Associazione Laureati in Lingue
Università degli Studi di Udine

Le Simplegadi

Rivista internazionale on-line di lingue e letterature moderne
International refereed online journal of modern languages and literatures

http://all.uniud.it/simplegadi
ISSN 1824-5226

Eco-Sustainable Narratives in World Literatures, Languages and Education

Anno XII, Numero 13
Novembre 2014

Le Simplegadi

http://all.uniud.it/simplegadi

Rivista accademica on-line dell'Associazione dei Laureati in Lingue Straniere dell'Università di Udine
International refereed online journal of modern languages and literatures

Direttore responsabile / Editor-in-chief: Antonella Riem
Segretario di redazione / Editor: Stefano Mercanti

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33100 Udine
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Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Udine N.2 del 5 marzo 2003
ISSN 1824-5226

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Rivista Annuale - Pubblicazione del numero in corso: 30 novembre 2014
Issued on 30th November 2014

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POETICHE / POETICS

ARTICOLI / ARTICLES

RECENSIONI /REVIEWS

INTERVISTE / INTERVIEWS

Dennis Haskell

Gelati alla Spiaggia

i.m. SD, GR and RH

We found it so bizarre, but still
loved it, as the brave photo I free
and hold and stare at proves:
Gustavo and Sheila, Rhonda and me

in overcoats, neck-scarved, upraised
gelati coloured in twos or threes, strolling
along the beach in our mid-winter
Rimini and Ricciole trip. Something

in Italian life encourages the bizarre.
Today down Via dei Chiari I walked
past your old door, number 5: beside
the bell still sit your names, uncorked

from you: "Downing/Riboldi". My finger
lingered in the air, as if to stem the
uncertainty, ring and make you appear,
yet I realise your names condemn me

as the only one of us alive, *solo io*.
C'è la vita, what could be more clear?
But what of what we are could be
sadder, more shaking, and more bizarre?

Grief

Like a whale
with an arbitrary tale
grief can have you
tossed off the sea
in an instant of wild spray
as salt-drenched as tears.

Like a cat with a ball
of string, grief
can string you along
and just when you think
you're all right
show you you're wrong.

Like a coin tossed
into the sun
grief can have you spin
not knowing which side
you'll land, head
or tail
but inevitably
on edge.

"Death shall have no dominion"
one poet wrote,
and another,
"Death, thou shalt die!"
Grief will tell you

one was a joke
and the other a lie:

Your emotions, your rationality, your ideas,
all are flimsy
faced with its seriousness, its
unimpeachable dramatic whimsy.

Plato's Error

Cabbage moths, white
like torn pieces of skin,
flit in and out of the garden beds
eating what vegetable
leaves they need.

Your skin, thinned out like paper,
itches constantly, and you scratch
like a dog with fleas.
It's the medicines they say.
Medicines designed not to cure
but to endure, to keep
the cancer at bay
a little longer. For five years
our lives have orbited illness
and for six months now
have been sucked
into its light-defiant
vacuum.
Your skin slumps on

the mannequin framework of your bones.

On the few occasions I hug you
I have to do so oh so gently
it barely feels like touch.

Misery attends us. Our friends
are frightened to call,
understandably. I must remind myself
that silence is a form of consideration.

Shadows slip through
slats in the outdoor chairs;
from an angle of sunshine
they look more real
than the chairs themselves
(Plato got it wrong)
as real as skin
fluttering, peeling its way
out of our lives.

Six Years

Outside, streetlights shine
like low slivers of moon
and people move
energetically about their lives.
For six years
we have slipped
into the black pit

of illness and death
again and again,
climbed out
with no suggestions of doubt
then slipped back
and climbed out
again and again.
You cry in the shower
at your wasted, hairless body,
your now small breasts
sagging like two
unanswerable questions,
and I listen beyond the door
helpless, useless.

It is exhausting.

Why you are tired
I know, poison
surging through your veins.
"Why am I so tired?"
I ask the air, frustrated,
then realise
always, coming and going
to doctors, chemists, hospitals,
arriving and leaving,
sifting through all the medicines to take,
all the things to do,
whatever I do, whatever I think,

a part of me
is already grieving.

Widower

"Widower". It's such an odd word
like something to do with threshing
or soaring: I caught this morning
morning's widower, stumbling down
wasted streets. It's against the odds:
women live longer than men,
wives than husbands. Everything about it
is wrong. Time with his clichéd scythe
has cut a vicious way.

And the words it sits with
have an odd ring, like
strangers in the house of our lives:
"ashes", "funeral", "loss", death", "fire".
Can they ever exhaust their meanings,
tire of us and relax
their knuckle-laden fingers?

"Widower": this pathetic run
of weak, short syllables
says nothing about me
or everything, catching on
my every breath
the low, dark aftermath of death.

Dennis Haskell is the author of 6 collections of poetry, the most recent *Acts of Defiance: New and Selected Poems* (2010), and 13 volumes of literary scholarship and criticism. His *All the Time in the World* won the Western Australian Premier's Prize for Poetry in 2007. He was Chair of the Literature Board of the Australia Council for the Arts and co-editor of *Westerly*. He is now Director of the Westerly Centre and Senior Honorary Research Fellow in English and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia.

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Kevin Brophy

Not a Dream: the Murmur of Poetry in Catastrophic Times

Abstract I: Il presente articolo intende rappresentare una breve meditazione sulla poesia della fine dei tempi e sostenere che essa sia il mormorio, spesso inconsapevole, di un'intensa afflizione e angoscia. La nostra risposta all'imminente catastrofe di scala planetaria è, paradossalmente, intensamente personale e fondata sul diniego. Parte di tale risposta – tale diniego – è costituita da un crescente mormorio di sublime poesia, ispirata e di grande bellezza. Essa non può essere politica, perché la poesia riconosce che non c'è nessuno che possa parlare schiettamente di tali argomenti, ma è piuttosto foriera di sprazzi di intensità selvaggia che emergono dai suoi suoni.

Abstract II: This article, a brief meditation on poetry in end times, proposes that poetry is the often unwitting murmur of intense grief and distress. Our response to a coming catastrophe on a planetary scale is, paradoxically, intensely personal, and based in denial. As part of this response – this denial – there will be a growing murmur of sublime, inspired and beautiful poetry. It cannot be political, for poetry will recognise there is no one to truly speak to about these matters, and this will bring flashes of a wild intensity to its sounds.

… that earthly life, that miracle of being,
that poetry conserves and celebrates
(Levertov 1973: 115)

Denise Levertov wrote that she "can carry burdens from forest to sea as sagaciously as the elephant" (quoted in Hollenberg 2013: 2). Her elephant is the elephant of long treks, endurance and wisdom. We know that there are many

kinds of elephant, and one of these is the elephant in the room.

Let me turn to that elephant in a book by the Melbourne poet, Andy Jackson, who has a way of not only conjuring for us that elephant in the room, its monstrous comedy, but uncovering its curious, particular existence both within and outside us. We are strangely alive at the end of his poem, though the elephant has not left the room. The first stanza goes like this:

> There isn't much room left for us.
> When we need to eat or collect
> the mail, we inch sideways
> along the wall, two-dimensional (Jackson 2014: 2-3).

The poem is a little longer than his usual one-page limit in his book, *The Thin Bridge*. Though the elephant does not leave the room it does expand across two pages in this tiny book, already so short of pages. The final two stanzas go:

> I thought I heard sobbing last night,
> sensed your hand stroking the globe
> of his belly. It's not a dream
>
> when I wake to feel his hot breath,
> his trunk hovering over my body. He
> nudges my chest and head, reverently
> lifts my arm, as if it were a tusk, lifeless (Jackson 2014: 2-3).

The lines of free verse have the classic rhythms of English poetry, slipping between iambic and anapestic, across 4 or 5 beats per line, a length long enough to have the dramatic or subtle stop along the way. I love the line and a half that goes, "little grunts escape our mouths,/involuntary confessions" (Jackson 2014: 2) – for the way it turns the tables on us, giving *us* the animal sounds, but then suggesting that these grunts are after all the stuff of poetry, the true confessions that truly

celebrate and conserve this earthly life.

All this of course is to avoid talking directly about the elephant. But after all, what would we be if we didn't have an elephant in every room where we gather? We would not be the social, duplicitous, fearful, clinging and grunting creatures that we are. Like Andy Jackson's elephant of gentle reminder, there is one here in this planetary room with us, threatening to squeeze us up against the walls. In 2014 Bloomsbury published a book by George Marshall, titled, *Don't Even Think About it: Why Our Brains are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*. Since the global agreement to do something about climate change at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992, the world has done very little about climate change. Twenty-two years later, in November 2014, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has produced a report in anticipation of the 2015 summit in Paris, declaring that the window of opportunity for action is closing, and that if we do not bring human-caused emissions to zero by the middle of this century, we face 4 degrees of warming by the end of the century, with mass human deaths, a 10-metre sea rise, weather chaos, and forty per cent of species and plants facing extinction. We don't want to remedy this situation, George Marshall suggests, because we don't want to believe it is really happening.

The problem is that each of us experiences the weather, the natural world, our environment, suburb and neighbourhood on a personal level. And what we experience on a personal level seems always to accord with our assumptions about the world and our place in it. I have worked for this, I tell myself, standing here in my garden in my backyard among the birds that have never had such a thought, but never cease themselves to work. In a review of Marshall's book, Paul Kingsnorth quotes Daniel Kahneman who won a Nobel prize for his work on the psychology of human decision-making: "No amount of psychological awareness will overcome people's reluctance to lower their standard of living" (Kingsnorth 2014: 18).

If science will not be heard, if politicians can only manoeuvre for position, can poetry be heard raising these most pressing questions, in its often slant, sly, or

even unwitting ways? We know that as all seven and more billion of us move about on this planet, there is a growing sense of the imminent loss of the very ecosystems that gave rise to us and bore us into history. We are suddenly curious about that divide between ourselves and the animal world. Students are writing theses about the species divide, novelists are turning out novels about it, not least Ceridwen Dovey's *Only the Animals* (2014). Philosophers won't stop talking about it. In this month's *New Philosopher*, Professor David C. Wood from Vanderbilt University makes his thoughts plain: "We cannot, however, continue to favour our own species in the ways that we do without hypocrisy and inconsistency. The failure is one of logic, or imagination or moral sensibility" (Boag 2014: 80). And if this state of affairs signals a failure of imagination, then at least poets are writing poems like Andy Jackson's "A Language I didn't Know". The poem is a series of thin bridges in longish couplets on the page, and each line-ending hovers over a gap, as though the poem wants to tip us out of ourselves. It is a clever and real poem. It touches upon the melancholy knowledge of the insouciance with which we dismiss species after species from the planet and from our conversation. The poet has found a waterfall and sits by it, by its sound, then notices near him a bird:

> … clearly he has seen me and knows
> my intent, standing now right before me,
>
> having flown across a gulf of rock, air
> and species. The silk of his black breast,
>
> his eyes rivets of rust-red, wings
> suddenly arms folded to barely conceal
>
> something obscure we have in common.
> He makes a sound like a stone
>
> being dropped into a small, deep pool.

I try to make the same sound, feel

absurdly human, but straight away he walks
forward, like I've said yes to a question (Jackson: 24-25).

Like the sound of a waterfall, sound that seems to collapse into the churn of water that produces it, poetry murmurs to itself the sound of panic as it turns to the world around. The world is hurling a question at us. Even in a poem with the anodyne title, "Garden Poem", the Australian poet of the natural world, Robert Adamson, follows the trajectory of a day in his garden, noting in passing,

at midday
the weather, with bushfire breath, walks about
talking to itself (Adamson 2014: 99).

Here, briefly, is the madness we are inside, and is soon to be inside us. Panic replaces nostalgia, anxiety replaces peace. Sometimes a whole book of poetry turns to the question of climate change, as John Jenkins does in his verse novel, *A Break in the Weather* (2003), but what I am hearing now are these moments of fissure, this terror in small places inside poems, this fear that poems are talking to themselves. With climate change now clearly unstoppable, the panic will, I predict, give rise to a poetry of extreme tension and extreme beauty and tenderness, a poetry of grief and love. There will be more and more of it, and we will wonder at it, read it, but we cannot easily hear it.

Can you hear the beautiful lament for the death of Gaia, mother earth, and the further eco-feminist note that links the oppression of women with the destruction of the planet, in the poem by Sharon Olds that almost ends her book, *One Secret Thing*, her book about her mother dying? It is a lament that is also a denial. Perhaps the only way to truly feel the finality of what has happened is, sometimes, to deny it is happening at the same time as acknowledging it. I know that the poet did not intend this poem to be read as a response to earth's

ecological catastrophe, but it happens to read perfectly and perhaps not entirely unwittingly as a poem for our end time on this planet:

> It was like witnessing the earth being formed,
> to see my mother die, like seeing
> the dry lands be separated
> from the oceans, and all the mists bear up
> on one side, and all the solids
> be borne down, on the other, until
> the body was all there, all bronze and
> petrified redwood opal, and the soul all
> gone. If she hadn't looked so exalted , so
> beast-exalted and refreshed and suddenly
> hopeful, more than hopeful – beyond
> hope, relieved – if she had not been suffering so
> much, since I had met her, I do not
> know how I would have stood it, without
> fighting someone, though no one was there
> to fight, death was not there except
> as her, my task was to hold her …..
>
> … Winds, stems, tongues.
> Embryo, zygote, blastocele, atom,
> my mother's dying was like an end
> of life on earth … ("To See My Mother", Olds 2008: 93).

Sharon Olds is the poet of the personal, private experience, but poetry can never be anything but public, and its move towards imagery will always broaden its murmur towards the most urgently important matters, those matters we can barely speak of and would prefer to drown out with sound, like the drowning rush of a waterfall or the rumbled crackings of a magnificent thunderstorm. When Saroya Copley ends a recent academic eco-feminist analysis of that explicitly political

Canadian writer, Margaret Atwood, with, "the future we want to see must be fought for and brought into being through both individual and collective political action, the penalty for political passivity being dystopia" (Copley 2013: 53) the muddled fall of this rhetoric brings her article quickly to the sudden, wistful finish of, "it is time to act wisely" (Copley 2013: 54). Yes, and how does one act wisely with a whole elephant in the room?

In 2007 I was in the town of Haridwar on the Ganges in northern India, wanting to see wild elephants. We met a Mr A. K. Singhal of the government tourist bureau in the street by chance, and after asking us what our good names might be, he promised us 'One hundred per cent elephants' if we took a tour of the local national park with him the next day. We were pleased, and signed up, and went out into the park in a jeep with him the very next day. For hours there were no elephants. We might have seen a tiger print in the dust of the road, but I did not believe it. Finally My Singhal admitted that one usually only sees elephants 'by chance'. Then there were four elephants in front of us in the forest, stripping a tree, and one infant being fed by its mother. Later in the dusk we saw them crossing grassland in a valley. It was the full 'one hundred per cent elephants', the elephants of treks, endurance, and the carrying of burdens. We were pleased to have been even that close to the real things in something like a natural state, even if it was its own illusion of wildness.

Those elephants seem so far away now, and so dreamlike in my memory. In this room of the mind, they are small, but I must remember their size if they are to prompt me into that zone of unbearable discomfort that is upon us.

Every time a poet goes to write a poem, there will be the unwitting song of it that will sing of its time to some future time. But when there is no future, and the song is swallowing itself, then perhaps that murmured song on the page, the song that lifts into the mind of the reader will be beautiful or terrible, it will be like the earth being formed again.

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Antonella Riem Natale

'A Kind of Blessing': David Malouf and the Spirit of the Embodied Word

Abstract I: Il corpo, lo spirito e la parola creativa sono elementi particolarmente significativi nell'opera di David Malouf: il suo linguaggio immaginativo e poetico dà voce alle sfumature più sottili della vita, rivelandone sia la dimensione spirituale sia quella creativa. La mia analisi si basa sul lavoro dell'antropologa e storica Riane Eisler e sulla teoria della parola creativa in contrapposizione al termine scientista di Raimon Panikkar. Nella presente analisi, utilizzerò le prospettive interculturali e di partnership proprie del lavoro di Panikkar e di Eisler come base filosofica e critica al fine di evidenziare in che modo Malouf dia forma ad un mondo di epifanie spirituali, in cui le realtà della vita quotidiana sono trasmutate in una dimensione spirituale attraverso l'intensità dell'immaginazione creativa.

Abstract II: Body, spirit and creative word are significant elements in David Malouf's work: his imaginative and poetical language gives voice to the subtleties of life, revealing both their spiritual and physical dimensions. My analysis is based on the work of the anthropologist and macro-historian Riane Eisler and on Raimon Panikkar's theory of the *creative word* versus *scientistic term*. I will use the intercultural and partnership perspectives of Panikkar and Eisler's work as a philosophical and critical background to show how in his work Malouf gives form to a world of spiritual epiphanies, with the *realities* of everyday life transmuted into a spiritual dimension through the intensity of the creative imagination.

Body, spirit and creative word are significant elements in David Malouf's work: his imaginative and poetical language gives voice to the subtleties of life, illuminating

simple actions, events and gestures, and revealing both their spiritual and physical dimensions. The *creative word* (Panikkar 2007) is a constitutive element of his oeuvre and manifests the essential connection between body, nature and spirit through a distinctive language which reveals a deep spirituality within the physical and natural realms. This language is rooted in Malouf's desire to 'translate' new place(s) into the already formed 'body' of English (language and literature) and offers the reader a new way to the 'other': a *partnership* (Eisler 1987) world-view where mutually respectful and caring relationships constitute an effective alternative to the usual binary patterns of domination based on gender inequalities, top-down hierarchies and violence. As Andrew Taylor observes, "predominant in Malouf's fiction is the urge to explore and challenge difference and boundaries" and the lyricism in his novels "springs from the same urge to go beyond difference" (Taylor 1999: 5). This urge, as I shall demonstrate in this article, is creatively embodied in Malouf's *partnership* and *creative word*.

My analysis is based on the work of the anthropologist and macro-historian Riane Eisler (1987) (1), extensively implemented since 1998 by the *Partnership Studies Group* within the study of world literatures, languages and education (2). In this article I employ the terms *partnership* and *dominator* according to Eisler's *Cultural Transformation Theory*, an interdisciplinary paradigm which examines cultural differences, gender relationships and, more extensively, creative processes of reinvention and re-imagination, in order to find new ways of making 'difference' productive rather than destructive, as "diversity is not automatically equated with inferiority or superiority" (Eisler 2002: 161). Similarly, Raimon Panikkar's theory of the *creative word* versus *scientistic term* (3) points out the need to further investigate 'the word' as an expression of creativity and what he calls *dialogic dialogue* based on its symbolic, poetic and spiritual power, far from the scientific and westernized *dialectical dialogue* which presupposes the primacy of a technical 'term', which is limited to a mere object of thought (*Logos*). In this article I will use the intercultural and partnership (4) perspectives of Panikkar and Eisler's work as a

philosophical and critical background to show how Malouf gives form to a world of spiritual epiphanies, with the *realities* of everyday life transmuted into a spiritual dimension through the intensity of the creative imagination.

When considering the creative word Panikkar relies heavily on the centrality of language in different cultural and spiritual traditions:

> From letters, a word is formed with its own meaning. From words, a sentence is formed with its own meaning. That meaning carries an image. Once an image is formed, you begin to feel good or bad … For example take the word fool. Now if you say these letters – F-O-O-L – one at a time, in themselves they don't carry any meaning. But when you combine these letters and say 'Fool!' it really has its own power (Shantananda 2003: 236-237).

Malouf is interested in studying how this process of assembling sounds and letters creates a *meaning* and thus gives life to different realities or narrations. Our innate capacity of associating sound with objects and learning different languages is a magnificent instrument both to apprehend the infinite multiplicity of words and tongues and realise that the words we speak, the feelings and ideas they express, have a significant impact on the way we imagine and then actualise what we call reality.

In his writing (and speaking), Malouf is intensely aware of this power of words and he chooses them with care. For Malouf language is a means to express beauty and, at the same time, a physical and spiritual instrument which touches both the cosmos and our inner Self. In keeping with Panikkar's view, Malouf also perceives language in silence, the highest form of communication, beyond speech: "The best question is asked in silence and the answer is given in silence" (Muktananda 1989: 490). Whereas 'scientistic terms' see silence simply as a pause in linear positivistic thought, where terms are used to define and limit and can often lie in order to control, 'creative words' are intertwined with physical experience in its intense secret connections with the spiritual world.

Many of Malouf's characters are seen in dialogic dialogue one with the other: Johnno with Dante, Ovid with the Child, Adair with Carney and before that with Fergus and Virgilia, Priam with Somax and then with Achilles, Achilles with Patroclus and then with Hector (even if after Hector's death), and many others. These characters are very different from one another, but there is a bonding that slowly takes place in their dialogue. In their words we hear echoes of the soul's language, speaking of our shared humanity on this living planet. Malouf's language is often solid and pragmatic, 'realistic' one would say, describing everyday little acts and realities, minutiae, small details:

> The reason I'm particularly interested in those things – like shelling peas and all the rest of it – is because the body in a way discovers itself in doing certain things, and so does the mind. Often people in my books are not saying anything to one another – they are communicating by doing something together … *Ironically, as a writer, I am quite interested in non-verbal communication*. Our bodies are sort of thinking things out a lot of the time or thinking themselves out through activity, and that is one of the reasons I am interested in those things (Turcotte 1990: 58, my italics).

In this simplicity and non-verbal communication Malouf works from the highest levels of speech, where, as Coleridge knows, Imagination is the soul's instrument of creation. In its inner rhythms, significant pauses and musical qualities, language makes us feel the poetic energy that gives shape to sound, interspersed with eloquent silence. Malouf is a *rhapsodos*, a singer of "woven words" (Brennan 2011: 5), interlacing life and light. The aim of his singing, resounding and weaving of words is that of telling stories (in both poetry and prose), of inviting us on his imaginative journey in order to experience aesthetic beauty and find deeper meanings for our lives, and the two are always conjoined. Malouf comments thus on the musical and metaphorical qualities of his work:

> Musical, I think that's certainly true. But I think that's true of the way all my books are shaped. I don't usually think of the forward drive of the book as having to do with plot, but with *exploration of things which are announced first, sometimes almost like metaphors in a poem*, say. You then explore both ends of the metaphor and let those spawn other oppositions, other comparisons, and then explore those. I think that's the way almost all my books work, and I think I learned really to shape a novel the way I'd learned to shape a poem. I sometimes referred in the past to the books therefore having a kind of poetical structure in that kind of way, or musical, if one wanted to say that (Daniel 1996: 1, my italics).

Metaphors give shape, sound and foundation to Malouf's art. In *Ransom* the breadth and depth of the opening scene, with the Sea/Mother metaphor and its lyrical undercurrent flow, sets the tone for this intimist tale, where we enter the heroes' souls, rather than follow their great feats of war. Its opening is far from the commonly accepted idea of 'heroic', with Achilles listening to the (silent) murmur of the sea, yearning for his mother's presence:

> *The sea has many voices.* The voice this man is listening for is the voice of his mother. He lifts his head, turns his face to the chill air that moves in across the gulf, and tastes its sharp salt on his lip. The sea surface bellies and glistens, a lustrous silver-blue – a membrane stretched to a fine transparency where once, for *nine changes of the moon*, he had hung curled in a *dream of pre-existence* and was *rocked and comforted* (Malouf 2009: 3, my italics).

The scene reveals the human and more gentle side of the 'hero', with which we can identify. If, as Malouf says, he "explore[s] both ends of the metaphor and let those spawn other oppositions, other comparisons, and then explore[s] those", here he plunges the reader into a soft, dreamy state of 'pre-existence', based on partnership flexibility. The sea-mother-Thetis represents a partnership approach to life: fluid, emotional, welcoming, and full of understanding and love. Then Malouf

starts exploring oppositions, for Achilles cannot take refuge anymore in his mother's arms; he is an adult man now: "the man is a fighter" (Malouf 2009: 4), totally alone in the face of his responsibilities, his desire for revenge and his guilt for Patroclus' death. Malouf takes us to the other end of his poetic metaphor, into the archetypal male dominator world. In a dominator warrior society, the motherly all-embracing sphere must be left behind when boys are old enough to enter their fathers' realm of fighting, stoic suffering and violent death:

> He had entered the rough world of men, where a man's acts follow him wherever he goes in the form of story. A world of pain, loss, dependency, bursts of violence and elation; of fatality and fatal contradictions, breathless leaps into the unknown; at last of death – a hero's death out there in full sunlight under the gaze of gods and men, for which the hardened self, the hardened body, had daily to be exercised and prepared (Malouf 2009: 6).

The negation of the Mother's *water* emotional world leads men to violence – the only possible outlet for their repressed feelings. Achilles' fury against Hector's dead body is his only means of venting his grief and guilt for Patroclus' death: "the tears he brings fall inwardly, his cheeks are dry … But it is never enough. That is what he feels. That is what torments him" (Malouf 2009: 33).

Ransom tells of an inner journey towards a more peaceful partnership model of life, represented by what stereotypically dominator societies ascribe to the 'feminine', but which, in reality pertains to all genders. Malouf is not interested in competing with Homer, but in having a dialogic dialogue with the *Iliad* and its myth of war and grief, finding how it can *cor-respond* with us now (that is respond with the heart), drawing out previously unheard resonances. After his moving and illuminating meeting with Priam, at the end of the novel Achilles attains an inner timeless dimension that hearkens back to the novel's opening:

> In the stillness that follows – for the noise his men are making no longer comes to his ears – Achilles feels immobilised and outside time.
> This morning, on the beach beyond the line of Achaean ships, he had stood staring out across the gulf and felt that it was not space his mind was being drawn into, but the vast expanse of time, at once immediate in the instant and boundless, without end (Malouf 2009: 185).

Stillness, reconciliation and peace are born from that trope of unity and belief that breaches boundaries (of time, space, nation, personality, ethnicity, language, culture). The poetic creative word bridges differences and leads us to a dimension where suffering and division are transcended in our common humanity and in the simplicity of nature and things other-than-human. To reach this state we must return, if temporarily like Achilles, to that feminine and partnership dimension that is excluded by the dominator paradigm.

This is the only way to peace and reconciliation: the immaculate body of Hector does not enrage Achilles anymore, he feels cleansed of his guilt and anger, ready to face his destiny, truly a hero now that, through compassion, he can open himself to his enemy, who existed only in the dominator world. In the end Achilles realises, as he watches the body of Hector being prepared for burial, the business of life is no more than "[b]eing turned this way then that in the hands of women", "naked as he began" (Malouf 2009: 194).

In *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, Michael Adair, the officer, and Daniel Carney, the prisoner, are also entrapped in the dominator paradigm where revenge is disguised as justice, based on the principle of 'an eye for an eye'. This very Australian and intensely poetical novel revolves on their nocturnal dialogic dialogues that recall personal and colonial history in realistic detail and reveal their psychological and spiritual development. Here too, within the partnership world, differences fade (officer/prisoner, memory/dream/reality, night/day, present/past) and boundaries become permeable: the other becomes the sign of my Self; identity (personal and national) is malleable and open to multiple layers of

transformation. At the beginning of the story we have the three young Irish friends, Adair, Virgilia and Fergus, who share a deep relationship that is constantly mutable (friends, half-brothers, would-be-lovers) and has:

> [i]ts own language too, in which thoughts passed from one to another so easily that it scarcely mattered which of the three had given shape to a new thought or produced the code word that from now on would be a new element in their speech. A joke might be the beginning of it, or a new name for some object that had previously been designated by common syllables and only now revealed the special colour and glow that would make it part of their private world (Malouf 1996*:* 86).

So it is intimacy, affective relationship, closeness, that shapes language and gives depth and meaning, 'special colour and glow' to our world. This same nearness is created between the grown up Adair, an army officer now, and his prisoner, Carney, whose very name connects him to *carnality* and the physical body in both its fleshly beauty and its heaviness and anguish. He belongs to the damned and poor of the Earth and Adair, in his "sympathetic understanding" (Malouf 1996: 130), is unable to condemn him. In his final baptismal immersion in the Aboriginal waters of Curlow Creek, Carney is redeemed, his body "dazzling" (Malouf 1996: 218) and glowing with spiritual light:

> Slowly the man turned and stood with lowered head, observing with a child's interest the paleness of his feet through the swirling water. Almost done with himself now. With the business of washing off the long accumulation of dirt and sweat and blood, with the heaviness of the flesh. In the modest pleasure of standing clean in the sunlight. In touch with that live element that on all sides was at play about him (Malouf 1996: 217).

Water, fluidity and light are interlaced: every word here is carefully chosen both at descriptive and symbolic levels. This evocative depiction shows the destination of

Carney's final journey beyond the body and its 'heaviness', beyond his personal and national history, into the spiritual dimension of the Australian bush. Like sea-mother-Thetis, the river's water is lively and liquid; it has a comforting energy that is maternal and of *partnership*. The troopers are staring open-mouthed, embarrassed by the sight of the man's exposed flesh and vulnerability; they are annoyed yet, at the same time, feel compassion, sympathy, even remorse for the prisoner's wounds and 'blue-black and livid' marks:

> they felt imposed upon, reduced to mere onlookers, to standing by and waiting on *his* time while, with O'Dare's permission it seemed, this fellow took all the time he needed, all the time in the world it might be, to just stand there idly running water over himself (Malouf 1996: 217).

This is Malouf's creative word at its best: simple, intense, evocative while describing the facts of the body and its 'reality' with sharp clarity. At the same time he creates empathic and spiritual echoes in us readers, causing us to reflect on life and on the absurdity of killing other living beings, be they human or animal. A similar nakedness is present in another outsider in the novel, the black guide Jonas. He challenges definitions and remains a mystery for Adair and the other troopers; he manifests physical presence and intensity, total focus on the present moment that renders him alert to everything around, and to the workings of his soul. He belongs to the place, embodying a denser and deeper darkness which eludes the scientistic term but can be embodied in the poetic word:

> He was, Adair thought, even under his name of Jonas, an opening there into a deeper darkness, into a mystery – of the place, of something else too that was *not-place*, which might also be worth exploring – but all traffic through it, in either direction, was blocked (Malouf 1996: 122).

This impenetrable darkness of the land and the Aboriginal is an embodiment of that universal lyrical comprehension that whites like Adair have lost under the rule of the dominator paradigm that seeks to objectify and control everything through the scientistic term. Jonas' place-non-place is Malouf's main focus. The act of incorporating place through colonial exploitation must be transformed in a true act of embodiment where, through the trope of unity and belief, white settlers can become one with the land and those in it. Malouf is profoundly sceptical of the superiority/inferiority ranking of whites and blacks/outsiders; rather, he stresses the inability of scientistic language to provide a deeper understanding of reality (Ramsey-Kurz 2003).

In the novel *Ransom* Somax has many affinities with Carney and Jonas: he too is the physical, simple man, the one who knows life beyond the walls of Priam's princely palace and who will lead him and teach him and, in the end, poetically tell his story. With Somax's help, Priam will abandon his rigid world of form and norm and appreciate the ordinary way of life the carter represents:

> And he looked at the old fellow who had revealed these things to him with growing respect.
> He knew things. The life he had come from, and had to some extent brought along with him, was full of activities and facts that, for all that they were common and low, had an appeal (Malouf 2009: 128).

These low and ordinary activities appeal to Malouf and to us; they represent our world and an opening towards something else: transcendence, a metamorphosis of the body, the blossoming of the soul. This happens in the very physicality of words:

> I think there are some people for whom words, when they start dealing with them, somehow *remain invested with all the physical qualities* that they refer to. It's a configuration of mind … and then there is another kind of writing which is

> an attempt to recreate the world *through* the words … That means that for some of us a particular word in referring to an object has the *real, sensual, tactile, voluminous quality of the object*. Once again, we get back to the body. I would say that what I am doing when I am writing *is shifting my body around, letting it travel and explore*. That is what I feel. *It is very, very physical* (Turcotte 1990: 60, my italics).

In *An Imaginary Life*, Malouf 'shifts his body around' incarnating his sensual and tactile words in the exiled Latin poet Ovid. Ovid's initial detachment from Tomis, its natural beauties and the voice of its people manifests the dominator-oriented paradigm of the Roman (British) Empire that he has absorbed and accepted. In Augustan Rome, Ovid was the dispassionate, sophisticated ironic poet – irony being the "trope of scepticism, and division" (McDonald 1988: 46), an instrument of the dominator rationalistic view. If at the beginning Ovid ignores and despises the Getic language, later he finds it "oddly moving. It isn't at all like our Roman tongue, whose endings are designed to express difference, the smallest nuances of thought and feeling" (Malouf 1980: 65).

After experiencing the epiphany of the poppy flower, he appreciates the "trope of belief and unity" (McDonald 1988: 46), the capacity of language to connect the creative word with infinite worlds: "This language is equally expressive, but what it presents is the raw life and unity of things. I believe I could make poems in it. Seeing the world through this other tongue I see it differently. It is a different world" (Malouf 1980: 65). Ovid starts to appreciate that linguistic and cultural differences do not mean superiority/inferiority and that the world is transformed according to the coloured lens through which we read it. He is looking for a language "whose every syllable is a gesture of reconciliation" (Malouf 1980: 98), a "speech in silence" (Malouf 1980: 97), and this revelatory understanding will finally bring him to experience the texture of the word poppy on his tongue, literally and metaphorically, which creates an inner explosion of joy and blossoming creativity:

> Poppy. The magic of saying the word made my skin prickle, *the saying almost a greater miracle than the seeing*. I was drunk with joy. I danced. I shouted. Imagine the astonishment of my friends at Rome to see our cynical metropolitan poet, who barely knows a flower or a tree, dancing about in broken sandals on the earth, which is baked hard and cracked in some places, and in others puddled with foul-smelling mud – to see him *dancing and singing to himself in celebration of this bloom* (Malouf 1980: 31, my italics).

The passage continues with a series of emotionally charged verbs suggesting heightened energy and passion: flowers explode, burst, unfold, spring, spread, open, the gods quicken (Malouf 1980: 32); colours are "magic syllables" and Ovid is "making the spring" (Malouf 1980: 31). This choice of words expresses a language of harmony and unity, the fusion of poet and Nature in the creative and blissful word. Transformed by the power of his imagination he uses synecdoche, "the trope of belief and unity" (McDonald 1988: 46) that is the core of Eisler's partnership paradigm, and he becomes Flora and Persephone, giving names to flowers: "opening out [their] secret syllables" (Malouf 1980: 32). In this way, "language ceases to be language and becomes, perhaps, a universal lyrical comprehensiveness" (Taylor 1999: 6).

In Malouf's short story "The Only Speaker of His Tongue", the lexicographer is not interested in universal lyrical comprehensiveness or the secret sacred syllables of life, but wants to study the Aboriginal man of the title, keeping him at a safe distance by using the third person pronoun 'he,' which represents the objectification of the other using scientistic terms. According to Panikkar, the use of scientistic terms requires us to restrain our imagination and look for an exact (one-dimensional) correlation between terms and concepts. Like Ovid with the child, the lexicographer is led to abandon this dismissive rationalistic attitude by the Aboriginal's pregnant and poetic silence. Perceiving the other's fragility and mortality, the lexicographer realises, with guilt, the devastation of lands,

languages, peoples, wrought by the colonizing dominator power. His voice is muted as he senses the loss as if it were his own: the loss of language, culture, the very life of his people. He acknowledges their shared humanity. In a moment of deep unity with the other, the lexicographer reverts to the creative language of partnership, giving voice to deep emotions and the inner poetry of things:

> I feel his silence … *Things centre themselves upon him* – that is what I feel, it is eerie – as on the *one and only repository of a name* they will lose if he is no longer there to keep it in mind. *He holds thus, on a loose thread*, the whole circle of shabby-looking trees, the bushes with their hidden life, the infinitesimal coming and going among grassroots or on ant-trails between stones, the minds of small native creatures that come creeping to the edge of the scene and look in at us from their other lives. *He gives no sign of being special*…
> I must confess it. He has given me a fright (Malouf 1982: 71, my italics).

In the lexicographer's profound fright that we all would feel in the face of such loss and destruction, Malouf articulates a form of English language which bridges differences, putting everything in poetic relation. He transcribes the dialogic dialogue among peoples, nature, inanimate things, stories and lands, illumines them from within. He draws on that inner vibration that makes simple words resound more deeply, showing empathy, understanding and interconnectedness rather than separation, violence and fear.

In *Remembering Babylon*, Malouf faces the conflict between white dominator settlers and Aboriginal partnership communities from the perspective of Gemmy, who has gone 'bush', entering landscape and letting it completely reshape his soul. Even if he 'returns' to white society for a while he remains an amphibious creature – he is depicted as a half-fish half-human when the Aboriginal women find him stranded on the beach, covered in shells and little animals (Malouf 1993: 22). He crosses boundaries between cultures and is balanced, as in the opening scene (Malouf 1993: 3), between worlds he

incarnates fully in himself. His choice, at the end, is to be absorbed again in the country. As Malouf says, "he represents a kind of pioneer spirit of what that landscape and that continent might do to you if you really and completely committed yourself to it" (Papastergiadis 1994: 85). Like Carney, Jonas, Jordan and the Child and many others, he has a deep knowledge of the Australian landscape and its secrets, but for the settlers: "The country he had broken out of was all unknown to them. Even in full sunlight it was impenetrable dark" (Malouf 1993: 8). Gemmy knows the language of the place, with its secret meanings understood and felt in the deepest silence; he, unlike Adair with Jonas, has opened the breach and entered into this otherness, transmuting himself; he feels and perceives the place as full of meanings, he knows animals, peoples, plants, figures of landscape, water springs, birds, he is interconnected, something that, according to Malouf, white settler society will have to learn.

In the story *Blacksoil Country* the settlers as a community lack this sense of communion with the other. Most of them fear the Aborigines and want to keep them *outside* the artificial boundaries they create to protect their possessions and lives. However the Aboriginal populations do not recognise 'fences' since they are custodians rather than owners of the land, and they cross them inadvertently or possibly use them to create occasions for encounter. The protagonist's father shoots one of the Aboriginals who were trespassing, unknowingly, on his plot of land, and in retribution his son Jordan is killed. Jordan is the only one in the family who loves both the country and the Aboriginals he meets in his exploratory wanderings; his is the narrating voice and only at the end do we understand that he is a ghost in blacksoil country. He is twelve, but, as he tells us, he can show us this country as if drawing on aeons of knowledge and experience: "I been in it long enough". We follow his story, similar to many we heard about in accounts of the process of settlement, about the absurd violence and the whites' all-consuming fear of the Aborigines. Fear and violence always go hand in hand. Jordan is a wise and ancient soul; an Ancestor now, he knows no difference

between himself and the blacks exterminated in revenge for his death: "*And me* all that while lying quiet in the heart of the country, slowly sinking into the ancientness of it, making it mine, grain by grain blending my white grains with its many black ones" (Malouf 2000: 130, my italics). As in Ovid's final metamorphosis, Jordan is also finding his true nature in meeting the other and the country at the moment of death. He reveals what vanden Driesen calls "white indigeneity" (Malouf 2000: xxvi), the opportunity for the white settler to finally belong to the land as do the Aboriginals, a possible reconciliation, which is as yet incomplete. Jordan does it through his slow fusion with the other and the landscape, cell by cell, transmitting his knowledge and wisdom to those who can feel it in his eternal love:

> *And Ma*, now, at the line, with the blood beating in her throat, and his shirts, where she has just pegged them out, beginning to swell with the breeze, resting her chin on a wet sheet and *raising her eyes to the land and gazing off into the brimming heart of it* (Malouf 2000: 130, my italics).

And *me* – and *Ma*, only a vowel's difference between Jordan and his mother, and the consonant *m*, resounding in the universal *OM* of creation, the first sound all children utter, *mmmm* like mother; they are united through the conjunction *and*, which indicates consonance, relationship, union and belief. *Me* is "lying quiet in the heart of the country", and *Ma* is hanging garments on the line, an action that often appears in Malouf as an image of revelation:

> Morning gets into its stride
> with clean straw flying
> and mares' tails. Outer garments,
> rinsed and wrung dry
> of their yesterdays, take
> to the sky, lighter than souls ("As It Comes", Malouf 2007: 8).

As I have noted, everyday actions often acquire in Malouf a special epiphanic and revelatory significance; they manifest the spirit in outward bodily forms; they stand as metaphoric and synecdochic instruments signalling unity, belief, harmony, partnership and peace. For the first time, possibly, Jordan's mother raises her eyes towards the horizon that previously terrified her: a clear sign that she is feeling something new arising in her, a form of love, as yet unrevealed and unacknowledged, for the land where her son's *body* lies. His father's shirts, swelling in the breeze, are a sign that he too is being traversed by a new breath, the *spiritus* of the land he inhabits, that will welcome his body after death, through the same slow merging his son is experiencing. Then they will both "take to the sky, lighter than souls". Deep spirituality can be found in the brimming heart of nature and the body: it abides in the physical and natural realms; the continent is slowly transforming the colonisers' outlook, creating new secret openings into the not-yet-known other – be it landscape or Aboriginal, manifesting a partnership world-view in the language of silence, gesture, poetry and rhythm.

Malouf achieves his narrative and poetic interconnections by translating the English language into a different 'sphere' of knowledge where it does not have to divide and discriminate, like Latin, but rather find new poetic spaces in the gap between name and landscape, in a more fluent and flexible form that facilitates transnational and transcultural understanding. Malouf makes room for the flow of imagination – his, his characters' and ours; he offers us the possibility of connecting and relating things in a wider web of life, not limited by the scientistic term, but opened up by the power of speech, manifesting 'unity and belief.' Moving beyond colonial exploitation into caring and mutual partnership we can become one with the land and the other, and most of all ourselves:

> [Adair] pauses a moment and pinches off a corner of the loaf, the salty sweetness of the crust in his mouth *a kind of blessing*. He chews as he walks on, his saliva mixing with its sugars and *driving new light into his heart, refreshing his mouth like common speech* (Malouf 1996: 213-14, my italics).

In the end, like Daniel Carney, we are all saved (Malouf 1996: 207) and share bread's salty sweetness, a kind of blessing, like Malouf's common speech, refreshing our very soul.

NOTES

1. Riane Eisler is a social scientist and author whose work on cultural transformation has inspired scholars and social activists. Her research has impacted many fields, including history, economics, anthropology, psychology, sociology and education. She has been a leader in the movement for peace, sustainability and economic equity, and her pioneering work in human rights has expanded the focus of international organisations to include the rights of women and children. Eisler is known for her 1987 bestseller *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, now in 23 foreign editions. See: http://www.rianeeisler.com/ and http://www.partnershipway.org/. The third Italian edition, with a new special epilogue by Eisler and a glossary on partnership language by Stefano Mercanti, was issued by Forum University Press, Udine, in 2011. See: http://www.forumeditrice.it/percorsi/lingua-e-letteratura/all/il-calice-e-la-spada/il-calice-e-la-spada/libro_view.
2. *The Partnership Studies Group* (PSG, http://all.uniud.it/?page_id=195) applies Riane Eisler's partnership model to world literatures, languages and education. By analysing the works of authors writing in the varieties of English including those of indigenous populations, the group explores the way these authors use the coloniser's word to transform the dominator values of colonisation and globalisation into cooperative and partnership codes, where often the dynamics at work are caring and sharing rather than exploiting and dominating (http://all.uniud.it/?page_id=198).
3. Raimon Panikkar was a leading scholar in interreligious and intercultural

dialogue in world cultures throughout the second half of the twentieth century; his many publications were translated into French, German, Chinese, Portuguese, Czech, Dutch, Tamil and many other languages. See: http://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/laudatio.html. Scientism is sometimes synonymous with positivism, however, while positivism may be used in a neutral way, scientism often has a negative connotation as it commonly identifies an exaggerated form of scientific thought that becomes unscientific in its exclusion a priori of all that cannot be (yet) demonstrated. This explains why Panikkar chooses 'scientistic term' rather than using the more common adjective 'scientific' (2007: 96-125). Panikkar appreciated science but not its degeneration. Being very concerned about language(s) and its manifold shades of meaning, he created neologisms which his proof-readers sometimes tried to correct and normalise. Panikkar stresses the distinction between creative word and scientistic term, where the creative, analogical and mythological function of the word is juxtaposed to the scientistic term of the Logos, which is devoid of symbolic echoes and of positive creative complexities. The scientistic term restrains and separates, pinning and limiting things to a specific and often univocal meaning that circumscribes and confines life into stereotypical patterns rather than opening up it to worlds of interconnected and dialogic significances. For a further analysis of this theme see: Riem *et al.* 2013.

4. In this article I use the term partnership according to Riane Eisler's theory and it does not carry any economic connotations whatsoever.

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Franca Cavagnoli

Ecosofia e traduzione: Remembering Babylon di David Malouf

Abstract I: L'articolo ripercorre il cammino da me seguito nel tradurre David Malouf in italiano: dalla difficoltà di seguire lo scrittore australiano nelle sue scelte stilistiche al desiderio di aderire sia ai campi espressivi da lui prediletti sia a quella chiara nota di leggerezza e precisione che caratterizza la sua prosa. Nel versare in italiano i romanzi di Malouf ho sempre cercato di non esercitare alcun impatto negativo sull'ambiente testuale, sottraendomi alla volontà di dominio sul testo altrui e favorendo un dialogo profondo tra chi scrive e chi offre ospitalità nella propria lingua madre.

Abstract II: The article retraces the path I followed in my translation of David Malouf's works into Italian: from the difficulty of staying in step with the Australian author's stylistic choices to managing to adhere both to his favourite semantic fields and to that clear note of lightness and precision that characterises his writing. In translating Malouf's novels my aim has always been to avoid exerting any negative impact on the textual environment, never giving in to the will to dominate the other's text and trying instead to encourage an intense dialogue between the writer and the translator, offering hospitality in her mother tongue.

Tra le scrittrici e gli scrittori di lingua inglese che nelle loro narrazioni stabiliscono un paradigma transculturale aperto a un incontro autentico tra le creature umane e la terra, un posto di primo piano spetta a David Malouf. Fin dai suoi primi romanzi lo scrittore australiano ha saputo sottrarsi alla volontà di dominio per contribuire a migliorare la relazione dialogica fra i popoli e la loro terra; la sua visione del mondo, dei rapporti tra gli individui e all'interno della società, è improntata a una

genuina ecosofia. L'opera narrativa di Malouf esplora il conflitto tra nuovo e vecchio mondo, tra Australia ed Europa, tra il Paese in cui si vive oggi e il Paese di un tempo, nonché le condizioni di un esilio psicologico prima ancora che fisico. Malouf ci racconta la storia del suo Paese dal punto di vista di chi nell'isola-continente è nato e, adottando un atteggiamento tipicamente postcoloniale, ricostruisce con il sussidio dell'immaginazione quanto è andato perduto. La Storia diventa per Malouf, come per molti autori postcoloniali di altre latitudini, "ricerca di appartenenza, dinamica collettiva" (Albertazzi 2001: 119) e nelle sue narrazioni Malouf coniuga leggerezza e precisione nel significato che a queste due parole dà Italo Calvino (Calvino 1988: 16). Anche quando ciò che scrive è ancora vago sulla pagina, non è mai la casualità a guidarlo bensì un'evidente aspirazione a un'ineffabile, poetica levità (Cavagnoli 2010: 111-114).

Il tema della traduzione in senso lato è da sempre presente nell'opera di David Malouf. In *Fly Away Peter* (1982), *The Great World* (1990), *Remembering Babylon* (1993) e *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (1996) c'è un motivo ricorrente: quello della cultura europea vista in una luce nuova, trasformata dal fatto di essere stata 'tradotta' in un luogo diverso, l'Australia. In *Fly Away Peter* (1982), Malouf racconta la storia di un'amicizia maschile, come spesso fa. Uno dei due amici al centro di questo romanzo breve è appena rientrato nel natio Queensland dopo un lungo soggiorno a Cambridge, dove ha compiuto gli studi, e dopo il *grand tour* che lo ha portato in giro per l'Europa, come era consuetudine per i giovani coloniali all'inizio del secolo scorso. In un pomeriggio inondato di sole, Ashley decide di fare una gita in barca con alcuni amici. Ecco come Malouf descrive le sensazioni del giovane:

> What he could not know was to how great a degree these trips into the swamp, in something very like a punt, were for Ashley recreations of long, still afternoons on the Cam, but translated here not only to another hemisphere, but back, far back, into some pre-classical, pre-historic, primaeval and haunted world (Malouf 1983: 30).

In pochi scrittori australiani si trovano immagini di altrettanta potenza evocativa per illustrare il rapporto intimo che lega europei e australiani, con quell'allusione appena accennata al lato oscuro di sé. In Malouf anche la descrizione di un processo psicologico in cui agiscono gli elementi più sottili si fa narrazione, e così pure la descrizione di un itinerario nei meandri della mente. Le gite nella palude del Queensland ricordano ad Ashley le gite sul fiume Cam che da studente faceva con i compagni di università su imbarcazioni a fondo piatto molto simili a quella su cui si trova ora con gli amici. Per i lunghi pomeriggi sul fiume trascorsi sui *punts* di Cambridge, che Ashley rivive ora qui nell'altro emisfero, e per le sensazioni che destano nel giovane, Malouf usa la parola *translated*. I pomeriggi di Cambridge sono stati 'tradotti' nel Queensland e consentono di rievocare gli anni dell'università. In un'intervista che mi ha rilasciato per il *Corriere della Sera* Malouf dice:

> Ho sempre pensato che la letteratura australiana non offra ai lettori europei una cultura nuova o esotica come la letteratura indiana o africana, bensì la loro stessa cultura in una luce nuova, trasformata dal fatto di essere stata 'tradotta' in un luogo diverso. Nella letteratura australiana ci sono temi, aspirazioni, simboli, tipicamente europei che però si sviluppano in una società e in circostanze diverse grazie a questa opera di 'traduzione' (Cavagnoli 2000).

Nei libri di Malouf l'Australia appare come qualcosa che è e al tempo stesso non è Europa, o nelle parole del protagonista di un altro suo romanzo, *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (1996), "the simultaneous underside of day" (Malouf 1996: 210). Il rovescio simultaneo del giorno è qualcosa di assai più sottile e inquietante che non il semplice rovescio della medaglia; è qualcosa che molto somiglia al proprio lato in ombra, al proprio lato nascosto, più oscuro, che vive e palpita simultaneamente a quello che si mostra alla luce del sole.

Ma è nella traduzione interlinguistica, la traduzione propriamente detta, che David Malouf sollecita l'ecocompatibilità di chi traduce e sfida la sua disponibilità a dare un contributo altrettanto fattivo al dialogo tra i popoli e dei popoli con la loro terra. In *Remembering Babylon* (1993) Malouf ambienta la sua narrazione nell'Australia di metà Ottocento. Gemmy, il protagonista, è un uomo di circa trent'anni che ha vissuto metà della sua vita nella natìa Inghilterra e l'altra metà nel Queensland. Figlio della *in-betweeness*, vive da molti anni tra gli indigeni australiani, che lo hanno soccorso e accolto tra loro dopo averlo rinvenuto sulla spiaggia, quando i marinai suoi compagni di navigazione, credendolo morto, l'avevano gettato in mare. Ecco come Malouf descrive il momento in cui Gemmy viene ritrovato:

> The creatures' eyes sprang open. They were of a milky colour; blank, maybe blind. The mob shifted closer. The eyes were open upon something. Not us, they thought. Not them, but some other world, or life, out of which the creature, whatever it was, sea-calf or spirit, was still emerging. They started, expecting as they watched to see some further transformation. The eyelids drooped and flickered. Now, they thought. It is letting go of that other life. It sees us. Now. The mouth opened, revealing a swollen tongue. But no change occurred (Malouf 1993: 23).

In questo brano è evidente come Malouf abbia una percezione acuta di tutto ciò che è minuto, lieve, anche quando descrive la sofferenza. È un momento in cui la tensione narrativa è altissima. La mente degli uomini e delle donne, di fronte a ciò che il mare ha depositato sulla sabbia, è attraversata dal dubbio: chi è la creatura portata a riva dalle onde? Si tratta di un essere vivente, un vitello di mare, o di uno spirito? La creatura stesa ai nostri piedi riesce a vederci, qui intorno a lui, o il velo steso sugli occhi le impedisce la visione? Tutto il loro essere, nel contempo, è attraversato dal *deep listening*, quell'ascolto profondo, fatto con tutti i sensi, con l'intero corpo e non solo con le orecchie, che è una caratteristica delle

popolazioni indigene australiane e un segno di grande rispetto verso l'Altro (Atkinson 2002: 16).

Questa partecipazione fortemente empatica delle donne e degli uomini raccolti intorno a Gemmy, la loro sollecitudine e umanità, i loro dubbi e pensieri, sono espressi da Malouf con un ritmo concitato, servendosi di frasi brevi, lievi, con due capoversi rapidi seguiti da uno più lungo. Le immagini e gli interrogativi si susseguono svelti. Il narratore entra ed esce dalla mente dei personaggi senza segnalarlo con le virgolette che introducono il pensato e il parlato. La mia intenzione, nel versare in italiano le parole di Malouf, è stata quella di produrre una traduzione 'ecocompatibile', rispettosa della relazione dialogica fra i popoli e la loro terra, e armoniosa nei confronti della forma stilistica scelta da Malouf per dar voce ai pensieri dei personaggi indigeni:

> Gli occhi della creatura si spalancarono. Erano di un colore lattiginoso; vuoti, forse ciechi. La folla si fece più vicina. Gli occhi erano fissi su qualcosa. Non su di noi, pensarono. Non su di loro, ma su un altro mondo, o un'altra vita, da cui la creatura, qualunque cosa fosse, vitello marino o spirito, stava ancora riemergendo. Sussultarono, in attesa di assistere a ulteriori trasformazioni. Le palpebre si abbassarono, ebbero un fremito. Ora, pensarono. Sta lasciando l'altra vita. Ci vede. Ora. La bocca si aprì, mostrando una lingua gonfia. Ma non accadde nulla (Malouf 1993b: 32).

Modificare il ritmo di questa scena, unendo le frasi in un unico periodo o in una successione di periodi più articolati per facilitarne la lettura, o eliminandone le ellissi, avrebbe avuto delle ricadute notevoli sul ritmo spezzato della prosa di Malouf in questo punto della narrazione. Qui bisogna essere disposti a scommettere che l'intenzione del testo (Eco 2003: 247) sia quella di esprimere la meraviglia degli astanti, e i vari punti di vista degli indigeni stretti intorno al corpo dello sconosciuto, per mezzo di una prosa nervosa, frantumata. Ignorare questo aspetto, distruggendo le frasi brevissime che sulla pagina rappresentano

concretamente lo scaturire degli affannosi respiri degli uomini e delle donne presenti, avrebbe reso meno intensa la meraviglia dei presenti, appannato i diversi punti di vista delle donne e degli uomini raccoltisi intorno a Gemmy e distrutto il valore estetico del movimento dinamico impresso da Malouf alla scrittura per cadenzare la sua prosa. La pregnanza delle parole ecofilosofiche di Malouf ha necessitato pertanto un atteggiamento dialogico responsabile per non inquinare l'ecosistema testuale della narrazione.

In un altro brano dello stesso romanzo, poco più avanti, succede invece qualcosa di molto diverso:

> They have got him hooped about with their arms, they are pulling a bag over his head, and with the choking chaffy roughness of it against his mouth, and in the dry breathlessness of nightmare, he is being hopped and dragged over stones, and when he stumbles, jerked upright by a crowd of bodiless whisperers who are trotting along on all sides of him, as if all tormentors had found one another at last in the dream-space of his head, and discovering now what they have in common, have joined forces to gallop him to some corner of the dark where he is flat-handed this way and that, and when he throws up his hands to protect himself, falls, but at other times merely hovers on the brink, and is baited and played with; not brutally but with hands, neither fisted nor frenzied, coming at him from every direction, and without sound save for the grunted effort it takes to haul a man to his feet so that he can be knocked down again, and the breathing in the darkness, which is huge even inside the sack, of many mouths (Malouf 1993: 121).

Il passo è formato da un unico capoverso che si protrae per molte righe, inframmezzato da innumerevoli virgole e da un solo punto e virgola poco prima della fine. Dalla proposizione principale s'irradia una varietà di subordinate. Ci sono proposizioni consecutive, relative che rimandano a elementi di un'altra proposizione, a mo' di attributi di maggiore consistenza, proposizioni temporali che sottolineano la durata e i rapporti di successione instaurati all'interno della

nozione di tempo. Il tutto è intercalato da similitudini e da una ricca aggettivazione. A causa del protrarsi del periodo, chi legge è costretto a una lunga apnea prima di poter riprendere fiato, se si esclude la breve pausa offerta dal punto e virgola. Ma l'apnea del lettore è poca cosa in confronto all'apnea cui in questa scena è costretto il protagonista del romanzo. Gemmy, che da molti anni vive con la comunità indigena che gli ha salvato la vita, sente voci che parlano in una lingua a lui familiare: poco lontano da dove si è fermato a raccogliere bacche c'è un piccolo insediamento di coloni scozzesi e quando lui si avvicina, attratto dal suono familiare della lingua, viene catturato. Il brano illustra un vero e proprio tentativo di intimidazione, se non addirittura un tentato omicidio, ai danni di Gemmy da parte di un gruppo di coloni, spaventati dalla sua presenza tra loro. Una sera gli uomini si avvicinano alla baracca in cui lui dorme, lo sorprendono nel sonno, gli gettano un sacco di iuta in testa e lo portano al fiume, dove gli ficcano più volte la testa sott'acqua. Con quel sacco di iuta che gli impedisce di respirare, e con la testa sott'acqua, Gemmy è costretto a una lunga apnea. Malouf ce la fa sentire grazie all'uso sapiente della sintassi, costruendo una ramificazione sintattica che al tempo stesso è un periglioso avventurarsi nei meandri della paura di Gemmy, che non capisce cosa gli sta succedendo (Cavagnoli 2012: 24).

Anche in questo caso era necessario aspirare a una traduzione che fosse rispettosa della forma che Malouf ha voluto dare a questo periodo e non dissonante nei confronti del suo stile:

> Lo cingono con le braccia, gli stanno infilando un sacco sulla testa, e con quel ruvido polveroso sulla bocca che lo soffoca, e nella secca apnea dell'incubo, ecco che lo spintonano e lo trascinano sui sassi, e quando inciampa, viene strattonato da una folla incorporea che bisbiglia trotterellandogli al fianco, come se tutti i suoi aguzzini si fossero finalmente ritrovati nello spazio del sogno dentro la sua testa, e visto quanto avevano in comune, avessero unito le proprie forze per spingerlo in qualche angolo al buio dove viene sbatacchiato

> di qua e di là, e quando alza le mani per proteggersi, cade, mentre altre volte si limita a perdere l'equilibrio, e allora lo tormentano e lo stuzzicano; non con brutalità ma con mani, né chiuse a pugno né furiose, che arrivano da ogni parte, e senza un suono che non sia quello dello sforzo per tirar su un uomo per poterlo abbattere di nuovo, e l'ansimare nell'oscurità, enorme anche all'interno del sacco, di molte bocche (Malouf 1993b: 135-136).

Il significato profondo del testo – il dramma vissuto da Gemmy a causa della violenza perpetrata dai coloni – si manifesta nella 'lettera' (Berman 2002: 288) del testo, nello stile scelto da Malouf in questo punto del romanzo. È evidente nella struttura arborescente del brano, ma anche nella sua lunghezza e nell'uso della punteggiatura: le numerose virgole e l'unico punto e virgola poco prima della fine del brano sospingono il lettore senza sosta a proseguire la lettura con il fiato in gola. Seguire con rigore la sintassi di un passo, e la sua punteggiatura, consente al lettore italiano di avvicinarsi anche da questo punto di vista allo stile di un autore e di 'ascoltare nell'intimo' l'angoscia del protagonista. La paura di Gemmy per essere stato imprigionato e trascinato via, l'ansia nel non comprendere cosa gli accadrà, la mancanza d'aria, sono tutte sensazioni descritte magistralmente da Malouf e il lettore le prova sulla propria pelle nel corso della lettura. Spezzettare questo lungo capoverso per ottenere periodi più brevi e accettabili (Even-Zohar 2002: 236) per il lettore, o razionalizzare la sintassi del brano per ottenerne un percorso di lettura più lineare, avrebbe spezzato il ritmo della scena e il lungo respiro dell'immaginazione di Malouf.

Una prosa ben scritta, servendosi delle immagini e di un lessico preciso, riesce a rendere concreti anche i concetti più astratti. Antoine Berman ha individuato alcune tendenze deformanti nel lavoro di traduzione, con cui si rischia di compromettere la poetica autoriale. Una di queste è la tendenza a razionalizzare, a portare il testo sul piano astratto: lo si stempera in formulazioni generiche, si riorganizza in modo lineare la sintassi, si privilegiano i sostantivi più

generici. Da questa prevalenza degli aspetti astratti a scapito di quelli concreti il testo fonte esce inevitabilmente deformato (Berman 2002: 280-281).

La razionalizzazione ha ripercussioni profonde sulle strutture sintattiche del testo fonte e sulla punteggiatura, uno degli elementi più impalpabili della scrittura in prosa. Nel primo caso tende a normalizzare la sintassi del testo fonte, a cancellare le marche di oralità o di qualsivoglia devianza dalla lingua standard che potrebbero caratterizzarla, e a non lasciare traccia di una diversa tradizione retorica. Ma la razionalizzazione porta pure a ricomporre le sequenze di frasi e a riorganizzarle secondo una certa idea che si ha dell'ordine del discorso. L'idea che si ha di come dovrebbe essere scritto un certo testo in prosa, l' 'astrazione' di quel testo dunque, prevale sulla 'concretezza' del testo che si sta leggendo. La prosa letteraria, ci ricorda Berman, ha una configurazione 'arborescente', data da innumerevoli reiterazioni, riprese di segmenti di frase, una massiccia presenza di proposizioni relative e di incisi, di frasi lunghe ed ellittiche. Questo tipo di configurazione sintattica si situa agli antipodi della sintassi lineare del discorso in quanto tale. La razionalizzazione rischia di portare dunque chi traduce a potare i rami dell'albero sintattico, a privarlo delle sue ramificazioni e a costringerlo nella gabbia angusta della linearità sintattica.

Troppo spesso la scusa addotta da chi traduce e rivede un testo letterario è che un certo aspetto del testo 'non si può' tradurre o che in italiano 'non si dice'. La conseguenza di questo atteggiamento è una grigia omologazione delle culture e l'immissione sul mercato di traduzioni per nulla rispettose delle differenze. Questa presunta impossibilità porta a negare ogni sconfinamento da parte dell'autore nei territori della creazione artistica, in cui per definizione ogni cosa è invece possibile. La razionalizzazione di chi traduce o rivede annulla la parola creativa dell'autore. Ma, così facendo, si annulla anche un altro aspetto vitale della prosa letteraria, e cioè la concretezza del testo, la sua incarnazione sulla pagina: "Chi dice razionalizzazione dice astrazione, generalizzazione" (Berman 1999: 54).

Per giungere a un'autentica ecosofia traduttiva è essenziale non praticare alcuna volontà di dominio nell'interazione serrata che unisce chi traduce al proprio autore. Quando verso in italiano un romanzo di Malouf cerco di non dimenticare che quel romanzo è soltanto suo. Ma sono felice se l'eco delle sue parole si riverbera sulle parole che ho scelto per lui in italiano, se tra le sue e le mie parole si palesa una genuina ecosostenibilità. Ciò accade se l'obiettivo è quello di non esercitare alcun impatto negativo sull'ambiente testuale, favorendo un più intimo colloquio e un ascolto più profondo tra chi scrive e chi gli offre ospitalità nella propria lingua madre.

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Econarrative as Politics or Culture – an Issue of Conflict?

Abstract I: Il presente articolo analizza come alcuni scrittori indigeni abbiano utilizzato le problematiche ambientali come un modo per enfatizzare il loro attaccamento culturale alla terra. Alcuni testi letterari provenienti dall'Australia e dalla Nuova Zelanda costituiranno le fondamenta della mia argomentazione, dal momento che i conflitti sul territorio hanno avuto un effetto seminale sulla loro stesura, sotto forma di protesta contro lo sfruttamento o malinteso sui concetti. Tali scrittori sono anche forieri di un messaggio positivo che mostra come si possa vivere in armonia con la natura. Nella società contemporanea, dove tutto e tutti subiscono l'impatto delle tendenze globali, essi rappresentano un paradigma transculturale, varcando ripetutamente i confini culturali.

Abstract II: This article will deal with how some indigenous writers have used environmental issues as a way of emphasizing their cultural attachment to the land. Literary texts from Australia and New Zealand will be the base of my argument, as the conflict over land has had a seminal effect on their writing, whether as protest against exploitation, or misunderstanding of concepts. These writers also have a positive message in showing how one can live in harmony with nature. In contemporary society where nothing and no one is unaffected by global trends they represent a transcultural paradigm, crossing and recrossing cultural borders.

When we talk of econarratives we are looking at a broad range of texts with political, pastoral or romantic notions of what is ecologically relevant. Basically we are looking at three different aspects: Culture, Nature, and Development. An ecocritical reading uses literature to effect an awareness raising of our attitudes to the environment, and an identification with nature. This is seen in the Romantic

poets where nature was a source of inspiration, for example the skating scene in Wordsworth's *The Prelude* where the "common face of Nature spake to me/Rememberable things" (Wordsworth 1950: 1. 586-8).

Critics differ as to what we mean by ecocriticism, covering, as it does, a vast field and a multitude of approaches. The most cited reference for ecocriticism is that of Glotfelty; "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment [...] an earth-centred approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty & Fromm 1996: xviii), emphasizing the representation of nature, the importance of place, and "the interconnections between nature and culture" (Glotfelty & Fromm 1996: xix). Garrard and others link it to the pastoral, which has "decisively shaped our constructions of nature" (Garrard 2012: 37). He discusses the pastoral in terms of time: the nostalgic elegy of the past; the idyll of the present in harmony; and a utopian future (Garrard 2012: 42). However, in my opinion Quayson's concept of calibrations, put forward in his discussion on reading for the social, can provide us with a wider framework for an ecocritical reading. In a section entitled "Calibrations and Dialectical Modalities" Quayson writes: "any phenomenon, literary or otherwise [...] can be made to speak to a wide ensemble of processes, relations and contradictions" (Quayson 2003: xxxi). This is precisely what an ecocritical reading will do, since as readers we should move away from binary polarities and instead look at other "subsegments" (Quayson 2003: xxxii), what we can call a reading in con-text. As in a machine these subsegmental levels intertwine and are dependent on each other for the overall message in the text. In postcolonial texts this would often involve a transcultural reading.

Much ecocriticism has concentrated on American or British literature, so Huggan and Tiffin's book *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* adds another dimension when they posit that there is "a burgeoning alliance between postcolonial and environmental studies, [and] the increasing convergence of postcolonialism and ecocriticism" (Huggan & Tiffin 2010: 2). This is especially true of settler countries where, historically, there was a general lack of interest in indigenous culture, often resulting in catastrophic disasters and environmental changes which we are now

trying to amend. Clark considers, a view I share, this environmental impact on traditional cultures is a form of neo-colonialism as it often means that the original songs, etc. are no longer performed when the environment in which they were created no longer exists (Clark 2011: 120-121). An identity based on common values rather than individual possessiveness is lost. Patricia Grace comments on this in *Potiki*:

> when a letter came telling us how we could be involved, and how we could dress up and dance and sing twice a day and cook food in the ground, we wrote angrily in reply. Our singing and dancing was not for sale, we said, nor was our food cooked on stones (Grace 1986: 97).

In many parts of the world money and power control the view we have of indigenous peoples and constitute a threat. In a most interesting book, *Postcolonial Tourism* (2011), Anthony Carrigan discusses critically the relation of literature, culture and the environment, and the effects of tourism, which he suggests is a form of appropriation, given the manner in which culture is desecrated and man is turned into a show (Carrigan 2011: 77). This tallies with the quote from Grace above and there is no doubt that tourism is harmful as money and too many people are destroying local culture and natural phenomena worldwide. Books such as *Potiki* by Patricia Grace and *The Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera make us aware of the fragility of our world and especially its nature and culture. One of the problems facing us as critics when dealing with these topics is the need to make a distinction between wilderness as "uncontaminated by civilization" (Garrard 2012: 66), an untamed landscape, and areas where the indigenous peoples have a communal relationship to the land. To many indigenous peoples nature is an extension of the human world, and they have a notion of respect for nature and animals, differing from the hierarchical one of 'us' and 'them' (Huggan & Tiffin 2010: 10-11).

Though not written by an indigenous author ownership of land is the backdrop for David Ireland's book *Burn* (1974), which has as its starting point the removal of Aborigine families from their homes and their treatment as second-class citizens: "On the first of January the shanty dwellers have to be gone" (Ireland 1974: 1). Various rumours arise that the land is wanted for its timber, others that an irrigation pipeline is going to be put through it. "They'll clear this little patch soon's we're out. Knock down the trees, put a grader in and there'll be nothing to show we lived here and had kids for twenty years. Like the wind blowing ashes away from a lonely fire" (Ireland 1974: 93).

What finally emerges is that the council wants the land, which was leased to the shanty families, not owned, to be used for "Myrooa Caravan Park [...] Whites pretending to walkabout" (Ireland 1974: 144). A classic feature of Aborigine way of life is the walkabout, as practical reasons and a respect for nature meant moving from one place to another. Grandfather Gorooh, who represents and is spokesperson for the old traditions states clearly the meaning of walkabout: "Deep in him he knows the why of walkabout. It was love of the land's soul, it was care, it was preservation. We did no harm to the land. Took only what was needed. We were *with* the land. We *were* the land" (Ireland 1974: 83). *Burn* ends on a sober note as the burnt dwellings represent the end of the family McAllister, as the surrounding trees are the only silent witnesses to what is happening.

> But if those witnesses weren't silent and if they never forgot and if the unsleeping eyes never grew dark and sightless, then those fierce flames might rise higher till the whole world saw them and the voice of each witness added together to produce a sound that could not be silenced and the coming and the life and the departing and the shame and the destruction of the McAllisters be remembered in history for ever (Ireland 1974: 145).

Nature sees what is happening, but can only be a watcher, symptomatic of the desecration of nature in the race for development.

If we accept 'cultural analysis' (Garrard 2012: 2-3) as an important aspect of ecocriticism then Ireland's book deals with central issues of race, belonging and changes in generational attitudes to nature, seen in their son Gordon's ideas of walkabout. The land can be read at multiple levels as it throws light on the problems of Aborigine families, especially those of mixed blood. Since Gunner's father is Scottish and his mother Aborigine, and he is married to a white woman the text opens up for a discussion of several facets of Australian life. *Burn* is essentially an environmental text in that it takes up the question of *race* and *place* against a backdrop of environmental change. It is of its time, when the White Australia policy was still dominant, but some of the issues raised are also relevant today.

Two authors whose work opens up for an ecocritical approach are Patricia Grace from New Zealand and Oodgeroo Noonuccal from Australia. Poetry and storytelling are their weapons in the cultural and environmental battle. Both take up issues which, though they have their origins in events from the 1960s to the 1990s, are in many ways resonant of contemporary global society: the lack of understanding of culture as an integral part of a person's existence and identity; so-called civilisation; economic gain contra sustainability. The last 20-30 years have not, despite the move towards acknowledgment of global warming, improved the situation. De-forestation and overgrazing of the land ignore nature's own cycles. Here looking at Grace's and Oodgeroo's literary work from a 'green' perspective can perhaps make us think differently.

Maori attitudes to land and ownership, and its importance for the individual are central in *Potiki*. "The land and the sea and the shores are a book too, and we found ourselves there. They were our science and our sustenance", because they are also the foundation of Maori storytelling (Grace 1987: 104). This attitude towards land and nature is fundamental in Maori thought and has been a cause of dissension between Maori and Pakeha. Roimata reminds the reader: "we could not help but remember that land does not belong to people, but people belong to the land. We could not forget that it was land who, in the beginning, held the

secret, who contained our very beginnings within herself" (Grace 1987: 110). The land is compared to the heart and soul of the body (Grace 1987: 97), held in "trust from those who've gone on ahead of us" (Grace 1987: 176), and something that will survive (Grace 1987: 147), an attitude underscored by Hemi who expresses the need to look to the land "if they didn't want to be wiped off the face of the earth" (Grace 1987: 60).

The central theme in *Potiki* is a classic environmental issue, a conflict between developers of land and the local population, and an example of appropriation by economic forces, even local ones, of the population. Juxtaposing power and money it is based on a real event, but fictionalised to portray different Maori reactions to development. "Above all we lived under the threat and destructiveness of the power people, and we had only really begun to understand the power," says Roimata (Grace 1987: 151), because money has made man like their machines:

> Money and power, at different times and in many different ways, had broken our tribes and our backs, and made us slaves, filled our mouths with stones, hollowed the insides of us, set us at the edge and beyond the edge, and watched our children die (Grace 1987: 132).

It is this political and economic attitude to environmental change that the text will counteract.

Grace's portrayal of the developers, especially their spokesperson, Mr. Dolman, whom they nickname Dollarman, is highly ironic. To Dolman it is all about money, repeating phrases which we hear frequently in connection with proposed developments: "First class accommodation, top restaurants, night club, recreation centre with its own golf links […] and then of course the water amenities" (Grace 1987: 88), offering even more money to replace and improve infrastructure. As so often work commences before negotiations are completed. Dolman's argument is

that they are denying tourists and families the possibility of viewing "our sea life" (Grace 1987: 92). The parallel to Ireland's *Burn* is obvious.

By introducing several aspects of environmental opposition Grace turns the text into an issue for all New Zealanders. She focuses on support from Pakeha, who

> did not want the company to make zoos and circuses in the sea, or to put noise and pollution there, or to line the shore with palaces and castles, an souvenir shops, or to have restaurants rotating above the sea, lit up at night like star crafts landing their invaders on the shore (Grace 1987: 98).

These supporters organise sit-downs, make placards, and are arrested by the police for disrupting work (Grace 1987: 107). The personal conflict of the workers, whether Maori or Pakeha New Zealanders, between earning money and having a job, or supporting the environment is highlighted. That the whole development ends in disaster due to flooding caused by the deliberate piling up of "rock and chunks of concrete and bitumen", and a landslide after too much of the hill has been dug away, is yet another comment on the hazards of development (Grace 1987: 116, 128). As Huggan and Tiffin point out "the community's most urgent struggle is for the freedom to negotiate the terms of its own engagement with a global modernity it cannot do without" (Huggan & Tiffin 2010: 71). The constant shift of storytelling in *Potiki* where the reader is forced from one point of view to another underscores this.

Culture and the environment are central themes in much New Zealand writing, not surprisingly given the difference between the landscape there and that in the countries from which many people came. But apart from specific issues, such as in *Potiki*, it is seldom portrayed as a source of conflict, but rather a genuine concern with the environment in its widest sense.

The poetry of Oodgeroo, a political activist, is seminal in any discussion of econarratives by indigenous peoples in Australia. The concept of the power of Nature to speak to man is central in Aboriginal myth. Oodgeroo's poems have

much affinity with the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss's deep ecology thinking. Næss's theory invites us to look at nature and our environment and revise our basic assumptions about the interdependence of all living things. As Alan Gregson writes, "Endorsing the Deep Ecology Platform principles leads us to attend to the 'ecosophies' of aboriginal and indigenous people so as to learn from them values and practices that can help us to dwell wisely in the many different places in this world" (1). It is this basic interdependence that lies at the heart of many of Oodgeroo's poems. For example in the poem "Return to Nature" where she asks,

> Am I strayed too long
> And now forsaken?
> …Was it yesterday
> Or a thousand years, My eager feet
> Caressed your paths;
> and she concludes:
>
> My tear-stained eyes
> Open now to see
> Your enemy and mine
> Is – civilised me (Noonuccal 1990: 80).

The relation between nature and the environment is expressed poignantly in the poem "Municipal Gum" where the gum tree has been taken out of its natural environment and placed in the city. It is "set in your black grass of bitumen" rather than "[i]n the cool world of leafy forest halls/And wild bird calls" (Noonuccal 1990: 45). In "Sounds Assail Me" she criticizes modern life saying there is "Something obscene/In man-made sounds affronts the sweet and clean,/But Nature's never./Shout of the stormy winds, ever/Toneless and rude, tossing the trees,/The harsh scream of seabirds – these/ Somehow belong/As much as the wren's airy song" (Noonuccal 1990: 5).

Oodgeroo's writing works at two levels; that of the political activist, yet one who is very conscious of her roots; and a desire to use her writing for the benefit of her people. She laments especially the loss of association with nature – a theme running throughout much of her poetry. Her speech on receiving an honorary doctorate at Griffith University was entitled "Custodians of the Land" and typifies her views, both the politically critical of indigeneity and multiculturalism, and those about the future of the Pacific area. "There can be no doubt that the grassroots people of the Southern Hemisphere are embarking on a natural course of balance. […] We of the Pacific must provide the working model of socioecomomic equality for peoples" (Cochrane 1994: 203-204), and she ends: "for the land is our Mother. We cannot own her; she owns us!" (Cochrane 1994: 209). Her emphasis on nature and its significance for her people is also found in *Dreamtime: Aboriginal Stories* from 1972, (also in a new edition from 1994 illustrated by Bronwyn Bancroft). In particular the second part of that book "Stories from the Old and New Dreamtime" concentrates to a large extent on natural phenomena as an explanation of myth and nature, such as the tale of the "Southern Cross/Mirrabooka". In "Boonah/Bloodwood Gum" and "Mai/Black Bean" she tells of how trees and birds came into being.

Oodgeroo's econarratives are expressive of the conflict between politics and culture in the transcultural manner in which she often places both Aborigine and other Australians their divergent cultural ideas within the same text. She poses this as a question of conflict, but without the harshness and bitterness that is often associated with such poems. However, though she stands out as an Australian writer with strong ecocritical views, these were shared by others on the political agenda at the time, especially by Judith Wright, Oodgeroo's long-time friend and companion activist.

Some of Oodgeroo's legacy is found in *From Our Hearts* (Teagle Kapetas *et al.* 2000). This anthology has several texts that reiterate Aborigine association with the land such as Kay Willey's "Heart" (Teagle Kapetas *et al.* 2000: 13), Marlene Ryder's "The Australian Grass Tree" (Teagle Kapetas *et al.* 2000: 94) and Vernon

Lawrence's "The Old Tree" which is "Dead, Yet not gone" and is symbolic of Aborigine peoples (Teagle Kapetas *et al.* 2000: 89). Ivy Dodd's "Mother my Country" which ends "Rapacious were they,/scaring your soul -/beauty of the land within,/taken and destroyed by another kin" is reminiscent of some of Oodgeroo's more political poems, though simpler in form (Teagle Kapetas *et al.* 2000: 53). Many of the texts in this anthology are autobiographically based, but at the same time visualize the close association of Aborigine to the land and natural phenomena.

Conclusion

The texts referred to in this short essay illustrate a reading which emphasizes their concern with environmental issues that pervade much of their work. But are they really ecocritical? Of the writers discussed Oodgeroo is the only one who uses an ecocritical stance politically throughout her career. For the others econarrative is but one aspect of their writing.

I have suggested that these texts have a transcultural element. This is seen in *Burn* in Gunner's stream of consciousness thoughts, italicised in the text, and forming a subtext about acceptance of racial difference. In *Potiki* the character of lawyer educated Tangimoana represents those who belong in both worlds and can become the voice of compromise. Much of the text deals with how to live in twentieth century New Zealand and yet keep one's culture and traditions. Oodgeroo uses juxtaposition to express the transcultural as she moves in and out of the two Australian environments at the time. The fragile landscape of Australia and New Zealand invaded by foreign species which have caused serious ecological problems with disastrous effects on native species, have forced not only politicians but also writers in these countries to highlight and look at sustainable ways of keeping their original environment and respecting indigenous rights and culture. Such literature reaches a broader public than the political, and thus can help to foster change.

NOTES

1. Gregson, Alan, www.deepecology.org (consulted on 29/8/14).

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Alice Munro's Ecosophy: from "Walker Brothers Cowboy" (1968) to "Dear Life" (2012)

Abstract I: L'interesse di Alice Munro per l'ambiente naturale e la sua fiducia nello stesso, evidenti nei suoi racconti, sono stati considerati dagli studiosi in molteplici modi: generici, tematici, retorici e ideologici. Mentre sarebbe inverosimile che la scrittrice sottoscrivesse una delle attuali definizioni di ecosofia, la saggezza ambientale comunicata e sostenuta attraverso la sua finzione letteraria dimostra l'adozione di prospettive ecologiche. Tali prospettive ecologiche vengono analizzate nel presente articolo attraverso alcuni riferimenti ad una serie di racconti che si sono susseguiti nell'arco di quattro decadi di attività creativa.

Abstract II: Alice Munro's interest in and reliance on natural environment, as evidenced by her stories, has been viewed by literary scholars in a variety of ways: generic, thematic, rhetorical, and ideological. While she is unlikely to subscribe to any of the current definitions of ecosophy, the environmental wisdom conveyed and sustained through her fiction is a matter of adopting ecological perspectives, which I would like to study in this article, referring to a handful of stories that span well over four decades of her creative activity.

It seems quite natural for a Canadian author to be a nature writer and for Canadian literary studies to be ecocritical. Canada is a vast expanse of natural landscape, where wilderness – conceptualized in turns as magnificent and threatening – is never far away. Although human relations seem to be the main focus of attention in Alice Munro's fiction, natural landscape and wilderness are often an immediate backdrop or a point of reference for the interactions and

musings of her characters. In the present article I first comment on the ways in which Munro's interest in nature may be approached. I focus then on a selection of her short stories, from the ones included in her earliest volume, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) to her latest writings collected in *Dear Life* (2012), which the author herself pronounced to be her final book. It is my intention to address the question of the ways in which Alice Munro is a nature writer and how her narrative and philosophical perspectives seek to sustain ecological balance.

Alice Munro's short stories are not nature-writing in the strict sense in which the genre has been defined. In W. H. New's *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, "nature writing" is compounded with "science writing" as one of two "loosely defined macro-genres – related and often overlapping – whose individual examples range from the specialized to the popular and sometimes belong to other genres as well" (Higgins 2002: 1010). Carefully studying the etymologies of the intersecting concepts of nature, science, and literature across time, space, cultures, and languages (especially English and French), Iain Higgins admits that "there is scarcely a significant poet ever to have written in Canada whose poems could not be considered part of nature writing" (1012). He refers to Margaret Atwood as an example. However reluctant he is about the exclusion of fiction, he nevertheless limits his observations to non-fiction writing, and thus Alice Munro is not even once mentioned in his definition of science and nature writing, even though "[h]er fascination with the human and natural history of her native ground – the land that lies roughly between Lakes Erie and Huron" (Scott 2006), is beyond any doubt.

Natural landscape, as an entity separate from human nature, is not the major theme of Munro's fiction, though it does play a role in her attempts to forge connections with Canadian mythology, including the myth of wilderness. Adopting a thematic approach, Faye Hammill discusses Alice Munro's contribution to Canadian literature precisely in this context. In view of the two main categories of wilderness myths in Canadian literature: the one associated with the "irrational or

Other" and its opposite that links wilderness with "healing and nurture" (Hammill 2007: 64), like Margaret Atwood, Munro "presents the wilderness as a place not of purity, but of sexual exploitation" (2007: 91). Focusing on "Wilderness Station" (*Open Secrets*, 1994), Hammill concludes that Munro "writes against traditional depictions of the monstrous wilderness" with its "hostile Native people or wild animals" (91).

Much of Munro's fiction was published long before ecocriticism had arisen. Laurie Ricou admits that although "Canadian literary studies, with their long-standing interest in nature, wilderness, and landscape, might be said to have always been ecocritical", a breakthrough publication in the field was Joseph Meeker's 1972 *Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*. It was only the founding of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment twenty years later, however, that helped to promote Canadian ecocriticism since the mid-1990s (Ricou 2002: 324). Benefitting from such studies and combining ecocriticism with feminism in a way that is at the same time more sentimental and more ideological than Hammill's interpretation mentioned above, Li Hong-hui's 2011 article explores "The Flats Road" (*Lives of Girls and Women*, 1971) as an example of Alice Munro's eco-feminism. Uncle Benny emerges in Li's reading as a paragon of tolerance toward women, children, and animals.

The rhetoric of Munro's depictions of natural environment invites comparison with pastoral and anti-pastoral tradition, as can be seen in Marianne Micros's article which studies the short story "Lichen" (*The Progress of Love*, 1986) as an allusion to 16th-century literary conventions in pastoral poems. Taking a more general view of Canadian writing, in his *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, W.H. New mentions briefly the presence of the pastoral and, even more frequently, anti-pastoral, motifs in Canadian writing. Except for Frances Brooke and Robert Hayman, whose early accounts of Canada conceptualized "the countryside as idyllic", New does not mention any other names in this context, arguing, however, that the "image of 'barren land'" and "intrinsically imperfect" world dominated in

the post-Voltaire era. He concludes with the blanket statement that "[v]arious elements of pastoral (and anti-pastoral) do [...] survive into 21st-century writing, in the continuing idealization of rural life and in some lyrical nature writing" (New 2002: 868). While Munro can hardly be claimed to idealize rural life, the lyricism of her occasional descriptions of nature is rarely unalloyed with other tones.

A reader of Alice Munro's "Jakarta" (*The Love of a Good Woman*, 1998) knows how ironic or at least distanced she can be towards all idealisms and ideologies, including those she knew at first-hand, the counter-culture of the late 1960s. By the same token, she seems unlikely to embrace either Arne Naess's or Félix Guattari's definition of ecosophy, though it is possible to prove that some elements of their respective reasoning (without political underpinnings, however) could be found in her own fiction. Like Naess, Munro repeatedly questions anthropocentrism and like Guattari, she explores the interconnectedness of mind, society, and environment. In an attempt to sum up the differences between those two independent fathers of ecosophy, John Tinnell points out that "Naess calls for an expansion of the self via identification ('Self-realisation'), whereas Guattari (and Deleuze) valorise autopoietic processes that perform a dissolution of the self via disjunction ('becoming-other')". Where is Alice Munro in that equation? As usual, and paradoxically, on both sides at the same time. The selves which she narrates into existence in her fiction are both expanded through identification and dissolved through othering.

Clearly privileging Guattari over Naess, Tinnell argues that the latter's approach leads to the mere "thematic study of literary representations of Nature", whereas the former's theory enables transversality, which consists of "creating lines of flight among various models" and is "a radically ecological concept in that it pushes us to constantly (re)articulate things at the relational level of their interactions". Naess corresponds with "the representational paradigms of nineteenth century realism (which are often celebrated by leading ecocritics)", whereas Guattari offers the equivalent of "modernist and contemporary aesthetics

of collage and montage". Although celebrated for her (psychological) realism, Alice Munro is a master of collage and montage as well, and thus again unites what Tinnell views as opposites.

The complexities of Alice Munro's prose seem to gravitate towards the complexities of Guattari's transversality in that she shoots through not only mind, society, and environment, but also mentally crosses other boundaries, most notably those of age and gender. Looking at a handful of her stories, I would like to point to the standpoints she takes that are at the same time narrative and philosophical perspectives on (wo)man in nature.

First of all, Munro has been celebrated for her ability to fuse the perspective of a child and an adult. "Walker Brothers Cowboy", the opening story of her first volume *Dance of the Happy Shade*, is a good example of such blending. Whereas in her early fiction, Munro locates cognitive and perceptive capacity in a schoolgirl (denying her younger brother the ability to see and understand his natural and social environment alike), in her later fiction, including "My Mother's Dream" (*The Love of a Good Woman*) and "Dear Life", she fuses the adult narrator's perspective with that of a female infant, exploring the process of subjectivity construction in relation to natural and social environment. While recreating the impressions of an ever younger child, Munro seems to study the mind which is not yet prejudiced. "My Mother's Dream" subverts, however, such a simplistic reading of Munro's authorial intention. It is a story of an infant girl who is from her birth deeply prejudiced against her mother and who decides to make peace only after having experienced a life-threatening crisis: "I believe that it was only at the moment [...] when I gave up the fight against my mother (which must have been a fight for something like her total surrender) and when in fact I chose survival over victory (death would have been victory), that I took on my female nature" (Munro 337). While resistance to the mother figure is presented as an individual experience in Munro's story, it may also be read as innate pre-cognitive opposition to Mother Nature and one's own nature which needs to be overcome

to make life possible.

The perspective Munro adopts in most of her narratives is that of a female, as opposed to male point of view. The story entitled "Boys and Girls" (*Dance of the Happy Shades*) dramatizes the moment in the young girl's life when she leaves the male sphere of fox farming, and the easy companionship with her younger brother comes to an end. That moment coincides with the girl's impulse to save the brave female horse, Flora, that is about to be slaughtered and turned into food for foxes. Instead of closing the gate through which the horse can flee, the girl opens it up and Flora runs away. It is not clear why the narrator acts that way: out of solidarity with a female animal or in awe of a female horse which unexpectedly shows male qualities: the power to rebel. The men (including for the first time the girl's brother) eventually catch and cut up the horse, and in the final scene of the story, the unnamed narrator is both "dismissed" and "absolved" by her father who says: "She's only a girl" (Munro 2000: 127). In spite of the social enactment of gender roles, Munro's female protagonists repeatedly traverse the gender boundary in an attempt to forge their own identity as women and writers. The story "Office" (*Dance of the Happy Shades*) is a case in point. As a foil to the female boundary-crosser, the story features an elderly feminized man who is, paradoxically and satirically, a self-appointed warden of the purity of gender roles.

Apart from crossing the boundaries of age and gender, which allows the narrator to perceive her natural and social environment as well as her own mind in a multi-dimensional way, Munro often takes an anti-anthropocentric view of these three spheres of being. In her stories anti-anthropocentrism manifests itself in two ways: the panoramic view of natural history and the presence of animals in the narrative space. "Walker Brothers Cowboy", and thus Munro's whole book-form legacy, begins with the father's jocular offer to his young daughter "to go down and see if the Lake's still there?" (Munro 2000: 1). Once they arrive on Lake Huron, the father narrates "how the Great Lakes came to be" (3), and his story, reinforced by the view, proves that the "fingers of ice" in pre-historic times were much

stronger than his own "spread fingers pressing the rock-hard ground" are now (3). The awareness of geological changes long before human presence (clearly insignificant in comparison) is frightening to the little girl and reassuring to her father: "The tiny share we have of time appalls me, though my father seems to regard it with tranquility" (3). The long view of natural history allows the father to distance himself from his own current troubles, and the girl will learn to adopt a similar attitude for similar purposes: to step aside and see her sorrows as insignificant in comparison with the massive and timeless presence of nature. Stories collected in *The View from Castle Rock* (2006) prove that the girl had learned the lesson of her father well. Fascination with natural history serves as a counter-point to the troubled human stories of various family members who appear in this book. The long view of human and pre-human history in Munro's fiction has an equalizing effect: in view of the vast expanse of time and space, the difference between child and adult, male and female, human past and present appears insignificant.

The motif of a bond between a female child and a female animal, which is present in "Boys and Girls" resurfaces in a modified form in Munro's later stories as well. "Runaway" is a good example. The word "runaway" applies equally to a young woman and her favorite goat, whose name is (again) Flora. The woman attempts to escape from her husband, as if following the example of her goat. Flora reappears briefly in a sudden moment of epiphany as "a live dandelion ball, tumbling forward, then condensing itself into an unearthly sort of animal, pure white, hell-bent, something like a giant unicorn" (Munro 2006: 39), only to disappear forever after that scene. The young woman, Carla, returns to her husband, accepting the sacrificial death of the animal. Especially in the stories set in rural Ontario, human characters often bear resemblance to animals: a ferret in "The Time of Death" (Munro 2000: 99) or a bear in "Heirs of the Living Body" (Munro 1971: 55). A comparison to animals need not be seen as demeaning, but as an indication that human and animal lives are close and run parallel to each other.

In contrast to Margaret Atwood, her friend and contemporary, Alice Munro is not an activist. And yet, some of her stories pose questions of current and perennial political interest, such as abortion and the place in society for old and disabled people. Alice Munro takes a philosophical stance when addressing the issue of abortion in the story "Before the Change" (*The Love of a Good Woman*), though she is also capable of descriptions that are overpowering and hyperrealistic in their sparse vividness. She refers to the times when abortion was still illegal in Canada, and performed by the narrator's father for reasons that she begins to fathom only after his death: "the risk. The secrecy. The power" (285). The motivation is important because even beyond the change in legislation, there is always something else "to be ashamed or afraid of" (285). Law may be changed, but that does not free people from taking decisions about their lives: "Change the law, change the person. Yet we don't want everything – not the whole story – to be dictated from outside. We don't want what we are, all we are, to be concocted that way" (Munro 1998: 285-286). In Munro's story abortion becomes the epitome of a philosophical problem at the interface of self, society, and nature.

In "Dear Life", the final, semi-autobiographical piece in her latest book, Alice Munro narrates the story of a young mother who saves her infant daughter from an old and reputedly insane woman who is prowling around their house. The old woman's madness seems just as certain as the young mother's bravery until many years later the narrator discovers the astounding confluence of human lives and fates, and "starkest madness" turns into "divinest sense." The old woman had a reason to approach the house because it had belonged to her long before the young family had moved in. She investigates the baby's carriage (Munro 2012: 314) because she also had a baby once. Her sudden interest arises from (con)fusing her own life with the lives of others, which is also what the elderly narrator is doing when recreating past events. The insane old woman blends also with the figure of the narrator's mother. In other stories, beginning with the famous

"Peace of Utrecht" (*Dance of the Happy Shades*), Munro refers to her own Gothic mother, whose Parkinson's disease was at that time still a cause of unease and shame. In "Dear Life" the strangeness of the mother figure is mediated by the crazy old woman, who in retrospect becomes surprisingly familiar.

Alice Munro plays with narrative perspectives. By conflating or juxtaposing apparently opposite points of view, she reveals the ecosophic depth of her deceptively simple stories. She proves through her narratives the existence of a network of invisible links that cut through social and natural environment, through animate and inanimate world. Although she admits a variety of differences that her characters exemplify and perceive in others, she radically transforms her readers' perception of their place in their social and natural environments by demonstrating the exchangeability and the prerequisite interconnectedness of particular elements: human, animal, and inanimate.

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Eco-Sustainable Interstices in Eleanor Perényi's *Green Thoughts: A Writer in the Garden*

Abstract I: Il saggio suggerisce di ricercare nella letteratura di giardinaggio un certo impulso verso l'eco-sostenibilità e una forma di dialogo tra l'uomo e la natura. Ponendo al centro della scena le problematiche del giardinaggio, gli scritti di giardinaggio presentano ai lettori una narrativa in grado di ricollocare l'antropocentrismo in contesti ecologici, con la soggettività umana che si limita ad emergere tra le righe. L'esempio analizzato, Green Thoughts: A Writer in the Garden (1981) di Eleanor Perényi, utilizza la struttura di una guida per suggerire idee alternative sulla modernizzazione della natura, presentando l'eco-sostenibilità come un processo al contempo storico e transculturale.

Abstract II: This essay suggests looking to garden writings for eco-sustainable impulses and a dialogue between a human subject and a living environment. By giving centre stage to gardening issues, garden writings present readers with a narrative that resituates anthropocentricism in ecological contexts as human subjectivity emerges from between the lines. The example discussed, Eleanor Perényi's *Green Thoughts: A Writer in the Garden* (1981) uses a guidebook format to convey alternative ideas on modernising nature by presenting eco-sustainability as a process that is both historical and transcultural.

The late managing editor of *Mademoiselle* Eleanor Perényi (1918-2009) is known aphoristically to everyone who has ever cracked a smile at her adage that "to garden is to let optimism get the better of judgment" (1). Her *Green Thoughts: A*

Writer in the Garden (1981) might seem an unlikely contributor to an academic debate on eco-sustainability narratives: it appears like little more a gardening self-help book. As a work marked by something Paul John Eakin terms a "referential aesthetic" (2), it belongs to a type of writing rarely studied in literary criticism. How much subtext, let alone transcultural contextualisation, can readers expect from a book they would consult to solve a concrete problem with their roses or artichokes?

In this essay I would like to explore the idea that *Green Thoughts* can fruitfully be regarded as life writing, following up on Michael Pollan's suggestion that a substantial number of gardening books may be seen as 'autobiographies written in green' (Pollan 1996). Garden books are not merely about gardens, they are also about individuals sharing their gardening experiences, about acts of creation and processes of growth and the problems involved in representing these. Garden books reflect how an individual thinks about her role in relation to the environment and may even be read as a type of *bildungsroman* that offers an intermedial and comparative means of reflecting on human growth and artistic challenges. For Perényi, the two creative acts of gardening and writing complement one another.

There is hardly any activity more formative than attempting to shape a place, especially a living one which offers resistance and seems to possess a mind of its own. Adapting a term derived from autobiography criticism, sociology and postcolonial studies (Eakin 1988; Glissant 1997; Gergen 2009), they can be read as relational narratives that emphasize a processual notion of identity as well as interactivity between human beings and the environment. Gardens are meeting grounds not only for human beings to exchange words and plants, but also beyond the sphere of human communication. Human gardeners form an emotional attachment to the garden itself, investing it with memories and personal landmarks. The garden, in its turn, responds to care, offers resistance and provides an ever-changing living panorama of seasonal changes, growth and decay. It thereby induces human gardeners to look beyond their immediate social lifeworld

and cultivate an awareness of other, non-human lives. The fact that to the best of our knowledge only one partner in this relationship acts consciously and communicates deliberately, for instance, by writing books about the experience, does not make it any less mutually transformative.

Eleanor Perényi's œuvre is eclectic, comprising a novel about the American Civil War, *The Bright Sword* (1955), and a book on the composer Franz Liszt, titled *Liszt: The Artist as Romantic Hero* (1974). *Green Thoughts* is based on transnational gardening experiences that connect Europe and New England. Born in Washington in 1918 and having spent formative parts of her childhood in the Caribbean, Eleanor Spencer Stone married the Hungarian Baron Zsigmond Perényi in 1937 and moved to his landed estate in Ruthenia. Forced to abandon the garden, farm and vineyard during the war, she subsequently created another garden in Connecticut. Her European marriage, which ended in divorce in 1945, is commemorated in a book titled *More Was Lost* (1946), which also reflects on the estate's destruction due to war and nationalisation. Perényi went on to become an editor, working for fashion magazines *Harper's Bazaar* and *Mademoiselle*, a professional expertise reflected in her frequent irreverent comparisons between human beauty and flowers, noting their transience.

Perényi's entire garden book is in fact marked by her knowledge of transitoriness, change and loss: her writing about garden matters reflects a preoccupation with the evanescence of all human efforts, environmental and otherwise. Perényi stresses that gardens are enclosed in time as well as in space and subject to history and changing trends, for instance, in culture and technology. She presents her book as a legacy commemorating a 'labor intensive' gardening tradition whose gardeners, "belong to a vanishing species" (Perényi 1981: xx). She writes herself into a specific horticultural history, claiming, from the preface onwards, that the kind of 'labour-intensive' garden she owned belongs to a bygone age. Perényi's observations thus acquire the undertone of an obituary for a particular kind of gardening life-world:

> Why, then, presume to write a book about gardening? The simplest answer is that a writer who gardens is sooner or later going to write a book about the subject – I take that as inevitable. One acquires one's opinions and prejudices, picks up a trick or two, learns to question supposedly expert judgments, reads, saves clippings, and is eventually overtaken by the desire to pass it all on. But there is something more: As I look about me, I have reason to believe I belong to a vanishing species. Gardens like mine, which go by the unpleasing name of 'labor intensive', are on their way out and before they go, I would like to contribute my penny's worth to their history (Perényi 1981: xx).

Despite its opening classification as a swan song (strengthened by Perényi's nod to Andrew Marvell's poem 'The Garden' from 1681 from which she derives her title), *Green Thoughts* is a practical collection of gardening ideas with few sentimental moments. For Perényi, the garden is far too political a space for frills and romance. It constitutes a vantage point from which to observe modernity at work and from which to criticise the capitalist global rampage of a male-centred anthropocene. She advocates stubborn individual thought in garden matters and beyond, encouraging readers to resist globalising and homogenising trends. Individual thought leads to relational responsibilities, as when Perényi poses sustainability dilemmas for readers to ponder, e.g. "What if you happen to know that a certain area is threatened with 'development' and the wild flowers in it are sure to be destroyed?' (Perényi 2002: 258). Between her green lines, what comes across as a conservative approach often proves to be innovative on account of its comparative and historicist scope. Being conservationist is a radical pursuit, and often, seeming progress may lead into backwardness: "We are where we were in earlier centuries when the designer and the plantsman lived in different worlds" (Perényi 2002: 270).

Innovation certainly shows in the book's unusual format. Whereas most garden books are structured according to thematic clusters or the chronology of

the gardener's year, Perényi eschews any conventional arrangement that would induce readers to traverse the book from cover to cover. Unlike most life writings, it is structured like a lexicon, with cross-references between the chapters. From 'Annuals' to 'Woman's Place', Perényi's seventy-two essays work their way through the alphabet. The book's form overtly questions the authority of linear plots and prioritises a more rhizomatic format. Instead of imposing an overarching theme, Perényi's garden alphabet covers a variety of garden-related micro-plots and travels through a multiplicity of moods: individual plant portraits of 'Endive', 'Garlic' and 'Peonies' are discussed alongside gardening equipment from 'Belgian Fence' to 'Seed Tapes' or technicalities such as 'Mulching', 'Pruning' and 'Making Notes'. 'Night' and 'Partly Cloudy' draw the weather and climate into her range of topics, and chapters on 'Longevity' and 'Tree Houses' conceptualise the garden as a site of dreams and extend the narrative beyond the merely practical plane of advice. Through her aphoristic style and extensive rather than systematic array of themes she revives the romantic genre of the literary fragment, highlighting an aesthetic of incompleteness that subtly underlines human fallibility. Perényi's title is interactive in that it draws readers' attention to thinking. Through their choices, readers become highly conscious of the act of reading. Like a book of recipes, *Green Thoughts* thus extends to readers the executive role of becoming agents who turn the words she has planted in their minds into actions and plots.

If the achronological reading path makes it hard to keep an overview of whether one has actually covered the whole, this, too, may be understood as a metatextual comment on the incommensurability of engaging with the environment. This is an interpretation subscribed to in the book's introduction. Here, Allan Lacy celebrates Perényi's format as a postmodernist device which not only engages readers in a serendipitous activity but also recreates the holistic physical, psychological and intellectual effects of gardening:

> the alphabetical arrangement is absolutely perfect. There is no beginning, no middle, and no end to this book. Like some of the experimental, aleatoric novels

> of the 1980s, it can be read in any order. And it is like gardening – a matter of total immersion at all times (Lacy 2002: xiv).

Perényi's alphabetical sequence is in part a critical comment on human beings and their obsession with order and control, as when she ironically notes a preponderance of lawns in spite of the fact that she has "yet to meet anyone who enjoys mowing" (Perényi 2002: 108) and advocates letting some plants grow wild: "We gardeners needn't kill ourselves in the name of order. Some plants should be allowed their way" (Perényi 2002: 106), and "nature left alone will strike a tolerable balance among the predators" (Perényi 2002: 166).

In this regard plants and nature differ from the human lifeworlds Perényi comments on. Not much in the modern gardening world of new breeding techniques and plant marketing trends should be allowed its way, as far as she is concerned. Several of her chapters contain To Do Lists, not only of gardening matters but by extension, of larger problems she deems worth weeding out, for instance hybridising and fertilising methods, and often her suggested modification is, unfashionably, to go back to earlier, time-honoured ways. The garden thus becomes complicit in her rebellion against industrialising trends. *Green Thoughts* documents Perényi's determination to set up gardening as a living monument to individuality and local identity and against a globalised lifestyle of big corporations and levelling developments in plant design and hybridisation.

It is green thoughts, environmental concerns, of campaigning for diversity, sustainability and individuality rather than any formal criteria that hold her book together as a narrative. Perényi unapologetically describes herself as an elitist who looks down on many of the 'debasing' trends in both European and American gardening, and she calls upon nonconformists like herself to resist the tendency towards mechanising and uniformity. To minimise any class bias, she painstakingly delineates how to save money by investing time, as when she recommends holding on to old collections of hardy peonies (Perényi 2002: 161). As a gardener who sees writing about her topic as a logical, inevitable consequence of her

passion for the subject, Perényi positions herself as a didactic translator who makes Europe and America known to one another and who reminds her present-day readers of gardening techniques past and forgotten. Seed corporations are part of a *zeitgeist* Perényi sees at work in both England and America and exhorts readers to be wary of. Gardening gives access to a quality of life distinguished by a taste for variety and historicity which she sees as disappearing fast, and she makes its textual preservation her intellectual legacy. Writing about gardening is thereby defined as an eco-sustainable act.

For her, the garden is both a space for her individual Self and a laboratory of ideas from which to address and rally kindred souls. The Self that speaks from the pages of *Green Thoughts* actively influences and changes her surroundings. Perényi describes herself as 'cantankerous and opinionated' and makes it quite clear that the unpleasant task of weeding out unproductive growth is not confined to flower beds and vegetable patches. In her often unflattering self-portrait she constructs the garden into a heterotopian space of resistance which clashes with naïve idealisations of surface beauty. Between the lines of concrete gardening experience, she addresses numerous social, economic and political 'weeds' worth attacking, and many of those relate to the depersonalised role of large corporations.

Perényi's first essay is programmatic in that it introduces the garden as a space of changing fashions, not all of which for the better, mirrored by the eponymous 'Annuals':

> Their ready-made air is a sad advertisement of the fact that ours is a throwaway culture, and that I suspect is their charm. A garden of store-bought annuals is as temporary as a plastic pool and can be abandoned without a qualm when the owner moves on.
>
> If that is the situation, it is abetted by those in charge of the mass market, where annuals far outnumber perennials and standardization is total. Only a few years ago it was possible to find a considerable variety of annuals at garden centers,

> many of which had their own fields out back: white zinnias, tall snapdragons, schizanthus, nasturtium, salpiglossis. Today, most seedlings are trucked in from a central source, wear identical labels and are confined to the fewest possible varieties in mixed colours (Perényi 2002: 6).

To Perényi, the garden is a microcosm of something fundamentally wrong with society. In this dystopian extract, gardening concerns are interlaced with notions of human mobility: the rootedness of plants is set against the restlessness of societies on the move. But even the plants, anthropomorphised for sympathy, have become implicated in mobility: "Many plants – wax begonias and geraniums among them – we call annuals in the North are actually perennials in their native South" (Perényi 2002: 4). Human interventions in the shape of plant transportation and adaptation have turned enduring into disposable plants. Perényi ends her opening chapter on a rebellious note, inviting readers to join her boycott of annuals.

Besides sharing a good deal of subjective opinions, Perényi relates a wealth of garden information gleaned from books. From her first essay onward, Perényi introduces herself as a reader in addition to being a gardener when she points out that the trend of changing fashions is not confined to the historical present. She turns to an American classic to make this point:

> In *Little Women*, Beth grows 'old-fashioned flowers,' and I always supposed this was part of Alcott's goody-goody emphasis on out-of-date virtue. This isn't the case. The sweet peas and larkspurs and pinks beloved of Beth actually were old-fashioned by the middle of the nineteenth century – having been superseded by the newer, smarter, tender annuals imported from the tropics and subtropics of Mexico, India and South America (Perényi 2002: 4).

Perényi rounds off her example of American garden reading with cases from England, notably Gertrude Jekyll, weaving a critique of carpet bedding and

ribbon borders into a green connective thread that comparatively considers gardens both sides of the Atlantic.

Books, like gardens, connect continents and different times, and in drawing readers' attention to this, Perényi proudly inscribes herself into a tradition that includes Alexander Pope's 1713 satire on topiary, *The Essay on Verdant Sculpture* (Perényi 2002: 182). The mutual dependency of gardening and writing functions as a *leitmotif* for Perényi. Gardening practices, she complains, are too much in the present and too much about innovation and short-sighted modernisation. Writing about gardening enables the author to be mentally present on more than one plane, the present as well as the past. Empowered by her knowledge of various European locations, her reading and her hands-on experience, Perényi sets herself against the trends towards hybridisation and homogenisation which she observes in plant nurseries and catalogues, at times resorting to anthropomorphisation for emphasis: "A garden entirely stocked with the newest, showiest hybrids is as depressing as a woman with a face-lift: the past is erased at the expense of character" (Perényi 2002: 54). Garden writings give Perényi and her readers access to a historical vision of environmental relations, one which she finds lacking in gardening culture in the USA, and she proposes seeing garden writings as an archive of great sustainability potential.

The garden and garden books are lenses through which she envisages an alternative modernity. Writing is her way of reminding her readership of the importance of history and of learning from the planting traditions of other countries. She does so in a manner which reflects a historically-founded sense of sustainability: she exhorts readers to resist the tendency to sacrifice variety to short-sighted motifs. For her, sustainability involves consideration of unfashionably large time frames and a willingness to resist trends, however compelling they may be. It is part of a lifestyle that involves individual thought and relational contemplation both of which need time and study.

The cheerful rebellion against global uniformity leads Perényi to critically

revise the anthropocentrism of the human gardener. In his preface, Michael Pollan relates having come to Perényi's book in search of useful tips on pest control. Where many garden writers expend considerable amounts of ink defeating pests rhetorically at least (e.g. Celia Thaxter and Charles Dudley Warner), Perényi considers the gardener as potential cause and suggests that many so-called pests or weeds are indicators of gardening mistakes. While refuting globalising tendencies in nursery culture, she looks beyond the immediate space of her Connecticut garden to place strategic warnings about ecological worries and sustainability:

> The green revolution may yet turn into a green nightmare; for not only do the new hybrids lack the resilience of the older native strains with their built-in adaptation to local conditions, they depend for their success on chemical fertilizers and pesticides – which, aside from other disadvantages, are for the most part manufactured by western conglomerates that are in turn dependent on that other scarce resource: oil (Perényi 2002: 85).

Perényi's practical-poetic anthology of essays is a unique example of an eco-sustainability narrative that puts the garden writer into the relational position of an ambassador between different environments and societies, and even between past and future. The garden is full of relations, and observing these unlocks valuable lessons for other linkages: "A garden is a world, and its parts are not separable" (Perényi 2002: 175). The idea of connections function as a mantra throughout her book. Perényi challenges comfortable ideas of selfhood in various ways, by embedding individuality in a form which encourages generalisation, stressing that for her the garden is a source of teachings which she transcribes for her readers. The literary impulse contained in the text is a performative one which incites readers to think of garden books as a hypertext where they eventually take over the role of scriptwriters: the text with its use of examples and illustrations of past successes constitutes a concrete, practical, 'how-to-utopia'. The combination

of utopian features and concrete, hands-on advice ensures an eco-sustainable narrative trajectory that avoids escapism and instead makes something paradisiac attainable by drawing attention to the relations within the garden and beyond.

NOTES

1. The original saying is more poetic than aphoristic and forms part of her chapter on asters: "The charm of asters is their fluffy heads and ravishing colours dusty pinks and powder-blues, strawberry reds and amethyst purples – and the way they arrange themselves in a bowl. I can't resist them and invariably let optimism get the better of judgment, which come to think of it may be the first principle of gardening" (Perényi 2002: 14).
2. This aesthetic challenges the reader's process of immersing herself in a narrative. Referential aspects of history, geography, biography and authenticity pose unsettling questions about the relationship between fiction and autobiographical modes of writing and different reading conventions, as well as distinctions between autobiographical or confessional writings and fiction (Spengemann 1980). Life writing criticism has moved on from a focus on self and identity as monolithic constructs to analysing modes of relationality (Eakin 1992: 29-53; Sarkowsky 2012).

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Coral Ann Howells

Patrick White Centenary: The Legacy of a Prodigal Son.

Cynthia vanden Dreisen & Bill Ashcroft ed. 2014. *Patrick White Centenary: The Legacy of a Prodigal Son*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. xxiv + 511. £57.99. ISBN 1443860409.

This multi-authored volume forms part of the celebrations commemorating the centenary of the birth of Australia's literary icon, Patrick White, in 2012. In November that year an international conference was held in India at the University of Hyderabad, and that is the basis for this book. It comprises chapters by thirty-four specialists in White studies from Australia and India, New Zealand, Fiji, Singapore, South Africa, Italy, Germany and Spain, Canada and the USA. Not surprisingly, the collection reads like 'a series of time-lapse criss-crossings, depicted in different colours', to borrow an image from another postcolonial writer, Michael Ondaatje, in *The Cat's Table*. Yet this diversity of voices and transdisciplinary approaches has produced a complex portrait of White the man and the artist with his "many-faceted face" (172) and a reconfiguring of major directions in White criticism.

The editorial introduction orients readers to this collection, which is arranged in five sections: "Revaluations", "Genre", "Individual Novels", "Comparative Studies" and "Socio-Political Issues". That design is a kind of hold-all, though there are common thematic issues centred on White's distinctive brand of cultural nationalism which is symptomatic of the transition from colonial to postcolonial identity in Australia following the Second World War. White, a Cambridge-educated returned expatriate, was a dedicated nationalist and mythmaker who believed fiction to be an effective instrument for cultural and moral reform. However, increasingly the novelist emerged as a public intellectual, using his celebrity status to fight for Indigenous rights, ethnic minorities, nuclear

disarmament, and protection of the environment. Indeed there seem to be two key reference points here: *Voss* (1957) and the *Mabo* case (1992) which "recognised 'native title' as part of the common law of the nation" (413); together they suggest an interesting counterpoint between colonial and postcolonial discourses of national identity.

"Revaluations" opens with John Barnes's "Prodigal Son", mapping the territory in prospect. It is Bill Ashcroft's "Horizons of Hope", a profound analysis of White as postcolonial writer and visionary which sets up resonances throughout the volume as he explores White's antipodean modernist project of "chasing down a postcolonial earthed sacred" (26), highlighting White's sense of the presence of the sacred in material things as he quotes the epigraph to *The Solid Mandala*: "There is another world, but it is in this one" (41). Ashcroft's dual emphasis on the spiritual and the corporeal which is at the heart of White's utopian vision is developed with different inflections by Satendra Nandan's "Patrick White: The Quest of the Artist", Lyn McCredden's "Language and the Sacred in Patrick White's Novels", Bridget Grogan's feminine focus on corporeality and abjection in *Voss*, and Jessica White's "Inscribing Landscape in Patrick White's Novels" where Australianness is written on the skin and on the psyche. Later these concentric circles widen to include essays by Antonella Riem and Julie Mehta.

White's work extends beyond the novel, and essays in the "Genre" section introduce new perspectives that extend the range of White criticism. Pavithra Narayanan discusses his non-fictional political essays and speeches, May-Brit Akerholt (who worked with White on *The Ham Funeral*) his plays, and Glen Phillips his early poetry, which White "airbrushed" out of his autobiography (198). Though Sissy Helff discusses film adaptations, curiously there is no mention of the 1986 operatic adaptation of *Voss* with libretto by David Malouf. The most exciting essay here is Greg Battye's "Looking at Patrick White Looking: Portraits in Paint and on Film", which asks fascinating questions related to the visual representation of subjectivity.

"Individual Novels" begins with Antonella Riem's brilliant essay, "The Spirit of the Creative Word in *Voss*", which illuminates his concept of the Australian sacred through her analysis of his poetic language and Aboriginal spirituality. Referring to Ashcroft's statement that "the energy of his work is to locate the sacred in a place in which, to European eyes, *it does not belong*" (228), Riem argues for the importance of Aboriginal cultural beliefs which offer "a partnership cultural paradigm as an alternative mode of living" (230). However, writing from an Aboriginal standpoint, Jeanine Leane offers a less sympathetic account of White's representation of the Australian Aborigine in *A Fringe of Leaves*, arguing that his narrative, "fundamentally aligned with the more familiar colonial discourse" (246), does not disturb white Australians' images of the Indigenous Other. Turning to *The Hanging Garden*, we have the first critical perspectives on White's last unfinished novel (or perhaps it is finished, as Alastair Niven speculates). Elizabeth Webby and Margaret Harris, who together prepared the novel transcript from the White archives, give us new insights into White's portrayals of children in that novel and *Happy Valley*. Brian Kiernan's clever essay "Twyborn Moments of Grace" provides a postmodern moment as he plays with different fashionable critical approaches to The Twyborn Affair, suggesting that White's novels, like all great literary works, are endlessly available for reinterpretation.

With "Comparative Studies" and "Socio-Political Issues" the net is spread so wide that this collection is in danger of losing focus. Many of the comparative essays, though testifying to the transnational dimensions of postcolonial studies, strike me as quite speculative. Mark Williams's "Patrick White and James Baxter: Public Intellectuals or Suburban Jeremiahs?" is the exception, with his close comparison between the Australian novelist and the New Zealand poet, both of whom sought to reinvent more truthful versions of their national histories in a postcolonial context. The essays in the final section move beyond White's historical moment into the 'heterotopic space' of contemporary Australia, so this section might be seen as 'supplementary' (in the Derridean sense of the 'supplement'

which gestures towards the incompleteness of the preceding narrative). The major concern is with Aboriginal issues, though White was also concerned with Australians' racist prejudices against ethnic and religious minorities. As Keith Truscott remarks in "*Mabo* – Twenty Years On: An Indigenous Perspective", "It is highly appropriate that this memorial conference [...] should also provide a platform for highlighting contemporary developments in the field of Aboriginal rights of which perhaps the most important has been the historic event of the *Mabo* decision" (443-444). Writing from a post-*Mabo* perspective, Truscott and Kieran Dolin point to Indigenous writing and art as vehicles of hope, though the overall impression of this final section is an echo of White's ambivalent utopianism, where Australia "hovers on the edge of a future that lies at the very heart of the real" (41).

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Steve Evans

David Malouf. A First Place

David Malouf. 2014. *A First Place*. North Sydney, (NSW): Knopf, pp. 350. $A29.95, ISBN 9780857984050.

David Malouf has made a major contribution to Australian literature with his essays, fiction, and autobiographical writings. His *12 Edmondstone Street* (1985), for instance, addressed the way that a house might shape a person, especially as the location for a family finding its own place in a new country. The person in that house was David Malouf, and his approach in that volume has a companion in his latest publication.

A First Place is promoted as a celebration of David Malouf's 80th birthday. Whether that is publisher's puff or not, these thirteen nonfiction pieces – forewords, lectures, and essays – offer a range of material covering some thirty years of Malouf's reflections on identity and place that collectively remind us of his gentle yet powerful presence as a thinker and artist.

The separate parts of *A First Place* share at least one characteristic in that each was prompted by an invitation to write for a public arena of one kind or another. As Malouf himself remarks, this distinguishes them from "works of the imagination…written out of inner necessity [and] entirely personal" (ix). The focus is decisively Australian, blending aspects of Malouf's own upbringing as a child of a migrant family, how one identifies as a resident of a country, and significant elements of its history. Together they marshal a view of the Australia's dramatic reshaping, especially in the last 50 years or so.

Despite the decades that separate some of the pieces, they are united through Malouf's singular and precise gaze. That necessarily shifts its focus over time but it maintains a solid link to the man via his skill at recollecting the places and events of childhood, family and locations. Particular to him, they nonetheless

also stand for the experiences of many new arrivals to Australia as it was refashioned by waves of migration from Europe and, more latterly, Asia.

The works can be read for entertainment – for the colour and vitality and some degree of nostalgic recollection – but deeper and sometimes darker factors are present too. Prejudice and neglect are properly mentioned, whether it was a rejection of black servicemen during WW2, bias against new migrants, the White Australia policy, or the denial of rights to Australia's own indigenous people. If Malouf is hardly strident about such matters, his gaze is true and his avoidance of polemics is preferable. The point is made.

Australians have long been occupied with the sense that they live on the fringes of a giant continent with a vast and largely unknown interior; a place of mysteries that is somehow part of them. Malouf draws attention to this when commenting on the Bicentenary for the way it jolted Australians' conception of themselves beyond this: "You have to be engaged by *time* to be interested in history. The consciousness of Australians has been dominated by *space*" (80). Looking back at 200 years since white settlement did force modern Australians to confront not only where they lived, but also to consider their achievements and failures, including their connections to the wider world.

Malouf engages such large themes with ease but it is through the particular that he seems to make the keenest connections. Speaking of the power of place, he says that we are sometimes blind to what is around us and to the influence it asserts on our sense of identity. It is the hard and real and sometimes relatively small-scale that we must also return to in seeing where and who we are:

> In all those necessary objects that make up our sort of living; bookcases and chaise longues and silver trophies and cast-iron-railings and shoe buckles and biscuit tins. These things speak to us. They also speak *for* us, and for the many lives that lie behind us and lead up to us (151).

This is the poet's eye, translating the domestic and intimate into the common,

shared and intimate environment. Here he is deliberately and simultaneously referencing a broader sense of awareness:

> This business of making accessible the richness of the world we live in, of bringing density to ordinary, day-to-day living in a place, is the real work of culture…This has been especially important in the case of the land itself…and most of all, the *spirit* of the land as it exists in all things and can be touched and felt there (152).

What we find, then, is Malouf ranging between: the personal and autobiographical as it might relate to the experiences of others; the way we make maps of our own geographies and mental landscapes; the affairs of state in a new nation as it moves from a collection of different territories to some sort of coalition; and, what it is to be a resident in a country whose own identity is constantly having to adapt.

These writings were intended as part of a public discourse. Even the oldest of them is relevant. As far as we can say a national identity does exist, its character is best tested at the level of the individual. It is reckoned by what we each see portrayed and what we are told about ourselves and our fellow Australians, but mostly by how we live now. Malouf knows that and makes it unarguably evident.

A First Place is a key contribution to Australia's ongoing debate on what it is, and how its inhabitants define their relationship with one another and the larger world. Australia's history is not that of all nations but many of its concerns are held in common. This book offers thoughtful material for the continuing process of improving our understanding of the way that place and history affect our knowledge of ourselves.

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La questione del soggetto nella pedagogia femminista

Silvia Caporale Bizzini e Melita Richter Malabotta (a cura di). 2013. *Soggetti itineranti. Donne alla ricerca del sé*. Firenze: Edizioni AlboVersorio, collana Filosofia sociale n. 3, pp. 143, €15,00, EAN: 978-88-97553-47-2.

Il libro *Soggetti itineranti. Donne alla ricerca del sé* è la traduzione italiana dell'originale inglese *Teaching Subjectivity: Travelling Selves for Feminist Pedagogy* pubblicato nel 2009 nell'ambito del progetto Athena (European Thematic Network Project for Women's Studies). Questo progetto, coordinato dall'Università di Utrecht, ha come principale obiettivo la disseminazione del sapere 'gender oriented', la promozione di un'epistemologia femminista e lo sviluppo di nuove forme di pedagogia che si differenzino da quelle tradizionali, patriarcali e fortemente gerarchiche. L'intento pedagogico è ben visibile nel titolo inglese della pubblicazione originale, mentre la versione italiana del titolo mette in primo piano il tema particolare sul quale la pedagogia femminista si esercita in questa occasione: quello dell'identità, del soggetto, del sé, come concetto profondamente cambiato nell'epoca del poststrutturalismo.

Quando nel 1996 Stuart Hall scriveva il suo fondamentale saggio *Who needs "Identity"?*(1) tra i principali 'colpevoli' per la dissoluzione del soggetto occidentale annoverava la filosofia della decostruzione, la psicanalisi, il pensiero postmoderno con la sua idea della performatività, e infine il femminismo. Tutte queste correnti di pensiero hanno offerto una forte critica in chiave antiessenzialista verso ogni radicamento identitario, in particolare quello di stampo etnico, razziale, nazionale o sessuale. Il problema che quest'idea comportava per il femminismo era chiaro fin da subito: la dissoluzione del soggetto, individuale o collettivo che fosse, lo esautorava dai suoi poteri politici e sociali e gli toglieva la possibilità di *agency* così importante per una teoria che, prima di essere una

corrente di pensiero, era e doveva rimanere la base di un movimento politico. La consapevolezza di questo problema nell'ambito del pensiero femminista in un primo momento ha prodotto una resistenza alla dissoluzione del soggetto come a un privilegio del discorso maschilista. Secondo Rosi Braidotti (*Soggetto nomade,* Donzelli, Roma 1995), la crisi della soggettività era prima di tutto la crisi della soggettività maschile e del suo status di autorità simbolica e politica di cui ha goduto per secoli. Forse proprio grazie a questa inizale cautela, quando in seguito la crisi della soggettività entra nel campo femminista, essa sembra essere più radicale che altrove, e produce concetti teorici, come quello dell'intersezionalità, con conseguenze lungimiranti per il pensiero teorico in generale. Non è un caso quindi che il citato saggio di Hall si concluda proprio con una approfondita trattazione sulla trasformazione del concetto dell'identità in Judith Butler.

La collezione di saggi *Soggetti itineranti* mette quest'idea, ormai consolidata nel pensiero femminista, ad un ulteriore prova: quella della pedagogia, della trasmissione del sapere, dell'educazione delle nuove generazioni. La lettrice o il lettore che prende in mano un libro che dichiara l'ambizione di insegnare la teoria della dissoluzione del soggetto alle studentesse e agli studenti, è preso dalla curiosità di vedere se nel campo della pedagogia ci sarà lo stesso bisogno degli *essenzialismi strategici* (prendo a prestito questo termine da Gayatri Spivak) come in quello della politica. Ci sarà anche qui il bisogno di *tradurre* la *teoria* postmoderna in *prassi* dell'attivismo sociale e del *empowerment* femminista delle giovani generazioni? Il confronto con le studentesse in classe (magari esse stesse - come avviene sempre più spesso - nomadi, migranti e sradicate) porrà lo stesso problema etico della teoria del terzo spazio ormai diventata una patria privilegiata dei soggetti migranti nel mondo accademico?

La struttura di questo libro (divisa tra i primi tre e i successivi quattro capitoli) rispecchia in un certo modo il dualismo tra la teoria e la prassi, ma tutti i saggi, a prescindere dal loro prevalente orientamento teorico o pratico, si impegnano a pensare la loro possibile applicazione in classe, con un capitolo obbligatorio di

suggerimenti per l'insegnamento in chiusura di ogni contributo. Elena Pulcini (*Contaminazione e vulnerabilità: il Sé nell'età globale*) mette a nudo l'illusione della sovranità del soggetto in una argomentazione che invece vi contrappone la contaminazione come principio della contestazione interna e dell'apertura al perturbante. Ciò che ne può derivare nel processo educativo è l'apertura empatica che supera l'indifferenza e che sembra l'unica risposta sociale alle chiusure immunitarie nel mondo globalizzato. Linda Lund Pedersen (*La mia dipendenza e altri Sé)* usa il concetto di traduzione così come lo fa la recente teoria della traduzione culturale, nel senso del viaggio o passaggio da una cultura, classe, posizione sociale ad altra. Partendo dall'esperienza personale, l'autrice sviluppa una riflessione sulla contaminazione di *ogni* testo (non più quindi del testo di partenza o d'arrivo) che spiega la radicale dipendenza del Sé da altri, e l'impossibiltà di un punto d'osservazione incontaminato. Pensare o amare l'altro (o, in altre parole, la filosofia come l'amore per la sapienza) significa accettare di non tradurlo a sé stessi, e di non possederlo mai fino in fondo: questa sembra la lezione più preziosa da scrivere nelle basi dell'epistemologia femminile. Eva Skærbæk (*Andare via di casa? I mondi della conoscenza, dell'amore e del potere*) riflette su idee simili proponendo il concetto dell'interdipendenza, applicato in una riuscita lettura socioletteraria della *Casa di bambole* di Ibsen. L'identità, come dimostra il caso di Nora, si sviluppa in maniera interdipendente, smentendo l'illusione patriarcale di un arrogante indipendenza del soggetto.

Biljana Kašić (Sulle contro-narrattive, nostalgia e rischi) contribuisce al volume con un saggio che collega l'esperienza personale di perdita e morte alla storia del movimento e del pensiero femminista nell'ex Jugoslavia e alla riflessione teorica sugli effetti del lutto sull'identità. Anche in questo saggio la traduzione, con riferimenti a Homi Bhabha, è lo spazio di non-appartenenza che definisce sia i rapporti interpersonali sia la costruzione intra-personale del sé. Questa costruzione avviene attraverso una mescolanza di persone grammaticali (lei-tu-io), in una costruzione di terzo spazio di libertà e contaminazione tra donne che hanno

saputo difenderlo dai monolitismi anche nei tempi peggiori della guerra nell'ex Jugoslavia. Il contributo di Melita Richter Malabotta (*In cerca del Terzo spazio*) è illustrativo per il rischio, evocato all'inizio di questa recensione, che la ricerca del sé nei testi degli altri si concluda, invece che con la dissoluzione del sé, con un lieto fine di autoaffermazione: il pretesto pedagogico e l'obiettivo del *self-empowerment* oscura la consapevolezza della natura discorsiva sia dei testi sia delle identità. L'elemento autobiografico e ricostitutivo è presente anche nel contributo di Silvia Caporale Bizzini (*Ricordo, dunque scrivo: le voci delle scrittrici italo-canadesi contemporanee*) che nell'esperienza della migrazione riconosce una minaccia per l'integrità del soggetto, ponendo una indiscussa fede nel potere restaurativo della narrazione come elaborazione della ferita identitaria. Questa fede però qui è giustamente accompagnata dalla consapevolezza che la scrittura è uno spazio eterotopico e non uno spazio del puro sé. Tale consapevolezza accompagna anche il contributo di Anabela Galhardo Couto (*Viaggiando attraverso le parole: la reinvenzione di un patrimonio dell'immaginario e degli affetti*) che riscrive il canone letterario portoghese introducendovi i racconti delle scrittrici del 17º e 18º secolo sulle loro esperienze mistiche come forme di aperture testuali all'alterità.

Con questa intuizione sulla incerta natura dell'identità costruita attraverso intrecci e cuciture testuali, il volume *Soggetti itineranti* fino alla fine mantiene abilmente aperto il problema del binomio tra la pedagogia della dissoluzione del soggetto e quella del suo rafforzamento strategico, creando così un prezioso campo per la discussione nell'ambito dell'educazione femminista.

NOTE

1. Hall, Stuart. 1996. Who needs 'identity'? *Questions of Cultural Identity*. S. Hall & P. du Gay ed. London: Sage, 1-17.

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Nadine Gordimer by Laura Giovannelli

Laura Giovannelli. 2013. *Nadine Gordimer*. Firenze: Le Lettere, pp. 388. € 22,50, ISBN 978-88-6087-684-3.

In her sixth monograph, *Nadine Gordimer*, Laura Giovannelli decides to focus on the work of the 'South African Lady of Letters', Nobel Prize for Literature (1991), Nadine Gordimer, who embodies one of the most representative voices of contemporary literature in English. Extending the study on Gordimer carried out by Tania Zulli in 2005 (1), Giovannelli provides a compelling reading of the South African writer's novels, from her early works to her last novel *No Time Like the Present*, by relying both on fundamental critics such as, for instance, Stephen Clingman and Dominic Head, and on Gordimer's non-fictional texts. In the introduction to her monograph, she outlines the main feature of Gordimer's writing: the tension between her ethical commitment to South Africa's history and political situation, and her devotion to art for art's sake. By citing one interview in which Gordimer claims that "my writing does not deal with my personal convictions; it deals with the society I live and write in. […] My novels are antiapartheid, not because of my personal abhorrence of apartheid, but because the society that is the very stuff of my work *reveals itself*" (32), Giovannelli emphasises, on the one hand, Gordimer's profound connection with her land of birth, and, on the other hand, her loyalty to a type of "scrittura onesta" ("honest writing", 33), to a language deprived of any ideologies or political propaganda.

After briefly discussing the history of colonialism in South Africa in the 20th century – with particular attention to the establishment of the apartheid regime – as well as Gordimer's biography and bibliography in the section entitled "La lunga strada della 'ragazzina Bianca di Springs'. Un quadro biografico e contestuale di Nadine Gordimer", Giovannelli moves to the analyses of the writer's early novels:

The Lying Days (1953), *A World of Strangers* (1958), *Occasion for Loving* (1963), *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), *A Guest of Honour* (1970), and *The Conservationist* (1974). I find very insightful Giovannelli's choice to analyse the novels not in a chronological order, but according to a thematic and conceptual point of view. Indeed, she first concentrates on *The Lying Days*, *Occasion for Loving*, and *The Late Bourgeois World* highlighting the tormented journey undertaken by the white bourgeois woman, who moves from a liberal-progressive dream to embrace a more radical perspective in relation to her involvement in the struggle against the segregation system. She also underlines how the dismantling of the liberal ideology is conveyed by a stylistic choice of privileging a discontinuous and fragmented type of discourse.

Conversely, the other three novels – *A World of Strangers*, *A Guest of Honour*, and *The Conservationist* – depict different typologies of the main male character, ranging from an attitude of empathy and solidarity with the problems affecting black South Africans to a posture of indifference and delusions of grandeur. Although these early texts lack the maturity and completeness showed by Gordimer's later novels, *The Conservationist* deserves particular attention, Giovannelli suggests, for its stylistic complexity and the deployment of the modernist technique of stream of consciousness, which is intended to denounce the pathologies of the imperialist mindset embodied by the male protagonist.

The following section, entitled "Verso nuove fisionomie identitarie", is dedicated to the discussion of four major novels: *Burger's Daughter* (1979), *July's People* (1981), *A Sport of Nature* (1987), and *My Son's Story* (1990). Giovannelli points out that all these texts play out the protagonist's journey in search of identity, who tries to adjust to South Africa's turbulent political and historical situation of the period between the 1970s and 1980s. She also underscores the importance of the narrative voice and the role of sexuality in the construction, deconstruction or negotiation of (new) identities. In *Burger's Daughter*, for example, the protagonist's three-phase *Bildung* corresponds to both the tripartite

division of the text and the three addressees of the protagonist's confessional moments. Sexual freedom turns into a revolutionary instrument in *A Sport of Nature*, where the demolition of the colour bar is dramatised by sexual intercourse between the white woman and the black man. In *My Son's Story* instead, whose protagonist is *coloured* according to apartheid racial classification, sexual transgression assumes other nuances reflecting the limits of the "sinergia tra eros e politica" ("synergy between eros and politics", 214) in the wake of the repeal of the Immorality Act.

As suggested by the title, "La transizione e il post-apartheid", the last section of the monograph deals with the historical period of the political transition towards democracy and inaugurates the novel of the post-apartheid era. Here, Giovannelli explores Gordimer's last five novels: *None to Accompany Me* (1994), *The House Gun* (1998), *The Pickup* (2001), *Get a Life* (2005), and *No Time Like the Present* (2013). These late novels, Giovannelli argues, witness Gordimer's growing inclination to adopt a polyphonic system of narrative voices and the indirect free speech, along with the intersection of the characters' mental peregrinations. She also emphasises the writer's undying interest in the problems which continue to affect South Africa despite the official demise of the apartheid regime in 1994. *None to Accompany Me* and *The House Gun* are anchored in the overwhelming challenges the country had to face in reinventing itself as a liberal democracy. On the other hand, the last three novels are presented as the author's invitation to awaken, to "get a life" – as the homonymous text advises, Giovannelli observes – to direct our attention to global-scale issues: the prejudices and the hatred against illegal immigration, the threat of environmental disaster, the spread of AIDS, along with the poverty and violence still reigning in post-apartheid society.

I believe that Giovannelli's *Nadine Gordimer* constitutes a painstaking and lucid in-depth analysis of Gordimer's novels which will definitely contribute to a greater familiarisation of the Italian readership with the South African writer's work,

her ethical commitment, and the coeval historical political context of South Africa itself.

NOTES

1. Tania Zulli. 2005. *Nadine Gordimer: strategie narrative di una transizione politica*. Napoli: Liguori.

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Eleonora Goi

In conversation with David Malouf

In the year in which the world celebrates the 80th anniversary of David Malouf's birth it seemed particularly important to acknowledge the major contribution this author has made to Australian and international literature. The following interview dates back to April 2013, when David Malouf himself kindly invited me to his house in Sydney to discuss some his novels and the topics I was researching for my doctoral dissertation.

The deep concern the author shows in describing the often difficult relationship between Man and Nature, his awareness that Art and Literature can help us get in touch with physical space as well as with some forgotten and mysterious part of ourselves, his ability to portray visions and metamorphoses that allow us to experience places where "boundaries of place and language dissolve" (Malouf 1991: 26), make Malouf's body of work the perfect paradigm of eco-sustainable writing.

Unsurprisingly, then, Malouf's 'ecosophy' and his characters' search for new ways of interiorising the Australian landscape, be it by naming its animals and plants or by capturing their image on film or on canvas, has been one of the topics mentioned more often during the interview, marking it, in my opinion, not only as a tribute to the literary greatness of this writer on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, but also as an interesting contribution to the present issue of *Le Simplegadi*.

Eleonora Goi In your novels, I dare say in all your works, the characters' need to recount and narrate is always very strong, sometimes even to the point of lying. Quoting from *Ransom*, "This old fellow, like most storytellers, is a stealer of other men's tales, of other men's lives" (Malouf 2009: 128). Is this a means of giving your

characters more depth, rendering them multi-faceted, or is it the act of storytelling itself you are so interested in?

David Malouf I think I am probably interested in storytelling itself, but I'm also interested in why people feel the need to tell the story. My first novel, *Johnno* (1975), for example, is about somebody who needs to tell the story because he has always meant to write about that person, but things have changed now because the person has maybe committed suicide and involved him as being partly to blame for it. This means that his need to tell the story now is not just because it is a good story and this is a good character, but because he feels responsible for something within the story, either having done something or not having done something, not having sufficiently understood him or not having sufficiently loved him - if that is what he wanted - or having misrepresented him in some way. We all like to tell stories, some people more than others, and of course a writer is someone who likes to tell a story, but then the story may be imposed on you in some kind of way.

EG So you feel compelled to tell it?

DM Yes, and at that point the fact that you are compelled to tell the story means that you are no longer free. One of the things you are trying to discover by telling the story is why you feel compelled to tell it.

EG According to the philosopher Raimon Panikkar, nowadays words are stripped of their dialogical power and considered 'terms', so that culture and education are being reduced to a mere transferring of notions (Panikkar 2009). Do you feel there is the need to embrace storytelling and creative writing as an instrument of cultural awareness?

DM Well, I think that when we tell stories we give experience a shape and I think those shapes are probably fairly fixed by psychology or by culture, so telling the story is a way of giving people access to a deeper understanding of things,

because they somehow intuitively recognize the shape of the story. That comes from the fact that our dreams themselves have shapes and those shapes are not ones that we impose on the dream, but rather they belong to some kind of repository of shapes that we use when we want to tell stories or we want to think in a certain kind of way. A story often has a logic that an argument would not have, and it appeals to people at a lower level than a logical argument, so perhaps if we have lost the capacity to communicate in one kind of way we have still kept it in another.

EG In *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* the unfamiliar setting in which the characters find themselves compels them to search for new myths and narratives; Michael Adair, for example, undergoes an almost mythical transformation in the legendary character O'Dare and in the Epilogue you describe both an intimate and a private transformation, similar in a way to those we find in Greek and Roman myths. In writing these passages did you feel you were forging a new Australian hero or giving Australia a new and more complex mythology?

DM The people who come to Australia bring old mythologies with them and that is a bit like the fact that they bring an old language with them. English, for example, is a language made for a different landscape, for a different climatic place, for a different topography, and they have to make that language fit in some way; they learn new words for the things that are there, words that other people who were there have for those things. When we call something a *billabong*, we are taking the Aboriginal word to describe a particular thing which elsewhere is called an oxbow lake. In the same way, stories and myths are just different modes of thinking, both symbolic and metaphorical. They would bring those myths and stories and try to find their echo or reflection in the new place; if they didn't find anything, they would have to either take it from Aboriginal people or make up new ones. It is difficult to say, as a writer, which you are doing.

In *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, for example, I use some Christian symbolism, which is right for those characters because that's the way they think; in

the book, toward the end, for example, the notions of washing and baptism, the eating of the bread in the very last chapter, they all are Christian notions which you would expect to find in Adair, although he is sceptical, or in Carney, although he is kind of ignorant, or in the other people who are watching. Does that answer your question?

EG It most certainly does. Do you think this is what Australian Literature on the whole is about? A transposition of European values in a new setting?

DM It is more a translation than anything else, but I think writers are not very self-conscious of the fact they are creating new myths. I think they are more likely to do what people in other places are doing by recreating those myths for their time. Here people are recreating those myths, or stories or ways of thinking, not just for another time, but also for another place.

EG Myths are, in their essence, fluid and ever changing, they can present many variants and they allow the narrator of the story to rearrange and reshape it. Do you like to give your characters the chance to be looked upon from different perspectives? I am not referring solely to the characters from the Iliad in *Ransom* or Ovid in *An Imaginary Life* (1980), but I am also thinking about your original characters, for example in *The Prowler* we find this undefined, ever-changing figure.

DM If you are a writer you are aware of the various forms of literature that have already been produced. You are always aware that you are working with material that has already been used and is seen in one way, so you are always trying to find new ways of rewriting it.

This is very true of *An Imaginary Life*. I think that when I wrote that book I wasn't conscious of the fact that someone might be reading it outside Australia, that it would be seen as a use of the material that no European would make. I didn't realise when I was doing it that it might arise questions about the centre or the edge or even the notion that you might read it as postcolonial. I didn't realise,

as I was doing it, that those things might happen. Here, for example, that book was seen as basically in no way Australian and as having nothing to say to Australians that was specifically Australian, but as soon as it started getting reviews in France or Italy or Germany people said that no European would use this material in this way, only an Australian would be thinking like this. There are things that, as Australians, we take for granted and we don't realise they are unusual.

EG Do they become unusual later on?

DM They become unusual when someone points out the fact that they are unusual. And then sometimes, as in the case of that book, the book becomes to Australians an interesting book about Australia, as well as a book about Ovid.

EG So, when you were writing it what were you thinking about? What was your main concern?

DM The question of what happens to a poet when he has his language taken away from him. Ovid's exile is a double exile, exile to a place where he is surrounded by strangers and is outside the known world, but it's also an exile to a place where no one speaks his language and he effectively has no language. The question is: how much gets taken away from a poet if you take his language away from him as well as putting him in a place where all the experience of the place is also new?

EG What about silence? In *Ransom* you say that "Silence, not speech, was what was expressing. Power lay in containment" (Malouf 2009: 126) and still storytelling seems to be so important. Isn't this a contradiction?

DM Silence is not necessarily a negative thing, it's not necessarily only an absence of speech, it may also be a state, as in meditation or something like that, in which people are more in touch with something in themselves that doesn't belong to the world of articulation and speech. Silence in my works is always a positive thing, in

fact if people really go into silence they make a new experience of themselves. It is something beyond speech, which is both prior to speech and after speech.

EG Talking about dreams, as we were doing just a moment ago, in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* you put an emphasis on dreams, which are described as a noble and terrible force. Dreams are present in many of your books and I would like to know if you were in any way inspired by the Aboriginal concept of the Dreamtime or if for you it is just a way of representing the unfathomable depths of the human mind.

DM I think it is not related to the Aboriginal Dreamtime at all. Dreams are clearly something very important; in the past people often thought dreams foretold the future, but after Freud we started to believe that dreams are another way of talking to ourselves about anxieties or problems or fears or aspirations. When you consider that we spend one third of our lives asleep and a lot of that time we are in some kind of way dreaming, you can see it is a huge amount of our experience. Dreams are important and I think dreams are always mysterious; we don't know what their message is and in interpreting them we are always on fairly risky ground. Nevertheless they belong to a process of our unconscious thinking and they are trying to tell something important.

EG Your references to ghosts are another thing I found truly interesting. Both in *Harland's Half Acre* and in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* the ghost is a presence that is almost more real than its observer, to the point where the character asks himself 'Could it be that I am the ghost?' Is that a way to reflect on the fact that sometimes what we evoke with the power of our imagination is more real than 'real life'?

DM Yes, and I also think we are never quite certain, given that how we see things and what we see is dependant on the structure of our lives. We are never quite certain, from the time of Kant onwards, that there isn't some other reality there that our mind in its conscious form is not constructed to see. A lot of people feel

there is a reality they can see which others can't see and we have no idea of how much reality we are missing because our mind is not constructed to grasp it.

EG The act of naming and renaming seems to hold a great importance in *Fly Away Peter* (1985). The act of name-giving seems to be almost a reference to the Bible, when God gives Adam the right to name the creatures in the Garden. Do you feel a parallel can be drawn with what colonizers did when they settled in Australia, trying to shape the country by naming it?

DM Yes, there was a kind of Genesis here as well. I think that's really important, because naming puts an object into your consciousness so that it belongs to your world of speech and world of thinking. Naming is, in a way, possessing the object in a different way. That is certainly quite important in *Fly Away Peter*, but also in Australia inasmuch as all those birds and animals were not part of the speech or the consciousness that we brought to the place. We were strangers, the place was not ours, and so a lot of Australian writing, especially from the '30s and '40s and especially in poetry, is about creating a poetry and a form of language and a form of consciousness in Australia that includes all those things. Judith Wright writes a whole book on birds through which all those birds enter Australian poetry (1) and in entering Australian poetry they enter the consciousness of Australian readers, which means we begin to possess those creatures as we didn't before, so we are no longer strangers because they are now inside us. That's been a very, very important job that poetry in Australia took upon itself. Judith Wright especially, but other poets as well, for example David Campbell or Douglas Steward, made a project of creating a poetry which referred to all those things and took them into our lives. It was more than just a new language, it was a new consciousness, a consciousness in which those things were familiar; they were named and visible objects rather than unfamiliar ones.

EG A process of self-contextualisation?

DM Yes. In Fly Away Peter Jim is a kind of conduit through which all of those birds and the names of those birds come alive, not just in the land, but in the book that he is keeping. Ashley Crowter sees that as a way of coming into possession of all of those things.

EG This process seems to be very similar to that employed by the painter Frank Harland in Harland's Half Acre.

DM Exactly. When I wrote *Harland's Half Acre* the whole notion of possession, which becomes an important thing there, follows directly from *Fly Away Peter*.

EG In *Child's Play* (1982) you describe the process the author has to undergo to create "a new self" that "defies the expectations of his admirers" and the "notion he is already dead and done with". When you start writing a new book is this your aim? To provide the reader with something new and unexpected?

DM I don't really think of the reader very much. [laughs] I think of providing myself with something new and unexpected. If it's unexpected to me and it seems important to me then there are some readers out there who will find it to be unexpected and new.

EG Going back to our relationship with space and nature, in the very first paragraph of *Ransom* water images are converted to references to earth: "The man is a fighter, but when he is not fighting he is a farmer, earth is his element. One day he knows he will go back to it" (Malouf 2009: 4). This is not the only novel where a similar description can be found. I am thinking, for example, of *An Imaginary Life* and *Fly Away Peter*. Is this how you imagine death? As a dissolution of self in order to become part of a whole, of Nature and of the landscape?

DM That is very true when you consider *An Imaginary Life*, but it is also true in *Fly Away Peter* when characters begin to dig in order to get to the other side while they are really just entering the earth. What is really important in the first paragraph of *Ransom* is that Achilles is a very different kind of character; he has a different

kind of consciousness when compared to the other warriors. He has a very strong feminine side, which is associated with his mother; she is a Goddess rather than a mortal like his father and she is associated with the fluidity of water, as she is a water nymph. Here earth and water symbolise the contrast between what is stable and what is fluid.

EG Your first works are full of autobiographical references, *Johnno* especially. Do you feel you are becoming more detached from your personal experience?

DM When you first start writing the safest place for you is your own immediate experience, but it is also a very mysterious place. One of the reasons you are writing is that you are now looking at things in a different way; all the things you thought you understood and all the things that seemed boring. That's why you want to write. You either are utterly puzzled by your experience or realize that you never really understood some of the things you gave for granted or notice that some of the things that seemed familiar and boring are now in fact very exotic and mysterious. That early experience is very likely to be the place where a writer works first; I think that, after that, you find that you are still working with that early material, but you are disguising it much more.

I am very aware at the moment of *Harland's Half Acre*, because recently it has been reprinted and I have been working on it, that even if it is my fifth novel it uses all the family material, all my aunts and all my uncles and all the rest of it, but in disguises even they wouldn't realise. You mix it all up much more. As you go along you realise that your material is pretty much fixed, because the things that you are really interested in, or puzzled by, or where you have the stronger sensory response, or where your memory is most reliable, are things that probably belong to the first twenty years of your life. You just become much cleverer as a writer in using that material so that is looks different.

EG *In* an interview you stated that you think of your work as not being chronological but rather spatial, filling the space between *Johnno* and *An Imaginary Life*. Do you think this definition still applies after *Ransom*?

DM That's quite a good question. In some ways *Ransom* probably is my last piece of fiction, I haven't been writing any fiction recently, I'm writing poetry mostly. So perhaps *Ransom* is more like the final or the last book than *An Imaginary Life*. One of the things about that is that *An Imaginary Life* is written as if it were written by an old man, and I wasn't an old man when I wrote that book - certainly not as old a man as I was by the time I was writing *Ransom* - but I still think that what I sort of grasped when I moved from *Johnno* to *An Imaginary Life* was the full span across which my writing would work. So, to that extent, it is like the beginning and the ending and you are just filling the spaces in between.

When you have written two or three books you begin to see what it is you do. You always refer to that and when you have got an idea for a new book you make quite certain that the books belongs somewhere inside that body of work. What matters in the end is the way in which, in that body of work, your books all fit together and speak to one another.

EG Some sort of dialogical relationship?

DM Yes, dialogue, connections. Sometimes there is contrast, sometimes there is agreement, sometimes there is aversion, but somehow they all belong to the same consciousness and the some body of writings.

EG What about your future projects?

DM As I said, I am writing mostly poetry. I think that when you get to a certain age as a fiction writer - I think you might see this in other people's writing as well – you don't have the patience that you had when you were younger. So, if you are not very careful, you end up writing books that are too thin, that do not have the

same kind of density or solidity. I think I don't want to write that kind of books or even stories.

EG What about drama?

DM The thing about theatre is that you are always working in collaboration, and that might be liberating in some ways, as you are not responsible for everything, but I think writers, especially novelists, want to have the control of everything.

I was also a bit shocked by the fact that every night, when I went to the play, it was like watching a different play. The audience was different, they were laughing in different places or the actors would do different things, so there is nothing stable there. You have very little control. Playwrights find it very exciting, but when you have spent most of your life working on sentences in order to manipulate and control as far as you can the response of the reader you get very jumpy when you are surrounded by people who are not following [laughs]. I really like writing librettos and I get very excited at the idea that the music is going to make it sound all different; I want to see that, I want to hear that.

NOTES

1. Here Malouf is referring to the collection *Birds* by Judith Wright.

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Alice Vidussi

In conversation with Tim Winton

Tim Winton is one of the most esteemed and prize-winning contemporary Australian authors. The subjects he deals with in his novels and stories concern respect for nature, as well as an immense love for the Australian country and history. The environmental question plays a very important role in his fiction. Tim Winton's writing is not only a sort of 'eco-philosophy', but also a way of making good literature. Maybe the key of his success lies in this double message. I interviewed him for *Le Simplegadi*, as this issue focuses on eco-sustainable narratives. I asked Winton to give his opinion about writing from a 'respect for nature' point of view. I was interested in the way he insists on underlining the fragility of the oceans' ecosystems and the dangers of exploiting the beaches for touristic reasons. Therefore, I tried to understand how his books can help people understand that nature is fundamental for our survival and welfare. Together with the writer I discussed some passages of his most famous novels, where his young characters fight to save the Australian oceans and marine fauna. We found out that these stories can help the readers to understand why it is so important to protect and respect nature. Moreover, Winton revealed his opinion about the future of 'Postcolonial Literatures' and their connection with the Australian writers and poets. Furthermore, I asked him to discuss the Aboriginal Australians' culture. There are many references to its ancient traditions in Winton's books and I was curious about the Aboriginal Australians' worship of nature and the connection with the writer's favourite themes. Finally, he exhaustively satisfied our curiosity about a possible connection between food and an eco-sustainable writing.

Alice Vidussi Do you consider yourself an 'eco-philosophical writer', as Salhia Ben-Messahel defined you in her article "'More Blokes, More Bloody Water' Tim Winton's 'Breath'" (Ben-Messahel 2012: 7)? Why?

Tim Winton I have been writing about people's engagement with nature from the very beginning of my career, from the old colonial alienation from the land to the new ethic of stewardship that has begun to take hold in the last generation or two. But I certainly haven't set out to be a standard-bearer for eco-philosophy through my fiction. I was just writing about what I saw and knew and much of that was either a human struggle *against* nature or humans struggling *within* the constraints of nature.

My own interests in nature were instinctive, not very educated. As you'll have seen from my little memoir, *Land's Edge,* I learnt by action, by being immersed in the natural world. For me it began as a physical, sensual passion that I didn't really have a language for as a boy. Later of course I read the Romantic poets – especially Wordsworth and Blake, Gerard Manley Hopkins – who spoke of the natural world as a *subject* rather than an *object* and this resonated strongly. Somehow this led me to other thinkers about nature from St. Francis to Goethe to Bill McKibben (1). I think the work of the Deep Ecologists has had more of an influence on the fiction than I first realized – and certainly more than most critics have noticed. Mostly because literature has been quarantined from other disciplines for so long. My suspicion is that my more public work as an activist has alerted some critics and scholars to the role of the environment in my fiction, but very few saw this strand of thought in the work itself until very recently. When I worked in the environmental movement in a much less public capacity and few outside the movement knew about it, nobody was drawing parallels.

I wrote *Blueback* before I'd read much eco-philosophy. Certainly before I became a public advocate for the cause. *Dirt Music* came after a long period of engaging with it and by then I'd been a public activist for a few years. And I've become more and more involved since then.

As a novelist I'm not certain I qualify as much of an eco-philosopher. But I think it's reasonable to see the influence of nature thinkers in my work. Nature is a subject, not just an object, a character, a living thing and not simply backdrop.

AV You are not only a writer, but also an environmental activist in Western Australia. The struggle you fought in association with the Australian Marine Conservation Society and other environmental societies, to save Ningaloo Reef in the 2000s is an example. Ningaloo Reef is now one of the world's great eco-tourism destinations, thanks to its 260 km of enchanting shore and the annual appearance of the ocean's biggest fish, the whale shark. Also, you have been patron of the Marine Conservation Society since 2006. Is there a link between your novels and your environmental activism? Ben-Messahel writes: "Tim Winton stands halfway between the activist and the writer of fiction" (Ben-Messahel 2006: 21).

TW I'm a storyteller first and foremost. I don't think the novel is an instrument of persuasion. Seduction, perhaps. Enchantment, yes. A reader of fiction quickly feels trapped and betrayed by a writer who sets out to persuade. Convincing a reader, though, is different. The artist's job is to get the reader or viewer to let go of their ordinary life, the safe, dull, conventional habits of life and mind and allow themselves to be swept into another reality, an alternative experience. If this experience shakes or moves the readers and lingers with them, then the work itself has done all the convincing it needs to do.

Art requires us to let go a little, to examine ourselves as we contemplate the strange echo the writer or painter has produced. The problems of a novel are not just a game to entertain a reader. They exist to disturb.

In my public life I concede that I am viewed as someone who stands, as Ben-Messahel suggests, between activist and artist. That's simply a public perception and it is sometimes a superficial reading. I engage in activism as a *citizen*, not as a writer. My (paid) work is distinct from my (voluntary) activism. Yes, I use the public reputation I gained as a writer in order to advocate for causes, but this has more to do with the way media and PR (2) work in a democracy than it has to do with writing or literature. Still the writing and the activism do overlap now and then. In *Eyrie* the activism has clearly influenced the fiction. And in *Blueback* the fiction informed or perhaps inspired the later activism. My experiences as an

environmentalist and my observation of comrades in the movement no doubt influenced the writing of the character Keely. But *Eyrie* isn't an eco-novel so much as a story of existential alienation.

AV Do the characters in your books feel the need to protect nature as you do? In *Shallows* (1984), Queenie Cookson joins the Greenies to protect the whales in Angelus (WA). Then, in *Blueback* (1997), you write about "whale bones, thousands and thousands of them all along the bay" (Winton 1997: 125-26). In your childhood you saw the massacre of the whales in Australia's whaling days during the 60s. You write about it in the article "Girt by sea" (2011), too. Are the characters of Queenie Cookson, Abel Jackson and Lockie Leonard in *Lockie Leonard, Scumbuster* (1993) examples of young environmental activists the readers could follow? If so, why?

TW Yes, there are characters in my fiction who feel compelled to speak up for nature. But there are many more who are afraid of it or even disgusted by it. For every Queenie in *Shallows* there are a dozen others who see nature as alien from them and something merely to exploit. The business of whaling is mostly historical now. But if you replaced it with the business of fossil fuels the same mentality applies. The conventional views of the time are always dominant. It's only in retrospect that commonsense looks crazy.

So I think it's fairer to say I mostly write about people at war with nature or in retreat from nature. Like the characters in *In the Winter Dark* for instance, who are terrified by what lurks in the bush. And now and then there is a marginal character, an outsider with a heretical view. Like Dora Jackson in *Blueback*.

In terms of what I'm trying to do with these characters, first and foremost I want them to be interesting as people, for their problems to seem real and engaging. Much of literature has relied upon characters swimming against the current of their culture or their family (or both). They are odd, strange, problematic. The physical state of the world is probably the most pressing issue humans face in our own era. In earlier times the ideology of class or of nationalism, of peace between nations or of the chaos caused by sudden technological progress were

the issues of the day. None of those problems are resolved, of course; they are still urgent issues, but the physical health of the planet looms above all of them. So it makes sense to have a few outlying characters swimming against the current of complacency that most nations and communities still settle for.

If a young reader – or an older reader for that matter – takes some sustenance or inspiration or is at the very least moved to contemplate this issue as a result of reading one of my novels then I'm happy about that. But as I've said, I don't write them for that purpose. Novels are very indirect vectors of ideas. There are many more direct and efficient ways to appeal to people.

AV Do you think that your fiction and the themes you deal with, such as the great mystery of life and death, love and the enchanting power of nature, can be an inspiration for younger generations? Can your fiction teach something to young readers? I refer to the respect for nature and the deep roots of the Australian history. Can your books be a connection between the beauty and history of your land and its young people?

TW Yes, I think literature can inspire people. Not politically and not in a propagandist manner. But through time literature has served an indirect purpose (as has music and art) in allowing or encouraging people to examine the ways in which they think and live. It colours our dreams and visions. Sometimes it merely reflects us back at ourselves in a way that's unflattering.

In my lifetime Australian literature has reflected great changes in thinking, in the cultural mainstream of our society. In recent years writers have relinquished the nationalism of previous generations. The old Australian anxiety about 'belonging' is slowly fading from consciousness. If my work expresses anything new it's probably reflecting the change from the settler-ethic to a sense of belonging that's not without its problems but which sees Australia the island, Australia the eco-system more clearly than it once did. When Australians thought of the country in terms of *territory* their conception of it was colonizing and nationalistic; they wanted to subdue it and own it and the boundaries were important. No doubt a necessary

stage to go through in a post-colonial situation. Nowadays young people are just as likely to have strong feelings about Australia the place, the *ecosystem*, the finite natural web of resources we depend upon for our physical survival and our spiritual sustenance. This is quite a change in thinking. But science has played a big part in this change. Much greater than fiction. Probably even greater than the thinkers of Deep Ecology (3).

Aboriginal Australians have had quite an impact on this change as well, greater than many people realize. Since the first invasion and settlement indigenous Australians have adapted and co-opted new ideas and tools from settlers. And for a long time the exchange was very lopsided. Robbery is always a bit once-sided, let's face it. Over the generations, though, especially in the last 50 years a slowly dawning respect for Aboriginal culture has begun to alter non-indigenous Australia. Of course the most successful Aborigines appropriated the most useful parts of the interloper's thinking and technology – that has never changed. What has changed is the way in which Aboriginal concepts have crossed into mainstream thinking. This has changed the cultural mindset and the political landscape. And some of this has flowed into this new idea of people owing some kind of debt and allegiance to the land itself. Many non-Aboriginal Australians realize that their continent is fragile and finite and that our survival depends on its good health. Many have come closer to the idea that we belong to it, not that it belongs to us.

AV In *Cloudstreet* (1991), the character of Fish Lamb is the most sensitive amongst the two families, the Lambs and the Pickles. He can talk with the pig in the yard and feels when his beloved brother Quick is in danger, even though he is far away from the family. There is a wonderful passage in the book, when the two brothers are on their boat at night on the Swan River. The sky is full of stars and Quick sees "the river full of sky as well. There's stars and swirl and space down there and there's no water anymore" (Winton 1991: 114). Does Fish represent humanity's

deep and forgotten connection with nature? Is he the symbol of your own respect for nature?

TW I haven't thought of Fish in those terms before, but this makes some sense, yes. He is in a liminal space between life and death, between nature and essence. He embodies the yearning of an earlier character, Ort Flack from *That Eye, the Sky* who is, in his inarticulate way, a kind of nature mystic of a sort that St. Francis or a Sufi mystic might instinctively recognize as a seeker. Fish and Ort sense that suffering humanity is not outside nature. All our battles with each other and ourselves happen within the realm of nature. It affects us and we have an impact upon it. So we're talking about a relationship here, a kinship. Whether we like it or not, the natural world is family to us.

AV Do you think that Western Australia's nature and the Australian environment in general are strictly connected to Australian culture? The space and wilderness of your country are not the same as in Europe. In your opinion, how can land affect a culture?

TW Australia is certainly not unique amongst nations and cultures when it comes to this question. Lots of cultures are informed (or even deformed) by landscape and space. Insofar as there is anything we can safely call a set of 'national characteristics' you can see these are a result of environment as much as history. Food, physical culture, patterns of thinking – these are geographical, not just historical.

Australia is an instance where you can see landscape and space competing with settlers' European origins and slowly overcoming them. There's no question in my mind that I would be a total confounding stranger to my first Australian ancestors and their Irish, Scottish and English cousins. Not just because modernity has come between us. But because my view of the place in which we live is radically different as a result of generations of experience and knowledge that I inherited by cultural osmosis. History has changed us, yes. But the land itself

has altered us beyond recognition. My ancestors came from small, lush green islands. And although I am an islander myself, Australia being the world's largest island, my view of the world has been formed by enormous space, vast distances, and a lack of fresh water unthinkable to a European. My sensory palate is different to that of my forebears.

Western Australia happens to be larger, drier and less populated than the rest of Australia, so all those forces are dialed up to the maximum. I'm also conscious that my part of Australia contains some of the last great wilderness areas on the planet. It's no accident that the environmental movement and green politics are strong here and growing in influence.

AV In your novels you sometimes write about angels. Talking about *Cloudstreet* once more, you write about a "black angel" or "blackfella" that Quick Lamb meets when he is alone and lost. Also, Fish Lamb is an angel himself as he saves Quick when he is injured by a kangaroo, by joining him in his dreams and "rowing a box across the top of the wheat" (Winton 1991: 200). In the passage, Fish is described as "silver with flight" (Winton 1991: 200). Moreover, Quick falls ill with a fever which makes his skin become "like mother of pearl" (Winton 1991: 228). These signs seem to be a sort of "presages". Are they conceived in a religious way or do they refer to a mystical connection with nature? On the one hand, Quick is touched by the magic of nature when he is alone in the fields: "the threes shake with music" is his mind (Winton 1991: 218). On the other, Fish is "blessed" by water since he almost drowned in the river. The only thing he cares about in the novel is going back to the water. Does water represent life? How important is water in a country like Australia?

TW I don't have a way of looking at the world that separates the spiritual from the natural, so my sense of those 'otherworldly' or 'angelic' characters is neither one nor the other but both. Religion is impossible without nature. Almost every tradition requires an engagement with the physical world. Those characters are not nature sprites. They are human forces, human resonances. And they resonate in nature.

That is, in humans, who, despite their exclusive sense of themselves, are a part of nature.

Water is life in any country or culture, let's face it. But it's most central to a cultural or religious tradition where it is geographically most precious. To the Jews wandering in antiquity water was so precious it becomes central in the Hebrew scriptures as an image of Yaweh's power and creativity. Hence the references to God making His presence known symbolically and literally in 'streams of living water'. In Australia where there is even less water than in the Middle East, Aborigines made water central to their thinking. For instance, the Ngarinyin people of the Kimberley 'conceived' of their children in rock pools; that is, the *idea* of the child appeared in the water and only then did a woman become pregnant. Similarly, the most ancient painted icons to be part of a living culture are the Wanjina figures of the Kimberley region central to Ngarinyin life. Painted in ochre in rock shelters and caves, these huge faces are an embodiment, a visual echo really, of the monsoonal storms that finally arrive at the end of the year to fill the rock holes and creeks. The rainy season only lasts a few weeks and that water has to last all year. So it's no accident that the force that provides all this water is powerful and sacred.

Australians are affected by both these cultural traditions (as well as many others). Generation after generation, if we've learnt anything collectively it's that water is our most precious commodity. Even in a land as arid as ours, humans are water-beings. Our bodies are 70% water. The planet we live on is 70% aquatic as well. All of us are water creatures before we leave our mother's wombs. No surprise that water is a big deal, then.

AV In your opinion, could respect for nature be a way of helping human beings respect each other? Why?

TW Yes, I think so because it relies on the notion of interdependence. Globalization has taught us that we are mutually vulnerable economically. In military terms, too,

there is less of a sense of issues and nations being discrete. In a strange way this makes us feel less safe, more vulnerable. And yet a certain level of vulnerability is an opportunity as much as a disadvantage. After all, how could any of us fall in love unless we'd embraced the risk of vulnerability? The study of ecology has taught us that the nature world is strung together by a web of relationships: mutual strengths and vulnerabilities. It is not a mechanical system as the thinkers of the Enlightenment liked to think of it; it's organic. Modern physical sciences have shown us that the world is finite, fragile and loaded with contingency. We are all more vulnerable than we realize. Even without the spectre of eating ourselves out of house and home and polluting ourselves into chaos we were *always* vulnerable but we just didn't know it. Acknowledging this and exercising our moral imagination to address it is the most pressing crisis and the greatest opportunity of our age.

AV As Australia is a post-colonial country, how is this particular condition connected to the love for the environment that you and the Australian Marine Conservation Society along with many other Australian associations feel? Do you think that taking care of your own land is a way to assert Australia's independence and dignity? Why?

TW Yes, to an extent this sense of pride and love did have its first form in post-colonial nationalism. But as I've said, this was a limited stage in the development of the culture, in my view. More and more people would now define their patriotism in terms of defending and celebrating the environment that sustains us rather than defending the state that contains us. The state is a confection, a game we play to drop a thin veil of order over something naturally disordered. The environment is not something willed and legislated for and enforced by violence the way the state is; it is not arrived at by ingenuity or effort. It simply *is*. It is a concrete fact of life. I suspect young people can feel a sense of allegiance to something that is real rather than something largely imagined or imposed. When the state continues to act in a manner hostile to the environment – and let's face

it, most government departments are doing that all day every day – you can understand the sense some people get that the state is acting against the best interests of the people. Its first priority should be the survival of its people. Governments that undercut the terms of human survival are not simply ecological vandals; they are anti-human, against life.

AV What is your opinion about 'Postcolonial Literatures'? Australian Literature is very rich in poets and writers. In your opinion, what do they have in common with the other 'Postcolonial authors'?

TW I'm not very widely-read in this area. My sense is that most of us, having lived beyond the older imperial age (only in order to endure a new one) are working out how we think and live and speak in our new circumstances. Some of us are still preoccupied with fighting the old order. For those of us at a great distance from the centers of the new imperial power, there's a struggle between the provincial and the cosmopolitan. The strongest work seems to come from writers owning their own place, their own specifics, their own vernacular. The politics of this isn't always interesting (although I know it fuels many departments in the academy) but to my mind the aesthetic fruits of this are amazing. The greatest poets of our age were not from New York or London but from Ireland, (Heaney) the Caribbean (Walcott) and Australia (Les Murray). You could probably say the same of novelists. They all come from piss-ant places nobody in the new *imperium* gives a damn about. But to be honest the post-colonial label is a little tiresome. The ex-colonies have gone on to new things, including enslaving others and cosying up to new imperialists. The label has lost its currency.

AV Is your fiction partially trying to give dignity back to the Aboriginal Australians? What is their role in your work? Both in *Shallows* and *Cloudstreet*, you write about the Indigenous cause. In your opinion, are modern Australians learning to respect nature from the Aboriginals Australians? Finally, do you believe in a cultural exchange between the Aboriginal ancient culture and Australian literature?

TW A number of great Aboriginal elders of the 20th century talked about 'two-way living'. In their own terms this meant encouraging their own people to be literate and competent in both traditional and modern ways, which is to say indigenous and non-indigenous ways. This was, in their view, a path to survival as much as an enlarged way of seeing and living. But they also used this term to try to draw non-indigenous Australia into an exchange of wisdom. Often with miserable results. Even so, this impulse is still at work and I've been very interested in it. The life and work of David Mowaljarlai (4) have been influential in this regard. I've spent quite a bit of time in the company of people who knew him and studied in his 'bush university' in the Kimberley. I have travelled and camped with members of his family and clan, though I would not dare to consider myself fluent in this way of thinking or an expert in any kind of indigenous matters, I have enormous respect for this 'two-way' ethic. I think Mowaljarlai was one of our country's greatest sons. I believe this exchange of wisdom, this mutual respect and regard is vital to this country's future. The dispossession of Aborigines since colonization is the great spiritual wound, the worm in the apple of the Australian communal spirit. There will be no maturity, no honest future without this being addressed.

AV How can the Australian Marine Conservation Society's Seafood Guide help Australians and other people all over the world eat well and respect sea life? In your opinion, is food a way of understanding nature? Why?

TW You can tell a lot about people from what they eat and how thoughtfully they consume. We've been working for a decade now to provoke a conversation about the fish we eat, how we source it and where and how we catch it. Really just to get people to be mindful, to buy and eat thoughtfully. And I think we've made some progress. We've alerted consumers to those fisheries that are the most destructive and least sustainable and in some instances we've helped bring attention to better, more sustainable choices. Sometimes people are surprised to realize there are better alternatives close at hand. Changing patterns of consumption is not easy, but it's interesting to say the way a market can be

vulnerable to scrutiny. Community groups can change demand in both local and larger-scale situations.

I think it's a natural progression that people will want to source excellent, safe, clean produce that is sustainable and ethical. Just as the Slow Food movement has shown, people want produce that is authentic, seasonal, high quality and lovingly cooked. Above all we want it to be clean. That doesn't just mean that it's free of chemical poisons, but also that it's clean in other senses. Many people still talk in terms of 'dirty money', currency acquired by foul means. There is a food corollary to this. Clean food is sustainably grown, caught and sourced. Humans are not simply disengaged appetites. We are moral beings too. Which brings me back to the point of relationships. We gain nutrition by a complex web of interdependence. We pretend this isn't so at our own peril.

AV In which way can food affect eco-sustainable narratives?

TW I have to admit I've never thought about that. Food has been central to storytelling, though, hasn't it? What people eat is either a register of their joy or their deprivation. I suppose it's safe to say that most of the feasting in my work takes place in *Cloudstreet* where much of the produce has been grown or caught by those who eat it. There are a few miserable meals, too. And ice-cream is used as a social weapon, now I think of it. I guess food is never simply sustenance; it defines us. Because, of course, we are creatures, not disembodied beings.

I wouldn't call myself a Deep Ecologist. My ideas owe a lot to this movement, as I said in the interview, but I am probably closest to the process thinkers and theologians who follow the lead of A.N. Whitehead: John Cobb, Charles Birch, etc. Other green theologians, biologists and writers like Wendell Berry, Thomas Berry, Bill McKibben and Rupert Sheldrake have been very important to me. There is a misanthropic vein in Deep Ecology that I am careful to distance myself from. I don't think of humans as a malign virus upon the earth – a bit too bleak for my taste. The mystical Christian reverence for nature sees all of life as sacred. Humans are a part of that and their lives and aspirations are expressions of

the same creative impulse, the same sacred yearning.

NOTES

1. Bill McKibben. 2006. *The End of Nature*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks (Winton's note).
2. Public Relations.
3. See the last passage of the interview about Tim Winton and the Deep Ecologist movement.
4. See *Yorro Yorro* by Mowaljarlai and Malnic; or *Storymen* by Hannah Rachel Bell (Winton's note).

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