, not to original poems, but to Nebuchadnezzar, from the Book of Daniel. He'd actually done some Christian stuff in the form of St. Francis of Assisi, which Tom wasn't so keen on, but what Tom said to us [was] on this occasion: we'll do the Bible.

He suggested Job, but I said no. I couldn't possibly do Job, not only because the Book of Job itself is remarkable and so peculiar in the original Biblical text, but Blake had really made it almost impossible to do Job; I mean Blake had finished Job off for good and all. And I said what about the nice short Book of Jonah which nobody much knows anything about. I also said there's something nice in the New Testament, perhaps in the Acts of the Apostles and Tom said 'No, no, we've got to keep this Jewish' and so we went back to the Old Testament again. And Jonah seemed an excellent subject, because it divides so neatly — it's a very short book, only four chapters, divided neatly into two parts — the part of the whale and the part of Nineveh where he's menaced by the worm and the gourd and the west wind. It's very obviously a picture-booky story; at the same time, it's very interesting because it is a story of the obsessional nastiness of God; the Jewish God, or the Christian God, whichever God you like to deal with.

It lends itself to a flippancy of tone and wit as well.

Yes, and this you can afford. When the book first came out — my English reviewers recorded 'Auden and Water'. I think probably the tone of that book, of my poems for *Jonah*, is the closest I ever got to being [like Auden?] ... I wasn't conscious of imitating Auden but I think it was probably the closest because it is rather like, in some respects, Auden's own most loose-limbed kind of concoction — the book which Auden called *For The Time Being*, which is a Christmas oratorio. The poems in *Jonah* are obviously to some extent pastiche but I saw each poem as a kind of woodcut or vignette and [was] thinking that Arthur would be able to see them that way, perhaps. In fact he released a whole cornucopia of images for the book. How these images were then put together into the book is another matter, of course. I think one of the problems with the collaborations that we've had is that Arthur produced in the first book, *Jonah*, and the last book, *Mars*, a kind of multifarious collection of images, some of them mere sketches. Whereas in the two middle books, *The Lady and the Unicorn* and *Narcissus*, his reaction was to do set pieces. What Arthur tends to do is to concentrate upon one particular image or one set of images and the poems and the pictures are not directly illustrative of each other. What happens in this, is you're to read these books as counterpoints, not as harmonies. What goes on in the poetry and what goes on in the pictures is to be felt contrapuntally — that is, to be one point against another point, rather than felt harmonically, where one thing reinforces and underwrites another thing. In other words the pictures and the poems are in a kind of relationship with each other which is touching only at points, rather than the pictures being illustrations of the poems or the poems extrapolations of the pictures.

Just a query ... once you decided upon the subject being Jonah, did you sort of sketch down some ideas, if you like, before Boyd gathered together a series of images or archetypal references and then work from there?

I'm not quite sure at what stage Arthur created the pictures. But I do know that, in general, he wouldn't really start working until he had the poems *en bloc*. It wasn't a question of sending, as it might be said with a poet working with a composer, who might send some passages and the composer set them and ask what [are] the next passages.

Were you conscious of — obviously you were conscious of his work generally — but were you conscious of his particular archetypes that might be inserted into...

Absolutely not. And of course, what he has done — I don't think this is unfair to Arthur to say this — but what he has done is tended to bring into all four of these books his obsessional archetypes which you can trace all the way back to the early pictures that were done in those areas around Melbourne ... the sort of funny looking muzzled dogs.

Stoats, flies...

And that's perfectly true. If you were to take, say (I can always get my examples better from music than I can from illustrative art) if you take an opera which is about Ancient Greece or an opera which is set in Italy or Spain about an amorist, Mozart's style will be the same for both. You don't have an archaic Greek style for an archaic story and a sort of sexy Italian style for a sexy Italian story. The artist has his own style.

And I do think that what has been ... helpful to Arthur in these books is that while on the whole he's been able to bring in his obsessional archetypes and his icons, the need to satisfy the story has liberated and brought in a whole lot of other imagery which might not otherwise have been dealt with.

After Jonah though, did you expect certain things to happen that affect the way you [write]?

Yes, I expected these things to happen but I was always surprised in each case of the further three collaborations, of new departures which I hadn't expected.*The Lady And The Unicorn* ... had a rather odd origin. The story was not to me in any way attractive, at least the legend that I had heard. The reason the book was written in the way it was written, was that, there was a chap in Melbourne who ran a gallery, called Georges Mora — originally a Frenchman, a French Jew, who'd been in the French Resistance. And he was a great admirer of Arthur and there was always a mystery about the finance of these books which I don't know anything about, as to whether the people who were supposed to put up the money did put it up, or whether it was Arthur's own money — which is something which I shall never know. Perhaps I could ask Arthur but I don't think he'd tell me.

I think in the front of one of them it mentions that there was generous assistance?

That's Georges Mora. Georges as a young man in Paris had frequently dropped into Musée de Cluny which is on the Left Bank. And inside the Musée de Cluny there are

these wonderful late medieval / early Renaissance tapestries of The Lady And The Unicorn. And what Georges wanted was a sort of modern development of that. So I then had to look out for the original story.

I found it almost impossible to find any real references to this story of The Lady And The Unicorn. I knew the general outline — that the unicorn was the only animal that didn't get into the Ark, etc, and the only way to catch the unicorn was with a virgin. But I managed to find an account of the legend in a strange book edited by a man who is better known as a Victorian hymn writer called Sabine Baring Gould. He took a lot of medieval legends, and to my surprise The Lady And The Unicorn is a medieval legend of the same sort of calibre, and about the same time as other better known ones, such as the one Piero della Francesca illustrated... The Story of The True Cross. And there's another famous one of The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus which is mentioned by John Donne in one of his poems. So I looked at this but I had to really fill out a lot of the stuff myself. *Jonah* had been, I thought, too discursive, so what I wanted to do with *The Lady And The Unicorn* was to do it in depth. Right from the start, I was going to do 20 poems and that's it. And Arthur would then do 20 plates which would go with the 20 poems. And so that was, right from the start, decided: it would be more formal.

It's the most pithy and epigrammatic of the books.

And that's what we did. I think Arthur excelled himself in the... sheer exfoliation. If you take the cover picture which is also No. 10 — it is, I think, a beautiful example, it's got Arthur's obsessions in it, it's got the cast-off shoe. The appearance of the picture is modern without any sense of pastiche. But it's also not unlike a modern version of Botticelli's *Primavera*. It's got the idea of the flowering. What Arthur is so good at doing is metamorphosis. And metamorphosis, of course, is the basis of much European culture. I mean Ovid was Shakespeare's favourite writer and the whole idea of people turning into things, the whole relationship of Nature; Daphne Laureola turning into a laurel bush, you know, that sort of thing. Well, this book, *The Lady And The Unicorn*, enabled both Arthur and myself, I think, to try admittedly in a slightly sophisticated way ... to do a modern Ovid — both sensual and sophisticated, both mocking and serious.

The mocking/serious tone in* Mars *reminds me of Bernard Mandeville. I was wondering: in* Mars *there are certain sections which have very distinct 'Grumbling Hive' overtones, almost a wistful playfulness with something incredibly serious and intense.

I think that had been the style of all the books really. I'm a great believer in mixed modes. I have no fondness for pure form at all.This is of course using very grand examples, but I always contrast, say, Shakespeare with Racine. If you take the end of *Antony and Cleopatra*; Antony is already dead, so we have had one great sort of crisis and then Cleopatra is going to kill herself with the asp. Shakespeare interpolates a scene where this vendor comes in with the asp in a basket and there's a series of what can only be called 'dirty jokes', and then comes the grand scene. Well, Racine would have regarded that as appalling. Because it is a mixed mode. But the English

style is the mixed mode. I think there is a lot to be said for the old proverb which they used to have in Vienna, which said 'the situation is desperate but not yet serious.' And that one of the notions of this is that seriousness is not the same thing as solemnity. While I would admit that there's perhaps too much paradoxical sliding out and tangential kind of reference in all four of these books, to some extent it also fits Arthur's style, because Arthur can be both extremely intense as he is indeed in *The Lady And The Unicorn*, and very relaxed. Some of the pictures are most elaborately drawn, they're mostly etchings.

I was wondering — the more elaborate ones seem to coincide with more elaborate forms you have used.

Yes, I think that's probably true, although I don't think Arthur takes very much notice of the forms of poetry except subliminally.

When the poems are invocational, he seems to take a lot of notice.

Yes, I think he probably does. One of the great problems of the 20th century has been that poets who recognized that there's a lack of serioueness in the world have turned themselves to a certain degree into stand-up comedians — even the best of them have done this. In the '60s and the '70s in England anyway — I'm not sure about Australia and America — the poet as a stand-up comedian became practically the style of the time. I think we are all of us tarred with that brush to a certain extent because we do want to hear laughter in the hall, we do want to be loved by our audiences and such like, and I think my own instinct is anyway that the one thing no writer should ever be is dull. But of course if somebody is prepared to be dull, a lot of good can come out of that. A poet like Geoffrey Hill for instance, although in his book *Mercian Hymns* he can be witty, he's basically serious to the point of po-faced solemnity and he gets the high prize eventually because people take him seriously and they do accept this extraordinary dithyrambic style; whereas I am a more demotic kind of writer I suppose ... I mean, it amuses me that in Australia people often think of me as a great formalist in the sense that — I am supposed to be the Athenian and Les Murray is supposed to be the Boeotian! God help the Athens which has to have me as its chief representative!

You mentioned earlier that Boyd had gone through and interpreted poems or reacted against the poems; how much interpolation went on on your part afterwards?

No, never — in none of them. What did happen in the case of making them up into books, in the case of the two middle books, *Narcissus* and *The Lady And The Unicorn,* [was that] there was no question of any editing having to be done because Arthur only did a picture to each poem, there was not a great scattering of other icons.

Would you have liked to work back the other way?

We were almost going to do that, because after *Mars,* Arthur was involved with Barry Humphries and Geoffrey Dutton in a project which I thought was going to be

a total disaster. I wasn't involved with it ... you could say that my thinking that it was going to be a total disaster was sour grapes on my part. But Geoffrey was doing a new translation of the libretto of *The Magic Flute*, and Arthur was going to do the sets, and Barry was going to sing Papageno. And the whole thing was to be an Australian *Magic Flute* which struck me as being a very otiose concept but ... I think there were going to be Aborigines and all sorts of things. So anyway the idea was that I would then start writing some poems not based on the new libretto but possibly based on the original Schikaneder libretto, and based on Arthur's pictures, because Arthur did quite a number of backdrops and things in one of his exhibitions, in Sydney in about 1988 or '89. He had a number of these Magic Flute / Queen of the Night features in some of them, and Papageno.

But as it happened ... nothing came of this. I did lay down a few possible ideas but nothing came further. However, there was a sense in which *Narcissus* ...was more like a collaboration based on the pictures leading to the poems. It didn't actually happen that way. But what did happen is that Arthur and I had been talking about the Shoalhaven River and I mentioned to him that I consider that some of his pictures of the Shoalhaven — I want to say (interpolation here!) that I'm no expert on Australian painting, but I think that Arthur's Shoalhaven pictures, not necessarily anything to do with things he's done with me but those many, many pictures he has done of the river and its environs are the greatest breakthrough in Australian pastoral landscape painting since the Heidelberg school, I think, he's really found a new way of representing Australian landscape, not just in the bush but particularly, I suppose, the river landscape — I pointed out that some of his Shoalhaven pictures looked like the famous painting in the National Gallery in London, of Piero di Cosimo, which is usually called *Mythological Scene* but is sometimes called *Cephelus and Procris*. It shows a nymph lying dead on the ground with a dog and a pelican flying by. It's a Florentine painting and I think what Arthur and I then began to think — we were talking about how Australia would fit well in with the concept of Narcissus; how Nature looks at itself and so basically *Narcissus* was the one book where the origin of the material was jointly conceived right from the beginning. But *Narcissus* had a long gestation — unlike the other three which were all written very fast and the pictures done very fast — *Narcissus* had about a ten-year gestation, in that I was staying with him, in 1975, when I'd gone back to Australia for five months then. While there I wrote what was the origin of the Narcissus poems. But published it separately before the rest of the *Narcissus* poems, and I called it *The Painters' Banquet*. And it is a poem about my own vision of what painting is. Painting is like eating and when you go into a gallery you let your eyes eat, and you eat the landscape.

And it is interesting how many of the voluptuous painters — I don't mean voluptuous sexually, I mean the most richly entitled painters like Veronese — how they loved to paint real banquets. In the Academy in Venice, there is the most magnificent Veronese called *The Feast at Cana*, which was one of Christ's activities ... and it's done in what can only be called the most opulent style. I wanted to develop the two ideas in *Narcissus* and I think Arthur liked this too and Arthur did a whole series of Narcissus-type pictures based on the Shoalhaven ... it isn't just looking into the water and seeing a reflection of yourself, it's seeing what you might call the upside-down view, of what Ruskin called the 'pathetic fallacy'. Ruskin seemed to think, if I understand him correctly, that Nature reflects us back, in the sense that we see in Nature

emblems of ourselves; I mean he used the phrase really to describe techniques. For instance, Shakespeare in *Macbeth* has elements behaving weirdly at night after the death of King Duncan as though it was a direct kind of interpolation, intervention, on the natural world, of the moral world. But what Arthur and I were trying to do in *Narcissus* was turn this upside down and when you look in the water your moral self is turned upside down. We wanted to produce a vision I suppose of ... how we don't see ourselves in the natural world. The natural world in fact enters us and becomes a kind of life, it has a pilgrimage through us.

Against the Dr Berkeley dictum, as someone said at a dinner party to him once, 'If we forget you are here, you'll cease to exist...' .The reflection actually becomes a thing in itself. Is that what you're saying?

I think that's what I'm saying. I've only really just begun to formulate this to myself at this particular moment. But I know that what we were trying to do in *Narcissus* was ... to get hold of that part of the self — it was Pascal who said 'le *moi* est haïssable' — the self is detestable. And what Arthur and I were trying to do was not to make the self detestable but make the self universal. To say that there was no such thing as unreflective existence. There's no such thing as innocent existence. All existence is actually self-reflective, it comes back on itself. And since Arthur loved the Shoalhaven and since it seemed to me I am not a natural landscape, pastoral poet, what I was trying to do was to find ways of writing poems where what comes of self-analysis is not 'I did this and I did that', but how all the things which are in the person actually can be taken out of the person. It's rather like the process you get in psychoanalysis, what you call projection. In other words, the people you project onto the landscape yourself, rather than what you take back from the landscape.

Do you think that both of you were working out of some sense of isolation — Arthur being in the world of Shoalhaven ... and you in your world of England?

Arthur's obviously very much more naturally an Australian than I am, in the sense that he uses Australian imagery so much more than I do. But I think people commenting on Arthur have not noticed how influenced he is, and how powerfully ... by the central tradition of European painting. He's obsessed (you've got a poem I think about it) — he's obsessed by that Rembrandt thing of that head...

Julius Civilus With A Dead Cock.

There are times when Arthur seems to be having a kind of wrestling match like Jacob and the angel with the great figures of European painting. I think in *The Lady And The Unicorn* he was looking at some of the Florentines, certainly looking at Botticelli. I think in the case of some of the later pictures which I wasn't involved in he was looking at Rembrandt. Earlier on he'd looked at Blake and other people of that sort.

Now I think this is very healthy. People tend to think it's very bad. I think it's very good because it seems to me that if the great writers and great artists of the past aren't a challenge to you almost as though they were your contemporaries, why bother with them? They are in fact part of the living ... I've got a poem somewhere

called 'The Prince of Anachronisms' which says that art is always the same age...

I have no time for people at all who say, 'Ah well, you can't understand *Macbeth* unless you look into the psychology of the late medieval mind.' That's bull. If it's any good it will make its own psychology for you in your own time. Therefore I'm not interested in the conventions of Shakespeare's stage or anything of that sort; what interests me is Shakespeare's poem, Shakespeare's play, as it exists in my mind ... I would agree that perhaps some of my anachronisms are a bit kitschy, but I don't feel at all ashamed of anachronism because it seems to me to be in fact literally what it does say — it's just simply spreading time around just as you can spread anything else around.

Do you think that you work from a sense of pun rather than parody? I know that Boyd in his use of European masters often puns, often makes play... You do it consistently... There is constant sexual punning, sexual isolation... Do you think that's a link between the two of you, or something that's occurred, totally independent?

I think the fascinating thing is that it *is* totally independent. Arthur and I are very independent of each other. We get on very well ... Arthur's a very well-read man, an extremely educated bloke. But we never have any deep conversations about what we intend; we just don't do that at all. As collaboration, I deliver him the final poems, he delivers me the final pictures.

Does art exist for both of you as a thing of purity? Is it something that — in its creation — is it made pure, does it go through a cathartic process?

Yes well, it happens to me in my mind, it happens to him in his mind. The only difference is that, in the case of the one book *Narcissus* there was a degreee of collaboration in the concept-ing of the book. The other three were more or less *given* stories. *Narcissus* is of the four books the one that doesn't have a central story. It has a central image in the sense of this Greek youth who looked in the water, but it's the one which is tied least strongly to its original concept. So, what I find remarkable about the collaboration now that I look back on it after all these years, is that these two people working together are so strikingly unlike each other and yet oddly enough, deep down, have very much the same attitude and approach to art. But not one which they've ever worked out in collaboration with each other. It's the working together of two given qualities.

In* Jonah *Boyd seems uncomfortable with Jonah's embracing of God; you reduce it to a contractual situation. Can you comment on that?

Well, that's a parody of course, isn't it? Because I'm actually fascinated by the language of legal documents. There's more direct parody in *Jonah* than in the other three books I think... One of my favourite works has always been *Robinson Crusoe*, I think [it's] one of the really great novels. I think that there's a lot of parody — there's the parody of a legal document, there's the parody of a diary being kept, there's a parody of the sort of language of the late 17th century, in *Robinson Crusoe*-type

language. So in a way, these parodies are affectionate references to the inexorable things that we have to put up with. We have to put up with the fact that lawyers dominate our lives...

Do these collaborations almost in a sense become self-parodies for both you and Boyd; give you an excuse almost to look back over your own work?

Yes, to both of us I think. For instance, in *The Lady And The Unicorn* there's a poem I remain quite fond of actually, which is a very odd poem ... 'The Lady's Wedding' — which turns out to be, I realise now, my own tribute to the kind of writing that got done in the 1930s by Wystan Auden and the group theatre. This is a complete parody of Auden. It's the Auden of the plays, but also very much the Auden of *The Age Of Anxiety*.

The book which actually turned me into a poet was *The Age Of Anxiety*. At school I'd written imitations of Robert Browning. I managed to leave school without even having *heard* of the name of TS Eliot... In a way, the kind of naive Australia I grew up in strikes me now — this is of course self-justification — as a bit healthier than the kind of cultural accumulation — 'know what's the right thing to think' critical correctness — which prevails in the universities these days. It was possible when I was a young boy actually to emerge ignorant. You can't emerge ignorant anymore. You can only emerge ill-informed, which is not the same thing.

So in many respects when I first read *The Age Of Anxiety* — it came out in 1948 — I suddenly thought, gosh this is what modern poetry is, you can do these things with language ... I no longer think it's anything like Auden's best book ... but I've always retained an affection for the kind of troping which you'll find there, especially the overdone alliterations. Alliteration is a terrible form — it can only be done as parody. I just do not think alliteration makes any sense at all as serious writing. I find all those old Anglo-Saxon works unbelievably uninteresting. Tony Harrison recently translated the *Oresteia* into alliterative verse and it is extraordinarily awful. I just don't think you can use techniques like that except with a high degreee of sophistication as Auden does in *The Age Of Anxiety*.

Australians' perceptions of you as a poet often miss the point that you parody the very thing they lump you with. You parody the gentility and the manners of English poetry. It seems to me that Boyd parodies movement — like Matisse's dance movement.

Yes he does.

Especially through these works — there's a constant parody of movement. Do you think that was a thing of attraction between you, that you both realised what Australians are incapable of realising in his art and in your poetry — do you think that sort of attracted you or was irrelevant?

No, I think it just happened ... I don't like to make claims which will look too boastful but what I do think is that I know an awful lot of people, including some very good English poets, have offered Arthur work for collaboration and he's not used them,

not because he didn't like them but because he didn't feel he could inhabit them.

A lot of people who don't like these books have commented on the fact that the poetry and the pictures don't seem to go together at all. In Australia they get reviewed as works by Boyd with those uninteresting or unnecessary otiose poems of Porter attached. In Europe or in England they get reviewed as Porter's interesting parodies and what are these ugly pictures by Boyd! In fact Arthur's been quite hurt by some of the reviews he's had over here.

The point really is that what I think people *don't* recognise is that the temperaments of the two artists — the poet and the painter — are strikingly the same *au fond,* deep down. They're not, of course, in any kind of recognition of stylistics: they may be much at variance. But deep down they're very much the same.

It is, I believe, a transformation technique. It is a technique based on metamorphosis. Nothing in the world seems to me to be fixed. I'm a firm Heraclitean in that sense. It's all moving about. And it is the purpose of the artist to try and get a snapshot of it — either when it's actually changing or to see it before it changed. Or to recognise that the change is going on. And the really good artist — Shakespeare, of course — is a person for whom the change is *so* brilliant that you like it at every stage of its evolutionary movement — its metamorphosis.

So I think that I couldn't write without reference to the past. But this does not mean that the works are academic. The academy doesn't do anything with the past except put it in the refrigerator.

Just a quote from Cyril Connolly which I think is from one of the dustjackets — it says the text is 'witty and disturbing — Jonah looks well in Peter Porter's battledress' — being a classic example of the European interpretation?

Yes... Leaving aside all questions of personal slight or anything of that kind, the thing which I find most baffling about my reception in Australia is that a lot of people say 'I don't know what you're writing about. What's he going on about?' It isn't just a question of subject matter, it's a question of subject matter and approach, I think. A lot of people in Australia are not hostile to what I write on the ground that it's European or on the ground that it doesn't deal with their daily lives. They're just totally baffled. Why would a man write like this?

I'm not convinced entirely that's the case now, but maybe I'm wrong.

Well I mean not everybody, but I do find more bafflement than hostility.

***When I was at school the first Australian poets I was exposed to in any serious way were in Alexander Craig's* Twelve Poets.**

Oh yes, that's a good little book.

Fantastic book: changed my life literally, made me look at Australian poetry whereas before I'd never even go near it. One of the things that book did was it reconciled many different styles.

I think it's the best book of its kind that Australia's had, because Alex himself is so intelligent in the things that he actually says. He was a very good example — he just did that out of the blue... I hadn't published a great deal at that particular time at least, I was hardly known in Australia... He allowed us to make our own selections, we chose the poems ourselves. I think in a way that he did a lot of good to me, launching me back in my own country as somebody who was interesting.

While he was prepared to discuss things like stylistics and modernism and so on, he wasn't interested in this expatriation. The word "expatriate" just fills me with horror ... I say to people, 'Well if I'm an expatriate then Les must be a patriot!' I don't like "exile" any more.

The word "exile" is inappropriate.

Well it's a self-exile anyway. It's not like Ovid being sent off by the Emperor.

Exactly... Another question: Do you think your god is as pagan as or more pagan than Boyd's?

No, I think my God is more Christian than Boyd's. I'm afraid, sad enough to say... my parents were both atheists, in so far as they took notice of these things at all, and I didn't have any kind of impulse to religion except that after my mother's death my father sent me, firstly to an appalling Church of England boarding school and then from there I went to two other boarding schools, one of which was Church of England and one was sort of Protestant non-denominational. There were no Catholics.

I got interested in religion when I was at school. I never became a "believer" but I did actually get confirmed into the Church of England. Also I think I've always seen religion as the only real tool we have for understanding death. Because when I was younger I first began to conceive of death, I needed some kind of tool to handle it. And I think that the Christian religion particularly came into that.

When Jonah says in the prayer, 'any other God but you would laugh to hear pleas from a man inside a whale', is that literally you speaking, almost?

Yes, in a sense. I do think there's an element of ludicrousness in our relationship to what we see as the divinity.

That allows you to play against it...

Yes. For instance, if man is made in the image of God then God has a sense of humour. And worst of all he has a sense of desolation too, I think. I don't know if you've read Peter Steele's study of my poetry — it came out at the end of last year — and Peter is a Jesuit. The book is entirely without a single reference to any kind of doctrinal thing, but Peter comes back continually to the concept which I think is absolutely correct — I recognise it as correct — which is that the truth or otherwise of Christianity has nothing to do with the effectiveness or the way in which we have absorbed it.

I do not think you can write about Western European people, whether they live in the South Pacific or the United States or in Europe, without taking into consideration 2000 years of Christianity, because that indeed is the great forming structure of our lives: in our philosophy, in our economics, in our history, and above all else in our morality.

And whether Jesus ever lived never interested me at all. But the fact that for 2000 years people were prepared to base their lives on the fact that he did, is something which can't be swerved around. I always think when people ask, 'Do you believe in God?', it's almost the most irrelevant question you could possibly have asked. It has been answered jokingly, by William Golding, 'I'm not sure, but I don't know whether God believes in me.' There is always that.

So for me the concept of the Christian God — actually the Christian God rather more than Jesus — is an absolutely central pillar of the philosophical understanding. And if death, as William Empson said, is the trigger of the literary man's biggest gun, it's also true to say that God is the only postbox into which we can send our confused requests.

Throughout the four volumes there's a lot of evidence of the struggle in Boyd as an artist with the feminine self — the anima/animus thing — the ripping apart of the two. You deal with it in a far more playful way but at the same time I think an equally serious way. Can you talk about that, and also the effect things like psychoanalysis have had on your work generally?

Well, to take the first part of it, I think Arthur is more deeply serious about that, in a sense, than I am. I tend to swerve away from concepts like animus and anima, or even for that matter the masculine and the feminine. For instance I am married now to a person who's very conversant with psychoanalytical theory — I don't myself actually ever think along those lines really... I'm a much more traditional person. But if on the other hand you even follow traditional lines of thinking you'll find that you're doing unconsciously what the more theoretical analysts and people would do, as it were, consciously.

I mean it was Henry James, wasn't it, who without ever having read a word of Freud of course, in *The Turn Of The Screw* does locate Miss Jessell by a lake, and at first has Peter Quint seen on a tower. I mean, the symbolism comes out of nature. The theory then comes from that, following.

I suspect that Arthur's view of the self-laceration as well as the fighting which goes on both inside the individual person and in between the sexes is also more in the traditional vein which we're all familiar with. Once again, to come back to a painter I mentioned before in the origins of *Narcissus* called Piero di Cosimo, there's a famous poem of Auden's called "Woods" which begins, 'Sylvan meant savage in those primal woods / Pio di Cosimo so loved to draw' — and there's a strong tradition in European fabulist painting, fable painting, where animals are seen metamorphosed into strange creatures, and [which are] also scenes of great fights. It's interesting, the Parthenon frieze, the fabulous frieze around the edges of the Parthenon sculpted by Phidias — actually the subject he chose was the fight between the Centaurs and the Lapiths — so there's a long tradition, I think, of animals rending each other apart and also of self-laceration.

I mean, Christianity is based, the symbol of hope of Christianity is based on torture. The Cross is not only a means of execution, it's a machine of torture. I think it's a part of Freudian theory that pain — pain — is another face of pleasure. And I think that people know this instinctively. You don't have to have read Freud to know this. There is something very ambiguous in our natures — Montaigne says we are double, we are never one thing — everything we have occurs in doubles. I notice that in Arthur's pictures, all through his painting, there is a very strong element of cruelty.

Yes — also the interesting thing, where he's often misinterpreted, is people impose a paganism on a reality... for example, when you think about Christ on the cross people never conceive that he would have shat himself, he would have pissed himself. You know, if you hang him there, that's what happens.

Oh yeah, yes, quite. That's right.

Boyd reconciles all these scatological facts very very comfortably.

Yes, he does. I'm very happy with Arthur's scatology. I think it would be extremely wrong not to be scatological in these things. Most people regard it as just bad taste, don't they, but in fact I think that you can't have good taste in torture. It doesn't exist.

Touché.

I think one of the strongest things in Arthur's work is — this is one thing I share with him but I'm not as strong as he is in this — is ... exaggeration. And I think that it's only exaggeration in the sense that because everything happens on a timescale, if it's going to be frozen it has to be exaggerated to cover that scale within the boundaries, as it were, of the time allowed to it. Because he uses very bright colours, Arthur is often seen to be attractive to the people who like to put pictures on their walls. But in each picture there is usually some violence going on — some unswervable violence — and this seems to me to be absolutely correct, because the world in fact is a colourful violent place.

And yet, in the books of collaboration we've done, the two central books are black and white. All the books are black and white in the sense that the main illustrations are black and white.

A lot of the imagery is colourful in* Jonah*, but not as much as in* Mars*, which is an infinitely more violent book, and its imagery is far more colourful as such. Did that come out of an innate knowledge of Boyd in this sense?

Yes, I think so. The problem both Arthur and I had with *Mars* — well, I had it, certainly — is that all three of the other books are in some respect or other (although they might seem to be very arcane) at least based on a fair amount of personal experience. Which is hiding in the background. It's not very much in the foreground, but there *is* personal experience there. I have no experience whatever of war, and I've never been an army man.

That's why Mars *is the most intellectual of the books?*

Yes. I've never been a fighter, I've never even been in the army, although I was in the school cadet corps. I've only fired a rifle about once in my life, and I hardly even hit the target. Arthur was in the army, but I don't think that Arthur's wartime experience really showed him very much of what actually happens in war. But we've all of us lived through the newsreels...

John Forbes has a poem which I greatly like, a recent poem of his about the Gulf War. Sitting in front of the television and watching the West 'do what the West does best'. To some extent we therefore are all of us adepts in things which we've never actually taken part in.

Do you think that Boyd has infinitely more freedom than you when it comes to creating these things? He has the freedom of the dream on his side, the Jungian thing, where he can sort of blend Giacometti-like images with Rembrandt-like images or whatever — there's a constant sort of mixing and flowing — it's freer.

I don't know. Paradoxically I think it's both freer and less free. It's freer in exactly the way you said — he can introduce any image he likes.

Maybe the boundaries between the images are less defined?

Yes ... I've watched him paint, though not for these books ... he works on a dream-like kind of pattern. I think it's much more carefully directed than it appears to be, but nevertheless it is hallucinatory in the sense that it's worked through a kind of quick-dash technique of here and there and moving around. But this means that like free association in literature, a good deal of his *idées fixes*, a good number of his obsessional images keep getting in because they're always there.

So he's freer in one way but less free in another because he cannot escape from his own *idées fixes*. Whereas I have to follow stories which in some cases are not particularly close to my heart. I have the less freedom to begin with but sometimes the more freedom in the end, because forcing my mind into areas where it isn't particularly anxious to go opens up part of the laziness of the intelligence, and releases things there which I wouldn't otherwise have discovered.

I do think that the problem with human mind is its intense laziness. I don't mind that because if we were not lazy we'd be dead, I think, because we'd just go mad with fervour, like some crazy cat that just keeps running around till it collapses. That's one reason why I would never advocate anybody being a hack reviewer. But one of the interesting things about the necessity of being a hack reviewer is the way you are forced to take notice of things which if you were a pure artist you wouldn't bother with. And these things which you are forced into doing out of a need to make money sometimes turn out to be fascinating and liberating...

I sound like a frightful right-winger, but compulsion is one of the essential elements of art. You've got to be compelled to do things, to a certain degree. When I for instance first read Jonah — I was only vaguely aware of the original story — I realised there were things I was going to have to cope with there which normally I wouldn't have bothered with.

Even more so in the case of *The Lady and the Unicorn*. *Narcissus* and *Mars* are not quite so much narrative, but there, especially in the case of *Mars*, I had to really concern myself with things... For a start I looked up Mars in the Greek theogony, how he fitted in. But we had to keep him as Mars. I think the Greek gods are preferable to the Roman gods as titles, but to have called the book *Ares* would have looked incredibly affected, actually, because it is through the Roman second nomenclature that we really got to know Mars. Mars and Venus do somehow mean more to us than Ares and Aphrodite.

The sound is more applicable to the English language too.

It is, too. That's another thing, because it's only in technical and scientific works, and some concepts in philosophy, that we have borrowed very much from the Greek. Mostly we've come from Latin, Latin-derived, but I mean I had to look that up.

Les Murray objects to these books (he told me so) because he thinks that it's peculiarly repulsive and unnecessary to bring northern hemisphere theogony, even theodicy, I suppose, into the South. But I think that since the people were introduced from the North they can be allowed to have brought a few of their gods with them, and that it doesn't really matter too much.

On the other hand, I wouldn't want to be a Hugh McCrae-type poet — I wouldn't want to be the sort of poet who has Pan ... I have absolutely no time whatever for Norman Lindsay: the idea of Pan romping around the upper reaches of the Parramatta.

Boyd seems to have a constant need to lift God or a concept of God out of God's limitations, a process of transfiguration that borders between going from God-as-pure to God-as-very-human and back again. Who, between you and Boyd, has the higher notion of purity, and what do you think this is?

Arthur has a stronger notion of purity than I have.

Which is ironic, you being ostensibly the more Christian of the two.

Well, I'm only more Christian in the sense that I'm more bothered by it. One of the old phrases often used by atheists about people is 'God-bothered', isn't it? I think that Arthur is purer because, in a sense, the nature of art is purer. I stick very strongly to the fact that painting, although iconographic, is a purer artform than literature, for the very good reason that literature is entirely symbolic. A word has no existence except in its meaning and its relationship to other words. Otherwise it's just a series of bits of curled writing. People talk loosely about realism and naturalism; well of course these are styles, like anything else.

There's no such thing as a natural style. All styles are styles. Language is absolutely — for all that it occurred very early on and it's probably impossible to imagine human evolution without the invention of language — nevertheless language remains an abstraction. It's an abstract thing, and no matter how abstract a painting tries to be it's never as abstract as a word.

I think, in that sense, that purity, a kind of deep-seated purity in Boyd is quite to

be expected. Images are sent directly, they do not have any intervention. But it's interesting that language is an interventionist form.

Notions of death in Boyd's work as a liberating thing seem very uncomfortable, he doesn't seem convinced.

Oh no, I don't think he is.

How do you feel about this?

[I've actually written] an attempt to describe death. It's the Death of the Unicorn, you know ... 'the avenues of jacarandas' — that's where my mother used to take me.

It seems to be a liberation of the feminine in death.

That's true — because my mother died when I was young, I associate death with my mother.

The basic principle of life is the feminine — we come out of our mother, she gives us birth, we are created in her (we may be created by God but we are created in her uterus) — when we die, we go back into the mother. That's the sort of concept. Which is a form of transcendence of death — it's not a horrible form of death. I had a vision of death the other day when I was in hospital because I was much closer to it, and it was quite different. I suddenly saw it as a series of algebraic formulae that were on a great big screen.

I know that in times when I've had really big problems I recite all my physics formulas!... Boyd seems to find a lot of safety in ambiguity — non-realist visual art has the safety of ambiguity. If a poet retreats behind it, it tends to become dislocated and affected. Do you think that the almost raw and solid comparison between the definition of the language you use and the ambiguities that Boyd uses is what gives the books their dynamism?

I think so. I think it's fair to say, however, that very good writers — better than me — have the same ability to be happily or usefully ambiguous that a painter can have. But it's easier for a painter.

I'm not saying that that can't be done. I think Language Poetry in its best forms can do that, for example.

When it's been more than just a whole series of conjunctions shown on the page ... I would take the example of a a very early play of Shakespeare's like 'Love's Labours Lost', which seems to me to be one of the most beautiful examples in any created work of art of the sheer reality of ambiguity... You remember in 'As You Like It', the country yokels ask Touchstone, the guy from the court who finds himself isolated in this bloody bog of a place, the Forest of Arden, they say, 'What is this poetry?' and Touchstone replies, 'The truest poetry is the most feigning'.

What is being talked about there is that a really good writer has the same level of screening of himself as a painter has. I wouldn't claim that at all for myself. But the reason why I choose so many different forms of writing these poems is to avoid

that (I think) bad habit, which is encouraged by things like psychoanalysis, of always pouring out, as it were, level mixtures of introspection, as though they could be poured out just like opening a bottle. And I think that therefore one has to put up different conduits and put up hurdles. As Auden said, every race should be a hurdle and not a flat race... To some extent I think that it's important to jar yourself into finding what you really want to say.

Do you think that you've got to be conscious of the limitations that language has by definition?

Yes, well, I'm afraid I think that language has very severe limitations; a lot of people don't, of course.

From Sonnet No. 5 'he spent his working hours deflating words/and every Saturday he spied on birds' — which is more important?

Well the answer is ... that I had in mind terrible academics. But in many respects the spying on birds was a good deal more useful to him.

And in 'Narcissus's Critic' you say , 'Now I sit in the academy of myself passing judgement on the works of night and day and writing that I never learned how to die'. Does a statement like that reflect the same sort of thing?

Yes. I mean, I get a lot of flak from critics, and I don't mind this because I've laid myself open to it. I say in that Gertrude Stein poem of mine that I've written several books to prove nothing can be done in words ... I got rapped over the knuckles by the odious Donald Davie for 'doing dirt' on the profession of poetry. I am the would-be oversophisticated ironist who 'does dirt' on poetry, like Lawrence talked about 'doing dirt' on sex — I've always loathed D.H. Lawrence... And I particularly loathe the idea of 'doing dirt' on sex, as though copulation based on human love was wonderful but every other thing was terrible. What people don't realise is that human love approaches in a million different forms. And I don't mean that I'm in favour of anything like polymorphous perverse systems. But the idea that there is one kind of proper icon or image, and everything else is second-rate, is just untrue.

And the whole purpose of writing — and once again I come back to Shakespeare — is to point out that no matter how brilliant an angle, there's always another angle. I've learnt to put up with being pissed on as an ironist. There's a man called Geoffrey Thurley, wrote a book in the 'sixties about: at last we were getting back to vatic truth and away from the hideous distortions of irony. And of course it was a time, the Ginsberg era, when irony was the dirtiest word in anybody's vocabulary.

As far as I'm concerned, irony simply means a recognition of different states of mind coexisting. It isn't necessarily a pejorative or a dismissive or a minimising thing at all. But then I suppose it depends what you mean by irony. But I think that Arthur's paintings, drawings and icons are both very beautiful — very positive — and also very ironical.

There's a heavy element of irony. If you look at, say, the corner of that *Narcissus* thing, on the face of it it's really straightforward. But it's not, when you look at it,

because not only are you seeing certain different sorts of things... you're actually getting a parody of the famous painting by Mantegna called *Cristo Morto*, which is the famous foreshortening picture of the dead Christ...

It also, just on a purely physical level, looks like vertebrae...

It does exactly, yes... Also, this is the metamorphosis, I think, that here these creatures are — this is a sort of parody of the kind of thing that Stendhal [and others] used to keep their notebooks for. This is my idea of a parodying that particularly French kind of notebook-keeping.

Balzac reading directories all day long and that sort of thing.

Yes... There was a certain degree of arbitrariness in the assigning of pictures to the text, but this is a very good example. You look at it, you realise that it is in fact like a human form but also like the kind of things you get in medical textbooks.

Gray's Anatomy *to a tee.*

And also of *growth*. I was tremendously shocked once, looking at a medical textbook and seeing a cross-section of a very large ovarian cyst which had been taken from a woman. And inside that cyst was a perfectly formed double molar tooth. The body had simply got the wrong signals and was creating bits of itself in the wrong place. And this sort of thing *happened*. 'The Erection', for instance, this is Narcissus's early morning wake-up call...

When Arthur's at his worst, he suffers from the fault of a painter whom I do not like at all, who is a sentimental painter, and that's Chagall. At his best, however, he completely avoids that and produces the kind of anatomical fixtures which are I think always extraordinarily numinous — which grab you — and in that he does resemble some of these people like Piero di Cosimo.

And he is of course an absolutely marvellous draftsman. I once was down at Shoalhaven with him and that self-loving painter Brett Whiteley came to call. It was the only time I ever met Brett Whiteley and I'm glad I never met him again. I'm not saying he wasn't a good painter — he was a good painter — but a difficult human being, I thought. Anyway, the point was that Arthur had got some copper plates.

Incidentally, Arthur is a marvellous technician, in terms of actually how paintings are done. He spends a great deal of money on getting everything right. He mixes his own paints. He has, like the great artists of the past, a tremendous knowledge of the technicalities of painting. I don't mean of drawing, but of painting.

Anyway, he was showing Brett that with this soft copper you didn't have to go through all the techniques of etching, but you could actually do quite nice prints... The copper was sufficiently soft, if you took a stylus or even probably a mapping pen or a compass, and scratched through the copper (you had of course to have the kind of hand that can scratch the right thing without having to go back and correct), you could then print straight from that, and produce a print on paper.

And he had about fifty of these copper plates which he was giving to Brett... And then I saw the two artists sit facing each other, each took a copper plate and a stylus,

and drew the other, both freehand. The interesting thing is they were quite unlike, but they were, both of them, masterful portraits. Because here were two painters who had this basic skill that they could do that freehand, they had that ability.

I think Whiteley confused his pictures because Whiteley was a *pretend* intellectual, and he didn't have any understanding of what he was doing at all. But he had an instinctive understanding of pictures, and he could *do* pictures. But what you would call the iconography of Whiteley's pictures is a mess, whereas I don't think Arthur's is. Arthur I think *has* gone through periods where imagery has been too dominant over the technique. I think there was a period when things like the Aboriginal bridegroom pictures — & also earlier than that, the great *kermesse* scenes outside Melbourne — I think there the symbolism and the imagery overwhelms the technique of the pictures. But generally speaking his great skill is that he (whatever his imagery) never fouls it up intellectually and makes it excessive to the technique that he's got, that it needs. He's technically so adroit.

Tell me — to quote a morpheme from one of your poems in* Mars *— do you think (not that it refers to Boyd in any way!) that maybe it's appropriate to talk of a 'detox centre for extremes'? Do you think that Boyd's paintings work like that for him, that in some way they're a total necessity?

Absolutely. Like all fine artists he has a very strong worldly sense. He knows how to sell his pictures, he knows how to survive in the world of crooked dealers, of third-rate art critics, of crummy bank managers — of all these terrible things that are sent to try us. But his painting is not a form of therapy; I detest that concept of art as therapy. But he would *have* to paint those pictures...

In a sense painting, all art, even writing poems and things, is not always fun either. Unless it's enjoyable you shouldn't do it; on the other hand, unless it's painful you shouldn't do it. It's a mixture of the two.

How much do you think these works are progressive? Do you think that when you go to write another one, they're building on the previous works?

No, I don't think that at all.

Is there something coming up?

No, at the present moment there isn't anything. Possibly there won't be, either. I think we may have come to the end of the road. There's been no quarrel between Arthur and I, or even, as far as I know, cooling off or anything. But when I last spoke to him, there didn't seem to be in either of our minds any particular theme which we wished to follow ... Arthur's got an authority ... I remember when we were staying with him once my elder daughter was there with her boyfriend and Arthur and this chap went down to the local village ... to do something — we were going to book in for a party that evening to have a meal in a restaurant there.

I remember when we came back, Royston, my daughter's friend, said, 'Everywhere Arthur went, he doesn't speak any Italian, but wherever he goes all of them say *Buona sera, padrone!...*' He is seen as "il padrone". He's got that kind of authority.

It's not just because he's rich...

But now recently in the last three or four years he's actually begun to paint in Italy. Because he's a serious painter, though he can always work in notebooks, he *likes* to have all of his stuff with him. And that means shipping a lot of stuff out. And so he's now set up a sort of studio in this Tuscan farmhouse and I think he's working out there. But he's gone from there back to Sydney.

Now Arthur was born in 1920, so he's 73, and I don't know whether there'll be very much more chance to collaborate. I think he and I are both — slowing down. In a sense perhaps we've done together what we were meant to do together. I mean, it's difficult to say.

MATTHEW POWER

Gesshoji

They're all dead here.
Each Darth Vader archway is the entrance to
a royal corpse. The laughing monks carved
on the doors were probably better prepared.
They serve tea. The leaves give up their spirits
at the back of your throat with a touch
of bitterness, which you forget with
sweet *azuki*. The leaves, though dead,
don't rot, but you do. Around the stone lanterns,
we sway like bamboo.

HENRY COGILL

Migrants meet in Centennial Park

At wet and ragged autumn dusk
I'll put on my Tasmanian Tiger-shirt
and run loping through the park.
I'll jog through gatherings of native trees
oddly set in a rolling carpet of turf,
to a tatty oak that feeds between ponds
of blue-green algae and gigantic carp.
Here, a stick waved overhead
might bring down a pair of wings
from any one of twenty species.

You lean on the oak's leeward side
while it sways, its leaves frantically busy.
You sway;
and your spine goes up and up
and ramifies, and a multitude of starlings
clings to your hair, hunkering down
on the uplift from a colder south,
and twittering about flight-paths, to India:
'Perhaps *this* year we'll gather up the generations,
and go back.'

Sydney's in a snarl all around the park
as the starlings take an experimental turn.
Let's stay a little longer,
because the clouds are turning pink,
and look at that! It's a Nosy Ibis,
wheeling with the flock.

My grandfather's watch

The old bird came in sometime
flying round from Holland or South Africa,
settling, briefly, on Sydney —
turned white and brittle
then flew up.

I chose his watch,
a beautiful heavy thing
which I wore with a 50-cent band of woven nylon
from the barber-shop.
It wound itself up
with an internal fly-wheel
whose impetus you felt
by walking with swinging arms.
It was waterproof, and for years I took it sailing
to count the seconds before the gun.
It got less use in winter,
lying quiet and dusty in a drawer—
giving me the pleasures of re-discovery,
of shaking it, of wiping the glass clean
and feeling the fly-wheel spin.
I knew that it could run for life;
and treasure even this,
though the thing itself one day vanished
from a bundle of cloth deposited on the beach,
while I naked swam.

Though only 60 when he died,
the man had seemed, to children anyway,
beyond any psychic pain—
someone obviously waiting to die.
We couldn't enquire into his stooping shoulders,
or his ironical smile.
For us, he just appeared,
perched himself in a high flat
we never entered, near the departure-point
of ferries.
Our parents had had some word
of his arrival,
and in pain and anger drew silence round him,
which children only partly penetrated:
for ferry-trips escorted by sea-gull-flocks
for Sunday visits to the Zoo
for fairy-floss, and a plastic yo-yo —
the best that money could buy.

DUNCAN RICHARDSON

Valete

Valete
the old boy dead
spread down the page
of the school magazine
replaced by lists of new boys
right margin justifed
whose eyes scarcely rub
the lines of quick fading print.
At least this way
your name's assured
of black / white reinforcement
at least three times
entry
departure
death.
Lord dismiss us with thy blessing
or not
as the case may be
the experience has been singularly
something
(supply your own adjective here)
this is a new age
freedom of choice is paramount
boys no longer have to wear
belts of a certain webbing
pulling your socks up
is a gesture to the old days
there's nothing left
in that particular corner
behind the lockers
or down on the oval
where mould grows
seniors park their cars.

The last dripping boy
has gone from the pool
the war cries die away
the mangrove shadows
around the school
creep in
to finish the day.

IAN TEMPLEMAN

A Knowledge of Politics

I watch you make gestures of friendship,
small movements, a hand on the shoulder,
whispering to a bent head, ear to lip,
confident as a husband and householder.

A feint of laughter ripples around you,
the shadow of voice disguised, a shyness
discarded as conversation provides a cue
for bold words assembled with shrewdness.

This intimacy wears gloves, neatly dressed
it fails to reveal fears a mother imposed,
or that a love the family has not blessed
may be furtive, reticent, remain unresolved.

Your masks are painted with polite charm,
an ambivalent smile allows you to discover
underground lives, a power used to disarm
critics, colleagues or a disappointed lover.

ANNA DOMBROSKI

Cat by Moonlight

Charlie came in while Carol was showering and turned on the light. "What are you showering in the dark for?" He slid back the shower door. He began to compare the costs and quality of the brushbox flooring at Mitre 10 and Swadlings. While he talked he pushed up the sleeve of his jumper and put his hand in to touch her waist. Carol liked his hand but didn't want to hear any more, wanting instead to let her thoughts unravel in quiet steamy darkness. Now cold air curled around the bathroom door and into the shower recess, and with it came the smell of earth from the kitchen.

"Is something wrong?" Charlie wiped his arm on a towel. He looked at her intently.

She shook her head. "I'm just talked out, that's all." Charlie nodded, shut the shower screen and went out, leaving the light on and the door ajar. She turned up the hot water.

Later they ate Turkish pizza, sitting in the doorway of the gutted kitchen, looking in at the exposed joists and bearers while Charlie pointed out which ones had to be replaced. The old tap looked strange sticking out over nothing. Where the sink cupboard had been, the wall was peeling and mouldy. Really they would have been better off getting a carpenter in to do the lot in a day. But Charlie liked to get his hands dirty. He had told her how much he'd enjoyed ripping up the floorboards. He was up again now, measuring the nearest joist. He frowned and scratched his hip with the stub of a pencil. "You're going great guns," Carol said and put down her piece of pizza, tired of take-away, and just plain tired.

Afterwards while she was lying down on their bed, browsing through a volume of Emily Dickinson's verse, Charlie came in and started fooling around with his tape. He measured her shoulder to her elbow and her hip to her knee.

"What are you doing, you nut?" She pushed him with her foot.

"Measuring you. In case I ever have to put you back together."

She had to smile. Charlie switched the TV on in the loungeroom and called out to her about the programmes he was watching. Carol didn't answer but he kept right on talking. In fact Charlie didn't really quit talking until his head hit the pillow. The last thing he said was, "I'm sore all over," and then he was out to it.

At first it was a relief to be lying in the cool quiet dark, her thoughts floating, but

gradually she felt more and more alert.

When she shifted onto her back, her eyes sprang open and scanned the darkness. During the ultrasound yesterday, she had been lying on her back in the dim room with the scanner inside her and a pad and pencil in her hands, writing the measurements as the doctor said them, and she had thought, "This is the last time."

Lately she worried about the drugs the doctor gave her. The papers she had to sign. Now worry thoughts tunnelled around her head. "The Brain has Corridors," Emily Dickinson wrote — and she wasn't wrong.

Charlie moaned and rolled backwards in his sleep. His shoulder felt heavy against her. She squeezed his arm, whispered, "I can't sleep." Charlie patted her thigh and rolled away from her, saying, "Think about somewhere nice."

She tried that; but everything was cast in a sinister shadow.

Tomorrow she would be a wreck at work.

She flung back the covers and made her way naked through the silent house. At the kitchen doorway she came to a halt. Moonlight poured through the curtainless window, illuminating the grid of bearers and joists before her. Cautiously she stepped down onto the nearest joist. Like the balance beam at highschool, she thought, only this old wood felt rough and splintered underfoot. She winced as her heel came down on a protruding nail. Then one more careful step brought her to the middle of the room and directly into the moonlight. Her body dipped in silver. She wondered that moonlight wasn't cool, as sunlight was warm.

Slowly she side-stepped along the bearer until she was opposite the bathroom doorway. It felt dangerous, this crossing at night. With her foot she tested the joist; it wobbled and she edged along to the next joist. After four slow steps, she was hugging the wall and the door architrave, pulling herself up sideways onto the doorstep.

The bathroom was awash with moonlight. She had a surreal feeling, as if she were walking into a dream. The bathtub shone seductively. She had a desire to lie down in it and bathe in moonlight.

From the toilet window she could see into their tiny garden. Splashed with the silver light of the moon, every leaf was clear. The tall white arum lilies looked as cool and elegant as sixties' brides. Charlie had picked a bunch of them yesterday and put them in a vase for her to come home to. He didn't know of their association with death.

She pulled away from the window. In her mind she still had the image of that pad of paper with the two columns of dimensions she had pencilled under the headings left ovary and right ovary. Now she wished she'd asked if the dimensions had been ideal.

After the smooth cold tiles of the bathroom, the timber joists felt rough beneath her feet as she slowly picked her way back across the kitchen. By the window, which was tall with six panes, three aside, she stopped, balanced on the middle bearer. Moonlight fell liquidly down her left side. Near her hip the tap jutted out over nothing. Below her, the earth was a dark musty pit. And she stopped there — midway across.

Directly outside the window, was the paling fence that divided the two terraces. Charlie had nailed a shelf to the fence for her to put plants on. She could see every leaf of the fishbone fern. One upright frond moved slightly, a mere shiver up its

ladder of leaves. Behind the pots, moving behind the palings, a shadow passed.

The shadow of what? Carol went closer to the window, pressed her cheek against the cold pane to see down the laneway between the wall and the fence. She heard a scratching sound on wood but nothing moved. She edged backwards along the bearer, turned and stepped along the steadiest joist, arms out for balance, and then once across, stood a moment listening, before she walked on through the loungeroom and started down the hall. She stopped at her study, deciding on the spare bed, and having felt under the blankets to check that the bed had sheets, she climbed in. Her legs stretched out between the cool cotton sheets of the single bed. From the next room came the sound of Charlie's breathing, a comforting rhythm in the heart of the house.

There was a buzzing past her ear. A blowfly bumbling about, hitting the walls. The room was small and she could hear the fly's progress around the room. "I heard a Fly buzz — when I died — ."

Moonlight pressed on her eyelids and opening her eyes she saw a shaft of silver light slanting into the room. It looked biblical, as if it might herald an angel. She got up to close the curtains but stopped when she saw the cat. The neighbour's cat, poised perfectly still on the paling fence, its brown and black back steeped in moonlight. This cat liked to walk along the fence between the two terraces, even crawling through the thorny bougainvillea. Charlie always chased it away. He hated cats; they killed native birds and lizards. She knew that, but she liked having this cat around. She was always finding it in some strange pose in the garden, still and unblinking, like an Egyptian statue.

The cat watched her from the fence and Carol admired its stillness. By the light of the moon, she could see the ragged silhouette of its fur, the grainy texture of the palings and the rough peeling bricks of the wall behind. Above this, moonlight lay like a sheet on the neighbours' iron roof. If she could paint, she would paint this still, moonlit image with its mysterious clarity. She would call the painting 'Cat by Moonlight'. It was something Henri Rousseau might paint.

Carol raised the window. "You and me, cat," she said to it. There was comfort in something else being awake. She opened the window wider and leaned out. The outside air felt cool like water on her chest. The cat crouched into itself, watching her through round eyes. Then Carol saw the heavy weight of its belly. The cat was pregnant. Carol stared at the cat and the cat stared back. A minute passed. Carol shivered, feeling cold now. She thought about unwanted kittens and feral cats hunting sugar gliders, and withdrawing her head, closed the window, drew the curtains and got back into bed. She heard the cat make its way along the fence, its claws scrabbling on the wood.

The Chinese herbalist whom Carol had been seeing, said once, "Some women come to me, they can't have a baby; the other women they don't want their baby" and she had laughed, seeing humour in this where Carol couldn't.

Carol turned onto her back. The blowfly had gone, but her head was like a TV that wouldn't stop. All those pages of risks and statistics, that she had read and reread. She pictured a tiny broom sweeping the floor of her mind, sweeping out all those thoughts, and after a time her mind slowed and she got that rocking feeling she often had when drifting into sleep, as though she were lying in the bottom of a rowboat on a quiet river. It was a lovely sensation, this gentle rocking.

The sheet suddenly lifted back. "I woke up and thought I'd lost you," Charlie said, climbing in. She moved back against the wall to accommodate him and his cold bum hit her lap. "There was this sadness," Charlie said and he sounded truly forlorn.

Carol curled into him, and ran her hand across the hair on his chest. She kissed his shoulder, pressing her nose to his skin. Charlie didn't sweat much; his smell was faint and attractive. Her hand stroked the fur pad on his belly and she thought of the cat, only its fur would be thick and sleek.

"I feel like someone's hit me all over with a wooden stick," Charlie moaned and then she could hear the air catching at the back of his mouth and she realised he was asleep and they were back where they'd started only now in a single bed. Except — except there was this image of the cat, a pregnant cat by moonlight, and she was slowly, carefully, painting its moonlit back and its swollen belly with a fine soft paintbrush on paper, and somehow she was lying in the bottom of the rowboat again, gently rocking, and the sun was pouring into the boat, warming her, while the boat drifted and rocked and the painting painted itself and there was nothing to worry her — nothing to stop her drifting now.

KATE TEMBY

Gender, power and postmodernism in *The Last Magician*

Janette Turner Hospital's *The Last Magician* both proposes a social critique and investigates the possibilities for narrative representation. The text's primary social concern is with the marginalisation that occurs as a result of the operation of oppressive power structures; my analysis of the novel will focus on gender-based marginalisation. A self reflexive, metafictional construct, the novel also consistently scrutinises the fabrication of artistic representation, consciously challenging the feasibility of mimesis. The narrative is self-consciously disordered and employs chaos theory as a metaphor for narrative structure.*The Last Magician* initially appears to achieve a synthesis of postmodernist politics and aesthetics, as the political concerns of the novel can be read as reflecting the "ethical dimension of postmodernism", for "in its celebration of the fractured, postmodernism is also a refusal of the dominant, an insistence that the otherwise marginalised or silent be heard too."[1] However, I will argue that the novel's self-conscious questioning and metafictional narrative form subvert the possibility of its providing a comprehensive or effective critique of oppressive power structures.

* * *

The Last Magician is a text which has an "obsession with the natures and varieties of power" (202). It engages in an analysis of power relations which posits power as a complex phenomenon, not reducible to being understood as a force that only dominates and subjugates. Those characters who live at the margins of the official world — the women, the child in the quarry, Charlie and Gabriel — all experience and are damaged by the exercising of official power. Yet the narrative claims that those on the margins are in turn able to exercise alternative kinds of power, which challenge that held by those of the official world. Thus *The Last Magician* contains a discourse on power which questions the relationship of the power of the centre to the power of the margins.

The theorising of power relations in *The Last Magician* can be analysed in Foucauldian terms. The claims that are made within the text about the complexity of

1. Ian Saunders, *Open Text, Partial Maps* (Nedlands, Australia: Centre for Studies in Australian Literature, 1993) 75.

power relations echo Foucault's insistence on this very complexity. Foucault maintains that "power must be understood ... as [a] multiplicity of force relations"[2] and that it "is constructed and functions on the basis of particular powers, myriad issues, myriad effects of power."[3] He claims that

> power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.[4]

Foucault's theory of power challenges traditional understandings of power as a centralised repressive force. He theorises that power is exercised rather than possessed, is not primarily repressive but productive, and operates at the lowest extremities of the social body, in everyday social practices.[5]

Power relationships within *The Last Magician* are presented as being always complex. However, the insistence on the complexity of power relations does not empower those who are marginalised, as although they are invested with "powers", they are ultimately denied any means of challenging the powers that emanate from the official world. The dominant forces in the text eventually destroy or effectively silence those who are oppressed, and are never called to account for the harm that occurs through their domination. Both the representations of marginalised people and groups and the understandings of power provided in the novel are ambivalent, as the marginalised are both oppressed and powerful, yet their power is impotent. It is evident that although the text advocates a complex understanding of the nature of the relations between different kinds of power, it finally presents a repressive model of power. *The Last Magician* is ultimately pessimistic about the possibility of the marginalised overcoming the power structures that oppress them, or transforming the conception of power that structures a hierarchical and oppressive society.

The character Cat operates as a site of intersection of different kinds of power within *The Last Magician*. The construction of her character problematises understandings of marginalisation and centrality, for although she has been marginalised, the answer to the secret of her absence lies at the labyrinthine centre towards which the text moves. As a child, Cat's oppression results from both her gender and her class. She is persecuted individually by other children, notably male children; and institutionally, within her school and by the judiciary. However, although Cat suffers from the imposition of institutional power, the text asserts that she too is powerful, and establishes tensions between different kinds of power, adopting a Foucauldian understanding of power as taking myriad forms.

> In its way, Cat's power was absolute; and yet people with a different sort of power ... despised the kind of power that Cat had, they snapped their fingers at it, they did not acknowledge that it was any kind of power at all. ... They ignored it because it made them uneasy, because it didn't acknowledge *their* kind of power (202).

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2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, (London: Allen Lane, 1976) 92.*
3. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977,* ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) 188.
4. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 93.
5. see Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault* (New York; London: Routledge, 1991) 21. Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 1989) 18.

Cat's possession of an alternative power is largely an assertion of Charlie's, who claims that she "is all powerful" (175). Her power is fundamentally different from the power of those who oppress her. It is ostensibly a liberating power, as it "came from not caring if you got hurt and not caring what other people thought of you" (202), and a power to critique the dominant, located in her ability to articulate the fact of their domination. Cat's power, however, is ambivalent, an ambivalence which is described within the text as "the mystery of its potency and its impotence" (208). The tension between these different kinds of power is established through the conflict between Cat and Robinson Gray. While Cat's power was one with which "[y]ou could *frighten* the ringmasters" (211), "[t]he trouble with Cat's kind of power, Charlie saw, is that there are people who develop a passion to break it" (211). This passion is held by Robinson Gray, and Cat's power is finally and tragically broken after the death of her brother, for which she is blamed. Cat is literally and symbolically silenced, prefiguring her later silence as victim of patriarchal violence at the hands of Robinson Gray. Although the text appears to present power as flowing from multiple places, and being operable from all levels in society, some forms of power are rendered impotent, and a centralised dominant form of power annihilates the protagonist who is claimed to hold alternative powers.

The representation of other women within *The Last Magician* also hinges on questions of power, centrality and marginalisation. An examination of these issues reveals an ambivalent attitude towards women, for the text critiques patriarchal systems that subjugate women, yet no woman is able to overcome these oppressive structures. The characters of Lucy and Catherine ostensibly survive the oppression which so savagely affects the lives of other women in *The Last Magician*. It is ironic that these women who survive are incapable of assisting the women who don't, an incapacity which is based on their complicity with oppressive power structures. Their refusal to name and acknowledge the crimes against women of which they are aware is the source of this complicity; Catherine through her constantly seeking "amnesia" (316), and Lucy through her refusal to identify her knowledge. Although there is some possibility for Lucy and Catherine to establish a socially critical voice in their decision to make a documentary about the quarry, their intention to speak is ironic as they ultimately "hang on to the lifeline of silence that connects [them]" (352). The depiction of women within *The Last Magician* is thus pessimistic, in that the women who survive do so at the price of being complicit in the destruction of other women.

The depiction of the transactions of prostitution within the text is a site of equally ambivalent attitudes toward women, as it is simultaneously presented as an area of exploitation and as providing women with a form of power. Ironically, the prostitutes' power is the source of their weakness:

> Upstairs at Charlie's Inferno the men are safe, and they sense it , for the very nature of the power of the women upstairs weakens the women. They are moved to pity. And are they also moved to contempt? Rarely, in fact. *This is what we are,* the daily singularities tell them. The women are moved to awe, they are often moved to a kind of fear. Ask not for whom the games are played, for whom the whips prepared. Upstairs the women are silent, keeping the secret of communal shame (116-117).

This silencing is characteristic of the mechanism by which women are controlled within the text. Many of the men who visit Lucy the prostitute are "tangled up with the law" (115), yet the judiciary is the primary example of dominating power structures in the text. The power of the prostitute, which allows her to remark "What a piece of work is man! How needy in all seasons, how infinite in abasement, in action how like a child" (116), is ultimately rendered ineffective.

Sheba, the barmaid and prostitute who introduces Lucy to the other world, is the woman in *The Last Magician* who most effectively interacts with the world on her own terms. Indicative of this is her insistence that she understands the way the world "works", her insight into patriarchal and oppressive structures, and her manipulation of them for her own purposes. She is the woman who is least prone to self-deception , describing herself by saying: "'I'm me. Sheba. I think the world stinks but I don't take crap from anyone and I know how to have a good time'" (326). Lucy's response to this captures the essentially ambivalent attitudes toward women within the text.

> "You're a feminist's nightmare, Sheba," I laugh.
> "Feminists," she says witheringly. "Don't give me feminists. I'll tell you how I know a feminist: they treat me like dirt. They treat me worse than any of the blokes do" (327).

It is ironic that the woman who achieves the most honest freedom within patriarchal structures is also a "feminist's nightmare". This is symptomatic of a text which too, is a feminist's nightmare, as women are either destroyed, silenced or subsumed into patriarchal structures. The ambivalent depiction of women in this novel is a manifestation of the conflicting ideas about power relations in a patriarchal society, and the difficulty that exists in any attempts to transform conceptions of power. Ultimately the text does not provide any woman with the means to effectively challenge repressive power structures.

* * *

The ambivalent presentation of power relationships within *The Last Magician* is intrinsically connected to the text's narrative form and structure. A text which is conspicuously concerned with the possibilities for and the politics of representation, *The Last Magician* interrogates notions of the "supposed transparency of representation",[6] by frequently acknowledging that representation is a constructed version of "the real". Through its self-reflexivity, it foregrounds what Linda Hutcheon describes as "many of the usually unacknowledged and naturalised implications of narrative representation."[7] The concern with acknowledging the processes of representation is typically postmodern, as Hutcheon explains: "postmodernism challenges our mimetic assumptions about representation ... assumptions about its transparency and common-sense naturalness."[8] This novel consistently asserts the impossibility of transparent and natural representation. Positing an unstable and disordered world, it theorises that any representation of this world must be equally

6. Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1989), 7.
7. Hutcheon, 35.
8. Hutcheon, 32.

unstable and disordered. This is largely achieved through its self-conscious narrative method, which consistently problematises notions of a coherent, stable and unified narrative self. An investigation of the text's narrative voice and narrative structure reveals that the text effectively challenges traditional understandings of narrative form, yet in doing so establishes unresolved tensions and paradoxes.

In *The Last Magician*, the 'I' of narration is problematised, conceptualisations of subjectivity are interrogated and notions of a coherent unitary self consistently destabilised. This is achieved through the self-conscious remarks of the narrator which present the self as being masked: "(I *myself*. What a riddle that is. Where in the grab bag of costumes and masks, does the self hide out?)" (56). The understanding of alternative selves as being present beneath masks is elaborated through Lucy's discussion of her working as a prostitute. She says that "(... Lucy, Lucy-upstairs-at-Charlie's-Inferno, was a costume I wore for several years ...)" (116). The problematic of the connection between subjectivity and narration is also presented when the narrator speaks of the changing understanding of the self through time. This denies any conception of a unitary subjectivity, as the persona of the narrator is fundamentally different to the character of the narrator that exists in the narrative past. The narrator says that

> (... [w]hen we watch the self on the screen of the past, we watch a stranger, but one for whom we have complicated feelings.
>
> I watch Charlie and myself in a room. I watch Gabriel and myself at Cedar Creek Falls, before either of us has met Charlie. I watch Charlie and Lucy, who is only myself in the most tenuous and convoluted way, and who was, in any case, acting the part of Lucy ...) (30-31).

That the self is layered and changeable, is a dominant assertion of the narrator of *The Last Magician*.

As well as destabilising narrative voice, *The Last Magician* deconstructs the possibility for the existence of an ordered, chronological and coherent narrative. This destabilisation and deconstruction is connected to the text's concern with issues of order and disorder, and to the conceptualisation of subjectivity presented in the text. The connection between disorder and subjectivity is partially evident in the manner in which the narration consistently switches between first and third person points of view. As the narrator is a changeable, unfixed entity, she is able to narrate the events of her past life in third person point of view, as if she were relating the life of a stranger. The shifting narrative point of view has further impact on the text, highlighting its constructed nature, in that the narrator makes conscious reference to the problematics of an omniscient point of view. In detailing Charlie's thoughts, for example, she points out the arbitrariness of the choice of narrative detail:

> [o]f all the possible moments, the one that came back to Charlie with a sick thump (so I choose to think now, from this from my vantage point) was the two of them in school uniforms (himself and the judge) going into Chang's Growers & Greengrocers on Newmarket Road in Brisbane, and there was Cat, as well as Charlie's own parents behind the counter (100).

The narrator also questions the possibility for omniscience when describing a reac-

tion of Gabriel's. "Under his quick surprised pain (but is that what it is? *is* it?) she digs at what might be a wound, but the power seesaws" (128). The alternating of point of view within the text also allows for the proliferation of narrative voices which complements the text's concern with the intersection of many different kinds of stories. Beneath this changing narrative point of view is a conceptualisation of a narrator who simultaneously and paradoxically operates as both a unifying and a destabilising force.

The question of narrative knowledge is also problematised within the text, as the narrator simultaneously asserts and denies her knowledge. She says that "I was after *knowledge* and I've got it" (282). Yet in the final pages she claims that

> [t]here are things we know. And there are things we don't realise we know. And there are times when we decide it is better not to find out what perhaps we unconsciously know. ... But I don't know anything. Nothing can ever be known for sure (348-349).

Whilst the narrator denies her ability to know, the text asserts a knowledge of the solution to its own mysteries. This simultaneous assertion and denial of knowledge is contradictory and defuses the narrator's claim of being an interpreter situated at the edge of the action. This contradiction becomes explicit in the image of the labyrinth, loaded as it is with concepts of an elusive centre. It is used to evoke the narrative path, which must wind its way through the labyrinth, seeking the centre which holds the answer to the riddle, the terrible answer to the secrets of the text. However, it is not an absence of answers that engenders the arduous journey to the centre of the labyrinth, but the impossibility of accepting the answers which on one level have always been known, yet which are consistently denied.

* * *

Hospital uses scientific models of chaos as a framework for the investigation of the relationship between order and disorder within *The Last Magician*. The premises of chaos theory ostensibly support the text's postmodernist project of undermining the possibility of an ordered authoritative narrative. However, the employment of chaos theory is problematic and contributes to the deep split between the ethical and philosophical concerns of the text.

Scientific models of chaos, which were initially formulated in mathematics and physics, and then developed from a wide interdisciplinary base within the sciences, challenge traditional scientific conceptions of order and disorder, which valorise order and the possibilities for classifying ordered (or linear) systems and regard disordered (or nonlinear) systems as aberrations, inconvenient deviations from linearity. As explained by N. Katherine Hayles, only recently has "nonlinearity been recognised as representative rather than exceptional."[9]

Chaos theoreticians made a dual and paradoxical discovery about the relationship between order and disorder. Firstly, it became apparent that simple systems (for example a swinging pendulum), which were believed to behave in an entirely predictable manner, could give rise to extremely complex behaviour.[10] Secondly,

9. N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 144.

new possibilities for describing order within complex systems were discovered. Within chaos theory, two different emphases on complexity exist. Nonlinear systems are understood either as being able to emerge into patterns of order, or as containing deep structures of order. Firstly, "chaos is seen as order's precursor and partner, rather than as its opposite. The focus here is on the spontaneous emergence of self-organisation from chaos."[11] The second appreciation of complexity emphasises the hidden order, patterns and structures that exist within chaotic systems. Hayles remarks that, "[t]he discovery that chaos possesses deep structures of order is all the more remarkable because of the wide range of systems that demonstrate this behaviour."[12]

A theorising of the connections between chaos theory and other areas of discourse which are re-evaluating complexity has been undertaken by Hayles, who has investigated how scientific theories of chaos are connected to literature, particularly to literary theories of poststructuralism and postmodernism. Similarities between chaos theory and contemporary literary theory are discernible in that they both challenge traditional ways of comprehending and ordering the world, especially the traditional notions of order and rationality. Hayles argues that both chaos and poststructuralism

> invert traditional priorities: chaos is deemed more fecund than order, uncertainty is privileged above predictability, and fragmentation is seen as the reality that arbitrary definitions of closure would deny.[13]

However, the question of the possible connections between chaos theory and literature is problematic, as is evident in the distinction, noted by Hayles, between the value attributed to chaos by literary theorists and chaos theorists. Literary theorists value chaos primarily because they are preoccupied with exposing the ideological underpinning of traditional ideas of order. They like chaos because they see it as opposed to order. Chaos theorists, by contrast, value chaos as the engine that drives a system toward a more complex kind of order. They like chaos because it makes order possible.[14]

The problematic nature of drawing connections between the two areas of discourse is also evident in Hayles' recognition that "[c]haos theory has a double edge that makes appropriations of it problematic for humanistic arguments that want to oppose it to totalising views",[15] as it both implies that the world is much more complex than is traditionally realised, and yet "attempts to tame the unruliness of turbulence by bringing it within the scope of mathematical modelling and scientific theory."[16] Because Hospital's *The Last Magician* investigates issues of order and disorder through explicit reference to the tenets of chaos theory, it becomes a site of intersection between the sciences and the humanities. It does not, however, escape the problems and paradoxes that characterise the interdisciplinary investigations and representations of chaos.

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10. James Gleick, *Chaos*, (London: Sphere, 1988), 41-44.
11. Hayles, 9.
12. Hayles, 10.
13. Hayles, "Chaos as Orderly Disorder," 314.
14. Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, 22-23.
15. Hayles, 15.
16. Hayles, 15.

Chaos theory is immediately identified as an important influence within *The Last Magician*, through one of the epigraphs to Book 1, in the quotation, "The first message is that there is disorder" (1), a remark attributed to James Gleick. Although this comment is to be found in his history of the chaos movement, *Chaos*, it is misquoted, actually being the words of the mathematician James Yorke:

> "The first message is that there is disorder. Physicists and mathematicians want to discover regularities. People say, what use is disorder. But people have to know about disorder if they are going to deal with it."[17]

This refers to the discovery by early chaos theoreticians that nonlinear systems are the rule rather than an exception. The use and attribution of this epigraph are interpretable as a desire to make an explicit reference to the science of chaos; ironically Gleick's name is perhaps more identifiable as being associated with chaos than Yorke's outside the scientific community. This epigraph leads to the immediate privileging of disorder within the text through a simplification of the implications of chaos. Yet the reference does not account for the notion that disorder, as theorised by scientists, is intrinsically linked to new conceptualisations of order as being present within, or arising from, complex systems.

Exploration of the tensions between order and disorder through reference to chaos within this text is evident in the narrator's comments about the search for meaning, about the possibilities for discerning a pattern in the apparently random events of life. She says that

> the very reason for telling stories (even to oneself) is to insist there is shape and meaning and direction in the messy flood that we find ourselves floundering in, the one that sweeps us up at birth and hurls us along, lumping us in with the flotsam and random event, making a pattern as it goes. Yes, it must make a pattern. We want to insist on that (299).

The reference to turbulent water flow is significant in terms of chaos, as turbulence is a characteristic nonlinear system which chaos theory seeks to reinterpret. This passage asserts that life is a complex system and that storytelling is an ordering mechanism which satisfies the desire for order and pattern to exist within this complexity. Also highlighted in this passage is the postmodern self-reflexivity of the text which consistently acknowledges its existence as a construction; questioning the tension between the desire for order, and the possibility of the achievement of an ordered or unified narrative. The exploration of the tension between order and disorder is a pervasive characteristic of *The Last Magician*, a text which is itself a complex system privileging notions of disorder, yet which paradoxically contains underlying pattern and order. *The Last Magician* simultaneously asserts the randomness and the chaotic nature of life, yet hints at deep organising structures of pattern and order.The *Last Magician* is simultaneously a disordered, fragmented and nonlinear narrative, and a detective story moving inexorably toward solution.

The appropriation of scientific theories of chaos within *The Last Magician* provides a fascinating challenge for the reader. It enables an understanding of the

17. Gleick, 68.

text as a complex system, and interweaves well with the postmodernist and post-structuralist theory which underpins other aspects of the novel. However, the use of chaos theory does become problematic, as the text appears to privilege disorder without fully acknowledging the new possibilities for conceptualising order within chaos. Ironically, *The Last Magician* also exhibits the deep structures of order which it ostensibly undermines as it moves toward the solution of its mysteries.

* * *

The insistence on a disordered narrative, demonstrable through the conscious destabilisation of narrative voice and structure, and the reliance on chaos theory, is intrinsically problematic within a text which has a prevailing ethical concern with the politics of marginalisation.

The world that the text posits is highly disordered, fragmented, and unstable, with shifting boundaries. The text establishes the impossibility of an unproblematic narrative representation of this disordered world. While the narrative depiction of the worlds of *The Last Magician* appears to be a challenging and satisfying manifestation of contemporary postmodernist theory, a questioning of its politics reveals the text to be a paradoxical and contradictory construction, exposing deep chasms between its political and theoretical concerns. Apparently proposing an emancipatory politics in its writing of the marginalised into the centre of the text, it actually enacts further marginalisation. This is particularly evident in the ambivalent representation of the women characters of the text. Although the text questions a hierarchical and repressive model of power, there is a pervasive pessimism about the possibility for those who are marginalised to effectively challenge powerful hierarchies. The impossibility of this text providing a comprehensive emancipatory politics is partly a product of the text's theoretical concerns. The narrative form and structure, and the pervasive references to chaos theory indicate the text's preoccupation with the indeterminacy of meaning. However, the indeterminacy which underpins a postmodernist narrative methodology is problematic in a text which exhibits a subtextual determinism as it moves towards the resolution of its mysteries. Although the narrator feigns equivocation about this resolution, it is nevertheless unquestionably a resolution. *The Last Magician* is a text which resonates with the deterministic principles which it attempts to deconstruct.

The cumulative effect of these methodological problematics is the dissipation of the guilt that is recognised and yet ignored within the novel. Guilt is clearly attributed at the novel's close, yet the guilty are not called to account. The terror at the labyrinth's core is exposed within the narrative, yet those who gain knowledge of it are either destroyed or silenced. Although the narrator has managed to chart a path into the heart of the labyrinth, and is presented with the knowledge of the horror at its core, she refuses to accept this knowledge. She does follow her thread out of the labyrinth, and is ostensibly unscathed, yet by denying herself knowledge, she denies herself power.

ROSE VAN SON

Inside Out

A child lies in a tiny room. Rain stops her outside fun. Inside her view is blotted by cloud — a falling mist.

Paint, her mother says, paint.

And she paints — with just a small brush on the misted canvas. She stands on the low window ledge and paints, slowly at first then faster, quickening her breath; fearful the canvas will close together and smudge, or worse: that the pages will tear and damage the work before she is done.

FIRST CANVAS:

The child paints in the sun, the sea, the rippling water's edge. She paints in the name: *Siderno-by-the-sea, Reggio. Cal.* She paints the colours of Late Summer, dimmed blues, brushed greens and whites so bright that they hurt the eyes to see:

My feet remember the feel of sand through the pebbles. Every grain familiar, comfortable, like a favourite cardigan. Handy to throw over the shoulders on a chilly evening or for going on solitary walks along a beach in the early morning. I carry my sandals. Gerrard walks beside me, above me, behind. I count pebbles in the sand. 114 in this square alone. Alone my Mother is waiting. My feet struggle to find a footing in the sharp stones.

SECOND CANVAS:

The girl cleans her brushes, washes out blues and greens. In their place she paints Winter's Colours: autumn tones, rich brown/orange hues, and leaves, many many leaves — their grip lost like a traveller on a stormy night walking barefoot on grass, tempted to stop, but she takes the small brush and paints:

For Today has not happened yet. Today is the future of Then. When you take me late one wet night to the shed where you keep the rat poison. You wave the flash-light about. And there it is — in the centre of the room painted yellow with light!

The copper — useful up until a decade ago to bottle thick juice from Roma tomatoes; thick juice from the tomato vine — thick salsa for matriciana, for *sugo* for Communion and Christmas. In the light of Today I see what you see, a jewel treasured from Then. Then, when you made sauce together: you cut the soft tomato flesh with a sharp knife; he tightens the machine's clamps on the edge of the new laminex table and methodically feeds the tomatoes in. And, together, you push.

The copper catches your flow, fills the warm bottles, mixes just the right balance of fire and water.

I take hold of one side of the copper's lipped edge. It is light she says, as she takes the other. The copper's empty basin brings us together: the closest we have been since the winter before last. *Yes, it is light,* I murmur, and its lightness weighs on my mind like fog as we make out way out of the dark.

In the light I see marks. Colours of black, moss green, some red. Colours of early mornings and perspiration. Colours of party balloons and white Communion dresses.

Not a mark on it, she says. We boiled the sheets in this. We hung them to dry, the stains gone. We made sauce, the sauce eaten, the empty bottles we stacked at the side of the shed.

THIRD CANVAS:

Summer colours splashed on with a brush: yellow sunflowers, purple eggplants, prickly pears painted a deep, deep green, with firm strokes like fashionable plates. Fashionable wine. Red and green ribbons.

In Paris it snows, John says. Christmas in France is much like here, he says, very much family. We begin with the salmon, then turkey, hot, of course, then ham. The fire is important. It is a necessity but sets the atmosphere too.

Marilyn has a round table discussion on what to do this Christmas. Her brother-in-law threatened them with an axe the week before last so Christmas may be a day on the beach. Any beach — Cottesloe or Port — as long as it is a long way from home.

Maria washes eggplants then stuffs them with garlic, breadcrumbs and beef. Just a little, she says, is important. Scrub well then scoop out the centre, paint on a little oil, some salt and let drain. Fill them with juice then layer with a tomato and chilli sauce, bake for a few minutes. An essential accompaniment to chicken and potatoes or a plate of hot pasta. And she laughs — her belly bouncing in the heat of the day.

We sit at the table set with red and green ribbons. My sister has brought her new husband for dinner this year. Christmas at home is a simple affair he says, mostly roast lamb and potatoes. A present or two from the farm. The child watches him eat — his mouth wide at each stroke. The Mother wears a blue apron. The Father

already asleep in his chair.
He's had enough, Mamma, can't you see?

FOURTH CANVAS:

A child stands in an empty room.

Paint, her mother says, paint.

She paints still life. Portraits of olives and wine. Portraits of empty houses with doors opening onto the street; of cobbled streets and women in black. Portraits of eyes and juice dribbling down his chin. She paints a fabric thick with mist in the coming rain.

PRIYA KALNINS

After Dinner

Walking in the rain with a one-shoe baby
tucked under one arm,
and a half-drunk bottle of wine
in the other hand

The goodness of women in my thoughts
and words words words
to be breathed in and out.
What do words do to us?
Inflating and deflating us,
as if we were a leaky air-mattress
blown up by a short-winded camper
again and again in the night.

STEPHEN GILFEDDER

Coastwatcher

For Michael and Jane L'Estrange

In a borrowed and bare weekender room,
out of season, with the permanent
make-shift curtains and sandpaper lino
caused by a generation of kids
trooping in from the beach, I take
my first waking breath in a child's bunk
in a sunless lightening before five,
having swapped with my youngest
sometime in the night the warmth
of the slack-mattressed parents' bed.
Before the others wake I go to sit
on the weathered deck next to the blackened barbecue
and celebrate my forty-fifth, already celebrated,
with an orange juice, shaken not stirred,
lording it over the now pathetic lines of surf
which ran all night like the traffic
outside the flat we once had in Barkers Road.
Watching the seagulls ride
on the grey folds of the morning swell
and its silver current trails,
waiting for the tide to turn,
I count the first of the procession
of grim-faced retirees powerwalking back the youth
mortgaged to the mortgage and the children.
My latest middle-aged pas de deux
with death does not bear comparison
with those like Len next door who has survived
in his terms with his dicky ticker,
garden shears chained to the wheelchair,
half a dozen operations under the belt.
The rip that took me from my wife's outstretched hand
yesterday making one or other of us God

had her shouting *go with the current*
and *you've always gone too far.*
The birthday boy wouldn't be telling you this
unless I had regained my footing, angled
against the surging undertow,
half embracing the stranger other half,
one contact lens washed away,
stumbling as a conquistador of life
onto a foreign shore, seeing the landscape anew,
including flags at the far end of the beach.
Left to get on with it, the all clear
only sounds like a timer on delay
a day later, the rising siren call
of my two year old blares across the bay
leaving me the lifesaver one final act,
hurriedly throwing charred meat scraps to the birds.

TOM BISHOP

My Father in His Element

Jupiter Pluvius rollicked, bashed the boards and called
for more wine. My father, jovial after tennis,
skips for his hoard of bottles in the garage,
rootles around the clanking red amphorae and
emerges shuffling like a mock-gorilla,
makes a monkey-face and waves the spoil
of some forgotten vintage: "that's the drop!"
Downing the dregs and shelling out the peanuts,
he takes off for the shower; banging tennis grit
out of his shoes, he stops to eye
how that Lobelia's not doing too well
or to lament once more
his pitiful but brave azalea sticks,

or cocks a look up at the
Sophora tetraptera,
rolling its name around inside his mouth
like an old port, thinking how his father
planted its parent tree cut down long since.
In the early December morning,
the sun already raging at the glass,
he plaits his Christmas tie:
tiny smiling Santas, but just one
smack in the middle has his pants down
and presents his rump. My father
pokes his tongue at us from behind the wheel
and guns his roaring beast off down the drive
towards the work of days and latexed hands,
uncorking babies with his practised air
of courtesy, a genial magician.
His mother says he was more serious once —
now his roses spread themselves less wide
than his grin at dinner, though his dreams
can still be shivered by a throng of demons
homing to attack. It's years of nights
he's learned to rise and dress and hit the street
to grapple generation's blacker shapes
with his wide gardener's hands.

ANDREW BURKE

Elegy for my Mother
(Hilda Mary Burke, 1912-1993)

Two 'With Sympathy' cards today
among our cheery Chistmas mail.
My mother died last Tuesday;

a mixed blessing, the nurses say.
Mixed? Yes, she had grown so frail.
Two 'With Sympathy' cards today —

some must read that list each day.
Death danced across our trail
when Mother died last Tuesday.

At her wake there was much to say
about sport, weather, and local ale.
Two 'With Sympathy' cards today —

now the undertaker wants his pay.
Behind a cloud the moon is pale.
My mother died last Tuesday.

A mixed blessing, so they say:
God's daughter's death, a nativity tale.
Two 'With Sympathy' cards today,
my mother died last Tuesday.

Mortality

I

Rushing like an ambulance
to the Casualty Ward at
Royal Perth Hospital our car

stalls and drops its clutch
on a hill at a Stop sign,
me not able to push

in my breathless panic,
the fear that drove us
this far, wife, daughter

and me. The tall cathedral
lurches between us
and the hospital, we walk slow-

ly around, derelicts dreaming
in greystone shadows, leaves
locked in chicken-wire cages,

mortality so much
a presence I suck air
like a desert wind,

then enter
air-conditioned Casualty.

II

We wait. My panic
leaps inside me in this
chapel of victims —
street girl cursing in
her blunt tongue; cops
like store mannequins,

their case losing
too much blood,
eyes spinning ...

A tow truck hooks up
our car, tows it away.
I lie back amongst

masks and gases.
This scene's a clip
from a madhouse movie —

yet who would think
to play these cops
just so, standing,

waiting, missing
their free burgers,
shaping their anger

amongst
the angst of others.

III

I am towed now,
scanned, and parked.
A toothless crone

lies beside me
mouthing soundless air,
thrashing at her belts,

one hand free
jerking like
a dying fish's fin.

I see my mother
new to her coffin,
thrashing, hands

ripping the lining,
her soundless mouth
opens and shuts.

'Taxi!' I scream,
laughing, 'Taxi!'

ANDREA SHERWOOD

On Arrival

When she arrived
she had two days off
then started work, fitting
and snipping.
Her Uncle said you're so lucky
sadness is a privilege
not a right.

At the hostel
she missed her mother,
her sound, talk
on the table.
Some things fell apart
inside her head,
or in the factory

she sliced flesh
into fabric, as fitting
as fact.
Her emotions sewn to perfection
so smooth
nothing could match

or be similar.
She sent her pay back
until her sister arrived.
She could survive too,
but didn't want to.
Her Uncle said, as though everyone
could put things together
and pull them apart
at the same time
and smile.

LAU SIEW MEI

Hunting the Squonk

He stands watching me, as he pretends to be absorbed in feeding the fish. The silence shrieks. Perhaps it is a cricket in a rainy night. Gently, he breaks the glass cage which holds me and speaks.

We'll try again tonight, hmm? he says.

But I am silent in a secret realm which I have shut him out of. My ear listens, but the passage for the words to emerge has long since snapped. He gives up. Tonight, perhaps, we will hunt the squonk again. In a time before this, when all I thought I would need was enough love. He takes my hand and we stare at our faces bouncing back to us from the glass of the fish tank.

I am torn with the racking pain of loving him and knowing that I fail, that I would always fail and that I stand alone as always, not knowing why I cannot be born into this world.

When Confucius' mother bore him in her womb, the spirits of five planets brought her an animal which spat out a jade tablet on which these words were written: Son of mountain crystal, when the dynasty crumbles, you shall rule as a throneless king.

When I was a small child, my mother told me she had a dream the night before I was born. It had to do with the ancient Chinese story of the celestial stag. In her version, the stag thought it had to cross the water to reach home, but upon touching land, it turned into a pestilent smell. My mother did not live to tell me what she thought I should do with such an omen behind my birth. I knew however that to survive and for me to eventually bring a child into the world myself, I would have to find the squonk.

I touch my face in the mirror. I say, I will find you someday.

I have rejected this world and its ways because they cannot fulfil me, yet I see nothing as yet. Sometimes it is important not to know but to trust in God who is so much bigger and wiser than me. Soul Ancestor One says, Live in awareness. Soul Ancestor Two says, The way of men is vulgar, the way of heaven sublime. Soul Ancestor Three tells me I have forgotten to light the incense sticks under its portrait again and that plucked boiled chicken would not do as an offering. I throw out the chicken. My soul ancestors annoy me, but it is good to respect them because there is much we do not understand in this world and the one who engages in the worldly realm finds the world spins very well without him.

I say, stand up, sit down, curl up and die. Hold your breath and remember how to breathe. I draw in my breath, once, twice and realise that if I do not remember, I do not breathe. Breathe in, breathe out. The way of the breath tells me how to follow the path to my diaphragm. I contemplate the centre of my being. I wake in the mornings to the warm breath of his body beside mine. I let the sun slip one moment, two, past the window and reach out to hold him.

Perhaps the place to start is with the squonk, without which I would never bear him a child and that is what he wants.

In between times, I have been reading about it. The squonk is of a retiring disposition, generally travelling about at twilight and sundusk. Because of its misfitting skin covered with warts and moles, it is always unhappy and weeps constantly. Hunters track it down by its tear-stained trail. It may dissolve itself into tears when cornered.

He says, Half the time, I don't know what you're on about.

I curl up in bed, looking pleased with myself. I am surrounded by ghosts and demons, I say. I even married one.

He says, Why do you lie in bed all day doing nothing?

I say that as long as I have done so, I have been happy.

When three Fosters a day Steve asked me to marry him, after he was seduced by a course in Asian studies, I was too lazy to object. And I have been happy, as long as he did not bring me around to meet his friends.

The man has eyes of a snake. I tell myself not to be silly. You do not trust him because of his eyes. Yes, that is it. Against the hard blank of specious remarks, each hypocrisy winds up like smoke, a comma across my page.

So difficult, isn't it? she says, her eyes widening a little. Behind her words she is telling me, how brave I am, how I defied convention. I refuse to say it. I am frankly bored. It is too much the trend today to defy, I could tell her, most of us don't even understand the value of what we defy.

He says, Come again. If you need us to pick you up. A little matter of transportation? He is kind, of course. But his eyes wink lazily, like a reptile's tongue. I shudder and say, Very kind, indeed, yes.

And always they look at you determined to be kind. You smile very well, they say. Were you taught how to? Do they all smile like you over there? How long have you lived here? he says. Do you have any friends?

She screws up her face in an attempt to be brave, so sad, my children, it is my fault, Eurasian. I brought them up this way and now they are confused, the father wanted to arrange a marriage for my daughter, but (adding proudly) she ran away — to Germany. How wonderful. Such initiative. How old may I ask is your daughter? She's 26 this year. Studied music. Ah, yes.

Meanwhile, out of the back of my head, I see him go from one to two to three and losing count, so many, so many, you want to live don't you? he says and tipples. The litres filter down.

And so from one to two to three easing himself, regardless of sanctity. What was that you said?

— Sanctity.

— Thought the word was out of use.

I am tired. I look into the man's eyes. He is stoned.

— Bagwan Sri Rajneesh, he mutters, you have to read him.

— Heard he was a fake, I say, shortly.

— Oh, no. He was the master. Those were lies spread about him, he says, yellow saffron smiling, hare krishna white, understanding the profundities of life. Or what he wants to see into it.

I am feeling desperate. I have to look for the squonk and the time is running out. He may dissolve into tears before I get to him, before I can ask him to weep at my death.

Her voice is loud, calling for attention.

— My son has a deficiency. The doctor has put him on pills. He is much better now. It has to do with the chemicals in his brain. Before going on the pills, he was absolutely wild, he would call us by four-letter words and throw things around.

— May I ask how old is your son?

— He's five.

— Aah, five. A good age to be psychoanalysed, I say.

I saw a programme on television, I say, interrupting, telling old people how they could beat this horrible disease called ageism. They got the old people jumping up and down in leotards shouting, I am not old. It's all in my mind.

But she is looking at me, suspicion awakening. I look back, eyes guileless, widening.

I start the car and he says to me, I don't understand you, sleepily. Why are you showing that black face for?

I mimic him. I say, I don't understand you.

He says, You are tired.

I say, Yes, of course I am. It's tiring.

What is? he says.

Just, I say.

He says, My parents loved you. They all did.

I say, Yes, ah.

Never mind, he says, and takes my hand.

I tell him the story of the celestial stag on our way home. It thought it had to cross the water to reach home, but on touching land, it turned into a pestilent smell.

I smile, china doll smile, watching and waiting, on the alert. He comes home, finds the charred remains of a chicken lying in front of the picture of Soul Ancestor Three. I wait for him to explode.

— What's this? he says.

— Just a chicken, felt like cooking a chicken.

— I can see it's a chicken, but what is it doing on the dining table with (he peers at it) this portrait, um, of your, um?

— It's called ancestor worship, I say.

— Ancestor worship! (now he gets riled) My foot! What do you know of that? Stop playing your stupid games, he says. You just want to get back at me, don't you? Because you didn't have a good time last night.

He looks tired suddenly. I pick the chicken up slowly and hurl it out of the room. We do not speak. I go to the kitchen to heat up the evening's meal. He clears the table. We sit, share a cup of coffee and eat. Thereafter, he feeds the fish.

The squonk waits, tears endlessly pouring down its face as usual. For the time being, we do not look at it.

SUBHASH JAIRETH

The 'I' in Sally Morgan's *My Place*: writing of a monologised self

Sally Morgan's autobiographical narrative *My Place* is hailed as a milestone in Aboriginal literature and is regarded by some as a prime post-colonial text in Australian literature. Like other Aboriginal writing, of which biographies and autobiographies seem to be significant genres, it is generally read in the context of the search by Aborigines to define and proclaim an Aboriginal identity. *My Place* is given the credit of creating "a new space within Australian literary culture for discovery of Aboriginality and for repudiation of all that has obliged its invisibility and silence."[1]

In less than ten years since its first publication, *My Place* seems to have found its place in the list of canonical texts studied in the departments of Literature and Australian and Cultural Studies in Australia and abroad. It is also popular with the 'general' reading public, and perhaps that is why *The Australian Magazine* referred to it as: "one of the most significant milestones in Aboriginal literature that traces Morgan and her family's search for their true identity."[2]

A number of indigenous and non-indigenous critics, however, have criticised the nature of Aboriginality asserted in *My Place*. For instance, Bain Attwood finds it "inherently problematic."[3] Jackie Huggins, in a rejoinder to Bain Attwood's article, "detests the imposition that anyone who is non-Aboriginal can define my Aboriginality for me and my race", but agrees with Bain Attwood on the problematic nature of Aboriginality constructed in *My Place* and that "Morgan's Aboriginality is forged throughout the creation of the text rather than the reverse".[4] Does this mean that Sally Morgan, who chose to write an autobiography, should have found some 'extra-textual' mode to forge her Aboriginality, or do they want Sally Morgan to become an Aboriginal person first and then produce a text which could be called an Aboriginal text? It seems that Bain Attwood and Jackie Huggins are reading *My Place* strictly from within the time-space of Sally Morgan — the person. In doing so they prioritise

1. Tim Rowse, "The Aboriginal Subject in Autobiography: Ruby Langford's *Don't Take Love to Town*", *Australian Literary Studies*, 16, (1993) 14.
2. *The Australian Magazine*, September 17-18 (1994) 302.
3. Bain Attwood, "Portrait of an Aboriginal as an Artist: Sally Morgan and the Construction of Aboriginality" *Australian Historical Studies* 99 (1992), 302.
4. Jackie Huggins, "Always was Always will Be", *Australian Historical Studies* 100 (1993), 459.

biographical details of Sally Morgan which are available to them either in the text or outside it, and then question the nature of Sally Morgan's Aboriginality.

In questioning certain aspects of readings of *My Place* I wish to ask how valid it is to read literary texts only from within the time-space of the author? Should an autobiography also be read only within the time-space of its author? I tend to agree with Mikhail Bakhtin, according to whom, "even when a person writes an autobiography or an honest confession, he as a creator of the work remains outside the world portrayed in it. If I tell or write about an event that happened to me, I as a narrator or a writer am locked outside that time-space in which the event happened... To equate absolutely one's own self with that 'I' about whom I am narrating is as impossible as it is to lift oneself by pulling one's own hair."[5]

In *My Place*, as in all autobiographies, the author has created a protagonist based on herself, and although the two selves might be very close to each other they are not identical. Because the text is framed and circulated like an autobiography, readers are asked to draw parallels between the author and the self constructed in the text, but this does not mean that this is the sole or the most significant function of this text. In this article, I explore the way the author has created herself as the 'hero' of this narrative. For this purpose, I shall use the Bakhtinian notion of the self as authored by the other (the author). I shall argue that in *My Place* the author has created a monologised, rounded and essentialised subject out of her own self. In my reading the narrative seems to be inspired by the liberal humanist discourse on subjectivity, and overlooks the messiness and fragmentary nature of one's subjectivity. This reading is situated within Bakhtinian discourse and will use a number of other Bakhtinian notions such as 'dialogism', 'chronotope' and 'heteroglossia'.

The chronotopes in *My Place*

In "The Forms of Time and The Chronotopes in The Novel" Mikhail Bakhtin has shown that literary narratives not only re-present historical time, space and human subjects but in doing so they use specific forms of time and space to structure themselves. Bakhtin uses the concept of the 'chronotope' (literally time-space) to discuss the narrative structure of literary texts, and to describe their relation with extra-textual reality.

The chronotope represents the "essential connectedness of temporal and spatial relations artistically assimilated in literature" (121). At the level of an individual text, literary chronotopes are shown to function as plot-constitutive and time-visualising devices. As a plot-constitutive device they operate as "organisational centres of the main events in the plot of a novel", where "the knots of a plot are tied and untied" (282). Such is, for instance, the chronotope of the "ball-masquerade" room in many nineteenth-century Russian novels (e.g *Anna Karenina*) or the chronotope of the path in seventeenth-century European picaresque novels (e.g *Don Quixote*). As a time visualising device chronotopes provide space in which the time and the world re-presented in the text find their most visual portrayals. In a chronotope, "time acquires a palpable and visual character; the plot-constitutive events in a chronotope become concrete, and take on flesh, and are filled with blood" (282).

5. Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes on Historical Poetics" *Literary and Critical Essays* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1986), 288.

In *My Place* the events are set in different types of public spaces such as: hospitals, schools, pubs, boarding houses, colleges, universities, and Aboriginal reserves. However, the main events unfold in a private house and Aboriginal reserves. They are the main plot-constitutive devices (chronotopes) of the narrative. An interesting point to note is that the house where the family lives is not strictly private because it is part of the public housing, and Daisy Corunna — the grandmother — lives there with a constant fear that her family might be evicted at any time. This fear imparts a feeling of placelessness to this private space. Its privateness is limited and conditional. Thus this public-housing home and other so-called institutionalised spaces function as the most appropriate sites for re-presenting the lives of its protagonists. It is hard to imagine that the life stories of Aboriginal people can be told without using these actual, real-life chronotopes.

But the most interesting chronotope of this narrative is that of 'place': 'My Place' or 'Our Place'. It functions as the dominant metaphor for the narrative and reminds the reader of another very common literary chronotope: the 'path'. According to Bakhtin, "the metaphorisation of the 'path' in phrases such as 'life path', 'to step onto a new path', 'the historical path' results from the fact it 'becomes the place where events occur' and 'the time seems to be poured into it and flows through it creating its own tracks'"(276). The functioning of the chronotope of the place as a metaphor in *My Place* can also be attributed to its capacity to make the past, present and future times palpable and visual.

The narrative is entitled "My Place" and not "My Time(s)" although the intention of the narrative is to re-present the biographical time and space of its protagonists. It can be argued that the 'place' in the title "My Place" represents both the spatial and temporal location of its protagonists in contemporary society and in history, where history is understood as a narrative unfolding spatially and temporally. The spatial and temporal aspects of this chronotope are also visible in the painting used on the cover of the 1987 edition. In this painting, a number of houses are connected by a meandering path marked by arrows in a clock-wise direction. This path might represent the chronotope-motif of 'path' or 'journey', which is one of the dominant motifs of the narrative, but can also be read as a representation of temporality itself. In this way, the two-dimensional structure of the painting acquires an additional dimension, that of time. This could mean journey-time as well as narrative-time: the time in which the narrative of writing a narrative — the book of family history which Sally Morgan is writing — is told, and identities are discovered and constituted. However, there is a distinct difference between this chronotope and the chronotopes of the house, the hospital or the reserve. If the latter have some physical although fictional presence, the chronotope of the 'place' seems to be the chronotope of absence. Its presence or reality is ensured by the desire associated with it; that is, it locates its presence in the aspirations of the protagonists.

Heteroglossia in *My Place*

The notion of heteroglossia (*raznorechie*, literally "varied speechness") reflects Bakhtin's emphasis on the understanding of language not as an abstract system (*langue*) but as a mode of social interaction: language as something which is always layered and differentiated into "linguistic dialects" and "social and ideological languages" by the way it is spoken by social groups, professional groups, genres,

generations, classes, and areas. Bakhtin denies the existence of any unitary, normative language. According to him, "a unitary language is not something which is given but is always in essence posited, and in its every moment of linguistic life is counterpoised to the real heteroglossia."[6]

The novel, according to Bakhtin, is "an artistically organised social heteroglossia" (76). In "Discourse in the Novel" Bakhtin discusses various compositional forms through which social heteroglossia is introduced and organised in the novel, such as: author's speech, the speeches of the narrator, the speeches of the protagonists, and the inclusion in the novel of genres such as confessions, letters, diaries, drama and poems. Bakhtin also discusses devices employed by novels to create heteroglossia such as stylisation and parodic stylisation, variation, and hybridisation. In Bakhtin's opinion, intentional hybridisation and hybrid constructions are the most effective means of introducing dialogised heteroglossia in a novel. Hybridisation, according to Bakhtin is "the mixing of two social languages in one utterance. It is the meeting of two different linguistic consciousnesses in the arena of an utterance" (170). In a hybrid construction one can locate "two consciousnesses, two voices, two accents" (171), and "two different outlooks on the world" (172).[7]

In *My Place* heteroglossia is introduced through the voice of the narrator which interacts with and is refracted through the dialogues of various protagonists. It provides a context for their speech acts and in its turn is affected and contextualised by them. However, the incorporation of three testimonies represents the most significant basis of heteroglossia in the narrative. Though these testimonies are framed within the main autobiographical narrative they are presented as relatively independent voices. Their independent status is also highlighted by not including them as chapters of the main narrative. Apart from some footnotes and titles at the beginning of each testimony, they do not include direct comments from Sally Morgan, the principal narrator. However, the narrators of these testimonies sometimes make direct references to Sally Morgan. For instance, Arthur Corunna in the final part of his story remarks: " ... I got Daisy's grand daughter writin my story" (213). But the most intriguing aspect of these testimonies is their isolation from each other. They do not interpenetrate each other, although narrators often appear as protagonists in each other's testimonies.

The separateness of testimonies from the main autobiographical narrative seems to have two opposite effects. On the one hand it gives them the status of independent voices although they are framed within the main narrative physically — being a part of the same book — and narratologically, because Sally Morgan's main narrative represents the story of obtaining, recording and writing them. But this relative independence also keeps them excluded from the dialogised framework of the novel. They are unable to help in the creation of a dialogised totality of the novel and participate in it. If one were to use Bakhtin's expression, the 'language' of one testimony is not completely 'visible through' or 'illuminated' by the eyes of other languages, such as the language of Sally Morgan's narrative and the language of other testimonies.

6. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", *The Problems of Literature and Aesthetics* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1975), 83-84.
7. There isn't enough space to discuss in detail the notions of heteroglossia and hybridisation in this article. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson provide an interesting and critical discussion of these notions. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

But perhaps the most interesting aspect of the testimonies is the presence of hybrid constructions which are absent in the main narrative. These hybrid constructions are more common in Daisy Corunna's Story than in Arthur's or Gladys' stories. Sally Morgan herself draws attention to the shift in the language in Daisy Corunna's story when she notes that Daisy Corunna "could speak perfect English when she wanted to, and usually did, only occasionally dropping the beginning or ending of a word. But in talking about the past, her language had changed" (351). Here is one interesting example of a hybrid construction in Daisy Corunna's Story:

> Aah, white people make you laugh the way they beat the native to teach him not to steal. What about their own kids? I seen white kids do worse than that and no one touches them. *They say, he's sowin' his oats or that kid got the devil in him,* but they not belted. Poor old blackfella do the same thing, *they say you niggers don't know right from wrong* and they whip you! I tell you, this is a white man's world (337) (*emphasis added*).

The above text is principally in the voice of Daisy Corunna, but within that voice other voices and speeches can be heard distinctly. The first sentence foregrounds the ironic intonation which pervades the whole text. The question in the second sentence can be read as a rejoinder. The fourth sentence (note the italicised part) sees the introduction of "some one else's" speech which represents reported speech but is not included in quotation marks. The words "they say" are not the only indicator of it being some one else's speech. The sentence includes popular English phrases, through which the language of the colonising 'other' shows its presence. However, this language or speech of the 'other' is not presented as such, but is refracted through Daisy Corunna's speech, which can be seen in the way the phrase "he sows his wild oats" is shortened. A similar mixing of speeches is seen in the next sentence, where Daisy Corunna's "poor old blackfella" turns into "you nigger" in the speech of the 'other'. The final sentence in which the words "I tell you" foreground Daisy Corunna's speech along with the first sentence frame the speech of the colonising 'other' within Daisy Corunna's speech. In this way, through the presence of a hybrid construction the space of Daisy Corunna's utterance becomes an 'arena' where not only two speeches interpenetrate each other but two 'world outlooks' and two value systems come face to face.

Monologised self in *My Place*

In spite of the heteroglossia and dialogised heteroglossia of hybrid constructions in the testimonies, *My Place* generates a monologised reading. This becomes more apparent in the way the subjectivity of the principal narrator is constituted. But before exploring this aspect of the narrative it will be useful to examine the Bakhtinian notion about the monologic and dialogic modes of constitution of the self.

In Bakhtinian discourse about the self, the creation of the self is "a unique, unified and open ended event of existence". In describing this event Bakhtin repeatedly uses a phrase *sobytie bytiya,* which can be translated either as "an event of being" or as "co-being of being". It seems that for Bakhtin being is not only an event but being is co-being — "being is a simultaneity, is always co-being."[8] In this event of co-being the

8. Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (Routledge, London, 1990), 25.

self is created or authored by the other as a hero of a narrative is created by its author.

An important aspect of this event of co-being is the spatial and temporal situatedness of its participants. Bakhtin uses a simple and visual metaphor to describe this event of co-being — that of two persons located opposite to each other and looking at each other. In this act of looking at each other, they act simultaneously but from their own unique time-space. Their unique position gives them a "surplus of vision" with respect to the other person but is associated with a corresponding "deficiency of vision" with respect to their own selves. When I look at the other person situated in front of me I am able to see parts of his body which are inaccessible to his own gaze — his face, head and the world behind his back. However, at the same time from my position parts of my own body and the world behind my back are inaccessible to me. Both self and the other need each other's surplus of vision to overcome this deficiency of vision. For Bakhtin "to exist means to exist for the other, and to be for oneself through the other". In Bakhtin's view the dependency on the other is so absolute that he denies any "internal sovereign territory" for the self. According to him, the self is "completely located at the boundary and looking into himself he looks in the eyes of the other through the eyes of the other."[9] For Bakhtin, the most important aspect of being is co-being — the ineluctable unity and simultaneity of being. That is why instead of using simply 'I' and the 'other', Bakhtin uses hyphenated versions such as 'I-for-myself' (how I look at my own self) , 'I-for-the-other' (how I appear to those outside me) and "The-other-for-me" (how outsiders appear to me).

Because both 'I' and the 'other' participate in the event of co-being from their own specific time-spaces, they experience their own time-space differently from the time-space of the other person. Their own space is always seen as the centre of perception and their own time open and unfinished. Perhaps that is why the self always perceives itself as open, unbound and limitless, and resists practices and perceptions which limit and finalise it while at the same time it perceives other persons as closed and finalised, objectified and essentialised.

In 1929 Bakhtin published the first version of his book on Dostoevskii in which he introduced two key concepts of his literary philosophy: polyphony and dialogism. A comprehensive reworking of this book began in the early 1960s, and a second edition was published in 1963. It is interesting that the notes on the revision of the book show how Bakhtin begins to stress the difference between the monologic and dialogic modes of constitution of the self:

> Monologism negates outside its own self the presence of an equal consciousness that is equal in answering; it denies an equal *I (you)*. In a monological approach *the other* completely remains an *object* of (my) consciousness and not the other consciousness. From that consciousness one does not expect an answer which could transform everything in the world of my consciousness. A monologue is final, complete and deaf to the answer of the other person, it does not wait for it and does not recognise its *decisive* force. A monologue circumvents the other and that is why it objectifies all reality to a certain degree. A monologue pretends to be the *final word*. It closes off the world and the people represented by it *(emphasis in original)*.[10]

9. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Notes on the Reworking of the Book on Doestoevskii", *The Aesthetics of Verbal Art* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1986), 330.
10. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Notes on the Reworking of the Book on Doestoevskii", 336.

Whilst criticising the monologic relationship between the two consciousness participating in the event of co-being, Bakhtin puts in its place dialogism and the dialogic relationship:

> The singular adequate form of *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended (unfinalised) dialogue.* Life by its nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in a dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the symposium of the world (*emphasis in original*).[11]

In *My Place* the narrative constitutes a monologised identity of the principal narrator. Bain Attwood locates reasons for this in the literary, anthropological, historiographical and behavioural psychological discourses within which Sally Morgan, the author, was allegedly operating. According to Attwood, the dominant anthropological discourse "provides Morgan with an essentialist conception of 'traditional culture' as unchanging or immutable and homogeneous or unitary" (306). Similarly, through the existing paradigm of historiography, Morgan was able to assume the Aborigines as a "clearly defined category, an unchanging and oppositional other" (306). In the same way, "her academic training in behavioural psychology" encourages her to see herself "as a unified self and privileges the rational, self-conscious ego" (307).

I agree with Bain Attwood that the narrative constitutes Sally Morgan — the principal narrator — as a homogeneous, unitary and unified subject. However, there is a significant difference in our reading strategies. Bain Attwood's project was to question the nature of Aboriginality forged in Sally Morgan's narrative and this forced him to operate from extra-textual, in particular biographical, centres of reference. I am more interested in the working of the narrative itself, and to locate in it those moments which foster the creation of a monologised identity of the principal narrator.

To a large extent this might be a result of the specific nature of the genre itself. According to Bakhtin, in all literary narratives the hero (the 'I') is constructed by the author (the 'other'). In autobiographies however, this difference is not only minimal but the 'other' is an invented 'other', a 'double' which is projected and assembled by the 'I'. The story is told by this 'double' who becomes the centre of the narrative, and his or her discourse begins to frame and encompass the discourses of all other protagonists. The world re-presented in the narrative, including the world of other protagonists, is seen and created from the position of and by the hands of this 'double'. His or her voice becomes the main monologising force in the narrative.

In *My Place* the monologising discourse is centred on questions such as: Who am I? What are we? What people are we? The narrative attempts to provide answers to these questions and in doing so, takes the structure of the narrative of quest. In this quest the protagonists undertake a journey to discover their roots, their place which helps them to discover their identities. The motif of quest and the associated chro-

11. Mikhail Bakhtin, 1986 in ibid 336-337.

notope-motifs of path or journey are reflected to some extent in the titles of various chapters such as: "Pretending", "Owning up", "What People Are We?", "Making Something of Yourself", "A Beginning", "Part of Our History", and "Links with The Past".

The journey begins when the principal narrator is accidentally informed by her mother that she is Aboriginal. This forces the main protagonist to remark: "I was very excited by my new heritage" (136) or "I desperately wanted to do something to identify with my new found heritage and that was the only thing I could think of" (137). This discovery of heritage initiates a long process of 'owning up'. At first there is shyness, awkwardness and uneasiness as the protagonist remarks: "We all felt shy and awkward about our new-found past" (137) and "I wanted to say, My grandmother's Aboriginal and it's a part of me too" (137). The shyness is gradually replaced by pride: "In a strange sort of way, my life had new purpose because of that... All our life, people had asked us what nationality we were, most had assumed we were Greek or Italian, but we'd always replied, 'Indian'. Now when we were asked, we said, 'Aboriginal'" (138-9).

The quest ends when on an Aboriginal reserve the protagonists are assigned to specific groups. The place and with it, the selves, are discovered. This climax engenders a profound catharsis in them:

> "That's right", agreed Billy strongly. "You got your place now. We've worked it out...."
> We all felt very moved and honoured that we'd been given our groups. There was no worry about us forgetting, we kept repeating them over and over. It was one more precious thing that added to our sense of belonging (232).
>
> We were reluctant to return to and pick up the threads of our old lives. We were different people, now. What had begun as a tentative search for knowledge, had grown into a spiritual and emotional pilgrimage. We had an Aboriginal consciousness now, and were proud of it (233).
>
> All my life, I've only been half a person (233).

Thus the pilgrimage and the narrative about it are able to locate full, rounded, essentialised, and closed off selves. Sometimes the narrative and the titles of its chapters seem to remind us of the German *bildungsroman* or the "novel of becoming". The *bildungsroman* tells the story of coming into being of the self. In it the self is becoming, evolving, and changing. However, in *My Place* there is no true becoming. The narrative does not make selves but helps to find full, rounded, and complete identities. The identity is not constituted but discovered. The protagonists are aware of the existence of complete, rounded and full identities or their source and strive hard to find it and to merge with it. This is a narrative in which the self moves to reach an equivalence to its own predetermined and objectified self. It is a movement to the state of equivalence, the predetermined or imagined sameness.

Stephen Muecke, underlining the difference of this narrative from a "standard autobiography" draws attention to the presence of the three testimonies and suggests that they make "the book multivalent and polyphonic". According to him, Sally Morgan has resisted "the impulse to enclose the others" narratives within her

own.[12] I am not sure if Stephen Muecke is using polyphony in the sense in which it is used in Bakhtinian discourse, but in my reading the narrative lacks polyphony as understood by Bakhtin. It is to be stressed that very often the notion of 'heteroglossia' is confused with 'polyphony', although it needs also to be emphasised that Bakhtin rarely produced 'clear' definitions of his key concepts and used them sometimes rather expansively. This seems to be the case with the notion of polyphony. The closest he comes to defining polyphony is in his book on Dostoevskii where he criticises Grossman for missing polyphony in Dostoevskii's novels. According to Bakhtin, polyphony is achieved by the "unification of highly heterogeneous material with the plurality of centres of consciousness which can not be reduced to a single ideological denominator."[13]

Thus, the presence of heteroglossia and other heterostylistic material in a narrative does not by itself make the narrative polyphonic. What is more important is the way they are organised and used in the narrative. When they become framed and finalised by the single consciousness of the author, they fail to produce polyphony. Polyphony requires the decentring of authorial consciousness so that a dialogue between equally independent voices of the author and the protagonists can take place.

In *My Place*, dialogised heteroglossia is present mainly in the three testimonies which in spite of a degree of independence are, by and large, framed within the main narrative. The narrators of these testimonies are conscious of the author's humanist project of finding and scripting true identities and histories. For instance, Daisy Corunna, who was initially very suspicious of the whole idea of writing a book, remarks: "I think maybe this is a good thing you're doin'. I didn't want you to do it, mind. But I think, now, maybe it's a good thing. Could be it's time to tell. Time to tell what it's been like in this country" (349). Arthur Corunna expresses similar thoughts when he wants his "story finished. I want everyone to read it. Arthur Corunna's story! I might be famous. You see, it's important, because then maybe they'll understand how hard it's been for the blackfella to live the way he wants" (213). Gladys Corunna hopes that her "children will feel proud of the spiritual background from which they have sprung. If we all keep saying we're proud to be Aboriginal, maybe other Australians will see that we are a people to be proud of" (306). For Sally Morgan — the principal narrator — the writing of "the history of my own family" (163) was the main project — to know herself and to find her true identity, her true Aboriginal heritage. In this way, the liberal-humanist discourse about the self which drives the story of the principal narrator also becomes the central idea of testimonies. The consciousness of the principal narrator becomes the narratological and ideological centre of the book.

It is interesting that many commentators are puzzled by the enormous popularity of *My Place*. Bain Attwood lists a number of possible reasons. Jackie Huggins on the other hand is cynical about its popularity and thinks that *My Place* is more popular with non-indigenous than indigenous readers. I suspect that one reason for its popularity could be the monologic reading fostered by this narrative. It can be argued that a more ruptured narrative and 'messy' identities constituted by it would

12. Stephen Muecke, *Textual Spaces: Aboriginality & Cultural Studies* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1992), 134.
13. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Problems of Dostoevskii's Poetics*, (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1972), 27.

have confused the reader and would have suppressed its liberal-humanist and liberationist voices.

Another possible factor could be the easiness with which this narrative can be assimilated into the metanarrative of Australian identity and nationhood. The discursive distance between a statement such as "I am Aboriginal and feel proud of it" and the statement "I am Australian and feel proud to be an Australian" is not large. Considering the eagerness with which the project of reconciliation with indigenous peoples of Australia is being pursued, such narratives as *My Place* provide appropriate journeys into history, and add another history to a just over two hundred year old Anglo-Celtic narrative of adventure in the once-proclaimed 'Terra Nullius'.

STEPHEN MALLICK

Fetching Wood

It's getting on for nine o'clock.
I've eaten: the kitchen's warm and safe,
And were I standing outside looking
In, must seem a golden cave.
The fire in the grate is troubled
By the wind. But no wind troubles here.

My wife, preparing for bed, absorbed
As a nun about her preparations
Slaps by softly on the tile.
She'll brush her hair a hundred times
Each side, apply her creams, and passing
Bid me stoke the fire for night.

The nightsky glistens, and the stars
Shake above me as I go down the yard
To where the woodpile hunches, obscure
In shadow. I am no longer a child
But hurrying scrape my shin and splinter
Fingers, and get wet wood with dry.

BRUCE DAWE

Distances

Living distances will call
insistently, like doves through morning mists,
to haunt earth's lovers whom they hold in thrall
turning the wakeful to somnambulists

The In-between reverberates, a sea
whose echoing immensity's a voice
half-heard, half-answered when, distracted, we
attempt to make necessity a choice

Distances define, as presences do
— we live with them and suffer them as much
as if they were a part of me and you,
shadowing gestures, miming every touch...

Zip-Code

My lecture having just begun,
in the front row I notice one
mature-age student who had penned
a sign she clearly did intend
for my eyes only, which when read
in a nano-second simply said:
YOUR FLY IS OPEN.
                    This being true,
I moved to screen from public view
those nether regions, while I made
repair from this grim ambuscade
to which a tricky zipper had
exposed me...
                    Later, shaken, glad,
I thanked the kindly person who
had spared me from my Peterloo
by those few words in letters bold...
"A very thoughtful act," I told
her, whereupon she wryly smiled
like one who has been reconciled
to deeds of mercy being done
when mercilessness were much more fun:
"That's quite alright..." she said, "with some
lecturers I'd have just kept *mum*!"
A chill crept over me — to think,
rescued from the dizzying brink,
what might well have been my fate
if left in that most perilous state,
had my good angel stayed tight-lipped
— I and my future both unzipped.

CAO XUAN TU

Li Po Wintering

Somewhere over the concrete
warzone some fool shoots a fuse,
and plunges the city slaves
into a new Dark Age.

And you midtown dropout,
fresh prisoner in a snowbound cul-
de-sac, throw away your book,
fumbling for a match. You pull

the drapes, blinking, and catch
a showering of stars, creamy
and cold like the skin of
a Frisian milkmaid. But where is

that old moon, recluse like you,
among the ice-capped firs, the stony
walls? Then you see pale beams
bounce across the rim

of a puddle of water. A convolution
now fading, now returning.
Beginnings of a constellation
or just your imaginings?

Call it moon. Li Po drank it
and drowned in the river.
But you cannot drown
in a puddle of water.

SHANE McCAULEY

The Journey to Ch'eng-Tu

I would make the journey to Ch'eng-tu
But today the weather is a hot poultice
And yesterday I entertained visitors

Before that there was a certain personal matter
But I have made the necessary affirmations
And sent peonies wrapped in a cajoling verse

And tomorrow the journey to Ch'eng-tu
Will be impossible for word has come
Of brigands lurking all along the East Road

In a week or perhaps two at most
They will be gone and I will escape
To the silence and beauty of Ch'eng-tu

If only I had a secretary to handle
Some of my engagements and papers
The trip could be made with an easy conscience

But all these things that fill a day —
And today the sun is hotter than a poultice —
Keep Ch'eng-tu such a distance away.

MICHAEL SARIBAN

Arachnids

Down here the pickings are lean, but
spiders grow fat in the corner, spiders
whose ship has always just come in

or is about to; spiders who know
there's a sucker born every minute,
or sooner, spiders who thread

vast nets of possibility sticky
as gossip, stake all in a gamble
that never fails;

who please the landlord by mopping up
the flying, crawling nuisance values
that blow out every summer

beyond statistics. Spiders who, indoors,
rarely tempt wasps or other hunters,
being protected by a startling

uselessness to human tongue and stomach,
by superstition, or general good will.
Magnetic personalities, they only need

to gesture, hypnotically, once.

REVIEWS

David J. Tacey, ***Edge of The Sacred: Transformation in Australia,*** Melbourne, Harper Collins, 1994, 240 pp, $19.95.

This is an important and necessary book, though given the ideological hold of ignorant pragmatism at the moment, not everyone will recognise either its importance or necessity.

David Tacey, would have it that the key to solving the problems which face us as a society lies in the area of symbols. Symbols, he believes, are potent. They constitute and govern behaviour at the social as well as the individual level. This is, of course, anthropological commonsense.

What Tacey is trying to do is no mere academic exercise. It is, he says, motivated by "a sense of intellectual responsibility for society as a whole". It draws either explicitly or implicitly on a range of areas from literary criticism, sociology, history, anthropology and Jungian psychology which provides the general framework. Even more unfashionably, it is concerned with the dimension we can broadly call "religious", accepting a level of reality beyond the observable world known to science and ascribing to it meanings and purposes which complete and transcend those of the purely observable and rational level.[1]

This religious sense is not necessarily Christian or, indeed, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist. What he argues, as a Jungian, is rather that a return to the archaic, to the "deep unconscious psyche (soul)" (ix) rests upon a sense of the sacred. In his view the Christian symbols which have been part of the pattern of Australian culture are "undergoing transformation, as a result of ... new and challenging experiences of the sacred" (ix). These experiences are the subject of the book.

The focus is thus Australian, though the scope is much more ambitious. Tacey believes that the crucial question facing the world as a whole is

> ...this archetypal drama of the death and rebirth of the sacred. The important task is to dream onward the interior life of the heart and the spirit, to relate this inner life to outward social change, and to continually attempt to build an intermediate realm of culture where inner and outer worlds can meaningfully relate to each other (x).

Tacey's enterprise is profoundly relevant. Like most educated people today, he has experienced Nietzsche's "death of God". He is "unable to pretend that the intellectual enlightenment, modernism and now post-modernism have not taken place" (2). So he is not trying to revive traditional images of God. Rather his initial approach is along the lines Habermas has sketched out, as a suspicion and contestation of a tradition which is seen as oppressive.

Personally I think that it would have been more helpful to take Gadamer's approach, to draw on the tradition in order to transform it, aware that willynilly, tradition still constitutes the ground of our thinking and action. Otherwise it seems to me difficult, for instance, to refute the objection made "by certain secular colleagues" that the attempt to "resocialise" our culture represents a return to "archaic superstition" and can therefore be seen as part of a "right wing and reactionary agenda" (2).

Later I will take up this objection, which seems to me an important one. But for the moment I would want to stress Tacey's debt to the Christian tradition — a debt which, to be fair, he does acknowledge:

> I am gradually out-growing the anti-Christianism of my earlier years, and am more interested today in how Christianity itself is undergoing transformation, as a result of our new and challenging experiences of the sacred (ix).

Tacey is deeply concerned with questions of justice, social decency and the environ-

1. David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, London, Harper Collins, 1978, 12.

ment, and with understanding of a reconciliation with Aboriginal people and culture. But the philosophical source of these concerns ultimately lies, I suggest, in the Christian tradition. Contrariwise, as the history of totalitarianism in this century indicates, Do-It-Yourself Religion can be a potent force for tyranny — the Okalahoma bombers were, one could argue, very much in touch with the strength of archetypes.

To say that is not to discredit Tacey's project, only to suggest that in fact the respect for the individual, for tolerance, intelligence and compassion which animates his book is ultimately Christian in origin — as indeed he recognises himself from time to time. It is also to say, however, that the project Tacey outlines is more complicated than his book suggests. What exactly is his argument, then?

First of all, and his most original point, is his premise "Social background is crucial (in any understanding of Australian culture), but so too is the depth psychological situation, which to date has not been taken into account" (38). Building on that premise, he argues that, by reason of our historical and geographical conditions, Australians "are close to primordial reality almost by default" (5), closer indeed than most other cultures.

In Australia the encounter with the land was particularly threatening, especially as the brutal nature of the convict system stripped away the protection of the social decencies. The reaction to that, Tacey argues, was the struggle for democracy and justice which we like to think of as characteristically Australian. (40).

In this view Australia represents a psychological as well as a social experiment. Even more importantly the land traditionally central to our consciousness of ourselves as a people takes on a new and deeper significance. For Tacey, as for Aboriginal people, the land is not just a physical reality. It is a living field of spirits and metaphysical forces..."a myth and spiritual field which acts upon human beings from without, causing them to conform to ancient patterns" (148). At the moment, he argues, this interaction is not happening. We are separated off from the land and from our environment generally, as the title of the fourth chapter puts it we are "Not Crossing The Gap".

This is not a new observation, of course, and Tacey traces it back through our writers in the work of Henry Lawson, D.H. Lawrence and Patrick White in particular. Nor is there anything very new in his discussions of what he calls the Australian "siege mentality" (59), our macho culture and our fear of the feminine, the moralism of a conformist culture. We need to make the journey from the edge to the centre, and so on. What is different and engaging is the way the discussion grows out of his own experiences of growing up in Alice Springs and coming to terms not only with the desert but also its Aboriginal inhabitants, so that theory seems to result from experience.

In this sense, *Edge of the Sacred* is a personal book, intuitive rather than intellectual. This search for personal meaning reaches its climax in the third section, "Re-Enchantment". But this is the section in which some readers are likely to part company with his argument. I suspect, however, that for many the problem may be more a question of language than of the argument itself. To say that we need to "shamanise" the landscape, for instance, and move from "shadow to shaman" the "indigenous archetype and come to terms with the Earth Mother" may sound like mumbo-jumbo to many. In fact, however, environmentalists and many scientists are saying much the same thing, though in different language, when they argue that we must become much more conscious that the world around us is living, not inert, and has needs and power of its own. Contemporary physicists would also argue with Tacey's proposition that ours is "not just a static world of rocks, sticks and earth, but a fluid world of imagination, capable of assuming a variety of shapes and many meanings" (15).

In effect, then, Tacey is calling for a new paradigm, a redefinition of the nature of "reality" and of our relationship to it, which is

more in tune with what is actually the case. Instead or perhaps as well as being preoccupied with economic matters we ought, he suggests, to care about our inner life, our sense of self, others and the other — in this case defined as what is different from ourselves. Above all, he argues, we have a great deal to learn from Aboriginal Australians. If we are prepared to listen, they may become for us "messengers of the sacred" (129), teaching us a sense of reverence and our dependence upon the living world around us.

This is obviously a reversal of old attitudes in which we are superior and the Aborigines are "mere shadowy figures upon the floor of hell" (129). Increasingly we are realising that it is they who are spiritually and culturally rich and we more or less barren spiritually. Yet, as Tacey notes shrewdly, this does not necessarily arise out of an actual encounter with them or with our own responsibility for history. If Aboriginality equals spirituality, then we are only continuing our "old mode of foisting projects on them" (130) — in this case projections to serve our middle class comfort. As Tacey rightly insists, "Aboriginality" is something other than these fantasies. It is the product of thousands of years of lived experience.

This brings us to the crux of the argument, our need to come to terms with difference. Instead of clinging to certainties and demanding that everybody become like us, we need to learn to live with uncertainty, confusion and difference. In political terms — which Tacey usually deprecates — this means coming to terms with our Asian neighbours as well as with the original Australians, instead of clinging to the shreds of Empire. In Tacey's terms this means honouring the claims of the past as well as of the future, living in a present which honours those claims.

What he is arguing for, as he says, is a "process of colonisation in reverse" (134). I find myself in agreement with this. Where I begin to disagree is with the assumption that this process is more or less inevitable in which "the new-old land has assimilated its conqueror" (134). Like Jung, Tacey attributes a power to the land to work on all of this, thus implying a kind of psychic determinism. Many will find this difficult to accept, and there is not much evidence for it.

The unconscious is obviously important but what is crucial to the story of freedom is surely the conscious choices people make. However they may be influenced by unconscious factors and governed by symbols, in the long run their force depends upon the way in which they are articulated and acted upon in the public as well as the private domain. A whole set of other factors, economic, social and even political as well as psychological are also involved.

For Tacey, however, myth and archetype have become a form of fate, a set of determinisms against which it often seems there is no appeal. Jung's system, as he admits, is at best a "pseudo-science".

> ...the idea that earth impacts on psyche is a mythopoeic claim, which cannot be scientifically proved or disproved. Many would therefore reject it as baseless, but...I am inclined to take the claim very seriously, even if it is irrational. It may not be good science, but it is good myth, and that is what interests and sustains me. (135)

This is the kind of claim unthinking religious believers tend to make. But in my view this sort of irrational belief is dangerous. There is also a long tradition of careful and honest thought about the possibilities of rational grounds for belief. Once that ground is established a whole set of ethical obligations appear and impose themselves — to love others, act generously and kindly, respect the rest of creation and so on. Tacey's system, however, seems to have no such controls and appears to demand no particular set of choices. We flow, as it were, with the archetypes. This raises many problems.

To be fair, he does say that it is up to us to get in touch with the deep psyche where these archetypes are to be found. However, he says nothing about the nature of their archetypes

or of our ability to resist them. In Tacey's view, it seems, the individual must serve them, not vice versa. The Western idea that "subjectivity is privileged and is regarded as the ruling element" (149) is mistaken, it seems. Instead we "are guided" (203) by forces at work in the unconscious, forces which are in turn under the spell of landscape "a myth and spiritual field which acts upon human beings from without" (148). This echoes D.H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo*, of course. But, more dangerously, it also echoes some of Hitler's ideas about "blood", land and destiny.

Tacey is no totalitarian. But his system cannot explain, for example, why the dark archetypes which drove so many to frenzy not merely elsewhere but here in Australia over the Azaria Chamberlain case, for example, and which sustain the racism, militarism and brutality also present in Australian culture should suddenly give way to enlightenment and reconciliation.

As we said earlier, Tacey's position is in effect a religious one. But his religion is without the ethical controls which rest on a sense of the individual's responsibility. For that reason it also lacks a sense of evil, the other side of a sense of the good. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, evil is defined as the refusal to acknowledge and obey a power beyond ourselves which makes demands upon us for the sake of others, and rejects what Ricoeur calls "the false greatness of purely human domination".[2] The cumulative effect of these refusals is to build up a climate of destructiveness (what theologians call "original sin") which limits the freedom we like to assert, making us captive to the forces we ourselves have created. Our task, however, is to contest their power in the name of freedom.

In this view existence is both dramatic and dialectical. Tacey's world view, in contrast, is one-dimensional and seems to work automatically. It would be good to think that the openness, range and generosity of spirit he predicts the archetypes will bring about will happen. Personally, however, I believe that there is a good deal militating against this. We need also to make intelligent and feeling choices at the political, social and economic as well as at the personal level.

To conclude, then, this is an important book. But part of the necessity it imposes, having shown the importance of psychic and "spiritual" factors, is to think more carefully about these factors. Arguably our society is not secular, as it likes to think, but rather in the grip of an ancient form of religiosity, worship of technology having replaced worship of the Gods of nature, promising us abundance of life for our obedience to their dictates. Tacey would contest this obedience. But his solution is to take us back to the very powers of nature which technology has replaced. In my view we need to test this kind of atavistic religious impulse and to find our solution where we are, not in a return to the past.

Where we are, of course, is problematic. Consciousness as subject, the centre of Western thought since the Enlightenment, is giving way to the post-modern sense that subjectivity is itself questionable. Tacey, like the nationalists and fundamentalists of various kinds, seems to find the answer to this in a return to absolutes, in his case the power of myth and archetype. It seems to me, however, that the way forward lies not in putting our trust in absolute systems but rather in embracing what is problematical, exploring the ambiguities and sense of sheer otherness, chaos if you like, which nevertheless has a "meaning" since it is a mystery and which reminds us of our limits. We must, I think, learn to live with this ambiguity believing at the same time human choice, intelligence and faith remain central to this exploration.

Veronica Brady

2. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1967, 57.

Richard Wilkes, ***Bulmurn: a Swan River Nyoongar,*** Perth, University of Western Australia Press, 1995, 219 pp, $16.95.

"'I'm a great believer in our young people learning everything they can about our ways to pass on to their children so our Law is passed down. Learning makes our people strong. It makes me pleased to know this.'" Thus speaks Bulmurn, the mobarn boylla gudjuk an Aboriginal doctor of medicine and possessor of spiritual power at the heart of this intriguing novel, which looks long and hard at the colonisation of the Swan River district.

Briefly, it is a simple story simply told. Bulmurn, cast out by his own people after allowing several of them of "mixed blood" to die, is asked to avenge the murder of his brother-in-law, Binyung, and the rape and murder of his sister, Munyee, by four colonists. He does so. For the remainder of the novel he is doggedly pursued by a team of black-trackers and troopers, threatening imprisonment on Rottnest Island and execution. The novel's considerable appeal lies in the striking contrast between this narrative simplicity and a surrounding web of social, political and cultural complexities, as pertinent to Western Australian in the 1990's as they were last century.

Set against the horrors of unacknowledged civil war — horrors reflected, for example, in the massacres of Gidgegannup and Pinjarra — two known massacres of Aboriginal groups by settlers and troopers in the nineteenth century — *Bulmurn* examines the tenuousness of the distinction between myth, fact and fiction. Local geography and history alike are uncompromisingly and challengingly represented from a Nyoongar perspective, so that a portion of the local area — extending from Murin Morda across to Walyalup and Wadjemup — seems suddenly distant from the reader who knows it today as the area stretching from the Darling Ranges, across to Fremantle and Rottnest. In this context the Nyoongars' relationships with each other and their environment appear even more mysterious and the extent of their gradual breakdown under the colonists' influence even more tragic.

This breakdown precipitates the story, as Bulmurn senses in the ways and law of the wadjbulla people, or colonists, a threat to his own people and traditional Nyoongar ways and law. Wilkes' evocation of the mutual misapprehension and conflict at its heart is one of the novel's strengths. As part of this process the landscape around Goomap, Perth, is transformed several times and each transformation reflects a different way of seeing it. One of the most graphic examples of this is Bulmurn's own corroboree and communion with the Dreamtime spirits in his sacred place.

He is introduced to this place, a well-concealed cave in a rocky hillside, by bikuta, the red rock kangaroo. Upon closer investigation Bulmurn finds a rock-painting of "a strong being with a rug-like covering over its body and a circle of light over and around its head" (59). Another circle near its heart appears to emit a brilliant blaze of light and by this "new energy", he is made "stronger and more powerful" to serve his people (59). Like many Mobarn Mamarup before and after him, Bulmurn is "honoured" by a gift of special powers from the Dreamtime spirits.

Later, in one of the most striking scenes in the novel, he returns to the sacred site and performs his own corroboree in preparation for the revenge-killings. In ceremonial dress and urged on by "clicking sticks, slapping boomerangs and ... unseen singers" (79) he assumes "mystical qualities". As he communes with the Dreamtime spirits, with "babbangwin the lightning, mulga the thunder and mar the wind" (80), his figure assumes "longer and longer proportions, and the outlining of his body created by the red, white and yellow wilgee create[s] illusions of several bodies united into the one human frame, 'Bulmurn'" (77). Here, reality and Nyoongar myth are made indistinguishable and the reader is asked to regard Bulmurn's world, his past, present and future actions, in

a new way. While this device is used on several occasions during the novel, it is perhaps most memorably and effectively employed at its climax with the capture of Bulmurn and in the final pages.

The contrast between his traditional ways and law, his way of "seeing" and that of colonist Jim Rows and his pregnant wife, Julia, or Senior Sergeant Clamp and his troopers, for example, is thus made more immediate. Although not always successful, Wilkes clearly attempts a balanced representation. Of Rows, one of the rapists and murderers, he could easily have created a villain or madman in the same vein as Vincent, superintendent of the Rottnest gaol. Instead, among his more admirable traits, Rows is a loving husband and conscientious farmer. Similarly, the skill and persistence of Clamp and his black-trackers, the men eventually responsible for Bulmurn's capture, demands respect.

In contrast with the beauty of the Nyoongars' traditional way of life, as depicted in the novel's early chapters, the final part of *Bulmurn* is a harrowing representation of life in the gaol on Wagemup, Rottnest. Based on historical accounts of its conditions and the treatment of prisoners, here the legendary Bulmurn undergoes perhaps his greatest trials. As he shares in the suffering of the other prisoners, most of whom face death and burial in an unmarked grave, "so that their spirits ... never return to their homes on the mainland", in the context of Wagemup he is most fully developed as a symbol of hope and courage. Like the great warrior, Wandabidar, who stands "calm, tall and dignified" before the hangman's noose, in these circumstances Bulmurn is more clearly defined as "a very noble and cultured leader". The novel's surprising and celebratory ending is a credit to the writer's careful and credible interweaving of fact and fiction.

Richard Wilkes' first novel, *Bulmurn: a Swan River Nyoongar*, is based on stories told to him in his childhood around family campfires in the tradition of oral story telling. In order to share the social, cultural and political implications of these stories with a wider audience, he has attempted the difficult, even unenviable task of communicating them in English and adopting the novel form. In this respect, to say that on occasion the writing is disarming in its simplicity may reflect more on the nature of the writer's task than on the way he performs it. Wilkes, as a descendant of the Darbalyung Nyoongar people, writes intimately of the beliefs and legendary figures by which he has been inspired. Yet he also attempts to empathise with those readers for whom such figures, like the landscapes they inhabit, are unexpected and "foreign".

In his own words *Bulmurn* is primarily a plea on behalf of the writer's people that "one day...we will be free to live in harmony with other Australians". The intensity of the novel's gaze, which is turned both inwards and outwards, is sharpened by a blurring of the distinction between myth, fact and fiction. The end product is a thorough yet thoughtful and compassionate representation of some of the most unsavoury events in the colonisation of the Swan River district. I look forward to reading more of Wilkes' writing.

Angeline O'Neill

Nicholas Jose, *The Rose Crossing*, Melbourne, Penguin Books, 1995, 288 pp, $14.95.

To begin at the beginning, the first point of contact, Jose's *The Rose Crossing* has an arresting, smoothly erotic cover: a woman swathed in crimson silk lies superimposed upon a textured background of golden-orange roses. What does this reveal of the text within? Well, it is a tale of desire restrained and desire enacted, of unlikely juxtapositions, and one in which the rose motif stands as a symbol of potential union, synthesis, and, perhaps, creation.

The story, as in Umberto Eco's *Rose* novel, weaves the pattern of the characters' predicament across the weft of historical and political circumstances. Edward Popple, philosopher

and horticulturist, abandons republican England of the Seventeenth Century with his daughter Rosamunde. Similarly, Lou Lu, eunuch and king-maker, escapes the turbulence and danger of China with his charge, Prince Taizao, the last of the Ming Dynasty. Such dualities structure the novel:

> ... Lord Lou and Popple, standing before each other as in a mirror, recognised their reflection as outcast, explorer, idealist, obstinate loyalist, deviator from the times. (149)

The inevitable meeting of the two pairs, in the relatively isolated context of a deserted island, provides Jose with the laboratory for exploring fully the correspondences and oppositions suggested by the four characters: East meets West; boy meets girl; the power of elders is challenged by an alliance of youth. And, of course, both sets of voyagers have brought a rose.

The title of the novel, represents both the journey of the roses and the potential resolution of the different cultures from which they originate. For Popple, the gardener/wizard with more than a touch of Prospero about him, the rose crossing offers the elixir of knowledge, the discipline of the scientific method in which he has sublimated the incestuous desire for his daughter, Rosamunde. As when he says to her:

> I remind you of our high purpose to unlock a deeper power, over nature, over the creation of kinds. It is alchemy, the skill for which the quest has been the drive of history.... It depends on us both, as sole partners, the male energy, the virgin purity. (186)

Rosamund's productive drive is of a more fundamental kind, however.

> She wished that the moon might pull the stoppered blood from her body and start the flow again, even as in the small hours of the night the neap tide uncoiled on the sand. (167)

This contrast of creativities, figurative versus physical, scientific versus sexual, is at the centre of Jose's novel, and indeed, its most interesting feature. The deliberate composition of *The Rose Crossing* lays a foundation upon which the narrative examines both the individual and social consequences of desire, be it for knowledge, power, or love. It is the rose, therefore, which signifies the complicated possibilities of resolution within Jose's carefully constructed dialectic world.

The Rose Crossing, while neither startling nor particularly adventurous in its expression, is nevertheless well written. The prose has a well-wrought economy which is especially effective, and perhaps heightened, in the passages depicting China.

> It was close to midday. Lou Lu ate the exquisite meal prepared for him alone in his chamber. Cockles, fresh-water crabs, pickled radish, pea sprouts, pearly rice and osmanthus wine. Draining the lotus-seed soup, he belched resonantly and stretched out on the satin-covered mattress to digest. (69)

In addition, Jose's descriptions of the fecund island paradise are successful in achieving the appropriate setting for his considerations of desire and creation.

> The balmy air was almost elastic, and on the day the pistils of the seed-bearing English roses in the garden were ready with a viscous exudation in the sutures of their stigmas, all nature felt instinct with joyous life. (179)

Jose has produced a well-conceived and executed novel. Unfortunately, and it is not an easy criticism to make, the tale lacks that somewhat intangible element that makes a good story compelling. In describing the world of *The Rose Crossing* I have used words like "laboratory" and "constructed". This is precisely because the novel has the feel, at times, of an intellectual experiment, an hypothesis tested in Jose's crucible of symmetrical elements. Popple's appreciation of the

circumstances might well be the reader's:

> Their knowledge and their clumsy attempts to ascertain answers were absurd. Their knowledge, given their situation, was so hypothetical as to be merely a gracious entertainment offered by each side to the other. (149)

The novel's triumph lies in its poignantly ambivalent presentation of human desire; indetectable yet essential in the greater schemes of history and evolution. Its failing might be seen as a direct and inverse correlation of that achievement, for Jose's novel does not sufficiently engage the emotional and psychological potential in his narrative. It is too cool, even in its moments of eroticism.

The Rose Crossing is a fine intellectual creation, quite meticulously crafted, but ultimately, the emotional timbre of the novel is less rich than it might have been, and consequently, its story is less satisfying.

Joshua Wilson

Dennis Schofield, *Slackwire,* Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995, 358 pp, $16.95.

> But mostly I like this stuff, up in the air, and slackwire. You can sway. (27)

Schofield's *Slackwire* is dirty and dangerous and strange. His characters walk the wire at their own risk; the act is a precarious one, the act can kill. *Slackwire* is about retribution that passes from person to person and never pays. It is a story of the deepest rot.

In his first novel, Schofield explores issues of art and pornography, of the camera eye, of what it is that makes the truth, and what constitutes violence. People are bound in their relationships to each other. This novel is a complex and beautifully constructed exploration of all that is suppressed in the unconscious. People spy on each other, they lurk in the shadows. They discover what should be kept hidden and make documents to prove it. This circular circling narrative is the greatest and most unsettling document of all.

Above all, it seems, Schofield is exploring fantasy:

> ... fantasies are illicit in a way dreams aren't. They intentionally cross a space between self-indulgence and public restraint. And that crossing gives them all the velocity and potential of deep secrets ... powerful secrets ... (17)

If the reader is the 'public eye' s/he is also a participant in this matter of self-indulgence: that is the nature of fiction. It is an uneasy sensation to have access to so much and yet to be unable to discern what is 'reality' and what is not. Something powerful is going on, but the reader is not permitted control. This sense of taboo is titillating. Billy says, "My daydream is about a fellow going mad." (14) Is this novel entirely the daydream? Is reality somewhere interspersed? Where do the layers of 'truth' and 'untruth' begin and end?

There is some crazy stuff going on: the images that flare on the screen have a bad magic to them. The truth that the camera tells is often too unwieldy for words:

> The woman has become transparent, ghosted in front of the rocks and spectators, her head taken the tail of a comet, distended, the eyes seeming adrift inside as two clusters of tiny, black facets. (212)

The images if offers are greater than the domain that *should* be granted to a camera.

Schofield has made *Slackwire* a vehicle for his own exploration of the second person narrative. The result is a narrative voice which is itself a slackwire. The voices of this text are strange, they take you in, you never know where you are, or with whom, the views are wired and wild and swing like a camera lense.

The first section of narrative belongs to Billy Thunder (sunk in a "deep funk of remorse from which he never fully recovers" (15)); or rather, Billy doesn't get much of a

look in, because his desire for fantasy is placed quite literally (and ironically) in his own hands. Thus Dexter and Sinister assume the position of narrators: "*They* tell the story. That is how Bill avoids telling it himself, how he avoids admitting anything: he has the nasty thing told to him." (16)

Billy's story finds a disturbing parallel in the section featuring the camera man Captain "Cam Raman". Each story seems a mirror of the other, slipside, badside, everything gone wrong. Both men are photographers travelling around Australia. Fittingly, their viewpoint dictates the narration and it is their images which supply the novel. But this control is only a surface thing. The conversation between Captain and his ventriloquist dummy (like the exchange between Billy's hands) reveals the potential for a duality (if not a multiplicity) of voices. Moreover, Billy's memories of his adolescent friend lurk — metaphorically and literally — in the nighttime nastiness of his home. Billy thinks his parameters are secure but he is wrong.

Schofield's narrative voice is compelling: he lets each character slip but never fall: "The jump from the burning house before you burn too, boyo. 'Cause the past is catching up." (11) But before this can happen he always cuts, the angle changes, another voice begins.

From time to time an omniscient narrator intrudes to address the characters as "you". This camera eye entirely directs the movements of Billy's girlfriend Michele and his gay (and nameless) childhood friend.

The effect of this narrative technique is not only to render the characters very very vulnerable, but also calls into question the level of control granted to them. This method of narration made me consider from another angle Drusilla Modjeska's comment that a "man writes 'I' as he sees, and in writing it is therefore seen. The relationship is clear. When a woman writes 'I' she must reconcile seeing with being seen ... " (*The Orchard*, 141). The narration of Billy's right hand and his cack hand make even Billy's 'I' a dodgy proposition, but it is especially in his use of second person narration that Schofield unpacks the relationship between speaker and character, an author and h/er work. It is the site where the masculine eye and the feminine I are unseated in his subject shifts and you are always at risk.

Two other characters are narrated by the omniscient narrator. It is the effect of the second person device that makes this (perfectly mundane) act of third person narration an interesting one, calling into question the issue of who has control. So Mary Hay, the battered teenager is rendered voiceless, and Omadi Kaïd, Captain's one time lover and illegal immigrant, is also without direct voice, strange for someone so angrily verbal.

Runner-up for the 1993 TAG Hungerford award for fiction, this novel deserves your attention. Schofield has written with a deftness and sureness of footing that is thoroughly engaging. You, on the other hand, won't know where you are until it is over. By then, it will be too late.

Georgia Richter

Terri-ann White, ***Night and Day,*** Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1994, 160 pp, $14.95.

Recently, in a quite different context, Anne Manne recalled the importance of what Vaclav Havel has called our "lyrical relation to life" ("Modern Motherhood: Being and Nothingness", *The Weekend Australian* (June 10-11, 1995), 25). This describes, I think, some of the impetus of Terri-ann White's enthralling book *Night and Day*. Neither autobiography (with all the issues of subjecthood which attach to that genre) nor journal, White's book borrows from both forms to create a sort of border-fiction: a hybridised writing — crossing the conventionally understood boundaries of fiction, diary, autobiography and cultural speculation — of a kind that was perhaps most recently acclaimed in Drusilla Modjeska's richly rewarding *The Orchard*. In

one sense, White's writing plays out a similar pattern to that identified by Paul Carter (himself the writer of a kind of "border-history") in early Australian explorer journals. Carter suggests that many explorer journals are marked by a trope not of progression but of the absence of progression. Accordingly this kind of narrative moves forward, not into the intricacies of plot and event, but deeper into its own familiar territory (*Living in a New Country*). In *Night and Day* , time is not linear but cyclical; the characters are not individuals whose lives we follow through a series of events, but are the city of Perth and its community, observed in a series of captured moments. These observations are shared by a narrator whose acute scrutiny includes her own powers, frailties, desires.

In one sense *Night and Day* is a love story. The café culture of Northbridge, the intermingling family-picnic and gay communities of Hyde Park, the sprawling suburbs around the river, the boom-or-bust frontier of The Terrace: all are treated with tender familiarity. But if this is a love story, it is one with an edge. The excesses of Perth's corporate culture, the destitution which passes as sub-culture, the middle-class fear that emptiness underlies brittle success: these are the pits and falls of contemporary urban existence which forbid any drift into musing sentimentalism.

A similar caution marks the narrator's treatment of herself. She is a voyeur, a watcher of others who records her assessments in her green notebook. But she is also the observed; her dreams and anxieties are opened to the reader's scrutiny. In this way the reader takes on a kind of double vision, sharing the narrator's glimpses of other lives as well observing the observer herself. "Writing about sex," we are told, "you have to assume that I'm writing about myself, that I've done each and every one of these things. Of course I have, even if they happened in my sleep. I watch, listening in to the privacy of others, whenever I feel I must. Rummage around in the secrets that are kept in drawers and files. Looking for hooks, for short cuts to move strangers in closer" (128-29). We become like the character who gorges himself on his lover's diary, aware of the painful potential of what is revealed but unwilling to resist. The typically exploitative curiosity of the voyeur, however, is absent here. In one scene, for instance, we regard the narrator as she observes, on a routine walk through the park, a scene of lovemaking; yet in the shadowy light the participants of this private drama, both the accidental intruder and the lovers, allow each other a generous invisibility. White's treatment of her subjects is intimate but it is always careful.

White is concerned not only with capturing the spirit of a moment but also with the event of writing. What is written might be borrowed from dreams ("The writing springs forth, fully formed. Hieroglyphics from someone's imagination. Or are they just from my rich and warm dreams?" [93]), but the act of writing itself also becomes a kind of dreaming: "The words there as beacons, talismen, telling me where to go next. It is said that dreams lack narrative structure, but it is their freedom that is appealing to me, the absence of a formal structure" (100-102). Music is another motif that describes the writing project: "music comes from bellies, throats, lips, fingertips ... Music that floats and glitters and skips and zips" (16-17); "music can unfold: with its stories, snippets; the trickles down into myth" (32). Like music, this writing is concerned with the discovery of its own patterns, echoes, refrains.

This is a book, in other words, in which nothing "happens" but everything is observed, and each scene is framed by an acknowledgement of shadowed or parallel worlds: of day and night, of the visible city and its unseen lives, and of an anxiety of loss beneath the pleasures of the ordinary. Indeed the book's structure is itself an acknowledgement of shadowed worlds. White's prose is framed by, and unfolds in relation to, a series of linocut and monotype illustrations by Alison Rowley. Like White's writing, Rowley's illustrations are spare and glancing;

the one kind of text cannot be read without the other, and they echo one another in ways that reverberate after each page is turned. On the front and back covers, illustration and prose are both enlisted to contain the pages in between: Rowley's cover image "Shadow Dance", of a woman (the author?) dancing with her shadow across a burning white horizon, anticipates the shadow dances with memory and desire within the pages; the back cover's brief script, the point of closure which affirms the seductions of nostalgia, suggests something of the compelling nature of this narrative.

Amanda Nettelbeck

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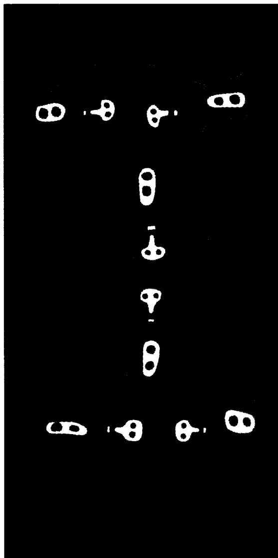

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