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Abstract
In an historical analysis of language and the ideology underwriting it, Michel Pecheux argues that all struggles of perception and belief arise from a relationship of contradictions between and within discourses, since 'thought exists only within a determination which imposes edges, separations and limits on it, in other words ... "thought" is determined in its "forms" and its "contents" by the unthought... [In discourse] the unasserted precedes and dominates the assertion'.

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In an historical analysis of language and the ideology underwriting it, Michel Pechteux argues that all struggles of perception and belief arise from a relationship of contradictions between and within discourses, since 'thought exists only within a determination which imposes edges, separations and limits on it, in other words ... "thought" is determined in its "forms" and its "contents" by the unthought... [In discourse] the unasserted precedes and dominates the assertion'.

In other words, a discourse can be identified not only by what is said but also by what is unsaid within it, and in as much as discourse is culturally-specific, culture itself becomes 'a complex of competing narratives of which one or another is for the time being dominant'. By this definition, any concept of a stable 'centre' within a particular culture or objectified into a particular place is undermined. Yet discourse - as the bridge between the human subject and the outside world - is inextricably tied to the need for 'centre', as the desired location of what Derrida has called 'being as presence'.

Derrida has widely demonstrated how this desire for being as presence and its accompanying need for a centre entails a whole tradition of metaphysics, which inevitably has political ramifications in terms of the construction of hierarchies and the exercise of power. For Australia - no longer a colonial country yet still living with the shadow of a Eurocentric consciousness - a power struggle is located between the conflicting discourses of the politically 'dominant' imperial and the 'subservient' colonial. By implication, it is located in the discrepancy between perceived states of national 'innocence' and 'experience', which mark out the relative place of a country within the arena of international history.

Post-colonial writers and critics argue that rather than overthrowing an imposed discourse to establish a new discourse of dominance, the power struggle between two discourses can function to expose the ideological bias underlying all discourse and thereby the status of discourse.
- and of knowledge itself - as relational rather than essential. The responsibility of such an exposure lies with post-colonial texts taking on counter-discursive strategies which will mark out and dismantle the ideological biases underwriting discourse, and so deconstruct the assumptions from which such binary oppositions as centrality/marginality and dominance/subservience take their strength. In other words such texts can operate, as Helen Tiffin says, to 'question the foundations of the ontologies and epistemological systems which would see such binary structures as inescapable'.

David Malouf's *Fly Away Peter* undertakes this process in its 'mapping' out of the world and, by implication, the various discourses through which it is read. In its historical portrayal of war, this text questions not only colonial involvement in an imperial war but thereby the power of the political and cultural 'centre' which controls life at the 'edge'. And in so doing, *Fly Away Peter* dispenses with the very notion of centrality which gives the imperial political structure its authority, and reveals a wider field of division and change within social and personal experience.

In setting *Fly Away Peter* during World War I, Malouf takes up the national myth of this war in particular as being a turning point in Australia's history. In the context of this myth, Australia's participation is seen as a loss of innocence; as an entry to what could be called the world of 'experience', the world of the post-Edenic fallen state. In a paradoxical sense, then, Australia's experience of war could be perceived as a claim to a new form of independence, a landmarking of our own place within the wider history of the world. Yet it was not until well after the war that the experience faced by Australians at war could be incorporated into the development of a distinct national identity. The whole society was irrevocably altered, but as yet no language existed with which to express the change. The returned soldiers tended to reduce their experiences to terms understandable and acceptable to those beyond the experience; the stories might be told in terms of adventure or of endurance, but always the raw experience itself was unacknowledged, because of the lack of a shared discourse with which to express it. Speaking of his own childhood in a time of war, Malouf writes:

I had a powerful sense of my storytellers' telling me nothing in the end of what they had really seen and felt ... they were expressing themselves out of my world. Or perhaps they had reduced the thing, even in their own minds, to the purely conventional terms in which they could most acceptably relate their experiences to themselves.

As a result, rather than resolving the uncertainty of national identity, the experience of war served to accentuate the tensions within the
national consciousness, at least until taken up by the imagination of following generations and reworked into the pattern of communal belief as a shared history. In an immediate sense, then, Australia’s involvement in Britain’s war was not so much a mark of new-found independence as a sign of colonial subordination to a still-dominant social and political power, in which language functioned as the instrument of authority. In the pre-war Australia of *Fly Away Peter*, an uncertain balance between an imperial and a colonial discourse is manifested in the maintenance of the class boundaries carried over from Europe and absorbed by the perceived ‘new’ world. Even within the idyllic world of the sanctuary - a natural haven for bird life which is maintained by both Ashley Crowther, a young landowner freshly returned from Cambridge, and Jim Saddler, a local farmer’s son - the boundaries of class, as part of the code of the Empire, still prevail. Jim recognises Ashley instantly as a kind of soulmate, as someone familiar because intrinsically similar to himself, yet he cannot approach Ashley because ‘It wasn’t his place to make an opening’. The role of establishing a relationship between them falls to Ashley who, despite his natural sensitivity and his scepticism of the political and social biases of the class in which he moves, is nonetheless locked into the discourse of Eurocentrism which assumes imperial power. Ashley is introduced in juxtaposed images of childish helplessness and imperial authority. He stoops under the weight of his grandfather’s watch-chain and stumbles over not only his words but also his own boots; still, ‘he had said “Well then, you’re my man,” having that sort of power, and Jim was made’ (FAP, p. 5).

The divisions of class which maintain the imperial/colonial tension are apparent not merely in the language which constitutes the opposing discourses but also in the ways in which the participants of those discourses play out their respective roles. It is his awareness of ‘that sort of power’, an awareness which pervades his whole presence, that makes Ashley passable ‘on that side of the world for an English gentleman’ (FAP, p. 8):

He spoke like one; he wore the clothes - he was much addicted to waistcoats and watch-chains, an affectation he might have to give up, he saw, in the new climate; he knew how to handle waiters, porters, commissionaires etc. with just the right mixture of authority, condescension and jolly good humour. He was in all ways cultivated, and his idleness, which is what people here would call it, gave him no qualms. (FAP, p. 8)

The roles of power are only reversed during a boating expedition on the swamp. Here, Jim is in control; his power lies in his knowledge of the birds and particularly in his capacity to name them. Ashley’s understanding of the landscape develops from an appreciation and respect of
its power, but Jim’s affinity with the land is perceived by both young men to be natural and innate. As such, his claims to the land are ‘ancient and deep’; they lie ‘in his having a vision of the place and the power to give that vision breath; in his having, most of all, the names for things and in that way possessing them. It went beyond mere convention or the law’ (FAP, p. 7). The visitors from the big house would be ‘subdued, tense ... held on Jim’s breath’ as he would whisper the names of the birds in a voice that ‘wrapped the bird in mystery, beyond even the brilliance of its colouring and the strange light the place touched it with’ (FAP, pp. 29-30).

As soon as the group leaves the swamp to picnic on hard ground, however, they revert ‘back to reality’ (FAP, p. 32), to the discursive boundaries which determine their lives. Jim sits apart beneath a tree to eat his home-brought sandwich while the others consume their picnic spread, and at the end of the afternoon the gentlemen tip him, Jim accepting the shillings in respect to an established set of roles.

In this instance, the discursive code constituting these roles is one that is recognised and adhered to without challenge by each group operating within that code. On the other hand, direct conflict between the imperial and colonial perspectives is apparent in the attitude of Jim’s father. In his bitter and resentful approach to life, Jim’s father is struggling against an order which he cannot define, but which has nonetheless moulded the pattern of his life. It is a futile struggle, however, yielding only to a destructive and unchanging despair of which even the source is eventually forgotten. Jim’s father embodies an aggression that is abhorrent to Jim, a side of the conflict between divided aspects of society that is frightening in its power and ultimately destructive; it is hostility ‘of a kind that could blast the world. It allowed nothing to exist under its breath without being blackened, torn up by the roots, slashed at, and shown when ripped apart to have a centre as rotten as itself’ (FAP, p. 6).

The arrival of war, with all its suggestion of change and inversion, does nothing to dissolve the class structure apparent within this society. Indeed the war, as an extension of imperial power, affirms the barriers with added authority. Both Jim and Ashley eventually join up, Jim as a private and Ashley ‘as an officer, and in another division’ (FAP, p. 57). The primacy of such regimented imperialism is, for those within its control, complete and unquestionable. The soldiers fulfil their duty within the hierarchy, according to the rules, despite instincts which struggle against it. Huddling together in an abandoned trench during a battle in which all sense of orientation and structure as a military force is lost, Jim and his companions find themselves under the spontaneous command of a young officer. Like Ashley, the officer is de-
scribed in terms which are naturally incongruent with his role. A picture of youthful innocence, he is scarcely more than a boy; round-faced, blue-eyed and, despite the mud, freshly-scrubbed. In accordance with his role he orders the men forward into the chaos of the battle and, in accordance with their own roles, the soldiers obey: "It's a mistake," Jim thought, whose own youth lay so far back now that he could barely recall it "This kid can't be more than twelve years old." But when the voice said, "Right men, now!" he rose up out of the ditch and followed (FAP, p. 94). The young officer, too, is a victim of the imperial authority which he must carry out. His place in its pattern is predetermined, and he plays out his given part without choice and to the letter, 'as he had learned from the stories in Chums' (FAP, p. 94). When he is killed, immediately after giving his order, it is with his unquestioning naivety intact, an expression of surprise on his round face, his blue eyes protesting "I wasn't ready. Unfair!" (FAP, p. 95).

In this sense, the impact of imperial power is all-pervasive; war, as the symbol of its power, transforms environment and humanity alike. Despite their varied lives all over the world, men are brought together into a horrific, shattered landscape where they become only 'the soldier - hard, reliable, efficient.... The transformation was remarkable' (FAP, p. 111). Again, language is the instrument of this transformation; it is constituted in a discourse that denies individuality, that determines 'the logistics of battle and the precise breaking point of men' (FAP, p. 109). Within this discourse the soldiers become '"troops" who were about to be "thrown in", "men" in some general's larger plan, "re-enforcements", and would soon be "casualties" (FAP, p. 112).

But language, always double-edged, also serves another purpose here; the destructive discourse of imperial power is countered by a more constructive discourse of personal affirmation, springing from the transformative effects of war and based in a shared process of resulting redefinition. Thrown into a 'new' landscape, which in an ironic reversal of perspective is the 'old' world of Europe, and confronted with their new identity as soldiers, the men must forge a new discourse which can give meaning to the environment in terms of their own experience, involving a process of remapping and renaming:

Crossing Half-past Eleven Square (it was called that because the Town Hall clock had stopped at that hour during an early bombardment; everything here had been renamed and then named again, as places and streets, a copse, a farmhouse, yielded up their old history and entered the new) you turned left and went on across Barbedwire Square ... and from there, via Lunatic Lane, into the lines. (FAP, pp. 76-77)
In this world without dimension, beyond time, the soldiers come to realise the extent to which ‘reality’ is not a stable truth but a process of perpetual redefinition. With each definition a new map is formed; not only maps of the external world but also of one’s own place within it. Accordingly each soldier possesses, as well as a title of the army’s hierarchy, a nickname which marks out his individuality. Ashley, also endowed with a nickname, is given a new identity suitable to the strange environment in which he finds himself. He considers that they all may have been ‘re-enforcements’ and ‘casualties’, but

They were also Spud, Snow, Skeeter, Blue, Tommo. Even he had a nickname. It had emerged to surprise him with its correspondence to something deep within that he hadn’t known was there till some wit, endowed with native cheek and a rare folk wisdom, had offered it to him as a gift. He was grateful. It was like a new identity. The war had remade him as it had remade these others. (FAP, p. 112)

The naming of ‘Parapet Joe’, a German sniper from the ‘other side’ of the trenches, is an act which breaks through the boundaries of conflict to affirm individuality even among the unseen enemy, and which thus establishes a basis for common understanding between men that runs deeper than national conscience. The process of naming also becomes a means of reassurance for men about to go into battle; a confirmation of their own individuality, of a safe and private life in the face of a wider horror. Language here takes on a magical, ritualistic quality which is located in the words of prayers or nursery rhymes brought forth from memories of childhood, holding at bay ‘that other form of words, the anti-breath of a backward-spelled charm, the no-name of extinction, that if allowed to take real shape there might make its way deep into the muscles or find a lurking place in the darkest cells’ (FAP, pp. 114-15).

In this way the clashing discourses of war, as a process of both destruction and construction, not only point to political power struggles but also reflect wider processes and divisions within the pattern of human experience. Jim’s own life follows a pattern of change, moving from a state of self-imposed innocence which is only sustainable within the idealised ‘Eden’ of coastal Queensland, to an enforced recognition not only of violence and division but thereby of a wider world, extending across the ocean to ‘fallen’ Europe, with himself as one of that world’s many fragments. In this sense the states of innocence (as perceived unity or peace), and experience (as the recognition of violence and division), do not simply represent an area of conflict which has its source in the tension between imperialism (as the authoritative power and the creator of war), and colonialism (as the victim of imperial appro-
Rather, the concepts of innocence and experience are constructs which only have status according to their shifting relations to each other; the possibility for the assertion of one is dependant upon the non-assertion of its other.

As such, Jim's initial state of innocence is a carefully constructed one. The novel opens with a scenic description of Jim's landscape that is almost artificial in its construction. One senses that this image of a harmonious, innocent world is only so as a created 'sanctuary'. The qualities of peace and light with which it is imbued are seen through the eyes of an as-yet undefined 'he', and their very presence is implied through the subjective intervention of an 'unseen hand'.

The sanctuary, then, takes on more than a literal meaning, becoming a source of safety from the world's harshnesses for Jim as much as for the birds. In fact the birds themselves do not seem to require the protection of the sanctuary. Adaptable to any environment, they repeat their patterns of migration year after year, indifferent to zones of war and the fluctuating lives of men. As the novel's pervasive metaphor for an apolitical perspective beyond the conflicts of human discourse, the birds shift continually between polarised worlds, 'quite unconscious that [they have] broken some barrier' (FAP, p. 48). The birds' double perspective, of course, applies not only to their 'horizontal' movement between the northern and southern hemispheres, but also to their 'vertical' movement between 'the flat world of individual grassblades' and 'the long view' from the sky (FAP, p. 2). Unlike the south- and earth-bound Jim Saddler, each bird retains,

in that small eye, some image of the larger world ... seeing clearly the space between the two points, and knowing that the distance, however great, could quite certainly be covered a second time in the opposite direction because the further side was still visible, either there in its head or in the long memory of its kind. (FAP, p. 20)

On the other hand Jim, cocooned within his sanctuary, resents the intrusion of anything that might bring change or disorder to what he perceives as a stable and innocent world. Bert's bi-plane in particular, the 'clumsy shape' of the novel's opening lines, is regarded by Jim with suspicion and dislike. The machine not only represents the pattern of change and progression - the post-Edenic world of experience - but also points towards imminent war, the ultimate symbol of conflict and division. The plane is introduced, through Jim's eyes, as a 'big shadow' which dulls the otherwise untempered brightness of the sky:

It was a new presence here and it made Jim Saddler uneasy. He watched it out of the corner of his eye and resented its bulk, the lack of purpose in its
appearance and disappearance at the tree line, the lack of pattern in its lumbering passes, and the noise it made, which was also a disturbance and new. (FAP, p. 2)

The machine is juxtaposed negatively against the birds to suggest a sense of tension between the human world and the landscape, between the potential of war and natural harmony: 'The bi-plane appeared again, climbing steeply against the sun. Birds scattered and flew up in all directions. It flopped down among them, so big, so awkward, so noisy. Did they wonder what it ate?' (FAP, p. 3).

Nonetheless, despite his apparent innocence, Jim is as much a participant in a dominant discourse, although in another way, as Ashley. His possession of 'the names for things' (FAP, p. 7) and thereby of the things themselves places Jim in a position of dominance within a discourse of power. The very act of naming represents an extension of the speaking subject into the outside world, so that in naming the birds, Jim 'endowed them with some romantic quality that was really in himself' (FAP, p. 15). Jim's appropriation of the natural world through language is formalised with his act of recording the birds in The Book. The Book (with its connotations of The Bible) takes on an almost religious status in giving 'life', in terms of human significance, to that which it names. The spoken word gives identity to an object, but the written word captures that identity in a permanent form, discarding the limitations of time and place and denying the fragmentary, shifting nature of 'the real' to give immediate life a fixed meaning. To write, says Derrida, is to replace a 'present and concrete existence' with 'the ideality of truth and value'. Jim's ritual of writing the birds into The Book, using his best handwriting with all the proper flourishes, not only gives credence to the identity he has provided the birds with in language but, by that very function, also gives credence to his constructed world and therefore to his own identity:

This sort of writing was serious. It was giving the creature, through its name, a permanent place in the world, as Miss Harcourt did through pictures. The names were magical.... Out of the air and water they passed through their name, and his hand as he carefully formed its letters, into The Book. Making a place for them there was giving them existence in another form, recognising their place in the landscape, or his stretch of it... (FAP, p. 44)

But the process of recording the birds into The Book does not only provide Jim with personal affirmation of his own world; by extension, it is a process which functions to perpetuate the dominance of an imperial discourse. Written in the language of the Empire, learned painfully at school 'without at all knowing what it was to be for' (FAP,
p. 45), and then passed on to Ashley, as the representative of that discourse. The Book serves to maintain a power structure of which Jim is unwittingly both victim and perpetuator. Before the very creation of The Book by Jim, in fact, Ashley is predetermined as its owner. Each week Jim displays his work to Ashley for approval, and when Ashley and Julia Bell are married, Jim ‘presented them with the first of the Books; not exactly as a wedding gift, since that would have been presumptuous, and anyway, the Book was Ashley’s already, but as a mark of the occasion’ (FAP, p. 45).

So although the process of mapping the world through words, both spoken and written, is important in providing Jim with a definition of his landscape - or at least ‘his stretch of it’ - it is nonetheless a process which limits an illimitable world to a specific discourse within a specific time and place. Jim’s state of innocence, then, is a constructed one in which an awareness of its ‘other’ - in the form of division and violence - is repressed. Just as writing is, to borrow Derrida’s term, a ‘dangerous supplement’ to speech, a deceptive process which suppresses its artificial status beneath an assumption of convention, so Jim’s state of innocence is a ‘dangerous’ one (FAP, p. 103), based upon an incomplete vision of the world which denies the ‘otherworld’ of experience. In this respect, Jim is happy to be ‘made’ by Ashley; the shift of responsibility provides a childishly simple solution to his reluctance to enter the ‘fallen’ world of experience by making him, in effect, ‘free of his own life’ (FAP, p. 5). Such an artificial state of innocence, however, cannot be sustained; Jim must travel to an unknown world which will open up the boundaries of his life, and the ‘otherworld’ of war takes on this function. The day on which war is announced represents Jim’s ‘last moment of innocence’ (FAP, p. 36), opening up to him a world which, at least consciously, ‘hadn’t even occurred to him’ (FAP, p. 36). Previously Jim, and to a lesser extent Ashley, had seen themselves as the centre of a world which radiated out and away from them in endless continuity:

He thrust his hand out, and both standing now, feet on the ground, at the centre, if they could have seen themselves, of a vast circle of grass and low greyish scrub, with beyond them on one side tea-trees then paddocks, and on the other tea-trees then swamp then surf, in a formal manner ... they shook on it. (FAP, p. 18)

But war carries with it an all-consuming power that cannot be ignored, spreading its shocking influence from the northern to the southern hemisphere, and shifting Jim’s own life - in another inversion of perspective - from the centre to the edge of significance:
He felt panicky. It was as if the ground before him, that had only minutes ago stretched away to a clear future, had suddenly tilted in the direction of Europe, in the direction of events, and they were all now on a dangerous slope. That was the impression people gave him. That they were sliding. (FAP, p. 36)

As with its repercussions on language, war here has both a destructive and a constructive effect. Parallel to Jim’s entry to the world of experience is Australia’s own acknowledged entry to the stage of international history. Walking along Queen Street, surrounded by the activity caused by the announcement of war, Jim reflects that ‘the streets did feel different. As if they had finally come into the real world at last’ (FAP, p. 39).

With his growing awareness of a world beyond the innocent one of his conception, the stage is set for Jim’s decision to ‘join up’, with its double implications of participation. It is still a decision, nonetheless, that is full of ambivalence. Jim recognises that his progress down the ‘dangerous slope’ is inevitable: The time would come when he wouldn’t be able any longer to resist. He would slide with the rest. Down into the pit’ (FAP, p. 35). On the other hand, if he resists the change he will never have a place within the social order of his generation, will never be able to share in the discourse shaping the new national consciousness:

If he didn’t go, he had decided, he would never understand, when it was over, why his life and everything he had known were so changed, and nobody would be able to tell him. He would spend his whole life wondering what had happened to him and looking into the eyes of others to find out. (FAP, p. 55)

The very next day Jim leaves for the war, and for another side of the world, a strange and terrible landscape, ‘newly developed for the promotion of the war’ (FAP, p. 67). Jim’s discovery of this world affirms the existence of the conflicts he had previously guessed at but always repressed, and places them in a universal - rather than merely personal - scheme. War not only exposes a new side of the world and the divided basis of society, but also exposes a new side to - the divided basis of - human nature. For Jim, ‘It was as if he had taken a wrong turning in his sleep, arrived at the dark side of his head, and got stuck there’ (FAP, p. 58). Confronted with a wider vision of the world, Jim discovers a dark side to his own character that he had never recognised before, and which now frightens him with its violence. Challenged by a man in his training camp who, significantly, reminds him of his father, Jim finds himself in a ‘murderous’ situation ‘for which there were no rules’ (FAP, p. 63). It becomes clear, then, that war, as a discourse of change and conflict, operates on more than one level: There
were several wars going on here, and different areas of hostility, not all of them official' (FAP, p. 71).

The full implications of war, however, do not touch Jim until a visit to the military hospital to see Eric - a 'pale, sad youth' (FAP, p. 72), with a babyish mouth and a hankering for cakes and chocolates - whose legs have both been blown away by a wayward shell. Eric's plaintive statement, "I'm an orfing. Who's gunna look after me, back there?" (FAP, p. 85) opens up, for the first time, an aspect of war that extends beyond the immediate horror of muddy trenches and barbed wire and death. Eric's fate 'back there' questions the power of an imperial authority in determining - and destroying - individual lives, without any understanding or regard for what those lives represent.

The question was monstrous. Its largeness ... put Jim into a panic. He didn't know the answer any more than Eric did and the question scared him. Faced with his losses, Eric had hit upon something fundamental. It was a question about the structure of the world they lived in and where they belonged in it, about who had power over them and what responsibilities those agencies could be expected to assume. (FAP, p. 85)

The necessity of facing this irresolvable question marks Jim now as a member of the 'fallen' world - 'it was as if he had been taken over by some impersonal force' (FAP, p. 87) - and makes him weep 'for the first time since he was a kid' (FAP, p. 87). Jim's innocence of the days of the sanctuary is now lost forever, and he will never be able to go back. Looking back on his past life, Jim realises that the world 'when you looked from both sides was quite other than a placid, slow-moving dream, without change of climate or colour and with time and place for all. He had been blind' (FAP, p. 103).

With this realisation, Jim also recognises that even his ideal world at home is marked by violence and conflict. Although he had admitted that violence did have a place 'in what he had known back there', he had not acknowledged it as a natural part of things; it had been 'extraordinary' (FAP, p. 103). With the last shedding of 'blind' innocence, however, memories of violence surface which can only be confronted now, in light of the experience of war. He is reminded of the violent death of his younger brother in a harvesting accident, the image of which can 'never be fitted in any language' (FAP, p. 103); and of the kestrel who had been a victim of mindless violence, which had made him weep 'with rage and pain at the cruelty of the thing, the mean and senseless cruelty' (FAP, p. 104); 'That was how it was, even in sunlight. Even there' (FAP, p. 104).

The recognition of violence and division, however, does not take its form in a vision of hopelessness and despair. The concluding section of
the novel suggests that acceptance of the fragmentary and often contradictory nature of the world is in itself a positive process, offering - if not a vision of completion - then at least a wider, more perceptive world view. This view must involve the realisation that one's own image of 'reality' can never be confirmed, at least in the way that one desires, because fragmentation must always override any wider unity. Travelling through an upturned landscape in which scenes of war and domestic civilian life are intermingled, Ashley senses that 'There were so many worlds. They were all continuous with one another and went on simultaneously: that man's world, intent on his ancient business with the hoe; his own world, committed to bringing these men up to a battle; their worlds, each one, about which he could only guess' (FAP, p. 110). And later, launching himself into the battle in which he will be killed, Jim feels that 'Perhaps he had, in some part of himself, taken on the nature of a bird; though it was with a human eye that he saw ... he moved in one place and saw things from another, and saw too, from up there, in a grand sweep, the whole landscape through which he was moving' (FAP, p. 106). Jim's recognition just before death of equality in relativity, and so of a kind of totality within life's fragmentation, is simple but as far-reaching as one man's vision can ever be:

He saw it all, and himself as a distant, slow-moving figure within it: the long view of all their lives, including his own - all those who were running, half-crouched, towards the guns, and the men who were firing them ... his own life neither more nor less important than the rest, even in his own vision of the thing, but unique because it was his head that contained it and in his view that all these balanced lives for a moment existed.... He continued to run. Astonished that he could hold all this in his head at the same time and how the map he carried there had so immensely expanded. (FAP, p. 117).

This sense of balance between life's various possibilities, which are constantly changing and requiring redefinition, stands as a prelude to Imogen Harcourt's realisation after his death that there can be no answer to her own question "'What am I doing here?'" (FAP, p. 130), whether she is in her adopted Queensland or her native Norfolk. Hers is a question that, in denying an answer, makes the concepts of centre/edge and dominance/subservience redundant, but that nonetheless allows for the possibility of a future, for the continuation of 'the flux of things' (FAP, p. 131).

Even so, the recognition of life's rhythm, as Miss Harcourt sees it (FAP, p. 132), cannot be read as a unified or undisturbed process; in her affirmation of 'the flux of things' there is an implicit tension between opposing states, which is sustained to the novel's end. Her vision, in the last pages, of a young surfer held on the crest of a wave,
brings together in delicate balance the seemingly opposing elements of change and continuity, motion and immobility: 'the balance, the still dancing on the surface, the brief etching of his body against the sky at the very moment, on the wave's lip, when he would slide into its hollows and fall' (FAP, p. 133). Miss Harcourt's testimony to some kind of 'innocence' in the face of division and death - embodies in the almost religious vision of the youth 'walking - no, running, on the water' (FAP, p. 132) - is an assimilating one in which the possibility of its 'other' is already contained. In one sense, then, hers is a vision which denies the necessity of a centralising - and therefore deceptive - discourse.

It was new. So many things were new. Everything changed. The past could not hold and could not be held. One day soon, she might make a photograph of this new thing. To catch its moment, its brilliant balance up there, of movement and stillness, of tense energy and ease - that would be something.

In another sense, however, Miss Harcourt's vision is one which leaves the text in a state of profound tension between a recognition of fragmentation and a nostalgia for/idealisation of unity. Even in her moment of insight - the recognition that 'Everything changed. The past could not hold and could not be held' - Miss Harcourt's desire to photograph the image of the surfer, to 'catch its moment', is paradoxical. To capture the moment would be to fix that moment in a permanent form and so to arrest it; to photograph movement and tense energy would be to render those elements immobile, flat. To recognise the impossibility of a centralising world view, then, is not necessarily to discard the desire for worldly stability and unity. This is the desire which, in the Lacanian sense, is always present but never satiable, located as it is in what can never be attained.

This same tension informs Malouf's other novels, in which the potential of both a fragmentary and an essentialist reading is balanced. One thinks of Child's Play (written, significantly, concurrently with Fly Away Peter), a metafictive challenge to literary tradition but which ends with a circular return to its idealised beginning of childhood innocence; or Malouf's previous novel An Imaginary Life, an exploration of the arbitrary and constructed nature of that most classic language, Latin, but which concludes with the affirmation of a 'true language' of childhood whose 'every syllable is a gesture of reconciliation'. Perhaps the clue to this dichotomy can be traced to the presence, in Malouf's texts, of both a post-colonial radicalism and a Romantic aestheticism.

Such a consideration contributes to the significance of the novel's carefully-ambiguous final lines, which allow for the possibility of a turning to both the future and the past. And in focusing here upon the
figure of Imogen Harcourt - who with her given imperial history and chosen colonial future can envisage the world from polarised perspectives - the text maintains its commitment to a balance between paradoxical tensions which, in its refusal to relax, is truly counter-discursive. As such, *Fly Away Peter*’s closing scene - be it an affirmation of continuity/unity or of change/fragmentation - is one in which the potential of its opposite is already contained; in which the asserted is inevitably shadowed by the unasserted.

This eager turning, for a moment, to the future, surprised and hurt her. There was in there a mourning woman who rocked eternally back and forth; who would not be seen and was herself.

But before she fell below the crest of the dunes, while the ocean was still in view, she turned and looked again. (FAP, p. 134)

NOTES

1. This title is taken from David Malouf’s article ‘A First Place: The Mapping of a World’, *Southerly*, 45, 1.