

DAVID MALOUF'S *REMEMBERING BABYLON* AS A RECONSIDERATION OF PASTORAL IDEALISATION

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David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* has been read primarily as a postcolonial work, following various threads, most particularly as insight into the complexities of language and place or self and other in the colonial encounter (for example, Sempruch, Ashcroft, Pons, Otto, Murphy, McCredden, Tayeb, and Tulip). Critical responses engage with the work as an exploration of a language that properly captures the particularities of the new colonial place rather than replicates the language of the imperial centre or subordinates place to an imperial language. Gemmy, the returning lost boy operates as a signifier of colonial anxieties over the integrity and immutability of whiteness. As Sempruch argues, '[u]pon the appearance of a stammering and nearly naked white man emerging from the bush, [colonial] naming however seems to have lost its power. . . .' (44). Gemmy has been read as a philosophical questioning of the boundaries between self and other (Sempruch 42) and as a Lacanian signifier of the realm beyond the colonial symbolic order (Ashcroft 51-2). Gemmy exemplifies the postcolonial condition of liminality and hybridity. This condition is crystallised in his highly symbolic moment on the fence, hovering between worlds.

Gemmy literally crosses a boundary in the understanding of space and place when he jumps on to the fence at the novel's opening. He brings with him an Indigenous understanding of knowing space to the colonial world, sharing some of what he has learned in his tribal existence with the sympathetic 'researcher,' the minister Mr Frazer, who sketches Gemmy's visions. As Ashcroft says '[w]e discover that who you are is vitally connected with where you are, and Mr Frazer is taken to the edges of an imperial consciousness, a place constructed in the imperial language, to a vision of what Australia might become' (Ashcroft 58). Gemmy's insights into place involve not just new pieces of knowledge, but an entire epistemological shift. Language becomes not the site of represented reality but the convergence of a forming selfhood and place (Ashcroft 54, 58). In Gemmy's moment upon the fence he embodies both human and animal forms: 'The creature, almost upon them now and with Flash at its heels, came to a halt, gave a kind of squawk, and leaping up onto the top rail of the fence, hung there, its arms outflung as if preparing for flight' (Malouf 3). This moment indicates a particular use of and fascination with the natural and nonhuman animalian realm. This paper is looking to reconsider the nature of that fascination beyond postcolonial significances.

In part, the compulsion to reconsider the place of the natural realm in *Remembering Babylon* comes in response to others' negative criticism of the novel. This criticism is often based on a sense that Malouf presents an idealisation of the natural world at the expense of historically salient political considerations. Jo Jones has argued that Malouf's vision of settlement is politically problematic in that it presents an interstice between Edenic nature and post-lapsarian Europe. She suggests the novel offers Australian nature as an Arcadia for those who will appreciate it and in the process it elides cultural difference (73). *Remembering Babylon* has been critiqued by others for a use of the Romantic mode that may obfuscate cultural difference and colonial frontier violence (Otto 55-7). Lyn McCredden clarifies this body of criticism as characterised by a perception that Malouf is dwelling on a 'literary' expression of Romantic transcendence at the expense of a necessary political focus (McCredden 6). This

paper does not seek to refute the charge that Indigenous difference is silenced in *Remembering Babylon* but it does seek to reframe and reconsider the presentation of nature in the text as complex, varied and ultimately suspicious of Romantic idealisation rather than guilty of indulgence in such sentiment.

The representation of nature as accessible Arcadia is not limited to Australian space in *Remembering Babylon* and from the opening chapters such idealising gaze is parodied (Tayeb 334). The Romantic motif in the novel must be further qualified and is more complex than Jones suggests. Malouf's writing never presents a singular engagement with place, rather it juxtaposes polyphonic standpoints. As Bill Ashcroft has demonstrated, the suggested transcendence and the announcement of 'the possibility of a . . . different kind of invention of Australia' allegorised by Gemmy as lost child is not realised (56). One way of approaching the reality of multiple engagements with nature in *Remembering Babylon* while reconsidering the charge of Romanticisation is to read the novel against the archetypal genre of Romantic and Arcadian nature: the pastoral.

This is a difficult task, as the pastoral is such a contested mode: it can be used as both a criticism of and a positive affirmation of critical complexity or jejune idyll (Alpers 8). Terry Gifford defines three general usages of pastoral. The first is traditional pastoral genre, originating in classical Greek and Roman poetry idealising nature, especially the Arcadian, rural life of the shepherd. Second is a broader thematic celebration of country existence and the natural realm; and thirdly is the 'sceptical use of the term—'pastoral' as pejorative, implying that the pastoral vision is too simplified and thus an idealisation . . .' (1-2). In all three—whether celebrated or disparaged—the natural realm functions as a place to retreat to in order to learn moral lessons or experience spiritual improvement before returning to the urban, sullied reality (Gifford 2). Arguably, implied in all three is a positioning of normative human 'culture' as ordinarily separate from nature, even opposite to it. Does Malouf indulge in this positioning of nature as idealised 'other' in *Remembering Babylon*?

One way of responding to this question is to look anew at the choice of authors cited in *Remembering Babylon*'s epigraph, and the significance of their combination. The epigraph reads:

Whether this is Jerusalem or Babylon, we know not.
William Blake: *The Four Zoas*

Strange shapes and void afflict the soul
And shadow to the eye
A world on fire while smoke seas roll
And lightnings rend the sky

The moon shall be as blood the sun
Black as a thunder cloud
The stars shall turn to blue and dun
And heaven by darkness bowed
Shall make sun dark and give no day
When stars like skys shall be
When heaven and earth shall pass away
Wilt thou Remember me

John Clare (Malouf epigraph)¹

The epigraph is not usually the focus of critical literature on *Remembering Babylon*. Those who do explore it focus on the details of the citations and see it as embedding the human and historical questions of the novel in apocalyptic terms and questioning colonial presumptions of belonging (see Morera de la Vall and Tulip, for example). The epigraph and title definitely evoke a history of dispossession and a pining for belonging: after the invasion of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar, thousands of Jews were dispossessed and forced into Babylon (Morera de la Vall 137). The meaning of Blake's *The Four Zoas* in the epigraph and the lines 'Whether this is Jerusalem or Babylon we know not' is surely intended to inject ambivalence into an established evil/good binary. As Elisa Morera de la Vall convincingly shows (137-143), the text presents Gemmy's perspective as an inversion, with Babylon (Australia) as site of evil and Jerusalem/Motherland (England) as the remembered 'chief joy' (Psalm 137). The Blake epigraph 'whether this is Jerusalem or Babylon we know not' makes colonial categories of belonging and displacement uncertain. It introduces the novel's established thematic objective to dismantle 'received settler perceptions of space and throws into doubt the sensory and cognitive tools by which space is ordered into either home or exile' (Tayeb 333). The lines from the two poets in the framing epigraph position the work as evoking clear connections between spiritual and colonial concerns, a discussion of spiritual transformation rooted in the tangible human experience of colonial Australian space (Tulip 71). The lines from Clare are apocalyptic in nature. They act as prolepsis for Gemmy's disappearance into the fire-ravaged bush and shed light on the magnitude and lost opportunity for integration with an Australian nature evoked by Gemmy's final disappearance and Lachlan and Janet's ongoing sentimental longing for and remembering of Gemmy. But there is another, complementary reading of the epigraph's questioning of the stability of belonging. The apocalyptic overtones and the uncertainty over belonging can be read as an allusion to human place and sustainability on the earth because of the novel's historical site of production in the early 1990s, and also because of the reputations of the poets contained in the epigraph.

An epigraph is an important site for analysis in a novel. The epigraph operates to 'set the tone or establish the themes of what follows' (Murfin and Ray 136); in the case of two or more citations, there is the meaning produced by the individual citation and there is the meaning produced in 'concert' (Murfin and Ray 137). I will focus on the significance of the combination—John Clare and William Blake in 'concert.' In regard to the criticism of the work as idealisation of environment, the epigraph can be used to ask new questions and arrive at new readings of the novel. If Arcadian idealisation of the Australian landscape was a thematic preoccupation, why choose poetic excerpts that do not idealise nature? And why place John Clare and William Blake side by side? Perhaps the epigraph raises questions beyond religious and postcolonial concerns?

The significance of the combination of Blake and Clare may not *only* be that they are Romantic poets and the citations share apocalyptic resonances. Malouf may well have selected the poets for their common fringe existence. Both wrote against industrial exploitation and the loss of the commons and village greens through the Enclosure Acts, and both protested about the living conditions of the homeless. And both wrote of complex mental states:

The solace they offer is that no human experience is too bizarre, too shameful or too lacerating to be outside the remit of our common experience, expressed in poetry. William Blake wanders through 'each chartered street' of London, marking the 'mind-forged manacles' that chain his city's inhabitants. John Clare sums up the estrangement of a man consumed by mental anguish: 'I am: yet

what I am none care or knows/ My friends forsake me like a memory lost . . .'
(Dunmore 24)

William Blake and John Clare are both historically located in the Romantic period of poetic production and share a fascination with nature as preferable to the corrupt exigencies of urban existence. They both have reputations for thinking outside established norms: John Clare's biographer, Edward Storey, asserts a strong parallel, describing Clare as 'refined, independent of mind, a man out of his time and as solitary in his vision as Van Gogh or William Blake' (Storey 16). In writing of Clare's authority as poet of the countryside and of the seasons Storey suggests the 'intensity of his concentration and involvement was like that of William Blake . . .' (Storey 214). Of particular interest to this paper, is that *both* Blake and Clare's wider *oeuvres* present, if in different forms, a simultaneous eliciting and questioning of pastoral tropes: a post-pastoral vision of nature.

Blake's poetry presents spiritual matters as embedded in bodily connectedness including visceral sexuality and human engagement with nonhuman other. His work is part of a post-pastoral critique of 'pastoral instrumentalization of nonhuman nature' (Hutchings 2). That is, Blake is preoccupied with the ways in which pastoral idealisation may reduce nature to anthropocentric utilitarian or spiritual service.² Blake's poetry presents a complication to the Romantic pastoral notion of nature as *primarily* a transcendental vehicle for the human soul, a site to retreat to for insight (Gifford 3) or a place to defend the self against, rather than as an integrated part of human existence. Kevin Hutchings uses Donald Worster to posit Blake as a poet who often presents discord between utilitarian notions of nature in a 'human-centred pastoral economy' and a more expansive sense of 'intrinsic value' in nature (3). Blake's form of post-pastoralism is a deconstruction of the Arcadian ideal and of a sentimental vision of nature as other or lost. This understanding of Blake re-contextualises the epigraphic frame. John Clare's poetry is even more clearly an expression of such post-pastoral passion for nature. The post-pastoral intimations of Clare's inclusion in the epigraph are suggested in his established reputation as a 'literal' poet, speaking a vernacular of his region and of nature. Arthur Symons, an early twentieth century editor of his poetry, describes his *oeuvre* as

an utterance which literary influences have not modified. The impulse and the subject-matter are alike his own, and are taken directly from what was about him. There is no closer attention to nature than in Clare's poems; but the observation begins by being literal; nature a part of his home, rather than his home a part of nature. The things about him are the whole of his material, he does not choose them by preference out of others equally available. . . . He does not make pictures which would imply aloof-ness and selection; he enumerates, which means a friendly knowledge. (Symons 18-19)

This theme of literalness recurs in ecocritical analysis over one hundred years later. Greg Garrard suggests that John Clare presents the more authentic 'naïve' poetic voice of the Romantic poets, presenting human and nonhuman as one (49). Yet Garrard qualifies his definition of Clare as an authentic naïve poet, transmitting 'literal' nature. Clare is not only descriptive, he is sophisticated and nuanced in his poetry, combining fierce defence of nature, despair at the destruction wreaked by men, and understanding of fragility beyond the abstract to precisely describe an unromanticised nature (49-51). Clare's poetry presents a literal engagement with nature in and for itself, and nature is not *other*. In presenting human and nonhuman as one and valuing literal nature for itself, Clare is an early post-pastoral poet. The

presence of William Blake and John Clare together in the epigraph opens up possibilities for reading *Remembering Babylon* as a work of post-pastoral, ecocritical significance.

The post-pastoral position is not simply a challenge to pastoral traditions. As Gifford points out, the three usages of the term pastoral—a particular Arcadia; the general idealisation of rural sites and nature; and the traducing of the idealisation of nature—often overlap. Quoting Lawrence Buell, Gifford suggests that in post-pastoral forms ‘accommodation and reformism are interfused’ (Buell 52 in Gifford 146). As Gifford says of these complexities:

What is needed is a new term to refer to literature that is aware of the anti-pastoral and of the conventional allusions upon which Arcadia is premised, but which finds a language to outflank those dangers with a vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated from by their possession of language. (Gifford 149)

Whether or not Malouf intended his combination of Blake and Clare in the epigraph to specifically reveal a post-pastoral patterning in *Remembering Babylon* seems to me to be immaterial: they are definitely poets who have elicited comparative ecocritical consideration. As Daniel Hannah has argued of other poems by these two authors, ‘Blake’s and Clare’s poems become representative of the complicated exchanges humans are called to by the nonhuman’ (Hannah 4). Their presence side by side and their common complex relationship with a poetic romanticisation of nature raises questions of Malouf’s presentation of a vision of humans accommodated in nature (rather than in opposition to or subordinating it) and questions his awareness of both the potential transcendence through, and dangers of, Arcadian vision. And when we look closely at *Remembering Babylon*, we do see ‘awareness’ of the ‘dangers’ of ‘the conventional allusions upon which Arcadia is premised’ as well as ‘a language to outflank those dangers with a vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated from’ (Gifford 149). Malouf is sympathetic to a deconstruction of pastoral romanticisation of nature, attempts moments of literal nature for its own sake and connects the non-human and human animal. In so doing, Malouf evokes a post-pastoral vision.

Pastoral Parody and Deconstruction of Idealised Nature

A suggestion of pastoral parody is present from the novel’s inception. The opening sequence of *Remembering Babylon* depicts children at play in the natural environment. There is intrinsic idealistic and sentimental interaction with nature at work. The children are situated in two spaces simultaneously: firstly, in ‘the middle of the nineteenth century’ in a paddock half way up the Queensland coast; secondly, in ‘a forest in Russia—they were hunters on the track of wolves’ (Malouf 1). There is a post-colonial critique implicit in this duality of setting. Lachlan is, like the grown men in his community, transplanting the idealised nature of the previous home into his imaginings of belonging and difference in the colonial place. It is also demonstrative of colonial education, symbolised in the ‘fourth grade Reader,’ and its process of ‘consolidating that construction of reality which language initiates’ (Ashcroft 56). Lachlan and his less enthusiastic cousins are imagining the clay-packed, ant-filled paddock as Europe and as forest. The incongruity of Lachlan’s game of dominion over nature can be read as a Romantic seeking of lost nature, subordinating natural objects to his own imaginative needs. Lachlan is transforming the natural into a manageable aesthetic and his acts are parodied by the narrator. He is romanticising his environment.

The narrator suggests that Lachlan had ‘elaborated’ the narrative from a story in the fourth grade Reader. Lachlan’s version elevates the human role from the original source. Malouf’s source for this story of the wolves in the Russian forest is clearly locatable. The *Queensland School Reader* was first produced in 1914 and remained in print for over fifty years (Taylor 41) and throughout that time the Grade IV reader contained two illustrated narratives relating to Russian forests and wolves, entitled *Mazeppa’s Ride—Part I* and *Part II* (*Queensland School Reader* 131-37). Lachlan greatly elevates the chase through the European wilds. The real fourth grade reader has no story of a boy hunting wolves, as occurs in the game Lachlan devises at the opening of *Remembering Babylon*. Instead there is at the heart of this reader a story called *Mazeppa’s Ride* where a man is chased by wolves, not vice versa, completely incapacitated as he is tied, naked, to a wild and terrified horse, as a punishment for an indiscretion. The differences between the human as immersed in and subject to nature in the original and Lachlan’s re-imagining of it as a space of dominion over nature hints at parody of Lachlan’s idealising of the tale.

A more extreme form of Romantic parody is revealed in the characterisation of Queensland governor Sir George Bowen. Malouf cites the Herbert letters contained in Bruce Knox’s *Robert Herbert: Premier* as the source for this characterisation, and as one of his few precise historical referents in the afterword. Like the use of the *Reader*, it displaces existing documentation as much as it draws on it. Sir George is a great disappointment to the utopian hopes of Mr Frazer. Sir George, in comic complacency and delusion, imposes his own classical Arcadian logic on his space, has ‘no interest in fact,’ uses talk of gardens and vegetables to reimagine himself in England and believes that the native orchards are already created just by talking of them (Malouf 169-73). It is significant that this chapter, which focuses on the failures of an idealised vision, is immediately followed by the chapter in which Gemmy walks upon ‘burnt earth,’ turning his back upon the settlement with his tongue as ‘brittle as an insect’s wing’ (Malouf 176). This chapter casts the two epigraphic poets as prolepsis.

There are other moments in which Malouf presents a Romantic attitude to a pastoral ideal, if not always in parody. Jock McIvor epitomises the idealisation of a pastoral, gentle nature located far away at the imperial centre. Jock’s perspective is characterised by his articulation of deeply sentimental elegising of his lost idyll:

The land here never slept. If only he could wake one day and find it, just for a day, under a blanket of snow! What he missed were the marks of change. The crying, high up, of curlews flocking to a new season, to some place thousands of miles to the north where it had been winter and was now breathing the freshness of spring, brought an ache to his heart for the sight of rowans just bursting into sticky leaf, and for days afterwards he would be rough-tempered, as if the need of bark for the shiver of radiance was in himself. (Malouf 76)

This focus on another ideal ‘lost’ place is intensified by an absence in perception of what is immediately present. Janet understands that Lachlan and many others in the community do not *see* in a literal sense what is present, instead idealising the absent form of nature and place in pastoral terms. The limited third person narration reveals her frustration: ‘[t]here were times when she felt helpless against a place which, as her parents evoked it in every word they uttered, belonged so much more strongly to all the highest emotions in her than the place she was in’ (Malouf 55). It is no accident that it is Lachlan who is enacting pastoral idealism through the wolves and forest tale at the novel’s inception. Lachlan’s very presence in the

family accentuates continuity of the colonial settlement with an idealising of pastoral European nature. He appears in transcendent, Romantic terms: ‘He glowed. He was radiant. The light of some far-off place she had only imagined shone through his skin’ (Malouf 57).

Post-pastoral Fusion with Nature

Remembering Babylon has been established as presenting the ‘deep rift in Western thought between nature and culture . . . as . . . the root of the white settlers’ estrangement from Australian nature’ (Tayeb 341). The evocation of nature/human union is further explained by the post-pastoral implications of the epigraph. If Blake’s presence attunes us to the potential for pastoral deconstruction and parody, Clare’s juxtaposition in the epigraph crystallises this into a post-pastoral union with nature. As argued above, Clare’s particular reputation as a more authentic and literal poet of nature is highly significant to the post-pastoral ramifications for *Remembering Babylon*. Despite attempts by contemporaneous publishers to market Clare as a rustic, Romantic poet, he is always ‘marginal and oppositional’ to the broader Romantic project (Kelley 159). Clare exists in a comparable liminal space to Gemmy. Clare is simultaneously authentic, autochthonous poet, speaking the argot of his particular natural realm, and ‘schooled’ in the economic and scientific rationalist encroachment on, and classification of, that place.

Clare’s particular form of post-pastoral expression is a rejection of the Linnaean system of defining flora and capturing and literalising the voice of the hunted more than the hunter (Kelley 164-65). Some of Clare’s poems, such as ‘Lament of Swordy Well’ even ventriloquise nature itself (Garrard 51), akin to Gemmy’s own acts of ventriloquism of the nonhuman and his polyphonic union with natural phenomena: ‘A drop of moisture sizzled on his tongue: the word—he had found it. *Water*’ (181). Gemmy’s articulation of nature here is coterminous with its material presence, not a defining dominion over the natural.

While Gemmy’s characterisation is the most overt site of this material, literal integration with nature, other characters also experience a shift between idealisation and post-pastoral insight into nature for its own sake. While Jock McIvor experiences moments of pastoral nostalgia at other points in the novel, Kathleen Doty and Risto Hiltunen (102), citing the following passage from *Remembering Babylon*, explain how Jock is also surprised by material, sensate, literal nature:

Wading through the waist-high grass, he was surprised to see all the tips beaded with green, as if some new growth had come into the world that till now he had never seen or heard of.

When he looked closer it was hundreds of wee bright insects, each the size of his little fingernail, metallic, iridescent, and the discovery of them, the new light they brought to the scene, was a lightness in him—that was what surprised him—like a form of knowledge he had broken through to. It was unnameable, which disturbed him, but was also exhilarating; for a moment he was entirely happy. (Malouf 107)

Like Jock, George Abbot represents a character capable of moving between nostalgic remembering of nature as it is elsewhere and moments of naïve fusion with ‘the drab bush trees’ of the present place (Malouf 92). George’s idealisation of a natural world beyond his immediate existence is more neo-classical than pastoral but shares an idealisation with Jock’s

longing for snow. Deeply resentful of the ‘humiliations and mean insufficiencies of his schoolmaster’s existence’ in Australia, he dreams of a make-believe Paris, of avenues and drooping foliage, and ‘a columned temple . . .’ (Malouf 81). This fantasy—inspired by George’s love of French literature—is gently parodied by Malouf and is further evidence of the novel’s preoccupation with the link between language and experienced reality noted by so many critics (Ashcroft, Pons, Tayeb, for example). It is George’s experience of belonging, community and, in all likelihood, visceral desire for Leona, at a chance afternoon tea gathering at Mrs Hutchence’s house, that opens his eyes to the beauty of nature around him and his own place within it:

He was filled with a sense of his own lightness. Some heavier self had been laid asleep in him, and another woken that was all open to the westering glow in which the drab bush trees along his way found a kind of beauty, all their leaves glancing and the earth under them alight along its ridges, and the sky above a show, a carnival, of cloud shapes transforming themselves . . . (Malouf 92)

George is reaching for and realising the limits of colonial language to access a landscape so different from the pastoral idealised space in which colonial language is founded (Tayeb 338). Like Jock, his post-pastoral experience of natural essence fills him with lightness, but it seems to be for love of this nature in and of itself. George is enacting a kind of literal poetry of the land here; akin to Clare’s *oeuvre*, he is describing what is present, not what can be used to service his own spiritual needs. He is experiencing ‘lightness’ more than affirmation of God. He experiences presence, not idealised transfer. And he is moving beyond the pastoral and sentimental Romanticisation of another place in search of expectant and open discovery: ‘He had the feeling that there were many things in the world that were still to come to him’ (Malouf 92).

One of the most significant experiences with nature in *Remembering Babylon* is Janet’s moment of epiphany with the bees on Mrs Hutchence’s property. Janet’s experience is a hyperbolic version of Jock’s glimpsing of the material, sensate presence of the metallic insects. This is probably one of the most critically discussed narrative events in the novel. Janet is, essentially, swarmed by bees, but remains unharmed, surrendering herself to a unity of consciousness with the ‘single mind’ of the bees (Malouf 142). Despite a life’s work with bees, Janet acknowledges she can never again grasp that communication, because of the ‘human shape’ of her adult mind. She knows that her momentary integration and communion with the bees was achieved through sympathy and Mrs Hutchence’s example, not explanation (Malouf 192). Such an intimate encounter with the non-human natural as epitomised by Janet’s communion with the bees is not, arguably, transcendence or idealisation. Such writing has ‘gone beyond received forms of religious observance, often beyond received traditions of literary genre, but perhaps most ironically, it has sought to move beyond language itself’ (Ashcroft *et al* 320).

Post-pastoral Nonhuman Animal

This mediation of a post-pastoral relationship to nature is no more focused than in Malouf’s use of the nonhuman animal. *Remembering Babylon*’s use of animalian representation is arguably both a critique of the colonial and racist conflation of Indigenous peoples with animals, and also a revision of the liberal humanist assumption of human and animal opposition, even evoking kinship between human beings and animals (Murphy 75-88). In this sense, like Clare’s poetry which frames the work, there is a post-pastoral evocation at work in

relation to the nonhuman animal realm. Nature and the nonhuman animal's numinous presence is not lost, or grieved. Instead there is a complex reworking of the myth of human and nonhuman separation, stimulating 'meditation on the essence and paradox of the human' (Byron 84-85), a glimpse of union. And Gemmy is the allegorical embodiment of such a union. As Lamia Tayeb has argued, Gemmy presents 'an alternative way of inhabiting the land based on the principle of communication rather than separation and opposition' (Tayeb 334). Gemmy enacts the utopian potential for new perspectives of the land (Tayeb 335). The acknowledgement of communication and integration is not idealisation of nature, and Gemmy's interaction is in stark contrast to the forms of sentimental and elegiac interaction exhibited by some of the settler characters. Gemmy's relationship to and kinship with animals is not sentimental, transcendental pastoral, but suggests a form of immediacy and 'literalness' that further contextualises Malouf's use of the John Clare epigraph. Gemmy enacts not so much a pondering on human transcendence through nature or human sentimental grieving for nature lost, but an immersion and collapse into nature. He 'threatens the stability of the animal-human-spirit hierarchy, either as a visitant from one sphere to another, or as paradox that threatens the collapse of distinction *per se*' (Byron 85). This collapse is epitomised in his complex states of zoomorphic animal embodiment:

The stick-like legs, all knobbed at the joints, suggested a wounded waterbird, a brolga, or a human that in the manner of the tales they told one another, all spells and curses, had been *changed* into a bird, but only halfway, and now, neither one thing nor the other, was hopping and flapping towards them out of a world over there . . . (Malouf 2)

The changeling figure is a trope of the Romantic imagination, and its placement here alongside the evocation of folk tales and marshes as darkness is a reference to Romanticism. As Gifford's definition above makes clear, however, a post-pastoral ethos involves acknowledgement, adaptation and redress of pastoral conventions. The animalian representation of Gemmy at this point is partially Romantic but is not a crude zoomorphism designed to belittle him. Gemmy is in the next paragraph described as a scarecrow, and his appearance as both white man *and* from the 'Absolute Dark' positions him as a liminal creature, a post-colonial desire to domicile the white intruder in the Australian landscape and explicate the sort of shock such potential presented to the colonial perspective (Brady 94). But before such allegories and romantic tropes, Gemmy is presented in terms of his animalian kinship, in terms of a literal position in a natural world that is tangible and appreciable. This is reinforced by the multiple animal references used to describe Gemmy: he has the 'look of a mongrel' (8) and is 'in some way changed into a bird' (Ashcroft 56). Upon his 'return' to 'civilisation' Gemmy begins a process of 'remembering' the Babylonian degradations of his life as a parentless urchin in the machine of industrialised London and then as bullied and indentured maritime stowaway. The remembering of his different identities—the immediate encounter with the white settler community where he is seen as abject; sixteen years with Indigenous benefactors as alien yet recognised subject; and a decade of utterly different objectified child existence—is in the form of an animalian awakening from hibernation:

All the events of his life, all that he had told and not told, and more, much more, now that it had begun to stir and move, which he was just beginning to recall, had been curled up in him like an old-man carpet snake. It was awake now. Lifting its blind head it was emerging coil on coil into the sun. (Malouf 21)

The heliacal focus of Gemmy's emergent 'carpet-snake' consciousness evokes an image of the sun quite distinct from the dark apocalyptic sun of the John Clare epigraph. This moment of animal awakening is the utopian antidote to darkness, both terrifying and empowering in its offer of union. There is a metaphorical evocation of mysticism and totemism in this analogy that is paradoxically Romantic and eliding an animal/human division.

This representation of an animal/human collapse can partially be explained as Malouf ventriloquising and parodying colonial, racist assumptions of Indigenous/animal conflation (Murphy 76). But it is also more complex. Gemmy, long before his time with his Indigenous benefactors, is a 'maggot' on the floor of a saw mill, a rat-catching ferret, and is dissolving with 'sand crabs' upon shipwreck (22). When he is first found he has 'flower-like' ulcers (22); is perceived by the tribe as 'sea calf . . . [with] the white worm of his prick' (23); and is 'pale worm-like' crawling towards them. Indeed, the image of the worm has multiple significances in *Remembering Babylon*: thus Lachlan, following the attacks on the McIvor family and in an inversion of the potentiality of Gemmy's 'carpet-snake' emergent memory and synthesising consciousness, describes the human potential for corruption as a 'niggling worm of denial' in 'even the straightest of men' (Malouf 161-62).

Animals occur again and again in *Remembering Babylon*, but they are more than metaphorical tools or crude zoomorphic reductions in the service of human concerns. Animal scenes present sites of common human/animal vulnerability in the material and visceral exigencies of life. An ornithological thread is one of the structuring elements of Gemmy's characterisation. He first appears to Lachlan and his cousins as brolga-like. One of his first tentative steps into the settlement is through observing the hens and then a scrabbled shared communion of their food, a salty pulp, probably corn or porridge (Malouf 31). The visceral continuities of human/animal existence are further developed in the violent and anonymous slaughter of the McIvors' geese, presaging the vulnerabilities of human beings to the same violent threat (Byron 85). Jock McIvor recognises this vulnerability, and his shock at the recognition tellingly leaves him a 'stunned animal.' Later, when his family's safety seems further at risk after a message is smeared in human faecal matter across his shed, Jock's breath is 'racking him like a wounded animal's' (Malouf 116). This appearance of corporeal matter furthers the potentiality for humans to behave according to 'bestial' markings of territory. The fact that the 'filth' is teeming with flies presents a gritty, quotidian reality of human/animal engagement beyond established boundaries.

Finally, animals are occasionally given perspective through the omniscient narration; they speak, if in a mediated way, and hold momentary significance in the narrative. Janet and her sister, for example, are bored with the game Lachlan dictates in the opening sequence. They share an ontological reality with the kelpie: 'the idea of wolf had not been transmitted to him' (Malouf 1). This is, of course, comic, a gentle exposé of Lachlan's colonial immersion in that which is discontinuous with his immediate environment. But it also suggests a form of kinship in the experience of the animal and girls, and an acknowledgement of animal sentience. These various sites of animal textual presence—mediated perspective and sentience, common visceral existence, and human-animal conflation—all greatly extend understanding of *Remembering Babylon* as a post-pastoral piece.

There are moments where human characters perceive the environment as the site of their own spiritual transcendence or nostalgic desire. But this is not a sentimental, Romantic idealisation of nature. Instead there are polyphonic positions on nonhuman nature. A sentimental, pastoral or elegiac engagement with place is gently parodied. Gemmy represents a Clare-like post

pastoral integration of human and nature in two ways. Firstly, he thinks of natural phenomena with an immediacy specific to place. He knows the words that seem to belong to the landscape, much like Clare's use of a regionally appropriate argot and 'literalness' discussed above. Secondly, in the figurative language of the text, Gemmy is both human and animal, not cleanly one or other, thereby complicating the presumption that human beings are not animals at all and that animals are utterly *other*. This form of characterisation represents a human affinity with the experiences, even rights, of the natural realm.

There are transcendent epiphanies for other characters who begin, tenuously, their own less sustained belonging in Australian nature. The focus of such epiphany is unsentimental, acknowledging transience and a love for nature in and of itself. Nature is numinous, but it is not exclusively in the service of the human soul, nor is it lost or grieving. Instead there is a complex reworking of the myth of human and nonhuman separation. The epigraphic juxtaposition of John Clare and William Blake clearly sheds light on all these disruptions to the pastoral form. The precise words in the epigraph elicit ecumenical, apocalyptic connotations and inject ambivalence into concepts of exile and belonging in place. But the choice of poets in the epigraph, and their operation in concert, is highly significant in a further way. William Blake is preoccupied in his prophetic poems with the ways in which pastoral idealisation may reduce nature to anthropocentric utilitarian or spiritual service. John Clare is both a 'literal' poet of nature and a politically charged poet presaging environmental concerns and concepts of deep ecology. In different ways, both can be seen as enacting a post-pastoral unromanticised vision of nature. Malouf's use of these poets is frame to his own exploration of place as post-pastoral and immediate.

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NOTES

¹ Malouf provides no source for this poem, yet does provide a source for the Blake excerpt. The source is not located in any larger collected poems but in a collection of Clare's later poems, written when he was in an asylum and frequently took on the persona of other poets, including Blake (Curry pers. comm.). The poem is in various versions, orders and fragments.

² It is true that Blake's *oeuvre* contains pastoral-style laments, such as 'The Echoing Green', but Gifford's definition of post-pastoral includes both use of *and* questioning of Arcadian idealisation.

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