Kunapipi 13 (3) 1991 Full Version

Abstract
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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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*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.
CONTENTS

FICTION
Marion Halligan, 'Tale Telling' 1
Geoff Wyatt, 'Icefield' 38
Bonnie Burnard, 'Deer Heart' 50
Olive Senior, 'Swimming in the Ba’ma Grass' 91

POETRY
Geoff Page, 'The Extra Panel' 26
'The Tour' 27
'Breast Plates' 29
'The Phrenologist' 31
Ian Stephen, 'Losgaintir' 44
'Southwest Harris' 44
'Sounds' 45
Graham Mort, 'Snow From The North' 58
'Unemployed at Tranmere: 1991' 59
Stephen Gray, 'Season of Violence' 60
'Tyranny of Knives' 61
'Proposition' 61
Lauris Edmond, 'Square-Dance Theme 1' 63
'Square-Dance Theme 2' 65
Kirsten Holst Petersen, 'Travelling: Australian Styles' 66
Eveline Tindale, 'Flat Head' 68
'Ode to Child Protection Workers and the Culture which
Gave Rise to Them' 69
David Dabydeen, 'From Turner' 104
jo Shapcott, 'The Mad Cow Believes She Is the Spirit of the
Weather' 106
'Leonardo and the Vortex' 107

PHOTOGRAPHY
Axel Poignant 33
Sam Maynard 46

INTERVIEW
Caryl Phillips interviewed by Graham Swift 96
ARTICLES
Ruth Brown, ‘The Songlines and the Empire that Never Happened’ 5
Anne Maxwell, ‘The Debate on Current Theories of Colonial Discourse’ 70
Benita Parry, ‘David Dabydeen’s The Intended’ 85
Marc Delrez, ‘Love in a Post-Cultural Ditch: Janet Frame’ 108

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS 117
A friend of mine told me this story. We were sitting in the back room of a restaurant, which was the bar and snacks, drinking white wine, catching up with one another. Cass had asked me how my novel was going, and I'd said, well, I was writing a lot, but I was worried that nothing ever happened. People had social gatherings, and talked and thought, but that was about all. Still, I was planning on putting in a suicide, that should make for a bit of action, it was at least a violent event. But then, perhaps it would seem contrived. When I get started I can talk for hours about my novel. But I don't want advice. Just reassurance.

Well, she says, suicides do happen. In fact a lot of people commit suicide, or try to. Her face twists. She's just heard about an old friend, she's still feeling upset.

I say it isn't a major character that will do it. It's one of the lesser ones, sort of pointing up the options open to the heroine (if you can call her that); she could do this, but doesn't, she chooses survival, there but for the grace, and all that.

Cass wants to tell me about her suicide. He was a young man, when she knew him, an electrician, who came to their house to mend the telly. She was just a kid at the time, fifteen or so, he probably ten years older. He was terrifically good looking, blond hair, golden skin, handsome shoulders, but more than that, he was nice, he talked to her. He didn't have to, she was just a kid, but he made her feel he liked chatting her up. His eyes shone, his face crinkled, he smelled. I got the impression the telly took a lot of fixing.

Naturally, Cass got a crush on him. She would've even if he hadn't noticed her. There were two buses she could catch to school, one from the corner a block away from her house, or she could walk two miles to the village (this was in England) and catch a bus there. In the village was the electrical shop he and his brother kept. So every day she walked that two miles, just to go past the shop, just so she might walk past that shop and just might see him, there, inside, blond and handsome, serving the customers.

Was he married?

Oh no; not then. Not till much later. His brother was, though. This married brother flirted with her a bit too, it was a sort of game, well, it probably was for the other one as well. Once, it was funny, she'd been
standing at the bus stop and he'd been driving past in his van and waved at her, hanging out the window, waving, grinning; he'd driven into the bus. Not concentrating on his driving, see. Nobody hurt, but the van a bit wrecked. His wife never spoke to her again. But the younger one, the one she found so thrilling, who always talked to her, he was a bachelor.

Cass's eyebrows lift, her eyes widen, her face smooths; she's a fifteen year old girl whom men like to chat up at the bus stop. Who has men do foolish things through just looking at her.

The young one, the bachelor, he kept it going, beyond that. Took her on a picnic, they sat under willows by a river, a flat still sort of river with grassy banks, it's still in her mind's eye. The unlined candid eye of the girl, seeing again that river of her former home, so different from the rocky broken rivers here. He held her hand and kissed her. That was all. It was just what she wanted. Romance. Well, at fifteen one does. But wasn't it thoughtful of him, knowing that was just right for her, when he was so much older, and had slept with plenty of women?

Maybe that was how he knew.

Probably. Anyway, she'd often thought gratefully of him because of that. Then what happened? Well, nothing. She got older, went away to university, got married, migrated. And he, twenty years later, committed suicide. Last year, that was.

But why? How?

Drank a bottle of whisky, took a bottle of pills. Drove up to a local beauty spot, sat in the car. That gets to her, somehow, his going there. Sitting in the car at a famous beauty spot, choosing as his last view of the world the peaceful smooth downs, and in the distance, a chalk horse — do I know those strange monumental horses, larger than life, ancient, drawn on the downs? She sees him looking at that, drinking the whisky, swallowing the pills.

It's sympathetic. The ancient landscape — no, it's unnerving. To kill himself there meant that the landscape failed. Perhaps he sat in the car, whisky and pills ready but not finally accepted, waiting for that beloved countryside to save him. And it didn't. So he had to take them. But the easy death, more or less easy, that is something to be grateful for. Neither of us likes to think of violent means to the already violent act, the wrist-cutting, brains-blowing, the jumping from high buildings, or railway bridges in the path of trains, the insistence on blood and mess to make the survivors suffer.

Yes, that's the way I'd choose, if I were to think of it which I don't, I add hastily, let's not tempt fate by admitting the possibility. Life has not been that bad yet. The cowardly way people would call it says Cass, but why not choose a comfortable end when there's an option.

A waitress comes to take our order, cold tongue or chicken pie, bread, salad. We order another bottle of wine, the house white, we sip a lot in the pauses of the narrative. This back room is a pleasant enough place,
except perhaps for the large numbers of men in natty suits who stand about the bar, one hand in pocket, the other round a glass, their legs slightly apart and very straight between the knife-edged creases of their trousers; frequently they throw their heads back and laugh loud ritual laughs full of teeth. What are they? Public servants, lawyers? Not journalists. Perhaps party men, or lobbyists. Cass hopes they don’t have people’s destinies in their hands; they probably do.

And this young man, the electrician, why did he do it?

Ah. Dreadful things had happened. The brother, the one who ran into the bus, he came home one night very late, very drunk, and murdered his wife. Strangled her with the electric jug cord. Sort of tool of his trade, you might call it.


In a way, but in reverse. He had a mistress, he was seeing her, was presumably sick of his wife. Neither of us can cope with this. Had the wife been having an affair and the husband killed her in a mad fury of betrayal, of jealousy, it might have been more bearable, it might have been tragic, like Othello. Even if he got it wrong. A kind of poetic justice, however bleak still logical. Instead the poor wife had been betrayed twice over. Of course, Cass says, he was very drunk at the time. Came home, strangled her, fell into a drunken stupor, woke up in the morning and saw what he’d done. Well, his eight-year old daughter came and woke him and showed him. He rang the police, said somebody’s murdered my wife, but there was never any doubt he’d done it, no sign of break-in or robbery, he the only one there. He was tried, convicted, put in gaol. He might be out now, it was eight years ago.

The food comes, the waitress brings plates and salad, bread sprinkled with chives, the second bottle of wine. We’re sitting in comfortable canvas chairs, under a skylight hung with massive ferns. The waitress brings cutlery wrapped in paper napkins, we sit with the watchful expectant air of people about to be fed. Our eyes glance about. The walls are hung with curious paintings of haloed naked saints, or christs perhaps, in the company of women naked too, perhaps they are holy whores, or their wives. In some they’re taking saunas. The paintings are for sale. We’ve agreed they don’t appeal to us. Glabrous.

We’re eating hungrily enough. Cass’s tale hasn’t put us off our food. But it isn’t finished yet.

And the other brother, her electrician, was he married by this?

Oh yes, says Cass, and that’s another thing. She sighs, the memory of that golden infatuation of her youth, of the kind beautiful young man so come to grief, oppresses her. Even though it happened far away in time and space, and she’s only just learned the details, from her mother visiting, venturing away from that small village life where nothing is secret. The mother smugly, nervously, eyeing Cass; a dreadful thing for
the parents, such nice ordinary people, you never know. Such a thing will never happen in her family, will it.

Oh yes, Cass says, there’s more to come. His wife committed suicide, the year before him. Went to town and up the highest building she could find, it was a small town and the buildings weren’t terrible high but high enough, and jumped off. Died almost instantly. All this business of the brother, the murdered sister-in-law, was thought to have preyed on her mind, she couldn’t live with it. She’d become more and more depressive, an ordinary clinical condition presumably, and so had he, the two of them weighed down by this family crime, not able to go on bearing it. And their children, they left two children, small, just going to school; think how terrible life must have become too much for them, to be able to leave their children like that, one after the other.

I notice the artifice in Cass’s apparently random and certainly unrehearsed telling of this story, her ordering of events for maximum pity and terror. It’s only at this point that she piles on the bit about the other wife’s suicide. The narrative can hardly hold together under the weight of it. No wonder it was all too much for the young electrician, in his forties now, to bear. It makes you feel unsteady, yourself; these young chaps prospering, business good, wives, children, everything going for them, and all gone to nothing. Four hundred years ago the teller of such a tale would have discoursed upon the theme of Mutability, how all is Mutability, on this cold earth beneath the moon. Nothing has changed.

The wife, adds Cass, jumping from that high-enough building, didn’t actually land on the ground. She fell on to a mini, belonging to a girl who’d just bought it, saving her money to buy the little red car she’d always wanted. Made a mess of it, in fact. The girl tried to get compensation, since it wasn’t insured, but nobody would have it on, it was nobody’s responsibility. She wrote letters to the paper, and everybody agreed it was a terrible shame, but there was nothing to be done.

We’re drinking coffee now, looking at the pictures of the laid-back saints, or christs, or maybe they’re just old-fashioned beatified hippies. Cass says, so you see, suicide’s pretty common. Even amongst ordinary people. So’s murder for that matter. Commonplace, when you look at the papers.

Of course she’s right. I see the form, the shape, the superlative repetitive horror of the pattern life has made. But I can’t see how I can possibly use it. Not in a work of fiction. Not that sort of truth. Life may be like that, but art isn’t.

I go back to inventing my suicide. Of a minor character, in a single chapter, cleanly, with sadness, not much horror. Drown her, swiftly, kindly, in an icy lake, the whole deed only seconds long. My heroine contemplates it and is safe.
On January 26 1988, the Aboriginal actor and ecologist Burnam Burnam landed at Dover and laid claim to England, solemnly undertaking to rule justly and never to souvenir, pickle or preserve English heads. His colourful and dramatic contribution to the Australian bicentennial celebrations reminds us of an aspect of Empire that we in Britain would probably rather forget. It is not widely known that in the nineteenth century there was a good market in London for dried human heads from the South Pacific. Attempts by humanitarians to suppress the trade were resisted: a prominent Mayfair buyer named Thomas Pringle regularly wrote letters to The Times pointing out that attempts at suppression ran counter to traditional British policies on Free Trade. This aspect of Empire is generally edited out of British perceptions. As Ann Dummett has observed: ‘The real truth about the history of the Empire is not palatable to English people’ – because it is not what they have been taught, and because it conflicts with the basic standards of good behaviour and British decency that they have also learnt in growing up. ‘They know that England abolished the slave trade; they do not know that England first grew rich enough to capitalize the world’s first industrial revolution on the profits of slavery that had accrued over two centuries.’

These opposing perceptions of the British enterprise – decency and good behaviour on the one hand, and a brutal quest for wealth on the other – are noted also in Heart of Darkness. Marlow’s aunt thinks that in his work for a British Company in Africa, her nephew will be an emissary of light or a sort of apostle ‘weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways’. Marlow on the other hand thinks that ‘there had been a lot of such rot let loose in print about that time’ and that his excellent aunt was living amidst humbug. He ‘ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit’.

How does Britain cope with this opposition in a post-Imperial age? One way is to take up sides, militantly. Broadly speaking, conservatives who continue to uphold that the Empire meant the dissemination of British culture, tradition, and law and order are ranged against left-wingers who see it as an exercise in brutal exploitation. These are the extremes, and probably most people take up a position somewhere in between the two,
aware that the Empire created problems as well as conferring benefits, but never really facing up to the horror of ‘robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind’.  

We are encouraged in this amnesia by a literary culture which over the years has successfully sanitized the Empire, making of it a colourful heyday and a source of nostalgia. The Indian Raj is particularly susceptible to this approach. Another way of figuring the Empire is to ignore its material practices altogether, implying that all it ever involved was the extension of culture. We can see this latter process at work in a very popular recent representation of Australia, *The Songlines* by Bruce Chatwin.

I want to give a reading which suggests that the major players in the Imperial drama are subjected to subtle re-alignment so that Britain, as cultural centre is absolved of all blame for any inhumane behaviour. In general terms the categories are that Aborigines are spiritual, Europeans are cultured, and white Australians are either racists who despise Aborigines, or philistines who deny access to their sacred knowledge. It is as if at some point on the journey from Britain to Australia a transformation occurred so that acts of atrocity or indiscretions of taste inconceivable for decent Britons are likely to be perpetrated by uncultured Australians.

As the *Daily Mail* reviewer puts it: ‘A white nomad himself, Chatwin’s affinity with the footloose tribes of the endless outback yields one of the most affectionate portraits yet of a race ravaged by the alcohol that so many other Australians privately hope will become a self-administered final solution.’

The narrator in *The Songlines*, Bruce, presumably Chatwin himself, is in Australia to investigate the songlines, the songs by which the Aboriginals are said to have sung their world into existence and mapped it. Bruce’s discoveries and his reflections on nomadism are revealed largely through conversations with Arkady, who is involved in mapping the sacred sites of the Aboriginals. Arkady explains their earthbound philosophy: ‘“To wound the earth is to wound yourself.... The land should be left untouched: as it was in the Dreamtime when the Ancestors sang the world into existence”’ (p. 13).

Later, Bruce and Arkady agree that this philosophy of life, far from being impossibly idealistic, is the hope for the future. The idea of returning to an “original simplicity” was not naive or unscientific or out of touch with reality. “Renunciation,” I said, “even at this late date, can work.” “I’d agree with that,” said Arkady. “The world, if it has a future, has an ascetic future”’ (p. 148).

As a migratory people, Aboriginals are associated with a Golden Age when men were unaggressive and lived in harmony with nature. They illustrate the ‘natural’ way to live, and with cautious optimism Bruce suggests that ‘nature’ will eventually reassert itself: ‘we may have a far more rigid moral, instinctive backbone than we hitherto suspected’ (p. 274).
Aboriginals, then, are positioned as spiritual. The second category represented by Bruce himself indicates that Britons are decent, kindly and cultured. Arkady shares these characteristics, which are dissociated from Australians in the opening paragraphs. Although born in Australia, Arkady is a ‘Russian’, and ‘nothing in his temperament predisposed him to live in the hugger-mugger of Anglo-Saxon suburbia or take a conventional job’ (p. 1). ‘Anglo-Saxon suburbia’ appears to be a false way of life, transported along with racism and philistinism to Australia, while the representatives of mainstream European culture never settle anywhere in the restless acquisition of knowledge. The contrast between the two groups is pointed in an incident in which Arkady attempts to explain the Aboriginals’ earthbound philosophy to an Australian policeman. ‘The Aboriginals put all their mental energies into keeping the world the way it was. In what way was that inferior? The policeman’s mouth shot downwards. “You’re not Australian,” he said to Arkady’ (p. 137). The Australian is positioned as hopelessly prejudiced: from his point of view, interest in spirituality is just the sort of idiocy to be expected of ‘a Pom and a Com’. Arkady’s Russianness makes the culture which he and Bruce represent broadly European rather than Anglocentric, but he might never have existed. Salman Rushdie, who accompanied Chatwin around Australia gathering material for The Songlines, thinks that Arkady is not drawn from any real person, but represents another part of Chatwin himself.

While Bruce and Arkady investigate spirituality and treat individual Aboriginals kindly, Australians behave like the evil beings perceived by The Daily Mail reviewer, as if hoping for a self-administered final solution to the Aboriginal problem. The worst racism is encountered at Burnt Flat Hotel, where the bullet hole resulting from the time a barman shot an Aboriginal is framed and marked with a brass plaque. Arkady explains how after the barman’s trial and acquittal the neighbours wished to show their support by contributing to his legal fees. ‘They organised a gala, with a topless show from Adelaide’ (p. 104).

Not all Australians are associated with such behaviour. Enid Lacey, the bookshop owner in Alice Springs, is favourably perceived, and so is Marian, a nurse. But on the whole Australian men are categorized as bigoted, in marked contrast both to Bruce and Arkady, and to the Aboriginals whose spirituality the Europeans seek to understand.

These categories may, as I have suggested, absolve Britons from all blame for the material brutalities of Empire and provide an acceptable national self-image in a post-Imperial age. Such a perspective, however, means gross distortions of history, and it also makes difficult the task of building a multi-racial society, either in Australia or in Britain.

To consider first the question of Aboriginal spirituality. However instructive or consoling it is for Europeans to find out about this, concentration on their spirituality serves to marginalize Aboriginals as material beings. Although no-one in The Songlines is so callous as to make the
point, the underlying ideology is that their continuing existence in any material form will not be necessary once their sacred knowledge is incorporated into the body of Western culture. Ted Strehlow, author of *Songs of Central Australia* (1971), had apparently been asked by his black friends to record ‘the songs and ceremonies of the passing order ... so their songs should not die with them entirely’ (p. 77), and *The Songlines* ends with a description of three old Aboriginal men dying, ‘smiling at death in the shade of a ghost-gum’ (p. 327). Their apparently happy death juxtaposed with the ritual happy ending of a marriage (of Arkady and Marian) makes it seem as if all is well. In this way, problems like alcoholism, disease, and a death-rate in custody to rival South Africa’s are made to seem insignificant. Such improprieties slip from the agenda in a focus on spirituality. Another part of the happy ending is that Bruce has collected his information, which will eventually be published. ‘Spirituality’ ceases then to be integral to Aboriginal life and becomes something else, a marketable item, like the paintings of Dreamings which fetch such high prices in city art galleries. (p. 291)

Eastern religion has been used in this way for a long time: Gita Mehta investigates the process in *Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East*. Another Indian writer, Mulk Raj Anand, has a character in a novel explain that attributing spirituality to the colonised is a trick to disguise appropriation of their territory, and to deny them a place in the new order:

The Victorians misinterpreted us. It was as if, in order to give a philosophical background to their exploitation of India, they ingeniously concocted a nice little fairy story. ‘You don’t believe in this world; to you all this is *maya*. Let us look after your country for you and you can dedicate yourself to achieving *Nirvana* (release from the trammels of existence).’ But that is all over now ... we will accept and work the machine. But we will do so consciously. We can see through the idiocy of these Europeans who deified money. They were barbarians and lost their heads in the worship of gold. We can steer clear of the pitfalls, because we have the advantages of a race-consciousness six thousand years old, a race-consciousness which accepted all the visible and invisible values. We know life. We know its secret flow. We have danced to its rhythms.

Much of this might apply also to Aboriginals. Having discovered the secret flow of life and danced to its rhythms, as *The Songlines* suggests they have done, they too might be well positioned to ‘accept and work the machine’. But they are denied the chance to do this by a dominant culture which insists on their spiritual aloofness from the ‘machine’ of contemporary life.

The second category conceals Western culture’s control of the machine by aligning it with decency and the pursuit of knowledge, as if that is all that the British Empire was ever concerned with. Such a perception veils outrageous violence: it fails to acknowledge the brute force which provided the framework within which knowledge was pursued by Britons in
the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In *The Songlines*, Kidder, a white activist who tries to halt the continuing appropriation of Aboriginal sacred knowledge, annoys Bruce intensely and he tells him: "Knowledge is knowledge ... It's not that easy to dispose of" (p. 47). He gasps with disbelief at Kidder's suggestion that all unpublished material about Aborigines should be returned to the rightful owners. When Kidder tells him that he was acting illegally in looking at a tjuringa in the British museum, he says he has never heard anything so silly. (p. 48)

Ultimately, the question of whether knowledge is private or not is a matter of power. If Aborigines hold sacred the right to keep some knowledge private, and artists in pursuit of universal 'realities' hold sacred the right of access to all knowledge, what counts is not whose claim is the more sacred, but who has the more power. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Aboriginal artifacts were acquired for the British Museum (and pickled heads for the British market) there was no question. Captain Cook once fired on the Maori crew of a canoe merely for refusing to stop and answer questions about their habits and customs; four of them were killed. As Belloc put it: 'we have got / The maxim gun and they have not.' W.L. Webb makes the same point: The thing about reality is that it's largely a construct of power. In the past we used to send gunboats to readjust the view in parts of the world where other notions of reality had started to obtrude on ours. But in the precarious democracy of today's melting pot that's not such a straightforward operation."

Unable to shoot Kidder for impeding the pursuit of knowledge, within the text Bruce eliminates activists in another way, by representing their activities as dangerous folly. They are condemned variously as jargon-mongers, the Canberra mob, and fuckers who don't understand. One activist, a young man called Graham, becomes very closely involved with an Aboriginal tribe. He eventually agrees to undergo their tribal initiation ritual, but the wound to his genitals turns septic and he panics. His fate, explained in some detail, provides a footnote of almost archetypal force to Matthew Arnold's injunction that the denizens of art 'Keep out of the region of immediate practice in the political, social, humanitarian sphere'. Chatwin's story threatens castration to those who disobey.

A dominant culture detached from everyday life is vindicated, and British decency maintained. Britain is even absolved from responsibility for the tragic effects of nuclear testing at Maralinga in 1957. Arkady has briefly informed Bruce that before the British H-Bomb test at Maralinga, the Army posted 'Keep Out!' signs, in English, for Aboriginals to read. Not everyone saw them or could read English (p. 87).

He goes on to say that no-one knows how many died because it was all hushed up, and he suggests that further information might be obtained from the Australian they are about to meet, Jim Hanlon. Jim's explanation, however, is made inarticulate with anti-British bitterness, and as he has already insulted Bruce as 'upper-snotty-class' his ravings about 'Anthony
stuck-up-Eden’s Cloud’ lose credibility (p. 93). Arkady shuts him up, and he later apologises to Bruce: ‘Sorry I flew at you - Always fly at Poms’ (p. 94). He is forgiven, British decency again preserved, and an account of Maralinga which portrays Britain in an unfavourable light silenced. John Pilger in A Secret Country breaks that silence with an explanation of how Britain’s commitment to joining the nuclear club meant the contamination of thirteen Aboriginal settlements within 200 miles of the Maralinga Range. Anthony Sampson says it was a matter of national pride. ‘MacMillan was well aware that for satisfying British pride his most useful asset was the H-bomb.’

The Songlines ignores this aspect of post-war national identity, promoting instead a more palatable emphasis on culture and decency, just as, in Ann Dummet’s scenario, the origins of the slave trade are overlooked in a history which focuses on how England abolished it. To dissociate British culture from power relations and racism requires some extraordinary intellectual and moral gymnastics. It means, for example, applauding Dickens for attacking Podsnappery, but never knowing that when in 1864 Governor Eyre was indicted for the savage suppression of a revolt in Jamaica, Dickens joined the Eyre Defence Committee along with Carlyle, Ruskin, Trollope, Tennyson and Charles Kingsley. Such a line-up of major writers may be seen as culture’s blessing on an act of savagery comparable (except that far more people were involved) with the way Burnt Creek whites rallied in support of the barman who shot an Aboriginal. In 1919, General Dyer, who gave the order leading to the deaths of 379 unarmed Indians at Amritsar, was also stoutly defended by his English friends. Readers of the Morning Post subscribed a £25,000 testimonial. The Ruskin who championed aestheticism is easily assimilable into our cultural tradition as we like to know it: the same Ruskin who told Oxford students in 1870 that ‘We are still unregenerate in race: a race mingled of the best Northern blood’ is easily forgotten. The more patronising variety of racism observed amongst Australians by Bruce also finds its counterpart in ‘cultured’ attitudes. The Australian policeman described earlier who says about Aboriginals: ‘I never said I didn’t like them. But they’re like children. They’ve got a childish mentality’ (p. 137) has the same attitude as Philip Mason, an English patrician who writes about India (1985), describing how a District Officer felt about the Indians in his district. They were ‘people childish no doubt, cunning but simple, laughable, stubborn’. Attaching the stigma of racism to Australians serves to disguise its prevalence in Britain. Furthermore, Australia is seen as having succumbed to the economic domination of other nations out of sheer greed, as if this could never happen to a more cultured people. Bruce asks Arkady: ‘Why, in this land of untold resources, do Australians go on selling them off to foreigners?’, he shrugged’ (p. 142). Categorising Aboriginals as spiritual, Britons as cultured and Australians as philistines disguises the brutality of Imperialism and blurs
the realities of its aftermath. In doing so it makes more difficult the task of building multi-cultural societies. Within the rhetoric of *The Songlines*, the world should have been kept the way it was and political activism is discredited.

A different viewpoint is expressed by the Aboriginal poet Oodgeroo (Kath Walker). To a degree she endorses Bruce's opposition to activism when she says that the Aboriginal Civil Rights organisations in the 1970s broke up because the Labor Government wanted not only to support, but also to control them. But active white support is clearly still welcome. On January 26, 1988, on the same day that Burnam Burnam was staging his protest in England, there occurred the largest gathering of Aboriginal and white protesters in Australia's history, to demonstrate against the Australia Day celebration and its implications. Of this march and of Aboriginals' place in Australia Oodgeroo comments:

> We’ll go on suffering. But we are going to survive. And what we have to do now is find, on the white Australian scene, the true humanitarians. And we found a lot of them on that march. That was brilliant, how the whites stood with us. And there were a lot of them. It’s the biggest march in Australian history.\(^{18}\)

In direct opposition to Bruce's scenario of Aborigines dying happily while European whites accumulate sacred knowledge and Australians exhibit bigotry, Oodgeroo acknowledges suffering and, without dwelling on this, welcomes the idea that whites should work with Aborigines for a more positive future.

Would such a demonstration occur in Britain on a national day? The disadvantages experienced by Britain's ethnic minorities may not equal the appalling situation of the Australian Aboriginals. Nevertheless, the type of solidarity Oodgeroo applauds might well ameliorate the problems in housing, education and employment experienced by blacks in Britain. It is by no means clear-cut, however, that the cultural tradition includes any sense that there are rights that should be righted. The most newsworthy event of St. George’s Day, 1991 was the publication of a speech from Prince Charles re-affirming the value of the English literary tradition. But an authoritative part of that tradition pretends that the Empire, as an exercise in the acquisition of territory and wealth, never happened. Where Australia is concerned, this pretence is easier to sustain from the old Imperial centre. Aboriginal spirituality can be assimilated into the cultural tradition, but Aboriginals themselves cannot: rejection of them, however, can be deemed an Australian shortcoming. When blacks come to Britain and there are no bigoted Australians to castigate, the problem is restated. Indian spirituality is a welcome embellishment to the cultural tradition, but Indians themselves rest less easily and in the rhetoric of *The Salisbury Review*, for example, they threaten to swamp it. John Casey, a Cambridge English don, has recommended the voluntary repatriation of Commonwealth immigrants on the grounds that they will not assimilate and will
weaken British culture. This represents the extreme, but at a more moderate level a tradition which cloaks the savagery of Empire in an affirmation of culture continues to reproduce itself in works such as Chatwin’s. A Eurocentric conviction that Europe understands Australia better than it understands itself is evident in other writing. Thus Terry Coleman in The Guardian finds that it is Australians who have adopted the Aboriginal Dreamtime as ‘a bit of Palaeo-liberal chic’.19 Like Bruce, Coleman points a contrast between Australians who are too philistine to appreciate the mysteries in their midst, and a European who has got it right. The French historian, Robert Lacour-Gayet, ‘probably the most disinterested of those who have written recent histories of Australia’, is the authority on whom he bases his explanation of the Dreamtime. Salman Rushdie reinforces a stereotypical view of Australia in an anecdote he tells about a lunch-time signing session Chatwin was asked to do in a book-shop in Alice Springs. ‘Bruce went to the bookshop with his Mont Blanc pen at the appointed hour. Not a single person came into the shop.’20 The point of the story, presumably, is that Chatwin was doing his best to promote culture but that Australians were too philistine to appreciate him. In another context, Rushdie has discouraged such stereotyping, and argued the need for ‘new and better maps of reality ... new languages with which we can understand the world’.21 It may be that there is a hint of irony in the mention of the Mont Blanc pen, as if the culture its owner represents is a little too precious. It is likely, however, that the story would be taken at face value as an illustration of the contrast between English culture and Australian philistinism.

It is difficult in Britain to redress the balance of Anglocentric perceptions by referring to Australians’ views because they tend not to be published here. Chatwin’s books were on sale in Alice Springs, but Australians’ carefully researched studies of Aboriginal culture are not easily obtained in Britain – and even if they were, is it likely that Henry Reynolds, say, would draw large crowds to a bookshop in somewhere like Barnstaple?

Chatwin may have helped to put Aborigines on the map. But it is an old map, exquisite and tasteful like a Mont Blanc pen, and as unrelated to everyday life. As the bicentenary recedes and Australia fades from the forefront of European consciousness, Chatwin’s Australia may be a dominant surviving image. There are better maps of reality. From January 26, 1988, comes Burnam Burnam’s reminder of the rapacity of Empire, and Oodgeroo’s pleasure that whites, acknowledging that such an Empire did happen, have committed themselves to working with blacks for future betterment. If assimilated into British consciousness, Burnam Burnam and Oodgeroo between them offer a more positive blue-print for the future than Chatwin’s dream of a return to a nomadic Golden Age. Some adjustment to the cultural tradition might be required, but blacks’ material well-being would thrive the better for it – as would exquisiteness and taste.
NOTES

4. ibid., p 50.
5. Bruce Chatwin, The Songlines (London: Picador, 1988), p. 13. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
10. In April 1989 the British press and police were seriously concerned about private letters stolen from Princess Anne and offered to a paper for publication. The private papers were returned, and the theft investigated.
The early reception of Henry Lawson's work saw both the work and the artist produced as the Nation on the basis of a narrative gaze which eschewed imaginative embellishments of its object. Lawson's objective, unemotional, and realistic treatment of typically Australian scenes in the 1890s were celebrated as a National art and then transposed into a National knowledge. This process was part of a direct contestation of Imperial authority as it was deployed through another set of knowledge which produced the country as a colony of the Empire. According to one reviewer, Lawson's art 'throws a strong vivid flashlight upon Australian life, and the literary photographs ... which are thus presented to mind, must do much to correct false and create fresh impressions of Australian life among all who are amiably or earnestly interested in learning what our National Characteristics are and towards what they may be tending.'

Lawson's work then becomes the authorised document of the Nation through its production of a knowledge of the object of the Nation - a knowledge authorised by the objectively real gaze which fixes that object as the real, the authentic, and the true. This notion of a form of nationalism which authorises itself through the deployment of a positivist knowledge of the Nation which is in turn authorised by the real or fixed location of the Nation as object takes on interesting implications when we look at it in the context of Homi Bhaba's theorisation of fixity and the stereotype in colonialist discourse. In 'The Other Question' Bhaba explores the concept of fixity (integral to colonial discourse's 'ideological construction of otherness') through 'its major discursive strategy' the stereotype. The durable authority of this form of knowledge, he argues, lies in its paradoxical vacillation between 'what is always in "place"', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated. For as the 'fixed', or the known, the stereotype represents (or is represented as) the privileged object of a colonial discursive authority - an authority rarefied and invigorated (via the stereotype) through the just and reasonable reflection of its
own epistemological gaze. While as the ‘anxiously repeated’ the stereotype is encoded with the threat of duplicity – the deflection of the self-affirming gaze of colonial authority – a threat which functions as an invitation for a vigilant form of surveillance which continually fixes and re-affixes the colonized subject as the authorised and authorising object of imperialist knowledge.

What I want to do in this article then, is to examine Henry Lawson’s ‘The Bush Undertaker’ as an encounter between the subject of an emerging Nationalist epistemology in 1890s Australia as it is deployed through the objectively real narrative gaze, and the object which it seeks to fix in the interests of an authorising and enabling regime of Truth. Bhaba’s theoretical argument provides an important context for this examination, but it needs to be said that as a settler country Australia cannot slip neatly into his theorisation. The colonial/colonized opposition which Bhaba works in his paper, for example, is re-situated in my own as a National/colonized opposition which is itself set within the context of an Imperial/National binary. I am more concerned with explaining the discursive engagement of the national-settler subject with the indigenous other in the terms of a National versus Imperial contestation of power, than I am with pursuing the implications of Bhaba’s theorisation of the colonial manipulation and deprivation of the colonized subject.

I propose approaching my interrogation of the boundaries of the realist Nationalist gaze through the representation of the mad or the weird in the story. It is after all the weird or the mad which by definition stands outside both the real and the rational, and which offers both the binary opposite, which reflects the rational as the real, and the duplicitous mysterious other, which threatens from the beyond. It is through the signification of the weird or the mad in ‘The Bush Undertaker’ that the National gaze can be seen to encounter the ambivalence of the stereotype, which paradoxically offers in the same discursive moment both its dis-solution and its reinvigorated deployment.

In an article which deals with the representation of madness in ‘The Bush Undertaker’, Brian Matthews describes the story as one in which ‘there is a strange shifting between the starkest realities and a weird lonely other-world in which objects and landscapes assume some other significance or are momentarily held in a strange new light’.4 This ‘strange shifting’ is the device with which the weird, the eccentric, the mad is deployed throughout the text and it occurs through inconsistencies which arise through the limitations of the different gazes of the narrator and the hatter. The narrative gaze is the vision of the ‘starkest realities’. It is described through the discourse of the objective gaze and characterizes the positivist epistemology of the Nation produced through the Bulletin (and other publications) of the 1890s. The hatter’s gaze is split between the real and the weird, the rational and the mad, and emerges via both his personal monologues and the descriptions of the narrator. What distinguishes
the two from each other then, is that while the possibilities for knowledge or the rules of formation for the narrator's discourse appear clear, the possibilities or rules for the hatter's are not. What the narrator knows, and how and why he knows it, is known; but the hatter's actions and motivations are elusive.

The hatter's discourse is presented purely in the form of monologic conversations with inarticulate receivers (the dog and the corpse) and the soliloquy (self). This discourse opens the text ("Five Bob!") and is modified as it progresses by the intervention of the narrative voice. The narrative voice provides the details necessary to interpret/understand/read the import/significance of the hatter's discourse. The narrative gaze encoded as it is in the discourse of the national-real is thus placed in a position of power over the discourse of the hatter.

The 'weird' is introduced early into the story through the monologic discourse of the hatter with the dog. The hatter's habit of treating the dog as an interlocutor is distinguished by the lack of modifying irony on his part. There is an accepted discourse between humans and animals but it is a discourse which signals the recognition of its own illusion through the device of irony. The deployment of irony allows at once the illusion that the inarticulate is nevertheless cognizant, while at the same time it distances itself from a position which it knows to be illusory, weird, perhaps even 'mad' (talking to oneself is after all one of the cliché signs of madness). The absence of this irony in the hatter's discourse indicates a person who has lost the ability to make this distinction and undermines his rational credibility.

With the proposal to exhume the blackfellow the hatter's discourse moves more securely into the world of the 'weird': "I'll take a pick an' shovel with me an' root up that old blackfellow," mused the shepherd, evidently following up a recent train of thought; "I reckon it'll do now. I'll put in the spuds." This paragraph opens up a split in the enunciative subject of the hatter's discourse - a split between those enunciations which fulfil the rules of formation of the narrator's discourse and those which don't - a split between those motivations which emerge clearly and unambiguously from the transparent world of the real, and those which remain obscured by the opacities of the weird and the mad. While the references to the cooking of his meal represent statements in accordance with the rules of the narrator's objective realist discourse (that is, statements which are consistent with the possibilities of knowledge of the Nationalist gaze), the exhumation proposal does not. The final clause of the first sentence is zeugmatic and links the two. Its referent might well be either the skeleton or the meal. The narrator follows by clearly distinguishing between the two, but while he appears to be capable of distinguishing between the referents for this statement, he is unable to supply the motivation for the exhumation. For the narrator, the referent must be the meal because the motivation for the exhumation lies outside the rules of formation of his
own discourse, outside, that is, the possibilities of his knowledge. This limit to the narrator’s knowledge (and therefore control or power) is clearly indicated by the narrative supplement to the hatter’s proposal: he was ‘evidently following up a recent train of thought’. For the narrator, located as he is within the clearly defined possibilities of the real (the National), this is logical. But it remains conjecture. The narrator does not know, because he is confined by the external gaze of the objective. What is the hatter’s train of thought? What is the purpose of the exhumation? What are the motivations behind the hatter’s action? It is from the space left vacant by the absence of these answers, the space beyond the comforting, real, truthful, fixed gaze of the Australian narrator, that the signification of the eccentric or mad emerges.

The hatter’s expedition of exhumation is an exercise which the narrator can describe but not know. The narrator is not privy to the motivations of the hatter and this lack of knowledge allows the hatter to elude the control of the narrative voice. The narrative voice copes with the subversive implications of this transgression by failing to show any signs of curiosity or concern over the elusive motivation for the hatter’s actions. The narrative discourse is the objectively real and therefore has no interest in that which can’t rightly be validated by the observer’s external gaze. What the narrator sees is what any Australian present would see. The gaze perceives the ‘real’ (which is of course the Australian). The ‘other’ side of the real is the unreal, the speculative, the imaginative, the romantic, the female, the imperial and the mad. The ‘other’, therefore, has no validity within the gaze of the National and the real. It is the distinction between these binary values which locate the boundaries of the National gaze.

The confinement of the narrator’s gaze is a strategy of survival. It survives the subversive implications of its lack of knowledge by banishing the objects of the unknown as the other. That such a banishment allows the deployment of power through the other – a power which may even exceed that of the real – is accepted and negotiated by the mythologisation of the powerlessness of the real as the National. The narrative gaze reduces its scope to the purely visual in an effort to demarcate a territory which is small enough to police. The mode of relation which polices this territory is the stoic heroic subsequently embraced by cultural mythologists as the National character.6 The national-real gaze of the narrator is a gaze which so fears the (other) madness associated with its failure that it fixes itself upon the obvious, the apparent, the superficially real. The objectively real gaze of the Australian narrator is, consequently, a cringe – where the cringe is the mode of relation of the stoic heroic – that anxious objective realist gaze epistemologised and mythologised as Nation.

The cringe of the narrative gaze is revealed through the signification of the weird in the text, because the weird emerges as a significant if elusive power within the narrative economy. The signification of the weird is not
merely confined to the eccentricities of the hatter described above. During
the exhumation expedition of the hatter the production of the weird shifts
from the elusive motivations of the eccentric bushman to those of the
eccentric bush. This shift occurs when the hatter’s attention is drawn to
what eventually turns out to be the remains of his friend Brummy by the
movements of a startled goanna. The recovery and relocation of this
corpse is then repeatedly interrupted by the increasingly disturbing re­
appearances of this goanna. The weird is now produced through the
device of this mysterious goanna and the frightened hatter’s fumbling
attempts to explain it – attempts which act as a foil to the narrator’s dis­
inclination or inability to do so – a foil which once again reveals the cringe
of the narrative gaze and the contingency of a mode of knowledge con­
fined to the visual.

This shift of the signification device of the weird within the text, the shift
of focus, that is, from the dubious exhumation of the skeleton to the dis­
turbing recovery of the corpse does not mean that the two are exclusive.
The eccentricity of the hatter (exhumation and monologue) articulates with
that of the bush (corpse and goanna) in such a way as to implicate the
hatter in the mysterious actions of the goanna. This relation of the weird
associated with the hatter and that associated with the Bush occurs at the
level of both the sign and the narrative.

At the level of the narrative the weird emerges through the monologues
of the hatter and the obscure purpose of the exhumation before coming to
lodge in the figure of the goanna. The monologue, exhumation and the
goanna are the textual devices of the weird (conversation, plot, character).
The point of intersection of these devices is the figure of Brummy’s corpse.
The expedition leads ultimately to the discovery of Brummy’s body. It is
the first appearance of the goanna which initiates this discovery. It is at
the moment of the identification of the corpse that the hatter’s monologue
transfers from the dog to his friend’s remains. The periodic and increas­
ingly significant reappearances of the goanna are then cued by the hatter’s
monologue with the corpse. The signification of the weird thereby shifts
from the dubious relationship between the hatter and the skeleton,
through the bizarre relation of the hatter to his friend’s corpse, to the
ultimately significant connection between the goanna and Brummy’s
corpse.

This narrative shift is reinforced at the level of the sign. When the hatter
first mentions exhuming the skeleton he describes it as ‘that old black­
fellow’. On unearthing it he is startled by a ‘great greasy black goanna’
which transfers his attention to the ‘blackened carcass of a sheep’. This
sheep then turns out to be the mummified remains of a man: ‘There was
nothing in the blackened features to tell aught of name or race, but the
dress proclaimed the remains to be those of a European’ (p. 53). The boots
identify the corpse as Brummy. When returning both skeleton and corpse
to the hut the hatter is then repeatedly disturbed by the reappearance of
the 'black goanna', or a 'flock of black gohanners [sic]'. Upon his return he stows the two sets of remains and retires for a sleep. He is woken when 'it was dark' by strange noises. These noises emanate from 'a black object' on the roof which when shot turns out to be 'a great black goanna'. Black then, becomes a sign which forms a metonymic chain of the signs of skeleton, corpse, Brummy, night, and goanna – signs which we find located within an elusive (weird or mysterious) semiotic which is other to that of the real.

An examination of this metonymic chain in the context of its insertion within the narrative establishes the significance/signification of the 'other' or weird semiotic which eludes both the narrowly delimited gaze of the narrator, and the fumbling attempts at comprehension of the hatter. When the hatter exhumes the 'supposed blackfellow's skeleton' the narrator describes his attempt to identify it: 'When he had raked up all the bones, he amused himself by putting them together on the grass and by speculating as to whether they had belonged to black or white, male or female. Failing, however, to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion' (p. 53). When the hatter discovers Brummy's corpse the narrator again indicates the importance of its identification: 'There was nothing in the blackened features to tell aught of name or race, but the dress proclaimed the remains to be those of a European' (p. 53). The whiteness of the blackfellow's skeleton prevents its 'satisfactory' identification while the blackness of the 'European's' corpse hinders its verification. As signifiers of death both the skeleton and the corpse defy the distinguishing categories of race; categories which are part of the string of binaries (for example, flesh/skeleton, person/corpse, life/death, reason/madness, known/unknown, white/black, day/night, man/woman, man/blackfellow) which discursively construct a Nationalist discourse of identity articulated through an epistemology of the visual. The signifiers of death, the skeleton and the corpse, are signs from the semiotic of the weird and their dismantling of the white/black racial binary which is constitutive of the discourse of identity, the discourse of the visually real, the discourse of the narrative gaze, the discourse of the Nation, displays the discriminatory operations which empower that discourse.

To demonstrate this the handling of the blackfellow's skeleton and the white-man's corpse needs to be examined. Although the skeleton is never 'satisfactorily' identified it is treated as indigenous, presumably because of the method of its burial ('a little mound of earth, barely defined in the grass, and indented in the centre as all blackfellows' graves were' (p. 53)). Similarly, in the case of the corpse, the identification of first race, then person, is accomplished through visible cultural signifiers (clothes and footwear). This discrimination between the remains (white skeleton as black and black corpse as white) establishes a conflict or contradiction within the text between the treatment of the different remains; for while the remains are distinguished at the level of the narrative (blackfellow vs
Brummy) they are associated at the symbolic level through the black metonymic chain (black skeleton, black corpse).

The distinction between the different sets of remains is the basis of their different treatment. While the hatter treats the skeleton as an anthropological curiosity, he treats his friend’s corpse rather differently. This difference raises once again the issue of the hatter’s motivation for the exhumation. How the hatter treats the skeleton provides the only textual evidence for why he treats the skeleton. As described above, the first mention of the exhumation is through the textual deployment of a zeugma which associates it with the hatter’s dinner. The hatter metaphorically feeds off the skeleton. In describing the hatter’s successful exhumation the narrator uses the colloquial discourse of the miner: ‘he bottomed on payable dirt’ (p. 53). This old mining phrase associates the skeleton with objects of individual and material gain. In fact, metaphors of profit or commerce frequently occur in association with the hatter’s discourse. The discovery of Brummy’s body, for example, continues the hatter’s prospector associations with human remains through the exclamation: “Me luck’s in for the day and no mistake!” The hatter clearly means to gain (materially) from the recovery of the skeleton. The association of material gain with the disturbance of a site conventionally deemed sacred is integral to the establishment of the hatter’s madness. The representation of the hatter’s madness is tied to a mining image of the white man removing something valuable from the land. The association of these metaphors of profit with signatures which are more usually the objects of discourses of the spiritual – signatures which are in fact identified through their opposition to the material or commercial – is integral to the signification of the weird in the story. After the hatter discovers the corpse to be the remains of his friend he undergoes a slow process of coming to terms with the implications of his friend’s death. Initially at least, his behaviour towards the corpse is inappropriate. Remember that the hatter’s monologues with inarticulate receivers provide textual instances of the signification of his eccentricity. The hatter’s continual banter, directed as it is towards the grotesque remains of a mummified body, betrays an inappropriate or weird reaction to the situation. The hatter’s reaction to Brummy’s remains, like his reaction to the skeleton, is characterised by his inability to conceive of the spiritual implications of death.

The hatter’s weird behaviour, however, is not permitted to go unchallenged. Upon recovering Brummy’s corpse his obtuse and eccentric monologue is repeatedly interrupted by the combined disturbances of the metonymically linked signifiers of the weird: the skeleton, the corpse, and the goanna. When the hatter discovers that the corpse is in fact the remains of Brummy he recognises that there is an accepted convention with regard to the handling of human remains: “I expect I’ll have t’ fix yer up for the last time an’ make yer decent, for ‘twont do t’ leave yer a-lyin’ out here like a dead sheep” (p. 53). It is because Brummy’s remains are
What Colour are the Dead?

human that they require burial. This treatment recognises a distinction between the human and the non-human on the basis of a peculiarly human value which exceeds both the material and the visual. From this point on the hatter’s monologue represents a fumbling attempt to understand the implications of this spiritual value; implications which have their own ramifications for his treatment of the blackfellow’s skeleton.

As he returns to his hut his journey is marked by repeated difficulties with the transport of both sets of remains. He begins with Brummy over his shoulder and the bones in his hand but is troubled by the reappearance of the goanna and has to stop to recover. This time he attempts to place the remains together by packing ‘the bag of bones on his shoulder under the body’ (p. 54). This arrangement proves uncomfortable and he is forced to stop yet again to recompose his load: “‘The thunderin’ jumpt up bones is all skew-whift’, he said. ‘‘Ole on, Brummy, an’ I’ll fix ’em...’” (p. 54). At this point the goanna, whose mysteriousness is further established through Five Bob’s reluctance to ‘sick ’em’, returns again to trouble the old man. The appearances of the goanna are significant because they occur at moments when the hatter’s reflections are particularly and inappropriately materialistic. The first occurs when he is returning with the desecrated skeleton. The second follows his thanksgiving for the leftovers of Brummy’s bottle, speculation over the financial viability of using his shirt to bind the corpse and the observation that: “‘I ain’t a-spendin’ such a dull Christmas arter all’” (p. 54). The third after his problem of carrying the two sets of remains together. The significance of these disturbing reappearances of the goanna, cued as they are to the hatter’s material bias, emerges when the hatter eventually kills the reptile: ‘Then the old man saw it all. ‘The thunderin’ jumpt-up thing has been a-havin’ o’ me,’ he exclaimed. ‘The same cuss-o-God wretch has a-follered me ‘ome, an’ has been a-havin’ its Christmas dinner off of Brummy, an a-hauntin’ o’ me into the bargain, the jumpt-up tinker!’” (p. 56). The relationship between the goanna and the corpse reproduces that between the hatter and the skeleton – remember the zeugma which links the hatter’s exhumation with his Christmas dinner. This parallel again focuses attention upon the hatter’s materialism. The idea of the goanna feeding off the corpse is repugnant. This is of course one of the reasons why the corpse can not be left lying out in the Bush ‘like a dead sheep’. The use of ‘hauntin’’ to describe the disturbing effect of the goanna on the hatter then becomes particularly appropriate. Haunting is after all the return of the spirit of the dead to trouble the living because of actions which prevent their successful transition into the afterlife. The goanna haunts the hatter because of his desecration of the blackfellow’s grave; a desecration which is not admitted to the hatter’s perceptions because of the restriction of his gaze to the superficial and the material. It is a desecration which is obscured because of the racist binary which organises the discourse of the real and the National, and reduces the aboriginal to the nonhuman and the material,
the suppressed halves of a series of binaries which identify the values of Nation and self.

The goanna, however, is not the only instrument of the hatter's haunting. From the moment of its initial discovery Brummy's corpse has its own disturbing influence on the old bushman – remember that at the symbolic level of the text the corpse is linked to both the skeleton and the goanna. When first discovered 'the shrivelled eyes [which] seemed to peer up at him from under blackened wrists' caused him to step 'back involuntarily' (p. 53). The difficulties the hatter has in trying to carry together the corpse and skeleton have already been described above. When the hut is reached the hatter 'dump[s] the corpse against the wall, wrong end up' with the result that it falls and strikes the hatter a 'violent blow on the shoulder ... The shock sobered him' (My emphasis; p. 55). The replacement of the body right end up displays the corpse's face which again frightens, or rather 'shocks', the shepherd: 'The shepherd was not prepared for the awful scrutiny that gleamed on him from those empty sockets; his nerves received a shock, and it was some time before he recovered himself sufficiently to speak' (p. 55). It is the gaze of the dead, the other, which finally silences the ramblings of the old man. The skeleton, the goanna and the corpse of his friend are significant. Their significance troubles but eludes the hatter. The significance of the other, the dead, the weird, the mad, is that the material, the real, the National is prescriptive, contingent and insufficient. It is the withdrawal into the visual, the physical, the superficial and the obvious, and it fails to explain the imaginative, the spiritual, the other, the human. Brian Matthews writes that Brummy's 'death has become important and significant to him, separated from his peculiar dealing in bones and bodies by confused memories of Brummy, and by some perception, however vague, of the deep significance of the event ...' (Matthews, p. 254). This significance is the significance of the other, the significance of the spirit, the significance of the mad, and, paradoxically, because it reveals through its opposition the inadequate cringe of the narrator, the significance of the sane. But while the disturbances of the goanna and corpse have led the old man to some form of limited awareness of an-Other epistemology to that of the National-real, there is no engagement with this other knowledge.

This is born out by the editorial changes made through the various editions of the story from 1892 to 1901. In the 1892 version the story concludes: ‘... dus ter dus, Brummy.’ Then he sat down and buried his face with his hands. And the sun sank again ...’ (qtd. in Roderick, Commentaries, p. 28). This version implies, as Roderick indicates, ‘that the hatter was emotionally overcome by the religious solemnity of the occasion’ (Roderick, Commentaries, p. 28), that is, that the hatter finally reacts to the spiritual implications to which he had been previously blind. Lawson, however, altered this passage for its 1894 publication in Short Stories in Prose and Verse to read: ‘He sat down on a log near by, rested his elbows
on his knees and passed his hand wearily over his forehead — but only as one who was tired and felt the heat; and presently he rose, took up the tools, and walked back to the hut. And the sun ...’ (My emphasis; p. 56). The change removes the implications of the hatter’s final enlightenment which are present in the 1892 edition. They ‘deliberately flatten the tone’ to place a greater emphasis upon the pressure brought to bear by the ‘weird’ upon the real. The National accentuates this pressure because it is this pressure which signifies the maddening influence of the Bush. The hatter’s resistance to this pressure is a resistance to the power of another knowledge. It is the mythologisation of this resistance as the National which produces the stoic-heroic as the identity of the Nation.

The hatter’s inquiries into the implications of Brummy’s death therefore cease with the internment of the corpse. They do not extend to the haunting goanna or to the blackfellow’s skeleton. If the ‘confused memories of Brummy’ provide the shepherd with a ‘perception ... of the deep significance of the event’ then, it is an awareness which fails to identify the discrimination which constructs the black, the goanna, the skeleton and the dead (i.e. the values which articulate with the corpse in the semiotic of the other) as other in the process of asserting the dominance and identity of the real and the National. The hatter’s fumbling movement towards an understanding of the implications of death acts not just as a foil to the eccentric, weird, mad (material), racist treatment of the skeleton, but to the inability/disinclination of the narrative gaze to investigate and incorporate the same knowledge. The cringing gaze of the narrator cannot view or recognize this knowledge because it is the suppression of the semantic values of this other semiotic which provides the dominated binaries which construct its own narrow but controlled semiotic, the semiotic of the stoic-heroic, the semiotic of the Nation.

The banishment of this level of symbol, this discourse of the weird, the other, from the end of the story is described by Matthews as ‘a measure of Lawson’s control ... that he does not allow such reflections to pervade the end of the story; this may have given the ending an air of mystery or symbolism which it is plainly not intended to sustain. He seals it off, as it were, firmly but tolerantly.’ (Matthews, p. 254). This is significant, for the banishment of the discourse of the weird is ‘a measure of ... control’. It is the movement of the discourse of the narrator, the discourse of the objectively real, the Australian, to reassert control or power over the narrative which has so clearly demonstrated the contingencies of such control. It is the action of an hysterical cringe to the threat of values outside its own emblematically charted territory. The position of power which the cringe gives to the narrator of ‘The Bush Undertaker’ is arbitrary, political and conditional. It rests upon a dominance which is purchased through the discriminative suppression of that which for the purposes of a politically expedient identity is established and held as other. The narrative voice banishes the subversive discourse of the other, the realm of the
spiritual, the weird, the mad, that world 'in which objects and landscapes assume some other significance or are momentarily held in a strange new light that promises but never quite yields insights' (My emphasis; Matthews, p. 251) with the conclusion: "And the sun sank again on the grand Australian bush - the nurse and tutor of eccentric minds, the home of the weird, and of much that is different from things in other lands" (p. 57). It is a banishment by acceptance. The weird, the other, is the mad and the eccentric of the 'grand Australian Bush'. The environment of the Nation is therefore that of the mad and the eccentric, and it is the stoic-heroic disengagement with this environment which identifies the character of the Australian Nation - a character identified not merely by its resistance to the bush; but by its resistance to an-Other knowledge. My reading of Lawson's story, however, is not intended to be one which stops at the exposition of a limited realist epistemology of the Nation. The point which is to be grasped here is that it is precisely this limitation which becomes its strength. For as the other by, which the National-real locates itself, moves from its fixture, it triggers its re-affixment - a process which iterates and reiterates the stereotype of the other and the epistemological system which it enables. It is therefore through the contingency of the National epistemology that it generates its effectivity - an effectivity which is directed as much against the rival Imperial as it is towards a mutually contested colonized subject.

NOTES

7. It also originates there in the 'suitable' bush location and ends there as 'the sun sank again on the grand Australian bush ....'
8. The significance of both the chain of black signifiers and the meal-exhumation connection are confirmed in Alan Lawson's discussion of the story in 'Lawson and Australia', a paper presented at Griffith University Brisbane, 23 Mar. 1987.
9. Considering the coverage given in the press recently to Aboriginal attempts to retrieve for burial the stolen remains of their ancestors, the old shepherd's obsession with profit and the association of this with the discovery of the bodies, in particular the first one, leads me to the conclusion that what the shepherd is about in exhuming the skeleton is the commercial sale of the remains to an anthropologist, a medically related industry, or even the macabre type of shop described in Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* (see Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, edited by Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 130). It appears from a survey of the medical journals of the time that the only systematic supply of medical skeletons to medical schools came from France but this fact doesn't preclude the possible sale of a few stray bones to an interested outback anatomist, anthropologist, or some colonial contemporary of Mr Venus (I am indebted to Dr. Bryan Gandeva for this information). Such a sale is I believe consistent with both the historical context and the construction of the exhumation within the text. It is also supported by a comment which Colin Roderick makes in his biography of Lawson but on which he fails to elaborate: 'Dan [Angus] had a macabre sense of humour and once bought Lawson's skeleton for beer money' (Colin Roderick, *Henry Lawson: A Life* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1991), p. 302.).

10. Roderick makes note of the different versions of this sentence in the editions from 1892 to 1896 and prefers this version on the basis of Lawson's preference. The other versions are '... like the fool yers allers was' 1892; '... like carrion' 1894; and that quoted above, 1896. See Colin Roderick, *Henry Lawson: The Master Story-Teller: Commentaries on his Prose Writings* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1985).

11. Note that, according to Roderick, the final phrase: 'and of much that was different from things in other lands' was omitted from 'all posthumous editions' of the story. He restores it in *Henry Lawson: The Master Story-Teller*, since Lawson clearly restores it for *The Country I Come From* (See Commentaries, p. 29). The omission places less emphasis on the particularly Australian character of the events. It might be seen as an attempt to reduce the local element of the story so as to place more stress on the universal.
THE EXTRA PANEL
Fred McCubbin 'The Pioneer' 1904

Where does it fit in the holy triptych,
the extra panel Fred left out?

Off to the left of panel one
where the new wife waits for the husband's billy

and the horse is off in its hobble chains,
the dray a beginning arched by trees?

Her face has a late
Victorian poignance. It's possible she might have known.

Or is it there
some weeks beyond

the hut that's up in panel two
washed with sunlight in a clearing,

off to the right of the painting's focus,
husband and wife and child in arms,

the rest from sweat as he sits on a log,
rubs his beard

and is talking softly,
his honesty and axe beside him?

Panel three is far too late
with its city that hangs as a vista there

brought by light through the thinning trees
and boasting its new span of progress.

The man who kneels at the slewed wooden cross
is a false lead only.
He might be the son, come back years later, 
or the pioneer himself still mourning the child.

But stare now hard between the panels, 
there in the space from two to three,

and have the scene develop slowly. 
You choose it from a random handful

although the trees remain the same, 
sturdy, dense and nineteenth century,

the undergrowth idealized slightly. 
The extra panel shows a child

(Fred’s brushwork here is less precise) 
tangled in the coils of strychnine

just there beneath the central tree 
that holds the whole thing all together

and two black parents crouched above her 
while in the distance is the hut,

its chimney quietly smoking.

THE TOUR

Once in 1868 
a century of weather cleared, a shaft of sunlight 
coming down at Lord’s. 
The first of summer ...
Twopenny, Mullagh, Dick-a-Dick, Cuzens 
and half a dozen others 
stride out on the field, 
the first Australians there —
against them in the batting order 
a viscount, colonel and an earl. 
And Dr Grace who’s looking on 
will put them in his memoirs.
We have the scorebook of that day.
Johnny Mullagh 75
with his ‘fine, free, wristy style’
and Mr Lawrence, captain/coach,
‘late of the English eleven’
comes in next at 31.
Three months at sea on the ‘Parramatta’
and 47 matches played –
fourteen lost and fourteen won
with nineteen to a draw.
Some vaudeville thrown in as well,
Mosquito with his boomerang,
mock battles done with spears
and Dick-a-Dick with club and shield
against a hail of balls.
Six months across the English counties;
then home again by ‘Dunbar Castle’,
a match in Melbourne passing through,
home again to the western districts,
stockmen in the paddocks lost –
or drafted to the new reserves,
‘Protection and Management’ via the Act.
‘Obscurity and early death’,
a shorthand guide to what was left –
though Mullagh played his bat straight through
for twenty years or so,
topping the score against the English
a final time in ’79;
also the smalltown competition,
his own team heading the ladder always
as he camped alone at ‘Johnny’s Dam’
a rabbiter on Pine Hill station.
And on that other
Victorian scoreboard –
seven hundred and seventy four
fullbloods in the state.
When Johnny died in ’91’
his bat and stumps were buried with him’
and an obelisk put up.
A sharp reversal in the weather
had forced the close of play.
BREAST PLATES

Those breast plates
of the 19C ...
still hard to see
the reason why.
'King Billy of the
Barwon Blacks',
'Tommy, King
of Narrabri'.

Each time you see
a white man stoop
towards an elder
at his fire
the faces both
have turned opaque
and give no index
to desire.

Is it white or
is it black
who wears the deep,
ironic smile?
So hard to see it
through the glass.
What kind of man
escapes the file?

Some pinched hierarchic
Queen's official
who wants to set the
skies to right?
Or some off-handed
public joker
laughing in the
bar one night?

One's bestowed by
Edward Milne
whose neat initials
at the rim
are 'fair exchange'
for artefacts,
an interest very
near to him.

'King Billy of the
Bandjalang' ... ?
A station owner
likes the thought
and shows his smith
a little sketch.
A town clerk of the
better sort

makes his trip out
to the dump.
A mission gives its
leading man
a brass plate for his
'dying pillow'.
The kangaroo and
emu on

their way towards a
coat of arms
are more bemused
in brass than he
who smiles to try
the trinket on –
while the donor's
there to see.

Much later they
are taken back
and under glass
are set on view,
the ribcages
behind them gone
together with the
names obscured

or simplified to
minstrelsy.
Toolbillibam
as good 'King Bill'
has set the fencelines
firm and square.
A smile supplants
the need to kill.

THE PHRENOLOGIST

And now the patients are all gone,
he takes the skull again –
yellow underneath the gaslamp,
an early winter's evening,
his fingers tracing out with care
the small configurations.
A hansom cab goes by outside.
He thinks of the man in Harley Street,
whose gift it is ...
this skull from the antipodes, a genuine New Hollander
for his consideration.
And wonders at the half-ironic smile
when promised at the club.
As fingers lift the outer shell
he has a vision of the centre,
two soft handfuls in a hairnet,
the Organs and the Faculties
pressing claims into the bone.
And here, of course ... Locality,
so much enlarged, the faculty which makes them nomads
and here below it, much developed,
the hanging brow of their Perception;
then slipping back to almost nothing
the concave region of Reflection,
likewise this hollow at the temple,
seat of that Constructiveness
so notably deficient.
He's seen the sketches of their gunyahs
crouching in the wind.
He glances up for reassurance
at Dr Spurzheim's chart
to check a ridge that he's forgotten.
Ah yes, the faculty of Time,
and well developed too, those dances and corroborees,
and then the hollow here beside it
the faculty of Tune,
so lamentably missing.
And now this heaviness down here,
this thickness down towards the base,
seat of the ignoble passions.
What more to summarize the case?
He puts the head aside and packs his bag,
stands a moment at the mirror,
runs a hand across his brow –
then higher where the hair has been;
feels the reassuring rise
so vital to the European,
the organ of Reflection there
pressed in hard against the bone.
He pauses at the door and smiles.
The foggy street is full of cabs
and rich with confirmation.
Axel Poignant

Axel Poignant was Anglo-Swedish. He arrived in Australia as a British 'boy' immigrant in 1926. His formative years as a photographer were spent in Perth from 1931 to 1942. He photographed Aboriginal people on Canning Stock route in 1942 and first visited the Northern Territory in 1945-46, as a cameraman on The Overlanders. In 1952 he camped on the west bank of the Liverpool River and within a short time some 60 to 70 Aboriginal people were encamped around him. As well as taking photos, Axel Poignant also kept a diary. Few of his photographs were published before the late 1960s when they were used in support of Aboriginal Land Rights Claims, but since then he has gained wide acclaim and had a series of major exhibitions.

Note on 'Paddy, King of Ord River':

The man in the photo is wearing a plaque round his neck. From the time of the first white settlement in Australia plaques have had a long tradition. One of the first ones was given by Governor Macquarie to an Aborigine from the Broken Bay tribe who was a man of great courage and intelligence and who had accompanied Matthew Flinders when he circumnavigated Australia in the Investigator. The inscription read: 'Bungaree, King of the Blacks.' The wearer’s name in Axel Poignant’s photo was not Paddy, the plaque was handed down from elder to elder. (The elder was the man who traditionally had authority over the Aboriginal work force. Though he was too old to work, the station owners supplied him with two sets of clothes a year and food rations. This was so that he would stay on the station and so ensure that the rest of the Aboriginal work force would also stay.)

The tradition has not died. When David Malangi’s ownership of the design on the Australian dollar was finally acknowledged, he received a small medal on a chain inscribed ‘Presented to David Malangi by Dr H.C. Coombs, Reserve Bank of Australia, August 1967’. He also received $500, a dinghy and a large army tent.

Axel Poignant wrote in his diary: ‘I had stopped by the station overnight and saw “Paddy” by the kitchen door. In the morning we walked a short distance to a spot where I could see his country behind him, and I photographed him there, in order to convey my feelings about his exploitation.’
Paddy, 'King of Ord River', Western Australia, 1946.
Elder with hand-out of offal, Mt. Doreen, Northern Territory, 1946.
The Ration, Wave Hill, Northern Territory, c. 1946-47.
Guy was speaking with the slaughterman, Mr Dunnett, whose habit of planting a bloodied hand on a hip had sheened his pocket satiny brown. On one of his rabbiting forays along creekbank warrens, the old fellow had caught a kingfisher in a net and caged it in his fernhouse. Brilliant colours whirled and fluttered in a wire cocoon.

"He’ll die", Guy warned.

"No ‘e won’t", Mr Dunnett promised around his pipestem, which now and then offered up an Indian smoke signal, past whiskered cheeks and sunburned bony nose, to hatbrim’s edge. ‘I’ll see to that.’

Every so often the bird stilled and hung sideways.

‘He’s so hurt. He’ll die.’

"Urt? I never ‘urt ‘im. I jis’ put the net over ‘is ‘ole in the tree, like so, see? When ‘e got caught I put me ‘ands around him, just like this. What would a little codger like you know about birds?"

When, later, Guy stole into Mr Dunnett’s fernery to release the kingfisher, he found it dead. He took from the floor feathers that must have burst in frenzy, and planted them, quills-down, in his mother’s vegetable garden.

‘Little duine!’ Granny Sutherland cried when she found them. ‘They won’t grow. They can’t grow.’

‘Hollyhocks do.’

‘But they’re not the same.’

‘How d’you know?’

‘Dear little duine’, Old Iseabel said, a joint creaking as she got down on her knees to explain. ‘Hollyhocks grow from seeds. Birds hatch from eggs.’

‘I didn’t want him to die. I wanted him to go back to the creek.’
Icefield

would leave them on a board to dry in the sun. Once, Granny Sutherland, his father's mother, sought to encourage him from formless creation:
'Make me a bowl, little duine.' She pronounced it 'doon-nah'.
'I can't see anything in bowls.'
Mistaking his meaning, the old woman laughed, and soon lapsed in memory:
'There was a glass-blowing Sutherland as married a Sinclair widow on Thurso. Then there was another settled on Harris, and another, Long Seamus, as gave up the craft and sailed away to Stornoway among those sabaideach McLeods of Lewis – all over a Munro slaodaire. Long Seamus died of the drink and a broken heart the year we left Gualainn and walked down to Fort William on Loch Linnhe to sail to the colony. He should have stuck with cinneadh ...'
Granny Sutherland, or Old Iseabel, as she was called, meandered on, forgetting, in words welling up from childhood lived at the top of Scotland, the point at which she had abandoned the present. Yet for her grandson the confluence of languages was pure music. He did not try to understand what he instinctively knew to be a river of humorous slander and insult, the bed of which was reefed in unyielding clan-stones. As she had said many times, once the Gaelic took lodging in the mouth it could never be evicted, not even after you'd forgotten it was there.
'... that Munro botramaid was borned in a Cromarty taigh-spadaith,' Granny venomously advised over the rim of her teacup. 'It was caoidhearan, caoidhearan, caoidhearan, my little duine, until she died of the snivels, the Cromarty dubchaile ...'
The river ran, the boy dreamed visions of Thursos and Stornoways, Uists, Hebrides and Skyes, botramaisds, dubchailes, and Macdiolains, and of blowships that ghabh the Highlanders to the Colony. Or he would compare the Lewis of his Gaelic history with that of his Anglo-Saxon at Lewes. To those unimaginable lands, accessible only in his mother's atlas, he would one day journey.
Occasionally Old Iseabel would blink and ask:
'Did you hear that, little duine? I said broinegs! That's all they ever wore all their rinabout days. Broinegs, and the bochdan they stole from the fuigleach in the fields.'

He was four years old, in that summer preceding his first year at school, and standing at the bush end of Main Street where the mountain seemed to begin.
Ever since he could remember, in a wicker basket on the veranda of their home, the tree-blued mountain had filled, dominated his imagination. It was more than a mountain, or upthrust along the Great Dividing Range;
but what it was additionally he could not begin to suppose. He wished to
create a track through the trees in order to reach the mountaintop and so
determine for himself what it was that suggested more; but the only way
that tracks were formed was by the passing over of many feet, or of
vehicles, constantly. This would not do, since he wanted his own personal
track to the mountain's secret.

Then he thought that if he dragged a log behind him, the work of many
feet over a long time would quickly be done, pushing leaves, bark, and
sticks aside, biting out a furrow that would not quickly be filled in again.
The problem, though, was that he was not yet big or strong enough to lift
such a log, let alone drag it up the mountain. Of course, if he started at
the top and dragged a manageable limb down, it would be easier. Yet, he
reasoned, how would he find his way, among all those trees, rocks, and
scrub, to the top, if no path existed? True, there was a road that began
somewhere beyond the cemetery and disappeared into the first rise; but
he didn't want to use that; it wouldn't lead to where he wanted to go.

He took up a long dry stick that had fallen from a stringybark and
trailed it some way under the trees. He paused by a torn stump and saw
that the result was far from satisfactory: in some places it had barely
disturbed the leaves. He remained there, considering the problem, until
the steam train leaving Willowhill to the north sent down over this part
of the world its long wilderness cry.

His mother, dusting flour from her forearms, was part of the mountain.
She had fed, filled, dominated his imagination since forever, in exactly the
same unfathomable way.

'How do you make tracks?'

There was flour on her nose and a bold white finger-brand on her
shining hair. He looked for the corresponding smudge on a knuckle. His
own nose felt itchy. Her hair he compared with the roan richness of time-
ripened acorns: darker than chestnut, yet lighter than her mahogany-
tabled sewing machine.

'Have you been to the end of Main Street again?'

He came to her and stood against her thigh, smelling the flour on her
hand as she collared his yearning neck.

'You have to be patient,' she said.
When Guy was older, and knew what many Gaelic words meant, he thought to ask:

‘Why do you enjoy hating them when they’re dead?’

‘Little duine’, she archly said. ‘I’m going to meet them one day, aren’t I now? I must keep up the practice so I can tell them guuuuid what I think of them.’

If her great age had drained her hair of colour, leaving it wrapped in white crinkled wings about her head, all of the life force had been concentrated in those glittering blue-grey eyes, fierce and imperious as an eagle’s. In her, Guy early knew, resided a Gaelic spirit vastly different from, and more acrid than, that of the Anglo-Saxon. The school larrikin Ray Watson had kicked her once, only to see erupt an old she-devil who snatched up her dogwood walking stick and beat him, head and shoulders, out of the yard and up Main Street, he bawling, and she screaming Gaelic imprecations that sounded as shocking as gunfire along somnolent Main Street:

‘Burraidh! ... Slaiorgtire! ... Neach diolain!’

The pounding ended only when she ran out of breath at the railway paddock, from which fence Guy’s mother unclutched an old claw and led her home, amid approving shoppers, to a nip of whisky.

Later, Guy asked:

‘What does neach diolain mean?’

Granny gave him the sweetest of smiles.

‘Bastard.’

Sometimes he would find his mother by the stove, her forehead pressed against the lintel bricks and staring at the chimneyback where glass panes had been smoked brown, suffusing the polished steel kettle with the same light that glowed through dark honey.

‘What can you see?’

A reflective hand might rise to his shoulder.

‘I’m not looking out.’

He wondered whether she might be thinking of his father.
In time, as he read, during his school years and after, Guy came to think of himself as having two distinct British heritages, the one raw and Gaelic; the other, softer Anglo-Saxon. He believed that his own secret convictions about things—what lay behind spoken words, a glance, a sunrise, the unfolding in his mother’s garden of a rose in which a pearl of rain was held—were sourced in his Sutherland being, in the kind of wild and solitary poetry that Old Isobel’s monologues provoked in him. Hers was another world, mythic, harsh, stony, on the violent seashore, amid endless rain and half-seen shrieking gulls.

Old Isobel remembered the turf house on Gualainn’s steep hill, the black cattle in winter housed at one end, and the peatsmoke that dyed the human spirit as it did the flesh of herrings. And in that dripping turf house, she told Guy, in the depths of the coldest winter anyone in the whole of Sutherland and Caithness could remember, and to which her old father, Niall Mackay, succumbed, there had been born to her sister such a howling screeching baby as had to have his mouth stopped up with rags and a cow-robe wound about his head.

‘She was chased by a mad horse when she was carrying him,’ the grandmother explained.

These stories, told before the fire during Meteora’s own long winter nights, created in Guy’s mind visionary pictures so vivid as sometimes to leave him to wonder whether he had not himself been born in Granny Sutherland’s century. He dreamed of growing up quickly and journeying to Gualainn, the fishing village on the high brae-shoulder staring north into the ocean, to visit his clansmen who, he was certain, were all giants of men with lopsided bony faces. They would welcome him with sardonic clan-love and gruff, grim humour.

As he grew older, and read of the great Celtic migrations from the shores of the Adriatic westward into Europe, north across the channel and seeking out the wildest and least hospitable of landscapes in what would come to be known as the British Isles, Guy began to understand how such turbulent human spirit could be dyed both by those epic wanderings and the wilderness sanctuaries high up the hardest mountain straths and glens.

He could never afterwards hear the bagpipes’ sudden rant without feeling delirious wayward love for this unpruned branch of his family tree. In those reckless skirling notes he heard an ancient voice proclaiming the savage pride of being, among eagles and peathags, where no other race or tribe would dream of isolating itself, let alone of enduring such long, silent, snowbound winters.

As he dreamed, a vast hunger for sea-voyaging, upon the wilderesses of water he had seen in picture books, entered his being.
There had been kinder seasons, however brief or bittersweet. Holding her tartan shawl for inspection, Old Iseabel described how in spring she, her mother and her sisters would scour the braes for lichen, *crotal geal*, to dry and mix with blaeberry, or *lus na dearc gorma*, for the extracting of purple dye. In her eighties, she still remembered the secret proportions of alder bark, dockroot, oak bark and acorns, mixed to yield black; and of privet berries, teasel, iris leaf, wild mignonette, furze bark, and heather, to give green, as well, to this most beautiful and sombre of Highland tartan weaves.

Sometimes she would sing, in a high, high voice in Gaelic, the haunting *Iseabel nic Aoidh*, the clan salute to her great namesake; or the infinitely sad *Cumha Dhomnuill Mhic Aoidh*, lament for Donald Mackay, first Lord of Reay; and afterwards bring forth from memory the clan bards' stories of the Mackay fortunes beginning in the thirteenth century.

Or she would tell him of the *seanachie*, poet and historian, whose function it was to record in memory the clan's unwritten history and genealogy from the beginning, and so pass it down to each oncoming generation.

She spoke from the distance of time, like cattle calling from a hillside, a lowing which could be confused with human complaint. In the same way, the rooster's faraway cry reminded the boy of an infant waking from sleep. On such nights Old Iseabel seemed to Guy to express a poignant state of exile from which no escape was possible except in memory. Her sadness, never broached in direct conversation, embraced her son, Guy's father, Will Sutherland, absent at war, which to her was the historic fate of her dismembered and dispersed clanship; and was perhaps why she unconsciously poured her great arch love on her grandson, her little *dounie* in whom the blood still ran. It was as though the boy might interrupt the circle of exile that gripped the century in which they were held, and step through a door of reality into a magical past where Old Iseabel's dreaming began, where the *piob Gaelach*’s shriek roused the blood quicker than ever could the water of life, and where a little girl wrapped in plaid forever skipped through the heather.
LOSGAINTIR

The form of your foot fits
in a swamped crater,
growing from flecked white
on Traigh Losgaintir.

Your salt-clogged hair
is rippled like
long abrasions
in sea sand.

I take you all in
and trust that threats,
overhead or undersea,
will remain remote

or be quietened
like the hard blue lines
grown hairy in
this range of tides.

SOUTHWEST HARRIS
(for Cathy Wilson)

This island is discontent as light,
come glancing under precipitation:
a weather-system from south of Islay.
Ireland is there, under Malin Head.

I let a measure of conditions
into the box, until a selected stop.
You sketch fast or lasso
the ewe's legs of your easel.
It doesn't want to be static,
straddling conflicts of gradients.

A melting landmass in the dunes of
Seilebost. Toe-head out as an arm
but insufficient to shield the machair.
Then there are katabatic bursts of wind,
against the grain of decent predictions,
bringing destroying light,
from Clisham and Mullo fo Deas,
brushing deep below the surfaces
of the sound of Taransay,
bringing only change.

SOUNDS

Here, the tides talk in Norse
and flood in conjunction
with prevailing spindrift.
You do not see the gradient of waters,
only the shoulders of fiords:
Loch a Ghlinne, Resort, Tamnavay.

To the south, set is composed
of midstreams and side-issues.
The flood takes off on a beam reach
to scour by Coppay, bounce Ensay,
nudging from Rhenish to the Uists
in a contrary cycle.

Even the cartographer concedes
special treatment for the Sound of Harris
and orientates the latitude scale
across the vellum.
You navigate
in diagonals.
Sam Maynard

Shiant Islands, mid Minches.
The Callanish Stones
Duncan at Long Beach, Tolsta, East Coast of Lewis.
BONNIE BURNARD

Deer Heart

She wouldn’t have gone on her own; two hundred miles across the prairie, it wasn’t worth it. She’d read the embossed invitation immediately as a chance to be with her daughter, not the Queen, to be off with her on a long drive in the car, contained, remote, private.

The invitation hadn’t come as a big surprise. She found herself, at forty-one, on some protocol list in Ottawa, the result of serving on a provincial board or two, the result of middle age. When she’d asked her daughter to join her at the luncheon the girl had said, ‘What Queen?’

She was aware of orchestrating these spaces in time with each of the kids, she’d been doing it religiously since their father’s departure. She would have named it instinct rather than wisdom. And they were good, the kids were fine; there was no bed wetting, no nail chewing, there were no nightmares, at least none severe enough to throw them from their beds and send them to her own in a cold sweat. If they did have nightmares, the quiet kind, they were still able to stand up in the morning with a smile, forgetful.

Her own acceptance, after nearly two years, took an unexpected form. She’d started files. One file contained the actual separation agreement, which listed all five of their names in full capitals, in bold type, the format generic and formal, applicable to any family; with the agreement she kept her list of the assets, the things that had to be valued against the day of final division. Another file held the information supplied by her government, little booklets on this aspect of family breakdown, supportive statistics on that. And the notification that she would be taxed differently, now that she was alone. In the third file she kept the letters. It was by far the thickest of the three, though growing more slowly now.

When the mailman began to leave these letters, casually tucked in with the usual bills and junk, she’d been dumbfounded. She’d sat on the couch with her morning coffee after the kids had gone to school unsealing, unfolding, reading one word after another, recognizing the intent of the words as they arranged themselves into paragraphs of affection. A few of the letters contained almost honourable confessions of steamy fantasies, which apparently had been alive in the world for years, right under her nose. The words fond of and hesitate appeared more than once.

These men were in her circle, there was no reason to expect they would ever leave it. And they were, to a man, firmly and comfortably attached
to women they would be wise to choose all over again, in spite of waists and enthusiasms as thick and diminished as her own. She disallowed all but one of the fantasies with laughter and common sense and a profound appreciation for the nerve behind the confessions.

Her defense, the time she gave in, had been what she called her net gain theory, wherein she was able to explain that any increased contentment for her would mean an equal loss for some other woman, a broadside, with the result that nothing new had been created. Her admirer had stood with his hands on her hips and told her it wasn’t her job to measure and distribute; he’d told her to relax. And she did relax, for about an hour.

She kept the letters. If she was hit by a truck on the way to the Tom Boy she would simply have to count on whoever went through her things to take care of them. The fireplace was just a few feet from her desk.

Her husband, her ex-husband, had found companionship more readily, young companionship, young smooth-skinned fertile companionship. A different marketplace altogether.

They began the drive to the small prairie city as she’d hoped, like an excursion. They stopped for gas and ju-jubes and two cans of Five Alive. They talked about school and the broad wheatland through which they were moving. She pointed out how bone dry it all was, told the girl how rain would change the colour of the landscape and how this in turn would change the economy of the province. And she told her that when she was twelve she’d kept several scrapbooks with Queen Elizabeth II emblazoned on the cover, had filled them with this woman’s life, her marriage and coronation, the magnificent christening gowns worn by her children, her scrappy younger sister, in love. She confessed all her young need for romance.

Then, without deliberation, she confessed how easily the romance had given way to tacky glamour, Ricky Nelson and James Dean, Brenda Lee. And how easily the glamour had been overtaken by Lightfoot, and Joni Mitchell, and Dylan. She tried to explain Dylan, what she took from him, without much success. The old intellectual distancing from all things usual sounded arrogant and smug, and predictable. She didn’t confess the next phase, the disdain, though she’d been happy to discover it at the time. She’d used it, while it lasted, without restraint.

The girl took it all in and asked the right questions, to please her. And then they were silent, cosy in the car and she set the cruise control and began to dream a little. She was interrupted by some of the questions she hoped might take their opportunity on this drive. There was a boy. Of course, there was a boy.

‘Why can’t he just talk to me normally? I haven’t changed,’ and ‘Why does he have to sneak looks at me all of a sudden?’

Old questions, easy to answer.

‘Were you pretty?’ Shared, intimate laughter, for the first time.
She told the truth as she knew it. She named the longing and the confusion and the hope of a crush and gave it a history common to all mankind.

When they arrived they had only to find the arena and it wasn't hard. The place was more or less deserted except for the parking lot and the streets leading into it. She guessed maybe a couple of thousand people would be involved in this little affair. She parked the car and they cut across the parched, leaf covered ball diamond to the arena. Inside they found the washroom and freshened up together, the girl imitating her mother's moves, though with her own style. At the entrance to the huge high beamed room which would in a month or perhaps even sooner be transformed into a hockey rink she found the invitation in her bag and handed it to a uniformed woman.

They waited only a few moments at their seats at the long table and then the orchestra, from the area of the penalty box, began God Save The Queen. They stood up and in she came. In a hot pink wool coat and a trim little hot pink hat, visible to all, waving and nodding with a fixed, flat smile.

She regretted not wearing what she'd wanted to wear, her cherry red coat and her dead mother's fox stole, which she kept wrapped in tissue in her closet, an absurdity now with its cold glassy nose and the hooks sewn into the paws; she had no idea why she loved it and longed to wear it, somewhere, before she grew old. She had her mother's opal ring, which she sometimes wore, so it wasn't that. There was a prayer, for the Queen, for the country, for rain and then the heavy noise of two thousand chairs being scraped over the cold cement floor. Prairie people, in expensive suits and silk dresses and elegant felt hats sitting down to eat a roast beef dinner for lunch.

She talked superficially and politely to the people around them at their table and her daughter listened and tried a couple of superficial lines of her own. 'Have you been looking forward to seeing the Queen?' she asked the woman across from her.

They didn't get to shake hands with the Royals, which was an obvious and unexpected disappointment for the girl but they heard the Queen speak, crisply, about the settling of this land, about the native peoples, textbook talk. She was followed by government officials, unable to resist a go at the captive audience. And then the program began, children in coy little dance groups and choirs and a youth orchestra and she could feel her daughter wanting to be up there on the stage, performing, taking the only chance she'd likely ever have to curtsey to someone. She wanted to tell her about Barbara Fromm saying there was no-one she felt the need to curtsey to. She often caught herself wanting to hand over fully developed attitudes, to save the girl time, and trouble.

A couple of hours later, when it was over, they both gladly left the arena and drove to the outskirts of the city, where they found a new shopping
mall. They wandered around together in the midst of sale signs and racks of last year’s fashions and temporary counters filled with junk jewelry. The girl bought two pairs of earrings and did not ask why she never saw tiaras in jewelry stores, which was something she had wondered herself, when she was young. The prom queen, not her, not even a friend, had worn a tiara, so they must have been available then, somewhere. They were neither of them hungry, they’d eaten everything served to them, including pumpkin tarts, but they sat down to a diet coke and watched everyone else who’d been at the luncheon wander around the mall. Then it was nearly five o’clock and she said they should get on the road. The girl had school in the morning, and the sitter might be getting tired.

‘She looks so fat on TV,’ she said. ‘She’s really not all that fat.’ The girl laughed in complicity.

In the car, on a whim, she dug out the road map and found the big dam. They would have to take smaller, older roads to see it and she asked the girl if she was interested, told her it might take a little longer going home than coming, if they decided to venture off. ‘Sure,’ she said. ‘Why not?’

She was glad the girl was game, capable of handling all this distance between their position here in the east central part of this huge province and home.

She knew next to nothing about the dam, but she’d seen lots of others and she could improvise if she had to. They could get some books on it when they got home. There might even be a school project on it some day.

It would take about an hour and a half to get near it and then some determining which little side roads to choose to get right up to the thing. She drove easily, there was no traffic left for the old highway, not with the new dead straight four-lane fifty miles to the west. She felt confident, anticipating the curves and she set the cruise control again, relaxed. They cut through farmland and then into bush, far more bush than she’d seen in this province. The prairie ceased to be open and she began to wonder if this side trip was wise. The sun that remained was behind the trees, blocked, and dusk, she knew, would be brief. She put the headlights on. There had been a time when she loved being in the car in the dark, like a space traveller, someone chosen, the blue white dash lights crucial, reliable, contributing precise information, the darkness around her body a release. Some of her best moments had been in dark cars.

The girl was quiet beside her, thinking. About the Queen? About her new earrings, which pair she would allow her sister to borrow if she promised not to leave them somewhere, or trade with a friend? About the boy who could no longer talk to her, normally?

The deer appeared in the corner of her eye. It had every chance. It was thirty yards ahead of them, in the other lane. All it had to do was freeie. Or dive straight ahead, or veer left, lots of choices. She threw her arm across her daughter’s chest, forgetting that she was belted in, and she kept her steering as steady as she could with just one firm hand. She braked
deliberately, repeatedly. She did not slam the pedal to the floor. She locked her jaw. Just hold tight, she told the deer. Just close your eyes and hold tight. When it dove for the headlights she yelled Shit and brought her arm away from the girl's chest back to the wheel. And then it was over. She'd hit it.

Before she could say don't look, the girl did. 'I think you took its leg off,' she said. 'Why didn't you stop? Why did you have to hit it?'

She saw again the right headlight coming into sudden, irrevocable contact with the tawny hindquarter, all in silence. The thump belonged to something else, seemed to come neither from the car nor from the deer. 'You killed a deer,' the girl said.

She pulled the car over to the side of the dark road and they sat there, waiting for her to do something. She put her hand on the door handle and unbuckled but she made no further move. Wherever it was, it was beyond her help. Her daughter looked back again.

'He's in the ditch. I think he's trying to climb out of the ditch.'

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'I couldn't go off the road to save him. We'd be the ones in the ditch if I'd tried. I'm really sorry.'

She pulled slowly back onto the road and, remembering her seat belt, buckled up. She took note of the reading on the odometer.

'Are we just going to go?' the girl asked.

'I'll have to find someone to kill it,' she said. 'We'll stop in the next town. That's all there is to do. I don't feel really good about this either.'

The girl sat in silence, pushed down into her seat.

Ten minutes later there was a town, a small group of houses clustered around one long main street, the only sign of life at the Sands Hotel. She pulled in and parked beside a blue half-ton.

'T'll just go in and talk to someone,' she said. 'You might as well wait here. I won't be long.'

She got out and walked to the front of the car. The fog lamp was bent like a wall-eye and the glass on the headlight was broken but there was no blood. She'd broken bones, not skin. She noticed for the first time a symbol on the Volvo's grille, the Greek symbol for the male, the circle with the arrow pointing off north-east. She remembered the first time she'd seen it, when she was a girl, wholeheartedly in love with Ben Casey, with his dark face and his big arms, a precursor to the men she would really love, later. And now it was later than later and here she was in a bleak prairie town with grey hair growing out of her head, with an angry adolescent in her car and a mangled deer twelve kilometers behind her on the road.

Inside the hotel she went directly to the young blond bartender to explain what she'd done but she'd known the instant she was in the bar which of them would be the one to go back and find the deer and finish it off. They were sitting in a large group around a table, watching her, eight or ten of them in green and brown and plaid, drinking beer and
Deer Heart

55

coffee. She knew she looked ridiculous to them in her boots and her long
dark trench coat with the oversized shoulders, like something out of a bad
war movie. Still, they waited in well mannered silence for her to speak.

'Talk to him,' the kid at the bar said, pointing. She approached the table
and a couple of them, the older ones, tipped their hats. One of these hat­
tippers leaned back in his chair and said, 'Pussycat, pussycat, where have
you been?' and it took her a few stalled seconds to reply, 'I've been to
London to visit the Queen.' He chuckled and saluted her with his coffee.

'I've hit a deer,' she said. 'About twelve kilometers back. I was wonder­
ing if someone could maybe take care of it.' She looked at the one she'd
chosen.

'North?' he asked.

'Yes,' she said. 'On number 10.'

'How bad?' he asked.

'I think I pretty well ruined his hindquarters,' she said.

'Your car,' he said. 'I meant your car.' There was no laughter.

'The car's all right,' she said. 'I think my insurance will cover it.'

'You have to report it,' he said. 'You should phone the wildlife people.
Unless you want to pay the two-hundred deductible. You call and report
it now, it's the deer's fault.'

'Is there a phone then?' she asked.

He led her out of the bar into a cold back room. The light was amber,
muted, dusty. There was a stained sink in the corner and a battered
leather couch along one wall, the rest of the room was filled with liquor
cases, stacked four feet high. There was a pay phone, and beside it, taped
to the doorframe, a list of phone numbers. He put his own quarter in and
dialed the number for her.

She took the phone and talked to a woman who put her through to a
man and she gave him all the information she could, the time and loca­
tion, her registration and license numbers, her apologies. She couldn't tell
him how old the deer might have been.

While she stood there, reporting the incident, the man stayed on the arm
of the couch, watching her. She became aware of her perfume and her
long, wild hair.

When she was finished he got up and stood beside her. 'Someone hits
da deer here about once a week,' he said. He reached behind her head and
turned down the collar of her trench coat, slowly. She would not have
been surprised if his mouth had grazed her forehead. 'I can check your
car.'

'The car's okay,' she said. 'The engine didn't take any damage.'

'Whatever,' he said.

'My daughter's out there,' she said. 'She's pretty upset.'

'Yeah,' he said. 'This kind of thing is hard on kids.'

Outside, he hunched down in the light from the hotel sign and ran his
hand over the shattered glass. 'Looks like it was a young deer,' he said,
standing up, stretching. He opened the car door for her and she climbed in behind the wheel. 'I'll go back for it,' he said. 'I've got my gun in the truck.'

'Thank you,' she said.

He tucked her coat around her legs and closed the door.

On the highway again, the girl listened to the explanation of the procedure. She sat in silence for a long time, her legs under her on the seat, trying, in spite of the seat-belt, to curl up. When her mother turned on the radio, to some easy listening music, she began.

'I don't see why she has to be there every week-end we go to Dad's,' she said. 'I don't see why we have to see her lying in bed in the morning. I think it's rude.'

'Where did this come from?' she asked. But she knew where it came from. It came from a very young woman riding in a dark car through the bush with her mother.

'You could tell your Dad if it bothers you, her being there when you are. Or I could, if you want me to.'

'I already have,' the girl said. 'He just tells her. They don't care.'

'Your Dad cares,' she said. 'He's not himself. He misses you, he's told me.'

'She bought that nightshirt I wanted, the mauve one,' she said. 'She bought it for herself. And she doesn't get dressed till lunch time.' She reached for the radio and punched in a rock station. 'She's everywhere you look.'

'That's why you changed your mind about the nightshirt?' she asked. There was no answer.

The young lady in question had not shown any particular skill at the unenviable task of winning the affections of a middle-aged man's half-grown kids. Though she'd tried. One weekend she'd even done their wash, an effort to appease the mother who bitched about sending them off clean and getting them back, always, in disorder. When they got home they'd stood in the kitchen emptying their week-end bags, showing off their clean clothes. In her pile, the girl discovered pink bikini panties not her own. She tossed them across the room to her sister, who screeched and pitched them like a live hand grenade to her defenseless brother, who cringed at the sight of panties of any kind.

'She loves your Dad,' she said.

'Because you won't,' the girl said.

'I'll talk to him,' she offered.

'Don't bother,' the girl said. 'I'll just get a lecture about how everyone's got a right to be happy and all that crap.'

'It's not crap,' she said.

She wanted to be his wife again, just for a little while. She wanted to talk to him about what people, very young people, had a right to. She'd heard more than once, from her friends, from the inarticulate counsellor, from
a homemakers' magazine, the theory that kids could withstand a lot. All you had to do was look around you, all these kids, carrying right on. She bought into it herself, sometimes, taking pride in their hard-won stability, their distracted smiles. Good little pluggers.

The girl stared out her window, watching the bush. 'Don't ever expect me to say good-morning to some boyfriend of yours.'

'No,' she said. 'I won't be expecting that.'

They drove on. She could think of nothing light and harmless to say, nothing would come.

'I saw this TV show,' she said, hesitating.

The girl waited.

'There was a woman standing in front of a mirror, she was very unhappy. It was just a dumb mini-series. Anyway, she was standing talking into this mirror, to someone behind her, and she said when she was a kid she'd been driving with her father in a car, at night, like we are, and it was winter, there was a lot of snow, and they saw a deer draped over a fence. It was dead. She said she began to cry and her father told her it was all right. He told her that deer have a trick. When they're trapped like that they don't have to wait to die. They can make their hearts explode.'

'A trick,' the girl said.

'I think it would be fright,' she said. 'I think it would be a heart attack brought on by fright. That would be the real explanation. But it means that our deer could be out of its misery before the man gets to it, maybe even before we left it in the ditch.'

Even as she recited this she knew it was unlikely. She assumed the deer was back there dying, not far from the ditch, the hard way. It would likely see him approach, hear the soft 'Easy now. Easy.'

And she knew that one of them would hold the deer in her mind for a long time, not dying, but fully alive in the bright shock of the headlights. And that the other would hold it just as long cold, wide-eyed, after the hunter.
Tonight, snow comes squalling from the north:
It curfew streets to silence,
Smothers footsteps, car tyres, voices
From the golden doorways of pubs.

Driving into flickering ice-flames,
Rooftops are preened with cold’s plumage;
Headlights glance on white wings
That beat in steady sweeps of snow.

The road dips and turns, brakes slew the car
Into invisible bends, tyres lurch
As it climbs in an agonizing gear
Onto a hilltop where drifts bury the moor.

Below, lines of yellow lights waft out,
Wind spins its flakes over Burnley;
The town falls asleep, house by house,
Surrendering to the white bird’s dreams.

Dead trees lean out from the dark:
Headlights amaze their eyeless staring,
Their lost souls clamour in the wiper blades,
Hiss under the tyres’ treachery.

Only my hands between this and me:
They poke out from the grey cuffs of my coat,
Wrenching the car away where it swerves
Towards oblivion.

I’m home, those wings still kissing my face:
Up behind that window she’s sleeping, not knowing
I’m here at last – still breathing, still holding
My breath – as snow lets that first star through.

Their white hands flutter,
Curling cigarette smoke
That quiet speech punches away;
Their knuckle-points maroon softly
Clenched fists beating to 'sixties singles
Spun from the juke-box.

Beyond this bar the shipyard clangs,
Tolling a far away busyness
Of labour and sweat and pay-days
Evaporating, vessel by vessel.
The river steals past, shifting
Its poisoned cargoes to the sea.

These men are waiting for a new scheme,
A new order, another half pint:
Trades have fallen from their hands
Like money they could not save
Fell from their pockets,
Like days fall from the calendar,
Or ash from a trembling cigarette.

A door opens and swings shut,
Shocking the blue air with cold.
The men look up, greet him, look down;
All the old scores are forgotten
Or have died.

Through half-frosted windows
Telegraph lines are scrawled across
Sky's blank order-sheet, delaying
Pigeons who bear no other message
But their shit.

Another war would do the trick:
That incandescent vision of plenty,
Its ribbons of steel rolling from the forge
To plate another frigate.
But the new wars are far away,
And the dying is foreign and far away
Like an unaffordable holiday.
On the television, squaddies lug water
From landrovers to the blinding sand.
A helicopter lets out a general
Who holds his hat and salutes the dunes.
At New Brighton a trash of plastic
Lolls at the tide’s edge.

In the corner the men glance up:
Someone swears, the barman laughs,
The dominoes go over, one by one.

Stephen Gray

SEASON OF VIOLENCE

has not ended; was due to close;
termination was fully announced –
prayer-day now throughout the nations –

the air is cluttered with silent words –
can’t breathe for ascending petitions;
not over yet; only begun

a derailment at Mariannhill;
Sunday is another killer in South Africa;
take a philosophical view:

‘O Lord afford me detachment
from those who want to but don’t know how;
bullets through flesh fly easily’

As Archbishop Tutu said Martin Luther
King said: ‘those who live an eye
for an eye end up blind people’

will not end; for ever and ever;
help out now; Amen.
TYRANNY OF KNIVES

for cutting bread not bodies
tomatoes, not sunk into my heart

having escaped knives narrowly
I am not fond of them
the damage they may do
out of the kitchen rack
pressed against my skin

take your weapons and throw them in the sea,
said the sage of disarmament

take this blade from my artery
if now my neck is slit
how do you intend to use me?
I shall not be able to assist
in your vandalous activity

there are other voices I would hear
a while longer of those I love:
not shut-up, give me –
no, you give me my life,
it’s at the point of your knife
do not press.

PROPOSITION

In those former days to say I loved you
meant I depended on you to alter my life

this did not happen: disturbance there was
but no matter how we tried no break occurred

I must thank you for trying to change me
God knows it cost you, before you left
somehow over time that difference took place
call it molecular arrangements their own code

there was no straight trajectory I have grown
apart from what I was destined to be

now love as an active agent is gone
I find I love you all the more

without conditions or expectations without
promises even or intentions, but: firmly.

Therefore I propose we try this new bond
see this time about your deeper structure.

WHAT DO THESE WRITERS HAVE IN COMMON?

Chinua Achebe, Ama Ata Aidoo, Thea Astley, E. Kamau Brathwaite,
Erna Brodber, J.M. Coetzee, David Dabydeen, Nadine Gordimer, Wilson
Harris, Marion Halligan, Jack Hodgins, Chris Koch, Bob Marley, Frank
Moorhouse, Alice Munro, Les A. Murray, Caryl Phillips, Olive Senior,
Wole Soyinka, Randolph Stow, Aritha van Herk, Derek Walcott, Rudy
Wiebe.

KUNAPIPI!
Lauris Edmond

SQUARE-DANCE THEME 1

I

You, Clara Eliza, five-foot legendary grandmother,
battling wood fires in a freezing dawn,

riding to town with an empty purse, the old man
blank with booze – I can see you, moving about

in the dim grey weather where history lodges;
it whirls like fog over the Poukawa farm –

now it clears, and you’re there in the gig reining
in a bolting horse, three terrified children

gripping your skirt ... I think I have always
known you, from tales that had their first telling

three years before I was born, when consumption
at last devoured you. August little lady, you used
every second of your dense half century creating
a clan, taking for materials your doggedness,
imagination, love. It’s time, you know, that we met
more exactly – if a generation’s fifteen years,

four lie already between us. I step forward,
take your small calloused hand; the skin’s weathered,

quite dark, but your brown eyes are sharp and –
no one had told me this – glinting with laughter.
II

You, sudden tall woman looming up through
the drift of the years, shaking my sleep; yes,
they do matter, the stories, bolting horses,
children learning to read by candlelight ... yet

I'm surprised you know them. It's true then,
the unnoticed accumulations of days in the end

built a community, a tribe, connected still by
blood, shared knowledge; and you are the grand-daughter

I never saw, come to me out of the inscrutable
future. What shall I tell you? Of Aunt Rose,

writing from London, 1882, 'Why, Clara, you are
blest, you are highly honoured, being a housewife'

– and truly it was a high calling, the endurance,
the shaping patience; let none misrepresent

its homely splendour. But I see you know this
already; perhaps it is my gift to you, and has

seeped, safe and strong, down through the crowded
years. And yours? Words, the winds that blow back

the years' inertia. We give then, and receive.
My blessing on you, on your children, and theirs.
SQUARE-DANCE THEME 2

I

Now I turn to the clearer quotidian weather of morning and evening; no ambiguous mist here

but streets, houses, a room festooned with the treasures of 13-year-old occupation –

RUTH in extravagant colours, photos, plants, books, and you at the centre, dark-eyed girl,

first grandchild, with the velvet bloom skin and already humorous smile. How can I tell you

of long-dead Clara, how show you the silent peak of the mind on which I stand, looking back

a whole century to her, forward to you, sweetly alive here, carrying like a lively germ

the secrets of future time – including, I believe, outrageous machines humming away in houses

of magic where you will easily come and go. But to family matters; that small long-skirted woman

used all her wisdom, her staunchness, to nourish her children; you too, daughter of many daughters,

latest inheritor, will likely give birth to a girl who in turn will depart for a later, stranger time.

II

We pick up and carry this baggage, each for a spell conceiving our labour as mothers with passion,

and a fine and healing delight; we grow larger of heart as we learn to allow our pain.

And each of us plucks from the present, as a new fruit, a variant, is added to earlier strains.
I cannot know yours, though I guess that
the brilliant brushwork in this child’s scrap-book

will one day declare you the artist, the woman.
Grandmamma Clara wrenched from her back country

farm skill with horses and with medicines found
in the bush; but you will mature among women

with a larger pride in their powers; take what
we offer, the learnt habits, the faith; respect them,

and alter them. Hers was a raw land, yours knows
itself older and darker; like us you will make

new garments of old and durable threads. Take my hand
now, as I took and held hers, feel the current,

the tingle of courage she passes through me to you.
Keep it and use it, through unimaginable beginnings.

Kirsten Holst Petersen

TRAVELLING: AUSTRALIAN STYLES
For Anna and Mark

As we drove into London
she relived the excitement, thirty years ago
of her first visit,
the magic of names come true,
Piccadilly and London Bridge,
the real thing and her there
with photos to prove it.
He shifted his cramped legs
in the too small car
and decided on 'yeah' and 'really'
as the appropriate answers
to undue enthusiasm.
I held my breath in the back of the car.

We entered the city,
swarming with bowler hats and umbrellas.
'Lousy weather' he observed.
She pointed out the Bank of England,
heavy grey stone, guarding the nerve centre
of an empire—
He admired the flower display
in the window boxes.

The river and bridges
gratefully accepted their
'really'.
Big Ben, unfortunately,
was covered in scaffolding,
and Buckingham Palace
occasioned a story
about Princess Margaret
wearing high-heeled shoes
on Bondi Beach,

but Kew Gardens
in a riot of spring blossom
seemed to please
despite the steady drizzle,
and the hot house, of course,
almost like home.
Eveline Tindale

FLAT HEAD

I saw her walking down the street
to meet her lover boy. She had
no head, no brain, was flat where her head
should have been. Although,
her face was in tact.

Lover boy was a bully who laughed
at the flat of her head. But he kissed
her face and said she was cute
for her age. She smiled and said,
he wasn’t as bad as she thought.

I saw them drinking at the bar.
He was drunk, she was nearly so.
He laughed at the flat of her head,
asked the barman to give her a hat.
She took it well, on the chin, they said.

They left in a car, a black limousine.
They sat in the back and his friends
piled in too, for laughs, they said.
He put his hand up her dress, to get
a feel for the lay of the land, he said.

She said it was time to go home,
but they booed and said, not yet.
They took off her pants and held
her tight, while each had a go
at the girl with no head.

All done, they dropped her at home.
They weren’t so bad those lads.
Mother said, dear, what have you done?
They raped me, she said. Have you lost
your head, mother said.
I saw her coming down the street
to meet her loverboy, who was a bully.
She had no head, no brain, no legs.
But her shoulders were big, her arms
were strong, and she longed
to kiss the bully boy.

ODE TO CHILD PROTECTION WORKERS
AND THE CULTURE WHICH GAVE RISE TO THEM

When I was a little girl,
my father fucked me.
My mummy said,
it wasn’t true.
Now I walk on broken glass
and my baby cries:
You fucked me, too.

And all the birds in the air
fell asighing and asobbing
and they cried: Me too! Me too!

Me too!
ANNE MAXWELL

The Debate on Current Theories of Colonial Discourse

In a recent article entitled 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse',¹ Benita Parry is critical of the recent trend in contemporary anticolonialist criticism to 'disown work done within radical traditions other than the most recently enunciated heterodoxies'.² In her opinion the contemporary taste for 'theory' has led to the down-grading of the anti-imperialist discourses of colonial liberation movements begun in the 1950s, and in particular the 'exemplary and exceptional radical stance' of Fanon. And she warns that this development may result in a criticism which is unable to withstand the force of the dominant order. In taking up such a position, Parry claims to be siding with critics such as Edward Said and Abdul Jan Mohamed, for whom resistance requires not a return to a transparent realism, but an oppositional stance (she is particularly impressed by Jan Mohamed's theory of Manichean aesthetics);³ and to be distancing herself from critics like Horni Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, who confine themselves to the purely negative task of deconstructing the texts of colonialism.

Spivak is the main target of Parry's disapproval. In particular, Parry is critical of Spivak's obliteration of the role of the native 'as historical subject and combatant, possessor of another knowledge and producer of alternative traditions';⁴ for in Parry's view it is the appeal to the equal aspects of native tradition which furnishes the colonized with an alternative representational framework or form of language from which to fashion a combatant subjectivity or self. Such a figure, she argues, is represented by the character of Christophine, the recalcitrant black native woman in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea.⁵ According to Parry, Spivak 'misconstrues' Christophine, seeing her as only a tangential figure whose image is conflated with that of the similarly marginalized character of Antoinette, the white Creole woman who is also 'native' to the colonies. Interpreted thus, Christophine is effectively silenced by the epistemic violence of imperialism, her presence merely serving to mark the limits of the European text. By way of contrast to this explication of Christophine as an unknown, because silenced entity, Parry gives her the status of both speaking subject and interpreter who acts to disrupt it.⁶ In this respect, she judges Spivak's approach to be even less radically subversive than Bhabha's; for he at least
offers the colonized some hope of being able to challenge colonial authority through the mimicry of colonial discourse. This is ‘a mode of contradictory utterance that ambivalently re-inscribes both colonizer and colonized’. Despite this distinction, however, Parry remains generally critical of Bhabha’s stance. After all, as Bhabha himself concedes, ‘The place of differences and otherness, or the space of the adversarial, within such a system of “disposal” as I’ve proposed, is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional’.8

This brings me to Parry’s second complaint against Bhabha’s and Spivak’s methods – their refusal of a Manichean discourse based on binary oppositions. Hence her observation that their narratives of colonialism serve to ‘obscure the “murderous and decisive struggle between two protagonists”, and discount or write out the counter-discourses which every liberation movement records’.9 What is being targeted here is the purely ‘deconstructive’ nature of their critical approach – its decision to do no more than ‘place incendiary devices within the dominant structures of representation and not to confront these with another knowledge’.10 This is a failure which is reflected in a further weakness of their work, namely its ‘exorbitation of discourse and a related incuriosity about the enabling socio-economic and political institutions and other forms of social praxis’.11 In short, the charge is that their use of deconstruction is a narrowly ‘textualist’ one which does not allow for any point outside of discourse from which concrete forms of opposition can be marshalled. Not surprisingly, Parry is also highly critical of both Bhabha’s and Spivak’s dissolving of the binary opposition colonizer/colonized in favour of a much less differentiated concept.12 The power of this opposition, she argues, lies precisely in its ability to recover humanism’s idea of the unified self. As against this, deconstruction has little more to offer than ‘a silent place laid waste by imperialism’s epistemic violence, or an agonistic space within which unequally placed contestants negotiate an imbalance of power’.13

To summarize, what Parry is attacking is the critic’s refusal to attribute to the colonized a unified consciousness or speaking voice which will enable him or her to stand in unmitigated antagonism to the oppressor. This is the result of an inordinate preoccupation with ‘theory’, and in particular deconstruction’s critique of the sovereign subject. Instead, Parry believes that critics should be concentrating on articulating the margins, and gaining control of the way in which the marginalized are represented. This is to take seriously Said’s claim that feminism, black, ethnic and anti-imperialist studies all rest similarly upon one ethico-discursive principle, ‘the right of formerly un- or misrepresented human groups to speak for and represent themselves in domains defined, politically and intellectually, as normally excluding them, usurping their signifying and representing functions, over-riding their historical reality’.14

Parry’s position is admirable in its intent, but is surely not without its own problems, the most serious of which are her quarrel with deconstruc-
tion or 'theory', and her perception of the colonized as being the holder of an authentic, sovereign voice. But let us start with her quarrel with deconstruction or 'theory'. The idea that deconstruction reflects a failure to connect textual subversions to concrete forms of struggle in the world appears to be an example of what Homi Bhabha has condemned as 'the damaging and self-defeating assumption ... that theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged'. 15 For according to him, it is part of this heterodoxy that '[t]he Olympian realms of what is mistakenly labelled "pure theory" are assumed to be eternally insulated from the historical exigencies and tragedies of the wretched of the earth'. 16 Bhabha’s defence of theory rests on its ability to reveal or analyse the processes involved in the ideological production of representational images. He argues that the categorical distinction between practice and theory, or politics and text, overlooks the metaphorical and rhetorical force of writing as 'a productive matrix which defines the "social" and makes it available as an objective of/for action'. Hence, '[t]extuality is not simply a second-order ideological expression or a verbal symptom of a pre-given political subject'; 17 it too can be a force for social change. Indeed, for Bhabha, theory has more to offer in the way of hope for the oppressed than the sort of criticism which attempts to resurrect the rigid binary oppositions which inform 'identity', for what must never be forgotten is that the latter carries with it its own legacy of violence:

Must we always polarize in order to polemicize? Are we trapped in a politics of struggle where the representation of social antagonisms and historical contradictions can take no other form than a binarism of theory vs. politics? Can the aim of freedom or knowledge be the simple inversion of the relation of oppressor and oppressed, margin and periphery, negative image and positive image? Is our only way out of such dualism the espousal of an implacable oppositionality or the invention of an originary counter-myth of radical purity? Must the project of our liberationist aesthetics be for ever part of a totalizing, Utopian vision of Being and History that seeks to transcend the contradictions and ambivalences that constitute the very structure of human subjectivity and its systems of cultural representation? 18

Here, Bhabha is exploding the myth of the 'transparency' of the human agent and the reasonableness of political action at the heart of the liberal tradition. In contrast to this stark concept of politics, whose space can only be Right or Left, theory opens up the ambivalent and phantasmic texts that make 'the political' possible:

The language of critique is effective ... to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of 'translation'; a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the Other, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the 'moment' of politics. 19
For the radical critic, the advantage of theory lies in its being able to prevent a relationship of simple identity forming between the political objective and its means of representation. In denying an essentialist logic and a mimetic referent to political representation, it cuts through the moralism that usually accompanies political separatism. In this sense, its impact can be described as ideological. This is not to deny the importance of more overtly material or political forms of anti-colonial struggle: theory cannot of itself substitute for these. Rather, it is to challenge the belief that theory is not a radically subversive force.

Though for the most part Parry appeals to a Manichean model of identity, and thereby carefully avoids the slide toward essentialism, there are nevertheless moments when her argument hinges on the notion of authenticity. One such moment is her appeal to native culture as the platform from which a recalcitrant identity can be fashioned. This appeal is, I would suggest, responsible for her misconception of Bhabha's project. Take, for example, her assertion that 'by showing the wide range of stereotypes and the shifting subject positions assigned to the colonized in the colonialist text, [Bhabha] sets out to liberate the colonial from its debased inscription as Europe's monolithic and shackled Other, and into an autonomous native "difference"'.20 Or consider her subsequent conclusion that, in Bhabha's work 'the subaltern has spoken, and his readings of the colonialist text recover a native voice'.21 I would like to know how we can reconcile this idea of the autonomy of the speaking subject not only with Bhabha's own theses concerning the ambivalence of colonial discourse and the refraction of the subjectivity of both colonizer and colonized, but also with his claim that the only space of resistance on offer to the colonized is the mimicry or parody of the speech of the colonizer.22

A further difficulty occurs with respect to her invocation of Said's concept of oppositional criticism. At first glance, this might seem easy to reconcile with her appeal to Fanon's theory of a unified consciousness for the colonized, which is collective and stands in unmitigated antagonism toward the oppressor. But in fact Said's oppositional criticism 'posits "nothing less than new objects of knowledge ... new theoretical models that upset or at the very least radically alter the prevailing paradigmatic norms"'23 precisely because these are based on an unmitigated antagonism and hatred of the Other.24 In appealing to Said's notion of oppositional consciousness Parry is therefore ignoring his rejection of the Manichean discourse adopted by Fanon. As far as Said is concerned, the destructive forms of representation used by both colonizer and colonized alike must be replaced by more positive and conciliatory modes which emphasize the overlapping of cultural boundaries and the interdependence of the historical narratives belonging to either side. This would involve abandoning fixed ideas of settled identity and culturally authorized definition.25 Said's own interpolation of Fanon gives prominence to the latter's vision of a new form of identity which recognizes both racial and class equality as
well as the idea of the collective.\textsuperscript{26} This is a reading which emphasizes the dialectical nature of Fanon’s program of counter-insurgency in order to down-play any importance given to a destructive or antagonistic phase based on the recovery of native traditions. This is perhaps to be expected given Said’s idea that nativism invariably gives rise to a ardent practice of separatism.

Both Bhabha’s defence of theory and Said’s dialectical interpretation of Fanon should perhaps serve to warn us that the emphasis which Parry places on nativism in her own reading of Fanon may be attributable to an unspoken desire to retain the antagonistic paradigms of identity. A careful reading of Fanon would lend support to this hypothesis, for it reveals that although the appeal to native culture does help to facilitate the production of a new self, it never assumes anything like the cardinal role that it does in Parry’s account. Moreover, in my opinion Said is quite right to give more weight to the conciliatory aspects of Fanon’s program than to what he perceives as its unwonted element of violence, particularly since it is Fanon’s dream of producing a radically new form of humanism – tolerant of heterogeneity – which distinguished his narrative of nationalism from the one sustaining European imperialism. But in stressing the placatory moments of Fanon’s program at the expense of its more dissonant phase, it would seem that it is also Said’s intention to dissuade post-colonial intellectuals from appealing to an authentic or originary identity. His ulterior motive would seem to be to keep the space of the Other from being appropriated by the still powerful arm of western imperialism, this time round in the form of the dominant narratives of postmodernism. For according to Said, despite inroads made by earlier anti-colonialist intellectuals such as C.L.R. James and Fanon, the struggle for control of cultural representation continues unabated today, the latest target for appropriation being the ‘otherness’ or ‘difference’ of the non-European world.\textsuperscript{27}

In this connection, Said has drawn our attention to the way in which the relentless celebration of ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’ by First World intellectuals has reached the status of ‘spectacle’, with the unfortunate result that Western intellectuals have felt they can continue to blatantly ignore the presence of the Third World. As a case in point, he singles out Jean-François Lyotard, who accounts for the phenomenon of postmodernism in terms of a loss of the legitimizing power of the great narratives of emancipation and Enlightenment, and their replacement by smaller local narratives legitimated by their users’ ability to manipulate the codes in order to get things done.\textsuperscript{28} According to Said this is an explanation which shows Lyotard to be guilty of separating Western postmodernism from the non-European world, and from the consequences of European modernism and modernization in the colonized world. For Said, Lyotard’s narrative represents the culminating stage of a process of relentless aestheticization and sterilization of modernism – a dynamic which can be traced through Albert Camus’s version of Algeria. For in stark contrast to Fanon’s Arabs,
those of *La Peste* and *L’Etranger* are ‘nameless beings used as background for the portentous European metaphysics explored by Camus, who, we should recall, in his *Cronique algérienne* denied the existence of an Algerian nation’. 29

In place of the intrinsically one-sided, or ethnocentric accounts proffered by intellectuals such as Lyotard, Said would like to see narratives which take the Third World seriously by placing what it has to say on equal terms with its own explanations. The current dearth of such material within the First World can be attributed to a failure on the part of its present-day intellectuals to attend to the fuller global context in which the West’s ideological productions occur – something which Said believes is being covered over by the vogue for ‘thick descriptions and blurred genres’ which only act to ‘shut and block out the clamor of voices on the outside asking for their claims about empire and domination to be considered’. 30 Nor does he consider that the recovery of this fuller, more responsible perspective can be easily achieved. For instance, it isn’t a case of exercising a politically, or ideologically disinterested form of reason based on aestheticism or theory as distinct from ethics or morality; for as history has shown this kind of reason always works to the advantage of the West. Rather, about the best that responsible critics can do is to uncover the political interests concealed behind the rarefied institutional practices of interpretation produced by their own culture:

In short what is now before us nationally, and in the full imperial panorama, is the deep, the profoundly perturbed and perturbing question of our relationship to others – other cultures, other states, other histories, other experiences, traditions, peoples, and destinies. The difficulty with the question is that there is no vantage outside the actuality of relationships between cultures, between unequal imperial and non-imperial powers, between different Others, a vantage that might allow one the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating, and interpreting free of the encumbering interests, emotions, and engagements of the ongoing relationships themselves. When we consider the connections between the United States and the rest of the world, we are so to speak of the connections, not outside and beyond them. It therefore behooves us as intellectuals, humanists, and secular critics to grasp the role of the United States in the world of nations and power, from within the actuality, and as participants in it, not as detached outside observers who, like Oliver Goldsmith in Yeats’ marvellous phrase, deliberately sip at the honeypots of our minds. 31

Spivak, also, is highly critical of the current intellectual enterprise of constituting the colonial subject as Other, and in her article ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ she cautions post-colonial critics against such an undertaking by reminding them that wherever such a subjectivity is theorized by First World intellectuals, it is accompanied by the desire to conserve the Subject of the West. 32 She even ventures to suggest that ‘[t]he theory of pluralized “subject-effects” gives an illusion of undermining subjective sovereignty while often providing a cover for this subject of knowledge’. Hence her
contention that: 'The much-publicized critique of the sovereign subject thus actually inaugurates a Subject'. A good example of this kind of critique is a text entitled 'Intellectuals in Power' by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. In her analysis of this text, Spivak points to the inherent contradiction in Foucault’s and Deleuze’s claim concerning the contributions made by French post-structuralist theory to counter-hegemonic discourse. On the one hand they maintain that the networks of power/desire/interest are so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counterproductive – which is why a persistent critique is needed. On the other hand, insisting that intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know Society’s Other, they proceed to articulate it in terms which are at once Eurocentric (by reducing radical struggle to the ‘the worker’s struggle’) and essentialist (by appealing to the empirical reality of the worker’s ‘concrete experience’, as is seen in Foucault’s claims that ‘the masses know perfectly well’, and ‘they know far better than [the intellectual] and they certainly say it very well’). As Spivak notes, the latter lends support to a positivistic paradigm which in turn forms the justifying foundation of an advanced capitalistic neo-colonialism: This S/subject, curiously sewn together into a transparency by denegations, belongs to the exploiters’ side of the international division of labour. The source of this contradiction, so Spivak argues, lies in a failure to distinguish between two different categories of representation: representation as ‘speaking for’, as in politics; and representation as ‘re-presentation’, as in art and philosophy. Thus it is the opposition between ‘applied practice’ (suggested by the appeal to ‘concrete experience’) and ‘pure theory’ which conflates the two forms and affords the transparency of the intellectual.

For Spivak, Foucault’s effort to locate epistemic violence in the redefinition of sanity at the end of the European eighteenth century constitutes a powerful instance of the transparency of the intellectual, precisely because it fails to rewrite the history of the systematic suppressions and marginalizations of Western society since the eighteenth century in accordance with the discourses of ‘normativity’ effected by imperialism. In other words, in Foucault’s account what was represented as normal was deemed not to be the result of contact with other cultures. What is left out of such a version is a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to the taste of First World intellectuals because they are thought to be ‘insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledge, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity’. Such an attitude, Spivak contends, is oblivious to the possibility that European intellectuals can never ‘know’ the non-European in any way other than through the prism of their own desires:

It is impossible for contemporary French intellectuals to imagine the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other of Europe. It is not only that everything they read, critical or uncritical, is caught within the debate of
The Debate on Current Theories of Colonial Discourse

the production of that Other, supporting or critiquing the constitution of the Subject as Europe. It is also that, in the constitution of the Other of Europe, great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect, could occupy (invest?) its itinerary – not only by ideological and scientific production, but also by the institution of the law.\footnote{37}

To ask therefore what happens to the critique of the sovereign subject when it is applied to the knowledge of society’s Other leads to the realization that, in representing the subaltern, intellectuals represent themselves as transparent. This is another way of saying that the western project to constitute the colonial subject as Other itself constitutes an instance of epistemic violence.

If Said’s and Spivak’s views are to be taken seriously, then surely we must ask ourselves if Parry’s desire to rescue the native woman subject from out of the quiescence imposed on her by recent criticism has more in common with the sort of epistemic violence which Spivak has just been describing than with the ‘exceptional stance’ of Fanon. As Parry herself has noted, her own objective is in marked contrast to the position taken up by Spivak, in whose writings the native subject is historically muted as a result of ‘the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project’, where the native was prevailed upon to internalize as self-knowledge the knowledge concocted by the master. This required of the native that he rewrite his position as object of imperialism by domesticating the alien as Master and himself as a self-consolidating and silent Other, a process which brought about the European ‘worlding’ of the native’s own world. Hence the following premise:

No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self.... A full literary inscription cannot easily flourish in the imperialist fracture of discontinuity, covered over by an alien legal system masquerading as Law as such, an alien ideology established as only truth, and a set of human sciences busy establishing the ‘native’ as self-consolidating Other.\footnote{38}

If this is true of the native in a general sense then it is doubly true for the native as woman. Spivak’s observation that ‘One never encounters the testimony of the women’s voice-consciousness’, ‘There is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak’, ‘The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read’, and ‘The subaltern cannot speak’\footnote{39} is derived from studying the discourse of Sati, in which the Hindu patriarchal code converged with colonialism’s narrativization of Indian culture to efface all traces of woman’s voice. This study could conceivably be used as a starting point for a critique of Fanon’s reinscription of native culture as demonstrated by his story of the haik. Just as the tradition of widow sacrifice became a battleground for the competing discourses of Hindu patriarchy and imperialist culture – a terrain from which the voice of the
subaltern woman was excluded – so it is possible that Algerian women had little or no say in clashes between the revolutionaries and the French government over the wearing of the veil. A critique developed along these lines could prove an embarrassment to Parry’s attempt to rescue the notion of an autonomous speaking voice and unified subjectivity for the native or subaltern woman based on a revival of elements belonging to the traditional native culture.

The omission of women from the formation of both traditional and revolutionary forms of culture is not the only aspect of Fanon’s work which could serve to compromise Parry’s argument. In ascribing to traditional native culture the power to generate a new identity for the colonized, Parry is seriously violating the spirit of Fanon’s whole critique of nativism. For Fanon, native culture had but a transitional part to play in the revolutionary process. Indeed, its only role was in the second phase of liberation – the moment when the native, discovering that ‘the settler’s skin is not of any more value than a native’s skin’, turns away from the values of the colonizing culture and comes into touch again with those of his own people. Here, in contrast to the ‘individualism’ and ‘egoism’ of the settler, the native rediscovers the strength to be gained from communal ideals. This is the power of unity contained in ‘the substance of village assemblies, the cohesion of people’s committees, and the extraordinary fruitfulness of local meetings and groupments’. Above all, it is this new found communalism which forms the basis of the political cohesion of the colonized: ‘Henceforward, the interest of one will be the interests of all, for in concrete fact everyone will be discovered by the troops, everyone will be massacred – or everyone will be saved. The motto “look out for yourself”, the atheist’s method of salvation, is in this context forbidden.’

But what is being insinuated here is that bourgeois individualism isn’t the only enemy of liberation; it is also those aspects of traditional native culture, such as tribalism and chieftainship, which because of their inherently hierarchical qualities have proved to be compatible with the colonizer’s culture:

The colonial system encourages chieftaincies and keeps alive the old Marabout confraternities. Violence is in action all-inclusive and national. It follows that it is closely involved in the liquidation of regionalism and of tribalism. Thus the national parties show no pity all towards the raidis and the customary chiefs. Their destruction is the preliminary to the unification of the people.

Fanon has to get rid of these features of the native’s pre-colonial past because they contravene the notion that one can determine one’s own future. For that, an entirely new belief system is needed, based on the concrete reality of the present, or the common experience of confronting death at the hands of the colonizer. Hence his pronouncement that:
After centuries of unreality, after having wallowed in the most outlandish phantoms, at long last the native, gun in hand, stands face to face with the only forces which contend for his life — the forces of colonialism. And the youth of a colonized country, growing up in an atmosphere of shot and fire, may well make a mock of, and does not hesitate to pour scorn upon the zombies of his ancestors, the horses with two heads, the dead who rise again, and the djinns who rush into your body while you yawn. The native discovers reality and transforms it into the pattern of his customs, into the practice of violence and into his plan for freedom.

The place of nativism in Fanon’s decolonization program, then, is one of subordination to a revolutionary new culture which in its ‘fight against poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment’ is unashamedly modern and progressivist. Here is how Christopher Miller puts it: ‘Fanon allows the look backward into tradition, but only to the extent that it is “in the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and as a basis of hope”.’ Thus Fanon was in fact undermining the force of traditional native culture by brandishing a completely new type of identity based on progressivist Marxist principles. Only where traditional native culture undergoes a radical transformation and takes on new meaning is it conceived of as contributing to the fashioning of such an identity.

Of course it’s always possible that Parry’s gloss on Fanon’s use of native culture may be deliberate. Miller, for example, has pointed out that one of the most serious problems with Fanon’s theory of a new national culture based on Marxist precepts is that it has provided the inspiration for the heinous crimes of Guinea’s tyrannical leader Sékou Touré. And he adds that the problem of Marxism’s clash with ethnicity is nowhere more obvious than in Fanon’s dream of imposing a modern form of rationalism on Africa; for here it can be seen that what is meant to liberate people from the fetters of colonialism is imperialism in another guise.

Briefly, I would submit that Fanon’s use of the word ‘nation’ covers over important unresolved tensions between ethnicity and ethics: by placing the word at the center of his concern for evolution, without questioning the complexities of its application to different geographical and cultural environments, Fanon winds up imposing his own idea of nation in places where it may need reappraising. As David Caute has accurately pointed out, ‘It is curious that Fanon, who wanted to snap the bonds of European culture, should have transformed arbitrary European structures into the natural units of African progress’. Far from being ‘natural national entities’ or cohesive nation-states, the modern nations of black Africa must make do with borders created to satisfy European power brokering in the ‘scramble for Africa’, borders that violate rather than reinforce units of culture.

Miller’s is both a powerful and persuasive critique of Fanon’s progressivist concept of nationalism, and it raises important moral questions concerning the destruction of native or ethnic culture when anti-colonialist resistance acquires a Marxist mien. But even if Parry’s interpretation of Fanon is based on such a concern, there is still reason to be wary of those forms of
western intellectualism which exhort ethnicity. Spivak, for one, has noted that: ‘In the United States the third-worldism currently afloat in humanistic disciplines is often openly ethnic’.\(^47\) And she cautions that a nostalgia for lost origins can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities within the critique of imperialism.\(^48\) That Spivak places Parry in this category seems clear from her own assessment of the latter’s project. Parry’s criticisms, she says, are ‘well meaning’ but compromised by her insertion into the nineteenth-century anthropological mode; that is to say she is still caught within a system of belief which privileges ‘the native informant’, as if there is still a pure native voice to be heard.\(^49\) Included under the rubric of third-worldism is the feminist project to constitute the native subject as Other. That Parry might be party to such a practice is suggested by her own thesis that: ‘What Spivak’s strategy of reading necessarily blots out is Christophine’s inscription as the native, female individual Self [my emphasis] who defies the demands of the discriminatory discourses impinging on her person’.\(^50\) For this reference to the individual self places Parry fairly and squarely within First World feminist discourse, something which I believe is reinforced by her subsequent declaration that ‘it should be possible to locate traces and testimony of women’s voice[s] on those sites where women inscribed themselves as healers, ascetics, singers of sacred songs’.\(^51\) Such a proposal betrays the influence of a western feminism which attempts to articulate a separate women’s identity for western and non-western women alike through the recovery of a separate female tradition, while ignoring its own privileged positioning on the other side of the international division of labour.

Caught between the coercions of a totalizing counter-discourse of national liberation, and the epistemic violence implicit in the project of speaking for the colonial subject, what forms of resistance remain open to the subaltern woman? Having exposed the tacit imperialism behind the post-structuralist project of knowing and disclosing society’s Other, Spivak admits that the critic is still left with the problem of what constitutes a more recuperable project than the ‘clandestine restoration of subjective essentialism’. For an answer she looks to traditional Marxist theory and in particular to the critique of the individual as oppressed subject. Here the two different categories of representation referred to earlier are not conflated. Class consciousness consequently remains attached to the feeling of community that belongs to national links and political organizations, and not to that other experience of desire whose structural model is the family. Thus full class agency (if there were such a thing) is not an ideological transformation of consciousness on the ground level, a desiring identity of the agents and their interest, an identity whose absence troubles Foucault and Deleuze. Hence Spivak’s view is that a radical practice should attend to what she describes as Marx’s ‘double session’ of representations rather than introduce the individual subject through totalizing concepts of power and desire.\(^52\) Put more simply, it should insist on the
distinction between the plurality of subject-effects adduced by art and philosophy and the conscious subject of politics. She is also of the view that the critic would do well to follow Marx's example in keeping the area of class practices on the second level of abstraction (as distinct from the stage of 'concrete experience'), for by doing this Marx effectively kept open the Kantian (and Hegelian) critique of the individual subject as agent of history. And she further notes: 'It does seem to me that Marx's questioning of the individual as agent of history should be read in the context of the breaking up of the individual subject inaugurated by Kant's reading of Descartes'. All of this represents a solution compatible with the poststructuralist critique of the sovereign Subject.

For Spivak, what remains useful in Foucault is what she calls the mechanics of 'disciplinarization and institutionalization', the constitution, as it were, of the colonizer. This, she believes, can be used to much greater analytic and interventionist advantage than his invocations of the authenticity of the Other. In a similar vein to this kind of work is Spivak's own attempt to develop a strategy of reading that will 'speak to', as distinct from 'speaking for', the historically muted subaltern woman.

In seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the post-colonial intellectual systematically 'unlearns' female privilege. This systematic unlearning involves learning to critique post-colonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized.

Given that Parry's complaints against Spivak include her ignoring of the methods of liberation of the 1950s, it is ironical that Spivak alone endeavours to return post-colonial criticism to a Marxist notion of consciousness. Her aim here is mainly to take the emphasis off an individualist concept of freedom so as to return anti-colonial struggle to its roots in collective as well as political and economic freedom. The individualist concept of freedom is something adhered to by both Parry and western 'culture' critics in general, and would appear to have been developed out of Fanon's theories on the phenomenological self.

To summarize, recent debates are divided on the issues of whether or not the post-colonial intellectual should be engaged in the attempt to recover an autonomous form of subjectivity for the Others of Europe that will allow them to 'speak for themselves.' Such a view would have it that: 'The current post-structuralist/post-modern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity.' Vying with this argument is the one which believes that the theorizing of an autonomous subject for the colonized ministers to the desire of First World intellectuals to know and thereby control the Other of the West. Faced with this prospect, the most that post-colonial intellectuals can hope to do is to continue critiquing the
subject of the West. This is the position taken by Spivak who has argued that:

If instead we concentrated on documenting and theorizing the itinerary of the consolidation of Europe as sovereign subject, indeed sovereign and subject, then we would produce an alternative historical narrative of the 'worlding' of what is today called 'the Third World'. To think of the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English translation helps the emergence of the 'Third World' as a signifier that allows us to forget that 'worlding,' even as it expands the empire of the discipline.57

The ground covered by this article represents what remains today of the challenge to both colonial and neo-colonial forms of representation proffered by Fanon. The shifts which have taken place in the interim period would have to include the attempt on behalf of Western intellectuals to restore themselves to a position of global supremacy through the deployment of increasingly subtle methods of cultural appropriation, as well as the efforts of post-colonial intellectuals to respond in equally wily fashion. What the outcome of these changes will be is very hard to predict; the ground I have just covered, for instance, serves only to confirm that the space of representation opened up by Fanon is still being hotly contested.

NOTES

2. Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories,' p. 27.
4. Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories,' p. 34.
16. Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory,' p. 5.
18. Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory,' p. 5.
22. See Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,' October 28 (1984) pp. 130-32. Here Bhabha writes: 'The ambivalence of mimicry – almost but not quite – suggests that the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal. What I have called its 'identity-effects,' are always crucially split.'
23. Quoted in Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories,' p. 27.
27. Said, 'Representing the Colonized,' p. 213.
34. This is in fact a conversation. See Michael Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) pp. 205-17.
40. For Fanon's account of the Haik, see Frantz Fanon, 'Algeria Unveiled,' in A Dying Colonialism, trans. Haakon Chevalier (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) pp. 21-53. For an alternative story of the Haik written by Arab women, see Lila Abu-Lughod, Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in Bedouin Society (Berkeley: U. of California P, 1986). This book examines the multiple positions and the modes of personal as well as collective expression taken up by Arab women in response to the pressures of modern life and the traditional expectations of Arab society. See particularly the chapters on women's love poetry and the veil itself.
42. Fanon, The Wretched p. 74.
43. Fanon, The Wretched p. 45.
44. Fanon, The Wretched p. 74.
46. Miller, 'Ethnicity and Ethics,' pp. 89-90.
47. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' p. 281.
52. Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ p. 279.
55. As Bhabha has noted: ‘The body of [Fanon’s] work splits between a Hegelian-Marxist dialectic, a phenomenological affirmation of Self and Other, and the psychoanalytic ambivalence of the Unconscious, its turning from love to hate, mastery to servitude.’ See Homi K. Bhabha, ‘Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition,’ in *Remaking History*, eds. Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani, Dia Art Foundation Discussions in Contemporary Culture, No 4 (Seattle: Bay P, 1989), p. 133.

What do you give to friends who have everything?

**A SUBSCRIPTION TO KUNAPIPI**.
Defending the Heritage of the Language is a coded resistance to an English that is being reinvented by its multiple users, and is a sign of disquiet at the challenge which a polyglot and cosmopolitan migrant population presents to the holistic notion of 'the nation' constructed and fortified by a political and intellectual rearguard. Hence the quest of David Dabydeen’s Guyanese narrator to redefine his identity through producing prose in Standard English can be read as beseeching entry to a community imagined as being culturally and linguistically homogeneous. His is the standard dream of a bygone colonial elite where to write the oppressor’s language with proper attention to grammatical and syntactic rules is to be liberated from a colonized condition:

I suddenly long to be white, to be calm, to write with grace and clarity, to make words which have status, to shape them into the craftsmanship of English china, coaches, period furniture, harpsichords, wigs, English anything, for whatever they put their hands and minds to worked wonderfully. Everything they produced was fine and lasted forever. We are mud, they the chiselled stone of Oxford that has survived centuries and will always be here.¹

To the extent that Dabydeen’s roman à clef is constrained by the narrator’s performance of this aspiration, it resembles the normative apprenticeship novel, the tracing of an irregular route from colonial through immigrant deprivations to a place at Oxford, retaining resonances of already-read scenarios set in different climes and other times. That it turns out to be more than the enactment of his ambition is due to the narrator inadvertently fracturing the structure which his story seeks to set in place and on which it depends. For every prediction written into his chronicle of a journey towards assimilation is interrupted by the very utterances he would denigrate and deny, every move towards the projected goals diverted by voices recalling him from the urge to historical and cultural amnesia.

Many stories are now being told about the post-colonial diaspora in Britain; these are diverse in medium and modes of narration, and differentiated by the geographical origins, the cultural, class and occupational positions, the gender and sexual identities of the tellers. Dabydeen’s is told by a narrator who is a young heterosexual male, an Indian Guyanese descended from Hindu low-caste indentured labourers, and a parentless
school-boy immigrant in Britain. His is offered as a story of disentitlement, dispossession and lack. About his forebears’ homeland he is ignorant: ‘I had no knowledge whatsoever of India, no inkling of which part my ancestors came from, nor when they left, nor even their names’ (p. 10); of Hindu tradition and ritual he knows little, his great-great-grandfather having converted to Christianity, which similarly plays no part in the family’s life. His only connection to this discontinuous history and broken past is through his grandmother, who around her ankle wears a thick silver bracelet bequeathed by her mother and ‘which had come all the way from India’ (p. 36), and who is the bearer of legend and rumour about the family’s fortunes and misfortunes in Guyana.

What he does know is that they are Indians; despite which neither his mother’s fears of African-Caribbeans, exacerbated during the race riots on the eve of independence, nor the received wisdom about their propensity to violence and their ignorance, get in the way of his learning that the communities are united by a history of enforced migration, share a colonial condition and speak the same language. More than once he returns to his last meeting with Auntie Clarice – ‘truly she was old, her African face sprouting hairs between the cracks, like a golden apple-seed’ (p. 39) – who gives him a carefully-saved five-dollar bill and whose parting words ‘You is we, remember you is we’ (p. 40) later reverberate to arrest an impulse to separate himself from ‘noisy West Indian-ness’.

Deprivation, backwardness, incomprehension, incapacity are recurrent terms in his judgement of urban New Amsterdam and rural Albion Village, and are repeated in his perception of the post-colonial migrants in the rundown suburbs of England, his desire to make something of himself demanding an impossible forgetfulness: ‘All I want is to escape from this dirt and shame called Balham, this coon condition, this ignorance that prevents me from knowing anything, not even who we are, who they are.’ (p. 230). Instead his story is an act of remembrance without sentimentality about want, squalid living conditions, and drunkenness in Guyana, but not without piety for the culture of survival nurtured and sustained by its communities, and even as he withholds value from Creole as the speech of adversity and illiteracy, the vivid and versatile utterances of its speakers are a rebuke to his denials.

His narration of the black migration in Britain, while not without compassion, anger and wit, is marked by a determined detachment. Where the representation of this diaspora has tended to focus on cultural imbrication – whether effected in a glamorized underworld, amongst sophisticated metropolitans, on the meeting ground of sexual identities and political affiliations, and so on – Dabydeen’s social space is situated on the margins. Where other constructions have foregrounded refusal, assertion and affirmation in the redefinition of the migrant experience, Dabydeen’s players are timid and resigned, desirous of invisibility. Of his friend’s mother he observes that only on entering ‘the protected environment of
her house, the doors and curtains closed to alien eyes', its rooms dec­
orated in green, smelling sweetly of spices, its walls displaying pictures
of worshippers in Mecca does 'her sari reveal[ed] a grace and dignity'
(p. 25). The status of outsiders which he assigns the community is regis­
tered by their insufficiency in English, the shopkeeper's anxiety about the
wording stamped on his passport, 'permitted to remain in the United
Kingdom for an indefinite period', a sign of the inability to escape from
the immigrant condition: 'He would grow dismal, muttering about how
English was so hard, how every word had a dozen different understand­
ings, how he could barely pronounce the words, never mind glean their
multiple meanings.' (p. 124)

His is the world of landlords to destitute tenants, open-all-hours corner
grocers, owners of video shops, unskilled labour:

In the swift journey between Tooting Bec and Balham, we re-lived the passage from
India to Britain, or India to the Caribbean to Britain, the long journeys of a previous
century across unknown seas towards the shame of plantation labour ... families
scattered across the west, settling in one country or another depending on the avail­
ability of visas; we lived from hand to mouth, hustling or thieving or working
nightshifts and sleeping daytime; we were ashamed of our past, frightened by the
present and not daring to think of the future. (p. 17 and p. 168)

If Dabydeen's migrants necessarily inhabit two worlds and are contrib­
utors to the formation of Britain's contemporary protean cultures, their
limited access to English confines them to the periphery. When their more
aggressive children claim citizenship by becoming amateur pimps, small­
time drug-dealers and inexpert purveyors of pornography, their facility in
the foreign tongue is limited to its most debased forms, whether the inert
jargon of Business Plans or the brutalized vocabulary of sex magazines,
thus again condemning them to the margins.

In the narrator's book then proper English is real power, and he intends
to acquire both. The title is borrowed from a canonical work which the
underprivileged and ambitious schoolboy is studying for his 'A' Levels,
Kurtz's formal designation of his betrothed being used in several of its
alternative meanings, as aspiration and as transfiguration. This last is
registered in the narrator's recollections of the mosques and temples of
Guyana treasured by their users, 'their white-washed domes and elegant
turrets ... exhibitions of the beauty and idealism of their barefoot lives'
(p. 19). The former is performed by the boy in the care of the Social
Services who gets to read English at

But although it is he who realizes his ambition by formally moving to
the official centre - 'I am no longer an immigrant here, for I can decipher
the texts' (p. 195) - while the illiterate Joseph Countryman destroys him­
self, it is the visionary Rastafarian who is the fiction's figure of a utopian
desire. Lacking a command of Standard English but with a capacity to use words appropriate to his exorbitant intentions, Joseph undermines the certainties which the narrator naively avows, his untrained intelligence and untutored imagination a reproach to his friend’s eager participation in rites of the educational apparatus. Where the narrator accepts language as a pliant medium to be crafted by skilled users, and elevates writing over all other texts, Joseph knows that ‘Words are so full of cleverness ... Every word is cat with nine separate lives’ (p. 103), understands that a video camera is ‘a different kind of book’ (p. 105), and, obsessed with the word ‘cocoon’ while in a state of advanced disorientation, struggles to enunciate an inchoate version of how language is a system of meaning constituted by signs that are arbitrary and differential, dependent on conventions and relations:

They were the very first chaotic attempts he had made in his life to write something, apart from his name ... It’s me, all of that is me ... here is C and this one here is O and another C and two more O’s, and then N.... Look! C is half O... it nearly there, but when it form O it breaking up again, never completing.... A is for apple, B for bat, C is for cocoon, which is also coon, N is for nut, but it’s really for nuts, N is for nothing, N is for nignog. Can’t you see, all of it is me. (pp. 194-5)

While the narrator accedes to the requirements of the English Literature syllabus, quickly learning to apply the method of ‘theme and imagery’, ‘appearance and reality’ to any piece of writing he studies, Joseph protests at rules putting an iron-bar in a room where the bird of poetry is trapped, and refuses his friend’s facile explanation that Conrad’s blacks dying under the trees relate to the notion of suffering and redemption at the core of the novel’s concerns:

No, it ain’t, is about colours. You been saying is a novel ‘bout the fall of man, but is really ‘bout a dream.... The white light of England and the Thames is the white sun over the Congo that can’t mix with the green of the bush and the black skin of the people. All the colours struggling to curve against each other like rainbow, but instead the white light want to blot out the black and the green and reduce the world to one blinding colour ... The white man want clear everything away, clear away the green bush and the blacks and turn the whole place into ivory which you can’t plant or smoke or eat. Ivory is the heart of the white man. (pp. 98-9)

In contrast to the narrator’s search for recognition by the master culture through assimilation, Joseph withdraws from its gaze, absenting himself from the identity it would impose on him:

When I was in borstal I was rumour. They look at me and see ape, trouble, fist. And all the time I nothing, I sleep and wake and eat like zombie ... and no ideas in my mind, no ideas about where I come from and where I should be going. You can’t even see yourself, even if you stand in front of mirror, all you seeing is shape. But all the time they seeing you as animal, riot, nigger, but you know you is nothing, atoms, only image and legend in their minds. (p. 101).
To fashion a self Joseph positions himself as a Rastafarian and looks to Africa, urging the narrator to find a book ‘which told the whole story’ different from the one which said ‘that we don’t have any chemistry and sums ... That we walk about naked with other people’s bones through our noses ... That we eat each other’ (p. 108), and aspiring to register this identity through making a film of *Heart of Darkness* on his stolen video camera.

Thus the identity of Joseph, the graduate of Borstals and Boys’ Homes and the speaker of a deviant English, is multi-located, dispersed, creolized, whereas the narrator, who has proved his proficiency as a writer of the stepmother tongue, seeks a refashioning that requires him to deny his native beginnings and migrant experience. At Oxford, long after Joseph’s suicide, the narrator is haunted by him ‘breaking in to the most burglar-proof of institutions, reminding me of my dark shadow, drawing me back to my dark self’ (pp. 195-6), but determined to remake himself as a figure who can be accommodated in the master narrative – ‘I will grow strong in this library, this cocoon ... I will emerge from it and be somebody, some recognisable shape, not a lump of aborted, anonymous flesh’ (p. 198).

If the narrator is sometimes earnestly and sometimes acerbically up-front about his susceptibility to the seductions of *The English Heritage*, and is neither apologetic nor censorious about his shame at being kith and kin to rumbustious West Indians or Asians ‘wrapped in alien, colourful clothes who whispered to each other in a strange tongue’ (p. 15), the incongruity of his intentions are abundantly inscribed. Other ironies emerge contingently, for the paradox of this fiction is that in a text which is preoccupied with language, in which language is cultural artefact and social lever, no shift in linguistic usage is effected. ‘Black people have to have their own words’ (p. 147). This retort to the narrator’s attempt at a classically-styled epitaph for the obscure sister of his humble Pakistani landlord comes from Shaz, inept student and soon-to-be devourer of pornography, client of prostitutes and pimp, which considerably diminishes its authority. Yet it is Shaz’s observation which haunts the book as reprimand and reminder that Europhone colonial and post-colonial writing, in bringing the experience of colonialism and post-coloniality into representation, appropriated and overturned tropes and literary traditions, and invented new hybridized languages as a means of interrogating and subverting the master culture.

Here, however, a narrator determined to establish his own linguistic competence consigns Broken English, both the fluent repertoire of Creole and the eccentric improvisations of recent migrants, to direct reported speech, while keeping his own enunciations free of their transgressions. (A very different strategy is deployed by Dabydeen in his poetry.) The consequence of this separation is a fiction which, despite its deliberate
juxtaposition of temporalities and its crossing of genre boundaries in mixing social and marvellous realism, personal testimony with detached commentary, does not rupture received fictional form. Can we attribute this to a complicity between text and narrator? Is this narrator the product or the producer of the text? That ambiguous area where the critical is embroiled with the confessional is discernible in the representation of sexuality. The charge of pornography made against the fiction in the New Statesman and Society is patently absurd, the stories of adolescent masturbation and failed fumblings so innocent as to be disjunct from the depiction of erotic behaviour intended to cause sexual excitement. What is however disturbing is that the language of a consummated encounter is without the affection that is brought to the remembrance of a childhood in Guyana, where the women are not victims but survivors and actors. Thus although the narrator recognizes it from the clichés of sex magazines and is repelled by Shaz’s disgusted lusting after the female body, he writes of Monica, the apprentice prostitute managed by Shaz, as a commodity that changes hands: ‘Shaz’s parting gift ... She let me take her’ (p. 217).

Dabydeen has told one of many possible stories about post-colonial migrancy, one in which the narrator, having at the outset made up his mind about his goal, is left on the threshold of adulthood in many minds. Yet I must argue that because the distance between the discourse of text and narrator always shifts and sometimes closes, the critique is enfolded with confession, and confession bears within it the seeds of exculpation. Hence the narrator is not only the object of censure – and a recognizable representative of one route pursued by post-colonial writers whose intentions are interrogated by the fiction – but survives as the voice of an aspiration whose legitimacy has not in the space of the novel been displaced.

NOTES

1. David Dabydeen, The Intended (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), pp. 197-98. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
Swimming in the Ba’ma Grass

... swimming? In the Ba’ma grass? Who ever heard of such a thing and a big man at that. Dress in him work clothes same way, him khaki shirt and him old stain up jeans pants and him brand new Ironman water boots that I did tell him was too big for him, this old man playing the fool in the middle of the pasture, lying there pretending he swimming with his two hands out there like he doing the crawl and his feet kicking. Look how he playing the fool till one of his boots fall off and is what that red thing like blood stain up the back of him brand new khaki shirt is only one time it wash and look how him gone stain it up now. And is why that police boy there, the one Shannon, why he standing there with his gun in him hand and that other one there from the station, Browning, standing beside him and the two of them watching my husband there making a fool of himself pretending he swimming? Why all the people running and shouting and Shannon waving his gun at them telling them to back-back, Shannon waving his gun at me while I run to Arnold who not swimming at all I know he jokify but this is going too far.

You don’t think the one Shannon could mad enough shoot Arnold? That is what Dorcas big boy was calling out to me when I was hanging out the clothes? Him did really say ‘Shannon shoot Marse Arnold’? Me not even sure now me did hear what him did say good. He was making so much noise I get confuse. He was calling my name, calling my name: ‘Miss Vie, Miss Vie. Come quick’ and something about my husband and Shannon but if he really did say Shannon shoot Arnold why me poor woman standing here thinking seh Arnold playing the fool?

See here now. Is only because I know Arnold is a man come from the sea and like to play the fool sometime; he love the sea more than anything in the whole world and when he wanted was to go to Treasure Beach and I wouldn’t let him, him would lie on the floor and pretend he swimming and laugh, doing it just to annoy me, but not in a malicious way, Arnold don’t have a mean bone in him body which is why everybody so vex with the way that that police boy Shannon been treating him since that time he went up to the station to complain. Trying every which way to get Arnold into trouble but he never succeed yet because everybody in this town know Arnold is a decent law-abiding man. Telling everybody, the boasy boy, say he going to get Arnold. And not a soul, not even Sarge that say him is Arnold friend do one thing about it, because that Shannon is
bull-buck-and-duppy-conqueror and everybody fraid of him. Forever boasting that he going to get Arnold. For what? Everybody know Arnold not a complaining man. He not a quarrelling man. Look how long we live here in peace with all our neighbours. Ask any one of them. Of all the people living here, Arnold must be the only one never quarrel with nobody yet. Me really can’t say the same for myself because everybody know my temper well hot. But this time it wasn’t me quarrelling with anybody why Dorcas boy was making so much noise. Mark you, him was always a noisy little fellow. But what he was calling out again ee? Lawd Jesus! A can’t keep a thing in mi brain.

Oh. I remember now. I was talking how my temper hot and that is why when that Shannon impertinence off to me at the station I did fire him a box hot-hot. Me big married woman him a go put question to! A tek him big dutty nayga hand a touch me. Just because he see me there a clean up the place he must be think I one of him dutty Kingston gal. I fire him a box you see, and him so shock, him just reel back so, and then I see some evil come into him eye, you see, and a swear to Massa God he going to kill me. But one of the other man come into the room same time and Shannon turn him tail and leave. The other guy ask me what happen and I tell him – this was one of the decent fellows there – one of the Wright boys from out Christiana way. And me did expect him to laugh but he look serious bout the whole thing and he say, ‘Miss Vie, you have every right to box him. Facety wretch. But Shannon not a man to cross you know. Them say a six man him kill aready in town. Is ‘Enforcer’ them call him there you know. And them only send him here because town get a little too hot for him right now. Then him look round good before him whisper to me, ‘Is Big Man behind him, you know’.

Cho! What Wright a play? Everybody know bout Enforcer and which politician him kill for. But that is Kingston business. Me did hear say him was getting too big for him boots so the Big Man glad to get rid of him, send him down here to cool him off for a while. And like how no politics a go on down here, Enforcer don’t have nothing to enforce.

But see here, that Shannon is a rat though, you know, a stinking dirty rat. After that, I couldn’t do nothing right at the station. Shannon cross me up every time. Is like him set in wait for me. The minute I clean the floor, him would walk outside in the mud and come tramping right across it, innocent like, and I couldn’t say a word. I would wash the sheet and towel them and hang them on the line, and when I come back to pick them up, somebody rub green bush and dutty into them. Me say, those things were so childish. If him was big and bad like they say, why him was going on like pickney so? I take the Sarge him coffee in the morning, and Sarge take one sip and swear blue light at me for somebody put salt in the sugar. Just things like that him do, like pickney. But still and all he was a snake. Used to make my skin crawl. Any time I at the station and he come in, my skin just crawl. Him never trouble me again though, and
I make sure to keep out of his way. But I get the feeling the whole time he looking at me and laughing inside, laughing and biding him time.

Then is what that Shannon doing standing there in the middle of the pasture in this sun hot, wearing him good Kingston shoes? Why he not at the station eh? I never even bother to tell Arnold about him putting question to me, for you know how man stay. Even though they there quiet, them like a raging bull when they think another man even look at their woman. And then again, sometimes man you would never ever consider, put question to you, and your own man vex because they say is you encouragement them. So me don’t say nothing. But all the little petty things Shannon doing getting on my nerves. So I start complain about the job and I tell Arnold I want to leave.

Arnold don’t want me to leave for he say is the best job I ever have, cleaning up at the station and doing a little washing on the side. Arnold say is good government work and I get my pay regular, I don’t have to put up with some facetry woman in her kitchen and if anything should happen to him, if I stay there long enough, I will come in for a little pension.

But I fuss and fuss every day till Arnold can’t stand it no longer and he ask me exactly what is happening and I still don’t tell him bout Shannon. I tell him bout all the trickify things somebody doing to me and how it making my work twice as hard. I don’t tell him how it burn me up day after day to go to work and see that snakey smile on Shannon face.

Well, unbeknownst to me, Arnold nuh decide to go and see the Sarge, who he know well – the two of them drinking all the time together down at One Love. But Arnold is a serious man when him ready so he don’t tackle Sarge at the bar – him put on him good clothes one day and after I leave work, he go to the station to complain to Sarge that one of the policeman have it in for me. So Sarge say he will look into it. Now I don’t know if Sarge did know what was happening – maybe Wright did tell him. Anyway, next day I go to work and he call me in and ask me how come something happening at the station and I don’t tell him, look how long I work there and is my husband have to come in and lodge complaint. So then I explain to him what happen with Shannon and me and why I don’t want to discuss it with Arnold. So he say ‘A-oh’. And that is the last I hear of it.

Is Wright same one did tell me how Sarge call in the Shannon there and chastise him for his treatment of me. But you see how life stay? Shannon get it into him head that is my husband that did lodge complaint to Sarge about him. And that is how the bad blood between my husband and Shannon start.

And is me cause it O God is me responsible for everything that happen in my husband life from he meet me. Is me cause him to be living here, working on the land, something he never want to do for he really wanted was to live by the sea. Is there him come from, down Treasure Beach way,
is a hard set of people living down there, you know. If them not fighting with the sea them fighting the land, for it hardly ever rain and it hardly have any proper tree or no little green grass. Is Mandeville I come from, up in the hill where it green and cool all the time and me not lying at all, me just never like the part of the world that Arnold come from. It never look natural to me, the way place suppose to look, and the people them don’t look natural neither. And I never never could stand the sea.

Is how me did get on to meeting Arnold? Me can’t even remember, I tell you, me brain gone.

Arnold used to deal with my Daddy, that time when I was a young girl and my Daddy did have a dray. He used to go down to Treasure Beach way and buy fish, and melon and tomatis and skellion, all those things what them Saint Bess people did grow, what nobody else was growing those time. And Arnold is one of the people he used to deal with.

When Arnold start put question, me never interested, because Arnold was a big hard-back man and me was just a little bit of a girl, used to ride with my Daddy sometimes for I was the youngest and he love me dearly. And I used to like travelling perch up on my Daddy dray, that time I boasie can’t done, but I never like that part of the world he used to go to and me never like those St Elizabeth red people. But after a while me just get used to Arnold, he know how to make me laugh, and my Daddy think highly of him, say he was a man of intelligence and ambition. So my Daddy was happy when I marry Arnold.

When we married first, I did go to live at Arnold house, but me not lying, me could never get used to those people, no matter them was fambly now. Never could like them at all. And them never like me, that’s a fact, for they just don’t like black people.

So I pull Arnold and I pull him and I never stop till he agree to leave that place and come with me to my Daddy land in the hills. So he come and I will say he make the best of it. He never say anything, but every chance him get he would go down to Treasure Beach and he would come back with fish and smelling of the sea. He never once blame me for nothing though, wasn’t that kind of man, not even when I never have no children. I used to tell him I don’t need more pickney than him the way he go on foolish sometimes. I tell you, that man can make me bus’ some big laugh. When I bother him, he say, ‘A gone leave you, a swimming to Treasure Beach’ and then he carry on as if he swimming. Moving his hands and feet any which way. He mek me laugh till water come a mi eye. What a foolish man though, ee.

Arnold go on too bad sometime. Now you can tell me why he lying there in the sunhot in the middle of the Ba’ma grass?

You see him waterboots? One of them fall off already and the other soon come off. Is stubborn he stubborn why they fall off, you know. Because he always buying things larger than him size. Though him is such a little man, I think in him head he see himself as big as a king. If I didn’t buy
him clothes for him, nothing would ever fit him right. He swear even his foot bigger than it is and when he did go to buy a new pair of boots Saturday, I warn him to get the right size for I know how he stay. And lo and behold, he come back with a pair of waterboots there that you could see was too big. He so stubborn, he argue with me say no, waterboots suppose to big. Put them on this morning to leave for his ground and see here now, it look like these big boots mek him stumble and fall, why else he lying there on the ground? Him hat and all fall off. Lying there making me think is joke he joking.

Is what Miss Dorcas big son did call out to me just now when I was hanging out the clothes and he frighten me, he there bawling so loud? Why I can’t remember? Lawd, my memory was always bad, from I was a young girl I forgetful. Is something Arnold tease me about all the time.

The boy say something about Arnold and I remember now I drop the clothes and run. My Father! I drop the good white clothes straight into the dutty ground. Is what happening to me poor soul, eh? And now I have more washing to do for Arnold new shirt soaking in blood and he lying here not saying a word and Shannon standing there like a snake and the people back off and standing over there fraid of Shannon and it can’t be true what the boy run come tell me. It can’t be true seh Shannon shoot Arnold dead?

Arnold always seh he want to die by the sea and is I take him away from where he wanted was to be. Jesus only know I have to take him back there. He can’t just die here so.

Arnold, come mi love. Let me help you sit up. Look. Look over there and see a great wave rising. It coming from the sea. It bringing the whole of Treasure Beach rising up to meet you. See the boat them there. And you fisherman friend them. Festus and Marse George and Tata Barclay and Lloydie. See you mother Miss Adina and see Grandy Maud, your sister Merteen, little Shelly your niece and baby Jonathan. Just sit up and look nuh, and stop play dead. You too jokify man, and everybody watching. Open you eye and look Arnold, if you think a lie. See the great wave there. Coming over the mountain. Coming to carry us to our home.
Caryl Phillips
Interviewed by Graham Swift

I first met Caryl, or Caz as I've come to know him, a few years ago at a literary jamboree in Toronto. I think we fulfilled all our official duties, but we spent a lot of time in a place in downtown Toronto called the Bamboo Club – one of those places which has acquired since a sort of metaphysical status, because whenever Caz and I have met again in some far-flung corner of the globe, it seems our first instinct has been to find out where the 'Bamboo Club' is. Caz, I confess, is a little bit better at finding it than I am.

Caz was born in 1958 in St. Kitts, one of the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean. He came to England when still a babe in arms and was brought up and educated here. In more recent years, he has travelled extensively and has made his temporary home in many parts of the world, including his native St. Kitts. In keeping with his nomadic inclination, it could be said that one of the main themes of his work is that of the journey or, put rather differently, of human displacement and dislocation in a variety of forms. The journey behind his first novel, *The Final Passage* (1985), was the one Caz himself took part in, albeit unwittingly - the emigration of the post-war years from the Caribbean to this country. The journey that lies behind both Caz's last novel, *Higher Ground* (1989), and his new novel, *Cambridge*, is a more historic, more primal and more terrible journey, the journey of the slave trade westwards from Africa.

Caz has maintained, however, a keen interest in Europe or, to be more precise, in Europe's pretensions and delusions about the place of European civilization in the world. His book of essays, *The European Tribe* (1987), was devoted to the subject. In *Higher Ground*, a novel in three parts, we travel from Africa in the slave trade days to North America at the time of the Black Power movement, only to end up in a Europe still nursing its wounds from the last war. In *Cambridge*, Caz has reversed the direction of this journey to bring a European consciousness face to face with Europe's global perpetrations. He does this through the person of Emily, a woman of the early nineteenth century who escapes an arranged marriage by travelling to her father's estate in the West Indies (her father being an absentee landlord), where she is exposed to and, indeed, exposed by the effects of slavery and colonialisation.

Like its predecessor, *Cambridge* is a novel in three distinct parts, the first and longest of which is Emily's own account of her journey and her observations when she arrives. From what seems at first to be an inquisitive,
self-consoling travelogue there emerges a drama revolving around a handful of characters: Emily herself; Brown, an Englishman whom we understand has somehow ousted the previous manager of the estate; the Cambridge of the title, a negro slave who has suffered the singular and equivocal fate of having lived in England and having been converted to Christianity; and another slave, Christiania, who, despite her name, indulges in decidedly un-Christian rites and appears to be on the verge of madness.

The second part of the book is Cambridge’s own account of how he came to be Anglicized and Christianized. The third, written in the form of a report (which we guess to be far from reliable), describes how Cambridge comes to be executed for the murder of Brown. And the brief epilogue of the novel tells us the effect of all this on Emily. These last few pages are particularly astonishing. Coming at the end of a novel of enormous accumulative power, they pack a tremendous punch and, written in a prose of tense intimacy, they show how facile it is to assess either Caz’s work as a whole, or his heroine, by any crude cultural or racial analysis. Caz is interested in human beings. Emily’s plight at the end of the novel plainly has its cultural and racial dimension, but it’s essentially one of personal trauma – psychological, sexual, moral and (a word Caz will no doubt love) existential.

How did Cambridge arise? What was the germ, the idea behind it?

You know that period when you’ve finished a book and you don’t know what to do? We generally have lunch during these periods in that place around the corner from the British Library, as one of us is pretending to be ‘working’ in there. Well true to form, I was doing little more than scrambling around in the British Library, having just finished Higher Ground, and having a month and a half on my hands before I was due to go down to St. Kitts. It was during this period that I happened upon some journals in the North Library. One in particular caught my eye. It was entitled Journal of a Lady of Quality, and written by a Scotswoman, named Janet Schaw, who at the beginning of the 19th century travelled from Edinburgh to the Caribbean. What attracted me to this story was the fact that she visited St. Kitts. Right beside what was once my brother’s place, up in the mountains in St. Kitts, is a broken-down Great House. Janet Schaw described going to a dinner there when it was the centrepiece of one of the grandest plantations in the Eastern Caribbean. I began to realize then that there was a whole literature of personal narratives written primarily by women who had travelled to the Caribbean in that weird phase of English history between the abolition of slavery in 1807 and the emancipation of the slaves in 1834. Individuals who inherited these Caribbean estates from their families were curious to find out what this property was, what it would entail to maintain it, whether they would get any
money. The subject matter began to speak, but that's never enough, for there's another and formidable hurdle to leap; that of encouraging a character to speak to you. At the back of '88 when we used to meet, I was concerned with the subject matter and the research, but as yet no character had begun to speak.

And how did the character of Cambridge evolve?

Actually, he came second. Emily, the woman's voice, came first, partly because for the last ten years I'd been looking for a way of writing the story of a Yorkshire woman. I'd grown up in Yorkshire and I had also read and reread Wuthering Heights, so I'd this name in my head, Emily. Emily, who wasn't anybody at the moment.

The novel's called Cambridge, but Emily certainly has more prominence in terms of pages. I wondered whether you'd ever thought of Cambridge as the main character, or indeed if you'd still think of him as the main character?

No. Emily was always going to be the main character, but Cambridge was conceived of as a character who would be ever-present. He doesn't appear often in her narrative, in terms of time, but he's always in the background of what she's doing, and what she's saying, and what she's thinking. And then, of course, in the second section of the novel, he has his own narrative.

There's a lovely irony to Cambridge's narrative. We've had many pages of Emily and then we get Cambridge's account: Emily figures in Cambridge's mind merely as that Englishwoman on the periphery - scarcely at all, in fact.

There is a corrective in having Cambridge's perspective. Cambridge's voice is politically very important because it is only through painful application that he has acquired the skills of literacy. There are so few African accounts of what it was like to go through slavery, because African people were generally denied access to the skills of reading and writing. Reading and writing equals power. Once you have a language, you are dangerous. Cambridge actually makes the effort to acquire a language. He makes the effort to acquire the skills of literacy and uses them to sit in judgement on himself and the societies he passes through.

Did your feelings about Cambridge change as you wrote the novel? He is a very ambiguous character.

You know you cannot be too judgmental about your characters. Novels are an incredibly democratic medium. Everyone has a right to be understood. I have a lot of problems swallowing most of what Emily says and
feels. Similarly, I have difficulties with many of Cambridge's ideas and opinions, because in modern parlance he would be regarded as an Uncle Tom. But I don't feel I have the right to judge them.

Emily seems to be a mixture of tentative liberal instincts and blind prejudice. And it could be easy for us, with our 20th century complacent hindsight, to judge her quite harshly, but you are very sympathetic — and we can't do anything but sympathize with her, pity her. I wonder if your feelings about her changed as you wrote her long narrative?

(pause) Maybe.

Did you have the end even as you wrote the narrative?

No. No. I think she grows. She has to make a journey which begins from the periphery of English society. I could not have told this story from the point of view of a man. She was regarded, as most women of that time were regarded, as a 'child of lesser growth' when placed alongside her male contemporaries. She was on the margin of English society, and I suspect that one of the reasons I was able to key into her, and to listen to what she had to say, was the fact that, like her, I also grew up in England feeling very marginalized. She also made a journey to the Caribbean for the purpose of keeping body and soul together, which is a journey I made ten years ago. So in that sense, looking at it coldly now, through the prism of time, I can understand why I would have listened to somebody like her and why she would have entrusted me with her story. And through the process of writing ... you are right, I did begin to feel a little warmer towards her. She rose up above her racist attitudes.

She became alive in her own right.

Because she was courageous. It may be a small and somewhat unpleasant thing in the context of 1991 to find a woman expressing some warmth and affection for her black maid, but in the early nineteenth-century it was remarkable that a woman, and particularly this woman, was able to confess to such emotions. A nineteenth century man couldn't have done this, for men have a larger capacity for bullshit and for self-deception, even when they are talking only to themselves. I am not sure that I would have trusted the narrative of a nineteenth century man engaged in the slave trade. The only time I read men's narratives which seem to me to be lyrical is when the men, nineteenth century or otherwise, are in prison.

Emily, in a way, is about to be sold into a kind of slavery — her arranged marriage - which gives her a perspective on what she sees. Is that how you saw it?
Yes. I don’t want to push it too hard, for the two things are obviously only analogous on a minor key. However, an arranged marriage to a widower who possessed three kids and a guaranteed income was a form of bondage. Emily finds the strength, the wit, and the way out of this. I admire her for this. What makes her grow are a series of events which are particularly painful and distressing for her. As I have already stated, part of the magic of writing is that you cannot be too judgmental about a character. You have to find some kind of trust, some form of engagement. You attempt to breathe life into these people and if you’re lucky they breathe life into you. You love them with passion; then, at the end of two or three or four years, you abandon them and try and write another book.

You said a moment ago that men could only become lyrical when they are in prison. The second part of Higher Ground actually consists of letters from prison in a very distinct male voice. In that novel generally, you seemed to depart from your previous work in using strong first person voices. In Cambridge again, there is an emphasis on first person narrative. Was that a conscious decision or did that just happen?

It was conscious. There are any number of stories that you can tell. You are populated with the potential for telling stories from now until doomsday, for these things are circling around in your head. But it seems to me that the real test of a writer’s ability is the degree to which that writer applies him or herself to the conundrum of form, to the task of imposing a form upon these undisciplined stories. I had written two novels in the form of the third person and somehow I couldn’t address myself again to such a manner of telling a story. It was as though I had to find some way of expanding my repertoire. So the first part of Higher Ground is written in first person present tense, the second part as a series of letters and the third part is in the third person but with these rather strange flashbacks. Each segment of the novel demanded a different point of attack. It was a way of breaking out of what was becoming, to me, the straitjacket of the third person. We used to talk about this when you were writing Out of This World. I remember you saying that there was an intimacy about the first person which you found attractive. Well, me too. And like you, I am interested in history, in memory, in time, and in the failure of these three things. It seems to me, at this stage anyhow, that the first person gives me an intimate flexibility which I can’t find in the third person.

Nine-tenths of Cambridge is written in a pastiche of 19th century language. Certainly, the final few pages of it are your language, the language of the 20th century. This sense of a language that can talk about certain things suddenly bursting through Emily’s own language in which she can’t, is very volcanic. It is a brilliant conclusion to a novel. I wonder if we could broaden things out and talk more generally about your writing. You say in The European Tribe that
you wanted to be a writer while sitting by the Pacific in California with the waves lapping around your ankles ...

Alright, alright! The summer of my second year in college, I travelled around America on a bus until my money ran out in California. And I went into this bookshop and bought this book, Native Son, by Richard Wright. There weren't many black people writing in England. So it never occurred to me that writing as a profession was a possibility. But when I was in the States, I discovered such people as Jimmy Baldwin and Richard Wright and Toni Morrison.

Do you think it was necessary to go to America to become a writer?

I was slouching towards a writing career. Being in the States shifted me into high gear and out of the very slovenly third that I was stuck in.

How old were you when you first went back to St Kitts?

Twenty-two. I had written a play, Strange Fruit, in 1980, which was done at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield. And with the royalties from that, I went back to St. Kitts with my mother, who had left in 1958 when she was twenty. It was strange, because I had grown up without an overbearing sense of curiosity about the Caribbean. My mother hadn't been back either. She held it in her memory. But when we arrived in St. Kitts, many of the things that she remembered were no longer there: her school had burnt down, people that she knew had died, and someone she dearly wanted me to meet had long since emigrated to America. For her it was like discovering a ghost town. But for me, it fired my curiosity about myself, about England, about the Caribbean. Naturally, the 'rediscovery' confused and confounded me, but that was no bad thing for, after all, writers are basically just people who are trying to organize their confusion.

Your first two novels were very much about the Caribbean, coming from and going back to. How much was that actually paralleling your life and exorcising your own feelings about the Caribbean?

My first novel, The Final Passage, was published in 1985. I had started it some five years earlier, on the inter-island ferry between St. Kitts and Nevis. I looked back at St. Kitts and began to write some sentences down. I wanted to try and tell the story of the journey from the Caribbean to England, which seemed to me to be, in terms of fiction in this country, an untold story. People had written novels and stories about this journey, but not people of my generation. The second novel, A State of Independence (1986), although not autobiographical, followed the emotional contours of my life, in that it dealt with the problems of returning to the Caribbean
and thinking, they are not sure if I am one of them, and yet feeling that I am not sure if I am one of them either. However, I have certainly not exorcised my feelings about the Caribbean. I have no desire to do so. The reason I write about the Caribbean is that the Caribbean contains both Europe and Africa, as I do. The Caribbean belongs to both Europe and Africa. The Caribbean is an artificial society created by the massacre of its inhabitants, the Carib and Arawak Indians. It is where Africa met Europe on somebody else’s soil. This history of the Caribbean is a bloody history. It is a history which is older than the history of the United States of America. Columbus didn’t arrive in the United States. He arrived in the Caribbean. The Caribbean is Marquez’ territory. He always describes himself as a Caribbean writer. It’s Octavio Paz’ territory. It’s Fuentes’ territory. The Caribbean for many French and Spanish-speaking writers has provided more than enough material for a whole career. For me, that juxtaposition of Africa and Europe in the Americas is very important.

But now it’s not just Europe, America has moved in. How do you feel about that? You are living in America now, teaching there.

The reason I am living in America is because, like yourself, like many people, business occasionally takes me to the United States. When I’m not there all I have to do is turn on the TV, or open up the papers, and I am bombarded with images of America. In other words, over the years I have come to think of myself as somebody who knows America because I have some kind of a relationship with it. However, I’m not sure that anybody can seriously claim to ‘know’ a country as large and as diverse as the United States. It seemed important, given the opportunity of spending a year or maybe two years in the United States, to make a concerted effort to get to know a part of the country more intimately. That’s really why I’m living there. Furthermore, the Caribbean is now, to some extent, culturally an extension of the Florida Keys, and I really want to understand a bit more about American people rather than simply imagining them all to be characters out of ‘Dallas’, or a nation whose soul is reflected in the studio audience and guests of ‘The Oprah Winfrey Show’.

I’ve one last question and it’s quite a big one. We always have a lot of fun together, whenever we meet we have some laughs. Yet your work doesn’t really glow with optimism. You are very hard on your characters; most of your central characters are lost people, they suffer. Pessimism seems to win through. Is that ultimately your view of the world?

I am always surprised that people think I am a pessimist. Cambridge is to some extent optimistic. Emily grows. Okay, she suffers greatly, but she still grows. It’s the price of the ticket, isn’t it? The displacement ticket. Displacement engenders a great deal of suffering, a great deal of confu-
sion, a great deal of soul-searching. It would be hard for me to write a comedy about displacement. But there is courage. Emily has a great amount of courage. As does Cambridge. And in Higher Ground there is faith. I don't necessarily mean faith with a religious gloss on it. I mean the ability to actually acknowledge the existence of something that you believe in, something that helps you to make sense of your life. You are right when you say that the characters are often lost, and that they suffer. But I would like to claim that the spirit and tenacity with which my characters fight to try and make a sense of their often helplessly fated lives is in itself optimistic. Nobody rolls over and dies. If they are to 'go under', it is only after a struggle in which they have hopefully won our respect.

(This interview is adapted from a public interview between Graham Swift and Caryl Phillips at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, in March 1991.)
The sea has brought me tribute from many lands.
Chests of silver, barrels of tobacco, sugar-loaves.
Swords with gleaming handles, crucifixes set in pearls
Which marvelled at, but with the years grown rusty
And mouldy, abandoned — cheap and counterfeit goods:
The sea has mocked and beggared me for centuries,
Except for scrolls in different letterings
Which, before they dissolve I decipher
As best I can. These, and the babbling
Of dying sailors are my means to languages
And the wisdom of other tribes. Now the sea
Has delivered a child sought from the moon in years
Of courtship, when only the light from that silent,
Full eye saw me whilst many ships passed by
Indifferently. She hides behind a veil
Like the brides of our village but watches me
In loneliness and grief for that fast space
That still carries my whisper to her ears,
Vaster than the circumference of the sea
That so swiftly drowned my early cries
In its unending roar. There is no land
In sight, no voice carries from that land,
My mother does not answer, I cannot hear her
Calling, as she did when I dragged myself
To the bank of the pond, my head a pool
And fountain of blood, and she runs to me
Screaming, plucks me up with huge hands,
Lays me down on land, as the sea promised
In earlier days, clasped and pitched me sideways
In the direction of our village, my dazed mind
Thought, across a distance big beyond even
The grasp of Salvador (he scribbles numbers
In his book, face wrinkled in concentration
Like an old seal’s mouth brooding in crevices
Of ice; like my father counting beads
At the end of each day, reckoning
Which calf was left abandoned in the savanna,
Lost from the herd, eaten by wild beasts.
He checks that we are parcelled in equal
Lots, men divided from women, chained in fours
Children subtracted from mothers. When all things tally
He snaps the book shut, his creased mouth
Unfolding in a smile, as when, entering
His cabin, mind heavy with care, breeding
And multiplying percentages, he beholds
A boy dishevelled on his bed. For months
It seemed to speed me to a spot where my mother
Waited, wringing her hands, until I woke to find
Only sea. Months became years and I forgot
The face of my mother, the plaid cloth
Tied around her head, the scars on her forehead,
The silver nose-ring which I tugged, made her start,
Nearly rolling me from her lap but catching me
In time, and when I cried out in panic
Of falling, pinned me tightly, always,
To her bosom. Now I am loosed
Into the sea, treading water. I no longer
Call, I have even forgotten the words.
Only the moon remains, watchful and loving
Across a vast space, woman I whisper to,
Companion of my darkest nights.
People out walking lean into the wind, the rain; they believe it thwarts the weather to welcome it like that. I can happily get lost for hours in a swirl of showers because I was born into weather. They still tell how my mother pushed me out of her body onto a rock and I split the stone in two while the rain washed me and the thunder broke overhead.

I was a junior cloud goddess, with storms following me, winds and whirlwinds, shots of rain and a split sky above my head. Always moving, I kept one jump ahead of getting wet, kicking back at the clouds with my hind legs to keep them there. It's harder now, here in the future: my brain has the characteristics of a sponge and the rain seeps into the holes. I think I'm making chaos. My vests don't keep me warm and when I last sneezed a volcano in the Pacific threw a sheet of dust around the world. I'm dangerous to the earth. I spat and a blanket of algae four miles long bloomed on the Cornish coast. I rubbed the sleep from my eyes and a meteor large enough to make the earth wobble in its orbit came very close indeed. I have been sad recently and now the weather has changed for good.
I get like him sometimes:
seeing the same shape in everything
I look at, the same tones in
everything I hear.

So I'll never make a deluge drawing
or be gripped by the science of circular
motion. And I won't learn to care
how many complex collisions happen in a pool
when water is trickled in from above. How
currents percuss against each other,
bouncing from the walls of the container,
how waves rebound into the air, falling
again to splash up more water up in smaller
and smaller versions of the same.
How it's different in a storm where air and water mix,
bursting again and again through the thin skin
which separates them. How a woman's hair
moves in spouts and spirals just like water
and how the leaves of the star plant
trail on the ground in a loose coil.
And look at your sleeve, folding and swirling
around your arm, and the pattern of fine black hairs
curving from your inner wrist to your outer elbow,
and the underlying muscles relying on that slight
twist around the lower arm for their strength,
and the blood coiling around your body
through the little eddies in the larger veins
and arteries, coiling towards the vortex
in the chambers of your heart where I sit,
where the impetus has pulled me in.
Love in a Post-Cultural Ditch: Janet Frame

Over the years the work of Janet Frame has been subjected to appraisal and appropriation by critics of the most diversified political persuasions. Frank Sargeson's early reception of The Lagoon testifies to his readiness to incorporate the younger writer into the mainstream literary tradition in New Zealand and to attribute to her the prevailing monocultural, universalist sensibility. He heralds the book as an unprecedented mapping of Pakeha culture: 'There is very little of what is common experience for every New Zealander that hasn’t found its way into the twenty-four stories: it is all there – soil, sea and sky ... all seen and felt as though with dazzled wonder and delight for the first time in human history.'

After Sargeson, the critics have grown more receptive to the adversarial force contained in Frame’s writing. A majority of commentators have pointed out her abiding concern with social satire, directed against the ruling philistinism and materialism of the settler populations of New Zealand. The feminists have been more sensitive to the presence in Frame’s work of a ‘trenchant criticism of male power’ in a predominantly patriarchal society where women are denied the freedom of spiritual self-fulfilment. More recently, post-colonial critics have considered Frame’s embracing of marginality as a specific attempt to ‘write back to the Centre’ of European cultural expansion, while others chose to emphasize the semantic playfulness, and the consequent deferral of (political) meaning, brought about in the later novels by the operation of post-modern tropes.

It could be argued that the revolutionary strain traversing Frame’s work, and variously interpreted or recuperated by the critics, has to do with her particular use and conception of language. Long before the ‘invention’ of deconstruction, Frame was aware of a cutting edge to the alphabet, of a limit to the words’ coverage, apt to expose both the conceptual horizons of the speaker and the gaping silent hollowness beyond, which she calls ‘eternity’. In a crucial sense, she circumscribes ‘eternity’ by resorting to metaphoric overdetermination. It is primarily the knitted richness of her baroque literary style which gives the reader a sense of language overflow,
of a semantic shift beyond the ‘hieroglyphic commonplace’ towards the region where words acquire poetic ‘force and permanence’. Suzette Henke has noted a resemblance between the cataclysmic word-storm bursting in The Carpathians and Kristeva’s perception of semiosis (i.e., a ‘heterogeneousness to meaning and signification’) operative in certain literary texts. I would go further and suggest that a semiotic tug affects the whole of Frame’s writing, in which language carries consistent signs of its own inverse factor and points to exhaustion, tumour-like, through proliferation. However, Kristeva defines the semiotic order, in complex psychoanalytic terms, as the memory perpetuated in language of the symbiosis existing between mother and child ‘before the logocentric organization of thought in patriarchal law and language’. Therefore, her theory of a semiotic force embedded in language and disrupting received social meanings is made subservient to her feminist thinking. To some extent, Frame shares Kristeva’s abhorrence of phallocentric discourse; throughout her fiction she charts what she calls ‘a no-woman’s-land of feeling’ characterized by an outgrowth of freedom from the assumptions afloat in a male-governed society. But Henke does not hesitate to stretch the concept of semiosis (as applied to Frame) and to make it a tool of political subversion as well, by suggesting that the law/language of the father is ‘replicated in the logocentric discourse of empire and conquest’. Thus, in The Carpathians, the breakdown of language can be regarded as a symptom of cultural decolonization, since ‘A new music arises from the chorus of Carpathian voices, a mother tongue ritually released and free to ... 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.’

These considerations throw into focus the ultimate inadequacy of those readings which stress Frame’s opposition to transcendental signification, supposedly expressed in post-modern strategies of semantic disruption. Indeed, despite her systematic decentring of the patriarchal languages of domination, she appears to remain in thrall to the possibility of meaning, acknowledged as a paradoxical ‘conviction of the “unalterable certainty of truth”’. However, the probing direction of her truth-seeking remains to be identified, especially in cultural terms. To my mind, it is not enough to state that ‘The criticism of New Zealand life in Frame’s novels is directed at the linguistic forms in which the culture embodies its repressions, prejudices and fears’. Equally important is the task of delineating, beyond a perception of the anarchic potential inherent in her prose, the author’s proposed guidelines for re-constructing the cultural subject, for herein lies her true innovatory gesture. Although Henke’s appeal to the notion of semiosis proves to be helpful for suggesting Frame’s relevance to the field of post-colonial studies, I remain under the impression that hard-core political readings of her work tend to fall short of addressing the key question of the writer’s ‘imagined culture’. Clearly, Henke’s reference to
a primitive-instinctual tongue or memory, reclaimed over history and shared by both colonist and colonized, poses the problem of cultural regression. Similarly, the analysis of The Edge of the Alphabet offered in The Empire Writes Back strikes me as being largely aimed against culture, in so far as the authors view the book as effecting above all a dismantling of 'received epistemological notions'. I want to argue the reverse and put forward that Frame takes culture very much in her stride even as she moves, novel after novel, towards an apprehension of life best described as post-cultural. I shall do this by articulating my case around the concept of love, arguably a pillar-stone of Western cultural constructions, and by showing that Frame's revision of the theme postulates, beyond mere dismantling, a new enlarged conception of the human person. In this, she resists and opposes the pull of cultural vacancy.

Janet's personal probings into the feel of 'True Romance' are recounted, in The Envoy from Mirror City, in a chapter headed 'Figuretti's'. Her growing attraction to Bernard seems to be prompted, somewhat irrationally, by the intrusive ring of his laughter, since 'each time he laughed I felt within me a reverberation of his laughter as if I were a vast empty palace awaiting the guests and the feast' (pp. 79-80). This observation rings in turn with the accents of nascent awareness. Although she has so far remained 'new to seduction' (p. 80), Janet proves swift to experience the seism of personality that love generates, as well as the longing to be peopled and to accommodate 'guests' or 'others' within a 'vast' unbounded self. However, simultaneously, the fairy-tale setting of the 'empty palace' points to the literary-cultural nature of the compulsion; also, the ostensible emptiness of the palace of herself suggests the masculinist sexism inherent in Janet's received definition of love. Predictably, therefore, the hoped-for housing communion with Bernard fails to occur and the sterility of their relationship is acknowledged when Janet, contemplating the possibility of pregnancy, finds herself unable to 'imagine Bernard's contribution to another myself' (p. 94). Importantly, then, the failure of love is ascribed here to some bankruptcy of the imagination inherited from tradition. Cardinal to this awareness is Janet's recognition that her love has fed on obvious clichés 'drawn from all the True Romance magazines' read in girlhood, as well as 'romantic quotes from poetry' (p. 80) destined to 'apply cosmetics' on the emotions and 'make them acceptably love as it should be without doubts and suspicions' (p. 83). The consequence was the birth of what Frame rightly calls 'a determined kind of love' (p. 86), nurtured by a specific culture, and found to preclude genuine cross-personal encounter.

Indeed, Frame's conventional chronicle of short-lived love on the shores of Ibiza is pitched against a counter-narrative of impossibility. The story is pervaded by a sly awareness of love's inadequacy to provide any mental grip on the 'other'. Bernard's invitation to love comes forward as a
proposal to take a walk ‘along the beach past Figuretti’s’ (p. 76), a place previously unknown to Janet and henceforth wrapped in mystery. Soon, her own love evolves into a fascination for ‘the person who talked longingly of the mysterious Figuretti’s’ (p. 78). Janet’s sense of the diffuseness of Figuretti’s in the landscape and sky of Ibiza turns it into a figure of otherness, a thing-ness impossible to ‘figure out’. The alienness of Figuretti’s certainly lies at the root of Janet’s surrender; yet, importantly, she never seeks to discover ‘the nature or meaning of Figuretti’s’ (p. 76): ‘Strangely, I cherished my ignorance and never inquired’ (p. 77). Thus, even while she yields to the mechanics of love, she strives to protect herself from the touch of the ‘other’, which is experienced as ‘not the Midas touch but the touch of ash’ (p. 87). I take such strategy to be paradigmatic of Frame’s general attitude to culture, as expressed in her fiction. The ashen touch of Frame’s prose involves an experience of thresholds, a stumbling upon a space of cultural penumbra or ‘blank uninhabited darkness’ (p. 87) that cannot be approached save tangentially, by walking ‘past Figuretti’s’ (p. 76, my emphasis). Crucially, then, she endorses the architecture of love and occupies the palace, its every nook and cranny, so as to negatively delimit a further expanse of ‘blank uninhabited darkness’. This negativity of inverse definition accounts for the much-advertised bleakness of her work. My suggestion is that Frame’s novels support a more positive construction of this utmost space of love/culture (Figuretti’s), long obscured from the critical record by the unaccustomed novelty of her ‘imagined culture’.

This deviation through autobiography is not meant to repeat the assumption that the author’s life can be equated with her fiction. I would rather share Simon Petch’s belief in ‘the fictive condition of all autobiographical discourse’, particularly evident in the case of Frame, who resorts to memory as an imaginative process of myth-making, central to her writing of herself. The same transformative laws apply to the raw material underlying both fiction and autobiography, which aspire likewise to the condition of myth – Petch’s other name, perhaps, for what I call ‘imagined’ or post-culture. However, a detailed examination of the representations of love in all the novels would fall beyond the scope of this essay. My intention is to show that a ‘mythic’ conception of love pervades Frame’s earliest work. The relevance of this conception to her great ‘love stories’, such as Intensive Care and Daughter Buffalo, will then be more or less self-evident to the addicted Frame reader.

Owls Do Cry has been regarded as Frame’s arch-novel of social alienation, stigmatizing all manner of conformism and ostracism in New Zealand, including the repression of strong emotions deemed embarrassing or disorderly. Such readings usually concentrate on the character of Amy Withers, the loving housewife exploited by a husband who ‘almost kisses’ her by way of showing affection. Amy is depicted as a victim of
emotional deprivation, whose life withers away in a ‘perpetual bereavement of cooking and muddle’ (p. 84). However, at the same time, Amy impersonates a conception of community or family-love symbolized by her undefeated capacity to darn socks and knit people together. Her attributes as a peaceweaver are the pikelet and the cup of tea, found infallible for settling disputes and restoring a sense of community among the family. Aptly, the cakes she bakes to accompany the rituals of tea-taking display a ‘fairy ring of criss-cross that she made around the edge with an old knitting needle, for decoration’ (p. 25). If the criss-cross pattern of togetherness tends to crumble away when dipped into the beverage—that is, to unstitch under the high demands of living—Amy faces up and drinks ‘the dregs of love’ (p. 133). Yet this leaves untouched her resourcefulness with the needle, which extends to the realms of imagination and language, as when ‘she seized the words ... and with them knitted herself a warm half-minute escape from the forever problem of facing up’ (p. 84).

Her irreplaceable contribution to the creation of community is measured, after her death, by her son Toby, who purchases tea in the outside world and finds its taste uncivilised, ‘as if it had been brewed in a world of no people’ (p. 159).

Toby’s bereavement here finds a counterpart in the reader’s own at the novel’s close, fostered by the drabness of an ‘Epilogue’ which reports the family’s split into so many lonely figures. However, significantly, the disruption of community recorded at the end derives not from Amy’s death but from Daphne’s leucotomy and apparent restoration to ‘sanity’. Central to Frame’s conception of community or ‘love’ is the role of the mourning memory, embodied by Daphne in *Owls Do Cry*, and victorious over the separations of death. It is important that the madness of Daphne erupts in the novel, at the strategic moment of Francie’s disappearance, as a growth of vision sprouting from a piece of seedcake placed ‘in a dish, beside a packet of needles and a wad of darning wool’ (p. 41). With her madness, then, Daphne inherits her mother’s capacity to ‘knit and weave and sew’ (p. 151), and to hold onto some vision of the family’s wholeness. The odes sung from the dead-room of the mental hospital and interspersed in the novel are as many evocations of the spirit of oneness in the world. In each of these, Francie survives. So does Amy, felt until the leucotomy to be alive and ‘sitting at home now, with a handleless cup stuck in the heel of my brother’s thick grey work-sock, and darning the whole, criss-cross criss-cross ...’ (p. 169).

A further aspect to this process of survival through commemoration concerns Francie’s rescue from the lure of romance. Her brand-new pubescence makes her distinctive among the children for her commitment to the rhetoric of love, ‘suitable only for Francie who had come, that was the word their mother used when she whispered about it in the bathroom’ (p. 11). Such experience of arrival into adulthood translates as an increasing departure from the family circle. Francie is sent to work at
Mawhinney's, where she receives as payment the complete fabrics of ordinary love, 'an evening dress with holey black lace along the hem' (p. 34), to go to a dance. Her flirtation with Tim Harlow, Teresa's future husband and dealer in fraudulent love, signals her further alienation from true treasure. Significantly, Francie and Daphne 'didn't sleep together any more' (p. 34), while the elder sister 'grew more and more silent about what really mattered' (p. 36). In this context, the 'sacrificial fire' (p. 134) of the rubbish dump bestows the virtues of transformation and purification; Francie's rite of passage through fire purges the taint of worldly love, through her association with Joan of Arc (a notorious virgin), and restores the bonds of community in the mystery of accession to a 'new place ... of home again, and Mum and Dad and Toby and Chicks; an all-day Mum and Dad' (p. 20). Frame's myth-making conception of memory is well-exemplified in Daphne's mourning ministration of her sister's life-facts. Memory here unravels the entanglements of love, symbolized by the valuable cloths, lace and blankets filling the average (Fay Chalklin's) wedding-box – prior to weaving afresh the stitched fabric of community.

Aptly, therefore, the sacrificial site of the dump is littered with the needles of the fir tree, 'needles of rust that slid into the yellow and green burning shell to prick tiny stitches across the living and lived-in wound' (p. 11) of the tip. Hence, the burning hollow of refuse becomes a gateway also into the 'grey crater' (p. 136) of the mad mind, since Daphne turns out to bear the stigmata of her own private link to the wound: the asylum nurse 'did not find the scars the pine needles had sewn' (p. 129). Daphne's needle-literacy involves a pointed understanding of the suffering occasioned by the fact that 'being alive was tangled' (p. 37) and frayed. According to Frame, such awareness eludes the majority of people. Bob Withers, the father of the family, embodies the bewilderment of the average person trapped in a web of complexity and randomly picking and unpicking 'something inside himself that every year of being alive had knitted, with the pattern, the purl and plain of time gone muddled and different from the dream neatness' (p. 34). Similarly, Chicks remembers her helplessness on the day of Francie's death, for her hair-ribbon 'kept coming undone and there was no one to tie it for me' (p. 100). Lack of care at this stage left for ever 'a kind of gap' (p. 100) in her life, an incapacity to link up death and community to her store of common experience. In this context, Daphne's hoard of insight makes it her responsibility to salvage her relatives from alienation and to incorporate them into a close-knit pattern of wholeness. Such possibility alleviates, ever so slightly, the bleakness of the epilogue. Bob's predicament of loneliness seems absolute at the end; his deafness, his voice which has 'grown thin like a thread' (p. 172), point to the likelihood of broken communication. Yet the imminence of fire, which burns upon him already 'hot as the stove ... ready for pikelets if there were anyone in the world to make them' (p. 173), suggests his possible commitment to the realm of the stitching,
transferring memory. The erasure of Daphne’s consciousness – the leuco­
tomy – by no means suppresses the reverberating song which she once
emitted. Bob’s thread of voice is there for the taking and weaving. Indeed
the spirit of Daphne is resuscitated in each of Frame’s novels,\(^28\) which can
also be looked at as utterances in the language of community, and which
therefore speak for everybody: him, you, me.

As early as *Owls Do Cry*, Frame’s sense of community extends beyond the
range of the Withers family. Throughout her years of confinement in hos­
pital, Daphne explores a dimension of outcast dilapidated humanity which
is found to hold a mysterious promise of sprout or fertility, despite the
blight of unprepossessing appearance:

> And so passed one morning and every morning and day but the people growing
gentle and together, like old bulbs without promise of bloom, thrown to the rubbish
heap and sinking in the filth and blindness to sprout a separate community of dark,
touching tendril and root to yet invisible colour of maimed flowers, narcissus,
daffodil, tulip, and crocus-leaf stained with blade of snow. (p. 137)

This idea of a detritus humanity, thrown to the rubbish dump of society
yet somehow treasurable, is taken up and developed in *Faces in the Water*,
where the ‘touch of ash’ or ‘blade of snow’ turns into the suffocation of
drowning. In this novel, Frame again reckons ‘the sum of truth’\(^29\) made
available to mankind through the so-called deranged rationality; signifi­
cantly, she sets this new journey into the reason of madness against a
background of apocalypse, an evocation of ‘the final day of destruction’
(p. 9) or metaphorical death of the dominant culture. This is symptomatic
of the strategic location of Frame’s writing beyond the usual bounds of
Western conceptualization. Throughout her work Frame’s concern with
cataclysm is ubiquitous and takes the many forms of nuclear holocaust,
ordinary death or the dying passage from madness to ‘normalcy’. Cata­
clysm, however, is never much more in Frame’s novels than the flippant
foil or last-minute counterpart to her vision of enlarged humanity. In *Faces
in the Water*, the restoration of reason once again provides closure and
bereavement of the compound personality which is alive in the madhouse
and which is characterized by prodigious empathy with the world. Com­
 pound personality is very much the subject of *The Edge of the Alphabet* also,
where the characters unite in a vacuum of identity symbolized by ‘the ter­
rible hoover at the top of the stairs’.\(^30\) In this novel, what triggers off Zoe’s
awareness of ‘the confusion of people’s identities’\(^31\) is the kiss enforced on
her lips by a drunk seaman. This, her only experience of love, is closely
entwined with the necessity of suicide, for it seems that she must die to
her ordinary restraining self in the process of accession to extended being
in the hoover bag, with the ‘scraps of hair and bone welded in tiny golf
balls of identity to be cracked open, unwound, melting in the fierce heat
of being’ (p. 107).
In the last analysis, it is hard to make out the extent of my indebtedness to Jeanne Delbaere’s insights into Frame’s treatment of death. Delbaere herself notes upon the collocation of death and love in both *The Edge of the Alphabet* and *Daughter Buffalo*. The uttermost potentiality of man’, death is felt to be akin to love in that it ‘unites all ... potentialities and binds him together in the totality of his existence’ (p. 147). Yet Delbaere’s approach to the paradox of Framean ‘being’, defined as a state of ‘constant watchfulness’ (p. 147) or imaginative relation to death-the-enemy, leaves room for reinterpretation. My own reading of *Owls Do Cry* suggests that ‘the fierce heat of being’ need not bring about a full stop to identity in the paroxysm of death. By making memory and imagination the key constituents of her sense of survival in this novel, Frame anticipates much of her later fiction, particularly *The Carpathians*. With regard to survival, the question of Maori influence may have to be investigated, by someone with fuller knowledge of the role played by the Ancestors (for example) in the making of Maori identity. In the meantime, what seems clear to me is that Frame’s conception of community defeats death and disconcerts Western readers. It may well be that the puzzling force of her prose derives from her free and unique location beyond the bounds of culture. This post-cultural stance would account for the semantic disruption effected by her novels, so deep and pervasive that it becomes difficult to enlist them within any one strict particular political agenda. Such, then, is the fate of freedom.

NOTES

17. Ibid., p. 33.
20. Mark Williams, op. cit., p. 17.
22. Ashcroft et al., op. cit., p. 115.
25. Ibid., p. 61.
33. Delbaere, ‘Daphne’s Metamorphoses’, p. 27.
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