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Anna Rutherford
University of Aarhus, Denmark

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Abstract

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Editor - KUNAPIPI
Department of English
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
Canada

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Kunapipi is a tri-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

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Anna Rutherford
Editor - KUNAPIPI
Department of English
University of Aarhus
8000 Aarhus C
Denmark

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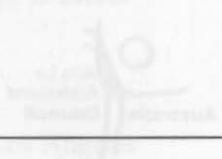
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COVER: Photograph by Peter Lyssiotis.

Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal's emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.

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HELEN GILBERT

Golliwog Dreaming



Once, a short time ago, in a land of fire and ash, there lived a man with his wife in a dusty farmhouse on the edge of a something you might have called a rolling hill, though it really wasn't much more than a hump in the ground. For many years, they dreamed of sons to help tend the sheep but the sandman brought them a daughter instead. They named her Mari and the woman knitted a golliwog for the cradle because they were too poor to buy a doll. Before long, the baby grew into a little girl. She was plain and a bit tubby with freckles on her nose, but her parents agreed that she was really no trouble. When it became clear that she would be an only child, they accepted their fate and forgot their dreams, for they were simple people, hard-working, mostly honest, and only occasionally given to violence.

From an early age, Mari learned to be quite average. She tolerated school, told only a few lies to her parents, and didn't back answer too often. During the week, her mother taught her how to cook and clean and knit, while on Sundays she went to church – or the wine shop – with her father. She had two or three unexceptional friends, a plaintive cat (who doesn't feature in this story), and no great future. We cannot say whether she was happy or not, but she didn't complain very much, except to the golliwog.

One day, when she was walking home from school through the bush, she tripped over a snake coiled in the sun beside an old black stump. It opened one lazy eye and told her to be less clumsy. Then, even though she'd done absolutely nothing to deserve it, the snake offered to grant her a wish.

Mari thought about this carefully before she replied.

'I want you to make my golliwog talk!' she said.

The snake looked grave, and then angry, and then sad. Finally it spoke. 'A long time ago,' it said, 'there was a skilful toymaker who created many different kinds of birds and animals. Whether plain or pearled they were all beautiful in their own ways, but the toymaker wasn't satisfied. She was lonely because she had no one to listen to her, so she decided to knit something in her own image. With her special bone needles and some black yarn, she began to work until a familiar shape grew. He had two legs, and two arms, a body and a head, just the same as she did. She spiked his hair, widened his smile and glassed over his eyes with buttons.

And she called him a golliwog, for the want of a better name. But she forgot to give him a tongue because it never occurred to her that he might have anything interesting to say.'

Mari waited for more, but the snake had clearly finished his tale.

'So what should I do?' she asked.

'You must let him go,' the snake replied, 'but first cut the thread that finished him. Then he will find his own tongue.'

'What if I make him one?' Mari persisted.

But the snake only flicked the fork of its own tongue at her, uncoiled itself, and slithered down a hole in the stump. Mari couldn't help noticing that its scales changed hue as it moved, like a rainbow dancing across the earth.

Disappointed and a little puzzled, but grateful nonetheless to escape without harm, Mari continued on her way. For many days, she thought about what the snake had said but it still didn't make sense to her way of thinking. When she sought the golliwog's advice, he only stared just the same as ever, so that didn't help much. Neither did her parents. Her mother thought she'd made it all up, and her father said snakes couldn't be trusted. She considered talking it over with God, but recalled that he didn't like snakes either so would doubtless be on her father's side, as usual. Eventually, because she loved the golliwog and couldn't bear to be without him, she did nothing.

A year passed, then two, and by and by Mari forgot about the snake. She grew a little fatter and the golliwog looked more tattered, but apart from that, things didn't change a great deal.

Then, when the third year was almost at its close, a strange thing happened. She was getting together a bag of old clothes for the rag and bone man when a small pink scrap of felt floated to the floor. A dark stain began to spread on the rug where it lay so Mari quickly snatched it up and threw it out the window. For some time afterwards, her fingers felt sticky and wet. That night, a strong wind blew the pink scrap back into the house and onto her pillow where the dark stain appeared once more. Mari tossed it in the fire and watched it sizzle for a while before it disappeared up the chimney in a puff of smoke. But the next morning, it reappeared on the breakfast table, this time parched and ashen. She would have buried it in the garden except a better idea suddenly struck her. Straight away, she fetched her golliwog, threaded a needle, and sewed the pink scrap on with neat, sharp stitches.

When the golliwog got his new tongue, however, the effect wasn't quite as Mari had hoped. He looked happy enough at first, but he still didn't talk. Then, after a few days, his smile turned into a grin, and the grin started to look more like a jeer, and the jeer became a snarl. His lips began to bulge, his mouth opened wider and deeper until it was like a huge, dark cavern, and out came big round globs that hovered in the air or burst into words Mari couldn't understand. The globs grew very large and the

words got louder and the room began to spin with the echo of laughter and fear, faster, and faster, and faster, until finally Mari could stand it no longer. She put a pillow over the golliwog's head and held it tight until the sounds faded to a whisper and then she locked him in an old chest with other toys she had long discarded. And there he stayed, all through the winter cold and the summer fires. Though Mari thought about him from time to time, she didn't dare let him out.

One afternoon, when the chill of autumn had just crept into the air, Mari went to play by the creek and met an old man there in a coat of many colours. He had black skin, no shoes, and a long grey beard. Mari asked him who he was and where he came from, but the old man merely nodded at her and didn't say a word.

The next day, and for many days afterwards, Mari found the old man always sitting in the same spot. Sometimes he smiled and other times he completely ignored her. She became convinced that he had a secret that she needed to know but she couldn't imagine what it might be.

'I'll tell you all my secrets if you just tell me one,' she pleaded with him, but still he remained silent. She told him some of her secrets anyway, because it seemed like a good idea and at least he wasn't likely to gossip. First the good ones, like what she kept in her treasure chest, and where the lambs' tails were put after branding. Then she told him the bad ones, the ones she wasn't supposed to know - why there were sometimes bruises on her mother's face, and what her uncle did to cousin Doreen in the shearing shed. But she didn't tell him about the golliwog.

The old man continued his silent vigil by the creek until Mari offered him another secret.

'I'll tell you where my father hides his plonk,' she said. Then she took the old man's hand and led him to a hollow surrounded by tussocks. She watched him uncork the cheap wine and drink it in silence. When he was finished, he smashed the bottle against a rock and walked away. As she gathered the broken glass to hide her betrayal, Mari held a fragment up to her eye and peered through it. From one side, everything looked like an old black and white photograph, but when she turned it round to look out from the inside, the black and white disappeared and she could see all the colours of the rainbow. Then she remembered what the snake had told her and began to understand why the old man had not spoken.

'I'll let my golliwog go,' she said to herself, 'and the old man will come back.'

Now the golliwog had been somewhat chastened by his months in the chest, and he never made a sound when Mari lifted up the lid. He even seemed to have his old smile back so she didn't find it too hard to love him once again and that made it harder to let him go. Because she couldn't quite bear to part with him completely, she found the end of the thread that had knitted him and spliced it to a very, very long piece of string which she tied to a tree in the yard.

'Now you can roam wherever you want,' she told him, 'and you won't get lost.' Then she threw the golliwog high into the air until he vanished.

That night she dreamed that the land unravelled itself, leaving bright trails of wool snaking over the countryside. The farmers of the district told their wives to take up their needles and knit or the sheep would suffocate from the weight of colour. *Knit one, slip one, knit one, pass the slipped stitch over, slip one, knit one, to the end.* The men brought out big knives and deftly severed the wool from the fleece while the women worked until their raw hands bled into the weave. Finally, they staunched the flow of thread and sat back to admire their handiwork. But nobody knew what they had knitted, and nobody wanted it. She woke to the taste of blood and lanolin in her mouth.

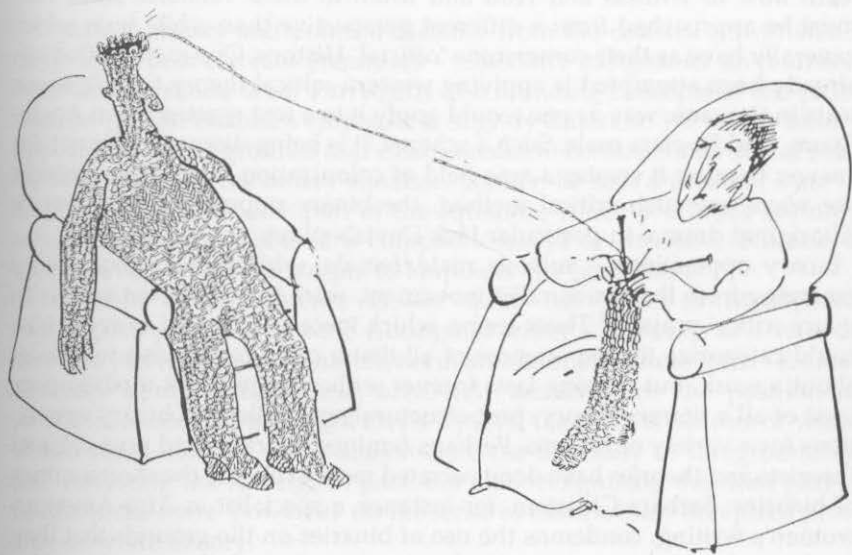
The old man never came back. We could assume he was killed that night in the town riots and so was unable to keep his bargain with a little white girl. Or we might suppose that he didn't really have a bargain to keep, since she altered the terms of the contract, and he never signed it in the first place anyway. But more than likely, the old man simply had better things to do.

Mari's story doesn't finish there, and nor does the golliwog's, but we'll come back to him shortly. When the townspeople had cleaned up the streets after the riots and the school re-opened with sheets of plastic over the broken windows, Mari took the piece of glass to the teacher and asked if she could tell everyone about the old man and the snake. But the teacher wasn't interested and the other children said that blackfellas had caused enough trouble for that week, and they taunted her until, in a fit of rage, she threw the magic glass against the brick wall where it shattered into a million pieces. Unknown to Mari, a tiny sliver lodged in her eye and thereafter her vision was occasionally coloured black and white. The doctors put it down to migraine and said she would grow out of it, but we can't know for sure if she did. We do know that she grew up in the usual way and finally left the school, and the town, and her parents in the dusty house, to become a nurse with the flying doctor service. Whether that had anything to do with the golliwog and the old man is a matter for speculation. Some say she always had a tender heart and a desire to help those less fortunate than herself. Others argue that she discovered the colour of money, but I prefer to think that a door opened and she simply walked through it. And if she kissed a snake out in the desert and found herself a prince, that's her business, or at least material for a different story.

As for the golliwog, he hadn't vanished in the usual way. Because he was smarter than Mari had credited, it didn't take him long to figure out how to detach himself from the string. He began by simply walking away. And as he journeyed far across the land, first one leg unravelled, then the next, then his stomach emptied its stuffing, and still he unwound himself

further and further until at last he had come to the beginning of the yarn that had made him what he was.

But that's still not the end of the golliwog's story. It isn't socially acceptable to see him on a child's bed these days, and you probably won't find his blueprint in the home journal, but if you've half an eye and can listen anytime – it doesn't have to be a dark and stormy night – you might hear his voice echo from the bottom of the toybox, or see the criss-cross of his tracks in your own backyard.



JOANNE TOMPKINS

History/history/histories: Resisting the Binary in Aboriginal Drama

Paul Carter's observation in *The Road to Botany Bay*, regarding Australia's past, that 'the gaze of most historians has been ... partial',¹ is now fairly commonplace. Perhaps not so commonplace is his comment, 'We have no grounds for presuming that Aboriginal history can be treated as a subset of white history, as a history within a history' (p. 325). Now that black versions of history are being told and written down, white critics must learn how to witness and read and listen to these versions, since they must be approached from a different perspective than white texts which generally have as their cornerstone 'official' History. One method that has already been attempted is applying western critical theory to indigenous texts in the same way as one would apply it to a text written by an Anglo-Saxon, middle-class male. Such a scheme, it is being discovered, is not the answer because it creates a new field of colonization. This paper looks at the ways one such critical method, the binary opposition, does not fit Aboriginal drama, in particular Jack Davis's plays.

Binary oppositions – such as male/female, white/black, good/evil – emerging from the structuralist movement, were for a time, the answer to many critics' prayers.² These terms, which were to be found in every text, could categorize the experiences of all that a critic could wish to discuss about a work. But nothing lasts forever without significant modification, least of all a literary theory: post-structuralism challenged binary oppositions for a variety of reasons. Perhaps feminist, marxist, and post-colonial theorists and theories have demonstrated most explicitly the shortcomings of binaries: Barbara Christian, for instance, a specialist in Afro-American women's writing, condemns the use of binaries on the grounds that they predetermine that one term is always more central than another. Her example is major/minor, which also becomes us/them and known/Other. She says,

we can say that the terms 'minority' and 'discourse' are located firmly in a Western dualistic or 'binary' frame which sees the rest of the world as minor, and tries to convince the rest of the world that *it* is major, usually through force and then through language, even as it claims many of the ideas that we, its 'historical' other, have known and spoken about for so long. For many of us have never conceived of ourselves only as somebody's *other*.³

One of the most popular ways proponents of binaries justify their use is switching the power dynamic, that is, in a male/female binary, pointing to instances when 'female' is empowered. Yet if 'female' is still operating within a 'male' hierarchy, 'female' cannot be experiencing equal power with 'male'. Two of the post-colonial critics who have most extensively explored this theoretical dilemma are Homi Bhabha and Benita Parry. Bhabha and Parry have challenged the supposition that a reversal of binary oppositions can empower the subordinate element of the equation. Bhabha maintains that texts that invert white/black to create an authority position for the black subset will ultimately fail, since these inversions merely *reinscribe* the dominant colonial power formations. As Parry explains further:

a reverse discourse replicating and therefore reinstalling the linguistic polarities devised by a dominant centre to exclude and act against the categorized, does not liberate the 'other' from a colonized condition where heterogeneity is repressed in the monolithic figures and stereotypes of colonialist representation, and into a free state of polymorphous native 'difference'.⁴

To create a literary and political distance from the colonial power structures, then, post-colonial literatures – especially indigenous literatures – must and do refuse what Parry calls 'the founding concepts of the problematic' (p. 28). Bhabha's emphasis is slightly different. He rejects binary oppositions on the grounds that clear, consistent constructions do not exist for both halves of the binary equation. Rather, he sees a constant state of ambivalence within each part of the equation, which precludes not only a convenient summation of a complex concept or situation, but also a simple reversal of the concepts to empower the powerless.⁵

This state of ambivalence is not quite the same as Mudrooroo Nyoongah's perception of the Aboriginal writer's existence in a state of ambiguity of writing black narratives in an essentially white form.⁶ Rather, Bhabha's term, 'ambivalence', accurately accounts for the position of Aboriginal history within Jack Davis's plays: the issue is *not* one of white versus black. Davis's plays demonstrate the necessity of foregrounding and validating the Aboriginal past, but also recognizing that that past is caught in the more 'powerful' (in the sense of more widely accepted) presence of white history.

Mudrooroo maintains in *Writing from the Fringe* that when considered at all, the white view of Aboriginal history is demeaning. He argues that in white 'explanations',

[T]he past was the basis for all explanation of the present and future. This way of placing time and things in a continuum is called *mythology* by Europeans and is contrasted with the scientific way of thinking which seeks to explain the past from the present. Scientists and scholars prefer to work backwards from what is now to what was and tend to ignore any accounts found in the mythology of the Aboriginal communities, though this mythology is the oral records of the communities.

They measure and chart data from which they postulate things about the Aboriginal people. (p. 5; his emphasis)

The condescending approach to which Mudrooroo objects is also apparent in criticism of the plays, such as the introduction to *Kullark*, in which H.C. Coombs has written that the play 'presents *simply* but effectively aspects of contemporary Aboriginal experience'.⁷ The use of a word like 'simply' suggests that the play is merely an elementary black version of a white form. The black drama is, in this construction, the weaker of the binary set, trying to demonstrate that it is just as good as the stronger, white element. Such a position is untenable, given the nature of 'history' in Davis's work.

The treatment of history in Davis's plays suggests a shifting foundation that challenges Western assumptions about the location, permanence, and objectivity of history. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* observe that 'revisions of political critical 'history' question the objective categories of historical discourse itself and expose their formations as culture specific rather than universal'.⁸ In response to this culturally specific perception of history, Aboriginal drama, like other genres of Aboriginal literatures, does not merely replace 'History' with Aboriginal concepts of the past by reversing the binary oppositions. Instead, Aboriginal drama's concerns with the past operates *outside* traditional binary constructions. Davis's plays present Aboriginal history in an ambivalent manner: all whites, even the colonizers, are not evil; all blacks are not perfect; and there is no assumption in the plays that black history will *replace* white history, as one of the Bicentennial slogans, '1988 - Celebrate - We Survived' illustrates. The plays detail the sheer persistence of Nyoongah culture - the presence of the oral tradition, the Nyoongah language, and the presence of the past (using 'presence' in both senses of the word). Nevertheless, Davis's plays demonstrate the necessity of foregrounding the long-suppressed Aboriginal past, and, paradoxically, co-existing *with* but not *within* white history. In marked contrast to white history, the Aboriginal past exists *within* the present *and* the future in Aboriginal cultures. This sense of history remains even as the plays advance, more or less chronologically, through a western time frame. Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poem, 'The Past,' summarizes this perception:

Let no one say the past is dead
 The past is all about us and within ...
 A thousand thousand camp fires in the forest
 Are in my blood
 Let none tell me the past is wholly gone.⁹

The ever-present Aboriginal past is more than simply a theme or backdrop: it is grounded in the use of the Nyoongah language, dance, song, and subversions of white history, and particularly in the oral tradition.

European, written language, on the other hand, transfers things to a place in a linear chronology.

Kullark juxtaposes the story of Yagan, a young Nyoongah trying to secure his land, with the Yorlah family through various moments in the twentieth century, to demonstrate the shameful legacy of one hundred and fifty years of white domination in Western Australia. *No Sugar* chronicles the forced settlements in the 1930s. *The Dreamers* takes up with the next generation, in the 1970s. *Barungin* incorporates the horrifying story of Aboriginal deaths in custody. *In Our Town*¹⁰ looks at racism in a Western Australian town just after World War II. Yet none of these plays is grounded solely in the present of that time frame. The plays confront three major historical moments, all of which collide with the hitherto authoritative, monolithic white Australian versions. These are, in western chronology, the Dreamtime past, or pre-1829 (Western Australia's foundation); various moments in the 'contact' past which communicate the history of Australia from Aborigines' perspectives; and the contemporary history of blacks from the 1960s to the present, the chronicle of what black Australians experience today, including the horror of the ongoing Aboriginal deaths in custody, which cannot be consigned to 'History', since according to History, such incidents didn't happen. Also according to History, they continue to 'not' occur to the many institutions that do not recognize the existence of the incidents.

The first of the three categories is the most extensive in Davis's plays. Both *The Dreamers* and *Kullark* include a figure who represents pre-contact Aboriginality and who defies western concepts of naturalism and chronology. This character's songs, music, and dances identify him with the land before the whites invaded, but which in its continuing representation on stage in the theatrical present defies History's inscription of it to the past of *prehistory*. The Dancer's presence challenges western time and history as well as challenging theatrical representations which inherently privilege the white, 'official' version of History, such as naturalism, which often presents an unproblematized view of history. In *The Dreamers*, where the main narrative storyline takes place in the 1970s, the heavily painted dancer periodically appears, dancing to the music of clap sticks and didgeridoo, singing of the land's wealth. Embodying Worru's tribal past, the dancer remains unseen by most members of the 'contemporary' family, but Worru continually feels his presence. This form of the past lives on, even though white History which 'began' after the origins of such dreamtime figures tries to suggest that it is the only possible version of the past. The time scale alone suggests how nebulous black histories can be, illustrating the impossibility of categorizing these perspectives on the past into one neat, all-encompassing term.

The use of Aboriginal music, singing, and dancing, especially when juxtaposed to the styles of today with Peter's disco dancing in *The Dreamers*, emphasizes the past traditions, but also the ways in which those

traditions were communicated. The most popular form of expressing the past of pre-1788 in Davis's plays – and plays by other black Australians – is the use of myths and the oral tradition. Frequently, an old character tells several other younger characters a story of the creation of the world, for example, or the transmigration of souls in the *moodgah* tree in *The Dreamers*. The corroboree in *No Sugar*, in which Jimmy sings of the fish and crabs, suggests a land of plenty before the whites began raping that land, leaving blacks to eat weavilly flour and illegally-trapped rabbits. These styles also take on additional meanings in the contemporary drama: they question the validity of the exclusive western forms of historical truth.

All five play titles recall the pre-1788 world, whether it be the dreaming, home, or the sweet, productive smell of the wind that always led the way to food.¹¹ These suggestions of the past continue to have meaning in the plays' collective present, meanings which are widened to accommodate the events that have occurred since contact, increasing the number of possible signifieds for each incident. In the second of the historical categories, the ambivalence of this time is apparent when the history that pervades the present within these plays is both regenerative (the dreamtime past) and destructive (the conquest past), as the plays' titles suggest: the titles' signifieds now incorporate winds bearing death, a prison-like home, nightmarish dreams, and the humiliating punishment of previously unnecessary food rations.

The second of the historical categories is clearly expressed in *Kullark*, which charts the black view of the white invasion of Western Australia in 1829, literally giving the blacks a voice, as Yagan and his family speak *their* thoughts of the intrusion in and into their own language. The presence of the Nyoongah language contrasts with the silencing of the Nyoongah people through invasion, murder, and the dissemination of Christianity and the English language. The 'Wetjalas,' according to Granny Doll in *Barungin*, 'killed our language' (p. 36), an important aspect of the cultural and literal murders. The imposition of English means that fewer Nyoongah words are spoken as the years of the plays go by, and at the beginning of *The Dreamers*, Shane knows only one: *Wetjala*.¹²

The use of various forms to communicate 'history' is particularly important in *Kullark*: several versions of the slaughter of Yagan and his tribal family are relayed, such as Yagan's own songs and Alice's diary, but only Stirling's version is accepted as the 'true' voice of history. The white documentary form, however, is turned back on itself with the addition of the black perspective in the play. When Stirling suddenly, without foundation, constructs the blacks as duplicitous, the alternative forms of recording the past – diary, journal, debate, and oral culture – illustrate that the official white version is full of lies, of misrepresentation, and of manipulations in the name of power. Inaccuracies are overlooked in the fabrication of white history. Ironically, the frequency and similarity in oral accounts of the

treatment blacks suffered suggest that the oral tradition is probably more 'reliable' than the 'written-down' version of white history.

The postmodern use of diaries, journals, letters, and such media from the white historical version to question the authority of that story are artistically important, but here, they become political imperatives as well. More than Hayden White's rereading of history to understand its fictive and selective nature,¹³ history in the Aboriginal context becomes a matter of denying or not denying a people's existence, and continued existence, and value in their past. Linda Hutcheon and Abdul JanMohamed have suggested that the significant placement of history and politics within minority literatures questions the established authority in a more political manner than the decentering of the location of power in postmodernism.¹⁴ The foregrounding of history and politics insists on a relocation of power to empower a specific group of oppressed people. This empowering is derived not from an inversion of binaries, but from a *side-stepping* of binaries. The individuation of the characters of Yagan, Mitjitjiroo, and Moyarahn, and the various versions of history that are validated by the text suggest that official white History is, as Paul Carter contends, partial. Yet the play does not leave it at that. *Kullark* works *within* the existing white framework as well, demonstrating the Yorlah family in the late 1970s, living in contemporary (white) Australia. This working against and alongside white History exploits Bhabha's concept, ambivalence, to undermine the outdated History book.

The contemporary past is characterized by the resistance to the legacy of silence and death. Mudrooroo comments, 'White settlement of Australia has been for the Aboriginal people a two hundred year long funeral service,'¹⁵ and the threatened death of the race is repeatedly represented by funerals and by the silencing force of prison. *Barungin* concludes with several characters reciting the names of Aborigines who have died in custody, which foregrounds the presence *and* the continuity of history.

Peegun's didgeridoo busking routine in *Barungin* demonstrates the value of traditions in an oral form that marks the presence of change. He explains (to two levels of audience) the history of the instrument, building up to a land rights refrain to his song which gives presence to all aspects of the past. Most importantly, he uses the methods of the Aboriginal past to survive in a white world that by his presence can no longer be just an uncomplicated white world. This post-colonial hybrid form of busking with a didgeridoo signifies *not* an *unchanged* Aboriginal *prehistory* but an Aboriginal present in a state of constant change. Aborigines are thus enabled to participate in history rather than being the object of History. Much anthropology and art discourse treats Aboriginality as only authentically existing in *unchanged* prehistory forms, that is keeping it *out* of History by denying it one of the essentials of History: *change*. In a related but slightly different way, *Kullark* demonstrates the presence of another form of oral culture in use today. Jamie quotes from Kevin Gilbert's *Living*

Black and refers to the Aboriginal narrative forms of biography and autobiography. These forms of writing are becoming increasingly popular in indigenous communities in Australia and Canada as a means of recording the past and saving the history that fragmented communities risk losing. The mention of *Living Black* foregrounds the use of the oral culture today. Davis's plays do not just alter the sense of western history: they also challenge the styles of western theatre in the process of questioning History. The use of didgeridoo, song, poetry, dance, painting, and 'political' narrative, such as the reference to Gilbert's book in *Kullark*, reshape Australian drama.

Disputes between blacks in the plays offer more than just dramatic conflict: they also provide a forum for working out possible solutions to issues currently facing Aborigines and more importantly perhaps, they contest and work against the particular violence of Historical discourse: the reifying inscription of Aborigines as singular subject who can speak only in a single voice. As Bhabha and Parry explain, binaries are limiting and totalizing entities that deny any deviation or individuality. The Nyoongahs in *Barungin* demonstrate the ridiculousness of such a supposition. Robert is first presented as a 'coconut' in *Barungin*: dark on the outside, white on the inside, especially in his firm Christian beliefs which are maligned by the others. This presentation of Robert as a coconut, in itself, breaks the idea of a binary, where one is *either* one thing *or* another. In his speech to the Rotary Club, however, Robert redeems himself from any claims that he has sold out to the whites. He *re-presents* (for whites) contact history in an oral culture form. This history, a version of the black past, mirrors the entire play, which offers yet another view of Australian history. Punctuated by Western historical reference points, Robert's speech demonstrates the need for several kinds of revisionism and highlights yet another method of situating oral traditions in a world dominated by literate discourse.

Each play concludes in an ambivalent manner. There is always a character who laments the white blindness to black problems, but the plays also express defiance: in *Kullark*, Jamie and Alec join in a toast to each other and 'thousands like us' (p. 66) while the black actor's song concludes the play with:

You marred her skin,
But you cannot whiten her mind.
They will remain my children forever,
The black and the beautiful kind.
The black and the beautiful kind. (p. 66)

These endings, mindful of both positive traditions and devastating nightmares of the past, weave together into a phase of history which is in the process of being written: the future, when both the Aboriginal past and white history are celebrated. Once again, the titles are significant of far

more than binary constructions would allow. In the contemporary history phase, each title has a further resonance that echoes in several directions.

Craig Tapping writes in 'Oral Cultures and the Empire of Literature' that '[f]orm is always a message, part of the content or narrative ... [and] frequently the most significant message any such cultural product conveys'.¹⁶ By adding Aboriginal senses of the past to the western theatre model, the plays maintain a distinction from western drama, particularly from the western form of naturalism, which Davis is generally lumped into. His plays also satisfy the indigenous pattern of appropriating what Tapping calls, 'the forms of imperialist culture, and the filling of these forms with indigenous, non-European content' (p. 93). The plays override any risk of pursuing a single point-of-view in a monolithic culture, a culture which would be homologous with imperialism.

In order to resist comparing indigenous literatures to the majority literature, Mudrooroo terms theatre such as Davis's 'Aboriginal reality'.¹⁷ This phrase, intended to distance Davis's drama from the naturalism it is often called, unfortunately and misleadingly overlaps with the Western dramatic technique of realism and concepts of the real as a privileged term in dominant discourses. It then risks falling in the trap of mere inversion, the very thing that Bhabha and Parry work against. Perhaps a term or phrase like 'Aboriginal oral-culture theatre' would distance Aboriginal drama sufficiently from its Western counterparts and still accommodate the all-important oral elements of the continuing past within the plays. *No Sugar's* corroboree, for instance, occurring spontaneously and continuing into the trading of stories from both the dreamtime and the contact past, re-positions the Aboriginal past and Davis's play form quite distinctly beside and against white dramatic genres. While this term may, on first glance, be open to charges of essentialism, it is more useful than the 'universalist' alternative of categorizing all plays written in Australia as equally situated Australian drama. Aboriginal oral-culture drama enables the strategic articulation of difference, while also satisfying the philosophical need to avoid essentialism.

Despite the differentiations that Davis's work invites, the historical presences in his work amalgamate all stages of black history in a context that does not dismiss nor simply add to conventional white history, but reject the exclusions that white history has so often perpetrated. Davis's plays foreground black histories and their different forms and allow for several possible kinds of the past, including other histories, such as feminist 'histories' (represented here in *Kullark* by Alice's diaries). The ambivalent constructions of Aboriginal historical traditions simply do not permit the 'white history/black history' binary. Working outside the binary with ever-present and ambivalent irony, Davis's most recent play, *In Our Town*, concludes with the Millimurras determined to inhabit the predominantly white town, symbolizing the existence of possibilities for white and black histories: both 'against' and 'alongside' each other. Black

histories must continually work 'against' the official white version to make their presences felt. Simply working 'against', however, would merely reinscribe the colonial power structures. At the same time, both black and white versions must exist alongside each other. Simply writing 'alongside' would refuse to take up the issues of power that have too long been inscribed in History. Maintaining the Aboriginal tradition, Davis's plays insist upon their forms and situation of history (and show how these may be relatable to white forms). Culturally specific histories combine to create a small 'h' history of Australia that undermines the inscription of power in the universality of the western History tradition.

NOTES

1. Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay* (London: Faber, 1987), p. xx.
2. See, for instance, Charles Segal, *The Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' 'The Bacchae'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982).
3. Barbara Christian, 'The Race for Theory', *Cultural Critique*, 6 (Spring 1987), 51-63.
4. Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', *Oxford Literary Review*, 9 (1987), 27-58.
5. Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October*, 28 (1984), 125-33.
6. Mudrooroo Nyoongah, *Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature* (Melbourne: Hyland, 1990), 148. Mudrooroo is currently known as Mudrooroo Nyoongah, although he has also published under Mudrooroo Narogin and Colin Johnson.
7. H.C. Coombs, 'An Invitation to Debate', in *Kullark/The Dreamers* by Jack Davis (Sydney: Currency, 1984), ix-xi. My emphasis.
8. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 161.
9. Oodgeroo Noonuccal, 'The Past', in *My People*, by Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1970), 94.
10. Jack Davis, *Kullark/The Dreamers* (Sydney: Currency, 1984); *No Sugar* (Sydney: Currency, 1986); *Barungin* (Sydney: Currency, 1989); *In Our Town* (Sydney: Currency, 1993).
11. According to the glossaries in the texts, *Kullark* translates from the Nyoongah to 'home', and *Barungin* means 'smell the wind'.
12. *Wetjala* translates to white man.
13. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978).
14. Linda Hutcheon, Lectures at International Summer Institute of Semiotics and Structural Studies, University of Toronto, June 1990; Abdul JanMohamed, 'Humanism and Minority Literatures', *Boundary 2*, 12, 3/13, 1 (1984), 281-99.
15. Mudrooroo Nyoongah, 'Black Reality', in *Barungin*, by Jack Davis (Sydney: Currency, 1989), vii-ix.
16. Craig Tapping, 'Oral Cultures and the Empire of Literature', *Kunapipi*, 11, 1 (1989), 86-96.
17. Mudrooroo, 'Black Reality', viii.

Peter Bakowski

THE DANCE

I see you
and your bright flag
that I rush to call
healing,
your lips
that may be
your secret form of arson...
and I don't want to
break the branch of friendship
over the knee
of sex
but want and need
are far thirstier saints than
the clock or reason.

Love has not bent the backs
of all these bar-room travellers –
it's neglect,
that lost priest of the heart
that wears our memories
while we sleep.
Trust is the ambered dance
that lovers never want to end –
it makes the heart
such a happy fish
in its
palace of bone.

Ah, your smile
is stronger than a crane;

take the debris from my heart,
fold me in violins,
take me precipice dancing
into new waterfalls,
I have thrown my last, battered shield
into the Nile.

BROKEN ON THE WHEEL OF LOS ANGELES

A used ticket in a foam cup
and a bottle asleep on the floor,
the fan like a scythe,
and the walls
and syrup of footprints in the carpet,
reeking of failure:
Oh the hours have been slaughtered here,
their blood has forever stained this room,
and your only wisdom is in another cigarette
– that poor baton of time.
And the neon sign has lost a tooth
and the cop sirens are the romeos of these
whiskey incognito nights
but they'll never find the culprit –
it's the heart and the heartless.

Saddest is
that it's not a movie
it's real –
men as ashes,
dust and weed in last corners,
dice fallen from the scarecrow's hand:

It's old harmonicas, broken hats and bucket-empty hours
from erased beginnings to the cushion of an alley,
and it's red eye of insomnia and these
tobacco crows aplayin' their brown paper trumpets
on the edge of a swamp of a mattress,
filling the spittoon with the phlegm of self-pity
and a sandpapered regret; or memory packed up like a circus
and bent cold in front of the pawn-shop
and the parson's toothless sermon.

And yes we were children once,
running with the swan of dreams –

even a time of sailboats in the park,
a time when the streets and sun were not whips,
but there are rules set fierce in concrete, clocks and hearts
that we have been luckless to fathom:
in a room, in a city, in a broken mirror of ourselves,
somewhere
we lost our way,
now we have no desire of the way.

We have been set on fire
by the lack of things –
lack of money
lack of peace
lack of kindness
dignity axed
no hand like soft rain
no kiss like a ship to take us to some sweet farness.
there is nothing to save us from the hotel room
there is nothing to save us from the hotel room
we are felled
we are wretched
we twist dizzy and are envious
of the dog fender-slain in the street.
we have no place left to meekly hoe
with our tin cup hearts.
we are the priests of shadows and spit,
burning, burning.

We want to drown
in sleep
in muddy wine
in window sill dust,
to hang in last sour rage
from sympathetic cord and rag.

We are tired
we are tired of our filthy, sometime walls,
we dream of burning in the roses of the wallpaper –
have you seen the black rose burn?
have you seen a black skull laughing?
We are tired of sorrow's inept gong
we are tired of our stench and shiver under scolding moons
and precinct eyes,
can we lie down somewhere forever?
We are tired of the nightstick's kiss

we are tired of the soup kitchen and the mission –
breadcrumb kisses to a pigeon heart.
So mayor and fence and railyard weed
bring us death
bring us death like a banquet –
like a vase of drugs,
the white beach of it,
cleansing our neon-mocked bones
bring us death –
she'll be the only angel we've ever kissed.

SOAK MY HEART IN JAZZ

Some nights,
my heart pitchforked in its bed,
I see again my father's ghost hand
pass that collection plate of tears,
but hope hides its wings
so very well.

You can
lynch a man,
but you can't
lynch a song.
The notes
are petals of the dream,
falling through
devil's alphabet of neon
and the rusted z of fire escapes
to our raised
chalices of jazz
that we call
the trumpet,
the saxophone,
the bruised task of our longing
microphoned to heaven.

Hear the antelope drums,
the pride,
the piano piggybacking the America-ancient blues,
beyond hurt and knowing

to the first and last human dream
of freedom.

PORTRAIT OF A GERMAN PENSIONER

A famished hand
upon the bannister
seeks the first floor altitude
of the restaurant
where white aprons
ship their delights
across the polished wood.

She allows herself
one beer with mineral water
now that it has correctly
gone noon.
Just a soup and roll today,
same as too many yesterdays,
then back home to do
the unnecessary dusting.

The cuckoo clock will not
release her from widow's black.
She sits in her dwindling time
counting off another rosary of rain,
each bead as brittle as her
war-lost husband.

Tear the wings off memory
to call it regret,
and ring that bell with no tongue,
the one which the crow and a crust of a moon,
call bitterness,
dress its matchbox heart in mink
and close the door.

And the sky and fields
still dress the seasons,
but not for her,
she sits,
assembling juries in her heart.

Ian Templeman

THIS MOMENT

This moment we meet, barter images, is this moment,
no other, not promise or contract of a beginning.
We share language and a shy obsession to document
our world, a habit of hand signs often underpinning

our shifts of voice. We exchange myth and legend,
tread the land feather-footed, leaving no trace.
Our song, an unwritten text, is a map of the land
through which we dance, record of a ritual place.

Fixing together the margins of our lives I sense
networks drawn under the skin by a family unknown
catalogue our differences, anticipate our intense
need to knit imagination into flesh, word into bone.

The song is not of body and blood, it is of the air,
river bend, carved tree, a dream or perhaps a prayer.

MONUMENTS

You weep in this city of monuments
shouting in frustration after celebrating
your birthday, pain reverberates around the room
hauling down the garlands of slow happiness
decorating the darkness.

Without the anxiety of children, demands
of friends or familiar geography, you search
for a definition of life, a role to play, a narcotic
to assist you confront the loneliness,
the bewilderment of growing old.

I offer no reassurance, my words fail
to imitate your mother's comfort, a touch
is not your remembered daughter's or the embrace
of a lost father. A childhood of admired
innocence is not in my silence.

You itemize the pieces of my affection,
measure responses in laugh, look and voice.
Obligations of love are not placed in one person
not balanced between blood, family, photographer,
painter, poet. It has no scale of value.

In these moments of flight, challenging
the arithmetic of life, we share a narrative;
intimate, complex and incomplete. The twists of plot
are skeined upon our fingers, playing for time
I can only love you enough.

FRINGE COUNTRY

Water,
tar-black, bruises the river bank.
The edge of sluggish current
slides a dark mirror
beneath the root props of casuarinas
holding together the mud bank
and a sky
reflecting blue shavings
in the white water race.
This moment of place recalls
childhood picnics
within a tree thatched riverbend,
sing of a shadow place,
a cave of flax reeds, a shirtless summer.
Exiled
you sing for those days
without shape.

Alone,
you claim the fringe of the territory

turning away from conversation,
 exploring the space
 neither past, present nor traded memory,
 to make agreements with yourself.

Nervously

turning from the camera
 recording the celebration
 of family, friends and landscape
 you begin to sing,
 to sing softly, self absorbed,
 on a solo run.

The photograph reveals a pale birthmark
 shadowing
 your face, a sense
 of reticence.

FIGURE WITH A YELLOW STRAW HAT

Sleeping upside down, the cream stucco houses
 with shaded windows
 slip beneath the bank tethered boat,
 every detail of the green ribbed dinghy
 reflected in the canal stillness.

Beneath the camouflage of the water trailed
 canopy, your striped
 shirt and straw hat with a blue band
 are speckled with sunlight. Hugging your knees
 and sketchbook you offer me a watercolour

of the morning, our conversation in reflection.
 A trickle of perspiration
 meanders down your throat, disappears
 beneath your open shirt. You turn to watch
 the children playing on the stone quay.

As I stretch to touch your cheek and complete
 a circle of intimacy,
 the waterscape evaporates, your image
 is replaced by a postcard, a painting by Manet.
 The poem is fiction and your voice mute.

LINDA WARLEY

Locating the Subject of Post-Colonial Autobiography

Somewhat of a growth industry these days, theoretical formulations of the poetics of autobiography by and large continue to ignore post-colonial writings even though many of the texts emerging from these locations, particularly in the past twenty years, are 'life-writings'.¹ Generally, Euro-American autobiography theory focuses on its own cosmopolitan space. Displaying an all too familiar geographic and ethnocentric bias, theory is made in the West and it speaks of the West. Because of this bias, theory tends to ignore the issue of place – that is, spatial and geographic location – as a constitutive element of the autobiographical 'I'. *Where* the 'I' is, theory says, doesn't really matter. But this ignores the fact that literary texts are always deeply rooted in specific places and histories. It is my argument that spatial location is crucial to post-colonial autobiographical self-representation, and that the forgetting of the locatedness of the subject speaks of an imperialist assumption of centrality that has never been possible for the post-colonial writer.

The problem as I see it is a foundational one: the poetics of autobiography has been produced by a critical enterprise that creates theory through divergent readings of the same corpus of texts. In the European tradition, these would include autobiographies by St. Augustine, John Bunyan, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Cardinal John Henry Newman, John Stuart Mill, W.B. Yeats and the more recent French autobiographies of Michel Leiris and Roland Barthes. In the American tradition, autobiographies by Benjamin Franklin, Henry David Thoreau, Henry James, and Henry Adams are the core texts. Important challenges have been made to this heavily white and masculine canon;² nevertheless, the 'great' autobiographies, and the theories that have evolved to describe and explain them, have been consistently occupied with the same three issues: the problems of truth, time, and form.

To support this broad generalization, I will briefly sketch out what the central debates within autobiography studies have been. First there are the critics such as James Olney,³ Roy Pascal,⁴ and Paul John Eakin⁵ who are concerned with the problem of truth in autobiography. Not surprisingly, truth – partly because of the vagaries of memory – is a slippery thing, and so the question for these critics is not 'is it true?' but 'what kind of truth

is it? The argument here is basically that in the process of writing his life, the autobiographer makes a new, metaphoric truth. This special truth, which conforms to some inner vision of the self, organizes and gives meaning to the life.

The second variety or school of autobiography theory is equally concerned with patterns and meanings but finds those patterns in temporal moments. This group includes both the various histories of the development of the genre and critical analyses that see the autobiographical project itself as a fundamentally periodic or historic enterprise. Of the latter category, Susanna Egan's *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography*⁶ is paradigmatic. Egan argues that autobiography re-presents a personal quest where the autobiographer traces his life by organizing the narrative according to significant stages. These stages she names childhood, youth, and maturity, thus producing a developmental, organicist model of autobiography.

The third and final group, which pledges allegiance to post-structuralist literary theory, distrusts both the notions of 'truth' and 'meaning' and argues instead that 'form' is the thing. Here the *graphe* is important, not the *bios*. Certain that to interrogate the referentiality of the 'I' is to ask the wrong question, this group of critics – among whom are Paul de Man,⁷ Jeffrey Mehlman,⁸ and Michael Sprinker⁹ – focuses on the 'I' as a signifier, an enunciative site in discourse, not a marker of presence.

Recognizable at the heart of each of these critical projects is the matter of the 'human subject'. Different as these approaches are, they create a peculiar kind of subject, one that I call an *unlocated subject*. If life is a journey, and autobiography fundamentally a quest narrative, then that journey to this point at least has been imagined as a temporal or metaphysical or linguistic voyage, not a spatial one. Details of place, it has been commonly assumed, are mainly set-dressing, *not* significant constitutive elements of the autobiographical 'I'.¹⁰ James Olney's comment on this point is perhaps the most succinct and revealing of the bias I have been describing:

though it treats often of specific places and times and individuals, and must do so to make its experience real, autobiography is more universal than it is local, more timeless than historic, and more poetic in its significance than merely personal.¹¹

Here we have it then: the universal, de-personalized, non-localized subject, an autobiographical subject that is, curiously, no place.

I do not want to suggest that critics of the poetics of autobiography have exercised a certain wilful blindness with regard to the issue of place in the representation of identity. If theory has taken this direction it is because the canonical texts themselves tend to underplay the geographical positioning of the 'I'. Why is this so? Because these autobiographical subjects are securely positioned within absolutely central, powerful, and *known*

territories: the Roman Empire, France, England. Rousseau or Mill don't have to self-consciously contextualize themselves because the space that they occupy is itself taken for granted. It is the site of Western culture.

Not so for the African, Jamaican, or Canadian autobiographer to whom the intersection of language and place is at the very centre of post-colonial identity politics. Always aware that his or her place has at one time been marked red on the imperial map, and that views of both 'home' and 'away' have been configured and frequently distorted by the colonial past (and, perhaps, the neo-colonial present), autobiographers from these locations struggle to construct a viable representation of the 'self' as a located 'self'. At stake here is more than local colour, painting in words a landscape against which the 'I' can authentically figure. The post-colonial autobiographer is engaged in a project of imaginative possession of place, an act of self-articulation at once necessitated by and working in opposition to the invasion of both territory and mind enacted by Europe upon colonial space.

Geographic position, as I have suggested, has particular valency for post-colonial subjects since their home locations have been historically constructed as peripheral. And, as critics such as Paul Carter,¹² Martin Leer,¹³ and Graham Huggan,¹⁴ have argued, tropes of maps and mapping – representations of a spatial sensibility – recur in post-colonial literatures. But spatial location also has meaning at the micro level. Spaces 'speak'. They are coded, meaningful signs. Spaces are permitted or taboo, safe or unsafe (every woman is finely attuned to these differences). They are measured, hierarchized, gendered. They mark race, ethnicity, and class – I am thinking here of the meanings of the ghetto or of being on 'the wrong side of the tracks'. Location positions the subject *socially*. And, of course, the specific meanings of spaces are culturally specific and culturally mediated. The relation of self to place, then, is not natural; rather space operates in discursive fields, and our understanding of our position within certain spaces or places, and also how *others* position us, is always mediated.

Further, *where you are determines what you say*. Location makes available certain discourses and not others, certain languages and not others. The located autobiographical subject produces utterances that could not have the same meaning elsewhere. This does not mean, however, that particular locations – say, nations – produce singular, homogeneous identities. Indeed, a variety of discourses interact with the discourse of space, so that the located subject is figured at the intersection of multiple meanings.

Two post-colonial autobiographies that speak to the differences of subjects located within the same nation space are Hal Porter's *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony*¹⁵ and David Malouf's *12 Edmonstone Street*.¹⁶ Both are Australian autobiographies that inscribe the peculiarly ambivalent identity common to the settler colony – the subject as de/colonized in relation to England but as colonizer in relation to indigenous peoples.¹⁷ However, in terms of the codification of Australian national identity, they are perhaps

atypical. Both refuse what is perhaps *the* paradigmatic narrative of Australian male national identity – the story of the battler in the bush. That story has been told by another autobiographer, A.B. Facey in *A Fortunate Life*.¹⁸ Porter's and Malouf's texts are urban stories, about writers' identities formed primarily in the cities of Melbourne and Brisbane.

What I offer here is not a detailed topographical analysis of each text, but a reading of the 'I-in-place' in a couple of key passages. Although each narrator moves over time, and, thus, the scene of identity shifts, the first childhood home figures prominently in each text. The house is an important trope in post-colonial writing particularly settler colony writing, for, as Helen Tiffin has argued, it is a figure of indigenization.¹⁹ The house is also a noisy place, discursively speaking, for it is one of the key sites where first messages about the world and one's place in it are received. The house distinguishes between internal and external space, and marks off the supposedly safe space of 'home'. Each room, corridor, wall, door, and object in the house signifies meanings to the child.

Hal Porter's autobiography opens with a description of the suburban Melbourne house at 36 Bellair Street that seems to be a completely appropriate setting for the story of an 'I' that we might think of as a paradigmatic white, middle-class Australian male of European ancestry. It is from the cast-iron balcony of this house that the narrator 'watches', directing his masterful gaze upon the scene, claiming all he sees as his own special territory. What he observes is a world heavily inflected by Europe, in fact, *seen* through objects and features of landscape that refer to a geographically distant but culturally present European order of value and knowledge.

The house is filled with items that confirm that European presence: a 'richly fringed saddlebag and Utrecht velvet suite', 'Nottingham lace curtains', a 'Venetian double bed' (14) and other markers of Empire:

small silk Union Jacks, a red-blotched map of the world, Pears' Soap, Epp's Cocoa, Lea and Perrins' Sauce, a chromo-lithograph of Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, Beecham's Pills, Mazawattee Tea canisters and stamped in purple inside wardrobes and drawers, the assurance *Manufactured by European Labour Only*. (21)

Figured here is an economic structure that in part forms Australian society: Australian products, such as wool, are 'raw' and are exported; European products, which represent the finest of human achievement and define the domestic space of the middle-class Anglo-Australian home, are imported. Nothing appears to be made in Australia, including, implicitly, culture.

Similarly, the scene that the 'watcher' surveys from his balcony is identifiably European in impression. His gaze takes in the Zoo, Prince's and Royal Parks (their very names signifying their allegiance), the University, and the Exhibition Buildings, but

[t]his prospect is less colonial Australian than eighteenth-century English in quality: billowy green trees, misty towers, even a shallow winding stream that starts and ends in obscurity like a painter's device. Southern Hemisphere clouds pile themselves up, up above, and take on Englishy oil-landscape tones.... (12)

Staged here is *not* the immigrant misreading an unfamiliar New World landscape through foreign eyes, but a resident of Melbourne whose home town has been constructed and named according to English design.

The observable world of the 'watcher', then, is a world in which space has been framed and filled up in very particular ways. The 'I' occupies a central position in this world, which is, in part, constituted by the others it excludes – Aboriginal peoples or non-Anglo-Celtic immigrants with the exception of one 'Dago' homosexual who is quickly rejected. This special, self-contained world is also the only one that will allow the budding young writer to emulate European models and choose poetry over football, wine in a café over beer in the pub.²⁰ Porter's Australia is a circumscribed Australia, defined by its relations to the 'mother country', England, and to its majority white Anglo population. It is an Australia that he can comfortably occupy because he 'fits'.

David Malouf's autobiography, on the other hand, presents an 'I' whose position within the nation space is a good deal more ambivalent. Like Porter's, Malouf's text opens with an extended representation of the remembered childhood house, but this time the house is a somewhat shabby, weatherboard building situated in a disreputable part of Brisbane. The city itself is less central than Porter's Melbourne since Queensland has never defined Australia in the same way that the southern coastal regions have. And to be in the wrong house in the wrong neighbourhood in the wrong city is to be automatically marked.

The house at 12 Edmonstone Street stands in the no-man's land between train tracks. It is 'too close to the derelict, half-criminal life of Stanley Street where the abos were and to Musgrave Park with its swaggies and metho-drinkers' (4). This marginal space is where many immigrant families live, and Malouf's grandparents, non-English-speaking immigrants from Lebanon, had settled there as others had before them. Even the architectural features of the house – the verandah with its 'evocation of the raised tent flap ... a formal confession that you are just one step up from nomads' (11) and the curious space under the house that the narrator associates with exotic objects, such as a Chinese dictionary, and erotic experiences – suggest that the narrator's life contains elements that are foreign and unmentionable.

On the first page, the narrator also draws attention to the fact that the house actually stands on top of a former Aboriginal burial ground. This is an acknowledgment that his own family story covers up and writes over an/other history an/other occupation of territory. Here, then, the autobiographical 'I's' relation to his specific site is self-consciously

established: he is implicated in a process of settlement and colonization of Australia which displaced and dispossessed indigenous peoples, even while he himself is marginalized by a primarily white, Anglo-Celtic population because of his Middle Eastern origins.

The final section of *12 Edmonstone Street* dramatizes the narrator's sense of being Other, out-of-place, in his own home. As a child at a train station in 1944, the narrator observes a crowd clustered around a wagon that holds three Japanese POWs. The Japanese soldiers are both magnetic and repulsive. Everyone gathers and stares, but as they move away, they utter curses that 'were meant to express what was inexpressible, the vast gap of darkness they felt existed here – a distance between people that had nothing to do with actual space, or the fact that you were breathing, out here in the still night of Australia, the same air' (131). The narrator makes the connection here between the Japanese prisoners and his own non-English-speaking Lebanese grandfather who, in 1941, had been arrested by the Commonwealth police as an enemy alien. Those same Australians who curse the Japanese once cursed the narrator's own family – and, by implication, him. This heritage, this precise awareness of non-paradigmatic language and race, disallows a secure sense of national identity. The narrator's Lebaneseness, his difference (a difference that cannot be obliterated despite its being diluted by his English mother's blood) mark the autobiographical 'I'. And the comfortable fit between subject and place, between inscape and landscape, evident in Porter's text is not available in Malouf's.

Australian autobiographers are concerned with issues of location, for they, and other post-colonial subjects, are acutely aware of the particular colonialist project that seeks to erase the specificity of place. Always aware that in the representations of world power systems they occupy 'peripheral' locations, these writers are more likely than Europeans to describe and define their particular places because their homes can never be mistaken as the 'universal home of man'. Moreover, in the Australian context, the particularly ambivalent position of the settler in what has always been occupied, not empty, 'New World' space forces the issue of belonging. This ambivalence has fostered an industry of identity-inventing, which could be read as a will to citizenship, a desire to define the land as one's own. However, as Richard White has argued,²¹ the construction of Australian identity has generally worked to secure the interests of the dominant group. Malouf's autobiography reminds us that there is no simple overlap between the 'I' and its location. There is, however, a *necessary* relation, especially in post-colonial contexts; for subject, place, and language form a nexus that is bound up with other political issues that have to do with appropriation and abrogation of both physical and psychic spaces. The I-in-place is always a negotiated subject.

If 'mainstream' autobiography theory has not considered the subject as a *located subject*, then this forgetting is a foundational problem that points to the persistent refusal of Euro-American theory to adequately address

the imperatives of specific, local, material, historical, and geographic differences. A single poetics, a global theory, of autobiography will never be adequate. Rather, any reading of autobiographical texts must begin from the ground up and be alert both to the idiosyncratic and to the shifting nature of that ground. I am arguing that the particular geographic and micro-spatial location of the autobiographical 'I' must be read as an important element of textual identity, for all autobiographical subjects are located subjects (even European ones). Recognizing this will help us to understand that the location of the speaker – and that includes the critic – shapes all utterances and the meanings they produce.

NOTES

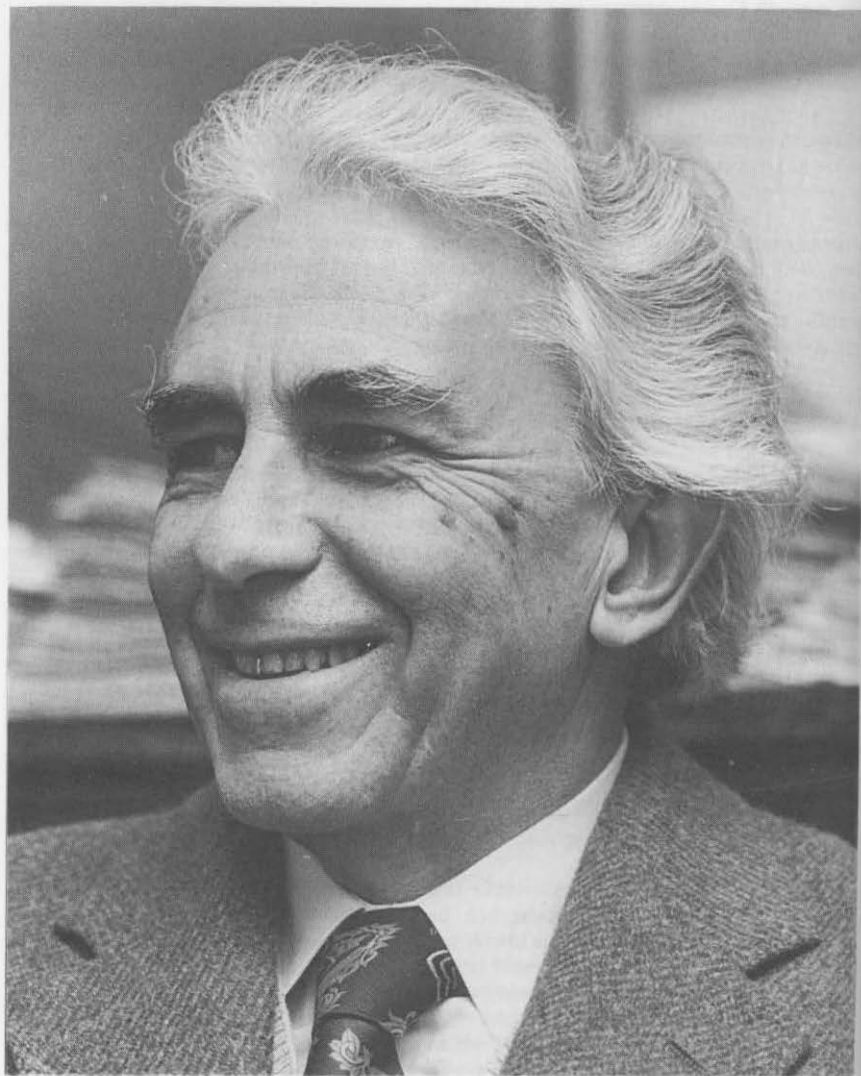
1. I would like to acknowledge the valuable criticism of this paper offered by Stephen Semon, Jane Watt, Dan Coleman, Kwaku Larbi Korang, Romita Choudhury, and Gerry Hill.
2. Mary G. Mason's essay 'The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers' in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 207-35 is pivotal. See also Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987) and two important collections of essays, Shari Benstock, ed., *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1988) and Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, eds., *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988). For studies that consider both gender and race issues, see Joanna Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1989) and Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989). For critical analyses of women's autobiographical writings from diverse cultural locations see Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1992).
3. James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972).
4. Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960).
5. Paul John Eakin, *Fictions of Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1985).
6. Egan, Susanna, *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1984).
7. Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *MLN*, 94, 5 (December 1979), pp. 919-30.
8. Jeffrey Mehlman, *A Structuralist Study of Autobiography: Proust, Leiris, Sartre, and Lévi-Strauss* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974).
9. Michael Sprinker, 'Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography' in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney, op. cit. pp. 321-42.
10. One exception to this generalization is Richard Coe's *When the Grass Was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984). Coe does devote a chapter to a discussion of the 'small world' that is the special

habitat of the child; however, as far as Coe is concerned, the relation of the 'I' to place is primarily a function of and limited to childhood. I would also argue that Coe's formulation of the child as sovereign of his special territory is a distinctly male paradigm. Recently, American critics have begun to consider how place might influence the representation of the autobiographical 'I'. See especially the collection of essays edited by J. Bill Berry, *Located Lives: Place and Idea in Southern Autobiography* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1990).

11. Olney, *Metaphors of Self*, op.cit., p. vii.
12. Paul Carter reads the narratives written by explorers and early settlers in Australia and argues that the country was made available and inhabitable through the act of naming, through linguistic mapping. See *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (New York: Knopf, 1988).
13. See Martin Leer, 'From Linear to Areal: Suggestions Towards a Comparative Literary Geography of Canada and Australia', *Kunapipi*, 12, 3 (1990), pp. 75-85 and 'Imagined Counterpart: Outlining a Conceptual Literary Geography of Australia' in *European Perspectives: Contemporary Essays on Australian Literature*, eds., Bruce Clunies Ross and Werner Senn (St. Lucia: Univ. of Queensland Press, 1991), pp. 1-13.
14. Graham Huggan argues that the construction of a conceptual map was an important means of disseminating colonial discourse, and that post-colonial writers deconstruct the map in the process of decolonization. See 'Decolonizing the Map: Post-Colonialism, Post-Structuralism and the Cartographic Connection' in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*, eds. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, (Calgary: Univ. of Calgary Press, 1990), pp. 125-38. For Huggan's analysis of the map trope in two autobiographical texts, see '(Un)co-ordinated Movements: The Geography of Autobiography in David Malouf's *12 Edmonstone Street* and Clark Blaise's *Resident Alien*', *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada*, 3 (Spring 1990), pp. 56-65. Aritha van Herk writes of the 'Person map' constructed by the Canadian child of an immigrant family in 'Space and Landscape: A Personal Mapping' *A Sense of Place: Essays in Post-Colonial Literatures*, ed., Britta Olinder (Gothenburg: Gothenburg Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 64-71.
15. Hal Porter, *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony* (1963; London: Faber and Faber, 1986). Further references are to this edition, and page numbers will appear in parentheses in the essay.
16. David Malouf, *12 Edmonstone Street* (1985; Ringwood: Penguin, 1986). Further references are to this edition, and page references will appear within parentheses in the essay.
17. Stephen Slemon argues that the radical ambivalence of settler colony literary writing foregrounds the mediated and compromised position of post-colonial writers in their various resistances to First World master narratives. See 'Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World', *WLWE*, 30, 2 (1990), pp. 30-41.
18. A.B. Facey, *A Fortunate Life* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1981).
19. See Helen Tiffin, 'New Concepts of Person and Place in *The Twyborn Affair* and *A Bend in the River*', in *A Sense of Place in the New Literatures in English*, ed. Peggy Nightingale (St. Lucia: Univ. of Queensland Press, 1986), p. 23.
20. I would also argue that Porter's models for his autobiography are European. Significantly, critics have tended to read *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony* as a local Australian version of the 'great' texts of the European tradition. John Colmer, in *Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest* (Melbourne: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 50-70 makes numerous connections between Porter's text and such classics as *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, and *Sons and*

Lovers. And Don Anderson reads Porter in relation to Joyce in 'Portraits of the Artist as a Young Man', *Meanjin*, 42, 3 (September 1983), pp. 339-48.

21. Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1981).



Ralph de Boissiere

Comrades in Words: Ralph de Boissiere Interviewed by Allan Gardiner.

When I visited Ralph de Boissiere at his home in the Melbourne suburbs I was greeted by a youthful and vigorous octogenarian. The scholar Reinhard Sander had commented on de Boissiere's good health in a 1986 article¹ on his novels.² But I am still a little surprised by his intensity when he tells me, at his dinner table, about regular morning swims, midday trips to classical music shops, and afternoon writing sessions. 'You have to stay fit,' he asserts, 'to live as long as possible. What good is it if, after you are dead, people say, "What a good writer he was!"' He has certainly watched many of his peers die unacknowledged; many missing out on even posthumous fame. His concern about recognition as a writer is relevant to my visit. I wanted to fill in some of the details left out of an account he published in 1981 as 'On Writing a Novel'³ about the writing of his first two novels. That essay left me still wondering, on the one hand, how he achieved the level of success he did, and, on the other, what had limited this success. I wanted to know more about the social relationships that must have existed to support a radical writing such as his; and I wanted to know why Realist writers, specifically those with 'workerist' or socialist impulses, are little known. Have they been censored and/or culturally marginalised or is their relative obscurity due to faults of their own?

Salman Rushdie's 1981 review of the revised and re-published version of Boissiere's 1952 novel *Crown Jewel* draws out the political interests that would have been threatened by the book.⁴ Rushdie writes:

In 1930, Sydney Webb, the socialist Colonial Secretary, had issued a despatch encouraging the formation of trade unions; but throughout the period described by *Crown Jewel*, workers who sought to form such unions were harassed, mysteriously sacked, and finally, in 1937, fired on by British troops. Such hypocrisies and ironies are perhaps easier for the British to swallow nowadays than they would have been four years before Suez; can this be why this passionate, humane, vibrant book has never been published before in Britain or the West Indies?

Most readers of *Kunapipi* would know de Boissiere not as an Australian but as a pioneer Caribbean writer associated with the magazines *Trinidad* and *Beacon* and with writers like C.L.R. James and Albert Gomes. 'On Writing a Novel' also over de Boissiere's Australian experience which

began in 1948 when he paid for a course in motor mechanics held in the USA for West Indians after the war. While there he read and responded to an Australian government advertisement for car factory employees in Victoria. From 1948 onwards, therefore, his writing must be understood as an unlikely hybrid of the West Indies and Australia. His first novel, *Crown Jewel* is about Trinidad and was largely written there, though it was revised in Australia before being published. The second novel, *Rum and Coca Cola*, also exists in two published versions, both drawing exclusively on Trinidadian material but it was mainly written at different periods of de Boissiere's Australian life. *Calypso Isle*, an unpublished but successfully performed play based on *Rum and Coca Cola* along with *No Saddles for Kangaroos*, his novel set in Melbourne, was written entirely in Australia. His latest, unpublished, novel is set in both locales and during its writing de Boissiere made a return visit to Trinidad.

An island like Barbados had hundreds of years of British rule whereas Spain ceded Trinidad to Great Britain as late as 1802. So I asked first about the cultural politics from which the *Beacon* group emerged.

AG: *Did Britain's brand of colonialism give it cultural power?*

RdB: Yes, definitely cultural power. Well, when you went to school what did you study? English poets, English writers. I can't recall ever that we studied American writers. You studied English history: all the battles they had won, how steel was made in Sheffield, some other product made in Bradford. You had to draw a map of England and point out the principal places but, ha, you didn't know your own Trinidad! One became a poor kind of carbon copy Englishman.

Under Crown Colony rule, the attitude of the British to the ordinary people was that they did not know them; that they did not *see* them. They could not be seen. The Englishman would drive past in his car. He had a chauffeur and he looked straight ahead. Once, Ivy and I were living in Ascot Vale when Sir Dallas Brooks went by in a government car. We were standing alone, and he waved to us. Well I was taken aback! (laughs). Because it was never done in the colonies ... impossible. These things get ingrained into your psyche.

You shared the same space but lived in different worlds.

Exactly.

Frantz Fanon talks about such radical separations as characterising the colonial experience.

I've not read him. A Martiniquan was he not? But in 1940 the Americans arrived in tens of thousands to build bases. When they came they had no

responsibility for this colony. It was not theirs. All they had to do was defend the place from the Germans. Now people had never seen the British work with their hands. You didn't see that at all. But for the first time people saw white men bared to the waist, digging trenches, using heavy earth-moving equipment never seen before. And they *spoke* to you: 'Hi buddy, what you doin''? They were very friendly with everyone. True, there was a lot of strife between white and black at times, but the *attitude* was quite different. You could not after that go back to how things were, to what had been up to the late 30s. After that there came the push for ... not at first for independence but for the vote. I didn't have a vote. Not until 1946. You had to have property of a high order, so many thousand dollars, before you could vote.

It seems that when you began to write it was under the influence of the great Russian writers. Was this a conscious intention to read outside the English canon?

Well I'd been interested in literature from very very early. On my father's bookshelf were books by E. Phillips Oppenheimer, a writer of mystery tales, and Edgar Wallace, an extraordinary writer because he was a formula-book man. He could *dictate* a novel in three weeks. One book I came across I couldn't read. Many years later in Australia I saw this book: *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*. But at ten years old it was not for me. I wrote my first short story when I was ten. I can remember most of it even now. It was about some terrible person, but very rich, who was living in a house that he had so designed that it swung on a plate. He pressed a lever and the whole house would turn slowly. He would go out at night and do these awful things – stealing or whatever – then he would come back, press the lever, and turn the whole house around and present a different front. It never occurred to me to ask what the neighbours would think!

But it just so happened that I came across Turgenev. I think it was *Smoke*. I was so taken with it that I rushed back and got all those that were on the shelves by him. And of course, alongside him was Tolstoy. I read *War and Peace* in an edition that was so old that if you made a dog-ear it cracked and broke off. Later I came across Gorky, even later the others like Pushkin, Gogol, the writings of Belinsky, Dostoevsky. But certainly they appealed to me instantly. You see, when I read Dickens, I am conscious that he is a very kind man; he has a warm feeling for people. But I am also conscious – before I was conscious *socially*, I recognised it sub-consciously – that Dickens is a product of his time; that he is seeing people as they should be in particular places; each one in their place in British society; each one knows to whom he should doff his hat. And somehow you get the impression that God is with those who are good and kind; who have *reason* to be good and kind because they are the

wealthy ones. Whereas, when you read the Russians there was nothing of that kind. *Everybody* somehow was on a level, in the sense that everybody was looking for truth, was suffering, had to be helped. Whether it was Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, there was this great compassion for people as a whole. After that I could never place other writers on the same level.

But of course, there was this underlying dislike of the British. Almost a hatred. That is why I did not go to England. As you know, a lot of writers from Trinidad went to England after the war. But I could not go there.

Can you tell me about those pre-war, pioneer Trinidadian writers?

C.L.R. James had taught me in college. He was then only about eighteen or nineteen; I was perhaps fourteen or fifteen when he was taking history classes as a subsidiary teacher. In October 1929, by which time James and Alfie Mendes had written some very good short stories in *Best Short Stories* which came out I think in America, James came to see me and [H. McD.] Carpenter, a good friend of mine who was a violinist. He said that he wanted to bring out a little magazine at Christmas time to make some money and that he wanted to know would I write a story and would Carpenter give him an article on music. We said, 'Of course!' you see, because we had never been published. That was how it began: with a magazine he called *Trinidad*; printed by some backyard printer, stapled at the side, and he went out and got advertisements, and it was very successful; got reviews in the papers. He had a story of course by Alfie and though the reviews were good, they were also very destructive at the same time of Alfie because he spoke of a horse 'micturating in the street'. What he meant was pissing, but you couldn't say that in those days, and they thought him very vulgar! But I came in for a lot of praise and was delighted.

That was December, 1929, and Alfie and another fellow called Wharton who was a lawyer decided to bring out another edition of this same magazine in March of the following year. But they had grand ideas. You had to go to a proper printer, and have overlapping covers. This thing cost a lot of money. I had stories in it and there were a lot of other peoples' work, but they went broke, because such an awesomely high-class magazine found few readers. It intimidated the man from downtown Port-of-Spain.

It wasn't until Bertie Gomes came that there was a chance. Bertie was of Portuguese descent, his father quite a wealthy shopkeeper. He'd sent Bertie off to New York to study philosophy. He told me he'd gone to lectures here and there but hadn't done much study; he was an undisciplined person, hopelessly individualistic. He came back in 1930 and bullied his father into starting this magazine called *The Beacon*.

(At this point I recognised the model for the character of Joe Elias in Crown Jewel).

He managed to get a lot of people to contribute to it. Much of the material had to be discarded – the poetry was awful – but it brought to light all of these unknown people coming out of the shadows who wanted to write. It had a lot of readers and went for about two and a half years, when Bertie, who was politically ambitious, gave it up when he became a member of the City Council. By then James had gone off to England. Alfie would go later to the USA. The group that was around them began to disintegrate then because the cement provided by *The Beacon* no longer existed. We used to go to each others' homes and talk about what we had done, what we were doing, read our stuff to one another. We talked about music and literature. I remember we were amused when a novel came out called *A High Wind in Jamaica* [by non-West Indian writer Richard Hughes]. Alfie praised it mightily. I came across it last year, read it and thought: what a great fuss over nothing! Because you were living in a small country where you could jump on a bicycle and go from place to place. There you are in touch as you cannot be in Australia. Melbourne is so vast that if you took its extreme limits you could probably fit the whole of Trinidad into it.

By the time I left, Alfie had been to the States and come back. He came from a wealthy family, and he was working in his father's stores, but it was a stifling existence living in Trinidad, whereas in the States he met a lot of writers and his second book was published there. Roosevelt had started a programme to assist the unemployed and he was taken up by this programme as a lecturer, going around talking to groups interested in literature and famed writers. When he became an important public servant in Trinidad he gave up writing. I asked him why, and he said 'I have nothing more to say'. Whereas, that was never the case with me.

(De Boissiere rose from his chair, left the room and returned with a typescript of his memoirs from which he read to me a passage dealing with his adolescent yearnings to be an artist. He recalls, in these memoirs, that he came to a point where he realised that it was too late for him to be a musician.) 'A fifteen year old,' he read,

words now whirled about me madly without pattern, like the cries of anxious birds, while I looked in myself for thoughts to anchor them, thoughts of earth and sky and love, some vague love that I longed at times to squander on some girl, my own creation, who was like, yet unlike, anyone I knew, and yet so *real* that her flesh burnt my own.

No, I came down slowly from my tower. I knew intuitively that I must write of what I saw and heard and felt and lived, but what did I understand of it all? ... I beat my head in my frustration. All about me was a concrete world I had not penetrated, or mirrored, or held the weight of in my hands.

From this time he was sure not only that he had something to give personally, but that his contribution 'was bound up, from very, very early, with social

conditions'. Yet light skinned, middle-class life was all he knew when he first attempted a novel, and he concedes that this first version of *Crown Jewel* began life as a 'comedy of manners'. His revisions were motivated by his observation of the increasing efforts of self-liberation by West Indian workers culminating in the big oil-fields strikes of the 1930s.

I realised, *instantly*, that I was writing the wrong book. That I had to write about *that*. You see, at that time I had the best job of my life, working with an American firm, selling bakers' supplies, travelling all over the island by myself driving a little panel van. I'd leave Port O'Spain, for instance, sometimes 7 o'clock on a Monday morning, travelling down then up around the coast, and I wouldn't get back until Wednesday afternoon, after sleeping overnight in San Fernando. So I saw what I could never have seen ordinarily: all aspects of the life of villages, small towns, the poverty that existed, the different races and their relationships. So I was becoming more aware socially, and what turned me left, surprisingly, was a book by Tolstoy called *What Then Must We Do?* Not a novel but a book written in his rage at what was taking place about him in the 1880s. He saw that peasants were being drawn into manufacturing industry, the rise of capitalism in Russia, and the terrible conditions under which these new workers had to live. And I was seeing what he was describing all around me. It was as if Tolstoy was suddenly pointing out to me that the situation was very similar here.

Why did you, like many other Caribbean writers, emigrate after the war?

After WWII the demand for workers slumped, and in this declining market my opinions, my disdain for the 'respectable' world about me, could not but make it increasingly difficult for me to exist and support a very young family.

Was censorship the reason why you could not become a professional writer?

My books were not accepted in England prior to the 80s, and they were not accepted in the USA *at all*. In the period 1942-43 a secretary called Charlotte Rainey at the Caribbean Medical Centre read the book and said she was going to send it off to Knopf, with high recommendations, to a friend she knew there. He spurned it! 'We do not publish theses; this is a thesis, not a novel!' Sent it back with the suggestion that she must be out of her mind. But you see she *knew*. It's not the people who *read* the books who don't like them. She was living there; had lived there three or four years and knew what I was talking about whereas he was looking at it as the point of view of someone with a revolutionary, an unconventional attitude: one of those crazy people who was against the system. In fact in my books I *am* against the system. People don't like that; even now they don't like that.

I had written what was then *Crown Jewel*, twice between 1937 and 1944. I had sent it overseas without finding a publisher. When I came out here to Australia, I saw a completely different world. This was a developed world. And I developed, and was able to see here the West Indian potential I could not see when there. This benefit of the perspective from a different place is gained when you live and *work* in it. Work is the operative word. Working in Australia with General Motors, on the line, I began to see a lot more in my own people than I had before. That's why I rewrote the book here. I experienced an upsurge in my realisation of what I had been missing in the earlier versions.

Then, of course, I came upon the Realist Writers' Group in 1948, my first year in Melbourne. It happened that I went to the Fellowship of Australian Writers. Who should I meet there for the first time but Frank Hardy. At that time the left, let us say the communists, were keen to reform the F.A.W. As I remember it, there were a lot of elderly people in the leadership and middle aged and elderly writers. Hardy drew me into the Realist Writers' Group, which was composed almost entirely of members of the Communist Party. There might have been one who was not; but he was left-leaning [laughs]. Because of the nature of the times we had the idea that we would make a great impact on, would change society. This was part of the belief that had sprung up with the successful conclusion of the war, the years of the spread of the cult of Stalin and so forth in 1948. We believed that change was around the corner.

I remember two plumbers who were members of the Party. Each had a magnificent house, and more work than they could possibly handle. They didn't have much time for Party work. They'd come to meetings and agree with resolutions, then they'd go off to work the next day knowing there was no *end* to contracts for lucrative jobs. Socialism was in the dreamtime. It was [in engineering jargon] a 'one-off' time.

But the CPA backed the publishing company, the Australasian Book Society didn't it? Presumably it was just as difficult to publish your kind of stories in Australia as it was when you lived in Trinidad.

You could not get what you were writing published in a conservative Australia at that time. There were only one or two publishers.

The first ABS book to come out was *Crown Jewel*. I remember going one morning to the office of the book importer in Melbourne who had arranged for the printing in Adelaide and seeing these vast stacks of big cardboard boxes: 3,000 copies of my book! But we had to go out and sell the book to pay the printer. Well there was me and Frank Hardy and Bill Wannan and Walter Kaufmann. Walter was a freelance photographer, German born and bred, whose novel, *Voices in the Storm*, about the Berlin he had known, was published by the ABS in 1953. He had been brought to Australia on the *Dunera* and interned. I had been chucked out of work

from where I was because I was reading *The Guardian* [the Communist Party paper]. Hardy of course never worked for anybody for very long. Together we'd hold meetings in homes, at pit-heads, at factory gates, on ships. Some of them were excellent, and some were appallingly bad. I remember the first I attended was at a meatworks and I was terrified. I'd never spoken before in my life but I had to get up on a table and who am I seeing? Italian and Maltese migrants and some Australian faces, and they are playing cards and talking, and I have to stand up and talk about a book! I managed a few minutes and we got a few members: there were always some left people about at that time. Then we'd travel interstate for meetings in Sydney, as far as Brisbane, to Adelaide, couldn't go to Perth which was too far. At the end of September we had over 2,000 members and could pay the printer. But not all members had paid up. This meant the expense of reminder letters and getting new members to keep the thing going. It was prone to stopping and starting and sometimes we could not publish at all for as much as six months. At one time we got help from left-led trade unions in the form of debentures that only needed to be paid back if and when we could afford to. George Seelaf of the meatworkers union was one of the chief figures pushing the ABS from its inception.

How did you make the transition from Trinidadian to Australian writer?

There I was, just escaped from a British colony, partaking of this high calory diet not available in the West Indies. Man it was really something. What saved me for a while was the fact that I was writing of what I knew, had felt, suffered, hated or loved back home. But all this time I was gathering material for the Australian novel. I had collected over the years a great stack of press clippings that supplied ideas. It was when I started on that that I really struck trouble. It is very difficult to write of a period in which you are yourself immersed. Also I was then so taken up with 'socialist realism'.

This was the early 1950s. Were Australian communist writers writing under the influence of Georg Lukacs?

I don't think that they did. I'm pretty sure they *did not*... In one instance, the assembled Realist Writers' Group members studied a denunciation of Lukacs by Revai and dutifully agreed that Lukacs had fallen prey to bourgeois errors; although this was the first any of us had heard of Georg Lukacs! Otherwise I can recall no reference to him in our talks. I did not properly come across Lukacs except by accident. I had a very good friend who was a Hungarian who had read a lot of Lukacs' work and who led me to get these studies that I have here: *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* and this one here is *Studies in European Realism, The Historical*

Novel. Well this one was of less use to me. It has chapters such as 'The Historical Novel and the Crisis of Bourgeois Realism'. All very interesting at one time but now it no longer interests me to the extent that I would wade into it, you know? And there's *Writer and Critic* which is very instructive.

But the book that most helped me at the time was this one by Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* Cape, 1954. I bought it years ago here in Australia, read it: excellent book!

You say that there is still resistance to your kind of writing in the publishing process?

Look what happened when Allison and Busby republished my books: they went against the grain of publishing in England to do it. The books got very good reviews, but when it came to publishing the fourth novel (which they had read and promised me in 1981 they'd publish without sending me a contract), by that time they'd been taken over by W.H. Allen and Clive Allison didn't want to get himself into any strife with his book so he sent it back to me without a word. But it will get published. I'm doing filmscripts now, screenplays for the first and second novels and I'll do one for the fourth before I do one for *No Saddles for Kangaroos*. I've long felt that the novels are highly visual and filmable and if anyone is to adapt them successfully it's got to be me. I can empathise with the characters as those that did not create them, did not know that social climate that gave them birth, cannot.

NOTES

1. Reinhard Sander, 'Ralph de Boissiere (1907-)', *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. D.C. Dance (New York: Greenwood, 1986).
2. De Boissiere's novels are:
Crown Jewel [first version], (Melbourne: Australasian Book Society, 1952); (Leipzig [East Germany]: Paul List Verlag (Panther), 1956). The novel was also translated from English and published in Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, China and the Soviet Union.
Crown Jewel [second version], (London: Allison and Busby, 1981); (London: Picador, 1981).
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Rum and Coca Cola, [second version], (London: Allison and Busby, 1984).
No Saddles For Kangaroos, (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1964).
3. Ralph de Boissiere, 'On Writing a Novel' (a talk first given at the Africa Centre, London, on 13 May 1981), *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 17, 1 (1982), p. 1-12.
4. Salman Rushdie, 'Exemplary Lives', *Times Literary Supplement*, August 7 1981, p. 910.

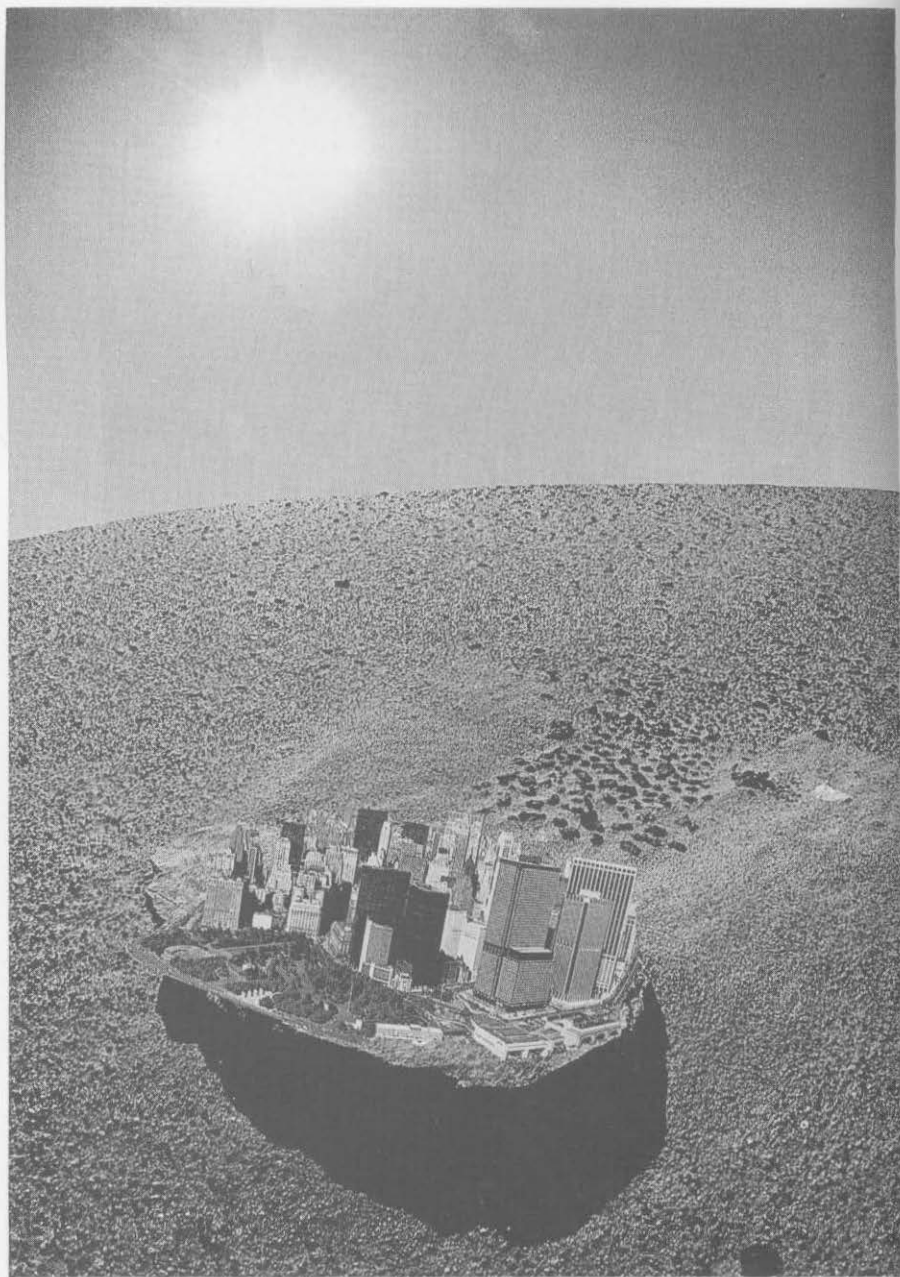


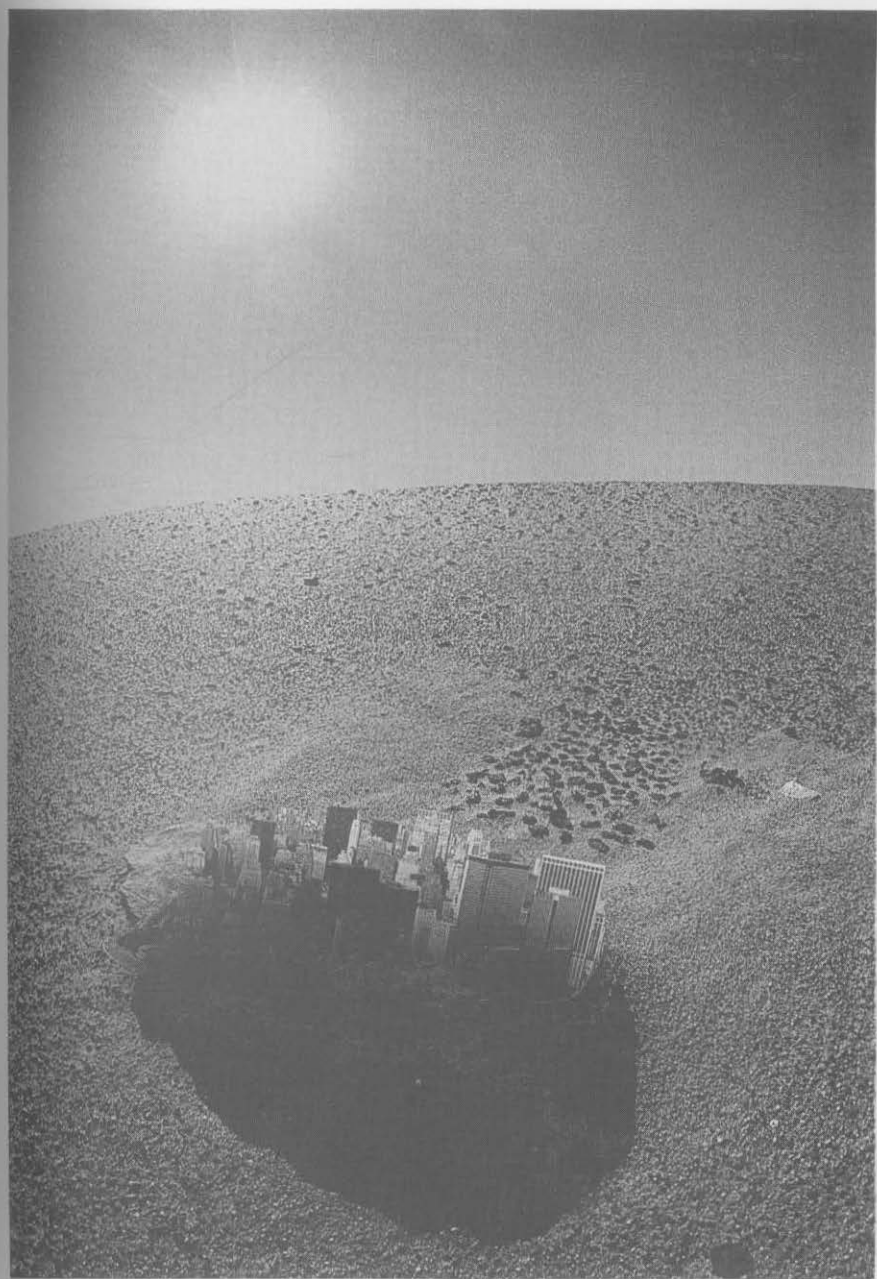
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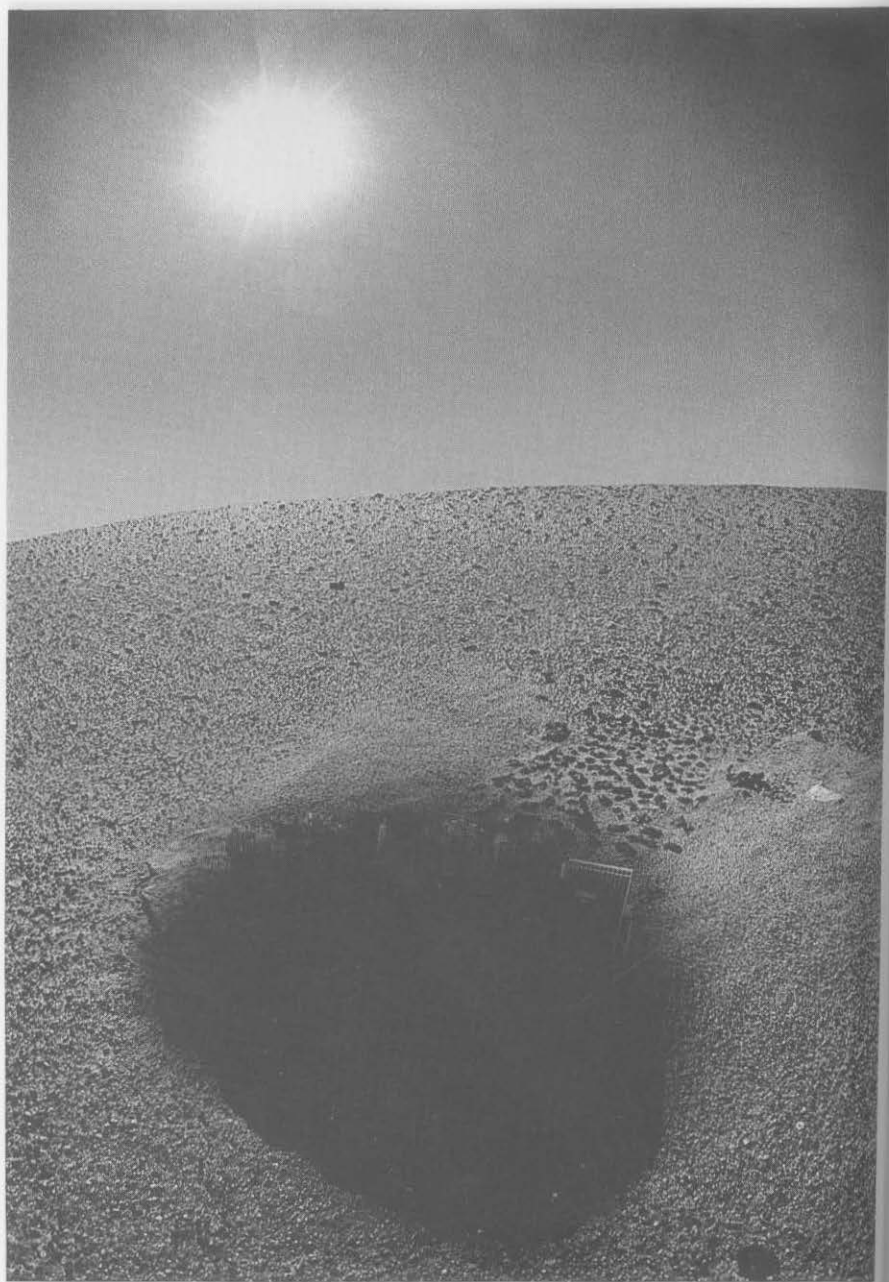
Peter Lyssiotis















CLAIRE HARRIS

Angel

It possible that I'm an angel. No, not possible, really likely. After all I'm black. Blacker than most African. An' I born in these Americas. Black like night, like a kinda velvet, an' in my secret places, I got this dark musty pink like those rare orchid. Three, four hundred years of clean, pure blood. Is not that I want to sound like Nazi. What it mean is that we aint had the opportunity to enjoy the advantage of ravage: You 'complish anything is because you half-white, otherwise you black. A little bit like Ben Johnson: Canadian win gold medal; Jamaican found guilty of drug taking. Instead everybody want to keep we down. In we place. Is so some of we does smile a lot. But it have compensation. Is not possible to confuse who you really is. In my family a lot of we take the opportunity to be mostly happy in weself, respectable, polite, hardworking. But we learn early to talk we talk. An it seem like each generation we does grow more beautiful. Cheek bone higher, hair thicker and more curly, neck longer, head perch right on top, small and round. Every bit a we the right size, 'cept the eyes. They getting larger, blacker, deeper. Way way back from them fort in Ghana, from them ship, we could see what pass next. Is how we never there when massa come.

Not like them others

Not like any she

lying in bed as in a grave such thin night nesting in her silence
 stifling the cabins while his spurs drag at dust ring against
 pebbles yard fowl disturbed by his passage flutter squall their
 resentment flambeau winging ahead of that confident curs-
 ing stride crack pale on thatch spreads down to stain baked
 mud floor his step on door stone his boot in the door and
 she dry bony weaponless

he trapped in the movement of a mind contracting mounts
 thrusts his weight bearing down his cock battering her open
 she stares at the ribbed sky listens to this woman who stifles her
 groans true slave to his hand and she despises her her
 empty anger her fear of dying who can not hope can not
 curse *her judgement as is the judgement of women self accusing*

Is the jerk when the bus stop what bring me back. I think is perhaps I'm the first angel what we grown. I work as a Teacher's Aide cum Secretary for a Catholic School Board. The workwoman worthy of she hire only in the sermon on Sunday. So I ride the bus. I does like it. For one thing I have is to leave home by seven o'clock. That time in the Calgary morning it so crisp an cool. The air so clean. Bridgeland so quiet, you hear ssswissh every time a car pass. Most days I don't meet nobody. Except the Alsatian. He live three houses down the road and every time he see me he does jump up an go into a frenzy of wagging and barking. An everytime the old man and the wife what live there does come to they window and glare at me. The man aint know he own dog. This morning Roman out do heself. As always I nod God-be-with-ye, smile with a sweetness I aint have no power over. It dont have nothing to do with what on my mind. This morning I think every one must see the light glowing in me. Though I know they can't. It like this every time there have a big job. An angel job. By the time I get to the bus stop, it didn't have no more than just a hint of electricity left. I being charged while I walk this place. Greening grass glowin on soft hills; the Bow river giving off a silvery shimmer; all the soft pastel houses have this gleam. I did turn off Marsh Road and walk down to the corner of Meredith where the bus stop on Edmonton trail, right there opposite the second hand furniture shop. Furniture on the sidewalk already. Sad, shiny, kitchen chairs. The kind what lavender and chrome. A dresser and two bookcase.

Mrs. Timmmins was already waiting, I figure I a little later than usual. She turn an give me this smile. Is a real sometimish young girl. If it aint have nobody else there she does talk. Otherwise is just nod. In truth, she don't even know she does do that. She practically unconscious. But this morning she start up at once 'bout she boss. Is the same old story: He like she better than he like everybody else, but he nicer to this other lady in particular, because she does hand it out to anybody what is a boss in the company. Is a sad sad thing. I always think that one way of improving the human design, might be some sort of recording device in the brain so we could hear weselves. Clinically. At any rate, the child simply don't have the courage of she own conviction. A good thing too. I see the husband once. Only the sulky mouth tell you what brutality sleeping in him. Handsome as sin.

We did chat, and I pay attention, but I know this wasn't it. I learn over the years that I must wait until I get told which is my case. The streets so full of the wounded. Once, in the early days, I follow a terrified child all the way up North Hill to she home. She passed me by with such a load of sorrow and fear. Moreover what ever gone wrong the poor little thing desperate. I did keep seeing images of flame round her. Everyone know now, is almost fashionable it fashionable, the desperate secrets what hide behind them well kept lawns, but this was the early seventies. The child take the longest way home, ignoring all the after rain still drip dripping

from the lilacs. Her too long red corduroys scuffing the pavement; her shirt half in half out of the elastic waistband, escaping from the short bright waistcoat. She look and feel a waif of a child. After she disappear behind the closed front, I wait in the wet hedges. And wait. This angel bit is a funny thing. You can't do nothing to help yourself. Not really I mean. I had was to wait there, and wait there till the parents come. And that time I wasn't so sure nobody could see me when I on business. When I hear a police car hooting an shrieking like is a TV, I nearly had heart attack. All my life I respectable. How I going to explain a African woman hiding in the people hedge? All yuhso what still reading so far, know you aint reading because you believe I is a angel. And the truth is if you reading this you literary. Who else going out to buy *Kunapipi*? So is probable you got a good good sense of things; you know the world a real strange place. Still yuhso dont believe. How I go explain to a police man? Anyway, first the car, then a ambulance, then another police car pass me by. Still the parents aint come home.

Finally come six thirty-five a car pull up. A real beauty of a woman, laughing for so with she man, step out the car, and the two of them laugh all the way up the walk. I know how people two-face. I feel this wave of fear rush out to greet them, this desperation. So I listening hard. And is like I move myself and I right there in the room with them. Was a nice room. Anyway to cut a long story short. The parents fussing and looking real worried and thing, because is plain the child terrified. She begin to bawl. Through all the sobbing she say is a accident. Mother think is car. She start running she hand up and down the child to find where she hurt. Child still bawling. She could hardly talk she talk. She say she use it for she exam and put it in she book bag. When she look for it later it gone. Turn out she lose the father gold pen he get award for something. Children aint have no sense of proportion. You is angel for child is nothing but trouble.

By now the major regulars, plus a few others, on the bus. We turn off from the river, and begin the long stretch which takes us to the opposite end of the city. I like this part of the drive. Sometimes you going on overpass it like riding a sculpture. It feel like you soaring, inspite of the smell of bus vinyl, what mix with antiseptic, and Pine Glow an the sweetish sour smell of human story we carry with us. Til we reach the suburbs no other passenger join us. There aint have no stops along that way. Two greying nurses, is like sisters, in their twin mountain parkas, one red, one hunter green, lean over to nod, smile. We exchange chit chat about the weather. 'Hot enough for you?' Mr. Saunders does call from his side seat right in front near as you could get to the bus driver. Starting at seven, he ride back and forth across the city, until the drop in centre open at nine. He think his wife think he working. His clothes still real good, fit him so well. And he have this serious but kind manner. It have only a little grey in his hair. Just enough so he look distinguish.

Today it have the usual school children, and this new young woman with a child. A small boy who insist on standing on the seat near the window. When they step on, my electricity sparkle. The bus driver slow the bus and ask if she could make the child sit down. It work for five minutes then he up again. The driver only looking at the girl in he mirror and she embarrass. She looking grim and pale. Finally the driver call out again, and she had was to hold the little man down. Well that child start 'busing up he mother.

'You fat cow! You bitch! You effing broad!' Everybody in the bus hush with shame for the poor girl. Three years old. He start crying. The swear words bubbling out of a rosy baby mouth. Botticelli angel. The whole time the girl never say nothing to him. Her business in the street, she paralyze with shame. I had was to shut he mouth myself. Is a hard thing to do if you not child angel. And to make matters worse he turn around in he seat and start staring at me. The mother throw a quick glance back to see what he staring at. When she see is me, she dead scared the child going to say something. The poor girl get off at the next bus stop. People looking back see her waiting there in the shelter for another bus. She face forlorn.

I shift, settle back. We come off the over pass and come on to 52 Street N.E. Now it have really heavy traffic. Is about eight o'clock. We start passing by the strip malls, the public housing, the gas stations, the 7 elevens, the A&W's, Pizzerias. I start to put on my English. I have is to clear my mind everytime I go into that school. Is because I sensitive to freedom. It aint have public institution what not like a jail. It aint have... there is no way to socialize people without binding limbs, crushing extremities. A grown woman's foot in a five inch shoe. They up and start...it begins so early, this lopping off of angles. We are coming to the big crossroads just before the Co-op where I get off. For once the lights are green. The driver put on a little speed. We hit the crossroads and is then I feel myself pushed over to one side. As I falling I catch a glimpse through the window. I see the truck coming straight for me. And I see the driver's face fill the windscreen. His desperate hands' a death-grip on the wheel. The whole rig looming huge and terrible. We fling to the side; the bus keel. If you could, imagine a dinky toy and a hand what reach out to right it. Above the crash and screaming, above the shatter and jar, I hear that other angel smile.

Armando Pajalich

IN KINGSTON: NO CHANGE

Reading L.K. Johnson,
asking the waiter for help,
sus = gossip,
cyann = can.
Cats = 'They are here for food.'
'What do they eat?'
'Bananas, chips, anything.'

I buy a packet of Chippies.
'Sorry. I have no change.'
I feel like Pound in Rapallo
and I have the chips for free:
nobody has got no change.
'He has found a friend.'
(says Anna addressing the ghosts
and myself). 'I have indeed
found a friend,' I think.

The cat has had enough:
I eat my free chippies on my own.

(Minutes later the waiter has the change:
I pay and leave
a generous tip.)

Nuruddin Farah

Interviewed by Armando Pajalich

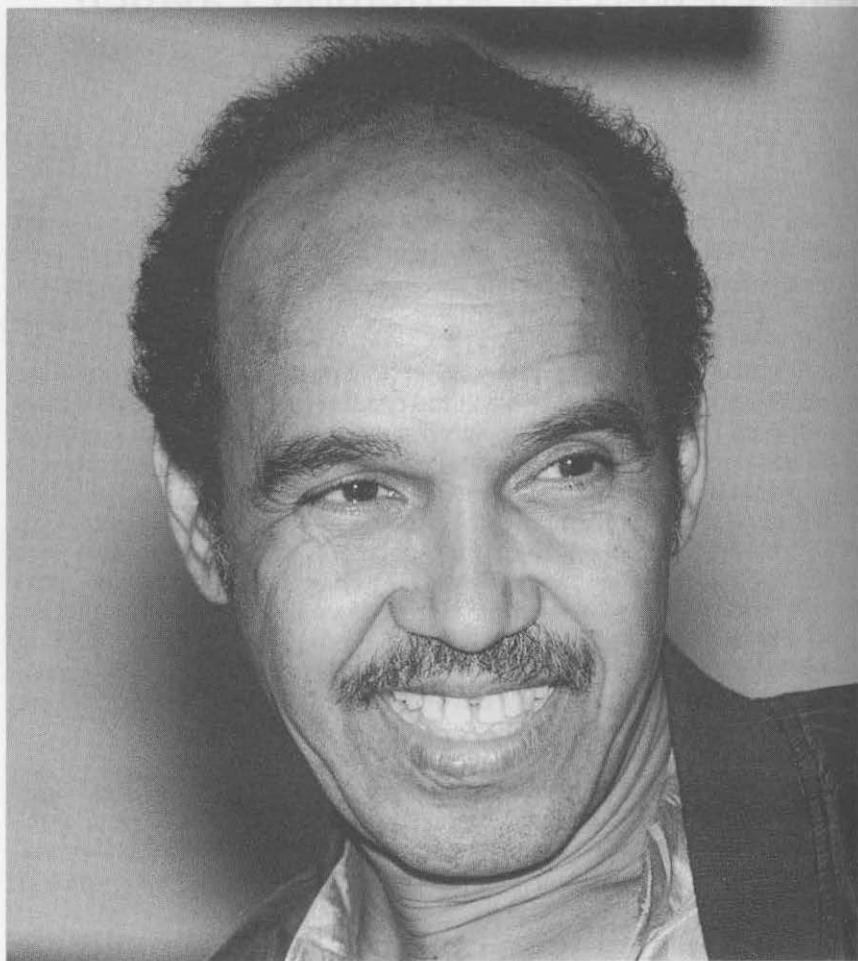
February 1993 – Italy, on the Torino-Milano train...

In one of your recent essays, you have declared that, in your novels, you have 'written about a country bearing resemblances to Somalia'; at other times you have said that the world described in them is, after all, a 'country of your imagination': don't you think that this imaginative element is true of all historical fiction?

Probably it is true for very many other writers who insist that they are representing reality and who live in the countries they write about. I have not set foot in Mogadiscio for eighteen years and I have kept writing about this country. My connection with Somalia has always been through other places, other memories; even when I lived in Somalia I often asked myself questions that made me use Somalia as a metaphor; the strength of my writing – if there is any strong point – is that I have always seen myself not as someone *representing* reality but also *challenging* reality, and making reality work as a *romanziera* for my own benefit. If reality did not agree with my own perception of things I altered reality, through talking about themes, about dreamscapes, depicting pictures that have no *corresponding* reality; for example, in a novel like *Maps* the dreams I inserted are more strong and real than 'reality'.

Still I think that it is a European or a western notion of history that precludes imagination or dreams from interfering with 'events', but in many parts of the world – and probably even in Europe – in the past, history also included imagination or dreams; so, there is a pseudoscientific approach to history which is probably now being contested also by some European scholars.

Of course there are many different types or schools of history, and even in Britain there is the Cambridge school and other schools. But I wonder how much history there is that's worth reading the way one reads novels, in the sense that novels also contain the future; they do not only talk about the past, but they also predict the future. Novelists can arrogate to themselves the power of doing that, while historians tend to think they are writing about something that truly happened, in the same way as realist novelists always want to describe streets, places and so forth, that are



Nuruddin Farah. Photograph: Peter Stummer.

'true'. One of the things that also in a sense I am very happy about is that in a novel like *A Naked Needle* there is a description of many parts of Mogadiscio, street by street, so that the real Mogadiscio today fades in comparison to the written-about Mogadiscio and so if somebody wants to reconstruct Mogadiscio today one may read *A Naked Needle* and see what street was called what, and what it looked like.

This is a particular problem with African history. I am thinking of many novels set in South Africa or even Nigeria, through which you have a reconstruction of cities which have been pulled down; I am thinking of Richard Rive's novels, for instance; but your words also remind me of Wole Soyinka who has been saying that one has to alter history in order to reach one's vision of things.

I think that what happened with Africans and many colonized peoples is that – given that we have been denied the power to articulate history, – what we had to do was either to invent an alternative history or to challenge the one that the Europeans have written down, in order to reach a balance of credibility. And then – since the European colonial masters were the ones who had the power not only to invest history but to impose their history on our people – we had the double responsibility of challenging this history and inventing an alternative one.

In your books, you tell folk tales, local myths but, as far as I can see, the mythical element is not one of their determining elements. Am I wrong?

No, you are absolutely right. What I like to do, in telling a story, is to study the numerous facets of a tale and to allow very many different competing views to be heard, which in a sense points to the democratic drift of my writing, the drift of *tolerance*. Tolerating the views of other people and coexisting with the contradictions and not in fact considering oneself to be weak because one has accepted the views of other people means to me what democracy is. All through history, patriarchies, tyrannical regimes, authoritarian policies or peoples, have always insisted there is one way of looking at things. I don't. I usually doubt almost everything, and therefore, because I doubt, I would look at different possibilities of looking at the same thing. In my real day to day living, I am more certain, because there are certain things I would never do. I wouldn't doubt for instance the just causes for which I fight. But, intellectually, it is more honest to allow different points of view to be heard, to the point where I would give as much space to people with whose views I would not agree, so that they fall into the ideological traps which they set for themselves, because the weaknesses of right-wing ideology, of capitalism *per se*, do not make sense. It does not make sense for one to say I am going to have everything and somebody else is not going to have it... And so for the weaknesses of patriarchy: the reason why I have always fought against authoritarianism,

even when it comes from Somalian traditional society, is that if we accept authoritarian rule within our own societies, then we must also per force accept authoritarian rule coming from outside. Democracy suggests equality, and there *must* be equality, we mustn't say we (men) would rule women ruthlessly, unkindly, undemocratically but we would not want the Italians to come and colonize us. We shouldn't colonize other peoples. There is a hierarchy of injustice, and the weaker the person the more likely for that weaker person to do more harm to those persons who are weaker than he. For example, in societies where there is political terrorism, the weakest animal is the one who suffers most. In Somalia, for example, we usually chase children who have always been hit. If you have a small child who is about eight and who comes home and his parents hit him, and he goes out and another person who is more powerful hits him, and they go about doing nothing because they can't come home for fear of being hit... well, they are more likely to be tempted to chase a dog. This is the spiral of violence, a product of this hierarchy of injustice.

Now, talking about a plurality of opinions: in your novels there never is a direct authorial comment of yours on the actions or words of the characters. Everything goes through the opinions or the actions of the characters themselves. Still there are some characters with whom – I am sure – you share more ideas. Is that so?

Yes, that is true but, as I said, I would like to give even the people whom I disapprove of a chance for their words to be heard. It is only through a debate that we can reach an acceptable logical inclusion. If I were to pick up my pen and pontificate in an authorial way, then naturally what I would have done would be to become a preacher, I would be going to a mosque and become a sheikh or would go to a *chiesa* and become a priest. I am not a priest, I am in the business of intellectually analysing and debating not with myself but with ideas. I am, I dare say, a product of an idea. I am an idea. A country is an idea. I am a hypothesis and I have to prove that I am more than a hypothesis for anyone to listen to me. As my point of departure, I usually propose a topic, a theme, and then I pursue the ideas as they might occur to anyone else. I don't imagine that there is any single voice, so this is why my novels are multi-voiced and, hopefully, multi-layered. If I use myths, and if I repeat things and oblique ways of answering these, I would also like the reader to come with me and to experience my self-doubtings.

Apparently you have read and appreciated works by William Reich, Otto Rank and other scholars in the fields of psychology: do you find works of this kind important for reusing ideas or perhaps working out new methods?

Ideas are given birth by other ideas. Ideas are different from dices. What happens in the matter of two dices alighting together is simple noise. But

what happens when ideas are knocked into each other is that another idea begins to emerge: it is possible that that idea is an offshoot of the two ideas that had the collision. I also have been an academic for very many years myself and I have taught and teach literature and philosophy in different universities and so sometimes I say that I know as much about theory of literature as the next man, but I do not stop there: I like to read the works of other philosophers, psychologists and psychoanalysts and to learn from them. And it does not matter who that person is or what language he has written in. I believe that anything that a human being has thought is my concern. I believe that anything that has been thought about human beings interests me. So, the world becomes an idea and I am there to question this idea and to get to the bottom of it. If William Reich, or Freud or Jung said something, or if something is in the Koran or in a Chinese proverb or in a proverb from some part of West Africa, I take this as the nucleus of an idea and then I take it and use it to elucidate something that may have happened in Somalia.

You mentioned now the Koran. One of the stimuli I had as a reader of your Close Sesame is to go and read the Koran, which is so peculiarly ignored in European culture. From what I have heard, there are many varieties of Islamic culture, ranging from mysticism to more practical approaches to everyday life. If you had to tell me or another European a reason why one should read the Koran – in the sense that you now mentioned that ideas can be tried and that one has to confront oneself with them again and again – which parts of the Koran would you suggest that I go and read, if there are parts...?

The Koran does not have parts in the way in which the Bible has books. The Koran is not organized along the same lines as the Bible. Basically the Koran is the Holy Scriptures of people who are born Moslem and I suppose that for somebody to have an idea of what the Koran is, the only thing is to read it. And you would find a great deal of similarity in scriptural terms between the Old Testament and the Koran. The Koran or, rather, Islam is most peculiarly more tolerant of Christianity than Christianity is of Islam, because in Islam it is believed that the Christians are the People of the Book. In other words, it is accepted they are people of religion. There are details about which the Muslims and the Christians disagree completely. I would accuse Christians of being intolerant when it comes to other religions and of accusing Muslims of being fundamentalists. When I was in Switzerland, for example, or Sweden, and I saw the Cross that decorates their flags and I went and asked a Swiss or a Swede 'how come you claim to be of secular persuasion and yet there is enough evidence of your Christian provenance', the answer – it was a Swede who gave it to me – was 'this is not a cross, Mr Farah, you misunderstand: this is a plus sign'... There are many varieties of Islam too, and there is more enmity between Muslims than there is between Christians.

In your works you mention names of characters from The Arabian Nights: apart from picking up stories that you rework in your novels, is there any kind of formal or stylistic influence of The Arabian Nights on your work?

The idea of having a story within the story, the idea of an endless debate with oneself, the idea of the allegorical nature of the tale itself, and of the flowery aspect of language, all these come either from Somali oral poetry or from the influence of the Arabic poetry to which I was exposed when I was very young.

When reading your novels, I felt compelled to go back to the sixties and to the ideas which seemed then very strong and somehow now have been forgotten; 1968 was the crucial year, but the sixties in general were crucial for some of the ideas you investigate in your novels: equality for women, rebellion inside the family, patriarchs, fights of the sons against the fathers... Would you acknowledge this inheritance or a relationship between your writing – or at least some parts of your writing – and the atmosphere of the sixties?

I was not in Europe in the sixties, I came to Western Europe for the first time in 74, and I had not lived in Italy before 75. Some of the characters had! It is quite interesting to think that the world we have known until the 'disillusion' of communist ideology as recently as 1990, until the demolishing of the Berlin wall, that that world is the one to which the sixties gave birth. For the first time, European and North Americans had the luxury to ask themselves intellectual and existential questions, and the gurus of that period were Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Simone De Beauvoir and Marcuse. All these writers proposed questions, and then answered them in a spirit which made the sixties appear different from anything before. There were sexual politics, the acceptance of guilt on the part of European colonists, the challenge of parents and authority. You must remember that if you calculated the number of years that passed from the end of the second world war and until 68 it would be something very close to 24, the age, then, of people who were born at the end of the second world war. And this period also coincided with central heating, with the economic boom, with television, with a sense of liberal thinking on the part of parents who allowed their children the freedom to challenge them. Now, my relationship to this is that in the sixties I was in India, so what happened in Europe in the sixties arrived in India two or three years later and then arrived in Somalia many many years later. We felt the repercussions, the tremors of the earthquake that the mid-sixties created; although I was not present, two things happened. One is that I became interested in the sixties because that was the period and the ideas that formulated the minds and the thinking of very many of the people who were either of my age group or a few years younger, and with whom I kept having dialogues when I came to live in Europe. And it was very

very good for me, because in a novel like *Sardines*, the question is raised whether Marxism-Leninism is a European property, whether Africans may appropriate Marxism-Leninism in the way they see fit, and one finds that the exponents of Marxism in those days insisted on the European provenance of Marxism-Leninism, and if that was so – said some of us, Africans – then, we would rather we would have nothing to do with Marxism-Leninism. The other thing is that, being a colonized person myself, I was one of those who insisted that we in Africa were victims of ideological falsehood because we seemed to be accepting foreign dictates: a hundred years before we had had European colonials telling us we were savages, a hundred years later European Marxists tell us that socialism is a European ideology and that we must follow a European ideology again. So we seemed to rebel against the dictates of powerful lay brothers and sisters.

The reader of your novels is often somehow disappointed at not finding solutions to the mysteries you present in the plots of your novels and even after reading the whole of the trilogy some characters remain undecipherable or unknowable: I am thinking for instance of Ahmed Wellie: personally I have not understood whether he is a traitor or one of the idealistic conspirators. Apart from my understanding or not, in your writing these books, even if you do not say it in them, do you have the complete view of the characters, or do you know them only as far as they appear?

Very often I know much less than even the reader who comes to these books. I like to explore ideas which I peel off layer by layer the way one peels off onions or baboushkas; the fact that you have actually said that you do not understand a character means that you have understood something, and that is enough. The reason is: aren't there people whom you know as a person, whom you have known for very many years and who remain a 'mystery' to you, an 'enigma'? The other thing I like to say is that I seldom insist on imposing my interpretation of the text on other readers. I usually like readers to make up their own opinions. Because, after all, I am not going to be in the same room with everybody to explain things. I like people to make up their own minds whether some characters make sense or do not make sense.

In Maps, you have used a structure relying on an I/YOU/HE sequence in which the protagonist is the narrator, the addressee or a third person. May I ask you how, or why, you used and developed this technique?

The technique comes from a need for the characters to develop distances. This is one interpretation, it is possible people have other interpretations.

Did it come naturally or was it the result of a conscious effort on your part?

Well, before I answer this, it is better I explain that when in 1984 my literary agent in London sold the book to my British publishers the typescript was only 135 pages long, which means about 120 printed pages in book form, and the only thing that was missing was the final word 'end' and a couple of final paragraphs, and I remember going to the Gambia and being asked by my editor when I was going to give them my final page and I said 'just before you go to the printers, could you telex and I will send you the final page.'

And that's the page where the police ask Askar to go to the police station...

Yes. And he went on to publish other books and I went on starting work on a novel that would be called *Gifts*. Then at some point he wrote a letter, a telex, asking where the final page was. I started reading the book from beginning to end and I discovered I was very unhappy about it. So I rewrote it to the extent that it grew from 135 pages to 380 pages in a matter of six weeks. And when I put it in the post and the editor received it, he telexed me immediately and he said he was unhappy and by then I had already collected the money and I had already eaten it. Also by that time he hadn't read the changes, so he took the manuscript home on Friday afternoon, and he read it and loved it. On Monday he wrote back to apologize. 'Sorry, this is a beautiful novel.' And he accepted it. So there is a certain background that I thought I should let you know. Now: you asked me 'why the change in persona'? The answer is in the book.

You mean at the end of the book when the protagonist says he became witness, judge and audience?

That's one possibility... and there are other possibilities...

For instance when Askar is spoken to in the third person by Hilall and Milado...

That's another possibility, and there are other possibilities in the text...

*You told me that you are particularly fond of *Close Sesame*, because it is a book which needs to 'be pushed' while other books of yours do not need that sort of 'pushing' on your part...*

Close Sesame came out in America, as part of the 'dictatorship trilogy'. It has only come out in hard-back. Almost all my other books have had their genesis in paperback or have also been published immediately in paperback, and so they have been popularly available. *Close Sesame* had never had a paperback edition, until very recently.

Of course, it is the third part of a trilogy, which should make sales easier...

Well, I fell out with Heinemann, to a certain degree and for certain details, and I had also left my publisher... But, you see, I think that *Close Sesame* is probably the one novel that will outlive all my other novels. It was much more of a challenge, to write, than most of the other novels. And the reason is that I have never been an old man. I had to rely more and more on imagination. It is difficult for me to explain why it is that I am more attached to *Close Sesame* than to the others.

Did it also mark a kind of turning point in your attitude to writing? For instance, all the novels in the trilogy use 'doubles' in a way; still, in Close Sesame the network of 'doubles' is much more sophisticated, less mathematical... very complex. And also, as you said before, in it there is a mixture of prose relating events and dreams and lyrical passages — and this appears to me more complex than in Sardines or Sweet and Sour Milk.

Yes, yes. And also, I think, because the old man suffers from asthma, and because it is very seldom, you see, that you encounter a character comparable to Deerye (or so I have been told) in literature.

Maybe he is also your biggest male character and quite a complex one. He has more space in the book...

Yes, that's possible, even if many readers think *Maps* is more complicated. I think each book has its own bole.

You have been mentioned as a writer who understands women and who has created many memorable female characters. Perhaps before Close Sesame there were fewer memorable male characters.

I had not even thought of that.

Even in Maps, the protagonist, Askar, is somehow less important than Misra...

But if you think of *A Naked Needle*, its main character is a man, in fact he is considered to be a misogynist... And also my most recent novel, called *Secrets*, has as its central consciousness a male character. Very often what I do is that I write a novel in which the central consciousness is male, followed by one with a female central consciousness, followed by one with a male central consciousness, and followed by one in which the central consciousness is mutli-generic, where the question of gender comes absolutely unclear: it is the case with *Maps*, in which the reader does not know whether to concentrate on Askar or on Misra, although she does not appear as much in the book as he does.

In my most recent novel, *Secrets*, there is a woman character, who is not the principal character, but who is really the impetus of the novel. It is as

if women in my novels determine the pace at which life is lived; whether they are absent or present they seem to determine how men should operate or should look at them or how they should view them. All these things are very important for me as a novelist who is interested in a situation of total equality between sexes, a situation of total democracy and tolerance in an ideal sort of way. And since the reality with which one has to live appears to be rather disappointing, I create conditions in the imagination in which women reign absolute. And the current civil war in Somalia has also vindicated my position because it has now become clear how important women have been in Somalian life. In fact, the majority of the families which have survived the terrific history and tragedy of Somalia have done so thanks to their women folk. In my sort of personal way, my brothers seem to have broken under the strain of the civil war. Whereas my sisters appear to have 'blossomed' and are now stronger, as if they had received inspiration from the agony and tyranny of the civil war, as if they had always been waiting for a point, for the opportunity to express themselves, to show how valuable they are.

Going somehow back to the beginning of this talk, you told me that you are now going to work on a non-fiction piece of writing, dealing with the experiences of Somalian refugees in Europe, is that so?

Well, it is a non-fiction book but it is not going to appear in the form of interviews. It is going to appear in the form of a reflective long essay on the condition of refugees. It is an attempt to present a psychological portrait of a refugee. I have done only one third of it...

Will the period be the contemporary one?

Yes, the contemporary period, but one wanders back to the history of Somalia and what created its form of things and there is going to be a sort of study of the Somali migrant, because we have always had a history of Somali migrants. You used to find Somalis living in Europe, in Antwerp or Liverpool or Cardiff, as seamen. Somalia has one of the longest coastlines in Africa. It is a study of the tragic conditions, the tragic side-products of the civil war. This has been second choice, really, because my original idea was to write a novel about the civil war. I have abandoned my main-stream and I have started writing about refugees and it is quite true, so far, that I have had to learn a new style of writing...

Yes: in your fiction, poetry is such an important component, even if it is not written in verse... Don't you find that your writing articles for magazines or your writing this book now is somehow limiting?

I don't. In fact I take refuge in a metaphor or an allegory or in the telling of a myth whenever I can't find ways of expressing everything. I have not abandoned the so-called 'poetic' vision of things, or poetic writing. If anything, my refugee book is in parts even more poetic than my fiction, so perhaps I should not call it 'documentary'...

Resuming again one of my initial questions, would you then subscribe to the idea that in order to describe 'reality' one must resort to imagination, otherwise reality is only partly described?

I would not say 'one must', but I think that different authors have different resources at their disposal. I have often sailed back on the imagination because of my special needs because I have been in exile and so I had to create an alternative reality, differently from other writers who have always lived in the same environment. I could not say whether or not my approach is healthier or 'better'... all I could say is that so far this method I have worked in has been of use to me but I am quite sure... or rather, I should say, I doubt very much whether it could be of use for any of the writers who have survived the difficult conditions they had to operate in. But now it seems that things are not as bad for me as they were when, say, I came and lived in Italy, about 14 years ago. I seem to have many more friends in Italy now, so probably it is for the general good of all of us to pass the test of endurance and to see whether or not I was sufficiently determined to become a writer and became one. I should also say that many people were very kind to me. Now, after 14 years, I have more or less abandoned the use of the Italian language: I came back to it with a certain *aria of nostalgia* but also with the same sort of feeling as an adolescent who says 'thank God I am not a two-year old child again, because I had to grow teeth and I had to go through my teething problems. But I *have had* my teeth. I am happy that I have a different future to look forward to'.

GAELE SOBOTT-MOGWE

Revenge Is Sweet

It was the first time in my life that I had been alone. Yet I didn't feel lonely. I was enjoying my own space, my own time, discovering myself and all that. I did sense the presence of something slightly threatening. Now I look back, I did sense something, yes. It was during the night. Sometimes I would lift my head, thinking I heard a noise. My neck and body would stiffen as all my senses, especially my ears and eyes strained radar-like in search of potential danger. I lay there like a piece of petrified wood or one of those terrible lava preserved images from Pompeii. I would think up possible methods of attack and escape routes - most of them probably far more devastating in theory than they could possibly be in actuality. I suppose I wasted good sleeping hours in this way for about three months, on and off. I would get up in the morning and find my book was not where I thought I had left it. My scissors disappeared. There was sugar on the floor in the kitchen...not much just enough to annoy me, crunching and sticking to my feet. Once the coffee jar was lying in the cupboard with its lid off. I don't drink coffee. I keep a jar in the cupboard for when guests come. I can't say I thought too much of all this though. These things have always happened to me in varying degrees. My imagination has been known to have fun with the creaks and groans of old houses and I can be absent-minded at the best of times.

I had been at Leloba's house. We'd been chewing on sweet reed and laughing a lot about people and work. It was dark when I got home. Leloba had given me a huge water melon which I was carrying in my arms in the dark. The dogs rubbed their wet noses behind my knees, wagging their tails, bouncing their front paws off the ground and scraping them down my legs. The lights were on and loud rhythms were blasting their base out the windows. It was my music so I liked it but I couldn't remember leaving it on. I didn't have any remote control or automatic gadgets. Maybe one of the kids had come home. A surprise? In some kind of trouble? I balanced the melon against the wall and fumbled around in my basket for the house keys. Surely the kids would have phoned. The door's open...stupid of me. The blame yourself for all the silly things that happen syndrome had plagued me for years.

'Oh, shit! What is that?' I yelled. The water melon splattered across the floor. 'A Tokoloshe!' It was so horrible. The sight. He came dancing up to me, grinning, swigging gin and sweating. I knew it was a Tokoloshe from

the descriptions I'd heard as a kid. Long furry ears, a pointed snout and spotted body. He was short and seethed a greasy sexuality. Thrusting his pelvis back and forth in time to the music. Leering. Blood shot eyes. He grabbed my arm and pulled me towards the kitchen.

'Come, cook for me my sweetheart!'

This was typical Tokoloshe behaviour. They have ravenous appetites and love meat.

'Ao batla nama?' I asked in a timid voice. 'Yes, give me meat, meat, meat!'

He pivoted on one foot and then sprang across the kitchen floor cackling.

I remembered someone saying that if a Tokoloshe has eaten well it will leave you alone. At least for a while. I had also heard that Tokoloshes hate salt. That is one sure way to rid yourself of a Tokoloshe. Feed it salt. I eyed the salt shaker. The meat was sizzling in the pan. He was still gyrating on the kitchen floor. I edged closer to the bench and stretched my arm out, slowly, very slowly. Where was he? I couldn't hear him. I stood still, my hand inches away from the salt shaker. I stood there listening, trying to place him. Where was he? His grimacing face exploded from under my skirt, a twisted screeching and salivating mass of teeth and hair. He had wheedled his way between my legs. I screamed, cold sudden fear pounding through my heart and lungs. His long grey finger nails hooked around the cupboard door handles and the drawer handles.

He clambered up on to the bench, picked up the salt shaker and pelted it across the room.

'Clean it up!' he spat.

I swept the salt and glass into a heap, scooped it up and threw it into the kitchen tidy. He grunted and began stuffing the meat and onions from the frying pan into his mouth, watching me from the corner of his eyes. Belching and making sloshy noises as he chewed. I pushed my back against the wall and watched him. He seemed to calm down. He rubbed his bloated stomach and burped again.

'Thank you, my darling! I'll see you later. Ke tla go bona kgantele, neh?' The words slithered by my ear as he disappeared in stages. He didn't just disappear suddenly - there one minute gone the next. He faded out of sight in phases with different colours predominating at various intervals. Reds and browns, greens, khaki, and mustard yellow. Digestion colours. Regurgitation and vomit colours.

I didn't waste any time. I ran outside. The dogs were jumping all over me. Excited by my late night activity. I carried bricks into the house. Two at a time. Scraping the inside of my arms. Rubbing red brick dust all over my blouse. I kept going until I had sixteen bricks in my bedroom. I placed four under one bed leg. The bed fell and grazed my back. I started crying and sat there for a while with my head in my hands. I removed three of the bricks. Then I placed one brick at a time under each bed leg. It made

more sense. Until the bed was perched up four bricks higher than its normal height. Four bricks under each bed leg.

I had to shower and put on a clean night dress. Somehow it felt better. I climbed onto my bed too tired to worry about eating, washing up the frying pan or cleaning up the smashed water melon. I actually fell asleep despite everything. For a while anyway. He came at sunrise. I knew he would. He came into the room. I could see his eyes shining. He was calling me and whispering obscenities. Heavy breathing, the lot. I waited. I rolled into the middle of the bed. His voice was becoming more desperate, beginning to squeak.

'Why, why did you do that?' he squealed.

He sprang up. His long nails scratched the air. He began screaming, screeching, turning in circles but he couldn't reach the bed. He disappeared. Suddenly this time, in a whirlwind of profanity and burning heat.

'Eat your heart out Rumpelstiltskin!' I whispered and fell asleep.

I phoned in sick. I had to rest. He'd be back. I cleaned the house, cooked a delicious lunch and ate it in the garden. I fed the dogs early. I didn't want him to do anything horrible to them. No one believes stories about Tokoloshes. I hadn't really believed the stories I had heard about Tokoloshes but at least I had listened to them. Most people get rid of Tokoloshes by feeding them salt. How was I going to get rid of this one? The bed trick was great but he'd be back. He'd bring his friends. I knew that from the stories.

He did come. He came with a woman Tokoloshe. He sneered at me. She smiled shyly. I put some music on and pulled out a bottle of whisky.

'Now you're getting the hang of it,' he cackled 'Have you taken the bricks out from under your bed? eeh? Have you?'

He was dancing and swigging great gulps of whisky from the bottle. She was also dancing. Laughing.

'Let's brighten up the decor!' he yelled and pulled over the bookshelf. He kicked a chair and sent it flying across the room. 'Fruit! Hee Hee!' He squashed some grapes into the wall and nibbled and licked pieces of the green grape skin from under his nails, spitting the seeds against the windows and watching them as they made slimy paths down the glass. I was beginning to lose my temper. I knew it would just make things worse but my control was slipping away.

'Have you cooked? Have you cooked my meat?' he screamed.

I could see right down his reddish maroon spotted throat and smelt the hot stench. I was going to be sick. Sour milk and stale gin mixed with something beyond definition.

'Cook my meat! Cook my meat!'

I sucked air through my back teeth - 'tlhh, oa ntena monna!' He pushed me, digging his nails into my back.

'Ke batla nama! I want meat!'

I stumbled into the kitchen, got out the frying pan and threw in a big piece of fillet. He was watching me slyly. The woman was still dancing in the other room making soft crooning noises. I chopped up some cabbage, tomatoes and onions. He loved it. I left him there stuffing the partly cooked food down his throat, slobbering and drivelling over the frying pan.

She was still dancing and crooning. I watched her hips sway. Her eyes were closed. I began dancing with her. She opened her eyes and smiled at me. I picked her up very gently. We danced across the floor, up the hall to my bedroom. I stroked her neck and back as I climbed up onto the bed. She continued to smile and made bubbly pigeon noises. I could hear him looking for us. He was scuffling and burping his way up the hall. I kissed her downy cheek. She kissed my shoulder. My skin did something it had never done before. It tasted her kiss. My skin became my tongue. I sucked her sweet nectar kiss into my pores and thought of the purple, slim-necked flowers I siphoned from the bees when I was a child. He was in the room. I could feel his presence. I could feel him watching us. Watching us in stunned amazement. I don't know when his hideous screaming started or stopped. Blue, red, green flashing lights getting louder and louder and then fading off into the distance. Gone forever. Nna Ke ile ka thulamela. I fell into a deep, sweet jazz sleep. Continuous slumberous curves, peaking and falling into honeyed ripples.

ADEWALE MAJA-PEARCE

African Writers and Social Transformation

The title of this talk is 'African Writers and Social Transformation', and I should begin by saying that it was only when I sat down to gather my thoughts that I realised the enormity of the undertaking, and wondered whether I shouldn't have chosen something more innocuous. Such a title requires a book, not a lecture, so that what follows is hardly a sustained argument, merely a few thoughts with which I'm becoming increasingly obsessed as I survey the chaos that is contemporary Africa. With that proviso in mind, here goes:

On the wall above my desk there is a newspaper cutting from the *Independent on Sunday* newspaper of 31 March, 1991. The article in question, 'A continent on the edge of madness', was written by the Africa specialist of a French national daily. The thrust of his argument was that Africa, 'racked by civil war and famine', was teetering on the edge of disaster; and if I tell you that it was written following a visit to Liberia, which was then in the middle of one of the bloodiest civil wars of our time (Yugoslavia notwithstanding), you will understand the reason for his pessimism. Indeed, the accompanying photograph was even more telling in this regard. In the middle of an otherwise empty highway on the outskirts of Monrovia, the capital, a 'rebel' soldier was pointing an AK-47 at a corpse sprawled across the tarmac.

Such a sight is hardly peculiar to Africa, of course. The world is full of young men – and not-so-young men – waving Russian and American and Chinese weaponry at their fellow human beings; what is unusual is the soldier's uniform, which consists of a woman's wig, a face mask of the kind favoured by anti-nuclear demonstrators here in Europe, and a jacket that might have once belonged to the supporter of an American baseball team. Obviously, I use the description 'uniform' advisedly. The man's rig-out wasn't simply an expression of his individuated personality, however bizarre – not to say chilling – one might judge that personality to be. Women's wigs, along with shower caps, bathrobes, welding goggles and wedding dresses were – and are – much in favour amongst his colleagues, which leads us to the conclusion that an entire society, represented by those soldiers, was – and is – suffering from what one can only call a

species of collective madness. It's one thing to run around killing people, it's quite another to do so in fancy dress. And at the risk of reading too much into it, I would go further and say that the kind of fancy dress one chooses is itself significant in terms of understanding the nature of that madness.

I'll return to this in a moment; in the meantime, anyone familiar with Liberia under ex-President Samuel Kanyon Doe, the ultimate target of those rebels, was hardly surprised by the savagery of the exercise. It happened that I was in the country two or three months prior to the invasion of disaffected exiles from the neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, and I knew at once that the semi-literate Master Sergeant-turned-General (but this is Africa), was in deep trouble. Doe himself was quick to reassure anybody who would listen that the rebels were merely a tiresome inconvenience who would be quickly routed, but even he, it seems, was unaware of the deep hatred he had engendered in the course of his ten years in power, which was evident enough to the casual visitor who took the trouble to listen to those who had cause to celebrate his eventual downfall. I remember, for instance, bumping into Rufus Darpoh, the country's most distinguished journalist, as I was leaving my hotel early one morning. I already knew about Rufus by reputation. In my capacity as Africa editor of *Index on Censorship* magazine, I had covered his case in 1985 when he had been arrested and imprisoned for an editorial which suggested that Doe had rigged the elections. He was held for six months without charge or trial, and beaten every day with a fan belt. The newspaper he edited was closed down, and he himself remained unemployed for eighteen months after his release. If I say that Africa is wasteful of its assets, you will understand what I mean.

Anyway, on this particular morning I stepped out of my hotel, and there was Rufus, walking towards me. He was drenched in sweat and visibly shaking. I soon discovered why. After we had settled down for breakfast – but he confined himself to coffee and cigarettes – he told me that some security people had collected him from his house the previous night, and that Doe had spent the intervening period between then and now screaming at him, telling him that he was careless with his life on account of the nasty things he wrote about him, and boasting that he, Doe, couldn't be killed by ordinary bullets because he was protected by powerful medicine. We needn't concern ourselves here with the apparent lack of any logical connection between these two statements, between Rufus's carelessness and Doe's invulnerability, which was only typical of Doe's own disconnected consciousness. What does concern us was his misplaced faith in the efficacy of his so-called medicine, a fact that was demonstrated graphically enough in an unforgettable video sequence taken by his captors as he attempted to flee the country when even he could see that the American marines stationed off the Liberian coast weren't about to charge to his rescue.

Let us be quite clear about this. Doe himself practised human sacrifice. The medicine he boasted about to Rufus consisted of the heart and the private parts of children, preferably female, preferably virgins. Compared to this, a wig and a wedding dress – to say nothing of shower caps, bathrobes, masks and welding goggles – are perfectly unremarkable, and even – dare one say? – understandable, at least in terms of a universe which is yet to wake up to the imperatives of the modern world. The point about the rebels' fancy dress on the one hand, and Doe's cannibalism on the other, is that either can only be understood in terms of the magical properties associated with each. The tragedy of Liberia, in other words, was not merely the everyday brutality of military regimes which deliberately set about destroying democratic institutions in order to guarantee their power, but the continued stranglehold of outdated beliefs which ensure the emergence – and survival – of such regimes in the first place. And what is true of Liberia is true of the continent as a whole.

I'm perfectly well aware, of course, that Africans, along with their European apologists, have spent the last thirty years or so making a great song and dance about the inherent worth of indigenous value systems, but the very notion of cultural relativism is at best mischievous and at worst dangerous, and this because the real world, the world that we are required to negotiate as best we can, is not – and never was – polarised between the West and the Other. To quote W.B. Yeats, a writer who certainly knew something about the colonial experience, 'Every man, every where, is more of his age than his nation.' In other words, what we are pleased to term the West is not a conspiracy of history, bad luck and/or white men in dark suits, but an inaccurate synonym for the modern world, the world that abides by the rule of law and sends spacecraft to explore the far reaches of the universe. The inability of an entire continent to enter into a modern relationship with the times we live in is tragic indeed, beginning with the sacrificial victims of President Doe's lust for power, but the solution to what is an apparently intractable dilemma is hardly to be found in conspiracy theories, however seductive. Worse yet, such theories only serve to give intellectual respectability to the dictatorships that are the cause of the anguish, and in this regard I'm bound to say that the overwhelming majority of African writers have themselves contributed to the continent's failure thirty years after independence.

The most obvious culprits were the members of what we might call the Dignity School of African writing of the late fifties and early sixties, the writers who set their sights on the pre-colonial past in order, they claimed, to rescue the African sensibility from the distortions of the colonial experience. The most celebrated practitioner was, of course, Chinua Achebe, whose first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, became the standard for all such novels published over the next ten years. He himself stated his intentions clearly enough in an essay he published after the event:

This theme – put quite simply – is that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this that they must now regain.

This is hardly the place to embark on a detailed critique of the novel, nor would I subscribe to Wole Soyinka's objection that the writers of this school 'mistook [their] own personal and cultural predicament for the predicament of [their] entire society' in their attempt to 'give the society something that the society had never lost'. The very popularity of Achebe's novel underscores the perceived extent of the damage to the African psyche after a century of colonial rule, and this despite the author's failure to resolve the problems he poses. Consider, for instance, Achebe's claim to reveal 'a philosophy of great depth and beauty'. In fact, the only evidence that the society possessed anything approaching a philosophy, properly defined, is limited to one short paragraph following the judgment of an oracle – magic again! – to banish a man who accidentally kills a fellow-clansman, as follows:

Obierika was a man who thought about things. When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his [hut] and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely led into greater complexities.

Obierika must pass for the local intellectual, the Socrates of the village, as it were, and yet this is the closest we ever come to any deeper reflection on the nature of divine law. The fact that the dignity of the society is posited on the reality of the gods in the life of the community; and, further, that their reality is promoted in the novel as a viable alternative to the European world which scoffed at such beliefs as evidence of a degraded fetishism, renders Achebe's failure as disturbing as the apparent ignorance of the novel's 3 million plus readers, to say nothing of its 3 million plus commentators, of the related fact that Achebe had actually proved the very thing he was claiming to have disproved.

In the meantime, of course, independent Africa was beginning to fall apart at the seams as military regimes and one-party dictatorships replaced elected governments, and a foretaste of what was to happen in Liberia broke out in Nigeria, Achebe's own country. This certainly lent some credence to Soyinka's charge that the African writer had been content 'to turn his eyes backwards in time and prospect in archaic fields for forgotten gems which would dazzle and distract from the present,' but even those novels – Achebe's included – which sought to delve into 'the niggling, warning, predictable present' were hardly an improvement in terms of revealing the true nature of the modern African predicament.

Ironically enough, the sheer scale of the problems confronting the continent in the wake of independence has hindered, not helped, the move towards a more accurate analysis of the dilemma. The public drama – political instability, economic collapse, social chaos – is so immediate and so overwhelming that it appears to have rendered superfluous the need for any profounder examination of the internal landscape of the African psyche. Worse yet, writers who refuse to engage directly with politics are seen as somehow frivolous, un-African, tainted with decadent European notions of art-for art's sake which, according to Achebe, 'is just another piece of deodorised dog-shit'. Their work, in short, is not relevant. The most obvious example of such an un-African African writer is Dambudzo Marechera, the Zimbabwean novelist and poet; and we can see how keenly he felt the weight of general disapproval by his need to answer the criticism in his own work, as follows:

After a time I just couldn't understand my people and they couldn't understand me. They were talking in terms of the cosmologies of a special creation as in Achebe's *Arrow of God* and I was talking in terms of genes and chromosomes, and calculus and relativity and the new astronomy. At first they tried to beat me into submission but I fucked off out of there ...

Or, again:

My father's mysterious death when I was eleven taught me – like nothing ever would have done – that everything, including people, is unreal. That, like Carlos Castenada's Don Juan, I had to weave my own descriptions of reality into the available fantasy we call the world. I describe and live my descriptions.... My people could never again see me as anything but 'strange'. It hurt, for the strangeness was not of my own making; I was desperately cynical for the descriptions were the only weird 'things' I cared to name 'truth'. They were the heart of my writing and I did not want to explain my descriptions because they had become my soul, fluid and flowing with the phantom universe in which our planet is but a speck among gigantic galaxies. This then perhaps is what 'they' too easily dub 'alienation' when they are thinking within the mould of the theory of *A Child Of Two Worlds*, explaining the bitter angst with simple African/European disjunctions. I am what I am not because I am an African or whatever but because it is the basic nature of a maker of descriptions, a writer.

To understand what Marechera was talking about one need only turn to the critics on both sides of the political debate. Here is Biodun Jeyifo, the self-styled Marxist, rehearsing a familiar argument:

For the greater number of our contemporary African playwrights, the individual is almost wholly self-determined, even when they pay lip-service to the force of African communalist custom and tradition. Soyinka is the greatest exemplar of this tendency and his enormous talent apart, this is the main reason why he is so beloved by the Western Liberal critics... They see in Soyinka's plays, with eminent justification, Western bourgeois individualism incarnate.

And here is the infamous troika in their celebrated and supposedly 'radical' study, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*:

When [Eurocentric] critics denounce what they consider didacticism, propaganda, or inconsistency of moral attitude, they usually do so only when these things criticise or militate against European bourgeois values. In their concern with promoting the Western brand of individualism, they denounce as 'situational' those presentations in which some individual does not dominate or wilfully tower over his social environment. And of course they do not want to hear or read 'protest literature' since the protest is, or has to be, overwhelmingly against what the bourgeois order ... is doing to the African.

Elsewhere in their book, they promote 'Humpty Dumpty' as 'great poetry' on account of its 'linguistic clarity and simplicity', which gives some idea of their own understanding of literature. But let us leave that to one side, and ask instead how it is that a Marxist should find himself arguing out of the same corner as the self-styled 'Afrocentrists', except that both subscribe to a vision of society which is itself the product of the very same 'bourgeois order' they affect to despise. Both, at any rate, would be perfectly well understood by their bourgeois liberal Western counterparts, who themselves continually agonize over the modern bourgeois condition. European literature for the last century-and-a-half at least is replete with books written 'against what the bourgeois order...is doing to' those who find themselves trapped within its own contradictions, i.e. the bourgeois order itself. And contradictory because it is this same bourgeois order – rational, sceptical, secular; in a word, enlightened – which has set the pace of the modern world; which is, indeed, the modern world.

Both Jeyifo and the troika are dead wrong. It isn't the generalised African who needs 'protest literature' in order to re-discover an identity which, alas, they are yet to lose, if only because the modern world, including literacy, has yet to arrive on their scene, and which goes some way towards explaining why they sacrifice children and run around in fancy dress. On the contrary, it is bourgeois Africans who are only too well aware that the bits and pieces of wood – à la Achebe – aren't really gods at all, and who are then driven to fashion a substitute mythology to assuage their troubled souls. Those of a more political persuasion find a resolution of sorts in Marxism, and then proceed – à la Soyinka – to 'cover reams of paper with unceasing lament on the failure of this or that writer to write for the masses of the people, when he himself assiduously engages, with a remorseless exclusivity, only the incestuous productivity of his own academic – that is, bourgeois-situated – literature'; those of a more sentimental – or more romantic – disposition cast their eye backwards in time and pretend that the modern world is simply a figment of someone else's imagination (proof to the contrary notwithstanding, including word processors and printed books), and that the modern world will go away if only they can somehow manage to ignore it for long enough.

Unfortunately for both sides, the game is up; and, no, the marines are not about to come to anybody's rescue, this need for the marines, otherwise known as the Western World, being every bit as necessary as they were for Doe in the scheme of things. Bearing in mind those rebel soldiers with whom I began, there's little doubt that Africa is in desperate need of social transformation; unfortunately, until African writers can begin to suggest what makes possible their fancy dress, the social transformation that we all desire, and desire urgently, today, now, this minute, will remain as elusive as the medicine that protects African dictators from the assassin's bullet. Thank you.

Chinweizu Interviewed by Kirsten Holst Petersen

June 1993, Aarhus, Denmark.

There are many ways of becoming famous, and you are famous as the man who quarrels with Soyinka. That takes a lot of courage; Soyinka has a reputation for being a formidable quarreller. However, you have a reputation for being equally formidable, so that when the two of you quarrel it is really a matter of the quick or the dead. What is it about your views that makes them so controversial?

Well, I don't consider my views controversial. But from what I gather from those who join in the controversy I think that what they object to is my challenging their world view. They have a world view that in my judgment is thoroughly Eurocentric. Whilst it is perfectly fine for Europeans to be Eurocentric, as far as I am concerned, I don't think it is perfectly all right for Africans to be Eurocentric. So I tend to argue for the need for Afro-centricism in Africa, and those who are committed to the European world view object to my point of view. Their world view is the one which has been entrenched during the last 100 years of colonial intervention in Africa. They hold the opinion that modernisation means Europeanisation; that modern culture must be European culture or as close an approximation to it as possible. Those of us who believe in cultural pluralism and insist that the various civilisations of the world have their own particular flavours and that diversity is a good thing, argue that it is proper that if I am in Japan I should get the flavour and feeling of Japanese tradition and culture, if I am in India I should expect the equivalent of Indian culture, not a bastardised version of European culture, and in Africa we should also present ourselves as Africans to whoever cares to come by to see for themselves.

What is the particular 'flavour' of African culture?

Well, it's not something you can describe in a few words. I think the important thing is that our values are not the same as the Christian European values. Our religious beliefs are not the same as the monotheistic beliefs of Christianity, for instance. Most African societies tend to be polytheistic. Our traditional ways of building houses and towns are not the same as those which have come out of the temperate zone of Europe.

If we had not had colonial intervention the towns and villages of contemporary Africa would not look the way they do now; they would be developments of traditional African architecture. We used mud to build houses of certain shapes and sizes which adapted well to our tropical climate. I would expect those approaches to technology to be continued instead of putting in concrete blocks, which are too hot, and then importing air-conditioners to cool them down. Our traditional architecture is such that in the worst of the heat the houses stayed cool because of the material they were built with. However, from a Eurocentric view point these things are looked upon as primitive or uncivilised and can therefore not serve as models for new developments.

In the realm of literature, which is your area, how does this apply?

Let us leave the issue of language aside, because we are for the moment in the cultural trap where for whatever reasons we have to express ourselves to one another in imported European languages. But even within that restriction the flavour of a people's literature reflects their literary tradition: the way they use images, the kinds of themes they discuss, the idioms, the framework of historical references. To take an example: if someone is writing from the European tradition and makes references to the sagas of his community, to the epics of his people then that is understandable, but if an African in his writings ignores all of the African oral tradition, the African epics and the historical characters of African fiction from before the colonial era and fills his book with references to Zeus, then you ask yourself, 'Out of which tradition is this chap writing?' Is he an African? He may be by citizenship, but in terms of his mental outlook? If we find that themes, characters and references from the African literary and intellectual tradition are absent from his work I think that we are justified in asking questions about the mentality and orientation of such a writer.

Are you not worried about the charge of being prescriptive? What if I was to say that you are sitting here telling writers how they should write and what they should write about?

All critics do that, but the good thing about it is that the writers do not have to listen to them. The charge of being prescriptive is usually directed against those whose prescriptions you don't like. When you like their prescriptions you simply go ahead and write.

I am going to play the Devil's Advocate. Obviously the idea of finding your roots and building on traditional aesthetics is a very natural pursuit, but in your Nigerian context it is a slightly different matter. All your traditions are tied to your African languages and to a pre-scientific and very local outlook. The point

here is that this did not slowly continue and develop and change, it was cut off suddenly and brutally by colonialism, and it seems that from that point onwards development has always been a process of learning European or British norms. How can you go back to that world which was cut off?

That is how the Eurocentrics like to present it, but I think that their description of the situation is misleading. Let me give you a few examples. I thought I heard you use the word 'pre-scientific'?. If I understand that word correctly it does not apply. There has been science in every society, incorporated in techniques of agriculture or food processing or architecture, so I don't think that there is any pre-scientific society in the world.

The presumption in that description of the African situation is that African traditional (pre-colonial) cultures have died out and therefore you have nothing to build upon. But that is not true. Traditional healers are still operating; traditional houses are still being built, in the villages, for the most part; traditional techniques of agriculture are still practised, and the stories which the Eurocentric academics dismiss as folk tales or folklore are still being told, traditional music is still being played. In every department of life these things are still going on. What has happened is that they have been cut off in the mentality of the Eurocentric Africans. I can illustrate this with the case of literature. Most of it they dismiss as folklore and refuse to treat it as literature. It is there, it is being practised, but they deliberately refuse to accord it its proper status. Therefore they can imagine that it has been cut off, that it is dead, and therefore there is no need to refer to it any more. What I am really pointing out is that the picture is one produced by ideology and propaganda. The reality is different from that image, and those of us who argue for a return to traditional foundations simply have to say 'open your eyes, the damned things are all around you; recognise that they are valuable and use them as a building block'.

This is a question of class. It seems to me that while the educated part of the population is eager to retrieve its African heritage the uneducated part, on the other hand is busy becoming as westernised as possible and putting as much distance between themselves and their traditional past as they can. A good example of what I am talking about is the use of the term 'bush'

That use comes directly out of the British colonial attitude. Those who have inherited that vocabulary keep using it. They still use the word 'native' as a pejorative. What I am pointing out is that it is not a class matter, because within the elite there is also a division of attitudes between those who are Eurocentric and those who want to become Afrocentric. You find the same division down the line. If you go to any village gathering in Nigeria you will find that people will practice aspects of traditional culture; at the same time as they will also bring in transistor

radios, etc., but these are artifacts which they integrate into that milieu. Basically, the problem arises for that fragment of the elite which rejects the notion of integrating whatever foreign element we introduce into an African place. They perpetuate the myth that it is only educated Africans who have been abroad and returned who want to return to the traditions which they regard as primitive and backwards. But that is not so. If you talk to people at all levels of society they recognise that they have to live their lives within their own traditions, adding whatever they find advisable or necessary, but there is a fraction who insists that the only way forward for Africa is to 'modernise', 'Europeanise', and they are hell-bent on trying to make that happen. They rest of us still want to modernise Africa, but so that it becomes a modern Africa, not a carbon copy of Europe.

The features you want to preserve as African are all within the cultural sphere. Is there not here a danger of being cut in two in another way? On the cultural side you remain African whereas on the production side you use high technology, because that is competitive; is there not a clash between the two?

No, I don't think that is a risk at all. I happened to use examples of that sort because of the context of our discussion. If we turn to areas like agriculture the techniques that have been recommended by aid agencies and those who want to sell us tractors are causing part of the disaster. In fact in those areas we have enough evidence from the last forty to fifty years to suggest that most of our old techniques which were developed in that environment and were cognizant of the dangers and the fragility of that environment are the wiser techniques to use. Talking about the Sahel and the drought and the resultant famine, part of the cause for all that was precisely new techniques. Recommendations were made to dig wells so that more cattle could graze as there would be more grass; but what happens when you do that is that you abandon the old habit of moving your cattle to where there is more abundant grass, and that eventually led to overgrazing of the local spots, which led to the erosion of the very fragile top soil, so a technique which was supposed to increase production led to more desertification. If people had respected their traditions they would have asked 'what were the reasons behind the methods which have been used for so long' before they simply discarded them.

You must be in opposition on the question of development?

I call it mal-development. I may be in opposition, but the other side has to give up because what they are bringing about is not development. The attempt has been going on now for thirty years, and we have not seen any development. Instead, we have seen desertification, we have seen famine, we have seen declines in agricultural and industrial production, and at

some point people have to face up to the fact and realize that this is the wrong way to go about it.

What are the consequences of the views you have just expressed with regards to your relationship with Europe? Would you like to simply say to Europeans 'Go home, and we will do things our own way', or can you foresee some form of co-operation which would not just be hurtful?

Let me put it this way. Our main problem to day is not Europe. Our main problem is the Europeanised African elite who are committed to a Eurocentric version of Africa. If we could solve that problem Europe could no longer continue to impose its views on us. The agents of perpetuating the European view point are entrenched in powerful positions, and they are Africans. Culturally, their mentality is shaped by colonial attitudes.

How do you suggest setting about solving that problem?

We are dealing with it. There are all kinds of ways. In Nigeria we have debates in the press. When the issues crop up we provoke a debate. The more you change people's minds the better are the chances that those in power might act differently. So ultimately it is a matter of changing attitudes, using every possible opportunity whether it be through books or through articles in the press, through theatre or through discussion to get more and more people to continue the criticism of the entrenched order. It is not something which can be done over night, it may take a generation or two or perhaps some severe crisis or other to compel people to actually move from thinking about something to doing something about it. Such historical processes take a while, and you just have to keep doing it.

John Lyons

UNCLE CYRIL

'Que hay?'

A sharp call from across the road:
Uncle Cyril, our family sailor,
adventurer down the Spanish Main,
bent like a question mark
to disguise his height
land-shambled towards me.

'Que hay?'

Hands weathered like good leather
reached out to me. El Dorado glinted
in his broad smile, hat at eccentric angle,
carelessness hanging about him
without malice.

His pockets were a cornucopia of coins:
'Buy "sweeties" but don't be lickerish now,
save some fuh yuh brother and sisters.
How's yuh Granma?'

Uncle Cyril had made and lost a fortune,
trafficking live stock to Port-of-Spain market,
fishing in his half-owned pirogue
for anchovies and jacks.

Years after his sea faring
my father found him consumed by bush lore
in a forest near Charlotteville in Tobago,
guarded by a vicious sow, a butting goat,
and a parrot screeching, 'Que hay?'

GRANDPA DOLPHUS

When Grandpa Dolphus
pushed car-tyre sandals off,
comforted shocked toes reluctant to separate,
you knew he had come in to stay
until next day when rum shop opened.

When he reached for the historic tin of twist,
trawled pockets for his 'sweet pipe',
you knew rigmaroles were coming
without the 'crick-crack-monkey-break-he-back-
on-a-piece-a-pomme-arac' endings.
He swore every single word was gospel.

He told of places under sand box and silk cotton trees
where unspeakable happenings bristled
his hairs like Grandma's scrubbing brush.
How he signed the cross, ran away
not looking back, not petrifying into salt.
Giant forms holding up the moon blocked the road.
They threw no shadows; they sucked his breath,
till he turned about to save his life.

Those tales were familiar as the nose of our faces.
Only the dog gave its dumb attention:
It rolled its eyes in the direction
its listening head should be.

When Grandpa Dolphus
pushed off his lap
Columbus, our don't-care-a-damn cat,
you knew his pipe had burnt itself out
like his tall tales;
but only for that night.

REDISCOVERING WHARTON STREET, TRINIDAD

No more that yellow earth road,
haunt of midnight presences;
by day, a school boy's practical lesson
in geography: ox-bow lakes,
gorge formations and alluvial deposits.

Now it is a pitted asphalt thoroughfare,
signposted Wharton Street, shrunken,
a betrayal of so many fond memories
of my kite-flying, marble-pitching days.

No 18, my old house, looks smaller
than when I saw it last back in 1959.
It stands curiously vulnerable
on tall pillar-trees out-datedly elegant.

Under its rusted, corrugated iron roof
poverty shows a brave face.
They are the tough ones, like perennial crops
from the seeds of forbears, selected
for survival by the Middle Passage.

Their priorities are instinctive
as coupling: food for the body,
calypso to lift the spirits, making
time to celebrate inconsequences.

Robin S. Ngangom

FROM THE BOOK OF RAIN

Haunting rain visits your hill and fog
weaves damp spider webs on pines.
Our days run out colourless like water
from the cupped hands of frolicking children.

Time departed quickly with you today
with such sweet sorrow behind
the merciless beating of unseen wings
in wet gusts of memory
and reality circles over our heads,
swilling kisses in our own mouths.
And I must get up and go
to walk Sunday's desolate dusk,
dreamer eventually turned realist
on the street.

You are so full of potential happiness
and you unconsciously measure out
fleeting pain. So when you wave one hand
before you turn home again
tell me what emptiness
I should hold in my arms.

Tired of waiting for you
every highway is put to sleep
by midnight rain,
every house has closed its doors
to loneliness.

FOG (FROM THE BOOK OF RAIN)

May's end and all regret.
Lose but your heart and you want it back.
To see the houses, the hills
wear the fog's grey shawl
and none to renew the lease of life,
none to walk together with
after quitting the fretting street
after skirting the cottages peeping
to walk the lanes, to take your time
in the desired drizzle,
the cherished fog.

Thus more than love itself
the thought of loving is better.
Our memories will be kind
and in wind and rain you are never apart
from laughter and from warmth.

To be mapless lovers from ancient pasts
before we ever become real again,
before love becomes sad in give and take
and be ghosts again with fingers of fog.
To see only our spectral selves embrace
and kiss from memory among pines wet with rain,
or, drink warm wines in restaurants haunted
and melt in the fog
to return again.

GUIDEBOOK

(after Derek A. Walcott)

In winter huts huddle
in the cold of feudal territory
and the man of the hills
still sits, toils and dreams
in the uncomprehension of festering progress
of ugly concrete and feverish towns

of these North-eastern colonies.
Tear up your passports
when you come here.

Here natives as grasping as the citizens
of independent India,
girls to be had by the conquistador salesman
we live as a Babel of colourful tribes
selling indigenous culture
in these worlds you discover
in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*
and tourist brochures
and when the burrower
from the tough plains
thinks of our gullible hills
he should remember
that we who seem uncouth
will also bite the hand which feeds.

SUSIE O'BRIEN

'Little Ole Noo Zealand': Representations of NZ-US Relations in Janet Frame's *The Carpathians*

At the entrance to a city's harbour, a statue depicting a loved story will entice more tourists than a street of wealthy merchants

Janet Frame, *The Carpathians*

In defence of the Canada Council's recent decision to consider 'appropriateness of voice and subject matter in future funding decisions', director Joyce Zemans has argued that 'we have a new need for authenticity'.¹ In the context of post-colonial theory, the debate generated by this move seems a bit belated, and the obsession of a settler society for artistic authenticity rather suspect. That the settler cannot, by definition, achieve the authenticity of unequivocal cultural authenticity and connection to place which is often imagined to have characterized pre-colonial society is clear, and, perhaps, ultimately beside the point. The power of authenticity ultimately derives, not from being authentic, which precludes self-consciousness and hence, the power-producing knowledge of one's own authenticity, but from being able to read, recognize and ultimately own the authenticity of the Other. I want to suggest that the politics of reading, writing and publishing when seen in these terms may be related to the politics of tourism – the ostensible (and perhaps authentic) subject of this paper.

In a review of Dean MacCannell's *Tourism*, Georges Van Den Abeele notes that

The tourist's quest for authenticity and his production of theory (in the largest possible sense of the imaginary construction of reality) parallel the social scientist's [and I would add here, the literary critic's] search for authentic social data and his own production of a theory to explain it.²

Janet Frame's latest novel *The Carpathians* explores both kinds of quests, focusing on the relationships engendered by the practices of writing and tourism, as they are played out between the US and New Zealand.

The Carpathians describes the experiences of Mattina Brecon, a wealthy American who spends two months in the small New Zealand town of Puamahara, getting to know its inhabitants. This is not the first such trip for Mattina; she has, in her own words 'made a career of being there and talking to *them* in all parts of the world.'³ She travels both to enliven an unfulfilling marriage, and to acquire knowledge – aims which turn out to be not unrelated. Quite simply, as she sees it, her desire to travel can be attributed to:

An urgency within her [which] demanded that she 'know' how the rest of the world lived, how they felt and behaved, what they said to one another, what they rejoiced in, despaired of, and dreamed about; and so whenever she travelled, she sought the company of the 'natives', listened to their stories, and often, recklessly, felt the satisfaction of giving cheques towards needs that could not recognise or be fed by money. (p. 19)

Mattina does not see herself as an ordinary tourist, and indeed her wealth ensures that she is not. Rather than just visiting places, she actually buys real estate, allowing her to claim ownership of the realities she encounters. One such purchase is the Bahamian Island of Cloud Cay, which comes with a 'small village of a handful of Bahamians who for three generations had cooked, cleaned and waited on the household of the owner of the island' (p. 139). Mattina leaves after a visit of several months, her happiness at having made friends with the islanders only slightly marred by her recognition of the terms of that friendship. She reasons:

What else but dollars could she have given the island people? They gave her much knowledge of themselves, their stories, their myths and legends... their families, their hopes. And as the plane left Nassau, looking over Cloud Cay, Mattina thought, with a furious sense of possession, *I know them, I know them. They are my friends* (p. 140).

Mattina's unwillingness, here, to acknowledge the economic basis of what she wishes to see as a purely intellectual and emotional exchange is one example of the kind of systematic denial John Frow argues underlies the practice of tourism. He suggests that 'Touristic shame and the apposition of an authentic to an unauthentic gaze work to repress an understanding of the investments (both financial and moral) that the circulation of cultural capital makes possible'.⁴ Thus, essential to Mattina's denial is her repeated insistence on the authenticity and integrity of her experience as against that of other tourists. As she gets off the plane in New York, she is momentarily disturbed by the memory of an occasion on which, washing her hair in the lagoon with laundry detergent, she saw some dead fish floating by the shore. Sam, the boatman told her 'They've been poisoned... Probably some tourist with detergent' (p. 140). Mattina's immediate reaction had been defensive "'I *always* wash my hair with detergent," she

told herself. "It's completely *harmless*. These people will make a song and dance about everything" (p. 140). Later, she contemplates the possibility that she may have poisoned them, but reasons 'It's *my* island... I bought it, paid for it. The fish were most likely ill to begin with' (p. 141). This rationalization exposes the contradictions in Mattina's construction of her activity, as she attempts to disavow both her status as a tourist – she owns the island – and her responsibility – this situation arose before she got there. Once again, her behaviour is consistent with the practices of tourism. As Frow argues,

It is tourism itself that destroys (in the very process by which it constructs) the authenticity of the tourist object; and every tourist thus at some level denies belonging to the class of tourist. Hence a certain fantasized dissociation from the others, from the rituals of tourism, is built into almost every discourse and almost every practice of tourism (p. 146).

For Mattina, the process of dissociation is complete as she leaves American customs: 'Her unease like a mild indigestion passed quickly, and there were Jake and John Henry [her husband and son] waiting, so near and loving that Mattina burst into tears. "I'm not flying away again," she said. "Not ever"' (p. 141). As usual, she finds that the memory of her travelling experience and the stories she tells, renew her love for Jake and help consolidate their relationship.

For Mattina, then, the real value of her travelling experience lies in its confirmation of her identity at home. She thus exemplifies Dean MacCannell's argument in *The Tourist*, that for the traveller, foreign cultural experience serves as a means of authenticating membership in a particular social group. As MacCannell points out, the tourist's voyage is ultimately circular in that the beginning and the end, between which everything can be 'domesticated', are the same place – home.⁵ This idea may function on more than one level, as is illustrated by Mattina's subsequent visit to Cloud Cay accompanied by her family and friends with young children. Not yet adept in the process of imaginative assimilation required to feel 'at home' in a strange place, the children are uncomfortable on the island:

when the parents explained that Cloud Cay was a *real* tropical island with coconuts and palm trees and sharks and scorpions, where they could play at being shipwrecked and captured by pirates and live in caves with wild animals for pets, young Eugenia began to howl so much with fright and homesickness that the parents assured the children that Cloud Cay was just like home, not at all like one of those islands in books or on television (p. 144).

Interestingly, the adults' first attempt to 'sell' the concept of the island to the children places it in the realm of hyperreality; the island is *real*, just like on TV. Alterity, then, exists only in the realm of the imagination as

controlled by the authority of the television, or of the American books they take with them to the island – *Treasure Island* and *Moby Dick* (p. 143). The disturbing unfamiliarity of the island can thus be explained away by its failure to conform to the 'authentic' exotic islands of American fiction.

While this explanation satisfies the children, Mattina has a bit more trouble with it, when, during her trip to New Zealand, neither Maori nor Pakeha culture seems to reflect the kind of definitive New Zealand reality she expected to find. One of her greatest disillusionments follows her meeting with some Maoris, from whom she had expected to glean the 'truth' of the legend of the Memory Flower for which Puamahara is famous. When she explains her interest in the legend to Hena Hanuere, adding 'I guess you know it in the Maori language,' Hena responds with embarrassment 'I get by with English.... It's the younger generation that are speaking Maori. I'm learning, you know, it's not so easy when you've been brought up Pakeha...' (p. 26). When Mattina leaves the store, Hena calls 'Arrivederci', 'the universal television goodbye,' Mattina notes, 'supplanting all other languages' (p. 26). Thus establishing herself as a member of television culture, Hena violates Mattina's image of the spiritual purity of Maoritanga. As Frow points out,

The otherness of traditional or exotic cultures has to do with their having escaped the contamination of this fallen world: having escaped the condition of *information* (in Benjamin's sense), being unaware of their own relativity, avoiding absorption into the embrace of touristic self-consciousness (p. 130).

Hena refuses to conform to this image, and speculates on the source of Mattina's curiosity: 'the novelty, I suppose. The tribes of the far south on that TV program *The Beautiful World*, eh?' (p. 84). Not only does Hena dispel the myth of Maori innocence, but also, and more disturbingly, by establishing herself as a viewing subject of rather than simply an object on television, she threatens to overturn the rules of the relationship whereby Mattina is the observer, the controlling eye/I and the Maori the object of her gaze.

Underlying this relationship is an economic system in which the Maoris – and New Zealand as a whole – serve as commodities for the American consumer. Mattina is thus disturbed to note the extent to which Maori and Pakeha culture alike are entrenched in capitalism. As Ruth Brown has observed,

elision of the Maori from effective capitalist operation is a part of the Westerner's version of Maoritanga, which foregrounds spiritual inviolability while ignoring or underplaying Maori involvement in entrepreneurial enterprises, so paving the way for continuing colonialist domination.⁶

For Mattina, who had a vision of Maoris and Pakehas embracing a kind of collective pre-capitalist Maoritanga, the materialism of Puamahara is

profoundly disturbing – not the less so because it is quite unabashedly modelled on that of the US. Showing Mattina around his computer shop, Ed Shannon remarks 'I suppose you see plenty of this in New York?' (p. 47). Later, at the Shannons' home, the family computer is proudly unveiled for Mattina to see. She comments:

'I should have thought that here in Puamahara you'd not be bothered with such things.'

'We're not backward by any means,' Ed said sharply...

'I meant,' Mattina said carefully, 'Puamahara is such a paradise, in a way... that computers seem out of place.'

Renée did not voice her thought 'There they are again, the Americans trying to decide what we should and shouldn't have. Even if Puamahara is a paradise, why should we be deprived? I suppose they think we'd be happy lolling around in the sun all year.'

Instead, Renée said 'We like to keep up, you know. We might have lovely scenery, but that doesn't make us less intelligent.'

Mattina said quickly 'I felt computers might spoil your atmosphere.'

For the tourists, no doubt, Renée thought.

She said, 'We're so far away here,' without entering into the everlasting argument of far away from what, from whom, which distant people and places? (p. 59)

Mattina is irritated by the tendency, exhibited by Renée and others to define themselves in relation to elsewhere – particularly the United States, and is uneasy at the eagerness with which they greet her claim to be a researcher. Hercus Millow's reaction is typical:

'Oh, you're writing a book about us, about Puamahara?'

'Surely,' Mattina said, trapped. 'Not really.'

'You're a writer?'

Why not, Mattina thought, if that will satisfy them.

'More or less'

'You're writing about us, then?'

He laughed aloud, then said, 'I could tell you a few things about Puamahara and Kowhai Street. I wouldn't mind being in a book.' (p. 40)

While the willingness of her subjects to provide information makes Mattina's 'research' easier, it also causes her to doubt the validity of the material she is collecting; she 'wonders if her questioning might destroy the answer. 'Who are you really? What do you think and feel and remember in this town of the Memory Flower?' (p. 70). The self-consciousness of her subjects, and their willingness to provide the kind of information they think Mattina wants, immediately renders that information unauthentic.

The legend of the Memory Flower itself is, perhaps, the most confounding element of all in Mattina's search for authenticity. In the legend, a young Maori woman, chosen by the gods as the collector of the memory of her land, searched the country until, finally, tasting the fruit of a

particular tree she released the power of the past. For many years she assumed the role of storyteller until, one day, she vanished. In her place a tree grew, with one blossom which came to be named the Memory Flower. It was thought that the orchards on the outskirts of Puamahara bore some relation to the original tree, a fact acknowledged, with varying degrees of disinterest, by the residents of Puamahara, who, like Mattina, learned about it from the Tourist Bureau. Attempting to resacralize the story, Mattina explains to the Shannons, 'Puamahara could be the place for pilgrims (I guess I'm a pilgrim) to be healed of their separation from the Memory Flower' (p. 61).

By placing her putatively sociological quest in this context, Mattina acknowledges its roots in nostalgia. Originally defined in terms of the physical symptoms of homesickness (which were probably indistinguishable from seasickness), nostalgia later came to be associated with melancholia, the 'specific depression of intellectuals'.⁷ In this particular case, the word retains its contemporary meaning as it reverts to its original sense: suffering from increasingly frequent bouts of nausea, Mattina eventually learns that she is dying of a malignant tumour. Her quest thus takes on an added urgency, even as her illness comes to be seen, increasingly, as an excuse for its inevitable failure. Mattina decides ultimately that her journey is:

an attempt... to cancel distance between nations... and although she assured herself her study was based on love, or a kind of love, it was also obsessive, with herself a stranger among strangers... trying to break the distance between herself and 'the others', and not, as she expressed it to the residents, 'between neighbour and neighbour'. She had therefore created herself as the dreamed-of centre of the circle, and when from time to time she sensed this, she excused her error, if it was an error, by reminding herself of the physical illness at work within her. (p. 78)

Mattina attempts to retain her own physical substantiality by jealously guarding her authority to tell her own story. She reasons, 'At least I'm not at risk of losing substance. For the moment, I'm the observer, the holder of the point of view' (p. 76). This attempt at control fails, as point of view is wrested from her by Dinny Wheatstone, resident of Kowhai Street and self-titled 'imposter novelist'. On the second day of Mattina's visit, Dinny, knowing that Mattina is the reader for a publishing house, gives her a manuscript to read which contains, as characters, all the residents of Kowhai Street, including Mattina herself. Dinny explains:

I have seized control of all points of view, although Mattina Brecon, the character from New York, trying to entice the point of view to herself, became unwilling to surrender it. I shall apportion it as I think fit because... it is my only power, my true self that is no self. I speak now. I 'tell'. Generously I give the point of view to others. It is words that take charge of the telling. (p. 52)

Mattina emerges from the manuscript with a sense of unreality, exacerbated by the realization that she has failed to be accepted by the Puamaharianians, and the accompanying, uneasy recognition that 'it is I, not they, who is the creature studied for *Our Beautiful World* shown in prime time' (p. 93). Thus Mattina, as researcher and holder of point of view, has been reduced, to a tourist in New Zealand, and, even more devastatingly, to a character in Dinny Wheatstone's manuscript. Dinny describes Mattina's position in that manuscript:

I, Dinny Wheatstone, imposter novelist intent on manipulating points of view, choose from daily life the commonplace facts of weather, accidents, quarrels, deaths, losses, gains, delights. Mattina Brecon is now experiencing the commonly haphazard daily life which she has little power to change or manipulate. She is reading my typescript. She has hoped that within two months she might witness and feel a concentration of life that would reveal the secrets of Kowhai Street, the presence of the Memory Flower and its blossoming. (p. 95)

The reader, too, would perhaps wish for such a revelation of secrets, but Dinny Wheatstone – and Janet Frame – ultimately frustrate that desire. The reality which Mattina has attempted to transcribe is finally reduced to a collection of words with no substance – as are all the residents of Kowhai Street. Just before her departure from Puamahara, Mattina wakes up in the middle of the night to find letters of the alphabets of all languages, written and spoken, falling from the sky. In the morning, a van stops at each house on Kowhai Street and removes the inhabitants, none of whom is heard of again. Mattina returns to New York with relief at having forestalled her own disappearance and retained her point of view; 'now in a governed world of warmth and money and reason, foreignness forgotten – who cared, anyway, about the people of other lands...?' (p. 159). Later, however, as she is dying, Mattina becomes obsessed by the loss of the people from Kowhai Street and, unable to clearly articulate the significance of her experience, she urges her husband, Jake and her son, John Henry to visit Puamahara to preserve its memory. The final ebbing away of her point of view would seem to attest to the power of Dinny Wheatstone's self-effacing – and perhaps post-colonial – authority. The real author, Janet Frame, has, however, added one final twist: when, before leaving Puamahara, Mattina returned Dinny's manuscript to her, she rejected it on behalf of her New York publishing firm on the grounds that it did not have 'general appeal.' The manuscript – the whole novel, in fact – appears under the authorship of John Henry Brecon, Mattina's son, who, he informs the reader in a teasing final note, visited Puamahara (perhaps) after the death of his mother (who, he then informs us, actually died when he was a young child, so he never knew her). Perhaps, he ventures 'the town of Puamahara, which I in my turn visited, never existed?' (p. 196). Just as the Puamaharianians frustrate Mattina's expectations of an authentic New Zealand experience, this final note confounds the post-colonial

critic's desire for a validation of the fictional integrity of Dinny Wheatstone's story. The epiphanic conclusion which is denied Mattina does not have to elude the critic, however, as Suzette Henke demonstrates. Describing the conclusion of Mattina's journey, Henke writes:

A new music arises from the chorus of the Carpathian voices, a mother tongue ritually released and free to play with explosive iterations that well up from a primitive, instinctual memory obscured by centuries of Anglocentric domination – by the white man's colonial burden and the black man's enforced subservience.⁸

In its attempt to represent *The Carpathians* as a vision of pure post-coloniality, such a conclusion may be seen to reflect the critic's desire for self-consolidation, for the authority derived from the production of a perfect literary artefact. Like the tourist's, the theorist's social identity is confirmed less through the endeavour itself than from the souvenirs and stories she comes home with. At the same time, the theorist's practice, like that of the tourist, can have an enormous impact – political and economic – on the object of critical inquiry (that the location for this particular gathering of inquiring critics is also a popular tourist destination raises interesting questions that I won't attempt to pursue now).

When Dinny Wheatstone warns Mattina of the catastrophic events that are about to befall Puamahara, Mattina's first reaction is one of denial. She

tried to think of something or someone to blame for the way her visit to seek the Memory Flower and get to know (and possess) the people had suddenly begun to change not only her world, but the world of all peoples, the world, the politicians say, 'as we know it'. (p. 124)

While few literary critics wield such influence, we nevertheless need to accept responsibility for the effects of our critical practices, on the academy, and on the literary territory we choose to survey. Susan Hawthorne has argued that

It is precisely because capitalism *depends* on the usefulness of its colonies that the work of [post-colonial] writers just now is doing well. What is the basis of this 'usefulness'? Western capitalism depends on change, or on the illusion of change, to establish a need for (apparently) *new* goods.⁹

Looked at in this context, Canada Council's 'new' need for authenticity is as spurious as Mattina's search for touristic transcendence. As post-colonial critics, we tend to try and distance ourselves from both of these pursuits. At the same time, in our prevailing concern to define the integrity of our critical project, particularly against what are perceived as the less politically pure agendas of post-modernism and post-structuralism, we need to be wary of making the claim that our reading experience is somehow more 'authentic' than theirs.

The Carpathians powerfully demonstrates the emptiness of such claims, as it exposes the imposture of both touristic and critical authority.

NOTES

1. Stephen Godfrey, 'Canada Council Asks Whose Voice Is It Anyway?', *Globe and Mail* 21 March 1992, p. A13.
2. Georges Van Den Abeele, 'Sightseers: The Tourist as Theorist.' Rev. of *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, by Dean MacCannell, *Diacritics* 10 (Dec 1980), p. 9.
3. Janet Frame, *The Carpathians* (London: Pandora, 1989), p. 59. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
4. John Frow, 'Tourism and the Semiotics of Nostalgia', *October* 57 (Summer 1991), p. 149.
5. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, (New York: Schocken, 1976), p. 77.
6. Ruth Brown, 'Maori Spirituality as Pakeha Construct', *Meanjin* 48.2 (1989), p. 257.
7. Bryan Turner, 'A Note on Nostalgia', *Theory, Culture and Society* 4.1 (1987), p. 147.
8. Suzette Hemke, 'The Postmodern Frame: Metalepsis and Discursive Fragmentation in Janet Frame's *The Carpathians*', *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada* 5 (Spring 1991), p. 33.
9. Susan Hawthorne, 'The Politics of the Exotic: The Paradox of Cultural Voyeurism', *Meanjin* 48.2 (1989), p. 260.

MARY CONDÉ

The Male Immigrant in two Canadian Stories

(Alice Munro's 'Oranges and Apples' and Margaret Atwood's 'Wilderness Tips')

By the end of the century the number of non-whites in Canada is conservatively estimated to be one quarter of the population, thus 'radically altering the world's image of a Canadian as white-skinned and of British or French heritage.'¹ Bruce Proudfoot in an article on 'The Setting of Immigration Levels in Canada Since the Immigration Act, 1976', remarks that 'Concern has been expressed by many regarding the future make-up of the Canadian population in the context of the arrival and settlement of immigrants from non-traditional sources – sometimes categorised under the term Visible Minorities'.²

The impact of this 'concern' on the Visible Minorities themselves has been treated by many Canadian women writers. For example, the heroine of the Trinidad-born Dionne Brand's story 'Train to Montreal' is followed by a stranger hoarsely yelling "'Nigger whore!'"³ One of the Chinese-Canadian women in Sky Lee's novel *Disappearing Moon Cafe* ponders the significance of 'the great wall of silence and invisibility we have built around us'.⁴

Bharati Mukherjee in the introduction to her short story collection *Darkness* speaks of her transformation as a writer when she moved to the United States from Canada in 1980 and changed from a 'visible minority' into just another immigrant: 'If I may put it in its harshest terms, it would be this: in Canada, I was frequently taken for a prostitute or shoplifter, frequently assumed to be a domestic, praised by astonished auditors that I didn't have a "sing-song" accent.'⁵ Frequent attention has been drawn to the significance of the difference between the U.S. metaphor 'melting pot' and the Canadian 'mosaic', for example in the collection of essays *Westerners Through Chinese Eyes*,⁶ and in the title of the second chapter of Linda Hutcheon's critical study *Splitting Images: "The Canadian Mosaic: A Melting Pot on Ice": The Ironies of Ethnicity and Race*.⁷ In Canada, all immigrants remain highly visible, or so at least some Canadian fiction would suggest. The expatriate writer Mavis Gallant, in her short story 'Its Image on the Mirror', gives a devastating account of Jean Price's father (described by one critic as a 'mild but enthusiastic' racist)⁸:

Our father believed that Scottish blood was the best in the country, responsible for our national character traits of prudence, level-headedness, and self-denial. If anyone doubted it, our father said, the doubter had only to look at the rest of Canada: the French-Canadians (political corruption, pusillanimity, hysteria); the Italians (hair oil, used to bootleg in the 'twenties, used to pass right through Allenton); Russians and Ukrainians (regicide, Communism, pyromania, the distressing cult of nakedness on the West Coast); Jews (get in everywhere, the women don't wear corsets); Swedes, Finns, (awful people for a bottle, never save a cent); Poles, hunkies, the whole Danubian fringe (they start all the wars). The Irish were Catholics, and the Germans had been beyond the pale since 1914. The only immigrant group he approved of were the Dutch. A census had revealed that although there were a quarter-million of them in the country, they were keeping quietly to themselves on celery farms in Western Ontario, saving money, not setting fire to anything, well-corseted, and out of politics. Their virtue, in fact, was that until the census one needn't have known they existed.⁹

The Pakistan-born executive director of the Canadian Ethno-Cultural Council asked angrily in 1989, 'What is Canada? The only people here who aren't immigrants are the aboriginal people.'¹⁰ But Native Canadians have not been treated well either. In her preface to her autobiography *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*, first published in 1975, Lee Maracle writes, 'This summer [of 1990], if anything, the state convinced a good many Canadian white people that it does not give a shit about any of us.'¹¹

In 1990 Lee Maracle also published a collection of short stories, *Sojourner's Truth*, which depict the oppression of Native Canadians, and in which she has used Native Canadian oral tradition, she says, to produce narratives without orthodox 'conclusions'.¹²

In a similar way Claire Harris subverts the conventional narrative with which her story 'A Matter of Fact' opens, by continuing:

Of all this: the river valley, the girl Jocelyn, the pregnancy, Burri as snake, the old storyteller will say nothing. She has no truck with this simple form, with its order and its inherent possibility of justice.¹³

Ironically, though, the narrator interpolates later, with a joint appeal to oral tradition and the literary tradition of the 'majority', 'I remember the old woman. And I am sure the story was told as I have written it because that is how the books say Afro-Caribbean tales are told. Your books, I mean' (pp. 109-110).

Lee Maracle's and Claire Harris's narrative strategies actually have much in common with those of Alice Munro, neither a Native Canadian nor a 'visible minority'. Hallvard Dahlie, for example, has commented on the way Munro's stories leave us with a residual uncertainty, puzzlement, or even despair.¹⁴ Rosalie Osmond has written on Munro's balancing of different kinds of narrative in her essay 'Arrangements, "Disarrangements", and "Earnest Deceptions"'.¹⁵ Coral Ann Howells argues that contemporary Canadian women's fiction as a whole focuses on what Munro herself has

described (in a story) as those shifts of emphasis that throw the storyline open to question, the disarrangements which demand new judgments and solutions, and throw the windows open on inappropriate, unforgettable scenery.¹⁶ The metaphor of scenery here is highly characteristic, for Munro's whole perception of her characters' lives is through emotional landscape. The blurb for *Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You* accurately describes her stories as opening up 'a whole geography of pain'; in a typical image Munro speaks, in the final sentence of her first volume, of the piano piece chosen by an eccentric old music teacher as 'that one communiqué from the other country where she lives'.¹⁷ In all of Munro's stories we are conscious not only of the physical landscape, with its shifting implications ('country we did not know we loved', as she calls it in *Lives of Girls and Women*)¹⁸ but of a dangerous landscape lying beneath and beyond it, whether it is the ironically named 'Mary Fortune's territory' of the lonely and despised ('Red Dress - 1946', p. 160), or the fatal legendary region of real life that Et recognizes in *Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You*.¹⁹

In 'Oranges and Apples' from Munro's latest volume, *Friend of My Youth*, Murray and Barbara live 'now' at the close of the story on rough, hilly land: 'Murray's father bought two hundred acres of it and built a primitive cabin and called the place his hunting camp.'²⁰ This last detail suggests that Murray's father had a romantic notion of himself as pioneer, possibly inspired by Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, a novel mentioned in the closing words of the story. Murray and Barbara find 'a white balloon, looking somewhat weakened and puckered' (p. 135). On one level this suggests an abandoned contraceptive, and thus, the end of the real or imagined sexual encounter between Barbara and Victor, but the balloon has blown over from the United States (like Fenimore Cooper), footnoted by a schoolboy, who names *The Last of the Mohicans* as his favourite book. The story ends: "'Oh, that's for the teacher,'" Barbara says, with the familiar little snort of laughter in her voice, dismissing and promising. "That's a lie" (p. 136). The triple complexity of this statement - is it a fiction about a fiction about a fiction? - is a fittingly inconclusive conclusion to a story named after a game 'There was no way to win' (p. 123). Oranges and Apples is a game of choices, and the choice implicitly offered to Murray, but never explicitly stated, is 'Would you rather your wife left you for another man or died of cancer?' As it turns out, the choice, like all the choices of the game, is hypothetical.

The other man is Victor, a Polish immigrant, and to this white male European Munro attaches all the stereotypes of the 'visible minority'. He is a sexual predator, first appearing 'like a cat among the pigeons' as he scatters the maiden ladies at the store (p. 114). He is inescapably visible, six foot five (but imagined as tall as seven foot) (p. 115), and like 'a golden palomino' (p. 114). He is a troublemaker, confirming Mavis Gallant's character's prejudice that Poles 'start all the wars' by almost destroying his

friends' happy marriage. Watching Barbara sunbathing through his binoculars he looks as if he is wearing a gas mask (p. 126). His name implies that he wins wars, and by his own account he was, during the second world war, a war hero, but much about Munro's narrative is deliberately misleading. For example, as Barbara and Murray drive to the doctor's to find out whether she has cancer (all the imagery suggests that she has), the cornstalks are high and 'Any day now the farmers will start to cut them' (p. 113). Barbara wears a 'fall' wrap of 'wheat-colored' wool (p. 134). But Barbara does not have cancer, and, although, as Lee Maracle says of her own work, 'As listener/reader, you become the trickster',²¹ and must make your own decisions, it seems that she did not go to bed with Victor either. After all, anyone who becomes Barbara's friend has to understand that 'Barbara doesn't want to *do anything*' (p. 111). The first thing we hear about her, punningly, is that she is a "'looker'" (p. 106).

Barbara is a voracious reader, in a way which Murray's mother almost makes seem sexually promiscuous. 'His mother said – isn't she worried about bringing all those books from the library into the house? You never know who has been handling them' (p. 112). Literary allusions within 'Oranges and Apples' spell social disaster (pp. 118-119, p. 121), but Victor, like all immigrants, presents himself as a story which must be read by the established settlers: 'Victor had a history of his own, of course' (p. 116). Whereas Murray, who has lost the status his great-grandfather won, says that his is a common story. Does it deserve to be called a classic? (p. 109), Victor has a very flamboyant story – which Barbara does not believe (p. 117). Nor does she believe Victor's claim that his English wife Beatrice (who remains a completely enigmatic character) is trying to poison him (p. 125). In trying to establish this claim, Victor appeals to the strength of racial stereotype, saying to Murray, "'You think she would not poison, she is an English lady'" (p. 124).

Appearances are deceptive, Victor argues, whereas Barbara disbelieves his war stories precisely because his appearance is too conspicuous: '...You have to look more like Alec Guinness to get sent on a secret mission' (p. 117). Barbara means, presumably, that you have to have the anonymous face of the really great actor, but also that you have to fit the popularly accepted media image. She herself dresses in the style of currently popular film stars (p.120). Victor has the wrong image, both inside and outside the story, outside because an immigrant in a story by a contemporary Canadian woman writer is not expected to be a tall blond European male, nor slippery and dangerous, nor disloyal: after expressing his gratitude to the English Canadians who have helped him, Victor says he now has enough money to go to Montreal, where he will enjoy speaking French (p. 135). (Of course, he may be lying.)

Munro has said of herself, 'I guess that maybe as a writer I'm kind of an anachronism ... because I write about places where your roots are and most people don't live that kind of life any more at all.'²² She does not,

however, present Barbara and Murray, who live where their roots are, as the true and open established settlers as opposed to Beatrice and Victor, the false and mysterious immigrants. Barbara, besides her addiction to fictions, has a secretive mouth, hair like veiling (p. 112), and such inexpressive behaviour that Murray cannot tell whether or not she has just heard she is fatally ill (p. 134). Murray, who played at bombing Germany during the war (p. 117), now plays at a kind of pathfinding like Natty Bumppo – for tourists who pretend to live in the wild (pp. 108-109). These European and American fantasies are put into perspective by the riven boulder which becomes part of Murray's emotional landscape as he waits for Barbara.²³ It is 'rock formed before the Last Ice Age' (p. 134). What is Canada? Who owns the land?

In the same vein, the closing sentence of Margaret Atwood's 'Wilderness Tips', the lead story of her latest volume, reads: 'And nothing has happened, really, that hasn't happened before.'²⁴ Portia is thinking despairingly of the fact that her husband, the Hungarian immigrant 'George', has just bedded her sister Pamela, but that for years he has been having an affair with her other sister Prue. On another level, George's invasion of Canada by creating 'Acres of treelessness' (p. 211) through his ironically 'shady deals' (p. 214) happened before, when her own great-grandfather, the "'robber king'" with whom she directly compares George (p. 218), 'made a bundle on the railways' (p. 200).

George, like Victor, is another highly visible, although European, immigrant. He 'has no desire to be startling' (p. 204), but 'is doomed to stand out' (p. 202). He is much more unambiguously predatory than Victor, however: he has 'glinting marauder's eyes' (p. 205) and a foxy smile, a vulpine smile, and long canines, and is compared with a snake and a dragon as well as a goat, a lizard, a puppy and a fish (pp. 198, 201, 209, 212). Like Victor, he experienced a very different second world war from that of the established settlers, but all his privations seem aggressive: shooting informers (p. 203), snaring small animals (p. 208), and taking a pin-up apart with a rusty knifeblade (p. 198). These activities he keeps a secret, but just as he capitalises on the 'family wars' (p. 213), so he cashes in on his immigrant status:

These people were lax and trusting; and easily embarrassed by a hint of their own intolerance or lack of hospitality to strangers. They weren't ready for him. He'd been as happy as a missionary among the Hawaiians. A hint of opposition and he'd thicken his accent and refer darkly to Communist atrocities. Seize the moral high ground, then grab what you can get. (p. 207)

For the son of the family, with the archaically chivalrous name of Roland, the moral high ground is represented by the anachronistic *Wilderness Tips*, which shares the bookcase with the book after which the family hunting lodge was named. Roland, who thinks that hunting is unsafe now ('there are too many other men doing it – Italians and who knows what')

(p. 211) bitterly regrets the fact that Indians now wear ordinary clothes, 'the same as everybody else' (p. 214). His notion of himself as a 'bean counter' (p. 214) suggests *Walden*²⁵ (for which *Wilderness Tips* would be an excellent alternative title), but, unlike Murray, he plays at pioneering only at weekends. In both 'Oranges and Apples' and 'Wilderness Tips' the successful businessman great-grandfather implies that the strong, transient grip of English Canadians on the land has weakened; George in 'Wilderness Tips' perceives the family hunting lodge as 'a little slice of the past, an alien past' (p. 203), but in both stories we see a cherishing of a past that has never existed.

'Oranges and Apples' and 'Wilderness Tips' have something in common, but Atwood's story, like her male immigrant, is far less open to question than Munro's. Her reader is given less opportunity, to use Lee Maracle's phrase, to play the trickster. There is no doubt about George's sexual or financial successes, or his comfortable future as a Scotch-drinking *Financial Post* - reading Canadian - or of the very considerable disgust he arouses in the reader. Atwood uses her male immigrant to alienate her reader's (presumed) liberal sympathies. Munro cheats our expectations at every turn, and is perhaps mocking a desire for political correctness with Barbara's closing diagnosis, "'Oh, that's for the teacher.... That's a lie.'"

NOTES

1. Peter Benesh (Toronto), 'Farewell to a White Canada', *Observer*, 19 March 1989, p. 28.
2. Bruce Proudfoot, 'The Setting of Immigration Levels in Canada Since the Immigration Act, 1976', *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1989, p. 253.
3. Dionne Brand, *Sans Souci and Other Stories* (first published 1988; Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books, 1989), p. 27.
4. Sky Lee, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1991), p. 180.
5. Bharati Mukherjee, 'Introduction' to *Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 2.
6. Chen Zhongming, Wang Xiao'ou, and Chang Yuemin, 'The Melting Pot and the Mosaic: A Comparison of Americans and Canadians', Jianguang Wang (ed.), *West-erners Through Chinese Eyes* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1990), p. 108.
7. Linda Hutcheon, *Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies* (Toronto, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
8. Bernice Schrank, 'Popular Culture and Political Consciousness in Mavis Gallant's *My Heart Is Broken*', *Essays on Canadian Writing* (Mavis Gallant issue), No. 42, Winter 1990, p. 70.
9. Mavis Gallant, 'Its Image on the Mirror', *My Heart Is Broken* (Toronto: New Press Canadian Classics, 1964), p. 138.
10. Benesh, 'Farewell to a White Canada', p. 28.
11. Lee Maracle, 'Oka Peace Camp - September 9, 1990', *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel* (first published 1975; Toronto: Womens Press, 1990), pp. 9-10.
12. Lee Maracle, 'Preface: You Become the Trickster', *Sojourner's Truth & Other Stories* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1990), p. 11.

13. Claire Harris, 'A Matter of Fact', *Second Story Collective* (ed.), *Imagining Women* (Toronto: Womens Press, 1988), p. 103.
14. Hallvard Dahlie, 'The Fiction of Alice Munro', *Ploughshares* 4, No. 3, Summer 1978, p. 57, quoted in Beverly J. Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes: Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1990), p. 39.
15. Rosalie Osmond, 'Arrangements', "Disarrangements" and "Earnest Deceptions", Coral Ann Howells and Lynette Hunter (eds.), *Narrative Strategies in Canadian Literature: Feminism and Postcolonialism* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991).
16. Coral Ann Howells, *Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 1. She is quoting from Alice Munro, 'Simon's Luck', *The Beggar Maid, Stories of Flo and Rose* (London: Penguin, 1980), p. 177.
17. Alice Munro, 'Dance of the Happy Shades', *Dance of the Happy Shades* (first published 1968; London: Penguin, 1983), p. 224.
18. Alice Munro, 'Princess Ida', *Lives of Girls and Women* (first published 1971; London: Penguin, 1982), p. 67.
19. Alice Munro, 'Something I've Been Meaning To Tell you', *Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You* (first published 1974; London: Penguin, 1985), p. 14.
20. Alice Munro, 'Oranges and Apples', *Friend of My Youth* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990), p. 108.
21. Lee Maracle, *Sojourner's Truth*, p. 13.
22. Quoted at the front of the Penguin edition of *Dance of the Happy Shades*.
23. The rift in the boulder suggests both the possible cancer in Barbara's body and the rift in their marriage. The boulder's description as 'far older than the shore on which it sat' (p. 134) recalls Walter Pater's description of the Mona Lisa, and thus the stately and secretive Barbara herself.
24. Margaret Atwood, 'Wilderness Tips', *Wilderness Tips* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), p. 221.
25. Whereas George, who would have no time for *Walden*, "didn't have a bean when I married him", as Portia points out (p. 219).

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

PETER BAKOWSKI is an Australian poet living in Melbourne.

CHINWEIZU is a Nigerian occidentalist, poet and cultural critic. His works include *The West and the Rest of Us*, *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* and *Decolonizing the African Mind*.

MARY CONDÉ teaches at the University of London.

ALLAN GARDINER is a Ph.D. student at the University of Queensland.

HELEN GILBERT teaches at Monash University Australia. She has published poetry as well as criticism.

CLAIRE HARRIS was born in Trinidad and now lives in Canada. She has published a number of volumes of poetry and prose.

JOHN LYONS is from Trinidad and is now living in Manchester.

PETER LYSSIOTIS was born in Cyprus and has lived in Australia since 1954. He is a photographer and photo-montage artist who combines image and text. His recent book done in conjunction with Anna Couani will be reviewed in the next issue of *Kunapipi*.

ADEWALE MAJA-PEARCE is a well-known African critic who now lives in England.

ROBIN S. NGANGOM teaches at North-eastern Hill University, Shillong, India, and has also published a volume of poetry.

SUSIE O'BRIEN is an Australian who is presently writing her Ph.D. at Queen's University, Canada.

ARMANDO PAJALICH teaches post-colonial literature at the University of Venice. He has published four volumes of poetry and is editing an Italian anthology of South African poetry.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN is associate editor of *Kunapipi* and teaches at Roskilde and Odense universities, Denmark.

GAELE SOBOTT-MOGWE was born in Australia and is now a citizen of Botswana where she is Staff Development Fellow of the English Department. She is now reading for her Ph.D. at Hull University, U.K. She has published children's stories with Heinemann, Longman and Baobab Press.

IAN TEMPLEMAN works at the National Library in Canberra, Australia. His poetry has appeared in newspapers and literary journals. His first collection, *Poems*, was published by Freshwater Bay Press in 1979.

JOANNE TOMPKINS teaches at La Trobe University, Australia.

LINDA WARLEY is a Ph.D. student at the University of Alberta, Edmonton.

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