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Private lives, public voices: a study of Australian autobiography

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PRIVATE LIVES: PUBLIC VOICES:

A STUDY OF AUSTRALIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

PhD

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

EDWARD HILLS M.A. (Hons)

Department of English

1997
DECLARATION

I certify that this dissertation does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Five of the chapters (in modified form) have been accepted for publication in various academic journals and should appear during the course of 1997.

Chapter One - “Poets and Historians”

Journal of Australian Studies
University of Queensland.

Chapter Four - “Whose Place is This?” (Sally Morgan)

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Chapter Six - “Babylon” (Judah Waten)

Span
University of Waigato, N.Z.

Chapter Seven - “La Maison Onirique” (David Malouf)

Meridian
La Trobe University.

Chapter Nine - “The Dream Garden” (Dorothy Hewett)

Kunapipi
University of Aarhus, Denmark.

Signed: ________________________________

Edward R. Hills 1st July 1997
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the notion that autobiography is an inherently ambivalent form in which personal quests for selfhood interact with and participate in broader historical narratives embodying tensions and contradictions that lie deep within the mythic life of the culture. Although autobiography represents a conscious effort to negotiate a unique voice out of the multiplicity of ideologies that constitutes subjectivity, it can also be seen as a mediated palimpsest in which individual expressions of difference concerning origins and identity are inextricably bound up with historically determined and largely unconscious narratives centring on national provenance.

The similarity of plot, character, motif and image that underlies each of the personal stories in this study of Australian autobiography suggests that each can be read as an individualised variation on the wider cultural themes of exclusion and homecoming, belonging and loss that characterise mainstream white European depictions of Australian geo-mythic space. The dominance of childhood stories that embody the double vision of Australia as both paradise and purgatory suggest a literary tradition in which notions of loss and failure are central to an understanding of national character. The motif of the traumatised exile searching for a lost and unattainable home in the golden valleys of an imaginary childhood is an essentially European and Romantic discourse in which the pain of exclusion is
counterbalanced by the Edenic possibilities of transcendence and homecoming. This search for an unattainable national space in the myth of a prelapsarian childhood may provide comforting anodynes for the trauma of exile but it also produces orthodox narratives which depoliticise the individual by transmuting the interested actions of everyday life into the disinterested powerlessness of essential childhood.

However, since autobiography is revelatory and confessional in nature and often positions the protagonist as a victim in stories about difference, powerlessness and injustice, the form has radical, subversive and oppositional possibilities. The secret stories of convicts, homosexuals, migrants, Aborigines, artists and women represent an unauthorised and covert history which, by exposing the dominant cultural forces that suppress and silence minorities, open up the secret country of the untold past. These forms of autobiography in which positionality and agency drive the narration can result in the foregrounding of subjects who consciously and actively speak out against the official storytelling strategies of the dominant community. The interpolation of these unspeakable voices into the mainstream can produce hybrids in which fresh identities emerge out of an essentially conservative medium.
INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the notion that autobiography is an inherently ambivalent form in which personal quests for selfhood interact with and participate in broader historical narratives embodying tensions and contradictions that lie deep within the mythic life of the culture. Although autobiography represents a conscious effort to negotiate a unique voice out of the multiplicity of ideologies that constitutes subjectivity, it can also be seen as a mediated palimpsest in which individual expressions of difference concerning origins and identity are inextricably bound up with historically determined and largely unconscious narratives centring on national provenance.

This ambiguity in which self-conscious acts of resistance conflict and interact with collective and compliant expressions of belonging, is particularly noticeable when we turn to Australian autobiography. The Lawsonian national theme of European Australia as a community of outsiders, of unique and battling individuals, is a deeply ambiguous motif in which the outsider is celebrated as a national type. What might begin as an expression of dissent very often turns into a celebration of values which suppresses individuality and difference. The medium encourages the protagonist to tell stories which represent Australian society as repressive whilst, at the same time, absorbing the subject into a mainstream form in which the dissident self is sanctified as typical. In other words, white
Australian autobiography contains within its matrix of conflicting discourses a tendency to define conformity in terms of opposition. This paradox, in which insider values are represented by the outsider, allows the nation to celebrate itself as a collection of outsiders whilst, at the same time, coopting new stories into the dominant discourse.

The similarity of plot, character, motif and image that underlies each of the personal stories in this study of Australian autobiography suggest that each can be read as an individualised variation on the wider cultural themes of exclusion and homecoming, belonging and loss that characterise mainstream white European depictions of Australian geo-mythic space. The dominance of childhood stories that embody the double vision of Australia as both paradise and purgatory suggests a literary tradition in which notions of loss and failure are central to an understanding of national character.

The motif of the traumatised exile searching for a lost and unattainable home in the golden valleys of an imaginary childhood is an essentially European and Romantic discourse in which the pain of exclusion is counterbalanced by the Edenic possibilities of transcendency and homecoming. As a result, mainstream Australian autobiography reveals a Romantic preference for paradigms that involve retreats from society and change into the idealised world of the natural child. This search for an unattainable national space in the myth of a prelapsarian
childhood may provide comforting anodynes for the trauma of exile but it also produces orthodox narratives which depoliticise the individual by transmuting the interested actions of everyday life into the disinterested powerlessness of essential childhood.

However, since autobiography is revelatory and confessional in nature and often positions the protagonist as a victim in stories about difference, powerlessness and injustice, the form has radical, subversive and oppositional possibilities. The secret stories of convicts, homosexuals, migrants, Aborigines, artists and women represent an unauthorised and covert history which, by exposing the dominant cultural forces that suppress and silence minorities, open up the secret country of the untold past. These forms of autobiography in which positionality and agency drive the narration can result in the foregrounding of subjects who consciously and actively speak out against the official storytelling strategies of the dominant community. The interpolation of these unspeakable voices into the mainstream can produce hybrids in which fresh identities emerge out of an essentially conservative medium.

The tension between antagonism and complicity which underpins autobiography is further reinforced by the tendency of the genre to promote the self as pre-social, coherent and autonomous. Although the sociographical and historical imperatives of the form undermine this tendency, the flat and naturalistic style of most self-reflexive discourse often masks
or suppresses those cultural mechanisms which shape the self and structure the form. This apparent lack of constructedness promotes a documentary version of the self which downplays the significance of mediation and foregrounds the unitary self in dramas of dissent in which opposition becomes typified as natural. Paradoxically, it is very often this separation of the unique “I” from the conforming and oppressive centres which draws our attention back to those social, literary and economic conventions which have brought both the subject and the text into being.

In Chapter One I have used the basic tenets of narratology and drawn on the ideas of Jacques Lacan, Gaston Bachelard and Claude Levi-Strauss, Sidonie Smith and Homi K. Bhabha to develop a theory of autobiography which recognises the power of the medium to absorb individual story into an integrated and collective centre, whilst at the same time, offering opportunities for resistance from the margins. Drawing on the paradigm of autobiography as palimpsest I have tried to suggest that the mode, whilst encouraging idiosyncratic and oppositional narratives, works on a deeper, more unconscious level, activating contradictory discourses centring on national identity. The dialectic between the pulls of Australia as blasted wilderness and transcendent paradise provides a tension which is central to an understanding of European notions of what it is to be Australian. It is my contention that the yearning for the poetic
space of ideal childhood can be read a cultural motif that reveals a deep longing for an unattainable homecoming that compensates for the pain of exclusion and exile.

Chapter Two draws on the theories of Louis Althusser to show how personal story is a cultural practice that reflects and embodies the way ideology reproduces and recruits subjects. Autobiographical story can be seen as a conservative social practice that suppresses social and generic mediation in favour of the natural and autonomous self. In Robyn Davidson's *Tracks*, for instance, her personal and private pursuit of an uncluttered, desocialised and 'anti-ocker' self in an empty but transcendent wilderness, can be read as a public text which celebrates traditional notions of Australian national space. The search for a dissident, autonomous self in the unmediated mirror of a pure if difficult nature can be seen, paradoxically, as belonging to a mainstream and conformist discourse in which survival in the desert and token gestures towards the indigenous life, guarantees membership of a national community.

Chapter Three focuses on the way the depiction of bush childhoods in Australian autobiography perpetuates and celebrates orthodox national values. Alan Marshall's *I Can Jump Puddles* and T.A.G. Hungerford's *Stories from Suburban Road* are texts which, by locating children in idealised bush settings, provide the dominant culture with a whole range of strategies by which it can rewrite history in its own image. Celebrations of the
culture's yearning for home, identity and coherence in the golden spaces of the bush can be seen as highly elaborate fictions in which the social and historical forces which have shaped the dominant culture have been transformed into myth. In many respects, the mythic world of the bush is part of the same presocial space that defines Romantic depictions of the Australian wilderness. Not only is it located outside society and history, in the domain of a Wordsworthian nature, but it also, like the wilderness as transcendent space, provides comforting anodynes in which the social and political realities of Australian life are elided into the perfectible yet unattainable world of idealised childhood.

Chapter Four focuses on autobiographical texts that set out to challenge and undermine mainstream narratives. In this oppositional world, in which positionality and agency are fundamental aspects of narrative stance, identity becomes a political force providing opportunities for previously unspoken voices to be heard. Within the complex network of relations which constitutes a mainstream form, the marginalised can 'shoulder' their way into the public arena and can produce hybrids which generate fresh identities. However, there is a danger that, having expressed themselves through the medium, they then, in turn, become absorbed into centres which undermine their ability to speak for those whom they claim to represent.

At first glance, Sally Morgan's My Place seems to be an
oppositional text that offers the reader a window into that mysterious, secret country of the past where the unspoken tales of the oppressed become an indictment of the dominant culture and its practices. Although the book does expose some of the dark recesses of Aboriginal history, it can also be read as an antagonistic text from the fringes rendered compliant by the power of the genre to mediate and transform 'raw' experience. Morgan's attempt to rewrite history from the margins is, in my view, undermined by nostalgic gestures towards an essential selfhood to be found in transcendent and cathartic expressions of what it is to be Aboriginal.

In contrast, Chapter Five focuses on Ruby Langford's Don't Take Your Love to Town as a text which remains faithful to its oppositional polemic whilst, at the same time, exploiting and working through the mainstream genre of western autobiographical story. By resisting the tendency of the genre to promote the introspective and ahistorical self, Langford's story of survival becomes a political metonym for the broken lives of all urban Aboriginal people. Her unofficial and unauthorised exposure of injustice converts silence into awareness, endows the marginalised with an identity and exploits autobiography as a antagonistic narrative practice which can challenge and undermine mainstream values.

Chapter Six deals with the way Jewish migrant experience provides complex insights into the dynamic of change that is
driving Australian society. Although there is a danger in characterising all Aboriginal or migrant experience as typical and therefore never fully individual, the double nature of autobiography as a form allows the experience to operate on two distinct and related levels. The individual story of the outsider is also the collective story of the group. Because individual migrant stories often centre on individual problems of adjustment from one cultural world to another, the focus of attention is drawn away from the drama of the autonomous self towards the social and historical conditions that produced the experience. Although the child-self and the child-narrator as they emerge in the autobiographical stories of Judah Waten and Morris Lurie seem to be individuated and particular, their stories can be read as metonyms for discourses about the alienated migrant and the trauma of adjustment. In both Alien Son and Whole Life, the writer bridges the gap between the nation’s most and least powerful cultures by adopting hybrid and heteroglossic forms which not only reflect the concerns of the minority but which challenge, modify and redefine the conditions that sustain the dominant culture. In both texts, autobiographical story becomes a collective and political practice about communities struggling to create new identities without abandoning traditional culture.

Chapter Seven centres on the theories of Gaston Bachelard as they apply to the autobiographical work of David Malouf. Edmondstone Street explores the notion of poetic space as an
acculturating force, as a map providing coded messages about who and what we are. The topography of the house reveals a metaphorical antiphony between centres and margins, between exclusion and homecoming in which the personal life of the individual autobiographer becomes a paradigmatic representation of the culture's wider sense of uncertainty about origins.

David Malouf embraces the fringes, to celebrate the outsider and forge a new sense of collective identity within the framework of a mythology which converts emptiness and exclusion into transcendence. His essentially Romantic solution to the problem of living on the margins involves the reconstruction of Australia as a site for achieving a harmony and wholeness that can only come through exclusion and exile. In this configuration, the child is an outcast, a half-caste, an exile, an artist attempting to construct a new tradition through a mythology that 'translates' Europe into Australian conditions. It is in the extremes, in the wilderness, in exile and finally in transcendent and epiphanic dissolution that new stories will be found that define what is different about Australian culture.

Chapter Eight focuses on Patrick White's Flaws in the Glass and The Vivisector as texts which reveal the inner workings of the modernist mind as it grapples with the last great image of Romantic yearning, the mythic space of Australia. In these stories the alienated child/artist attempts to transcend the crassly material world of the great Australian emptiness by
drawing on the unconscious and non-rational possibilities of the imagination as it converts childhood memory into art. The shapes that emerge from childhood memory are mandalas or refracting mirrors which provide a unifying frame for the alienated, chaotic and fragmentary self. The search for the unified and undivided self in the distorting mirrors of art is to be found in the pristine gardens of childhood and the timeless landscape of perpetual morning. However, although White's dramatisation of the artist as a deeply ambivalent and child-like outsider sets up oppositional narratives that expose the shortcomings of the culture, his art promotes a tendency towards withdrawal and silence which neutralises the possibility of social change by removing the protagonist from historical process.

Chapter Nine explores Dorothy Hewett's *Wild Card* as a text that exemplifies and embodies the dialectic between the sociographical and the poetic dimensions of autobiographical discourse. The Romantic search for the poetic and integrated "I" in the golden valleys of a lost childhood is counterbalanced by a deep awareness of the historical forces that have shaped her life. Although the book, as sociography, highlights the struggles of the political activist, her constant references to the idealised and irrecoverable childhood of Wickepin reflect a yearning for a lost and transcendent world that involve withdrawals and retreats from the flux of historical change. Childhood, like the Australian inland sea, is a mirror for the culture's ahistorical and
transcendent yearnings, for images which lie at the heart of the European dream of Australia as a lost, blasted and unattainable paradise.

This Romantic tendency towards the transcendent and the poetic, is counterbalanced by an increasing interest in the political and oppositional possibilities of the genre. Autobiographical discourse permits the individual storyteller to reconstitute the past in a way that frees it from narratives that promote official, fixed and inevitable views of the world. Once the gridlock of authorised history has been relaxed then the past can be viewed as a protean and multi-dimensional site for alternative, relative and diverse readings. Within this context, autobiographical discourse can be seen as a complex, interactive medium in which mainstream narratives produce, absorb, interact with and are undermined by alternative voices whose reconstruction of the past can promote realities that reflect the diversity of culture that constitutes Australian life.
In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard exposes the central tension within autobiographical discourse when he suggests that, "we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost."¹ Since autobiographical story is centrally concerned with both the outer realm of social action and the inner space of personal "being", each act of self-discovery will always embody a tension between the text as a site for individual expression and the text as a site for historical or cultural analysis. The final object of all autobiography may very well be "l'impossible recherche de la naissance"² but the final outcome of such acts of self-reflexivity will always reveal the complex of social and historical forces that constitute the self.

From the viewpoint of the historical, all autobiographies - no matter how personal the story - become, to use Donald Horne's phrase, sociographies,³ social histories refracted in the mirror of the individual life. Since the medium combines the “authority of a primary historical record” with “the freedom of an unashamedly personal vision”⁴ the social and cultural history that emerges from such texts will always be grounded in the particularity of experience. Patrick White's expatriate world of divided loyalties, David Malouf's Brisbane, Louis Nowra's Melbourne, Ruby Langford's
Redfern, Hal Porter's Bairnsdale, Dorothy Hewett's journey from West Australian pastoral childhood to political Sydney, Morris Lurie's Jewish upbringing, Mary Liverani's migrant Wollongong: each of these personal stories can also be seen as “socially symbolic acts,” or as cultural sites which offer insights into the way social and national motifs reiterate themselves through text.

It is my belief that the autobiographical mode, with its rich interplay of historical and personal narratives, is deeply reflective of the tensions and conflicts that exist within the wider culture and that autobiographical texts can reveal the multiple and often contradictory ideologies that determine subjectivity and selfhood. As Sidonie Smith puts it in her introduction to *De/Colonizing the Subject*:

> The autobiographical occasion (whether performance or text) becomes a site on which cultural ideologies intersect and dissect one another in contradiction, consonance and adjacency.⁶

Within this context, autobiography can be seen as a “complex mediation of formal, cultural and personal constraints, agendas and interests,” in which the act of self-invention reveals the diversity of the value systems which inform and act upon the narrating self. Although the autobiographical act represents a conscious effort to negotiate a distinctive and unique voice out of this complex of constraints and agendas, it can also reflect a deeper, less conscious manifestation of
concerns about national origins and identities. The essential instability of the form means that no matter how self-consciously individual the autobiographical voice might be, the dynamic interplay between the discourses operating within the text will result in the emergence and reiteration of dominant themes. Although each articulation will remain distinctly individual, it will, in turn, be part of a wider pattern of meaning through which fresh articulations might be generated.

Each of the texts in this study embodies a dialectic between the particular and general which involves complex interactions between individual searches for meaning and identity and broader historical discourses centring on notions of national origin. Each text needs to be read within the framework of a historically determined set of discourses in which the individual voice, separate and distinct, becomes absorbed into a modified centre which, in turn, generates fresh individual voices. Within a white Australian context, the predominance of autobiographical stories dealing with non-conformity, individuality and self-reliance as quintessentially Australian national traits suggests that the genre has the potential to colonise the non-conformist fringe and translate its stories into the language of national iconography. This dynamic interaction between discourses which centre on collective and private notions of provenance provides the reader with an ideal opportunity to study the way in which the persistent and often totalising themes of national identity
produce, act upon and are acted upon by idiosyncratic acts of self-exploration.

It is for this reason that I would replace the popular model of autobiography as a private, factual and individual quest for self through an understanding of the individual's fixed past with a model that accepts autobiography as a social practice, as a site for fictions about "subjects" whose journeys through their own particularised life stories reveal questions and contradictions that have public and political implications that go beyond the individual and which, in fact, help to shape what we call individuality. In a sense, the autobiographical mode is more about adults and the present than it is about children and the past. Indeed, if one accepts the notion that childhood itself is a fairly recent western invention then stories about the adult's child-self can be read as being more about the way adults interpret their position, membership and meaning in contemporary society.

The first of my central concerns in this thesis is to show how certain types of Australian autobiography promote and perpetuate national myths about growing up which reinforce European notions of what it is to be Australian. From a semiological viewpoint, national myth can be defined "as the symbolic embodiment of a general idea often buried too deeply to be neatly apprehended by the analytical mind" but which manifests "its continuing relevance by a tenacious life in national consciousness." Those narratives which define
Australian identity in terms of a pristine and natural paradise are perfect examples of this kind of mythologising practice. There are many autobiographical texts ranging Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* and Alan Marshall's *I Can Jump Puddles* to Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* which either embody the myth or draw on it for inspirational or creative reasons.

Quite often the reiteration of the national myth is masked by what appear to be naturalistic stories about the bush. Although such texts as *I Can Jump Puddles* or T.A.G. Hungerford's *Stories from Suburban Road* naturalise the process of construction so that the reader experiences the acculturated subject - "I" - as an autonomous agent freely and individually telling his or her own story, we are also witnessing the expression of a collective and politically potent dream through the eyes of a constructed child-self.

The tendency for autobiography to foreground a notion of the unique and autonomous "I" can often mask the complex of social influences which shape the biographical self. This masking can lead to a view of the self which is both pre-linguistic and transcendent and which insists on the sovereignty of unified individuality over the notion of the self as socially oriented, decentred and protean. Paradoxically, such an insistence on a Wordsworthian pre-social self tends to smooth the way for the expression of an orthodox view of white Australian national identity. What appears to be a natural childhood situated in a
natural environment often deflects attention away from the essential constructedness of the story, the myth and the childhood.

Alan Marshall's *I Can Jump Puddles*, for example, is ostensibly the individual and verifiable story of the author's struggle with poliomyelitis. However, the story is driven by a dominant myth which shapes the facts of the story into a celebration of Lawsonian bush values centred on the figure of the father as Australian icon. This naturalistic tale of a boy who overcomes his handicap by adopting the traditional values of self-reliance, reveals the power of Australian myth as it narrates, constructs and fictionalises its meaning through individual characters, settings, themes, plots and - writers. The book is less an individual story than a public and tribal celebration of the Australian bush myth.

When Alan learns to ride he proves he is worthy of belonging to the clan. The rite of passage is painful and rigorous - blood is spilt - but the prize is acceptance as a fully fledged member of the bush world the book celebrates. When his father says, "You're a good bloke, Alan. I like you and I reckon you're a good rider," we know that Alan has passed the test of manhood and has been successfully "written" as a part of the value system that drives the book. It is interesting to note that although Marshall describes his book as "the story of my childhood", he admits that he has "gone beyond the facts to get at the truth" of a period in
which men and women were "reliant, forthright and compassionate." The "facts" are secondary to the myth and merely serve to demonstrate it.

An understanding of the importance of narrative and myth in the imaginative and ideological life of a culture is central to an understanding of how meanings are made and shared amongst us. According to Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires in *Telling Stories*, "Stories structure the meanings by which a culture lives." For Michael Sprinker in "Fictions of the Self", each narrative text is a "product of intertextuality, a weaving together of what has already been produced elsewhere in discontinuous form." Fredric Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious*, goes even further when he argues that narrative is a basic ingredient of all human thought and can be seen as a "central function or instance of the human mind." Within this narratological framework, autobiographical story can be seen as a mythmaking practice central to the whole process of constructing, disseminating and reinforcing meaning. The process of mythologising experience is a process of symbolic conceptualisation whereby the essential values and attitudes of a culture or group are rehearsed, celebrated or tested. Generally speaking, the resulting myths can be seen as representative not only of various value systems but also of power relations within the society.

According to Claude Levi-Strauss, myths are the symbolic
embodiment of truths that lie below the conscious mind and which express "incarnate anxieties" and drives that are deeply buried in the unconscious life of the culture. The recurrence of common themes, images and motifs in various forms of narrative are embodiments of discourses that not only give expression to the contradictions which cause the anxiety but which also promote social cohesion by offering symbolic resolutions. In spite of the author's conscious assertion of agency and control, autobiographical stories can, like any other type of text, be seen as unconscious and interactive articulations of deep cultural and historical themes.17

David Malouf's autobiography, 12, Edmondstone St., provides a particularly good example of the process whereby the poetic space of the author's first home reflects the deeper, mythic life of the culture. Malouf's deeply personal feeling of exclusion from the warm centres of family life embodies a wider cultural myth concerning the relationship between centres and margins. The topography of the house, in which the duality of separation and inclusion is a basic determinant in the formation of the young Malouf, is clearly the blueprint for both the individual and for the society that formed him:

Perhaps it is this daily experience of being cast out and then let in again that has made the house and all its rooms so precious to me. Each morning I step across the threshold and there it is, a world recovered, restored.18
Malouf's participation in the process of mythmaking is, in a sense, both conscious and unconscious. On one level, his reminiscence perpetuates the notion of Australia as a place of exile and restoration. On another level, his conscious analysis of the first house as a blueprint for the culture, indicates a personal involvement and authorial intervention that is unique to the memory.

Of central importance to the shape of my argument is the semiotic connection between personal story, identity and cultural myth. In National Fictions - a semiotic analysis of Australian film and literature - Graeme Turner views all narratives as "articulations of the values, beliefs - the ideology of the culture." Within the multiplicity of culturally defined voices which go to produce a particular text, he identifies and explores a number of dominant and persistent themes, themes which often take on the status of rigid and exclusive orthodoxy.

One such orthodoxy that I wish to explore in my study of Australian autobiography is what Richard Coe calls the myth of Australia as a "paradis-perdu". In "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Australian", Coe sees the "paradis-perdu" - a simultaneous notion of Australia as both a paradise and a purgatory - activating potentially escapist stories that promote utopian images of nature as a retreat from the purgatory of society:

From this point of view, the paradis-perdu ingredient in childhood-reminiscence, which, the world over, constitutes a recurrent...motivation for re-creating a vanished past,
assumes a particular importance. The trouble is that it constitutes a Paradise which is at one and the same time real and inaccessible. The image of the alienated individual defeated by intractable forces - usually natural - appears in all sorts of forms and representations in Australian narrative. It is an utterance that has many variations and enunciations. The explorer, mad and dissolving in a Sidney Nolan landscape, the narcissistic artist struggling for integrity in an Arthur Boyd Shoalhaven painting, the death of Voss in the deadly but transfiguring wilderness, the disappearance of Ovid, the death of Johnno, the failure of Miles Franklin's career, the blighted life of the neurotic child in Lurie's Whole Life, the voyeuristic and Oedipal Hal Porter, all point towards defeat, dislocation and failure. This sense of the impotence of human action in the face of an overpowering fate is reinforced by a yearning for the transcendent, the poetic, the extra-social, the space beyond or before history where the individual may dream and may belong but only if he/she remains 'outside'.

In the childhood configuration of this myth, survival is the best the child can expect and defeat in what appears to be an oppressive, sterile and alienating environment seems inevitable. Like the young Patrick White, the figure feels like "a stranger in (his) own country, even in (his) own family" and yearns for an ideal unrealisable first home that might compensate the adult
child-self for the losses involved in growing up into a world that seems alien and alienating. Patrick White's mythic Australian childhood, Dorothy Hewett's first house "in the hollow of the heart"22 in Wild Card, David Malouf's poeticised home in Edmondstone St., Ruby Langford's "belongin' place" in Don't Take Your Love to Town, Hal Porter's cast-iron balcony of mother and security, Alan Marshall's bushmen, all are ideal poetic spaces, special sites of transcendent significance, spaces that confer a sense of completeness, conjunction and belonging. In this poetic space, before language converts being into the symbolic realm of meaning, outside history and entropy, the child is seen in its full Romantic guise as "father to the man,"23 as unified, undivided, as a secular manifestation of paradise.

This ideal can, of course, never be achieved, and consequently increases the protagonist's sense of exclusion and alienation from a society that seems to deny inclusion in this better, utopian world. In this depiction, the child is either innocent or vulnerable or both and is smothered by a society-in-the-family that is seen as a sterile wasteland in Louis Nowra's Summer of the Aliens; as a prison in Morris Lurie's Whole Life; or as crassly materialistic in Patrick White's Flaws in the Glass. This tension between the utopian dream of the poetic possibilities of childhood and the harsh and unrelenting pain of growing up into Australian society, into the flux of history, resonates throughout white Australian writing about the
developing self.

It is a theme that lies at the very base of European Australian culture and involves an irreconcilable contradiction: how does the culture create a mythic homeland out of the detritus of history when the space has been mapped by Europeans who, at one and the same time, viewed it as odd and heavenly, empty and full, dead and fertile? How does the colonial culture construct a country out of a European myth that defines the new/old place as both Babylon and Jerusalem and where the fall from mythic space into history is marked by invasion, genocide, slavery and convictism?

Although the contradictions that underpin this myth are European and Romantic in origin - a response to the velocity of change which seemed to fragment and dislocate human society and experience - the Australian version of the myth is particularly significant because these contradictions are the birthright of the new culture. Australia was invented by a European world reeling from the shock of vast social change brought on by the effects of the Enlightenment and the development of capitalism. The penal colony was a historical result of sweeping changes in English society that had wrenched a whole population from the land only to convert that population into an urban, disenchanted surplus that was expelled to the other side of the world.

On a deeper mythical level, the image of the lost and
vulnerable childhood can be seen as a persistent and recurring manifestation of this overpowering sense of historical and cultural alienation. The extremes of life as imprisonment and life as transcendent are fixed at the centre of the white Australian myth and help to account for the constant duality of images of paradise and wasteland that inform the culture’s narratives. If De Quiros’ dream of the southern continent promised utopia, the nightmare of the Abrolhos tragedy pointed the way to a darker side of human nature.24

Historically speaking, the myth of the lost and vulnerable child is an invention of the Romantic movement created to offset the dehumanising effects of the onslaught of industrial society. The child as a Blakean or Wordsworthian moral force, a secular manifestation of the Edenic myth, is counterbalanced by the child as victim, as a casualty of an intractable and merciless world. This image was developed firstly by Charles Kingsley and later by Charles Dickens into a symbolism that embodied loss of innocence and defeat. As Peter Coveney puts it:

In childhood lay the perfect image of insecurity and isolation, of fear and bewilderment, of vulnerability and potential violation.25

However, as the image developed, it became for some authors - noticeably J.M. Barrie - "an habitual means of escape, a way of withdrawal from spiritual and emotional confusion in a
tired world." The child became a means of escape from the "pressures of adult adjustment", and a "means of regression towards the irresponsibility of youth, childhood and ultimately nescience itself." In reality, of course, children are relatively powerless agents, unable to affect or profoundly influence the outer world of social action. By definition, children belong to a pre-adult world in which they are acted upon by social forces outside their control. As Kate Grenville puts it, "no history is to be made in the dull wastes of childhood." However, in the hands of the Romantic and modernist artist, the figure of the "innocent" child has developed into a metaphor for an escape from history into the unattainable worlds of timelessness and transcendency.

Furthermore, the Romantic notion of the artist as an innocent child, promotes the image of the writer as a hero in his/her own story about attaining individual fulfilment in alternative worlds of poetic possibility, removed from the threatening and damaging effects of the "real" world. The artist revolts against the wasteland of modern society which threatens the purity of the inner space of his childhood self. Stephen Dedalus in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is a child/artist who embodies his mythic name by flying free from the "nets" of cultural restriction in obedience to a higher destiny, to become "a priest of the eternal imagination" who uses "silence, exile and cunning" as bastions against the
Intrusions of national culture.

In its white Australian manifestation, the image of the lost and vulnerable childhood can be seen as an expression of alienation from the European home. Exiled and cast out from its European centre, the culture fulfils part of its European destiny by retreating from history into the transcendent spaces of an ideal Edenic childhood. In this white European depiction of Australian origins and identity, where childhood is defined as a state of grace outside time, Australia can never have the birth it desires because attainment would result in non-existence. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the search for the impossible purity of childhood should be accompanied by a fall into failure, defeat and homelessness. In these depictions, the child is often constructed as a powerless or violated outsider as in _Summer of the Aliens_ and _Whole Life_, or is consigned to the depoliticised zones of Romantic poetry and transcendence, as in autobiographical novels like _An Imaginary Life_.

It can also be argued that this double vision of Australia as paradise and hell, which doubly ensures the entrapment and failure of the individual, transmutes the interested social actions of everyday life into the escapist idealism of lost childhoods or the defeatism of the individual lost or dying in a beautiful but intractable nature. The search for an unattainable national space in the myth of prelapsarian childhood or in the ahistorical emptiness of Australian nature produces narratives that
disempower by replacing subjectivity and involvement with exclusion and conformity. Paradoxically, the image of the child as excluded from Eden and home, ensures inclusion in a dominantly conservative discourse about the impossibility of social action. Nature cannot be changed. The past cannot be changed. Just as nature is preferable to society, so childhood is preferable to adulthood.

Such depictions can lead to immersion in depoliticised zones which promote the individual's impotence in the face of social realities disguised as intractable nature or unattainable childhood. In David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*, for instance, Ovid's disappearance into the silence of pre-social nature led by a wild, pre-linguistic child is a perfect example of a myth that neutralises social action and change by removing the subject from society, language and history. In the end, the figures of the innocent child and the estranged child - which, of course belong to the same discourse - paradoxically promote the reader's inclusion as part of a myth that celebrates exclusion.

These sorts of depictions relegate the individual to powerlessness within idealised and innocent pasts, or within pasts fixed by notions of the unalterable. The past, like time and space, is not ideologically neutral: it can be constructed and reconstructed according to the underlying ideology that activates it. The notion of the past as fixed and unchangeable ensures the perpetuation of the status quo. You cannot change yourself or your
environment if both are fixed by an unchanging and static past. (This is the way it was and it can never be changed.) This ideological view of the past is closely related to the notion of official and fixed history where the culture's past is seen as factual, verifiable and closed to alternative readings: the reader is not encouraged to challenge the authorship. Such challenges would involve undermining the culture's dominant mode of organising "reality" and so threaten the continued transmission of values. Not only that, but since "national histories are predicated on exclusions," the marginalising or silencing of the powerless can be seen as an integral part of the historicisation of national experience. As Sneja Gunew puts it:

Those who don't fit into the dominant historical narrative, who are not assimilated, either exit as boundary markers, token figures, or are consigned to the margins and thus either to invisibility or to permanent opposition.

Freeing the past from the inevitable and relocating it in the contingent, or relative, or nominal could provide areas of creative invention whereby individuals and communities might reconstruct the past to promote realities that challenge conservative ideologies.

Before exploring the power of alternative or unauthorised voices to challenge orthodox myth I would like to outline a context for my argument which takes into consideration the critical debate that has made the study of autobiographical
writing a crucial site for theorising about the relationship between literature, culture and the self. I think it would be true to say that the classical belief in autobiography as a medium for realistic and authentic stories about the search for the essential self, no longer holds sway. According to Georges Gusdorf, the act of autobiography “is the mirror in which the individual...strains towards a complete and coherent expression of his entire destiny.”35 James Olney, in his introduction to Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, reinforces this view when he claims that subjectivity is essentially irreducible and that “the act of autobiography is at once a discovery, a creation and an imitation of the self.”36 Indeed, for Olney, autobiography is more easily understood as a mode of consciousness rather than a form of literature or writing.37

After Gusdorf, perhaps the most celebrated critic to offer a comprehensive theory of autobiography is Philippe Lejeune, for whom the authenticity of the autobiographical account is guaranteed by a special pact between reader and writer in which acceptance of the non-fictive status of the writer, narrator and protagonist is secured by the fact of the signature, or published name of the author. Lejeune then goes on to define autobiography, in somewhat classical terms, as “a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life” and “in particular in the development of his
personality."³⁸

What makes Lejeune particularly interesting is that although he continues to advance the cause of authenticity, he has no difficulty with accepting the basic tenets of a post-structural belief in the textuality of the self and fictionality of reference. Even though he is aware of the constructedness of the subject and the account, he still believes in autobiography as a medium through which the self engages with a knowable world beyond the text:

Telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as a complete subject - it is a fantasy. In spite of the fact autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from happening.³⁹

For such post-structuralist critics as Paul de Man, Michael Sprinker and Jeffrey Mehlman, autobiography offers a perfect opportunity to expose the fantasy of the complete subject and to demonstrate the fictionality of all texts, even those most tenaciously concerned with "self"-expression. Since autobiography tends to foreground the self as unique and at the same time downplays the constructedness of language and text, it provides rich critical pickings for post-structuralists. With their insistence on the death of the self, the supremacy of text and discourse and the illusion of referentiality, post-structural critics such as Michael Sprinker have confidently proclaimed the death of the form:
The origin and the end of autobiography converge in the very act of writing...for no autobiography can take place except within the boundaries of a writing where concepts of subject, self and author collapse into the act of producing a text.\textsuperscript{40}

For such critics self-presence in a text is problematical because it exposes the radical (Lacanian) split between the self as subject and the self as other. Although the ego may search for unity, awareness of the difference makes coherence impossible. The co-existence of two "I"s in an autobiographical text - the self that writes and the self that is written - is seen as an ultimately "self"-defeating contradiction.\textsuperscript{41}

For de Man, it is the rhetorical or "tropological" nature of all texts - no matter how naturalistic - which guarantees the non-referential and fictive status of the subject. In his influential article, "Autobiography as De-facement", de Man draws attention to the central importance of language in the construction of the autobiographical subject by turning the debate on its head. Perhaps, he suggests, it is the rhetorical figure that determines the referent and it is the form which defines the life:

We assume the life \textit{produces} the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer \textit{does} is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium? And since the mimesis here assumed to be operative is one mode of figuration among others, does the referent determine the figure or is it the
Although there have been attempts by such critics as Paul John Eakin\(^{43}\) to rescue subjectivity and referentiality from the deconstructionists, the impact of this approach on the humanist belief in autobiography as the expression of a rational, unified consciousness has been profound. The contemporary critic’s indebtedness to post-structural thinking has been, as Vaughan Prain demonstrates, highly influential:

From this perspective language is perceived as a set of learnt discursive moves that seek to mask their constructedness and contingency. Within this framework subjectivity is read as multiple, layered, constructed by discursive practices, non-unitary, contradictory, polyvalent in meaning, socially produced, not fixed and incapable of embodying essences of self or character or representing non-linguistic ‘truths’. In this view the self is constructed as a site of struggle and conflict, where fractured senses of identity, and the ambivalence of the otherness of selves within subjectivity, compete for determination.\(^{44}\)

There is little doubt, however, that extreme forms of deconstructionism have attracted a good deal of criticism. According to Laura Marcus, too great an insistence on the textuality of the self has “resulted in a neglect of ethnic and gender diversity and differential subjectivities, and a highly abstract concept of identity.”\(^{45}\) For Paul John Eakin, the post-structural belief in linguistic systems as absolute and self-regulating denies the importance of history in the formation of
meaning. And for James Olney, it is the abolition of subjectivity and agency which causes him the greatest concern:

...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 to do with an authorising author. The self, then, is a fiction and so is life, and behind the text of an “autobiography” lies the text of an autobiography: all that is left are characters on a page, and they too can be “deconstructed” to demonstrate the shadowiness of even their existence.

This renewal of interest in the referential and the intentional aspects of self-writing is central to an understanding of David McCooey’s recent study of modern Australian autobiography, Artful Histories. Drawing on the theories of E.H. Carr and Wilhelm Dilthey, McCooey sets out to re-establish what he feels is a necessary distinction between autobiography and fiction. He believes that if we are to fully understand the paradoxical condition of autobiography, we should “turn our sights away from literature towards history.” Autobiography’s lack of finality is for McCooey, “a sign of its non-fictive status, one that it shares with history, since narratives of the past are always contingent and dependent on the changing face of the future.” Unlike fiction which cannot be verified, he believes that autobiography is an essentially discursive form of narrative. He shares with C. A. J. Coady a belief in autobiography as a public and social form of writing, as a historical genre, “open to
all the checks and limitations of testimony."51

Some of the more interesting developments in autobiographical criticism have, to a certain extent, taken us beyond the humanist/post-structural debate. And it is a consideration of this criticism which brings me to the second part of my intention in this thesis: the exploration of the autobiographical gesture as a form of oppositional or resistance literature. The work of Judith Butler52 and Sidonie Smith, in particular, has shifted the debate concerning culture and the constructions of self to a more profound awareness of the political dimensions of subjectivity, positionality and gender.

In her introduction to De/Colonizing the Subject, Sidonie Smith sees traditional autobiography as a masculinist, teleological practice enshrining notions of individual uniqueness within a canonical and generic law which excludes and silences alternative voices, noticeably the “colonized” female:

Despite their differences, of place, time, histories, economies, cultural identifications, all “I”s are rational, agentive, unitary. Thus the “I” becomes “Man” putatively a marker of the universal human subject whose essence remains outside the vagaries of history....The colonized “other” disappears into an anonymous, opaque collectivity of undifferentiated bodies.53

Smith then goes on to explore the ways in which alternative voices and forms can challenge the hegemonic practices that characterise western autobiography. She argues that by
“deploying autobiographical practices that go against the grain,” autobiography “may constitute an “I” that becomes a place of creative and by implication political intervention.”54 Furthermore, she believes that it is “illegitimate speakers” who will have the greatest success in “exposing the instability of forms” and the power relations those forms represent.55

Caren Kaplan makes a similar point when she argues that “outlaw genres” such as women’s prison memoirs, enable “a deconstruction of the ‘master genres’, revealing the power dynamics embedded in literary production, distribution and reception.” She goes on to argue for a “politics of location”, a discourse of situation in which the complex of influences that constitute subjectivity, empower the subject to speak out.56 This politics of position which involves speaking out from the margins implies a view of the subject that goes beyond the authorless discourses of deconstruction. This new critical position which takes account of historical contingency and differentiated subjectivities will, Judith Butler believes, lead to a new “politics of reading identity differently” whereby identity is seen “as a negotiation among fixed possibilities that both resists and remakes the representation of human experience.” In such a negotiation “the unspeakable would be mapped as speakable” and as part of a process in which “boundaries are traversed, articulated, confused and undone.”57
Of particular relevance here is the work of Joy Hooton in her exhaustive study of Australian women's autobiographies of childhood, *Stories of Herself When Young*. In the book she challenges the dominance of mainstream androcentric narratives concerned with self-definition and aesthetic closure and offers the reader a 'gynocentric' model based on an alternative notion of subjectivity in which relatedness replaces individuation as the central organising factor. Although she is not claiming a separate poetics for women's autobiographical writing she does suggest that the self that is being structured into these texts is a 'relational', collective, and decentred self in which “it is the process of living that is foregrounded, rather than achievement or destiny.” According to Hooton this 'relational' subjectivity produces narratives in which teleological and literary design is replaced by non-chronological, discontinuous and episodic structures. These alternative and largely unspoken stories provide very different insights into the history of Australian society than those offered by the dominant masculinist canon.58

Such an approach raises some interesting questions concerning resistance and hybridity. To what extent is it possible to devise a counter-genre with a distinct philosophy of self which operates outside the dominant forms? To what extent is the articulation of such a counter-discourse the product of a complex interplay between complicity and antagonism which is part of an ambivalence inherent in all discourse? Even though the
notion of the 'relational' self draws the reader away from unmediated, singular and 'natural' views of subjectivity towards the textuality of selfhood, it does raise the question of where the subject is located in terms of the dominant forms. To what or to whom is the 'relational' self related? Is it a conforming or an oppositional self? Can there be a subjectivity which is non-relational? And if relatedness is seen as being opposite to and separate from masculine individuation then could it be argued that both concepts belong to the one discourse, a discourse concerned with the ambivalence of selfhood in contemporary society?

The 'gynocentric' model is a mechanism which, whilst effectively exposing and challenging dominant male narratives, has, in a sense, been spawned by the very system it is rejecting. This ambivalence is particularly evident when one considers that subjectivities based on oppositional or separatist models are in themselves unstable discourses capable of subversion. In other words, the 'gynocentric' model is a hybrid form resulting from a complex interaction of forces which, in itself, is then capable of becoming a dominant mode open to new resistances, resistances which are part of its very existence as a discourse. As Michel Foucault points out in Discipline and Punish, the violence inherent in all discourse produces its own outside and its own resistance. And since power is dispersed throughout society and not concentrated in particular locations, every social practice
including writing about the self is an expression of a set of power relations which is in a constant state of flux.\(^{59}\) For Foucault, power is expressed through "innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, of an at least temporary inversion of power-relations."\(^{60}\)

This is why it is difficult to conceive of an unmediated place outside society from which an oppositional subject or 'subaltern' might speak. As Stephen Muecke points out in his discussion of Aboriginal writing, *Textual Spaces*, there can be no pure space of resistance for Aboriginal writers outside English or outside all those mechanisms which ensure publication and distribution.\(^{61}\) This is particularly true of the process by which writers such as Sally Morgan and Ruby Langford have been able to communicate their stories to a wider reading public. The danger is, however, that the 'subaltern' in his or her attempt to attain a speaking position becomes engaged in practices which undermine and silence the dissenting voice.\(^{62}\)

The conundrums surrounding resistance, the politics of location and subjectivity can be partly solved by looking at those contradictory historical forces which have produced the nation state. The sense of the nation as an organic unity holding diverse groups together is often countered by a Romantic belief in the value of rebellion and dissent. Political resistance is structured into a concept of community in which it is both acceptable and
unacceptable to oppose the state. It is an ambivalence reinforced by a double view of the nation state as a totally self-generating force and as an unclosed and unstable discourse within a wider, continuous historical process. This is the ambivalence which Homi K. Bhabha explores in his introduction to *Nation and Narration*. Drawing on the work of Benedict Anderson, Michael Oakeshott, Hannah Arendt and Tom Nairn amongst others, he conceives of the national space as a Janus-faced, imagined community of competing interests, associations and dispositions in which the public and private, the conformist and antagonistic interweave in complex and constantly changing ways.63

Viewing the nation as text opens up some very interesting notions as far as subjectivity and self-reflexivity are concerned. The fact that the nation as a concept is a cultural indeterminate which gestures towards totalization means that the discourse is essentially split and unstable. As Bhabha puts it, “The problematic ‘closure’ of textuality questions the ‘totalization’ of national culture.” As a result, it is possible to view the nation state as a multi-accentual sign, a non-monolithic set of relationships in which articulations of power nearly always invite some form of opposition or difference. For Bhabha, “the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly in the act of composing its powerful image.”(p.3). It is this uncertainty which permits counter-narratives from the margins to emerge. As the fringes intervene
in dominant discourses, they establish "thresholds of meaning which must be crossed, erased and translated in the process of cultural production." The interactive nature of this process of intervention at the boundaries is what produces new hybrid forms and stimulates political change:

...the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation.(p.4).

This ambivalence is particularly relevant when we turn to those Australian autobiographical narratives which attempt to speak out against the centres. Not only does the dominant culture permit and encourage licensed dissent in the form of democratic participation, it also induces unlicensed dissent in the form of outspoken opposition at the fringes. In doing so, the mainstream then works to incorporate these oppositions into centres which prompt a new unlicensed resistance. Very much the same can be said about Australian autobiography which, as a genre, obliges its authors to represent society as repressive and themselves as rebels in order for them to achieve a marketable uniqueness that is even more marketable because the unique is seen as collectively typical.

It should be clear from this discussion that in spite of the tendency for autobiography to reiterate dominant themes and to
exploit mainstream modes of expression, it can provide the chance for unauthorised voices to be heard. As a mode of expression, white Australian autobiography contains within its matrix of conflicting discourses a tendency to define national character in terms of opposition. This paradox, in which insider values are represented by the outsider allows the nation to celebrate itself as a collective of outsiders whilst, at the same time, coopting new stories into the dominant discourse.

Even the most orthodox of texts will display a tendency towards opposition before being re-absorbed into the mainstream or before the narrator, during closure, reinserts him or herself back into the master narrative. However, there are autobiographies in which positionality and agency drive the narration and in which the subject consciously and actively speaks out against the official storymaking strategies of the white hegemonic centre. This dynamic interplay between separation and absorption, between resistance and orthodoxy is central to an understanding of how a master narrative like autobiography can offer up fresh subjectivities whilst maintaining its role as a conservative social practice.

The stories of outsiders offer different and sometimes subversive perspectives on the social agencies that shape white Australian culture. Since autobiography is concerned with origins and identity and focuses, through individual consciousness, on the complex of conflicting influences that produce the subject and
form the narrator, these secret histories should reveal both the power of the dominant culture to impose its meaning and the need for oppositional narratives to confront and disrupt dominant modes of transaction. As John Colmer puts it:

If most autobiographers are in some sense, outsiders, the fact that one belongs to a minority group provides an additional justification for adopting this role and developing a radical criticism of established society.64

The secret stories of the marginalised open up new avenues for storytelling which should enrich the culture, and question and dislodge the monopolistic tendencies of dominant and official, public narratives. Such stories may even lead to the erosion of the very binary oppositions between the centre and the margins that promote exclusion, invisibility and silence. The stories of misfits, outcasts, minorities can become the driving force behind new cultural identities as different forms of marginality impinge on or reinvent the centre. Ruby Langford, Patrick White, David Malouf, Morris Lurie, Dorothy Hewett, in differing ways, all tell stories about themselves as outsiders in a dominant culture that cannot tolerate difference and which punishes those who stand outside. Although autobiography tends to emphasise the disadvantages facing the protagonist as he or she struggles towards self-fulfilment, the struggle is exacerbated by the dominant culture's attitude towards gender, ethnicity and race. Furthermore, if we look beyond the conventional literary canon to
the sorts of stories that Joy Hooton uncovers we see an even richer display of experience on show. Such a wealth of storytelling reveals the existence of many Australias each with its own particular history.

These sorts of oppositional stories are essential to a culture still struggling to define itself. If the dominant culture, as it has done, suppresses alternative and secret histories then it is denying the complexity of difference which informs and has informed Australian life and history. These secret stories have been consigned to the silent fringes of suppressed and covert history. As John Pilger puts it:

I have long regarded my own country as secret, as a land half-won, its story half-told. It was as if the past was another country, mysterious and unexplained.65

The counter narratives of the dispossessed, alienated and marginalised can challenge and undermine official histories and open up the previously closed map of mythmaking to new influences. And even though these narratives may, in their turn, be absorbed into the mainstream, they can both disrupt the "national pact of silence"66 and foreground minorities in a rewriting of history which undermines the exclusivity that drives official and national myth.

The increasingly diverse range of secret stories that makes up Australian autobiography is both an indication of and a determining force in the development of a richly heterogeneous
society. It could well be that the development of cultural identities that meet the needs of such a society will increasingly depend on the articulation of stories that celebrate otherness, marginality, difference and diversity. The disrupting effect of personal story may very well be the means by which official history gives way to new definitions of cultural identity. As Stuart Hall says:

Identity is formed at the unstable point where the "unspeakable" stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history.67

This relationship between subjectivity and history depends, I believe, on a notion of selfhood which is essentially social in nature. "The genesis of the self," George Mead claims," is interpreted as being one and the same event as the discovery of society."68 As children are shaped by the symbolic orders of language, where differentiation between "subject" and "object" begins to occur, they learn to adopt the role of the "other", to internalise those roles and so function symbolically and effectively in society. According to John Berger, identities "are socially bestowed," and every system of social control has "an identity-generating apparatus" through which the emerging self is "continuously created and recreated...held together by the slender thread of memory."69

The notion of self as a process producing fabricated "roles"
or "characters" constructed through the interweaving texts of society, has significant implications for the way we view autobiography. The paradoxes abound. Goronwy Rees defines autobiography as "the art of creating a self which does not exist." And, in the same vein, Jean-Paul Sartre, in _Words_, describes the self as a "retrospective illusion" which can have no existence outside the act of articulation:

I was beginning to find myself. I was almost nothing, at most an activity without content....The liar was finding his truth in the elaboration of his lies. I was born writing. Before that there was only a play of mirrors. By writing I was existing...but I existed only in order to write, and if I said "I" that meant "I who write."71

This notion of the fictiveness of self and the role of language in constructing self is well illustrated by Jorge Luis Borges when he searches for a fixed point in the proliferation of selves that occurs once the totalizing effect of the pre-linguistic coherent self has been removed: "Who was I? Today's self, bewildered, yesterday's forgotten; tomorrow's unpredictable?"72 One of the attractive and powerful aspects of autobiographical story is its ability to preserve and indeed promote the illusion of the coherent self against an overwhelming sense of fragmentation and dissolution. The craving for an integrated self is closely connected with a deep need for meaning and coherence. By foregrounding the issue of the self autobiographical story can simultaneously mask and reveal the illusion, mask and reveal the
literary and social mechanisms that propel us into the identities that give us significance.

The search for coherence and harmony in text is tied up with the need to “suture”\textsuperscript{73} the tearing of the self into the subject and object that occurs, according to Jacques Lacan, when the child enters the symbolic order of language and is forced to sacrifice being for meaning. During what Lacan calls the "\textit{stade du miroir}\textsuperscript{74}" or “the mirror phase”, the child, for the first time, sees him/herself as the "other", as a literal representation of self. However, this moment of self-recognition is immediately counteracted by the knowledge that the image in the mirror, the "other", is not "I". Lacan concludes that our initial ideas of harmony and identification "are constituted in disharmony" and that our lives are a constant search for ego ideals ("\textit{je-ideal}\textsuperscript{74}") or archetypes that will allow us to re-experience that feeling of harmony and wholeness.\textsuperscript{74}

This Lacanian self, as Terry Eagleton points out, is "essentially narcissistic"\textsuperscript{75} since it is constituted by reflections of ourselves in others. And since this reflection is both us and not us, we experience both harmony with and alienation from the "other". According to Lacan, the child "misrecognises" itself in the reflection and finds in it a pleasing unity that does not exist. The ego is, therefore, a "narcissistic process whereby we bolster up a fictive sense of unitary selfhood by finding something in the world with which we can identify."\textsuperscript{76} The mirror image - which is
a recurring image in most autobiography - takes on symbolic significance if one sees it as the interruption of language into the equation. According to Lacan, since nothing can predate language, a full distinction of self cannot occur until the subject has entered the "house" of language, where identity depends on difference and symbol rather than self-identicality.

As a result of the mirror phase trauma, the individual searches the objective world for ideal identifications, for a renewal of wholeness and harmony that was thwarted in childhood. In other words, the individual seeks to reinvent the unitary self in mirror reflections (narratives of self) in which harmony is defined by separation. This search for self is, in effect, the need that lies at the basis of the autobiographical urge and that drives the tension between the poetic space of ideal, lost childhoods and the experience of time and history in the movement of our lives. As Paul John Eakin puts it:

The logic of individuation is predicated on loss: language and the other, language taught by the (m)other, enable the articulation of self that, conceptually is by definition founded on the recognition of its separation from the other, its division from plenitude. The language of autobiography is a further naming of the self, a further reenactment of this primal partition.77

The search for ideal mirror worlds which might compensate for this "primal partition" from "plenitude" may very well account for the preponderance of doppelganger motifs in
Australian writing where the divided self is translated into images of doubleness or opposition that hint at the possibility of union or resolution in some ideal world. David Malouf's fascination with repetition and reflection can be seen in his portrayal of Johnno and Dante in *Johnno*, in the interrelated worlds of Ovid, the dead brother and the Child in *An Imaginary Life*, and in the persistent image of the twin jardinieres in *12 Edmondstone Street*. The same fascination is detectable in Patrick White's work: there are the Brown brothers in *The Solid Mandala*, Voss and Laura in *Voss* and a myriad of mirror images in *Flaws in the Glass*.

One of the recurrent themes which lies at the base of a number of mainstream autobiographies seems to embody this conflict between the promise of plenitude and the fear of partition. The recurrence of Australian childhoods that dramatise the conflicting pulls of separation and belonging seems to reflect a deep sense of cultural displacement that is particular to white Australian national myth. As Ross Gibson points out, the focus on selfhood in Australian art reflects a profound reaction to the emptiness of Australian space:

> To white sensibility most of Australia is empty space, devoid of inhabitants, architecture, artefacts. It hasn't been incorporated into the symbolic order, except as a signifier of emptiness, a cultural *tabula rasa*, a sublime structuring void louring over all Australian culture....The mythic centre draws Australian arts onward, around and inward in quest of selfhood just as it lured so many explorers.
As a result, there has been an obsession with "primitive themes" and an interest in "some divine and immanent (as opposed to social and arbitrary) system of meaning." According to Gibson this interest in the "unknowable heartland" represents a crucial lack that in turn operates like a "gravitational pole" which draws the culture towards an "essentially unattainable zone of meaning where all outstanding enigmas might be explicated."79 It is this yearning for the unattainable self to fill the emptiness at the centre which produces the dual image of utopian possibility and existential failure. Although this is true of most western autobiography - especially in its colonial manifestations - the existence of the harsh and intractable wilderness has given the search for wholeness within separation a localised and particular resonance. The search for a new home seems to be constantly and obsessively undermined by the central and alienating emptiness of the Australian desert.

This dual image of "severance and conjunction,"80 of exile and yearning for home, is very similar to Lacan's notion of the individual's search for ego ideals that will reconcile the individual to the pain of separation. The search for cultural identity seems to involve the same process of crisis in which images of paradise that involve completion and homecoming compensate for the pain of separation into history or the realm of symbolic meaning, difference and independence. Separation and
displacement is often expressed through the historical myths of failed explorers, traumatised convicts, dispossessed Aboriginals, alienated migrants, broken children and isolated artists whose yearning for the compensation of harmony is expressed through the coherence that alienation bestows on the separated individual. The absence of utopian homes reinforces the empty spaces of mythic Australia which in turn forces the culture inwards to quests for the self that always end in failure.

Although it is clear that my central interest lies in identifying what appear to be largely unconscious manifestations of Australian myth in autobiographical writing, I would like to conclude the chapter by offering a model for autobiography that goes some way to reconciling the contradiction between autobiographical narrative as a conscious act of self, on the one hand, and as an unconscious manifestation of cultural theme, on the other. What happens when a life is written? Quite clearly there are a number of things going on.

On the one hand, the autobiographical past is "a symbolisation, a secondary account rather than a transparent window" and as such will always reveal the social and cultural agencies which have shaped the writer. One of these agencies may very well belong to that symbolic ordering of reality we call national myth. And, it may be that the writer, whilst engaged in what appears to be an individual account of a unique life, inadvertently and unconsciously weaves his or her story through
an existing cultural myth. Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* is a text which, I believe, exemplifies such a tendency. On the other hand, the notion that the narrated self is a complex of shifting and protean identities, each determined by a series of rule-bound discourses, presupposes authorial control. According to this model, negotiation, choice and agency become paramount, especially if the protagonist is speaking out from a clearly defined position, such as Ruby Langford in *Don't Take Your Love to Town*.

One solution to this conundrum is to look closely at what it is we do when we narrate our own story. My belief is that the autobiographical voice is only one of a number of voices and selves that constitute the array of social roles which form part of our acculturation. I think that it is likely that the habit of reflection and of telling the story of yourself is a social practice that we learn from a very early age. As a result of this early conditioning, we grow up thinking of ourselves as narrators and characters in our own stories. I believe that the autobiographical voice that negotiates between the variety of selves that the past has produced is just as mediated by cultural considerations as any of the other voices that we employ. The main difference is that we privilege and value that voice as an authoritative source. Mikhail Bakhtin's views on selfhood seem particularly relevant here:

> Selfhood is not a particular voice within, but a particular
way of combining many voices within. Consciousness takes shape, as a process of interaction among authoritative and innerly persuasive discourses.⁸²

According to Bakhtin, the autobiographical voice is particularly persuasive since it, of all the innerly persuasive voices, can be seen as a potential "other", who is "with us when we look at ourselves in the mirror, when we dream of glory, when we lay down the external plans for our life."⁸³ Even though this self-reflexive voice is as constructed as any of our other selves, its ability to negotiate a pathway through the discontinuous flux that constitutes "real" life, gives it an authority and certainty when it comes to articulating life stories. It is my contention that this voice is both a conscious and an unconscious manifestation of the narrating self and of the social agencies which structure our lives. Not only that but both conscious and unconscious discourses can exist within the same text. Don't Take Your Love to Town may be read as a highly individualised account of an unspeakable life but it can also be read as a further reiteration of the dominant myth of the Australian battler.

One further way of bridging the gap between autobiography as individual negotiation and autobiography as cultural text is to view each text as kind of a palimpsest in which conscious acts of recollection involving choice and agency are interspersed with inscriptions from collective narratives. In Touching the World, Paul John Eakin defines a palimpsest as:
...a text whose content has been subject to different temporal accretions, to deliberate erasures and emendations, overwritings and inadvertent survivals, and, in these ways, a palimpsest may serve to evoke both the conscious and the unconscious dimensions of the relation between present and past that occur in the autobiographical act.84

Such a model recognises the impossibility of absolute originality whilst drawing attention to the importance of active participation in the act of recollection. Such a model recognises the presence of wider cultural themes operating through the text whilst at the same time giving the writer opportunities to rewrite and reinvent his or her own life. Viewing autobiography as palimpsest promotes a reading of the text which recognises the creative tension that exists between persistent myth and the idiosyncratic author. The accretions, erasures, emendations, overwritings and inadvertent survivals that characterise autobiography as a mode should provide insights into both the personal world of the autobiographer and the complex of cultural messages that constitute the text.

In a sense, each autobiographical project, whether it encodes mainstream ideologies or expresses the unspeakable, belongs to a self-reflexive form which is both highly creative and highly unstable. Within the context of autobiography as palimpsest, the private voice can meet and engage with the broader, more public stories of history. Personal story can both turn us into poets, as we create fictions that dramatise our
uniqueness, and turn us into historians who, through a deeper sense of the "other" in ourselves can understand and appreciate the rich diversity of Australian life.

The autobiographical act, with its emphasis on self-reflexivity, can lead to a greater awareness of those social forces which shape the self and so promote a "politics of difference"\textsuperscript{85} essential to the health of a heterogeneous and multifaceted society. By breaking through the mirror of autonomy to an understanding of the social conditions that produce the decentred self, the poetic and integrated "I", which autobiography encourages, can be reinserted into the flux of history and be changed by the very processes that gave it meaning. The unique "I" of self-reflexive story is an interactive voice which, by drawing on the tension between subjectivity and history, can provide a dynamic for cultural change which facilitates the emergence of secret voices and new identities.
CHAPTER TWO

THE ROOM BEHIND THE MIRROR

In "Oh Mr Gallagher, Oh Mr Sheen", one of T.A.G. Hungerford's stories in his autobiographical collection about growing up in South Perth, Stories from Suburban Road, the narrator, assuming the guise of a younger, innocent self, attempts to trap the timeless essence of his family as he, the older intelligent self, remembers them in the poetic space of his childhood. As he describes them playing cards in the parlour they seem to exist in the pure, fixed, and static space of immemorialised time, like petrified figures caught in timeless moments on the side of a Keatsian Grecian Urn. The noise of the family playing cards is a litany that captures the essence of their existence: it is like "the sound of being in church", with "everyone saying the same things and making the right answers."¹ And, as the boy closes his eyes to listen, he can see them "on the back of his eyelids" as clearly as if his eyes were open and he had been "looking straight at their reflection in the sideboard mirror."²

When nobody is looking, the young boy stands in front of the mirror staring at his own image, searching for an identity that is singularly and specifically his, looking for reassurance in the unique reflection that he believes is his and nobody else's:

I used to wonder whether I'd still be me, the way I looked and felt, if I'd been born Les or Bobbie or Eddie; or if anyone would ever find a way of getting into the room in the mirror, and what it would be like in there.³
It is through the sideboard mirror of his childhood that the narrator, with the innocent eyes of a younger self, constructs the mythologised space of an idealised past and through it a coherent and integrated sense of his own adult self. This image is a perfect illustration of how the autobiographical urge is closely associated with the search for unique, unmediated identities in the desocialised spaces of childhood. The fact that such a search is impossible does not seem to deter the quester: the fact that neither the self nor the mode of narration can ever be unmediated seems, if anything, to spur the narrator on to more energetic pursuits of the unattainable. There can be no way back through the mirror of childhood memory except through the illusion of a nostalgic past, through an idealised space that serves to endow both the world and the self with an illusory coherence and fixity.

Tommy's fascination with his mirror image is a motif that lies at the very basis of Jacques Lacan's theory of how the ego develops during the "stade du miroir". The room behind the mirror and Tommy's appearance in it can be seen as an embodiment of the imaginary world of narcissistic self-absorption in which the ego creates "a fictive sense of unitary selfhood" by searching for reflections of itself in the objective world. Although the identification is gratifying, the growing suspicion that this reflection cannot be the real thing creates a sense of dislocation and unease. The reflection seen in the sideboard mirror is both
Tommy, and not Tommy, is both the subject and object of the narrative. This feeling of being simultaneously inside and outside is the dilemma that first prompts the narrator to gaze into the mirror of the past for images that will give the present meaning. The narrator wants to be reunited with an illusory image which can only exist in what appears to be the desocialised room behind the mirror. Only such an idealised place can guarantee his uniqueness, can guarantee his identity as "Tommy": it is a place in which he, as an integrated centred self, cannot be confused with anyone or anything else.

This yearning for identity in the harmony of the unmediated self is accompanied by a feeling of being shut out from the ideal place behind the mirror. The desire for a harmony that will compensate for the knowledge of exclusion is realised in the very act of memory itself. The room behind the mirror is the realm of unfragmented selfhood where the divisions between subject and object can be smoothed into a complete sense of being. The memory of the moment in the mirror is the integrating force that produces the writer's sense of self, his sense of himself as a whole and autonomous subject.

At the end of the story, the smooth mirror of introspection is shattered when the boy unwittingly disturbs the family harmony by singing a scurrilous song about prostitutes. Although young Tommy is totally unaware of the meaning of the song, he is exquisitely aware of the effects that his singing has on his
family. During the fracas, in which for a brief moment the family is frozen in shock, Tommy - the outsider looking in - studies his family through the sideboard mirror. As the image unfurls, the mirror becomes a metaphor for seeing and for recording, for memory and for art:

I was still looking into the mirror. It's funny how the way things reflected in it always seemed closer and sharper than the real things in the room....My mother, Mrs Moodie and Rudolph, all still as paintings of themselves, staring at their cards....You saw these things everyday, but in the mirror, at night, they seemed different in a way I couldn't explain to myself....I stood...watching them all, sitting there like paintings. I thought: This is how I'll always remember them, sitting like painted people in the room behind the mirror.5

This sense of exclusion within the poetic space of belonging is articulated through the presence of the two narrators - the younger innocent self who belongs, and the older, knowing narrator who feels excluded and yet who seeks unity through the process of recall, through the autobiographical text. Although the past seems to be a fixed poetic space in which the innocent self can identify with its reflection, the watcher, at one and the same time, feels both unified and alienated, both integrated and separated.

This is precisely the dichotomy that characterises both Morris Lurie's Whole Life and Hal Porter's Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony. In each case, the yearning to return to the integrated spaces of childhood is counterbalanced by the
narrator's anguished sense of exclusion. Not only does the source of harmony - the mother - die but both are left yearning for pasts that seemed closed off to the questing self. For Porter, even his yearning to be put back on the balcony, to return to the innocent spaces of his childhood is defined by separation and exclusion:

Oh, God, the watcher on the cast-iron balcony screams out within me, Oh God, put me back on the balcony! One scream within, and one only. There is no one to hear.6

The simultaneously pleasing and disturbing unity that the autobiographical mirror or the balcony, in Porter's case, induces, is reinforced by the apparent accuracy of the reflection. The mirror not only confers unity and coherence but because it seems to be flatly reflecting the past it also appears to be telling the truth. What the mirror fails to do, of course, is reveal the social agencies and symbolic orders that have constructed that self; in Hungerford's case, the social and economic realities of the Depression. Because the mirror cuts out all reference to the social conditions that produced both the narrator and the protagonist, the reader is deceived into sharing the illusion of decontextualised coherence: the social and historical self is masked by a reflection that insists on autonomy.

The sleight of hand which produces the illusion of coherence is achieved by the mature writer adopting the literary persona of the child/protagonist. Since we cannot expect children to understand the processes that shape their lives and which seem
to make the adult world so perplexing, we are invited to suspend our own understanding of those processes and see the child's perspective as superior. The child's innocent viewpoint operates like the mirror in "Oh Mr. Gallagher, Oh Mr. Sheen": it censors the mechanisms that produce the self by promoting notions of subjectivity that transcend history. T.A.G. Hungerford's Tommy is a literary device that provides the narrated self with a sense of wholeness that cannot be supported outside the text.

Paradoxically, it is this unitary self generated by the integrating and fictionalising force of memory which permits the reiteration of myths and ideologies that lie deep within the unconscious life of the culture that produced the story. Of particular relevance here are the ideas of Louis Althusser who views the formation and expression of the unique "I" as a prime means by which society promotes ideologies, transmits its norms and maintains conformity:

Ideology represents subjectivity as a state of continuous self-apprehension - of being an acting, thinking, feeling subject (an "I") - in order to subject the individual to meanings that perpetuate the social structure.7

According to Althusser 'Ideology' constitutes individuals as 'subjects' by creating the illusion of autonomy, by encouraging individuals to (mis)recognise themselves as free and autonomous beings with unique personalities.8 The subject is flattered into subjection by being addressed personally and by being valued as a
coherent, centred and independent agent. As Terry Eagleton puts it:

It is as though society were not just an impersonal structure to me, but a 'subject' which addresses me personally - which recognises me, tells me that I am valued, and so makes me by that very act of recognition into a free autonomous subject. I come to feel, not exactly as though the world exists for me alone, but as though it is significantly 'centred' on me.\(^9\)

The constituted subject finds gratifying images of the self in the mirror of the objective world, narcissistic images that compensate the individual for subjection to social orthodoxies. This notion of self-reflexive autonomy is a highly potent form of social discipline since it encourages a belief in the inevitability of those social relations that activate and secure subjectivity:

Silencing contradiction and evading alternative representations of the real, an ideology represents society's power relations as inevitable and natural, beyond question of change.\(^{10}\)

And yet, in spite of what appears to be the inescapable subjection of the individual to the ideological mirrors of society, total identification between the self and the "other" is never completely achieved. As Terry Eagleton points out:

I am not actually the coherent, autonomous, self-generating subject I know myself to be in the ideological sphere, but the 'decentred' function of several social determinants.\(^{11}\)
As a result of this dislocation, the 'subject', rather like the child in Jacques Lacan's mirror phase, searches for further opportunities to reestablish the feeling of well-being that emanates from that initial taste of union with the other. Dislocation or alienation only serves to encourage further searches for integration: Lacan's child searching for harmony to compensate for the knowledge of separation is another form of the same search. Stimulated by gratifying images of self, the "I" is prepared to subject itself to the very processes that seem to threaten autonomy: the subject is prepared to subject itself in order to become a subject. For both Lacan and Althusser, society is like a mirror in which images of the ego deflect attention away from the forces that produce the self. This misrecognition of the self in the mirror smooths the way for the transmission of social value since social process is now masquerading as individual, decontextualised story.

Autobiographical story enacts the process by which both Lacan's children and Althusser's subjects search for images of self in the mirror of the objective world. The misrecognition that characterises both the child's response to his/her image and the subject's response to the world, is the same misrecognition that characterises the reader's empathic relationship with the child protagonist. Narrated as innocent, pre-social creatures, readers are asked to suspend their adult understanding of the social practices that shape the world we inhabit and the fiction we read.
As we are narrated into personal story, we, too, are being recruited into a form of subjection that denies mechanisms that bring it into existence. The mirror world of fictionalised childhood seems to deny the refractions of language and sign.

By way of contrast to the flatly realistic and unmediated reflections of childhood reminiscence that inform most autobiographical story, Lewis Carroll's use of the mirror in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* provides an effective illustration of how the mirror of narrative needs to take account of the symbolic and arbitrary nature of language as it transforms experience into meaning. Alice, like Tommy, wants to climb into the room behind the mirror to make discoveries about the nature of the reflected world of the imagination. But whilst Tommy, through the naturalising medium of the narrator as mirror, becomes absorbed in narcissistic reflections of self, Alice is drawn into a consciously fictional world where the rationale which underpins the symbolic orders we call "reality" is constantly threatened. In Alice's world, the mirror inversions and distortions tell us important truths about the nature of language and the way meaning is constructed through symbol. The mirror world alerts us to the essentially arbitrary nature of language as a tool for constructing reality and the potentially chaotic and threatening nature of a world without symbolism or language.

When Alice enters the Looking-Glass world, she enters a world organised on very different principles from the one she has
just left. Concepts of time and space, logic and reason that form
the basis of her sense of living in a 'normal', 'real' world of
agreed assumptions are undercut by the alternative symbolic
order of the mirror world. The Red Queen runs faster and faster
simply to stay where she is, the White Queen experiences pain
before she pricks herself and happily informs Alice that in this
backwards world memory works both ways. But, perhaps, the
notion of normality as a relative, contingent and arbitrary
principle is best illustrated by Alice's conversation about
language with Humpty Dumpty. When Humpty uses a word "it
means exactly what I want it to mean - neither more nor less."13
The linguistic anarchy that such a philosophy entails, alerts us
both to the arbitrary nature of the symbolism and to the
importance of the system in creating meaningful worlds of social
action. Humpty is the ultimate solipsist, a mad literary critic
who constructs meaning in an isolated and completely self-
centred way. He has not graduated from the imaginary world of
the mirror phase into the symbolic world of shared meaning.

Lewis Carroll's fantasy draws our attention to the fact that
we live in a world mediated by symbols and that to reveal truths
about the world and ourselves we need to warp or distort the
smooth surface of the mirror to get at the structures that lie
below. However, the narrative style of autobiography is
predominantly naturalistic and promotes an idea of the memory
as an accurate and reliable mirror reflection of the actual past.
The mechanism of the autonomous and unified "I" which emerges from such constructions of the past tends to mask the complex of mediations which constitute subjectivity. The naturalising device of the unique "I" undermines the dymanic of autobiography as palimpsest, as "always-already-read text." The "I" is privileged over the social agencies which make subjectivity possible.

This tendency to foreground the self and reduce the part played by society and history in the unfolding story is a process which Donald Horne in The Education of Young Donald, seeks to reverse. Not only does he call his personal story a 'sociography' but he consistently downplays the role of self in determining events. He feels that the very term "autobiography" suggests a "sense of self-importance" that is not warranted by the nature of the story. The emphasis is on the "Education" rather than on "Young Donald":

...but since the central character is presented as a social animal, his adolescent revolt shaped by and coloured by social circumstance, I would use the word, 'sociography' rather than 'autobiography'. Although parts of it are concerned with the kinds of accident that affect character and affront human dignity with the importance of their triviality, other parts attempt to show what social history can look like when told through people....

Generally speaking, however, such attempts to draw attention to society through the individual life promote narratives which invite the reader to misrecognise the
symbolically interactive mechanisms of the text for an idea of self that obscures those social agencies that brought both the self and the text into being.

Paradoxically, it is the promotion of the desocialised and independent self which provides conduits for the expression of ideologies which undermine diversity, independence and choice. For example, the white Australian myth of the self-reliant battler encourages a notion of selfhood which denies the social and yet which promotes a highly conservative and conformist notion of Australian national identity.

Robyn Davidson's *Tracks*, an autobiographical account of her travels across central Australia, is a particularly good example of how the dominant white culture can perpetuate orthodox ideologies by writing itself through the lives of individual subjects. Although Davidson is fully conscious of her narrating and narrated selves as she negotiates her way through those conflicting forces which have produced the story, she is not always aware of the presence of deeper cultural themes operating through the text. Her search for a dissident, autonomous self in the unmediated mirror of a pure if difficult nature belongs to a canon and tradition of writing about the Australian wilderness which goes beyond the particular to collective and political understandings of what it is to be Australian. The private voice of disaffection activates broader, public myths about the meaning of the desert in white Australian discourses about national identity.
The Australian desert, according to Meaghan Morris, is "always a pre-existing pile of texts and documents and fantasies, legends, jokes and other people's memories."\(^{16}\) Even the notion of the desert as an empty but wonderful space in which the free and autonomous individual can find him/herself resonates with cultural meaning. The myth of emptiness masks a set of texts which is deafeningly full of cultural noise about national identity. Such narratives centre on Australia as a "sign-posted yet self-effacing"\(^{17}\) inland sea of emptiness and possibility built on a series of binary oppositions:

The peculiarity of Australian inland space lies...in the series of stark oppositions which define it (and which reappear in other contexts as basic problems of Australian history and culture in general): here/there, positive/negative, presence/absence.\(^{18}\)

The search for personal identity in a place which denies identity mirrors the search for a white national identity in a mythical space which denies the operation of history. Furthermore, by placing the subject outside society in an empty space the capacity of the subject to read and then act upon the political and social determinants which shape subjectivity is severely reduced.

The book, itself, is a complex of interweaving texts, each with its own meaning and agenda. It is a quest for personal insight, a rite of passage involving absolution and acceptance, a
travelogue and a meditation on self. It is a series of political
treatises about Aboriginality, feminism, ockerism, mateship and
bush values, a guide to handling camels, and a love story. All
these texts, some of which have conflicting ideologies and
discourses, are focused through the medium of the desert. Not
only that but the narrative is bathed in imagery that comes
directly and indirectly from seminal and authoritative texts
about the Australian outback. Although Davidson is searching for
a unique way of claiming the desert as a site for the resolution of
personal conflicts, there is a sense in which the expedition has
been written by Edward Eyre, Charles Sturt, Thomas Mitchell,
Henry Lawson, Randolph Stow, Patrick White, Kevin Gilbert,
Russell Drysdale, Sidney Nolan, Arthur Streeton and many others.

The factors that drive the need for the expedition lie at the
very centre of the language, images and motifs that define the
public myth of the Australian wilderness. In a sense, her
expedition is less about self-discovery and autonomy than it is
about the reiteration of myths that bind her to the culture, that
endow her with a particular subjectivity. Enthralled by the image
of herself reflected in the desert, she subjects herself to it and
becomes a subject in a discourse about Australian society. She
is being constituted as a subject in a story that ensures her
conformity to dominant values about belonging and acceptance.
When asked what she thinks is the substance of the world in
which she lives, she replies: "Desert, purity, fire, hot wind, space,
sun, desert, desert, desert.\textsuperscript{20} The fact that she "had no idea that those symbols had been working so strongly within (her)"(p.49) is a clear indication of the suggestiveness and power of the public motifs and themes which are weaving themselves the story.

Within the palimpsest of the text, the deeply Romantic discourse of the lost and alienated child searching for an essential self merges with the broader myth of the wilderness as a defining characteristic of white Australian identity. From the outset, she sees herself as an alien, an outsider who "never had a home of (her) own"(p.52), as a "loner" who treasures her individuality, and an isolate who hates the soft materialism and "self-indulgent negativity"(p.50) of urban Australia. As a result, she feels comfortable and at home in the desert. For her, it is a place that, in its association with the irrational and instinctive, is vastly superior to reason and society: "I believe the subconscious knows best. It is our vastly overrated rational mind that screws everything up."(p.53).

It is also a place where Davidson can meet, confront and deal with her mirror self, her alter ego. Her determination to succeed becomes identified as a distinct character, a 'desert' character that has to face up to its possible elimination by her opposite. When she loses the camels she has a chance to back out of the project: she has an alibi. However, she pits her desert, unpractical and dreamy self against her cowardly, social, rational self, and it is only when the camels are discovered and her alibi
disappears that the "disparate selves" agree to resume the trip.

This centring of the single self, in the mirror of the desert becomes the focus of the entire discourse as Davidson turns her travelogue about trekking with camels across central Australia into a public rite of passage in which selfhood is achieved through ordeal by desert. The daughter, the sister, the lover, the feminist, the Australian are all separate identities, each constituted by a different ideology and each producing conflicts in which the search for essential selfhood offers the narrator a form of resolution. The journey begins with her rejection of society in general and of suburbia in particular. She will not become like her sister: she will reject the stultifying comforts of suburban life for the hardships and deprivations of her desert self. And, as she realises this self by crossing the desert, she sees herself exorcising the ghosts and easing the traumas that have plagued her family. It seems that she is undertaking the journey in order to affirm her father and lay to rest the ghosts of the past. Her success will somehow redeem the family and provide her with the necessary credentials for adulthood.

In a sense, she is searching for acceptance by re-enacting journeys that bind her to important family rituals. We learn that her father spent twenty years walking across Africa, "living the life of a Victorian explorer." She is pleased to be considered "a chip off the old block"(p.105), to be like him, and to win his approval by undertaking a trip that mirrors his own. But perhaps
more interestingly, she sees this "gesture of mine" as symbolically absolving the "stupid meaningless pain our family had suffered." She sees herself as the family exorcist, who has the power, by confronting herself in the desert, to ease the pain and guilt, "as if I could walk it away for all of us."(p.106).

Woven into the fabric of this "private" rite of passage across the desert is Davidson's public celebration of the myth of the rugged individual. It is only when one realises the mythic significance of her faith in autonomy that the pursuit of self within the centring mirrors of Australian value becomes clear. By writing herself as a character or subject into the literary milieu of the unmediated desert, Davidson is living out an Australian myth that narrates subjects as outsiders in non-social spaces. As a paradigm for social action the myth promotes inaction and stasis by placing the individual outside the centres of social action. Paradoxically she is centred in reflections that deny the existence of centres: she is subjected to emptiness.

The orthodoxy that underpins this belief in the desert self is well illustrated when Davidson sees herself as an embodiment of the outback myth of the battler:

For many outback people, the effect of almost total isolation coupled with that all-encompassing battle with the earth is so great that when the prizes are won, they feel the need to build a psychological fortress around the knowledge and possessions they have broken their backs to obtain. That fiercely independent individualism was something akin to what I was feeling now.(p.78).
Of course, there is very little that is individual and free about the space she occupies. The desert itself seems to be full of the detritus of human activity including tourists, coke cans, a National Geographic photo-journalist and a whole host of texts and characters that fill her space and remind us that Robyn Davidson belongs to a culture that is all these things and more. Not only that but many of the things she carries with her - Rick Smolan, Eric Satie and whiskey to name a few - bind her to the very culture she seems to despise. Davidson's push towards isolated individuality takes her closer to the things she is escaping because the reflected subject she is pursuing is a social construct that belongs to the world of National Geographic and Eric Satie.

Davidson's dilemma is neatly demonstrated by her growing realisation that no matter how much she asserts her freedom and individuality and her love of the wilderness she has little control over the shape and meaning of the expedition. The process by which ownership of the trip and the story is taken from her is a metonym for the process by which her personal agenda is being superseded by pervasive and dominant narratives. Tracks, as a formal resolution of the conflicts which motivate the narrator to tell her individual story is being "colonised" by and subjected to more powerful interests and forces. As soon as National Geographic - which has a conservative ideological agenda of its own - hijacks the story, Davidson is no longer free to pursue her
own dream or to tell her own story. By accepting money from *National Geographic*, she realises that her particular story is in danger of being undermined and reinvented:

I...knew at some level that it meant the end of the trip as I had conceived it: knew it was the wrong thing to do - a sell-out....It meant that an international magazine would be interfering - no, not overtly, but would have a vested interest in, would have a subtle, controlling factor in, what had begun as a personal and private gesture.(p.98).

The physical manifestation of the magazine's influence is, of course, Rick - the photojournalist - whose presence on the trip becomes highly problematic. Not only does he compromise her desire "to be alone, to test, to push, to unclog my brain of all its extraneous debris" and "to be stripped of all social crutches"(p.99), but he also represents the very cultural forces she is trying to escape by retreating to the desert: "The camera seemed omnipresent."(p.108). Their eventual union as lovers provides a nice metonym for Davidson's inescapable journey towards the centres of her own culture: the closer she gets to the emptiness, the closer she is drawn to the socio-economic and socio-political forces that define the expedition. Her subjection to Rick's sexual influence is, by implication, both political and commercial. By selling out she has lost political control over the expedition.

The resulting *National Geographic* article reads like a neo-colonial reoccupation of the Australian wilderness by intrepid
explorers: "Daring the harsh and beautiful outback, a young woman makes a remarkable journey across half a continent." Interestingly enough many of the photographic and textual images reinforce the same kind of ideology that underpins Davidson's own notions of rugged individuality.

As she begins to realise that the trip "belongs to everybody but me" (p.101), she becomes increasingly aware of herself as a writer, as a novelist with a distinct and crafted story to tell. It is as if the role of writer compensates her for the disappointment of not being able to live out the fantasy and that the poetic space she creates in her book is a substitute for the "real" Australia she fails to find in the desert:

I did not perceive at the time that I was allowing myself to get more involved with the article about the trip than the trip itself. It did not dawn on me that already I was beginning to see it as a story for other people, with a beginning and an ending. (p.140).

And, when Rick insists on posed shots in front of Ayers Rock, it is quite clear that Davidson has herself become a cliched addition to the very preexisting texts she is trying to escape. She has subjected herself to the narratives she most despises:

They were gorgeous photos, no complaints there, but who was that Vogue model tripping romantically along roads with a bunch of camels behind her, hair lifted delicately by silvan breezes and turned into a golden halo by the back lighting. (p.137).
As the contradictions between all the discourses within the text intensify, she seems to resort even more enthusiastically to achieving essential selfhood within the mythical landscape of the empty but full wilderness. What she cannot achieve in time, within the context of events, she will achieve in space, within the context of myth: she turns her story into fiction by tuning into a myth whose articulation endows her with an absolutely centred, public subjectivity. She is comforted into powerlessness by allowing herself to be 'sutured' into wholeness, by subjecting herself to the dominant narrative. It is the act of writing that allows her to project images that endow her with meaning and coherence. The comforting catharsis of the narrative knits her ego together so that she becomes integrated by seeing herself in the mirror of the desert: "I could feel myself knitting together, sorting it out, putting into perspective, clearing my confusion."(p.169).

What she accepts and rehearses is an almost epiphanic celebration of Australia as Hell and Utopia. As she rides out into the desert for the first time, she sees it "all fresh and bathed in an effulgence of light and joy, as if a smoke had cleared, or my eyes had been peeled."(p.107). The desert "is like a vast untended communal garden, the closest thing to earthly paradise I can imagine."(p.117). At one stage, as night falls, she feels as if she is in "a cathedral of black and silver giant gums...the heart of the world, paradise."(p.215).
This orthodox paradise is counterbalanced by an orthodox hell: "the country seemed alien, faded, muted, the silence hostile, overwhelming." (p. 150). Indeed, they are moments when Davidson, like Edward Eyre, Charles Sturt or Henry Lawson feels that it is positively evil:

I woke into limbo and could not find myself. There were no reference points, nothing to keep the world controlled and bound together. There was nothing but chaos and voices....I walked out into that evil whispering sea. Like an animal, I sensed a menace, everything was quite still, but threatening, icy, beneath the sun's heat. (p. 153).

Into this mythic Australian space, Davidson attempts to conjure up a whole series of self-reflecting images. In spite of the fact she cannot be an Aborigine or even get close to Aboriginality because of the white culture she carries with her, she is determined to compensate for exclusion from paradise by reproducing the Romantic orthodoxy of the Aborigine as Noble Savage. At one stage, whilst she is travelling with Eddie, an Aborigine from the Docker River area, she feels that she has entered the Aboriginal dimension of desert reality where time melts and where the questing self can relax into a mystical sense of its own naturalness:

And just as Aborigines seem to be in perfect rapport with themselves and their country, so the embryonic beginnings of rapport were happening to me. I loved it. (p. 192).

Predictably, the trope is completed with a comparison
between the two societies: "The one so archetypically paranoid, grasping, destructive, the other so sane. I didn't ever want to leave the desert." (p. 195). The binary opposition on which the urban myth of the desert is built lies at the very basis of her dream of selfhood. The European notion of Aboriginality is yet another reflected illusion, an invented subjectivity that binds her even more firmly to the insane society she is seeking to escape. The explorer who never wants to leave the desert is the protagonist in a fiction which is set squarely within an urban culture that the explorer has, in effect, never left.

No matter how hard Davidson tries to acquire an Aboriginal identity, she is nearly always shut out from the world of values she associates with Aboriginality. It is another mirror image which attracts only to confront the subject with the impossibility of union. The identification/alienation trope which characterises her subjection to desert imagery is perfectly illustrated when she is invited to dance at a women's corroboree. At first, she feels "melded into" a sense of "belonging". But, when she is asked for money as payment for the "show", she feels like an outsider, someone that would never be able to "enter their reality and would always be a ‘whitefella’ tourist on the outside looking in." (pp. 147-48). The inside/outside duality that lies behind the fascination with mirrors attracts the subject only to alienate her from the image. She wants to be an Aborigine but she knows that she can't be one: she wants to be inside but feels as if
she is always on the outside. Once again, the antiphonal oscillation between conjunction and separation, between plenitude and privation becomes central to the discourse. Davidson realises that her need to belong to something "natural" outside her society, is being undermined by her own "civilised" nature. In short, the dream of communion is unattainable.

The closure of the book involves a strange combination of celebration and disappointment, as if Davidson has difficulties resolving the contradictions that result from the clash of narratives. She wants to mythologise her trip by inscribing it into the legend of the outback: the poet in Davidson wants to carve out a space for women in the orthodoxy of the wilderness. At the same time, she is conscious of the impact of history and contingency on her expedition. She knows she cannot control the social agencies that inform her life and give meaning to the desert. Rick, National Geographic, Paladin - who published her book in England - her family, her background and education are all forces over which the rugged individualist has no control.

It is the gap between the fantasy of Davidson's escape into the asocial self and the urban, and essentially public meaning of her expedition, that exposes the very texts that construct the fantasising subject. Robyn Davidson, as she emerges from this book, is an "I", a subject who has both engaged in and has been acted upon by a series of texts which continue to define white Australian identity in terms of the wilderness. Each of the
ideological conflicts which underpin this text, whether it is radical feminism or outback conservatism, is tested within the mythic framework of the Australian emptiness. Davidson attempts to resolve these conflicts by producing a further narrative in which the mythologised figure of the camel lady becomes both a positive reinforcement of the outback myth and a negative embodiment of all the things she despises about contemporary society. The notion of the expedition as novel is the first stage in the process: "I felt that the trip had ended itself; had reached some psychological conclusion, had simply become complete, like the last page of a novel."(p.223). The expedition is now conceived in terms of fiction in which the protagonist is a writer rather than an intrepid explorer. Having established the setting, outlined the characters, introduced and developed the motifs and images, it is now time to recapitulate.

She completes her literary journey, by rehearsing the myth that allows the "I", the subject of this romance, to merge into the poetic space of the Australian emptiness. Here, in the desocialised centre of the "paradis-perdu", the European fantasy of renewal in the desert is realised. The setting, imagery and language place the narrative at the centre of a tradition that sees nature as preferable and strange, as a purifying escape from the claustrophobic constraints of society. She begins her mythic journey in the petrified landscape of a disturbing limbo:

This was peculiar, oppressive country. It was dead flat,
covered in white gypsum dotted with clumps of succulent at intervals of twelve feet. And out of this vast expanse would arise the occasional still wave of sand, covered in taller trees and scrub. It had an abandoned quality. (p.224).

As she gets closer to the centre of this dead land she enters a strangely beautiful country which contains "the most impressive surreal piece of landscaping I had seen on the whole journey." It is a weird world of "topographical freaks", a "martian landscape seen through multi-coloured glasses" (pp.224-5), a "savage and scarlet" landscape of renewal and possibility. It is at this point that Davidson releases her desert self into the mythic landscape and subjects herself to all the transcendent mysticism that the Australian space promises:

I took off my clothes and danced. I danced until I could dance no more - I danced out everything....I shouted and howled and wept and I leapt and contorted my body until it refused to respond any more. I crawled back to the camels...and slept for an hour. When I woke, I felt healed, and weightless, and prepared for anything. (p.226).

This self-generated version of Davidson as a figure in a strangely beautiful and cleansing wilderness is almost immediately contradicted by a self that resents the way she has been transformed into "the myth of the romantic, mysterious camel lady" by the "jackals, hyenas, parasites and pariahs of the popular press." (p.227). Her fascination with her own reflection seems to prevent her from realising that she is the unwitting author of the hype she disdains. Not only that but, in spite of her
condemnations of the myth makers, she continues to build on the myth she despises by observing that her expedition has become a national inspiration and a kind of conduit through which the collective frustrations and desires of an entire society can be expressed:

It would seem that the combination of elements - woman, desert, camels, aloneness - hit some soft spot in the era's passionless, heartless, aching psyche. It fired the imaginations of people who see themselves as alienated, powerless, unable to do anything about a world gone mad.(p.231).

Although she tries to distance herself from the public narrative and the myth-creating mechanisms that have hijacked her trip, there is little doubt that she finds the reflected image hard to resist. She may dislike being the "romantic camel lady," or the "crazy irresponsible adventurer" who has become both a "feminist symbol" and a "mythical being who had done something courageous and outside the possibilities that ordinary people could hope for"(p.231), but these are the very images that lie behind the intimate disclosures that characterise her 'private' narrative. Her dismissal of cliched and orthodox myth masks an orthodoxy which is, in a sense, even more potent than the myth that drives the National Geographic article.

By ignoring the social agencies that have shaped both her and her trip she asserts an autonomy that is impractical and narcissistic. Not only does it place the individual outside society
in a limbo of non-action but it encourages acceptance of the status quo and all those myths - mateship, the outback, egalitarianism, rugged individualism - that induce conformity. When she claims that her sole aim was to prove that "anyone could do anything" she is perpetuating a myth that promises the ultimate freedom of the individual in a world of social practice in which that freedom cannot be sustained.

These conclusions hit at the very social processes through which ideologies are expressed and through which social norms are converted into subjectivities. The desert is a site that allows her to be both a radical and a conservative, to be both an outsider and a conformist, to both believe in and disavow her own mythology. These conflicting ideologies are resolved by constructing a coherent and integrated narrating subject that is 'sutured' into wholeness by seeing only itself in the mirror of fiction. When society appears in the form of Rick and others she retreats further into narcissistic images of the unattainable: instinct, Aboriginality, the subconscious, transcendent nature, outback mythology. Even the dismissal of her own mythology represents a rejection of society in favour of the preferable area of pure space somewhere "out there" in the poetic emptiness of Australia.

The resulting nostalgia for lost and unattainable worlds is both comforting and disempowering. Both reader and writer are sutured into wholeness in a process that disempowers by
removing us from society and narrating us as outsiders in search of a pure mirror self that cannot exist. Nostalgia denies history by pretending the illusory past is preferable to the world of interested action. It is no accident that at the end of the book Davidson confesses: "I knew even then that, instead of remembering the truth of it, I would lapse into useless nostalgia." (p.247).

And so, the narrating subject, the questing "I", retreats into the room behind the mirror, that centred space in which the divided self can be reunited with its ideal reflection. It is here, in the poetic space of the first house (T.A.G. Hungerford), on the cast-iron balcony of the lost childhood (Hal Porter), in the unattainable promise of "Leben" (Morris Lurie), or in the desocialised space of the desert (Robyn Davidson) that the narcissistic self is most susceptible to the impact of ideology. Although the innerly persuasive voice of the autobiographical "I" represents a conscious effort to negotiate a distinctive and unique self out of the complex of texts which constitute subjectivity, the persistence of unconscious motifs within the palimpsest of autobiographical writing is a clear indication of how effectively public stories can express themselves through private lives.
CHAPTER THREE

THE BUSH IN THE MIRROR

Perhaps the most powerful and evocative search for the mirror image of the pure, unmediated self can be found in the proliferation of bush childhoods that characterise white Australian autobiographical story. Whereas Robyn Davidson's book reinforces the European culture's faith in the transcendent and defining essence of the Australian wilderness as an unattainable home, bush childhoods, as they are represented in autobiographical works such as Alan Marshall’s I Can Jump Puddles and T.A.G. Hungerford’s Stories from Suburban Road, can be seen as part of a similar process whereby the trauma of exile is resolved into stories of belonging and homecoming.

The location of children in idealised bush settings belongs to a tradition of white Australian writing in which national identity is explored and celebrated through the fictions of the lost and vulnerable childhood. Although each text represents an individual interaction with the tradition, the persistence of the motif suggests that there is a deeper substratum of meaning operating through the narrative.¹ In many respects, the mythic world of the bush is part of the same pre-social space that defines the wilderness. Not only is it located outside society and outside history, in the domain of preferable nature, but it also, like the wilderness as transcendent space, provides comforting anodynes in which the social and political realities of Australian
life are elided into the perfectible yet unattainable world of idealised childhood.

These Romances of the Bush are like novels of education - the Lawsonian *bildungsroman* - in which the protagonist is initiated into the rituals and practices of the cult of the outback and in which the novitiate or the child-self is structured by meanings which reinforce and perpetuate the ideologies which underpin the myth. These unique and private accounts of growing up in the bush can also be seen as public mirrors in which the values of the dominant white culture are reiterated through the experiences of the individual. In *I Can Jump Puddles* this celebration of dominant value is expressed through the creation of a child self who is atypical and marginal, and yet whose eventual location within the Lawsonian code places him at the very centre of the tradition. Although poliomyelitis sets the young Alan apart from the rest of the world, it becomes the means by which he achieves membership of the bush code. The outsider becomes absorbed into a dominant narrative in which national space is defined by conformity to the non-conforming values of the battling outsider. Childhood becomes a sacred site of nostalgic value in which the author yearns for an earlier, atypical self, a self which sets him apart as different but which also sets him up for absorption into the mainstream myth.

In the telling of the story, Alan Marshall, the writer, constructs himself as a novitiate, as an embryonic bushman
whose genesis, the very origins of his identity as character and writer, is couched in mythic terms. Marshall is preserving that tradition by writing himself into it as protagonist and bard, as hero and singer. Young Alan's quest to become a bushman, to be "self-reliant, forthright and compassionate,"\(^2\) is a rite of passage in which the collective voice of what has become a nationalistic and nostalgic tradition is expressed through the particularity and coherence of the narrating "I". The operation of the ideology through the individual story is hidden as we are narrated as empathic readers who believe and who participate in the quest of the battler as he overcomes impossible odds and achieves the mythic status of the bushman.

Once the myth begins to occupy poetic spaces which deny history and reinforce the status quo, the tendency towards nostalgia and sentimentality begins to dominate the narrative. The idyllic and golden childhood of the bush world belongs to an order of nostalgia that depoliticises the reader by placing him/her in an ahistorical, asocial field of mythic space. Since nature happens and children are powerless, the combination of the two promotes an unquestioning acceptance of value systems that embrace impossible, unattainable but preferable pasts. The nostalgia perpetuates an ideology that "silences contradictions, evades alternative representations of the real and represents society's power relations as inevitable and natural, beyond question of change."\(^3\)
This process of depoliticising the past by turning it into unchangeable and unchanging myth is reinforced at the end of the book where the move to Melbourne represents a contradiction that can only be resolved by an even more energetic pursuit of the ideal. Alan Marshall has to leave the bush in order to write about the bush: he has to abandon what he professes to love. Although he feels that he could never leave the bush "from which," he says, "in some strange way, I gained my strength" (p.242), his departure to the city marks the end of the bush as a geographic setting for the fiction and the beginning of the bush as nostalgic psychic space. In a sense, the writing of the book itself compensates for a loss that is built into the very structure of the myth. Although the impact of the motor car is a historical force that seems to destroy the idyllic world symbolised by horses and the bush, the final gesture is towards the preservation of the unattainable within the context of a fiction that ignores the imperatives of history by a further romanticisation of the myth.

The opening of the novel leaves us in no doubt as to the values which underpin the protagonist's quest for acceptance into the community of bushmen. As the mother, pregnant with Alan, watches "the tall gums tossing in the wind" and "cloud shadows racing across the paddocks", she knows intuitively that, "It will be a son; it is a man's day." And her husband, who is also in deep communion with the Australian bush, looks through the window to "the dark green barrier of the bush", and acknowledges the gift by
declaring his intention to "make him a bushman and a runner."(p.1). Both gestures towards the unborn child reflect the gender-specific attitudes that structure the ritual. In the dominant mode, it is the male, and in particular the father, who takes the active and central role in the formulation and in the articulation of the myth. Although the mother, as in this case, may seem to be tuned into the mystical implications of the birth, her influence is, at best, incidental, secondary and passive and, at worst, feminine and negative. The domestic is seen as being at odds with the masculine ethos of the battler myth.

In rehearsing the story of Alan's birth, the mother reinforces the predominantly male ethos of the code by mythologising him as the phallocentric inheritor of a tradition, articulated and perfected by 'Banjo' Paterson and Henry Lawson:

I could smell the myall-wood handle of your father's stockwhip hanging on the end of the bed, and I could see you wheeling it around your head.(p.1).

This image should alert to us to the mythic importance of Alan's father as a fictive extension of the bush world that the older Marshall wishes to occupy. The father, who has "a bushman's face, brown and lined, with sharp blue eyes embedded in wrinkles that came from the glare of saltbush plains"(p.3), is inscribed on to a bush landscape that is replete with wattles, lorikeets, kangaroos and even bunyips. He is also, more especially, an bush icon in his own right, a horseman whose self-
reliance and manliness represent the egalitarian spirit which underpins the bush myth: "We own this country and we'll make it a paradise. Men are equal here."(p.238). Indeed, it can be argued that Alan's father, who the boy sees as "stronger than any God"(p.19), is constructed as the apotheosis, the idealised embodiment of the whole value system.

Alan's mother, in contrast, stands for domesticity, passivity, fear and affection. Her concern for his welfare is construed as weakness and as a clear disadvantage when it comes to embracing the masculine values of the bush. It is hardly surprising, given the rigours of the paradigm, that the boy learns to suspect displays of affection. On many occasions it seems to be the mother - the agent of compromise and indulgence - who undermines the strength and independence of the growing boy. It is she who delivers the eggs to the hospital, who commits the crime of calling Alan "lame", and who protests when Alan's father encourages his son to deal with his problems at school by fighting his enemies.

Apart from the potential for "weakness" that the mother represents, perhaps Alan's greatest enemy is his alter ego, the "Other Boy", the "shadow self, weak and full of complaints, afraid and apprehensive..."(p.145). This cowardly doppelganger who "wore my body and walked on crutches,"(p.146) is the antithesis of everything his father stands for. In a series of physical tests Alan learns to come to terms with and to finally defeat the
worthy double. When he teaches himself to swim he lays the ghost of his weak self to rest as if he has completed a kind of quest, as if, he says, "I were an explorer returning home from a long journey of danger and privation."(p.165). It is at this point that he is ready to step into his father's world.

Alan's father is also and is perhaps primarily a bush poet, a bardic figure who brings the system alive through story and yarn. Respect for the stories, songs and hymns of the bush tradition is reinforced on every possible occasion. Miles Franklin is seen as a model of virtue: "She never baulks a fence. She's game, got heart..."(p.238), and "The Wild Colonial Boy" is treated with a reverence that borders on the obsessive. The values of the tradition are also reinforced when Alan's father rehearses yarns which celebrate his own central participation in dramas that enact the basic tenets of the system. The struggle between Australian egalitarianism and English elitism - a defining characteristic of the myth - is demonstrated in the parable of the horse race, in which Alan's father outwits the local land owning family, the Carruthers. When Alan's father tells the story, not only is he celebrating the triumph of his own horsemanship, which is, in itself, a celebration of bush values, but he is also rehearsing the supremacy of bush culture over effete and English alternatives.

The yarn also operates as a socialising and acculturating agent. When Alan's father retells the animistic fable about the
kangaroo dog, its educational significance is as important as its entertainment value:

Well, you've got to be like her. Fight and run and race and ride and yell your bloody head off while you're looking on. Forget your legs. I'm going to forget them from now on.(p.100).

Membership of the clan is conferred both through the simple act of listening and through vicarious participation in stories about the outer reaches of the bush, where harsh nature breeds even tougher and even more self-reliant men.

This is particularly true later on in the novel when Alan joins Peter McLeod on their mythic journey into the bush. Alan's trip in which he learns his heritage by being initiated into the practices and rites of the bushman, is a literary Romance of the Bush. McLeod, himself, takes on the qualities of a trope, a cliched version of Alan's father, "a tough, hard man with a soft heart"(p.176), whose appearance, behaviour, language and stories place him at the centre of the yarning tradition and all that it stands for. McLeod is the "hero of so many tales told where groups of men gathered to yarn."(p.185). As Alan, the acolyte, is immersed in the tradition by listening to the yarns, the process of becoming a bushman takes on religious overtones: "I lay there tense with listening, awaiting a revelation."(p.195). And when Alan confesses to wanting to be like McLeod(p.176) the quest for an ideal reflection of self in the mirror of the Australian bush
code is complete, both for the young Alan and for the older writer who, by paying homage to the tradition, has written himself into it.

Communion with Australian nature is central to the iconography of the quest. When Alan emerges from the hospital into the gardens, after his operation, he is embraced by a nature that recognises and affirms the inner quality of the child: "the sun wraps itself about me like arms".(p.67). Alan sees this embrace as a "merging of my identity with the bush."(p.112). It is a semi-religious gesture with distinctly Wordsworthian and pantheistic overtones: "I knelt among the moss and fern and pressed my face against the earth, breathing it into me."(p.111). Alan's communion with nature is a perfect example of the melding of childhood and nature into a dual expression of Australia as a “paradis-perdu.”4 To a certain extent, the image of the "child as father to the man"5 is a mirror reflection of the image of Australia as a lost paradise. Both are poetic spaces that lead the narrated subject into a hybrid zone of unattainable transcendency. It is in this mythic space that the complexities of history are elided into the image of the natural child.

Much the same process is discernible in David Malouf's An Imaginary Life, where the wild child, as father of the man, educates Ovid in the ways of the wilderness, in the transcendent silences of the pristine and pre-social self. In Malouf's story, the rite of passage whereby the child is initiated into the values of
the system is reversed so that the aged and experienced can also qualify for membership. The experienced and urbane poet, through the agency of the innocent and natural child, unlearns his 'social' past in order to be reborn into a new 'natural' world replete with its own rituals and language. Both texts gesture towards Australian nature as a poetic space of spiritual possibility in which childhood is seen as the ultimate endorsement of mythic value.

It is interesting to note that the darker side of the Australian myth, Australia as a dead intractable place, is also well represented in I Can Jump Puddles. Much of the imagery that underpins the graphic description of the dying horses during the drought owes its validity as myth to the language that informs Henry Lawson's description of the bush in such sketches as "Hungerford" and "In a Dry Season": "On the rise were dead gums and these were silhouetted against the red sky." Even the wind "could not move their dead limbs" as they pointed "their skeleton fingers at the red sky."(p.138). The bifocal image of Australia as utopia and Australia as hell is inscribed into a fable that elevates virtues that are, at one and the same time, transcendent and futile. Communion with the bush leads to death or to a loss of consciousness in pantheistic nature. Either way, nostalgia preserves a mythic way of life that celebrates survival as the best hope and defeat as an heroic achievement. As a model for living in society it is a myth that ensures conformity by writing
the subject as a helpless individual lost in an intractable nature where, if he/she is lucky, he/she can escape into the unattainable worlds of childhood or pure nature.

At the centre of this mythic world of the book is the icon of the horse, an icon that not only stands for all the values that Alan admires in his father but which also becomes the means by which he can achieve full membership of the clan. Throughout the autobiography, the horse is a totemic and anthropomorphic symbol of strength and resolve. When Alan is in severe pain with his leg, it is the picture of the frightened horses over the mantelpiece which sustains him through his ordeal. Alan's identification with the anguish of the horses - "Oh! horses, horses, horses..." (p.9) - enables him to deal with his own excruciating pain. And, it is a horse, the appropriately named Starlight, "a symbol of perfection for me" (p.218), which enables him to prove that he is a worthy member of the clan. By learning to ride he lays to rest the ghosts of his fear and earns the lasting respect of his father. The pain, hardship, blood and disappointment that accompany this trial of manhood result in the final defeat of both the "Other Boy" and the mother. The cowardly self is buried and the mother's emasculating influence no longer counts: "Mother never knew I had torn my leg." (p.226). And when Alan stuns his father into admiration - "you're a good bloke, Alan, and I like you" (p.234) - by riding around the paddock, we know that Alan has graduated from novice into fully fledged
bushman. Blessed by the Elder, he can now take his place in the tradition.

It is a tradition, however, that cannot compete with the motor car and all that it stands for in terms of social and economic change and a sophisticated urban life. "Clancy" has to pack up his swag and beat it back to Melbourne because, in spite of his Romantic longing to live in the bush, the lack of publishing houses necessitates a recognition of the city and what it has to offer. To get an education and to become a writer, the young Alan must abandon his beloved bush so that he can learn, in the city, how to write lyrically about a mythic landscape that excludes all that the city stands for in terms of its literary, historical and social meaning. What he learns results in a book that celebrates the bush by turning it into a literary tradition that has more to do with urban social practices than the realities of country life. The urban myth of the idyllic bush childhood produces nostalgias that compensate the citydweller for the loss of coherence and autonomy.

At the same time, the medium of myth converts Marshall's childhood into an act of literature that suppresses the very mechanisms that created it. Alan Marshall, the writer, in attempting to "give a picture of a period that has passed" (preface), has settled for Romance at the expense of history. This idealised picture of the bush promotes values that may appear to be pastoral and transcendent but which are, in
effect, urban and political. The reader is invited to participate in a narrative that asserts, under the guise of the mythic figure of the self-reliant battler, a nostalgic acceptance of the status quo as natural and inevitable. The child subject is structured into pastoral landscapes that highlight and foreground national values and yet which depoliticise the individual by narrating the reader as innocent, powerless and natural.

This process of downplaying history in favour of mythic space is also evident in T.A.G. Hungerford's *Stories from Suburban Road*. Although the ironic gap between the adult narrator and the innocent child seems to draw attention to social forces by juxtaposing the poetic space of childhood with the adult world of time and change, the narration favours the innocent perspective and history is repressed in direct proportion to the degree childhood space is idealised. In spite of the fact the stories are set in a semi-urbanised Perth during the Depression, the wider world of poverty, inequality, cruelty, prejudice and change is softened and sifted out through the innocent eyes of the child-self. The reader soon is aware that Young Tommy has only a limited view of a world he finds both wonderful and confusing. Through the boy's eyes we get glimpses of what it must have been like to grow up in semi-rural South Perth during the Depression, but because the adult narrator adopts the guise of an innocent boy-self, we are charmed into a literary world which, like Marshall's narrative, behaves more like Romance than history.
Since narratives about childhood pasts reflect the concerns of the present, it is likely that both Marshall and Hungerford are responding to the velocities of change in contemporary society by freezing time in idealised pasts. Nostalgia provides an effective, if solipsistic way of coping with an incomprehensible present. There can be no doubt that the changes that have been wrought in modern society since the Second War must make pre-war Australia seem like a golden age of lost virtue. Indeed, in Hungerford's work, the Depression, instead of drawing attention to the misery of the times, is converted into poetic space as a time of tough honesty in which the economic and social causes of the misery are obscured by the innocent charm of the viewpoint.

At the centre of the Romance lies the family home: Tommy's home life is clearly idyllic. Although he lives in a suburb of Perth, almost everything about his world is pastoral and natural. Indeed, in such stories as "The Lucky Spinner" and "The Day of the Wonderful Eggs", and "Of Biddy and My Dad" it is hard not to believe that the family live on a farm in the middle of the bush. Tommy is a natural child - a sort of Huck Finn or Spit McPhee - who is shaped by nature, the bush and its values. His family is immediately recognisable as belonging to the same bush tradition that drives Alan Marshall's depiction of his bush childhood. In "King Bantam", the first story in the collection, the mother - conventionally domestic - is busy in the kitchen, the power house of the home, where she feeds, nurtures and protects her family.
The fact that she seems to spend a good deal of her time cooking and providing Tommy and his friends with "pieces" is a clear indication of her role as passive protector and provider. She is the archetypal bush mother providing a conventional and secure environment through the medium of natural food, kitchen comforts and affection. No less than Alan Marshall's mother in *Can Jump Puddles*, she is complaisant, compliant and house-bound. The rest of the family, as one would expect, are caught in predictably orthodox poses: Tommy's sisters are playing the piano, Tommy's brother is varnishing his model yacht, and his father is sitting, reading the paper.

In contrast to the mother, the father belongs to the outside world of action. He is another bushman figure forged out of the same mould that produced Marshall's father and Alan's bush hero, Peter Mcleod. Tommy's father is, like McLeod, "a tough hard man with a soft heart"(p.176) who in previous manifestations dug for gold in the Yilgarn, drove camels in the Murchison and cattle in the Diamantina. Once again, as is customary in bush depictions of childhood, the father tends to dominate the world of the developing child: Tommy's great ambition is to displace his brother as his father's favourite son so that he can share the masculine world of bush value that his father's character and stories represent.

The mother, however, is consigned to the secondary and apparently retrogressive role of the nurturer. Indeed, the mother
figure in this kind of mythic space seems devoted to delaying maturity. In "Coodie Crab Co.", when Tommy canoes across the Swan River to sell crabs in the big city, his initiative and independence is punished by a tearful and angry mother who rewards his endeavours by confiscating his canoe. And in "Down Como", it is his mother's influence he is rejecting when he asserts his independence by throwing away his hat: "Bloody silly hat! Doesn't she know I'm nearly thirteen? She thinks I'm still a little kid!" Although Tommy succeeds in escaping the emasculating effects of his mother's influence, the collection of stories, as a whole, represents a backwards glance towards the poetic spaces of a "Motionless Childhood" structured by Lawsonian values.

"The Day of the Wonderful Eggs" is a perfect illustration of how the harsh realities of the Depression years are blocked out by the poetic space of the bush childhood. At the beginning of the story, as Tommy "goes round the traplines" collecting debts for his parents, he becomes acutely aware of the hardships that face the community. He notices how poor the houses are and how everyone looks "so hopeless and ashamed and sorry about it all."(p.58). However, the experience prompts Tommy to see poverty as something that can be avoided simply by willing it. Every time he sets out on his rounds he swears that when he grows up he will "never, never, never, be poor."(p.58). This tendency to see poverty as a life choice separate from the
economic conditions that may have caused it, is reinforced when the family discuss Tommy's best friend, Ernie. Ernie is poorly dressed, hungry and diseased; his father is out of work and the whole family is dependent on the Government for sustenance. Ernie, as a character, represents a view of the Depression in which poverty is seen as self-inflicted rather than as a result of social conditions. In this version, Ernie's misery seems to be a direct result of something lacking in the individual, in the father, rather than something lacking in a system that consigned thousands to unemployment, hunger and poverty.

The comparison between Tommy's and Ernie's families reveals the battler myth at work. Although the Hungerfords are poor they are self-reliant, independent and happy: they are battlers, survivors who, in spite of their neighbourliness, place a greater value on autonomy than on shared social responsibility. Their "success" as survivors deflects attention away from the social conditions which produced the hardship in the first place: value lies in survival and acceptance of the status quo rather than in attempting change. On the other hand, Ernie's family is portrayed as dependent, helpless and miserable, and the father as unable to provide for his children.

Although we are alerted to the conditions, the causes of these hardships are hidden behind the limited perspective of the child. When Ernie's father, in a moment of frustration, says: "I don't know what I went to the bloody war for", the young Tommy
is unable to see the connection: "The war had been over for years, and it couldn't have anything to do with the sustenance."(p.59). The comforting, "natural" world of Tommy's poor but safe, independent and well-fed family deflects attention from collective responsibility to individual liability. "Our kids don't get sores!"(p.59) exclaims Tommy's father and, as the mother prepares an extra large "piece" for Ernie, the reader is encouraged to share the writer's delight in remembering with nostalgic affection a family that had it tough but battled through.

This deflection from the social realities is further achieved when, at the end of the story, Tommy merges into the mythic space of Australian nature. Tommy and Ernie spend a "wonderful" day in the bush collecting eggs and being natural. The account of the boys' day in the bush has all the Wordsworthian feel of Dylan Thomas' "Fern Hill", in which childhood is celebrated as vital space: "Time let me hail and climb/ Golden in the heydays of his eyes."9 It is an immediate, vivid, immemorial place of natural spontaneity and perfection in which Tommy exists in "the exact middle of a living story" and his body is "my adventure and my name."10 This is a holy place, far removed from the social inequities that produce scurvy, unemployment and sustenance.

This poetic space is further enriched when Tommy's father, on seeing the eggs his son brings home, is transported back to his own mythic past when he drove cattle in the Diamantina. As the father reminisces about his "other life", his voice becomes
dreamy and he speaks as "though he was reminding himself of something he'd forgotten for a while."(p.67). He is back, however briefly, in the other, transcendent, superior place - the Australian centre which gives both him and his son value. By naming Cooper's Creek as the place where the father first saw the eggs, Tommy is invited to join his father in a mythic space that perpetuates the values of the bush by elevating the boy's experience.

The bonding of these two magic experiences (egg collecting and droving) into one is made complete when Tommy tells his older brother, Mickey, that he found the eggs "Up Cooper's Creek." In other words, the discovery of the eggs is a secret only to be shared by father and son, a secret defined by the mythic implications of Australian nature:

I knew that no matter how old I got I'd stand in my own kitchen with Ernie and remember it - just as my father stood in ours and remembered Cooper's Creek and the Diamantina, and the bald coot he'd seen there.

And I'd always remember it as the day of the wonderful eggs.(p.68).

This marriage of the idyllic childhood and the bush myth of Romantic self-reliance is constructed into a montage that transports the reader back into the golden age of an illusory past. However, at the same time, the reader is confronted with a mirror image - two reminiscing characters - that somehow shuts us out of the experience itself. Mesmerised by the act of
remembering, the questing self, like Narcissus, is ultimately unable to find a way into the room behind the mirror.

This is very similar to the difficulty that Dorothy Hewett experiences in *Wild Card*, as she attempts to find a way back into the golden valley of her childhood. The poetic space - "the small clean enclosed space of filtered light"\(^1\) - is endlessly attractive, an infinite regression of self-gratifying images. However, Hewett's awareness of the impossibility of the task, whilst spurring her on to further reconstructions of the past, does not blind her to the contradictions inherent in the attempt. She rarely resorts to the sort of nostalgias that allow both Marshall and Hungerford to return to and live out the illusion of the idyllic childhood. If Hewett's theme is the tragedy of never being able to return, then theirs is the ahistorical fantasy that bush childhoods are superior and preferable to the adult world of social action and are to be valued as bastions against a dangerously contingent and arbitrary world.

The forces of change hover like a dark shadow at the edges of Hungerford's idyllic world of poetic space. Nowhere is this more obvious than in “The New Kid and the Racehorse Goanna”. The goanna is another representation of the marriage between Tommy’s childhood innocence and his father’s mythic Australia. When Tommy watches the goanna, the back of his neck tingles and shivers in exactly the same way as when he hears his parents reminiscing about the Yilgarn, a mythic bush space "where they
used to live before I was born."(p.84). The family mythology includes yarns that define membership of the clan. The battler myth about the gold nugget - shaped like Australia - that had to be sold to get the couple out of "Queer Street" is typical of a mythology which celebrates bush values through yarn. But most importantly, it is the place called Yilgarn that conjures up the essence of the Australian mystery: it "seemed to belong to some world I could never know about, hard and scaly and secret, older than Australia."(pp.84-5). The association of the goanna with the father and with bush lore is further developed when the boy describes the head of the animal as "long and fine, and beautiful in a way I'd never noticed before: like one of the wedges my father used to split logs."(p.91).

Into this idyllic, pastoral world comes the new kid. He is diametrically opposed to everything the goanna means to young Tommy. He represents the urban world of dishonesty, cruelty and insensitivity. He is an anti-child who has no respect for living things, who has no innocence and no sense of wonder. He belongs to all that threatens the bucolic wonderland of South Perth. This opposition between bucolic myth and urban history is mirrored in the geography of Perth. "'Our end' was all dairies, and the Chinamen's gardens, and patches of bush and paddocks."(p.86). And even though the "other end" is rich and privileged it still belongs to a static, magic world separated from history by the Swan river. When the new kid arrives from North Perth - the big town -
this perfected world is undermined. Although the old values are
maintained by Tommy's mother: she continues to feed the new kid
pieces even though she is wary of his influence - "He's been here
before, that one!" (p.87) - there's no escaping the impact that the
new kid's experience has on Tommy's innocence.

The beginning of the death of innocence occurs when the
new kid - who always remains anonymous - is singularly
unimpressed by the goanna: "Well...what's great about this
bugger?...You come all this way to look at a silly lizard." (p.92).
The effect on Tommy is devastating:

As easy as that, in a split second, he killed it for me,
perhaps for all of us, what we felt was so wonderful about
the racehorse goanna....In the few weeks I'd known him this
kid from North Perth had taken everything I had grown up
with thinking was wonderful and made it look silly. (p.92).

And when Tommy joins the new kid in beating the goanna to
death we know that Tommy's world is "buggered" as surely as the
goanna, and that it will never be the same again. (p.93). The
carelessness and indifference of the boy as he wanders off at the
end of the story suggests that the mythic space of childhood is no
protection against the onslaught of experience. Indeed, at one
stage, Tommy admits that deep down he knew this had to happen,
that "there was no escape" from the destruction of the goanna and
its meaning.

Although this story seems to announce the death of the
myth of the natural bush child at the hands of the experienced and
urban new kid, its very vulnerability makes it all the more valuable. Hungerford both accepts and regrets the passing of his innocence. Although it is inevitable, it is, at the same time, a sad loss. The solution to this impasse is the writing of a book that promotes the lost childhood of the past as inherently superior to the adult world of contemporary life. The fact that this poetic space of childhood is unattainable merely strengthens the yearning. By consigning the child to the mythic space of a golden past, the intrusion of the new kid and history only makes the quest more important. The golden world is all the more valuable because it is beyond the narrator's grasp.

This picture of the lost Romantic world of childhood is complicated, as the innocent boy of the earlier stories begins to turn into the experienced and slightly cynical young man of the later stories. The Romantic voice of the lost child is replaced by a more world-weary narrator whose tone is more objective and whose narrative style is more naturalistic. The Romance of the Child is replaced by a naturalistic fiction in which the prosaic "realities" of adulthood seem to eclipse the charm of the earlier nostalgia. In this new world, innocence is under threat from history, from the impact of a war that will radically undermine the golden valleys of childhood. The colourful charm of the yarn gives way to a flat and distant chronicling of life in the city as the child crosses the river to the world of work and adulthood.

This later Hungerford is a very different invention from the
innocent young Tommy of the earlier stories. There is little doubt that, although the name is the same, the central character has changed and that the reader is being distanced from this newer, more 'real' world. Both the attitudes and language of the child-self have undergone a considerable change. The later Tommy is insensitive, unemotional, selfish, and dull. It is as if, in narrating the process of growing up, the special aura and charm of childhood has been lost.

As the young man thinks of the war and the future he feels:

...a numbing sense of isolation...of being somewhere outside the world listening to the waves...and of (himself) alone on that thin glittering strip of white sand at Scarborough, between the thousand blue miles of ocean and the thousand red miles of the continent. (p.207).

The outbreak of war intensifies the overpowering sense of isolation that defines Australian consciousness. Isolated from history and living on a littoral edge between two wildernesses, the culture reels back from contact with the world of time and retreats into a world of ideal space in which the Australian "nothingness" becomes a bastion against change. It is this sense of emptiness and isolation which drives the writer back to the mythic spaces of the lost childhood. The collapse of time and space into a threatening nothingness forces the individual into a quest for identity in the mirror spaces of a mythic bush childhood. The town becomes country, society becomes nature and the search for self in the unattainable past becomes a metaphor
for a deeper cultural retreat from the threatening and arbitrary present into a safe and resolved golden age.

However, the promise of occupying the idealised room behind the mirror - the golden world of the bush childhood - is negated by a realisation that the pursuit is unattainable. This pursuit of the unattainable is further complicated by the fact that the reflected space, rather like the Australian heartland, is empty and that the yearning for some form of home or national identity in the self-reflecting mirrors of the Australian wilderness is both futile and narcissistic. This is why the pleasure gained from the conjunction of the self and the "other" in the mirror of the myth is undercut by a simultaneous feeling of alienation, as the room behind the mirror is perceived as inaccessible. And it seems that the more this imaginary world is misrecognised as natural and inevitable, the more vigorously its illusory promise is pursued.

Within this context, the narrating and narrated "I"s of Australian autobiographical story can be seen as conscious embodiments of largely unconscious motifs working through the structure of the text. Although each particular narrative seems to offer fresh and unique insights into the experience of growing up in Australia, each story activates a matrix of texts and sub-texts in which the drama of what it is to be a white Australian is played out through fictive representations of childhood reminiscence.
Generally speaking, the reiteration of the trope of the lost and vulnerable childhood encourages conformity to a set of values which promotes passivity by elevating the "Motionless Childhood" of the bush over the imperatives of change and history. This negation of history is reinforced by a parallel tendency to downplay the importance of constructedness and to deploy narrative styles which emphasise naturalistic and faithful retellings of a seemingly unchanging and fixed past. Such narrative tendencies deflect attention away from the socially mediated and essentially fictive nature of all acts of memory.

The notion of the autobiographical occasion as a socially symbolic act or as a palimpsest in which the individual voice is seen as interacting with a complex of unconscious and conscious texts and gestures, goes some way towards explaining why certain types of text escape the infinite regression of the flat and natural mirror of self-reflection. In some forms of autobiography, the mirror is warped or shattered and the misrecognition revealed for what it is - an illusion. It is at this point that the dissident and oppositional voice - which is characteristic of much autobiographical writing - disrupts the expression and reiteration of orthodox ideologies. This disruption of the genre opens up ways for the "unspeakable" voices of the marginalised to convert nostalgia into new forms of knowledge and awareness.
CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT COUNTRY, FRIENDS, IS THIS?

In spite of the tendency of autobiographical story to affirm the orthodox by creating subjects that embody the dominant themes of white Australian culture, there is little doubt that as a form it can and does offer opportunities for the marginalised and the suppressed to find a medium for their stories. In autobiographical stories as different as Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Flaws in the Glass, Wild Card, Whole Life, Don't Take Your Love to Town, the voice of the minority and of the outsider can be clearly heard.

The deployment of voices and forms which are self-consciously alternative provides opportunities for "illegitimate speakers" to give expression to their "unspeakable" experiences whilst at the same time challenging "the power dynamics embedded in literary production, distribution and reception." In this oppositional world, in which the differentiated subject replaces the autonomous "I" and in which positionality and agency are fundamental aspects of narrative stance, identity becomes a political force, the result of "a negotiation among fixed possibilities that both resists and remakes the representation of human experience." Such a negotiation permits the unspoken to be mapped as speakable and allows generic "boundaries to be traversed, articulated, confused and undone."
If narrative discourse "is only possible within a logic of insufficiency, disequilibrium and deferral" then there will always be a potential for a clash between ideological orthodoxy and disruption. Although challenges to the status quo, whether social or generic, may be diverted into orthodoxy by closure, the articulation of secret or alternative stories will always affect the system and allow new conditions to emerge, conditions that will inevitably produce new meanings. In other words, although a subversive or open-ended or experimental text may eventually be subsumed into the mainstream, the challenge will permanently affect the way the genre or social practice regulates future utterances.

Because the genre tends to foreground the relationship between subjectivity and acculturation the focus of the narrative can involve critiques of the dominant social forces that have shaped the life of the individual subject. There is little doubt that the presence of the "I" as both a narrating and a narrated subject tends to reinforce and validate the illusion of authority and autonomy in the text. Since the notion of autonomy is a central feature of the way dominant national models of selfhood are manufactured, the lack of constructedness in autobiography can be seen as a mechanism which suppresses or displaces alternative notions of subjectivity. Paradoxically, it is the very presence and dominance of this natural, unmediated self which draws our attention to the absence of other voices.
Although the flat and naturalistic mirror of most autobiographical narrative elevates a documentary version of the self which reinforces mainstream values, the mode also encourages stories which, by either denouncing or recognising the existence of social forces, draw attention to the central importance of construction and mediation in the development of the autonomous "I". The individual voice, by separating itself from the collective centre, succeeds in highlighting those forces which characterise the dominance of the centre.

Furthermore, the mediation of social forces in and around the 'raw' experience of the narrator should also alert us to all those economic, cultural and generic factors which determine the production of autobiographical texts. Those social forces which determine subjectivity also determine the means of production by which that subjectivity is communicated to the rest of the culture. It is this essential doubleness of autobiography which allows us to see the medium as both an individual expression of difference and as a collective expression of belonging in which the individual voice is recuperated into the central national mythos.

Ruby Langford's memoirs, Don't Take Your Love to Town, is a perfect illustration of this doubleness. It is an outsider text which tells the inside, unspoken story of the oppressed survivor. It sets up a logic of disequilibrium, which serves to undermine and dismantle official historical narratives. This is history as
told by the survivors, not the victors. However, in order to gain access to the public, in order to tell her story to a wide range of audiences, Ruby Langford has to conform to certain publishing, funding, historical, political, literary and linguistic conventions that have the potential to remove the sting from her story and transform it into an orthodox mainstream myth about battlers and autonomy. The fact that the book was published in 1988, Australia's bicentenary year, means that although the text can be seen as an expression of Aboriginal dissent, its inclusion within an historically framed national moment may very well result in the dissident voice being absorbed or recuperated into the dominant national space. In other words, there is a danger that the fringe may become centred as soon as it begins to employ the "master genres" of the centre.

Furthermore, as Sneja Gunew argues in *Striking Chords*, this incorporation of the diverse and marginalised into the centre is fraught with difficulty since individual stories may be converted into alibis for indifference or inaction:

> What we must guard against, however, is the incorporation of merely token figures from the so-called margins who exist as a type of alibi for claims that the culture is inclusive and fully representative.6

This may be the reason why, on one level, it is possible to view Sally Morgan's *My Place*, as a complicit text masquerading as an antagonistic text from the fringes. What, at first sight,
appears to be a text which should be deeply troubling to white consciousness, ends up by providing the dominant culture with comforting alibis that reinforce the prejudices and injustices that produced the story. Although Morgan's account seeks to step outside the official histories of the centre, assimilationist narratives continue to structure the way her family tell their stories. As Suzette Henke puts it:

The subaltern capitulates to white hegemony by mimicking the values of the alien, ostensibly superior culture of aggression and conquest.7

In Ruby Langford's case, however, this tendency towards orthodoxy and the centre is countered by an assertion of cultural identity that undermines the influence of the genre. The publication of the story also represents a generic shift from the centre to the fringe that will permanently change the conditions of Australian autobiographical story. In a sense, history has turned full circle as those dispossessed of their stories employ the genre of the victors in order to rewrite the history of the oppressed.

The tension between the oppositional and the orthodox in narrative discourse is especially evident in autobiographical story where the symbolic orders that inform the construction of the text are masked by the all-embracing and coherent "I" of the narrated subject. Although Langford's story is about family and community, and the survival of black urban culture in an alien
white world, the danger is that the temptation to identify with
the subject will block the reader's appreciation of the historical
factors that have produced the misery. The danger is that, as
readers, we may sympathise with "Ruby" as a battler and a
victim but fail to see the political implications of what has
happened to her and her family. It would not be difficult, in this
context, to convert Langford's story into a further manifestation
of the European myth of alienation in a foreign land. If this is the
case, then the genre would have succeeded in colonising the
unofficial story and inserting it into the mainstream.

Although it would seem from this that all utterances must
eventually be subsumed into the mainstream, it is clear that if
text is the site of struggles between conflicting discourses, each
of which transmits ideology through subjectivity,\(^8\) then some
parts of each story will not only succeed in escaping assimilation
but will actively promote alternative readings. If each discursive
practice transforms as well as reproduces\(^9\) then the telling of
oppositional stories will contribute to the transformation of the
system of values that underpins the genre. The covert histories of
the fringe will challenge and undermine the exclusive and
totalising tendencies of the dominant mode. Of particular
relevance here is the notion of interpolation in which the
colonised subject 'shoulders' a space into dominant discourses by
appropriating the language and forms of those discourses.\(^10\)

According to this model, the subject can only speak when he or
she intervenes actively in the dominant systems of cultural production, systems which contain an ambivalent and interactive mix of complicit and resistant narratives. As Bill Ashcroft puts it in “Interpolation and Post-colonial Agency”:

The concept of interpolation confirms the capacity of the subject to act, but it cannot act meaningfully without engaging the dominant discourse. When resistance involves an attempt to ‘recover’ or ‘rehabilitate’ an essential cultural identity, this project must involve the reconstruction or reinvention of such an identity and it is most often accomplished with the tools of the dominant discourse.¹¹

The Canadian anthology of Metis and Native literature, Our Bit of Truth¹² and the Aboriginal anthology, Inside Black Australia¹³ are both good examples of how the margins can ‘shoulder’ themselves in to modes dominated by the white hegemonic centres. The transition from oral to written traditions is a process in which the native cultures must appropriate western forms of literary production, such as the notion of an anthology of alternative writing, if they are to speak to a wider audience. Although the experience is raw and easily identifiable as marginal, each writer in these books has used the tools of the dominant discourse to construct oppositional identities.

Autobiographical story can be seen as one method by which subjectivities can be reinvented through the medium of a dominant discourse. Self-reflexive interventions into the ideological contradictions that underpin autobiography mean
that our apprehension of the narrating self becomes an apprehension of those broader historical narratives which structure the culture as a whole and which can in their turn create new subjectivities. These metonymic reconstructions of the past, in which the pursuit of origins and home is central to notions of identity, are both idiosyncratic and collective explorations of contradictions which lie deep within the culture as a whole. This complex interplay of narratives exploring provenance is particularly interesting when we turn to the secret stories of Aboriginal dispossession. Since white Australian myths of origin coincide with the beginning of the destruction of Aboriginal culture, the stories of the survivors have enormous implications, not only for the indigenous cultures but for the future of Australian society in general.

The need to tell the unspoken story is what motivates John Pilger's polemic, *A Secret Country*, in which he sees Australia as a secret land "half-won, its story untold" and its past "another country, mysterious and unexplained." In his view, it is only through the articulation of counter fictions and covert narratives that white Australian society will come to terms with its history and build a heterogeneous and inclusive future. The need to challenge the silences and anodynes of a sanitised past and so politicise that past, lies at the basis of Pilger's argument:

With the Aborigines written out, the Australian story seems apolitical, a faintly heroic tale of white man against Nature, of 'national achievement' devoid of blacks, women
and other complicating factors. With the Aborigines in it, the story is completely different. It is a story of theft, dispossession and warfare, of massacre and resistance...It is above all a political story.\textsuperscript{15}

By exposing the dominant myths as instrumental in the suppression of individual lives and societies, the marginalised can write themselves into the texts of history and can alter, however minimally, the structures that maintain the status quo. The articulation of unspoken stories not only challenges the official by proliferating the perspectives but it also provides marginal communities with the means to lay claim to their own particular histories. This claiming of the past as a site for collective identity, as a series of windows into the present and the future, is an essentially political gesture which both undermines orthodoxy and empowers the minority.

The recent rewriting of history by the Garadjadi people from the Bidjadaga community at Le Grange in Western Australia is a perfect example of how secret stories can challenge the politics of white mainstream myth and at the same time provide a basis for identities that renew a culture's sense of belonging. In Fremantle, on April 9th 1994 the Garadjadi people, with the help of the history staff and students of Murdoch University, mounted a plaque on the reverse side of a monument dedicated to the memory of three white explorers who were "murdered by treacherous natives" just south of Broome on November 13th 1864. This new superimposed plaque tells a very different story
to the one celebrated on the front of the monument. According to official history, the three explorers - Panter, Harding and Goldwyer - were employed by the Roebuck Bay Pastoral company to search for new mining and pastoral opportunities in the North West of the state. According to this authorised version, the explorers, in a totally unprovoked attack, were set upon in their sleep and murdered by local Aborigines.

Although the event occurred in 1864 in the North West of the state, it was not until 1913 that C. J. Brockman, a powerful West Australian pastoralist, chose Fremantle to erect a monument as a tribute to the memory of the three explorers. Quite clearly the erection of the monument was a calculated political gesture designed to use history to promote the vested interests of powerful white settlers. By caricaturing blacks as ferocious and treacherous, the genocidal clearing of Aborigines from their traditional lands to make way for the development of the white economy, could be seen as justifiable and acceptable.

However, according to the alternative story, as told by the black survivors, the three explorers were discovered abusing and spoiling important water holes, digging them out and leaving them dry. Furthermore, during a number of altercations, in which relations between whites and Aborigines deteriorated, Panter was reported to have pointed his gun and fired into a group of Aborigines. What does not appear on the white side of the monument but which is recognised on the obverse side is the
death of at least twenty Aborigines who were killed in a revenge raid by Maitland Brown in 1865. The new inscription on the monument, which contains a tribute to those Aborigines killed in Brown's act of revenge, represents a challenge to and critique of colonial readings of Australian history.

The new inscription converts what was once a single expression of white history into a site that juxtaposes two diametrically opposed readings of the same events. Not only does the inscription reverse and so challenge the official history on the very site of its construction as myth but it also provides the black community with a non-offensive way of reasserting and redefining its identity. By laying claim to the monument as survivors of a war, by overlaying the existing myth with stories of their own, the community can reverse the polarity of the site, and empower itself by rewriting history. As the white myth is debunked, so the black story repositions the community as the owner of its own history. By telling its own story, the community can lay claim to the future because the ownership of such stories and their sites guarantees political influence. And not only that, but within a more specifically Aboriginal context, ownership of the story guarantees ownership of the land. The marginalised have brought their story to the centre by employing white social practices - the erection of monuments - to focus attention on the impact of European history on black communities. The genre has been transformed by the inscription of alternative, oppositional
stories into the sacred sites of the dominant culture. The unspoken stories offer critiques of the dominant mode and at the same time provide new sites for old identities.\textsuperscript{17} The monument represents a palimpsest in which the original text has been subjected to additional and alternative inscriptions which complicate and problematise historical perspectives.

Another example of the occupation of mainstream discourse by the marginalised is James Miller's \textit{Koori: A Will to Win}, where the writer blends the genres of formal academic history and personal biography to tell the story of himself and his people. Although the book begins with an imaginative reconstruction of life for the Wonnarua people of the Hunter valley, before and immediately after the European invasion, it quickly turns to the academic register of official history to chart the near destruction of the writer's people. It is the secret, untold story of what happened to the defeated: first encounters, brief debacles, dispossession, guerilla warfare, syphilis, cultural violation, slavery, apartheid and "protection." The maps, the facts, the research, the dates, the chronology, the legislation, the evidence all have the authority of official history, an official history that, in effect, represents an indictment of a white culture that speaks and defines itself through this very historical genre.

The challenge to authorised white history is achieved by occupying those academic sites that produced the justifications
and propaganda for the invasion. Now we have the other side of the story and it's official. It is a story that James Miller bills as "the heroic resistance, survival and triumph of black Australia", and it is a story which explores and reveals Pilger's secret country by employing the same mythmaking apparatus that launched the white myth of settlement. We are invited to believe in this black version because it is written in the language of authority, of fact and of academic discourse. The disruption of this master narrative occurs because the polarity has been reversed as the heroic black story of survival characterises the European as the barbarian, as the rapacious, vindictive and genocidal villain.

What makes this history particularly interesting is that the final phase of the story develops into a personal biography of the writer. Each stage of the story of the European invasion is mirrored in the particular impact of white policy on the writer's people, clan and family. In a sense, he is the final product of the process of dispossession and cultural violation that characterises this version of the events. As a result, his story is metonymic, representative of the way whole communities were and are subjected to the relentless destruction of Aboriginal identity.

In 1940 Miller's grandmother arrives in Sydney only to have her five children abducted by the Protection Board: the younger children are sent to Bomaderry whilst the author's mother and
sister are sent to Cootamundra. Forced into missions, the family is separated and the children are stolen, enslaved, abused and forgotten. The secret story of the political process by which the writer's family is dismantled is a particularly powerful way of representing the wholesale destruction of an entire people. As history impacts on the individual life, the reader can experience, almost at first hand, the oppressive effects of white policy on a whole way of life. Because we are narrated as individuals it is easy for us to identify with the author as he describes the effect of the policies of the Board and the mission homes on his mother and his family. The mother's recollections, as she recalls conditions in the mission, are further personalised evidence of the process of cultural annihilation that these institutions embodied: "They were making us think white - look white - act white. That was the main standard of Cootamundra."18

By drawing on the stories of his relatives, the history is validated by first-hand accounts of first-hand experiences. And when one adds to this the writer's own involvement in the broad sweep of history, the effect is particularly dramatic. Having drawn attention to the arbitrary and draconian power of the police to remove children from their parents on the mere suspicion of neglect, he personalises the impact of such policies by revealing the effect of this history on his own situation:

On the 20 March 1969 the Aborigines' Protection Board was finally abolished after 86 years of oppression. Five days earlier in Kempsey Jan gave birth to our son Jamie. He
would grow up free from the fear of the Board. (p. 191).

And so, as Miller turns to his own story, the personal frame of the autobiography begins to inform the broader political and historical discourse. He retells the story of his personal life and political awakening against the backdrop of the wider Aboriginal awakening of the sixties and seventies. Charles Perkins’ Freedom rides, the Gurindji strike, the tent embassy and the reforms of the Whitlam government all provide a backdrop for his development and so when his life undergoes a fundamental change in 1975, we are prepared for the integration of all the stories into one. The mythical, the historical, the tribal, the political all merge into the one story that culminates in the circumstances that have produced Jim Miller’s story. In other words, he has drawn on the past to politicise Aboriginal history and to politicise his own personal story. By inscribing this story into mainstream narratives he becomes both the voice and the living proof of the "heroic resistance, survival and triumph of black Australia."

However, there is a price to pay for occupying dominant sites. As the margins move towards the centre, and begin to employ mainstream social practices such as historical and autobiographical discourse, they may become assimilated into the value systems that regulate the production of meaning through these narrative forms. There is a sense in which the political message of the book is complicated by the writer’s choice of
language and medium. Although the genre will never be quite the same as a result of this rewriting of history from a black viewpoint, Miller's adoption of a genre that has consistently suppressed and silenced the voices of the survivors, implicates him as a subject in the very value system that produced the injustice. The logic of "insufficiency, disequilibrium and deferral" that destabilises the genre and so provides us with the unspoken story, is the very process by which ideological coherence is reinstated into "the orthodoxy of culturally dominant discourses."¹⁹ This tension between oppositional and orthodox readings underpins the dynamic and polemical of the book.

It is a tension that is well illustrated by studying the photographs in the book. Most of them convey and embody Miller's political message: they provide startling and vivid visual evidence of the impact of European civilisation on the indigenous people. Images of Aborigines as noble savages and as wretched primitives are interwoven with portraits of the victors. Photographic evidence of the grinding poverty and the appalling living conditions are interspersed with portraits of Aboriginal children being "protected" by white teachers. These photographs are particularly effective because once these images are repositioned within the polemical context of Miller's rewriting of history the author transforms them and gives them new meanings. By claiming these from white archives, he can give them new and disturbing meaning by inscribing them into his new perspective.
In most cases this recontextualisation reverses the original meaning of the photographs so that what were once images that reinforced the paternalistic and "civilising" influence of the Europeans become telling indictments of the rapacious destructiveness of that colonising power.

Two photographs seem to undermine this oppositional stance, however, just as the adoption of the mainstream historical discourse checks the force of what is predominantly a subversive written text. The portrait of Miller's family (pp.204-5), which appears towards the end of the book, is a celebration of "conservative" European middle class family values. Irrespective of Miller's personal reasons for including the portrait, its composition, the apparently neutral studio background, the clothing of the family, the positioning of the children around the mother and the dominance of the father as protector and provider, place it in the centre of a European tradition of portraiture that stands for many of the values that were instrumental in the near destruction of Miller's people. The question remains: Has Miller rewritten history by laying claim to mainstream traditions or is the ideology writing him, transforming him into a conservative, narrated subject in just the same way as the ideology reproduces subjectivities in European writers and audiences?

On a more politically obvious level, the iconic photograph of Whitlam pouring earth into the hands of Vincent Lingiari in 1975(pp.222-23), represents another telling embodiment of the
tensions that occur when the oppositional employs mainstream practices. The towering figure of Whitlam, fist closed, pouring soil into the frail hands of the Aboriginal elder who is clutching a piece of paper has the effect of reinforcing white dominance rather than symbolising the transfer of power. Although the image seems to reverse history by ritualising the return of the land to the original owners, this epic piece of narrative belongs to a tradition which, in the past, has glorified, legalised and masked colonial theft. In this variation, the white man is empowered by his role as magnanimous giver (of what is not his) and the black man is disempowered by his role as grateful receiver (of what was always his).

My purpose here is not to diminish the extraordinary success of Aboriginal people in transforming the political landscape so that they can now lay claim to what is rightly theirs but to draw attention to the tensions and contradictions that occur when mainstream ideologies are employed to tell a story which undermines narratives that lie conservatively at the centre of orthodox European genres. As a result of this reverse colonisation, history has been rewritten and cultural identities have been reclaimed. It is a process, as John Pilger points out, that has profound implications for all Australians since, "until we white Australians give back to black Australians their nationhood, we can never claim our own." Yet, it is still true to say that if the past is a strange, unchartered country, then it is
just as likely to be colonised by European forms of narrative as it is to be reinvented to produce new identities based on secret and alternative stories. It is precisely this process of the colonisation of narrative that I would like to explore in Sally Morgan's autobiography, *My Place*.

On one level, *My Place* is a moving and disturbingly unspoken story, "a covert narrative of resistance" in which images of stolen children and stolen pasts become powerful metonyms for the wider implications of the European impact on Aboriginal culture. Morgan's research into her family history provides us with a window into a past that contains the untold stories of the violated and dispossessed. Each of the stories she tells in the book, including her own, reveals a version of the Aboriginal story not found in official history. By exposing conditions on the stations, by revealing the way children were separated from their parents, by charting the exploitations and violations and by identifying the conspiracy of silence that informed black as well as white participation in the story, she politicises the past by rewriting history. The rewriting begins with an acknowledgement of the silences:

Well, there's almost nothing written from a personal point of view about Aboriginal people. All our history is about the white man. No one knows what it was like for us. A lot of our history has been lost, people have been too frightened to say anything.
Her reasons for opening up the channels and filling the silence with story are both personal and cultural. These windows into the past reflect an anger at the way her mother and grandmother were treated by whites, a conscious desire for her children to know who they are and where they come from, and a political desire to communicate to the wider Australian public the sufferings and pain of Aboriginal people. When Morgan discovers her "belongin' place", her physical, tribal, cultural and historical place, she reverses a process that has condemned the destruction of Aboriginal culture to the silences of covert history. As she tells her story, she reveals the very processes by which she, her family and her clan have been robbed and dispossessed. Not only that, but the actual telling of the story produces new versions of history which induce strong feelings of coherence and wholeness. As soon as Morgan realises that she is part Aboriginal, the search for her origins becomes a search for self and home: "The feeling that a very vital part of me was missing and that I'd never belong anywhere. Never resolve anything"(p.106), motivates her search for her Aboriginal identity.

Furthermore, Morgan's use of the autobiographical mode to tell her family's story does, to a certain extent, traverse and confuse the accepted norms of the genre. Within this context, My Place could be read as a "deconstructed postcolonial narrative" in which "the autobiographical subject, with its narcissistic ego"
has been “deliberately decentred” to produce an “autobiography-cum-oral history” which, with its emphasis on the non-linear and serial, is more reminiscent of Aboriginal storytelling than western narratives of introspection.24

However, on a more compelling level, the book can be characterised as an essentially oedipal and Odyssean quest25 in which the Romantic search for the centred and autonomous self is expressed within the framework of what appears to be Aboriginal experience. Although the narrative does seem to gesture towards the serial rather than the hierachical, the collective rather than the private, it is my contention that the conflicts within the text are resolved in favour of mainstream forms of storytelling. In the final analysis, My Place may be seen as a master narrative from the centre masquerading as a counter-memory from the fringe.

Although the book provides windows into the recesses of Aboriginal history, it remains primarily a European story with a white focus.24 Essentially, Morgan's search for "My Place" is a search for the private integrated self, and involves a reconstruction of a past which is built on introspection and censorship rather than on assertions of cultural and communal identity. Her journey into the past, which is constantly underpinned by denial - "tell them you're Indian" (p.38) - becomes a journey into the past as anodyne and alibi in which those social forces which produced the injustices are elided into catharsis.

A common theme and motif running through the book is
denial and silence. Aboriginality is constantly denied and even when secrets are forced out into the open, the storytellers insist on doctoring and censoring their versions. When Morgan's grandmother, Nan, says, "I'm taking my secrets to the grave"(p.162), it is clear that we are in a narrative world where secrets and denials are more important than exposure and affirmation. Although fear lies at the basis of this combination of denial and silence, representing, as it does, a further indictment of European culture, it ensures that Morgan's story will be a sanitised and ahistorical narrative. Although the Drake-Brockmans had a devastating effect on the lives of thousands of Aborigines, they are never held to account in any of the stories Morgan tells. Instead, the reader is narrated as a tearful spectator who is absolved of responsibility by sharing in the suturing that takes place as the writer allows her family to tell a story that reinforces her own sense of coherence and self. History is depoliticised as the personal and emotional take centre stage. In Nan's death at the end of the book, we have a closure that transforms the story of the oppressed into a sentimentalised, comfortable and apolitical story about transcendency:

...it was a bird, Sally. God sent him to tell me I'm going home soon. Home to my own land and my own people. I got a good spot up there, they all waitin' for me.(p.356).

Home is not the rediscovery of origins that can repair the injustice or transform the future: home is out of history, out of
time, out of life, a place where nothing can be changed and where
the suffering is best forgotten.

Indeed, it is possible to argue that this book is as much
about the European fear of loss of identity in a new and alien
world as it is about Aboriginality. The image of the Aborigine as
an integral part of a place that defines identity and meaning is
one of a series of European myths that highlights the culture's
deep rooted sense of estrangement. According to this orthodoxy
Aborigines know how to belong whereas Europeans do not and will
never know how to belong until they learn how to be more like
Aborigines. This is, of course, the same orthodoxy that underpins
the narrator's search for the essential desert self in Robyn
Davidson's *Tracks* and which characterises Ovid's search for the
wild child in David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*.

Furthermore, because the text has been absorbed into
western-dominated ways of representing Aboriginality, the book
can be seen as a metonym for assimilation by absorption. The
colonised subject has been absorbed into the tradition of
autobiographical story. Although the writer has shouldered
herself into the genre, her appropriation of the language of the
form has produced an orthodox story in which western notions of
autonomy are privileged over the collective self. This is
particularly significant when one considers that each of her
family's stories is contained within the wider frame of her own
autobiography. In a sense, the form has colonised her family's
stories in just the same way as mainstream culture has appropriated black experience. Although, on the surface, the book seems to be about the unspoken station histories of Arthur, Gladys and Nan, in the end, each story serves to define Sally as an individual searching for an exclusive place she can call her own.

The cover design of the book, also by Morgan, is a graphic illustration of the way the text assimilates, sanitises and sentimentalises Aboriginal experience. Although the painting uses Aboriginal forms of storytelling, the impact and meaning of those forms is reduced and eclipsed by the superimposition of European motifs. The full weight of what happened on the stations, in the missions and in the white households is watered down into a simplistic and childlike cartoon depiction of Morgan's origins. She takes centre stage in a story about the celebration of self which reverses the dynamic and purpose of Aboriginal storytelling: collective and communal forms serve to promote the individual story. Although the Rainbow Serpent myth and the tracks of the ancestors during the Dreamtime are intended to represent a hybrid form of expression in which the two cultures are reconciled, the overall effect is to create a text in which the centred and unitary self eclipses black culture by colonising its forms of expression.

The early part of the book positions the reader as a fellow traveller in Morgan's investigations. This is reinforced by what appears to be a fairly conventional white suburban upbringing in
Perth. We learn to sympathise and identify with the young girl as she faces all the usual problems children face as they grow up. And although there are hints as to Morgan's true identity, it is not until chapter fourteen, one quarter of the way through the book that the truth emerges. "Tell them you're Indian...no more questions. You just tell them you're Indian" (p.38) is a refrain that symbolises the conspiracy of silence that surrounds the family and, although it becomes the prime motivator in Morgan's pursuit of the truth, this spirit of denial is woven into the fabric of the whole narrative. Although Sally's assumed identity is part of a "racial counter fiction of pure Aryan ancestry" designed to keep the rapacious white authorities at bay, the fiction perpetuates rather than challenges the lie.

In the same way, Nan's reluctance to speak out prevents the unspeakable being voiced. Although she has every reason to feel shamed by what happened to her at Corunna Downs, her silence denies the reader access to the cause of her distress: "I'm not saying nothing. Nothing do you hear?" (p.105). As a result, we can only guess at the horrors that she and her family experienced on the station; sexual exploitation, incest and abduction. Her determination to protect her family, whilst understandable, causes pain and confusion to the very people she wishes to protect and serves to protect those people who caused her so much misery. When Morgan's mother equates this silence with Nan's shame: "Sometimes I think she thinks she's white. She's
ashamed of her family," (p.148) it is easy to understand why the writer is so determined to reverse this culture of denial and find out the truth about the past.

This determination to discover the truth is closely bound up with Morgan's personal relationship with her grandmother: "If I denied my tentative identification with the past, now, I'd be denying her (Nan) as well." (p.141). And even though Morgan breaks through this pact of silence and denial to lay claim to her past and her identity, she is equally guilty of writing herself into the conspiracy as she continually downplays the injustices that caused the silence in the first place. Although there is little doubt that Alice Drake-Brockman was instrumental in the production and training of black slaves for white households and that she, like Nan, is circumspect in what she tells Morgan about Corunna Downs, the neutral historian seems reluctant to raise the issues and allocate blame: "I was aware that it would be unfair of me to judge Alice's attitudes from my standpoint in the nineteen eighties." (p.170).

Indeed, a quiet respect for the dignity of the Drake-Brockmans permeates nearly all the accounts of life on the station. Although they kept private harems, forced Aborigines off their land, separated families (including Morgan's) and dislocated communities, the Drake-Brockmans, especially Alfred, are treated with delicacy and affection. Arthur, Nan's brother, takes a deep pride in the making of Corunna Downs: "We were the tribe
that made the station."(p.181). He views it nostalgically as a home which helped to shape him and a place to which he longs to return: "Aah, I always wish I'd never left there. It was my home."(p.181).

Arthur's personal reminiscence is a curiously unrepresentative story which, whilst providing insights into the lives of those few Aborigines who succeeded in competing with the white man in a white man's world, unwittingly promotes the very values that caused so much suffering to station Aborigines. His story is a celebration of the battler myth - hard work, determination and self-reliance - translated into an Aboriginal context and given an extra twist by the inevitable hardships facing a black man struggling to succeed in a white man's world. Arthur succeeds, in spite of his colour, because he is an autonomous and independent man who can compete with white men on equal terms: "I was on my own, a black man with no one to help him."(p.207). In this world where "each man has to find his own way"(p.212), it is Howden Drake-Brockman - his putative father - who is Arthur's model and equal: "We were both men."(p.202).

Although Arthur's story refers to the brutality of the Drake-Brockman regime as it systematically destroyed his own family, his nostalgia for station life coupled with the softening mediation of Morgan's narrative frame, removes the political sting from the account. The process by which this history of
apartheid and genocide is masked by the dominant discourse of the battler is completed when Arthur writes himself out of the political arena and into a spiritual, apolitical and transcendent realm:

Now my life is over. I'm looking forward to heaven. I'll have a better time up there. I'll be a little angel flying around, looking after stars and planets, doin' the spring cleaning. God is the only friend we got....You look away from God, you go to ruin.(p.213).

Arthur's desire to write himself into history, "I'm part of history, that's how I look at it"(p.213), is checked and undermined by a narrative stance that denies the possibility of change. Heaven is a comfort but it is, by definition, outside history and only offers consolation to those who wait, see, accept and behave. The facts of his story may prompt action but the tone of the narration deflects attention from the issues to individual stasis. There is a sense in which each of the closures in this book is closely connected with death, and with final gestures away from society towards transcendency. Although both Nan and Arthur talk about the need to tell their story before they die, their disclosures have more to do with cathartic exorcism than historical revelation. According to this model, the past can be buried with the dead and action is impossible since death is as unchangeable as nature, childhood and history.

Arthur's story prompts Morgan to pay a visit to Corunna Downs in order to piece together the rest of her family's story.
The continuing irony is that the truth which Morgan tries to uncover in the remote parts of West Australia, lies at home in the Morgan/Milroy household where it is Nan who holds the key to the family's origin and Nan who refuses to speak. Although Morgan's visit represents a renewal of identity through the discovery of origins, her 'homecoming' often reads more like a guided tour than a symbolic return to the family's ancestral home. Equipped with a video camera, Morgan goes north to claim her birthright. The result is a sentimentalised and, at times, patronising sequence of tearful reunions. At one point, a full blood Aboriginal woman whispers to Morgan: "You don't know what it means, no one comes back. You don't know what it means that you, with light skin, want to own us."(pp.228-9). In what appears to be a fascinating reversal of the ritual of acceptance into the clan, it is Morgan, not the elder, who seems to have the power when it comes to endowing individuals with membership and meaning, and it is whiteness rather than Aboriginality that seems to gain approval.

Morgan's visit to Corunna Downs to validate her sense of belonging is bathed in a romanticism that prepares us for a final catharsis: "Soft, blue hills completely surrounded the station. They seemed to us mystical and magical."(p.229). Considering the significance of this site in terms of the suffering of Morgan's people, this softening and desocialising of the landscape once again deflects attention away from the historical events towards Morgan's emotional state:
We kissed everyone goodbye and headed off towards Nullagine. Mum and I were both a bit teary. Nothing was said, but I knew she felt like I did. Like we'd suddenly come home and now we were leaving again. But we had a sense of place, now. (p.230).

If Morgan has, in fact, found her identity and her home, it seems strange that, having claimed her ancestors and her membership, she would need to leave. The fact that she has to go back to Perth, to the life she really belongs to, suggests that Corunna Downs is not her place at all. Or, if it is, then it belongs to an ambivalent colonial discourse centring on problems of individuality and belonging.

It is possible, within a broader historical context, to read Morgan's story as a European and Romantic search for a birthright in a strange land. The rediscovery of her origins allows her predominantly white readership the vicarious experience of being narrated as outcasts who have at last come home and found a place they can call their own. When Morgan is told, "you got your place...you've got a right to be here same as the others" (p.232), perhaps the comment could be seen as representing an invitation to the alienated European to be sutured into belonging and wholeness in a cathartic outpouring that glosses over historical event.

A similar pattern of absorption can also be found in Gladys's story. On the one hand, her experiences at Corunna Downs and Parkerville Children's Home are disturbingly representative: she
is every abducted child and every dislocated life. And, because we experience the European system of abduction and slavery through the secret story of the individual life, the impact is more vivid than if we were presented with statistics. Not only that, but the tendency of European autobiographical story to elevate childhood as a special, sacred area of experience, means that its violation or loss seems particularly tragic.

On the other hand, although Gladys's experiences are, at times, very depressing, this particular story of slavery and cruelty is, once again, couched in a language which softens the effect of the telling. The appalling events are related but the implications are downplayed or they are masked by a sentimentality that diverts attention away from the political issues towards the emotional life of the individual. Parkerville is described as "a beautiful place...surrounded by bush and small streams"(p.241), and although life is hard, Gladys still experiences a "wonderful feeling of security" when the older Aboriginal girls give the "black babies an extra kiss and cuddle."(p.241). And when she realises that a young friend of hers has died, the childlike language, whilst charming and understandable, does little to raise the consciousness or trouble the conscience of the reader:

I picked up some buttercups and placed them on top of the grave, like I always did when I found a dead bird in the bush and buried it. I tried to hide my tears from the others, but they noticed and started chanting, "Look at the sookie bubba!" Enid heard them and shouted, "Leave her alone! Then
she ran back to me and picked me up. "It's all right," she said, "your friend is happy in heaven."(p.245).

Gladys's narrative, rather like Arthur's and Morgan's, seems to make allowances for those very people and forces who were instrumental in perpetuating the system. Even though Alice Drake-Brockman, in sending Gladys to Parkerville, was the prime force in disrupting her life, Gladys is thrilled when the Drake-Brockman family come to visit her at the home: she is proud to be associated with them and to feel part of the family: "I loved it when they all came up, because the other kids were so envious. There was a lot of status in knowing someone with a car."(p.251). It's almost as if Gladys has been successfully assimilated into a system designed to turn black children into compliant subjects.

Although, given the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Gladys should want to deny her Aboriginality, the conflict between acceptance and denial which lies at the base of Morgan's book seems to resolve itself in favour of denial. At one very telling moment in the story, Gladys recalls an incident in the kitchen at the Drake-Brockman's Perth residence when Alice Drake-Brockman enters with her daughter, June, who is carrying a doll that has "golden hair and blue eyes and was dressed in satin and lace."(p.261). Gladys wants it because she wants to be a princess, and wants to be like June. However, June offers Gladys another doll, "a black mopsy doll dressed like a servant...with a slave cap on its head." Gladys rejects it: "I don't want a black doll,
I don't want a black doll,"(p.262) because she really wants to be "a princess, not a servant." Apart from neatly summing up the Drake-Brockmans' impact on the life of Gladys and the other black servants, the incident is a reflection of Gladys's deep-seated fear of being characterised as Aboriginal. Although such fears are understandable, her rejection of one caricature in favour of another is a further manifestation of the assimilative power of a white culture which undermines the subaltern by forcing it to deny its distinct identity: "Mum and I decided we would definitely never tell the children they were Aboriginal."(p.305).

When Nan eventually decides to tell her story, the same tensions and motifs which have characterised Morgan's narrative as a whole surface once more. This "covert narrative of resistance" is also a text which is recuperated into mainstream discourses centring on the quest for selfhood. Although the story fails to close in a conventional way: "the oedipal riddle has been left unanswered" and the Odyssean quest remains unfulfilled, the incompleteness reinforces the silence and the unspeakable remains unmapped. As far as Nan is concerned the truth is only partially revealed: "I'll tell you some things that's all."(p.319). As a result, the potential of this covert history to debunk the official story is undermined by a tendency to sanitise the past. Nan confesses to being "happy up North" and yearns for a childhood that she remembers as satisfying and comforting. Even when she recalls the horror of being forcibly separated from her mother
and sent to a home, the account is softened by the anaesthetic of nostalgia: "When they took me from the station, I never seen days like that again."(p.332).

In spite of the abuse and exploitation, Nan sees the Drake-Brockmans as family, as providers, protectors; as a model for herself. Indeed, as her story unfolds, she admits having always wanted to be white: "I'd lie in bed at night and think if God could make me white, it'd be the best thing."(p.336). In one sense, Nan's desire for whiteness is a further manifestation of a colonising culture which operates by encouraging the oppressed to become absorbed into the mainstream. In another sense, whiteness provides both Nan and Gladys with a disguise which keeps the dominant culture at bay. Whiteness will protect the Milroy family from further abductions, pain and loss. As a result, Nan treasures her secrets as security against further hurt, as a kind of insurance policy for her family.

Nan's death provides a closure that reinforces the tendency of Morgan's narrative to drift towards sentimentality and nostalgia. It is as if the pain which Nan's life should instil in the readership is taken on by the narrator only to be exorcised in a ritual apotheosis. The political impact of all the secret stories in the book is dispelled in a highly personal and privately emotional conclusion. Morgan's prayer for her dying Grandmother removes us from all responsibility for the violation of Nan's Aboriginal identity. Because "Her Place", her belonging place, is in heaven,
the impact of her story lies outside the realm of political and historical consequence:

God...you know this is about Nan. We really love her and we know you do. She's tired of this world, now. She's ready to go. We know you've got a good place up there. A big old gum tree where she can sit and play her mouth organ. (p. 356).

And so, although it is possible to see Morgan's book as a counter-narrative in which the collective voice of Aboriginal experience is represented through a disinterested, decentred author, it looks as if this window into Aboriginal history is, after all, a further expression of European colonisation. Although Morgan sets out deliberately to tell a story that will break the silence and that will offer an Aboriginal view of history, she is, nevertheless, being absorbed into a western form of storytelling which asserts autonomy and self-reliance. Within the palimpsest of autobiography, Morgan's conscious intentions are complicated by other texts and discourses, most of which reproduce and reinforce white Australian stories of survival and homecoming. As characters and narrators, she and her family can be seen as "token figures from the so-called margins" 29 whose stories may appear to offer a voice to the subaltern but which, in effect, provide comfortable alibis for the hegemonic centre. The tragic story of an indigenous people forced into exile in their own land, their children stolen, their stories and origins suppressed and their whole way of life dislocated by an alien and alienating
culture is subsumed within the European myth of the longed-for homecoming. What appears to be an interpolation into the centre by a colonised subject becomes, in the final analysis, an orthodox text that absorbs the marginalised voice in order to justify the existence and actions of the mainstream white culture.

Finding an answer to the question, "What country, friends, is this?" involves a search for counter-narratives and outlaw genres that might open up the silences and reverse the denials. Perhaps it is only through the proliferation of different forms of storytelling in which different kinds of subjectivity are foregrounded, that the past will cease to be an exclusive and static country, "mysterious and unexplained."
CHAPTER FIVE

"SOMETHING IS MISSING"

At first glance, Sally Morgan's *My Place* and Ruby Langford's *Don't Take Your Love to Town* seem to occupy similar territory: the exposure through personal story of silence, injustice and oppression. However, on closer inspection, the cultural and narrative assumptions that lie behind the depiction of Aboriginality in *Don't Take Your Love to Town* are very different from those that drive Morgan's book. Although there are many similarities in terms of purpose, subject material, funding and narrative choice, Langford's book is a more political, less sentimentalised account of the impact of white society on Aboriginal culture.

Although both books were funded by the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council and appeared just before the Bicentennial, Langford's book is a far more powerful indictment of the impact of two hundred years of European dispossession on Aboriginal culture. As such, her story represents a more effective counter myth to the rituals of the Bicentenary celebration than Morgan's more acceptable search for self. Langford's story represents a potent antidote to the amnesiac of the white Bicentennial version of history, a 'whiting out' that is perpetuated in the easing of guilt that underpins Morgan's book. Whereas Langford confronts the reader with the political implications of dispossession, Morgan narrates the European
reader as a surrogate Aborigine in stories which suppress history in favour of nostalgia.

Langford’s story is political because it embodies the social and cultural dilemma of a people caught between two cultures. Because she belongs to the margins, to a suppressed minority, her story assumes the status of a history that is, in spite of its deeply personal tone, politically critical of those mainstream forces which have produced the injustices. Apart from its function as a critique of mainstream social forces, the book has a political agenda that gestures towards the collective future. The personal dimension - Langford’s concern for her family and their shattered lives - becomes a platform for reconciliation which acknowledges the meaning of 1788 without bitterness or resentment. Quite clearly, she sees her book as a non-assimilative gesture towards a process of reconciliation based on a mutual respect for difference:

I knew when I finished this book a weight would be lifted off my mind, not only because I could examine my own life from it and know who I was, but because it may help better the relationship between the Aboriginal and white people. That it might give some idea of the difficulty we have surviving two cultures, that we are here and will always be here.²

Although Langford only rarely engages in explicit political debate, her book is highly political in nature because it typifies black urban experience. She has lived and is living the full effects of the warfare that has been silently waged against Aboriginal
people since 1788. Her journey from a childhood on a mission in Bonalbo, to a fringedwelling subsistence life in country New South Wales, to a nomadic urban existence in Redfern is political because it is occupied with the life of a minority community and its struggle to survive the impact of the dominant culture. Not only that, but if "we can only understand Australian history by analysing the lives of the oppressed," then it is a story that has important ramifications for the entire society. By giving expression to stories that reveal the covert histories of the oppressed, the secret and strange country of the past can be opened up for discovery and change.

To a certain extent, the ideological conflicts that characterise My Place are also present in Don't Take Your Love to Town. It could be argued that Langford's book (published as autobiography) is part of a white Australian tradition of writing in which the individual battler is seen as struggling against overwhelming odds in order to achieve self-fulfilment. However, this reading fails to take into account the way the book employs a serial and non-hierachical narrative approach in which the author becomes decentred in favour of the broader Aboriginal community. She has, to use Sidonie Smith's words in De/Colonizing the Subject, deployed "autobiographical practices that go against the grain" and which "constitute an "I" that becomes a place of creative and by implication political intervention." Although My Place appears to behave in a similar way, each of the voices
Morgan's book tends to lead the reader back to the centred author searching for an individual identity. In Langford's case, the power of the genre to dominate the experience is countered by a hard-headed resistance to the nostalgic and narcissistic potential of the medium.

The use of Aboriginal storytelling techniques which privilege the collective over the private, is one clear way in which Langford resists the power of the master genre to appropriate her story. There is a clear sense in which Langford's story belongs more obviously to an Aboriginal tradition of oracy than it does to a western tradition of literary introspection. Langford's life is constructed through a series of loosely connected anecdotes as if the narrator is engaged in continuous conversation: "I write like I talk. It is the oral tradition coming out." As a result, there is a curious and, at times, uneasy disconnection between the genre of literary autobiography to which the published book belongs and the individual voice of a speaker whose stance is social and gregarious rather than private and introspective. Paradoxically, it is her lack of sophistication as a "literary" practitioner that prevents the book from being assimilated into a genre whose central concern has been, for the most part, the exploration of the dehistoricised self.

Even though the book can be read as a conventional autobiographical story about an individual search for identity, the expected gesturing towards the notion of an unmediated,
integrated self is never allowed to become a major preoccupation. Indeed, the narration is consistently focused on the unravelling of event in terms of the collective experience of the family and the community. It is as if Langford's intended audience is not the private, discreet and introspective reader but the public and communal listener. This conversational, immediate and public voice ensures that the narration never strays very far from the issues as they are defined by the historical experience of black people:

It is like performance poetry: get it out there, throw it and hit people in the guts with it. I write mostly to lift my people up and show our side of history, and to educate non-Aboriginal people about what goes on in our lives.6

This vernacular immediacy, linked to a rigidly chronological structure, prevents the story becoming either self-indulgent or nostalgic. Although her childhood contains important reference and defining points, it never becomes a site for nostalgic introspection. Her asides are few because the battleground is not the realm of disembodied ideas but the realm of event. Langford, the historian, is far too engaged in telling the story of her family to indulge in searching for the personal or the unattainable. The present tense is never far away and contemporary reality is rarely out of focus. Because Langford narrates herself through a fixed chronology of events, it is the story rather than the individual that conveys the overall meaning of the narrative. It is
as if history is being rewritten through her, or as if she is being written by the injustices and sufferings that have shaped urban Aboriginal experience. As a result, our attention is focused on the pure unrelenting suffering of the family as it criss-crosses the white rural and urban landscape. The accumulative effect of evictions, deaths, betrayals, humiliations and injustices represents a devastating attack on the invisible enemy.

It is worth noting that Aboriginal identity is based very securely on the notion and reality of kinship and lineage and that in spite of the attempts of white society to disrupt the lineages, Aboriginal culture seems to have survived the onslaught. Although it would be an exaggeration to describe white policy as an active form of genocide, the ramifications of the policy of calculated neglect have resulted in conditions which closely resemble ‘ethnic cleansing’. The policy has involved massacres, mental and physical harm, the destruction of cultural and economic life, sterilisation and the forcible removal of children. At its height, there were no fewer than sixty-seven Acts of discrimination against Aboriginal people that were designed to eliminate indigenous practices and disenfranchise the dispossessed. It is against this historical background that Langford’s personal struggle to maintain the integrity of her family must be seen.

In a sense, Aboriginal history is family history and the survival of Langford’s family is a metonym for the survival of Aboriginal people, as a whole. This is nowhere better illustrated
than when Nobby, Langford's oldest son, is sent to prison: his incarceration is the family's incarceration, his suffering, the family's suffering:

'Look son, each time you are jailed the whole family goes with you; you have never done jail by yourself, it was the most traumatic time for our family. When you ran, we ran too, when you were bashed we felt it too!'

Although we rarely see white society or its agents, its effects are pervasive. The structure of mission life which deprives Langford of her language and culture, the breakup of her family at Bonalbo as her father searches for work, the grinding poverty of her life as a fringedweller, the humiliating attempts at assimilation at Green Valley, her constantly thwarted efforts to keep her family together in Redfern and the destruction of two of her sons' lives by drugs, crime and mental illness all point to the accumulative impact of European society on the wider Aboriginal community. This autobiographical story is an unofficial and subversive account that endows the marginalised with an identity while, at the same time, confronting the majority with new and challenging ways of interpreting history.

In a sense, Langford's book represents the forging of a new set of myths, a new narrative language out of the wreckage of destroyed lives. The personal goal of keeping the family together by naming and remembering the children and their lives translates into a political act that draws our attention to the
wider implications of their suffering. By relating every event in painstaking and painful detail, she preserves the culture of her family and so secures the survival of the community. Furthermore, her use of European forms to forge new urban myths about suffering and renewal allows the unspoken and silent voices of the forgotten to be heard in the public domain of mainstream discourse. Although the dangers of being drawn into the value systems that perpetrated the injustices are ever present, Langford's unromantic and disinterested stance sets up a distance that prevents the sort of catharsis and nostalgia that I have argued depoliticises Morgan's book.

It may be worth noting that neither Morgan nor Langford indulges in the Romantic notion of the child so prevalent in European autobiographical story. The fact that neither had a particularly enjoyable childhood may very well account for this lack of idealisation. Indeed, from the standpoint of the marginalised, the Romantic trope of the powerless and vulnerable child may be construed as a powerful symbol of colonial oppression, one that suppresses social and historical realities (the tragic story of the stolen generation, for instance)\(^\text{10}\) in favour of a poetic space which excludes the marginalised. For Langford and Morgan, childhood experience is part of a political reality in which communities are threatened and, in some cases, devastated by white cultural practices. Nevertheless, the autobiographical theme of self-realisation through ordeal
requires the author to create ideal spaces as forms of reward or compensation for the questing subject. In Morgan's case, the ideal space is located in the future, in the transcendent notion of a special place, "My Place", in which identity is reinforced by family and community. For Langford, Uluru and traditional forms of Aboriginality offer her the opportunity to sidestep the historical imperatives which dictate the writing of her book. In both cases, there is a constant tension between the poetic spaces of transcendency and the political reality of their histories.

The opening of Langford's book, however, suggests that there will be few concessions to poetic space. The emphasis, from the very beginning, lies on the raw immediacy of experience and the sense of a life lived to the full. Each of the epigraphs helps to establish the coordinates for the story. The reference to the Rogers' song, which also provides Langford with her title, not only reflects a physical lust for life and love that permeates the narrative but also reflects the sense of pain and hurt which results from her having given too much. There is little doubt that Langford takes her "love to town too many times"(p.242), and as a result, pays for her adventures with battles, betrayals and losses. Nevertheless, there is a clear sense in which she both accepts and indeed celebrates these failures as both inevitable and life-enhancing.

The extracts from poems by Bobbi Sykes and Walt Whitman both serve to warn against the bitterness that can result from
the sort of experiences that constitute Langford's life. Her pain and suffering which is, of course, the representative and "accumulated pain of two centuries" provides a basis for renewal in which the "jagged and broken" people, free from bitterness, inherit Whitman's "complete earth." (epigraph). It is the combination of lustful irresponsibility, hard-headed pragmatism and lack of bitterness that characterises the voice of the narrator and which provides an antidote for the horrors that make up the details of her life.

The introductory chapter - Names - is both a referential and symbolic precis of the narrator's life. Each name not only traces the various stages of her life but also represents its meaning in terms of the story of black suppression. Although each of the references is personal and particular, the pattern of experiences that each reference represents, is a product of historical and cultural forces. Each stage of her life is represented through photographs, songs, scraps of conversation, and nicknames, each of which defines the impact of the invisible and silent enemy on the individual life.

Langford's Christian name, for example, symbolises the disruptive effect of white culture on her family and clan: it is a name that defines her beginning and determines her heritage. It is an alien European name, a name imposed by a colonising society determined to wipe out all evidence of indigenous culture. And yet, at the same time, it is a name she has inherited from her
beloved great aunt, a name that defines her as a member of a family with a tradition and lineage of its own. However, even this assertion of identity is undercut by the memory of a mission photograph in which her two great aunts are sitting dressed in white Victorian dresses. It is a photograph which is iconically indicative of the effect of white "protection" on Aboriginal culture. Langford's name is her history and her inheritance: named and identified by a culture that has stolen her tradition and replaced it with another.

Even though she is aware of her indigenous inheritance through her surrogate "mother", the clever man, Uncle Ernie Ord, it is an inheritance impoverished by loss of language and culture. This loss is symbolised by Langford's totem - the willy wagtail - a naming that should guarantee her membership of the clan but which, in fact, marks her out as a lonely messenger, a bringer of bad news, a teller of stories that reflect the gradual destruction of her family, her lineage and her clan. Ironically, it is this very propensity for telling stories - enshrined in the totem - that, in the long term, ensures the survival of her people. The covert history that Langford exposes is a story that will promote alternative and empowering versions of black experience.

As her immediate family disintegrates and she goes to live with relatives in Bonalbo, the poverty and deprivation which have become her new inheritance are balanced by her energy and lust for life: "Big Noise" is the exuberance and resilience that Langford
displays throughout her story. "Rangi" is the physically tough self, "Ando" is the female adolescent self, "heifer" is the working and singing self, and "Andy" is the Redfern girl-about-town self. Each of these identities represents a stage of Langford's life and a reflection of broader Aboriginal experience and each is defined by a song or an event or a photograph. Three men - two white and one Aboriginal - dominate Langford's adult life and provide her with the family of nine children she struggles to keep together.

Langford's story is a bush-to-city sociography told from an Aboriginal viewpoint: her progress from mission life to Redfern is a collective story about the struggles and survival of a whole culture. Her early life on the missions reflects the way in which white culture has created the sort of economic and social conditions which undermine the integrity of indigenous life. Families are forced apart, children are abducted, traditional practices are suppressed, language is forgotten. The white school teaches the young Ruby to read by immersing her in story that carries European and colonial values. "The Man From Snowy River," "Lady of Shalott," "The Solitary Reaper" replace Aboriginal dreaming as a source of cultural meaning, identity and life. The inappropriateness of Gray's "Elegy" and "The Ancient Mariner", as texts which structure Langford's education, are indicative of a genocidal process that kills cultures by stealing story. The new stories not only succeed in blocking out the old and so destroying the community's sense of ancestral identity but
also carry values and belief systems that are essentially hostile to the survival of Aboriginal culture.

This cultural theft is reflected in the absence of traditional custom and language in Langford's formative years. In spite of the influence of the clever man, Uncle Ernie Ord, who tries to teach her something about her place in the clan and of Aunt Millie Boyd who is the storykeeper of the tribe, Langford is denied her inheritance as a member of the Bundjalung people. The death of language is part of the process of ethnic cleansing: "Mum and Dad were the last generation to speak Bundjalung in our family." (p.135). And, when Langford is wandering the countryside living the life of an itinerant refugee, there is little traditionally Aboriginal about her relationship with the land. Robbed of her culture, she is no different from and in fact worse off than all the other itinerant groups struggling for survival:

I felt like I was living tribal but with no tribe around me, no close-knit family. The food gathering, the laws and songs were broken up, and my generation at this time wandered around as if we were tribal but in fact living worse than the poorest of poor whites....(p.96).

Although everything begins well when Langford and her large extended family move to Green Valley, it's not long before the family's comings and goings upset the sensibilities of the local white residents. It is important to remember that, for Langford, family is not simply a matter of convenience and security but central to her struggle for personal and cultural
survival: "I always had a houseful wherever I went. It was a means of survival."(p.158). Gradually she begins to realise what Green Valley represents and is keen to leave. Apart from reminding her of mission life, it brings home to her the full impact of European attempts to draw Aborigines into mainstream society: "The government policy of absorption by assimilation meant splitting up Aboriginal communities."(p.176). In a rare outburst of resentment she reminds her white neighbours of what it means to be a refugee in your own country:

...while you bastards were having kids in comfort I was battling to raise mine in a tent - you don't own the land your house is on, my people were here first, so get off....(p.176).

Langford's struggle to raise her children is the central focus of the second half of the book and provides us with a concentrated history of the effects of the silent war on young urban Aborigines. What happens to Langford's sons, Nobby and David, is an indictment of a society that has been and still is practising subtle forms of apartheid and genocide. The destruction of both lives can only be seen in terms of a two hundred year war culminating in the broken lives of children who have no home and no cultural inheritance. The drunkenness, drugs, violence, crime and imprisonment are all features of a life produced and then destroyed by the dominant culture. As Langford puts it when Nobby is in prison:

...I knew Nob had been bashed by the police, that tear gas
was used in riots, that prison broke people's spirits, and it was killing our sons like a war. (p.224).

The role of the white media in its treatment of Nobby's story is a perfect illustration of the power of mainstream culture to wage war through story. The manipulation, articulation and control of Nobby's story are all in the hands of a media whose central agenda is the preservation of the status quo and the relegation of oppositional or critical modes. From a black viewpoint the media presentation of Nobby's arrest and escape and rearrest can only be seen in terms of propaganda in a war in which the losers are stereotyped into outlaws and narrated as dehistoricised criminals. The formula story of the murderous and wild black teenager who is charged with "attempting to murder a police constable" (p.183) is couched in language which leaves the reader in no doubt as to the guilt of the "offenders". The fact that Nobby was a "kid who went handcuffed to his sister's funeral, who lifted his dead brother from the bath and laid him out, who drank to kill pain, who was arrested in a cemetery" (p.183) is ignored because it belongs to an alternative historicised narrative that threatens the dominant myth.

As the media story unfurls, we are witness to a prewritten agenda, a prescribed white story in which the delinquent Aboriginal outlaw and escapee is pitted against the legitimate forces (the police) of white "civilised" society. The "MANHUNT FOR VIOLENT TRIO" story characterises Nobby as desperate and
dangerous: "Langford is described by police as the most dangerous and they fear he will shoot if cornered."(p.185). The media reinforces this orthodox reading of the events by narrating the reader as a law-abiding white citizen who sees the police as fighting a war against outlaws and misfits who threaten the status quo. Nobby has no existence, has no subjectivity in this particular discourse except as a symbol of violent disruption.

Interwoven into the text is Langford's unofficial, secret and until this moment, unpublished version of what happened to her son. Her personal and oppositional view not only highlights the injustices but alerts us to the power of official story to occupy centre stage in the conflict between black and white. Interestingly enough, it is Langford's access to white mainstream media - the published autobiography - that permits her to write her own critical version of the same events.

What we witness in Langford's story are the shattered lives of the refugees and casualties of a war in which the oppressors remain hidden and the battle-lines, on the whole, remain invisible. As a white film director comments after making a film about Aborigines in Redfern, "It's an amazing thing to discover an entire race of people who keep walking into glass doors."(p.231). Prompted by this comment Langford reflects on the innumerable glass barriers that constitute the state of apartheid that determines black reality. She concludes that this invisible apartheid is a two way process. The white media construct
barriers by producing stereotypes and by enforcing a censorship which, by denying black achievements and black voices, excludes whites from black experience as effectively as it excludes blacks from white society.

The chapter entitled "Surviving Culture" represents the beginning of Langford's political awakening. As she learns about Aboriginal deaths in custody from a video, she begins to realise how widespread the warfare is. The case histories of John Pat, Eddie Murray, and Robert Walker provide a political framework for her own life and a context in which to view the lives and deaths of her sons. By drawing on these cases Langford foregrounds and politicises the issues that define and characterise urban Aboriginal experience.

The video is a turning point not only because it opens up her eyes to "a lot of things not spoken about in books"(p.255) but also because she begins to realise how powerful her own Aboriginal heritage is when it comes to storytelling. It is a realisation that by drawing attention to the power of Aboriginal narrative form empowers her to tell her own story:

The Pintubi sandpaintings were like maps and books of holy knowledge: they showed dreaming tracks, the waterholes, women's business, dancing, fire breaks, animals in certain areas. These things had a strong effect on me and showed me how most books in white culture have so little value. What is an autobiography compared to a dreaming track?(p.255).

Although Langford has no effective access to the dreaming
tracks of her ancestors the fact that they belong to her ancestral world provides her with a strong political motivation for telling her own particular story. For Langford, the existence of the sandpaintings not only highlights the limitations of autobiography but also becomes a source of symbolic inspiration: "The pen is mightier than the sword but the finger in the sand is mightier than that."(p.255).

The fact that Langford cannot make sandpaintings is an indictment of the losses and violations that her book seeks to reveal and exposes the power of the centre to suppress the margins. The fact that Sally Morgan, in contrast, feels free to exploit traditional Aboriginal art to present her life in a visual form is a clear indication of how readily the centre can tell its stories through what appear to be alternative forms. Both *My Place* and *Don't Take Your Love to Town* are texts that, in differing ways, draw attention to a paradox that lies at the basis of all minority or oppositional critiques of dominant culture. In a sense, both narrators are subjected to a centre which permits dissidence in order to appropriate that dissidence and make it part of the mainstream. And since non-conformity and battling for survival are central features of the white myth of national identity, it is easy to see how readily their stories may be absorbed into the master narrative.

By deploying European forms to expose European crimes, Langford must always face the danger of becoming assimilated
into the genre. Quite clearly, Langford's raw experiences would never have the political impact that they have if they hadn't been expressed through acceptable and dominant forms. The tradition of autobiography, the economic and social disciplines of publishing, the presence of a co-writer - Susan Hampton - and the process of editing and rewriting which is an inevitable part of publication, are all part of the cultural process that has transformed the writer's experiences into the very literature that she considers inferior to Aboriginal dreaming. And yet, without access to this inferior form there would be no story to communicate.

Furthermore, the pervasive power of the genre to construct subjectivities that celebrate European notions of autonomy and selfhood acts against Langford's oppositional narrative stance. Is Langford an Aussie battler, or is she the representative victim of a cultural violation which autobiography, as a form, seeks to obscure? The problematic nature of this paradox is neatly revealed when Billy Marshall-Stoneking, on the front cover of Langford's book, greets the story as "the ultimate battler's tale." The problem with framing the book in this way is that what starts out as an unspeakable story from the dissident fringe is in danger of being assimilated into an white orthodoxy that promotes survival rather than change as the ultimate achievement. Black versions of the battler myth simply serve to reinforce those very colonising practices which Langford's story
seeks to undermine. The individual lost in the desert, the battler surviving the drought, the lone woman trekking across the wilderness, the Aboriginal battling white culture in a Redfern ghetto, children brutalised by their environments can all be seen as powerless, defeated figures whose best hope is survival in a society that neutralises political and historical change by hiding it behind notions of autonomy.

In Langford's case, however, we have a story that, in spite of its potential for being absorbed into the centre, remains firmly on the outside. Don't Take Your Love to Town is a counter-memory which escapes assimilation because it is constantly moving beyond the personal and private to the public and political. The battler myth in Langford's book, is not so much an individual story that promotes acceptance of the status quo as a collective celebration of a cultural survival that may lead to significant social change:

We're survivors. That's what I've been written as, surviving what has been done to us. It is not only me. My book is not only one, it's every Aboriginal person's story.¹¹

It is a surviving culture that looks to its traditions for inspiration. Although Langford cannot reproduce the sandpaintings, she believes that political action can come from the strength and character of traditional culture. Aunt Millie Boyd, a Bundjalung elder, becomes a symbolic force in Langford's story because she still carries the stories of her people in her
head. She is the custodian of the sacred places, of the stories, of the entire culture that should have been Langford's inheritance. Aunt Millie and her control over nature is a potent political symbol because the lineage that she has preserved provides a vital link between the legendary past and the political present. The mysticism surrounding Aunt Millie's power is not a Romantic retreat but a gesture towards the future: "The main thing was that political action should come from such powers."(p.261).

Aunt Millie's story makes Langford "feel connected again, not just to my Bundjalung origins but to positive forces happening now, to these people who carried the culture and kept it strong..."(pp.261-2). It is this sense of custodianship and ownership which provides the strength needed to survive the impact of white culture. The land may have been stolen from the Aborigine, but it will always be Aboriginal because the black sense of belonging is inscribed into a lineage which not only predates white civilisation but which endows all Aboriginal people with a birthright. Simarly, although the city is ostensibly European it is the Aborigines who are the custodians of the land. According to Langford, belonging to this land means more than owning the real estate:

And I wondered who had been the custodian of Henderson Road, Alexandria. Eora country was at La Perouse but it reached this far into the city, into Redfern.(p.262).

The theme of connection is a constant reminder of
Langford's simultaneous sense of belonging and of not belonging to a tradition which, however fractured and dislocated, continues to provide her with a strong sense of identity and purpose. On a return visit to Bonalbo - her "belonging place" - it is her childhood lived within the wider community of her extended family that gives her strength. In spite of the fact that Bonalbo embodies the very process of deculturalisation that has determined the particulars of Langford's life, it remains a special place, a defining space which "had made us strong enough to deal with all the troubles later on." (p.230).

Her trip to Uluru as part of an ABC documentary about urban Aborigines represents a perfect example of this central tension between the need for traditional identity and the sense of emptiness left by its destruction. On one level, she is the product of a white media narrative in which the urban black encounters the lost traditional culture. Her sense of separation and longing is clear:

Looking out the window I wondered how our ancestors survived out here. They must have been a very strong people and I was proud to be just a portion of this race. (p.233).

Even though this traditional world has been stolen from her, she feels connected with the power of the rock as a symbol of her people's culture and history:

It made me think of our tribal beginnings, and this to me was like the beginning of our time and culture. Time was suddenly shortened to include all of history in the present,
and it was also stretched to a way of seeing the earth that was thousands of years old.(p.234).

There are moments during the trip to Uluru, however, when Langford is being written by the very media narratives she suspects are distorting her version of events. She is drawn into the trap of sentimentalising a connection that has been severed by the very technology that transports her so comfortably to the rock itself and which carries its own mythic interpretations of the rock's symbolism. The documentary is, in a sense, another example of white expropriation of Aboriginal story: the encounter between urban and traditional black cultures reflects a masking of guilt through the ritual of reconciliation. The rock is an acceptable symbol of Aboriginality since it refers to a mythic space outside history and political action, unlike the unpalatable realities of deaths in custody. Uluru is a far less controversial and confronting site than Redfern.

According to this discourse, the purely natural (traditional people) cannot function within the political arena and the purely urban (city blacks) cannot function within the natural arena. As a result, both groups are disqualified from participation in the political process, either for being too Aboriginal or for not being Aboriginal enough. And so when Langford's mother claims that, having seen the rock, she "can now die happy"(p.236) Langford's narrative is clearly in danger of being hijacked by a discourse that disempowers black contemporary culture by locating it in
sacred desert areas that can have no impact on mainstream white culture except in terms of eco-tourism or noble savagery.

In spite of this gesture towards dominant myth, Langford is not a token figure from the margins whose stories provide comforting alibis for the centre.\textsuperscript{12} She resists the colonising power of the centre by positioning herself as a representative and politically self-conscious voice. The sentimentality which underpins the Uluru episode is countermanded by a hard-headed and unromantic appreciation of the historical realities. She knows that the gap between traditional and urban culture is, in practical terms, unbridgeable. She knows that:

\begin{quote}
City blacks couldn't survive there, and they (traditional people) couldn't survive in our half black half white world. It was very hard on both sides and for our survival we had to be mentally strong as well as physically. (p.235).
\end{quote}

Langford's recognition of this difference ensures that her story will not be subsumed into white constructions of Aboriginality. Indeed, her experiences seem to spur her on to find politically useful ways of exploiting aspects of traditional culture which might give voice to her story. The closure of the book is suspended between Langford's outrage at the treatment of Nobby and her increasing sense of purpose as she recognises the power of her traditional inheritance to help her speak out and tell her story. As Nobby is sentenced once again, Langford wonders if "a half-caste will ever be given a chance - or will white
Australia ever understand?" (p.263). The political implications of Nobby's situation are broadened to include the whole issue of the treatment and deaths of Aboriginals in police custody. Nobby is every Aboriginal boy who is subjected to white legal and judicial practice and Langford is every Aboriginal mother who struggles to keep her family together in the face of overwhelming odds.

Because she is both a victim of and a witness to the injustices, her story has a validity that conventional histories lack. When in commenting on the brutal treatment of Aborigines in country towns Langford states, "I have witnessed this" (p.264), she is speaking for a whole people and her narration becomes less a matter of simple storytelling and more a matter of historical and collective responsibility. In her story, she is bearing witness to what she has herself experienced. As she writes, the observer, the witness becomes the activist: she is politicised by her own writing.

The power of the witness to rewrite history is reinforced by Langford's discovery of the meaning of her totem. She feels that in spite of her forced separation from her traditional past, the totem is a symbolic representation of a collective voice sanctioned by Aboriginal practice. Since it is the function of the Wagtail, in traditional Bundjalung culture, to deliver messages, Langford, the writer, is fulfilling a role that has been set down by her ancestors. It is at this point that Langford decides to commit her life to paper:
I unpacked my books and bought a typewriter...a desk and a filing cabinet. Outside my window a hibiscus opened its buds and the noise was not traffic but birds.(p.268).

Langford's book is a secret story which succeeds in remaining faithful to its own oppositional polemic whilst at the same time exploiting and working through the generally orthodox genre of autobiographical story. The form enables her to turn the mirror preoccupations of the narrator as introspective self into a history that has communal and political ramifications. The tension between status quo and disequilibrium produces a story that challenges the values that underpin the genre whilst, at the same time, celebrating a politics of identity which can form a bridge between the different cultures. It is this feeling of a separate but collective identity within the wider context of possible reconciliation which drives the dynamic of the book. In both generic and cultural terms, the closure permits difference within a communicable common ground.

Although the broken lives that represent the substance of Langford's history are never assimilated into mainstream ideologies, nevertheless, they come to represent an essential part of the half-told Australian story. Within the context of white Australia as a "nation founded on the bloodshed and suffering of others", a nation which must eventually "make its peace...with the lives of the oppressed,"13 Langford's book can be seen as a powerful antidote to the "national pact of silence"14 that has
characterised official Australian history. It is the prolonged absence of unauthorised and unofficial narratives like Don't Take Your Love to Town that constitutes the something that is missing. Perhaps closer attention to the unauthorised versions of history that Langford's book represents will open alternative windows into pasts that have the power to turn the complexities of the political present into stories that ensure a richer and more heterogeneous future.
It is my contention that autobiography, in its oppositional mode, is a palimpsest in which the subject, politicised by his or her location, can give voice to unofficial histories by negotiating a way through the multiple and often conflicting discourses which constitute the narrator's subjectivity. In many cases this negotiation involves the deployment of counter narratives which both exploit and undermine mainstream forms. According to Judith Butler, such a narrative strategy not only encourages the “unspeakable” to be “mapped as speakable” but also allows generic and cultural boundaries to be “traversed, articulated, confused and undone.” This is particularly true of migrant writing where self-reflexivity has become a prime means of steering a course between the dominant conventions of the host culture and the particular modes of the migrant culture. Although there is a constant danger of the migrant voice, in its myriad forms, being absorbed into the mainstream, the interaction between the master genres and the migrant enclaves has, in some cases, resulted in a rich array of hybrid and experimental texts.

Furthermore, since autobiography combines the “the authority of a primary record” with “the freedom of an unashamedly personal vision,” each personal story can be read as a socially symbolic act in which history is refracted through the
mirror of the individual life. Once again, this is particularly pertinent when we turn our attention to migrant writing. Individual stories giving expression to dreams of a new start or the traumas of displacement or the dramas of adjustment can be seen as metonymic narratives in which the struggles of the individual to come to terms with the new culture are representative of the struggles of the migrant community as a whole. Not only that but there is a sense in which those migrant dramas which explore problems of identity and provenance provide yet another variation on the dominant Anglo-Celtic myth of Australia as a lost paradise or a place of exile.

To a large extent, the story of the migrant is the story of change in contemporary Australian society. The economic, social and cultural upheavals which have taken place as a result of the various waves of migration since World War II have had and are having a profound impact on the basic structures of Australian life. The Snowy Mountain Scheme is one historical event amongst many which symbolises the deep-seated and comprehensive nature of these transformations. And yet, in spite of the continuing importance of migrant communities, their story has, until recently, remained unspoken or has been elided into mainstream discourses centring on assimilation and difference. It is this constant struggle between absorption and resistance, between assimilation and heterogeneity which characterises the ideological tensions which underpin the articulation of migrant
When John Pilger, in *A Secret Country*, discusses the impact of migrant culture on Australian life he chooses to tell his story through the "unsung" lives of individual migrants. Since, in a sense, each story represents a rewriting of the whole history of each community, so each story becomes a metonym for the social, cultural and political interactions that constitute the dynamic of change. Pilger demonstrates the power of personal story as a force for change by drawing on his own ancestral history as a means of revealing injustice and of redressing historical imbalance. This is precisely the same strategy that James Miller adopts in *Koori: A Will to Win* when he draws on his own tribal, clan and family history to reveal the devastating impact of white 'civilisation' on Aboriginal culture. Although Miller has the added difficulty of having to learn and work through a genre and language that are alien to his own tradition, both writers employ similar autobiographical techniques to undermine official histories and politicise the present by reconstructing the past. The repositioning of the oppressed, marginalised and excluded as crucially valuable participants in the wider Australian story owes much to the emergence of autobiography as a historicising device. With the personal experiences of Aborigines, convicts, women and migrants written out of Australian history, the story seems, as Pilger puts it, "apolitical, a faintly heroic tale of white man against Nature, of a national achievement devoid of blacks,
women and other complicating factors."

The propensity for the dominant white culture to expropriate, absorb and suppress the histories of the marginalised may to help to explain the invisibility of these classes in the annals of those official storytellers whose narratives downplay the unpalatable, block the oppositional and eliminate the politically controversial. Myths of the outsider and the alien are reiterated in order to coopt the marginalised into the dominant national mythology. The Australian homeland - the reworking of the ancient European dream of Eden - is also Babylon - the place of exile and exclusion. As each wave of migrants, or refugees or exiles takes its place in society, it is amalgamated into the bifocal structure of a European myth that promises conjunction and plenitude but which delivers severance and partition. The motif of the convict, explorer, migrant, woman or Aborigine trapped inside or outside an intractable society leads to a powerfully normative cultural patterning. The great Australian emptiness, childhood, exile and alienation are all states of consciousness in which nothing can be changed. The process by which a predominantly white population of four and half million has become, since the Second World War, a heterogeneous population of seventeen million speaking more than eighty languages and practising more than forty religions is a largely silent one in which the new arrivals have been consigned to a mythology which depoliticises the present by locking up the
Because the individual migrant story, in its many forms, centres on the problem of adjustment from one cultural world to another, the focus of attention tends to be drawn away from the drama of the narcissistic and autonomous self (as in conventional western autobiography) towards the social and historical conditions that produced the experience. The dream of a new home, the trauma of displacement and the drama of adjustment are all narratives which continually draw our attention to the relationship between the minority culture and the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture. Although the protagonists that emerge from such texts as Judah Waten’s Alien Son and Morris Lurie’s Whole Life, Ron Elisha’s In Duty Bound, Richard Beynon’s The Shifting Heart are individuated and particular, the fact that each belongs to a specific migrant community gives their stories a collective and political dimension in which the social and historical context of the experience is essential to an understanding of the narrative.

The stories that result, as diverse cultures conflict within the context or social dynamic of 'growing up', provide critical insights into the operation of both the migrant and the host culture. In In Duty Bound, for instance, the developing self becomes the battleground for conflicting forces that highlight the inflexibilities, anachronisms and prejudices of traditional Jewish culture. Whenever Jack Bercowicz’s parents feel threatened by a
world that they fear may behave in predictable and familiar ways, they produce the sacred icon of their fear, the locked tin of photographs that depict the deaths of their relatives in the Nazi concentration camps. For Simkeh and Fania, the very idea of their son 'marrying out' is a denial of history and a betrayal of Jewish identity. And so when Christine, Jack's shickseh fiancée, comes to dinner, they feel 'duty bound' to reveal the contents of the tin to shock her into surrendering her hold on Jack.9

As H.G. Kippax suggests, it is not hard to understand why Jack's parents hold on so desperately to the horrific past as a bastion against the uncertain future, since exclusiveness is a "survival principle, bred in the bone by centuries of flight and persecution and terribly validated by the Holocaust."10 When the poetic space of a static past built on horror conflicts directly with the imperatives of history and change then the past becomes a refuge, a ghetto and a fortress. Accordingly, Jack's parents use the past to control the present and the future, to ensure the permanence of a four-thousand-year myth that defines Jewish historical and cultural experience. It is Jack and his espousal of contemporary society and the imperatives of history that threatens the spaces.

In narrative terms, this tension between the old and the new is very often expressed in hybrid depictions of migrant experience in which traditional conventions of storytelling interact and merge with mainstream forms. Although Waten and Lurie are
working within the generic framework of western autobiographical and fictional writing, they do so in a way which allows them to draw on their own rich traditions of Yiddish storytelling. Waten, in particular, is the Australian inheritor of a tradition that includes the Yiddish short story writers Hayyim Balik, Sholom Aleicheim, Pinchas Goldbar and Herz Bergner. Not only are Balik and Aleicheim written into the stories themselves as cultural reference points for a homesick expatriate community, as in "The Theatre", but their narrative styles serve as Waten's models. In "A Writer's Youth", Waten refers to these Yiddish writers as having a profound influence on him as he was growing up as a young Russian-Jewish émigré in Perth: "The first writer in my life was Sholem Aleichem, the great Yiddish comic writer," whose tragi-comic stories Waten remembers being acted out when he was a small boy. The importance of these stories as both reminders of a past life and as models for the future writer is clear from the mixture of anxiety and excitement with which Waten remembers the community waiting for the arrival of newspapers containing Aleichem's stories. The fact that these stories were often read out aloud by accomplished performers who used to act out the stories, "using different voices for the characters" might help to explain why Waten's own stories are theatrical and rhetorical in style. And, if one adds to this his mother's passion for Anton Chekhov and Leo Tolstoy coupled with early indebtedness to Katharine Susannah Pritchard
then the emergence of a hybrid mixture of Yiddish tragi-comedy and western genre seems inevitable. In Alien Son, for instance, the 'artless' realism of autobiographical story combines with the anecdotal orality and ritual symbolism of Yiddish folktale to produce a form that employs the old to tell stories about the new.

This combination of western and traditional forms pulls the reader in two directions. The personal voice of the child-protagonist which is a dominant feature of western autobiography draws us into a series of identifications with the lives of the characters. However, the archetypal nature of the folktale as a form serves to distance the reader from personal identification. The anonymity of the protagonists - we never discover the names of the family - coupled with a tragi-comic and uneasy ironic gap between the child-protagonist and the narrator forces us to recognise that these stories are representative. Since we are made aware of the mechanisms that construct the fiction we are, by inference, made more aware of the social and historical forces that have produced the 'subjects' or characters that concentrate the meaning of the stories. And, since the genre of the folktale tends towards allegory or symbolic representation, it is the community and its problems that take centre stage not the individual self. These strategies keep us focused on the wider, cultural theme of a Yiddish community forced to leave Russia after the 1905 uprising. The attempt to find a new homeland not only repeats the Jewish story of the Diaspora but also adds
another dimension to the myth of Australia as a "paradis-perdu".\textsuperscript{14}

In a sense, each story is a modern folktale in which the tensions that drive the life of this Russian émigré family are dramatised through the shifting perspectives of the boy's narration. The interplay of the innocent child-protagonist and the anonymous, distant narrator provides a voice which allows us to participate in the action whilst remaining critically detached. The choice of the boy as a narrator places the reader in an ambiguous position. Since he is both part of and yet separate from the traditional values that shape and determine the lives of his parents, we both share and feel detached from his ambivalent status as a bewildered but involved onlooker. The resulting ironic interplay of perspectives prevents sentimentality and nostalgia, since we are never allowed to fully empathise with any of the characters. Instead we share the boy's confusion as, on the one hand, he tries to make sense of the old world his parents still belong to and, on the other hand, tries to come to terms with the demands of the new world. He feels as effectively shut out of the "old country" as Morris Lurie feels shut out of "Leben", the spirit of his mother's secret and passionate past.\textsuperscript{15}

This interplay of perspectives which is reflected in the overlapping styles of narration, helps us to focus our attention on the difficulties involved in adapting to a perplexing set of new and alien conditions. The sense of a displaced community attempting to survive in a remote and foreign land is perfectly
illustrated in “The Mother”, when the father, on hearing that Australia is the mother's choice for a new start, remarks:

Why have you picked on Australia and not Tibet, for example?...There isn't much difference between the two lands. Both are on the other side of the moon. (p.177).

One of the central dramas in Alien Son is the conflict between the way the father attempts to adjust to the new society and the way the mother is dedicated to preserving traditional Yiddish culture at all costs. In “To a Country Town”, the father, having failed in the city, decides to move to the country to make his fortune since "The possession of money...would compensate us for the trials of living in a strange land."(p.1). The mother is bitterly opposed to the scheme and even though she was instrumental in choosing Australia as a new home, she shows no enthusiasm for her adopted country:

This was no country for us. She saw nothing but sorrow ahead. We should lose everything we possessed; our customs, our traditions; we should be swallowed up in this strange, foreign land.(p.1).

She is a figure who belongs both to the particular world of the émigré and the folklore world of the traditional Jewish story. She is the same self-sacrificing figure that shadows Lurie’s portrayal of his mother in Whole Life. Both women symbolise and embody the sorrow and pain of a tribe whose central historical experience has been exile and homelessness:
Her sallow face was serious...and her dark-brown eyes troubled. For as long as I can remember she had always looked as if she expected nothing but sorrow and hardship from life. I somehow imagined that Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, must have looked just like my mother, with her long black hair combed back above her hollow cheeks, deep-set eyes and high forehead. (p.2).

This reworking of a modern story through a traditional form reveals the extent to which the narrator's world is determined and shaped by cultural conditions beyond his control. The mother and her ambitions for the children in the strange land, a modern Babylon, belong to a story that has been told many times, and in many other adopted countries: "We were to serve our oppressed people. I was to be another David and my sister a modern Esther." (p.2).

With their lives and culture and traditions on their backs the family set out for a new life in an ironic imitation of the exiled Jewish community wandering the wilderness in search of a homeland. Their ultimate failure in this gloomy and claustrophobic landscape, which at times feels more Russian than Australian, rehearses the failure inherent in both the Australian myth of the lost paradise and the ancient Jewish myth of the Diaspora. Although, on arrival in the town, the boy, unlike his mother, tries to adjust to the new surroundings, his efforts are met with either indifference or mockery. Nevertheless, he tags on to a group of town boys who devote much of their time to harassing and taunting Hirsch, a local Jewish merchant. In a
fascinating reversal, the child-narrator, who is desperate to be accepted by his peers, becomes implicated in the very persecution that he has already fallen victim to. When the old merchant, after chasing the town boys away from his house, recognises the narrator as Jewish, it is not hard to understand why the boy feels distinctly uncomfortable as if "he had caught me out."(p.8).

For the mother, however, Hirsch is a reassuring reminder of potential community in an alien land: "Perhaps this place is after all not the end of everything."(p.8). If community, in the context of this Jewish folk tale, involves the sharing of sad stories about loss and homelessness, then the story of Hirsch's flight from Russia and his subsequent desire to find his way out of the wilderness into the promised land of his birthright is an archetypal celebration of Jewish identity:

He had come a long, hard way and his dearest wish was to be buried in the Holy Land. All his family had gone to Palestine after the death of his wife, and he was going to join them there soon, he hoped, with his younger son.(p.10).

In this context, Australia is depicted as an alien and alienating place, "a very hard, foreign and inhospitable land"(p.11), a Babylon in which Hirsch stands for the wandering and dispersed Jewish nation that is separated from the homeland and the family. The narrator's mother uses Hirsch and his circumstances to reinforce her own determination to remain faithful to the past. She regards Hirsch as a kind of tribal hero, a
model for her children, a model of the sort of Jewish value that
has kept the culture alive:

He belonged to our imperishable people. Surrounded by foes
who frequently desired our blood, our people had always
triumphed in the end through courage and devotion.(p.16).

The appearance of another Russian émigré, Mr. Osipov
provides a third articulation of the homelessness trope. Although
a non-Jew, Osipov is like a mirror in whom the mother can see her
own situation and her own dreams and yearnings reflected. Like
her, he is an exile from Czarist Russia, and like her he looks
forward "to the day when he could leave for the homeland."(p.17).
She sees in him, both the persecution she suffered when she was
at home and the idealism that inspired her as a young woman,
before she was forced into exile.

However, this small, tight-knit community of the displaced
represents a brief moment of cultural integration in the
continuing history of the Jewish Diaspora. During the course of a
party in which there is a strong sense of hope and renewal, it is
revealed that Hirsch's son, the boy who is going to take his father
home to the Holy Land, has died. The effect is immediate: Hirsch
is destroyed and the community disperses. Drawn suddenly
together by mutual sorrow, the community is just as suddenly
dispersed by further sorrows. It is left to the mother to make the
connection between these particular stories and the great sweep
of Jewish cultural history: "This is the end of our
community....Comes the first puff of wind and it blows away. How can we build on shifting sands?"(p.21).

In "Mother", the obsession with the past as an idealised and fixed poetic space to which the alienated migrant can retreat is closely associated with the need to preserve identities that are essential for survival in the new land. Whilst the father is seen by the narrator as part of "everyday things", of time and change, the mother is seen as "apart and other-worldly and different"(p.169) and as belonging to the static immemorialised spaces of the past. The new country and the present are impermanent: she is always in a state of readiness for the return:

Our house always looked as if we had just moved in or were about to move out. An impermanent and impatient spirit dwelt within our walls; Father called it living on one leg like a bird.(p.170).

The past that she belongs to is structured and legitimised by story. Out of her own past and out of the family trunks, she plucks stories that confirm the value and traditions of the old world. Story is the only permanent feature of her nomadic and archetypal readiness for flight. It is her means of passing on the precious culture of the idealised past to her exiled children. And, thus, story becomes the prime mode of education and of acculturation, carrying the drives, hopes, fears, anxieties and values of the exiled community. Through the mother the children are immersed in the stories of Tolstoy, Gorki and Sholom
Aleichem, acculturated through the epic tales of the heroes of the 1905 revolution and educated through stories and poems about "Jewish liberators from Moses until the present day". (p.171).

But by far the most important narrative in this celebration of traditional value is the mother's own story. It is a representative story which reflects the values, fears and ambitions that motivate the whole culture. Born into a world dominated by grinding poverty and brutal pogroms, she is like a prisoner in her own land. She grows up illiterate and deprived having "never seen a tree, a flower, or a bird." (p.172). Orphaned at fifteen, self-educated and idealistic, her brief career as a nurse is cut short by the 1905 Revolution. Although escape from the pogroms promises safety, it is only a temporary solution. Almost as soon as she arrives in Australia she takes a dislike to the new society, refuses to adapt and immediately resolves to return home:

Mother never lost this hostile and ironical attitude to the new land. She would have nothing of the country; she would not even learn the language. (p.179).

Instead of adapting to the new conditions she turns to her children and inculcates them with the values of the past by telling them stories that celebrate the sort of ideals that guided her when she was young. The alien son realises that she will never change because "her vision was too much obscured by passionate dreams of the past for her to see any hope in the
present, in the new land." (p.185). Although we are left feeling that such intractability is one of the reasons why the anonymous narrator feels like an alien son, the underlying ambiguity of the narrative voice complicates the reading. The mixture of affection and ironic distance with which the narrator paints the portrait of his mother prevents the story from becoming either sentimental or nostalgic. The central focus is not the autonomous self but the contradictory historical and cultural forces that have given rise to a text that is the result of the clash of two cultures.

The melding of traditional and modern forms, within which new meanings and possibilities can be negotiated, reflects the central dilemma underpinning migrant experience. If both generic and cultural assimilation means the loss of distinct identity then the obstinate refusal to adapt to any social practices including narrative forms, creates a fortress mentality which can lead to a further sense of alienation. The refusal of the mother to learn the new language is symbolic of her determination to remain culturally intact: she will not give up the purity of her past. It is this exclusivity in the face of a threatening culture that produces the contradictions that drives the conflicts in each story. The narrator is caught between his mother's denial of Australia, on the one hand, and her celebration of traditional value, on the other. As a result, he is doubly exiled: he can never truly belong to either culture.

The ambiguity that underpins the narration of Waten's
stories is well illustrated in "Black Girl", where there is an uneasy tension between the role of the narrator as guilty voyeur and as sympathetic observer. In this story, the boy witnesses the persecution and abuse of an Aboriginal girl whose Jewish name - Samuels - represents a neat melding of Aboriginal and Jewish experience. Although both the Jewish and the Aboriginal families suffer similar deprivations - both have been displaced and both have been dispersed - the Samuels do seem to be at the very bottom of the pile. Their fate, of course, like all Aboriginal people, is made worse by virtue of the fact that they are exiles in their own land. Not only do the Samuels have no status within the migrant ghetto but they are also victims in a system that turns persecuted minorities against each other.

One of the interesting features of these stories is that whilst we see the evidence of displacement and prejudice, we rarely see the perpetrators. In "Black Girl", however, the invisible enemy has a face: it is the brutal, and racist face of Mr Johnson who hates the Samuels, not simply because they are, to use his words, "stinking, thieving abos"(p.138) but also because he sees "something mocking and menacing in the carefree gaiety of the black children."(p.134). In the case of Lily Samuels, the fifteen-year-old-daughter, his prejudice is compounded by prurience:

No girl as young as Lily should be left in charge of such a wild brood, and besides he knew what black girls of fifteen or so were like. They were frivolous or worse. They could
not be trusted. (p.134).

Although it is clear where the boy-narrator's sympathies lie, the narrative perspective becomes complicated by his personal involvement in the action. When the narrator, at Lily's request, agrees to play with the black children, it is clear that the narrator is much more interested in the way Lily's pink blouse "tightly embraced her breasts and slender shoulders" (p.136) than in the children's games. Indeed, it is this guilty sexual interest which drives the narrator's curiosity when Lily later decides to accompany three white youths - one of whom is Johnson's eldest son, Bert - into the local park: "I was seized by a strange, unholy curiosity and I followed them at a discreet distance." (p.144).

Suddenly the sympathetic observer whose narration, up to this point, has involved his readers as moral arbiters in a conflict between racism and innocence becomes implicated in the guilt as he, the child, becomes the voyeur. Although he is not part of the attempted rape that takes place in the park, he is implicated in the crime by virtue of his stance as curious onlooker. This reversal of role in which the traditional victim becomes part of the crime by virtue of his role as witness, is a further reflection on the confusion that underpins the figure of the alienated émigré attempting to find a place in the strange country.

This reversal raises the question of authorial and narrative stance. The traditional Yiddish storyteller, irrespective of the subject material, should be secure in the knowledge that his
voice, however ironic, would have the authority of the community to give it legitimacy. Waten's child-narrator lacks this legitimacy, not only because he is a child but because he occupies a confused, claustrophobic and threatening half-world between cultures. Waten's hybrid mixture of Yiddish and western storytelling reflects the uncertain position of the migrant in relationship to mainstream culture. How Waten's fictive self, the child-narrator, positions himself in relationship to the reader is a question that reflects the central dilemma of the migrant. Powerless like a child and caught between conflicting cultural forces, the narrator lives in an anonymous and shifting world of fear and uncertainty in which even self-knowledge is a dark and threatening experience.

The closure of the story reinforces the shifting and complicating perspectives of the narration. It would seem that the guilt of the watcher is often harder to bear than the guilt of the persecutor. Either way, it is the boy's Jewish birthright and destiny to feel both guilty and estranged:

A frightening silence descended on the park. The shrunken moon had sailed high into the sky. Round me the trees stood like rigid sentries, their lips sealed. A feeling of mingled guilt and shame swept through me. Not only were Bert Johnson and Tommy Jamieson to blame, but in some way I too. (p.146).

This hybrid approach to storytelling can also be found in Morris Lurie's more obviously autobiographical story Whole Life.
The existence of folktale elements, the energetic orality, the ironic interplay of emotional and detached narrative voices, the self-pity, the histrionics, the insights into migrant Jewish culture, the theatricality, the stychomythic rhythms of emotional intensity and the self-consciousness all contribute to a story of self that dramatises the dilemmas and traumas of Jewish migrant culture through its impact on the inner life of the narrator. If one adds to this array of styles the more contemporary voice of the patient in therapy, then Morris Lurie's book can be described as a painfully self-conscious, bitterly ironic, hybrid of Yiddish folktale and autobiographical theatre. Lurie's book also belongs to that Jewish tradition of metaphysical absurdity, self-deprecating pathos and exquisitely painful self-consciousness that informs that other psychoanalytical tract, Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*.

Although the psychoanalyst's couch seems to be the setting for the narration, there is a clear sense in which Lurie is also centrally concerned with the metafictive implications of storytelling, with how this particular story of self is delivered as story. As a result, the book is as much about the process of storytelling itself as it is about trauma. Since each of the narrative forms he employs (folktale, confession, anecdote, autobiographical story, psychoanalytical realism) carries value systems that are conservatively reinforced in their closures, disruptions of the genre through metafictive techniques or
juxtapositions of form draw attention to the mechanisms that set
the fiction and the narrated self in motion. This metafictiveness
prevents that easy and comfortable identification with the
protagonist that limits our awareness of the cultural and generic
factors that produce the life.

The constant shifts of voice, style and genre which
characterise Whole Life set up a framework in which each of the
value systems are exposed to criticism. Even when the voice
seems at its most personal, the artistry behind the stabbing
rhythms of the emotional outbursts should alert us to a
controlling consciousness that is fully aware of the social and
political implications of narrative discourse. The protagonist's
ambivalent status as a child trapped between two cultures is
conceived in terms of clashes between ways of telling stories.

Perhaps the most important genre that Lurie exploits in his
autobiography is the Jewish folktale. The parable of the
exemplary servant mother who sacrifices everything, including
her own life, to provide sustenance and security for her family
provides Lurie with a traditional and ironic framework within
which to tell his own personal and tragic story. The story of the
mother belongs to a culture that has coped with exclusion and
displacement for centuries by exploiting a narrative tradition
that universalises suffering by telling stories about despair and
yearning, exile and homecoming. The depersonalised style of
Lurie's version of the parable - the characters have no names - is
underscored by his constant use of the third person to describe himself: he is always known as "the boy".

However, the control that this detached style offers the narrator is consistently undermined by an intensely personal and highly emotional narrative stance which suddenly and irrationally bursts through the impersonal restraints of the folktale. It is this highly personal and confessional voice which allows Lurie to theatricalise his own deep sense of alienation by turning the traditional tale of woe into a modern fable about cultural dislocation. This personal fable about suffering and loss can be seen as both a modern reworking of the Diaspora and a unique articulation of the more recent myth of Australia as a lost paradise. The irreconcilable clash between conjunction and severance, between paradise and hell, between love and loss are all contained within the one fable:

There once was a family with a miraculous servant. Heavensent, a worker of magic, there was nothing impossible for her, there was nothing she couldn't do. Returning from the markets, say, to the house cold and dark, she had only to step inside for everything to be in an instant transformed. Her presence was sufficient....One foot in the door and straight away the whole house sprung alive, ablaze with light, inviting and warm. (p.1).

In this particular version of the folktale the mother is the heart and hearth of the family, an exemplary Jewish mother who is smart, dauntless, open-hearted, self-sacrificing, shrewd, scrupulous, fastidious, tireless, alert and loved by everybody, “a
treasure. A jewel."(p.5). But, in spite of the family's love for the exemplary mother, she is exploited and used up until, exhausted by years of hard work and selfless toil, she is "summoned" and "called away"(p.6). The whole family is so stunned by their loss that they are unable to function; this is especially the case with the father, whose decline into deep depression is sudden and complete. The narrator - dispossessed and alienated - is left to grieve alone, a son cut off from paradise.

It is at this point that Lurie's folktale suddenly lurches into a personal and griefstricken curse. The impersonal mask of the bard is stripped away to reveal the anguished face of the other narrator, the son who has never really come to terms with the loss of his mother. The bitter and despairing conclusion to the folktale catches the reader out: there is no soft and predictable closure here. The reader is stunned by the sheer ferocity and raw immediacy of the narrator's pain. The sudden shift from impersonal folktale to anguished curse shocks us into the appalling enormity of the loss:

And twenty years later on...the son whose story this is, this hard history, in hopeless depression, awash with tears, driving to see the psychiatrist...this son curses the servant and her husband the slob, rails against their dumbness, their blindness, their unfeeling stupidity, and in his black rage all he can think to do - and would have done if there had been the slightest point...is to drive to the cemetery where they are buried and piss on their graves.(p.9).

What follows is a piece of psychoanalytical "realism" which
charts the development of the alienated self as it searches the mirrors of the past for the lost and unattainable world of innocence and wholeness which the mother represents and which will give the present a meaning. Whilst the remembering helps the narrator to reconstruct the present, it inevitably brings in its wake overpowering feelings of guilt and shame since the narrator knows that he is part of the process which destroyed the treasure. There is a clear sense in which the narrator feels that he is personally responsible for his own mother's death and that this autobiography - his confession - is a kind of exorcism. If "Kids are in a state of grace," then the narrator is in hell. And whilst it is primarily the irresistible and tyrannical onslaught of "The Law" in the form of the father and zaydeh (the grandfather) that is responsible for alienating the child, it is the loss of the mother, which reinforces the narrator's sense of alienation and exclusion.

The yearned for integration with the mother is also the source of the narrator's deepest feelings of alienation, since the harder the narrator searches for the harmonious ideal the more he feels shut out by the fact of her death. The mother is the lost paradise, that illusory world of self-reflection that bares such a strong resemblance to Jacques Lacan's notion of the "stade du miroir". She is the narrator's narcissistic urge to reintegrate with an ideal image of self, an integration which only seems to lead to further feelings of alienation since the symbol of
reintegration is always, except in the poetic spaces of the past, missing.\textsuperscript{17}

Of particular relevance here is Gaston Bachelard's notion of the poetic space of the "Motionless Childhood" where the memories of first houses can be read as topographical blueprints for the integrated and poetic self, without which "man would be a dispersed being," never able to "abide" within himself.\textsuperscript{18} Within this context, Lurie's memory of his first house is a blueprint that, in spite of his mother's presence, has little to do with integration or wholeness. A close examination of the spaces reveals an irreconcilable clash between the pain of exclusion and a yearning for inclusion that informs both his personal story and the story of the wider migrant community.

The nomadic and unsettled nature of the family's early life in Australia is symbolised by the fact that the first houses are rented: they do not belong, in any real sense, to the family. This is particularly significant for the mother who believes that ownership bestows membership: the family will never truly belong in this new land unless they own a part of it. Ironically, it is this obsession with ownership that causes her downfall. Having saved the family from the Nazi threat and having worked herself to the bone to buy a house the family can call their own, she dies of exhaustion.

The first house that Lurie remembers is a small, semi-detached "mirror image" of their neighbours' house, a house which
is occupied by "pleasant, ordinary, well behaved, decent suburban people" (p.14) who keep their garden fastidiously neat. However, this archetypally "white" suburban Australian couple's neighbourliness does not extend to inviting Jewish children into a house whose position in the street seems to reinforce the writer's sense of exclusion: "They got the sunlight. We didn't." (p.15). The interior of the Luries' house provides a further symbol for the narrator's claustrophobic sense of imprisonment. Although the kitchen belongs to the warmth and possibility of his mother, the house as a whole is a cramped tight space with dark and threatening passages. It is also a place that represents the mother's ultimate émigré nightmare - insecurity, penury, eviction and homelessness:

If you rented, you had nothing. You were beholden, indebted. Worse. At any moment you could be evicted, made homeless, without a second's notice flung naked into the street. (p.17).

The mother's dream of the new house spawns in the fevered imagination of her son an even more revealing émigré nightmare. Instead of Bachelard's poetic space of coherence and integration, we have a metaphor in which houses can never become homes, in which the individual feels like a stranger even in the midst of his own family. In one dream, the boy comes home from school to the old place only to discover that the name on the letters in the letterbox belongs to someone else, that the name is not his. On entering the house he discovers that, in spite of the invitation
that the open door offers, everything feels strange and alien:

The front door stood open, but when I started down the passage I saw strangers inside, people I had never seen before, people I didn't know, and I would wake confused, not knowing where I was to go, where I belonged, where I really lived. (p.18).

This personal sense of alienation is reinforced by the oppressiveness of the Jewish émigré culture to which the boy is exposed. The first indication of the force of this culture is the existence of an "inescapable" house that the narrator himself can not remember but which stands for the bedrock of Jewish traditional culture that dominates his early years. The house belongs to the synagogue, to the yidden, to the Jewish community and is rented out to the family under a special arrangement. It is a house that defines the writer's cultural heritage and which symbolises the tyrannies that constitute his traditional Jewish upbringing. It is associated with everything that defines him as different and alien: the synagogue, the Hebrew school, and the mentor grandfather whose task it is to inculcate the boy with Jewish traditional values.

It is at this point that the narrator introduces a theme which explores the whole notion of autobiographical story as anodyne. The theme is first introduced when the narrator recalls an aunt who supplies him with information about the family before he was born. Although she shakes her head and talks of the past as terrible, the narrator can see that it is a place that
promises protection from the very horrors it preserves:

Terrible, those days, she says, unbelievable. Her eyes quiver. She shakes her head. But she loves the past. She loves to go there. The past is always beautiful. It is safe now. It is the past.(p.23).

If one of the functions of memory is to convert the flux of experience into understandable and manageable patterns of meaning, perhaps it is not surprising to discover memory translating what was once painful into comforting and comfortable story. The characters, the plots, the imagery and themes all work together to provide a safe and secure structure for experiences that might otherwise be unbearable or meaningless. The aunt loves the past because it cannot hurt her anymore and provides her with an identity and coherence that her present life lacks. For Lurie, however, stories about the past and about his mother, in particular, have lethal implications. Although, at one point, he claims that his autobiography is merely a story, and that “stories are safe”(p.180), the more he rekindles the memory of his mother, the more he seems to be torn from the ideal identifications that would heal the wound. He is never able to consign the loss of his mother to the comforting regions of an anaesthetised past.

Although there are warm moments in the first houses of the narrator's heart - when his father bathes him, for instance or when he is allowed to sleep in his parents' bed - the dominant
mood of the narration is cold, threatening and alienating. This sense of estrangement within the context of an underlying desire to belong is well illustrated during the bedtime rituals. Having to call his mother to help him pee into the chamber pot is a shameful and humiliating experience, yet it is an experience that brings him closer to a mother who seems to have little time to lavish affection on her son. Although the experience is comforting the benefits are short-lived. In a sudden shift of perspective in which the little boy becomes the grown man, the narrator shifts from the detached view of the third person to the immediate and raw involvement of the first. This is not a safe story: this is still happening:

And every night, every single night I would lie there and feel guilty and frightened and ashamed and try as hard as I could not to call out "Mummy! Mummy!" but it was impossible and I hated myself but I had to do it. I just had to, and every night.(p.33).

This telescopic collapsing of the past and the present, of the third and the first person, of distance and involvement, of the subject and the object results in a simultaneous feeling of conjunction and separation. Although the adult narrator is aware that in this narrative he is the "other", a character in a story, the force of the memory propels him forward into a dimension in which the past is intolerably present. The distancing effect of story by which the narrator of self can adopt the role of the "other" to tell the story of self - "Je est un autre"19 - is no
barrier against the sheer force of his need to belong, to integrate and unite with an experience that merely reinforces that sense of alienation which prompts the search for integration. It is as if the narrator has never really escaped the continuous loop of Lacan's "stade du miroir."

This feeling of exclusion from the mother is nowhere better expressed than when the narrator tries to piece together the story of his mother's early life in Poland. The same combination of folkloric and 'realistic' techniques is used to conjure up the spirit and image of a past which he yearns to call his own. It is through this invented dramatisation of his mother's past that he hopes to gain access to a mirror life that will endow him with the wholeness he lacks. Born a "Jewess in an anti-semitic country"(p.37), he imagines her life as a struggle for survival in the hardest of conditions. He turns her early life into a mythic tale replete with heroes, villains, challenges, tests and homecomings. In his hands her life becomes a tribal story of courage, determination and self-sacrifice, an archetypal Jewish tale of the Diaspora:

...it was only natural that this daughter should be chosen, that the serious, responsible, dutiful daughter should be the one sent to safety, to another continent, to another land, to the other side of the world, there to work and to quickly send back money to rescue and save them all.

It was the classic migrant situation, the classic duty of the oldest child.(p.38).

It is not difficult to detect behind this archetypal Jewish
tale the archetypal figure of the guilty son who, in spite of his devotion, can never live up to the ideal set by his mother. Although he, also, is the oldest child, he fails in almost every respect to do his duty, fails to live out the life that is expected of him.

Even his attempt to get his mother to talk about the past and share the experience with him, is met with rejection. Her assumption that he would never be able to understand the meaning of her experiences is like an expulsion from paradise:

_Leben_, my mother called it when I asked. A certain look would come into her black-circled eyes, something of joy and sadness both together, a memory, a pleasure, a pain, a glow..._Leben_, she said, Life. She made it sound like a taste, like warmth.(p.37).

This overwhelming desire of the narrator to identify with the experience, to be written into his mother's story, into her _Leben_, is blocked as she dismisses his ability to understand the essence of that lost and unattainable world. She guards the memory like a "last private treasure to be hoarded, never to be given away."(p.37). And so when she turns to her son and says, "Ah, but what would you know?" the dream mirror world of total identification is shattered as that world closes in his face like "a slammed door."(p.38). This rejection is compounded when the mother hands over the boy's upbringing to the grandfather, to zaydeh. Instead of getting the Leben he desires he gets a monster, a tyrant, a sadist, the opposite of the harmony that the essence of
his mother promises. The ferocity of the education that young Morris receives at the hands of his grandfather is a further reflection of the insecurity of a migrant culture that feels threatened by the power of the new society to destroy it value systems. The indoctrination is fierce because the culture is in exile and survival depends on the proper enforcement of ritual and cultural practice. Young Morris is a victim of this enforcement and there is little doubt that this "education", coupled with the father's brutal undermining of the boy's confidence, is one of the major causes of the older narrator's neurosis.

At the same time, it must be remembered that this story, like many of the others in Lurie's autobiography, belongs to a tradition of self-theatricality that lies at the basis of Yiddish storytelling. The repetitions, the exaggerations, the outrageously self-pitying tone all belong to a self-ironising and grotesquely comic stance that never allows zaydeh's victimisation to become sentimentalised:

I was the focus of his days.
The centre of his life.
I was the light of his eyes, the smile on his lips, the visible pulse that beat in his wrist.
I wanted him dead. (pp.42-4).

The demolition of the boy's ego at the hands of his father is also handled with a grotesque, self-dramatising irony that belongs to an oral tradition of theatrical self-deprecation: "My father wanted Tom Sawyer. He didn't want me."(p.52). The comedy
which underlies the domestic tragedy of the unwanted and brutalised child has a raw immediacy which is reinforced by the rhetorical nature of the telling. His father is a master of the art:

"Where's a broken leg?" he said. "Where's a broken arm? A real boy has fights. A real boy falls from a tree. A real boy comes home with a bloody nose."(p.52).

This tragi-comic portrait of the Jewish émigré son as alien and outsider reaches a climax when, after his father continually harangues him by calling him, "Idiot. Madman. Nothing. Shit,"(p.56) the extremity of his suffering is translated into an atavistic desire to die since nothing can be worse than this:

At night in bed, night after night, I experienced the strangest sensation, I seemed to be huge and weightless, floating out of and above my body....I could look down on the whole room, on myself far below in my bed. It was my soul, I think. I was trying to die.(p.57).

Because of the bullying and oppressive influence of the men in the household the narrator sees his development as a child in terms of denial and suppression:

I live in the shape of I don't, I can't, I'm not able, I'm not strong enough, I never have before, I never will. I know me.
This is how I am.(p.137).

Young Morris is the classic Jewish anti-hero whose failures and neurosis draw attention to the irreconcilable contradictions that lie at the basis of his acculturation. He belongs to the Jewish
tradition of the *shmule*: he is weak, effete, isolated, self-indulgent, unhappy, defeated and alienated.

When the young Morris is exposed to the tests of the community his failure is as catastrophic as it is grotesquely and self-deprecatingly comic. His education into the seminal myths of Jewish traditional life reflects both his failure as a son of the tribe and his indifference to its survival. During the preparations for his bar mitzvah - the classic rite of passage - his inability to learn the sacred stories of the community leads to further humiliations. When an inspector arrives to test the knowledge of the children, the boy's seeming ignorance of the story of the Exodus leads to his own expulsion: "'Get out!' shouts Mr. Eissen. 'I don't want you here in my class. You are expelled!'"(p.140). The tragi-comic implications of a Jewish novice being expelled because he does not know the history of his culture's four-thousand-year expulsion is a joke that heightens his own personal sense of alienation.

Although there are moments of stillness, warmth and security, each seems to be tinged with or produced by the isolation that characterises the rest of the boy's life. Even when he is luxuriating in the warmth of his bath the underlying motifs of isolation and exclusion are never far from the surface:

I sit down carefully so my knees don't get wet....I look at them. They are two islands, the only land in the whole wide ocean, in the whole world. I am a castaway. I am a prisoner. I am shipwrecked sailor with only a tiny island to live on.(p.62).
As his knees sink beneath the still surface of the bath water, and he loses himself in the comfort of non-existence, the "perfect stillness in the unmoving bath" is shattered by the "slob father" who shames him out of his reverie and slaps him back into the humiliating reality of not being a "real boy." It is only when he climbs into the womblike warmth of his bed, his "magic cave", his "biggest fort" that he really feels safe and secure.(pp.64-5).

The tension between the harmonious promise of the Mother/Subject and the alienating force of the Father/Law often results in the narrator retreating into safety zones that promise harmony only to reinforce exclusion. The Oedipal intensity with which the boy longs to lose himself in the escapist world of the radio serial as he lies huddled in the forbidden warmth of his parents' bed is a perfect example of the boy's need for an ideal identification that is always qualified by dislocation and disappointment. Although the privilege of lying in the parents' bed has been bestowed by the mother, and although the bed is warm and comforting, he still feels like a "sneak, a usurper, a traitor, a spy".(p.77).

This contradiction is further developed in a scene in which the young Morris watches his father shaving. The intensity with which the narrator insists on the reader witnessing the event - "I want you to watch"(p.90) - not only reinforces the symbolic importance of the event in the boy's developing consciousness but
reminds the reader that one of the narrative worlds that informs this book is psychoanalytical realism. The older narrator is in therapy: these are the incidents that help the reader understand the neurosis. The scene seems to have all the hallmarks of a Freudian or Lacanian narrative. The mirror through which the boy watches his father - face masked in white - wield the sharp razor, is no ordinary mirror. It is the narrative mirror of the fixed, immemorial past of Bachelard's poetic space:

O but treasure this moment, preserve it, have it, hold it forever, stretch it out like a golden wire on and on, this endless quivering golden moment, how the bathroom glows with the heat of water and soap and the father's hot body, the electric smell of it, the life, the beating pulse, but still, caught, not a movement, not a sound, poised before the brilliant glass. (pp.91-2).

This is the idealised space of the immemorial where time is frozen and the poetry of space determines the symbolic meaning of the "whole life". But then, the narrator undermines the potential harmony and stillness by introducing a threat which is symbolised by the blade of the razor as it slices through the soap on the father's face. Not only does the blade image reinforce the brutality of the sculpturing and cutting that underlies the shaping of the young life but it also hints at images of emasculation. If one adds to this, the image of the knife as a central component in the mother's slow and painful death then the blade becomes a dark and disturbing force in the boy's consciousness. The Oedipal implications of the razor image are reinforced when the father
inadvertently cuts himself. Although the resulting blood becomes a source of fear for the boy, it takes on the significance of a test of strength for the man. For the father the blood is "nothing" (p. 92): it becomes a boast, a challenge. To the son, the blood is part of a psycho-mythic fantasy which symbolises both the repulsion he feels for the father and the obsessive need he has for his mother.

The closure of the book crystallises all the major themes and motifs of the story by centring on the deaths of the grandfather, the mother and the father. Rather like a carefully structured novel, the denouement involves the recapitulation and resolution of themes and narrative styles that lie at the centre of the discourse. As Frank Kermode suggests, in The Sense of an Ending, we search for closures to make sense of our experience because our self-conscious and meaningful lives belong to the 'middest'. Since we can never know or experience our beginnings and our ends we strive, through story, to shape experience into patterns that turn the flux of life into poetry:

Men, like poets, rush 'into the middest', in media res, when they are born: they also die in mediis rebus, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems.20

Because life does not seem to behave like story - there are no discreet beginnings and endings - we seek to fictionalise our lives by structuring them into completed narratives. This
fictionalising of the individual life may help to account for the popularity of autobiography as a genre. As readers we can live our lives through the story-like "whole life" of the protagonist in a way that is denied us during the course of our own complex and arbitrary lives. This is why being sutured into the illusory wholeness of the narrated life is so pleasurable. At the same time, in heteroglossic texts where metafictive techniques undermine simple catharsis, closure in death can reveal interesting and disturbing insights into the fractures that occur when contradictory historical and cultural forces clash. Many of the impossible pressures which have produced the developing Morris in Whole Life are foregrounded in the way he deals with the deaths of his grandfather, mother and father.

Not only does death (in tragedy), like marriage (in comedy), provide a conventional means of closing the narrative, it also concentrates the attention of the reader on the complex of related and often incompatible motifs that draws the reader into the text. Closure stabilises the narrative so that only certain favoured discourses prevail. The reader, to use Steven Cohan's words, "gains pleasure through identification, the content-ment of meaning" because "he/she assents to being narrated as a desiring subject with an investment in the symbolic order that is regulated by the narration." As a result, closure, by finally arresting all movement, fixes the reader as a "gendered and classed subject of the discourse."
This would be acceptable if the complex of narrative styles all pointed in the same generic direction. However, in books where the genre is constantly undermined by other genres or by irony or by metafictive disruptions, the closures are far less comfortable and comforting. And because heteroglossic texts, like Whole Life, foreground the mechanisms of their own generic and cultural production, the illusion of the integrated self is never allowed to eclipse the political, social and historical focus. Instead of resolving into catharsis, the deaths create disruptions that highlight the dislocation of the subject. As the narrator ironically retreats into adolescent fantasy at the end of the book, it is clear that nothing has been resolved.

When zaydeh dies the boy feels relief and then feels nothing: "I really didn't care."(p.177). But the event does give the older narrator an opportunity to tell a further story, a story that typifies many of the difficulties facing the émigré Jew attempting to settle in a new land. Furthermore, "because stories are safe, because stories are sound, and because stories make the world go round"(p.177), the pain he still feels as a result of his grandfather's campaign of discipline can safely be contained within the innocuous shape of another perspective. If one tells the story from another viewpoint then the experience that prompts the story may seem less painful.

The narrator invents a version of his grandfather's return to Israel which reworks many of the themes which underpin the
entire book. Because there is no room in the new house, the exile returns to the promised land where many years ago he abandoned his wife so that he could live with his son in Australia. As the narrator switches perspective and invents the story from his grandparents' viewpoint, we have a further variation on the theme of separation and dislocation, a theme which ironically reflects back on the narrator's situation. On his return to the promised land, zaydeh is rejected by the long-suffering wife: she doesn't need anyone and she doesn't want him. The subsequent depositing of the grandfather in an old people's home and the "invented" justifications of the children as they discuss his incarceration foreshadow the guilty behaviour of the narrator when he has to face the death of his mother. The death of the grandfather in the home, as he wills himself to death out of sheer unhappiness, is an uneasy reminder of the little boy's suicide fantasy as he lies wretchedly unhappy in bed after a day of bullying from his father. The overriding irony is that the harder the narrator tries to cope with his distress by reinventing the past the more the inventions cause him pain. Stories are not safe at all: stories are lethal.

The narrator deals with the death of the mother by resorting to a whole array of narrative techniques each designed to distance the narrator from the event. He begins with "A MEMORY NOT MY OWN"(p.183) which rehearses the folkloric dimensions of the mother figure he constructed in the opening chapter. From the safety of the detached and anonymous folk mask he can reproduce
a character who belongs to the Jewish tradition of the dutiful and self-sacrificing daughter. By adopting this stance - "AT HER OWN DAUGHTER'S ENGAGEMENT SHE COLLAPSED"(p.184) - he can momentarily distance himself from the actual moment of her imminent death.

But the self-restraint disappears as another form of storytelling takes over and shocks the reader out of complacency. By first drawing on the persistent motif of the knife - "And then my mother, to employ the cruellest but most correct imagery, went under the knife"(p.187) - the narrator then adopts the persona of the anguished son. Resorting once more to the ritualistic stychomythia of short stabbing outbursts, the narrator forces us into an almost claustrophobic apprehension of his grief. This sudden and raw outburst of theatricality in the midst of folkloric distancing not only heightens the emotional impact but also reinforces the narrator's overwhelming sense of cultural dislocation and isolation. He is truly an alien son, guilt-ridden and angry:

Fuck them! Fuck us! Fuck us for our stupidity and murderousness and fear! For our viciousness for our childishness for our ignorance for our horror of love! - was to slice her, was to hack her, as to rend her down to shadows, to bruises, to thin bones....(p.187).

The intensity of the guilt and grief reaches an ironic and self-destructive climax when the protagonist, in spite of accusations of being "A Hitler, a Nazi!"(p.193) decides to leave
home before his mother dies. The mother who saved the whole family from the threat of a Hitler is abandoned by a son who out of spite, revenge, guilt and self-hate behaves like one. He leaves because he can never belong to her. Her death is his exile, his alienated Jewish inheritance:

For daring to die. 
For daring to leave me alone in this world. 
To punish her. 
To punish her for all these things. 
To punish myself. 
I went.(p.193).

The father's death rehearses the bullying insensitivity of a patriarch who has spent his life cutting into the fragile ego of the growing boy. Although we are left with a strong impression of the power of the father's knives to hack into the boy's consciousness, there is a softening of tone in the description of the father's decline after the mother's death. Just for a moment it would seem that the telling of the story really has the power to ease, qualify and moderate the pain. By constructing a narrative that confronts the anguish and rehearses the cruelty of the father's behaviour he seems able to nullify, however briefly, the devastating effects of his influence:

I don't know what happened to them, where they are, if they even exist any more, those beautiful dangerous clumsy knives he would never use, never let me touch, except here they are, they suddenly are, inside me, my head, my heart, my father's knives at last made flawless, immaculate, safe.(p.201).
The narrator's attempt to distance the death of his mother through the safety of story is less successful. Narrative time collapses into 'writing time' as he draws the reader into the awful immediacy of the memory. The visit to the graveyard is, of course, a rehearsal of his own immediate pain:

It is raining, of course.
I am crying, of course.

The cemetery is mine.

The damn pen hardly works on the sodden page, but I make it, I force it.(pp.208-10).

With the final fictive barrier down between writer and reader we, as reading subjects, are converted into confidants, guilty children, disappointed parents, witnesses, therapists and greedy voyeurs:

Do you have it now? Do you see? Do you know? Do you understand how it was?
What more can I show you?
What more can you require to see?(p.211)

It is as if the reader is being constructed as judge and jury in a court case in which the accused - the narrator - is inevitably guilty and must be condemned to infinite repetition. No sooner has the exorcism been completed, the private crime uncovered and the confession been heard than the guilty protagonist must start all over again.
Although the book seems to end on a positive note as the narrator includes the reader in a fantasy about his parents coming to watch him playing in a jazz band, this "ebullient" conclusion in which he is accepted, loved and appreciated merely adds to the intensity of the exclusion and alienation which this story embodies. The fantasy belongs to the unattainable dream of conjunction and harmony which underpins a wider belief in the possibility of promised lands. The second-generation Jew reels from one set of myths about exile into an isolation which merely serves to reinforce that heritage. The narrator may seem to reject zaydeh and his father but his story is as much a part of the Diaspora as his mother's triumphant escape from Nazi Germany.

Both Whole Life and Alien Son are migrant stories in which the palimpsest of autobiography provides a means of writing within a mainstream genre without compromising the integrity of traditional forms. Because autobiography, like the novel, is flexible and potentially heteroglossic, it can absorb and preserve the traditional whilst providing a platform for the conflicts that result from the clash of new and old cultures. This combination of Yiddish and western forms gives the Yiddish voice an Australian dialect and the Australian voice a Yiddish heritage. And it is this mutually affective integration of traditional and modern voice that invites the reader to consider the central questions that underpin the migrant situation. What are my stories? Where have my stories come from? Who owns my stories? And who has the
authority to tell those stories? These are seminal questions that focus on the central dilemma of the émigré: Where do I belong? Where is my home? What is my birthright? Both texts do much to explore the full impact of these questions and in doing so, not only reveal the pain of those who have lived and who are still living out their own particular exiles but also to a contradiction which lies deep within the collective unconscious of the wider culture. “Whether this is Jerusalem or Babylon we know not,”23 is a question that highlights an ambiguity which is central to an understanding of the national geo-mythic space.

Although autobiography continues to be a predominantly Anglo-Celtic discourse,24 there is little doubt that the form is becoming an effective medium for the tensions and conflicts that characterise the secret lives of the marginalised, displaced, oppressed and disenfranchised. As John Colmer puts it:

In the near future, autobiography may become the major form for all those writers who are intent on discovering their cultural roots and who feel that they are in some sense outsiders.25

Within this context, migrant story can be seen as belonging to an emerging tradition of oppositional storytelling which both reflects and enacts a politics of self-reflexivity essential to the development of a heterogeneous and multifaceted society.
CHAPTER SEVEN

LA MAISON ONIRIQUE

At the beginning of Wild Card, Dorothy Hewett describes the first house of childhood as sitting "in the hollow of the heart", a mythical space of promise and enchantment that "will never go away."¹ This invented space is, to borrow Gaston Bachelard's phrase, "une maison onirique, une maison du souvenir-songe,"² the dream house of the self where imagination and memory merge to create the "land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are."³ According to Bachelard, this invented house of memory in which the constructed individual can learn to "abide" within him or herself, is the birth place of our sense of self, a geo-mythic hall of mirrors in which the diverse and many faceted selves which constitute our lives can be harmonised into a single integrated whole. And yet, although these poetic spaces seem to celebrate a yearning for pre-social childhoods and the undivided self, in effect, they owe their potency to cultural practices that play a central role in the construction of the social self.

The pursuit of the unique "I" through the palimpsest of autobiography can be seen as a prime means by which society promotes ideologies, transmits its norms and maintains conformity. In Althusserian terms, the encouragement of individuals to (mis)recognise themselves as free and autonomous beings is central to an understanding of the process by which
social structures are perpetuated. Although self-reflexivity represents a conscious negotiation between diverse and often conflicting subjectivities, it also permits the expression of unconscious motifs through the integrating and fictionalising process of memory.

It is for this reason, that the fixed spaces of the past can be seen as a prime acculturating force in the formation of the social self. When autobiographers look back on their pasts for evidence of uniqueness and integration, they are, in fact, taking part in an interactive process whereby the social complexities of the decentred self are elided into the natural and child-like simplicities of the unitary life. This process of acculturation through the articulation of individual story is so "natural" that very often the autobiographer only sees his/her own image in the mirror of the past and fails to recognise the forces that have produced both the social self and the medium of reflection.

It is my belief that autobiographies which centre on the dream houses of childhood provide a language for exploring origins and identities which is as relevant to the wider culture as it is to the individual story. Because the dream house of childhood is a topographical blueprint which helps the reader to understand those forces and influences which have shaped the individual life, the dismantling of these fictive houses should provide interesting insights into those discourses which are most concerned with cultural identity and provenance.
The process by which the nascent and formative spaces of childhood are mythologised into psychic maps that reveal the inner workings of the culture is a process that lies at the very basis of David Malouf's concerns as a writer. In "A First Place: The Mapping of a World", he uses his own childhood in Brisbane as a model to show "how the elements of a place and our inner lives cross and illuminate one another" and how our interpretations of space form the basis of "our first maps of reality." He maintains that it is this process of mythologising space that helps us find our way into the wider world outside the inner securities of the house. This first place, he says, "constitutes your fortune, your fate, and is your only entry into the world." (p.261).

The outside/inside dichotomy which is so deeply embedded in Australian national mythology is central to an understanding of Malouf's individual map. His description of the architecture and shape of Brisbane as combining "solidity" and "insubstantiality"(p.264) reflects a duality in which the artist's insecurity becomes emblematic of a wider cultural sense of confusion and dislocation. The artist lives at the edge of a city (dominated by a European centre) that sits on the edge of a continent that is situated at the edge of the world. It is the sort of map that, with its constant oscillation between margins and centres, belonging and exclusion, is guaranteed to disorient rather than guide the new recruit.

The duality that underpins Malouf's image of the city is to
be found, in a microcosmic form, in the way he describes the
topography of the typical Brisbane house. Although the interiors
are secret and closed off, these timber structures are like tree
houses, alive, natural and vital and, because they have no doors,
are "unsealable" and open to the influences of the outside world.
Even the enclosed centres, "where privacy is maintained", seem
open "to the air, to the elements."(p.265). Their architecture is a
perfect blueprint for the contradictory pull between the
claustrophobia of conjunction and the agoraphobia of separation,
a pull that underpins the white European myth of the lost
paradise.

This contradiction lies at the basis of Malouf's description
of the verandah, a physical paradigm for the creative ambiguity of
the fortunate exile. Although the verandah belongs to the centre it
seems to have a life of its own. A verandah is, like European
constructions of Australia, a littoral place, "an intermediary
space between the house proper, which is itself only half closed
in, and the world outside." Verandahs have an independent
existence with "their own conventions" whose function is to make
the "too-open interior seem closed" and "therefore safe and
protected." The young learn to develop a keen sense of what is
"inside and safe and what is out there on the edge": the verandah
is "a boundary area, domestic but exposed."(pp.265-6). The
inside/outside imagery that defines the house, the life and the
culture is interwoven into a configuration that seems to
celebrate the contradictions.

The downstairs area under the house has a cosmology which contrasts sharply with the open and secure spaces of the upstairs floor. This "archaeological site" (p.266) is an enclosed, sinister and dangerous space. And, although it is a wild place of exploration, freedom and inhibition, it is also a place of guilt and secrets, a place to hide things. Its contrast with the upper world of the house is a further variation on the theme of inside/outside, centre/margin that informs Malouf's depiction of Australian cultural and historical life. For Malouf, "A landscape and its houses" are a "way of life...a way of experiencing and mapping the world" (p.267), and since these topographies are the product of inherited coordinates they might also provide a guide to those cultural discourses that set the coordinates in motion.

When we consider white Australian dream houses as a whole, the overall picture does not always indicate a secure and warm beginning. In many cases, the first houses are not dream houses at all but nightmare houses, haunted or empty houses. And even when there appears to be some warmth and security at the centre of the house - usually in the kitchen - the possibility of harmony and unity is constantly undercut by feelings of alienation and estrangement. Dorothy Hewett's dream house is a fragile house of cards in which "the small clean enclosed space of filtered light" is always under threat by the constant fear of collapse. Indeed when "she tries to build a second storey...it only
holds for an instant" before toppling "into ruin." For Patrick White, home is a strange, alien, and at times foreign place in which he feels like "a stranger in (his) own country, even in (his) own family." Morris Lurie's first house is a place of fear and shame and even when his mother achieves her own personal dream of owning her own house, the dream is shattered by her imminent death. Lurie's dream house is his mother's sense of "Leben" from which he feels totally excluded. Although Ruby Langford has fond memories of her "belongin' place", the mission at Bonalbo, it is her family that she feels strongly about, not the place itself. While Hal Porter, whose first house promises so much in terms of warmth and security, is not only an outsider in his own home, 'a watcher on the cast-iron balcony', but is also, like Lurie, witness to the loss of paradise in the form of his dead mother.

Although it is possible to argue that separation and alienation are characteristic elements in the depiction of childhood in western literature, white Australian autobiographical story does seem to be dominated by failure and death. It is as if the rhythm of alienation and harmony which characterises Jacques Lacan's "stade du miroir" is never resolved and that the failure to find the unattainable child in the treasure house of the past leads to further and yet more distressing failures. To a large extent, the tension between identification and separation, home and exile is deeply reflective of wider sense of historical exclusion: each particular private
story is a palimpsest of personal and cultural narratives of exile which interact and interweave within the structure of the text.

When we turn to 12, Edmondstone Street, the sense of pain and exclusion that characterises a good deal of white Australian autobiographical story, although less extreme, is nevertheless firmly inscribed into the dream house. The tension between "severance and conjunction" is built on a series of oppositions between mother and father, subject and object, self and other, Australia and Europe, margins and centres - oppositions which define the life of the white culture through the life of the child.

Malouf begins his autobiography by recognising the fictive nature of the genre. 12, Edmondstone Street, as he describes the house in the book is a fabrication, a "trick of memory". It is a combination of two houses that allows Malouf to shut out the renovations which destroyed the ideal weatherboard house that contains the dream blueprint of his life. Memory allows him to become reunited with a notion of the child-self as complete and undivided. The suppression of insignificant factual detail allows him, he explains, to "keep my larger memory whole." (p.11). As a result, his first house can remain, like himself, "undivided", a symbol of the wholeness and harmony that attends the remembrance of first houses:

...it is this whole house I want to go back to and explore, rediscovering room by room, what it was I first learned there...what kind of reality I had been born into, that body of myths, beliefs, loyalties, anxieties, affections that shapes a life, and whose outline we enter and outgrow.(p.12).
One of the central tensions that characterises the topography of 12, Edmondstone Street is the problem of origin and cultural identity. Like Waten and Lurie, there is a sense in which, in spite of his mother's influence, Malouf is caught between two cultures. Although the house embodies the mother's Anglo-Australian values, Malouf's yearning to get closer to his father suggests a strong desire to make contact with his Lebanese heritage. Malouf's sense of being an outsider is closely connected with this feeling of belonging to neither culture, of being on the edge of one and shut out altogether from the other by language.

This feeling of exclusion is reflected in the way he views his grandfather. Unlike zaydeh in Whole Life, Malouf's portrait of his grandfather is affectionate and respectful: the old man stands for the traditional culture Malouf admires but from which he will always be excluded. As the grandfather, "the exiled ruler of a minor kingdom"(p.6), holds court amongst his fellow Lebanese expatriates, the boy is entranced by the storytelling rituals that characterise these meetings. Yet, the boy is excluded from both the stories and the grandfather because he does not know the language: "he remained unknowable since I could not speak to him; close even companionable when he called me to dig, but a mystery."(p.5).

The notion of the grandfather as the archetypal migrant who "has never quite migrated" is the central theme of Malouf's poem,
“Early Discoveries”. He is a figure whose fierce loyalty to the old country, its customs, rivalries and values is reflected in the way he maintains his garden. Although he is living in Australia, his garden is really, "a valley in Lebanon" in which "you can smell the cedars of his flesh/and the blood of massacres, the crescent flashing through ravines/to slice through half a family." Although the poem is about the grandfather and his uncompromising love for a culture he cannot relinquish, quite clearly the old man's confusion and insecurity - "the weather in his head is upside down" - is metonymic of the poet's own sense of disorientation: "Where am I? This is Brisbane, our back yard." Within the context of the mother's Anglo-Australian home the aristocratic grandfather is a "stranger, dark, moustachioed,/ un-Englished", a reminder of the poet's own separateness and difference.

The sense of the child-artist being shut out of half of his life by silence or strangeness is reinforced when Malouf considers his father. Although, the father completely adapts to the ways of the new country - playing football for the state, speaking English, marrying an English girl - he remains a constant and intriguing mystery to the boy. The inner workings of the father's mind as he takes on the responsibilities of carving out a new life for his family are the subject of mere speculation. Since the father never expresses or shows his feelings and never teaches the boy his language, Malouf feels that he has been denied a whole world of cultural and personal definition.
"The Kyogle Line" reminiscence is a perfect illustration of this sense of being shut out of the centres of family life. The topography of the family house in Queensland sets up both the tone and the theme of the story: "We lived in a strip of no-man's-land between two rail lines." (p.125). This littoral existence and its nomadic and marginal implications give the rail journey a wider cultural significance. The rail journey south across the border is a journey across frontiers and edges which holds so much possibility for the boy but which ends in disappointment and failure. He is "hungry" for some "proof that the world was as varied as I wanted it to be" (p.127) but discovers, in the flatness and sameness of the landscape, an ordinariness that undermines his excitement. The edges are both fascinating and tedious, strange and yet disappointingly familiar. This ambiguity is further developed when the train stops at Coff's Harbour and the boy joins his father for a walk on the platform. The boy's sense of being both inside and outside the family, of being both inside and outside the experience, is reflected in his relationship with both his parents:

In some ways the most different thing of all was to be taking a walk like this with my father. We were shy of one another. He had always worked long hours, and like most children in those days I spent my time on the edge of my mother's world, always half-excluded but half-involved as well. My father's world was foreign to me. (pp.128-9).

Instead of providing an opportunity for identification and
empathy, the walk along the platform simply increases the boy's sense of isolation. The gap between father and son is mirrored in the emptiness and isolation the boy feels when the crowd jeer at three Japanese prisoners who are being held in a truck. The ugliness of the crowd's behaviour alerts the boy to his own essential loneliness in the "vast gaps of darkness" (p.131) that characterise white Australian notions of the Australian landscape and mirror his own sense of separation.

It is a separation that is concerned with provenance, history and identity. The narrator owns a story about his family which binds him to and yet excludes him from its essential meanings. It is a story about a grandfather who fled a homeland that "had no existence except in the mind of a few patriots" (p.132) and who, despite enormous hardships, including the threat of expulsion, succeeded in starting a new life in a new world. And yet, in spite of the telling of these inherited stories which, by celebrating the values of the family, should bind the storyteller more closely to the clan, he continues to feel irretrievably excluded. It is as if the barriers between father and son - culture, language, history - are too immense to overcome:

It was just another of the things he kept to himself and buried. Like the language. He must, I understood later, have grown up speaking Arabic as well as he spoke Australian; his parents spoke little else. But I never heard him utter a single word of it or give any indication that he understood. It went on as a whole layer of his experience, of his understanding and feeling for things, of alternative being, that could never be expressed. (p.133).
The topography of 12, Edmondstone Street reflects this adult difficulty in coming to terms with the exclusion from the centres and certainties of family life. It is through the antiphonal rhythm of desired homecomings and continued exclusions that the personal life of the individual autobiographer becomes, in one sense, a paradigmatic representation of his culture's wider sense of uncertainty about origins.

The first major area to be explored is the verandah which, of all the areas in the house, best symbolises that inside/outside tension which underpins Malouf's cultural and aesthetic stance. Neither open nor locked, neither inside nor outside, the verandah is the prime site for social intercourse with the outside world. The Front Room - "a dead room" (p.48) - is too formal, and the kitchen is too personal but the Front Verandah is the middle ground, somewhere on the edge where visitors are entertained and where travellers "appear and show their wares." (p.14).

Although the place is safe and secure, occasional visitations from the outside world disturb the peace and, at the same time, alert the boy to the fact that there is an outside world that operates very differently from the value systems represented by the house. The pregnant "stranger", who collapses in the street and lies recovering on the verandah, represents an intrusion which threatens the good governance of the house. Her smoking, swearing and filthy appearance undermines the
"invisible barrier" that separates the strange world of outsiders from the relative security of the Front Verandah.

Not only does the verandah represent "an invisible barrier beyond which we children are forbidden to pass"(p.17), but it also provides a way back to the warm and safe areas of the inner house. The Front Verandah leads on to Cassie's room and Cassie's verandah. The boy's attraction to the maid, Cassie, hinges on her ambiguous position in the house. Although she is "my mother's confidante" and seems to belong to the family, she comes from "outside" and occupies a room that is strictly off limits to the children. Ever the explorer, the young Malouf crosses the forbidden barrier into Cassie's room and in a ritual strongly reminiscent of a primitive or infantile empathic ceremony sits down, opens a jar of Pond's cold cream and since she is "associated in my mind with things to eat"(p.19), proceeds to eat her smell.

The verandah is a place that stands like a littoral strip between inner warmth and the darker world outside. When the children are placed outside at night to sleep, the boy feels as if he is being "put down at the edge of a rainforest."(p.19). The garden at night is a frightening and threatening place: the grotto reminds him of a "half-petrified, half-rotting...stranded sea monster" and the fernery is a scary, primordial non-place where he "will get time-lost" and "turn back into some smooth or hairy green thing with dirt in my fists."(p.19). In spite of the
reassuring embraces of his parents the boy interprets his expulsion to the verandah as "being abandoned, shut out, not only from the continuing life of the house...but from the house itself, that secure enclosure." (p.20).

Malouf's verandah belongs to a tradition of imagery that is closely linked with the geo-mythic spatialisations that constitute a European notion of Australia:

Verandahs are no-man's land, border zones that keep contact with the house and its activities on one face but are open on the other to the street, the night and all the vast, unknown areas beyond. (p.20).

When he recalls the experience of being taken out at night to sleep and then allowed back in again in the morning, he is recalling a ritual that lies deep within the structure of white Australian myths of national identity. Malouf's dream-nightmare house is also white Australia's dream-nightmare house: the "paradis-perdu" of a culture searching for a lost home. But it is an exile that prompts the quester to search even harder for the lost domain, searching the mirror spaces of childhood for that special moment when what has been taken away will be given back, when the harmony and wholeness which identification with the subject promises is recovered and the divided self is made whole once more:

Perhaps it is this daily experience of being cast out and then let in again that has made the house and all its rooms so precious to me. Each morning I step across the threshold and there it is, a world recovered, restored. (p.21).
This embrace of the mythical edge as a place of creative exile is a dominant feature of Malouf's work and is central to his interest in mythic Australia as the embodiment of possibilities that can only be achieved at the margins. In the poem Sheer Edge, Malouf depicts Australia as an experience that lies "at the edge/of darkness where all floors sink to abyss...the furthest promontory/and exit sheer fall." Yet, it is this moment of insecurity when "words slide off, and hands/catching fail to hold", that becomes the moment of creativity, "the moment of touching, the poem."12 The importance of the edge for Malouf is effectively summed up by Martin Leer when he describes Malouf's edge as the place, "where things happen, where sudden discoveries illuminate hidden memories, where revelations and metamorphoses occur."13

When we turn to the inner recesses of Malouf's dream house, we are introduced to the prime socialising space in which the young Malouf is shaped. The parents' bedroom, which is another ambiguous space, is a silent blueprint of their lives and their values. Apart from being overpoweringly claustrophobic, it is a place that symbolises the conflicting influences of the Anglo-Australian mother and the Catholic-Lebanese father on the growing boy. The Sacred Heart which shines in the bedroom is a source of deep resentment as the non-Catholic mother tries to fight off the influences of a family that still exercises enormous
control over her husband. The struggle is so intense that neither
feel as if they truly belong to the place: it is occupied by other
people with other histories:

So my mother's room was both hers and not hers. Nor was it
my father's. They might, in their different ways, have felt
the same trepidation on entering it, the same sense of bold
trespass, that we children did. It was already too fully
occupied.(p.26).

It is clear from the way Malouf tells the story of Our
Burglar that he strongly identifies with the intruder as,
"undismayed by the Sorrowful Watcher and impervious...to the
magic of thresholds"(p.26), he enters his parents' room and
burgles it. This sense of identification with the stranger, with
the "other", becomes even more obvious when the boy fantasises
about being the burglar's accomplice. It seems that it is only in
the guise of the intruder, that he can get to the centre of a house
that for him, both as a little boy and as a grown man, will always
remain a mystery. The trope of the doppelganger burglar is a
perfect illustration of the deep desire to reunite with the strange
other and so make contact with the whole self.

The twin jardinieres that stand on the piano are a further
expression of the ambiguity and doubleness that characterise the
mythic space of the growing child. Both jardinieres belong to the
timeless space of Bachelard's "maison onirique" in which endless
afternoons become "so densely packed with experience and events
that time appears viscous."(p.39). However, it is the left-hand
jardiniere that holds the greater fascination for the boy because "it is the general repository for the half-lost, half-found, the useless-for-the-time-being-but-not quite-rejected, and all those bits and pieces, and odd things and marvels that have no formal category."(p.40). It is a mirror symbol of the "other" which represents the possibility of conjunction within separation, of unity within disunity, of the undivided within the divided: it is a crystallisation of all the contradictions that underpin Malouf's personal, cultural and mythic vision:

The spirit of accidental separation hovers over the jardiniere, but in so far as it is itself part of a pair, it speaks for completeness, for final restitution.(p.41).

The twin jardinieres mirror a further doppelganger, a mirror image which manifests itself in the boy's secret, invisible friend, "a lost twin of my own."(p.42). The older man clings to the image of the jardiniere because it is a symbol of his need to reunite with the other boy, the lost twin. In a neat reversal, Malouf makes us fully aware of the paradoxical nature of his quest for self. The problem of identity becomes critical: who is the self and who is the "other", who is the subject and who is the object are questions central to the conundrum of autobiographical discourse:

As a smaller child than I am now I had an invisible friend, a lost twin of my own. I cling to the jardiniere in the belief that one day we too may be united: that he (or is it I?) will be found.(p.42).
The space under the house, which contrasts strongly with the dead Front Room, where nothing happens, belongs to a primordial space-time continuum of its own and is closely associated with the underside of consciousness, with the non-intellectual, non-rational world of the imagination. It is both expansive and claustrophobic, familiar and frightening, liberating and restricting, definite and infinite. It is a place measured by bodies, "in heartbeats"(p.46), rather than by social space or time. It is a world subject to its own rules and conventions where clocks and language have no meaning. It is a pre-linguistic, asocial, "dream space, dark, full of terrors", but is also full of "the freedom and mystery of a time before houses."(p.47).

This mythic space of ambiguities, of old and new, of inside and outside, "where there is no awareness of space or time"(p.47), is the pre-rational wilderness beyond Tomis in An Imaginary Life or the dark primordial forests that surround the white community in Remembering Babylon. It is a psychic and cultural edge where wild children, like Gemmy and the Child, inhabit an instinctive world of transcendent possibility. There are gifts from the wilderness to the half-world of daylight rational "reality", offering the possibility of wholeness and completion in the silences of pre-social nature:

In bed at night, at the very edge of sleep, you feel that there may after all be a balance to things: that the underdark outside matches now, but perfectly, the dark within....(p.47).
The triumph of the under world over its daylight counterpart or opposite, the fusty and dead Front Room, is a triumph of body over intellect, of imagination over reason. This triumph is dramatised in the boy’s persistent need to leave piles of excrement in the cold corners of the room. This ritual which extends to other symbolically significant areas in the house is described as blessing the house with gifts from the body. This rebellious and atavistic behaviour is his way of laying claim to the space and appeasing the ghosts. It is a practice closely associated with the burglar, with intrusion, with the attempt on the part of the stranger to turn the cold room into a home and to gain access to what the Front Room denies, "the forbidden garden of delights." (p.53).

The attempt by the body to defeat the claustrophobic and deadening effects of the rational and archaic Front Room represents an attempt on the part of the adult to gain access to the spiritual possibilities of the child as a Romantic symbol of transcendent value. The growing body may get "cramps and growing-pains...but at certain intangible contacts, it soars till it might be angelic, gifted with unique, undeniable powers - of flight, of change, of eternal instant being." (p.54). Initially, however, Malouf seems to recognise the impossibility of reoccupying the preferable and idealised spaces of childhood:

What moving back into it would demand would be a kind of dying, a casting off, one by one, of all the tissues of perception, conscious or not, through which our very notion
of body has been remade.(p.64).

Exploration of the dream house seems to offer a means of both confronting and understanding the passing of time. It is as if the imaginative reconstruction of the poetic spaces of the past can lead the quester forward into the future:

...memory, in leading us back, has turned us about. It has drawn us through room after room towards a past body, an experience of the world that cannot be entered, only to confront us with a future body that can.(p.66).

And yet, although Malouf sees the blueprints of the past as maps for the future, the final words of the text suggest a search for the child that denies the operation of history. The transcendent child-self prevails: it is a "creature stranger than any sheep-child," who, though "shyly emergent", is "eager already to explore the universe." It is a mode of perception in which the imagination, "a third eye for seeing colours the rainbow missed," for "sighting new horizons"(p.65), is made flesh in the figure of the child, a literary figure strongly reminiscent of the child in Wordworth's "Ode: Intimations on Immortality".

The idealised space of childhood, as it is expressed in Malouf's dream house, is, in the final analysis, concerned with transcendent silence: "Our actual body is the wall our fingertips come to. We have only to dare one last little blaze of magic to pass through."

(p.66). This is precisely the same gesture that underpins Ovid's attempt to achieve union with the wild child in
An Imaginary Life: "I am growing bodiless. I am turning into the landscape. I feel myself sway and ripple. I feel myself expand upwards toward the blue of the sky." 14

12, Edmondstone Street is a historically prescribed palimpsest in which complex and sometimes contradictory messages are expressed through the blueprint of the first house. Although Malouf is referring to his own body and to his own invented house, the guided tour of the individual dream house is, in effect, a guided tour of those interactive discourses which have helped to form him as the inheritor of European notions of what it is to be Australian. The binary oppositions that characterise the writer's ambiguous relationship with the life and architecture of his first house embodies the ambiguities which underpin the essentially Romantic European myth of Australia. The tension between the outer reaches and the secure centres, between the raw nature of Australia suggested by the space under the house, the civilisation of Europe collected in the Front Room, and the creative disruptions of exile to be found in the Front Verandah all contribute to an overarching mythology in which exclusion and separation are seen as precursors to renewal.

There is little doubt that Malouf sees himself forging new mythologies that recognise the margins which define Australian independence but which, at the same time, draw on the centres from which the new culture has emerged. Malouf sees himself as "translating" rather than "transporting" these European traditions
into the Australian context.\textsuperscript{15} His recognition of the generic and cultural power of forms without which his work, life and culture would be meaningless, is counterbalanced by a refusal to become a mere cipher for those forms.

However, in order to assert his independence as an Australian rather than as a second-hand European poet, the writer has to find a symbolic framework that marks him off as distinctly Australian. Malouf, like a number of other Australian writers who have chosen autobiography as a substitute for tradition, turns to his own personal story to construct mythologies which give him access to the mainsprings of his culture's life. The perceived lack of a sustaining body of independent myth or culture which can provide plots and themes which are relevant to local experience forces the writer back onto himself, onto his "unique" autobiographical experience.

On closer inspection, however, this synthesis of European translation and personal mythology can be seen as a further articulation of the dream that drives the European myth of Australia, the notion of the new land as transcendent space, as operating outside history. When Malouf sees Australia as a marginal place of exile where new homes and centres can be formed out of the creative rupture of homelessness, he is participating in a nationalistic discourse which defines identity in terms of marginality and exclusion. The new culture is consigned to an exile which can only be alleviated by
transcendency, a utopian dream inherited from the mother culture which defines nationhood in terms of exclusion from the dynamics of history.

Although on one level, Malouf's autobiographical stories are about outsiders, searching for new languages by which they can make sense of this new hard world, they are also, on another level, mainstream narratives which retell European stories, using European forms in a Europeanised landscape. Perhaps Johnno and An Imaginary Life can be best understood as autobiographical stories about the exiled Australian artist struggling to find a new language in "A place where poetry could never occur" only to be thrown back onto strategies which merely reinforce membership of the great European tradition. As Geoffrey Dutton puts it, in his discussion of An Imaginary Life:

Perhaps the whole book is...given an added edge by the suspicion that Malouf may be writing a kind of autobiography...of the poet of the European tradition exiled in barbarous Australia. Though Australians as a whole are determined to make a virtue of not going beyond the limits, the mysteries of Australia itself, and its strange unknown gods remain. Malouf's Ovid painfully realises that here in exile is his true fate, "the one I spent my whole life trying to escape...here is your second chance." The Child is the guide.

The image of the child in An Imaginary Life is Malouf's search for Rousseau and Wordsworth in the Australian "emptiness". It is his translation of the Romantic tradition into a context that creates a viable and sustaining language for the
European poet in a landscape that seems to lack any form of tradition to which the European can relate. Ovid, like Malouf, is a civilised exile who is forced to abandon the deadening, sterile centres of civilisation, to get "closer to the raw life and unity of things...to the first principle of creation."(p.65).

Ovid's search for his doppelganger, for the wild child, with whom union promises aesthetic and psychic wholeness, begins in the half-world of a Virgilian landscape. In the civilised peace of a pastoral eclogue, the young Ovid is "playing under the olives at the edge of our farm" where "Bees shift among the herbs", and where "the goatherd is dozing against an olive bole."(p.9). It is in this landscape of civilised nature, that the young Ovid first communicates with the invisible twin, the wild child. Their relationship and their secret language represents a hint of the ideal life that union between the mature poet and his childlike self promises.

The Virgilian eclogue very quickly gives way to Gothic fantasy as the inner child of the innocent self is translated into a wolf boy, some wild unsocialised entity located beyond manicured nature in the dark recesses of the wilderness, where harmony and renewal can be achieved by embracing emptiness. Although Ovid misses the sustaining comforts of civilisation, the fact that "we are at the ends of the earth...centuries from the notion of an orchard or a garden"(p.15) means that the overcultured exile can come to grips with his inner self by exploring "the very edge of
things where Nothing begins." (p.27).

In many respects, this desire to be made whole through the dark disassembling force of the Gothic wilderness is another reworking of the trauma of separation that characterises Jacques Lacan's notion of the "stade du miroir". The search for self in the mirror image of the wild child dramatises the dialectic between harmony and alienation that accompanies the child's desire to identify with the image of the "other". In a similar way, the mirror of the great Australian "emptiness" encourages self-contemplation, since evidence of the historical and cultural forces that have produced both the landscape and the narrating self have been erased. As a result, the Australian Narcissus is engaged in the pursuit of an infinitely regressive series of images which seem to promise harmony but which merely serve to confirm exclusion. When Ovid goes beyond language at the end of the book, what appears on the surface to be a transcendent melding of lives into a whole is, in effect, a kind of narcissistic death in which the protagonist is "Free at last, to prepare a death of my own." (p.52).

This tendency towards annihilation revolves around the search for a prelapsarian wholeness that is centred in the image of the child. If the wild child "has no notion of the otherness of the things," (p.96) then he/she is the pre-linguistic conjunction that predates Ovid's severance. According to the logic of this configuration, Ovid must learn to occupy pure space and abandon
The true language, I know now, is that speech in silence in which we first communicated, the Child and I.... We knew that language once. I spoke it in my childhood. We must discover it again.(pp.97-8).

This search beyond history and society, involves a "venturing out into a space that has no physical dimensions, and into a time that may be, in human terms, just a few minutes, that is also an eternity."(p.144). The rainbow child of Wordworth's "My Heart Leaps Up" guides Ovid back to an image of childhood that removes the narrating subject from history into a world beyond text:

He is walking on the water's light. And as I watch, he takes the first steps off it, moving slowly away now into the deepest distance, above the earth, above the water, on air.(p.152).

However, this Romantic pursuit of the undivided, pre-linguistic self is fraught with contradictions. If the experience lies beyond language, then the poet is ultimately powerless to express it. And if the solution to disharmony lies beyond society, then there can no viable way of living meaningfully within it. The championing of the Australian poet as outsider, as an inspired child searching for "Nothing" or for idealised transcendent spaces, renders white European culture as powerless to change itself as the pre-linguistic child is to change the transcendency
that defines its separation from history.

Even when Malouf turns his attention to historical settings, as in *Remembering Babylon*, the same Romantic preoccupation with the myth of the transcendent child dominates the narrative. The half-white, half-Aboriginal Gemmy is seen as the key to resolving the opposition between home (Jerusalem) and exile (Babylon). It is an opposition that is centred on the contrast between the utopian idealism of Mr. Frazer, the minister, and the complementary image of the new land as "hostile and infelicitous," a contrast reinforced by the incipient brutality and destructiveness of the white culture.

According to Frazer, Gemmy offers a model to the white community for a way of living naturally and harmoniously in the new land. Gemmy's dual role as a Dickensian child-victim and as an Aboriginal wild-child provides a hybrid link between European and Aboriginal Australian history:

This is what is intended by our coming here: to make this place too part of the world's garden, but by changing ourselves rather than it and adding thus to the richness and variety of things. Our poor friend, Gemmy is a forerunner. He is no longer a white man, or a European, whatever his birth, but a true child of the place as it will one day be....(p.132).

Gemmy is Malouf's translation of Europe into white Australian terms. The "black white man" who emerges like an instinctive firebird out of the wilderness has been translated, rather like Jack Chance in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*. 
from Europe into white Australia by the transforming force of the wilderness. Like the convict, the child-victim is a product of a brutalising and oppressive society: Willet and his excesses represent a European hell that reduces and eliminates childhood innocence and possibility. It would appear that, like Ellen Roxburgh and Jack Chance, Gemmy's heritage as part of an exploited and brutalised lower caste is seen as a necessary condition for learning to live in the new world. European culture is too English to adapt to the new conditions and too frightened of the wilderness to understand it. Gemmy is, in contrast, a symbol of the transformation that is necessary if the new culture is to survive.

From the outset the boy is connected with change and metamorphosis. Moulded and transformed by fire and water he is Caliban turned hero: a "sea-calf or spirit"(p.23) whose intimate knowledge of the Aboriginal landscape provides him with a language of place that is denied the European settlers. He is an inbetween creature living in two worlds but belonging to neither or rather, as Frazer describes him, he is a premature forerunner of a new breed who has the potential to turn the "infelicitous" Babylon into a transcendent Jerusalem.

For Jock Mclvor, Gemmy's influence leads to an intensely spiritual communion with a landscape which, up to this point, he had only seen as hostile. His sudden discovery of the beauty of a swarm of insects is like "a form of knowledge, he had broken
through to." However, since Jock lacks a language - "It was unnameable, which disturbed him"(p.107) - through which to express this growing awareness, he feels shut out of this paradise he senses is just beyond his reach.

The gesture towards an alternative natural universe, where metamorphosis is the norm and where even the obviously destructive yet seemingly fragile practices of European culture can be transformed, is reinforced by Malouf's use of the honey bee as a central motif. Jerusalem is situated in the heart of the Australian wilderness, a world of transcendent harmony that is preferable to the sterile, inappropriate and 'civilised' practices of Governor Bowen and the imported culture. Janet Mclvor sees in the swarm of bees, "another life, quite independent of their human one, but organised, purposeful, and involving so many complex rituals."(p.140). The gesture involves being "drawn into the process and mystery of things"(p.143):

If she could escape, she thought, just for a moment, out of her personal mind into their communally single one, she would know at last what it was to be an angel.(pp.140-1).

Australia as a place where a finer and more harmonious sense of living can be achieved is counterbalanced by Australia as a place of exile and suffering. Although the character of Gemmy suggests that this condition is fortunate and even essential, the sense of isolation and exclusion is also very strong. Ellen Mclvor is intensely aware, rather like Malouf, the poet, of the "fearful
loneliness of the place," of the "absence of ghosts." (p.110). It is an empty place where Ellen feels in danger of losing herself in "the immensities of the land" and where nothing can "hold you down against the vast upward expanse of your breath." (p.110). It is a place without tradition where the poet has nothing to build on, where there is no "threshold worn with the coming and going of feet."(p.110).

Although Gemmy offers a solution to this loneliness, his own isolation within the white community forces him back into the wilderness and we are left with a closure which reinforces a geo-mythic vision of European Australia that once again places it outside history in an asocial, spiritual dimension. If Frazer offers stoicism - "there might be something after all in mere endurance" (p.181) - then Janet McIvor offers transcendency and harmony. Her prayer, at the end of the novel, is a celebration of margins that promise radiance and wholeness. In this context, white Australia continues to be an otherworldly Romantic possibility, removed from history and rich in spiritual potential. Illumination, love and knowledge glow in a final epiphany in which "light, running in fast now, reaches the edges of the shore...and all the outline of the vast continent appears, in touch now with its other life."(p.200).

Malouf’s essentially Romantic solution to the problem of living on the margins involves the reconstruction of Australia as a site for achieving a harmony and wholeness that can only come
through exclusion and exile. In this configuration, the child is an outcast, an artist attempting to construct a new tradition through a mythology that 'translates' Europe into Australian conditions. It is in the extremes, in the wilderness, in exile and finally in transcendent and epiphanic dissolution that new stories will be found that define what is different about white Australian culture. How to construct a new tradition that draws on the European heritage without aping it or being submerged by it, is the problem that Malouf attempts to solve.

Unfortunately, by drawing on a Romantic European tradition that celebrates childhood, exclusion and transcendence as superior to adulthood, inclusion and involvement, the dramatisation of historical processes which activates Malouf's fictions is dispelled as he retreats into a pre-linguistic state of childhood grace. In a gesture which is reminiscent of A.D. Hope's preference for "the deserts where the prophets come", Malouf revives a European dream of Australia that converts the "waste" into "Springs" and the hell of the penal colony into the dream of a transcendent, pre-social paradise. Australia becomes Europe's final chance to reintegrate the divided self, to break down the gap between self and other, to harmonise the fragmented self and find a way back into "la maison onirique".
The tensions between the historical and the personal and between the unconsciously typical and the self-consciously unique which characterise western forms of autobiography represent a dialectic which goes to the very heart of self-reflexivity. Within this context, the autobiographical act can be read as an essentially ambivalent palimpsest in which the interplay between oppositional and compliant gestures can often reveal the multiple and contradictory discourses which define and structure national space. This dialectic is particularly noticeable when we turn our attention to Patrick White whose work can be read as antagonistic to mainstream notions of Australianness but which at the same time lies squarely within the conventions of orthodox European Romanticism.

The trope of the outcast/artist as child which characterises a good deal of White’s semi-autobiographical fiction, is part of a Romantic discourse in which alienation and antagonism become the basis for paradigms that celebrate an alternative form of national identity. Paradoxically, these antagonistic gestures can only be expressed through narrative practices which draw the oppositional artist back into centres in which the outsider is constructed as typical and representative. The isolated but prescient ascetic who struggles to produce an art that undermines "the trash and filth" of materialistic
Australia and attempts to replace it with a moral vision born out of "the desert of mortification and reward," is a figure whose ambiguous status as an outsider from a predominantly British and upper class centre is reinforced by the artist's need to work within the orthodoxies of a European tradition.

It can also be argued that the ambiguities which underpin White's status are deeply reflective of those ambiguities which complicate white notions of what it is to be Australian. Through the artistic mirror of his complex of self-inventions ("All the characters in my books are myself, but they are a kind of disguise") White tells stories in which the dilemma of the artist as a traumatised outsider searching for home and completion, can be read as representative of deeper cultural dislocations. As the alienated artist turns the mirror of fiction on the fragments of his own life, he is, in effect, rehearsing the very dramas of separation and self-construction which seem to characterise white Australian notions of national identity. White's thinly disguised autobiographical fictions can be seen as part of a collective discourse in which the artist attempts to fill "the Great Australian Emptiness" with myths which both embrace and transcend the trauma of separation. The artist, disguised as Voss, Laura Trevelyon, Stan Parker, Hurtle Duffield and all the other refracted personae that White adopts in his fiction, is expressed as "a seeing eye or recording angel," a quester, an explorer whose journey inward is a lonely and alienating experience through
which the broken and disrupted values and practices of the culture can be dramatised and exposed. Inevitably, the artist's quest leads to further feelings of alienation as Australian society, confronted by painful and unpalatable truths, fails to understand or refuses to listen to the mad visionary. As a result, the artist is left isolated and impotent, a pariah, a permanent exile.

However, within the context of the European imagination, Australia, as a poetic space, provides White with a unique aesthetic. The wasteland of spiritual decay can also be seen as a garden of lost possibility where the child/artist, after careful and often negative self-exploration, might succeed in finding the lost inland sea of transcendence. Within this context, childhood can be seen as a powerful integrating force, an "unalterable landscape" by which the fractured and fragmented self can be shaped into meaning and wholeness. As Stan Parker sits in the centre of a garden that radiates out to express an epiphany, in which "One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums," the urge towards harmony which underpins White's moral vision, is best understood as the fusion of memory and imagination in the poetic space of a mythologised Australian childhood. Renewal is expressed through the figure of Stan's grandson whose poems scribbled on "the already scribbled trees" are "shoots of green thought" which reflect a secret "greatness" essential to the continuity and fullness of life.
Growing out of his own deep sense of difference as a child, White sees the Australian landscape of his youth as a symbol of renewal and perfection: "Those early days when it was always morning. Time was endless." It is in this timeless landscape of perpetual morning that the fragmented and flawed adult reconstructs himself through memory and imagination into a whole and undivided self. In The Vivisector, for example, Hurtle Duffield's memory of the early morning drive to Mumbelong - "the streaming golden paddocks on which the sun was shining through his boyhood"(p.184) - is the inspiration which drives the mature artist to "drag the easel into relationship with the glass."(p.235).

When White admits that "my flawed self has only ever felt intensely alive in the fictions I create," it is the creative force of childhood which provides him with the framework he needs for artistic and personal completion. As he explains, in a reference to The Aunt's Story, "I was just fascinated by the idea of returning to one's origins after 'exploring' the world and finding in those origins the perfection for which one had been looking." In Flaws in the Glass, White describes this landscape as "the synthesis of living sensuality: the blaze of light," as "the paradise of my childhood and youth."(p.29). Indeed, the moral and artistic importance of childhood as "the source of creation, where perception is at its sharpest," is a clear indication of White's Romantic sensibilities. In White's moral world, as in the similarly child-oriented world of David Malouf's fiction, "The
Child is father of the Man," and the "rainbow in the sky"\textsuperscript{13} is a hint of the birth-in-death transcendence available to the responsive spirit. The concluding paragraphs of \textit{Flaws in the Glass} celebrate this heightened sense of possibility:

Early morning has always been the best time of day. In childhood, gold pouring through the slats as I got up to raid the pantry for crystalised cherries....Now when I wake the naked window is washed pale....Down in the garden, light is a glare...

If I were to stage the end I would set it on the upper terrace, not the one moment of any morning, but all that I have ever lived, splintering and coalescing, the washed pane of a false dawn...liquid calls of hidden birds, a flirt of finches, skittering of wrens, bulbuls plopping round the stone bath carved by Manoly in the early days at Castle Hill, as though in preparation for the Twyborn moment of grace.(pp.256-7).

Although this moment in the garden seems to offer a solution to the dilemma of dispossession, it is never guaranteed as a landfall for the exiled. Stan Parker's spittle or Hurtle Duffield's chandelier may offer temporary glimpses into the promised land but, as mandalas, these embodiments of spiritual perfection, like the garden of childhood, are half articulated, mysterious or never fully realised. In mythic terms, the moment of grace in the poetic space of the Australian garden remains a latent possibility rather than an established state of consciousness.

Indeed, it would seem that the tireless search for a lost world of childhood which would unite the conflicting worlds of
spirit and body, art and matter, self and other merely serves to increase the gap between exile and homecoming. The attempt to unite the ugly and diurnal with the beautiful and transcendent - as in *The Vivisector* - or to unite the finite and ordinary with the infinite and extraordinary - as in *The Tree of Man* - is doomed to failure because the notion of impossibility is structured into the equation. The song of the invented childhood is the song of the exile reeling from the pain of exclusion only to discover that the dream of renewal is always beyond reach.

As a result of this antiphonal swing between exclusion in the desert and inclusion in paradise, the drama that unfolds between the mirror of art and the garden of childhood centres on the role of the artist as a permanent outsider. The archetypal questing figure in White's fiction (women, convicts, artists, homosexuals, Aborigines, Jews) is always on the outside. Each protagonist tells a secret story which challenges and undermines mainstream ideologies and attempts to forge new myths out of white Australian experience. We are at the margins where the broken and disrupted lives of the insane, failed and outcast become the central focus for cultural discourse. Theodora's inspired insanity, Stan Parker's simple spirituality, Voss's self-destructive egotism, Laura Trevelyan's asceticism, Himmelfarb's Jewishness, Hurtle Duffield's artistic vision, Ellen Roxburgh's awakening and Jack Chance's suffering all point towards oppositional readings of Australian culture, readings which
dramatise the lives of the marginal and displaced. As David Marr puts it:

Most of his heroes are escapees, men and women who turn their backs on the lives laid down for them to follow their own paths towards their own fulfilment.\textsuperscript{14}

As with most of White's fictions, the story of the egotist/artist or outcast madman who searches for the impossible only to be destroyed by ego or thwarted by failure, has mythical and allegorical implications. Voss's journey from the city to the desert is a journey through the matrix of mythic landscapes that constitute white Australian culture, from the bucolic paradise of Rhine Towers to the blasted heath of the central desert where Voss is ceremonially decapitated. And when Ellen Gluyas embraces Jack Chance, "the convict, her saviour lover,"\textsuperscript{15} in the aboriginal wilderness, it is an embrace that represents the birth of a new version of Australian history in which the convict takes centre stage:

...she covered him with her breasts and thighs, lapping him in a passion discovered only in a country of thorns, whips, thieves, shipwreck and adulteresses....\textsuperscript{16}

It must be born in mind however, that this gesture towards the margins is not the radical rejection of mainstream culture it seems to represent. It can be argued that, as with David Malouf, White's celebration of the margins is a central part of a
predominantly conservative discourse about social inaction and exclusion. The search for the ideal self which underpins this celebration is closely bound up with the search for a way back into some form of Edenic purity that is or was pristine Australia. The integrity guaranteed by alienation and exclusion can be seen as the obverse side of an idealism that tends towards ahistorical nostalgias and retreats. The Australian misfit or outcast can be seen as a figure whose pursuit of spiritual alternatives in the depoliticised zones of an intractable nature, or an unattainable childhood places him or her outside the realm of interested action and promotes an orthodoxy that emphasises the individual’s impotence in the face of social and historical change.\textsuperscript{17}

At the same time, it should also be stressed that White’s constant disruption of mainstream generic conventions and his recognition of the existence of the fragmented and diverse self operate against the suturing and empathic tendencies of Romantic art. White's elevation of the transcendent self is counterbalanced by the alienating and distancing effect of his narrative line and technique. Although we may sympathise with the moral dilemmas that confront his protagonists, empathy is positively discouraged: we are never allowed to get too close. As a result, that suppression of the social, cultural and generic mechanisms which accompanies the production of 'realist' fiction and which promotes notions of the autonomous self, is absent from White's art. As a symbol of narrative, of the means by which the artist
converts his many faceted and flawed self into fiction, the
distorting mirror constantly reminds us of the artistic process at
work and because the poetry is in the forefront and the means of
production easily detectable, the reader is rarely drawn into the
sort of empathic suturing that suspends critical awareness.

Quite clearly, it is White's painful awareness of himself as
a self-exiled artist which helps to account for the complexity of
both his technique and his vision. In a sense, each of his novels
represents an attempt to resolve ambiguities generated by his
status as a homeless and expatriate artist. Caught between
cultures and never fully belonging anywhere, the "outcast-
initiate,"18 who is the "stranger of all time,"19 feels cut off both
from the European tradition which sustains him and the post-
colonial culture which offers him new forms of expression. Not
only does this dilemma expose tensions which lie at the very
basis of white Australian notions of homelessness, but it also
reflects contradictions which underpin White's aesthetic vision.
Although the European tradition provides him with Romantic and
transcendent ways of redefining the mythic space of Australia - a
new home can be found in the unforgiving desert - it also
encourages narratives which prevent the artist/protagonist from
achieving completion. The expatriate, longing for a landfall which
compensates for the trauma of dislocation, is a figure who, by
virtue of his status as a permanent outsider, never seems able to
achieve the object of his dreams.
In spite of these contradictions, White embraces his exile and difference as a necessary part of his destiny as an artist. Exile in the "Mirror City" of the European tradition is seen as healthy since it offers a distance from which to check the claustrophobic potential of the mother culture and at the same time allow the artist the freedom to map out new myths for the unchartered new land. Indeed, White’s exile from childhood seems to afford the artist access to higher, preferred planes of living: "All writers are exiles wherever they live and their work is a lifelong journey towards the lost land...." White’s decision to “return to the scenes of his childhood, which is after all the purest well from which the artist draws” represents a search for the lost land of childhood memory, "the source of creation, where perception is at its sharpest." In this context, The Tree of Man can be seen as the artist’s homecoming, his attempt to map out myths that will fill the void of the "Great Australian Emptiness" with alternative spiritual meanings.

White’s exile from the pure well of childhood is built on a series of oppositions and dualities which, at one and the same time, dramatise his fragmented nature and provide him with special integrative insights. According to David Marr, White always saw himself as a divided and contradictory man:

...not one man but a kaleidoscope of characters trapped in a body both blessed and cursed, proud and wracked by doubt, rich and mean, artist and housekeeper, a restless European rooted in Australian soil, a Withycombe and White, man and
woman.\textsuperscript{24}

Of all the dualities and contradictions which constitute the exiled and divided self, it is probably White's homosexuality which provides the most creative impulse for his work. "My homosexuality," admits White, "gives me all the insights that make me a great writer."\textsuperscript{25} The ambivalence, disguise and artifice that define homosexual behaviour seems central to White's aesthetic, becoming "a kind of metaphor for artistry itself."\textsuperscript{26} And it is by refracting these contradictory and everchanging dualities through the mirror world of his fiction that he attempts to find signs of harmony and perfection in the watery fluctuations of himself. It is this constant struggle between acceptance of multiplicity and flux and a deep-seated desire to find a way back to the undivided self that underpins White's artistic vision.

In this context, the mirror is a powerful symbol of the very processes that underpin the creative impulse. In \textit{The Vivisector}, for instance, the mirror is the "crystal eye" of the artist who dissects the world to see it better. With "eyes like knives"(p.107), Hurtle Duffield dissects and often destroys his subjects to find their inner beauty: he explores the scatological in an effort to discover radiance and illumination. In this sense, the mirror is a symbol of the immanence of purity and harmony in a deformed and dirty world: it represents the crystal clear yet opalescent depths of the unpredictable unconscious. Chandeliers,
crystal birds, smooth watery surfaces, empty canvases and flawed mirrors are all metaphors for the transforming power of art as it plunges into the mysteries of the unconscious to draw out shapes and forms that give order to an otherwise mad world. The refracting mirror of art which "distort(s) appearances to arrive at truth" (p.229), is the creative medium through which Hurtle Duffield attempts to both see and transform the world.

The strange and lonely world of the artist caught in the reflection of his own watery and flawed fluctuations is, of course, the central image that permeates White's self-portrait, Flaws in the Glass. If the image of the garden reflected in "the great gilded mirror, all blotches and dimples and ripples" (p.1), hints at the possibility of regaining the lost world of childhood, then the mirror itself represents the process of art as the artist converts "the cast of contradictory characters of which I am composed" (p.20) into fiction. The protean and shifting kaleidoscope of fragments that make up the self belongs to the non-rational world of the unconscious, to the melding of imagination and "the opalescent shallows of childhood." 27 Out of the shimmering pool of imagination and childhood memory, the artist allows his unconscious self to be refracted through the contradictory facets of his personality and reformed into fiction. The shapes that emerge from childhood memory are "patterns on water" (p.70), symbolic mandalas ordering the chaotic into art and non-rational meaning.
Nowhere in Flaws in the Glass is this artistic process better illustrated than in White's recollection of the appearance of the Mad Woman in the garden. As a figure she belongs to that half-world of watery fluctuations, surfaces and depths that defines the creative frontier between the daylight reality of memory and the darkness of illusion and magic. She is also associated with that mixture of fear and sexual excitement that seems to accompany the creative effort:

...I was some way involved with a world of illusion, half terror half delight, like those orgasms in a hot bath and the near ejaculations of fear which accompanied my encounters with the Mad Woman. (p.20).

Her madness, is, of course, part of her significance as a fragment of White's imagination. She is an archetypal outsider, a strange and ugly woman who is eventually thrown out of the garden of childhood by Sol, the exotic black servant. For White, she belongs to the "nether world" of the fevered imagination where the diurnal and ugly are transformed into "the illusion referred to as art." (p.20). By day she is "insignificant" but as dusk falls she turns into "dreams and waking fantasies", and becomes the very stuff of art.

As Sol struggles with the drunken Mad Woman in the midst of Guelder roses in White's magic and sensual garden, we witness the very process by which the artist draws on memory to construct his fictions. The Mad Woman is a tropological paradigm
for all the broken, mad and displaced fragments that people White's art: she is the inspirational trigger that sets off the creative imagination, all of which is experienced through the mirror of art. It is here in the space between the mirror and the garden, or rather the garden recreated through the mirror, that the excitement of creation is felt:

Sol grappled the Mad Woman in the shadow of the guelder roses, just beyond the bunya-bunya where, at another time, Mrs Bonner ordered the carriage to stop and they picked up Voss. Now Sol and the Mad Woman were wrestling and spinning in the dusk, she hissing, Sol shouting through his ragged moustache and brown stumps of teeth. Then the Mad Woman's skirt fell off. I did not see what happened after that. I ran away. I ran upstairs. I lay on my bed. The glass above the dressing-table showed me palpitating in green waves. My heart was beating, a wooden irregular time, as in another situation the hooves of Voss's calvacade drummed their way down the stairs in the same house.(p.21).

For the young White, it is these fevered moments of creative refraction which help to compensate for the loneliness that exile and exclusion have engendered.

From the outset, White sees himself as a gauche and self-conscious foreigner - "a skeleton at the Australian feast"(p.22) - whose constant searches for self in the flawed mirror at Felpham only serve to increase his sense of strangeness. Images of exclusion and imprisonment structure a narrative in which the glow of childhood fantasy is the only protection against exile. White's "four year prison sentence"(p.12) at Cheltenham, for instance, induces a fantasy which has all the hallmarks of a full-
blooded colonial romanticisation of the Australian bush:

...memory helped flesh out an English schoolboy's idyll: riding a pony bareback through girth-high tussock, stripping leeches from my body after a swim in a muddy creek, my solitary mooning through a forest of dripping sassafras towards the sound of the waterfall. (p.14).

Australia becomes an ideal and consoling country of the mind in which the displaced and unhappy boy can "still grow drunk on visions of its landscape." (p.106). As David Marr observes in Patrick White, A Life, White's exile from the garden of the mythic Australian childhood, becomes "an exile from which he would seek to return all his life," an illusory, nostalgic homecoming that could only be achieved through art since, as Marr points out, "there is no voyage home except in memory and imagination."  

This dialectic between strangeness and the promise of childhood or poetic landscapes is built into the very structure of the self-portrait. The bucolic, garden images of Mt. Wilson, "the paradise of my childhood" (p.29), "my spiritual territory" (p.16) meld with lyric images of the Monaro landscape in which White luxuriates in the sensuality of his own nature. Even as a schoolboy at Tudor House he recalls feeling the full force of "the country as a synthesis of living sensuality: a blaze of light...". (p.27).

And yet, White's return to the scenes of childhood after his exile in England only seems to increase his sense of alienation:
I was alarmed at first, then permanently unhappy, to return home and find myself a stranger in my own country, even in my own family. (p.46).

The "freak" who doesn't like cricket and the "changeling" who belongs to neither of the cultures he has inherited, is caught outside both, a victim of historical and cultural circumstance. And, if one adds to this White's homosexuality - "Sexual ambivalence helped drive me in on myself" - then it is not hard to see why he chooses the distorting and integrating mirror of art to introduce to a "disbelieving audience the cast of contradictory characters of which I am composed." (p.20). The painful but creative dichotomy that underpins the contradictory nature of his sexual ambivalence is the necessary condition that provides the artist with a focus for the connection between alienation, art and the protean shifting self:

I recognised the freedom being conferred on me to range through every variation of the human mind, to play so many roles in so many contradictory envelopes of flesh. (p.35).

Not only does homosexuality offer the artist a catholic insight into human nature, an empathy with difference and contradiction, it also offers the artist a paradigm for the divided self. The search for completion and harmony is closely bound up with the search for the twin, the other half, the completed mandala which will give shape to the chaotic life:

I did not question the darkness in my dichotomy, though I
had already begun the painful search for the twin who might bring a softer light to bear on my bleakly illuminated darkness. (p.35).

Although White's personal search for the twin is secured when he meets "Manoly Lascaris, this small Greek of immense moral strength, who became the central mandala in my life's hitherto messy design" (p.100), his artistic search for the ideal twin, for the harmony of opposites that will reconcile "the great Accursed One - and the Supreme Knower," remains unresolved except in special moments of grace or silence.

White's glance into the mirror is a glance into the unconscious past where half-formed images and fragments lie waiting to be transformed into consciously created fictions. This process is driven by a "sensual, emotional, instinctive" (p.81) and sometimes destructive urge through which "unfulfilled and half-forgotten lusts explode" (p.46) into creative energy. It is a process by which the mysteries of self, the demands of truth, the pain of self-destruction and a yearning for the ideal silences of transcendency can be given full expression:

How to be explicit about a grandeur too overwhelming to express, a daily wrestling match with an opponent whose limbs never become material, a struggle from which the sweat and blood are scattered on the pages of anything the serious writer writes? A belief contained less in what is said than in silences. In patterns on water. A gust of wind. A flower opening. I hesitate to add a child, because a child can grow into a monster, a destroyer. Am I a destroyer? This face in the glass which has spent a lifetime searching for what it believes, but what can never prove to be, the truth. A face consumed by wondering whether truth can be the
worst destroyer of all. (p. 46).

The flawed individual turns to the mirror of art to resolve the contradictions, to reconcile the creator and the destroyer, the ego and the "other", the child and the monster, the male and the female and all the oppositions and dichotomies that constitute the divided self. Yet, in spite of the apparent failure of most of White's flawed protagonists to achieve the silence of transcendence, the ideal mirror world of the perfect surface remains potentially accessible, at least to the inspired few. It is a possibility graphically expressed in the Yeatsian figure of the "flawless crystal bird" that contemplates "its own reflexion in a pool of water"(p. 130), and whose aloof perfection transcends the strident passions that characterise White's divided self. It is a perfection which permeates all of White's mandalas: crystal surfaces, mirrors, glasses, chandeliers, gobs of spittle, blank canvasses and golden hens all belong to the perfected world of early morning childhood gardens.

Although most of Patrick White's novels are obliquely and poetically autobiographical, it is The Vivisector which comes closest to fictionally dramatising the preoccupations and motifs that inform White's self-portrait, Flaws in the Glass. Hurtle Duffield is perhaps White's most transparent attempt to reconcile the dichotomies that define his personal and spiritual vision. In the novel he attempts to reconcile the two Australias of his imagination - the one materialistic and the other spiritual - to
unite the finite and diurnal with the ideal and the unknown, and to resolve the tension between the artist as angel and the artist as self-destructive egotist. All these dichotomies are focused through the crystal eye of the painter whose canvas becomes a mirror through which the artist dissects matter in order to transform it into God.

Hurtle Duffield is White's attempt to mythologise the artist as the archetypal outsider struggling to reconcile his doubleness and so find a place in a culture that seems inimical to his art. The estranged figure searching for an identity in a religious experience of art that attempts to reconcile the scatological and the divine can be seen as a metonym for the individual searching for a place in a culture that offers little nourishment yet whose emptiness seems essential to the life of the artist.

Like White, Hurtle belongs to neither of the cultures he has inherited as his birthright. Born into a poor family, he is educated into the world of art by the aristocratic if materialistic Courtneys who offer the boy access to the sort of privileged existence without which the art White values, would be impossible. The dilemma of the expatriate artist is perfectly reflected in the drama that underpins Hurtle's double nature. The artist, no matter how instinctively talented, cannot flourish without Europe and yet the Australian artist, however idealistic and Romantic in temperament, must abandon the privileged life of high art for the ordinary life.
Hurtle's role as the enlightened but blighted vivisector who attempts, through his art, to bridge the gap between the spiritual and the physical, to focus his "crystal eye" on the "nerves of matter" (p.221), is complicated by his preference for ideal forms. From the very beginning, Hurtle is disgusted by the sexual and the scatological and yet, since he is determined to unite the binary worlds of light and dark, of spirit and flesh through the pure vision of his art, he is forced into a relationship with 'reality' which seems to distance him from his objectives. This contradiction is perfectly illustrated in his attempt to aestheticise "the lust-worn" Nance (p.189) and transform her through "bursts of kaleidoscopic imagery...filtered sensuously through his blood" (p.188) into art. The artistic drive may very well be instinctive and sensual but, throughout the novel, the sexual is rendered as filthy and somehow antithetical to the higher reaches of art, reaches which seem more closely connected with silence, gardens and "the streaming golden paddocks" of a childhood Mumbelong morning (p.184).

Hurtle's retreat from the city and Nance into the bush to paint the landscape is replete with the sort of mythical implications that inform most of White's fables about the outcast/artist. Living in a crude shack on a littoral strip between civilisation and the wilderness, Hurtle encounters a landscape which is both austerely sexual and primordially beautiful. Rather like the Narcissus figure in Arthur Boyd's Figure Falling,32 Hurtle
pours and wastes the seed of his creativity into the mirror world of the wilderness. Fascinated by his own 'unique' image he fails to see that it is a landscape structured by the European myth of Australia as a "paradis-perdu". The metaphorical, aesthetic and mythic implications of Hurle's bush are clear: it is A.D.Hope's "Australia" where only by embracing the hardships and tortures can the "hopeful green" of creativity emerge from the "ghostly flesh" of the land.

It is at this point that Hurle decides to paint his self-portrait and "drag the easel into relationship with the glass." As in Flaws in the Glass, the artist turns the distorting and "transcendental glass" of art in on the flawed and divided self in search of "the slow developing seed of (the) unborn twin", for the doppelganger that will make the flawed character whole. However, Hurle's attempt to control the relationship between "the necessary and the unknown" by wrestling with the "honest version of his dishonest self" drives him into a narcissistic obsession in which the paradox of the glass which lies to tell the truth becomes a troubling and distorting reflection of the artist's own idealism.

It is an idealism closely associated with the anima and "the crystal bird" of reflected perfection that perches on a table between Hurle and Hero Pavloussi, the Yeatsian "golden hen", whose "consecration" in "earth" represents the potential union of matter and spirit:
The golden hen flashed her wings: not in flight; she remained consecrated to this earth even while scurrying through illuminated light. (p.393).

This is the same "flawless crystal bird contemplating its own reflexion in a pool of water", that haunts White's recollection of conversations with his mother in Flaws in the Glass and which represents his own yearning after purity, a purity closely associated with "revelations of light" and "the unalterable landscape of childhood." (p.307). Kathy Volkov, Hurtle's "spiritual child of infinite possibilities" (p.424), is a further manifestation of the child/doppelganger that Hurtle searches for in his art. She is at the very centre of his dream of illumination because she represents the essential child inside himself: "after all there is only one child: the one you still carry inside." (p.405).

And yet, even Kathy's possibility as an image of ultimate radiance and understanding is undermined by persistent images of profanity and deformity. Rhoda's hunchback and the disturbing image of the Japanese man "in whom an actual child was found growing" (p.408) are mirror images in which the search for "the unborn twin" is blighted by the material side of human nature. Rhoda's physical deformity, in particular, can be seen as the grotesque underside of the purity Hurtle searches for in Kathy's reflection of himself, a search that draws all the contradictory images together in an overarching image of the inner child:

There was one drawing in which all the women he had ever loved were joined by umbilical cords to the navel of the
same enormous child. One cord, which had withered apart, shuddered like lightning where the break occurred; yet it was the broken cord which seemed to be charging the great tumorous, sprawling child with infernal and miraculous life.(p.519).

Although it seems to be the broken cord, the deformed child, and the distorting mirror which open up the artist to the illumination and radiance of art, Hurtle's final vision is couched in a nonsense language that shuts the reader out from the ideal world he has been seeking to articulate. If "silence" is the "loudest affirmation of all"(p.221), then Hurtle can be said to have succeeded; but if integration of the self and the "other", the spirit and the world, within the harmonising realm of art, is the purpose of the exercise, then the retreat into inspired if broken utterance does nothing to heal the rift.

The Vivisector and Flaws in the Glass are autobiographical stories that not only reveal the inner workings of a modernist and Romantic mind as it grapples with the mythic space of Australia but which also expose the contradictions which lie at the base of a post-colonial society still coming to terms with its European heritage. The egotistical and emaciated child/artist who, Voss-like, attempts to crash through the material world into pure being is, in effect, turning the mirror of Romantic idealism onto the void of the "Great Australian emptiness". The outcast/artist takes the mirror of art and redefines the mythic space of the land and the unofficial and secret stories of the marginalised become
palimpsests for the new society. The stories of homosexuals, shipwrecked women, persecuted Jews, anguished and mad explorers, brutalised convicts and divided artists are part of a mythology which challenges and undermines the easy and conservative stories of the dominant mode.

But what Patrick White's art also reveals is a mythology which, in its insistence on transcendent solutions to the problems of living in Australia, marginalises the protagonist by removing him or her from social and historical process. The duality that lies at the basis of Patrick White's art is not merely a duality of matter and spirit but more especially a duality that exposes the silences of history, seeking their redemption in a symphonic modernist symbol that reaches out to the ahistorical silences of pure spirit. Somewhere between the mirror and the garden is the land of ultimate silence in which the child and the old man wait patiently for "the Twyborn moment of grace."
CHAPTER NINE
THE DREAM GARDEN

The motif of the outsider who, traumatised by exile in the Australian emptiness, searches for a way back into the golden valleys of an imaginary childhood, is a motif deeply reflective of the contradictions and complexities which lie at the centre of white Australian national myths. Idiosyncratic and non-conformist gestures towards a self-knowledge that lies in opposition to or outside the social centres can often be absorbed or recuperated into broader national discourses in which the figure of outsider becomes reconstituted as representing the values of the conforming centre. This paradoxical relationship between individual expressions of selfhood and collective expressions of nationhood manifests itself in an ambivalence in which the autobiographical “I”, mediated through white Australian notions of uniqueness, can be seen as both compliant with and antagonistic to dominant value systems. As a result, autobiography provides the reader with an ideal opportunity to study the complex ways in which individual stories may be seen to both participate in and, at the same time, embody the persistent and often totalising themes of national identity.

The secret stories of convicts, homosexuals, Aborigines, artists, women told through the eyes of child-protagonists represent an unauthorised and covert history which challenges the authorised and dominant myths. These stories, in their
exposure of historical forces that have suppressed and silenced minorities, open up John Pilger's "secret country" to the "crystal eye"\(^1\) of the alternative narrator. The political and oppositional implications of western autobiography, however, are very often counterbalanced by a Romantic obsession with the self that denies those historical and cultural forces that suppress the alternative voice. Within the context of white Australian autobiography, the exclusion which covert and subaltern histories expose is often complicated by stories of homecoming or inclusion which tend to be expressed through ahistorical transcendency and poetic retreat. As Ross Gibson points out, the white culture's obsession with "the unknowable heartland" of pure selfhood represents a crucial lack that is reflected in the aestheticisation of the desert as an image of ultimate reality. The search for a self that seems to result in failure in the dead heartland of social exclusion is counterbalanced by a belief in the asocial inland sea of renewal. The historical and mythical desert is like a "gravitational pole" which draws the culture towards an "essentially unattainable zone of meaning where all the outstanding enigmas might be explicated."\(^2\) In other words, the dialectic between the historical and poetic imperatives of autobiographical narrative, between the sociographical and the personal, reveals a Romantic preference for paradigms that expose historical practice only to mask its operation behind transcendent escapes into unattainable childhoods.
This dialectic between historical process and poetic space is perfectly illustrated in the highly self-reflexive work of Dorothy Hewett. Her thinly disguised autobiographical narratives - "I've been criticised for writing a sort of endless autobiography" - are concerned with what appear to be the unresolvable tensions between the poetic "I" and the historical "other". In *Wild Card*, the conflict between her political and artistic self, between the historian and the poet, is central to an understanding of the way her work interacts with and reflects some of the deeper concerns of the culture. *Wild Card* is both a domestic and political secret history in which the writer "invents a pseudonym, a character, and follows that character through a series of events that appear to make up a life," a life suspended between two opposing pulls, political and poetic, each represented by different personae and different modes of narration. The sociographer and political activist is expressed through the "realism" of the referential historian and the anarchic romantic is expressed through the poetry of the preludes in which the golden valley of the Dream Girl's Garden becomes a metaphor for the lost world of childhood possibility.

On one level, *Wild Card* can be read as a documentary about a middle-class woman whose development from country girl to city activist and Romantic poet reflects the movement of a whole society as it copes with the traumas and contradictions of historical isolation, economic depression and war. The fact that
the storyteller is a woman, a poet and an ex-Communist reinforces the very isolation and dislocation that the sociography reveals. On another less conscious level, it is also a story about a society emerging from the myth of a bucolic paradise to embrace its fate as an extension of urban European history. When Dorothy Hewett decides to escape Perth and travel across the continent to Sydney, she is descending into an Orwellian Purgatory - "my very own Wigan Pier"5 - in which the fall from the grace of childhood gardens is expressed through the desert of city life, "a landscape of horror".(p.166). It is a landscape which not only reveals the collapse of mythic Australia as natural garden but which also opens up the secret countries of Australian covert history. Within this context, *Wild Card* is a sociography of activism in post-war Australia, in which the female outsider, "conscious of being a radical, intellectual minority in a little Australian backwater"(p.84), battles against all odds to establish feminist and Marxist alternatives in a predominantly conservative and unresponsive culture.

Although the book, as sociography, highlights the struggle of the marginalised and oppressed, it is far from being a political tract. Indeed, the main focus of *Wild Card* is not so much political and consciously historical as personal and Romantic. It is the story of a poet whose central concern is the gap between the pain and disappointment of experience and the purity of the prelapsarian self. Her constant reference to the idealised
childhood of Wickepin is, in effect, a yearning for the lost and transcendent possibilities of youth. The aged and experienced Alice cannot find a way back into timeless Wonderland, "it's sad to grow up" (p. 237), except through the union of memory and imagination in art. Even Hewett's energetic Marxist faith has to be seen in terms of a Romantic utopianism which seems to inform every aspect of her story, whether it concerns love, family, poetry or politics.

This conflict between the poet and the historian belongs to a set of dualities and oppositions which is central to an understanding of the way Hewett interprets her life. Doppelganger images of division structure a narrative in which the protagonist is seen as constantly at war with herself. The "I" is divorced from the "other", the watcher from the doer, the ascetic from the hedonist, "the responsible Communist" from the "wild girl" (p. 119), and the poet from the activist. "The girl who moves and talks and rages and loves," is in direct conflict with "the cold detached consciousness of the writer" (p. 90): the subjective actor and the objective vivisector, to borrow Patrick White's image, seem constantly at odds.

Hewett's attempt to resolve these dualities lies at the basis of her search for coherence and integration in the poetic spaces of ideal childhood. It is a search closely connected with her need to heal the wound caused by the fragmentation of the self into decentred and contradictory roles. The mirror of
childhood provides a poetic which sutures the tear and consoles the exile for prolonged exclusion from the garden. The risk is, however, that the search promotes a narcissism and a nostalgia which deny the operation of social and historical forces in the construction of reality.

The preponderance of garden, glass and mirror motifs in Hewett's work is a clear indication of her fascination with ideal spaces and her tragic sense of being locked out of those spaces. Her identification with Lewis Carroll's Alice and her adventures in the mirror world of timeless wonderlands is central to an understanding of all her work, in general, but to Alice in Wormland, in particular, where Alice is a kind of Eve in an Edenic garden threatened by experience and the world:

Done Alice said All over
your wife domestic Eve will warm your bed
swallow your guilt & big with it your life
forfeit perfection let your garden grow
one winter's day you'll find behind the door
that white blurred mirror on the other side
reflecting all the Eden we possessed
the gift of self single distinct & whole
& your worn face.7

The sense of a lost world of innocence in which the "gift of self...single distinct & whole" is what lies behind Alice's Wonderland door and Looking-glass world. Ironically, the mirror of the lost self is a motif that simultaneously denies the very thing it celebrates: inclusion in the unattainable world of
childhood perfection. Although Nim is Hewett's attempt to reconcile the profane and the sacred, the sensual and the pure, it is the sense of expulsion from paradise that dominates the poems. Hewett's Alice has fallen into the world and cannot get back: she is in Wormland and she is going to die: "I'm experiencing old age very hard."8 The "Dream Girl's Garden", the Wickepin Eden, "perfect circular" is blighted by "the spotted snake" with "hooded world-sick eyes" and Alice is "driven howling from the garden,"9 as time and the world take their toll.

In Bons Bons and Roses for Dolly, the protagonist, dreaming "of youth/That seems/Ephemeral, unreal..."10 is "the fairytale Alice...the dolly-bird in green" who inhabits the "crystal palace"11 of cinematic dreams where mirror transformations are magic and childlike. In a fantasy that underpins many of Hewett's autobiographical figures, the middle-aged and dowdy Dolly Garden walks through the projecting mirror of art to emerge as eternally young and beautiful. The crystal palace is a kind of never-never land in which Alice/Dorothy never has to face the horror of growing old until the mirror smashes and the disappointment of imperfection is just too painful to bear:

DOLLY: (to music) The Crystal Palace, it all fell down, we all grew old...we all grew old. They promised me the world, and I ended up with a lousy, empty, out-of-date picture show.12

It is this horror, when the fantasy world is shattered and
the reality of mutability prevails, that lies behind Hewett's fascination with Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott". Doomed to live in a tower (Rapunzel comes to mind) the lady of Shalott weaves Arthurian legends into perfect tapestries through the mediated mirror of art: "But in her web she still delights/To weave the mirror's magic sights." Even though she is "half sick of shadows", she continues to look at the world through the distancing and idealising medium of the mirror. Alone, innocent and unchanging - rather like a Romantic child - she is condemned to see life through the perfecting mirror of art until she is tempted by the appearance of Launcelot to abandon mirrors for windows and art for life. When she impulsively glances through the window the mirror cracks, the tapestries disintegrate and she drifts off in a boat to die, "like some bold seer in a trance". This high Victorian fable about the incompatibility of "pure" art and "real" life provides Hewett with a motif that reflects both her "terror of time passing" and her struggle to reconcile the demands of the social with the poetic.

In a sense, *Wild Card* reverses the Lady of Shalott fable by turning the past into a longed-for but inaccessible dream of childhood possibility. Although the homecoming at the end of the book forces her to recognise that "There is nothing left of the dreams of childhood," the autobiographer does not reject those dreams. Indeed, when she makes her final return in 1987, a rite of passage which represents the starting point for her personal
story, the "real", historical Wickepin is replaced by metaphor and translated into "the Dream Girl's Garden" where "the first house lies secure in the hollow of the heart." (p.273).

At the same time, it has to be admitted that, however attractive idealised childhood may seem as a consolation for experience, guilt and loss, the counterbalancing narrative of the historian prevents the account turning into escapist nostalgia. The need to shrink, like Alice, into her wonderland childhood, or dissolve like the Little Mermaid, into the flux of nothingness is undercut by an overpowering sense of reality born out of harsh experience. In other words, the difficulties experienced in Redfern make full acceptance of the Wickepin fantasy impractical. The tendency towards nostalgic and narcissistic retreats is also undercut by the self-consciously fictive and radical nature of a secret story that not only challenges accepted readings of Australian history (masculinist, naturalistic and conformist) but which also lays the foundation for new myths that might include the marginalised and oppressed. Although Hewett's rebelliousness may finally be assimilated into the Romantic orthodoxy which underpins her poetry, her disruptiveness, in terms of personal, generic and social practice cuts against many of the ideologies that define the orthodoxy.

The motif of the house of cards which frames *Wild Card*, introduces us immediately to the tension between fantasy and history that structures the narrative. The author is Alice who, on
cold winter days when mutability threatens the dream, attempts to rebuild the poetic space of childhood, the "small clean enclosed space of filtered light" which is the unattainable ideal that lies behind the narrator's quest for youth. Although her size and age prevent her from entering the golden space, she plans, by drawing on the powerful narcotic of memory, to enter, inhabit and explore her own fragile construction, her own biography. The attempt to reverse time, however, fails and she is left feeling excluded, "a giant amongst the Lilliputians", an outsider, a lady of Shalott, condemned to a life of yearning whilst being locked out of worlds she will never be able to inhabit.

In spite of the failure, she continues to build houses of cards, in an attempt to regain what Gaston Bachelard describes as the "space we love...the eulogised space"\(^\text{15}\) of ideal childhood. The poetic and immemorial space of Hewett's dream house is not only valuable in its own right as a place of integration in the "land of Motionless Childhood"\(^\text{16}\) but also as a paradoxical condition in which the impossibility of return seems to promise fulfilment. It is only when Hewett leaves Sydney with nothing, with all her houses in ruins, that she can begin to search for "the clean well-lighted place in the middle of the world."(p.264).

Dorothy/Alice is the wild card, the impulsive hedonist and anarchic romantic, searching for a house that will heal the pain of experience and growing old. Perhaps it is the writing of the autobiography itself which is the drug that Alice must drink, a
drug that both promises and deceives, both comforts and disturbs. As the act of articulation both fragments and integrates the narrating self, so she will be both torn and sutured by her own narrative. Whilst memory of the first house may very well provide a medium for the integrated self, "the gift of self single distinct & whole", the search to "recover the child in the garden"17 serves to remind her of the fragmentation and exclusion that constitute the narrating persona.

This double image of severance and conjunction is immediately reinforced in the contrast between the "aged/Dim loneliness" of the "Testament" landscape (p.1) and the enchanted world of the first house. Throughout the autobiography, the harsh reality of experience (the Sydney years, the death of Clancy, her relationship with Les Flood) is expressed through a deep sense of exclusion, loneliness and exile. In spite of the losses, guilt and pain, "the little sour apples" that "still grow in my heart's orchard" continue to come up "out of the dead country."(p.267). It is this pain of exclusion that prompts Alice to continue to build her fragile houses of cards as she searches for an integration and inclusion in the "enclosed space of filtered light" that reflects "all the Eden we possessed."18

The prelude to part 1, in which the adult Hewett rebuilds the first house of the heart, is a richly realised collage of images and fragments which contrasts sharply with the flatly naturalistic language of the chronological narrative found in the
chapters. This bucolic Eden is Bachelard’s fixed and immutable space of “permanent childhood” where memory and imagination combine to produce “the poetry of the past”:

The first house sits in the hollow of the heart, it will never go away. It is the first house of childhood become myth, inhabited by characters larger than life whose murmured conversations tug at the mind.(p.3).

This is the timeless garden of the imagination where the orchard “heavy with peach and apricot, nectarine and mandarin, quince and pear”(p.7) celebrates the richness and fullness of life, and where the running child, if she runs fast enough, will find the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.(p.8).

It is, however, a myth made more beautiful and precious by loss. Entropy and failure fall like a blight on the garden as the child leaves home and enters the world. The garden dies, the orchard withers and even the myth itself, kept strong by memory because it integrates the wasted self, may simply be an exquisitely beautiful adult illusion. The Hallelujah of this poem to childhood is undercut by doubts, desolation and question marks:

Is it there on the far side of Day’s paddock in the bend of two creeks, unchanged, unclaimed except by the weather and the starry wastes of sky? Do the ghostly draught horses wheel and gallop through the dark? Through the open French doors swinging in the wind is a scratchy 78 still playing the Hallelujah Chorus over and over again...Hallelujah, Hallelujah?(p.10).

The child in the garden of security and inclusion is, of
course, easily recognisable as part of the European Romantic motif of Australia as a pre-social pastoral garden. It is as much a part of Hewett's mythic and poetic birthright as the motif of exclusion and exile which accompanies it. Indeed, no sooner has she concluded her celebration of paradise than she introduces the cold reality of chronology and "realistic" narration. The same events are reworked into a narrative voice that abandons Alice and poetry and speaks with a harsher more objective tone, as the "skinny ten-year old"(p.11) begins to face the world. In this narrative world the comforting anodyne of the coherent childhood self is counterbalanced by a more historical perspective in which the developing self is seen in terms of the cultural forces that shape the roles that constitute the life: "Daughter, sister, lover, wife, mother, grandmother, domestic treasure, I will be suborned into all these roles."

It is always important to bear in mind that this story, like most autobiographies, charts the development of self, the experiencing and integrated "I", through the fictive conventions of the reflective cohesion of the narrating "I". As a result, the tension between the Romantic notion of the self as absolute and the historical notion of the self as culturally determined permeates the telling. If the historical mode produces the sociography, social history when told through people, then it is the Romantic mode which guarantees the integrated "I" of the child/artist. Although Hewett sees herself as fragmented into
roles determined by the past and by her upbringing, her identity as a writer is an absolute that draws the pieces together. The "I" in this narrative is made coherent by a destiny that seems to predate history: the "I" is a character that only has definition and existence in so much as "she" is a creation of her own autobiographical act. In other words, being a writer is being an adult with the power to re-enter childhood through the medium of the double “I” (the narrated and narrating selves) constructed in the text. It also provides her with a sense of vocation which offers her an unchanging identity beyond the fragmenting and alienating flux of history:

I have my vocation. It is outside sex, and yet my sex is part of it. It is already fixed, brutal, implacable, complete. There is nothing I can do about it, except to get better at it. It shakes me, seductive as love. Words fall out, I am possessed by them.(p.11).

Although this act of self-creation seems to transcend everything, it drives a narrative that, even in its most ahistorical moments, reveals the culture's deepest concerns: the question of genesis and historical identity. Although the story is a personal account of an individual life, with the writer as hero, it is also a cultural site which offers insights into the way social and national motifs reiterate themselves through the text. Wild Card is a palimpsest in which the interplay of personal and historical narratives reveals the multiple and contradictory discourses that shape subjectivity. The character of the misfit, the
outsider/artist - "Everything seems to mark me off as different." (p.44) - in a distant land which is both remote and exotic, both isolating and rich in potential is a figure that rehearses dreams close to the centre of the white Australian myth of exile in paradise. It is a double image which hints at Romantic possibilities only to expose the blight beneath. Emerging from “a seemingly gentle, unpolluted, isolated world of space, white beaches and long golden summers”, the exiled child turns into a radical romantic who, as she scratches “the thin skin off the top of this utopia”, finds “corruption beneath...and a vicious world that blocks everything.” (p.88-9).

It is the metonymic dimension of the personal story which gives the autobiography a strong sociographical slant. The collective stories of the clan, "the inherited traumas" that constitute family history are mythologised into narratives that are deeply reflective of discourses which explore the values and anxieties of white Australian culture. The early part of the autobiography is full of the murmurs of "adult voices endlessly recounting the web of stories that crisscrossed the generations." (p.27). The anecdotes about convicts, pioneers, farmers, swaggies and secessionists, the references to the depression, to the war and to growing up on a sheep and wheat farm in Western Australia combine to produce a view of Australian social history which is mediated through the myths of family folklore and then validated through the intimacy of
personal story.

In spite of the sociographical detail, however, it is the essential romance of these stories that draws the reader into the world of the developing child, into the fables that shape the writer. For example, Hewett's account of her grandfather's wild ride into the bar of the Wickepin pub - a romanticised story she has inherited from her mother - is told with a delight that not only celebrates the power of myth to poeticise and immemorialise the past, but which also reveals the writer's own particular preference for a narrative that freezes time into perfect moments of space:

This was her dream father, a kind of 'man from Snowy River', thundering up the turkey red carpet, throwing his hat in the ring, the red horse rearing, glamourised and frozen for ever in that one magnificent gesture.(p.24).

A similar romanticisation of the past can be seen in the way Hewett characterises her mother as the mythic source of her own divided self. In this wonderland fable, the evil stepmother punishes her daughter for inheriting the “non-cautionary” romanticism(p.25) that has plagued her own life. She wreaks revenge on the innocent and beautiful fairy princess by poisoning her with guilt. The magical potion of transformation is a poisonous drug designed to destroy the very innocence that keeps both wonderland and the pristine self intact:

She is standing by the dressing-table, her shadow huge on the white walls. The carved heads of the griffins are
grinning at me from the doors....She is holding a tiny bottle in her hand, full of some brownish liquid. I think of *Alice in Wonderland* and the white rabbit. Her eyes ablaze.(p.31).

And so myth and history are united in the trope of the blighted wonderland in which the innocent child is cast out of the timeless garden. The farm may very well be “the centre of our existence, our Garden of Eden” but the “black snakes” of guilt and sensuality that “wait and slide”(p.32) in the undergrowth suggest a dark and guilty lust for life that is both attractive and threatening. In the Dream Girl’s Garden, the fairyboy, Nim, is a Dorian Gray figure, timelessly beautiful, but disruptively bad, a life force whose surface beauty masks an essential threat to the innocence of the garden. This contradiction between the need for experience and the yearning for Eden is resolved into poetry when the dreamer turns her past into static space, into the pure myth of the idealised first home:

I have given my heart once and for all and I know that I will never have another real home in the world again....I'll make legends out of this place...the Golden Valley of my childhood with Nim, the boy with the owl on his shoulder and the falcon on his wrist, buried at the foot of the orchard....I'll write poems and plays and stories full of ghosts.(pp.48-9).

We are in the timeless and inviolable space of art, "no one will be able to take it away from me"(p.49), in which paradise is regained through the mirror of poetry and the lost child is compensated for exclusion by faith in the unattainable.
The second house of cards - adolescence - is built, like the first, on shaky and ambivalent foundations. "The tantrums and tears" of adolescence and the titanic struggles with the mother are counterbalanced by retreats into the sanctuary of "Cathay", her grandparents' house. If home "throbs like a bruise, like a boil swollen to bursting point with our hatred", then Cathay is, she explains, "my 'safe' house. Here I am beloved. I can do no wrong." (pp.55-6). The pain of exclusion from the first house of the heart produces fantasies in which dissolution seems preferable to the loss of paradise. This is the ahistorical yearning for freedom that can only result in death:

I feel as if I have been turned out of Paradise into the dark world beneath. I wish I could be like Hans Andersen's mermaid, become foam on the flood water of the Swan River and flow back back back dissolving, lost in the creeks of my own country. (pp.60-1).

As the narrating self searches for coherence in the firsts of sexual and intellectual experience, it is the trauma born of exclusion from the garden which dominates the discourse. The search for wholeness, and for the other half that will make the "I" complete manifests itself in the utopian idealism and impulsive romanticism which characterises all her actions whether they are political, personal or artistic.

On a personal level, her grandfather is "my other self, the gay, blond, tender, blustery companion of my childhood." (p.121). Her first lover is a "secret lover, my other self" (p.92), the ideal
companion for the non-cautionary romantic. This persistent search for completion in the ideal other is a motif that informs all the important moments in her relationships with men. Indeed, it could be argued that the stormy and extreme nature of these relationships, especially in the case of Lloyd Davies and Les Flood, suggests a need for perfection which can never be satisfied. In spite of the energy with which she pursues these relationships, the dream of completion fails and the idealist feels locked out of paradise. The "idyll is destroyed"(p.93) by betrayals, guilt and hate and the purity of relationships violated by attempted suicides, abortions, separations, divorces and dead children.

On a political level, a similar search for wholeness can be found in the utopian idealism that underpins Hewett's commitment to Marxism: "I will proletarianise myself. I will be a heroine of the Marxist revolution."(p.160). The Pilbara strike, the visit to Russia, the political campaigns, the personal involvements, the self-sacrifices all point to a need to resolve the duality in her nature:

...the mainspring of my political belief was a Utopian faith rather than any philosophical, scientific Marxism. I actually believed that Communist had saved my life....Marxism for me was a conversion, an act of personal salvation.(p.174).

Once again, the energetic pursuit of the "other" in the mirror world of ideal reflections seems to exacerbate the
division between the two selves. The figure of the responsible
Communist attempting to bury the ego in the language of social
realism is constantly at war with the figure of the "rebellious
girl with the hooped earrings and the black velvet beret, who
wouldn't be seen dead with her hair in a victory roll?"(p.123). The
conflict between the two selves seems to represent a direct
threat to the wholeness that the Romantic poet requires for her
art. Living the outer life too strenuously leads to fragmentation
of the self and the destruction of the poet:

   In burying her (the wild girl), have I fragmented my
   personality so drastically that I have killed the poet in me,
   traded the gift of tongues for the dream of a Marxist
   Utopia?(p.123).

   This pursuit of the inner self is strongly connected with the
desire "to sink back again into my childhood"(p.134), to be free of
the responsibilities that tie her to the outer world of action. But
the escape from responsibility brings with it the sort of pain that
is closely associated with the motif of expulsion. Her decision to
leave Lloyd Davies, Clancy and Perth for Les Flood and Sydney is
an experience that is once again expressed in terms of the pain of
exile and separation. As she leaves Perth, the clock chimes, the
rain falls and her timeless childhood comes flooding back in a
rush of images that suggest a yearning for an irrecoverable ideal
violated by time, loss and flux:

   A child is calling, 'Mummy, Mummy!' all the way up the hill
to the Darlington train, a ute is driving into the dusk and
distance while I stand bleeding at Joan Williams's gate, Lilla is coming towards me through the Guildford grass, my grandmother's dying breath fills the back room like bellows, the wind in the unripened wheat flows in a green sea to the foot of Rock Hill.(p.145).

And so Alice, driven by the "maggot of love", tumbles out of wonderland into the Orwellian nightmare of her Sydney years. The journey from childhood, from the poetic self to the cold reality of adulthood and objective responsibility is a journey from Arcady to hell, from the blessed country to the ugly city. This mythic journey belongs to the sort of narrative paradigms Richard Coe outlines in "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Australian". The myth begins with "a passionate, an overmastering love for the 'magic' and mystery, for...the tangible 'timelessness' and 'agelessness' of the Australian bush." According to Coe, this blessed beginning is followed by "an uneasy, half-nauseated contempt for Australian 'civilisation'...with its ugliness, conformism, petty-mindedness and philistinism." The urban hell which is Hewett's Sydney is the "house of cards" that seems to lie furthest from the golden spaces of her childhood.

Although, Hewett's activist years in the "city of the poor and dispossessed"(p.171) reinforce her need to withdraw from politics into poetry, they provide a telling insight into the unofficial and secret history of Australia's political left. Her experiences at the Alexandria mill where she campaigns for equal pay and gets sacked for being eight months pregnant is just one
example of the way her particular story reflects the lives of many. The party meetings, the rivalries, the debates, the expulsions, the world events, the Petrov affair, the referendum, her own disenchantment with the movement are all part of a radical, covert history in which feminist and socialist perspectives undermine the dominant ideologies. Within this context, the book can be seen as a sociography that creates in the reader "an eradicable scepticism towards the official myths offered us by our mythmakers and cultural historians."21

Each strand of the narration, however, takes us back to the central motif of the estranged and alienated self searching for harmony and integration. Indeed, it could be argued that it is the confessional rather than the historical urge that prompts the narrator to embark on the quest for self. As Clive James points out in Unreliable Memoirs:

...books like this are written to satisfy a confessional urge and that the mainspring of a confessional urge is guilt; and that somewhere underneath the guilt there must be a crime.22

In a sense, Wild Card is a book about a crime and about exorcising those ghosts that prevent the guilty Alice from finding a way back into the garden. Unfortunately rehearsal merely seems to result in a deeper sense of alienation. The death of Clancy, for instance, is bathed in an imagery which suggests that the loss is as much to do with her own loss of innocence as it is to do with
the actual death of her son. Her dream of the child drowning is, of course, a metaphor for the boy's death, but it is also a chilling reminder of her deep sense of alienation from the centres of her own mythic childhood:

From this angle the pool looks innocent and clear. Only when I come closer I can see something lying on the bottom - a shadow? Puzzled, I lean over the surface and see the drowned child, the white face turned upwards, the floating sandy hair, the open eyes reflecting the sky. I am weeping uncontrollably, groping for the dead child in the limpid pool.(p.183).

It is this loss of the essential self that eventually prompts a return to the "first house in the hollow of the heart," to the mythic centres that might compensate for the failures. Going back to the bush is, of course, the final stage in the "paradis-perdu" myth whereby the "vanished past" of childhood can be reconstructed into a "Paradise which is at one and the same time real and inaccessible."23

Although the heart leaps to see "the house lying in the hollow amongst almond and fig trees"(p.236), the exact moment of fulfilment in the golden childhood is undercut by the harsh realities of history and change. Not only has the garden disappeared but instead of the longed for reunion with the mirror landscape of the past, the dominant image is one of desolation and flatness in which her own children, the inheritors of this blessed land, "stand, small and desolate, on the verandah, staring out across the empty flats."(p.236). Although, on one level,
Hewett's recognition of the power of history to shape destinies undermines her nostalgic need for "The Golden Valley of (her) childhood", on another level, her disillusionment represents a further articulation of the antiphonal swing between exclusion and homecoming which structures the text:

The Golden Valley of my childhood has gone for ever. I am reliving my mother's life on the farm, finding out the difference between illusion and reality. A child's vision has changed into a grownup woman's nightmare. Standing by the kitchen window, staring out across the creek bed, I even experience the identical loneliness my mother must have felt, the sense of hopeless entrapment. (p.237).

Although she recognises the power of time, change and history in determining the shape of a single life, the failure of the return does not destroy the dream. If anything, the impossibility intensifies her sense of longing for childhood spaces. This inclination towards the inner life is reinforced as the narrator gradually abandons politics for poetry. Shortly after her return to Wickepin, "the miracle happens" and the narrator is able to write again after "ten silent years." (p.246). The clash between history and poetry is resolved in favour of "the country of the imagination" (p.247), whose inspiration lies in the golden valley of her childhood. As she travels back to Perth, "tired, defeated, sadder, older, wiser perhaps" (p.264), the exile's dream of renewal is grounded in a desire to rediscover the poetic spaces of the transcendent childhood self:

Perhaps now that I have nothing I can find that empty space
of sunlight, 'the clean well-lighted place' in the middle of the world. (p.265).

Hewett's song of exile ends with an epilogue in which the aged Alice returns for the final time to the site of her childhood. Having tasted the "sour apples that still grow in my heart's orchard" and experienced the desolation of the "dead country" the poet confronts the reality of her exile and is empowered to speak: "Here I will eat their salt and speak my truth." (p.267). When she discovers that the landscape of her mythic childhood is denuded and desolate she is also participating in a collective national myth grounded in the dialectic between the garden and the desert, homecoming and exile. The search for the first house, in Bachelard's poetic and fixed space, ends in a mirror reflection of the past, ultimately the autobiography, which reiterates the story of exclusion from paradise that informs so many white Australian autobiographical stories:

In the first bedroom the dust motes are dancing on the silver hand mirror....In the tarnished glass there is a card house made of fibro, weatherboard and corrugated iron bowling over and over through the empty paddocks, torn apart and scattered across the sunstruck mile with nothing left to show that once a family worked and loved and quarrelled here, planted orchards, gardens and crops, raised animals and children, grew angry, sentimental, passionate, proud and sad. (p.272).

Although the "tarnished glass" of memory shows us "what social history can look like when told through people" the
closure of the story seems to reinforce Bachelard's maxim: "we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost."25

As Hewett turns away from the site of a golden childhood blighted by history, the poetry that was lost is now "secure in the hollow of the heart."(p.273). She doesn't need to return to the Dream Girl's Garden in Golden Valley because the poetic space has become her art, has become story. The ghosts that keep "walking in our sleep"(p.273) are the narratives that make up the art of self that informs all of Dorothy Hewett's work, a private art of self which, in its engagement and interaction with the broad public themes of origin and national identity, reveals the deeply ambivalent nature of autobiography as a form. The impossible search for the centred and unique self in the unmediated spaces of childhood is an essentially public and socially symbolic act through which conflicting ideologies of selfhood intersect and dissect one another in personalised narratives that reveal the deeper concerns of the culture as a whole.
CONCLUSION
PRIVATE LIVES: PUBLIC VOICES

It has been my contention throughout this thesis that autobiography is an essentially ambivalent cultural practice in which self-conscious searches for coherence in a fictionalised past are deeply reflective of contradictions that lie buried in the unconscious life of the dominant culture. Not only does the genre explore the contradictory social and historical forces which shape the individual life but it also draws attention to an ambivalence which underpins all acts of self-reflexivity in western culture. Self-expression represents an assertion of uniqueness which can only be articulated through forms which absorb the individual into the collective. In other words, autobiography is a medium which allows positions of resistance whilst, at the same time, drawing the antagonistic self back into the mainstream. This doubleness is particularly significant when we look at white Australian autobiography since one of its persistent themes is non-conformity as a defining characteristic of national identity.

However, since the form is, like most narrative structures, unstable, the relationship between complicity and antagonism, between absorption and resistance can provide a dynamic for change in which the marginalised and silenced may find a voice. Once the subaltern 'shoulders' or interpolates its story into the mainstream genres, then the interaction between the raw
experience of the outsider and the totalising imperatives of the dominant literary practices produce hybrid forms of self-reflexivity, narrative forms which, in turn, stimulate fresh opportunities for dynamic interchanges between the centres and the margins.

One of the totalising imperatives which informs most western autobiography and which draws oppositional stories back into the mainstream is the central theme of autonomy and transcendence. The drama of the developing self finding fulfilment by overcoming and then by transcending those social forces which seem inimical to essential selfhood is a motif which lies at the very basis of western notions of selfhood. Reeling from the trauma of separation, the developing self finds the division between the "I" and the "other" painful and alienating. As a result, the ego or narrating self searches for comforting and compensating images of itself in the mirror of the objective world.¹ Within this context, self-reflexive story can be seen as a harmonising and integrating process whereby the ruptured and divided self can be sutured into wholeness. In Wild Card, for example, Dorothy Hewett's search for the lost paradise of her mythical childhood represents a deep-seated desire to repair the damage caused by living in the adult world of pain and change. Although Hewett is aware of the nostalgic and narcissistic tendencies of her need to retreat from history, the narcotic of self-reflection is a powerful antidote to the trauma
of experience.

The notion of a coherent self determined by the integrating power of early childhood memory, has important implications for reading autobiography: the remembrance of things past should provide revealing insights into those contradictory ideologies which determine subjectivity. The dream houses of “Motionless Childhood”\(^2\), the acculturated spaces in which the self is formed, can be seen as paradigms which both reveal and enact conflicts that lie deep within the culture from which the story emerges. For instance, the topography of the first home, as in David Malouf’s *12, Edmondstone Street*, becomes a cultural blueprint, a mythologised space in which the need to embrace the secure if strangely empty centres of the house is contradicted by a fascination with the outer regions of the Verandah. This personal conflict can be seen as deeply reflective of broader cultural themes in which the creative disruption of exile is seen as essential to the life of the new society.

Of particular importance here, is the Althusserian notion of subjectivity as a social practice through which the culture reiterates and perpetuates its central values. Not only is the unique “I” an interactive product of poetic and immemorial space, it is also a form of social discipline through which the ideologies of the culture can be transmitted.\(^3\) If society recruits individuals by flattering them into a sense of their own uniqueness,\(^4\) then an understanding of how the autobiographical subject is constructed
should reveal important insights into those discourses which shape subjectivity. When Robyn Davidson, in *Tracks*, searches for her dissident, autonomous self in the emptiness of the Australian wilderness, there is a sense in which the narrated self is being subjected to and "written" by a set of pre-existing public texts which perpetuate rather than undermine orthodox notions of white national identity.

The operation of society through the construct of self-reflexive autonomy is a highly potent form of social discipline since it promotes subjectivities which often deny the very social practices which give the unique "I" meaning.\(^5\) This is precisely the same process which occurs in autobiography: the integrated "I" takes centre stage in narratives which tend to suppress both the social forces that shape the individual and the generic mechanisms that produce the text. In *Tracks* and *I Can Jump Puddles* rugged individualism, expressed in the drama of the self-reliant "I", masks the historical and literary forces which have produced both the myth and the text. Not only that but the autonomous self, as it expressed in the lives of the central characters, becomes a conduit for the perpetuation of orthodox and mainstream values in mythic dramas which celebrate conformity and acceptance. It is important to stress that this white nationalistic myth is a construct and a process which is neither absolute nor unchanging but which should be seen as part of the same process of interactive change which characterises
autobiographical self-construction.

It is for these reasons that I have replaced the popular notion of autobiography as a private, factual and individual quest for self with a model that accepts autobiography as a geo-mythic site for fictions about "subjects" whose lives reveal questions and contradictions that go beyond the individual to deep-seated anxieties about cultural identity and origin. Each of the childhoods I have explored in this study of Australian autobiography reveals a thematic substratum, a commonality of plot, character and motif which seems to strike at the heart of what most concerns the culture.

Perhaps the most compelling motif to emerge from the study is the figure of the traumatised exile searching for a way back into a lost paradise or an unattainable childhood. The yearning for ideal spaces which underpins the myth reveals a deep longing for some form of homecoming that will compensate for the pain of exclusion and exile. In its more orthodox forms, this fable of the outsider is a metaphor for the paradox of the exile-in-paradise that structures a good deal of white Australian national space. The dual image of Australia as paradise and purgatory produces narratives which encourage withdrawal from history and social action into the sublime and timeless space of the Australian emptiness. Both the trauma of exile and the dream of completion provide comforting anodynes in which the social and political realities of living in contemporary Australia are
elided into the perfectible yet unattainable realms of idealised childhood or transcendent nature.

*I Can Jump Puddles* and *Stories From Suburban Road* are perfect examples of texts which, by idealising the bush and all that it stands for in the Australian imagination, celebrate the culture’s deep yearning for home and completion. These Romances of the Bush, in which childhood is depicted as golden and unchangeable, conceal an orthodoxy which reinforces an essentially conservative view of Australian history. Depictions of the past as sanctified retreats in which nature is seen as preferable to society promote an ideal which is ahistorical and escapist. As a model for national identity, the mythic and spiritually charged world of the bush, with its emphasis on self-reliance and masculine value, encourages an unquestioning faith in an exclusive and narcissistic image of Australian life.

A similar impulse towards ideal states of being that induce conformity and inaction underpins Robyn Davidson’s pursuit of her “desert” self in *Tracks*. The alienated misfit escaping the hell of Australian urban life and searching for a way back into some form of instinctive and natural home in the Australian heartland belongs to the same order of myth that informs *I Can Jump Puddles*. Davidson is so absorbed in the pursuit of her asocial self that she fails to recognise the potency of the urban texts that are structuring her expedition. Furthermore, belief in the autonomous self places the individual outside society in a limbo of non-action
which involves acceptance of all those myths (mateship, egalitarianism, rugged individualism) that induce conformity.

The yearning for transcendency in the purity of a distinctly Australian space is also central to an understanding of the autobiographical works of Patrick White and David Malouf. Although both writers are concerned with forging new myths for a new land, they draw their inspiration for cultural difference from an essentially Romantic and European notion of Australia as a lost paradise. Out of the nightmare of Australia as a place of exile, as a blasted wilderness of intractability or crass materialism, comes the image of Australia as a source of transcendent hope in which the natural and innocent child can find a home. In both cases, the search for home is closely connected with the need to unite the divided self and to repair the rift caused by the separation of the self into the “I” and the “other”. This search for integration in the poetic spaces of childhood or in the transcendent possibilities of the Australian wilderness reflects a deep cultural yearning for landfalls which might compensate for the trauma of exile.

For Dorothy Hewett, the coherent and integrated self is to be found in the poetic of her Wickepin childhood. Although she embraces life and experience with an energy which borders on the anarchic, her constant need to return to the mythic centres of her childhood reveals a deep-seated desire to find a way back into the paradise of wholeness and harmony. The fact that the original
garden of childhood is blighted by time and history and lost for ever, does not deter the questing narrator. Indeed, as the quest becomes more impossible, so “the clean well-lighted place in the middle of the world” becomes more valuable. Once again, the public and collective myth of the lost paradise is activated by a private and personal quest for individual fulfillment.

Although the tension between the poetic “I” and the historical “other” is central to an understanding of the conflicts which drive all the autobiographical narratives in this study, there is little doubt that, in most cases, the preference for self over history tends to dominate. The risk is, of course, that overemphasis on the self reduces awareness of the social and generic mechanisms which determine the shape of the life and so induces a narcissism which encourages nostalgia and withdrawal. Although White, Hewett and Malouf, each in their own way, draw attention to the contradictions and tensions which underpin Australian culture, their preference for transcendency means that the image of the child as outsider comes to represent a deep yearning for escapes which involve stasis and defeat.

It is my belief, however, that this celebration of the outsider as emblematic of Australian experience, has an obverse and radical side. Since autobiography foregrounds the relationship between subjectivity and acculturation the focus of the narrative, especially if it is delivered by the marginalised or oppressed, can result in subversive and oppositional stories. As a result, the
personal stories of misfits and fringedwellers in which the child/protagonist is seen as an outsider tend to challenge and undermine orthodox representations. The stories of migrants, Aborigines, women, artists and homosexuals each have the potential to expose the exclusive silences of mainstream culture. The individual lives dramatised in My Place, Don't Take Your Love to Town, Flaws in the Glass, Whole Life, Alien Son and Wild Card all expose the dark side of a society in which difference is punished and injustice is the norm. Although there is a danger of assimilation through absorption, each interpolation from the margins into the mainstream genres spawns oppositional texts whose inevitable recuperation into the centre can produce innovative hybrids.

For Judah Waten and Morris Lurie, the problems facing the Jewish migrant in coming to terms with an alien culture are mirrored in the way their stories are articulated. By adopting an amalgam of modern and traditional forms, both writers attempt to bridge the gap between the mainstream centres and the migrant margins by developing hybrid narrative forms. Their stories can be seen as attempts to create new identities without abandoning tradition. Furthermore, the trope of the Diaspora, with its emphasis on the trauma of exile and exclusion, provides a compelling variation on the myth of the lost paradise which weaves itself through most of the personal stories in this study.

Of all the stories which centre on dispossession or
dislocation as fundamental to living in Australia, Aboriginal experience is perhaps the most distressing. In Ruby Langford’s book, the full horror of two hundred years of oppression and warfare is compressed into the life of a single woman. Langford’s struggle for survival becomes a political metonym for the broken lives of all urban Aboriginal people. Not only that but, by adopting a western and mainstream form for her story, she succeeds in gaining access to a means of production which will ensure a wide reading public. By appropriating dominant narrative sites, Langford has written a story which converts silence into awareness and endows the dispossessed with an identity.

The interpolation of the subaltern voice into mainstream forms is, however, fraught with difficulties. Conventional voices from the centre may very well be masquerading as oppositional voices from the fringe. Although Sally Morgan’s My Place seems, at first glance, to be an oppositional text like Langford’s, in the final analysis, the text gestures towards appeasing rather than troubling white consciousness. Although Morgan’s book exposes the dark recesses of Aboriginal history, her search for identity is a search for the private integrated self, and involves a reconstruction of the past which is built on introspection and censorship rather than assertions of cultural and communal identity. Indeed, Morgan’s tendency towards cathartic and transcendent solutions to the misery of dispossession means that historical responsibility takes second place to sentimentality and
Nevertheless, it can be argued that autobiography, with its emphasis on the self as both complicit and antagonistic, mirrors the dynamic unpredictability of all hybrid forms. As each new voice from the fringe is incorporated into the network of economic and cultural relationships which represent the centres of production and distribution, it should generate alternative and politically challenging sites of meaning on which new subjectivities and identities might be inscribed. Within this context, each autobiographical occasion can be read as a palimpsest in which the self-consciously unique “I” interacts with those historical and cultural discourses whose power to absorb the private voice is constantly being modified by the emergence of new hybrid sites of self-flexivity. By drawing on the tension between subjectivity and history, autobiography can provide a dynamic for change in which the culture is both enriched and modified by a diversity of private story which dramatises the multifaceted and protean nature of contemporary Australian society.
CHAPTER ONE


3 Donald Horne, The Education of Young Donald (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1967), Foreword.


12 I Can Jump Puddles, Preface.


15 Fredric Jameson, p.13.

16 John Fiske, Bob Hodge, Graeme Turner, Myths of Oz


20 Richard Coe, pp.126-62.


25 Peter Coveney, p.31.

26 Peter Coveney, p.32.

27 Peter Coveney, p.240.

28 Kate Grenville, Joan Makes History (St. Lucia: Queensland University Press, 1993), p.43.


30 James Joyce, p.221.

31 James Joyce, p.247.

32 Graeme Turner, p.35.


34 Ibid.


37 Laura Marcus, Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticisms, Practice (Manchester: Manchester University Press,


40 Michael Sprinker, p.342.

41 Laura Marcus, p.183.


43 The most notable example would be Paul John Eakin’s Touching the World.

44 Vaughan Prain, p.43.

45 Laura Marcus, p.183.

46 Paul John Eakin, Touching the World, Chapter 5.

47 James Olney, “Autobiography and the Cultural Moment,” p.22


49 David McCooey, p.6.


51 David McCooey, p.164.


53 Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith, p.xvii.

54 Julia Watson, p.xix.

55 Julia Watson, p.xx.


57 Judith Butler, p.145.

58 Joy Hooton, Chapter 4.


60 Foucault as quoted by Gilles Deleuze, p.25.


62 Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, ed., The Spivak Reader:

63 Homi K. Bhabha, Nation and Narration (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.1-7. All future references to Nation and Narration will be cited parenthetically in the text.


69 John Berger, p.124.


71 Jean-Paul Sartre as quoted in Paul John Eakin, p.142.


73 Steven Cohan, p.171.


75 Terry Eagleton, p.164.

76 Terry Eagleton, p.165.

77 Paul John Eakin, Touching the World, p.136.


79 Ibid.


81 Vaughan Prain, p.39.


83 Gary Morson, p.217.

84 Paul John Eakin, Touching the World, p.67.

85 Stuart Hall, p.45.
CHAPTER TWO

2 T.A.G. Hungerford, p.120.
3 T.A.G. Hungerford, p.122.
5 T.A.G. Hungerford, p.125
10 Steven Cohan, p.134.
11 Terry Eagleton, p.173.
12 Ibid.
15 Donald Horne, The Education of Young Donald (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1967), Foreword.
18 Meaghan Morris, p.66.
19 Terry Eagleton, p.173.
20 Robyn Davidson, Tracks (London: Paladin, 1987), p.49. All future references to Tracks will be cited parenthetically in the text.
21 Robyn Davidson, "Alone Across the Outback (Australia)," National Geographic, May 1978, pp.558-611.
CHAPTER THREE

1 Pierre Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge & Paul, 1978), Chapter 15. Macherey’s views on silences and absences in texts are particularly relevant here: “The speech of the book comes from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it traces a figure. Thus, the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a certain absence, without which it would not exist. A knowledge of the book must include a consideration of this absence.” (p.85).


7 T.A.G Hungerford, Stories from Suburban Road, (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Press, 1983), p.26. All future references to Stories from Suburban Road will be cited parenthetically in the text.


CHAPTER FOUR


4 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the


8 Steven Cohan, p.142.

9 Ibid.


11 Bill Ashcroft, p.182.

12 Agnes Grant, Our Bit of Truth: An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature (Winnipeg: Pemmican, 1992), pp.vi-x.


15 John Pilger, p.31.

16 For further details of the original inscription see Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, The Dark Side of the Dream, pp.157-8.


18 James Miller, Koori: A Will to Win. (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1985), pp.163-4. All future references to Koori: A Will to Win will be cited parenthetically in the text.

19 Telling Stories, p.141.

20 John Pilger, p.88.

21 Suzette Henke, p.36.

22 Coral Edwards and Peter Read in The Lost Children (Sydney: Doubleday, 1989) offer a disturbing insight into the history of dispossession. The book charts the lives of thirteen Aboriginal adults who were stolen from their parents when they were children and who, with the help of “Link-up”, were able to reclaim the violated spaces of their pasts.

23 Sally Morgan, My Place (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987), p.163. All future references to My Place will be cited parenthetically in the text.

24 Suzette Henke, p.40.

26 This is very much Mudrooroo Narogin's view of My Place in his book, Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature: "The plotline goes like this. Poor underprivileged person through the force of his or her own character makes it to the top through own efforts. Sally Morgan's book is a mile post in Aboriginal literature in that it marks the stage when it is considered O.K. to be Aboriginal as long as you are young, gifted and not very black. It is an individualised story and the concerns of the Aboriginal community are of secondary importance." (p.57).

27 Suzette Henke, p.36.

28 Suzette Henke, p.44.

29 Striking Chords, p.xx.

CHAPTER FIVE

2 Ruby Langford, Don't Take Your Love to Town (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988), p.269. All references to Don't Take Your Love to Town will be cited parenthetically in the text.
3 Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee as quoted in John Pilger, A Secret Country, p.3.
6 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
11 Ruby Langford Ginibi, "It is Our Turn," p.85.
12 Sneja Gunew and Kateryna O. Longley, Introd., Striking


3 Ania Walwicz and Peter Oustabasidis are just two examples of writers who have experimented with forms that cross confuse boundaries in order to create new forms of expression.


6 John Pilger, p.31.

7 At the same time it has to be admitted that migrant writing in recent years has done much to redress this tendency. The existence, for instance, of Peter Skrzynecki’s Joseph’s Coat and its inclusion in a number of H.S.C English syllabuses is a clear indication of the impact of migrant writing on mainstream ways of defining Australian historical and cultural experience.

8 David Carter, Introd., Alien Son by Judah Waten (North Ryde: Imprint, 1990), p.xvi. All future references to Alien Son will be cited parenthetically in the text.


11 David Carter, p.ix.


13 Ibid.


15 Morris Lurie, Whole Life (Ringwood: Penguin, 1987), p.37. All future references to Whole Life will be cited parenthetically in the text.

16 François Truffaut, as quoted in the epigraph to Whole Life.

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10 David Malouf, 12, Edmondstone Street, (Ringwood: Penguin, 1985), p.11. All future references to 12, Edmondstone
Street will be cited parenthetically in the text.


14 David Malouf, An Imaginary Life, (Woollahra: Picador, 1980), pp.145-6. All future references to An Imaginary Life will be cited parenthetically in the text.


19 David Malouf, Remembering Babylon, (Milson's Point: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p.130. All future references to Remembering Babylon will be cited parenthetically in the text.


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3 Patrick White Speaks, p.23.

4 Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son," in Patrick White Speaks, p.15.

5 Patrick White Speaks, p.90.

6 Patrick White, The Vivisector (Ringwood: Penguin, 1985), p.307. All future references to The Vivisector will be cited parenthetically in the text.

7 Patrick White, Tree of Man (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986),
pp.477-480.

8 Patrick White Speaks, p.76.
9 Patrick White Speaks, p.42.
12 Patrick White Speaks, pp.55-6.
14 David Marr, p.134.
16 A Fringe of Leaves, p.280.
19 The Twyborn Affair, p.142.
21 Patrick White Speaks, p.13.
22 Ibid.
23 Patrick White Speaks, pp.55-6.
24 David Marr, p.12.
25 David Marr, p.581.
27 The Vivisector, p.228.
28 David Marr, p.67.
29 David Marr, p.92.
30 The Vivisector, epigraph.
a world of transcendency and perfection in which the "complexities of mire and blood" are resolved into ideal forms by art.

34 Flaws in the Glass, p.257.

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5 Dorothy Hewett, Wild Card (Ringwood: Penguin, 1990), p.150. All future references to Wild Card will be made parenthetically in the text.
8 Dorothy Hewett in Bons Bons and Roses for Dorothy.
9 Alice in Wormland, p.10.
10 Dorothy Hewett, Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly, (Sydney: Curency, 1976), p.43.
11 Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly, p.24.
12 Bob-Bons and Roses for Dolly, p.48.
14 Ibid.
15 Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. Maria

16 Gaston Bachelard, pp.5-6.

17 Alice in Wormland, p.100.

18 Alice in Wormland, p.55.

19 Gaston Bachelard, p.16.


23 Richard Coe, p.137.


25 Gaston Bachelard, p.6.

CONCLUSION


5 Terry Eagleton, p.173.

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