From Metastasis to Metamorphosis: The House of Self in the Novels of Randolph Stow

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Abstract
Architectural tropes are commonplace in the tradition of psychological enquiry. Freud himself considers the house an apt image for the human psyche, when he refers to the process of repression and sublimation as an elaborate play of trap doors; in the main, his theory of psychoanalysis is polarized along a vertical axis which stretches from cellar to attic. Not dissimilarly, Jung develops an architectural metaphor when broaching the subject of the collective unconscious:
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We have to describe and to explain a building the upper storey of which was erected in the nineteenth century: the ground-floor dates from the sixteenth century, and a careful examination of the masonry discloses the fact that it was reconstructed from a dwelling-tower of the eleventh century. In the cellar we discover Roman foundation walls, and under the cellar a filled-in cave, in the floor of which stone tools are found and remnants of glacial fauna in the layers below. That would be a sort of picture of our mental structure.¹

This connection between house and self has also been approached from the angle of phenomenology in G. Bachelard’s The Poetics of Space, and some of M. Foucault’s ideas would be pertinent to a post-structuralist study of the architectural metaphors produced in discourse, and (more particularly) in literature.² Most characteristically, though, in the context of post-colonialism the house metaphor receives a specific treatment which differs from any previous use of it by Europeans. Indeed, the architecture of self depends on concrete cultural determinations; and it is clear that the vertical/palimpsestic construct outlined by Freud/Jung resists translation from one culture into the next. In other words, it cries out for deconstruction. It may well be worth, for example, comparing Freud’s vertical structure with a quip made by Janet Frame, which presupposes an altogether different structuring of the mind: ‘The average New Zealander possesses no staircase leading to the [emotional] upper floor; indeed no upper floor...’³ As to Jung’s archaeology of the soul, it finds a subversive counterpart, in the Australian corpus, in the one-
storied weatherboard mansion charted by David Malouf in *Harland's Half Acre* and *12 Edmondstone Street*. Raised on stilts above ground level, Malouf’s house is apparently cut off from ‘Jungian’ sediments of history. It does not follow, however, that history is a prerogative of the European consciousness. On the contrary, the area ‘under-the-house’, a dimension of darkness wedged between the sloping ground and the wooden floorboards, is evocative of an ‘alter/native’ history more uniquely embroiled in the Australian soil: ‘Cinders have been spread over the topsoil, but if you scratch a little you find earth. It is black, rather. And if you scratch further you come upon debris, bits of broken china, bent forks, old tin pannikins, encrusted nails and pins, which suggests that habitation here might go back centuries.’

Although arguably akin in spirit, the archaeological metaphors developed by Jung and Malouf differ significantly in concrete terms. Thus, in the post-colonial context, the house/self nexus crystallizes into a quite different configuration from the one projected in the shadow of European history. In other words, emancipation from European culture is encoded in architecture, particularly in the gesture it makes towards the vernacular. In Australia, Russell McDougall points out that this architectural adaptation to environment assumes the form of a quite unique quality of sprawl, which opposes the vertical. Sprawl typifies not only the way in which the buildings agglomerate in boundless suburbs, but also their inner structure which extends horizontally into the verandah, a ubiquitous feature in Australian architecture. The verandah, as unclosed structure leading into the world ‘out there’, makes for some transition between an imported structure of European design and the intractable bush beyond. This is why McDougall calls it a ‘blurred boundary for civilization in the wilderness’, the ‘symbolic furthest reach of Empire’, which focuses the encounter between Self and Other. In this respect, it is significant that David Malouf thinks of the verandah as evocative of the native (nomadic) way of life: ‘As for verandahs. Well, their evocation of the raised tent flap gives the game away completely. They are a formal confession that you are just one step up from the nomads’ (p. 11). The suggestion is clear: the constitutive openness of the verandah forces the dweller towards ‘othering’ or indigenization. This dialectic relationship between house and inhabitant is further circumstanced in *12 Edmondstone Street*, where the openness of the house ‘makes the timberhouse-dweller, among the domesticated, a distinct subspecies somewhere between bushie and brick-and-mortar man’ (p. 11).

This interplay between settler and environment (between Self and Other) hits a note of variation from the established tune of colonial history, where the conqueror’s self-image tends to be maintained, not modulated. In this respect, the work of David Malouf finds a resonance
in the strain towards revision discernible in the writings of Randolph Stow, an author also inclined to debate about the pros and cons of indigenization. In *To the Islands*, for example, Heriot’s peregrinations in the bush can be interpreted as a ritual voyage of initiation into the native way of life, with Justin (an Aborigine) officiating as high priest throughout. Towards the close of his journey, as he settles to die in a funerary site dedicated to a local God, Heriot has recanted his Christian faith (symbolic, in all of Stow’s work, of imperial expansiveness) and has achieved some insight into the sacred mythology of the natives. The tension between European and native imageries is further explored in *Tourmaline*, a novel in which Stow contrasts the townspeople’s sustained hankering for water with Dave Speed’s readier acceptance of drought, more in keeping with the parched actualities of the land. Speed’s capacity to survive on a minimum supply of water makes him, like Alistair Cawdor (the protagonist in *Visitants*), ‘a black man true’. It is nonetheless typical of Stow’s tentativeness that Cawdor, like Heriot, should reach this ultimate stage in his development at the moment of death only. Indigenization, whose value as an antidote to imperialist patterns of behaviour is being probed insistently, generates its own problems. Indeed, Cawdor’s fearless exploration of alien cosmogonies asks for such self-abnegation, such surrender to strange ontologies, that it transforms the Other into a potential invader, a housebreaking ‘visitant’. It is in relation to this difficulty that I intend to examine the function of the house image in Stow’s novels. As I said earlier, the house is a symbolic border between antagonistic orders of existence, suitable for staging the encounter between Europe and its Others. But there is more. The house metaphor proves an auspicious avenue of approach also in that it pervades all Stow’s novels, including the last two he published, *The Girl Green as Elderflower* and *The Suburbs of Hell*. These two books provide Stow’s corpus with an unexpected coda, as they are set in England and appear to evade the political dimension investing the earlier work. This disconcerting shift in perspective seems to induce a *mise-en-crise* of a method of critical enquiry devised to highlight the political stimulus in literature to the exclusion of all other aspects. Whether or not it can be called a retreat from the political sphere, the extent of Stow’s trajectory is nowhere clearer than in his treatment of the house metaphor, which overarches his work from first to last.

Undeniably, the political impulse informs much of Stow’s early work. In *A Haunted Land*, his first novel, the story of Andrew Maguire’s sustained determination to found a dynasty to bear his name can be read allegorically as a survey of the vagaries of imperial power in a distant land. How devastating such power can be, is suggested in the prologue when the character called Jessie returns to Malin homestead, some fifty
years after the events recounted later, to find a scene of desolation and waste: ‘They have left nothing here for me.’ The sterility of the imperial enterprise is further testified, in The Bystander, by Patrick Leighton’s failure to engender an heir to take over Maguire’s estate. This failure to subsist accounts for the plethora of derelict homesteads with which Stow’s universe is fraught. Rob Coram, the protagonist in The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea, envisions his own native country as a place haunted by the bones of the explorers, by ‘sheep-skulls in the dead grass’, by ‘ruined houses and abandoned land-mines’ (p. 234). Ruin proves as much a condition of the land as heat or dust. This state of affairs is best epitomized by the numerous ghost-towns scattered through Stow’s West-Australian landscapes. For example, when he strikes a friendship with a youth called Mike Ashcroft, Rob learns that he ‘had come to Geraldton because his town had died ... in the night’ (p. 196). The evocation of the ghost-town again calls to mind the work of David Malouf, particularly a passage in Johnno which may usefully be mentioned here:

I was reminded sometimes of ghost-towns in the north that had once had a population of twenty thousand souls and were now completely deserted - the houses one morning simply lifted down from their stumps, loaded onto the back of a lorry, and carted away to create another town a hundred miles off. In my childhood I had often seen houses being carried through the streets, creaking and swaying on the back of a truck.

Interestingly, the complete absence of foundations to these houses makes them akin to the shacks in Tourmaline, where the townspeople inhabit ‘shanties rented from the wind’. The epigraph of the book, ‘O gens de peu de poids dans la mémoire de ces lieux’, reinforces the sense of a loose attachment to a place best untroubled by human presence, little amenable to architecture. In terms of Jung’s archaeological structure, the suggestion is that Tourmaline’s people are deprived spiritually of the nourishing potentialities of a rich fertile past. In this sense, the Law presents his fellow citizens as people without a history, at least not a history rooted in the place. Hence the fractured topography of their minds: they dedicate themselves to cultivating a myth of abundance totally at odds with the determinations of local climate. Also, Tourmaline’s allegiance to the wind (rather than the earth) testifies to the utter transiency of the town’s condition. Though it has not, accurately speaking, ‘died in the night’ (p. 55) like the neighbour township of Lacey’s Find (swallowed in a sweep of sand-dunes), Tourmaline ‘lies in a coma’ (p. 8) of frustrated expectancy, in a condition of reprieve bound to last until the close of the book, when a dust-storm obliterates it from the map: ‘There was no town, no hill, no landscape. There was nothing’
There is undisguised irony, of course, in the fact that the agency of Tourmaline's destruction assumes the shape of the long-expected flood: 'It was like swimming under water, in a flooding river. Dust sifted into my lungs; I was drowning' (p. 173). In this respect, the town shares the fate of Lacey's Find, whose 'two-storied hotel' disappeared under a 'gentle tidal encroachment' of dunes (p. 33, my emphasis). The point is clearly that European imageries, symbolic of alien convolutions of thought, prove to be destructive in the last analysis. However, it is important to notice that Stow's sustained concern with apocalypse, with the wastelands of the imperial imagination, conveys a sense not only of the irrelevance of derivative images, but also of the necessity for an epistemological revolution by virtue of which the ruins can become a viable structure. This re-membering of the episteme, I would like to argue, is an endeavour which engages Stow's attention again and again. A further look at the image of the house/ruin will clarify this point.

Wilson Harris alerts us that there exists 'a curious rapport between ruin and origin as latent to arts of genesis'. In To the Islands, Stow plunges the reader into the heart of this ambivalence from the outset, as Heriot is presented, in metaphoric terms, as a broken rock: 'He saw himself as a great red cliff, rising from the rocks of his own ruins.' Heriot's essential duality is expressed in a nut-shell in this evocation of a character at once whole and fragmented, rooted in debris but rising with rock-like solidity. This initial duality continues in the novel, as attested by the abiding ambiguity attached to the ruin metaphor and to the related concepts of construction and destruction. As the leader of a Christian mission in the North-West of Australia, Heriot is involved in the construction of a new building destined to house a school. That the mission should thus be in full architectural expansion has an ironic significance, for Christianity is presented throughout Stow's work as an inseparable part of the imperial enterprise, and Heriot's long-standing devotion to serving the system has always translated itself into unashamedly authoritarian proselytizing. He himself asserts: 'I'm the only one of the builders left' (p. 42), to gloss over the fact that he was a Bible-basher quite ready to use the whip when necessary. Such construction, however, based as it is on coercion, proves to be 'ruinous' (p. 33). The destructiveness endemic in the monuments of Empire makes it urgent to 'forestall ruin by embracing ruin' (p. 43). Undoubtedly, Heriot's decision to 'pull down the world' (p. 43) and to take flight into the bush can be considered in these terms, as a necessary rejection of hegemonic values prior to releasing oneself into new modes of being. In this respect, it is significant that Heriot's 'murder' of Rex, the crucial incident which immediately induces his voyage of expiation, takes place
under the walls of the building in construction. Indeed the lethal stone aimed at Rex with mischievous intent is referred to, with biblical reverberations, as ‘the first stone’ (p. 44); and it was probably taken from ‘the skeleton of the half-erected building’ (p. 43, my emphasis), in telling indication that the time had come to let go of fossil values. In this sense, the ‘first stone’ emerges as an important structural turning-point: it triggers off the dismantling of the edifice of Empire and the reconstruction of self in which Heriot engages from this point onwards. It is appropriate also that, towards the end of his journey, Heriot comes across a ghost-town with ‘a familiarity about the scene that troubled him’ (p. 105): the abandoned mission of Gurandja, a prey to dust in the desert, is a kind of mirror-image of the mission-station he has just deserted, but one in ruins, which provides a measure of the progress he has made towards relinquishing ingrained ‘ruinous’ attitudes.

The duality inherent in this concept of ‘ruins’ becomes apparent. On the one hand, the ruins/runes are a dead inscription of culture in the wilderness, which signifies the inaccuracy, and in the last analysis the destructiveness, of fossilized unselfquestioning systems of thought. On the other hand, however, by embracing ruin to forestall ruin one resuscitates the possibility of exploding monolithic conceptions. The ruin then becomes the emblem of the self-violence that is necessary to go beyond complacent, self-asserting epistemologies. One can guess, in the light of this duality, why Stow should have felt attracted to Taoism in Tourmaline, his next novel: the philosophy of the Tao provided him with a ready-made system of thought where opposites can coexist without clash. It is worth signalling, incidentally, that Heriot’s ‘first stone’ finds a counterpart, in this novel, in the Taoist ideal of ‘being a rock to be shaped by winds and tides’ (p. 148). Again, the image of the rock/stone is subjected to a duplicitous process of transformation, perceived at once as formative (‘shaped’) and erosive (the ‘winds and tides’). This ambivalence lasts until the last page of the book, which (for all its catastrophic content) ends on a note of possibility. When the red curtain of dust lifts on the storm-blasted town, it is to reveal a major redisposition of categories since the Law’s prison-tower (the epitome of verticality, hence of centrality to the European episteme) has shifted towards the edge or boundary:

There was no town, no landscape. What could this be if not the end of the world?
Then the wind dropped for half a minute. And I saw my tower, the boundary of Tourmaline, waiting. (p. 174)

Regeneration, then, is the other side to the coin of catastrophe; ruin adumbrates new construction. This duality arises again in Visitants. The
house on Kailuana island, where MacDonnell the planter has been living as the only white man for several decades, was built entirely after the Dimdim (occidental) fashion: the natives find it strange.

When I first came from Wayouyo I said to Naibusi: This house is too hollow, too loud. Because a house among palms is like a house at sea, and the leaves are in it all around you, night and day. A house should be like a cave, I said, closed and dark. But Naibusi said: No, that is not the Dimdim custom. They like the wind in their houses, she said, and to look out on the sea, and I think he listens to the palms, because he planted them in the time when he was strong and young. (p. 5)

This is a typical instance of cultural conflict encoded in architecture. In his strange house of imported design, MacDonnell looks emphatically, emblematically white: 'He was white like a woodgrub, and something of the same texture' (p. 33). This makes him a representative of Europe, of a comic sort. It is sadly accurate, however, but quite in keeping with this ambassadorial status, that he should pretentiously refer to himself as 'The King of Kailuana' (p. 113), despite the presence on the island of the worldly-wise Dipapa, whom the natives venerate as paramount chief of the tribes. Moreover, the internal organization of the household replicates the hierarchical structure of power inherent to imperialistic rule: Naibusi, in more youthful times MacDonnell's mistress, now attends upon him as a domestic: a characteristic combination of sexual and political domination. In view of this, it is appropriate that Dipapa's rebellion against the authority of the 'King' should be directed at the house itself, which he attempted to bring down during the war, albeit unsuccessfully (see p. 157). Yet, despite this failure, the novel suggests that the house (called 'Rotten Wood') is doomed to collapse. Like the buildings in Tourmaline, it is deprived of proper foundations: 'The stilts on which the house stands drop pale gobbets of themselves on the chicken-raked mud' (p. 7). Consequently, its apparent stability is deceptive: 'Under the palms, the house lies turbulent and still' (p. 8). In this sense, it contradicts the native conviction that 'a house endures' (p. 5): 'Rotten Wood' is eaten by the termites from within and, from without, it is 'signed by rain with marks of a daily kind, like time' (p. 7). The house, then, is a potential ruin. The stigmata of rain and mildew point to the predictable moment when it will cave in, 'as suddenly as Jericho, with a slow dank crunch into mud and leaves in the rain' (p. 27). As in To the Islands, ruin here paves the way to new vision, and to self-transformation of a sort. Cawdor, a regular guest in MacDonnell's household, identifies with the house: 'It is like my body is a house' (p. 183), and disappears with it. 'My house is bleeding to death' (p. 183), his last reported words in the novel, anticipate his suicide and

But an additional complication has crept in with *Visitants*, in so far as the ruin metaphor is compounded here into a structure of openness (versus closure) as well. As opposed to Dipapa’s palace-house, which is ‘shut like a safe against light and air’ (p. 82) as a protection against sorcery, MacDonnell’s house is wide open to the gaze of everyone, so much so that the natives have ample opportunity to examine, ‘through the hole in the cookhouse wall’ (p. 42), Cawdor’s shell-white buttocks under the shower. Furthermore, the openness of the house makes it participate, on quite intimate terms, with the warm ebullient life of the rainforest which surrounds it. In fact, the presence of the forest impinges enough to affect the quality of the light inside the house: ‘The light falls through the shutters green with leaves’ (p. 5), as well as its rich sound life: ‘The palms above the house submerge the rooms in their surf of sound’ (p. 7). This consubstantiality with the surroundings is even described in terms of literal intrusion: ‘The palms wander in the bare wooden passages, in the gaunt living room wide open to the sea. Sudden gusts send them streaming, grey-green plumes against a grey-blue sky’ (p. 7). By some effect of pathetic fallacy, the openness of the house to the elements of bush, sea and sky reflects what I have called Cawdor’s indigenization, his agreeable disposition to the native customs and language, which justifies Naibusi’s reference to him as ‘a black man truly’ (p. 41). Like the ruin metaphor, then, the image of the open house points to the powers of the unlocked imagination to bring about genuine transformation of self. This is clearly illustrated in *Tourmaline* too, by the openness of Dave Speed’s habitat. Unconvinced by the townspeople’s idealization of enclosed ‘buildings ... shaded with vines’ (p. 74), Speed endures the local conditions unsheltered, with the same ‘tolerance of deprivation’ (p. 67) as the natives, in an open encampment ‘radiating out to the horizons’ (p. 67). This instance of absolute horizontality opposes the blindness to landscape entailed by the Law’s prison-tower, or by Kestrel’s hotel (an important centre of the town’s social life), which is also depicted as an enclosed space: ‘The window-panes were painted over’ (p. 10). In this context, the openness of Speed’s ‘house’ provides a release from the imaginative captivity of the colonial consciousness, represented in *Tourmaline* as locked inside the prison of inadequate patterns of thought. Clearly, the house in *Visitants* can be seen in this light also. It is kept open to the palms and winds as a token of a cultural acclimatization comparable to Speed’s venture. Moreover, it enhances the visionary faculties since it allows the inhabitant ‘to look out on the sea’ (p. 5), in explicit contradistinction to the stock image of imaginative confinement in Stow: the Shot Tower of
Geraldine in *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, whose carceral vocation is aptly identified: 'It was old, it looked old as the Tower of London' (p. 235), and which accordingly commands 'an endless view of nothing at all' (p. 236). Clearly, then, the structure of openness and the image of the ruin fulfil a similar function: they are both metaphors for the ruthless cultural disinvestment which Stow advocates as the necessary first step towards genuine exploration of alterity and the new vision that must ensue.

Yet there is a problem here. For while *Tourmaline* and *To the Islands* present indigenization as 'possible and indeed desirable'; as an exacting but viable alternative to firmness of identity, in an important respect *Visitants* denies this possibility. For one thing, whatever his disposition to openness, Cawdor remains remote all through the book from the events reported, which he skims 'like a wooden figurehead' (p. 180) with unbridged, pathological detachment. There is even a sense in which Cawdor is physically absent from the scene all the time, since the narrative consists of a retrospective, investigative police report prompted by his own anterior death. For another, Cawdor's openness seems to induce nothing but a vision of despair, quite a far cry from the positive reconstruction of self one would expect. Although his suicide can be viewed as an attempt to pull down the prison of himself and establish some contact, 'down the tunnel' (p. 179), with a reality of sorts, it is nonetheless an act of sheer destructiveness by which he topples the platform of encounter with the Other, to expose its all-too-common foundations in fear and violence: 'It is like my body is a house, and some visitor has come, and attacked the person who lived there' (p. 183). The novel then comes to a close in a surprising, tightly fastening deadlock. Stow's relentless exploration of otherness in *To the Islands*, his non-committal contrasting of discrete cosmogonies in *Tourmaline*, give way in *Visitants* to a resolution, final in aspect, of all the conflicts purposely left open before. It will take an entire book to reverse the gear and restore the possibility of difference, way back from Cawdor's cosmic vision of undifferentiated matter, where the infinitesimal mirrors the infinite and atoms fall through space like stars.

Stow has confided in an interview that *Visitants* and *The Girl Green as Elderflower* could best be seen as the panels of a diptych, 'intended to complement one another. What Clare is recovering from is obviously much clearer if one has read *Visitants*. And similarly the fate of Cawdor in *Visitants* doesn't look quite so irreversible if one has read *Elderflower*. Crispin Clare, the protagonist in *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, is a former anthropologist who had to leave the tropics with a bad case of cerebral malaria, and who now convalesces in the ancestral family cottage, in a small Suffolk village called Swainstead. Like Cawdor, he
experienced madness and attempted suicide; and like him he is obsessed with a vision of the universe which equates the microscopic and the macrocosmic scales: 'Clare pushed aside his emptied pot and looked at the circles on circles stamped in drying beer over the shining wood of the bar. So inside atoms. So in all space. The everlasting terror of a process without term.' His story is one of recovery in at least two senses of the word: it traces at once 'the rebeginning of his health' (p. 3) and a retrieval of difference, of all the discrete orders of existence first excluded from consideration in his levelling world view. Interestingly, the site of Clare's renewed interaction with otherness is his medieval cottage, conceived as blurred boundary between inside and outside. At the start, though, the cottage emerges as an instance of the house/prison. Its isolation from the surroundings is indicated by its name (the Hole Farm), and it is clear that Clare conceives of it as a redoubt against the outside world: 'The cottage had only one door. When it was closed behind him, he stood for a moment with his back to it. The drawbridge was up' (p. 34). However, Clare's seclusion is not complete; 'unused to white men's houses' (p. 4) after his sojourn in the tropics, he has kept the habit of leaving the bedroom window open at night. In fact, he goes so far as to align the bed in front of the window, 'so that by moonlight he could look down the clearing of the abandoned fishponds ... to the Sylphides-like wood which closed the view' (p. 3). Through this opening, he contemplates every morning the landscape's day-to-day transformation from wintry bareness to springtime luxuriance, a process which mirrors his own gradual spiritual rejuvenation. Thus, the window emerges as a symbolic channel leading into the world 'out there', back from alienation and sequestering of self. This renewed relationship with reality is described in the novel as a gentle intrusion of spring through the framed opening, which contrasts with the disruptive invasion of the rainforest in Visitants: 'At the edge of each window the apple tree, agitated by bullfinches, intruded branches of tight flushed buds.... He thought, on one such morning, listening to the cuckoo, that his provisional happiness had put down roots, that the fact of it would endure' (p. 65).

This outcome has nonplussed post-colonial critics, who felt some surprise that Stow's protagonist should finally achieve a sense of place in an innocuous environment like Suffolk, which (compared with Stow's previous settings) can hardly obtain as an embodiment of the Other. Also, disturbingly, Stow's romanticization of the colour green in this novel contradicts his indictment of this attitude in Tourmaline. Furthermore, by exalting the English countryside as 'insistently literary' (p. 72), he appears to privilege 'legendary Europe' above Australia, as if the latter had failed indeed to 'earn the right to be written about in
books' (Merry-Go-Round, p. 205). In short, some uneasiness derives from the impression that Stow has sold out, with The Girl Green as Elderflower, on the common cause of writing back to the Empire, in explicit recantation of his former avowed political faith. As an attempt to recuperate the novel for the Australian curriculum, Robert Sellick suggests, among other plausible interpretations, that Clare's dependence on twelfth-century Suffolk legends to mythologize reality in Elderflower can be construed as an instance of post-colonial 'abrogation and appropriation' of the textual/cultural authority of the metropolis. To my mind, though, it is precisely against the spirit underlying such appropriation that Stow's work militates. My suggestion is that by reading The Girl Green as Elderflower as a eulogy of difference, as a celebration of 'the variousness of everything that is' (p. 127), it is possible to transcend the surface contradictions in Stow's work which I have just delineated. However, this cannot be done unless one acknowledges the important structural part played by Clare's cottage as a symbolic hinge articulating the different layers of experience which he is trying to retrieve. I have shown how the open window allowed Clare to regain a grasp on the outer Suffolk landscape; in a metaphoric sense, the cottage opens the door onto more, imaginary, landscapes of self. Through its name, 'The Hole', the cottage is associated with those 'certain hollows or pits' (p. 115) which provide entrance, in the last of the medieval legends, to the underworld of the Antipodes 'or the Antichtones, who live south of the equatorial ocean' (pp. 129-30). In this respect, even while it makes for some atavistic response to the land of his ancestors, Clare's 'home' keeps unsevered his connection with the tropics and the mad fever he suffered there. Moreover, the farm is also the site of his meeting with Matthew Perry, whose Jewishness and homosexuality make an apt incarnation of the Other. Mat's resemblance to Clare is made clear through a series of images, which reverberate in chained succession. His wild sensuality accounts for his appearance, in Clare's transcription of the second tale, in the guise of a mute merman netted in the sea; a man/animal hybrid, his grey eyes and shaggy chest nevertheless identify him as Perry's alter ego. When tortured by his gaolers in a dungeon, the Wild Man from the sea is hung by the feet: an immediate echo of Clare's own attempt to hang himself in the southern hemisphere, and of the Tarot card in which he recognizes himself, the Hanged Man, who 'seems to be hanging from the earth, between two trees' (p. 20). Thus, Clare's cottage, as a doorway to all kinds of 'antipodes', gives him access, in imagination, to spheres of reality previously eclipsed from his cramped sense of normality: madness, speechlessness, foreignness, sexuality, animality, death. The latter, in particular, comes into consideration at the end of the first story, when Malkin (the
benevolent child-spirit) leads the master of the house to the gate of death, guiding him with 'the call of a cuckoo' which resonates 'somewhere out beyond [the] window' (p. 61). This recalls Clare's own window, from the vantage-point of which he too listens to the cuckoo:

The cuckoo had for Clare of all touches the most magicianly, the most transforming. When he lay in his bed in the early mornings, looking out from his pillow over the clearing of the old fishponds, the cuckoo with its frail assertiveness expanded everything, till the wood grew huge as the ancient manscaring forest of High Suffolk, and the sound was a tender green. (p. 65)

The expansion of landscape evoked here comes to encompass death, which Clare can now contemplate with equanimity, as when he sees a dog devour a pheasant: 'What at one time would have sickened him he could now once more take with calm. It was the way of the green god' (p. 68). As Clare himself perceives, the pheasant is 'the constant visitor which had marched so masterfully under his windows' (p. 68): and like the cuckoo, this 'visitor' has lured him into crossing an important threshold (or window-sill) of awareness. In this sense, the novel provides the announced demonstration that 'even a situation like Cawdor's is not irredeemable' since Clare's achieved dialogue with his subterranean 'visitors' opposes Cawdor's failure to communicate with the extra-terrestrial 'visitants' from the stars.

This reading, far from invalidating the post-colonial approach, has much conceptual bearing on the question of the inclusion of difference in the context of post-colonialism. That this should be but one interpretation among many, however, is in keeping with Stow's determination to have, like Amabel/Mirabel in the last story, 'so many truths to tell' (p. 134). In this respect, The Girl Green as Elderflower offers a model of interpretive ambivalence which reaches back to Tourmaline, across Cawdor's vision of 'post-human wholeness' in Visitants. The novel's bifurcation of meaning is grounded, most importantly, in the ambivalence of Stow's fascination with green, which can be read either as a sign of political nostalgia for the imperial metropolis, or as a pervasive symbol for the Other, perceived not as monstrous but as a subtly tinted version of Self, in a dialectic relationship where each contains the green trace of its opposite. The same kind of elusiveness informs much of Stow's last novel, The Suburbs of Hell, where the Self/Other dichotomy (established with the house metaphor in terms of inside versus outside) is further subverted. This novel completely undermines the notion of the safe, cosy, closed house that is presented in the first chapter when Harry Ufford, the protagonist, is seen enjoying the privacy of his living-room: 'What he felt was warmth and freedom, the privacy of his own special place, the comforting profusion of all those things, so lovingly
chosen, which he had carried home to mark his patch. Harry Ufford, at forty-seven, ... was at home like a cockle in the mud." In their fear of the random killer roaming about the district, the inhabitants of Old Tornwich, Suffolk, retire to the protection of home, and set out to tremble behind their thick medieval walls. Young Greg Ramsay, in particular, barricades himself inside the house where his older brother has been found dead, inexplicably shot in his own living-room. His desire for protection assumes the form of an obsessive concern with his own spatial integrity: 'He became increasingly disturbed about the postman, and formed the habit of always waking before he came. It worried him that this stranger could intrude objects, could even perhaps intrude his hand or arm, out of the world into his private space' (p. 64). Ironically, though, the house is presented consistently as an inadequate demarcation from the domain of the Other. The renovated Georgian mansion in which Ramsay seeks refuge is 'draughty as arseholes' (p. 13) and, like indeed most buildings in the town, exposed to the howling northeasterly 'searching out every chink in the close-packed houses' (p. 61). Also, the entire town is built upon a dense network of underground passages carved in the legendary days of smuggling, so that each house is susceptible of being burgled through the cellar. This state of affairs has implications that reach deep into consciousness: 'Something like this changes you, somehow. When you think of your house, normally, you think of doors and windows that lock and walls that are solid. But suddenly you find yourself thinking about window-panes that break and bolts that don’t hold and smugglers’ tunnels into the cellar' (p. 29). Finally, the fragility of the house of Self is epitomized in the novel by Death’s supernatural ability to read into the inner lives of those he prepares to take, a mental burglary more often than not accompanied by an actual case of housebreaking.

The various metamorphoses undergone by the house metaphor throughout Stow’s work yield no easy generalization. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the author’s ‘strategic location' with regard to his own material is imaged in the successive guises assumed by the house in his fiction. As I have suggested, the ruin metaphor embodies the undigested legacy of colonialism; therefore, in To the Islands, Heriot’s decision to forestall ruin by embracing ruin testifies to a kind of retributive logic which taps, quite disturbingly, the very imageries he seeks to discard. It is significant that Heriot’s symbolic attempt to destroy the rock of himself, at the end of this novel, should be depicted as an instance of ‘the momentousness of his strength, his power to alter the world at will' (p. 125): he subscribes to the ethos of Empire even while struggling to erode the monolith. Unsurprisingly, then, the image of the ruin is associated with the prison (one thinks of the Law’s tower in
Tourmaline, which is derelict), as a kind of confession on Stow’s part that even a militant imagination like his own remains fettered to European ideology. Stow has once commented on the ‘sense of imprisonment’ which he perceives as omnipresent in his country’s literature (from Clarke’s His Natural Life to Stead’s For Love Alone to the novels of Patrick White), and which relates back to the land’s actual past as a penal colony. Though he acknowledges the existence in Australia of a counter-myth of ‘newness and freedom’, the ruin/prison image can be read as the architectural representation, within his fiction, of the carceral space which still circumscribes the post-colonial consciousness.

However, Stow inscribes himself in this literature of enclosure only to subvert it better: to open it up, as it were. We have seen that the image of the open house in Visitants purports to do exactly this. It commands a vista of the outside world somehow preempted previously by the self-captive gaze-confining vestiges of the European imagination. Nonetheless, the lineaments of openness sketched in this novel ultimately prove unsatisfactory too. Unrestricted receptiveness to the Other appears to bring about no curtailment of the logic of conquest and assimilation. Clearly, Stow had to evolve a more elaborate tool for representing a moment of sufficiently ‘distinctive encounter’ with the Other; my suggestion is that the house image in The Suburbs of Hell provides a model of qualified fluidity between in and out apt to bring into play precisely such controlled, mutual penetration of Self and Other. It is a paradox, of course, that Stow should return to the site of Jung’s vertical, palimpsestic history to found this new cultural construction, having probed the hidden depths of Australian experience so relentlessly in Tourmaline and The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea. All the same, I hope to have shown that his ‘European’ novels, particularly The Girl Green as Elderflower, evince a complexity of roots sprouting from a veritable ‘visionary counterpoint of resources’ or cultures. It may be, then, that in order to keep writing truly ‘oppositional fiction’ (to modify Said’s phrase), Stow must constantly shift the ground that supports it. Whenever ‘the paradox of a green flush’ (Elderflower, p. 136) colours his work, it is in accordance with an aesthetic of metamorphosis or mutancy meant to defeat the monumentalization of history (whether European or Antipodean) into rigid, cancerous excrescences (ruins). In this sense, the subversion of categories effected by his last two novels applies to Stow’s strategic location as well; he creates for himself a fugal discipline which allows him to escape from the retaliatory and thus self-perpetuating politics of ‘abrogation and appropriation’.
NOTES


5. David Malouf, *12 Edmondstone Street* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986), p. 44. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.


7. Ibid., p. 219.


12. Randolph Stow, *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986), p. 80. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.


18. For a summary exposition of the Tao's principles in conjunction with Stow's work, see Paul D. Higginbotham, "'Honour the Single Soul': Randolph Stow and his Novels", *Southerly* 39 (1979), 378-92.

19. The novel is set in the Trobriands, off the east coast of Papua.

20. To my knowledge, the term was first used by Helen Tiffin in 'New Concepts of Person and Place in *The Twyborn Affair* and *A Bend in the River*', in Peggy Nightingale, ed., *A Sense of Place in the New Literatures in English* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1986), pp. 22-31.


23. Randolph Stow, *The Girl Green as Elderflower* (New York: The Viking Press, 1980), p. 32. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.
27. Judith Wright, quoted in Fay Zwicky, 'Speeches and Silences', *Quadrant* 17, 5 (May 1983), 43.
28. Randolph Stow, *The Suburbs of Hell* (London: Dent & Sons, 1985), pp. 3-4. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.
29. A concept defined by Edward W. Said in *Orientalism* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 20; paraphrased as 'the way [the author] seeks to contain, represent and speak on behalf of a space which is outside the European space' by Gillian Whitlock in "'The Carceral Archipelago": Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life* and John Richardson's *Wacousta*," in McDougall and Whitlock, op. cit., p. 66.
32. A similar point was made with regard to Clarke and Richardson; see Whitlock, op. cit., p. 61.
34. Ibid., p. 18.
35. Edward W. Said proposes 'oppositional criticism' as the mode in which criticism is most itself, 'in its suspicion of totalizing concepts, in its discontent with reified objects, in its impatience with guilds, special interests, imperialized fiefdoms and orthodox habits of mind'. See *The World, the Text and the Critic* (London: Faber, 1984), p. 29.