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Abstract

In an historical analysis of language and the ideologies which underwrite it, Michel Pecheux argues that all perception and value arise from a relationship of contradictions between and within various discourses, since 'thought exists only within a determination which imposes edges, separations and limits on it, in other words ... "thought" is determined in its "forms" and its "contents" by the unthought . . . [In any discourse] the unasserted precedes and dominates the assertion'.¹ In other words, various discourses can be identified not only by what is said but also by what is unsaid within them, and so 'culture' itself becomes 'a complex of competing narratives of which one or other is, for the time being, dominant'.²

AMANDA NETTELBECK

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In an historical analysis of language and the ideologies which underwrite it, Michel Pécheux argues that all perception and value arise from a relationship of contradictions between and within various discourses, since 'thought exists only within a determination which imposes edges, separations and limits on it, in other words ... "thought" is determined in its "forms" and its "contents" by the unthought ... [In any discourse] the unasserted precedes and dominates the assertion'.¹ In other words, various discourses can be identified not only by what is said but also by what is unsaid within them, and so 'culture' itself becomes 'a complex of competing narratives of which one or other is, for the time being, dominant'.²

These are, of course, familiar ideas: in what might be called this post-colonial age in Western history, the supposedly once-secure belief in centres of knowledge or 'fullness of presence' (was it really ever so secure?) is perpetually thrown into relief against its antithesis; that is, suspicion of metaphysical centres and scrutiny of their role in the construction of cultural and national hierarchies, and those hierarchies' exercises of power. As post-colonial writers and critics have variously argued, moreover, understandings of 'nation' and 'culture' are particularly provisional in ex-settler societies, like Australia, where any act of mapping out historical space³ is always subject to the competing perceptions of the various groups who are implicated in such acts: not only the governing imperial body and the colonial settlers, of course, but also the indigenous dispossessed.⁴ In Australia, then (as in other ex-settler societies), understandings of culture and nation have arisen out of frictions between different understandings of historical space: images of independence rub up against the codes of empire which are present in the very systems of language and knowledge which are basic to Australia's post-colonized society.

In its focus on Australia's participation in World War I (amongst other things), David Malouf's 1982 novel *Fly Away Peter*⁵ addresses some of these 'frictions' and the national myths to which they give rise.

Dealing as it does with the close relation between the rhetorics of war, class and national identity, *Fly Away Peter* has a great deal to say about the various codes of knowledge through which a nation and its mythic history are read. War, of course, is the active instrument of cultural, political and economic power, and in setting this novel during World War I, Malouf takes up the national myth of this war in particular as a turning point in Australia's history. According to this myth, Australia's participation in World War I marked a loss of innocence, an 'arrival' to a world of violence, international 'experience', and post-Edenic self-awareness. In one sense, then, Australia's participation in a largely European war became a claim to a new form of independence, a landmark of its own place within the international arena of History. Yet ironically World War I also held mythic relevance, not so much as Australia's independence from Britain, as Australia's re-acceptance by ancestral Britain: an invitation, as Malouf has put it, to play with 'the big boys in the playground'.⁶

Another irony in the mythologizing of this war is that although Australia's participation certainly gave rise to a new kind of national heroism, it was not until well after the war that the experience could be incorporated into a distinct legend of cohesive national character. Although the Anzac legend could borrow from the character of the Battler, Australian society 1914-18 had been irrevocably altered in ways which allowed for no language to express the changes. Speaking of his own childhood in a time of war, for instance, Malouf writes:

I had a powerful sense of my storytellers' telling me nothing in the end of what they had really seen and felt ... they were expressing themselves out of my world. Or perhaps they had reduced the thing, even in their own minds, to the purely conventional terms in which they could most acceptably relate their experiences to themselves. (*Australian Literature and War*, p. 226)

Rather than rounding out an established national image, then, the experience of war might even have accentuated the already-existent tensions within Australian society, at least until taken up by the imagination of following generations and reworked into the pattern of a shared history. In effect, as a whole generation of historians have argued, Australia's involvement was perhaps not so much a mark of new-found independence as it was the sign of an ongoing and ambivalent connection to Britain: a connection which Australians still both rejected and nurtured.

The extent of Australia's dependence on inherited (English) social codes is apparent in *Fly Away Peter* in the dynamics of pre-war Queensland society. Malouf depicts a community which, despite its 'grass-roots' community, is invisibly bound to the conventions of class. In depicting this community, Malouf implicitly addresses another national mythology about the 'coming into being' of Australia: that is,

of course, that the social hierarchy of empire was replaced by a principle of egalitarianism, in which each man (used advisedly) enjoys equal status under a shared sky. Yet even within the natural and idyllic world of the Sanctuary – the haven for birdlife which is owned by Ashley Crowther, the young landowner freshly returned from Cambridge, and managed by Jim Saddler, the local farmer's son – the boundaries of class still prevail. Seeing Ashley for the first time, Jim recognizes him instantly as a kind of soulmate, as someone familiar because intrinsically similar to himself. But for all that, he cannot approach Ashley because '[it] wasn't his place to make an opening' (p. 4). The responsibility for making contact falls to Ashley who, despite his natural sensitivity and his scepticism about the value and rights of land-ownership, is nonetheless bound to the responsibility of social power. Ashley is introduced in contrasting images of childish helplessness and imperial authority: he stoops under the weight of his grandfather's watch-chain and stumbles over his words as well as over his boots. Nevertheless, 'he had said "Well then, you're my man," having that sort of power, and Jim was made' (p. 5). Indeed it is his own awareness of 'having that sort of power', an awareness which pervades his whole presence, that makes Ashley passable 'on that side of the world for an English gentleman'.

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

Their roles are only reversed during a boating expedition for Ashley and his wealthy friends on the swamp. Here, Jim is in control; his power lies in his knowledge of the birds and particularly in his capacity to name them. Although Ashley is seen to appreciate and respect the landscape, Jim's affinity with it is perceived by both young men to be natural and innate. His claims to the land, the novel suggests, are 'ancient and deep'. They lie 'in his having a vision of the place and the power to give that vision breath; in his having, most of all, the names for things and in that way possessing them. It went beyond mere convention or the law' (p. 7). The visitors from the big house would be 'subdued, tense ... held on Jim's breath' as he would whisper the names of the birds in a way that 'wrapped the bird in mystery, beyond even the brilliance of its colouring and the strange light the place touched it with' (pp. 29-30). As soon as the group leaves the swamp to picnic on hard ground, however, things revert 'back to reality' (p. 32). Jim sits apart beneath a tree to eat his home-brought sandwich while the others consume their picnic spread, and at

the end of the afternoon the gentlemen tip him, Jim accepting the shillings in respect to an established set of social rules. Jim's acceptance of his place within a defined social hierarchy is not shared by his father, who struggles against an order which he cannot define but which has moulded the pattern of his life. His struggle, however, is portrayed as futile, giving way as it does only to a kind of aggressive passivity of which even the source is eventually forgotten. His father's social hostility is regarded by Jim as being 'of a kind that could blast the world. It allowed nothing to exist under its breath without being blackened, torn up by the roots, slashed at, and shown when ripped apart to have a centre as rotten as itself' (p. 6).

The arrival of war, with its firm sense of hierarchy, does nothing to dissolve the passively received pre-war class structure. Indeed the war, as an extension of imperial power, affirms the boundaries with added authority. When Jim and Ashley join up, Jim enters the army as a private while Ashley enters 'as an officer, and in another division' (p.57). Within the hierarchy of the military machine, the soldiers fulfil their given roles despite deep instincts which struggle against them. Huddled in an abandoned trench, for instance, Jim's division finds itself under the command of a young officer. Like Ashley, the officer is described in terms which are naturally incongruent with his authority. A picture of youthful innocence, he is scarcely more than a boy: round-faced, blue-eyed and, despite the mud, freshly-scrubbed. However when he orders the men forward into battle, they obey: 'It's a mistake', Jim thought, whose own youth lay so far back now that he could barely recall it. 'This kid can't be more than twelve years old'. But when the voice said 'Right men, now!' he rose up out of the ditch and followed (p. 94). The officer, of course, is as much subject to the authority he wields as the soldiers. His place in the pattern of things is predetermined and he fills it completely, 'as he had learned from the stories in *Chums*' (p. 94).

In this sense, the impact of imperial power seems all-pervasive; war, as the instrument of this power and despite its inevitable chaos, seems to confirm the exercises of power which had long been naturalized in the social structures of the colonial world. Yet war also alters those structures through its various effects. One of those effects is the transforming and flattening out, in language, of human life. The language of war articulates 'the logistics of battle and the precise breaking point of men' (p. 109); it turns 'farmer's sons' into "'troops" who were about to be "thrown in" ... re-enforcements [who] would soon be "casualties"' (p. 112). Ironically, then, the hierarchy of the war machine is smoothed out in the process of finding a language in which to smooth over war's repercussions.

But language, always double-edged, has another effect here; the language which diminishes value is countered by a language of re-

evaluation, in which identities and their positions in space and in history are re-defined. For instance, grappling with a 'new' landscape (which of course is the blasted 'old' world of Europe) as well as a new identity within the war machine, the soldiers invent new definitions for things which are meaningful in terms of their shifting experience. In effect their environment, which includes themselves, is in constant process of being remapped and renamed:

Crossing Half-past Eleven Square (it was called that because the Town Hall clock had stopped at that hour during an early bombardment; everything here had been renamed and then named again, as places and streets, a copse, a farmhouse, yielded up their old history and entered the new) you turned left and went on across Barbedwire Square ... and from there, via Lunatic Lane, into the lines. (pp. 76-77)

In a surreal world without dimension and outside of time, the soldiers enter into a process of perpetual re-definition, not only of the tilting world, but also of each one's own place within it. Accordingly each soldier possesses a nickname in addition to an army title. Ashley, surprised to find himself also endowed with a nickname, is given a new identity which is suitable to his strange circumstances. He considers that they all may have been 're-enforcements' and 'casualties', but

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

The naming of 'Parapet Joe', a German sniper from the other side of the trenches, is an act which breaks through the boundaries of conflict to affirm the humanity of even the unseen enemy, and which establishes a ground of common circumstance that runs deeper than national conscience. The process of naming also serves as a means of reassurance for men about to go into battle. Language here takes on a magical, ritualistic quality which is located in the words of prayers or nursery rhymes drawn out of memory, and it works to hold off death, which is 'that other form of words, the anti-breath of a backward-spelled charm, the no-name of extinction' (pp. 114-15).

In effect, then, the different languages which arise from the war indicate that the assertion of any sustaining narrative is dependent upon the non-assertion of others (such as 'that other form of words'). Of course what such a reading of Australian history suggests is that the national myth of pre-war innocence (an innocence which is shattered by the intervention of empire as authoritative power and creator of

war) is sustainable only through the necessary suppression of its other; that is, the uncomfortable memory of violence and colonization in pre-war Australia. At the same time as it revives the national mythology of Australia at war, then, *Fly Away Peter* explores the underbelly of that mythology in its glimpses of 'our *other* history';⁷ that is, the social events and fractures which history misses. In this sense, Jim's initial innocence is, though guileless enough, offered up as being always, already suspect. The novel opens with a self-reflexive description of Jim's landscape, in which the Sanctuary – a harmonious, sanctified world, with its borders of trees and rings of colour – is artfully created: the 'light was dulled by cloud shadows, then, as if an unseen hand were rubbing it with a cloth, it brightened, flared, and the silver shone through' (p. 1). The Sanctuary, in fact, is more a source of security for Jim than for the birds. After all, the birds themselves do not seem to require the protection of the Sanctuary, adapting as they do to any environment and repeating their patterns of migration in a way that is utterly indifferent to the zones of war. Like the war, the birds are one of the text's pervasive metaphors for change but, unlike the war, their role is an apolitical one; indeed in their movement between polarized worlds they are 'quite unconscious that [they have] broken some barrier' (p. 48). Most importantly, the birds have the capacity to hold more than one kind of map in their heads at any one time: not only do they move 'horizontally' between the northern and southern hemispheres, but they also see 'vertically' between 'the flat world of individual grassblades' and 'the long view' from the sky (p. 2). Unlike the south – and earth-bound Jim Saddler, each bird retains,

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

In contrast to the birds, Jim can initially imagine only one kind of map. Bert's bi-plane in particular, the 'clumsy shape' of the novel's opening lines, is regarded by Jim with suspicion and dislike. It represents a threat to the static world of the Sanctuary, and in his eyes it is a 'big shadow' which dulls the otherwise untempered brightness of the sky. But like the different languages of war, which can either disintegrate or remake the world as it is known, the bi-plane has a double effect. On the one hand, it signals a negative tension between the post-industrial, imperialistic world of human ambition and the apparently eternally-unaffected landscape, between the potential of war and a natural harmony: 'The bi-plane appeared again, climbing steeply against the sun. Birds scattered and flew up in all directions. It flopped down among them, so big, so awkward, so noisy. Did they wonder what it

ate?' (p. 3). On the other hand, the plane signals the sorts of changes which, as Philip Neilsen puts it, are naturalized in the terms of time's inevitable cycles;⁸ the question which then forms itself is this: is Jim's place within an apparently timeless landscape any more or less 'natural' than the movements of capitalist imperialism?

In fact, despite his innocence and his 'natural' connection to the land, Jim is as much a participant in the colonizing culture of Australia as Ashley. In particular, his possession of 'the names for things' places Jim in a position of power in terms of that most systemic apparatus of colonialism: language. Jim's appropriation of the birds through words endows them with a quality 'that [is] really in himself' (p. 15). This act is formalized by Jim's recording of the birds into *The Book*. Jim regards this activity in terms of his sense that the written word captures the spoken signification in a permanent form. (To write, Derrida suggests, is to have the sense of replacing a 'present and concrete existence' with 'the ideality of truth and value'.⁹) Jim's weekly ritual of writing the birds into *The Book*, using his best handwriting with all the proper flourishes, gives credence not only to their named identities, but also, in a ritualistic and therefore seemingly natural way, to his own place within the world as he sees it: 'Out of air and water [the birds] passed through their name, and his hand as he carefully formed its letters, into *The Book*. Making a place for them there was giving them existence in another form, recognising their place in the landscape, or his stretch of it ...' (p. 44). *The Book* is written in the language of the empire, learned painfully at school 'without at all knowing what it was to be for' (p. 45), and then passed on each week to Ashley, the land's owner, for approval. Before the writing of *The Book*, in fact, Ashley is predetermined as its owner; when Ashley and Julia Bell are married, Jim 'presented them with the first of the Books; not exactly as a wedding gift, since that would have been presumptuous, and anyway, the Book was Ashley's already, but as a mark of the occasion' (p. 45).

Jim's state of innocence, then, can only be partial (in both senses). Just as writing is the 'dangerous supplement' to speech, both less than and in excess of what it claims to be, so Jim's innocence is 'dangerous' (p. 103), complicitous as it is with the invisible exercise of cultural power. Ultimately, too, it is not sustainable, as the intrusion of the war indicates. Until this moment Jim sees himself at the centre of a world which radiated out and away from him in endless continuity. As Jim shakes hands with Ashley on his employment as the Sanctuary's bird-keeper, the two appear 'at the centre, if they could have seen themselves, of a vast circle of grass and low greyish scrub, with beyond them on one side tea-trees then paddocks, and on the other tea-trees then swamp then surf' (p. 18). But with the announcement of war, Jim 'felt panicky. It was as if the ground before him, that had only minutes ago stretched away to a clear future, had suddenly tilted in the

direction of Europe, in the direction of *events*, and they were all now on a dangerous slope. That was the impression people gave him. That they were sliding' (p. 36). And as with its repercussions for language, war here has both a diminishing and a rejuvenating import; parallel to Jim's slide into European events is Australia's mythologized acceptance by 'the big boys in the playground'. Walking along Queen Street after the announcement of the war, Jim reflects that 'the streets did feel different. As if they had finally come into the real world at last' (p.39).

As his image of his own world slides (as well as expands), Jim prepares to 'join up'. He fears that his progress down the 'dangerous slope' is inevitable, for '[the] time would come when he wouldn't be able any longer to resist. He would slide with the rest. Down into the pit' (p. 35). If he resists the change, he will never have a place within the social order of his generation, will never share in the new discourse of national consciousness: 'If he didn't go, he would never understand ... why his life and everything he had known were so changed, and nobody would be able to tell him' (p. 55). The next day Jim leaves for the war, and for another side of the world, a strange and terrible landscape 'newly developed for the promotion of the war' (p. 67). Jim's arrival in this landscape affirms the violences and divisions which were already present, but repressed, in the protected society of pre-war Australia. The night before he leaves for the war, as he goes home with a girl from the pub, Jim witnesses a disturbance among a group of Aboriginal men. The girl's indifference to the scene – indeed, the absence of Aboriginal presence, until this point, in either the urban or the 'sanctified' landscape – indicates the naturalizing of the settler culture's own violences: "'Abos", the girl said with cool disgust, as if the rituals beings enacted, however violent, and in whatever degenerate form, were ordinary and not to be taken note of' (pp. 39-40). The disturbance is played out in the darkness of the fig trees; it has no impact upon the festivities in honour of war, and no-one intervenes.

In turn Jim uncovers a dark side to his own character which had always been unrecognized, and which now frightens him with its violence. Up against another soldier in a fist fight and surprised by the 'black anger he was possessed by', Jim finds that he 'needed this sudden, unexpected confrontation to see who he was and what he had to defend' (p. 63). The war, clearly, operates on more than one level: 'There were several wars going on here, and different areas of hostility, not all of them official' (p. 71). The full implications of the war, however, do not touch Jim until a visit to the military hospital to see Eric, a 'pale, sad youth' (p. 72) whose legs have both been blown away by a wayward shell. Eric's plaintive statement, 'I'm an orfing. Who's gunna look after me, *back there?*' (p. 85) opens up, for the first time, an aspect of war that extends beyond the immediate horror of muddy trenches and barbed wire. Eric's fate 'back there' in Australia raises

larger, even more muddy questions about the power of imperial authority in determining the relationship between patriotic and individual identity, and about the toll that relationship exacts:

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

The irreducibility of Eric's position makes Jim weep 'for the first time since he was a kid' (p. 87). His innocence of the days of the Sanctuary is now lost; yet it is an innocence, of course, that was always shadowed by its opposite. Looking back on his past life, Jim sees that the world 'when you looked from both sides was quite other than a placid, slow-moving dream, without change of climate or colour and with time and place for all. He had been blind' (p. 103). Looking 'from both sides', Jim only now recalls the violent death of his younger brother in a harvesting accident, the image of which can 'never be fitted in any language' (p. 103); and of the kestrel who had been a victim of mindless violence, which had made him weep 'with rage and pain at the cruelty of the thing, the mean and senseless cruelty' (p.104): 'That was how it was, even in sunlight. Even there' (p. 104).

This recognition, however, does not take its form in a vision of hopelessness or despair. The concluding section of the novel suggests that acceptance of the fragmentary and often contradictory nature of things is a process allowing for, if not a vision of completion, at least a wider and adaptable world view. This is something already understood by Ashley who, despite his sheltered social position, adapts readily to change. Travelling through an upturned French landscape in which scenes of war and civilian farming life are intermingled, Ashley senses that '[there] were so many worlds. They were all continuous with one another and went on simultaneously: [the farmer's] world, intent on his ancient business with the hoe; his own world, committed to bringing these men up to a battle; their worlds, each one, about which he could only guess' (p. 110). And later, launching himself into the battle in which he will be killed, Jim feels that '[perhaps] he had, in some part of himself, taken on the nature of a bird; though it was with a human eye that he saw ... he moved in one place and saw things from another, and saw too, from up there, in a grand sweep, the whole landscape through which he was moving' (p. 106). Jim's recognition just before death of relative worlds held in balance is simple but as far-reaching as one person's vision can ever be:

He saw it all, and himself as a distant, slow-moving figure within it: the long view of all their lives, including his own - all those who were running, half-

crouched, towards the guns, and the men who were firing them ... his own life neither more nor less important than the rest, even in his own vision of the thing, but unique because it was his head that contained it and in his view that all these balanced lives for a moment existed ... He continued to run. Astonished that he could hold all this in his head at the same time and how the map he carried there had so immensely expanded. (p. 117)

Jim's apprehension of balance between any moment's various possibilities stands as a prelude to Imogen Harcourt's apprehension after his death that there can be no answer to her own question 'What am I doing here?' (p. 130), whether she is in her adopted Australia or her native England. Her question is one which, in denying an answer, empties of meaning that ideal of 'fullness of presence' and simultaneously affirms 'the flux of things' (p. 131). Even so, Imogen Harcourt's recognition of flux is underwritten by an implicit tension with its opposite, and this is a tension which is sustained to the text's close. Her vision in the last pages of a young surfer held on the crest of a wave brings together in delicate balance the seemingly opposing elements of change and continuity, motion and immobility. Struck by the unfamiliar image, she admires 'the balance, the still dancing on the surface, the brief etching of his body against the sky at the very moment, on the wave's lip, when he would slide into its hollows and fall' (p. 133). Watching the surfer's fragile dance, she decides:

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

Even in this acknowledgement of change, though, there is a nostalgia for – even idealization of – unchanging permanence. Within her insight that '[the] past could not hold and could not be held' lies Imogen Harcourt's desire to photograph the image of the surfer; yet to 'catch [the] moment' would be to arrest that moment in a permanent form; to photograph movement and tense energy would be to render those elements immobile and fixed. To accept a world in which knowledge is without centre is, then, not necessarily to discard the desire for such a centre. Desire, after all, is located in that which will always elude its fulfilment.

This same tension between provisional and essentialist readings of world and consciousness informs Malouf's other novels,¹⁰ and can be traced to the presence in Malouf's work in general of both a post-colonial relativism and a romantic aesthetic. One reading of this inherent tension in the novel might suggest that Malouf, following the conventions of national mythology, aligns the war with cyclical change which signals Australia's movement towards maturity; but such a reading would not allow for the ways in which *Fly Away Peter* does

review the narratives of our national history: in its unravelling of the mythic thread between European 'centre' and Australian 'periphery'; in its scrutiny of Australia's mythic egalitarianism; in its depiction of language itself as the means by which such myths are naturalized. These considerations give a certain weight to the novel's final lines, which allow for a turning both to the future and to the past. And in focusing here upon the figure of Imogen Harcourt – who with her given English past and her chosen Australian future can envisage divergent horizons – the text maintains those tensions which, in refusing to relax, suggest that the enduring and the provisional precede and determine each other. As such, *Fly Away Peter's* closing scene – be it an affirmation of continuity and universals or of fragmentation and relativities – is one in which the potential of its opposite is already contained, in which the asserted is inevitably shadowed by the unasserted:

One day soon, she might make a photograph of this new thing. To catch its moment, its brilliant balance up there, of movement and stillness, of tense energy and ease – that would be something.

This eager turning, for a moment, to the future, surprised and hurt her ... There was in there a mourning woman who rocked eternally back and forth; who would not be seen and was herself.

But before she fell below the crest of the dunes, while the ocean was still in view, she turned and looked again. (p. 134)

NOTES

1. Michel Pecheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, trans., Harbans Nagpal (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 187-88.
2. Chris Tiffin, 'Imagining Countries, Imagining People: Climate and the Australian Type', *SPAN: Special Number: Inventing Countries*, 24 (April 1987), pp. 46-47.
3. See Paul Carter and David Malouf, 'Spatial History', *Textual Practice*, 3, 2 (1989), pp. 173-83.
4. This is not to suggest that there are only three 'edges' of contact between governors, settlers and Aborigines, nor that such edges are not subject to overlap; rather, the effects of the 'contact zone', as the Australian historian Henry Reynolds has made familiar, are multiple.
5. David Malouf, *Fly Away Peter* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1983). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
6. David Malouf, 'Australian Literature and War', *Australian Literary Studies*, 12, 2 (1985), p. 266.
7. David Malouf, *The Great World* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990), p. 284.
8. Philip Nielsen, *Imagined Lives: A Study of David Malouf* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990), p. 91.
9. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1976), p. 142.
10. For instance, *Johnno's* conclusion depends upon the ambiguity of the character's life and death, but it also allows for a return to his source; *Child's*

Play is a self-reflexive challenge to literary tradition but it is one which ends with a circular return to its idealised beginning of childhood innocence; *An Imaginary Life* is an exploration of the arbitrary nature of that most imperial language, Latin, but it concludes with the affirmation of a 'true language' whose 'every syllable is a gesture of reconciliation'. (*Remembering Babylon* is another example. ed., AR.)

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