Travelling writing, writing travelling: the text as journey, the journey as text

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NOTE

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PART THREE

WRITING TRAVELLING
'The only true pictures are those which are not intended to be shown.'

de Tocqueville

'Road, n. A strip of land over which one may pass from where it is too tiresome to be to where it is too futile to go.'

Ambrose Beirce
The Devil's Dictionary
As mentioned in the Introduction to this paper, travel texts are constituted by a number of discourses. 'Discourse' here means a sub-system of signs together with their socially located meanings present within a text; a particular form of language-use, talking, writing and thinking, which involves certain shared and characteristic assumptions. Of the various discourses which are frequently evident in travel writing, I have arbitrarily chosen the following five for discussion:

- the diary
- autobiography
- exoticism
- the Other
- the quest

The real diary, and the unreal

The principal forms of first-person written documentation may be differentiated as follows: the journal or diary is a consecutive, regular record of events over a period, usually transcribed daily; an autobiography is a full survey of events over an extended period; a memoir is a selected recall of events.

In the travel account, the document used by the writer to record his initial field work may never be identified by him as a formal diary. It may be just a notebook; even the quasi-nautical term 'log' may be too grand. No matter what title, this primary document nevertheless functions to transfer strong diaristic elements into the later representation of the journey. These primary notes are almost never published 'raw' (even if that impression is contrived at), but are processed and mediated by various literary determinants (style, genre, market, etc.) and by memory. ('In memory, the journey takes shape and grows; in the notebook it merely languishes.' says Raban,'87:248) If the diary is memory incarnate, the travel account is the diary reincarnate.

As we have noted throughout earlier sections of this paper, the various forms of travel writing frequently are reflective of contemporaneous literary and other, broader cultural
developments. The history of the diary as a published form is long, and its development has involved a significant excursion towards fiction, by way of the 'diary novel.' Consequently, many questions of 'fact' versus 'fiction' arise in the discussion even of diaristic elements evident in travel accounts. In turn, these questions have more recently been subsumed into the larger question of 'writing transitive' being replaced by 'writing intransitive.' Whether in the form of a diary, poem, travel account or novel, 'writing a specific kind of text,' as Gerald Prince notes, 'has been replaced by writing.' ('85:481) The following overview of some forms of 'the diary' or 'the daily journal' is offered because of the resonances of these which may be discerned in travel literature. The term 'journal' refers simply to the transcribed record of daily events, hence the term 'journalism.' (A. Hassam,'88:32) A superficial journal shape consists of a text divided into a certain number of sections, each preceded by a more or less specific date. (Prince,'75:477)

'Today we think of the diary as a periodically kept, secret, or at least private notebook in which the diarist writes down anything ranging from intimate details or introspective self-assessments to descriptions of the events of his day, random observations or aperçus, outbursts of anger, aphorisms, drafts for poems, or even quotations.' writes Lorna Martens (in The Diary Novel ['85:3]) But, as Andrew Hassam notes, in the 18th century the keeping of a journal did not necessarily mean, as it does now, that the daily entries were written solely for the diarist's own eyes; it was common practice to keep a journal as a form of correspondence with others. ('88:32) William Haller observes that, coinciding with the rise of Puritanism, '... the diary became the Puritan substitute for the confessional'. (in Martens,'85:66) Today the term 'diary' connotes an intensity of privacy, cloistering and isolation. (Abbott,'84:11) The diary (in its current, sequestered 'self-speaking-to self' form) seems especially suited to a sympathetic presentation of the narrator, with the supposed lack of a reader suggesting uninhibited and truthful self-expression. (Martens,'85:37) However, as with all forms of writing, its 'transparency' (or 'truth-to-life') has been called into question. By the turn of this century, with the work of Andre Gide '... the journal ... was no longer regarded as the vehicle of an unproblematic sincerity but, rather, as a site of conflict, specifically a conflict
between spontaneity and reflection, and hence also writing.' (ibid:141)

The link between the diary or journal, and the subsequent narrative of a journey lies in the prior similarities which are shared between the open-ended forms of the diary and the journey itself. Each (the diary and the journey) is a loose progression, not necessarily cohesive, consisting of segments or episodes, and the only order implicit in either is the successiveness of the events of the journey and of the narrative entries. 'Because [the diary's] mode is one of linear temporal succession,' argues Martens, 'it does not seem to impose distorting structures on the natural order of experience. It has no end: Consequently it is never "finished", either as a text or as a work of art.' (ibid:187) It must be said though that, while the form itself may not seem to impose distorting structures on the natural order of experience, there is nothing to prohibit the travel writer from later doing so.

The formal attributes of the diary which hold the greatest appeal for present-day authors of 'actual' (as opposed to novelistic) journals are the discontinuity (or the fragmentary character) of the diary and its open-endedness. (ibid:195) Insofar as travel writers frequently attempt to work within the putative realm of the 'real' (notwithstanding the abovementioned notional reduction of all writing to 'neither-fact-nor-fiction' - just writing), the diary form, or its vestiges, is a pre-eminently suitable device for late 20th century journey narrative. For the 'author,' that reconstructor of journeys through an epistemological and psychological wasteland, the diary's formal open-endedness symbolizes well both its own material and metaphysical empty center - and that of the modern journeyer. It provides a clear correlative between the narrative of the signifier and the narrative of the signified.

The diary narrative as diary novel

The diary novel is defined by Lorna Martens as '... a fictional prose narrative written from day to day by a single first-person narrator who does not address himself to a fictive addressee or
recipient.' ('85:4) (While the narrator may purport not to address a fictive recipient, he in fact is always addressing a recipient, who is not necessarily fictive.) The first decades of the 20th century witnessed, within the frame of the psychological novel, the emergence of what might be called 'quasi-diary fiction' - first person fiction similar to diary fiction. (ibid:136) Discussion of diary fiction and quasi-diary fiction (and the sub-genres of memoir novels, epistolary novels, and diary novels) are beyond the scope of this paper, but, as there are features which the diary novel shares in common with travel accounts, I will survey briefly those features. The point to be noted is that travel narratives which self-consciously employ similar formal devices to those found in the diary novel or its variations, soon begin to lose their claim to stand pristinely apart from fiction. The following eleven features of the diary novel (which are presented here in non-heirarchic order) are drawn from those nominated by Lorna Martens in The Diary Novel, H. Porter Abbott in Diary Fiction: Writing as Action, Andrew Hassam in Literary Exploration, and Gerald Prince in The Diary Novel: Notes for the Definition of a Sub-Genre. Points (i) to (vi) are quite clearly, although not mandatorily, also features of 'real' travel narratives, while the others are less likely to be so:

(i) The narration is fragmented and inserted between various sequences of events: the narrator does not tell a story in one sitting; he relates series of happenings in at least two different instances. (Prince, 478)

(ii) Mimetic functions (the illusion of the real): in the 18th century the diary was employed (in fiction) to give the illusion of something that people write but that is not supposed to be art. This illusion of reality in the diary is attended by at least two recurrent details. Firstly, the convention of the 'editor's note' which explains with greater or less plausibility why so private a document would have wound up in the hands of the public. Secondly, the account of why the diary exists in the first place, which is generally left to the diarist himself, who relates somewhere in the course of his entries the reasons for making them. (Abbott, 18-21)
(iii) Thematic Functions (isolation and self-reflection): 'One of the great expressive advantages of the diary lies in its confinement of the reader to the internal world of a single ego. The diarist is preeminently alone.' (Abbott, 24) Consequently, we are restricted to a document '... that emanates from inside the story.' (loc cit)

(iv) 'Intermittent' style: 'His style is unregulated. It ranges from the purple to the colloquial. It is marked by false starts and abrupt stops, by blanks, and by logorrhea. It speaks in the present of present emotions. It is as self-conscious as its author [or narrator], anxiously reflecting upon the words by which it manifests itself.' (Abbott, 16)

(v) There is the framing of other documents within the narrative, poems, newspaper clippings, etc., which gradually begin to break free from the journal form. Then there is evident a collision of texts...' (Abbott, 43-44)

(vi) 'the artlessness associated with the diary form'; the use of the diary strategy has become '... a formal attribute of the absence of form.' (Abbott, 19)

(vii) '... the textual paradigm remains basically ... the discovery of one's inner nature and the recovery of psychic wholeness by a persistent effort of spontaneous, periodic writing.' (Abbott, 107)

(viii) in the modern quasi-diary, the diary is thought rather than written. (Hassam, 45)

(ix) A roman personnel, an Ich-Roman, a first-person novel in which the narrator is a protagonist in the events he records. (Prince, 477)

(x) Intercalated narration in which the hero is possibly divided into two heroes, the one narrated and the other narrating. '... as we read, we are made simultaneously aware of two events, the event recorded and the event of recording. Moreover, where the heroes, recorded and recording, are not at bottom two heroes but one complex one, the two events can be different to the point of irreconcilability.' (Abbott, 29)
(xi) A formal separation between the 'story' and the 'discourse' by juxtaposing first- and third-person narratives; that is, the insertion of portions of a character's journal into a narrative otherwise written in the third person. (Martens, 36)

In summary (if that is possible), the important similarities between 'diary fiction' and the travel account's 'diary fact' are many. (That there is similarity is not surprising in itself, given the symbiotic relationship between travel narrative and other literary genres.) Those diary elements most relevant to modern travel accounts may be identified as: monovocal or polyvocal narration, intercalated narration and documentation, 'quasi-artlessness', inner 'psychic' record, stylistic open-endedness and bricolage.

Sea journals

Finally, I will consider one classic form of non-fiction travel writing which has enjoyed considerable popularity, the sea journal. Of the journals published prior to Robinson Crusoe (1719), Lorna Martens notes that, 'Early published sea journals were, in fact, the first genuinely "literary" diaries. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries they formed a new variety of the established genre of travel books ...' (85:64) In turn, these sea journals and logs have been widely imitated in fiction for at least a century and a half. (Martens [85:74] cites Poe's MS. Found in a Bottle (1833) and The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (1838), Pierre Loti's exotic travel novels like Aziyade (1879), and Malcolm Lowry's Through the Panama (1961). Andrew Hassam, in Literary Exploration: The Fictive Sea Journals of William Golding, Robert Nye, B. S. Johnson, and Malcolm Lowry, notes that '... the sea journal has always been an important part of the British diary-writing tradition,' (88:29) and that such documents have provided subsequent diarists with a model to copy and adapt. Moreover, 'Since the late seventeenth century they have also provided fiction writers with a recognizable nonfiction form to imitate.' (loc cit)

They also represent an excellent model of the journey account in general (whether fiction or nonfiction), because the conditions of
the journey highlight basic features of first-person adventure narrative: physical isolation, circumscribed number of characters (i.e. crew), physical tests and danger, intended (though not guaranteed) route and destination, and the possibility for self-reflection and realisations. As Hassam notes, '... specific to the sea journal, a sea voyage provides a hazardous environment in which character can be tested, a hazardous and often alien environment which correlates typically with a crisis in the diarist's life.' (ibid:30)

We have seen earlier (in Part Two, section three, 'An incomplete history') how in some contemporary travel writing there is a strong convergence in both form and content with fictional writing. The psychological content of a concern with quest, self-identity and psychic wholeness can be seen to have migrated back and forth over the ages (or, to have settled in both places) between factual journey narratives and fictionalised forms of the same. Just as the content has found a home in various forms, so too have the forms of the travel narrative found themselves adapted to different subject matters and content. The diary form, for example, lends itself well to the concerns of modern fiction: 'The modern writer is in general concerned with a psychological examination of character and the first-person of the diary form provides a way of stressing changes in perception, of analysing present states of mind and contrasting them with subsequent reflections.' (loc cit) What binds the fictional and nonfictional diary together may be the central, and traditional, concern of the hero's growth into maturity. This growth has its analogues in several planes: the physical challenge of the primary journey, the psychological challenge of the inner (or secondary) journey, and the creative challenge of representing both, and growth, in writing - which might be termed the tertiary journey.
'Sons of time, autobiographer and traveller alike must go on living and travelling, even as they write, endlessly recreating the world and the selves they seek to comprehend.'

William Spengemann

_Eternal Maps and Temporal Voyages_

'... in the sixteenth century, when they [autobiographical journals] were beginning to be written, without repugnance they were called a _diary:_ _diarrhea_ ...'

_Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes_

'Can life be translated into words? Can a life in progress and process actually understand and grasp itself? Can we distinguish between fact and its own acts of construction and invention?'

Ihab Hassan

_Travel, autobiography and cross-cultural perspective_
In The Diary Novel Lorna Martens takes autobiographical narrative as a starting point and argues that '... the existence of a writing subject in any given kind of narration tends to undermine all genre distinctions; all writing is autobiographical, while fiction is inevitable.' ('85:31) This statement is problematic when applied to travel writing, a genre which, above many others, insistently presents itself as mimetic, grounded in empirical experience, factual, and at times, with a pose of almost direct 'referent-to-reader' veracity. Instead, suggest Martens and others, we must be prepared to see travel accounts as strongly autobiographical in content and thus, as vulnerable to the same myths and self-misrepresentations (which is not to say only deliberate fictions) as any other text generated by a writing subject.

'Autobiography is the essential act of self-witness.' says Ihab Hassan in Travel, autobiography and cross-cultural perspective (1990b). However, according to James Olney in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, neither the autos nor the bios is there in the beginning of a written work. For him, it is here that the act of writing, '... the third element of autobiography assumes its true importance.' It is through writing that the self and the life, complexly interwined, take on form, assume shape and image, '... and endlessly reflect that image back and forth between themselves as between two mirrors.' ('80:22) Taking this model to a deconstructed extreme, Olney leaves us with a 'written self' which resembles Dr. Frankenstein's creation: '... the text takes on a life of its own, and the self that was not really in existence in the beginning is in the end merely a matter of text and has nothing whatever to do with an authorizing author. The self, then is a fiction and so is the life, and behind the text of autobiography lies the text of an "autobiography": all that is left are characters on a page.' (loc cit) The implication for autobiography of these conceptual convolutions is not one of authors in search of characters (i.e., themselves), but of characters not in search of their authors. Pirandello might have been amused, but I am not convinced by this severing of the author from his supposedly autonomous, non-self-witnessing 'character.' While I acknowledge that there are problems of autobiography and representation (similar to those raised by Lacan and others about the self and language), this declaration of
the death of autobiography as a meaningful concept is not my position.

The life travelled

Spengemann (in *The Forms of Autobiography*) differentiates between three forms of first person non-fiction narrative: the journal or diary, for him, is a consecutive, regular record; the memoir deals with selected recall; and an autobiography is an attempt at a 'full' survey of the events within a nominated period. Within the latter form, Spengemann proposes that there are three distinct kinds of autobiography: historical, philosophical and poetic. Historical autobiography is concerned with self-explanation; philosophical autobiography has the form of a self portrait; and poetic autobiography employs 'enactment' over mere recollection and may be likened to psychodrama. Since a travel account is not primarily an autobiography, it would be artificial to attempt to categorise travel writings by the above typology. However, it may be said that travel writings at times demonstrate aspects of all three, but generally are characterised more by the third kind, 'enactment,' in the sense that the writer attempts to mobilise an imaginative recreation of the journey instead of presenting a mere recollection of a sequence of events.

'Travel and autobiography are essential and primary forms of literature.' says Ihab Hassan. ('90b) If the task of autobiography is the representation of the self, the task of first-person travel writing may be characterised as the representation of the self in transit. However, this self is both in transit and in flux. Roy Pascal argues that writing the story of one's life is itself an act in that story, '... and like every significant new act it alters in some degree the shape of [one's] life, it leaves [one] different.' (in Abbott,'84:9) This process of alteration may hold true also in the realm of the journey, insofar as the writer-traveller's approach to the journey itself is influenced by the attendant task of representing that journey. Here, writing itself becomes a 'significant act' in the journey and it alters to some degree the shape of that journey. Narrative conventions (and other mediators) may operate to shape the journey itself towards the
writer's ordering of it as text-to-be. Contemporary psychology (not to mention Heisenberg's 'uncertainty principle' and 'the observer effect') have taught us that a person, '... far from being subject to readymade, completed situations given from outside and without him, is the essential agent in bringing about the situations in which he finds himself placed. It is his intervention that structures the terrain where his life is lived and gives it its ultimate shape, so that the landscape is truly, in Amiels's phase, "a state of the soul".' (Gusdorf,'80:37) An autobiography (with strong elements of travel narrative) which demonstrates admirably this proposition is Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*.

Another aspect of autobiography relevant to travel writing may be the 'inner' and 'outer' personas of the narrator. Spengemann notes that American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne encountered an autobiographical problem that informed his entire literary career: '... his abiding sense of himself as two quite distinct and unrelated persons, one public and typical, the other private and unique.' ('80:134) Thus, in considering the autobiographical content of travel writing we may need to look for 'the writer behind the writer.' As the journey is reshaped (and perhaps 'pre-shaped') by the text, so (as Hawthorne concluded) is the self continually reshaped by efforts to explain, discover or express itself. 'This self of which we take possession,' Regis Michaud has argued, 'is a veritable psychic creation. It is a character we spend our life in designing ... every one of us is an artist and spends our life in drawing an original portrait of himself. Our actions write our autobiography, which is, of course, a fiction.' (in Spengemann, ibid:167) The self revealed in texts then, will not be seen as an 'essential' or 'true' self - nor a false one - but simply a 'written' self. (Barthes goes much further and declares, 'The self does not exist; it writes; it is *l'ecriture*.' - a case which I do not support because it is more rhetorical and hypothetical than demonstrated.)

Since a travel account, as noted, is not primarily an autobiography, it would be erroneous to see all travel writing as lending itself to an autobiographical reading of the subject (or subsequent biographical reconstruction of the subject). Speaking of women artists, Sue Rowley (in a paper"*Think of the Work*": Artist as
subject, and process in artwork) makes this very point: '... the artist constitutes herself as a subject, and is constituted as subject in the process of the work, and ... this subjectivity is inscribed in the product of her labour, but not in ways that can necessarily or fruitfully be read as autobiography.' ('89:1) Rowley goes on to suggest that the artist '... relates to herself as a "decentered" subject, usefully treated as a layered, multi-textured, uncompleted fiction, bearing the imprint of both conscious and unconscious experience ...' (ibid:9) Except for the contention of the self as a 'fiction', the 'self' of a travel writer which is recoverable from the autobiographical discourse within a journey account might fruitfully be seen according to Rowley's model; that is, as a 'decentered subject', 'layered, multi-textured, uncompleted', which bears 'imprints of both conscious and unconscious experience.'

According to Georges Gusdorf, the autobiographer undertakes a '... revaluation of individual destiny; the author, who is at the same time the hero of the tale, wants to elucidate his past in order to draw out the structure of his being in time.' ('80:45) Gusdorf speaks of 'individual destiny' and 'past', terms which, without too much liberty, we may substitute with that well-travelled metaphor, 'the journey of life.' In Gusdorf's final analysis, the prerogative of autobiography is '... that it shows us not the objective stages of a career ... but that it reveals instead the effort of a creator to give the meaning of his own mythic tale.' (ibid:48) Perhaps what is evident here is not only the journey (of life) as mythic quest, but also the representation of the journey as an equally important movement in the mythic signification of that journey by its protagonist-narrator subject.

James Olney argues that the self's ability to write 'I' and to have any authority for that assertion '... has been of late so thoroughly compromised philosophically and linguistically and so thoroughly complicated literarily that the very basis on which a traditional autobiography might be commenced has simply been worn away.' ('80:23) His position is characteristically extreme, and it may be more correct to say that the traditional basis to autobiography has been partially, not completely, worn away. Recent theoreticians of autobiography, according to Lorna Martens,
argue that '... the very project of writing, the act of signification itself, alienates the writing self from his subject.' ('85:40) Roland Barthes goes further, to say that there is no referent in the field of the subject: '... the self, so called, can at most be written, but not represented.' (in Martens:loc cit)

This suspicion of the self-inscribing 'I' was levelled earlier by Nietzsche, but from a different angle. For him it was neither the deconstructable illusions of the text and subjectivity, nor the heroic-mythic delusions of the self-portraitist, but another 'force' equally suspect in its capacity to occlude its own workings. Michael Sprinker (in the End of Autobiography) glosses Nietzsche's critique (as expressed in The Will to Power): 'What thinks, organizes, writes the text before us is something nonsubjective, impersonal, beyond the authority and control of any individual. It is the will to power: "All 'purposes,' 'aims,' 'meaning' are only modes of expression and metamorphoses of one will that is inherent in all events: the will to power." Nietzsche obliterates the authority of the subject by exposing it as a deception, as merely the figurative expression of a conditioned activity.' ('80:334) One must ask, is this then the meta-structure of all writing - the will to power? If so, is travel writing, among other literary forms, simply a braggadocio of text, terrain and readers 'conquered' in the ceaseless search for advantage over slightly more pedestrian and/or less articulate brethren?

Doomfully, enigmatically, comes more: 'If autobiography (says Sprinker) can be described as the self's inquiry into its own history - the self conscious questioning of the subject by itself - then Nietzsche offers a fearful warning for any autobiographical text: "The danger of the direct questioning of the subject about the subject and of all self-reflection of the spirit lies in this, that it could be useful and important for one's activity to interpret oneself falsely".' ('80:334) I believe that is possible for the writer of non-fiction to recognise and address this contingency (while in fiction it may well be part of the author's very point about the narrator). If not for such a possibility, travel writing's evidence of autobiographical discourse might have to be greeted with cynicism re its veracity, and nihilism re everything else.

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3.3

THE OTHER

'To be a Gringo in Mexico - ah, that is euthanasia.'

Carlos Fuentes
The Old Gringo

'The alien is within us, not outside. The heart of darkness is the heart within us.'

Ihab Hassan

Travel, autobiography and cross-cultural perspective

'All my life my heart has sought a thing I could not name.'

A Hells Angel
in Hunter S. Thompson, Hells Angels.
'Other' than ...

There is a Taoist ideal of retreat from an ignoble world, of union with Nature, and a return to a plainer mode of existence. It would be surprising to find a culture which did not have some concept of an other, different and better realm or condition of being. However, the 'other' to which this chapter refers is not simply an alternative place, person or quality which, as a desired object, might exist externally to the subject, like greener grass, or even a Platonic ideal.

The 'other' of today is rendered ('signed') as a 'Big O' Other, or alternatively, as an hypostasized and parenthesized 'other.' (I have chosen the written form of Other, over 'other', for simple typographical convenience.) It is the other other. Not the spoken other of the conscious mind, but the Lacanian Other whose discourse is said to be the unconscious. Another word for Other is 'alterity'; like 'difference', it is '... perspectival, interested, contaminated from the start.' (Hassan,'90a:410) Alterity, says Ihab Hassan, is not merely cultural, a matter of colour, or so-called race; nor of any simple category, for the past can be Other, as can nature or as foreign landscape. Above all, he says, it can be spiritual, '... a quest for the enigma of being, for something numinous or strange.' (ibid:412) However, it is not in this aspect of the numinous, spiritual of 'strange' alone that the difficulty lies in discussing the Other. To define or isolate the Other is a contradiction, for it is not fixable. Apprehending Otherness inheres in the act of observation, not in fixing it in discourse. 'At best, we can attempt a watchful discourse, empathetic and self-critical, lively and lucid. At the very best, we can recognize that alterity is ineluctable, a function of consciousness itself.' (ibid:417) He concludes that Otherness inhabits language and consciousness: '... it is the way identity (sameness) both makes and unmakes itself. Otherness, in other words, is a radical conceit of the mind ...' (ibid:419)

'Otherness' is distinguished through the condition of 'difference' from something else. In semiotic terminology, one definition of signification is a system of differences in which each sign points to an Other, its referent; and society itself is a system of differences in
which we are each a sign of ourselves. (Williamson,'78:60) The evolution of the concept of the Other through 19th and 20th century Western philosophy and psychology is complex and cannot be traced here. Instead, I put forward Eloise Lindsay's explanation (in Transgressive Reveries) of the social functioning of the Other: '... the structures of socio-economic rationalism are contaminated by what they exclude. As contemporary writers such as Bataille and Kristeva argue, every system (state, legal, philosophicial, familial, psychological) is constructed precisely around what it prohibits as "other" to its own "proper" business. But this repressed residue (noise, madness, holiness, poetry, the abject, the erotic) does not disappear; it returns as the very condition of the possibility and impossibility of the identity of every object and subject. This residue in every system is the "outside" that is "inside," hollowing out everything that seems to be fixed, firm, solid and erect.' (90:2) If it is correct to say that all systems are constructed around what they prohibit as Other to their own 'proper' business, travel writing, as a system of discourses at the intersection of a number of other systems - anthropology, literature, geography, et al - may be expected to be the site of a complex of Others. I will discuss in reference to travel writing a limited and arbitrary set of aspects of Otherness:

Europe
imperialism
tourists
geographic Other
topographic Other (the desert)
Otherness denied

But first a cautionary note. Psychoanalysis and human sciences like anthropology, says Stephen Muecke (in Reading the Country), are currently '... like mystic guardians which, armed with rules of interpretation, stand at the borderline between Man and that "Otherness" (stretching both inwards and outwards) which threatens the concept of man as unitary and knowable.' (84:187) This threat to the possibility of man 'knowing' himself in a direct sense, unmediated by the interpretative theoretical technology of the psychoanalyst, semiotician or anthropologist, is noted here because of the mystification which now seems attendant upon these
terms and their interpreting heirophants. In this paper Otherness is a concept, a cultural construct through which, in a theoretically unsophisticated manner, I may gain some insight into the world and the text which is travelled; it is not a fetish. Edward W. Said (in Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors) heeds that 'difference' and 'Otherness' have acquired talismanic properties: 'Indeed it is almost impossible not to be stunned by how magical, even metaphysical they seem, given the altogether dazzling operations performed on them by philosophers, anthropologists, literary theorists, and sociologists.' (89:8)

Other than European

'Still the world is wondrous large - seven seas from marge to marge -
And it holds a vast of various kinds of man;
And the wildest dreams of Kew
are the facts of Kathmandu ...'

Rudyard Kipling

In the Neolithic Age

Things are always perceived in relation to other things, and thus are defined in terms of those relationships (spatial, temporal, linguistic, etc.) Travel, in particular, says Ihab Hassan, '... reveals the fascination with otherness, a fascination always double as in the doubleness of a taboo. In both, attraction and repulsion contend ...' (1990a:412) Mary B. Campbell (in The Witness and the Other World), notes that the earliest known work devoted entirely to the account of travel beyond Europe (ca. C5 A. D.) was the Peregrinatio ad terram sanctam of Egeria ('88:15), and that '... it is in part the result of such travels and such narratives that we have come to see ourselves as "the West" at all - a world apart from and opposed to an Other World we call "the East".' (ibid:21) 'The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience,' writes Edward Said in Orientalism. Having gained a notion of itself in contrast to an Eastern or Oriental
geographic/cultural Other, for Europe 'the East' then functioned as a concept separable from any purely geographical area. Writes Campbell, 'It is essentially "Elsewhere". All four cardinal points equally imply the word "far" when used as place names, and at different times and from different vantages, all four have been suspect: the North to imperial Rome, the West to the Chinese, and so on.' (ibid:48) Anywhere can be an Other place, but specific Others are privileged (in a dubious sense) to be more Other, according to varying political-cultural conditions.

On another level (cultural rather than geographic), anthropology, says Muecke, constructs the face of universal man by '... repeatedly comparing European man's image to that of "the Others" - the tribal or pre-industrial peoples whose societies are seen symbolically as the unconscious counterpart to modern western man's consciousness of himself as a labouring, investigating, suffering being - one who has lost "nature" and innocence with the rise of industrialization.' (84:187) Susan Sontag (in The Anthropologist as Hero) describes 'modern thought' (by which she means modern Western thought) as pledged to '... a kind of applied Hegelianism: seeking its Self in its Other.' In this process, Europe seeks itself in the exotica of Asia, the Middle East, pre-literate cultures and a mythic America: 'The "other" is experienced as a harsh purification of "self".' (79:69-70) Much foreign location travel writing, not to mention offshore tourism, could be explained in one fell swoop by such a concept, if it were uncritically applied. There is however, more to the discussion, for the relationship between the notional entities of 'West' and 'East,' or 'South' and 'Europe,' is not necessarily a one-way, chauvinistic transaction.

Ruth Blair in"In Transit" - Travel Narrative as a Habit of Mind ... writes that Claude Levi-Strauss and Andre Breton set a particular tone among European writers because they did not simply consider tribal cultures as mirrors in which Western 'civilisation' might contemplate its own merits and faults. Their interrogation of the Other was not just the negative narcissism of the West, but rather a valuing of the encounter '... as a way of keeping Western culture alive because it is an encounter with a real "other", because the very different culture offers alternative ways of dealing with the
world, because European culture is tired.' ('86:273) It was an opportunity for a resuscitation of European culture. Critics familiar with his work agree that turn of the century French traveller and novelist Victor Segalen was far ahead of his time in his recognition that discovery of the Other leads invariably to knowledge of the Self. (Yvonne Y. Hsieh,'88:73) Later, the developing science of anthropology contributed towards the relativisation of European 'supremacy' through its hermeneutic stance, an approach which Paul Ricoeur defined as '... the comprehension of the self by the detour of the other.' (in Carter,'88:9) Anthropology's role in apprehending the Other cannot be interpreted solely as non-problematic and benign, as we shall read.

Otherness as imperialism

'... the hunger for money of a Neapolitan cab-driver or of Asiatic representatives of similar trades, as well as of the craftsmen of southern European or Asiatic countries, is, as anyone can find out for himself, very much more intense, and especially more unscrupulous, than that of, say, an Englishman in similar circumstances.'

Max Weber

Sontag writes that while the European 'self' was busily colonizing strange domains of experience, modern sensibility was moving '... between two seemingly contradictory but actually related impulses: surrender to the exotic, the strange, the other; and the domestication of the exotic, chiefly through science.' ('79:70) Art and literature - and thus, travel literature - also were complicit in this colonization and domestication of the Other. In his major work on this topic, Orientalism and in other writings, Edward Said makes much of European culture's 'history of exterminism and incorporation' in 'the imperial contest' and the subsequent European apprehension of the Oriental Other. To him, this history is of extraordinary political and interpretive importance, '... because it is the true defining horizon, and to some extent, the enabling condition
of such otherwise abstract and groundless concepts like "otherness" and "difference". (89:12) The Orient and the Other so constructed by the agencies - particularly anthropology and literature - of European culture reveal nothing like a 'truth' about their subject matter, but more a reflection of Europe's desire to see the Other as an inferior, suspect, violent, eroticised and exoticised realm 'deserving' of European protection, i.e. domination.

For Said, then, the 'fetishization and relentless celebration' of Difference and Otherness of other cultures is an ominous trend which suggests several conditions, namely, '"... the spectacularization of anthropology" whereby the "textualization" and "culturization" of societies occur regardless of politics and history, [and] also the heedless appropriation and translation of the world by a process that for all its protestations of relativism, its displays of epistemological care and technical expertise cannot easily be distinguished from the process of empire.' (ibid:9) Far from a value-free tool, science (as anthropology) is seen by Said to be a mythologer, reinforcing notions of 'essential,' rather than historically determined, differences between cultures. He argues vigorously that Others must be seen '... not as ontologically given but as historically constituted' in order to 'erode the exclusivist biases we so often ascribe to cultures, our own not least.' (ibid:20)

Other than tourists

'The border means more than a customs house, a passport officer, a man with a gun. Over there everything is going to be different; life is never going to be quite the same again after your passport has been stamped.'

Graham Greene

If an encounter with the/an Other promises change for the traveller, that change may be no more (or no less) than an evasion of the Self. Alternatively - and more optimistically - the encounter may mean the enhancement of the Self, or of the Self's
comprehension of itself. In this vein, Dean McCannell (in *The Tourist*) suggests that the 'tourist critique of tourism' indicates a desire to go further than other 'mere' tourists and into '... a more profound appreciation of society and culture.' ('76:10) All tourists, he claims, '... desire this deeper involvement with society and culture to some degree; it is a basic component of their motivation to travel.' (loc cit) Hart Cohen (in *Swinging through the Jungle*) asks why tourists (and travellers) have the desire to become the 'primitive'? His answer is in terms of tourists being 'moderns' whose consumerist lives are characterised by rife 'instability and inauthenticity.' Hence, Cohen finds, tourists turn towards naturalness and '... to the accumulation of artifacts of cultures they identify as authentic.' For him, their 'desire to encounter the other may be linked to emotional stability.' ('88a:14) McCannell shares, to an extent, this attitude, finding sightseeing to be a tourist ritual 'performed to the differentiations of society,' and '... a kind of collective striving for a transcendence of the modern totality, a way of attempting to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience.' ('76:13) However, it cannot succeed, for at the same time it 'tries to construct totalities, it celebrates differentiation.' That is, the 'repressed residue' of Differences (e.g. noise, madness, holiness, poetry, the abject, the erotic) which is the Other returns '... as the very condition of the possibility and impossibility of the identity' of the tourist.

Middle class travellers, i.e. tourists, (according to McCannell) systematically scavenge the earth for new experiences to be woven into their own collective version of the Other. If previously McCannell had seen positive, albeit unattainable aspects to tourism's enterprise of seeking a stabilised Self in its 'primitive' Other, his benign view drops away from here on. He finds that this '... effort of the international middle class to coordinate the differentiations of the world into a single ideology is intimately linked to its capacity to subordinate other people to its values, industry and future designs. The middle class is the most favoured now because it has a transcendent consciousness. Tourism, I suggest, is an essential component of that consciousness.' (loc cit) The 'transcendant consciousness' referred to here is (obviously) quite different to that
one which might, in the traditional sense of Enlightenment, have united the conscious Self and the Other of the unconscious in a greater awareness.

The constitution of the foreign world as an emblematic Other, which is the both the work and promise of tourism's publicists (among them travel writers) mobilises a potent mythology of travel, that of transformation, transcendence and the integration of the Self with its Other. Even to jaded 'B.T.D.T.' (Been There, Done That) types, a little of journeying's 'magic caskets full of dreamlike promises' must remain - or else why continue to travel? Hermann Hesse, in Journey to the East, expresses that innocent aspiration for the Other at its most absolute, as '... our goal was not only the East, or rather the East was not only a country and something geographical, but it was the home and youth of the soul, it was everywhere and nowhere, it was the union of all times.' This almost-Absolute Other is a metaphysical chimera which may have its source in the imprints of one's first journey. (Death, I assume is the Absolute Other; '... the final alterity, the otherness of death, immanent in every human act.' [Hassan, '90b:415]) Near the end of his life, Theophile Gautier, musing over his early travels, concluded that 'le premier voyage est comme le premier amour, il donne des sensations qui ne reviennent plus.' (The first journey is like the first love affair: it generates feelings that never rise again.) (in Berben, '83:369) Though the feelings may never rise again, or at least not in the same intensity, travellers - in their will to be Other - continue to pursue them, and travel writing continues to document close encounters with them, and to promote the possibility of more.

The geographic Other

'In Wahroonga, the liquidambars and maples are looking like Keats's Ode to Autumn. You can walk up and down these serene, leafy streets and never meet anyone. There is no sign of life. You have to imagine what the rest of the world is like.'

Craig McGregor
The Politics of Being Kathryn Greiner
One physical analogue of the unconscious Other is 'elsewhere' as Other. 'The detour to remote lands,' wrote French critic Daniel Soutif, '... does nothing more than re-direct the self to the self; the careless traveller is hurled into the search for an imaginary other.' Perhaps it is modernity's (and suburbia's) capacity to array before itself 'media-ated' Differences (such as the artifacts and images of other cultures), while simultaneously homogenising these simulacra beyond any capacity to impact meaningfully upon itself, which so demands that the traveller/tourist search for the authentic and the Other (... and the Self) in the Elsewhere.

The imagined world is a magnetic Other, and - it seems - is particularly so for Australians. Writer Andrea Stretton notes, 'Australia must be one of the few nations to use so consistently the blanket concept of "overseas," with its implication that we are here surrounded by water, while the real world is over there.' Something may be 'over there;' however, the Other is not encountered simply by the Self relocating to a particular Elsewhere. In Invisible Cities, Italo Calvino has his character Marco Polo explain to Kublai Khan that, 'Elsewhere is a negative mirror. The traveller recognizes the little that is his, discovering the much he has not had and will never have.' (74:26) The geographic Other is located at the asymptote of movement and the imagination. For Sir Richard Burton, Japan (which he never visited) was, says Rana Kabbani, the 'Utter Other.'

There is some irony that Australia in general (and Wahroonga par excellence) is suggested as a site so void of authenticity that for some Australians the Other must be elsewhere - if not specifically in Europe. For there was a time when the Australian continent itself occupied an homologous position for the European mind. In The Fatal Shore, Robert Hughes, writing of 'The Great South Land' prior to European contact, notes that 'By the end of the sixteenth century, [it] was encysted with fable. To some, it was the golden country, filled with every kind of wealth - jewels, sandalwood, spices - and inhabited by angelic beings: an embellishment upon the myth of the Terrestrial Paradise. To others it was the land of deformity.' (87a:44) It was such a screen for the projections of the European mind that, 'Within its inscrutable otherness, every fantasy could be contained; it was the geographical unconscious.' (loc cit)
The topographic Other - the desert

The interplay between the imagination and the places it has made for itself creates fictional topographies. These are most frequently represented in literature and art, and function as emblems of Otherness and Difference. Foremost among those archetypical landscapes are the sea, mountains and the desert, each of which has been the occasion and impetus for vast amounts of literature. It is upon the latter, the desert, that we will focus, for it presents a pre-eminent example of a presence-as-absence, a void, upon which the unconscious Self can be speculatively projected like a shadow puppet.

The history of prophets (psychopomps of the Other?) follows a pattern, as T. E. Lawrence pointed out: '... born in a civilization, they reject its standards of material well-being and retreat into the desert. When they return, it is to preach world rejection: intensity of spirit versus physical security.' (in C. Wilson, '78:94) The desert, says Chatwin, is used in all great religions as a metaphor for calm and for spiritual peace. The desert thus comes to represent a place in which the conditioned Self may both annihilate itself and, experiencing the unconditioned Other, re-emerge as a 'truer' Self.

With all this mythic puissance and pristineness, desert descriptions, warns Meaghgan Morris (In The Pirate's Fiancee) are not innocent of cultural reference: "The desert" is ... a vast imaginary hinterland which most coastal dwellers like to dream all their lives of seeing in reality one day." ('88a:140) Its '... myth motivates and structures the visitor's vision of the land,' (ibid:142) The myth of this oneiric inland Other ought to preclude any seeing of it with the traveller's own eyes; but in fact, the element of surprise, jouissance even, frequently intrudes into this scenario, causing the tourist to discover unanticipated objects and responses. The myth of the desert '... attracts quests, produces the travel patterns of voyagers in search of special realities, evidence, or some new vision.' But, adds Morris, '... the enduring seductiveness of the myth resides in the reversibility of its meanings. The inland is also repulsive; an image of a natural dreariness, dullness, desolation and monotony which slowly encroaches upon settlements, and spreads

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its emptiness by contagion to culture.' (ibid:146) Just as the 'negative desert' takes many forms (vacant lot, backyard, quarry, cemetery, dump), the Other then also may be a negative quality or entity, and the unconscious - of which it is the discourse - with all its detritus may also be a tainted realm, as opposed to a condition of 'truth.'

Jean Baudrillard's prose in America represents an extreme case of desert hyperbole, 'validated' in the theory-freighted discourse of the late 1980s. His mythologizing and mythography (of grandeur, purity, stars, Indians, silence) works to stereotype the desert yet again, even if in novel terminology: 'The grandeur of deserts derives from their being, in their aridity, the negative of the earth's surface and of our civilized humours. They are places where humours and fluids become rarefied, where the air is so pure that the influence of the stars descends direct from the constellations. And, with the extermination of the desert Indians, an even earlier stage than that of anthropology became visible: a mineralogy, a geology, a sidereality, an inhuman facticity, an aridity that drives out the artificial scruples of culture, a silence that exists nowhere else. ('88a:6) Baudrillard climaxes his reductive eulogy with what we might call 'topomorphism,' in which an Other, the human female is construed as 'desert-like,' having a '... spontaneous and superficial animality, in which the carnal combines with aridity and discrimination.' (ibid:53) In a welter of conflated Others - desert, sacrifice, woman, death - Baudrillard makes the extraordinary statement that, 'One should always bring something to sacrifice in the desert, and offer it as a victim. A woman. If something has to disappear there, something equal in beauty to the desert, why not a woman?' ('88a:55) As George Alexander rightly comments, 'It is difficult to know what to make of such a stupidly sexist, and sadistic speculation.' (in Zurbrugg,'88:36)

The Other negated

'One place is everywhere. Everywhere is nowhere.'

Persian Proverb
D. H. Lawrence said of exotic locations (in those days, Tasmania, Ceylon, Africa, America ... Thirroul?) that '... they are only the negation of what we ourselves stand for and are: and we're rather like Jonahs running away from the place we belong.' One of the dangers inherent in seeking the Self in the geographic Other (in psychoanalytic terms, an impossibility in itself, because the conscious mind cannot apprehend directly the unconscious) is that the quest may reveal little, other than the fractal repetitions of 'everything's changed - and it's all the same,' and that the traveller's psychic baggage remains the same whether acknowledged in Wahroonga or Ougadougou. In his poem Le Voyage, Baudelaire remarks that travel leads to a bitter knowledge: 'what the world shows us, in the end, is ourselves.' In order to encounter the Other, says Ihab Hassan, '... one confronts oneself - and there you will meet the Other in the heart of your own unconscious and darkness.' (90b) It then may be that the encounter with the Self should take place among the facts of Kew rather than the wildest, distracting dreams of Kathmandu.

The role of travel accounts and other documents in the inscription and promotion of the geographic Other is important. As texts, they linguistically represent (or 'pre-present') Other places, to the point that an encounter with a putative image of the Other occurs in the act of reading. This may be the clearest focus in which the geographic Other can be signified, that is deferred, at one remove, represented, not directly apprehended. (Perhaps it may be said, pseudo-Taoistically - as it were - that 'The Other which can be named is not the true Other.') Once in the presence of the real-time, visceral son et lumiere of Gizeh, New York or anywhere else, any representation (framed and limited by conscious codes) of 'the Other' is irrupted and graffitied beyond retrieval. The Other evades signification while the text preserves something else. "'I think you recognize cities better on the atlas than when you visit them in person," the emperor says to Marco snapping the volume shut. And Polo answers, "Travelling, you realize that differences are lost: each city takes to resembling all cities, places exchange their form, order, distances, a shapeless dust cloud invades the continents. Your atlas at last preserves the differences intact: that assortment of qualities which are like the letters in a name." (Calvino, '74:108)
If, as I am suggesting here, there may be no Other place (perhaps because, as one Robert Burton said in 1621, 'All places are distant from heaven alike?'), it is equally valid to hypothesise that there are only Other places. Craig Owens in *The Discourse of Others* expresses this possibility and its ramifications: 'Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just others, that we ourselves are an "other" among others. All meaning and every goal having disappeared, it becomes possible to wander through civilizations as if through vestiges and ruins. The whole of mankind becomes an imaginary museum: Where should we go this weekend, visit the Angkor ruins or take a stroll in the Tivoli of Copenhagen? We can very easily imagine a time close at hand when any fairly well to do person will be able to leave his country indefinitely in order to taste his own cultural death in an interminable aimless voyage.' ('85:161) Everywhere is nowhere.

Levi-Strauss, who considered at some length the question of Other and Difference, collapsed many false distinctions in his refusal to see Western civilization as privileged and unique, in his view of the human mind as programmed, in his emphasis on form over content, and in his insistence that the savage mind is not inferior to the civilized. (Hayes,'70:86) (It may well be different, but not inferior.) He replaced '... the particular minds of particular savages in particular jungles with the Savage Mind immanent in us all.' (Geertz,'73:355) One place is everywhere.

One writer of travel narratives, French novelist Victor Segalen dealt throughout his work with the encounter of the (European) Self amid the (exotic, Asian) Other. As Yvonne Y. Ysieh notes, Segalen's focus quickly moved from 'l'Empire de Chine' to 'l'Empire du soi-même.' ('88:73) James Clifford, in reviewing Segalen's work (in *Encounters with the exotic*), comments on this familiar theme of the quest for Self amid foreign climes. He finds that Segalen '... writes the modernist experience of displacement: self and other as a sequence of encounters, the stable identity of each at issue. [But] There is no unified culture to be represented, no whole self able to interpret a "China".' ('84:639) This recognition of no stable Self or Other to reveal any tangible 'truth,' leaves only a recognition of the '.... seductive ... movement of the narrator's own insatiable desire for
disclosure, a structure of knowledge underlying all stories of concealment, penetration or initiation. [Segalen's novel] Rene Leys subverts this logic of secrecy - the positing of an other with a true "within". There are no ultimate depths: the desire for revelations is endless. What remains is an ethnography of surfaces, of signs without essential content ...' (ibid:638) Segalen wrote, 'Au fond, ce n'est ni l'Europe, ni la Chine que je suis venu chercher ici, mais une vision de la Chine. (ibid:639)' Segalen's Other, then, is a construction of desire, and like the Japan of Roland Barthes' Empire of Signs, an ephemeron of signs.

The slip of the signifier beneath the signified seems ineluctable. The Other is found at the asymptote of language. I cannot trip the circuit breaker to this semiotic rondo, except by returning to the model, by taking my metaphor literally - that is, by recalling that a 'rondo' is a musical form, something which is played, and thus - by the exercise of volition - also not played. The Other may well be an ephemeron of signs, but 'semioclasm' (as Barthes called it) is also just a playful utterance - or silence - away.
3.4

EXOTICISM

'... a process of desire, the "law of exoticism" [is] in motion, internalized. A forever unsatisfied quest for diversity constitutes the intimate body and subjectivity of the traveller.'

James Clifford
Encounters with the exotic

'Fly the great big sky, see the great big sea.
Kick through continents, bustin' boundaries.
Take it hip-to-hip, rocket through the wilderness.
Around the world the trip begins with a kiss.'

B-52s
Roam
'Exotic' is defined in Hamlyn's Encyclopedic World Dictionary as '... of foreign origin or character ... strikingly unusual or colourful in appearance or effect ...' (71:563) In the previous chapter we noted Susan Sontag's observations, that Europe (or the West) seeks itself in the exotic, and, that modern sensibility moves between two seemingly opposed but related impulses: surrender to the exotic or the Other, and the domestication of the exotic. For travel writers, the exotic has occupied a perennially central place in their accounts; indeed, without the exotic, travel writing's stock of dominant discourses is considerably reduced and it is denied a dramatic and enabling opposition, the interaction with and comment upon the unfamiliar and the foreign-anomalous. Travel writers however are not alone in this concern with the exotic (often as utopia or dystopia). Their fellow travellers, anthropologists and tourists, exhibit a similar desire to celebrate Difference - which may be manifest in the spectacle or the sexual, as well as in nostalgia for the loss of the exotic. It is not possible to separate completely the intertwined strands of the Other, the exotic, autobiography and the quest, nor within each of those to separate, for example, looking at from looking for. Thus, it is to be expected that there is some overlap in the following properties or conditions of the exotic.

The exotic as spectacle

'... certain motifs recur consistently: The Orient as a place of pilgrimage is one; so too is the vision of Orient as spectacle, or tableau vivant.'

Edward Said
Orientalism

'More than any other tropical island Bali has become the most exotic of exotic lands; a fantasy of the splendours of the Orient and the beauties of the Pacific. Over three centuries the West has constructed a complex and gorgeous
image of the island that has emerged to take over even Balinese thought.'

Adrian Vickers
Bali: A Paradise Created

The 'Orient' as written in 19th century European literature, is an exemplary study in the constitution of the exotic and the oppositions within which it is established. Gustave Flaubert's 1862 novel set in Egypt, Salammbo represents, according to Robert Harbison (in Eccentric Spaces), '... the furthest reach of the Romantic taste for the exotic, for conceiving an unthinkably bizarre gorgeousness and locating it is some remote place.' (77:114) Edward Said notes that Flaubert's Oriental perspective is rooted in '... an eastward and southward search for a "visionary alternative".' Flaubert sought such oppositions as gorgeous colour (instead of the greys of the French provincial townscape), exciting spectacle (instead of humdrum routine), and the perennially mysterious (instead of the all-too-familiar). Writing almost a century after Flaubert, but commenting on a descendant of the Romantic novel, the adventure film, Roland Barthes (in Mythologies) comments on the continuation of the same over-coloured spectacularization of the East: '... this same Orient which has today become the political centre of the world we see here all flattened, made smooth and gaudily coloured like an old-fashioned postcard. The device which produces irresponsibility is clear: colouring the world is always a means of denying it ...' (73:94) Neither Flaubert nor the makers of The Lost Continent (the film to which Barthes refers) presented an Orient (be it Islamic or Far Eastern) constituted of working people, productive terrain, or in short, an economy of humans being. The desire for the exotic, which is always colourful, violent, sexual, spectacular, overwhelms and suppresses the mundane - which frequently is not.

In passing, it should be noted that there is also a recurrent 'exoticization of the West' itself (Carter,88:9) also evident in Western literature and culture. This might be experienced as the touristic reversion towards Swiss hamlets, Swiss Guards, English castles, Irish pubs, or simulations of these and similar productions
(Knott's Berry Farm, Swan Hill, Old Sydney Town); more recently, 'undertaker tours' of the expiry points of certain Hollywood celebrities may be seen as an aspect of this exoticization of the domestic West. Earlier, throughout the first five decades of the 19th century, urban England even 'exoticized' in popular literature certain alien aspects of its own urban geography. F. Z. Schwartzbach in "Terra incognita" - An Image of the City in English Literature, 1820-1855, notes that the phrase 'Terra incognita' and others like it occurred constantly in urban description of the period. ('82:5) The primordial Terra Incognita, Australia, although no doubt still exotic, had been removed from the register of Utter Others, and that title was displaced from the peripheries back to the homeland. At the heart of the English city was both the motor and the dark side of its Industrial Revolution, the 'dark Satanic mills' and their human grist, which, in representation, might simultaneously be coloured and denied by being displaced into the exotic. Evident in these descriptions, says Schwartzbach, is '... the imagery and language of geographical exploration, and the attendant atmosphere of mystery, wonder and fear, that writers ... appropriated to suggest the mixture of feelings that the labyrinthine inner city districts inspired in those who penetrated them.' (ibid:6)

In recent representations, the contrapuntal movement of the 'domestication of the exotic' takes another shape in Northern Europe or America's coding of 'The Mediterranean.' The mild meets the wild (literally half way between East and West) and the resultant vector is called the 'South.' The imagery is tamed, no longer depicting the harem or the jungle of the Eastern Other, but still lingering - though safely so - in the margins of the slightly unfamiliar, the less-homely: '... beach and sun, bright coloured aperitifs at little tables outdoors, copious fish and shellfish to eat, folk or popular music played on string instruments, cheap drinkable local wine, much use of oil (olive for cooking, suntan for browning), all in a setting of colored architecture and "colorful" street markets. A maximum exposure of flesh guarantees a constant erotic undertone, and a certain amount of noise (Vespas, children shouting on the beach) provides a reassurance of life and gaiety.' (Fussell,'80:135) This scene, says Fussell, constitutes '... one of the main presiding myths of the desirable for the modern urban and suburban middle
proletariat, [and] has become our version of pastoral.' (loc cit) It is, of course, a consumable pastoral - not only in a vicarious, literary sense or a post-colonial (the pan-colony of 'Touristan'), ideological sense, but principally in its promise of the purchasable, prophylacticized exotic.

In the sense of 'the spectacle' as subject to the intruding gaze of the traveller, Anne McDonald (in *Girl Dancer At Rigo Festival*) comments on how each of us is reluctant to consider the possibility that our desire to stare (write/photograph/film) with an 'unreflexive gaze' at the exotic is '... impervious to and perhaps the real motivation for our commentary.' None of us, she notes, '... is keen to discourage the romance that we are more sympathetic and understanding than the imagemakers we refer to.' ('88:63)

**Exotic erotica**

'Well, I'm a-standin' on a corner in Winslow, Arizona.
I'm such a fine sight to see.
It's a girl, my Lord, in a flatbed Ford
Slowin' down to take a look at me.'

*Jackson Browne, Glen Frey
Take It Easy*

'I wish I was a trapper, I would give a thousand pelts
to sleep with Pocahontas and find out how she felt
in the morning on the fields of green ...'

*Neil Young
Marlon Brando, Pocahontas and Me*

Earlier, I noted Rosemary Creswell's comment that, of the themes of recent Australian travel writing, '... perhaps the most obvious ... is sexual adventure. Exotic places seem to provide the setting, and perhaps the opportunity through cultural freedom or dislocation, for exotic sexual and emotional experience.' ('87.ix) Paul Fussell reinforces this opinion that the journey takes a traveller
from his/her world of middle-class restrictions towards a new order of experience, much of it arising from involvements 'in tabooed relationships.' (80:116) This concern with the twin djins, sex and travel - each a symbol of liberty and, simultaneously, a reminder of its at-home inhibition - informs much literature, although a traveller or writer may chose whether to emphasise this aspect a little, a lot, or completely deny it. This opinion (of the sexual drive within the 'travel itch') is admittedly speculative. One critic, Ralph Freedman, sees Hermann Hesse's novel Wandering as being at pains to delineate '... the erotic upsurge that ... shapes all wanderlust.' (in Fussell, ibid:113) Ihab Hassan describes this drive as the '... desire for the Other, the one who is different in the place which is different to our native place.' (90b) (Conversely, it has also been said that sex itself is a form of travel.)

'Like everyone else, I ... gave myself over to the traditional hobbies of the traveller: lust and sightseeing.' Fussell quotes an Australian traveller, Kenneth Minogue, in order to point to the frequent conflation of 'erotic' and 'exotic.' For the Australian, Fussell observes, 'the erotic capital of the world must be located abroad, just as for the English it may not be London.' (80:113) The possibility of erotic involvements in exotic places, or vice versa, is not the only aspect to the sexual dimension of travel. On a different level, the archetypal male journey, such as that in the Odyssey, may be seen as men in exile from women. With the accompanying notions of test, return and reward (e.g. to/of Helen, Penelope), during this journey the heroic quester faces repeated danger of death (by, cannibals, headhunters, etc); in this mingling of death (the Absolute Other) and sexuality, the exotic journey is rendered as the erotic journey. ('The erotic involves fascination and the exotic, both of which are ambiguous, involving desire and fear,' says Hassan. [90b])

The erotic landscape, as frequently represented by men, can seem at times as much a domain of domination and double-think as the imperial landscape. (The following description of the south of Bali by American writer Hickman Powell is a fervid conflation of imperial, erotic and anthropomorphic - or 'topomorphic' - figures: "... a teeming, pregnant woman, and in her eyes burned afterglow of
fallen empires". [in Vickers 1989: introduction]) In *Introduction: Travel Literature, Ethnography, and Ethnography* Caroline Brettell notes what she calls '... the uncanny parallel fixation' of 19th century travellers on women in primitive and peasant societies: 'Women clearly epitomized the most exotic manifestation of "the other." Whether as toilsome beasts or sensual, often naked, beauties, they presented a dramatic contrast to the Victorian ideal of womanhood.' ('86:132) The exotic is fixed in its contrast to the mundane, and while the signifiers of both conditions are in constant flux, there ought to be no expectation that the exotic will ever cease to encompass the erotic. Nevertheless, it is surprising to note, in the 'ideologically correct' world of contemporary theoretical discourse, the following elegantly 'semioticised' rationalisation of supposedly 'essential' racial distinctions: '... it must be said that black, the pigmentation of the dark races, is like a natural make-up that is set off by the artificial kind to produce a beauty which is not sexual, but sublime and animal - a beauty which the pale faces so desperately lack. Whiteness seems an extenuation of physical adornment, a neutrality which, perhaps by that very token, claims all the exoteric powers of the Word, but ultimately will never possess the esoteric and ritual potency or artifice.' (The writer is Jean Baudrillard in his 'theory takes a trip' book, *America*. [‘88a:15-16]) Despite rather coy denials of this 'beauty' being sexual, the vocabulary of 'animal,' 'sublime,' and 'esoteric and ritual potency,' when attributed to human beauty, comes very close to being the signifiers of the erotic, and thus, to equating a specific skin colouring with that erotic.

The disingenuousness of the denial is less a problem than the authority with which (and by whom) these ontologically and epistemologically suspect statements are presented. It is, as Said writes, out of such a coercive framework that, for instance, '... a modern "coloured" man is chained irrevocably to the general truths formulated about his prototypical linguistic, anthropological, and doctrinal forebears by a white European scholar.' ('78:237) To this we may also add 'coloured' woman. A larger question then emerges (and must go unanswered here): can the erotic in the context of the racially 'exotic' operate for the Western male traveller (and travel
writer), and for the subject(-as-object) herself, in other than an exploitative relationship?

Nostalgia for the lost exotic

'From the early nineteenth century on, European letters resound with the sentiment of being Europamude, tired of Europe. Travellers continue, in every larger numbers, to make trips to exotic, non-Western lands, which seem to answer to some of the old stereotypes; that simpler society, where faith is pure, nature unspoiled, discontent (and its civilisation) unknown. But paradise is always being lost. One of the recurrent themes of modern travel narratives is the depravations of the modern, the loss of the past: the report on a society's decline.'

Susan Sontag

Model destinations

Pure, unspoiled, contented paradise always being lost to the modern - to paraphrase Sontag - is noted as a common lament. Neither the familiar nor the exotic place remains worth occupying for long. Weltschmerz meets Europamude. To retrieve the value of any excursions into other, older, more exotic cultures from the threat of nihilism, two observations should be made. Firstly, that journeys to those 'grievously poor countries' may be seen and experienced as 'a trip backward in time,' in which exposure to the 'simplicities, pieties and materially spartan life of an earlier age,' (Sontag, loc cit) may be, at worst, bourgeois vicariousness or, more optimistically, a positive opportunity for re-education and a perception of alternative values and technologies. Secondly (and in a less humanistic sense), that our post/modernist fascination with declining cultures and ruins (of others and our own) is experienced not as a world to reconstruct but as an aesthetic of fragmentation and process - one perhaps to deconstruct. (Clifford,'84:638)
The structural decrepitude of older forms, physical and abstract, in both metropolitan and peripheral cultures is seen today as a postmodern inevitability; and as an opportunity more for a writer's creative commentary than for his concerned engagement with or resistance to the process. This decrepitude may elicit threnodies for and nostalgic excursions in witness of the passing of the ages, but only in extreme cases - such as with the Amazon rainforest - does the inexorable morbidity of the process impact beyond our fascination with, and insulation by, the 'dis-simulacra' of the text. Modernity has long felt culpable in the murder of the exotic, but powerless to stop it. As accomplices all, we are jaded by the accusation which can be neither refuted nor silenced: 'A profound sadness took possession of me. The dream which had brought me to Tahiti was brutally disappointed by the reality.' said Paul Gauguin, expressing the post-coital remorse of the West after its congress with the exotic-erotic Other of the Pacific had had its historic way.

There are several familiar literary retreats, each equally powerless, from this discomfort at witnessing the extinction of the exotic. One is into 'straight' nostalgia, as in: 'The more the Aborigines are exterminated, the more the West becomes nostalgic for them.' (Baudrillard, 88b:31) The other is 'the report on a society's decline,' which is often an element, sometimes central, to the modern travel account. Nowadays, this report of decline may appear not with a tone of concern for its subject matter, nor even with the revivalist sentimentality of nostalgia, but, as in as this lengthy quote from James P. Sterba in Singapore's Straits Times (18 July, 1987), as nostalgia parodied: '... those who come in search of the past are in trouble, because hotels in the steamier reaches of the Orient aren't what they used to be. All but gone are the grand verandas where plots for novels and more serious misdeeds were hatched over pink gins behind potted palms. ... Gone are the beady-browed sots in white linen suits who conducted colonial and Cold War chicanery long into hot nights laced with whispers of gold, guns, opium, flesh and the less egregious implements of no good. Gone is Hong Kong's Repulse Bay Hotel, a victim of real estate greed. ... The Raffles in Singapore, now flanked by glitzy high-rise monsters, is occupied mainly by ripe German tourists and shoestring Australians with no
visible means of laundering. Singapore slings get slurped in souvenir T-shirts with the recipe chest-high.'

**Anthropology and the exotic**

'He [Levi-Strauss] arrived as a delayed Columbus to make a flattening discovery: "The tropics are not so much exotic as out of date".'

Clifford Geertz

**Interpretation of Cultures**

Anthropology is capable of revealing both the '... familiarity of the exotic and the exoticism of the familiar.' (Fuller and Parry,'89) In the past, it has been strongly associated with the ethnography of the foreign exotic, and much less so with the 'exoticism of the familiar' (the domestic) realm. This absorption with distant 'exotics' (such as Berber horsemen, Jewish peddlers and French Legionnaires), writes Clifford Geertz, is '... essentially a device for displacing the dulling sense of familiarity with which the mysteriousness of our own ability to relate perceptively to one another is concealed from us.' ('73:14) Travel writing, like ethnography, has thrived in the realm of the unfamiliar, and like ethnography, may stand accused of 'the inability to detect the subtle' (Wilde's definition of 'boredom') in the everyday.

Regardless of the proximity of its subject matter or the depth-of-field employed, during the 1980s, the lens of anthropological writing found itself under scrutiny by the same deconstructive critical gaze as most other forms of writing. It had long been the historical predicament of ethnography, notes James Clifford, that it was '... caught up in the invention, not the representation, of cultures.' ('86:2) (In fact, ethnographers - especially those who write a little too well - had often been called novelists manque, says Clifford. [ibid:4]) Under the new critical regime, *writing* emerged as '... central to what anthropologists do both in the field and thereafter.' Writing was no longer the marginal, occulted or
occluded dimension of the scientist's work; the ideology which had previously claimed '... transparency of representation and immediacy of experience' was rendered highly suspect. ('ibid:2) Culture - be it foreign 'exotic' or local 'familiar' - was seen now as '... composed of seriously contested codes and representations.' Most importantly, in the writing about cultures it was now assumed that 'the poetic and the political are inseparable,' and that 'science is in, not above, historical and linguistic processes.' (loc cit) In the age of post-structuralism, writing about the tropics _qua_ tropics became, like the tropics themselves for Levi-Strauss, 'not so much exotic as out of date.'

This would hold as true for the general practice of travel writing as for the speciality of ethnography, except - I suggest - for the factor of _fascination_. Objects of study and intellectual perspectives may all have limited 'shelf-lives', but the desire to know has no 'use-by' date. Certain _approaches_ to knowing (via ethnology, journalism, fiction) the tropics may become dated, but not the drive to find other approaches; that is, to be fascinated another time, by the object and by the intellect and spirit which apprehends them.

**The tourist and the exotic**

'We've been conditioned into wishing for exotic unreality; we get all the reality we need in our everyday lives.'

Anthony Burgess  
_Small Things Count_

It is a moot point - or a grand debate - whether we _do_ get all the reality we need in our everyday lives, or instead (as Geertz proposes), are dulled to '... the mysteriousness of our own ability to relate perceptively to one another.' Either way, a taste for the exotic has persisted among travellers (and readers) ever since a liesured and literate class found itself capable of discretionary travel. As William Eisler (in _Terra Australis: Art and Exploration 1500-1768_)
records, the upper strata of European society in the 16th century viewed as 'exotic' the 'savage' peoples with 'strange' customs (i.e. the rural peasantry) who lived among its own islands and mountains. (Eisler, ibid:16) Two centuries later, the opinions on Irish civilisation expressed by one Gilbert White to a certain Thomas Pennant, in White's proposal for a scientific tour of Ireland, have a ring of familiarity: 'The manners of the wild natives, their superstitions, their prejudices, their sordid way of life, will extort many useful references ...' (Eisler, ibid:16) The 'many useful references' which are to be so frankly 'extorted' from the 'wild,' 'superstitious,' 'prejudiced' and 'sordid' 'natives' are no less (and no more) than the equivalent of the gleanings of today's traveller: for the travel writer, a scoop article on post-Red Ulan Bator; for the anthropologist, a lexicon of urban ghetto argot; for the tourist, video footage of a Lhasa 'sky burial.'

The horizon of the exotic continually recedes, but does so from a centre which is, relatively speaking, everywhere (and whose perimeter is thus nowhere). Consequently, while a Margaret Thatcher might still view the 'natives' of, say, Belfast as a 'wild,' 'superstitious,' 'prejudiced' and 'sordid' lot, desire might no longer constitute this for her as 'exotic' in a positive sense, and the desirable exotic for her almost certainly would be located elsewhere, far beyond Ulster. Meanwhile, for a Nepalese sirdar or shopkeeper imagining English roses and his very own Rover, his wildest dreams of Kathmandu are no doubt, for someone else, the facts of Kew. It should be noted that this process of desire, which Clifford calls the 'forever unsatisfied quest for diversity' which constitutes the 'intimate body and subjectivity of the traveller,' also operates upon those who travel in the vicarious sense, via the accounts of writers and travellers.

The tourist (vicarious or otherwise) is not simply an observer, but, as Hart Cohen writes, also a dreamer, in particular of 'nature' in its idealised, untampered state. Within the sphere of the exotic, the "primitive" is the idealisation of nature internalised by the tourist to be romanticised and thus imprisoned. The culmination of this dream is to play out the repressed desire to become the primitive. (Cohen, '88a:14) Fussell has suggested that the rise of tourism
during the 19th century was directly linked to this 'bourgeois vogue of romantic primitivism,' ('80:38) which appears to persist, unabated, today. The travel industry and its publicity arts have mobilised and manipulated this seemingly atavistic desire for the pure, primitive, anachronistic and exotic, until the very word 'abroad' (under which these other concepts are often subsumed) comes to assume a dreamlike, talismanic quality. (Raban,'87:254) In Barthes' words, 'By appending to Eastern realities a few positive signs which mean "native", one reliably immunizes them against any responsible content.' ('73:96)

Travel writing and the exotic

'Now, do you really imagine that the Japanese people, as they are presented to us in art, have any existence? If you do, you have never understood Japanese art at all. The Japanese people are the deliberate self-conscious creation of certain individual artists ... The actual people who live in Japan are not unlike the general run of English people; that is to say, they are extremely commonplace, and have nothing curious or extraordinary about them. In fact, the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people.'

Oscar Wilde

_The Decay of Lying_

The 'old-fashioned literary journey,' says Susan Sontag, is about '... going to an exotic land in order to return home and write about it.' ('84:699) The basic ingredients, exemplified by colourful/sexy/sordid/etc. natives, at roam (rarely at work) in a textscape of mountain, sea or desert, represented according to the persuasion of the Western eye, have already been touched upon. The Western intellectual who has pretended, like the ethnographer, to be the faithful amanuensis of the exotic is the travel writer. As such, his accounts have a history which reflects the enterprises, ideas and ideals of his own culture. In _Model Destinations_, Sontag
stresses the basic opposition deployed in such literature: 'Books about travel to exotic places have always opposed an "us" to a "them"... Most classical and medieval travel literature is of the "us good, them bad" - typically, "us good, them horrid" - variety. To be foreign was to be anomalous ...' (84:699) Premodern travellers, she states, never thought of themselves as the anomalous or barbarian party. Modern travel literature (with its agenda of angst and quest) only starts when civilization '... becomes a critical as well as a self-evident notion, that is, when it is no longer so clear who is civilized and who is not.' (loc cit)

Thereafter, Sontag finds, 'travel judgements' seem to alternate in cycles of hope and disillusionment. The idealizing of an exotic society replaces the report on its barbarity, and in sequence is overturned by the next report. (loc cit) 'The joy of the pioneer encountering the primal scene quickly passes. The missionary, the soldier, the slaver, the anthropologist, the Orientalist, and kindred men of commerce soon go to work. Then we hear the lament of the returning traveller venting elegies to a world on the wane.' (Cockburn, '86:23) One modifier of the rapture over exotica is its 'domestication' - in the most literal sense of 'bringing it all back home.' The wildest nightmares of Kew may be to encounter the facts of Kathmandu on one's doorstep. As noted earlier, Evelyn Waugh griped how '... it was once fun to meet people who were different, but now ... one has only to leave one's gates.' (in Stannard, '82:125)

Every Orientalism, says Said, is revivalist. Flaubert, for example, '... must bring the Orient to life, he must deliver it to himself and to his readers, and it is his experience of it in books and on the spot, and his language for it, that will do the trick.' (78:185) For Barthes, the evocative devices employed in a cinematic documentary representation of the exotic East work towards the same end - a revival of the mythic form, rather than a engagement with the historical content: '... the rites, the cultural facts, are never related to a particular historical order, an explicit economic or social status, but only to the great neutral forms of cosmic commonplaces (the seasons, storms, death, etc.) If we are concerned with fishermen, it is not at all the type of fishing which is shown; but rather. drowned in a garish sunset and eternalized, a romantic.
essence of the fisherman, presented not as a workman dependent by his technique and his gains on a definite society, but rather as the theme of an eternal condition ...' (73:95) Such scepticism (of the 'constructed' exotic) is not the currency of professional critics alone. The travel writer too is aware of the accusation of his/her own devices and today is caught between two romances, of the Other and of the Self.

'The travel writer seeks the world we have lost - the lost valleys of the imagination.' (Cockburn,'86:23) With the inexorable progress of 'Progress' the travel writer (who professionally engages the analogue of time rendered as space) becomes the surrogate time traveller for his readers, voyaging toward a past which is always beyond his reach, and ours. He must often adapt his tone to the chagrin of this realisation. 'Amid the wreckage of the 20th-century world,' writes Alexander Cockburn, 'his mode must be one of irony. Round the next bend may be Eden, but Eve will have endemic syphilis and live in a tarpaper shack, while Adam will work at a construction project downriver.' (ibid:25) But the irony, variously self-deprecating or mock-heroic is egocentric. When it is no longer possible to deny history, then, says Cockburn, '... there is always the self to be discovered.' (loc cit)

If Cockburn's sceptical pronouncement (history ironised = self fixated) was the full theorem, or even more than only partially correct, the forecast for travel literature would be indeed grim, but it is not. For a long time (if ever) it has not been possible for a writer to simply 'deny history' - even if this were desired - and to retain intellectual credibility; and most of the best travel writers predicate their comprehension of a site, culture or event upon its historical antecedants, not to mention acknowledging that historical dimension as often the very motivation for their presence. I nominate Peter Fleming, Robert Byron, Gavin Young, John Steinbeck, Jan Morris, Freya Stark, Laurens van der Post ... for starters, as exemplars of this historic contextualisation. Moreover, history confronted does not then imply the ironic treatment of same, nor preclude the discovery of the self. From Cabeza de Vaca's epic of horrors and miracles in crossing 16th century America, to Bruce Chatwin's unwinding (in *Songlines*) of the 'World Song' in the
collective Self, there is an unbrookable stream within travel writing which *pairs*, without irony, these two concerns, history and the self.

**The creative, exotic tropics**

'Ceylon is an experience - but heavens, not a permanence.'

D. H. Lawrence

'All jungles are evil.'

Leonard Woolf

If the desert was seen in a preceding section as epitomising the topographic Other, the tropics in general might epitomise the Creative Other, an archetypal site in which the *frisson* of the exotic motivates the passing writer to creative heights. (Meanwhile, conversely and perversely, the same tropics are said to *de*-motivate from any such activity those who are either born or linger too long there.) There is a long history of European artists and writers who have sought the significant (the Self and/or the Other) in the emblematic 'South' of the tropics. This frequently erogenous tropical zone encompasses, without too much geographic specificity, Asia (as marginally distinct from the Islamic 'East'), the Pacific and the warmer parts of Australasia and Latin America.

Paul Gauguin in the Marquesas is the archetype of this kind of aesthetic quester. Arthur Rimbaud conjured the essentials of this desire to find a creative epiphany somewhere inside 23.5 degrees of the Line better than almost anyone - without yet having left Europe. In *A Season in Hell*, he challenged his own fate, as well as prophetically describing a romantic lifestyle still emulated by Western 'bohos' from Tangier to Bogota: 'Here I am on the Breton shore. Let the towns sparkle in the evening. My day is done; I am leaving Europe. The sea air will scorch my lungs; odd climates will tan me. To swim, to trample the grass, to hunt, above all, to smoke; to drink liquors strong as boiling metal, - as my dear ancestors did
around their fires. I shall come back, with limbs of iron, my skin dark, my eye furious: from my mask, people will judge me a member of a powerful race. I shall have gold: I shall be idle and brutal. Women take care of these ferocious invalids on their return from torrid countries. I shall be involved in political affairs. Saved.' ('73:49) Half a century later, Australian painter and writer, Donald Friend, was moved by the same urge, desiring '... a wild, topical, exotic life among dark-skinned native people,' which he set off to find, and to paint and write about for most of his life. (Hawley,'89:1)

While the tropics (or the desert, the mountains, the sea) may provide visual, intellectual and erotic stimulation, in 20th century travel writing they themselves are rarely the principal matter in the account. Travel writing has ceded the dominance of description over narration to ethnography, and has generally occupied itself with the inverse formula. In the contexts of cultural dislocation/isolation and the contemporary enterprise of 'the self to be discovered,' the traveller's narrative has become increasingly concerned with the inner quest which parallels the outer journey, in short, with 'the double quest'. Subsequently, in virtually all accounts of modern reflective travel, notes Sontag, the master subject is alienation itself. 'The trip may support a sceptical, acutely sensuous, or speculative view of the world. Or the trip is an exercise in overcoming alienation, in which travellers celebrate virtues - or liberties - found in a distant society that are lacking in their own.' ('84:699)
3.5

THE QUEST

'Le transfert de l'Empire de Chine à l'Empire de soi-même est constant.'

Victor Segalen

'The crow went travelling abroad, and came home just as black.'

English Proverb

'The quest always leads to further despair.'

Marjorie Kalter

Metaphorical Quest
The quest

The questing hero is a recurrent figure in literature throughout all ages and across all cultures, whether the story be regarded as fact or fiction. Fundamental interpretations of the quest include Northrop Frye's (in Anatomy of Criticism) that, 'Translated into dream terms, the quest-romance is the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfilment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality.' (in Kalter,'76:16) In his essay, The Quest Hero. W. H. Auden sees the quest as a '... literary mimesis of the subjective experience of becoming,' which parallels the the two fixed points in life - birth and death - with its own fixed points, the quest's commencement and successful conclusion.' (in Kalter, ibid:20) It may be useful to summarise the quest model in literature in terms of the following synoptic comments made by Janis P. Stout (in The Journey Narrative in American Literature: Patterns and Departures.

- 'The goal of the quest may be either ... proximate in the sense of a materially real, obtainable object, however magical or totemic; [or] ultimate in the sense of an abstraction such as Truth. In either case, it is deeply involved with the self-realisation of the questing hero, who proves and finds himself in the course of his journey.' (88)

- '... the quest is primarily a journey toward, a journey of aspiration rather than rejection.' (89)

- 'The geography of the quest, even in the outward quest for a "real" object, is not the world of reality so much as a patterned, emblematic landscape presented in terms that point to its essential or affective quality rather than its perceived components.' (89)

The quest then is primarily a journey of searching, towards the unknown, across a symbolic terrain, and it involves tests and revelations: its goal is both radically uncertain and significant. (Stout,'83:88)
The heroic journey

While the quest is a perennial topic and narrative-structuring device, in its specific form as 'the heroic journey,' mythographer Joseph Campbell has analysed many variations on the theme of the mythological adventure of the questing hero and has called it the 'monomyth.' The basic movements (or 'nuclear unit') of the monomyth, as distilled by Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, are a magnification of the formula typically represented in traditional rites of passage: separation - initiation - return. 'The adventure of the hero normally follows the pattern of the nuclear unit ... : a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return. ('75:35)

In its synoptic form the mythic quest entails a number of clear stages. The hero, setting forth from his home or castle, is lured, carried away or voluntarily proceeds to the threshold of adventure where he encounters a shadowy presence that guards the passage. Defeating or conciliating this power, the hero enters the kingdom of the dark. (Alternatively, he may be slain by the power and descend in death.) Beyond the threshold the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar forces, some of which threaten him (tests) and some of which give magical aid (helpers). Arriving at what Campbell calls 'the nadir of the mythological round,' he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. His triumph '... may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divination (apotheosis), or again - if the powers have remained unfriendly to him - his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft).' In essence, the journey represents an expansion of consciousness and of being - as manifest in illumination, transfiguration or freedom. His final work task is to return: 'If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). The hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread, resurrected and the boon that he brings restores the world. (ibid:212-213) This final stage is sometimes known as the Return of the Hero as Master of Two Worlds. In some versions there is also a coda: the hero, having received his reward
(wife, treasure, land or fame), enjoys this into late middle age when, once again, the clouds darken. As Bruce Chatwin writes (in *The Songlines*), "... restlessness stirs him. Again he leaves: either like Beowulf to die in combat or, as the blind Tiresias prophesies for Odysseus, to set off for some mysterious destination, and vanish." ('87:214)

There are, of course, many variations of emphasis within the range of heroic quest tales: 'Many tales isolate and greatly enlarge upon one or two of the typical elements of the full cycle (test motif, flight motif, abduction of the bride), others string a number of independent cycles into a single series (as in the Odyssey). (Campbell, '75:213) Whether the hero be comic or saintly, the morphology of the adventure is essentially to the same plan, even though popular tales may represent the heroic action as physical, and religious versions may show the deed to be moral.' (ibid:37) Quests may be differentiated according to the motives of the protagonist, into those involving religion, war, a golden or social utopia, exploration, monetary gain, a person, knowledge of the world or oneself. For Chatwin, the Hero Cycle represents 'an unchangeable paradigm of "ideal" behaviour for the human male' (one could, he adds, of course work one out for the Heroine), each section of which - like a link in a behavioural chain - will correspond to one of the classic Ages of Man. 'Each Age opens with some fresh barrier to be scaled or ordeal to be endured.' ('87:215)

Wherever the mythological hero may venture, Campbell notes that his passage is fundamentally inwards - '... into depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long lost, forgotten powers are revivified, to be made available for the transfiguration of the world.' ('75:31) In the ideas of its interiority and 'the transfiguration of the world,' the classic heroic journey involves more than an individual's lone excursion into a regimen of physical challenges of consequence to no one but himself and perhaps his family. Campbell sees the hero's quest as a shamanic journey, symbolically undertaken for the redemption of his own community or culture. 'It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal - carries the cross of the redeemer - not in the
bright moments of his tribe's great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair.' (ibid:331)

In terms of a contemporary challenge, Campbell continues '... man himself is now the crucial mystery. Man is that alien presence with whom the forces of egoism must come to terms, through whom the ego is to be crucified and resurrected, and in whose image society is to be reformed.' (ibid:330) The quest has now become so internalised that the individual is on a quest of self-initiation, necessitated by what Campbell perceives as the dissolving of 'the social structuring of the unconscious,' obliging the individual to take an heroic journey 'and go within to find new forms' which then become the boon for both himself and the wider society.

The sublime quest

'In order to travel the Path, you must become the Path.'

Gautama Buddha

'If you meet the Buddha on the road, slay him.'

Zen Proverb

Beyond the generic model of the heroic quest journey, there is a specific version in which the quester is a spiritual pilgrim, for whom the road may be, literally, the path to salvation - 'the road to redemption.' In a radio talk, *Walking the World into Being*, Bruce Chatwin commented that 'The great religious teachers have always been pilgrims ... They have said that in order to find favour with God or to find peace, you will find peace on the road. This is what the Medieval pilgrimage was about. One of the cures for all venial sins or the great sins in Medieval Europe was to take to the road, because this was a way of somehow expelling sin.' (A propos his own theories of humankind's nomadic genesis, Chatwin adds, 'If you then assume that "sin" was the sin of settlement, maybe one should pack one's bag and go.') Within the Islamic Sufi tradition, one way
of merging the dervish's consciousness with the Universe was through walking. As Chatwin writes, 'The aim of the dervish was to become a dead man walking, one whose body stays alive on the earth, yet whose soul is already in heaven. ... towards the end of his journey, the dervish becomes the Way not the wayfarer, i.e. a place over which something is passing, not a traveller following his own free will.' (87:179) In both traditions, the physical process of journeying - often through extreme tribulation - is integral to the quest, as is the idea of 'dissolving' something from the past: in the Christian instance, sin, and for the Sufi, the membrane of egotism which separates the self from God. For both, the pilgrimage is towards a place which is, in and of itself, 'grace-ful' and redemptive. In more contemporary (that is, secular and theoretical) terminology, the journey towards wholeness and integration may be expressed as the dissolution of psychological or egotistical blockages.

Janis Stout interprets Homer's *Odyssey* in terms of both the redemptive model and the spatial analogue model. She writes that Odysseus's descent into the underworld '... involves the giving of spatial terms to a nonspatial concept, the integrative encounter and converse with the past and its secrets.' (83:13) The horrific journey, she notes, is a regular feature of the hero tale or monomyth and '... in every case it is a means of representing not only the hero's conquest of his environment but some redemptive experience occurring not in space but in another dimension, inner or spiritual.' (loc cit)

**Quest, myth and consequence**

'The traveller must be born again on the road, and earn a passport from the elements.' wrote Henry David Thoreau. If the quest for re-birth entails a journey, the re-telling of that journey entails a story. But we live in a culture/time sceptical of its shattered stories. No longer do we dwell in groups where initiatory and symbolic journeys are programmed as rites of passage into our lives and where the meaning of those journeys, both in their mythic and actual senses, makes sense to an individual and his/her group.
'The problem of mankind today,' writes Campbell, 'is precisely the opposite to that of men in the comparatively stable periods of those great co-ordinating mythologies ... Then all meaning was in the group, in the great anonymous forms, none in the self-expressive individual; today no meaning is in the group - none in the world: all is in the individual. But there the meaning is absolutely unconscious. One does not know towards what one moves. One does not know by what one is propelled. The lines of communication between the conscious and the unconscious zones of the human psyche have all been cut, and we have been split in two.' (75:328)

Carl Jung noted that his work as a healer did not take off until he realised that the key to the human psyche was its story. One commentator (in reviewing Laurens van der Post's Testament to the Bushmen) described Jung's realisation as: '... every human being at its core has a unique story and to discover one's greatest meaning is to grow one's own story. To lose one's story or to fail to live it is to lose meaning and become disorientated, "the collective fodder of tyrants and despots", ending up alienated and out of one's mind.' For van der Post, the Kalihari Bushmen represent "frontier scouts" on the borders of unconsciousness; they are hunters of meaning, living proof that that the pattern of the individual in service of a self which manifests the divine is written into the contract of life itself.' If we can for the moment parenthesize the reference here to 'divine' or substitute some awkwardly secular term (which may be less redolent of the unfashionable and suspect 'transcendental signifier') such as 'psychological and ecological wholeness,' the idea (and the story) of being a 'hunter of meaning' is vital, alluding as it does to the symbolic quest - and the quest for the symbolic. Here is the quest as a healing symbol-story into which individuals (in this case the Bushmen) enter in order to 'read' their interior universe and to inscribe the meanings recouped into their daily lives.

The idea is not as alien to 20th century Western culture as it may at first appear. Susan Sontag writes, 'If in the last century, art conceived as an autonomous activity has come to be invested with unprecedented stature - the nearest thing to a sacramental activity acknowledged by secular society - it is because one of the tasks art has assumed is making forays into and taking up positions on the
frontiers of consciousness ... and reporting back what's there ... The exemplary artist is a broker in madness.' (This, I think, is a dubious point, equating the outer reaches of awareness and aesthetic sensibility with madness.) Forays to the frontiers of consciousness: the language used is that of journeying. Reporting back: the quest generates its own subsequent account. With both the Bushmen and the secular artist, the nuclear unit of the monomythic quest is evident: '... a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power and a life-enhancing return.' What is consistently manifest is humanity's apparent need (and capacity) to tell stories to itself, and the fact that those stories frequently are rendered in the form of journey epics. The traveller in this case may be seen not so much as 'a broker in madness' but more, as a broker in sanity. In the telling of his journey is the effort to recognise the healing patterns to what he has seen and been: '... to discover one's greatest meaning is to grow one's own story.'

The shadow of this heroic journey still resides, I suggest, in the making, the telling and the reading of accounts of journeys. However, since a myth can be called (in Levi-Strauss's view) 'a kind of message in code from the whole of a culture to its individual members,' and since the unconscious codes of both mythology and the quest have been partly broken (i.e. decoded) in 20th century thought, the quest can no longer operate only as an unconscious meta-discourse or 'master' narrative within journey accounts. Perhaps it survives in the shadow of its telling as a 'servant' narrative, as it were, in the employ of modern thought's own quest-to-power over signification itself.

The quest in travel writing

'Most of us, not being heroes, dawdle through life, mis-time our cues, and end up in our various emotional messes. The Hero does not. The Hero - and this is why we hail him as a hero - takes each ordeal as it comes, and chalks up point after point.'

Bruce Chatwin
The Songlines
If all travel writing was transparent to a quest model interpretation, it is doubtful that there would be much point or pleasure to either the writing or reading of it. However, in fiction, as Marjorie Kalter notes, '... not every journey is a quest, and not every quest is a journey.' ('76:4) The statement also holds true for non-fictional journey accounts. Thus, part of the work in negotiating a text will be to discern what quest, if any, is foregrounded or embedded there; and - importantly - if so, how the writer has chosen to manipulate and modify the elements of this quest. As Chatwin notes, most of us mere mortals dawdle, mis-time and mess up our quests, which is what makes us non-Heros - a condition which literature has also long exploited. The quest, as written today, may contain all sorts of subversions (and sub-versions) of its own paradigm, and, consequently, once encountered does not necessarily suggest a pre-ordained path (departure, tests, reward, return) towards a foregone (and thus, forego-able) conclusion. The modern travel book, according to Paul Fussell, is what Northrop Frye would call 'a myth that has been "displaced".' In it the myth has been '... brought down to earth, rendered credible "scientifically"' - even though it still resembles the archetypal monomyth defined by Campbell. ('80:208)

In literature where the quest is highlighted, Percy G. Adams has enumerated seven sorts of quest which are common to the novel and the récit de voyage: those involving '... religion, war, a golden or social utopia, exploration, monetary gain, a person, and knowledge of the world or oneself. ('83:153) He adds that, of these, 'The search for a person - a father or other relative, a sweetheart, someone lost - is perhaps the only quest more common to fiction that to the literature of travel ... '((ibid:157) Common to all these quests are two operations, by writer and reader, respectively. Firstly, that 'The man who writes his own journey, is under a necessity ... of making himself the hero of his own tale,' (Edward I ve in Adams [ibid:148]) and secondly, 'Somehow, we feel a travel book isn't wholly satisfying unless the traveller returns to his starting point: the action, as in a quest romance, must be completed.' (Fussell,'80:206) Writer, reader and hero come together in the literary imagination, the interstitial, three-way screen which is shared by all. 'It is impossible,' says Auden, '... to take a train or
an airplane without having a fantasy of oneself as a Quest Hero setting off in search of an enchanted princess or the Waters of Life”. Which is why, proposes Fussell, we enjoy reading travel books - '... even if we imagine we're enjoying only the curiosities of Liberia, British Guiana, Persia, or Patagonia.' ('80:209)

What are the rewards to be enjoyed by a reader who partakes in the literary journey and, at one remove, that of the questing quasi-heroic travel writer? One reward is the gaining, temporarily, of another set of eyes; to find, as Proust wrote, '... other eyes, to see the universe with the eyes of another ...' In standing behind another set (or sets) of eyes, as it were, the reader can share vicariously in a number of positions, perceptions and quests of different natures, limited only by the variety of his reading. One important kind of the quest which recurs in travel literature, is what Billy T. Tracy (in D. H. Lawrence and the Literature of Travel) calls the secret quest, a 'search for Eden', which pervades and controls the travel books of authors like C. M. Doughty, J. M. Synge and D. H. Lawrence. In the '... attempt to return to the beginning of civilization,' writes Tracy, these 'naturist' travel writers journeyed to remote or isolated regions in the hope that existing traditional cultures which still remained might reveal '... remnants of the life natural man enjoyed.' ('83:13-14) The importance of this quest is that however personal it may appear, the writer (Lawrence is Tracy's model) searches 'on behalf of modern society as well as on his own.' (my emphasis) Lawrence, says Tracy, regarded '... the primitive cultures that he investigated both as potential homes and as examples which might correct civilization.' (ibid:19)

If not all quests by travel writers can be construed as nobly as this, there is another more general aspect, which we have touched upon in earlier chapters - the temporal dimension. (That is, time rendered as space traversed.) In the effort of a travel writer to recapture the older pagan/pristine/etc. world, his travels have a chronological as well as geographical trajectory. If it can be said that science fiction, in general, takes the reader forward in time, naturist travel writing may be said to travel backwards in time. Tracy proposes that this chronological spanning permits the traveller (and reader) to contemplate such ontological questions as
those Gauguin posed on his most ambitious Tahitian canvas - 'D'où venons nous? Que sommes nous? Où allons nous?' ('83:14)

Lending itself to such ontological-analogical concerns, travelling-as-questing is never far from the mystical, and its literature has not shied away from such content, regardless of agnostic suspicions and Romanticism's detractors. Marcel Proust wrote of the journey in terms reminiscent of mystical Hindu or psychotropic imagery: 'The only genuine journey, the only Fountain of Youth, would not be to seek out new landscapes, but to have other eyes, to see the universe with the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to see the hundred universes which each of them sees, which each of them is ...'

The double quest narrative

The modern quest, as depicted in the 20th century novel, is thematically and stylistically different from traditional journey-and-quest works. The specific form of the modern journey novel which Marjorie Hope Kalter (in Metaphorical Quest: modern European quest novels and their tradition) has identified as the 'double-quest' novel. Normally, such material would be beyond the scope of this study because of its focus on fictional literature. There may, however, be a parallel application of the 'double quest' structure in 20th century non-fiction travel narrative; and, because of that possibility, I will discuss further Kalter's model, with the intention of later considering the sample of Australian non-fiction travel writings in reference to this model.

Quests - whether literal or metaphorical, fictional or non-fictional - evidence a common need, states Kalter, '... to express human searching ... for objects abstract and concrete, proscribed and prescribed, accessible and inaccessible, life-giving and death-dealing.' They embody the urge '... to express the inexpressible,' and quest literature in general reveals the effort '... to translate this inexpressible matter by rendering it acceptable and infusing it with profound resonances of meaning.' ('76:23) The double quest novel is a story which involves a journey which '... is undertaken for the
purpose of a quest, and that quest is itself undertaken for the purpose of a second, simultaneous quest. The double quest consists of two-levelled search: external and internal, concrete and abstract, or literal and metaphorical.' (ibid:2) It may be represented by the formula:

\[ \text{quest} = \text{outer search} + \text{inner search} \]

The primary quest, explains Kalter, is, like the journey itself, literal, and directed towards a concrete destination. The secondary quest is a non-literal, metaphorical quest whose object is abstract. 'In the course of the primary quest, the expected object is discovered or is proved to be unobtainable; in the course of the secondary quest, the unexpected is discovered, and it proves to be more important than the original object of the literal and primary quest.' (ibid:5) This double-quest form and structure are uniquely modern, argues Kalter, because of the psychological nature of the second quest (ibid:2): its orientation is '... a reflection of modern theories of space, time and the unconscious.' (ibid:3)

The double-quest structure is characterized by the presence of a multi-levelled metaphor, the surface layer of which consists of an actual journey and a literal quest. At a deeper (and often latent) level, the metaphorical quest operates as '... a basically internal search for something abstract - usually knowledge of the self.' (ibid:147) Typically, the metaphorical quest is personal, the protagonist being in search of some aspect of his self. (ibid:5) The extended metaphor employed in the double-quest novel '... is uniquely modern because of its intrinsic acknowledgement of the basically searching nature of twentieth-century man and the increasingly symbolic nature of twentieth-century fiction.' (ibid:7) Unfortunately, Kalter's insistence that the double quest novel is 'uniquely modern' ignores many 'pre-modern' works, such as Moby Dick, Huckleberry Finn, the Arthurian Cycle and the previously-mentioned travel narrative by Théophile Gautier.

An added dimension to the double quest narrative is that the alternative quest can itself conceal still deeper levels, such as 'the narrative quest,' in which the author/narrator/protagonist seeks '... a way to transcribe, reflect or construct reality within the form of a
literary journey, or the act of writing the novel.' (ibid:147) In turn, this involves the reader's engagement, in terms of negotiating not just meaning, but the very construction of the writing - and thus, the representation of reality. As Kalter says, 'Where previously the narrator and the protagonist had the task of distinguishing appearance from reality, that task is now shared by the reader, who is ... invited to "collaborate" in the construction of the novel.' (ibid:249)

Kalter applies her analysis to three novels, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Franz Kafka's *Das Schloss*, and Michel Butor's *La Modification*. The study is, in her words, an attempt '... to understand the modern need to create a fiction form that represents the human fascination with identity quests and their literal counterparts, and with fictional quests and their literary counterparts - quests for replicating or inventing reality in the novel.' (ibid:14) Lest this sound similar to what journey fiction has done all along, Kalter stresses that the secondary quest is neither just a possible level of interpretation, nor is it merely allegorical. Rather, it is '... a deliberate, integral and often central theme of the double quest novel.' (ibid:3)

The double quest evolved as a correlative for the changed psychological experience of the modern journey hero in the process of self-discovery. Kalter states that the expansion of the journey motif into a plot involving two simultaneous quests represents '... a culmination of the progression towards individualism and realism that began in the picaresque novel.' (ibid:298) Included in the evolution is, as noted, the questioning even of the replication or invention of reality in the very writing of the account. Another aspect of the evolution concerns the foreclosure of the 'happy ending' scenario in which, traditionally, the quester would gain his reward, be it the reintegrating boon of bride, treasure or illumination. However, the modern quest hero's psychological isolation is '... an expansion of the physical situation of the traditional hero and gains a dimension of significance from the shared knowledge of the author and reader that the protagonist cannot merely endure a journey, complete a quest, and return to the the social world for a heroic welcome. He is alone before and
after his journey, and his isolation is a static quality.' (ibid:301) In this sense, the modern quest hero differs from his antecedents in the picaresque novel, with his '... continual guilt and the despair that both causes and increases it.' (ibid:302-3)