MUNICH STUDIES IN ENGLISH 45

Ruth Barratt-Peacock

Concrete Horizons: Romantic Irony in the Poetry of David Malouf and Samuel Wagan Watson

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Drawing on Bernd Mahr's model theory, this volume introduces a new approach to Romanticism in contemporary Australian literature. Focusing on two very different authors, David Malouf and the Indigenous poet Samuel Wagan Watson, this book highlights their similarities rather than their differences. It is the first book-length study dedicated specifically to each author's poetic oeuvre. Comprehensive readings reveal that an ironic dialectic underpins how each poet writes from within a disjunct of culture and environment following colonisation, finding hope in dialogue and a productive process of negative assertion. The theoretical framing of Romanticism developed here effectively rehabilitates Romanticism as a productive paradigm in contemporary Australian poetry.

The Author

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For Gudrun
For the lending and giving of books
which is the loveliest act of kindness

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I. Introduction

"If you are to be interested in Australian literature, it is not because it is some peculiar and exotic place like Africa, it is because it is another version of Europe which will tell you something about Europe. The changes we have made and the variation of it that we offer will tell you about yourselves, and that's why you might be interested in what we're doing."– *Malouf 1990*

Introduction

Reading Irony in Watson and Malouf: Content and Parameters

Every project has its own moment of beginning, and this one started with a poem: "For the Wake and the Skeleton Dance". The piece pulls the reader onto the streets of urban Australia, which belong to both familiar and radically different realities. The reader is left hanging, suspended in a place where both realities exist, each illuminating the other. Neither is fully in sight, and the poem in many ways reflects on its own blindness. This piece, by Samuel Wagan Watson, provided the orientation points for this project: Romantic irony, (sub)urban Australia, and finally, poetry.

The voice I have chosen to place across from Watson's is that of the older poet, novelist, and social commentator, David Malouf. One of Australia's best-known authors, Malouf has received many high-profile awards for his work.[1] Although it is his novels which have engendered the most academic interest, he has always written poetry and, despite the existence of over forty years' worth of scholarship on David Malouf, there is a sad lack of work dedicated solely to his poetic oeuvre. The current volume is, in part, an attempt to rectify this. Before writing this book, I examined all existent poems written by Malouf, identifying thematic and structural patterns. Not all of this data has been included, however. The majority of the poems selected for closer examination here are based in Australia and have been influenced by Malouf's childhood memories of growing up in Queensland, particularly around Deception Bay.

The following chapters are concerned with the role of Romantic irony in Watson and Malouf's approach to place-making in a contemporary Australian context. It must, however, be remarked upon that these authors are bound together by their relationship to Queensland and to Brisbane. This book brings all three volumes of Watson's critically acclaimed and only disparately studied poetry into the same discursive field as that of the more established, and perhaps more 'European' poetry of writers like Malouf. The questions which Watson's poetry first brought to mind when starting this project have become the lens through which I read Malouf, even though the sheer length of Malouf's career and volume of written work has led me to afford him slightly more space.

The poems selected here reflect patterns and developments within each author's complete body of poetry. In the case of Watson, this book attempts to highlight a development away from the writing back paradigm of the first generation of Indigenous poets and towards a new regional cosmopolitanism. In the case of Malouf, I reveal how the central concern in his poetry, overcoming the self/Other divide in order to write the subject into place, is negotiated through a pattern of strategies which are tied to setting in his work. What connects these two poets is their negotiation of the Australian condition through a productive negative dialectic; one which is first found in the philosophical and literary concept of Romantic irony. Each author's body of work is used as a test case for a new approach to Romanticism studies in Australian literature presented in this book. This approach understands Romanticism, not as an historical period or set of aesthetic practices, but as modelling processes which adapt Romantic models to address contemporary concerns.

Although there was no Romantic period in Australian literature, in the work of David Malouf and Samuel Wagan Watson, I see a model of Romantic irony in their representation of the Australian (sub)urban landscape and subjectivity. This subjectivity is fraught with the brutal aftermaths of colonial history and with an ambiguous relationship to the land: a palimpsest of histories and myths which is unable to produce a cohesive sense of place for the subject. Instead, there is only a longing for unity and for an explanation of being and of being in that particular place which is asserted negatively. The resulting dialectic becomes a productive and powerfully positive tool for expressing the realities of being a hybrid subject in contemporary Australia and for living with the uncertainties and tensions this entails in a way that makes room for celebration and communication.

Australian poetry has a tendency to question far more than it answers, which is perhaps why prose is so disproportionately favoured in both the media and academia. Yet poetry is best suited to the exploration of the postmodern Australian condition because it places the reader in an individual scene of consciousness, creating not a perfect narrative, but the complex and fragmentary experience of the individual. The central question that this book poses is how this poetry – for all the differences in the authors' experience of contemporary Australia – responds to the basic question of how a subject might have knowledge and experience of that which lies outside the self. In both Watson and Malouf's work, this question is intimately involved in their writing of place. This is where we find parallels to Romantic irony in these authors' approach; adapted here in a contemporary Australian context.

Romantic irony was an aesthetic response to the debates in epistemological philosophy at the end of the 18th century and is to be differentiated from simple rhetorical or Socratic irony, along with allegory which primarily form the basis for discussions of irony in postcolonial studies. As a term, irony is both omnipresent and slippery. As Linda Hutcheon writes in *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*: "Why should anyone want to use this strange mode of discourse where you say something you don't actually mean and expect people to understand not only what you actually do mean but also your attitude toward it?" (Hutcheon 1994, 2). The answer lies precisely in the difficulty of this communication which ironic speech lays open. Romantic irony has very little to do with rhetorical irony except in this one point: its lays open the limitations of language.

Friedrich Schlegel's theory of irony stemmed from a philosophical line of enquiry that started with Herder and Hamann and was developed by Kant and Fichte. Romantic irony developed a central principle in opposition to the thought/language dualism of the Enlightenment: the dependence of thought on language, which limits the human ability to perceive anything outside of the subject's own thinking consciousness. In Romantic irony, art reflects the means and conditions of its own production and oscillates between construction and destruction. The self-reflexivity of the form aims to draw attention to the illusion of representation and the écart between signifier and signified. Ultimately, it is a refusal to resolve the contradictions of a subject which is both discursive and absolute, and which cannot objectively represent itself outside its own linguistically determined consciousness. Romantic irony is not only an epistemological position, but also a structure of representation which functions via a negative dialectic. In this dialectic, that which lies beyond language, and thus beyond representation, is nevertheless asserted negatively: it is represented by dint of reflection on the impossibility of this representation.

By addressing poetry's failure to create a unity of subject and place in Australia Malouf and Watson evoke its possibility. Watson and Malouf's work shares the same structure of ironic evocation and revocation in which linguistic scepticism plays a central role. However, in the case of Watson, Romantic irony is understood primarily as a reading lens which allows me, as a cultural outsider to so much which makes his work unique, to better understand the dynamics at play in his negotiation of urban space, politics, and art in contemporary Australia as an Indigenous poet in the international literary scene.

In the poetry examined here, Romantic irony becomes a way to better understand the self / Other divide in contemporary Australia. The task of writing place in Australia is, in its essence, an attempt to overcome the subject / Other divide. This process can be viewed as an adaptation of the fraught relationship between the self and the transcendent in Romantic irony, not least because place has become the carrier for the sacred in modern Australian literature (Ashcroft, Devlin-Glass and Lynette M. McCredden 2009). An overarching longing for the transcendent in Romanticism is replaced to a certain degree in Australia by an alternative vision of the sacred as an earthed, embodied sacred. This is a shift which effectively replaces the transcendent with place; reaching for the transcendent becomes an act of place-making. McCredden writes:

> While the commonplace myths of Australia as a modern secular state persist, the last decades of the twentieth century have begun to open out a dialogue in which such terms as sacredness, spirit, belief, and religion are not merely seen as embarrassing or irrelevantly archaic, but as urgent elements in new national and global debates. (McCredden 2010, 66)

Ashcroft, Devlin-Glass, and McCredden argue for a sense of the sacred in Australia which was developed by authors such as Patrick White, Francs Webb, and Judith Wright (Ashcroft et al 2009, 2). This sacredness is one which is characterised by the subject's relationship to place, rather than an overarching universal transcendence (ibid.). It is "earthed, embodied, humbled, local, demotic, ordinary and proximate", and open to "the other, to the land, and to that which is not human" (ibid., 3). The ordinariness of this sacred also allows it to migrate from nature to urban spaces. This understanding of the sacred is illuminating when Romanticism is considered in a contemporary context, as it frees the examination of Romantic epistemology from the question of Nature.

David Malouf's poetry falls squarely within the tradition of Wright, White, and Webb. By contrast, Watson's work is most obviously read in the context of Indigenous[2] writing. However, his work reflects both a connection to this tradition and a practice which is less expressive of alterity than concerned with finding a point of connection with specific individual experience, through a dynamic enmeshment of common concerns. Malouf's poetry is concerned with the ability of the subject to write itself into a sense of place in Australia; a process which is thwarted by the limits of language itself. His poetry reflects a model of Romantic irony which evokes a unity of subject and Other (in Malouf's case, primarily the landscape, ocean, and animal Other) and simultaneously reflects on the poet's inability to achieve or sustain this unity in his art. This model of Romantic irony can be understood to be the central structuring element behind his entire poetic oeuvre up until the completion of this manuscript in 2019. As such, it questions the positive role attributed to the imagination in Malouf's writing by previous scholarship.

The desire to understand what we are and how we can relate to something which transcends the self is very human and is much broader than Romanticism or Australian poetry. My interest lies in finding a way to trace how the approach of Romantic irony is modelled to address these concerns in contemporary Australia. Malouf and Watson are poets whose writing engages with the specific concerns of the subject living in a disjunct between culture and environment, following the British colonisation of Australia and its islands; though their work has very different starting points[3]. Both, however, approach this situation from an ironic position. Romantic irony is an extremely useful lens, because it takes as a powerful point of departure the irresolvable nature of the issue of a knowledge (and connection) which transcends the self.

This study is positioned between two central discourses: Romanticism studies and a strain of Australian literary studies which is never far re-moved from post-colonial studies and its indebtedness to spatial hermeneutics. It is, however, the negative dialectic found in Romantic irony that plays a central role in my readings of David Malouf's and Samuel Wagan Watson's poetry. In order to make Romanticism a productive paradigm for my readings of these two contemporary authors, I have turned to model theory, as developed in a literary context by Bernd Mahr. Model theory offers a pragmatic alternative to providing a definitive understanding of Romanticism in its entirety or limiting its role to the aesthetic. This approach views Romanticism as a series of model-building processes which began with the emergence of Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century and which continue in the present.

The form which a model takes is determined by its application. This means that there is always an element of reduction and adaption. A model plane - to take a pedestrian example - may be capable of flight, however, it is unlikely to include a working cockpit. A plane as modelled by a flight simulator for training purposes, however, might. The model, then, is defined by its application. Models arise from a complex matrix, which is reduced and adapted according to the model's purpose. The poetic oeuvres of David Malouf and Samuel Wagan Watson reflect this process. These two authors' works are understood as two model objects which utilise a Romantic-ironic model of epistemological enquiry to address contemporary concerns. When understood as a model applied to the question of the subject's ability to write itself into place, Romantic irony forms an interface between debates on Romanticism in Australian literature and a long-standing discourse regarding the role of writing in place-creating processes in Australia.

Section one, "Rethinking Romanticism" revisits the question of Romanticism in Australian literature. Within this section, chapter one "A Bad Romance" offers an outline of previous debates around the development of Romanticism in a specifically Australian context. These debates revolve around a disjunct between landscape and language in the Antipodes as well as Australia's lateness in developing a local literary culture. Negativity, absence, and what Judith Wright calls a 'double vision' play a central role in the history of Romanticism in Australia and in poets' responses to these absences. Three fundamental narratives of Romanticism studies lie at the heart of this discourse: temporal, genealogical, and 'Nature' based paradigms, which are performed in scholarship on the question of Australian Romanticism. This book offers an alternative approach which frees the question of Romanticism in Australian literature from both these, and specifically postcolonial, paradigms.

Romantic irony is explored with a particular focus on its enmeshment with developments in the concepts of language and space during the period in chapter two, "New Approaches to Romanticism: A Model of Romantic Irony". These concepts are central to both Malouf and Watson's work, although they have been traditionally viewed through the lens of spatial hermeneutics in a postcolonial context. "Malouf: An Author in Context" and "Framing the Indigenous Author" in sections two and three respectively situate Watson and Malouf's poetry in the discourse on space and language found in previous scholarship. It is, however, argued that returning to the understanding of space and language in the epistemological philosophy of early Romanticism reveals dynamics at play in these authors' works which have been previously overlooked. Each large section on Malouf and Watson contains detailed readings of a wide range of poems from each of these authors' poetic oeuvre which illustrate their use of a negative dialectic in response to the self/Other divide which faces the Australian subject and which will be of general interest to scholars and readers of these poets.

The final, synthesising chapter of the book is an attempt to highlight the similarities between Malouf and Watson's work, rather than their differences. Both Malouf's and Watson's lyric works play out against the backdrop of a dialogue between European literary culture, Australian identity, and an emerging regional cosmopolitanism among contemporary Australian poets. This poetry invites the reader to engage with individual experiences of life that are influenced by the global ramifications of increasing nationalism and neo-colonialism. Poetry operates independently of the "artefact of arrival" (Langford et al. 2016, vii), and the poets examined here posit the impossibility of "arriving" as a potent way to reimagine being in Australia. Poetry offers the reader an experience of the personal voice of self-expression, as well as its embeddedness in regional and global political, cultural and historical structures. Whilst poetry does tend to be categorised nationally and regionally, it shares forms, language, and often communities of artists on an international basis - a quality which makes it particularly useful in postcolonial studies (Ramazani 2017, 7).

This book introduces a new way of approaching Romanticism in Australian literary studies and uses model theory to this end. David Malouf and Samuel Wagan Watson's poetry provides case studies for this approach. However, their work itself is deeply embedded into postcolonial discourse around language and space in Australia. This context naturally flows into my reading of their texts which can be of equal interest to those working in the broader fields of Australian literature and postcolonial studies.

The discourse around Romanticism in Australian literature itself however, has been almost entirely subsumed under the umbrella of postcolonial studies in recent times[4], with a focus on the complex relationship between Australian literature and (English) Romantic canon. In contrast, the approach taken to the question of Romanticism in an Australian context here is situated deliberately outside postcolonial theory, even as the individual readings acknowledge the embeddedness of Watson and Malouf's poetry in Australia's colonial and postcolonial contexts and are naturally situated within a broader postcolonial discourse in Australian literature. Specifically separating the theory developed here from postcolonial studies, however, has allowed me to revisit the question of Romanticism's afterlife in Australian literature without being limited to established paradigms, which too often unquestioningly assume the English canon to be the touchstone for Romanticism in Australian literature.

The theoretical approach taken here allows for the existence of different models of Romanticism in contemporary contexts. Malouf's work alone models Romanticism in more ways than one. The decision to focus on the specifically early German Romantic concept of irony for this study constitutes a deliberate move to radically decouple discussions of Romanticism from the assumption that English Romanticism must be basis for Australian Romanticism in this globalised age. This book is in many ways an attempt to rehabilitate Romanticism in Australian literary studies as a productive critical lens through which the place of writing in negotiating the contradictions and desires of contemporary, multicultural, Australia is both celebrated and questioned.

Framing Romanticism

Poetry is dense, compact, and in the case of Watson and Malouf, its voice is a deeply personal one. While the line between poetry and prose becomes ever more blurred, poetry retains a certain musicality, a form of communication with the reader which slips out from under the sign, making it a mode which lends itself to reflection on the relationship of the self to the world and to language itself. This is an unashamedly Romantic standpoint, but it is a fitting one, considering that these relationships form the central concern of this book.

The way that Romantic irony is modelled in Malouf and Watson's texts, both thematically and in function, reflects a heightened and even postmodern awareness of language itself. In their 2016 anthology of Australian poetry, Langford, Beveridge, Johnson, and Musgrave write that there is a kind of "'natural' postmodernism" in Australia, "one that arrived at the groundlessness of postmodernism through cultural and geographic circumstances, rather than through the more painstaking process of wrestling with tradition and assumptions others wished to keep" (Langford et al. 2016, xi). The "suspicion of assumption" that they identify as being so common in Australian poetry also extends to language, and it should perhaps be extended to the framings applied to authors' work more than is commonly the case.

Watson's work uses a negative dialectic to reflect on the social and political implications of writing processes in the context of contemporary Indigenous Australia. It is this same dialectic which can be found in Malouf's poetry, although Malouf's writing has a decidedly more transcendental, even Romantic, bent. Existent research on David Malouf positions his work in the wider tradition of a pan-European and largely nature-focused interpretation of Romanticism. However, Romanticism's application to the contemporary context of his work remains obscure, due in part to the difficulties of working with the term. For example, there are over 24 variations on the term "Romanticism" used by scholars in relation to Malouf's writing. These range from temporal modifiers such as "post-Romantic" (Neilsen 1996) or "post-industrial Romantic" (Randall 2007), through to markers of a qualitative relationship to Romanticism such as "Romantic doctrine" (Hamilton April 2001), and variations which are simply undecided, such as "not un-Romantic" (Randall 2007) or "proto or post-Romantic" (Buckridge 1994). This unwillingness to engage with the original term has led to a variation on a Regency dance, in which the writer touches hands with Romanticism before moving away to weave and hop with more attractive theoretical paradigms.

Australia is a highly urbanised society, yet its national imaginary is very much grounded in images of the Bush and the Outback. I chose the poetry of Watson and Malouf specifically because this is writing which, although by no means city writing specifically, reflects the experiences of urbanised Australia in its settings. My first instinct on reading these poems, however, was that the negative dialectic utilised by both Watson and Malouf was familiar; that is was Romantic. This left me with the nagging thought which has become the driving question behind this volume: how, why, does Romanticism work in this modern and often urban context? Simply finding equivalencies between historical British Romanticism and stylistic elements in the texts does not answer this question.

Watson, as an Indigenous author, has never been identified as a Romantic. In contrast, there is a long catalogue of motifs which have been identified as Romanic in Malouf's work, not least his interest in the importance of myth and language in the creation of culture, and the location of the sacred in nature.

However, these aspects are not in themselves what makes his work Romantic. In his poetry at least, there is a more urgent question behind these themes; one which the Jena circle of early Romantics attempted to address at the turn of the eighteenth century, in the face of the very real pressures caused by the loss of previously stable meaning-making structures. This is the question of the subject's relationship to that which lies outside the self. In the case of Malouf's poetry, it is the relationship of the subject to the continent. In the case of Watson, the relationship between Indigenous and 'Western' inscriptions of the land. In an Australian context, the subject–continent-as-home relationship is similar to the relationship of the self to the transcendent in Romantic irony. All the more so because, as Chris Wallace-Crabbe once noted, "landscape is what Australians have instead of faith" (Williams 1998, 244).

For the understanding of Romanticism which I attempt to make productive in this Australian context, I am greatly indebted to the DFG-funded research group Modell Romantik: Variations, Reichweite, Aktualität. They not only funded my research, but was also a significant influence on the development of my hypothesis. A large part of this influence was the idea of using model theory to approach a definition of Romanticism that Sandra Kerschbaumer and Stefan Matuschek explore in their 2015 essay "Romantik als Modell".[5] Their essay outlines the difficulty of defining "Romanticism", especially when its definition is expressed in epochal terms, which cannot account for the ongoing presence of Romanticism in contemporary contexts. I see the value of their approach not as providing a single definitive model of Romanticism, but in approaching Romanticism as a plurality of different models which are created and adapted according to the needs of their application.

Romanticism is, to borrow from Kate Rigby, a "notoriously multifaceted, often contradictory, and ultimately rather amorphous cultural phenomenon", and one which "has long been one of those points of eternal return for literary criticism, a touchstone in which successive generation[s] of critics have tried out favoured theories and approaches" (Rigby 2004, 1). The work of David Malouf offers an excellent opportunity to better understand the dynamics at play when examining the continued presence of Romanticism in modern Australian poetry. If the aspects of Romanticism that scholars have already instinctively recognised as Romantic are understood not as being constitutive of Romanticism in the text, but as "excess" (see chapter two, "Rethinking Romanticism: A Model of Romantic Irony") then these elements indicate a deeper underlying model of Romanticism in this poetry, without having to carry the primary Romantic "cargo" itself. That is, they indicate that Malouf's poetry in particular, reflects a far more deeply rooted Romantic model, which has been formed from a matrix of possible influences (Romantic and otherwise) and which holds a specific function and contemporary application. I argue that this is a model of those aspects of Romanticism which explore the bind of the linguistically defined subject, who both desires transcendence and cannot, as a thinking ego, obtain it: in other words, the poet cannot slip out of his own skin.

Australian literature has inherited two full sets of difficulties when considered in relation to Romanticism. The first is the general difficulty of defining Romanticism and addressing its afterlife in our period. Arthur Lovejoy's assertion that "the word 'Romantic' has come to mean so many things, that by itself, it means nothing" is far from true, as the flourishing field of Romanticism studies shows (Lovejoy 1924, 232). However, Lovejoy's comment does bear at least the echo of the ring of truth, in terms of how Romanticism is approached in Australian literary studies. Romanticism is by nature pluralistic, contradictory, and has always been appropriated and reworked. Moreover, in Australia the situation is further complicated by the country's history, which did not allow it to be a significant literary participant in historical Romanticism.

Judith Wright and Andrew Taylor, who debated the existence/non-existence of an endemic Australian Romanticism early on, base their arguments on an understanding of Romanticism as an historical period. In the nineteen-nineties, Paul Kane moved beyond the historical paradigm to a certain extent. However, he still tried to find that one defining feature of Romanticism in Australian literature: he assumed that Romanticism had ended in Europe, and therefore needed to be *re-created* in modern times. Wright's assertion that for Australia, this period was haunted by a disjunct between the English language and the Australian landscape which continues to this day, further links the fate of Romanticism in Australia to the relationship between people, land, and language, and it problematises the existence of a Romantic period in Australia. It reflects not only a temporal, but also a qualitative understanding of Romanticism as being synonymous with a positive view of nature. There is an implicit (and ironically Romantic) assumption here that national identity requires an organic connection between people and their environment. My selection of poets who write about urban and suburban spaces was a deliberate attempt to disentangle the theoretical approach to Romanticism explored here from the all-pervasive association of Romanticism with a positive view of nature.

I have chosen to use Bernd Mahr's model theory to rethink "Romanticism" in the context of Judith Wright's idea of a fundamental disjunct between land and language in modern urban Australia, using David Malouf's and Samuel Wagan Watson's poetry as examples. Ultimately, my analysis of Malouf's and Watson's work can be read independently of the theoretical approach towards Romanticism explored here. However, an exploration of model theory as a possible approach to creating a pragmatic theoretical foundation for examining the ongoing presence of multiple different aspects of Romanticism in modern Australian poetry is a second ongoing line of inquiry throughout. I have found it to be particularly useful in this area for two reasons: first, a model carries information between two points and accounts for the adaptation of that information. Second, models are also reductive, idealised, and purpose-oriented. They leave out parts of the complex original that they are modelling, and highlight those aspects which are useful for a specific purpose.

There is no way to directly access an idea as nebulous as Romanticism. However, it is possible to see how a text models different aspects of it for different purposes. Model theory in this context brings a useful side effect, in that the focus automatically shifts forward: rather than the main movement being the tracing of motifs back to historical Romanticism, which leaves little room for examining the motifs' function in this new textual environment, the focus shifts to the application of the model in the text to the contemporary concerns of the author. This theory is the lens through which I have viewed each poet's work.

Watson and Malouf: Finding Common Ground

Approaching the poetry of Watson and Malouf through the lens of Romantic irony, the common issues with which these poets grapple become clearer, without denying the differences between their individual voices and experience. Bringing these two poets together is an attempt to, in part, answer Watson's own call to face the darkness of the mirror that stands between our individual experiences of Australia. Watson writes:

> The people down the street are denied access through my gate of closed assumptions; behind the greatest sum of lies hide the smallest fears. […] We will all die lonely in succession. We will refuse the prosperity to mirror one another as the truth lies in our murky reflections, unable to rewind to the black and white frame from which we developed out first glimpse of innocence. (Love[6] 104)

This desire to move beyond a "black and white" frame of reference is part of Watson's irony: it is expressed in the broader ironic political drive in his work to open up a space that provides contingency and multiple views of urban Australia. Bringing Malouf's and Watson's work together in this context is an attempt to work against an underlying racial bias in the characterisation of the sacred and the secular in Australia, in which

> white Australians are often constructed as brazenly and gloriously secular, full of disbelief, cynicism, and blasphemy. Black Aboriginal Australians are frequently depicted as possessing sacred values, truths, and visions, and as inhabiting sacred space […].

> By virtue of this split, white Australians are denied access to sacredness (especially the sacredness of the land), and black Australians, often imprisoned in the 'religious' category, are denied access to materiality, wealth, and economic security. (Tacey 1995, 8)

Watson's poetry works against a fetishization of "the Aboriginal" as a signifier of spiritual purity. Instead, he confronts his readers with hybrid images of urban Australia, which is most Australians' primary habitat; thus beginning a process of Romantic ironic reflection and the destabilisation that this entails. This ironic structure occurs both in relation to the socio-political climate in which Watson is writing, and in more metaphysical musings on the nature of writing itself.

Negative assertion through a reflection on the limits of language celebrates the process of creating dialogue. However, this dialogue is not to be understood as a means to any reconciliatory ends, but as the only possible way to face the challenges of living in contemporary Australia and the wider world in its current state. In my analysis of Watson's poetry, I argue for the presence of structures which hold a similarity to those that are central to Romantic irony. Watson's work does not present a cohesive single model of Romantic irony. Rather, by taking a model of Romantic irony as the lens in my reading of Watson's poetry, I am able to reveal dynamics at play in his writing, which cannot be identified by framings more commonly used in critical work on Indigenous writing.

Malouf probes the relationship between the self and what lies outside the self, between the mundane and the transcendent, and he also explores the potential of language to provide knowledge of these things, as well as its heart-breaking limitations. In his poetry, these concerns are not dusty relics of the German transcendental philosophical tradition. They take on a new sense of urgency in the context of the disjunct between land and language which faces Australian authors writing the subject into place. Language is pushed to its limits in this context and shown to be lacking. The subject, being defined by its thinking self, is necessarily defined as distinct and separate through language. Paradoxically, it is in language that the subject is able to conceive of a connection with something beyond itself and beyond language. Approaching Romanticism in Malouf's work as a modelling process reveals that a model of Romantic irony is a foundational concern throughout his poetic oeuvre. This approach identifies a far more ambivalent attitude towards the ability of language (whether poetry or prose) to write the subject into place than has previously been asserted in Malouf scholarship.

Like Malouf, Watson approaches language with both hope and suspicion. He treats language as a means of expressing a desire for cohesion and understanding, whilst, at the same time, reflecting on the limitations that language places on attaining these desires. Both authors write about place as a space where the banal and the mythic coalesce. Where Malouf's mythic aspects draw on an imagined distant past, Watson turns to his Indigenous heritage and an understanding of place grounded in the land and its spirit beings. There is, however, a vital qualitative difference in the stakes at play in the poetic musings of these two authors. Malouf expresses an understanding of literature as part of a long cultural process of creating places in Australia, and shows that these places can be layered on top of the Indigenous places which had already been long in existence before colonisation (Malouf 1998, 51).

There is an uncomfortable layering of an imagined sacred connection with the land here which precludes an acknowledgement of the interwovenness of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, and the cultural and political ramifications of this. The stakes for those writing themselves into a new place are not the same as for those who have been dispossessed of their places. Malouf can afford to be largely philosophical in his approach. Watson's work addresses these questions with the same dynamic, but in light of the all too real structural power differences between modern postcolonial Australia and Aboriginal cultural realities.

The search for a space of transcendence and sacred connection is thus necessarily a political imperative for Watson. Since the publication of his first collected volume in 2004, Watson's political poetic voice has increasingly bound his commentary on Australia's ill-treatment of Indigenous Australians past and present with current government policy, particularly in relation to the draconian treatment of Asylum seekers and an increasingly Orwellian legal system. Watson's irony goes beyond Aboriginal Gothic disturbance of the white status quo (although this does represent a significant aspect of his early style). He opens up his world to the reader, offering common points of access which draw the reader in, like the smell of Saturday morning suburban madness (to borrow from Watson's "White Stucco Dreaming"); and then situates the specifics of his speakers' experience (of place, of writing, of being read) in the middle of a poem which has proffered a connection to the reader. He does so in a way that shows there is also so much which lies impossibly far beyond any gesture of knowledge or connection that the poem can offer. Watson makes the streets of Australia uncanny, and shows up the bias and blindness which accompanies us all to varying degrees; while still asserting the possibility of reaching a point beyond this blindness, through what can be seen as essentially ironic processes of assertion and negation.

In contemporary Australian literature, there is increasingly a sense that there has never been a point at which Australia has become home to its non-Indigenous population, or when reconciliation has happened; rather, if postcolonialism can even still be applied to this literature, it has to be understood as representing a never-ending process of engagement and negotiation. This process is inherently ironic in that it posits the existence of the desired knowledge and connection with the other, whilst recognising (in form and content) our inability to attain it through poetry, if at all. The true value and beauty of Watson's and Malouf's poetry lies not in an imagined resolution to the gap between self and Other which language creates, but in the potentiation of an endless approach, and a powerful appellation of imperfect synthesis.

II. Rethinking Romanticism

A bad Romance? Rehabilitating Romanticism in Australia

> "*Historically, it was as if Australia was some Rip Van Winkle who fell asleep as a neo-classicist and awoke as a Victorian*" – Kane 1996, 10

Australian Romanticism: A Brief History

At the heart of what it means to be an Australian subject lies a fundamental disjunct between landscape[1] and language. Australia is not referred to as "the antipodes" without reason. The landscape is utterly alien to the European eye; and yet it is with European cultural norms and language that many Australians translate and map out their sensory experiences of it. In his article "Australia – the Space that Is Not One", Gerard Stilz writes that in the first half of the twentieth century, the Jindyworobak founder Rex Ingamells had already viewed settler Australians as having "cognitive deficits which […] made the colonial newcomers blind to the true character of the land and prevented them from being truly at home" (Stilz 2007, 38; see also Brian 1979). This is what Judith Wright so poignantly termed our "double vision" (Wright 1975, 59).

In my use of the term, I do not simply refer to the gagging impossibility of describing Australia's vastly varied and alien landscapes which confronted the early white settlers and poets. If a language is incapable of capturing the landscape, then it is difficult to achieve cultural works that create a sense of place in that landscape. A mismatch between how space is interpreted in the mind through language, and how it is experienced through the senses, draws attention to the gap that prevents the sense of connection to place; this sense is supposed to be achieved through writing, and the kind of connection to place which lies outside what language can achieve. This mismatch between language and landscape has continued to influence scholars and authors long after Judith Wright, including David Malouf.

Kate Rigby prefaces her 2004 book *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* by pointing out that in "Australia the interrelationship between culture and nature, world and earth, […] is revealed negatively, in the profound misfit that still obtains between the dominant settler culture, shaped as it was by the topography, climate, and biotic community of the British Isles and the diverse natural environments of this great continent [Australia]" (Rigby 2004, xi). David Malouf, who was educated in an Australia which still thought of itself as "New Britannia", shows a keen awareness of this issue in his poetry and prose. In an interview, he identifies the "problem of having all your sensory life very strongly in one place and your language coming from somewhere else or the literary or cultural world belonging somewhere else" (Malouf qtd. in Willbanks 1991, 148). Malouf sees it as "a question of making that authentically yours rather than secondhand [and that this] has always been the great problem of Australia" (ibid.).

For Malouf, the central problem for Australia is one of the hybrid subject. Yet at the same time, it is synonymous with Wright's "double vision", which expresses a way of viewing the world that existed in early settler culture: this perspective arguably limited the possibilities for an endemic Romanticism to take root in the country during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For the colonising settlers, this "double vision" was the product of occupying a country which the language of English Romanticism was ill-equipped to describe. They viewed Australia as a truly antipodean landscape, where even the trees did not follow the basic laws of British decency. One example of this is the anonymous poem "The Land of Contradictions", sent to the *Launceston Examiner* on 17 January 1849. Despite its amusing tone, the piece shows an undercurrent of *wrongness*, which is understandable in a situation where it is only possible to describe a country by virtue of what it is not:

> There is a land in distant seas,
> Full of all contraries
> There beasts have Mallard's bills and legs,
> Have spurs like cocks, like hens lay eggs,
> There parrots walk upon the ground,
> And grass upon the trees is found;
> On other trees, another wonder!–
> Leaves without upper side or under.
> There pears you'll scarce with hatchet cut;
> Stones are outside cherries put.
> Swans are not white but black as soot
>
> (Anonymous qtd. in Haynes 2006, 36–37)

The comic representation in this example masks "other emotions that were more difficult and painful to express: the loss of all that was familiar and homely" (Haynes 2006, 37). There was simply no language, as used or understood by those with the power to publish, capable of describing what this country is. Australia has reacted to this issue of a mismatched language and landscape in three different ways: by reshaping the land itself; reshaping its language to better suit the landscape; and through a process of what can be thought of as a poetisation of hybridity.

Malouf identifies Judith Wright as a key figure in the attempt to create a poetic language befitting of the Australian landscape, although she and Les Murray follow on from earlier attempts by poets such as Christopher Brennan, as well as the Jindiworobaks, who “pushed the idea of ‘truly’ arriving in Australia and making it a true habitation by habitualizing the immigrant culture to the native spaces and objects [which] included adaptation in language and thought” (Malouf 1998, 39; Stilz 2007, 38). Timothy Clarke sees authors such as Wright as proponents of a Romantic ecology, a “continuity of Romantic ideas [that] can be traced through elements of the texts of Wordsworth, Henry David Thoreau, Ruskin and William Morris in the nineteenth century, and, in the twentieth, aspects of the Frankfurt School of Marxism, Lewis Mumford, Murray Bookchin” (T. Clark 2011, 18). The assumption that Romanticism must necessarily express a positive view of nature becomes a stumbling block when considering its place in the literature of a country which has a complex, at times positive, at times extremely antagonistic, relationship with its habitat.

My research explores the possibilities opened up by a third approach to the issue of the language/landscape disjunct: the possibility that authors use those aspects of Romanticism which deal with the paradox of the role of language and subjectivity as a tool to express and live with this “double vision”. The clearest expression of this lies not in English Romanticism, but in Romantic irony as developed at the end of the eighteenth century in Jena. Romanticism, particularly Romantic irony, is deeply concerned with the relationship between language and subjectivity: in other words, with the role language plays in attaining knowledge of what lies outside the horizon of thought. Romantic irony functions here as a heuristic which allows contemporary Australian authors to write about the hybrid subject and the hybrid landscape without the need to resolve its contradictions and layers. The presence and function of Romantic irony in Malouf’s and Watson’s modern poetry is not a case of “post”-Romanticism, or any other prefix dictated by this literature’s place in Australia’s literary history. Instead, this study rethinks available approaches to the term Romanticism itself.

To approach Romanticism as an historical period is to encounter the problematic relationship between European settlers, the landscapes in which they found themselves, and the language of British Romanticism. Twentieth-century poets’ attempts to create a poetic language capable of a new endemic-English understanding of the Australian landscape necessarily fall out of the period’s time frame. There is an increasing interest in the relationships between literature and global movement in the Romantic period[2] which explores the complex intersections of the British Romantic canon and (post)colonial literature. However, despite the fascinating insights into the period and into our relationship to the literature produced in this period which this research offers, little has changed in the indiscriminate use of the term ‘Romanticism’ or derivatives thereof in contemporary contexts. This book is not an historical account of Romanticism and its afterlives in Australian literature, but an attempt to provide a conceptional framework which allows us to effectively speak of Romanticism in a contemporary context as more than the aesthetic scraps of a colonial past. The following overview of discussions on Australian Romanticism concentrates on the early academic debates around the topic. It is here that essential narratives around Romanticism crystallise which explain the difficulty of speaking about Romanticism now in a contemporary Australian context.

Judith Wright's *Because I Was Invited* (1975) and *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (1965), along with Andrew Taylor's contribution to the collection of essays *Imagining Romanticism: Essays on English and Australian Romanticisms* (1992) have broached the question of a possible endemic Australian Romanticism, whereas the introductory chapters of Paul Kane's seminal work *Australian Poetry: Romanticism and Negativity* (1996) offers one of the few attempts to conceptualise Romanticism's place in contemporary Australian literature outside of the canonical tradition. Taylor and Wright demonstrate the main starting points for debates on the existence/non-existence of Romanticism in Australian literature which still function within an understanding of Romanticism as an historical period. The first viewpoint is based on a concept of poetic lineage: in this case, the authors start with the work of Charles Harpur and trace his impact on Australian poets.

The second line of argument places settlers' relations with their environment at the centre, tying the existence/non-existence of Australian Romanticism to positive and negative settler relationships with nature respectively. This second argument also posits that Australians' inability to romanticise their landscape stemmed from a fight for survival which made it impossible to sufficiently acculturate the landscape. The settlers had no existent language that could describe the nature of the antipodes, nor indeed an urgent need to create one, at a time when Australia was culturally still a child of Britain in exile, and they lacked the concept of a new Australian culture.[3] These lines of argument link the fate of Romanticism in Australia to the relationship between people, landscape, and language, and each of these approaches problematises the existence of an indigenous Romantic *period* in Australia. It was not unheard-of for settlers to fulfil these criteria;[4] although it was unusual, and it cannot explain the continued presence of Romanticism in modern Australian poetry and prose.

Judith Wright's and Andrew Taylor's academic writing on Australian Romanticism is exemplary of work on this topic, in that it restricts enquiry into the place of Romanticism in Australian literature to the dates of the British Romantic period. It reflects not only a temporal, but also a qualitative understanding of Romanticism as being necessarily synonymous with a positive view of nature, and the literary style of the British Romantic poets. The inability of the language of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to account for the Australian landscape, or to create a sense of sacred connection with that landscape, has led to Taylor's rejection of Romanticism as a theoretical paradigm for the examination of language and meaning in Australian poetry. In his essay "A Case of Romantic Disinheritance", which forms a "kind of *locus classicus* for any subsequent discussion" of Romanticism in Australia, Taylor's view of settlers' relationships to the land is one in which nature is configured as a colonised female body, which men "penetrate, tame, subdue, control, rape, open up, explore and, of course, possess" (Coleman and Otto 1992, 198). The physical necessities of European settlement at that time did include many failed farming attempts, which can be linked to an antagonistic image of nature. Taylor's ideas, however, rest on an unhelpfully simplistic understanding of nature in Romanticism as being a manifestation of God. He states that "[n]ature in Australia, was, and is, not a manifestation of God, as in England and America […]. Nature provides no support for the imagination in its search for order: search as the imagination may, she reveals not divine coherence, but continuing conflict" (ibid., 200).

It is exactly this uncertainty and conflict which, I would argue, lies at the heart of early Romanticism, and certainly that of Romantic irony. Kane also astutely argues that Taylor's understanding of nature in Romanticism is based on "questionable" ideas about Romanticism which lazily assume that the expression of unity was the goal of all Romantic poetry (Jones qtd. in Kane 1996, 13). Proffering Kant's *Critique of Judgement* as a reference, Kane posits that, while "there is an important relationship between Romanticism and nature" in Romanticism, "the natural world or its objects have an uncertain status" (Kane 1996, 13). This makes an automatic association of nature and Romanticism problematic. Instead, "the tendency of writers is actually to deemphasize nature in favour of human subjectivity" (ibid.).

It is more accurate to say that the place of the subject in relation to others and the natural world is questioned in Romanticism. In any case, it is unsound to assume that changing the Australian landscape (rather than celebrating it) automatically excludes all possibilities for Romanticism to play a significant role in Australian literature. Andrew Taylor's assertion that the Australian landscape is too alien for it to function as it does in the British Romantic tradition is based on a far less solid understanding of Romantic philosophy than Wright's, and Taylor's view has been effectively refuted by Dennis Haskell as well as Paul Kane. However, this does not negate the consensus that, whilst some Australian poetry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was Romantic in influence and style, Australian literature did not develop its own distinct Romanticism during this time.

Landscaping

The early settlers' initial reaction to their perception of the landscape as alien, as deemed by Taylor and Wright, was to change it. English gardens, trees, and farming practices were the norm in Australia until well into the second half of the twentieth century. During the nineteenth century, the island state of Tasmania's biggest selling point was its status as the most English place in Australia (Haynes 2006, 26). The widespread practices of refacing, renaming, and mapping, which are most commonly associated with nineteenth-century imperial expansion, share a common thread of repressing Aboriginal history and agency, as well as the darker sides of settlement culture itself, such as the killing of Aboriginal peoples, and its own convict history. To plough away the face of the land meant burying these ghosts and repressing the shadows of the Other. While this is a topic which plays an important role in Australian Gothic literature, the thematic material is not necessarily Romantic.

The desire to gentrify the Australian landscape has seen a slow decrease since the colony's push for greater autonomy from the 1970s. The 1970s ushered in the creation of a national currency, the founding of "the world's first Green party, the United Tasmania Group", and an increase in the use of native flora and fauna in suburban landscaping (ibid., 281). Prior to this, Australia had attempted to reshape itself to be as English as possible. The comparisons made by Sydney Parkinson, Lt John Bowen and Captain Cook, between Van Diemen's land and "a nobleman's park in England", link the landscape favourably with the parks designed by the eighteenth-century English landscape gardener Lancelot "Capability" Brown (Bowen 1803, qtd. in Haynes 2006, 23). Where the landscape could not be thus encoded into the familiar, there were attempts made to change it; amongst other methods, through the introduction of European flora and fauna. Failing this, certain aspects of the landscape were also located in "the artistic and literary conventions of the Romantic sublime" (Haynes 2006, 23). In the case of Mt. Wellington, for instance, Butler Stoney borrowed directly from Byron's poem "The Giaour" in his description of the mountain (ibid.). Although these instances are too few to conclude that there was a widespread understanding of the landscape as Romantically alien, it does belie the claim that settlers' relationships with the land were fundamentally anti-Romantic.

Early Australian Romantic Poets?

It would be fair to say that at the time when Judith Wright published her *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (1965) and *Because I was Invited* (1975), there was an informal canonisation of Australian authors, which included "Clarke, Furphy, Lawson, Brennan, Richardson, Neilsen, Slessor, Xavier Herbert and Martin Boyd" (Wallace-Crabbe 1974, 3). Largely thanks to Judith Wright's work, this canon starts with Charles Harpur, even though Charles Thompson was Australia's first published poet (Wright 1975, 60). Harpur saw himself as the poet who would establish a national poetry in Australia. His canonical status makes it unsurprising that he is taken to be the originating point of Romanticism within his immediate and extended sphere of influence, which included Henry Kendall and Christopher Brennan,[5] as well as the Bush balladists in their depiction of the rustic rural life (Wright 1975, 73). Brian Elliot also describes Harpur as remaining "at heart a topographical romantic" (Elliott 1967, 75), although it must be noted that Andrew Taylor views Harpur's work as too late to be considered Romantic. According to Taylor, "instead of bounding like a roe o'er the hills, Wordsworth [had] become a postmaster, and so could not provide a sustaining influence for writers who came after him", including Harpur (Coleman and Otto 1992, 203). Because of the timing of Australia's colonisation, the disjunct between language and landscape, or Wright's "double vision", is entwined with the language of Romanticism (Wright 1975, 59).

Significant reshaping of the landscape started at a time when the land was also being semantically encoded in the language of European Romanticism (if somewhat after Romanticism's heyday in Europe). Within this context, Charles Harpur's choice of a Wordsworthian style for what he saw as the colony's first native poetry is not as unfitting as it sounds today. Harpur was not tasked with creating a new language for the Australian landscape as well as an indigenous poetry, because the landscape itself could be expected to change. Harpur's intention to fulfil his desire to be Australia's first great poet with the help of a Wordsworthian Romantic style is nowhere more explicitly stated than in his sonnet "Australia's First Great Poet":

> His lot how glorious whom the Muse shall name
> The first high-priest in this bright southern clime!
> Aglow with light from her aspiring flame,
> Catching the raptures of her Grecian prime,
> Lifting these latter days to heights sublime,
> So shall he walk the glorious path of fame;
>
> He boldly quarryeth from nature's frame
> The sculptured marble of his lofty thyme
> Enbreathed with beauty; o'er his splendid page
> Shall glow his country-women's lustrous eyes,

> And many a future hero's noble rage
> His flame shall kindle; all the brave and wise,
> Breathing his influence from age to age,
> Shall sound his glory to his native skies.
>
> (Harpur qtd. in Coleman and Otto 1992)

Had Harpur indeed succeeded in "breathing his influence from age to age", or at least coughed on a few of his contemporaries, Australia might have had a (delayed) Romantic period. However, according to Judith Wright, even Harpur's close follower Kendall was quickly tainted by the materialism of the Victorian era (Wright 1975, 65). Where opinions vary is in whether Harpur's failure to establish himself as Australia's national poet (or indeed, to establish a national poetry) led to the fast decline of what had been a brief blossoming of an Australian Romantic period, or whether his most obvious sphere of influence had been too small to constitute a movement. For Wright, Australian Romanticism was a brief but ineffectual period, characterised by a Wordsworthian understanding of the poet's function and an appreciation of the rustic life in nature.

Where Judith Wright sees Charles Harpur as representing "the strengths of early Romanticism in Australia", she sees in "Kendall its decline" (ibid., 73). Yet Kendall's work was not limited by the supposedly negative relationship of settler culture to local ecosystems. The notion that the Australian landscape was alien to early settlers is one which Wright argues is grounded in those circumstances that shaped settler culture. Wright asserts that settlers were "in opposition to nature, first and foremost, in a physical battle for survival", and that "the life of the mind, education, and culture took a very minor place" (ibid., 61). Following Wright's argument, it seems that nature was not only unable to function as a source of poetic imagination because it was alien, but also that any transvaluation of nature was made impossible because what counted in frontier society "was usually material success" (ibid). A lack of leisure bred materialism, and did not allow the development of a language with which to understand the Australian landscape (Wright 1965, xii). To many, however, Australia did mean freedom as well as hardship. This combination of alienation, of exile from the European homelands and culture, and the possibility of liberty (at the cost of a harsh struggle for survival rather than material wealth, as Australia had nothing like the raw resources of North America) is what Wright terms the "double aspect of the inner Australian" (ibid.).

This idea, however, does not reflect the diversity of thought in the nineteenth century. Henry Kendall belonged to a generation of political poets who, according to Elliott, attempted to push against the "settled opinions" of a community "doggedly devoted to material advances" (Elliott 1967, 110). Yet he is viewed as a nineteenth-century poet, rather than as being specifically Romantic. The next great Australian poet, Christopher Brennan, is still considered to be a symbolist, largely because of the stress Wright placed on the colony's isolation from Britain, and its free but "delayed access" to British literary trends (Wright 1975, 60). This led her to view Brennan's work as exemplifying a shift from an English to a wider European influence on Australian writing at the turn of the century (Wright 1975, 60).

Wright traces Christopher Brennan's symbolism back to the change in the perfection of nature that occurred with Baudelaire, in which nature becomes a "resource, a 'forest of symbols' in which man finds a continual correspondence to human experience" (ibid., 73). It would appear, then, that nature's move into the symbolic realm at the end of the nineteenth century in Australia meant that the issue of poets' troubled relationship with an alien land, which, according to both Andrew Taylor and Judith Wright, had hindered the blossoming of an indigenous Romantic era in Australia, could be put aside (Coleman and Otto 1992, 200). Harpur was the first and last Romantic poet active in Australia close to the era generally accepted as the Romantic period in Britain and greater Europe. In consequence, the possibilities available to poets after Brennan for the use of nature "to express human experience and human meaning in larger, universally shared natural terms" could only be viewed by Wright as a symbolist reaction to realism, rather than an expression of Romantic philosophy (Wright 1975, 74).

Whilst Australia did not develop a distinct national Romanticism, within the framework of periodisation, the nature argument could address the issue of why there was no discernible belated Romantic period in Australia, as arguably occurred in the US. If nature was too alien to be Romanticised in Australia, then it remained too alien throughout the nineteenth century. At the heart of this line of thought lies an interpretation of Romantic attitudes towards nature as being rooted in an eighteenth-century understanding of it as "a point of coherence, a stable base for a superstructure of cultural (and political) imaginings" (Kane 1996, 11). Even in the case of nature as the sublime Other, "that sublime Other is generally recuperated within an economy of human reason or imagination, and so it is returned to a more 'natural' or naturalized state" (ibid.). In the context of this understanding of nature, it is no surprise that the environment of the antipodes "no longer corresponded to *Nature*, to the complex preconceptions that defined the physical world", and that "any attempt at a dialectic that aims to transcend a subject-object dualism through a healing act of the imagination would be frustrated by the overwhelming impingement of so alien an object" (ibid., 11–12). Thus, a Romantic-poetic expression of the Australian landscape as untouched by European hands would be completely at odds with colonial attempts to tame the landscape for European-style habitation.

Romanticism as Absence

Based on the arguments of Judith Wright, Andrew Taylor, and Dennis Haskell, Paul Kane also joins the consensus on the lack of an Australian Romanticism during the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. Unlike other scholars, however, he attempts to address the continued (and if critical work on David Malouf may be taken as an example, widely acknowledged) presence of Romanticism in Australian literature. Kane posits that the "absence of an indigenous romantic movement in Australia brought about a volatile situation in which poets sought to recompense this loss or lack by creating a belated romanticism grounded in absence or negativity"; a modus operandi which, according to Kane, continues to this day (Kane 1996, 5). What is interesting about Kane's work is not that negativity is a particularly plausible defining attribute of Australian literature, but that his argument implicitly moves away from the need to limit an examination of Romanticism in Australia to a specific period.

Kane builds on the nature debate by drawing on New Historicist critics such as Alan Liu, Karl Kroeber, and David Simpson. The result of this is that he no longer views nature as the key term in Romanticism. By removing a positive view of nature as the central feature of Romanticism, Kane opens up the possibility of a view of Romanticism in Australian literature that is less stylistically than philosophically grounded. By positing that Romanticism (in the form of negativity or absence) is the one red thread connecting Australian literature past and present in all its plurality, Kane's ideas align with the possibility of approaching Romanticism as a continuing force rather than a past era. While Kane agrees that there was an absence of a Romantic movement in Australia, he does not attribute it to the alien landscape, arguing instead that through its very alien aspect, "nature in Australia afforded poets ample opportunity to go beyond nature towards an autonomous realm of the poetic imagination" (ibid., 1996, 14).

Following Paul de Man and Harold Bloom, Kane instead argues that "with the romantic tendency to fuse subject and object, we get an identification of the origins of object-language with the origins of the poetic self" (ibid., 26). Here, according to Kane's reading of de Man, "the failure of word and object to coincide leads to a melancholic nostalgia, an experience of negativity that stands behind the rhetoric of romanticism" (ibid.). Kane does not address Romantic irony in his work, although it is precisely this gap between word (consciousness) and object which Romantic irony explores. Instead, he focuses on absence as both essential to Romanticism, and as "a generative presence in Australian poetry" (ibid., 203). These forms of absence include: Australia as the negative of a European positive; Australia as empty; Australia as the negation of freedom; Romantic belatedness; kenosis; rejection; imitation and substitution; and Ab-originality defined as the Aboriginal Other (ibid., 44–46).

These facets of absence that are so important to Australian literature are disparate, and by themselves do not negate Chris Wallace-Crabbe's claim that there is a lack of "significant imaginative connection" between the most important Australian writers (Wallace-Crabbe 1974, 5). Kane singles out Romanticism's failure to flourish in nineteenth-century Australia as the cause of Australian authors' tendency to be isolated and self-centred (Kane 1996, 203). By doing so, Kane connects the disparate tropes of absence in Australian literature with each other and back to Romanticism, by positing that Romanticism and negativity (in the form of absences) are the "hidden stream" in Australian literature (ibid.). Thus, according to Kane, the absence of an endemic Romantic movement in Australia "has functioned as a generative present in Australian poetry" (ibid.).

Kane sees the generative aspect in a supposed imperative for Australian poets, who have each "had to come to terms with the lack of an indigenous cultural origin – that foundational narrative which so preoccupied the high romantic era – and each has worked to inscribe romanticism as a central feature of his or her poetry" (ibid.). What Kane describes is an almost pathological (and ultimately unprovable) need felt by Australian poets to fill the perceived lack of an indigenous Romanticism (and, following his logic, therefore a lack of a founding national narrative) by employing "the forms of romanticism as a point of origin for their own poetic projects, and yet without reference or recourse to a romantic tradition as such" (ibid., 203–204). For this reason, Kane sees "romanticism in Australian poetry as a recursive fact but not as an overtly acknowledged heritage" (ibid.).

Romanticism Beyond Nature, Beyond Nation

My use of model theory is not intended to call into question the assertion that Australia failed to develop its own Romantic movement in the nineteenth century. It does, however, question the premise inherent in all the discussions outlined above, including Kane's book: namely, that the existence of Romanticism in Australian literature until the present would have had to be contingent on the development of an Australian Romanticism. Another aspect of these debates, particularly in Taylor and Wright, of relevance here is their underlying ideal. The central position afforded to nature in these debates reveals that the implicit criterion against which Romanticism in Australia is measured is a specific understanding of the desired relationship between language, nature, and national identity: specifically, that a national identity is created through a shared mythology and literature, which in turn creates a connection between people and nature.

In her essay "Meaning, Value and Poetry", Wright speaks out against the idea that a poet has a duty to society, state, or nation (Wright 1975, 42). Nevertheless, in both "Some Problems of Being an Australian Poet" and *New Land New Language*, the national classification appears paramount, to the point that "poetry has played a very important part in this task of making Australia articulate, of helping us to become a separate nation with our own personality. For poetry is as important a part of a nation's character as feeling and emotions are in the character of a man or woman" (ibid., 49–58; Wright 1957, xi). This very understanding of the relationship between nature and literature itself shows a certain degree of influence by aspects of Romanticism. It is not my intention to investigate the real-life validity of this view of place and national identity, but it is important to note that these ideas form the basic framework from which Malouf examines the question of place and literature in Australia. The same narrative is also carried forward and labelled "Romantic" in academic studies of Malouf's work, particularly regarding the aspect of a desire for a nation-forging mythology (Randall 2007), or literature's role in creating a closer connection to nature (Neilsen 1990).

Space is vitally important for the self-conception of the nation. Caroline Rosenthal writes that "nations constitute themselves geographically, socially, or politically, but people achieve a sense of belonging to a specific nation through the cultural productions that enable them, to varying degrees, to identify themselves as members of their particular nation" (Rosenthal 2011, 12). Space conceived of as place is one of these cultural productions, and so plays a vital role in the national imaginary.[6] What we are seeing here in Wright's writing is a focus on the role of the written word in the cultural production of place, which highlights a two-way process involved in spatial encoding: this means that place can be culturally constructed through writing, but also that in order for this to happen, linguistic codes have to adapt to the specifics of the Australian environment, because it is so resistant to the linguistic codes inherited from Europe.

This is not simply a case of a nebulous Romantic ideology being brought to bear on these critics' expectations for Australian literature and carried forward by authors such as Malouf. In particular, Judith Wright's "double vision" refers to the problem facing Australian colonial poets. The situation early on in the colonisation of Australia was that "the country itself was of a wholly alien character, not yet grasped or accepted; and the eyes which saw it were possessed of a kind of double vision – their expectations, as it were, were English: but what was presented to them was something very different from any English landscape, and different in ways that had not yet been isolated and interpreted" (Wright 1975, 59). In Wright's view, poets such as John Shaw Neilson offered the possibility of a solution to this problem by being the first "to use aspects of Australian landscape, not descriptively, but symbolically", and "as symbolic embodiments of psychic truths" (ibid., 55). The implication here is that language is imbued with meaning through cultural processes which create an object's (including nature's) symbolic force in language. The further implication of this is a kind of telos, whereby the work of culture, including writing, will eventually be able to achieve unity between language and landscape in Australia. "Unity" in this Australian context is specifically envisioned as a sense of "home" (Stilz) or "place" (Malouf). Even in Langford, Beveridge, Johnson, and Musgrave's recent collection of Australian poetry, this poetry is credited with creating a richer conceptualisation of the environment; and by "making it available to our imaginations" in the process, "country has become an irreducible, if evasive, other" in its own right, rather than a canvas to be projected onto (Langford et al. 2016, x).

Even as Wright argues for the absence of a specifically Australian Romanticism, her criticism itself reveals an adaptation of Romantic thought to a certain degree, not least towards Romantic nationalism. There is by no means a one-to-one reflection of Romantic thought here, however. The role of the poet and poetic language in the potentiation of nature is replaced by a work of culture that is far less concerned with the metaphysical, and more with a translation of endemic flora, fauna, and geology, thus enabling them to function with symbolic force. This is a development in the direction of symbolism, which Wright herself traces between Wordsworth and Rossetti in Europe and Harpur and Kendall in Australia (Wright 1975, 66–69). A process of adaptation of these thoughts can be seen in Wright's and Taylor's writings discussed here. Whilst poetry remains tasked with forging a connection to nature, in this Australian context there is greater pressure on language itself, rather than the art created from it, to adapt in order to make this possible. Another point of adaptation is that the early Romantic absolute, or as Wright prefers, Wordsworth's "one impelling spirit" (ibid., 66), is replaced by the creation of place. In Wright's criticism, the focus in more on the ability to assimilate the native landscape into language in a way that allows the landscape to function with symbolic force in that landscape; while Malouf's understanding includes an understanding of place that is created not only through writing, but also through social practices (Malouf 1998).

The roles of the two poles of language (poetry) and nature are further complicated by the fact that they represent colonial relations between Britain (where the language originates from in this context) and the landscape to which it was imported: this is a key point with regard to Watson's poetry. Malouf belongs to the intellectual tradition outlined above, which to a certain degree equates language with national identity. The legitimacy of the ideal of a unity between language and landscape is itself questionable, however, the focus of the following chapter lies primarily on the ways in which Malouf and Watson's poetry illuminates the issues inherent in this premise through its adaptation of Romantic irony.

New Approaches to Romanticism: A Model of Romantic Irony

Language and Space

During the Romantic period, ideas of immanence and transcendence, finitude and infinity, periphery and centre, surface and depth, the horizontal and the vertical, calm and movement, near and far, up and down, inside and out, were transformed into a dynamic, decentralised topographic structure (Mülder-Bach and Neumann 2007, 7). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this led to competing approaches towards space. Media-based representations of space in the eighteenth century's landscape aesthetic show a receptive view of space: that is, space as an ontological object independent of the subject. This stands in contrast to a more radical topographical understanding of space as mediated by the subject in the Romantic period (Gemin and Sick 2012, 9–10).[1] Language is key in this regard, as it is language in early Romanticism that functions both to represent existent materials, and to transform our knowledge of them (Bär 1999, 110). The socio-political aspects of space-creation and spatial experience as explored in spatial hermeneutics is not yet to be found in Romantic understandings of space. However, it can be argued that it has its beginnings already in Romanticism's understanding of the role of language in mediating the subject's experience of space and it is particularly the role of language in this regard which is key in understanding both Watson's and Malouf's poetic concerns.

In the model of Romantic irony found in Malouf's poetry, and to a certain extent in Watson's, language and writing become the main focal points in its contemporary application. Space is an important concept, in as much as it relates to the role that language plays in mediating space as place. In Malouf's poetry, this mediating process is adapted to the act of writing the subject into place by creating a connection with the Other (the Australian environment, flora and fauna) which transcends the mediating mind of the subject. This process is revealed to be inherently flawed, albeit from different perspectives in Malouf's and Watson's poetry. The poets reflect on the impossibility of reaching this point of self-transcendence through their art, and in doing so, utilise a model of Romantic irony. This occurs both in form, through a self-reflective poetics of assertion and negation, and in a thematic reflection on the nature and limits of language and art.

The Romantic understanding of space, as material formed through the gaze of the subject, developed from Kant's declaration in *Kritik der reinen Vernuft*, that it is impossible to separate material from the subject's experience of it (Mülder-Bach and Neumann 2007, 8). Dünne et al. note that, in Kant's *Reflexion auf Anschauung*, the raw material of space is not created by the individual alone, but it is nevertheless only conceivable to the mind through reflection on the subject's intuition of its existence (Dünne et al. 2006, 30). It is not possible to conceive of something outside the self, in a different place, without first having the concept of a place in which things may be variously positioned (Kant 2006, 76).

This means that while physical space exists, the mind holds all the possibilities for conceiving of it, even if these lie outside the realm of material possibility (Dünne et al. 2006, 30). In other words, space is both empirical reality and transcendental identity (ibid., 31). This led to a partially idealist position towards space amongst Romantic thinkers, who viewed it as created for the subject though language, yet still based on the existence of the material world. Rigby writes that Romantic philosophy asserted the need for intersubjectivity, whereby "the absolute I must be sought beyond the self within external nature, which […] should not be viewed as a mere derivative of the I but as an equal other" (Rigby 2004, 40). A Romantic understanding of space thus relates to the central problem of consciousness and subjectivity: namely, how the ego can determine itself while at the same time being determined by an Other, or being simultaneously subject and object.

These irreconcilable modes of determination must eventually collide. Fichte's answer to this problem is the example of light and dark: light cannot be darkness or vice versa; yet by extending these two points far enough, one may reach a point where something else exists, such as twilight. It is this point for which the imagination is responsible. The imagined spatial extension of opposites to the point of meeting is what Fichte terms *schweben*. This figure, which Novalis made the basis for his theories on sign and representation, uses space to work with the paradoxical nature of the cognitive subject (Mülder-Bach and Neumann 2007, 15). This is also the figure upon which Friedrich Schlegel developed his concept of Romantic irony; the key difference being that where Fichte can be viewed as presenting this point of meeting as a fixed point, for Schlegel particularly, it is movement:

> Die romantische Poesie ist eine progressive Universalpoesie […]; und doch gibt es noch keine Form, die so dazu gemacht wäre, den Geist des Autors vollständig auszudrücken: so daß manche Künstler, die nur auch einen Roman schreiben wollten, von ungefähr sich selbst dargestellt haben. Nur sie kann gleich dem Epos ein Spiegel der ganzen umgebenden Welt, ein Bild des Zeitalters werden. Und doch kann auch sie am

> meisten zwischen dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden, frei von allem realen und idealen Interesse auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion in der Mitte schweben, diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen. (Schlegel 1967, 182)
>
> [Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry […]; and yet there still is no form which would be as fitting for the complete expression of the author's spirit: so that many artists who only wanted to write a novel ended up writing what is more or less a portraitit of themselves. Only this can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole world, an image of the age. And yet it can best hover on the wings of poetic reflection in the middle between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal interest. It can potentiate this relation again and again, and multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors.]

The solution to the limits of representation is expressed, not in the assertion of a resolution to the disjunct between world, self and representation, but in an ex negativo assertion of the absolute, through reflection on this very disjunct in an empowering way. The endless succession of mirrors referred to above is an expression of the way in which ironic poetry is both the product and a representation of the process of production (Strohschneider-Kohrs 2012, 47). If the existence of the mirror is forgotten for a moment, the reflection appears to be identical with the subject standing before the mirror. If, however, the existence of the mirror remains present in the mind of the subject looking into the glass, then the difference of the reflection from reality is foregrounded. This is the self-reflexive function in Romantic irony.

Malouf's poetry is situated in a dynamic in which the local landscape is to be approached as an equal Other, but also in which the desired intersubjectivity can only occur in an endless approach through language and the imagination. In Malouf's poetry, gaining knowledge of something outside the self occurs in the form of a desired transformation of space into place-as-*Heimat*. As such, place is able to take on the role of the desired experience of the transcendent in the model of Romantic irony which I examine in Malouf's work. The power of language to create that connection to the Other is limited because language is a form of representation processed through the subject's consciousness.

According to Novalis, because all senses are representative and symbolic, all sensory experience is second-hand: the object itself must become the means by which the subject experiences it. If this thing is the whole world, then the subject would have part of this world in themselves and part outside themselves. The part inside the subject is what it experiences:

> Aller Sinn ist *repräsentativ – symbolisch* – ein Medium. Alle Sinnenwahrnehmung ist aus der 2ten Hand […]. Sinn ist ein Werkzeug – ein mittel. Ein absoluter Sinn wäre Mittel und Zweck zugleich. So ist jedes Ding das *Mittel selbst* es kennen zu lernen – es zu

> erfahren, oder auf dasselbe zu wirken. Um also eine Sache vollständig zu empfinden und kennenzulernen, müßte ich sie zu meinem Sinn und Gegenstand zugleich machen – ich müßte sie *beleben* – sie zum ab[soluten] Sinn, nach der vorherigen Bedeutung machen. Wenn ich dies aber nicht vollständig *könnte* oder *wollte*, so müßte ich mir einen Theil derselben […] ein Glied zum Sinn machen. was entstände nun hier? Ich bekäme eine zugleich mittelbare und unmittelbare – repräsentative und nicht repräsentative, vollkomne und unvollkomne – eigne und nicht eigne, kurz antithetisch synthetische Erkenntnis und Erfahrung von dem Dinge[…]. Nenn ich das ganze Ding Welt, so würde ich ein integrantes Glied der Welt in mir, und das Übrige außer mir haben. (Novalis 1981, 550–51)
>
> [All sense is representative – symbolic – a medium. All perception through the senses is second-hand […]. Sense is a tool – a medium. An absolute sense would be simultaneously means and purpose. So every Thing is the means to learn about itself – to experience, or act on it. Therefore, in order to feel and gain knowledge of something completely, I would have to make it simultaneously sense and object. I would have to bring it to life – make it an absolute sense, according to the previous definition. If I were not able, or willing, to do this completely, I would have to make a part of it a link to the senses. What would result here? I would get something which is immediate and indirect – representative and not representative, complete and incomplete – my own and not my own; in short, antithetical synthetic knowledge and experience of the thing. If I call this thing the world, then I would have an integrated part of the world in me and the rest outside me.]

The material realm and space that the Romantic subject occupies is a version of the subject itself, because it is being experienced within the subject. The subject is part of the world and the world is part of the subject. It follows that the subject's consciousness and ability to create art is both a means of gaining knowledge of the world, and is itself part of the object of study. Gaining insight into the object occurs through a process of intuition and reflection, which is the realisation of insight as praxis, rather than absolute knowledge.

Romantic irony is optimistic scepticism, based in the realisation that knowledge is not conscribed to the representation of an existent truth, but is realised in its constructive character. This opens up a different orientation in space and time to the subject, allowing it to glimpse the possibility of finding that which is beyond itself. The ironic standpoint is that the process of gaining an understanding of what lies outside the self, or even of the self per se, is never complete; any attempt to reach a point of definitive knowledge is rejected (Frischmann 2009, 85).

The dynamics involved when the subject attempts to write themselves into place through language are explored in Malouf's poetry in a way which models both a Romantic understanding of space, and the linguistic scepticism of Romantic irony. In both cases, the central issue is one of the status of pre-reflexive consciousness. There are times when Malouf's work situates the transcendent simply outside language and the self, in a Romantic sense. However, the development of an earthed and embodied sacred in Australian literature (Ashcroft, McCredden) is also reflected in a way that equates the transcendent in the moment of connection with the Other of the Australian landscape, and with other subjects and other bodies.

For the purposes of this analysis, the transcendent and the absolute can be understood as being synonymous. Both represent a unification of sense and object beyond the mediation of the subject. The absolute reflects its non-mediated (absolute) character, and the transcendent reflects a transcendence of the mediating self. Both are adapted in the contemporary application of the model in Malouf's and Watson's work. In the case of Malouf, the absolute can be understood the moment when the subject becomes part of Australia as place or *Heimat*. In Watson's work, a definition becomes more elusive, but could be understood as a form of social, political, and personal healing.

Romantic Irony

Being a "romantic" in modern slang may express a sense of optimism or idealism. However, Romantic irony is idealistic only in that it posits the existence of an absolute. This is based on an acknowledgement that the absolute can only be indicated by its absence, or in a momentary point of reconciliation between the finite and the infinite during a process of negative assertion. This is very different from the unity of man and nature and the attainment of transcendence through acts of the imagination which is implied by the use of "Romantic idealism" and similar terms in work on Malouf by Neilsen, Indyk, Sestigiani, and Seger (Neilsen 1990; Indyk 1993; Sestigiani 2010; Seger 2005).

Romantic irony potentiates the movement back and forth between deconstruction and construction. This is a never-ending process which only leads to new deferrals and never to a final meaning. In Romantic irony, the existence of the absolute is proven by a process of apophatic assertion. Romantic irony contains a formal element of textual self-reflection; however, this is inseparable from its metaphysical stance. Romantic irony is essentially a short, but influential, moment in a trajectory of philosophical thought stretching from Plato's dialogue "Parmenides", though Christian theology and medieval mysticism such as Meister Eckhart's negative theology, to Derrida's deconstruction. Simply put, Romantic irony contains elements similar to those of Meister Eckhart's apophatic assertion of God and Derrida's linguistic scepticism. The essential difference from postmodern thought is that absolute truth is still asserted in Romantic irony, even if through negation.[2]

Irony: Rhetorical, Socratic, Romantic

The poems of both Malouf and Watson exhibit a level of self-reflexive enquiry on the nature of writing, the text, and language itself, despite the fact that they are not all self-consciously ironic in form. Watson's poetry, in contrast to Malouf's, utilises rhetorical irony extensively. Watson's ironic address of an implied 'white' reader functions within the framework of postcolonial literature. This particular use of irony is difficult to miss in his work, being very much on-the-nose. The irony examined in his writing here is something altogether different, however. It refers to the dialectic structure and epistemological stance of Romantic irony which, I argue, finds resonance in his work. Romantic irony is to be understood differently from purely rhetorical definitions of irony as saying one thing and meaning another.[3] It is, however, not completely unrelated to the rhetorical figure of irony. Schlegel's work expands on the écart implied in an ironic act of communication in rhetoric, viewing the reflection on this as a way to approach the absolute. Schlegel goes beyond classic irony's semantic paradigm. For Schlegel, the moment of irony is in the acknowledgement of chaos's eternal agility, as a reaching for the infinite:

> Ironie ist klares Bewußtsein der ewigen Agilität, des unendlich vollen Chaos. (Schlegel 1967, 263)
> [Irony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, an infinitely full chaos.]

Schlegel developed his concept of Romantic irony between the *Lyceum* (1797) and the *Athenäum* (1798–1800) fragments. In the *Lyceum Fragments*, Schlegel engages with Socratic irony, developing Romantic irony as an aesthetic form later in the *Athenaeum Fragments*. Romantic irony is similar to rhetorical and Socratic irony in that it functions by means of the gap between what is said and what is meant (rhetorical irony) or what is known (Socratic irony[4]), as well as the process by which a statement is revealed to be ironic by what follows it, which is a form of assertion and revocation. Schlegel writes that Socratic irony shows both the necessity and the impossibility of pure communication:

> Die Sokratische Ironie ist die einzige durchaus unwillkürlich, und doch durchaus besonnene Verstellung […]. Sie enthält und erregt ein Gefühl von dem unauflöslichen Widerstreit des Unbedingten und des Bedingten, der Unmöglichkeit und Notwendigkeit einer vollständigen Mitteilung. (Schlegel 1967, 160)
>
> [Socratic irony is the only completely instinctive and yet considered representation. It contains and arouses a feeling of the irreconcilable struggle between the absolute and the conditional, the impossibility and necessity of a completed act of communication.]

Romantic irony is based on this sense of unresolvable conflict between the infinite and the finite, and the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication. Rhetorical and Socratic irony, however, only create a passing moment of misunderstanding or unknowing, respectively. Clarification does eventually come through context, leading to a state of clarity heightened by the ironic moment (Schumacher 2000, 10). In contrast, Romantic irony makes opacity the basis for the entire theory; the source of this opacity is the mediation of the object in the subject, though language.

Beyond Thought/Language Dualism

Friedrich Schlegel's theory of Romantic irony became aligned with a philosophical revolution that started with Herder and Hamann and was developed by Kant and Fichte: this offered two central principles in opposition to the thought/language dualism of the Enlightenment. These are the principles which Michael Forster and Klaus Vieweg identify as, first, the dependence of thought on language, and its limitation through the same; and second, that the identity of meanings lies not with the objects signified, Platonic forms or subjective ideas, etc., but with the use of words (Forster and Vieweg 2012, 12). For Novalis, humans are beings who think in language:

> Denken ist Sprechen. Sprechen und tun oder machen sind Eine nur modifizierte Operation. (Novalis 2013a, 459)
>
> [Thinking is speaking. Speech and action are one operation, merely modified.]

As beings who think in language, how it is possible for us to have knowledge of something outside our own linguistically determined consciousness? Novalis understands language as material and formal appearance, symbol and image, which allows us access to products of the imagination, but not to the thing itself:

> Was kann Sprache für Realität enthalten? Verhältnis der Sprache zur Anschauung, Denkkraft, und Einbild[ungs]kr[aft]. Geschriebene-gesprochene-gedachte Sprache. Sprache ist materialer und formaler Schein-Zeichen-Bild[…]. Wir denken und schaun immer nur *Produkte* an. (Novalis 2013b, 301)
>
> [What is language able to contain for reality? The relationship of language to contemplation, thought, and the imagination. Written-spoken-thought language. Language is a material and formal simulated symbolic image […]. We only ever think of and observe *products*.]

We may be unconsciously aware of the foundation of our being, but to be unconsciously aware is self-contradictory. One may experience the root of one's being only indirectly. This leads to a state of indeterminacy or *schweben* between the extremes which are neccessarily both separate and united. As the absolute (*das Unbedingte*) is that which is "un-thinged", or "that which cannot be experienced with any determinacy", pre-reflexive consciousness is part of the absolute (Rush 2006, 177). Poetry can bring the reader to engage in a reflexive process of self-creation and self-destruction (what Schlegel terms *Selbstschöpfung* und *Selbst Vernichtung*),[5] at the very edge of indeterminacy. However, as its form is language, it can only indicate a unity of object and sign which reflection destroys. This is the underlying idea upon which Schlegel's concept of Romantic irony is built.

Ordo Inversus as Romantic Irony

Although both Schlegel and Novalis developed their aesthetics in relation to Fichte's philosophy,[6] the term "irony" does not play a significant role in Novalis' thinking. When irony is referred to, there is a tendency for research to equate Romantic irony with rhetorical irony, and so deny its use as a meta-critical Romantic form of representation.[7] Andreas Barth however, argues that there is an implicit strain of Romantic irony in Novalis' writing, an ironic paradigm of representation, which is explored from a linguistic-theoretical perspective far more radically than by Schlegel (Barth 2001, 230).

The "ordo inversus" figure in Novalis' *Fichte-Studien* can be understood as a contribution to the concept of Romantic irony. This motif of reflexive inversion, which forms the basic principle running throughout the *Fichte-Studien*, can be read as an attempted solution to Fichte's placing all knowledge inside the subject. Manfred Frank proposes that the ordo inversus figure postulates a particularly refined approach to the limitations of reflection (See Frank and Gerhard Kurz 1977, but also Menninghaus on Manfred Frank's interpretation in Menninghaus 1987, 78–79). Barth further argues that, if taken out of the realm of the discursive, the figure has consequences for aesthetic practice (Barth 2001, 232). Stressing the difficulty of representing pre-reflexive reflection demonstrates the latter argument (Barth 2001, 232).

Novalis argues that we first leave the realm of the identical in order to represent something:

> Das Wesen der Identität läßt sich nur in einen *Scheinsatz* aufstellen. Wir verlassen das *Identische* um es dazustellen – Entweder dies geschieht nur scheinbar – und wir werden v[on] d[er] Einbildungskraft dahin gebracht es zu glauben – es *geschieht*, was schon Ist – natürlich durch imaginäres Trennen und vereinigen – Oder wir stellen es durch

> sein Nichtseyn, durch ein Nichtidentisches vor – Zeichen – ein bestimmtes für ein gleichförmig bestimmtes […]. (Novalis 1981, 104)
>
> [The essence of identity can only be shown in a pseudo-proposition. We leave that which is identical in order to represent it – either this only appears to occur – and we are brought to believe it through the power of the imagination – what already *is*, *happens* – naturally through imagined separation and unification – or we imagine it negativity, through its being non-identical – a sign – an absolute for another absolute of the same form.]

If, as the figure of ordo inversus shows, knowledge of being builds on the knowledge of the appearance of not-being, then the inaccessibility of being is always vouched for negatively (Barth 2001, 264). However, in terms of language theory, this thought is radicalised, so that the negative access to being can be asserted as something positive: specifically, that the modus of negation indicates the primordial alterity (ibid., 265).

For Novalis, sign and form are not separate: sign does not represent form, but they are co-forming. Novalis writes:

> Schein ist die Realität aller Form. Seyn die Realität alles Stoffs. Kein Seyn, kein Schein – kein Schein, kein Seyn. (Novalis 1981, 183)
>
> [Appearance is the reality of all form. Being is the reality of all material. Without being there is no appearance – without appearance, there is no being.]

If we exist only in as much as we recognise ourselves, but we see only the appearance of the self – and further, have knowledge of this inverted understanding of intellectual reflection – then the "I" has to break out of the semiotic relationship in some form. This is the ability of intellectual reflection, which, in the reverse formation of the self, also reveals the simultaneous creation of the same. This does not revoke the a priori basis of language, but at the same time, it shows how the knowledge of reflection survives its signified existence as lack (Barth 2001, 269).

The figure of the ordo inversus allows that which cannot be fully imagined, fully represented, or even fully known to nevertheless be spoken of: it is asserted *by dint* of the artist showing that it cannot be represented. This approach allows the subject to express its desire for something that lies beyond language and beyond thought and to give that thing form. In Romanticism, this thing is an absolute unity of subject and world which transcends language and thereby also thought. In Malouf and Watson, a sense of placedness, of a unified experience of place, takes on the role of the absolute. The gap between subject and world exists in different forms in Watson's work than it does in Malouf's poetry. The land-language disjunct lies at the heart of the subject's inability to create a sense of unity with the continent in Malouf's poetry. Watson, in contrast, addresses not only this same issue from an epistemological perspective, but also the fractured and layered sense of place and a suspicion of language which has resulted from Australia's history of violence towards Indigenous Australians.

Representing the Unrepresentable

Schlegel's Romantic irony likewise ascribes art with the knowledge of its own inadequacy in relation to the representation of that which cannot be represented. Schlegel's irony can be understood as a reaction to two assertions which appear to be mutually exclusive: that knowledge of the self is only possible through immediate relation to the self, which occurs before all reflexive realisation; and that this knowledge cannot represent an object of our knowledge because of its pre-reflexive status (ibid., 112). To get around these completing claims, without resorting to the God solution, Schlegel offers the aesthetic experience as compensation for the deficiencies of the mind. What cannot be ascertained by the mind is represented in reduced form as analogous to that which cannot be represented; and by proving the deficiency of that representation, the existence of the unpresentable is negatively asserted. In short, Romantic irony achieves the representation of the unpresentable by representing it *as* the unpresentable.

Schlegel develops a specific aesthetic form of Romantic irony where the basic structure of evocation and revocation utilises the diametrically opposing forms of allegory and wit.[8] Allegory in Schlegel's work is tasked with revealing the distance between the unreachable ideal and its insufficient representation (ibid., 113). The two are diametrically opposed, because wit can be understood in the context of the period as the ability to unify magnitudes which would otherwise be impossible to unify.[9] This can be seen in the punchlines of jokes today, which make the audience aware of a secondary, perhaps conflicting, meaning behind the original narrative of the joke. As Schlegel writes,

> Manche witzigen Einfälle sind wie das überraschende Wiedersehen zwei befreundeter Gedanken nach einer langen Trennung. (Schlegel 1967, 171)
>
> [Some amusing ideas are like the surprise meeting of two befriended thoughts after a long separation.]

In contrast, the allegory is ex negativo in its form. It is a process of continual assertion and destruction, in which every representation is shown to be only preliminary, and part of an endless process of poetic execution and negation (Barnes 2001, 123). These understandings of allegory and wit are not examined separately in the model I investigate in Malouf's and Watson's poetry. However, they are echoed in these poets' particular uses of humour, in pieces such as "Dog Park" (Malouf) or "Labelled" (Watson). I approach their recourse to allegory and wit as being part of the basic structure of Romantic irony modelled in their poetry.

Productive Negativity: The Ironic Dialectic

Romantic irony is a dialectic of poetic assertion and revocation which Schlegel developed from Fichte's three-fold dialectic model. Fichte coined the triadic constellation, Thesis – Antithesis – Synthesis, in relation to the relationship between the I and the not-I in his *Grundriss des Eigentümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre, in Rücksicht auf das theoretische Vermögen* from 1795 (Fichte 1975, 7). Each term is dependent on the others. Antithesis requires the existence of a thesis, and synthesis requires the existence of a previous antithesis. These correspond to Fichte's three foundational principles. Fichte's first principle is that a thinking self posits the existence of the I. The second is that the not-I is unknowable. In a third step, Fichte attempts to determine the relationship between the I and the not-I, resulting in a separation of an empirical I and a not-I, which take part in an absolute I. The act of positing the I not as object but as action (*Thathandlung*) creates a synthesis. This synthesis is denied in Romantic irony (Fichte 1965, 259; see also Götze 2001, 208).

Schlegel's triadic form is one of *Selbstschöpfung*, which is the act of naïve poetic creation; *Selbstvernichtung*, which is the revocation of what the poet asserted; and *Selbstbeschränkung*, which is a kind of synthesis. The main difference from Fichte in Schlegel's approach is that synthesis is not a return to a unity of pre-reflexive consciousness, but a transformation of the previous undifferentiated position in the dialectic of interacting determinations; this relates to the middle of the process, rather than the beginning or the end. *Selbstbeschränkung* is a moment of unity in the reflexive recognition that the two extremes (of the finite and the infinite) belong together. However, this synthesis is endlessly negated, and cannot serve as a place of escape. Rather, it is an endless process which implicates the self as a structural element in the ironic process (ibid., 46).

Schlegel also differs from Kant in that the sought-after ideal is no longer an isolated product in this process but is contained in the progressive movement which is simultaneously immanent and transcendent (ibid.). *Selbstbeschränkung* is an integral structural element in Romantic irony. As an intermediary in the medium of poetry, it exists in a represented synthesis of *Selbstschöpfung* and *Selbstvernichtung* – or the laying open of the poetic process. This is a process of revealing that represented unity is mere show, while also reflecting on its own process of representation. By revealing the difference between unity and the failure of reflection, Romantic irony corresponds to the reflection process of self-awareness outlined above in relation to Novalis.

Romantic irony celebrates a never-ending process as the only possible way to express or experience that which lies beyond language: an absolute unity of I and Thou or subject and world. In the poetry examined in this book, the subject/world relationship is fraught with failed attempts at creating a sense of *Heimat* or placedness for the settler subject and an impossible reconciliation of Indigenous and 'Western' place for the hybrid subject. The solution which Romantic irony offers is humble. There is no glorious moment of arrival or of reconciliation, simply dialogue, longing, and recognition of our own human limitations.

Irony Applied: The Subject in Australia

The model of this idea in Malouf's and Watson's poetry loses some of the weighting towards the inward reflection of the subject upon itself, although the impulse remains in their first-person lyric pieces. Instead, it is the limitations of language and thought in breaking out of the subject's internal horizon and reaching out to the Other outside the self which are highlighted. The Romantic subject cannot provide objective representation of that which makes up its being. The self-reflexivity of Romantic irony aims to draw attention to the illusion of representation and the écart between signifier and signified. It is a refusal to resolve the contradictions of a subject which is both discursive and absolute, and which cannot objectively represent itself outside its own linguistically determined consciousness. It can, however, reflect on this predicament aesthetically, and point to a space beyond the self.

The subject, being constituted through its bodily and linguistic interactions with its environment, is faced with even greater hurdles when there is a fundamental mis-match between these environments and the language in which it processes thought. This situation has been noted in the previous research on Romanticism in Australia, which has been less focused on subjectivity than on literary and cultural history. As a consequence, this mis-match of language and environment, and the resulting feelings of alienation from that environment, have been understood as being fundamentally contrary to Romanticism. Bringing subjectivity to the fore reveals a perspective through which this disjunct may be viewed as a productive probing of the hybrid subject's paradoxical existence, in the spirit of Romantic irony.

The ideas encapsulated in Romantic irony are the model of Romanticism represented in Malouf's poetic oeuvre. The cargo, or idea, which is transported from Romanticism to the application of the model in the context of Malouf as a modern Australian writer, is the irresolvable relationship of subjectivity to language, environment, and transcendence. The Romantic subject, like the modern subject, creates itself linguistically (imaginatively) through its experience of all that is Other to it, including nature, the animal Other, and space; yet it desires unity with these Others, which can only be achieved through the paradoxical transcendence of the desiring self.

The disjunct between English as the primary language of literature in Australia and the local landscape has been posited as one of the reasons for the lack of an Australian Romantic movement, as outlined previously. This directly affects the ability of language to write the subject into place, which is a central concern of Malouf's entire oeuvre. If, however, this disjunct between the desired connection to place and language becomes the application of a model of Romantic irony, Romanticism (in this form at least) becomes more than a lingering set of orphaned aesthetic markers marooned in an Australia without a Romantic period. Rather, it becomes a central coping mechanism in contemporary Australian literature, which deals with a disjunct of spaces and cultures.

Model Theory: How Romanticism Continues and Adapts

It is impossible to address the continued presence of Romanticism in Australian literature – whether it be in the form of Romantic irony, the role of art and the artist, the relationship between art and nature, or any one of the myriad ideas which developed from the end of the eighteenth through to the nineteenth century – without addressing the issue of "Romanticism" as a term. Any attempt to provide a definitive and all-encompassing definition of Romanticism as a theoretical or aesthetic paradigm is bound to fail in the face of the heterogeneity of the historical movement and current uses of the term in the public sphere. There is, therefore, a need for a theoretical paradigm able to account for the various developments within Romanticism in a practical way, as well as its ongoing presence in contemporary literature.

Model Theory: A Pragmatic Alternative

Model theory offers a pragmatic and workable alternative to providing a definitive understanding of Romanticism in its entirety, or even as a period per se. This approach views Romanticism as a series of model-building processes which began with the emergence of Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century and continues in ever more disparate and frayed forms to this day.[10] The poetic oeuvres of David Malouf and Samuel Wagan Watson reflect this process. These two authors' works are understood as two model objects which utilise a Romantic-ironic model of epistemological enquiry to address contemporary concerns.

A model can only be viewed through its representation by a model object, just as Romanticism has traditionally been construed from the canonical texts taken to represent it. Models, on the other hand, may be conceptualised as ontological objects, but they lay no claim to truth or completeness. Instead, they exist in the shadows behind the model object, and transport knowledge between two points. When the text includes tropes and ideas commonly identified with Romanticism, these may be viewed as indicators of a specific model of Romanticism being made visible by that text. This means that different model objects (texts, practices, art) will contain different models of Romanticism depending on their interest. Models are by nature reductive, subjective, and tailored to a specific purpose. The model of Romanticism which the text represents does not, in turn, need to encapsulate every nuance of what happened between the end of the eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth century. The forms of representation merely hint at the nature of the model.

If a text, or a body of work such as Malouf's oeuvre, is approached as the model object, those aspects of Romanticism reflected in this object do not have to represent a Romanticism that has remained unchanged in content and form. Nor are they necessarily "post" Romantic. Rather, the modelling process allows for the transport of Romantic elements between two points, while accounting for a process of adaptation in their application. The information transported by the model is viewed as a heuristic with contemporary applications rather than as a set of aesthetic markers.

Just because motifs, such as the artist figure or an interest in the power of the imagination occur in Malouf's work (to take just two of many examples), this does not automatically make him a Romantic author. Conversely, there are very few direct references to Romanticism in Watson's poetry, yet there are underlying structures in each authors' work which can be best explained as Romantic models (in this case, Romantic irony). The question is not necessarily whether or not Romanticism is a model, but what can be gained by viewing it as such. By working with an understanding of Romanticism as a model, my use of the term clarifies the essential aspects of Romanticism in *the context of the purpose of my analysis*, rather than an attempt to create an all-encompassing definition of Romanticism. Model theory provides a conceptual framework and vocabulary with which to show this. Because of Bernd Mahr's addition of the two modalities *of* and *for*, the theory can be oriented towards the role of one model in becoming another. It thus provides a framework in which the continued force of Romanticism in Australian poetry can be analysed, whilst at the same time allowing the form of this influence to adapt dynamically to the particular author in question.

What is a Model?

In its everyday form, a model may seem unassuming, as a smaller, less real version of something else; and it is so widely used, in both the vernacular and the sciences, that it is approaching the status of a platitude. The more technically minded may have visions of intricate match-stick aqueducts or detailed architectural designs floating before their eyes. A model can be anything from a playdough rendering of the Boogie Man through to Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man; it is everything and nothing.[11] The interesting feature of models is their ability to transfer information from one point to another, while accounting for adaption and new applications of that information. Where examination of Romanticism in literature is often a two-way path between literature of the period and the text at hand, a model can account for a third path which allows not just the identification of Romanticism in a text, but also an investigation of its application and transformation. In this instance, the model is reflected in the text, rather than in the physical form of the book. However, the principle is the same as for more conventional physical models.

To take an example, somewhere in Wales there is a model of a model village. It is a representation of a Welsh village in miniature, with another smaller version inside, and another in that. Each babushka-like iteration becomes the model for the next, losing detail and becoming more abstract each time. Yet each model remains as recognisably a village as the Welsh village in Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*. Both are models of a Welsh village, reducing real-life complexities into something representational which conveys information to the viewer or reader. In the first instance, the model shows the building style and layout of the place at a certain point in time, focusing on the form and order of the buildings, streets, trees, etc. In the case of the play for voices *Under Milk Wood*, the model largely ignores architecture and town planning in favour of the private lives and interactions of the village's inhabitants. The first shows the streets, the second fills them with the image of Mr Beynon going after the corgis with his little cleaver.

Stachowiak's original essential characteristics of a model in a mathematical context are similar to those of any textual reading: a model is representative, reductive, and subjective. It is not judged according to criteria of truth or ontology, but according to the relation of purpose to usefulness. Its usefulness in the transportation of knowledge becomes clearest in Bernd Mahr's further development of the model as a theory. For Mahr, knowledge is transported across two modalities: from a model *of* something to a model *for* something. It is always a model of something: of an original which may be either natural or created, and which in turn can function as a model for something else. These relationships show how a model may be updated or find new applications.

Returning to the example above, it is possible to see how, in the creation of the two different models of a Welsh village, the models reflect a subjective selection of attributes drawn from the vast matrix of available information about villages in Wales. This information has been reduced and idealised to convey information for a specific purpose: to show the physical layout of a particular village from multiple angles for instance, or to communicate Welsh culture. These models may then become part of another matrix reflected in other models: such as a town providing three-dimensional model-maps for visually impaired tourists, or "a day in the life of" literary structures.

The Modelling Process

The decision to create the model stems from the observation of similarities between the model object and matrix. These observations are then tested against the model's application, and the selection made from the matrix is then revisited and adjusted accordingly. The cargo exists as the central idea in the overlap between object, matrix, and model as made visible in the model object. It is this cargo which is transferred to the application through the model object. In all the changes which can occur through this modelling process, it is the cargo which must maintain consistency. It must contain the essential elements of the model on all sides, despite the need to transform these elements for their use in the application. The point at which the application (the contemporary context of the text) and matrix (literary-cultural background which includes aspects of Romanticism) overlap is where the cargo is transported from the one to the other.

Elements which are simply not relevant to the modelling process for the particular question at hand are excess baggage, not important to the cargo. The movement from matrix to application is linear, whilst the movement between model judgement, matrix, object, and application, is the typical backwards and forwards of classic hermeneutic analysis. The cargo, as the name suggests, is much like an item which is packed onto the model at one end (in this case, early German Romanticism) and carried to the other end (in this case, contemporary Australia). The only way to access this model is through the model object (in this case, the text).

Research on Romanticism in David Malouf's work to date reveals the consistent presence of Romantic elements. However, it has been unable to sufficiently account for their function or explain how they connect with Romanticism from a theoretical perspective. The Romantic tropes in the poems examined are not that which defines them as Romantic; rather, they form an excess in the model object which indicates the possible presence of Romanticism. As the interpreting subject, I take these as indications of Romanticism in the matrix behind the work, and make a model of Romanticism (in this case, of Romantic irony) based on the contents of the model object (the text). The creation of any model through this process is openly subjective and reductive. For this reason, the process involves continually reassessing the model judgement against the contents of the model object and its matrix; i.e. comparing my understanding of Romantic irony with what is reflected in the poems themselves.

The model is a model of the matrix, and as models are always idealising and reductive, there is an excess of material in the model object which is not relevant to this modelling instance. In the case of Malouf's oeuvre, this would include for instance biographical details, meta-textual information, or other themes. The model object (the text) carries information (cargo) from the matrix (including cultural background) to the application (the model's intended use). In this case, the cargo is the way in which Romantic irony functions as a tool for expressing the subject's longing, but inability, to transcend the self and connect to something outside the self, which is an expression of the absolute. What constitutes this connection changes between the Romantic irony, as explored by the early German Romantics in Jena, and its contemporary application.

III. David Malouf

Malouf: An Author in Context

David Malouf was born in Brisbane in 1934, of Christian Lebanese, Portuguese Sephardi Jewish, and English heritage. Although his mother was originally from England, his father was born in Australia. Malouf's childhood was an Edwardian one, which his mother recreated in the image of her own English background (Hansson 1991, 23; Heinke 2005, 8). Malouf's education followed the classic English style of the upper middle classes: Brisbane Grammar school, then arts at the University of Queensland, and finally teaching positions at St. Anselm's College, England and the University of Sydney.

When it is not situated in Australia, Malouf's poetry engages with England, but more explicitly with the continent in the form of Italian settings, as well as a plethora of allusions to German literature (Petersson 1990, 129). Malouf has identified Goethe and Thomas Mann as important influences on his writing, and his poetry references other German authors in its titles or epitaphs, such as Heinz Piontek in "Birthday Poem" and Joachim Ringelnatz in Malouf's adaptation of "Die Karpfen in der Wilhelmstrasse 15" in "The Carp" (both from *Bicycle and Other Poems*[1]). Other influences include Wallace Stevens, W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Martin Heidegger (Hansson 1991, 19). Following on from Malouf's assertion that it is "not simply that Australia produces *clumsy* variants of Europe, it produces critical variants of Europe" (Malouf and Davidson 1990, 288), the application of Australia's European cultural heritage in the form of Romantic irony could be viewed as one such variation, albeit adapted to subject–world relationships in an Australian context.

It is certainly as an Australian author that Malouf has primarily been read. The reception of his novels within the context of Australia's History Wars and the identity crises of nationalism in the Howard years have overshadowed his poetry, which reaches from the regional to the cosmopolitan and mythical with very little of the national in between. In this respect, it reflects a tendency in contemporary Australian poetry to move away from Harpur-like aspirations of national poetry, towards extreme attention to local places and participation in wider global communities: a kind of *global regionalism*. Malouf writes of the world and of Australia from the spaces which have formed him as a Brisbane poet, not least Deception Bay. This focus is reflected in the selection of poets in the 2016 Langford collection of Australian poetry, and it can be seen most clearly in Watson's writing.

Scholarship on Malouf, particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s, situates his work in a national context, which was influenced by a larger discourse on Australian history and identity that was occurring at that time. Malouf's poetic writing, however, is a poor fit for a positive assertion of Australian national identity formation, which could explain why his novels have received a great deal more attention than his poetry. Even within national literature, such as that of Australia, Ashcroft argues that writers are driven by "transnational" concerns which exceed the "boundaries of the nation-state" (Ashcroft 2013, 36). The nation in Malouf's work is better understood as *Heimat* (Ashcroft), which "becomes the promise in postcolonial writing that replaces the promise of nation, what it may be like in the *future* but the promise of *Heimat* transfers to the present" (ibid.).

Heimat reflects Malouf's views on the role of literature in the creation of a culture in Australia: specifically, to bridge the divide between the author's language as a British inheritance, and the Australian landscape. However, Malouf's poetry also reflects the provisional nature of the very *Heimat* he regards literature as creating. In this respect, Malouf is programmatically Romantic. Romanticism's image of the human – as a being that never *is* but that is only ever *becoming*; that can never reach a definitive identity and sways between necessity and freedom, social conditioning and self-determination – is in this respect an ironic one. It is one which is paralleled in Malouf's understanding of a specifically Australian subject, or even a specifically Australian literature.

Remembering Babylon is one of Malouf's best-known novels. It is easy to understand why the book and its treatment of Indigenous characters and themes of belonging garnered such critical interest, in both the academic and popular press. Published in 1993, it emerged just after the final decision on the Mabo case was delivered in 1992,[2] and at the start of the History Wars which followed. Peter Otto situates the debate around *Remembering Babylon* (as seen in *The Age* newspaper, November 1993) firmly within the context of the Mabo decision, positing that the novel came at a time when "the line between Australia's settler past and its postcolonial present was being redrawn" (Otto 2010, 231). This "redrawing" of the lines of colonial history to the present could be seen in the period between the Keating and Howard governments,[3] which came to be known as the History Wars.

Malouf and the History Wars

This period saw the rise and clash of two competing views of Australian history: the "Black Armband" and the "White Blindfold" extremes. Historians such as Henry Reynolds and Lyndall Ryan, whose work focussed on the massacres of Indigenous peoples throughout Australia's colonial past, were subject to a huge backlash from conservative historians, including Keith Windschuttle, who asserted that they had essentially invented evidence of British violence towards the Indigenous population. The pejorative term "Black Armband" was coined by the historian Geoffrey Blainey, who thought that the younger generation of historians placed too strong an emphasis on wrongs committed in Australia's past (Macintyre and A. Clark 2004, 3).

The battle over the balance sheet of Australian history ultimately reflected the different political visions of the Australian Labor Party under Paul Keating and the conservative Australian Liberals under John Howard; as well as their respective voter-bases, and the narratives directed at these voter bases. Where Paul Keating pushed a policy of multiculturalism and closer ties to Australia's Asian neighbours, for John Howard, bashing leftist political correctness was a safe path to gaining conservative votes. As Stuart Macintyre writes: "The elites provided Howard with a foil for the battlers, whose achievements and sentiments they blackened" (ibid., 4). At a time when the movement for Indigenous land rights was gaining critical momentum, a narrative that did not disturb the status quo for those workers reliant on the mining and logging industries was also an existential matter. The dynamics of the characterisation of the left as bleeding-heart radicals and perpetrators of false information, polarised against the hard-working ordinary Joe, is familiar, and by no means unique to Australian politics.[4] Reactions to the push to keep the atrocities visited on Indigenous-Australians in the history books and public consciousness ranged from extreme denial to a simple desire not to have to think about it. Ultimately, the History Wars were a struggle over how the country was to be defined in the present rather than the past. Macintyre summarises what was at stake:

> The rewards for coming to terms with the past that Paul Keating offered in his Big Picture included greater tolerance, increased autonomy, a deeper understanding of the land and its original inhabitants, an outward-looking, productive and self-confident nation. The risks of a Black Armband view of Australian history that Geoffrey Blainey identified included intolerance of old Australia, loss of sovereignty, the tying up of productive resources, disunity, pessimism and guilt. (ibid., 14–15)

Closer examination of Macintyre's assessment of the stakes for each side quoted above reveals that a large part of the issue is not only the facts of history, but also how it is acceptable to relate to a European heritage, and what that relationship means for belonging in Australia. The History Wars became a situation where people, who in many cases had known no other home, were being urged to see themselves as, at best, immigrants.

For authors such as Malouf, who were educated in an environment still fundamentally British,[5] the basic positions I have briefly described here form an important backdrop for examining the relationship between the self, the local landscape, and the authors' use of a European linguistic and literary heritage. Australia's colonial past has had a significant impact on how modern Australian literature is received, particularly in its relationship with its European and Indigenous cultural heritages. Closer attention to Malouf's non-literary writing reveals a far more complex attitude towards the Australian identity than a "rush to resolve Australia's contradictions": instead, his viewpoint is deeply seated in ideas of Romanticism, and attitudes towards space and time, in which Indigenous relations necessarily play an important role (Otto 2010, 242). This is certainly the case in his novels. Indigenous presence does not, however, play a significant (if any) role in Malouf's poetic oeuvre. The continued presence of Romanticism in Australian poetry when viewed in this context is not so much a product of "negativity" (Kane 1996) as an alternative mode to express the personal experiences of being Australian or being in Australia. In-between states that both reach for and reflect on the impossibility of transcendence, the use of poetic language to express concepts otherwise inexpressible, and the Romanticisation of the everyday, are at the heart of Romanticism, thus making it an extremely useful toolkit for the poetry of writers whose cultural identity is the product of a cultural uprooting.

Malouf: A Romantic?

Malouf has been a strong presence in the Australian cultural scene as a critic and social commentator, for instance as part of the Boyer lecture series, *A Spirit of Play – The Making of Australian Consciousness* in 1998 (published as a book under the same name). However, it is his novels which have gained the most critical attention. Don Randall comments that "*An Imaginary Life* claimed the lion's share of attention until the mid-1990s when *Remembering Babylon* became, and subsequently has remained, the main topic-text for Malouf criticism"; although there has since been some interesting work on Malouf's war novel *Fly Away Peter* (Randall 2007, 182).

On the basis of his novels *Remembering Babylon* and *Conversations at Curlew Creek*, as well as his Australian nationality, Malouf's work is often deemed to be postcolonial in its content, postmodern in its narrative techniques, and post-Romantic because of its representation of nature and the ideal of unified humanity (Heinke 2005, 10). The post-Romanticism which Heinke mentions is just one of many various permutations of the term Romanticism in scholarship relating to Malouf's works. Existing research on David Malouf is diverse, particularly when journal articles are taken into account. However, in terms of book-length works,[6] the topic of Romanticism is perennial, if not examined in great detail.

There is a general consensus that Romanticism is present in Malouf's work. However, in detailed analysis, the term becomes more of a byword used in combination with concerns of subjectivity and national identity. The ability to create unity and meaning attributed to the individual imagination (Hannson), and the importance of mythology (Bliss), are also identified as Romantic concerns in Malouf's writing. In Caroline Bliss's work, however, the focus is less on the Romantic idea of a new mythology, and more on Malouf's engagement with "specifically Australian permutations of myth", which include "transportation and the exile from a distant, perhaps never glimpsed 'home', mateship, the bushranger, the lost child, and the baptism of Anzac" (Bliss 2000, 725).

Patrick Buckridge is one of the few writers to apply Romantic theory to Malouf's work, by examining the intersections of Schiller's understanding of the sublime and Malouf's war novel *Fly Away Peter*, as well as *Child's Play*. Nevertheless, the aspect of the sublime that Buckridge identifies as Romantic is merely "Romantic egotism" and the "Romantic illusion of transcendence" (Buckridge 1994, 167–68). This has led to the odd situation in which Buckridge's essay has been identified as one of the most substantiated examinations of Romanticism in Malouf's work (Bliss 2000), without Buckridge actually identifying it as such.

Vivienne Hamilton remains the only author who has specifically explored Romantic genre and form in Malouf's novels. Taking over the term from Ivor Indyk's work, Vivienne Hamilton's master's thesis examines the "post-Romantic" aspects of Malouf's "construction of individual metamorphoses" (Hamilton April 2001, 7). Although she speaks of "the transcendent aspect of spiritual metamorphosis, achieved through [a] reconnection with primitive origins", the connections she makes to the post-Romantic are similarities between Malouf's novels and the genre of the Bildungsroman, including the Künstlerroman subgenre. The former focuses on "the construction of the metamorphosis of the protagonists", while the latter looks at "Malouf's construction of the artistic development of the protagonist in *Harland's Half Acre*" (Hamilton 2001, 12–14). In both cases, the focus is on the way Malouf's novels portray the power of the imagination to transform reality through perception. In Hamilton's work, this concept of the imagination is deemed to be strongly connected to "Romantic ideology", whilst she identifies "retrospection" as a "major tenet of Romantic doctrine" (ibid., 60).

This importance of the power of the imagination as a Romantic trope is largely attached to two figures from Malouf's novels: Johnno from the novel of the same name, and Frank from *Harland's Half Acre*. In the character of Johnno, Hamilton sees "an embryonically Romantic emphasis on the power of the human imagination and memory to transform perceptions" (ibid., 18). The most obvious example of this is Malouf's emphasis on the power of Frank's imagination to transform perception and consequently reality, although Hamilton acknowledges that the metaphorical expression of "human interdependence with the natural world" is not exclusively Romantic (ibid., 40). Hamilton's research has been influenced by Neilsen's identification of the character of Frank as a Romantic artist figure (Neilsen 1990, 18).

In fact, many of the references to Romanticism in academic writing on David Malouf are in response to Neilsen's 1990 book. Although it only covers Malouf's six novels existent at the time of publication, Neilsen engages with the question of poetry within his analysis of the novels, if only because of the poetic nature of Malouf's prose. He identifies the two main themes of Malouf's work as nationality (Australianness) and mythology. Seventeen years after Neilsen's publication, Don Randall would identify the national aspect as Romantic:

> In *Fly Away Peter*, and still more clearly in *The Great World*, one can discern the influence of the Romantic conception of the need for a nation-forging, nation inaugurating epic. [As] a maker of national myths, Malouf tacitly affirms the importance of a shared lore in the production of national consciousness – again a notion that is central to Romantic thought. (Randall 2007, 3)

However, rather than exploring the exact connection between Romanticism and those aspects of Malouf's writing which he identifies as Romantic, Neilsen instead veers into a structuralist approach. He identifies essential Straussian oppositions of "wholeness/incompleteness, nature/culture, and change/stasis" (Neilsen 1990, 3). According to Neilsen, "a persistent theme of Malouf's [is] the problematic and blurred boundary between life and art – a metaphysical concern" and "the construction of social reality through language" (ibid.).

Neilsen views all themes and oppositions in Malouf's work as variants on the basic sets of wholeness/incompleteness, nature/culture, and change/stasis (ibid., 45). He makes the connection to Romanticism explicit only in certain tropes, such as the Doppelganger figure and "the existential or 'romantic' hero alienated from bourgeois society and from himself, searching for truth in an absurd world" (ibid., 18). This leads Neilsen to define Malouf as a "post-Romantic" writer (ibid., 4). He uses this term specifically to refer to Malouf's "priorities" of myth, nature, and also transcendence, which "is achieved through what Malouf himself refers to as the 'power of the imagination'" (ibid.). Neilsen's positive interpretation of the imagination set the tone for later readings of Romanticism in Malouf.

The priority of nature in Malouf's work is also commonly connected to Romanticism. Grogan sees the Romantic in Malouf's work in his critique of rationalism and his interest in nature and the imagination, stating that "Nature, for Malouf, is beyond all categorical capture. Nonetheless, a poetic language may attempt to regain it through images, metaphor and gestures of unification" (Grogan 2014, 28). This implies an understanding that Romanticism in Malouf's writing is defined by the power of poetic language to regain nature in idealist terms. Grogan would say that the figure of the child in *An Imaginary Life* "finally embodies the possibility of an intimate, delicate, joyful and reciprocal relationship with the natural world" (ibid.). Hamilton also identifies a "contemporary Romantic ecology" in Malouf's work, which would "look long and hard at the radical other of culture, the wilderness, as a complex possible model for transforming human society"; and she is by no means the only scholar to equate a positive view of nature with Romanticism in Malouf's novels (Hamilton 2001, 32–33).

Yet if a positive relationship, or even "oneness", with the natural world is Romantic in Malouf's work, in what context can a positive view of nature not be considered Romantic, or an artist figure cease to be a Romantic artist figure? Aside from Vivienne Hamilton's reference to Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* and the occasional Wordsworth quote, the research outlined above asserts a Romantic connection based on a perceived consensus which does not reflect the multiplicity of Romanticism itself. Working backwards from these texts, the implication is that Romanticism consists of aspects such as a positive relationship with nature; an emphasis on the importance of mythology in nation building; the attainment of transcendence; the figure of the alienated artist and the artistic genius; memories, fantasy, and dreams which "establish a Romantic tone" (ibid., 63); the transformation of self and nature through poetic language and art; as well as certain motivic and formal elements.

Don Randall's work on Malouf comes closest to my understanding of the core Romantic model behind David Malouf's poetry, by briefly broaching the idea of negative capability. Cached in a Chinese box series of prefixes, Don Randall writes the following:

> Malouf does not become un-Romantic in his quest to forge a post-Romantic writing […], Malouf's work manifests its affiliation with Romanticism's legacy. The writing undertakes the detailed articulation of individual consciousness, portraying the 'I' self-consciously engaged in the process of its becoming. This 'I' moreover, possesses a world-making power of imagination, and thus enables a creative conjunction between

> nature and consciousness. Malouf's portrayal of intense experience of individual subjectivity and his affirmation of imagination's creative force recall Wordsworth, most particularly among the Anglophone Romantics. But the Keatsian drive to push beyond the bounds of self, to imaginatively inhabit the other – the drive giving rise to the notion of 'negative capability' – is equally pertinent to the effective reading of Malouf, and especially of his imagined life of the poet Ovid. (Randall 2007, 3)

However, despite his identification of negative capability[7] as an important aspect of Malouf's writing, Randall still follows Neilsen and subsequent authors' view that the imagination is able to successfully bridge the self/nature divide in Malouf's work; an assertion which these Malouf scholars have made particularly on the basis of the novel *An Imaginary Life*. I believe that this is not the case in Malouf's poetic works. This book focuses on exactly the inability of the subject to overcome the self/Other divide in the imagination, arguing that Malouf uses a model of Romantic irony to make this failure productive.

A Poetics of Place

Place plays a central role in Malouf's poetry. The desired, yet unattainable, absolute in these pieces is figured as a desire for placedness: an experience of connection with the continent which would allow for the sense of *Heimat*. This is more than an interest in spatial hermeneutics: placedness is configured specifically as transcendent and sacred. Romantic irony is able to account for this dynamic in a way that other paradigms are not. Malouf's poetry is not, I argue, Romantic because it celebrates the imagination and its ability to imagine the subject into place. It is Romantic in the value attributed to place-making as a transcendental and sacred process. Malouf speaks specifically of literature's role in the creation of culture, of making place from the spaces on the continent we occupy. His approach to this is unashamedly hybrid:

> In the choice between culture on the one hand, and geography on the other, the nineteenth century comes down firmly on the side of culture […]. The desire to stand alone, to have a destiny and a history of our own, was inevitable of course, and necessary, but it destabilised us, introducing first a resentful sense of being marginal […], then an endless worrying back and forth about how we were to ground ourselves and discover a basis for identity. […] But the belief that we must make a choice is an illusion, and so, I'd suggest, if we are to be whole, is the possibility of choosing. It is our complex fate to be children of two worlds, to have two sources of being, two sides to our head. The desire for something simpler is a temptation to be less than we are. Our answer on every occasion when we are offered the false choice between this and that, should be 'Thank you, I'll take both'. (Malouf 1998, 79)

Malouf's comment references two major forces, with regard to the ways in which Australia has been imagined in its cultural decoupling from the UK: first, the national inferiority complex, which supposedly arose from being at the margins of the British Empire; and second, the long process of identity formation and nation-forging when freed from England's apron strings. This is a simplistic narrative indeed, as Malouf points out. That does not, however, mean that "taking both" is an easy alternative. Here, Malouf's poetry is read as exploring precisely this proposal. "Taking both" means marrying the language and culture of Europe (which includes European transcendental philosophy) with the local environments that had become the source drawn upon to imagine Australia's identity as independent of Britain.

Malouf's work has often been read in the context of the "endless back and forth about how we were to ground ourselves and discover a basis for identity", as Malouf himself expresses it in the quote above. However, his writing also reflects the idea that the relationship between reader and writer is more important than that of national identity. Hansson writes that Malouf regards "the imaginative act of passionate, individual reading as equal to the creative, imaginative act of writing" (Hansson 1991, 15). This is an expression of the Romantic ideal of the reader as co-creator of the work, based as it is on the understanding that all perceptions of reality are a creative act of the subjective imagination. Reality flows from the torsion of the subject's pendulum swing between the poles of his make-up as both a material and a reflective being, between the finite and the infinite. Novalis[1] proposes that this moment contains and is the source of all reality (Novalis 2013c, 310).

Importantly, this pendulum swing in itself can be understood as the creative force of the imagination which moulds and remoulds the never-ending forms of the subject. The hybrid subject in Malouf's work is like a migratory bird "still here and with us but in another / tense" (AOB 53). This is not to call the physical status of the material world into question, but the processes whereby it attains meaning. In Malouf's poetry, the trick is "to tune/our ear, beyond what passes/ for silence" (ibid.). Novalis writes that

> Ichheit oder produktive Imaginationskraft, das *Schweben* – bestimmt, produziert die Extreme, das wozwischen geschwebt wird – dieses ist eine Täuschung, aber nur im Gebiete des gemeinen Verstandes. Sonst ist es etwas durchaus Reales, denn das Schweben, seine Ursache, ist der Quell, die Meter Realität, die Realität selbst.[2] (Novalis 2013c, 310)
> [Ego or the productive power of the imagination, called *suspension*, produces the extremes between which suspension occurs – this is an illusion, but only in the area of the common mind. Otherwise, it is something very real, because suspension, its cause, is the well-spring of materiality, of reality itself.[3]]

This productive power of the imagination itself determines the bounds of the subject's never-ending movement between forms. To use Novalis' term, it is a meta-reality, which could be viewed as being in a dialectical relationship with the material world and the way it is both perceived and also shaped under the influence of human perception.

The physical existence of Australia is incontestable. However, Malouf expresses this same sense of the imagination's function in his approach to the relationship between literature and place: the processes by which the space becomes place involve the imagination of its writers and its readers. In Malouf's poetry, place-as-*Heimat* is understood as taking on the role of the transcendent in Romantic irony. Within the relationship between reader and writer, and between self and Other, there remains the question of place, because these relationships are determined by the language–place relationship.

In expressing the dynamic between Europe and Australia, and between self and Other throughout his oeuvre, Malouf writes place in a deliberate and informed way. It is of little surprise that the inscription of space with place narratives should form a central concern in Malouf's writing. Spatial hermeneutics lies at the heart of the debates on belonging in Australia, as well as in the debate on the development (or lack thereof) of Romanticism in Australia, outlined in "A Bad Romance: Rehabilitating Romanticism in Australia". Malouf has spoken and written extensively on the importance of writing in the creation of place from space. In this regard, he aligns himself with Australian postcolonialists such as Bill Ashcroft, in understanding place as

> the equivalent of *parole* – utterance – rather than the potentiality of utterance that is space. Place, we might say, for both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is uttered into being and maintained by narrative. Cultural production is marked by an ideological struggle over how Australian place should be uttered into being, how it should be represented, and it begins in the act of seeing itself. (Ashcroft 2010, 21)

Bill Ashcroft's comments adapt the work of earlier spatial theorists to the situation of postcolonial Australia. As in Malouf's own critical work, there is a shift here, away from an analysis of the dialectic relationship between the cultural production and the physical experiences or formings of space – the "socio-spatial dialect" (Soja)[4] – towards an examination of the influence of cultural products (writing) in the creation of "place-images" (Shields) in the symbolic realm, which is largely decoupled from socio-geographical analysis of "concrete spatiality" in this quote (Soja 2009, 77). Although Malouf does use examples of concrete spatiality in his own critical writing, it is weighted towards an interest in the roles that myth and writing play in the spatial etchings of Australia's national imaginary.

In Malouf's view, the way in which the landscape "had been taken deep into the consciousness" of Indigenous Australians is the same process that non-Indigenous settlers enact (Malouf 1998, 49). For Indigenous Australians, the land's features, the raw space of Australia, "had a second life in the imagination and in the mouths of women and men" through the act of "naming and story-telling and myth-making" (ibid.). Malouf's attitude towards the reshaping of the landscape, both physically and culturally, demonstrates a sensitivity towards the layering of place in Australia, and the superimposition of European culture on Indigenous sovereignty; whilst at the same time, he is far less damning of the practices of landscaping, mapping, and renaming than might be expected:

> What we did when we came here was lay new forms of knowledge and a new culture, a new consciousness, over so much that already existed, the product of many thousands

> of years of living in and with the land. This supplemented what was already there but did not replace it, and cannot do so as long as any syllable of that earlier knowledge exists in the consciousness of even one woman or man. A land can bear any number of cultures laid one above the other or set side by side. It can be inscribed and written upon many times. One of those forms of writing is the shaping of a landscape. In any place where humans have made their home, the landscape will be a made one. Landscape-making is in our bones. (ibid., 51)

Landscaping can be expressed as the physical change to the ecosystems in Australia as a result of colonisation. It also refers to the transformation of space into something which is created socially and culturally, and which exists in the imagination of the subject. Malouf's use of the term "landscape" in the quotation above reflects the understanding of landscape as a human-defined vista. The word comes from the Dutch *Landschaap*, for the framed view in landscape painting (Sestigiani 2014). As such, it contains visual overtones and is also a "deeply cultural product", which "presupposes a beholding entity – most commonly, and most likely in literary texts, the human" (Crane 2012, 9-10). The poet's act of viewing and writing the landscape becomes an act of landscaping, in that it transforms land and ocean into culture.

Malouf's view of landscape as inherently cultural, rather than nature-pure, implies an understanding of nature echoed as "natureculture":[5] i.e. something which is always laden with cultural meanings. Reading Malouf's poetry in our Anthropocene age, it is interesting to consider how Wright's questions of a disjunct between land and language remain relevant in the context of a nature/culture divide, and are negotiated in this time of a radically diminished distance between nature and culture. Although in some poems, such as "Dog Park" or "Earth Hour", Malouf sets up an idealised naturalism in contrast to modern culture, he does this in temporal rather than spatial terms. His poetry does not utilise, and does not need to utilise, nature as a site of longing or purity.

Malouf has, however, maintained a strong interest in the topic of mapping in Australian literature. In an interview with Paul Carter 1989, he asks if Australians have a particular feeling for space and mapping because there is a "the sense in which we feel we don't know it and are always talking a little bit into something unknown" (Carter and Malouf 1989, 179). It is in this focus on provisional mapping that Nettelbeck identifies as "the post-colonial impulse of Malouf's work: colonial patriarchy's tradition of claiming space, and thereby the conditions of knowledge, is made questionable, by a perpetual evasion of resolution" (Nettelbeck 1994b, 107). Nettelbeck's critique implies that Malouf portrays nature precisely as a site of purity and colonial longing even as she identifies Romanticism[6] as a way of avoiding the colonial image of nature and

Indigenous figures as the Other in Malouf's writing. Nevertheless, Nettelbeck's view that Malouf's work demonstrates an inability to resolve the tensions and conflicts involved in writing space in an Australian context is close to my own understanding of the issues at stake in Malouf's poems. The tensions which are inherent in the relationship between the subject and its Others – animal, vegetable, or mineral – are a central concern of early Romanticism.

The understanding of nature as always already a cultural project means that "pure" nature does not function as either an ideal or a contrasting element in the model of Romanticism in his poetry. One of the most fascinating aspects of Malouf's poetry is the way in which he takes the question of the land/language disjunct raised by Wright away from a colonial vision of Australia as wilderness, to address it in contemporary (sub)urban contexts. This move strips away the distraction of a specific nature-idealising perception of Romantic poetry and can directly address the limitations of language and literature in creating access to the Other that lies outside the self. The strategies by which the poet attempts to gain experience of the Other include an exploration of the relationship between the human and the animal. This reflects not only the fundamental interconnectedness of the human and the animal in the sense of Haraway's natureculture, but also the difficulty in actually experiencing or grasping this connection, and the unity of subject and world, on a larger scale.

The relations between world and subject become the central probing point in Malouf's poetry within a wider frame of postmodern understandings of space. This move, however, occurs in ways which are not always unproblematic. Malouf himself acknowledges that the Indigenous peoples of Australia have long achieved what he can only hope to in the creation of place (Malouf 1998, 39). He represents Indigenous cultures as a living culture on the one hand; but in asserting that the land can carry multiple, layered understandings of place, he implicitly legitimises the layering of a European-Australian culture on top of Indigenous place. Unlike Watson, who directly engages with the permeability of these layers, Malouf's nature/culture dynamic is not that of the European over the Indigenous specifically, but the more general relationship of the subject to that which lies outside itself.

The notion that multiple landscapes can occupy the same time and space is the logical conclusion of the metaphysical tradition in which Malouf writes. If landscape, as a place of meaning, is created in the subject then this will differ among subjects and cultures. Malouf's own comments make it impossible to ignore the importance of spatial hermeneutics in his work, which he characterises as an exploration of "how the elements of a place and our inner lives cross and illuminate one another, how we mythologize spaces and through that mythology (a good deal of it inherited) find our way into a culture" (Malouf 1985, 3). I would go as far as to argue that spatial hermeneutics forms one of the central underlying structures of his work. However, the role of the imagination in writing the subject into place is not, I argue, what makes his work Romantic. Rather, it is the *transcendental value* he attributes to this process, as represented in his use of the Australian quotidian sacred.

There is a clear epistemological strain in Malouf's poetry which is combined with, and related to, the subject's experience of place in a way that recalls a fundamental shift in the understanding of the relationship between the subject, space, and language in Romanticism. It is likewise related to the self–Other relationship explored in Romantic irony. In Romanticism, there is a strong focus on the role of the subject, and of language itself, in the formation of space and vice versa. Moreover, it is this aspect which bears greatest relevance to the relationship between space and the model of Romanticism explored here. Malouf's poems reflect a model of Romantic epistemological enquiry[7]. They explore the same ironic reflection on the subject's inability to experience a connection between self and Other through language as anything other than a momentary gesturing towards its existence, or the negative assertion of the same.

There is a surprising degree of consistency between the spatial frameworks utilised in these poems and the strategies with which the poet attempts to enact transcendence in any given piece. This is not to say that every single poem with one particular setting will share the same thematic content: that kind of neatness across five decades of writing would be a little uncanny. However, by grouping Malouf's poems according to their spatial qualities for the purposes of the following analysis, it is easier to see how they function as sites through which two main relationships are negotiated: self–language and self–Other. This, then, is how I have chosen to structure my analysis of Malouf's poems in the following chapters, because it reveals something of the nature of the poet's relationship to these places as well. The self–language and self–Other relationships form the two central thematic lines of enquiry running throughout the following analyses, which focus individually on the sites of the ocean, interiors, suburbia, earth, and the body.

Water

If such a thing were possible in Malouf's work, water would be the central binding element. Especially in an Australian context, water serves a range of symbolic functions. It is the edge first and foremost: that fine line which isolates and demarcates the continent, and which creates the country's island identity. The permeability of water becomes significant in light of Malouf's own emphasis on Australia's island form:

> When Europeans first came to these shores one of the things they brought with them, as a kind of gift to the land itself, was something that could never have existed before: a vision of the continent in its true form as an island that was not just a way of seeing it and seeing it whole, but of seeing how it fitted into the rest of the world. (Malouf 1998, 261)

This is very different from a focus on the beach, which is "often considered to be a landscape of vital importance for the nation's identity" (Schwarz 2007, 125). Malouf instead proposes that the first cultural shaping of Australia in the minds of its European settlers was one which was imported from the seafaring culture of Britain. Malouf's understanding of this initial view of Australia is subtler than later characterisations of the continent, which ranged from a "new Eden" to "hell on earth" (cf. Haynes 2006). The way Malouf writes the ocean does not force the subject to choose between one or other understanding of the continent. It allows a dynamic exchange between elements, such as isolation and connection, Australia and Europe, the domain of the sea-creatures and that of man, and not least, the moment when the unconscious mind meets the edges of the thinking self. The ocean is a symbol of Australia's isolation (even exceptionalism, when viewing flora and fauna preserved there by its island form), and at the same time, a reminder of the sea-faring identity of its colonising nation, Britain. It is the ocean which has shaped the continent as well as our relationship to those outside its shores: at times an open channel, whilst at others it has made "little-islanders of us; has made us decide, from time to time, to close ourselves off from influence and change" (Malouf 1998, 12).

Edges of the Nation

"Sheer Edge"; "At Deception Bay"; "Into the Blue"; "The Catch"; "This Day Under My Hand"; "An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton"

The poems in this section examine Malouf's portrayal of the edge of the continent as both the edge of the nation and of consciousness. These ideas are entwined with concerns which run throughout his work: language, the (im)possibility of transcending the self through acts of place-making, and music. These are poems which are more about longing than belonging. They reflect a Romantic movement encapsulated in the idea of 'perhaps', particularly the first piece examined here, "Sheer Edge". The way the landscape resists its integration through naming practices is key to understanding many of Malouf's poems and it is approached in different ways in the ocean poems examined here. "At Deception Bay" for instance, evokes intertextuality with the crab poems and musical references, combining Malouf's repeated interest in language, the animal Other, music, and place-making. "The Catch", and "This Day Under My Hand", and "An Evening at Hamilton" show how water dissolves barriers as it negotiates structures of belonging and possession through the speaker's relationship with the ocean. Failure to take possession of the continent in the imagination in these poems is a failure of both language and literature; the foothold on the continent which writing creates is only ever provisional.

As the title suggests, the poem "**Sheer Edge**" is concerned with the edge where the continent meets the ocean, but also the edge where the thinking self reaches out towards the Other in a movement simultaneously inwards and outwards. Although it had already appeared in *Poems 1959–1989*, the piece was reused as the opening poem in Malouf's 2008 collection *Revolving Days*, introducing the reader to the concerns expounded on in different ways in the rest of the collection. In a whimsical move, the poem is placed at the "edge" of the volume, not being afforded the status of first poem (that honour goes to "The Year of the Foxes"), but acting as a prelude to the rest. It is on the cusp between text and meta-text; and this position provides a formal reflection on its own content.

The geographical location of the poem is most likely to be Point Lookout. According to Martin Leer, this is the easternmost point in Australia, an "edge off an edge off an edge, as it were – for if Australia is at the edge of European consciousness, then Brisbane is at the edge of the Australian high culture consciousness that centres on the Sydney-Melbourne axis, and Point Lookout is at the edge of Brisbane […] on Stradbroke Island off the coast" (Leer 1985, 10–11). Cultural quips aside, the edge in Malouf's work, "is the vantage-point from which he surveys or sees glimpses of an outside world and an interior – almost equally known and alien" (ibid., 10).

Leer's analysis taps into the myth of the "great emptiness" of inner Australia, yet the desert itself is not represented in Malouf's poetry. This may be because the permeability of the edges of land, water, and sky are better suited to the search for unity expressed in Malouf's work than more stereotypical images of Australia's red-sand deserts. It may also be because the idea of the desert being the great unconscious of the Australian mind simply does not reflect Malouf's (and most Australians') own experience of place. Rather, Malouf stresses the diversity of the natural habitats in Australia:

> In a continent as large as ours, there are many kinds of landscape, each of them typical of a particular region, no one more authentically Australian than another. I mention this because I am always taken aback when I hear Australians of a certain turn of mind claim that we will only be fully at home here when we have learned to love our desert places. (Malouf 1998, 48)

The interest in specifics expressed here, from which larger cultural and metaphysical applications may be construed, is typical of Malouf's poetic works. Rather than looking inwards and connecting to the national myth of the "great emptiness" of inner Australia, in "Sheer Edge" Malouf looks outward to the ocean as darkness. In this case, Australia's borders, so important for connecting the continent with the rest of the world (particularly Europe), merge with a darkness which is to be interpreted as the limits of consciousness. Thus, the edge where the continent meets the ocean as the edge of consciousness is not merely that of the poet; it may also be that of the nation.

In verse two, the "darkness" becomes a universal factor. This "edge / of darkness" (lines 7–8) is the moment where the speech act fails; that space so sought after in Malouf's work, where meaning transcends words. Whilst it is possible to speak of the darkness of the forest or ocean floor, the word is more commonly associated with housing. In this way, the poem achieves movement from the edge of the continent, and turns inwards to cut under the floors of the Australian home. Under the floorboards has been a liminal, dream space for Malouf since he was a child. In *12 Edmondstone Street* he describes the typical "under the house" of the Queenslander (and many Australian homes which are likewise built on a slightly raised structure without a solid foundation): "There are no clocks down here. There is not even language [...]. To come down here, up under the floorboards and the life of rooms, is to enter a dream space" (Malouf 1999, 47).

In light of this passage, the darkness of the moment when the floor falls away can be seen to connect to a space beyond language. Malouf embraces a more encompassing interpretation of the edge in his work, by equating it with the human condition. It is "a situation in which we always find ourselves; we are *never* at the centre because we never know where the centre is" (Malouf, qtd. in Leer 1985, 11). The most striking aspect of Malouf's poems, in contrast to the national myths supposedly reflected in his novels, is how they refuse to define any fixed centre of identity, but celebrate the "spaces in the net" ("The Crab Feast", RD 109–118, line 65). This aspect is somewhat akin to Schlegel's pendulum swing between the finite and the infinite, between the self and the Other; and in Malouf's case, between the (still largely) European subject and the environment of the antipodes.

Malouf's comments above echo the "romantic poetics of place" which are "attuned more to longing than belonging, testifying to dislocation, while frequently also embracing, however ambivalently, the freedom to roam that is so characteristic of modernity" (Rigby 2004, 89). The centre of ourselves becomes difficult to locate when you indeed say "thank you, I'll take both", rather than embracing a single national identity (Malouf 1998, 79). This "edge" is not only to be found where the ocean meets the sky, but also between the binary pairings found elsewhere in Malouf's work, such as those "between suburbs and wilderness; between the settled life and a nomadic life; between a metropolitan centre and an edge; between places made and places that are unmakeable or not yet made; between the perceiver … and all sorts of things which are other and that other may be the animal world or simply some other consciousness" (Malouf qtd. in Leer 1985, 11). It is no less than the issue of intersubjectivity with which the early Romantics also wrestled.

The act of "taking both", of not reaching for a definite and "pure" Australianness, but of accepting that as "children of a complex fate" (Malouf) Australians will always be of two worlds, leads to an understanding of identity and place which parallels Schlegel's understanding of truth as the movement between extremes, rather than as a fixed or definitive concept. It is this movement between two poles that allows the subject to continually renegotiate this position, with the place of truth being in the middle of this never-ending movement itself, rather than in a fixed end result. Schlegel uses the image of an eclipse to show that there is more than one centre (Frischmann 2009, 86). This is equally applicable to Malouf's understanding of being Australian. The image of an eclipse, of the moment two worlds with multiple centres cross, expresses the moment when he says: "thank you, I'll take both" (Malouf 1998, 79). Malouf situates the subject in this movement, the moment of eclipse between the old worlds and the new.

The poem "Sheer Edge" follows the symmetrical movement from coast to civilisation, and back to the coast, with the darkness of this periphery reaching into and undermining the centre.

> Here at the sheer edge
> of a continent dry weed
> clutches, grey gulls turn
> from the sea and gather
> here, precariously
> building their nest (lines 1–6)

The centre of the poem then implodes in on itself downwards and outwards, weakening the aspect of the edge's spatial denomination in the geographical sense, and undermining (literally) the centre/periphery, inside/outside, wild/domestic, and ocean/land binaries. The end of the poem drives this point home. The symmetry of movement from edge to centre, and back to edge has been completed; the edge is transformed from geographical into temporal space, collapsing time and place into one moment of sensory experience. The reader is pulled beyond the edge back into that moment of falling, moving the focus away from the continent of Australia and towards the more universal possibility of transcendence through poetry. Thus, the moment of the fall in this poem counterintuitively combines "touching" with the failure to hold. The moment of touching, of connection, is reached through poetry, but is beyond language.

> and here too at the edge
> of darkness where all floors
> sink to abyss, the lighted
> bar is of light
> the furthest promontory
> and exit sheer fall (lines 7–12)

The "too" (line 7) in stanza two forces the thematic connection between the two stanzas, laying the second visually under the first. The three stanzas explore three levels of perception applied to the same image. Beginning with the observation of the physical environment, this space is romanticised through a moment of the sublime. The observing subject is pulled beyond himself, experiencing a momentary loss of his own subjectivity outside the system of signs. Just as the subject slips off the edge of his own cogito, so does this second stanza bleed into the third thematically. The hope which poetry offers, the "moment of touching" (lines 17–18) is first alluded to in the middle of the third stanza, "here also may flower, / precarious as weed" (lines 15–16). This belated element in the third and final stanza shows the role of the imagination in reconciling the two different perceptions of the scene in stanzas one and two. In an ironic move, however, the imagination's power in this regard is shown to be flawed. The repetitiveness of the structure grounds the reader spatially "here" (lines 1, 5, 7, and 15), while at the same time it questions the solidity of this spatial grounding by noting the "precariousness" hold of the gulls' nest (lines 16–17).

The poem uses several techniques to highlight its own textuality: for instance, the chiastic structure of "the lighted / bar is of light" (lines 9–10), in which it becomes a thing which points only to itself. The inversion of the normal word order in the line "here also may flower" (line 15) prioritises the space "here", showing the piece to be about the nature of the relationship between space and poetry rather than the nature of poetry itself. The poem is structured around the binaries of the near and far, permanency and loss, "here" vs. "furthest" and "edge", and "building" vs. "slide off" (lines 1, 11, 1, 6, 13). The final stanza brings together the elements from the previous two stanzas in both parallelism and simile, the poem being parallel to the nest, as well as likened to it. This weakens the statement which at first appears to affirm the possibility of taking imaginative possession of the continent. The hyperbaton in the final stanza turns the simile into nothing more than a list of nouns which appear no longer dependent on grammatical structures for their meaning. This, combined with the use of the modal verb in the middle of the stanza, "also may flower" (line 15), posits the possibility of the poem bearing meaning outside the structures of language. This possibility, held in the subunctive, echoes the final lines of Eichendorff's "Mondnacht": "Und meine Seele spannte / Weit ihre Flügel aus, / Flog durch die stillen Lande, / Als flöge sie nach Haus" (Eichendorff 1981, 285).

The idea of *maybe* insinuated into the final line of "Sheer Edge" finds stronger expression in the poem "**At Deception Bay**" (RD 103–104). "At Deception Bay" takes up the notion that the text, as the process of creating place, cannot escape its own textuality and that the foothold the subject has on this continent is only ever provisional. The poet's place is not a corner of land made forever into home: it is an endless becoming, punctuated only by a "moment of touching" ("Sheer Edge"). As Martin Leer has pointed out, "Malouf spent his summer holidays as a child at Deception Bay: he grew up surrounded by placenames (Mt. Hopeless, Mt. Despair) which hinted at an inherently deceptive or illusory quality about Australia" (Leer 1985, 9). Leer's comments are echoed in Paul Carter's 1989 discussion with David Malouf on spatial history. Here Carter replies to Malouf's assertion that settlers "come with the English language which they have to impose somehow on a landscape which has never known it" in the eighteenth century (Carter and Malouf 1989, 175). Carter puts forward the more nuanced view that the naming of the landscape shows the semioticising processes to be self-reflectively ironic and provisional:

> There was enormous fluidity in the way language was working at that time. […] The names were provisional, occasional: they were historical events. They defied the attempts of the newcomers to make ready-made places. The names are extra-ordinary: Cape Catastrophe, Mount Dromedary, Lake Disappointment. These are names which have to do with *not* finding places; they allude to the inability of English to impose itself easily, […] it's not simply a blank landscape that's written over, it's something that has to be named *in order to be brought into existence*, but its very naming then reflects on the language which is used. Hence 'mountain' refers to a thing which is not there; 'river' refers to something not there. The names work, but in the course of it they make

> language very ironic: people go to places which don't exist as a result. So you have names like Dry River or Mount Hopeless where what is being said is that, although to all intents and purposes this is a thing we can call a 'river' or a 'mountain', in fact it offers us none of the things that word should imply; the landscape is brought into being as a place where language doesn't work. (Ibid.)

The importance of this comment cannot be overestimated for Malouf's work and its situation in "At Deception Bay". What Carter addresses here is the way that the creation of place through the naming practices in colonial and postcolonial contexts can point to the fissures inherent in these self-same place-making processes. Malouf's poetry expresses exactly this relationship between language and space in Australia.

Even as he writes place, Malouf's writing of the landscape indicates the limits of the language from which it is created. Through his use of re-focussing between the micro and the macro spheres, the poet attempts to write both seascape and subject into a wider cosmic order:

> The sun plenipotentiary
> In Capricorn, bay water
> Jangles its bells. Stunned to a torpor
> On the sour-salt sunstruck surface
> Of noon, ghostly mud-crabs
> Rise to meet their image in the sun, bubbles
> Burst, each one a star, a gaseous world (lines 1–7)

The piece attempts to articulate a sense of transcendence. To this end, the subject is framed in a stanza of sonorous and stately cosmic movement between Capricorn (line 2) and Cancer (line 35). The poem also moves between the lyric "I" (lines 14, 16, 33) and the more inclusive "we" (lines 9, 14, 20, 23, 25), thus generalising the speaker's experience and desires. The crabs in the poem are already part of this order, and the gas bubbles produced by "ghostly mud crabs" (line 5) become synonymous with galactic gasses when "A new start explodes out of the net" (36). "At Deception Bay" is one of Malouf's most self-referential poems, caught in a web of references to other similar poems in his oeuvre. This restricts its ability to write the subject into the cosmic order it portrays, by not transcending its own (inter)textuality on the one hand, and on the other, by invoking other poems which show the impossibility of communion with the central figure of the crab as Other.

"**Deception Bay**" is revisited in Malouf's most recent volume. In this case, the self becomes part of the water as reflection. Yet, this is no permanent triumph, but a moment of suspension as "a boy, in his fist / the pebble that should shatter / all this in an instant […] / a self, then another / lighter, more enlightened /

self in reflection (AOB 19, lines 10-18). The sea here is "incommunicable" (line 22) and the entire occasion for communication already lost in recollection. The final lines of the poems, "Into the Ever / Now of recollection" (lines 29-30) recall Wordsworth's definition of poetry as emotion *recollected in tranquillity*. In Malouf's 2018 volume, the transcendent beyond language slips into the "Ever/ Now of recollection" increasingly. In the earlier piece, "**At Deception Bay**" however, the subject still strives to achieve unity with the ocean and its creatures, in this case, also through the poem's intertextuality. When the "bay water jangles its bells" (line 3), for instance, the poem echoes the "jangling" of the "blue night-music / of the Bay" (lines 1–2) in "Voyages" from the set "**Into the Blue**" (TM 78–81). This creates a connection between these poems and Malouf's music references, such as "An Die Musik" (RD 179).

Seger interprets music in Malouf's work as a symbol of transcendence, which is certainly in keeping with the Romantic concept of an absolute music. It follows, then, that the music of the bay constitutes one of multiple connections between water (most often the ocean) and the absolute. The childhood experiences of drowning and the threat of intrusion posed by the ocean are representative of the threatening power of the sublime: this is addressed briefly in "At Deception Bay", when, in another combination of sea and sky, "cyclones carry / salt into the foreshore gardens, into nail-holes and the nails / go brittle, blacken, snap" (lines 18–19). The "snap" of the nails in the face of this salty onslaught is reminiscent of the sublime moment in "**Aquarius**" when "something in us / snaps, a spring, a nerve" (EH 1, line 8). In contrast, the music of the bay echoes the music which the poet experiences in earthed (garden) surroundings. This music is produced within the social order, becoming part of that "ordinary day-to-day living in a place", which for Malouf offers a richness and depth that poetry should make available (Malouf 1998: 35). This is part of the process of "enriching our consciousness-in both senses of that word: increasing our awareness of what exists around us, making it register on our senses in the most vivid way; but also of taking all that *into* our consciousness and of giving it a second life there so that we possess the world we inhabit imaginatively as well as in fact" (ibid.). The music of the bay is an echo of the absolute in outer space, in water, and in the gardens and houses of Australia, becoming fainter with each reiteration.

When the surface of the bay takes on the aspect of time in the fifth line, becoming the "surface / of noon", it pre-empts the merger of time and space typical of Malouf's poetry. In this instance, however, I would argue that Malouf's use of telescoping does not function in the same way as in other poems explored later. Rather than injecting a sense of a lost wildness into the present, the first stanza of the poem establishes an image of an harmonious universe, of which the crabs are a part. The movement of the crabs and their bubbles echoes the confrontation with the self as Other in the mirror in "Aquarius", and the dissolution of the self in upward galactic movement in "Footloose: A Senior Moment" (EH 8), as well as in various other poems by Malouf. In the stillness of the water's noon, the crabs "meet their image in the sun" (lines 5–6). The mirror motif found in "Windows" (EH 40) and "Aquarius" (EH 1) is taken up and transformed. Where the mirror is associated with darkness in the other poems, here it is characterised as an harmonious part of nature: it mirrors the lightness of sun and afternoon landscape.

The bubbles, like the body, rise to become one with the starts of the poem, whilst containing these stars already within themselves: "bubbles / burst, each one a star, a gaseous world / poured out of the Coalsack" (lines 6–8). This movement is at once away from the darkness of the ocean (the Coalsack darkness), towards the sun, and beyond this to the darkness of the nebula. This reveals the frustrated nature of the speaker's attempts to transcend the self in similar processes. Although the "end is certain" for the crabs (line 31), "A new star explodes out of the net" (line 36), showing their place in the universe to be secured, brilliant, and unified. In contrast, the poet is denied the vertical movement of the crabs, being limited to "sideways steps and / indirections" (lines 23–24) These "indirections" are reflected in the typesetting of the poem, which sets the word "indirections" on its own line, aligned hard right. The otherwise verseless structure of the piece intensifies the insurmountable difference between the cosmic order and the human subject. Unlike the crabs, the subject's life takes "indirections", and is cut off from the cyclical nature of the crabs' relationship to the cosmos in "*their* season" (line 30, my emphasis).

In contrast to the crabs whose stars continually explode, the subject's movement is inward rather than outward. The house pulls the poet back: "we always find our way back" to sites of memory (lines 14–25). The poet cannot achieve what the crabs can, perhaps because, unlike the crabs, his body does not already contain aspects of the cosmos within it. Instead, its every atom suffers change (lines 15–16). Despite their seemingly consumable, ill-fated individual lives, as aspects of the whole presented in this poem, the crabs are eternal. The final lines of the poem, "my long skull falls / balding through centuries. And the ox-bone / shines, singing of space, the pale sun wintering in Cancer. / A new star explodes out of the net" (lines 13–36), imply a certain degree of success in the poet's experience of transcendence. This, however, is undermined by the contrasting characterisation of the sea life here and in other, intertextually related, poems.

One such poem, "**The Catch**" (TM 80), shows that the creatures with which the poet comes into contact "live in the mind as much as in the sea" (Smith

2009, 178). The description of these creatures as “ghosts” (line 3) in “The Catch” implies that any fate shared with the ghostly crabs in “At Deception Bay” is likewise a thing of the imagination. This is in itself not necessarily a limiting factor. Of all Malouf’s sea poems, it is “At Deception Bay” which demonstrates the most positive poetic enactment of transcendence. Nevertheless, the title of the poem stands: “At *Deception* Bay” (my emphasis). When read in the context of the other bay poems, the implication is that the poet’s sense of communion and place within a greater cosmic order created imaginatively in the work is an illusion. In the end, both ocean and word deceive the poet. It is typical of Malouf’s style that each poem is reticulate and multifarious, and in many instances can function as a microcosm of his entire oeuvre.

In Malouf’s childhood poems, water enters as a disturbing and threatening force of nature, and it continues to symbolise death in the poems which take place during the poet’s adult life. In simple terms, water represents a connection, a threatening permeability. Its very nature is contradictory, in that it simultaneously demarcates and permeates, connects, creates, and erases. It is the geographical realities of mountains and coastlines which have given form to Australia’s (sub)urban centres and its identity as an island continent. Water, however, also threatens to dissolve these structures, threatens the life of the individual, and forces a connection between that which is wild and that which is tame. It is a transformative and transcendental force which perfectly encapsulates the dynamic of attraction and revolution of the sublime. This dynamic is a constant presence in Malouf’s treatment of water in this poetry. The following poems explore the dynamic between water and land, and between water and the man-made interiors of Australian suburban life in this context.

The poem “**This Day Under My Hand**” (RD 57–58) negotiates structures of belonging and possession between man-made spaces and the coast. Each site of belonging is questioned and transformed through the poem’s movement from the domestic interior of the speaker’s childhood to the moment at which he instead chooses to be defined by a relationship with the ocean. Far from being a smooth progression, the poem develops out of a series of tensions, ending finally with a return to the interior of the beach house around which the piece initially revolves. Interiors in Malouf’s poems may be divided into two groups: those which are re-explored sites of childhood memory, and those which occur doing adulthood. In this case, the beach house belongs to the first set. As a site of memory, it is expected that the poet’s exploration of this space is a process of self-creation, of exploring his sense of belonging in relation to his roots. However, from the very beginning of the poem, this space is characterised by the poet's non-possession of it, opening with the statement, "Well it was never mine, / not really" (lines 1–2). Instead, the focus quickly turns to the island the house stands on.

> Well it was never mine,
> not really. My father bought it
> in my name to save
> the tax in '45:
> streaked weatherboard, no view
> to speak of, only the sand
> -hills of Moreton Island
> humpbacked and white like whales
>
> […]
>
> Sandcrabs will throw their claws
> In a copper pot, hiss
> red, their agonies
> sealed off under a lid.
> At nine the Scrabble board
>
> […]
>
> The cold Pacific – banging
> an open gate. Australia
> hitched like a water tank
> to the back verandah, all night
> tugging at our sleep. (lines 1–8, 17–21, 28–32)

This movement from interior, to island, and to the intrusion of the sea into this interior space (in the form of sea creatures) constitutes the first set in a chain: First Moreton Island, and then Australia as an island continent surrounded by the ocean which intrudes into "the cracks in iron" in this place (line 39). The image of the island, and in this case the interiors of the house, as fragmented into different "exotic islands", is recalled in "An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton" (line 15, RD 27). There is constant tension caused by the threat of intrusion from the ocean which transforms the spaces it seeps into, and the attempt to facilitate this merger between land, body, and ocean through creative acts of the imagination. These acts of the imagination occur in the second and final stanza of "This Day Under My Hand".

In the second stanza, the children combine sky, water, and the imagination to make the ocean available to them through shadow play, where "small arms spread to conjure / again from moonlight shallows / the old rock-cod they hooked / at dawn out on the reef" (lines 13–16). It is worth noting here that they only *hooked* the cod. The children's attempts to possess the creatures of the ocean are not clearly fulfilled. Rather, the description of the sandcrabs dying a horrible culinary death “sealed off under a lid” (line 20) in the following stanza pre-empts the barriers between the wildness of the natural world, the domestic sphere, and by extension, that which defines the poet.

The Scrabble board indicates another attempt to take semiotic possession of the space. The “small words interlocking / down and across that fill / an evening square by square” (lines 22–24) are set against the attempts of nature into intrude into this space in stanza four. The criss-cross of the Scrabble board itself reflects the net-like structure of Malouf’s own work, in which many poems function as miniatures of his entire oeuvre, offering a subtle comment on his own inability to fulfil his own imperative to “come into full possession of a place […] in the imagination” (Malouf 1998, 39). The fourth stanza contains not only the familiar motif of the water as a wild force of nature threatening to intrude, knocking like “the Tigermoths / at the wirescreen door” (lines 25–26). It is after this stanza that Australia as a nation is no longer the umbrella definer for the poet’s sense of identity, but is made subordinate to the domestic sphere, “hitched like a watertank / to the back verandah” (lines 29–31).

Two things occur at this point in the piece. Australia as a nation is first made unreal by being attached to the verandah, which is itself a liminal non-space. Malouf experienced this first-hand when, as a child, his sleeping place was on the verandah. As an adult he spoke of this place as a threshold, “a verandah is not part of the house. Even a child knows this […] Each morning I step across the threshold and there it is, a world recovered, restored” (Malouf 1999, 20). Then Australia becomes a secondary, unreal point of identification which attempts to draw the poet back into the realm of the mundane and finite, when he could be experiencing a connection with the wild in the form of the ocean in his sleep (as in other ocean poems), or in a process of letting go, as in the first lines of the final stanza in “Sheer Edge”: “Now let it go, my foothold / on a continent!” (lines 41–42). As was prefigured by the Scrabble game in stanza three, the poet fails to take literary and imaginary possession of Australia. Instead, the continent fades away into insignificance, and the act of writing as possession is addressed in relation to the raw powers of nature itself, in the form of the ocean.

The poet’s break with the continent is directly followed by the act of signing his name, a name that then “blooms elsewhere / as salt, gull’s cry, bruised flesh / of the reef that gasps and thrashes / its life out in our hands” (lines 43–44). The “gull’s cry” (line 44) looks back to “Sheer Edge” and the gulls’ precarious hold on the continent:

> Now let it go, my foothold
> on a continent! – I sign
> my name, it blooms elsewhere
> as salt, grey gull's cry, bruised flesh
> of the reef that gasps and thrashes
> its life out in our hands (lines 41–46)

The poet can sign his name, but his hold on the country will only ever be provisional. Space is imbued with human meaning through social practice, including writing. It is transformed into place through the sign, and if the sign itself is only ever arbitrary, then so too is the human meaning which transforms space into place. The very language (poetry) which Malouf views as part of the process of the enculturation of Australia into a place of belonging for its European settlers (cf. Malouf 1998) is that which defines our foothold on this continent as never more than provisional. Where the writing of a name could mark an act of taking possession, the signing of it implies agreement. It is also worth noting that "to sign" (line 42) draws attention to the name as a sign and only a sign, thus exposing the emptiness of the semiotic system. The name is able to break free from the semiotic system entirely and become embodied in nature. Yet, it is not long before the attempt to unify the poet's self with nature, to commune with nature, is revealed to be caught up in the destructive relationship of possessor and possessed, hunter and prey.

Finally, it is the reef, the interior of the bay, which is embodied as "bruised flesh" that "gasps and thrashes / its life out in our hands" (lines 44–46), and even the bay hisses like the sandcrabs of the third stanza, as "their claws / in a copper pot, hiss / red, their agonies / sealed off under a lid" (lines 17–20). This tension between a desire for belonging (which the signing of the poet's name in the salt of the seas expresses), and the destructive nature of possession, is also an important element here in "This Day Under My Hand"; it is also present in "The Crab Feast", and in "An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton", where "the Pacific/breaks at our table" (lines 8–9). This relationship is symptomatic of the (post)colonial relationship with the land which Malouf is not able to resolve; or rather, is only able to momentarily resolve in experiences of transcendence which are not grounded in the land, but in the ocean.

Malouf's water poems paint the nation as a slippery subject. Even as the poet seeks transcendence through the act of place-making it eludes him, allowing only a loose foothold at the edge between land and deceptive waters. Yet the water offers other possibilities. In the following pieces, the subject attempts to transcend the self and reach for unmediated unity with the animal Other through an act of communion. In keeping with the quotidian sacred, this communion is manifest in what might be Australia's most beloved past time: eating.

Communing with the Animal Other

"In the Sea's Giving"; "The Crab Feast"; "Pentecostal"

The three pieces read in detail here continue to address the possibility of possessing place through language and the imagination, with the additional possibility of the body offering a way to overcome the separation caused by language. Malouf characterises the ocean as simultaneously Other and familiar. It is the absolute, existent beyond speech, which the subject desires. Corporeality, like language, offers both the possibility of communion with the animal Other (most notably the crab in the water poems) and limits the subject's ability to experience unity with the animal Other this side of the grave. Importantly, the destructive nature of this hunger for (colonial) possession is never far from sight in these poems.

"**In the Sea's Giving**" (P 148–149) combines the different elements which come together in the ocean as a site of Malouf's attempts to achieve an experience of transcendence.

> A world so close that was not
> Ours. Though we could swim,
> My sister and I,
> before we could walk (lines 1–4)

From the outset, the first stanza expresses the Otherness of the water simultaneously with the subject's affinity with it. Although ocean is described a "world so close that was not / ours" (lines 1–2), the subjects of the poem were able to enter this world and swim in it before they could walk. This implies an affinity with the water that runs deeper than that with the earth. The children's affinity with the ocean recalls the universal pre-linguistic state of the baby in utero. From a less Freudian angle, the ocean is also a symbol of connection, as it both defines the outlines of the continent and connects it with the rest of the world. This being the case, the children are situated between their desire to return to this world, and their realisation that "it was not our element" (line 5).

Malouf heightens this feeling of Otherness by expressing it in terms of non-possession. In a dry side-reference to Mathew 5:5,[1] the ocean is characterised as the "two thirds of a planet / we'd not inherited" (lines 8–9). The two-thirds to one-third division also places the "we" in the wider context of humanity, rather than the specifically Australian subject. By placing a central value on Australia as an island, Malouf explores how water offers the gift of a new way of inhabiting Australia in the imagination, whilst at the same time denying the subject the possession of the continent, this being that part of the planet that man did not inherit.

The third stanza continues the pattern of connecting the ocean with dream states, with the animal Other and with something deeper and darker "than daylight could fathom" (lines 10–11). Stanzas three to five are of particular interest because they consider the difficulty of connecting with the other world and its animal inhabitants imaginatively. If we view dreams as being symbolic of the poet's genius (e.g. the imagination rather than fancy, in the sense of Coleridge), then the failure of the children to "make friends / with its creatures" even "in dream" (lines 11–13), is also a failure to successfully create a unified whole through a process of the imagination. The ocean is often associated with dream states and the unconscious, perhaps due to the poet's bodily rather than linguistic experience of it. In "The Crab Feast" examined next, for instance, the poet characterises the ocean as a dream which he is open to receiving: "The back of my head / was open to dream / dark your [the crab's] body moves in" (RD 112, lines 78–80). The attempts of the two subjects in "In the Sea's Giving" to actively form an integrative image of the oceanic dream world with their daily lives is shown to be futile:

> Cuttlefish
> could not be reconciled
> to their birdcage bones, seahorses
> were fabulous strangers,
>
> more fabulous because,
> unlike the beasts of air
> and earth, all our wishing
> could not make pets
> of them […] (lines 13–21)

They cannot reconcile their corporeality with the medium of the ocean; but the poem shows more than a thematic interest in unifying these areas. The lines, the "Cuttlefish / could not be reconciled / to their birdcage bones" (lines 13–15) make it clear that the protagonists actively attempt to reconcile these two aspects, here represented by the cuttlefish of the ocean, and the empty cuttlefish shells common on the beaches of Australia, which are used as "birdcage bones" for their domesticated aerial cousins.

The failure of the imagination to unify the swimmers with the animal Others in "In the Sea's Giving" is highlighted further in the seventh stanza, which mentions "These others / melted in our heads" (lines 25–26), whose image cannot be maintained in the imagination once "Hauled out into the sun" (line 27) and the humdrum world of the poet. The wildness of these animals is contrasted with the tamed suburban versions of these oceanic representatives of wildness, and wildness lost: "tabbycats / in butter boxes" and "Willywagtails / tempted with rainbow cakecrumbs" (lines 21–24). Through their description as "beasts of air / and earth" (lines 18–19), the domesticated animals are differentiated from the wild, not only in kind, but also in environment. This allows the sea creatures to continue to function as a symbol of pure wildness even when repositioned in an urban or suburban setting, as in "The Carp" (P 33) and "The Crab Feast" (RD 109–118).

Just as Malouf writes animals in a suburban and domestic context, the animals here serve as a reminder of what humanity once had and has now lost. This loss is not an assertion, but rather a question which leaves the reader to search for the answer: "How then did we manage / to live with it? What / had we traded to be safe?" ("In the Sea's Giving", lines 32–34).

> What
> had we traded to be safe?
> Past midnight, sealed off
> In the bronze bell of the moon,
>
> We plunged over the sea ledge seeking
> Answers, climbed back
> At dawn wearing our magic
> Skin – only later
>
> Found what we had lost (lines 33–41)

That which has been lost takes on a dual temporal and spatial character in lines such as "past midnight" (line 35) and "on the shores of an ice-blue earlier / kingdom" (lines 46–47). The two questions look in both directions: to the loss, but also to the result of this loss. The first question, hanging between stanzas eight and nine, places the search for the transcendent at the centre of the human condition, rather than characterising it as an optional extra. The question is not What else is out there? but "How then did we manage / to live with it?" (line 32), the "it" being the loss of the absolute and wild. When the subjects of the poem do find it "only later" (line 40), it is not in a fleeting experience of the ocean, but in the dissolution of the self as ocean. The "ghosts, fishlike, transparent" which float out of the subjects in a "flush of warm salt", "light" the flesh from the inside, while the ocean creates a "magic skin" (lines 39–44). The skin of the body remains a transitionary space. It is only in the renewed loss (the sloughing off of the water as they return to the shore) in the face of the "sunshine and death" (line 48) of daily life that reflection is made possible, through the linguistic system. It is only in this moment of reflection that the subjects of the poem realise what it is that they have lost. And there is the bind: this knowledge requires reflection, and can thus only be attained in the negative, as an understanding of what is absent.

Whilst "At Deception Bay" reflects the limits of the imagination, the other crab poems – namely "The Crab Feast" (RD 109–118), "Into the Blue" (78–81), and "Pentecostal" (RD 10) – explore the subject's desire for communion with the animal Other. To put this in more Romantic terms, these are the attempts of the subject to transcend *I* and gain experience of the *Thou*. This necessarily involves the transformation, even dissolution, of the self. Malouf's gestures to Ariel's song from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in "At Deception Bay" (RD 103–104), and again in "The Crab Feast" (RD 109–118), tie in with the thematic focus of a merger between the subject and its oceanic Other:

> Full fathom five thy father lies.
> Of his bones are coral made;
> Those are pearls that were his eyes;
> Nothing of him that doth fade
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange
> – Ariel's song, *The Tempest* Act I, Scene ii (Shakespeare and Dyce 1868, 17)

Mark Byron also notes this allusion to Ariel's Song in *Remembering Babylon*, in which the "correspondence between human child and marine creature is counter-balanced by gestures toward the spirit world: the crabs and Gemmy's 'ghostly' visage" (Byron 2005, 80). Malouf elevates the humble crab to the most common symbol of the animal Other, namely the Other as crustacean. In these poems, the poet attempts to overcome the binary human/animal paradigm in his search for communion with the animal Other. He remains, however, bound by the hunter–hunted relationship. This relationship "would seem to work against any notion of a surrender of control by a dominant human species" (Smith 2009, 167). The ambivalence of the hunter–prey relationship in the context of the poet's attempts at a communion with the animal Other echoes the title of "At Deception Bay". Yvonne Smith has also noted that "this ambivalence, often troubled by an awareness of the writer's capacity for both creativity and deception is figured and re-figured in several of [Malouf's] works" (ibid.).

One of the few Malouf poems to have been honoured with repeated academic attention, "**The Crab Feast**" is at once a multi-part epic and intimately personal. "The Crab Feast" utilises the power of the personal pronoun to affect the reader's perspective in a way which imitates the speaker's own attempts to cross the line between the human and the animal. The direct address of the opening section opens up the possibility of a dual perspective, whereby the reader can identify with the lyric I and, at the same time, assume the position of the addressee. The sensuality of the opening section adds the aura of a love poem. Looking back to the connection with *The Book of Beasts*, Yvonne Smith notes that "The crab in the bestiary is a cunning hunter who, the reader learns, enjoys a feast and uses stealth to keep the oyster's shell open by inserting a pebble as it relaxes in the sun 'pleasuring its internal organs in the free air' " (ibid., 175).

> He is very fond of oysters and likes to get himself a banquet of their flesh. But, although eager for dinner, he understands the danger, some the pursuit is as difficult as it is hazardous. It is difficult because the inner flesh of the oyster is contained within very strong shells, as if Nature [sic] its maker has by her imperial command fortified the soft part of the body with walls. (*The Book of Beasts:* Cambridge University Library 1984, 210)

This further blurs the line between the crab and the speaker in Malouf's poem, as here it is the speaker rather than the crab who feasts, and whose words imply a "pleasuring" of the crab's "internal organs".

In addition to the similarity between the poet and crab, the personal pronouns in the piece form an I/you/we constellation which blurs the line further between poet, crab, and reader. The use of the collective first-person catapults what has been a confusion between "you" (as both the crab and perhaps the reader) into a further confusion between "we" (as the crab/hunter relationship) and the relationship of the collective human "we" to the animal Other. At the beginning of section two, the focus is still largely on the "we" of the speaker and the crab, as one of the "variant selves" expressed as "Doulton claws" (lines 26, 31). By section three, however, the "we" can no longer refer to the crab, as the crab has no need for the "the breaths / we draw between cries" (lines 62–63). The collective pronoun puts the hunt into a universal perspective of the human relationship to the animal. Rather, the speaker places himself and his hunt within the universal human relationship with the animal Other as a *fixed* framework; "fixed terms in what is celebrated, / the spaces in the net" (lines 64–65). The use of the passive mode is telling here: he lets go of all agency. In its use of the plural first-person address, the poem hovers between the personal and the general throughout.

Despite the rich descriptive language, the extensive use of the present tense lends the piece a personal immediacy. It is this plain speech to which the speaker returns for the final sentences of the piece, and in exaggerated form through the shortness of the final lines "I am ready. / Begin" (lines 255–256). The poem oscillates between the present and past tenses, anticipating the temporal confusion of the final lines. The effect is two-fold. It makes the experience of the speaker universal and timeless, inviting a metaphoric reading; but it also shows that poetry is limited to transmitting this experience always and only after the fact. The immediacy of experience conjured up through his use of the present tense and direct address is shown to be a mirage. Thus, the piece reflects on its own fallibility.

In section II, stanza four, there is the first evidence of zeugma, when the speaker's desire, "I wanted" (line 37) refers to multiple parts of the sentence. In this stanza, the crab is defined corporally: "raw poundage" (lines 37–38); spatially: "on my palm, on my tongue" (line 41); and in manner: "in defiance of breathlessness / and verbal charms" (lines 39–40). Each of these aspects reflects on the role of language in creating the crab imaginatively. The "raw poundage" on the speaker's "tongue" echoes the "raw words" of those new to speech in "Wolf Boy" (P 27, line 9). It also deconstructs the body of the crab into mere matter, without form until located on the tongue of the speaker; thus it becomes a double metaphor for the act of consumption and the speech act of the imagination.

When the poet speaks of the crab as "raw poundage" (line 37), the line length exceeds the confines of the structure established in the poem until that point. This enacts the speaker's desire to move beyond language itself, an interpretation supported by the call to possess the crab's "defiance" of "the power of verbal charms" (lines 39–40). In section IV, stanza one, the act of feeding ties the act of eating to the speaker's attempts to unify with the crab, while the use of the death trope and the plural "small mouths" (line 75) after "everything" (line 74) provide a less personal context for this desire for unity. Section VI, stanza four draws attention to the uncertainty of who dies through this process: "I crossed the limits / into alien territory. One of us / will die of this, I told myself; and one of us / did. The other / swam off to lick warm stones and sulk with clouds along a shoreline" (lines 139–144). This uncertainty is echoed in the irregular line lengths, which cause a pause in rhythm before the affirmative "and one of us did" (line 142), and after "the other" (line 142); before the following lines explain what happened to the survivor.

Section IIX, stanza eight repeats and extends the line "because you are so open" (line 76) to "Because you are so open. Because you are" (line 198). The repetition here highlights the importance of the openness of the crab, in which that which is inside is laid bare in readiness to be shared, in readiness for a connection. The same standalone line which functions as the eighth stanza of section XII prefigures the final lines of the entire piece: "you lie open before me/Begin" (line 256). The lines in section X, "But words made you / a fact in my head. You were / myself in another species, brute / blue, a bolt of lightning, maybe God" (lines 244–247), show the power of the poetic imagination to create the crab in speech. The “but” which introduces line 244 negates the drawn-out description up to that point, which describes the speaker as a part of a pure landscape of “water / poised above water” that is “never to be weighted” (lines 234–241). The potential to poetise their relationship and communicate through language is shown to be, at the same time, that which limits the speaker in his attempts to become a part of that nature. The poet attempts the Romantic philosophical act of a killing of the self,[2] by escaping the bounds of the reflexive self.

“The Crab Feast” opens with a series of assertions of unity between the poet and the crab, from the triumphant opening statement “There is no getting closer / than this” and “I know / now all your secrets” through to “when the shell / cracked there was nothing / between us” (1–8). All this has been made possible (or so it would initially appear) through the moment when the poet’s “tongue slips into / the furthest, sweetest corner” of the crab (lines 1–4). Initially, the tongue (which holds the dual function of speech and taste) is what allows the poet to enter into a state of unity with the larger system of nature already laid out in “At Deception Bay”: moonlight, ocean, galactic gas bubbles. The crab is the embodiment of nature itself. It is “moonlight / transformed into flesh” (“The Crab Feast”, lines 8–9). Thus, the consumption of the crab places the poet in direct communication with nature. In the final line of the first section, however, this communication breaks down into mere mimicry.

The poet mimics the ocean with his own body, making a “new habitat under the coral / reef of [his] ribs” (lines 22–24). The clear boundaries of internal and external (the crab contained within the body), self and Other, are not truly dissolved. Upon re-examination, the triumphant unity with which the poem opens, in which man and animal are open to each other in a sensual union, is undercut by its relation to the wider context of human nature. The magic of moonlight, a highly Romantic symbol of transcendent wildness, is paired with the refuse of mankind. The human/animal divide, which the speaker seeks to overcome through the act of consumption, is already shown to be nonsensical in these initial stanzas. The flesh which the speaker desires is already made of moonlight and sewage. The piece shows the paradoxical situation of a speaker who is incapable of achieving transcendence through union with the animal Other except through the text; while in the background, that which the speaker desires to consume is shown to already be the product of various acts of consumption and processing through the human body. In the consumption of the animal, the human consumes his own refuse. The “moon’s ashes” captures the destructive nature of this relationship in one apocalyptic image (lines 12–13).

The second section reiterates the connection between the crab and languageless knowledge. This time, however, it is expressed as desire rather than success: “I wanted the whole of you, raw / poundage / in defiance of breathlessness / or the power of verbal charms, / on my palm, on my tongue” (lines 37–41). The desire expressed in the second section stems from the poet’s experience of the self as multiple, and importantly, situated in nature and made visible to the poet through nature as mirror: “Noon that blinding glass did not reveal us / as we were. It cast up variant selves / more real than / reflections” (lines 25–28). These revelations of the self provide the poet with another quality of view, one that looks beyond the literal. The “glass” of the ocean was “blinding” (line 25). In going against its original function and obscuring sight, the mirror does not “reveal us as we were” (lines 25–26) but opens up the poet’s eyes to a higher truth, the familial relationship between the wild and the self.

It is this changed quality with which the poet views the world that occupies the third section, through the use of further reflection imagery: “waterbirds whose / one thin leg props up clouds” (lines 45–46). This section also draws attention to the way that a poem is not simply a reflection of what is seen, but constructs viewpoints:“.. then the perspectives: / matchwood pier, a brackish estuary / that flows on into / the sun, a tip of light over the dunes. / I enter” (lines 50–54). It is with this changed quality of view that the poet is willing to give himself over to nature, equally as hunter and one who will die. The hunter now hunts for knowledge of the connection between the self and the animal Other, as expressed through the use of the first-person plural: “I hunted you / like a favourite colour, / indigo, to learn / how changeable we are, what rainbows / we harbour within us / and how I should die” (lines 80–85, my emphasis). As the hunt continues in section V, it becomes a universal hunt through Malouf’s use of telescoping his poem out of the near present to “a distance of centuries” (lines 93–94).

The poet describes the crab as “myself in another species” (line 246). This familiarity, however, is not comforting, but leads to the sublime shock of understanding the Other as the self. This shock is expressed as a realisation of transcendence in the final section through the characterisation of the crab as the self “in another species, brute / blue, a bolt of lightning, maybe God” (lines 246–247). There are several moments of the sublime leading up to this final realisation. The confrontation with the openness of the dissected crab is described as a “sort of power / that kills us, for whom moonlight, the concept blue, is intolerably complex as / our cells are, each an open universe / expanding beyond us, the tug / of immortality. / We shall reach it and still die” (lines 180–187). The image of the body’s cells expanding towards immorality and death (blue is associated with death both here and in “Ode One”, RD 181–183) is reminiscent of the feeling of the self dissolving in the awesome face of nature, in the classic Kantian sense of the sublime. Ultimately, though, this experience does not last. Instead, the moments of the sublime in this piece are later shown to simply mimic the backwards/forwards dance of the hunt, swinging between affirmation and limitation, and increasingly so towards the end of the piece.

In the final stanzas of section IX, for instance, there is a sublime moment in which the crab dislodges the poet's consciousness to the point where the poet's self is lost: "you blaze in my thoughts. Displacing more / than your own weight, making less / disturbance than the unusual disturbance you plunge and take me with you. I go out / in silence" (lines 217–222). The gravity of this moment, when the self finally transcends itself in unity with the ocean, is undermined by the absurdity of the situation. It is at exactly this transcendent moment that Malouf inserts the image of the poet sitting in a restaurant: "I go out / in silence, in full view / of waiters, having learned / this much at least; to die true / to my kind – upright, smiling – / and like you, beyond speech" (lines 221–226). This is the only use of an urban space in the entire poem; and the contrast it contains between the language of honour (lines 224–225), the hovering waiters, and the poet straight-backed in his chair in the throes of ecstasy normally reserved for food critics, is a classic case of Malouf's use of bathos.

The use of the (sub)urban setting here is ironic in the Romantic sense. It distances the reader from that which, until that point, had been an experience of the closeness and magic of the hunt. It is from this point onwards that the poem reflects on its own role in the characterisation of the crab. In the final section, the simple statement "But words made you a fact in my head" (lines 244–245) reveals the entire narrative until that point to have been exactly that – an act of the imagination only expressible from within the linguistic system, a translation of the transcendent.

Yvonne Smith holds a surprisingly positive view of the final state of the poet's relationship to the crab:

> The simple statements that conclude the poem contrast with the subtle and complex images that have gone before as the crab is placed in a wide frame of reference that touches on the mythical, astronomical, scientific and autobiographical. However, the 'gift' of this rich array of associations casts a deep shadow over the actual creature. The speaker must accept that the crab lives in its own order of knowledge, co-existent with his life, and it is this recognition, sustained as belief, that redresses the imbalance so that 'the weights are equal' (Part X). Now that speaker, intent of imagining this improbable match of power, is "open" and "ready" to be broken and eaten in a 'love feast'. (Smith 2009, 176–177)

This, however, ignores the structure of the poem, which reflects on its own erroneous assertions of success. The final stanzas break down into ever smaller sentences that move in jolts towards their own contradiction.

Now all has been made plain
between us, the weights are equal, though the sky
tilts, and the sun

with a splash I do not hear breaks into
the dark. We are one at last. Assembled here
out of earth, water, air

to a love feast. You lie open
before me. I am ready.
Begin. (lines 248–256)

The passage from "we are one at last" (line 252) and "You lie open / before me" (lines 254–255), until the final line, "I am ready to begin", reveals the entire narrative to have been constructed, rather than remembered or directly experienced. The state of being "open" for the "love feast" of (un)equals is shown to be provisional and deferred. To say "begin" implies that which has not yet begun. Water as a source of food is not incidental. The act of eating denotes an attempt to become one with nature in a very physical way. In nearly every poem in which eating (as opposed to drinking) occurs, the food is highly symbolic, being either forbidden fruit or, as seen above, seafood in the majority of cases. In this aspect, water occupies a liminal position between being life-sustaining (at times eroticised) and a site of death – be it for crab or poet.

In the larger context of Malouf's work, the desire to bridge the animal/human divide has its background in his desire to transcend the self. One of his strategies is communion with the animal Other. My use of the term "communion" in this context is not only a nod to the Romantics,[3] but also flows from the poems themselves. It establishes a Christian blueprint for the process Malouf is emulating in his crab poems, specifically that of the spiritual connection with Christ established through the symbolic consumption (assuming a Protestant rather than a Catholic practice) of his flesh and blood during Communion. This Christian symbolism is recalled in the title of "**Pentecostal**" (RD 10), and at once invoked and satirised.

Lit scales in the grass, in a dented pail soft guts
that spill their lost light thin as the Pleiades.
Mullet, whiting, bream – the terror of Fridays
Their names, their boneless ghosts, lodged in my throat.
[…] Gelatinous thick
Tongues in a shell too far from the sea, they thunder
Te Deums to table-salt, writhe in the anguished
Hiss of deliquescence. I make myself small,
then smaller; approach the vanishing point; surrender

> breath then blood to hear from the wet sizzle
> of flesh made dung, scoured shell, sucked bone, the clear
> death-aria in my throat, the voice of the word
> -less creature in us that rages against hook,
> Against withering salt, against frying pan and fire (lines 1–4, 9–18)

By initially defining the sea creatures as "the terror of Fridays" (line 3), the poem recalls the Christian tradition of eating fish on Friday from the perspective of those children unfortunate enough to have had to consume this fish. The reference to Friday's fish forms a point of contrast to the rest of the piece. Firstly, it is a satirical element which contrasts with the poet's earnest attempts to achieve unity with the sea creatures through the dissolution of the self, in lines such as "I make myself small, / then smaller; approach the vanishing point" (lines 12–13) and in physical surrender in lines such as "surrender / breath then blood" (lines 13–14). Secondly, fish is traditionally eaten on Fridays because it is a fasting food. This stands in contrast to the exorbitantly detailed and luscious description of eating and food in lines 9–12 and 12–16.

The sea creatures in the bucket are a visceral and imminent take on the tongues of flame in Acts 2:3,[4] as "Gelatinous thick / tongues" (lines 9–10), as well as Jesus as the Word made flesh in "the wet sizzle / of flesh made dung" (lines 14–15). On the one hand, these instances may be read as sardonic references to the Romantic concept of communion. Yet within this, there is also a more positive association with Romanticism. This is a rejection of the two-world approach to transcendence, in which the transcendent merely connects with the imminent on a vertical axis. Instead, Malouf explores the possibilities of Novalis's single world model in which the transcendent is already in the imminent, the difference between them being qualitative rather than spatial.

The use of this single world model of the transcendent within the imminent in an Australian context is not limited to Malouf's work. Bill Ashcroft, Frances Devlin-Glass, and Lyn McCredden have posited the development of the sacred in Australia as an earthed, embodied, and often mundane presence-experience of the sacred. Bill Ashcroft argues that the Australian sacred has developed out of a specifically Australian understanding of the sublime which developed in the nineteenth century (Ashcroft et al. 2009, 5).[5] Ashcroft views the Australian sublime to be related, but in some ways opposite, to that of the European Romantic tradition. For him, the Romantic sublime is "vertical and temporal", based as it is on Kant's images of mountains and gorges, whereas the Australian sublime is "horizontal and spatial" (Ashcroft et al. 4). When stripping back the preferred illustrative images of each, however, both the so-called Australian sublime and the sublime of European Romanticism reveal the same core concept in each case: an excess at the limits of representation.[6]

With the post-war generation of poets, including White and Webb, this idea of the sublime, which "astonishes by tracing the edge of all form where *no-thing* appears" moves away from the expanse of the horizon and into "the proximate details of everyday life – objects and relations observed beyond the possible entrapment of language, […] objects whose luminosity defies explanation" (Ashcroft et al. 2009, 10, 12, emphasis in original). In this way, the Australian sublime develops into a concept of the sacred in the "intimate and proximate presence of material things, which in their own way intimate the unpresentable – the sacred possibilities – in their very presence" (ibid., 12). The materiality of this sacred in the works of Australian poets since the second half of the twentieth century has created "moments of aesthetic presence in which the sacred is glimpsed outside structures of interpretation" (ibid., 18). The concept of *presence*[7] sees this material and proximate sacred as a rejection of a hermeneutic, rather than the embodied relationship with the world that the Enlightenment brought (ibid.). Bill Ashcroft states that in Malouf's work, "it is this presence, a presence that exists beyond language, and indeed beyond interpretation, perhaps even beyond memory, that poetry seeks" (Ashcroft 2014, 5).

Both this rejection of a purely hermeneutic relationship to the world, and the desire to find the sacred in the material everyday world, play key roles in early Romanticism's rejection of Cartesian mind/body dualism. The Romantic view involved in the Australian experience of a proximate sacred shines through implicitly in the way academics such as David Tacey have approached it in the twentieth century. Tacey, for instance, writes of poetry as a carrier of a "mythopoetic mode of perception in secular times", noting how in landscape poetry, authors "do not merely describe or represent the land, they *participate* in it" in an attempt to undermine the self/Other divide (Tacey 1995, 162). Tacey's comments, however, lack the reflection on the difficulties involved in bridging this divide which are so central to Romantic irony, as well as to Watson's and Malouf's work. As Ashcroft writes, "in Malouf's writing, we get the sense that while poetry provides supreme access to presence, it is available to all of us in our everyday lives, one of the dimensions of consciousness that poetry in its 'love for what is out of reach' makes more accessible" (Ashcroft 2014, 5). *More*, is of course relative, and it is this aspect in which irony finds potential (ibid.)

Natalie Seger picks up on this structure of the immanent sacred in her essay "Imagining Transcendence: The Poetry of David Malouf":

> Malouf's exploration of the distance between the self and the other is complicated by a sense of paradox that plays throughout his work: a negotiation of wholeness, which is figured positively, and the more negative idea of fusion, the celebrated status of the creative individual, as opposed to one which is displaced from the community. This contradiction is a problem addressed by Levinas, who, as Blanchot explains, was the first to look closely at the 'strange structure' of 'transcendence within immanence'. (Seger 2005, 147)

Nevertheless, there is very little evidence to support the idea that fusion is a negative concept per se in Malouf's poetic work. Rather, poems such as "The Crab Feast" demonstrate how this ideal can highlight uneven power-relations. The issue of transcendence in immanence was already a central concern of Novalis, and Malouf's poetry reflects the poet's attempt to find transcendence in the immanence of the crab (and in general, in the artefacts of daily life) through an act of the imagination. The paradox of the self–Other relationship is exposed through ironic reflection.

The tension between communion and fusion in "Pentecostal" is expressed in the act of eating. James Tulip clearly explains the difference between the two concepts in the following:

> It tells of what eating means, what flesh means, what the crab is in relation to man and man in relation to the crab, and how these two states of nature are bound together but only known to be so by a sacrament or sacrifice that lets us penetrate physically and sensuously and imaginatively into the otherness of the animal and into us. There is a discovery – or should we say rediscovery – of the meal as a sacramental moment in this poem. (Tulip 1981, 396)

It is this understanding of communion with which Malouf engages when the speaker eats sea food in his crab poems. Although the focus is often on eating, particularly in "The Crab Feast", Malouf's writing fuses elements in a way that creates the illusion of a connection with the animal Other. In "Stars" (TM 79) from the set "Into the Blue", the sea creatures' habitat is characterised as "further out than thought could reach" (line 5), a description which is in keeping with the ocean itself as the stuff of dreams, or "galaxies" in "At Deception Bay" (line 3, RD 103). In "Rockpools" (from "Into the Blue"), however, their habitat is made of materials and forms from the poet's familiar urban and domestic spaces: "glass", "skirts", "tango", "distant rooms", and finally, "red velvet mouths" (lines 1–5). By blending these materials in the description of the animal Other, Malouf is able to bring the two worlds – the transcendent world of the ocean and the galaxy, and that of (sub)urban Australia – together. To a certain extent, this mitigates the "shock" felt at the realisation of a "family likeness" between the poet and the animal Other (lines

7–8). This "shock" may be understood as a moment of sublime shock, as the self sees itself in the Other.

The dual lens of otherness and likeness is common to Malouf's animal poems. The Otherness of the animal is highlighted by the use of the hunter/hunted food/consumer relationship. The familial likeness occurs through the identification of an animal-self within the human. In the case of man-made objects taking on animal form, such as in "Typewriter Music" (TM 12) or "Bicycle" (RD 67), both possibilities coexist. This dynamic between the familiar and the Other, in which they exist simultaneously or follow each other within the same poem, makes it difficult to view them as two poles. Instead they take on a qualitative aspect which is neatly summarised in the section "Stars" from the same collection "Into the Blue" (TM 79): "it / took us / out and further out than thought could reach. / First apprehension / of distance: the far, the near" (lines 3–7). The characterisation of distances as objects transforms description, the mimetic functions of language, into a creative function of language which creates concepts rather than represents them.

Voice and language are key in understanding the familial relationship between the animal Other and the self in "Pentecostal". Through his consumption of the seafood, the poet internalises not only their flesh, but also the voice of the animal Other, as their "death-aria" sings in the throat of the poet (line 16). It is in the line following, that "the voice of the word / -less creature" is situated "in us" (lines 16–17). The use of the plural form here suggests that the voice of the animal Other is the same as that of humanity's animal self which likewise "rages against hook, / against withering salt, against frying-pan and fire" (lines 17–18). The animal Other in the crab poems forms an interesting intersection between language, otherness, and body. In order to connect to them, the poet is obliged to fall back on bodily experience rather than linguistics. The connection between body and language is shown in the way the sea creatures themselves become "Gelatinous thick / tongue" (lines 9–10), symbolically becoming language. This is a language shared by nature in general (see for instance "Cuisine"), and it is the language of taste.

Water: Closing Remarks

The ocean connects and delineates, bearing a Schlegelian fluidity that makes it the perfect vehicle for exploring the tensions between two ways of being in Australia. This is the double lens throughout Malouf's work: namely, the metaphysical and the specifically Australian issues he addresses in his critical work (the language/landscape divide, making place in Australia). These two are connected here, as they were in Romanticism. The metaphysical in these poems is an integral part of sense-making in the world, in an earnest attempt to deal with the issues of the day; then as now. Whether writing the continent or the ocean, in each case, language is posited as both a method of approaching unity, and as its limiting factor. Schlegelian irony turns this backwards and forwards into a productive force. Malouf's ocean poems elicit a re-thinking of categories such as time, space, the human, the animal, and the nature of the sacred (something which he expands on in his body poems).

By pointing to the fundamentally deceptive nature of such categories, the poet calls into question the hierarchies implicit in the desire to possess the land and the animal Other, thus revealing the deceptive nature of place-making processes both under colonialism and today. Malouf uses water rather than land as a new approach to nation-making processes. Whereas land and nature (usually land-plants and river systems) have been important in the nation-making processes of the US, Malouf offers water as an alternative: his nation, like his subject, is hybrid, fluid, in a flux state between isolation and global connections. Water gave Australia the form that the English gave it and its unique settler identity, but it also shows us the extent of our own limitations.

The ocean is like the Romantic subject in that it defines what is (i.e. the continent as Australia, or the "continent" of our own consciousness) and indicates that which is not (absolute unity, a truly indigenous relationship to the land), thus proffering a connection of which the human cannot take full advantage. This is why the edges of the land are so important: they represent the edges of the mind. The sea's pervasiveness is as pervasive as the infinite that can enter the land and seep under the floorboards of that more finite place, the Australian suburb. The ocean's intrusion into the domestic sphere serves the dual purpose of undermining a colonial way of being in Australia – the parcelling out of small patches of land to be owned, and mowed; a suburban dream of English gardens and civilised society – and of showing the reader another way of belonging, which is a communion with the Other: always sought, never reached, but ever in becoming.

Interiors

Malouf's interior poems approach the writing of the subject into place through its deconstruction, creating room for new ways of being in place. This occurs directly or via the intrusion of the fantastic into the domestic sphere. Here, the interiors are rendered uncanny as they merge with the ocean, the body, or the wildness of the animal Other. The deconstruction and reconstruction of place in these poems raises the possibility of rewriting colonial patterns of living into one which is defined by an endless creative process. The final poems addressed in this section describe interior spaces quite differently to the other pieces examined here. Rather than deconstructing interiors spaces, the poems "Bicycle" and "Typewriter Music" evoke the godhead in mechanical form. They form a continuation of the play between the mundane and the transcendent explored in Malouf's suburban settings.

Fragments of the Social Self

"This Day Under My Hand"; "An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton"

I now return briefly to two poems already mentioned: "This Day Under My Hand" and "An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton". In these pieces, the house walls dissolve as the outside creeps in. However, I argue against Leer's assessment that the self/Other divide is overcome through the imagination in Malouf's writing. Rather, the interior loses its ability to create a cohesive, at times colonially influenced, social order. This life and place made inside is endlessly fragmented rather than dissolved in a way that might allow a transcendence of the self.

True to its nature, water refuses to remain in its own designated site, but seeps into many of Malouf's other sites as well. These include the interior spaces in Malouf's poems. The relationship between the interiors of Malouf's childhood haunts, and their ability to serve as integrative sources of identity, was touched on in "This Day Under My Hand" (RD 57–58). The themes and motifs of that poem are also present in **"An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton"** (RD 27), which shows the house's inability to create a coherent familial (and by extension, social) order. Martin Leer proposes that Malouf writes the psyche as house (Leer 1985, 4). As such, the fate of the house in "An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton" may be read as being analogous to the self.

> The garden shifts indoors, the house lets fall
> its lamplight, opens

> windows in the earth
>
> and the small stars of the grass, the night insects, needlepoint
> a jungle more dense
> than any tapestry, where Saturn burns, a snow owl's nest, and melons feed
>
> their crystal with hot sugars of the moon. (lines 1–7)

The boundary between the interior and the outside world of the garden (and later the Pacific Ocean) becomes blurred in the very first line, as "The garden shifts indoors". The relationship between suburbia and gardens is a relatively unthreatening one. It is not the wilderness or the forest which encroaches into the interior, but something already akin to it: the garden. It is not surprising that the movement is a reciprocal one. Not only does the garden enter the house, but the house enters the earth. It "lets fall / its lamp light, open / windows in the earth" (lines 1–3).

In his analysis of this poem, Martin Leer expresses the critical consensus that Malouf's work achieves a positive resolution to the self/other divide through the power of the imagination:

> Malouf's poem (where again one notes the proximity of ocean and desert[1]) is purely about the way the outside world enters the perceiving consciousness through the windows of the imagination […]. Malouf displays a decentralization of the mind, a freeing of the imagination from a superimposed, supposedly rational, conscious self: a rebellion in fact, not so much against Stevens, as against Descartes and Freud, against the separation of mind and body, 'ego' and 'id', corresponding on the political level to the demise of the British Empire. (Leer 1985, 16)

Leer's comments are founded on a psychoanalytical approach. However, his basic thesis of the function of imagination in Malouf's work credits art with the ability to dissolve the self and partake in a presence-experience of connection:

> The movement of the self out of itself takes place on many levels and in many situations in Malouf's work. It is the movement back to the pristine house and at the same time the movement onto the ultimate beach or plain stretching to the pole in Ovid's case—of individuality and facing up to death. Death in Malouf turns the creatures inside out. They break out of constrictions, into their true selves, into a space where all time is eternally present, or continually present. This is paradise, but also nature in its ceaseless flux—if we offer no resistance to it by trying to mark ourselves off from it—and it is the work of art. (ibid., 19)

There is, however, a significant change which occurs in the third stanza, the exact middle of the poem, when the "Pacific breaks at our table" (lines 8–9); this undermines the idea that anything is finally resolved in the poem, whether at the centre or periphery. The Pacific likewise intrudes into the domestic sphere in

"This Day Under My Hand", "banging -/ an open gate" while sea water salt works "its slow way into / the cracks in iron, laying / its white crust on the skin (lines 28-29, 38-40).

The interior in **"An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton"** is fragmented, then the house itself becomes corporeal before being deconstructed.

> The Pacific
> Breaks at our table
> each grain
> of salt a splinter of its light at midday, deserts
> flare on the lizard's tongue. Familiar rooms
> glow, rise through the dark – exotic islands; this house
>
> a strange anatomy
> of parts, so many neighbours in a thicket:
> hair, eye, tooth, thumb. (lines 7–15)

Through this process of dissolution and *Verfremdung*, the house loses its ability to create a coherent familial and social order. Its interiors are no longer the interiors of memory as a space of self-determination. Rather, the house/self is multiple, and in its fragmentation of parts, it has the ability to connect with the other "neighbours in a thicket" (line 15) – a line which reflects the title of Malouf's 1974 collection in which "An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton" first appeared. The deconstruction of the self, the loss of its coherent socially and linguistically defined form, should lend the self an ability to connect with the Other in the Schlegelian sense. Malouf's own comments on the piece echo the concept of the Romantic symbol unmistakably:

> The movement of that poem is from something observed, described – objects, events – straight through into the mind, and the experience it enacts – the *belief* – is that there is no disjunction between thought and object, between mind and body – that the old subject/object dichotomy is resolved in experience, in being itself. […] The whole movement of the poem is from the house and garden outside to a point where the house has become the house of the body itself and the anatomy that one is talking about is the body as the point from which the thing is experienced *in itself*, but not as something *separate*. (Malouf 1990, 274, emphasis in original)

And yet, at the end of the piece, the self does not connect with the Other, but remains deconstructed, fragmented into a meaningless ensemble of body parts: "hair, eyetooth, thumb" (line 15).

The moment when the ocean enters the suburban interior of the house at Hamilton recalls "The Crab Feast" in the way the possibility of merging two worlds is encapsulated in the act of eating, while the "salt a splinter of light at midday" reminds the reader of the crabs in "At Deception Bay" rising "to meet their image in the sun" (P 77, line 6). Given that "At Deception Bay" was also originally published in *Neighbours in a Thicket*, the intertextual relationship between the two is not unexpected. The repetition of the collection's title in the poem "An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton", however, implies a greater degree of connection to the other poems than simply their proximity in the edition. The "neighbours" and the "thicket" in line 15 are never defined. The mixture of closeness (as to be neighbours implies both a social bond and a physical ease of passage between two locations) and the barrier implied by the word "thicket" may be viewed as symbolic of the interrelatedness of Malouf's poems, of language in general, and of the self with the Other. On the other hand, it also shows these relationships to exist in the context of the insurmountable barrier of language. This is not necessarily to disagree with the author: indeed, the emphasis on the belief that "there is no disjunction between thought and object" in the quotation above stems from Malouf himself. The experience of wholeness may be enacted with success in the poem, but ultimately its enactment is still a matter for the mind rather than the body. The image of Malouf projected by critics such as Marin Leer is that of a dreamer. This may be the case, but the final image of this poem contains more than a little nightmare.

Recollections of Childhood: Deconstructing the Indoor Self

"Interiors from a Childhood"; "Indoor Garden"

The coalescence of house and body in "An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton" exemplifies a connection between interiors and childhood which occurs in a substantial body of poems. Interior spaces become important as sites of memory in the development of the self through its enculturation into the linguistic order. The body, mind, and interior are brought together in the set "Interiors from a childhood" (P 3–5), which consists of "At My Grandmother's", "Family Photographs", "Maiden Aunts", and "Childhood Illness". The domestic sphere of the childhood poems here is one which is dominated by women and a culture strange to the poet. Malouf inverts the Australian Gothic trope of the uncanny Australian landscape. Instead, it is the domestic interiors of his childhood which take on the role of the Gothic, void of the sublime.

In "At My Grandmother's", the interior of the grandmother's home is portrayed as a threatening underwater world. The similarity of this poem's underwater scene with the underwater world the speaker longs for in other poems serves contrarily to highlight the differences between the two, while maintaining the characterisation of water as a threatening element. The sea in the grandmother's house is not a part of the Australian landscape. Nature is neither welcomed nor desired in this room that is "shuttered against the bright envenomed leaves" (line 2). The description of the leaves outside as "envenomed" conveys the grandmother's relationship with the Australian landscape outside. Whilst many Australian plants are poisonous, the term '*en*venomed' implies that it is the grandmother's own attitude which has made them so. What nature there is in the room is dead: "the parrot screeching soundless / in its dome of glass, the faded butterflies / like jewels pinned against a sable cloak" (lines 9–10).

The underwater world of the room is not the underworld of the ocean and the living outside, but one of memories. The threatening nature of the space stems from the strangeness of these memories to the speaker. The image of the grandmother "winding out skeins" of wool and "trickling time" is reminiscent of the Nornir goddesses of fate (lines 12–13). The grandmother is given this kind of power in the text: the power to trap the child poet in her world of European culture and ghosts, which threatens to separate him from the native habitat outside. Malouf's description of the room as a "still sargasso / of memory" (lines 5–6) further distances the poet from the possibility of connecting with the Australian landscape. The Sargasso Sea is the only sea without any coastline: as such, it offers the perfect image with which to describe memories without place or roots. The grandmother's room is a space filled with memories that do not belong there. The grandmother occupies a nebulous space which has not been made into place through the work of memory. Malouf's return to childhood scenes in his work may be read as an attempt to rescript those spaces with his own memories and thus take "imaginative possession" of them, thereby transforming space into place. The poet is better able to do this in spaces which have some connection to nature, which shows that his identity is at least in part grounded in the Australian landscape. In this context, the verandah becomes highly symbolic as an in-between space between the interior and the exterior.

Although not part of the set, the poem "**Indoor Garden**" (P 6) is an example of a dispassionate attitude towards the Australian landscape: it is similar to the grandmother's, and a typically colonial one.

> The Blakes have an indoor garden, cubic foot
> of earth in a painted trough, where gaily flourish
> cactus (of pigmy size), wax plants and china
> garden creatures, rabbit, snail, frog.
>
> The Blakes are English and believe a touch
> of green gives to the mind that necessary
> signal for release, will open vistas
> between four walls, of forest, field and sky (lines 1–8)

The poem offers a satirical view of an English couple whose loving tending of a cactus garden in their house allows them to avoid engaging with the truly wild and threatening Brisbane weather and landscape outside: "meanwhile, beyond the sill, a violent season / hammers the land, rainforests quail, sharp whips / of water lash the valleys, and the jungle / pushes through fences and split paving-stones. / But no storms shakes this cactus that the Blakes / tend like a favourite pet" (lines 9–14). The piece also satires the drawing-room Romanticism of settler society. The couple could not be more different in their outlook from the more famous bearer of their name, William Blake. The syntax of the line "where gaily flourish cactus" (lines 2–3), which inverts subject-predicate order, mimics the unnatural speech patterns in nineteenth-century English poetry.

The Englishness of the couple is highlighted in the following stanza, and connected with a disjunct between their theoretically Romantic understanding of nature and what this actually entails: "The Blakes are English and believe a touch / of green gives the mind that necessary / signal for release, will open vistas, / between four walls, of forest, field, and sky. / Meanwhile, a beyond the sill, a violent season / hammers the land." (Lines 5–10). The hammering of the land outside recalls the lines of William Blake's "The Tyger": "What the hammer? What the chain?" (Blake and Stevenson 2007, 178).

The "signal for release" (line 7) which the mind supposedly receives through the Blakes' pigmy cactus is all the more ludicrous when set against the poem "**Childhood Illness**" from the set "Interiors from a Childhood". This poem marks the introduction of many key concepts which are taken up throughout Malouf's poetry. The changed perspective which comes with a fever, making everything appear uncanny, continues the Gothic trend of the entire set. The effects of the fever are, however, highly specific.

> His fingers quailed and lost their grip, till books
> slipped through them, shadows, unrelated voices,
> slipped through the open places in his mind
> […]
>
> The mirror, in whose strict eye he had lived
> his life between four walls, now locked its gaze;
> entered and took possession, subtly stealing
> by sleight of mind, to furnish in its depths
> a room more real than his, the shelves where solid
> authors stood in rows, the desk, the chair,
> his shadow gesturing beyond his will (lines 1–3, 8–14)

The semiotic and cultural order is replaced with "unrelated voices" (line 2): voices which do not conform to a pattern, and thus break away from the expected order. The first stanza of the poem exhibits a kind of reverse Romantic sublime. The child's mind bypasses the conscious, leading him towards something beyond himself, "his shadow gesturing beyond his will" (line 14). This changed mental state, however, is not a product of confrontation with a sublime landscape, but instead first facilitates a changed view which re-semanticises the interior space of the child's bedroom as uncanny and sublime: "The walls moved like an avalanche, and faces / once near, seemed suddenly far off, like landscapes / his eye had never travelled" (lines 4–6).

It is the mirror which has the power to cast the room in an uncanny light, "subtly stealing / by sleight of mind, to furnish in its depths / a room more real than his" (lines 10–12). The mirror in Malouf's poems often offers a reflection of the self as Other: it provides a confrontation with the reflection in the glass, and thus raises the topic of the self/Other divide. In this case, it is only the room, which is reflected and rewritten through this reflection. The first stanza also points to its own distance from the events of the text, through the use of simile in particular: "walls moved *like* an avalanche"; faces / once near, *seemed* suddenly far off, *like* landscapes" (lines 4–5, my emphasis).

In this way, the poem invokes an act of the imagination in the re-imagining of the room which occurs in the text. It is an imagination which is far from the fantasy a conscious mind might produce, stemming from outside the child and working through "the open places in his mind" (line 3). The mirror, a space normally containing a reflection of the "other" self, has the power to re-write the interior space. Combined with the changed viewpoint offered by this intrusion of the imagination through the child's mind, this creates a moment of autogenesis in the poem. The third stanza, in which the child returns to health and forgets these visions, shows this moment to have been fleeting, as are so many sublime moments in Malouf's poems.

Inside Language

"Dot Poem, the Connections"; "In the Beginning"

As seen in the previous section, interiors take on particular resonance in combination with recollections from childhood. In addition, however, they may also be interpreted as an exploration of authorial genius. The following piece, "Dot Poem, the Connections" (EH 7), at first appears to be likewise situated in childhood, given the list of toys in the poem. However, it spans a period from a developmental stage prior to the child's ability to actively use language, through to the writer's adult life as a poet. There are two distinct attitudes towards language in Malouf's work which can be found in this poem. On the one hand, there is an almost constant desire to escape language itself, a reverence towards silence and the desire for communication outside the system of signs. The body, with its ability to commune with nature and the Other through taste and consumption, explores one possibility of communication beyond speech.

In this case, speech and language are part of a system of signs which forms the basis of our thinking and the basis of the self's separation from the other; whereas the space beyond this system is a space of true communion with the Other, which offers the possibility of transcendence. On the other hand, there are the poems which celebrate writing poetry as a true act of the imagination. Coleridge's distinction between fancy and the imagination provides a framework for understanding the differences between these two, apparently contradictory, views of language.

> Before I had words
> at hand to call the world up
> in happenings on a page, there were the dots, a buckshot scatter
> of stars, black in a white sky. Behind them, teasingly hidden,
> the company of creatures. (lines 1–5)

In "**Dot Poem, the Connections**", the uneasy fit of toys (lines 12–13), the ability to understand stories and imagine others (lines 9–1, 16–21), and an inability to speak (lines 1–2), open up the possibility of reading the piece as a poem on autogenesis and the development of the writer's poetic abilities. The primary thematic concern of the poem is with the role of poesy in writing (thereby also co-forming) the world as we humans experience it, and nature in the wider sense of a unified cosmos. It does this early on by equating "stars" – which are normally associated with transcendence – with the words on a page: "black in the white sky" (lines 3–4). The use of mythological creatures in a fairy-tale setting situates the reader more strongly in the literary realm. Thus, the unicorn's desire to be recognised in line 8 may be equated with its incorporation into the semiotic realm through the act of being written.

> What I'd set
> my heart on, spellbound, snowbound
> in a wood, was a unicorn, shyly invisible but yearning, even
> at the risk of being taken,
> to be seen and recognised
>
> What I got
> was the dwarfs, Grumpy and Doc;
> Spitfires, tanks, a drunken jalopy. I'm still waiting, as star-dots click
> and connect, to look up and find myself, with nothing I need say
> or do, in its magic presence, (lines 6–10)

Two things become apparent in the final two lines of the second stanza. Firstly, that which the author writes already exists. It is not created, but re-cognised, that is, reinterpreted in the conscious mind of its author. The second thing is that writing constitutes taking possession, which involves a certain "risk" (line 9).

> as from the far
> far off of our separate realms, two rare
> imaginary beasts approach and meet. On the breath that streams
> from
> our mouths, a wordless out-of-the-body singing. On the same
> note. From the same sheet. (lines 16–21)

The third stanza differentiates between what Coleridge would distinguish as fancy and imagination. The dwarfs of Disney's fanciful tales and the other trappings of childhood do not satisfy the poet's desire to attain unity imaginatively, or by means of the imagination. This is an important distinction, as in the latter case, nothing is really achieved, only represented. Although the process of writing is alluded to in the way the words "click / and connect" (lines 13–14), the moment of unity occurs through passivity, beyond words, where the poet says: "nothing I need say / or do" (lines 14–15). The typography of the final two stanzas performs the moment of almost coming together by letting the word "from" bleed between the lines (lines 9). Whilst this unification appears to be complete, it only occurs imaginatively. The poet is not able to reverse his own evolution and become a corporeal, speechless beast. His wordlessness remains only in the memory of childhood. In recalling this memory, the ability to be speechless is lost. Even the title supports the basic irony of the poem. Dots are by their nature unconnected, and even the title separates the dots from the "connections" by a comma. Even a title about connections is not truly connected, but overtly divided.

The motif of pre-linguistic childhood and adult memory is further explored in "**In the Beginning**" (P 229), which misleads the reader from the beginning. The poem places the figure of the child on the cusp of its entry into the linguistic order at the same time as that of an adult poet on the trail of his childhood memories.

> The table's there in the kitchen, where I kneel on a high chair, tongue at air, trawling a slate with pot-hooks; on the track of words; on the track of this word, *table*. Is there instant, wobbly wooden, four-square in its solid self, and does not need my presence to underwrite its own or scrawl, thick tongue, thick hand, a puddle slate and knock it up out of blue nowhere. Where are they, table, slate, slate-pencil, kitchen, and that solid intent child on one knee reaching for sawn planks back there? Breathless today, or almost, I wrestle uphill to where, in a forest gap of table size, it stands, four legged, dumb, still waiting. An unbreathed word among the chirrup and chafe, it taps a foreleg.

> Table, I mutter. With tool-marks fresh as tongue-licks, already criss-crossed with scars
> I feel my own where hard use makes them, it moves as that child's hand moves about
> muddy water (lines 1–18)

The image of the highchair invokes that of a child. The process of learning to speak is depicted in terms of a hunt. The child is "on the track of words" (line 3) as a hunter might follow the tracks of an animal. In the early Romantic understanding of language, the language in which a child grows up is that which forms its thinking and way of viewing the world (Bär 1999, 86). The child who is still hunting for words is one who has not yet been fully enculturated into the realm of the sign. Yet this hunt parallels that of the poet hunting for this memory of this child: "Where are they, table, / slate, slate-pencil, kitchen, and that stolid / intent child on one knee" (lines 9–11). It is this question which makes the temporal distance of the poet clear, from the opening scene of the poem.

The text shows a Romantic understanding of language as an arbitrary system of signs, of words, which are not the expression of Platonic forms, but are concepts which themselves facilitate thought (Nassar 2014, 69). Whilst the table has a "solid self" (line 5) which pre-dates its name – and Malouf goes to great pains to describe the table without using the word for it whilst in the child's time – the child calls it out of the blue, giving it the form it has in his mind. At the beginning of this process in the fourth line, the table does not exist for the child at all. This line consists of a sentence which starts at the predicate, missing out the subject (table, presumably) entirely, thus underpinning a view of language as something which first brings ideas and concepts into being, rather than reflecting Platonic or material forms.

The idea of language as creation is then taken to the limits when the poem seamlessly merges the child's hunt for the word "table" with the adult who is building one at the end of the piece. The colour blue in Malouf's other poems is connected to the ocean and the absolute. When the child recalls the word for the table "out of blue nowhere" (line 8), its shape comes from itself. The speaker sees it as a wild animal and connects with it on this level, as the table's scars become his own in lines 16–17. The poet searches his memory to regain the child's power to view things from outside the linguistic order (and thus see their true nature), yet he is only able to truly connect with his subject matter in the moments when the word remains unsaid. Instead, he feels the shape of the thing beyond language in the physical sensation of the scars on his body. The role of the body as a site of transcendence in Malouf's poetry is explored in a later section.

The Wild Indoors

"The Year of the Foxes"; "Notes from a Menagerie"; "Footnote for a Bestiary"

Interior settings are combined with a larger thematic group in Malouf's poems, which is divided into two subsections: tame or dead animals which were once wild, and the animal self. The loss of the wild for the animals parallels human fate. Recalling a lost primal animal state for the human subject constitutes an attempt to provide unity with the animal Other in an imagined prelinguistic state which circumvents the issue of a linguistically formed consciousness in the subject. 'Wildness', however, it not only supposedly lost, but also reflected on as an act of the imagination and is, therefore, limited. This structure reflects the underlying epistemological position of Romantic irony.

In "**The Year of the Foxes**" (RD 3–4), the foxes are given a surprising amount of agency. The sober adult reader knows them to be dead, but to the child poet, they merely "played / dead" (lines 4–5). Death in Malouf's poems does not cut a being off from the living, but connects the realm of the living to that of the irrational, ghosts, and the ocean: see, for instance, the ghostly crabs in "At Deception Bay" (RD 103–104), or "The Gift, Another Life" (P 123), "Open Door" (P 225), and "Toccata" (EH 6). The third stanza establishes the foxes in the wider context of the natural realm in Malouf's work: "I slept across the hall, at night hearing / their thin cold cry. I dreamed the dangerous spark / of their eyes, brushes aflame / in our fur-hung, nomadic / tent in the suburbs, the dark fox-stink of them" (lines 16–20). The foxes are thus connected to childhood, dreaming, danger, nomadism, and later, "the mirror glass" (line 30).

The foxes highlight the permeability of the domestic sphere. Animals and mirrors open up the possibility of transforming the interiors of suburbia through their connection to wildness, dream states, and alternative versions of the self which the mirror shows. The transformation of the domestic sphere can be traced incrementally through the first, third, and fifth stanzas of the piece. At first, the foxes as alive, wild, and active figures in the poem are positioned at the borders of language, in parentheses (lines 2–6). These parentheses are also situated at the borders of the poem's suburban surface reality. The characterisation of the house as a "nomadic / tent" (lines 19–20) points to the precariousness of middle-class Australians' hold on the continent, reminding the reader of "Sheer Edge". There, too, something dark and strange lies just below the floorboards of Australia's suburbs, reminding its inhabitants that their physical hold on the land is not yet matched by their dreaming, the mythologisation of place into an Australian consciousness. Malouf himself sees the “nomadic tent” as being Other to the house of the first stanza. Malouf says that

> “The Year of the Foxes” dramatises themes, then, that were essential for what I was going to do later. […] the opposition contained in a phrase like ‘our fur-hung, nomadic tent in the suburbs’ introduces a whole set of oppositions that is right at the centre of almost everything I do, or was going to do after that poem was written. It points to other poems as well as to some prose work like *An Imaginary Life*. […] and the way the animal world there is made part of the moral perception about the human world is something again that I’ve gone back and back to. (Malouf and Tulip 1990, 219)

These Straussian pairs are difficult to miss when reading Malouf’s work, and have also been noted by Neilsen (Neilsen 1990). What I find particularly interesting, however, is the way in which these seemingly opposite forces occupy the same space in Malouf’s suburban interiors, and have the possibility of intermingling and transformation. Indeed, Malouf approaches the suburbs with a method that echoes Schlegel’s dialectic of endless becoming.

Schlegel’s dialectical relationship functions as the basic structure of his world-view, which is oriented on a pattern of an interplay between poles: finite and infinite, being and appearance, freedom and determinism, thesis and antithesis, order and chaos, good and evil, true and false. It is the movement between these poles that is of interest, in their tension and movement: irony (Frischmann 2009, 82). What Nielsen identifies as Straussian pairs in Malouf’s work are present, but it is the moment of dialectic movement between these poles which becomes the focal point in Malouf’s poetry. This is the Romantic gaze which romanticises the mundane, and which answers Novalis’s call to Romanticise the world (Novalis 2013c, 384). The piece “Childhood Illness” best demonstrates the connection between the mirror and the transformative effect of the imagination, which is also seen in “The Year of the Foxes”.

In “The Year of the Foxes” it is the child’s dreaming which brings forth the foxes, rather than the mirror itself; just as the fever-addled mind of the child in “Childhood Illness” attributes its changed gaze to the mirror which had previously overseen the child’s normal life (P 5). The world the foxes inhabit, and the one in which they are hunted, is “lost behind the mirror glass” along with the “cry of the hounds” (lines 29–30). The hounds hunt the foxes in this other, wilder version of the house, much in the same way that the speaker hunts the crab in “The Crab Feast”. The desire to connect with the animal Other, which is reflected in the relationship of poet to crab and fox, is linked to the power of the imagination of facilitate such connections in “The Year of the Foxes” by the placement of the hunt behind the mirror. The use of the hunt motif itself also connects to the child's hunt for the word "table" in "In the Beginning", tying together the (limited) power of the imagination to create these connections through language: it is limited because the foxes remain behind the glass, and the relationship between poet and crab, or man and fox, remains that of hunter to hunted.

The importance of language in this poem has been noted by both Paul Kavanagh and David Malouf. Drawing on Heidegger, Kavanagh writes that

> the presence of the foxes, once dreamed by the child into full substantiality, can be inhaled as the naming of them lights up 'knowable spaces in us'. This refers to the gradual approach of an experience of presence, which is never – perhaps never can be – fully realised. The prerequisite for this sense of imminent presence is a 'clear space' in the mind – an absence, which expects, in an active and generative sense, to be filled. (Kavanagh 1994, 153)

What Kavanagh describes is a bringing into being. It is the creative power of the imagination to give form to that which can otherwise only be sensed. The immanence of the animal Other, Kavanagh implies, can only be realised in an absence in the mind, a "clear space". Once this space is not clear, once it belongs to the black letters on the page, rather than the white spaces, it cannot remain present. However, the poem can point to this space of absence. The poem, according to Malouf,

> appears to offer the occasion for a story, and then delivers none. What it delivers within the narrative tone and the setting is a set of correspondences and associations that evoke, I hope in a surprising way, a world: a view of nature and of society and history that is not acted out as a story, or argued in any way, but hit off in flashes – in a way that belongs not to narrative or philosophy; but to poetry and does it within a highly structured from in which rhyme, half rhyme and echo, and a rhythm controlled by line length, are inseparable from what is being said. (Malouf 1990, 271)

There are two particularly poignant aspects to this comment, when considering a specific model of Romanticism reflected in Malouf's work. First, Malouf evokes the Romantic concept of poesy as a form capable of evocation – which is a direct connection, rather than the representation that language results in. The second is an echo of Romantic irony in the poem's form. That is, the reflexivity of its form, and the reflection on the form's deliberate choice to fail to deliver what it at first appears to attempt: "the occasion for a story" (Malouf 1990, 271).

Like the foxes in "The Year of the Foxes", the animals in "**Notes from a Menagerie**" (P 8) form a kind of portal that allows this wildness to enter into the domestic sphere. This occurs, for instance, at the turn of the first and second stanzas: "those / domesticated lies that mewl and purr / so primly round your knees / admitting the dark presence / of images that stalk beyond / the precincts of desire" (lines 3–8). In contrast, the piece ends with the possibility that all that is wild "in time might grow / as tame, as blunt of power, as these / your other pets" (lines 20–22). "Footnote for a Bestiary" (P 12) likewise connects cats back to their wilder selves. This recalls the legend of the trick that first tamed the tiger into its substitute, and which is a direct quotation from the English translation of a medieval bestiary, *A Book of Beasts.* Yvonne Smith recognises that

> mythemes arising from "hunter and hunted" and connection to *The Book of Beasts* continue in poems such as "The Year of the Foxes" and "Bicycle" […]. The Latter offers a mythopoetic vision of the "other" that approaches not as a recognisable animal but as a hybrid creature of prophecy like the centaurs" in *An Imaginary Life* […]. The hybrid and mythical form of the animal, this time in conflict with the human, is represented in the cover illustration of *Neighbours in a Thicket* (1974), where Piero de Cosimo's "Battle of the Lapiths and the Centaurs" represents disruptive drives and desires that disturb the apparently ordered surface of societies. (Smith 2009, 173)

The "mythemes" which arise from this hunter/hunted relationship in combination with suburban settings not only reflects the value Malouf places on myths in the Romantic sense, but also his ironic approach. In this context, the intrusion of the mythical into the suburban sphere makes sense. The poem itself serves the purpose of once again noting the wildness of the domestic house cat, the unpredictable tiger who might be immune to tricks such as "a dish of milk," "or – well, a silver ball" (lines 18, 20). Although the poem is a gentle, tongue-in-cheek reminder of wildness in the domestic sphere, the selection of the intertext is itself revealing. The silver ball's ability to reflect the tigress as another (her cub) is what tamed her, according to the legend. By pointing out that tricks might cease to work on tigers in his own poem, Malouf also indicates the possibility of the silver-ball trick also failing, of wildness re-entering the world. The central position of a mirror-like reflection in the original legend relates it to the mirror motif in general. The original ball made the tigress see her own reflection as Other; but if she viewed it again, she would confront what she had held to be Other as a part of herself, as the self/Other dynamic is the essence of the mirror.

Interiors: Closing Remarks

With his treatment of interior spaces, Malouf introduces a subtle critique of postcolonial Australia. The interiors are sites of memory. This links them closely to the enculturation of a subject into the linguistic order, and with this, into the social order. For this reason, the moments in which the interior space is undermined are those moments of connection to something outside this order.

The interiors spaces offer two ways of being in Australia: one that encapsulates the postcolonial mindset (in the sense of internalised colonial structures), and one which is decolonial, if only in relation to the white subject. The first is reflected in the interiors as sites of memory: specifically, those memories and cultural artefacts that were imported from England. These are the basis of suburban living and interaction (or lack thereof) with the Australian landscape. The Blakes are the bluntest representation of this way of not-being in the landscape, in what is almost a version of the Canadian garrison mentality.[2] They hide in their English-styled, suburban home and garden, surrounded by what they perceive to be a threatening, untamed nature on all sides.[3]

Whilst the general development of Australia's cities and suburbs has been formed by the geographical realities of sea, rivers, and mountains (in the case of the earliest settlements of Sydney, Hobart, and Melbourne, as well as Malouf's Brisbane) rather than against any frontier threat, the history of Australia's suburban development (explored in more detail in the following chapter) demonstrates the typical ghosts which haunt the early colonial subject. The rancour of poverty and crime are powerful fears in what was a penal colony until the mid-nineteenth century, and the fear of cultural degradation which arose through the distance from a European centre and the constant threat of "going native". The Blakes' English garden, like the real gardens of pre-sixties Australian suburbia, protects its creators from the intrusion of these ghosts, and offers them the promise of redemption in the form of land ownership. Malouf identifies the desire to own land as the Australian dream:

> To own a piece of Australia, even if it was only a quarter-acre block, became the Australian dream. The desperation that lay behind it, the determination of poor men and women to grasp what was offered and raise themselves out of a landless poverty into a new class, was the source of a materialism that is still one of our most obvious characteristics. It has taken us 200 years to see that there might be another and more inward way of possessing a place, and that in this, as in so much else, the people we dispossessed had been there before us. (Malouf 1998, 16)

For those fleeing willingly or unwillingly from the tyranny of tenantship, this is a powerful dream. The alternative Malouf offers is an attempt to create a way of becoming, not a "land dreaming people" like Australia's first inhabitants, but a shared "sea dreaming", an identity based on the understanding of Australia as an island and as changeable as the sea (ibid., 8). In the suburbs of Australia there is a contradictory desire to flee the conditions of life in the European "centre", and the replication of these same structures in the minds of those who believe themselves to stand, huddled, at the edge of an abyss on "the periphery". Where the suburbs may be viewed as outward expressions of real and imagined pressures, their interiors are the metaphorical interiors of the self. The language of the child hovers on the cusp of the world and the alternative that Malouf explores in his poetry. The child's language is formed in these interiors. However, the child has not been fully incorporated into this socio-linguistic order. He still shares an affinity with the ocean, and with fever-dreamed monsters outside this space.

The poems examined in this section may be understood as the poet's attempt to write the subject into Australia. What is already there in the suburban interior has to be re-written in a way that allows poet and reader to better imagine themselves into the environment, by forming a relationship with the Other through the self. There are always these two sides of self and Other: the two sides of the "coin we bring" ("Earther Hour", line 13). In his fragmentation and permeation of these interiors, Malouf explores an alternative which attempts to overcome the colonial subject/Other divide in a *process* of endless approach. The (colonially) linguistically determined self is on one side, and that which lies outside this self is on the other: the I and the Thou.

(Sub)urban

This book's title, *Concrete Horizons* expresses the idea that the transcendent - the gaze beyond the horizon - exists within quotidian urban and suburban spaces in these poems. It is urban and suburban space which houses the majority of Australians and yet the country's national imagination has been disproportionately defined by the Bush and the Outback. This is not the case in Watson's poetry nor in that of Malouf examined here. Watson, in particular, directly engages with the (sub)urban spaces of Brisbane and Melbourne as discussed in "Two Realities, One City". Malouf, however, may likewise be thought of as a Brisbane writer in much of his work.

The focus on the (sub)urban in my reading of Malouf is largely in avoidance of deeply ingrained clichés inevitably connecting Romanticism to the characterisation of 'Nature'. Romanticism, when thought of as modelling instances, is a highly diverse and flexible source of adaptive forms, ideas, and lenses, which may or may not have anything to do with 'Nature'. Although certain negative attitudes towards suburbia as confined and closed-minded shimmer through in "Windows" and "Suburbia", there is little interest in long worn critiques of suburbia in comparison to idealised rural Australian spaces, nor do we find the bohemian or the soulless city finding its way into Malouf's poetry. In fact, it is not easy to separate the urban from the suburban in the poetry explored in this book, nor is it necessary to do so in this instance.

The importance of these spaces lies in the way they highlight the quotidian sacred in an Australian context. The quotidian sacred is at home in the (sub)urban environment as it is situated in the humble, embodied connection to place found in day-to-day living. It is not the transcendent sublime of the desert and mountains, but the humble joy of suburban backyards with a veggie patch for an alter. This perspective situates the possibility of an experience of the absolute (whether understood in religious or philosophical terms) within the actual lived sphere of the contemporary Australian subject. The associations however, which inevitably come with the terms: "nature", "suburban" and "urban" have their own complex histories and it is worth providing some brief insight into them at this point.

Particularly in the US and Britain, research supposes that the suburbs are a specific environment with their own social structures and practices which stand in binary opposition to the urban. Despite a long anti-suburban intellectual tradition in Australia, the distinction between suburbia and urban space is, however, not easily made. This might be due to the country's failure to develop a metropolis with the cultural significance of London.[1] The nature of Australian urbanisation itself complicates the division of the urban, suburban, and nature. In Melbourne, the expected urban/suburban dynamic has disintegrated over time with the rapid expansion of Australia's largest cities; not so much as cities, but as their oxymoronic cousin, the suburban city:

> One cannot focus on any place, any situation, and say, 'Here indeed is the true centre of Melbourne', for the city is not merely large, but to an extraordinary degree, sprawling and centreless. The mile-square grid of the city proper is somehow far less real, less permanent, than the hundreds of square miles of suburbia into which the population flees in the evening, draws down the puritan blinds and settles itself before the blue shimmer of the television screen. (Wallace-Crabbe 1974, 66)

These contrasting spaces may be seen to embody all that is cosmopolitan, artistic, morally depraved, lower-class and dirty, vs. safety, morality, the higher classes, boredom, and sterility. In turn, both spaces stand in contrast to nature. The distinction between the (sub)urban and wilderness or nature becomes increasingly meaningless in the Anthropocene age, with global warming and pollutants affecting the atmosphere and revealing the nature/culture divide to be a construct. Regardless of the reality that Australia is a primarily urban country, the nature/city divide maintains ideological significance, even if the suburban/metropolitan does not. This is similar to the situation in Canada with the Canadian North, and the resulting encodings of these spaces reveal a pattern which could be readily applied to Australian spatial narratives:

> The 'particular literary system' of each nation has indeed produced different spaces and different spatial divisions, Whereas US-American literature thrived on the polarized dynamic of pastoral versus urban space, Canadian literature avoided the traditional binary oppositions inherent in the division between city and country and found its own specific ways of dealing with culture-nature divisions by turning to the small town, a space in between the rural-urban divide. Because of its strong pastoral traditions in American culture, the city as a counter-space in American literature was symbolically loaded, while Canada never saw its national myths spatialized in the middle landscape and therefore was not threatened, provoked, or stimulated by the city in the same way. (Rosenthal 2011, 25)

Research on suburbia in Australia is comparatively sparse compared to North America. However, it indicates not only that Australian urban and suburban development differs from the North American model, but also that the distinctions between the urban and the suburban are not as significant as the country's anti-suburban intellectual history might suggest. As Judith L. Kapferer notes, "it is an item of public knowledge that Australia is one of the most highly urbanised countries in the world, with the majority of its population clustering around […] the coastal belt" (Kapferer 1992, 254). Conversely, it is also well known that Australia's national narratives are based on the image of the Outback and the Bush (T. Clark 2011, 25). Australia has been one of the world's most suburban societies since its colonisation, with the suburbanisation of Sydney beginning just forty years after settlement (O'Reilly 2008, 10). The central place of the Outback and the Bush in fashioning the nation's image of itself is utterly incongruent with the demographic realities, even during early settlement. The central place which criticism has afforded to rural Australia in the formation of Australia's national imaginary and literary canon has had the effect of excluding, as Quartermaine writes, "from much critical discourse that place where most Australians actually live, the suburb" (Quartermaine 1992, 16).

Whilst the perceived gap between rural and urban culture in Australia may not reflect the demographic realities of the nation, the ideology behind it remains a powerful one. This is because the images of rural living which have become hallmarks of Australia's national imaginary (mateship, self-reliance, survival against the elements, etc.) are "ideological in that their organisation and orchestration is structured in and through the cultural institutions of Australian society and the ideological apparatuses of the Australian state" (Kapferer 1992, 255). As such, they are ironically constructed within the urban environment "where legislation is enacted, business is conducted" (ibid., 256). Rural and suburban spaces may be represented as being in opposition to urban centres; however, they are equally enmeshed in economic and legislative structures stemming from these urban centres.

This cultural dynamic has been determined by historical settlement. In this regard, Australia has historically presented a different order of urbanisation from that in Europe:

> The first rural workers and landowners were, by and large, urban people – convicts, currency folk, military men and emancipists. Australian country towns did not develop over long centuries of tribalism and feudalism, but rather sprang, fully armed as it were, from the industrial world of the nineteenth century. (ibid., 259)

The political and social ramifications of this have been numerous. I surmise that one such impact is that the distinction between urban, rural, and even suburban cultures is highly artificial and, if not required for a specific ideological purpose, is not automatically a significant factor in Australian poetry set in an urban/suburban/rural environment. The distinction between the urban and the suburban is not of ideological significance in Malouf's (or Watson's) poetry. These pieces deny the binary structure of Outback or Bush versus metropolitan writing, and instead present a lived experience of space which merges the two.

Malouf's poetry plays with the tension between the reality of (sub)urbia and the animal Other. This animal Other represents the continent which resists enculturation through the imagination. Were this a simple Nature vs. culture divide there would be little use for irony. Yet, in Malouf's settings the two, if divided at all, are separated by imagined spans of deep time rather than space. The moment of transcendence is sought, not in 'Nature', but in the quotidian sacred found in the lived (sub)urban spaces of contemporary Australia. Situating the absolute in these spaces is made easier by patterns of development in Australia and the resulting complex, rather than binary, attitudes towards urban and suburban spaces.

The richness of the available literature (both critical and literary) which deals with the topic of suburbia in Britain and the US dominates our understanding of suburban culture (O'Reilly 2008, 4). Yet it cannot be assumed that suburban development occurs in the same way and results in the same cultural patterns in Australia. For instance, the income of Australian residents often decreases with the distance from the urban centre of a city; whereas in the US, the more exclusive and removed the suburb, the higher its socio-economic status (ibid., 19). This was not always the case. Initially, the outer suburbs were affluent, English affairs. However, with the pull of home ownership being a large part of immigration advertising, and the decision to build detached houses rather than tenant blocks of government-owned housing (particularly after WWII), this led to the widespread growth of middle- and working-class suburban occupation (ibid., 16). There is no prototypical Australian suburb. Australia's larger cities

> have literally hundreds of suburbs, there is a great deal of variation from suburb to suburb with regard to factors including population size, geographical size, age, distance from the CBD, population density, property size and value, and ethnic and demographic composition. Therefore, the typical Australian suburb does not exist, although it can be useful to employ terms such as "inner," "outer," "middle-class," "working-class," "established," "newly-developed," "exclusive," "affordable" and "expensive" to refer to individual suburbs or groups of suburbs. (ibid., 9)

Despite the particulars of suburban structural development in Australia, critics such as Alan Gilbert posit that being anti-suburban in Australia is to align with a global opposition between the small-minded suburb and the broad-minded cosmopolis (Gilbert 1989, 37). O'Reilly notes that the anti-suburban intellectual tradition in Australia started to be challenged from the 1950s onwards (O'Reilly 2008, 22). Critics who were instrumental in this change include Donald Horne in *The Lucky Country: Australia in the Sixties* (Horne 1998) and Hugh Stretton in *Ideas for Australian Cities 1970* (Stretton 1989). This reassessment went hand-in-hand with a greater understanding that there was historically no one suburbia in Australia. Lionel Frost, for instance, views contemporary cities as now being similar in form; however, he also notes that "in the nineteenth century they were physically and spatially of two contrasting types. Sydney, Brisbane, and Hobart […] more closely resembled those of Britain, Europe, and eastern North America, than they did the other Australian cities. Melbourne, Adelaide, and Perth were of far lower density, with sprawling suburbs like those of the American West" (Frost 1992, 191).

While city and landscape are generally perceived to be different ideas in Australia, the differences between Australia's capital cities show them to be mutually influential. As Frost explains, the growth of Sydney's slums caused by inward development was connected to "the city's location on one of the numerous small, hilly peninsulas which jutted into the magnificent harbour at Port Jackson. […] Brisbane was similarly hemmed in by a tight bend in the wide Brisbane River, while Hobart was so close to its port 'that ships seem to be anchored in the streets' " (ibid., 192). Colin Patrick also stresses the strong connection between natural geographic and climatic factors and (sub)urban development in Australia (Patrick 1992, 274). Conversely, "many 'natural' landscapes in Australia are as man-made as any suburb", meaning that the supposed opposition between the " 'natural' and man-made landscapes are not as sharp as they seem" (Quartermaine 1992, 15).

In the relationship between urban, suburban, and natural environments, there are two distinct understandings of suburbia. One sees suburbia as a borderline seeping into nature on the one side and the urban on the other. This marks suburbia as a porous demarcation of centre from periphery, and wildness from development. The other is the idea that "while the inner-city paradoxically retains traces of the Bush, Suburbia is intrinsically 'anti-Nature' and, by extension, anti-Art" (Gerster 1992, 23). In David Malouf's semi-autobiographical novel *Johnno* for instance, which shares many of the same settings as his poetry, the poet looks back on "his enforced adolescent move to 'one of the best suburbs' of Brisbane" (ibid.). The character of Dante "pines for the old wide-verandahed inner-urban house (located in South Brisbane) in which he grew up, with its 'damp mysterious storerooms', its verdant backyard and its nearby disreputable park populated by metho drinkers and swarms of insects" (ibid.). Because the inner cities are older (and more run-down, offering nature a foothold on their very building substances), they are closer to nature than the new suburbs. The poet's suburban residence is " 'glossy' and 'modern', disparaging adjectives in a national genre which privileges the essentially European quality of age, a quality only, if at all, to be found in the cosmopolitan inner city" (ibid., 23–24).

The anti-suburban intellectual tradition in Australia stems from the nineteenth century, in both literature and criticism (O'Reilly 2008, 19). The characteristics of "domesticity, boredom, depression, conservatism, repression, safety and predictability" attributed to the suburbs in Australia by Louis Esson in 1912 have been "echoed and repeated by numerous Australian intellectuals for almost a century" (ibid.). The pioneering man of the wilderness as a national symbol is undermined in the suburbs where, "the wilderness – synonymous with the pioneering spirit – gives way to manicured lawns – synonymous with bourgeois respectability" (Hoskins 1994, 2). This has led to a situation in which, according to O'Reilly, suburbia is rarely explicitly the topic of Australian literature. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that it is rarely included in the canon. Where it is a significant theme, it is primarily in the form of short stories or poetry (O'Reilly 2008, 2).[2]

The idea that inner-urban spaces may themselves represent a contrast of nature and suburbia is significant when examining the role of Romanticism in writing in these spaces. Strauss posits that

> the valorization of nature as the positive, the good, the real, and its location in the unsocialized or the rurally-socialized landscape, passed from English romanticism into Australia and dominated the way that Australian writers came to terms with their environment, not least in the way that the generic term 'the bush' was used both for the natural physical landscape and for the rural social life established within it. (Strauss 1992, 60)

Poetry is particularly well adapted to the desire to "look for a vision which will illuminate the mundane, and *contain* it illuminated, neither annihilating it by abstraction nor transforming it into the fantastic" (ibid., 59). However, traditionally this kind of poetry has been associated with nature writing. As Jennifer Strauss notes, "we have such poetry in the Australian tradition, but it is much more likely to be concerned with nature than with the city, as indicated by the fact that Hope's distinction of this kind of illumination as metaphysical rather than strictly philosophical is made in relation to the poetry of Judith Wright" (ibid.). In an urban context, this may, however, lead to a process of a "'naturalizing' into poetry of the details of urban living – a process that certainly is becoming more and more commonplace, and which may thereby be doing more than overt argument to subvert essentialist notions that the urban has no proper place in poetry" (ibid., 60).

What Strauss identifies as a "naturalising" of the details of urban living into poetry is part of a development of Australian poetry which utilises intense attention to the specific settings and the details of everyday life. Ashcroft, Develin, and McCredden identify this development as being part of the expression of an Australian expression of the sacred which is found in the earthed and mundane experiences of everyday life (Ashcroft et al. 2009). As such, urban and suburban spaces are able to take on the metaphysical function afforded to nature in Hope's Wordsworthian Romanticism.

By bringing nature directly into the suburbs, Malouf redefines the parameters of the nature–national relationship, celebrating an endless dialectic of approach and acknowledgment of its limitations. Malouf celebrates the process of creating *Heimat* rather than the endgame of nationhood. Nature is simply part of the detailed poetic expression of lived, everyday experience. It is this experience which is romanticised and which becomes the carrier of the sacred in contemporary Australia. Malouf's model of Romantic irony is adapted to this change. Nature, which the research on Romanticism in Australia interpreted as a transcendent medium, functions here as simply "nature" (with a lower-case n): one of many elements of everyday life in which the poet attempts to transcend the self and experience a sacred connection to the Other. Through use of ironic reflection, poetry allows the subject to posit the metaphysical possibility of gaining knowledge of something outside the self, thus creating a transcendental connection to place in Australia, whilst asserting that writing can do little more than indicate this possibility. It is not possible for poetry to transcend its own medium, just as it is not possible for the subject to transcend their own linguistically determined consciousness. Ultimately, the poet cannot write the subject into place; he can only write the subject's desire for that place.

Civil Beasts

"Dog Park"; "Bicycle"; "Typewriter Music"

Malouf Romanticises his suburban settings in two ways. Firstly, he brings-in elements of the fantastic through telescoping. In the case of "Suburban" and the other poems explored later in the next section, he does this by including micro and macro perspectives, from ants to the cosmos. Secondly, he Romanticises suburban spaces by bringing the animal and human worlds together, creating a sense of the mythic. "Bicycle" and "Typewriter Music" evoke the godhead in mechanical forms, continuing the author's almost constant play between the mundane and the transcendent. "Dog Park" merges the two by supposing a wilder, prelinguistic state now lost which stands in for the unmediated experience of the Other.

The dynamics of the desire for place in the suburbs are explored with biting humour in "**Dog Park**" (EH 62, from the set "A Green Miscellany"). The piece opens with an ironic jab at attempts to be at home in Australia without actually bending to the land itself. This is represented by people's preference for native plants without any understanding of their habitat: "Trees of a dozen shades, all of them native / none from the same / habitat or region, though the breezes visit them equally" (lines 1–3). The critique is a light-hearted one in the context of this piece, but it taps into a much darker aspect of Australians' search for an identity based on exclusion:

> In their latest incarnation these puritanical exclusionists have chosen Nature as their sphere. Their aim is the expulsion from our parks and gardens and foreshores of every bush, plant and flower that is not a *bona fide* native. Not so much out of concern for the health of the environment, the need to conserve water, for example – though that is sometimes a part of the argument – as for the health of the nation, our sense of ourselves as Australians. Only when the last non-native shrub and flower has been grubbed out of the earth, and our hearts no longer leap up at the sight of a daffodil or a bed of tulips at the Canberra Floriade, will we have broken free at last of the old superstitious nostalgia for Europe and be ourselves natives, at least in spirit, of our Australian land. (Malouf 1998, 58)

Malouf goes further than most in his rather unfashionable desire to maintain hybridity between Europe and Australia. His critique is not so much aimed at the very real environmental imperative for preferring Australia's endemic flora and fauna, as at the ideology behind it: the idea that by tearing one kind of root from the ground, we can somehow tear out another from ourselves. As Allaine Cerwonka writes, the native garden movement "contained a distinct philosophy about landscape that originated with the British Landscape School tradition but also provided Australians with the vocabulary for critiquing Britain's imperial relationship with Australia" (Cerwonka 2004, 107). The practice of tearing up European plants to replace them with indigenous species constitutes "a moralizing discourse about nation and ecology" as part of larger processes of mapping and mythmaking which attempt to establish the boundaries of a nation as *natural* (ibid., 23, my emphasis; see also Anderson 1991).

The treatment of domestic animals in Malouf's suburban poems demonstrates an interest in humanity's routes: how we got to *here* from *then*, as it were. They undermine the fantasy that the gardens which Australians plant in the suburbs, whether native or not, could ever be natural. The first stanza of "Dog Park" sets up the spatial aspect of Malouf's image, which is condensed from multiple layers of space and time. In this case, he introduces the reader to the wild in the form of the supposed wolf ancestry of dogs, juxtaposed together as civil/beasts. The temporal nature of the relationship between wolf and dog is initially hidden by attributing more reality to the former than the latter; the dogs are the ones who are past and dead. They are "ghost-dancers on the feet of sleeping wolves" (line 7). Because wolves are merely sleeping, there is the possibility of their awakening in the future. There remains, however, the issue of access to this other animal self (the wolf in the dog, the animal in us). This connection to the wild animal self is lost at a boundary fence:

> The scent trail across country blurs and is lost.
> Communication is minimal, the greeting
> codes more intimate-curious among
> the creatures, who know
> no shame and are free to follow
> their noses into places better not named (lines 9–14)

Rather than stopping them physically, the fence is merely the place at which the trail is lost, and where the wolf and the dog become blurred in the process.

In the final stanza, Malouf uses suburban imagery to reflect on modernity versus something like a natural origin. This development is tied to a negative view of mapping and naming, as the humans "emerged / as the namers and keepers" (lines 20–21). This reference to the mapping process replaces a geographical focus with a temporal one; the result is that the loss of wildness in the piece is shown to be a process, rather than a simple binary. The piece expresses this process through the use of the present perfect tense in the penultimate stanza. In lines 15–21, the park lawn serves as a site of memory, drawing attention to the long development of the natural into the social. This process is one of absolute bathos, from the time of "long-sighted stargazers" (line 21), through to the process of making place as "herders of space into viable chunks, moody diviners / of closeness and the degrees / of melancholy distance, with all / that ensued as entailment" (lines 21–25). The result is an exile of the self from the Other in the most mundane way possible: in a world of "dog-tag, poop-scoop, / dog-whistle; the angel gate / of exile. Beginning with our own" (lines 26–28).

Tamed animals are not the only way in which wildness enters the suburban landscape in animal form. The two poems "Bicycle" (P 59) and "Typewriter Music" (TM 12) portray machines an animals, lending them a touch of the power that nature itself holds in Malouf's work. The bicycle in "**Bicycle**" (P 59) appears as a horned, insectoid "forest deity, or deity of highway" (line 7). It is "the godhead / invoked in a machine" (line 8), and the offering it requires is the poet's "saucer of sweat" (line 24). This nature in a machine holds power over every figure in the poem, except one. Of all the anthropomorphised pieces of furniture, only "the mirror / remains unruffled, / holding its storm of light unbroken, calmly accepting / all traffic through its gaze" (lines 6–9). Whilst the bicycle is already a hybrid of a finite world and infinite nature, the mirror offers no confrontation.

Ivor Indyk sees, in this combination of finite machinery and infinite nature, "an apocalypse of bicycles […]. Totally transformed by correspondence and analogy, the bicycle disappears, to be reconstructed as an emblem – part tree, part beast, part insect, part angel – which unites at last the disparate orders of creation" (Indyk 1993, 52). The poet, however, fears the mirror. Indyk sees the poem as "a comic conceit, brilliantly handled, but [with] a serious point to make about the power of the imagination to re-establish the connections between the disparate areas of human experience, and to return them to an awareness of their common foundation in nature" (ibid.). Certainly, the bicycle does function as a reminder in this way. Nevertheless, its perfect integration of the natural, the godly, and the infinite also serves as a foil to highlight the lyricist's own inability to reach a similar state. It does this with the same gentle irony as the other pet poems.

"**Typewriter Music**" (TM 12) offers a similar wink to the act of writing itself. By making a grasshopper of the typewriter, the poem removes the act of writing from the figure of the poet and creates a nature-machine hybrid similar to the bicycle, a combination of "chirp and clatter" (line 14). Nevertheless, this is no perfect poetry, for rather than achieving the silence of meaning beyond itself, the hammerstroke of the typewriter's key is just "another notch / in the silence" (lines 17–18). Just as the bicycle highlights the poet's own separateness from the natural order, the typewriter-grasshopper is blind. "Brailing though / études of alphabets" (lines 13–14), the typewriter writes raucously, but without insight into the absolute. These poems are full of a humour, yet they also show just how far the removed the human subject is from the poet's dream of unity with the godhead or with the dancing wolves.

Liminal Transcendence and Black Coffee

"Suburban"; "Towards Midnight"; "Windows"; "Earth Hour"

Like "Bicycle" and "Typewriter Music", the first two pieces examined here, "Suburbia" and the set "Towards Midnight", create moments of transcendence from within the clichés of suburbia – a transcendence however, which is categorically denied in "Windows". All these pieces utilise the tension between tameness and wildness, indoors and outdoors which runs throughout Malouf's poetic corpus. The primary concerns of Malouf's poetry with their familial similarity to Romantic irony are bundled in one poem: "Earth Hour" which closes this section.

As the title suggests, the poem "**Suburban**" (P 51) is one of the few instances in which Malouf directly engages with the clichés of suburbia, at least the

Australian suburbia of the 1970s. The interior/exterior/transitional spaces are a more common topic in his work than the suburban/urban divide. In this case, however, the piece uses the tension between constraint and release to pit the negative clichés of a monotonous suburban life against the release of a transcendence that is firmly situated outside the suburban space. The regular two-line structure used throughout is highly unusual for Malouf's poems, and serves to underscore the monotony of suburban life. The use of the word "safe" to open the poem, and its repetition at the beginning of stanza five, lays the foundation for the suburban/natural, tame/wild tension in the piece, recalling the question, "What / had we traded to be safe?" in "In the Sea's Giving" (P 148). The movement of the townspeople "to the edge of town" indicates an inside/outside structure (P 51, line 20). Uncanny nature lies outside the safe zone of the town and threatens to encroach upon its borders. An inside/outside wild/tame dynamic is, however, only clearly present in the first two stanzas.

The first two stanzas are full of barriers and distance: the carports, the gauze which lies between the residents and the stars, the "far off" safe distance from Asia with its "white mountain peaks", and the sprinklers under which the grass is small and manageable (line 3). The piece uses these images to offer a disparaging and humorously satirical take on Australian suburbia. The setting is more clearly marked as Australian than in the majority of Malouf's poetry, through the specificity of the "stars of the Commonwealth" (line 2). The two images of the noble stars of the Commonwealth and the dirty gauze used to protect her inhabitants from flies and mosquitoes, one sublime and one ridiculous, are brought down to the same level in the first stanza by the suburban inhabitants who sleep under both equally. Where the "safely" in the first line consisted of a protective barrier between the inside and the nature outside, the second stanza's image of safety is the "far off" safe distance from Asia (line 3). As the poem stems from the 1970s, which marked the end of the White Australia Policy, it is not too far-fetched to read this stanza as a jab at the racism of suburban Australian culture.

The feeling of containment in the suburbs is created through the repeated imagery of barriers: the gauze, "safe behind lawns and blondwood doors, in houses / of glass" (lines 9–10); the "chrome fittings" in the bathroom holding "back the tadpole-life that swarms in dams"; and the "cotton wool in medicine bottles", which "stands between us / and the capsules whose cool metallic colours/lift us to the stars" (lines 11–19). Unlike in Malouf's suburban animal poems, these constraints are not broken by the intrusion of nature from the outside. Rather, the entire suburban structure is broken out of through a change in perspective afforded by dream states, whether in sleep, fever (as in "Childhood Illness"), or induced by drugs or alcohol, as here in lines 16–19.

During the dream state, the lawn which is supposed to function as a safety barrier for the inhabitants, who lie "Safe behind lawns" (line 9), merges into a non-human perspective where "small grass under the sprinklers / dreams itself ten feet tall as bull-ants lumber / between its stems" (lines 6–8). The headaches in stanza seven, which lead to the intrusion of the uncanny in the form of "black cats" which "give / off blackness", are likewise ushered in through nature permeating the boundaries of the suburban: in this case, "when dull headaches, / like harbour fog roll in" (lines 14–16). The fog is the finger of the ocean, which, as noted previously, is a space of darkness, otherness, the sublime, and the possibility of transcendence. The transformation of the suburban space during sleep re-characterises nature imagery as that of the suburbs: the snowy mountains of Asia, so far off, become part of the fabric of the suburban space in the form of the sleeper's bedding, "Under cold white snow-peak tucked to the chin" (line 22); the lawn becomes "ten feet tall" (line 6); and the hill's hoist, the quintessential symbol of Australian suburbia, is transformed into an image of release: "ghosts on the rotary-hoist fly in the wind" (line 21). The washing on the hill's hoist recalls the ghostlike animals of the ocean in the crab poems.

The power of nature to intrude into suburban spaces is expressed through water and insects in poems such as "Suburban", as is the possibility to rewrite this space in dream states. This explains why gardens hold such a special place in Malouf's poems. The creation of suburbs in Australia was a deliberate interference in urban working-class culture, and the gardens of these suburbs are where the ideology behind this interference plays out most publicly. At the start of the twentieth century, the "Royal Commission for the Improvement of Sydney and its Suburbs" rejected the European and American tenement systems in favour of separate houses in the suburbs for workmen (Hoskins 1994, 4). Although the report specifically mentions workmen, this proposed domestic ideal "involved gender-defined space. The feminised house in the garden suburb, separated from the masculine world of work, would enable them [women] to play the part of mother better and to devote themselves to making their homes pleasant and attractive" (Hoskins 1994, 5).

A glance at Australia's wealthier suburbs shows how little this image has changed. However, Ian Hoskins makes the point that while the "interior of the house was an opaque private space capable of deflecting public gaze […], the exterior of the home and setting, the garden were visible to all"; and that in the early twentieth century, the Housing Board of Daceyville's prize listings for gardening competitions "[indicate that] participation in the competition, and perhaps gardening in general, tended to be a male preserve" (ibid., 12–13). In a more nuanced approach, Jean Duruz writes that

> suburban gardens form significant sites for dreaming and remembering within suburban culture. As an integral part of the 'great Australian dream' of home-ownership in the suburbs, especially for times when this dream is at its height, these gardens become contained domestic spaces in which relations of place, gender and identity are played out. (Duruz 1994, 212)

Whilst her article focuses on "making these gardens through women's remembering", their central role as spaces where place and identity can be negotiated within the suburban sprawl is relevant to Malouf's use of the garden in his poetry (ibid.). If the garden is symbolic of the ideologies of the "Australian dream" that underlie suburban development, then Malouf's criticism of the Blakes' English garden in "Indoor Garden" (P 6) can be viewed as a direct rejection of a colonial ideal. It also follows that the poet's search for the transcendent, for an alternative language which can create real unity between the subject and the soil, is symbolic of his search for an alternative way of being in Australia. As water enters and undermines these suburban gardens, and insects rewrite the sacred text of their soil, so too does Malouf attempt to write the sacred into the immanent, in his conceptualisation of a different Australian identity.

"**Towards Midnight**" (EH 44–47) continues in a similar vein to "Suburban", exploring the transcendent in the humdrum setting of (sub)urban Australia. The set consists of three smaller poems, each of which addresses a different aspect of man's experience of transcendence. The first section, "**The Cup**" (EH 44) situates the transcendent within the mundane world of the Australian café. Given the nature of Australia's coffee culture, it is impossible to know whether the setting is urban or strictly suburban. The basic dynamic of the piece, however, remains the same in either case. The description of darkness and night as "espresso black" (line 2) shows that understanding of the transcendent is accessed through the daily objects. The circle which the cup makes is one of many instances in which a circle or an arc becomes a symbol of transcendence in Malouf's poems (cf. Seger 2005, 147). The opening image of the single cup bundles the eternal "distances" (line 3) of transcendence with the momentary "brief proximities" (line 4) of the poet's access to it. At the same time, the "darkness" (line 8) of the impermeable liquid (reminiscent of the ocean in Malouf's other poems) is combined with "sunlight" "on a sill" of a (sub)urban café (line 6).

In the first two stanzas, the coffee undergoes a further mutation when the "black / night" espresso is drunk as "heady mouthfuls / of breath" (lines 2–3, 8–9). The cup of coffee thus combines the elements of breath and darkness which represent transcendence in Malouf's poems. The use of enjambment between the second and third stanzas occurs at the border of night and day. Throughout Malouf's poetry, dreaming has been a process of a loss of consciousness akin to the sublime. The “singular story” of the subject who is single and cut off from unity had been “scattered” by sleep (lines 13–16). These fragments of the self are pulled back into one unit by the drinking of coffee. The act of drinking involves the body, which functions as a gateway. When alone, as here, it is more connected to the mundane. In Malouf’s love poems, the body becomes the medium for a sublime moment in the merger of the self with another. The coffee as an expression of transcendence is characterised in two ways: firstly, as an “*intimation* of the Eternal Return”, not the actual event (lines 19–20, my emphasis). Secondly, it is ever-present “*in* us” (line 23, my emphasis). Access to transcendence is understood to be internal, while the poem points to the impossibility of expressing transcendence in its true form; the best it can manage is an “intimation” (line 19), oscillating between affirmation and deflection, as reflected in the combination of “bitter- / sweet in the same cup” (lines 20–21).

The second poem in the set, which also shares the title “**Towards Midnight**” (EH 45), combines (sub)urban spaces with the dark: first the café, then a room. The movement in the title *towards* midnight sets up the mood of night in the poem. The feeling is one of approaching, rather than attaining, transcendence. In “The Cup”, the body was a “guardian angel of the ordinary” (lines 9–11). In this piece, the body is confronted with “a stranger. / Upstart angel / of unease or mute disruption” (lines 3–5). This other angel combines wordlessness with “the killing / word” (lines 6–7). The killing word and the upstart angel can be understood as a loss of consciousness, as consciousness is rooted in the language. However, despite the angel’s muteness, that which frees the subject from language here is itself a word. Once again, the possibilities for transcendence are thrown back on themselves.

The ambivalence of the two pieces in regard to achieving transcendence contrasts with the sense of absolute release in the third, “**Rapture**” (EH 46–47). As Natalie Seger has previously observed, in Malouf’s work transcendence cannot be grasped at, only received (Seger 2005). The opening of “Rapture” reflects this idea through the exaggerated use of the passive voice and nominalisation: “The being seized / and taken” (lines 1–2). The act of transcending the self becomes the grammatical subject, unattached to a specific person or personal address, and thus universal. The inside-outwards movement of the self, who looks inward to connect to the Other, becomes the thematic content of the final four stanzas. Here the subject experiences a moment of transcendence which is like lightning:

> as if
> in the nest of your palm
>
> an egg, its shell
> as fragile and pale

> blue as the sky
> overhead, suddenly trembled
> and cracked
> opened as your self-
> containment might (lines 11–19)

Although the majority of the piece describes this transcendent moment, the use of the subjunctive mode in this passage indicates that the entire experience is deferred.

The overall structure of the set is that of the present tense, which contains at once a single moment and an eternity of repeated moments (as opposed to the present continuous, which only captures the present action). The second poem of the set moves further into the future with the opening word "always", before combining past and future in the present perfect tense of "we have set / a place for" in expectation (lines 1, 10–11). This expectation is not met in the third poem. It is disappointed by its reverse movement into the past in line 21. There is a certain reflective irony in the way that the circular pattern of the tenses frustrates the set's efforts to complete a performative experience of transcendence; yet it may be argued that this circular structure, like the egg in "The Rapture", is a symbol for that very transcendence in Malouf's work.

The egg combines the outside world, the experience of nature and space (sky), with a symbol of consciousness itself (that which contains the self). Importantly, however, the image of the egg is distanced from the body of the subject through its position outside the body (on the palm of the hand) and a series of similes ("blue as the sky" in line 15, "as your self / -containment might" in lines 18–19). The poem perfectly reflects the moment of the sublime, in which the consciousness of the self breaks apart from the outside in and moves beyond time and language, in "less a breaking than a breaking out" (lines 28–30). Ultimately, however, it reflects on language and poetry's inability to truly capture this moment.

There is no true moment of transcendence, or even the shock of the sublime, to be found in Malouf's suburbia. The poem "**Windows**" (EH 40) also makes this very clear. Windows should symbolise liminal space: they normally offer a view of, and a certain degree of access to, the other side of a division. But it is exactly this function which they fail to fulfil in the poem. Rather than providing an opening into the dark, otherwise associated with transcendence (for instance the night sky, or a darker reflection of the self), the darkness of the mundane modern world is encapsulated in "the tradesman's / van" (lines 15–16). The windows are contained within the domestic sphere, rather than offering an opening to somewhere else. This initial assessment is somewhat qualified in "Windows II" from Malouf's most recent volume *An Open Book*. There they are "frames to contain, within measure, / the boundless proximities / of ocean, air […]" (AOB lines 1-2). They remain, however, a limiting factor. The windows' dearth of sublime properties in "Windows" is shown by the lack of stars reflected in them: these windows "are blank and do not brighten / with dawn. No stars / pinpoint at nightfall / their squared-off polished depths" (lines 5–8).

> The carpenter has arrived bringing windows.
> He unpacks them from the dark
> of a van, carries them in,
> stacks them slant against a wall.
>
> They are blank and do not brighten
> with dawn. No stars
> pinpoint at nightfall
> their squared-off polished depths. (lines 1–8)

Unlike most of Malouf's poems, the (sub)urban interior of this house is not undermined by earth or water, and cannot merge with nature. The sublime does not intrude here. Once fitted, the windows offer no connection to nature (e.g. via a view of the seasons), only a connection to a place to which the author does "not want / to go" (lines 17–18).

> He has made windows
> to a place I do not want
> to go and will be back
> on Friday to fit them.
> I ordered and paid for this. (lines 16–20)

The speaker sought a glimpse of transcendence in the window he bought, and will receive only the mundane suburbia he paid for. He had sought the infinite, that which is "unthinged", and found only things, such as the windows he ordered and paid for (Novalis 1981, 413).[3]

Many of the poems examined in this chapter stem from Malouf's 2014 collection *Earth Hour*. The poem "**Earth Hour**" (EH 51) shares the collection's title, which is a reference to the practice of switching off the lights for an hour once a year to highlight environmental issues. However, in the wider context of Malouf's other poems, reading the title as a deliberate combination of time and space makes more sense. The prose approach to capitalisation, coupled with mid-sentence line breaks, support the ebb and flow of the poem's rhythm. Although Malouf makes extensive use of enjambment in many of his pieces, here the line breaks draw particular attention to the piece's use of key themes from the rest of Malouf's oeuvre: the animal Other, the animal self, and the point at which language fails. In the poet's search for universal origins in nature, he is confronted by the impossibility of connecting with these origins, due to the poison of suburbanisation and the inadequacy of the speech act. Taking the line breaks in chronological order, the following themes emerge.

"It is on our hands, it is in our mouths at every breath, how *not* / *remember*?" (lines 1–2, my emphasis). The speech act which is the breath in our mouths fails to provide a cohesive unity between the self and its origins in that which lies outside the self. The text implies that what separates the two is suburbia, where "we sit *behind moonlit* / *glass* in our *McMansions*" (lines 4–5, my emphasis). The juxtaposition of the moonlight and the ultimate symbol of American-style suburban banality – the McMansion – throws the entire poem into a different light. Without mention of the McMansion, the piece would roll on in the same evocative and mystic language. The insertion of the McMansions into the piece functions much like the startlingly humorous image of the poet having a culinary orgasm in "The Crab Feast". The poem's overall tone opens up (or at least *attempts* to reveal) a different, Romantic, way of reading the world.

The bathos of this suburban imagery reflects back on the fallible nature of this endeavour. The lines, "cool / millions at rehearsal / here for our rendezvous each with his own / earth hour" (lines 5–8), likewise show the deferral of the desired unity, as it is rehearsed here, but not achieved. The combination of "earth" and "hour" encapsulates a unity of nature and time. Nevertheless, the individuality of "each with his own / earth hour" in his or her suburban mansion shows that this unity is far from actually being achieved (lines 7–8). Similarly, the assertion that "we are feral" (line 9), which so self-assuredly occupies its own line, is immediately undercut by the weaker defining statement "at heart", in a gentle ironic touch (line 10).

The crux of the matter comes in lines 10–11: "Mind / is the maker, mad for light, for enlightenment". The cognitive, language-bound mind is the creator of consciousness. The suburban mind seeks the light, the rationalism of the Enlightenment. It does so, however, at the cost of the poetic. The cost is "this late admission / of darkness the cost, and the silence / on our tongue" (lines 11–13). Throughout Malouf's work (in "Sheer Edge" for instance), darkness is that which lies beyond language, and which the poet's work attempts to make immanent, but cannot, by dint of its own form. The admission that something exists beyond the grasp of judgement is as difficult for the rationalist, who cannot prove it, as it is for the poet, who can only gesture towards it. The poem implies that we have lived too long in the light of rationality, to our own detriment. By speaking rather than poetising all our lives, we have hoarded "silence / on our tongue" (lines 12–13) for "the extended cry of our first coming / to this ambulant, airy / *Schatzkammer* and midden, our green accommodating tomb" (lines

14–16, italics in original). This "cry" is vocal, but not verbal. Our "coming", then, consists of a dual structure: the non-verbal expression of the infinite, and the vocal potential for the verbal (for language). At the moment of the origin of the self, the subject occupies a liminal place between the pole of the vocal, eternal, unity, and the dividing force of verbal, self-reflecting consciousness.

Although it is strictly speaking a rubbish dump, and therefore implies a critique of throw-away culture, a midden is also where daily individual lives fall together into one place and one image. It is an image which stresses the archaeological, anthropological aspect, in keeping with Malouf's reverence for the daily artefacts of our day-to-day lives (Malouf 1998, 35). The "green accommodating tomb" (line 16) of nature will eventually house the decomposition of individuality and suburbanism within something united through death, both in matter and time. The fact that Malouf chose to cache this hope in images of a rubbish dump and the grave reflects the poet's own inability to forge his art from that ur-cry of the meta-linguistic. If the line-breaks in this piece show anything, it is that the infinite is only attained between the lines.

(Sub)Urban: Closing Remarks

Suburban space does not have any agency, unlike the ocean. It is acted upon; is written and re-written; and as with all place, its creation is a process of culture. As such, it is as provisional as the subject's own foothold on Australia. These poems present an image of suburban Australia as a way of being in Australia, and as a way of writing nationhood through specific relationships with the land: whether this be the earlier model of a rejection of the Australian native flora and fauna in favour of the English garden, as in the Blakes' home, or the more modern extreme of using the native environment as a sign of 'Australianness'. Malouf offers a hybrid identity, both of plants and of linguistic culture, and one that is not stable. This is what he calls for in his Boyer Lectures, when he says "our uniqueness might lie just here, in the tension between environment and culture rather than in what we can salvage by insisting either on the one or the other" (Malouf 1998, 10).

It is typical of Malouf's work that multiple layers of time and space are condensed into a single point of contemplation. His poems are not just about what it means to be "here" in Australia, but also about how the "here" and the "then" interact, writing a synthesis of the two into the suburbs. The wildness which seeps into Malouf's writing of the suburbs is not only that of the Australian environment, i.e. a simple binary of wild Australia versus postcolonial iterations of modernity. Instead, this wildness is humanity's and it encompasses everything outside our European linguistic order. Malouf uses the suburbs as a symbol of the finite. After all, there are few things more mundane than a suburban Australian dog park. Within this mundane space, though, he uses language to find the wild and the transcendent, to bring the reader towards a new understanding of their place on the continent through that "moment of touching" when the finite becomes the infinite.

Of Earth and Clay

Of all Malouf's sites, earth and body are where the relationship between the material and the transcendent are most closely explored. Two approaches to language play a central role in Malouf's writing of these sites. The role of nature (here closer to Nature in the Romantic sense than elsewhere) as a medium between the immanent and the transcendent is explored through the lens of the *living word* versus the *spoken word*. This is an idea with a long theological tradition, but one which the early Romantic Schelling also took up in his conception of art and poetry (Bär 1999, 159). This is the language of nature itself, and the body is able to connect with it through an embrace of the material over the immateriality of spoken language. It is in the "joys of the flesh" that the author seeks forms of communion founded in silence; although as always, the poet is unable to escape the textuality of his medium.

Gardens of the Living Word

"Touching Earth"; "Cuisine"; "The Worm's-Eye View"

Communion and translation are key strategies for overcoming the self/Other divide, ones which were also used in the crab poems. In Malouf's garden poems, they are explored through Schelling's ideas on the 'living word' with reference to Novalis. Word becomes matter which is taken into the body in the hope that, there at least, the subject can merge with the continent by consuming that which it produces. As the title of the poem "Cuisine" however, already hints, culture always gets in the way.

The worm is an industrious creature in Malouf's work. In its own quiet way, it achieves what the poet is unable to: a unification of nature and the modern world. In "**Touching Earth**" (EH 16), the first of Malouf's "Garden Poems" (EH 16–19), the worm is "remaking the earth, processing tea-bags, vegetable scraps, and hot / from the press news of the underworld, the fast lane, / to slow food for the planet" (lines 4–6). The act of creation, whether of good garden soil, as in "Touching Earth", or the fruit which grows out of this freshly munched-up earth in "Cuisine" (EH 56), is analogous to the poetic impetus. Through its connection with the creative powers of nature, the text is transformed into something behind the text and is rendered sacred.

In the final stanza of "Touching Earth", the old man's fancy turns "to worms in their garden box; stepping aside / a moment in a poem that will remember, /

fitfully, who made it and the discord / and stammer, and change of heart and catch of breath / it sprang from. A bending down / lightly to touch the earth" (lines 17–22). The semicolon after the "garden box" (line 17) makes the subject ambiguous, so that the reader is uncertain whether it is the worms or the old man's fancy which then engages with the poem mentioned in the following line. By adding the indefinite article in the final lines of the poem "*A* bending down lightly to touch the earth" (lines 21–22, my emphasis), the action of connecting to the earth becomes a noun rather than a verb. This object is, in turn, equated with the process of creation: in this case, the "discord / and stammer, and change of heart and catch of breath" from which a poem springs (lines 19–20). The piece offers the interpretation that the poem created here is itself the garden. How else could a poem "remember, / fitfully, who made it" (lines 18–19)? If this is the case, then the creation of a garden is an act of the poetic imagination and may be read as an alternative to the written word, with the same aims and the same limitations. The potential attributed to the gardens here makes Malouf's critique of what Australian suburbia has made of this potential in "Dog Park" (EH 62) all the more biting.

The idea of nature, particularly the earth as text, is taken up again in "**The Worm's-Eye View**" (EH 64) from the group "A Green Miscellany" (EH 52–64). Here the garden is divided into two levels. The deeper level of the worms constitutes "the sacred text", a "vast library sleeping, leaf on leaf" (lines 15, 9). This deep earth takes on the character of a hushed monastic scriptorium. It is still. The other level is movement, and the munching of caterpillars who are "unmaking, or with saw and riddle making / their own thwart commentary on the sacred text" (lines 14–15). The garden poems all explore what is best described as moments of the sacred at a micro level, possessing none of the ocean's grandeur of the sublime. The sacred is present, yet inaccessible to both poet and caterpillar. It can only show itself in the ruins of leaves and the incompleteness of the "stammer" ("Touching Earth", line 20).

The body becomes one strategy for accessing the living word of the earth. In "**Cuisine**" (EH 56), "Nature" (here capitalised) is "reorganised, translated; / a matter for mouths not speech" (lines 4–6). The apples, cherries, and avocados of the garden are understood as "consonants" (line 12) of this language, which can be incorporated bodily. In fact, the subject is credited with translating "unstable Nature" into these fruits; however, not in speech, but as "matter for mouths that is not speech" (line 6). The final stanza of this poem is one of the few instances of a successful unification between the subject and its environment. To Malouf, the act of eating is an act of communion. In his essay, *Imagining the Real*, the author tells of a rural farming community affected by the nuclear fallout of Chernobyl (Malouf and Tulip 1990, 282). During this discussion, he speaks of the importance of eating as ritual:

> This daily ritual reaches its climax when the whole family comes to the table at midday, eats what the fields and the little garden have produced, and drinks its own wine. The church's sacrament, of course, is based on this meaning and draws for its deep spiritual resonance, in some part, on the ordinariness and sacredness of this shared meal and its relation both to the land and to labour. (Malouf and Tulip 1990, 282)

Communion has the ability to unmake the garden and return it to the original creative force as it "goes back to breath" (line 14). Novalis places a similar importance on eating when he defines it as intensified life:

> Das Essen ist nur ein akzentuiertes Leben. Essen – Trinken – und Atmen entspricht der dreifachen Abteilung der Körper in feste, flüssige und luftige. Der ganze Körper atmet – nur die Lippen essen und trinken – gerade das Organ, was in mannigfachen Tönen das wieder aussondert, was der Geist bereitet und durch die übrigen Sinne empfangen hat. Die Lippen sind für die Geselligkeit so viel, wie sehr verdienen sie den Kuß. Jede sanfte weiche Erhöhung ist ein symbolischer Wunsch der Berührung. So ladet uns alles in der Natur figürlich und bescheiden zu seinem Genuß ein – und so dürfte die ganze Natur wohl weiblich, Jungfrau und Mutter zugleich sein. (Novalis 2013c, 406)

> [Eating is simply accentuated life. Eating – drinking – and breathing correspond to the threefold division of the body into solids, liquids, and air. The entire body breathes – only the lips eat and drink – that organ in particular, which, in manifold tones, expels what the spirit has received and prepared via the other senses. The lips offer so much for sociality that they deserve to be kissed. Every soft rise is a symbolic wish to be touched. Thus everything in Nature invites us, figuratively and humbly, to pleasure – and so it follows that all of Nature must be female, virgin, and mother in one.]

Novalis' particularly corporeal expression of this kind of communion with nature is one which is reflected in Malouf's writing of the body, but also in his treatment of eating and food as the kind of erotic sacrament already noted in "Pentecostal" and "The Crab Feast", and which continues with the "smaller / sacraments, hand / to mouth, cup to lip" in "A Tavola" (AOB 34, lines 5-7). The Biblical imagery of breath as that which creates life, the garden, and even the apples, is quite present here in "Cuisine". The Eden motif as evoked through the combination of apples, gardens, and the living word is explored more thoroughly in other works, particularly in relation to the Empire and Australia as an "other Eden".[1] The idea of life-creating breath, the breath of the living, also plays a significant role in the early Romantic understanding of language and of nature as explored below.

Gardens as Schelling's Living Word

Schelling taps into a strain of thought on the nature of God and logos which goes back to medieval mysticism (Bär 1999, 158). This tradition views man as a reflection of the original image of God. God himself is logos, the living creating word. As such, human speech is a part of the original creating speech that is God, and what Hamann would later view as an imperfect translation of God's original word (Bär 1999, 158–59). It should be noted, however, that although the early Romantic language discourse is heavily based on the European tradition of logos mysticism, the Biblical termini are to be understood as an aesthetic choice for the expression of a secularised philosophy (Bär 1999, 94).

For Schelling, the living word appears in nature as pure sound. The living word can speak itself, and thereby overcome the difference between the finite and the infinite. Language is both conscious and unconscious, and integrates the real and the ideal in a reflection of the absolute. It is the immediate expression of the ideal (thought, knowledge, feeling, will) in the real (Schelling in Bär 1999, 161). Whereas pure sound is the individuation of the absolute in the finite, language bridges the two as an expression of the fully accomplished imagination. In Schelling's system, language is simultaneously a product of nature and that which overcomes the purely natural in order to move into the realm of the reflexive. Because of this, whilst language is a medium of representation at the level of the object, it is itself an object on a meta-level, meaning that it is freed from the sphere of the subjective. The subject-objectivity of language is universal. Just as God is the absolute unity of ideal and real, so too is language the point of connection between these two (Bär 1999, 162).

Although Schelling does not overcome the problem of reflecting on language as both object and means of examination, his interpretation of the issue places the status of language as both subject and object in a positive light (ibid.). Malouf's concept of the ur-cry, the "extended cry of our first coming" (EH 51), and his treatment of nature as language in his earth poems, reflects Schelling's understanding of nature as an expression of the living word. Malouf's treatment of the spoken word, however, also has much in common with early Romantic irony. Like Schelling, Schlegel situated language between the conscious and the unconscious, and viewed it as a necessary and original product of the human mind (Bär 1999, 103). Nevertheless, the language discourse of early Romanticism maintains a position of scepticism. In early Romanticism, the limits of language are at the centre of discourse. For the first time in the history of language theory, the failure of language to facilitate understanding becomes the rule (ibid., 87). Thus, there always remains that which language cannot articulate. By reflecting on its own limits, language is able to indicate that which lies beyond itself:

> Das Sagen des Unsagbaren ist eine unlösbare Aufgabe, aber die Sprache erfüllt dennoch, gerade indem sie daran scheitert, diese Aufgabe. Sie erfüllt sie in der einzig denkbaren

> Weise, die der Musik und allen anderen Ausdrücksmedien nicht möglich ist – durch bewußte Nichterfüllung: Sie sagt nicht das Unsagbare, aber seine Unsagbarkeit. (ibid., 97)
>
> [To speak the unspeakable is an impossible task. Yet language nevertheless fulfils this task by failing. It fulfils it in the only way imaginable – in a way that music and all other forms of expression cannot – through deliberate non-fulfilment: language does not speak the unspeakable, but rather its unspeakability.]

In Malouf's poems, the dissolution of the garden also spells the dissolution of a suburban space, and access to its underlying elements through the body and outside the semiotic system; or so it would seem. In "**Cuisine**", "taste is the name / of things in a new language" (lines 15–16). However, the poet is unable to capture this experience in his poem in terms other than that of "language" and nature "translated". The entire frame of the poem, the title and the final line, call into question the successful representation of the experience of communion with the sacred in nature. The choice of the word "Cuisine" for the title recalls an act of socialisation and translation. Cuisine is not nature's element, but what happens when food is encoded into the social: an apple is an apple; an apple on a giant white plate with chutney and cheese and a good ginger micro-brew on the side is cuisine. From the outset, then, nature in the piece functions in a way which is already semantically occupied. There is a parallel here to poetry. As Angelica Michelis notes, "words like food are processed and what becomes of them is not determined by what they intrinsically are, but by the interpretative meaning they gain during their 'procession' through our bodies" (Michelis 2005, 82). Michelis thus highlights the similarity between the processes of eating and reading.

As a processor, the body takes on a borderline position, and it is "this borderline position between the sensual and the cerebral that is produced and constantly rearranged as a site of identity by poetry and by food and the process of eating" (ibid.). Food (or rather, *cuisine*), like poetry, is part of the symbolic realm and is likewise unable to provide an experience of the thing itself. In the final moment of "Cuisine", in which the poet would give himself over to the feast (this delicious poem beyond words), he is unable to bring back into words that which has been translated into food. The result is that the reader is left only with that weakest of linguistic devices, the simile: "plain / fare, we sit down / *as to* a feast" (lines 17–18, my emphasis). The final two lines may also be read as a commentary on the Romantic reading of the world, on the call to find the sacred in the everyday things. That is why, even though the language of the garden's fruits is "plain fare" (line 17), we are called to treat it as if it were a feast. Nevertheless, this *as if* is by its nature a deferral of the real.

Earth: Closing Remarks

Understanding the earth as the site of a different language allows the poet to explore the possibility of accessing this language through the body. The body, being made of clay, is thus connected to this ur-language and functions as a medium between the material and the infinite. Malouf's ideas about communion reflect how the corporeal can be a conduit for the sacred: the transcendent in the immanent. Whilst the earth's own language appears to contain some of the creative force of the absolute, it does not translate well, and this is where Malouf returns to Romantic irony. The earth produces food, but it is not food pure, it is cuisine. The cuisine swings between the infinite creative force of the earth and the finite realm of our own cultural-linguistic horizon like a pendulum. It is both matter and culture. Eating the fruits of the land allows the subject to partake of the land in an act of communion, whereas the English language does not allow the Australian subject to commune with the continent.

The Body

"First Things Last"; "The Switch"; "Elegy: The Absences"; "Unholding Here"; "Afterword"; "Ode One"

The first two poems examined here address the development of consciousness and explore the relationship between the mind and language on the one hand, and on the other, between consciousness and the body. "First Things Last" and "The Switch" highlight the effort involved in making consciousness in a way that recalls Malouf's Boyer lecture on the making of an Australian consciousness. In the poems "The Absences" and "Unholding Here" addressed in the second half of this section, the body becomes a site of transcendence which replaces the self. These poems are read with recourse to Malouf's long essay *The happy life* (2012) in which his writing of the body recalls ideas of unrest and presence from Novalis and Hölderin.

Importantly, it is in the body (the body personal may be extended to the body social) that the poet situates the moment of permeability. In his treatment of the body, Malouf seeks the transcendent in the most material aspect of man. The joys of the flesh are not less than those of the mind. Because the body's connection with others (through eating and touch) is silent, it offers a connection that is outside language, even as this moment is communicated only in part through the language of poetry. The body is dual: it lies beyond language, but is itself a "limiting factor" ("The Crab Feast", line 118), separating the individual from other minds and the creatures of land and sea. The body is not of language, but it is similar to language in its possibilities and limitations.

“**First Things Last**” (RD 166–168) is one of the more opaque poems among those situated in and around the body. As one of the few to write about this poem, James Tulip does not look to the body in this piece at all. Instead, he describes it as “a study of consciousness – almost totally abstract, yet lyrical for all that. […] ‘First Things Last’ is both a metaphor and method. It studies consciousness in the process of formation” (Malouf and Tulip 1990, xv). The two, however, are intimately entwined in this piece. Consciousness is pulled back piece by piece from a state of anaesthesia together with the body, by “accounting for each hair / on your head, each grain of dust” (lines 33–34). The title implies a hospital: the place where we are born and go to die. This image also brings up circle-of-life connotations. The first stanza’s implied setting is certainly that of a hospital. The room is “on all sides viewless”, and the “clean, fluorescent, flat, unhappy country” (lines 1, 7) in which it stands is reminiscent of an institutional corridor. Few domestic spaces still utilise fluorescent lighting. The third stanza, in particular, indicates a setting in which medical instruments in the classic black doctor’s bag are at home: “Only the instruments / are keen with a view / to business. They are unpacked / from a black bag” (lines 15–18).

In keeping with Tulip’s interpretation, however, it is possible to see the “First Things” in the title as the development of consciousness. Nevertheless, this consciousness is not only rooted in language, but also in the body. This comes “last” in what Tulip interprets as the “ritual death of anaesthesia”, which is “accepted, absorbed and understood as the point from which on awakening a new perception of the world is possible” (Tulip 1981, 400). “First Things Last” is one of the few poems in which the dissolution of the body and the self are characterised as negative states, rather than a movement towards unity in a higher sense. The body here is fragmented, as “other / parts of your body / are off elsewhere” (lines 10–12), rather than plural. In “The Crab Feast”, for instance, the poet imagined the self in multiple forms, thus opening up the possibility of a connection with an Other. Here the body is merely a whole which has been broken into isolated parts. The hospital setting, with the animal curiosity of its medical instruments, underscores a view of the body as a mechanical collection of parts. Little wonder, then, that the entire second section shows the struggle of the self to reassert itself in this space. This occurs through the familiar motif of the mirror; except that in this case, the mirror does not reveal the self or another self, but simply nothing: “When the mirror / clears, no one stands / in the wet field that peals from / its surface” (lines 28–31).

The reassertion of the subject into this space over the span of days “accounting for each hair / on your head, each grain of dust” (lines 32–34) is made possible here through the imagination as you “imagine yourself / back into the frame" (lines 35–36). More importantly, the imagination facilitates a connection between the inner world of consciousness and the outer natural world, in the lines "you argue with the sky / in your mouth; you breathe out / clouds, get them moving / behind you, they lift the grass, a little nightwind / arrives at your skin" (lines 37–42). Whilst the image is simply that of someone breathing on a mirror before wiping it, the language used in the fourth stanza of the second section positions elements of nature inside the subject: the "sky / *in* your mouth" with its clouds "you breathe *out*" echoes the breath of life in a way which places the body at the centre of this exchange (lines 37–38, my emphasis).

The third and fourth sections continue the theme of not belonging in a place. In contrast to Malouf's use of memory in his repossessing of childhood domestic spaces, these sections take the theme of amnesia to show the results of a failure to do exactly that. These sections start by marking a move from the second-person address to the collective first-person plural, inviting the reader to share the experience when he writes: "We've all been in there" (lines 147), turning this issue into a shared one. Whilst it may have been possible to hold the hospital setting of the first sections responsible for the feeling of *Verfremdung* from which the poet suffers, the placelessness of the spaces in the final sections stems from the lack of rooted memories in the amnesiac subjects: "how long we stayed is a black hole / or many in the fabric, / amnesias and pits we tumble into, deep / as first breath or the long drop where we missed / a step that was not there" (lines 48–55). To miss a step is something which happens in a strange space, a space which you have not written into your memory.

The universe here is not like the unity of the ocean with celestial bodies in the crab poems, but one in which "whole stars are swallowed / at a gulp. They shine / as velvet intermissions / holes with a history" (lines 55–56). As the stars are generally a symbol of the transcendent, the association of a lack of memory with the swallowing of stars ties transcendence to the making of place-memories. The making of place from space through acts of memory and imagination constitutes a Romantic way of reading that space, one which connects it with the absolute. There is no celebration of the Romanticisation of space here, however. The fourth and final section instead lays out the social conditions which make it impossible to connect with a place: poverty which sucks you dry to the bone; the lessons a long hard history of poverty teaches, like the cheapness of fish wrapped in newspaper; the inability of the body to function above and the beyond the bare necessities of "*Living from One Day to the Next*"; and a loss of the "*Joys of the Flesh*" (lines 62–73, emphasis and capitalisation original). The lack of the joys of the flesh stands in particular contrast to the celebration of the body's sensuality in Malouf's other works, especially the sexual body as a site of transcendence.

In his essay on happiness, Malouf characterises the body in the twenty-first century as representing "a kind of worship" which has "largely replaced what in earlier times would have been called the Self" (Malouf 2012, 29). Malouf traces this positive view of the body as a site not of corruption, but of inherent goodness and mediation, back to a similar change in attitudes towards nature (ibid.). Malouf does not explicitly situate these changes in Romanticism. Nevertheless, his characterisation of the twenty-first century body as a site of worship is very close to his exploration of ideas of "intensity of presence" and "energetic unrest", introduced by the early Romantic generation of Novalis and Holderlin, which he explored in the same long essay (ibid., 27). Considering this, it is hardly surprising that Malouf should use equally Romantic means of treating the body as a site.

In *The Happy Life*, Malouf combines the idea of "energetic unrest" (which he attributes to the generation of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Holderlin, and Novalis) with the body as the site of the self (ibid., 28). Rather than emphasise the relationship between this energy and genius, as he does in his essay, in this poem Malouf explores this energy and unrest under the aspect of an ironic relationship between the self, the body, and the transcendent. The irony in "First Things Last" lies not in its final verdict, which is difficult to read as anything other than "nobody wins" (line 77), but in the emphasis it places on the processes involved. In an oeuvre of work which swings between the possibility of transcendence and the failure to attain it, this piece falls squarely on the side of the latter.

Nestled amongst so much which reeks of the metaphysical, in between such apparently effortless flights of lyricism, this piece leaves the reader with something of equal value: a deep sense of the sheer effort involved in the *making of a consciousness*. This sense of effort is present from the beginning of the piece, as the poet struggles to pull together body and mind, piece by fractured piece. My turn of phrase above is a deliberate evocation of Malouf's *A Spirit of Play: The Making of Australian Consciousness*. The sheer effort enacted in this poem is disproportionate to Malouf's treatment of the mind (often verging on the metaphysical, sometimes playful) in the rest of his poetry. Turning to Andrew Taylor's reading of the body in Malouf's novels as a trinity of the body continent, body politic, and the body of the individual, the effort involved in the restoration of consciousness to the body begins to make sense (A. Taylor 2004, 76). The transformation of the house in "An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton" (RD 27), which introduces disparate body parts through the intrusion of the ocean, likewise becomes clearer in this context. The house at Hamilton is space turned into the place of Australian suburbia, representing the nation at the level of its people's daily lives. The interactions of these lives, on the border between the Australian landscape as unmade space and the suburban version of place, change the nature of those lives. The ocean erodes their surface veneer of coherence and wholeness, whilst offering the possibility of a deeper unification. This possibility is explored through the body as well, as though the materiality of the body might be able to bridge the gap speech cannot. The hope which Malouf's poems place in the corporeal could be interpreted as a further expression of the material aspect of the Australian quotidian sacred, particularly when suburban interiors are brought into the dynamic.

"**The Switch**" (P 176), for example, contains a constellation of body, interior, and landscape which is similar to that in "An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton". In this case, however, there is no melding of interior and body, but a melding of body, time, and landscape, which illuminates the interior in a new way for the subject. This poem shows a divergent strategy from other poems, such as "Elegy: The Absences" (RD 147–148), which approach the unsayable through corporeal connections. In "The Switch", the focus lies on writing new roots between earth and body. As in many of his poems,[2] Malouf merges time and space. The result is that either European history becomes the history of specifically Australian spaces, or the subject matter is placed in terms of cosmic history.

In "The Switch", time follows a double movement. The room moves backwards into the "long ago", yet also undergoes the forward movement of decay. This forms a condensed variation of the Romantic triadic model of history, which Malouf adapts in his attempts to write the subject into the Australian landscape.

> The walls creak as if we were far out in the landscape,
> sailing low over fields. The walls fall still as if we had
> arrived somewhere; so long ago that the forest has grown up
> round us. Beetles have drilled through the roof to let in starlight.
> The floor planks have softened, on their way to being the earth floor
> of a forest.[3]

The golden age of the past is replaced with nature, and the body's unity with the land is placed as a future possibility by dint of the house's decay. The past is characterised as the realm of nature when "the walls fall, as if we had arrived somewhere; so long ago that the forest has grown up around us". Yet the house does not dissipate as an object which has not yet been built. Rather, "the floor plants have softened, on their way to being the earth-floor of a forest", showing the onward process of decay of something already existent. This future process is asserted in the indicative, though still within the frame of the subjunctive that allows the poet to travel to the imagined past. The moment in which the poet submits to the experience of this nature and this past displays passive acceptance, rather than the reaching for the transcendent already identified by Natalie Seger.

The speaker expresses a complete letting go when he says "I settle for the dark. I lower myself into it and drift. It enters my ears, passes in and out of my mouth so I barely notice, touches my skin, touches the secret place on my surface that is the switch".

It is the experience of this unity in the imagination which brings the promise of transcendence closer to the immanence of the present, thus changing the way the poet sees the four walls around him. This changed view facilitates a greater sense of shared humanity and a restoration of lost community. Malouf takes this model and transforms it by weighting it towards a physical rootedness in the landscape. In his desire to appropriate an Indigenous way of belonging in Australia, Malouf gives the imagination a privileged position. It is in the acculturation of the Australian flora and fauna into the symbolic realm of a new mythology, from "their first nature" to the "symbolic one of consciousness", that Australians will "come at last into full possession of a place. Not legally, and not just physically, but as Aboriginal people, for example, have always possessed the world we live in here: in the imagination" (Malouf 1998, 39). The effectiveness of this imagination as expressed in the written word is tried against the various sites of Malouf's poems. It is in the body that the imagination appears to be free to fulfil this function fully: in the moment, that is, in which it is fully transposed onto the body, avoiding engagement with the speech act.

Unlike so many of Malouf's poems which actively engage with the question of language and the imagination, the author goes to almost painful lengths to avoid drawing attention to the role of language in "The Switch". The piece is a fully-fledged prose poem and uses extremely plain, short sentences, giving the impression of a factual reporting of experience. He also situates the transcendent in the body, thus avoiding the issue of linguistic consciousness. The poet, however, is once again betrayed by his language. The sought-after unification of body and nature cannot escape into the real, but remains self-consciously in the realm of the subjunctive: "… *as if* we *were* far out in the landscape", "*as if* we *had* / arrived somewhere", "One of / these sounds, *if tracked* to its source, *would* be my heart" (my emphasis).

Even in this constellation of nation and person grounded in the physical, the imagination remains central; Taylor deems this to be a "rather Coleridgean imagination" (A. Taylor 2004, 75). When speaking of the imagination in this context, it is important to note that both Taylor and Malouf avoid couching the relationship between the imagination and nationhood in terms of Benedict Anderson's imagined communities. Despite the similarity to the programme Malouf sets out in his Boyer Lectures, the focus in this instance is on the intersection of a specifically Romantic understanding of the imagination and the body. It is this imagination which creates a connection between the self and the Other; or as Malouf articulates it, between "between inner life – mind – and the world of objects. Between consciousness and environment" (Malouf qdt. in A. Taylor 2004, 76). Malouf takes an idealistic position, asserting the power of the imagination to actually "achieve the resolution of that tension … between inner life – mind – and the world of objects. Between consciousness and environment": this resolution is attained through poetry in "moments of high imagination and daring experiment" (ibid.). If my reading of Malouf's poems (which may fairly be taken as "moments of high imagination") has shown nothing else so far, it is that this stance is actually constantly questioned, undermined, and ultimately negated in Malouf's own poetic oeuvre. Malouf's treatment of the body is as a hybrid space in flux. The body/consciousness divide reflects the gap between the physical presences of the subject and its surroundings, and its cultural relationship to the same.

Current research has identified two alternative ways in which the body functions in Malouf's work, which also apply to his poetry: the exploration of space through the body, as mentioned by Souter; and the body as a site of the sublime, noted by Buckridge (Buckridge 1994, 181). In his characterisation of the relationship between the body and the sublime in Malouf's work, Buckridge writes that

> the amazement elicited by a sudden sense of the body's involvement with fields and forces beyond our immediate comprehension is balanced by a necessary concomitant: a renewed awareness of the body as machine, an assemblage of bits and pieces bolted together more or less successfully (rather than the unified organism central to the discourse of the beautiful). (ibid., 178)

Expanding on this idea, it is possible to see the body become a liminal space in Malouf's poetry: it is capable of change, and of both dividing the self from the rest, while also pointing to the possibility of overcoming this divide through the sublime. The body in Malouf's poetry is unstable. It is not only a matter of flesh, but is also created linguistically and spatially, with a deconstruction of word and body going hand in hand in several of his poems. Until now, I have not mentioned the role of the body politic in Malouf's poetic works (academic or poetic), and it remains of only marginal concern here. Nevertheless, Taylor's reading of *A Spirit of Play* is one which supports a parallel between Malouf's use of Romantic irony and his understanding of the postcolonial subject's situation in Australia:

> If the imagination is what enables us to be conscious of experience – both personal and national – both as a totality, a wholeness, and as meaningful, it must embrace the physical […] And the physical, in *A Spirit of Play*, means three things which, ideally,

> would interact in a seamless harmony. They are the physical body of the continent (what Malouf calls the landscape), the body politic, and the individual physical body. (A. Taylor 2004, 76)

If the body is a reflection of the land's body as well as the body politic, then Malouf's treatment of it must reflect a specific understanding of Australian identity: one that is never stable, always becoming, and always reaching for a true connection (to land, to sea, to nature, and to ourselves and Others). As a "seamless harmony" (Taylor) between the subject and the continent has been shown to be impossible time and again in Malouf's poetry, it can be assumed that the "totality" and "harmony" to which Taylor refers form an ideal that Malouf holds up as such; whilst he simultaneously embraces the idea that constant movement, rather than the actual achievement of this ideal, is both inevitable and preferable.

The permeability of the body is most evident during dreaming states and love states. In the poem "**Elegy: The Absences**" (RD 147), a dream state is shown to affect not only the mind, but also the body. This denies the body/mind divide, situating the self firmly in the flesh, whilst still allowing for the possibility of its dissolution. The piece begins with the image of a universe in harmony, expressed through the use of micro-macro telescoping: "Tree crickets tap tap tap. They are tunnelling / their way out of the dark; when they break through, / their dry husks will be planets" (lines 1–3). This harmony is connected to silence. As silence enters the poet's body during sleep, it has the effect of making that body part of the earth itself through the connection between reader, speaker, and the bodies of dead buried in the earth: "I sleep, and silence / climbs into my ear, the land blacks out, all / that was delicate and sharp subdued with fog. / The dead are buried in us. We dream them / as they dreamed us and work and found us / flesh. Their bones rise through us. These are your eyes: / you will see a new world through them. This is your tongue / speaking" (lines 8–15). As the dead's bodies rot and form part of the earth, they can offer a symbol of physical and existential integration. The new eyes and tongue they offer become a new way of seeing and speaking the world.

In the second section, the body becomes a Russian doll-like collection of "ghostly bodies we grew out of", which "are still somewhere within us" (lines 26–27). The body, then, is not one cohesive whole, but multiple. This is in keeping with the poet's desire to incorporate the crab under "the coral reef of my ribs" in "The Crab Feast". The integration of multiple selves within the body and the changed view this offers creates a connection between past, present, and future: "The ghostly bodies we grew out of / are still somewhere within us. We look through them / to what lies ahead, back behind / is greener than it was for all those deaths" ("Elegy: The Absences", lines 26–28). Even the dead are both literarily and bodily characterised. In contrast to their integration into the body of the poet, the absences the dead leave behind, the sense of loss, is encapsulated in the limitations of language: "You knew about absences. I am learning / slowly how much space they occupy / in any new house I move to, any page – the white spaces / no ink flows into, the black ones / no breath flows out of, mouths" (lines 20–24). Absence, then, lies outside that which the poem, the ink on the page, can convey.

Absences occur once more as a central concern in "**Unholding Here**" (P 7). The piece shows the relationship between the ocean, body, poetry, and dream states, connecting them all to something which lies beyond utterance and is expressed in the form of the arc. Natalie Seger identifies the circle as an expression of transcendence on the example of this poem:

> Mystery, the presence of an untranslatable other, loosens the boundaries of the self and facilitates its integration into that wider fabric of interconnections celebrated in Malouf's work. The early poem 'Unholding Here' observes this potential of the unknowable. (Seger 2005, 148)

In a small extension of Seger's reading, I propose that the combination of ocean, body, word, dream, and absence, which are so prevalent in Malouf's entire poetic oeuvre, form a structure in which Romanticism is reflected. Even the symbol of the arc points to wholeness which is absent in an ultimately Romantic gesture, the arc being a fragment of a perfect circle. The absences are particularly central to the piece. The title consists of a negative prefix, creating a word which does not exist: *unholding*. The sea also presents the reader with an absence. The nature of the ocean is that of a border which defines what is there, and at the same time, indicates that which is absent. By dint of the presence of an absence expressed, there is an indication of what *could* be there, taking the reader into the realm of the hypothetical. It is a call towards that which is beyond our ken: the "book unread" (line 1) which curls "as the wave curls on its dark, your brown / fingers" (lines 4–6). The dark here is only an adjective, yet it is used as a noun to create an un-thing consisting of nothing more than its own description. This poem indicates what might lie beyond the page, in the involuntary curl of the finger as the body reaches for the absolute in its dream state, or unconscious state.

> Unread, the book you asked for
> lies open on the sill,
> its pages in the sunlight
> curling as the wave
> curls on its dark, your brown
> fingers in half-sleep
> involuntary curl:

and waking at your side,
I watch, unholding here,
fingers, pages, waves –
an evocation of
related absences:
the dream, the poem unread,
the sea's perfected arc. (lines 1–14)

The action of unholding, as Seger notes, shows that transcendence in Malouf's work cannot be grasped at, but only received (cf. Seger 2005, 147). The poem plays with the tension between letting go and calling out; between "unholding here" and "fingers, pages, waves – / an evocation of / related absences" (lines 9–12). This tension is felt in Seger's reading as two kinds of absences in the poem: "the first absences are gaps in a sphere, the space remaining in the incomplete circle of the curl. The 'related absences' represent the whole that is beyond the poet's perception" (Seger 2005, 149). Another way of viewing this is to say that the first and the second absences are one and the same. However, the first are fragmentary, and as such, they point towards an unattainable whole.

The relatedness of these absences indicates the function of the imagination in creating wholes from these, through the poetic gaze. Seger notes that a "sense of polarity exists between the two stanzas: at their precarious point of balance is the poet watching" (ibid.). Her further analysis shows that the "enjambments of the first stanza – 'wave / curls', the 'page in the sunlight / curling', and the fingers that 'in half-sleep / involuntary curl' – join in the second to become complete in space" (ibid.). This insight into the poem's structure supports the idea that it is the poet's gaze which brings together the disparate elements (separated performatively through the line breaks) together in the final stanza. The precariousness of the wholeness afforded by this gaze is reflected in the moment of joining: "the dream, the poem unread, / the sea's perfect arc" (lines 13–14). These elements do not become poetry, but are dream stuff to be forgotten upon waking, a poem which does not communicate its word, and a wave poised before crashing. In this way the piece, like so much of Malouf's work, reflects on the moment in which the poetic imagination finds transcendence, only to lose it again, only to be failed by its own medium.

It is hardly surprising that Malouf's love poems should show intimacy in both the physical and emotional senses. They are, after all, love poems. Nevertheless, "**Afterword**" (TM 82) opens up the possibility to take a step back from the *Zweisamkeit* which has become the primary association of the term "romantic", and view the relationship between the two lovers as an expression of the absolute. The first stanza contrasts two kinds of closeness. The first half paints a picture of the physical closeness of the press of the crowds, "the close, the loud / lives, some of them those / of loved ones or ones / nearly loved" (lines 2–5). This is not the image of the city as a place of disconnectedness: if anything, the speaker's connection to these lives is too close. Rather, this image lacks content. The focus on the level of love in these relationships underscores the contrast with the second half of the stanza. In this first half, the relationships are flawed, many of them being only "nearly loved" (line 5). In the second half, the characterisation of the speaker's partner as "embodied / silence" (lines 6–7) connects him with the absolute, or at least with a space beyond the system of signs, which occurs several times throughout Malouf's work.

The communication which does occur between the lovers happens via the body: "at ease after the roads / you've travelled and with just / a trace on your skin, / in the scent you give off, of what / you bring me, the light / you'll pour into my mouth / of fields where on the way / you rested" (lines 8–15). This sensory, sensual, non-verbal communication is closer to the communion the poet seeks through physical unity with the crab in "The Crab Feast" (RD 109–118). The poem moves from the hectic city to the peace of the domestic sphere. It is in this environment that communication as physical and spiritual (or at least, mental) communion can take place. The final image of the poem is one which recalls the visceral experience of nature via taste that occurs in Malouf's earth poems:

> *But not*
> *tonight,* you say,
> not yet your smile assures me.
> *We are alone. No need between us*
> *for speech. Take your time. Eat the last*
> *of the apple. Finish your wine* (lines 15–21, italics in original)

Perhaps the microcosm of the interior space and the two lovers could function as a metonym for the space of the poem, its author and the reader. Ultimately, this piece offers the reader a moment of rest from the processes of assertion and negation in the rest of Malouf's poetic oeuvre. The simplicity of the final sentences, combined with line lengths which force a ritardando, are a gift, a moment of stillness. However, in light of the poem's title, these moments of rest are posited as being, not in language, but outside it. "Afterword" can be interpreted literally, as a short commentary on a text, or figuratively, as something that exists after words.

In "**Ode One**" (RD 181–183), the imagination is given the power to transform the body into myth, as if becoming myth in physical form offers a counterbalance to the mundane. The transformation into myth occurs by taking on the forms of nature: "All of our natural history told / in spells, in brilliant transformation scenes, / as finger, choosing secession, walks away / as stag, a lung flares up as laurel bush / an eye winks and is bird" (lines 24–28). It is only at the end of the piece, in the very final word – "*opera*" – that we learn that the way the body has been transformed into myth is an act of the imagination in the form of music. Seger sees music as representing "both a transcendental order, and the possibility of communication" (Seger 2005, 147). Although Seger prefers to look to Levinas, Malouf's treatment of music as an expression of the absolute beyond speech is very much indebted to Romanticism. Singing holds the middle position between necessary animalistic cries and free conscious articulation (Bär 1999, 106).

By dissolving the body into song, the poet places it in this middle position, between the finite and the infinite; between the mundane and the transcendent. Although this final word appears to cast the entire content of the poem in the light of an opera retrospectively (after all, opera offers mythological subject matter and the transformation of the body through costume and scene), it is the language of the body which may itself be interpreted as opera, rather than vice versa. It is this language which rewrites the finite self as infinite, at least in part: "Out of the dark / we bring these fictions forth to explain ourselves / before bicycles and clocks" (lines 28–30).

The language of the body is still ruled by syntax and is thus unable to completely dissolve itself. However, "the body's syntax" is shown to push the limits of regular syntax. It "is baroque: / it elaborates, zigzags, detours, jumps the tracks" (lines 33–34). The body is also capable of accessing the absolute in a physical way which is beyond human speech: "… and forests where the mind meets all those shapes / it longs for […] / the language, abstract, / exact, of miracle, which on occasions / we hear as human speech. Though the body's ear / is deaf to it, some other part, the tongue, / a hair, is tuned to catch (tiny receiver / of another harmony) its messages" (lines 47-54). This excerpt brings together a collection of motifs associated with the absolute in the other poems: music, nature, perfection, harmony, and something beyond syntax. These images merge into one taste, accessible to the body in the familiar motif of the tongue connecting to the language of nature: not through speech, but through its corporality, and a loosening of the walls of the thinking mind during sleep.

Sleep is a state in which the semiotic system is cracked. It is in this state that the self connects with the animal Other and with the gods: "Our bodies meet in another kind of order / than stroking knows or claws. Change is the dress we wear before the gods. How else should they / perceive us as we are? Who look smilingly / on fingernail and city, rose, hawk, eyelid – *opera*" (lines 69–72). The identity of the self is finally a shared one which is not limited to the body. Our selves "as we are" are body (fingernail, eyelid), place (city), nature (rose), and animal (hawk). Together, all of these disparate parts make up the final triumphant description of the human condition as opera – music, body, and myth in one great whole. There is a voice in Malouf's poetry which comes "from farther away, from the centre of compassion, reconciliation and loss in a universe where, as Malouf knows, nothing is ever lost. That voice is the identity of David Malouf, and it sings" (Hassan 2004, 98).

Malouf's Imaginary of Endless Becoming

> "I believe that the value of the special knowledge that poetry offers is that it allows us a distinctive form of entry not only into that which is other (the alien, that which is not ourselves, our time, our place) but also into the familiar, that which is our time, our place, our selfhood. If a large part of our social existence is ignored or perceived only negatively, our cultural self-perception is deprived" – *Strauss 1992*

Instead of the centre/edge, city/Bush, civilisation/wilderness dichotomies identified by Neilsen (Neilsen 1990, 4), the settings in Malouf's poetry display different strategies for his enquiry into the possibilities of transcending the self to connect with what lies outside it. Edward Soja writes that "social and spatial relations are dialectically inter-reactive, interdependent; that social relations of production are both space-forming and space-contingent" (Soja 2009, 91). Traces of this idea are implied in the way that the poems' strategies for attempting (and failing) to obtain transcendent unity are adapted to their spatial settings. All of the strategies used for writing transcendence and connection in each site involve an attempt to rewrite the contours of places in order to define and close the self/Other divide. These attempts remain at a symbolic level, and do not call for a reading of the concrete-spatiality of these sites.[1] Nevertheless, Malouf's poetic settings demonstrate a deep understanding of previous symbolic encodings in the national imaginary.

Malouf's preference for the ocean and suburban spaces as settings, rather than the Outback or Bush, reflects his understanding of Australia as an island continent, both with an exclusionary island mentality, and an ongoing connection to the culture of Europe. The rejection of strong binary oppositions, or settings which have formed part of the national imaginary, such as the Bush or Outback, are replaced by an attempt to potentiate a hybrid identity, one which is constantly being negotiated as the subject navigates different relationships between the human mind and the Other. This also includes the way we relate to the continent, whether it is fenced-out and landscaped, or approached as an equal Other. The merger of the non-human world in the form of water and animals with man-made interiors reflects the ever narrowing gap between nature and culture in the reality of urban Australia. However, nature remains part of the world which exists outside the subject and of which the subject is also a part. As such, there is a limit to how much an act of culture like poetry can achieve in providing knowledge of this world and the subject, and in creating the experience of connection between the two.

Water both creates form and dissolves boundaries. It is the medium in which the subject attempts to connect with the animal Other: in the imagination and physically through eating. As humans cannot naturally breathe underwater, it opens the occasion for connection, whilst simultaneously placing limitations on that occasion. The struggle to connect with the animal Other, and the intrusion of the water into the interior settings, uses the symbolic language of Australia as an island to explore the Romantic question of the relationship between the self and the Other. These poems likewise reflect Novalis's "single world" model, in which the finite and the infinite exist simultaneously but are not simultaneously accessible in our experience of ourselves and of the world. In the ocean poems, sea-life is transported to the table where it becomes encoded as seafood; and in others still, the poet traces the development of culture from the cosmos with its sky wolves, to the dog-park fences which delineate the realms of the "namers and keepers" (EH 62).

The Rubin vase structure[2] of the Romantic world is taken further in these interior and suburban settings, where it is reflected in the hybridisation of the animal and the mechanical, or the present and a mythic past. In this context it is adapted to explore how internalised structures of colonialism might be broken up to allow a more organic connection to the continent. The colonial interiors that are full of memories are symbolically dissolved; perhaps in reaction to the way that "private places such as homes and bedrooms become encrusted with souvenirs to the point of becoming an extension of the memory. The bricolage of memorabilia, being so many reminders of the self, is supporting evidence in the narration of a coherent personal biography" (Shields 1991, 268–69). In Malouf's interior poems, the relationship between these places and colonial memory is deconstructed; seemingly to allow a new formation of the self in a different relationship to place. The transcendental aspects of Romanticism are not removed from this process, but are rather to be reinterpreted within the structures of an Australian concept of the sacred as earthed, local, and in some ways to be found in mundane, everyday artefacts (Ashcroft et al. 2009; Malouf 1998). Malouf writes in this tradition of the sacred, displaying a strong interest in the way that everyday objects can be luminous and "disrupt our myth of the linearity of time" (Ashcroft 2014, 4).

The suburban settings depict attempts to access the transcendent via another strategy; that is, through the introduction of an imagined natural or wild past which places Nature (in a classic Romantic sense) outside human language. The search for the transcendent becomes a tracing of humanity's imagined roots and its routes into language. Furthermore, the cognitive barriers in the conception of something outside language are replaced by imagined temporal ones. This tactic, however, likewise results in a further negative assertion of the transcendent desired connection by dint of positing its loss. This ultimately ironic negative assertion is reflected in the poems' inability to create more than a fleeting expression of timelessness. The garden setting poems approach the nature/language quandary from another perspective: by writing nature as living word; although the poem remains unable to break free from its own textuality. The body, with its ability to touch and eat, like the garden worm, provides a site of merger and transformation. In all cases, there is a rejection of binaries (human/animal, cultural/natural) in favour of a hybrid understanding of space and of the self.

It is possible to see how these poems exhibit a model of Romantic irony. Nonetheless, models adapt to their application, and this can also be seen in these poems. The extensive use of water as the space of desired connection in these poems, rather than the Bush or the land, sets up the key points of the model's application: a vision of Australia as an island country which does not need to base the subject's relationship to it on a positive or negative understanding of the landscape. Instead, this vision depicts a relationship which embraces a set of dynamic permutations and a permeation of the connection between the Australian subject, the local flora and fauna, the continent, and Europe. Symbolically at least, it also reflects the relationship between the subject, the world, and that which lies beyond language.

These poems evoke the Romantic concept of "poesy" – i.e. a poetry that is a direct link to meaning, rather than a form of representation in language as a system of signs – in their attempts to bridge the gap between language and what it signifies. However, this is not to say that the imagination is able to achieve a unity of understanding and sign through poetry. The way Malouf's poetry uses form, such as setting to deliver meaning and then self-reflexively failing to do so, as well its reflection on the linguistic processes and their limitations, reveals an ideological position similar to that of Romantic irony. The model of Romantic irony in these poems is not simply applied in blanket form to the question of how the subject may have knowledge of itself (and therewith also have knowledge of the absolute). Rather, the different settings in Malouf's poetic oeuvre become testing grounds for different ways for trying to find this connection between the self and the other, and the experience of something which transcends language.

The model of irony which ultimately highlights the limitations of each of the attempts is naturally adjusted slightly in each setting, although the pillars of the model remain the same.

Similarly to the relationship of the Tasmanian oak to the oak trees of England, there something in the multifarious collection of literature, art, politics, science, and philosophy known as Romanticism which transcends its most famous forms. In a model scenario, it becomes recognisable, like the oakishness of the *Eucalyptus regnans*. It is not the words, nor the leaves, but something more insidious and enduring than word or image. Romanticism developed a set of ideas and practices in response to the pressures of social change. It is these ideas, not their aesthetic expression, which function as heuristics in modern Australian poetry. They form part of an unconscious or conscious cultural background of European-Australian authors, which can be drawn on to address similar issues. Viewed in this way rather than as a period, there is no need to speak of an endemic Australian Romanticism, or to attach any kind of modifying prefix. What we find in Malouf's poetry is not a reflection of the entire Romantic period, but Romantic irony as a specific tool which seeks to make the disjunct between subject and Other productive. This is unsurprising, considering that the Australian subject finds himself in a situation similar to that which confronted the Romantic subject.

In an Australian context, the subject–Other relationship is indicative of the relationship of the self to the absolute in Romantic irony. In the model of Romantic irony explored here, language is both that which creates an insurmountable gap between the subject, and that which is Other to it (be that raw space and unenculturated nature for the Australian subject, or the absolute in early German Romanticism); moreover, it is the only medium in which humans are able to think and thus even begin to imagine bridging this gap. Malouf's poetry is itself part of the long process of enculturation between language and landscape in Australia. The result of an acculturation process for those born in modern Australia is the replacement of a British colonial (linguistic-cultural) identity by one which is neither.

Malouf celebrates this tension, rather than supporting the idea that a true fixed Australian identity or culture will ever emerge. In doing so, he offers a biting critique of the more recent understandings of nature in the context of Australia's national imaginary. Nowhere does this become more apparent than in, for instance, his critique of the undifferentiated approach to native plants in "Dog Park", or in the resounding lack of setting the sacred in the Bush, in binary opposition to the coast. If nature is a representation of the cultural imaginary of a nation, then Malouf simply refuses to buy into Australia's. The decision to view the way that Malouf's poetry engages with the question of the subject's relationship to the Other as a modelling process does not simply serve to highlight the similarity of the ideas in Malouf's poetry to those explored in Romantic irony. It also allows a shift of focus towards the process of adaptation, which provides deeper insight into the field of this application. That is to say, examining how Romantic irony is modelled in Malouf's poems highlights the question of how the self might have knowledge of itself and of the Other, both transcendental and mundane: specifically, the ways in which this question is entwined with the subject's relationship with the local environment in Australia and the cultural construction of place in the contemporary context of Malouf's work.

Malouf's poetry exhibits the use of Romantic irony to explore a way of being in Australia which embraces the flux of hybridity. He situates in different spaces the question of how the subject can create a connection to the Other beyond language. Each of these works offers a different aspect of the self/Other relationship. In Malouf's poems, the traditional sites of alterity (the Bush or the Outback) are rejected in favour of the ocean. This could be interpreted as a rejection of such a well-established paradigm in favour of one which far better reflects the realities of Australia as a nation of urban coastal dwellers. Symbolically, the ocean undermines any possibility of establishing a fixed hybrid identity in the unification of self and Other. The fluidity of the ocean circumvents binaries such as Australian/not Australian, nature/civilisation, the sacred Other/food, etc. Malouf also raises the body from the position of a colonially fetishized site of purity, to a position which celebrates it as a site of communion.

In each case, the result is the same: there is no true merger of the self with the Other. This is impossible because we can only ever conceptualise this unity, or a new hybrid identity, in language. This language is that which simultaneously separates the self from the Other and allows the self to imagine such a possibility. In the new application of Romantic irony in Malouf's poetry, the attempt to bridge the language/landscape disjunct through the adaptation of this language is at best an endless approach. No matter what the language, or how the author writes the land into place, this process is bound by the limits of language itself. The speaker in Malouf's poems can approach the Other, and the poems can indicate that which lies beyond language, but they can never escape their own textuality.

Malouf has expressed scepticism towards the idea that a national literature or a national identity is something that can be actively achieved (Malouf and Davidson 1990, 287). By highlighting this situation, Malouf calls into question the very foundations of Australia as an imagined community, whether that be the Australian dream of the suburbs, or the Bush paradigm, or simply the idea that we may ever come into "full possession of a place" (Malouf 1998, 39). Even in the imagination, our "foothold on a continent" (RD 1) can only ever be provisional. This is a poetry which places a deeply personal longing for connection within the depth and breadth of centuries. It lives in the spaces between the planets, and the world of ants, and Sunday cricket matches; not as a triumphant feat of unifying imagination, but as a gesture towards something which "runs deeper than speech" (EH 85).

IV. Watson: Moving Beyond Protest Poetry in the Second Generation

> "It is when the supernatural, the fantastic, the magic is dismissed from the world that Empires crumble and apparatuses of realities are discarded like the serpent's skin" – *Mudooroo 1996*

Much has been made of place and the difficulty of place-creation in Australia from a settler perspective. Especially the problematic nature of the entire enterprise is too easily forgotten – entailing, as it must in a (post)colonial context – acts of violence and erasure. As an Indigenous author, Watson entwines these issues deeply in his problematisation of the relationship between the hybrid subject, language, and place in (sub)urban Australia. The fact that language in a postcolonial setting is never neutral adds another layer of complexity to the self-world relationship in Watson's poetry which is largely missing in the pieces by Malouf examined in the first half of this book. In Watson's writing, however, we find a sense of the same Romantic ironic dialectic underpinning his negotiation of this relationship. Reading Watson's poetry through the lens of Romantic irony highlights the ways in which this dialectic functions at two distinct levels.

Watson writes both as poet in general and as an Indigenous subject specifically. The two are not separate but questions of the sacred, of writing, and of placedness which are addressed in his poetry take on different qualities depending on which end of the spectrum the focus lies. In Watson's poems, placedness is not an abstract desired Other. Rather, it is a state rendered impossible through the disjunct between Indigenous and 'Western' renderings of space in (sub)urban Australia. Addressing the complexities of place and language in contemporary Australia, Watson's work demonstrates a sensitivity to the epistemological conundrums facing all authors in relation to the self-world-other dynamic. Postcolonial concerns, such as colonial power structures, displacement, hybridity, syncreticity, appropriation, and counter-discourse, however, raise the stakes in the self-world-language relationship. It is not surprising then that Watson combines the philosophical and the political as he works through the realities of living as a hybrid subject.

These poems contain powerful moments of bearing witness, elegy, biting sarcasm, and the standard preoccupations of an artist figure. Nevertheless, there is a common thread running throughout his body of work: not a white fantasy of 'reconciliation', but an endless backwards and forwards between assertion and negation. This structure asserts that it is impossible to gain true knowledge of the Other (in society or as a unified sense of place). Simultaneously it expresses the possibility of doing so. The solution which Watson offers is to acknowledge that there is no final reconciliation between the different interests in contemporary Australia to be had, but to never cease negotiating for it. This is where negation becomes productive in his work and it is this structure which is read through the lens of Romantic irony here.

Framing the Indigenous Author

Watson, who has spent a great deal of time overseas, defines himself as a Brisbane writer; and with a mixture of humour and seriousness typical of his work, he speaks of the "muddy swell" in Brisbane as a muse:

> I don't see myself as an 'Australian' poet until I'm actually performing outside of Australia. It's an odd way to exist. I've shared a podium with some fantastic 'Australian' poets and I understand their position. I'll never be a Les Murray. I'll never be as dedicated to the form as Dorothy Porter – but it was a pleasure to work alongside those artists! I'm more comfortable being a Brisbane writer. The muddy swell of the tides have been a good muse! (Brennan and Watson 2011)

The combination of highly regionalised identities and participation in a global poetic culture (which I refer to as *global regionalism*) in Watson's work appears to be emerging as a hallmark of contemporary Australian poetry. Such participation in global cultural networks provides an opportunity to reassess previous framing norms. To return to Malouf and Watson as examples, it is telling that in Langford et al's 2016 collection of Australian poetry, four of the poems selected from Malouf's work are set in Europe or explicitly engage with European literary traditions.[1] In contrast, the majority of those selected from Samuel Wagan Watson's oeuvre all showcase specific Australian locations and Australian-Indigenous experience.[2] These are key elements in both David Malouf's and Samuel Wagan Watson's work. However, they also reflect certain reader expectations (Malouf as a poet of the intellectual old guard and Watson as an Indigenous poet), which obscure the complexity of their respective poetic visions.

As the authors of the 2016 anthology write, Australian poetry participates in international poetic discourse with a wide range of voices.

> Many of the arguments and concerns which have characterised Australian poetry have been those which have reverberated throughout the western world: the extent to which the poem should or should not be underwritten by a coherent narrative self, for instance; or the nature of the space that the poet might be imagined as speaking into. All those movements which have so broadened and diversified the nature of the speaker have found their equivalents in Australia: pre-eminently, perhaps, the feminist movement, but all those other impulses as well that have argued for what had been marginalised or unexplored voices – Indigenous poets, for 'the matter of maternity', for the full range of sexualities or for poets of diverse ethnic heritage. Indigenous poetry in English has become a world of different voices in a way that can only have been dreamt of by pioneers such as Ooderoo Noonuccal and Kevin Gilbert. […]. There are also many

> more migrant voices in this anthology than one would find in collections from previous periods. (Langford et al. 2016, viii)

In reading and representing Australian poetry, there nonetheless remains the conundrum which the quote above unwittingly demonstrates. Highlighting the heterogeneity and diversity of the Australian poetic scene inevitably leads to a situation in which individual voices are categorised precisely along a scale of their relative marginalisation. In a field where authors identify themselves along these lines, this is not an issue per se. However, when selecting an analytical lens, the balance between respecting the author's self-identification and the danger of focussing on, for instance, an author's Indigeneity at the expense of other dimensions of their writing, is an increasing challenge in such a diverse scene.

Watson: Labels and Indigenous Writing

Samuel Wagan Watson identifies with specific kinship ties and his European ancestry, being of Munanjali, Birri Gubba, German, and Irish decent. His work includes references to specific Indigenous language groups and country, regions of Queensland such as the Boondall Wetlands, urban landmarks (often in Brisbane), and international landmarks, including the Berlin Wall (Smoke 166). Although Indigenous-Australian figures, cultures, and history are an essential aspect of Watson's poetic voice, and form much of the thematic content, he himself has expressed great unease with being placed in the role of the Indigenous poet. In an interview in 2007, he agrees with the interviewer that gathering his first shorter collections into *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* represents the closing of one artistic phase, saying: "being like one of the only Indigenous writers that is constantly on the circuit, I definitely provide that character but no, it's too much responsibility for me" (Featherstone 2007).

Because of his heritage and engagement with Indigenous rights and experience in his poetry, Watson is considered an Indigenous poet. This is, however, a marketing strategy which he approaches with the same suspicion that he expresses towards playing the role of the Indigenous poet:

> I do wonder about certain opportunities I've been afforded as a 'Black' writer. Did the editor choose my work because of its creative merit, or was I simply herded through because of a racial quota? I've assessed funding applications and seen the box asking 'Will this project benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?' ticked every time. Even if these projects see the light of day, they will probably never enhance the life of an Indigenous individual. Not ever. […] please interpret my writing through the colours you see when my words paint your mind's eye, and not solely for the fact that I've been racially profiled by the staff of a bookshop. I write to inspire adrenalin and to have my place on a bigger page of writers from all races and creeds. (Carruthers et al. 2016)

The comment above also reflects scepticism about poetry's ability to bring about change or reconciliation. Watson sees his work as being part of a "bigger page of writers" which includes a tradition of Indigenous writing, but also T. S. Eliot, Tom Waits, the Clash, Joseph Conrad, and Francis Ford Coppola, who have all influenced Watson's work (Brennan and Watson 2011). It is my interest to see if his work shares this page with Romantic irony as well.

Collected Volumes: Themes and Development

The titles of Watson's three collections, *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* (2004), *Love Poems and Death Threats* (2014), and *Monster's Ink* (2016) exude a sense of the tensions in their content. *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* offers three signifiers of secrecy. They indicate at once the existence of a moment of knowledge and its concealment. As Ann Vickery notes, the title "foregrounds elements of coding, veiling, and secrecy", yet this obscurity in Watson "might be viewed as performative, applying to certain constructions of identity, as well as to language and grammar" (Vickery 2014, 2). The smoke in the title connects to the poem "Smoke Signals" (Smoke 147), in which the speaker reads the smoke signals over the cityscape of Brisbane. These signals tell of the class and racial divides signalled by the black/white smoke. The socio-political aspect of Watson's work is entwined in the issue of language, as the "encrypted" in the title implies.

In "**Smoke Signals**", the young speaker does not simply see the monochrome smoke which characterises the spaces occupied by low-income families suffering "industrial accidents" or a "fibro-lined house smothered in winter flames" and those clean, "white-collar fireplaces" (Smoke 147). The speaker learns to *read* Brisbane. The city is mapped through the act of reading. In a clearly postcolonial vein, Watson is reading the city in a way that highlights how its spaces are defined by access based on class and race. Watson, however, also introduces another key aspect of his poetry in this piece: an intense locality and cosmopolitan literary touches, each equally embroiled in the political.

The piece is not only set in Brisbane, but the specificness of the setting as "the steamy Bjelke-Petersen plateau" is introduced at the start of the piece and the poem ends with a haiku, adding an international touch. Watson provides the appearance of location, while making a clear political statement. The reference to one of Queensland's longest serving, highly conservative premier[3] is a brilliant sleight of hand and this is typical of Watson's writing. His characterisation of place evokes the political: at times in Australia, at times on an international level (see for instance, "Apocalyptic Quatrains: The Australian Wheat Board/Iraq Bribery Scandal" in "Beyond the Postcolonial: A Different Take on Irony"). The final haiku portrays the power dynamics in urban Brisbane in a way that makes them appear universal. The final line bleeds from the specific experience of the speaker into a generalised concept signalled through Watson's use of italics:

> Beyond the white smoke where I thought I would
> discover the *Lucky Country*
> *Highrises dictate*
> *A crow punctulates the sky*
> *Clouds await error*

The multi-story buildings are typical of the urban landscape which holds power over the environment, threatening the clouds. The ending is also a subtle reflection of the ambivalent role which language plays in Watson's work. The image of the crow breaking into the sky is one of transcendence. The crow is breaking free from the constraints even of the sky and it does it through language: "a crow *punctuates* the sky" (my emphasis). Situated as it is between the first and final lines of the haiku, this image also reveals anxieties as the "clouds await error" rather than success in the crow's flight. Even the choice of the word *punctuate* implies that language is not only a facilitating medium, but also a limiting one.

As limiting as a full stop or comma, language not only creates and imagines, it also demarcates. In this case, it separates the Haves from the Not-Haves. Watson's smoke encrypted whispers murmur of black and white clouds above the city and the writer's black ink on the white page. The imagery is on-the-nose yet handled with a complexity and authenticity that reveals something new each reading. At the same time, the "whisper" in the title of this first volume from Watson is the hope of one voice reaching another's ears, even if only in a whisper. Even if something is lost along the way, as in the children's game of "Pass the Message", language still carries potential for communication.

The title of Watson's second collection, *Love Poems and Death Threats*, highlights the interrelatedness of power, danger, and the desire for a connection, while *Monster's Ink* returns to the issue of language and power with a new assertiveness. The themes of power, hybridity, language, and race relations in Watson's work are expressed in a voice which is often ironic (in the everyday sense of the word), bitingly sarcastic, and ever aware of the only marginally 'post' colonial condition of contemporary Australia. Watson's social critique is anything but encrypted and his artistic engagement with known modes of postcolonial writing unmistakable. My interest, however, lies primarily in the moments of ambivalence in Watson's work which are less visible; the moments in which his poetry reaches the limits of language and explores a process of negative assertion in his approach to the self/Other divide. Romantic irony is applied as a reading lens which sharpens the focus on these points, being identified as a structural element in his work on occasion but functioning primarily as an interpretive model.

The jacket of his recent volume, *Monster's Ink*, introduces Watson as an "award winning Indigenous poet and professional raconteur" before acknowledging his Munanjali, Birri Gubba, German, and Irish decent (Monster's 2016). This places Watson's work in the wider tradition of Indigenous Australian writing, which goes back to storytelling practices reaching into deep time. As an Anglo-Australian, I cannot speak from within this long tradition; nonetheless, the last sixty years have seen Aboriginal literature become a significant part of the wider Australian literary landscape. Whilst Watson may not find it necessary to talk of a tradition of Indigenous writing, Aboriginal literature is often approached as its own category, in terms of critical framing and marketing within the wider Australian literary scene; and this, as Watson notes, has political implications.

> Just being published and pigeon-holed as an Indigenous writer is political in itself. Lionel Fogarty is from my father's tribe – the Munanjali people – and quite a few of us are published. That's probably about as close to 'tradition' as we can get?! (Brennan and Watson 2011)

Without wishing to perpetuate the kind of pigeon-holing Watson himself rejects, the *perception* of a tradition of Indigenous literature in Australia remains relevant to his work, which engages with the dynamics of being both an Indigenous-Australian and a writer.

Australian-Aboriginal Literature: Context

In the introduction to their *Anthology of Australian Aboriginal Literature*, Anita Heiss and Peter Minter write that "by the end of the 1980s Aboriginal writing was firmly established as a major force in Australian letters" (Heiss and Minter 2008, 6). Poetry by Indigenous authors enjoyed rapid development in the second half of the twentieth century, and the first volume of Aboriginal poetry published in English is thought to be Kath Walker's *We Are Going* (1964) (Cooke 2013, 89). The title of Walker's famous volume reflects the importance of Elegy in the early reception of Indigenous poetry in English, which has a strong tradition of being protest poetry. Watson's poetry touches base with this tradition. Because Indigenous voices had been largely ignored in telling Australian history, even the simple presence of Indigenous writing takes on an element of the political, whether implicit or explicit. The right of the writer's work (I could add, their body as well) to be a-political is not a privilege easily enjoyed by Indigenous authors, as will become clear in Watson's poetry as well.

Despite the existence of Indigenous writing in English from the outset of colonisation, the term "Aboriginal literature" has started to be widely used only relatively recently (Wheeler 2013, vii).[4] This is perhaps because non-written forms of expression tended to be examined by anthropologists or those interested in art, given that "the term literature has not always been applied in oral cultures without writing as conventionally defined" (ibid., ix). The perception of a divide between the written and the oral word continues to be reflected in approaches to Aboriginal literature from within a paradigm Grossman identifies, wherein "Aboriginal writing continues to be defined as one version of the final frontier of Indigenous participation in the colonizing culture" (Grossman 2013, 128). This does not mean that Aboriginal literature's engagement in political discourse is suspect: rather, that it should not be viewed as a binary reaction to colonial pressures, or as being stuck in a reductive "writing back" paradigm.[5] Instead, it has its own history and forms, and as Wheeler notes, "[i]t asks to be respected and valued on its own terms" (Wheeler 2013, viii).

Because Indigenous Australians have been written about extensively from their first contact with the British to this day, according to Grossman, "the introduction of writing and textuality was neither innocent, nor neutral, nor 'natural', but was in the first instance something that happened to them – that is, literacy may be understood both politically and culturally as an event as well as a structure" (Grossman 2013, 2). Yet Aboriginal literature is also able to assert its own agency in the various fields of written representation. Jackie Huggins aptly notes that Indigenous-Australian writing is not about defining Aboriginality, but about "reclaiming our history and place in Australian society on our terms"; and Penny Van Toorn writes that "literacy and the English language were powerful tools of another kind, tools that enabled Aboriginal people to bargain with a new force that was shaping the world – the white man" (Huggins 2008, 60; van Toorn 2006, 24). The question of the relationship between language, the mind and reality becomes highly culturally and politically charged in this context.

Watson engages with the ambivalence of language's role in writing in a way that provocatively combines the age-old conundrum of language for the author per se, and the specific issues of writing in English for himself as a poet and Indigenous-Australian. The poem "Blacktracker … Blackwriter … Blacksubject[6]" (Love 50) examined later is one example of this. Watson's poetry exhibits an ambivalence towards language as both his artistic medium and a vehicle of violence towards Indigenous Australians. Watson does not shy away from questioning the labels attached to him in poems such as "Labelled" (Smoke 48). Rather than reflecting simply an act of 'writing back', Watson's poetry intersects with many different literary cultures; from science fiction and horror through to haiku. His work combines this cosmopolitanism with a strong sense of the political and local. There is a strong tradition of Indigenous protest poetry in Australia and it is part of the general literary and cultural landscape in which Watson writes. The political has been perceived as so central to Indigenous writing that, rather than categorising Aboriginal literature according to style or region, Heiss and Minter trace its history, as represented in their *Anthology*, along the lines of its political engagement. The earliest pieces of Aboriginal writing are public letters and petitions by individuals such as Bennelong (c.1764–1813), and Indigenous writing of this kind continues and, according to Heiss and Minter, it demonstrates "one of the persistent and now characteristic elements of Aboriginal literature – the nexus between the literary and the political" (Heiss and Minter 2008, 2).

Aboriginal literature was influenced by the American civil rights and the South African antiapartheid movements at a time when Indigenous Australians were fighting for equal citizenship in the 1960s and 70s[7] (ibid., 4). The 1980s saw a rise in public interest in Aboriginal literature,[8] which was picked up by mainstream publishers, and developed into "a vigorous and commercially independent network of Aboriginal literary presses" (ibid., 6). The three years between 1987 and 1990 were also key for Aboriginal literature, because of the rise in presses that specialised exclusively in Aboriginal literature, such as Magabala Books (Grossman 2008, 2).

Literature written in English by Indigenous authors, during the colonisation of Australia and up to the present-day, is part of the wider category of Australian literature. Broadening the narrow category of what can be easily included in collected volumes, however, means including a long history of the relationship between Indigenous Australians and writings in English: Historical records, petitions, court transcripts, journalism, letters, and even rap.[9] Wheeler writes that "one of the most attractive and powerful aspects of Aboriginal creative expression is its capacity to cross boundaries, to give proper protocols, and to share its making communally, entering into exchanges with others" (Wheeler 2013, iii).

Part of this process has been the way in which Aboriginal writing pushes the boundaries of Australian literature through strong engagement with multimedia projects. As Wheeler states, "Australian Indigenous writers are also leading innovators in collaborative expression across the generations, across art forms, in life writing, storytelling film, performance and video art" (ibid., vii). The "Blackfellas Whitefellas Wetlands" project in which Samuel Wagan Watson was involved is an example of this kind of cross-media collaborative expression: It traced the history of the Boondall Wetlands through the work of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and poets during a six-month collaboration.[10]

Aboriginal literature engages with the realities of Australian culture, which includes more than two hundred years of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships. It belongs in the canon of Australian literature, yet as Wheeler states, there has also long been the feeling that it calls for

> different kinds of response and engagement, with the recognition that it is a distinct and separate expression of the Indigenous cultural world. At the same time, it connects with and even permeates the wider Australian current in so many ways that it needs to be interpreted in that larger context too; as dialogue, incursion, counterpoint. (ibid.)

This idea creates a conundrum for academics working with this literature from an outsider perspective. There is a balance to be weighed between on the one hand, policing what influences can be assumed, or which theoretical paradigms are appropriate when approaching the work of Indigenous authors; and on the other, subsuming Indigenous voices in a sea of European or Anglo-Australian discourse. This is assuming that the author in question identifies their background as being important to their work, which is not always the case. As the Australian poetic landscape becomes ever more heterogeneous, the understanding of Indigenous poetry as outlined above can be seen as diversifying into a wider Australian poetry scene, with authors participating in multiple traditions.

Approaching Watson: Writer; Indigenous Writer

Throughout this project, the idea of connecting Romantic irony, a product of eighteenth-century European epistemological enquiry, to Samuel Wagan Watson's poetry has been something I have approached with a certain unease. This unease stems from the idea that Indigenous literature necessitates a different set of analytical lenses. Yet, despite the many aspects of Watson's work to which I am blind, when I encountered the way in which Watson negotiates the tension the subject experiences between Indigenous place and the Australian urbanity paved over it, my first reaction was one of recognition. Not the recognition of a cultural insider by any means, but that of a cultural outsider who sees structural similarities between the questions Watson poses and those posed by the Romantic philosophical and literary tradition that Australia has inherited; because this is an inheritance that belongs to Watson and myself equally.

Malouf and Watson have been read in very different ways, naturally because of the different themes in their work. However, comparing scholarship on the two writers also reveals an unspoken bias in their expected framings. Part of this stems from a lingering national framing, which is an uneasy fit for both Malouf and Watson. Watson writes both as a poet and as an Indigenous poet. The two are deeply entwined in his work. However, the former is often subsumed in readings of the latter. The questions of the relationship between language, subject, and world take on different qualities depending on whether a piece foregrounds the writer or the Indigenous subject. Placedness, which takes the position of the transcendent to a great extent in the poetry examined in this book, is not an abstract Other in Watson's writing. It is a state rendered impossible through the disjunct between Indigenous and 'Western' place layered together in the same spaces in Watson's depiction of (sub)urban Australia.

Watson often makes use of postcolonial modes, such as the Aboriginal Gothic or rhetorical irony. However, when it comes to rendering the complexities of place and language, his work also demonstrates a sensitivity to the epistemological conundrums facing all authors in relation to the self-world-language dynamic. In addition, his work does more than address the postmodern, postcolonial condition in Australia: he offers a solution. This solution lies, not in resolution and certainly not in reconciliation, but in an endless reaching for understanding and acknowledgement of its limits. The irony in Watson's work lies in the way it proffers this dialectic of endless deferral and negative assertion. Writing of the realities of living as a hybrid subject, Watson's work sways between the articulation of desire for resolution and the acknowledgement that this desire is fraught due to the nature of both language itself and ingrained structures of prejudice and injustice facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Reading his writing through the lens of Romantic irony highlights this aspect of his writing which would otherwise be easy to miss.

Watson's engagement with his different heritages and his identity as a writer develops between his first two volumes of poetry. In *Smoke Encrypted Whispers*, poems such as "Labelled" (Smoke 48–49) and "The Fatal Garden" (Smoke 29) depict frustration with labels being applied in a situation where the subject is of mixed heritage. Yet there are others ("After 2 a.m. ", "New Farm is Closed", "A Black Bird of My Mind", "Jaded Olympic Moments", "Without Regret") in which the speaker questions his own identity as an Indigenous-Australian writing in English in the city.

In "Without Regret" (Smoke 128), Indigenous characters are contrasted with those who "own the paved streets of Paris" (Smoke 128, line 16) and in "Jaded Olympic Moments" (Smoke 126) Watson writes "it's still very much an US and THEM kind of deal in this / modern dreaming, / we're city people without language" (lines 16–18). In these cases, "Aboriginal" or "Black" are depicted in binary opposition to the city or European cultural heritage; this creates great sense of tension between these two seemingly opposing identities. Watson utilises this dynamic structurally in this first volume, particularly in his writing of layered place and the hybrid subject's experience of it as the following chapters will explore. The poetry expresses a desire to move beyond binaries entirely, while still addressing the social and political realities of contemporary Australia.

Many of the poems which engage with specific locations together with Indigenous subjects (such as “Brown Water Looting”, “A Stanza for the Cheated”, “Fly-Fishing in Woolloongabba”, “Mudflat”, “Fire”) do not offer descriptions of specific regional language or kinship ties. These do, however, occur in later volumes (for instance “Blood and Ink” or “A Postcard from Yarrabah” in *Love Poems and Death Threats* or “Reflex Point” from *Monster’s Ink*). This signals a shift away from a strong binary between Aboriginal and White Australia, towards the assertion of highly specific heterogeneous identities. In addition, Watson’s poetic language draws on elements from a range of cultures, from haiku through to inserting German in his work (“Die Dunkle Erde”). The author’s use of epigraphs and intertextuality alone could fill a study in its own right. Although Watson is still very much read through the lens of Indigenous writing, his use of popular culture has also garnered academic interest[11].

A Poet of the Second Generation

McCooey places Watson in this “second generation” of poets such as Kerry Reed-Gilbert, Romaine Moreton, Dannis McDermott, Yvette Holt, and Anita Heiss, seeing a template in their work in which “expressions of anger and mourning are offset by lyrical evocations of nature and expressions of black pride” (McCooey 2017, 77). McCooey dedicates a paragraph to Watson, and his assessment of Watson’s themes is in keeping with how the poet has been read by others, including Watson’s interest in the road, which McCooey reads as one of the “urban liminal spaces” which are “ambiguous sites of Indigenous freedom and death” (ibid.). For McCooey, Watson’s most notable stylistic characteristic is a mix of “stylized indirection and protest. Presenting Australia as a place haunted by its own (denied) Indigeneity” (ibid.).

In Watson’s 2004 collection, the central themes are being a writer; an Indigenous-Australian with a mixed European, Munanjali, and Birri Gubba heritage; and how these different cultures are etched and scarred into the same spaces. In his second and third collections, these themes remain, but he asserts with increasing clarity that these different cultural inheritances are coexistent, yet disparate, aspects of his identity. These later two volumes also exhibit extensive engagement with Australian and global politics, particularly the treatment of Indigenous Australian peoples, the Iraq war, workers’ rights, the Australian government’s treatment of asylum seekers, and domestic surveillance (see, for instance, “Terror” or “El Diablo Highway” from *Love Poems and Death Threats*).

Watson's poetry reflects the contemporary relevance of many of the grand narratives which supposedly lost their explanatory function in postcolonialism (such as imperialism, capitalism, and class relations). He does not use these elements to explore narratives of power and its resistance, but as aspects of the "structures of feeling" (to borrow from Lazarus) in his work. These "structures" are the portrayal of "the texture of life as it is experienced, not merely in its objective but also in its subjective aspects" (Lazarus 2011, 79). Watson's poems communicate a subjective and lived experience of imperialism, capitalism, class, and race, as fractured yet re-emergent narratives in a broader complex experience of subjectivity formed between specific regional identities, and participation in global cultures and issues.

Writing in the Protest Tradition

"Labelled"; "In the Light of Two Fires"; "Enemy of the State"; "Cheap White-Goods at the Dreamtime Sale"

Watson's volumes of poetry contain pieces which continue the protest traditions of Indigenous poetry in English from the 1960s onwards. More often than not, Watson merges the injustices of the past with the present and reflects on the role which writing has played throughout this history. "**The Book, The Jungle, The Judgement**" is just one example. In this poem, the Murri child standing before the court, who "can hardly read a word of the Queen's English, / a victim of the Queen's pleasure", is forced to hear Rudyard Kipling quotes handed down by the judge (Love 100–101, lines 3–4). McCooey focuses on this linking of "a violent colonial past and contemporary unequal power relations between government, business, and Indigenous Australia" as the central aspect of Watson's poetry, when he characterises Watson as a Murri poet in the second generation of Indigenous poets writing in the school of social protest (McCooey 2017, 77).

As an example, McCooey takes the poem "Parallel Oz" (Love, 51), in which the fairy-tale yellow brick road shows the sites of massacres, and Dorothy cannot escape while the land is parcelled out for the grazing and mining rights of men of tin and straw. "**In the Light of Two Fires**" (Love 6–7), on the other hand, looks to the past. The piece rewrites archival material in a way that challenges its status as historical material by contrasting it with lived experience. The first move the poem makes is to portray the information on place and dates in parenthetical lines: "*(The state archives reveal too much, circa 1996)*" and "*(A morning of dark horses, circa 1907)*" (lines 1 and 17, parentheses and italics in original). The poem thus relegates colonial writings to a position of being merely minor details in the background of Watson's own writing. There is not a line wasted in this poem. The first lines make the connection between writing and the physical fate of its victims by depicting the printed archival accounts the speaker reads as "depressions created by ink" (line 2). This does not, however, herald in the start of an elegy.

The presence and agency of Watson's Indigenous voice are clear in the following line, as the speaker asserts his gaze with the very first word "I": "I am able to navigate sinkholes / void of humanity" (lines 3–4). The simple inversion of the expected adjective in line 7 reminds the reader that these texts or "factotums of brutality" the speaker reads are not part of a distant past, but are close to the present, being "not even a *century young*" (lines 6–7, my emphasis). This point is then driven home by the establishment of the speaker's kinship with a person who had been a report subject, "traded like cattle" (lines 11–12). The same familial connection is made in the section which describes the experience of one of the children of the Stolen Generations snatched from its mother. More than a dramatised account of a past, it is also a promise for the future: "I am named after this child, and he will never be civilised / like this again" (lines 27–28).

Watson maintains this strong position of protest in "**Enemy of the State**" (Monster's 2–3) in his next collection *Monster's Ink* (2016), where he ends the piece with the statement:

> I don't like separatism and like the idea of inclusion-ism especially without delusion-ism and illusion-isms. Of course I could be a public enemy of a Lucky Country's facades, carry criminal records of conscience that I have never been welcomed *home* but have been offered sanctuary in strange lands with open arms. I cannot apologise for being your idea of a public enemy, an enemy of your state, cracked and faulty. I have inherited the scars from a history of violence and usually violence begets violence begets evil upon the lounge of your comfort zone upon zones long prohibited by my kind.
>
> Then I am comfortable being your public enemy, in public,
> Accepting and could have it no other way;
> Because I know that's where I stand,
> Guilty as charged.
>
> (lines 29–41, emphasis in original)

The need for this assertion of self-determination and power is associated with a view of modern Australia as "the battlefields of assimilation" in "Midnight's Boxer" (Smoke 33–34), although the subject of that poem has come out of that battlefield with "a tender honour", rendering him unable to "try and extract the truth from his fists" (lines 11, 8). There is a similar use of italics in "We're not Truckin' Around" (Smoke 90–91) as in "In the Light of Two Fires": The simple interjection "– *where'd ya get ya license!*" (Smoke 90, line 7, italics in original) reverses the perception of law and permission in the piece. Rather than the Indigenous subject getting a driver's licence under Australian law, the question is asked of "the Invader" who, as the driving motif continues, "drove right through the bora-ring / and knocked our phone off the hook / forever / forcing us to stand out on the shoulder of the road / looking for a lift" (Smoke 90, lines 1 and 9–13).

Apart from carrying on this tradition of protest in poetry, Watson also engages with the reception of Indigenous poetry, and with the commercialisation and appropriation of Indigenous culture. This last point is very clearly made in "**Cheap White-Goods at the Dreamtime Sale**" (Smoke 56–57) – a poem no less biting for the pun in its title – which bemoans the commodification of Indigenous art and culture globally. The way in which Indigenous art is "flogged off to the sweet seduction of yen / sit in the halls of a Swiss bank" (Smoke 56, lines 9–10) is the central theme of the poem. However, it also implies a critique of "an academia of art" (line 17) which ignores "the Rubenesque roundness of a / bora-ring" until it is "unfolded" in well-marketed dot paintings (lines 15–16). Although referring specifically to art and land usage here, Watson's take on the consumption of Indigenous art and culture as goods for sale provides a backdrop for qualms about being an Indigenous writer on the literary scene, which are examined later in this section.

Watson does not only engage with Indigenous writing from the perspective of a writer: he also writes on how Indigenous bodies and writing are framed. The simplest expression of this is in the sarcastic piece "**Labelled**" (Smoke 48–49). The opening eleven lines of the piece depict a dialogue between some doctors and a Mr Watson who evidently believes he is a horse. The framing of this exchange in "the cold floor of the locked ward" (line 3) shows the interference of the state (to the point of incarceration) in the self-determination of Mr Watson, even as the doctors attempt to convince him of his humanity:

> *"Mr Watson … why these antics?!"*
> "Let me out of here … I'm a winner … I have a Cup to win!"
> *"Mr Watson … you're not a race horse … you're a human being!"*
> (lines 8–10, emphasis in original)

The humanity in this poem is, however, humanity as defined by the doctors who hold power in a locked ward. Mr Watson, far from addled and passive, asserts his identity with clarity and force, however crazy it sounds at first. The sudden change which the poem takes in line 11, "oh yeah?", moves the rest of the poem from the opening dialogue situation and into the full voice of the speaker. The shift back into standard type in line 11 slows down the pace significantly from the fast exchange between doctors and Mr Watson, which features italics, bold, and ellipses. This decrease in tempo prepares the reader (and the implied figure of the doctor) to actually stop and listen to the speaker in the next section.

The second section clarifies the initial statement that the speaker thinks he must be a horse, utilising both form and content to do so. The horsiness of Mr Watson in the first section is revealed to be a sarcastic take on the desire to categorise Indigenous Australians according to their "bloodlines". As the speakers says:

> All my life I've been under some kind of label –
> full blood?
> Half blood …
> Half breed!
> Half caste –
> And even questioned about being a quadroon
>
> (Smoke 48–49, lines 12–17)

The inclusion of terms like "half caste" in this list recalls the practice of categorising the children of the Stolen Generations according to skin tone, and perhaps the intermittent calls for a policy of genetic testing to prove a person's Aboriginality in Australia.[12] The choice of the name Mr Watson, however, also suggests the ways in which Watson and his writing are received and marketed as "Indigenous". The abrupt change to plain type at line 11 effectively erases the figure of the doctor from the piece, and from its explanation of Mr Watson's "antics" in the first half. In doing so, it excludes this giver of labels from the knowledge which Watson shares with the reader. In this way, it transfers authority over the label "human" from the doctor to the speaker in the poem.

Beyond the Postcolonial: A Different Take on Irony

"Apocalyptic Quatrains: The Australian Wheat Board/Iraq Bribery Scandal"

In her discussion of the postmodern and postcolonial, Linda Hutcheon differentiates the two according to their supposedly differing concerns:

> It is not a matter of the post-colonial becoming the postmodern […] but rather that the manifestations of their (different, if related) concerns often take similar forms; for example, both often foreground textual gaps but their sites of production differ: there are "those produced by the colonial encounter and those produced by the system of writing itself" (Slemon, "Magic" 20), and they should not be confused. (Hutcheon 1989, 151)

In Watson's writing, the two are not so much confused as intimately entwined. This is where it becomes crucial to separate rhetorical from Romantic irony.

Samuel Wagan Watson does use rhetorical irony as well as allegory in his work to speak (even shout) from a place of silence and repression in a way that is difficult to miss and not unusual in postcolonial writing. Such rhetorical irony, however, is not the primary concern of this study. Rather, it is the two-fold nature of Romantic irony in its combination of a negative dialectic as a structural basis and specific epistemological interest.

Hutcheon warns against conflating postmodernism and postcolonialism in the quote above, taking "textual gaps" as an example. Whilst the two cannot be viewed as one, neither can they be so easily separated. Watson's work is fascinating because it so eloquently and brutally reflects the position of the subject who is both postcolonial and postmodern. For Watson, the English language in which he writes is suspect because of its enmeshment with still existent colonial power structures. At the same time however, he also poses the same questions about the power and limits of art and language which writers have been musing on since Romanticism.

What Romantic irony offers, is a model for representing the unrepresentable and living with extreme indeterminacy which is equally applicable to the postcolonial and the postmodern condition. In contrast to rhetorical irony, Romantic irony is not simply concerned with the gaps of language but situates the transcendent beyond the limits of language. This structure allows the sacred to become an essential aspect of the model. The sacred, in the form of Indigenous place and dreaming, is an essential element of Watson's spatial hermeneutics which his work refuses to section-off within his 'Indigenous writing'. It is equally a part of the postmodern Australia in which all Australian subjects live.

Irony in Watson's poetry is conceptualised here as a reaction to social pressures in which relationships between subject/language and subject/world are of central importance. Irony then, can naturally be brought to bear on the political as the political is an essential part of this relationship. In Dirk von Petersdorff and Jens Ewen's 2017 collection on irony in 1800 and 2000, Ewen proposes that these two periods are bound by their similar use of irony in reaction to the social and epistemological developments of the times (Petersdorff and Ewen 2017, 13).

For early German Romanticism, this was an intellectual constellation which strove for an ideal, but also assumed reaching this ideal to be impossible: it affirmed the existence of pure truth, but negated language's ability to express it (ibid.). This developed into an antidogmatic thinking which can be viewed as a reaction to the phenomenon of modernisation that was being experienced at the time (ibid., 14). Romantic irony assumes that all possibilities of description are contingent on world views and are therefore never final (ibid.). This assumption is neither positive nor negative: it simply continues to attempt to understand and interpret the world with this contingency in mind, and with recourse to meta-reflection.

The ambivalence which is the foundation of Romantic irony enables the possibility of change within political structures, allowing none to become finally normative (cf. Noetzel 2003). Romantic irony entwines the realm of human meanings (including the political) with the material and the transcendent. In addition to the dialectic movement which characterises Romantic irony, it is this merger of the material (political) and the transcendent (sacred) that can be productively read through the lens of Romantic irony in Watson's work. This is not to say, however, that he does not make use of rhetorical irony as well.

To take a quick example, the final section of the poem "Labelled" is one such moment of rhetorical irony. In this piece, the reader is invited to share the joke by being made aware of the duplicity of meaning in the poet's earlier words:

> Well
> With magnificent bloodlines like that
> I decided
> I must be a goddamned pedigree of some sort!
>
> (Smoke 49, lines 17-22)

This use of rhetorical irony is close to Jahan Ramazani's understanding of its function in postcolonial poetry. In this kind of irony there is common ground to be found in a shared joke, helping readers "to imagine communities beyond what the state […] imagines for them" (Ramazani 2001, 105).

Ramazani explores the *dédoublement* of irony in the context of the convergence of cultures in postcolonial poetry:

> Within the 'contact zone' of postcoloniality or of irony, the crossings and conjunctures result in compound formations irreducible to either source. Hybridizing often contradictory cultural perspectives, postcolonial writers have in irony a potent rhetorical correlative for their bifocality and biculturalism. (ibid., 104)

This particular understanding of irony is based on the rhetorical: a mode of expression or "rhetorical correlative" rather than the enactment of a fundamental position. Nevertheless, his observation that "postcolonial irony not only cuts; it also gathers" resonates with how I see the function of Romantic irony in Watson's poetry. Romantic irony provides a structure in which the hybrid in Watson's writing is problematised. The compound formation of the hybrid subject is taken apart and these parts brought into endless dialectic movement. Watson's poetry is almost self-conscious in its use of common tools in the postcolonial poet's box, leading to a writing which seems to know where it comes from and yet surprises with new perspectives.

Watson's awareness of traditions now established in postcolonial writing could be viewed as fitting Neil Lazarus' rather ungenerous, but apt, identification of postcolonial literature as not only being discussed in discourse on postcolonialism, but also being highly influenced by the formulaic interests of that discourse:

> For some scholars in the field, evidently, all that is required of the texts evoked is that they permit – which is to say, not actively disallow – a certain, very specific and very restricted kind of reading to be staged through reference to them […] So widespread and routine have such critical readings become that they have even begun to spawn a literary practice in their image. (Lazarus 2011, 23)

The same general principle can be seen in the focus on Watson's Indigeneity in scholarship on his work, and in the awareness that his poetry demonstrates towards the traditions of reading and writing Indigenous literature in Australia. In his study on the development of postcolonial studies from post-war decolonisation to postmodernist theory, Neil Lazarus argues that the move from a temporal use of the term (meaning largely "the period immediately following decolonization") to a critical lens, led to postcolonial studies becoming a set of postmodernist theories (ibid., 14). The grand narratives of imperialism and Marxism were no longer adequate interpretative models for understanding a world presumed to have moved on from "the 'old' order of 'modernity' (whose constituent features and aspects – unevenness, revolution, the centrality of the nation, even imperialism – are seen to have lost their explanatory power) to the 'new world order' of fully globalised capitalism" (ibid.).

In a post-9/11 world, however, it is becoming increasingly clear that imperialism, nationalism, and class struggles have not been completely replaced by postmodernism. According to Lazarus' assessment, in postcolonial studies "there has been a tendency to insist that what is urgently needed in the context of the debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan is more of precisely the kind of theory that had already been prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s"; and that this version of postcolonial studies is "premised on a distinctive and conjecturally determined set of assumptions, concepts, theories, and methods that have not only not been adequate to their putative object – the 'postcolonial world' – but have served fairly systematically to mystify it" (ibid., 17).

Whether or not one agrees with this assessment of the field, postmodernism did occur, and it greatly influenced both academia and literature. The move towards a postmodern view of the world might not have had the intended effect on real-world politics; nevertheless, I would argue that it did render modernist grand narratives not necessarily obsolete, but certainly inadequate. The contemporary poet is not so much living with postcolonialism as with "imperialism 2.0" – with the double history of colonialism and postmodernism. Watson's work reflects this very well in the way that he draws parallels between colonial history and the more recent imperialist machinations of the US in the Middle East, along with current Australian politics, in a way that does more than reveal equivalencies or continue past protest traditions.

Watson's work instead utilises postmodern forms to connect back to these traditions and address the re-emergence of imperialism and class struggles, developing them further at the point where they intersect with more "postcolonial" concerns of representation, history, and alterity. Watson works with the tension between complex individual experience and collective effects, with a sensibility for postmodern geographies and the tension between global communities and growing nationalism in an Australia under industry leadership. "**Apocalyptic Quatrains: The Australian Wheat Board/Iraq Bribery Scandal**" (Love 8–9) is an excellent example of how Watson bundles national politics with Indigenous protest poetry and ironic form.

The title of the poem references the Australian Wheat Board's violation of UN sanctions on Saddam Hussein's Iraq, disguising kickbacks as transportation fees, from 1999 until the invasion of Iraq in 2001. Considering that the AWB was a government body until the start of 1999, this did not reflect well on the Australian government under John Howard. The convergence of governmental corruption on a national level, use of capital as power through international sanctions, and the direct invasion of Iraq, forms the frame of the poem through reference to the scandal in the title only. The "apocalyptic quatrains" in the title connect it to the rest of the poem by pre-empting the epigraph citing Nostradamus' quatrains (II: 75) at the beginning of the piece (*Nostradamus* 2012, 37).

As Nostradamus' quatrains haven been credited with predicting 9/11 in popular culture, here the use of one referencing wheat returns full circle to the title:

> APOCALYPTIC QUATRAIN: THE AUSTRALIAN WHEAT BOARD/ IRAQ BRIBERY SCANDAL
>
> 'The call of the strange bird is heard
> On the pipe of the breathing floor;
> So high will become the bushels of wheat
> That man will cannibalise his fellow man ….'
> – Nostradamus, II:75

> We learn, yet forget, in the cataclysm of our birth
> the owl songs of Muk-Muk;
> the death feather, and reacquainted we shall be
> in the sunset of our mortality.
> (*The call of the strange bird is heard …*)
> The didjeridu sits in the corner of my room
> near the window, ghosts breathe
> my frailty of spirit
> resonates in the acoustics of the gouged plain.
>
> (Love 8, title through to line 5, italics and capitalisation in original)

The poem creates a compound effect: it adopts the image of the bird and resituates it in an Indigenous elegy, with the Nostradamus quatrain of the epigraph now interspersed line by line after each stanza. The bird becomes the Australian Muk Muk (line 2) or Boobok owl (a bringer of sickness or portent of death) in the first stanza; the "*breathing floor*" (line 10, italics in original) becomes the "gouged plain" (line 9) of the land in stanza two; and the "*bushels of wheat*" (line 15) become "the new crops of the invader" (line 13), which subsume the "perished seeds of the Dreamtime" (line 12) in stanza three. This places the particular histories of Indigenous Australia in the context of a scandal shared on a national level with all Australians, and internationally in the context of the US-led invasion of Iraq.

The fourth and final stanza follows the same process within the smaller frame of that one stanza, starting with a term ("invader") associated with the colonisation of Australia in Watson's poems (see "We're Not Truckin' Around"). It then moves on to the "dictator", which implies an international context (Australia not being known for any dictatorships in particular), before setting the subject as an undetermined "they" (lines 16–19). The relationship of "they" to the "dictator" could be that of Indigenous Australia to the current government, to governments past, or to Hussein (which is the most obvious interpretation). The piece, however, ends with a line from Nostradamus, "(… *that man will cannibalise his fellow man*)" (line 20, italics in original).

Irony: Between the Universal and the Specific

The final line of "**Apocalyptic Quatrains: The Australian Wheat Board/Iraq Bribery Scandal**" places the global, national, and Indigenous themes in a time-transcending universal context reminiscent of that reserved for sacred texts:

> *(…that man will cannibalise his fellow man.)*
>
> (Love 8, line 20)

This is of, course, exacerbated by the biblical style of the Nostradamus translation. One of the effects of this is to express the apocalyptic sense that the poet's view of the world changed with 9/11, in a way that brought pop-culture surrealism into real-life experience:

> I remember the night September 11 happened. I never thought I would see that. It was not a world that I knew, even though I had grown up with surreal figures in my life—the Muppet Show, The Bionic Man—from popular culture. But seeing a plane driven into a building—I never thought the world I was in was capable of that. (Watson and Magee 2015)

The poem thus enmeshes Indigenous cosmology with European mysticism and its reception in Western popular culture. The expanding layers of associations and parallels drawn in this poem do not only demonstrate how the same structures which have caused so much damage through colonialism continue to be used in Australia and internationally. In addition, the way the poem is written meshes shared knowledge and experience with the experience and knowledge of a specific culture (or in many other poems, an individual). In this poem, the invasion of Iraq is a significant historical moment for an international readership: this moment is brought closer to a national context by the AWB scandal; and finally, an Indigenous Australian perspective is nested within this.

Because the stanzas which use easily recognisably Indigenous terms (Muk Muk, didjeridu, dreamtime) are embedded in an internationally and nationally shared context, this works against the tendency to view Indigenous affairs and art as a thing apart, and too ultimately Other to be engaged with from any perspective other than their Indigeneity. Instead, Watson offers a structure (used repeatedly throughout his work) whereby the reader is invited into a poem through a point of commonality. It is from this point of commonality that Watson then introduces a personal or culturally specific perspective. In many of Watson's poems there is a sense in which the speaker is saying, "this is our story, and now I'm going to tell you mine".

This play of the universal and the specific, however, is not the same as presenting a shared common understanding. It serves to posit the possibility of gaining understanding of the Other, and of something outside language itself, at the same time as it actively reflects on the limits to this understanding. It is this aspect of Watson's writing which is explored through the lens of Romantic irony in the following chapters. However, there are already traces of this kind of self-reflection in "Apocalyptic Quatrains: The Australian Wheat Board/Iraq Bribery Scandal", which are brought in subtly through the citation of Nostradamus in the thematic context of the piece. The citation of Nostradamus throughout the piece, in parentheses after each stanza, poses the main body of the text as an exegesis of each line, implying that there is greater meaning to be found in each line than the reader could possibly have inferred from the initial citation of the quatrain as an epigraph.

Watson's poems enmesh a deeply personal and individual voice with a range of contexts and themes that opens up a point of access and connection to the reader, even as the poem makes the reader aware of the various limitations of this connection. This is the basic structure which I identify as fundamentally ironic in Watson's work. Among the ways in which he creates this structure are through the use of elements which range from the banal, through to the mythological, the sacred, and even pop-culture Gothic. All of these elements are presented as equal experiences of reality, which converge in one space and one moment in urban Australia.

Two Realities, One City

Watson's work places the invisible norm of middle-class whiteness and rationality in urban Australia under scrutiny. He does not do this by simply increasing the agency and visibility of Indigenous voices and culture in his poems; rather, Watson's ironic ambivalence allows him to maintain multiple, at times self-contradictory, positions. He leaves the material or fantastic, profane or sacred, status of the mythological[1] imagery he utilises open and unresolved. In Watson's poems, evil is older than colonisation, yet colonisation has brought with it evils enough. The tongue of the coloniser is poison, yet the last hope is to be found in dialogue. Dreamtime spirits are trapped under the tarmac, but interact with urban Australia; and whilst many of Watson's Indigenous figures are lethargic, addicted, and forgetful of their culture, that culture's ancient fears are powerful enough to become the universal fears and evils to which all Australians are doomed, unless a way forward can be found.

Watson uses two levels of reality, which McCredden calls the real and the hyperreal, but I prefer to think of as the mundane and the mythical, to make the forms and norms of mundane urban Australia visible, and then subvert them. The use of the mythological or hyperreal plane of reality highlights the contours of reality and its norms, even as it destabilises them. Under Watson's hand, Brisbane becomes like Rubin's vase: Watson brings the vase between the faces to the fore. Once seen, this visibility challenges the authority of the faces' contours, not allowing the viewer to see one without the other; but paradoxically, never both at the same time. Irony in these poems is a fundamental epistemological standpoint brought to bear on the political. It is an acknowledgement of the impossible cultural bind Australian's find themselves in and a way to live with an imperfect situation productively. The images in Watson's poems examined in the following chapters have an ambivalent status that reflects a Romantic merger of the human and transcendent and which moves beyond postcolonial hybridity. In this context, the status of reality in Watson's poetry becomes a central aspect of its irony as explored in this chapter.

Narrating Reality: The Gothic and the Hyperreal in Watson

"The Dingo Lounge"; "The Crooked Men"; "Cribb Island"; "Capalaba"; "Die Dunkle Erde"

How, and to what end, diverse levels of reality are used in Watson's work has been interpreted differently; particularly in the works of McCarthy and McCredden.

Whilst McCarthy views Watson's palimpsestic writing as hyperreality functioning as postcolonial criticism, McCredden's interest lies in "the penetration of sacred and secular into one another" that Watson's poetry enacts on the streets of Brisbane, and how "the historical realities of time, of modern Brisbane street life and the sacred values and traditions of his Indigenous heritage interfuse both to a postcolonial critique and an expression of a very real sacred" (Lyn McCredden 2010, 80). How these layers and mixtures are interpreted depends on the reality status afforded to the different elements at play, and how these are framed. Existent frames which accommodate an uncertain mixture of realities include the hyperreal and the Gothic.

The following briefly explores these possibilities for interpreting the reality status of what appear to be fantastic elements in Watson's work. In the case of what McCarthy identifies as the hyperreal, the fantastic elements are not understood to be real, but an *Ersatz* Australia which functions as a testing ground. In the case of the Aboriginal Gothic on the other hand, the fantastic questions and unsettles settler narratives. Reading the two levels of reality presented in Watson's writing of the city through the lens of Novalis' single-world model, however, it is possible to see how Watson is making two moves: Initially Watson uses postcolonial forms such as the Aboriginal Gothic to indeed challenge 'Western' systems of knowledge (similar to magic realism). However, viewing elements of the fantastic and mythic in his writing as simply real – as I believe there is no reason not to – Watson is able to build a model of the world which entwines both as equals and equally real. It forces the reader to read one world *through* the other. This is more than stating or portraying a position the reader may or may be able to sympathise with. Watson writes his city in such a way that it is *only* possible to read it through the metaphors and imagery presented by the mythological and fantastic elements of his writing, thus forcing an alternative way of viewing these spaces onto the reader. The single-world model of Romantic irony contains such tension between these two ways of reading place that it performs an ironic dialectic. First, the two realities are posited as one, but equally, the reader becomes aware of the slippage between the two. Like bi-stable images of bunnies and mountains, we are aware of both, but cannot see both at the same time, nor see one without knowledge of the other.

The Hyperreal

McCarthy identifies an essential thematic standpoint in Watson's work: "a fundamental alterity within Australianness, as well as the impossibility of community in postcolonial Australia" (McCarthy 2006, 41). His approach, however, differs significantly from that taken in this volume in that he reads this impossibility as final. McCarthy argues that Watson's poetic palimpsest has to be a virtual or hyperreal representation of Australia, which his subjects rely on in order to negotiate Australia as contested terrain (ibid., 42). McCarthy writes that:

> One of Watson's recognisable agendas in negotiating Australian hyperreality is to dissect Australia topographically, providing a host of intersections, rather than an expansive journey in Wagan Watson's work. (ibid., 65, emphasis in original)

My understanding of this journey and these negotiations differs significantly from McCarthy's in the following point: despite Watson's deconstructions, he does posit an end to this journey, even if only negatively; I argue that Watson's evocation of community – impossible, but still desired – presupposes a belief in its existence. Likewise, although the aspects of Indigenous culture in his work often serve to create a sense of the uncanny, Watson's sense of the sacred and of his own Indigeneity are real; with the exception of their reproduction as mass-media, which is a topic Watson engages with explicitly in poems such as "**The Dingo Lounge**" (Smoke 52). McCarthy writes that

> Wagan Watson's poems employ symbolism and grunge realism. His poetics confronts (and constructs) what I would call 'hyper-indigeneity', with landscapes of a nation, both physical and spiritual, in the language of the hyperreal simulacrum. However, Wagan Watson's expression of the hyperreal departs quite markedly from Baudrillard's theoretical articulations, in as far as the invocation of the simulacrum emphasises a model of a virtual jouissance (with measures of menace), rather than a language of dystopic reproduction. (McCarthy 2006, 62)

McCarthy uses the idea of hyperreality to explain the deconstructive potential of the way in which Watson brings together images from very different symbolic palettes in his poetry – ranging from pop culture to Indigenous mythology, European literature, localised close writing, and contemporary politics. I would agree with McCarthy's assessment that Watson's use of different elements is an act of deconstruction, to the extent that it opens up multiple framings within each poem and makes the reader aware of the contingency of these perspectives, as other elements and possibilities present themselves simultaneously. I would, however, posit that this position has far greater potential if understood to be real (albeit limited by its status as language) rather than a simulacrum.

"The Dingo Lounge" (Smoke 52–53), for instance, depicts a struggle between "the screaming engines of the machines of consequence" (line 9) and the pull towards something deeper than this world. I would argue that this struggle is presented as a crisis of art, and a crisis of the movement between this world and the next, rather than a deconstruction. Watson plays with the dynamics of death, art, and the divine in both European and Indigenous mythologies. The dances of the Boneman and Morpheus are each tied to the role of art and words in connection with the divine, and the failure of this connection. The dingo's voice is no longer able to be heard as he "shrieks" (line 24). Morpheus's dreams, which should provide messages from the gods, are now "arduous", as an act of labour in a labour economy; and the storm bird, which stole law from the gods themselves, no longer comes (line 24). In Watson's modern Australia, it is not just Indigenous cultures which are "swallowed up and regurgitated in foreign lands for a / dollar", but all myths become "faded memories of the story telling damned" (lines 5–6 and 30). In contrast to the hyperreal, Romantic irony negotiates the uneasy position between assertion and negation while maintaining the real existence of the transcendent (the sacred, the desired connection with the Other), despite its deconstructive bent. It is able to both deconstruct and assert the impossible without shifting into hyperreality, because it is based on negative assertion and is focused on the process rather than the result.

The Gothic

Aside from the hyperreal, Watson also makes use of classic postcolonial modes, such as the Aboriginal Gothic[2]. The Gothic is sometimes utilised in the expression of what at first appear to be elements of the fantastic in Watson's poems: this is particularly evident if his work is read as an attempt to unsettle Australian place, which has been created and represented through ongoing colonial structures that erase an Indigenous presence. Katrin Althans identifies the use of the Gothic by Indigenous authors such as Mudrooroo,[3] Kim Scott, Sam Watson (senior), and Alexis Wright, as a way of challenging an Australian identity centred on male Anglo-Celts (Althans et al. 2010, 1). These authors mix the European Gothic mode with Indigenous cultural traditions, as a way of rejecting the Othering of Indigenous Australians (ibid.).

Althans goes to great pains to point out that the Aboriginal Gothic is not simply a case of counter-discourse, but that it engages with the Gothic in a way that allows its authors to "expose the ideological shortcomings of European Gothic texts as well as of the 'typical Australian' and replace it with a more complex picture of Australian identity" (ibid., 5). The Aboriginal Gothic takes the European Gothic's fascination with transgression and uses it to challenge the status of white Australia; simply, as Althans puts it, "*because of its being merged* with Aboriginal culture and relating the Gothic to a much broader postcolonial context" (ibid., 29). Yet, in adapting the Gothic, Indigenous-Australian authors are faced with a dilemma: "on the one hand, postcolonial reworkings of European originals need well-known sources in order to function properly and to help the reader participate in the game of similarities and modifications, yet on the other hand, this very dependency on and centrality of the Western literary canon and its characters, plots, and ideas is their greatest flaw" (ibid., 21).

Watson engages with this problem by assuming ownership of both traditions. Poems such as "Crib Island" (Smoke 151) or "The Crooked Men" (Smoke 19) sit well outside a reversal of the Australian Gothic coloniser/Aboriginal dynamic which might spring to mind when thinking about the Aboriginal Gothic. In "**The Crooked Men**", the tone is more suburban thriller than nineteenth-century Gothic, reflecting Watson's partiality to pop-culture traditions and references:

> my Dad straightened out the crooked men
> in the old laundry shed
> above fishing gear and jars of nuts and bolts
> where on a rack
> their naked, twisted forms did hang
> from the neck
> body hair like pine-needles
> retrained by welded g-claps
> and steel-trap teeth
> hydraulic arms and pullies
> and a shiny drip-tray on the floor
> to catch the expelled, blackened hate
>
> (Smoke 19, lines 1–12)

It is only the author's Indigeneity which could imply that lines such as "not being grateful" (line 21) indicate a subversive reversal of the idea that Indigenous Australians should in some way be grateful to the Australian government, or that "innocence lost / to the crooked men" (lines 31–32) would refer to colonisation. Otherwise, the poem simply functions as Gothic-horror in its own right, without needing to enter into the Aboriginal Gothic's "game of similarities and modifications" (Althans et al. 2010, 21). "**Cribb Island**" (Smoke 151), on the other hand, enters into this "game" when Watson writes "we were the first Aboriginal people to analyse the remains of the first Europeans to be cleared from this soil" (lines 4–5). Because of this, the empty white "ghost town" (line 1) takes on the aspect of the Gothic castles and their ghosts.

Rather than defining these ghosts as spirits of the dead, however, Watson turns the poem into a critique of commercialism, the "remains" being the deserted houses spewing out the treasures of "Armageddon with its apocalyptic merchandising" (lines 4–7). "Capalaba" (Smoke 152) is a Gothic poem whose figures all happen to be Indigenous. Its title places it specifically in Queensland

(Capalaba was a suburb of Brisbane); though aside from these aspects, it still functions in the simple Gothic mode, without any need to adapt. Watson takes ownership of the mode, much as he also makes extensive use of haiku in his poems, including "**Capalaba**", which ends with: "*In all directions / night speaks in the darkest tones; a little boy hides*" (lines 15–17, italics in original). Perhaps the best example of Watson simply owning the genre is "Lost Parasomnias" from *Monster's Ink*, which is a love poem in the Gothic mode, heralded by an epigraph citing Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (Monster's 14).

These poems reflect an indebtedness to the Aboriginal Gothic without actually following the same programme. Perhaps the most striking example of Watson's use of the Gothic mode, not as a postcolonial critique, but simply as a horror story, is the libretto for *Die Dunkle Erde* (an excerpt is included in *Monster's Ink*, 9). Watson's mother's family comes from Germany; and after holding events in Berlin for two years, Watson collaborated with William Barton and Stephen Leek to write a Gothic tale of a German vampire who acquires a taste for Indigenous dreaming. Watson says that his love of German horror "goes back to growing up in a contemporary urban Indigenous family; you're brought up with a wealth of horror stories" (Ford, Barton and Watson 2011). When asked about the plot, Watson simply explains:

> I've come up [sic] with this idea of a young German Vampire that has decided to travel the world in search of the taste of pure blood and he comes to Australia and feeds on an Indigenous person. But not just any Indigenous person. It's an Indigenous person with an extreme connection to their dreaming. So the vampire starts experiencing the spiritual landscape of this Indigenous person. And it's unlike a dreaming he's ever experienced before. (ibid.)

"Die Dunkle Erde" (Monster's 9) is a marriage of Watson's German and Indigenous heritage, as well as his love of popular culture. The use of the Aboriginal Gothic on a hypertextual level is of most interest in relation to Watson's poetry.

The hypertext is where elements of Indigenous culture such as dreamtime stories are referred to, but may not be easily visible or accessible to the non-Indigenous reader unfamiliar with this cultural context (Althans et al. 2010, 185). Taken further, this hypertextual level can lead to what Althans refers to as "the enabling pattern of Aboriginal Gothic", in which elements of Indigenous culture and language are introduced, so that "a Western audience and its sense of linguistic and generic security is unsettled while at the same time Aboriginal cultural identity is resurrected" (ibid.).

The way that Watson writes Aboriginal places under urban Australia is similar to this pattern of the Aboriginal Gothic. There is certainly a level of opaqueness that confronts the non-Indigenous reader in Watson's use of dreamtime figures and Indigenous names. Part of the ironic structure of his work is that the reader is invited to connect with the poem while simultaneously being made aware that there are limitations to what they can understand of another's experience; and that there are limits to the poem's power to transcend the mind of the individual.

The relationship of the subject to the two elements of the mythical and the material is explored further in "**Valley Man**" (Smoke 54–55). The piece makes use of repetition to highlight the central concerns of each stanza. The repetition also serves to lend the piece the rhythmic drive of rap. This is particularly noticeable in the repetition of "hands" in the first stanza, and in the way that the final words of a line occur again as the opening words of the next: "with something in his *face / his face* that held abuse" or "the material *society / a society* existent on the *dark place / the dark* places" (lines 11, 14, my emphasis). This brings the reader's focus almost violently back to the main elements of the first page. The constraint of this focus echoes the bind in which the valley man finds himself, oscillating between two spaces: material society and the dark places.

> He had rough hands
> street hands
> black hands
> hands
>
> that reached out
> and felt the dark places
>
> but
> feeling the dark places
> He would always return
> with something in his face
> his face that held abuse
> served in an irrational way by society
> the material society
> a society existent on the dark places
>
> the dark places
> places that could not harness him (lines 1–16)

The tight rhythmic drive of the first page only heightens the sense of relief and freedom on the second page, when the subject breaks out of the constraints of society and is able to unify himself with the Australian crane or "brolga".[4]

On the second page of the piece, Watson ceases to use repetition to structure his lines, instead opening out the piece and slowing the rhythm with commas and ellipses.

> and finally
> He danced up a wind

> and mocked the dark places
> until He laid silent
> waiting… (lines 20–24)

The repeated elements in the first stanza, of hands, society, place, and dance, are representative of separateness and the attempt to create a kind of unity. The hands are the furthest, most disparate and independent, parts of the body. It is fitting, then, that they represent a different part of the subject's identity in each line of the first stanza: the rough hands of a working man, or a man much outdoors, then the street hands of the cities and suburbs, and finally, the black hands of his Aboriginality. Hands are also that part of the body which reaches out and connects to others. It is this function which they take on in the two-line second stanza. Here, the hands "reached out" (line 5), not necessarily towards other subjects, but towards "the dark places" (line 6).

These "dark places" have an unclear status in Watson's work. Much of the poetic inspiration depicted in the poems which focus on a writer's life and process is detailed as coming from the night, and in Watson's work the night and dark are depicted as the dwelling-place of the Indigenous mythic beings. However, the darkness also tends towards the Gothic, with death, nightmares, and insanity being typical characteristics of the night in Watson's poems. These functions of the night and darkness play within the tradition of dark Romanticism. There remains, however, a certain ambivalence on the part of the author as to whether this is a good thing or not.

In this poem, the "dark places" lie underneath modern materialistic society, yet these "dark places" also "create a temporary peace" within the subject (line 17). Considering the location of the spirits under the bitumen and in the "dark places", the "dark places" could be read as depicting an Australia which belongs to these spirits. The "dark places" also recall the Gothic's psychological elements. They are *unheimlich*, Indigenous place which has been rendered uncanny through colonial violence. Interestingly, these places are depicted as existing beyond language and the man in the poem is thus unable to truly connect to these places, at least not in a positive way. In this piece, a wholistic experience of identity which is posited beyond language (thereby taking on the structural role of the transcendent) is significantly darker than its characterisation in other pieces. The man in this poem is not simply an individual character.

The repetition of "hands" in the opening lines of the poem distances the hands from the initial subject "he", until they take on the form of a more general subject themselves. The hands of the individual "he" become simply "hands" at the point where they are characterised as "reaching" (lines 4–5). This reminds the reader of the general predicament of mankind, as does the use of the upper case when referring to the valley man. "He" in the upper case characterises the subject "He" as a categorical marker rather than an individual. "Society" is placed between the reaching out of the hands for the darkness and the sense of place this darkness offers (line 12). This is the materialistic society of modern Australia, which is built over the places of Australia's Indigenous peoples. Thus, the irrational injustices of this society cannot come as a surprise to the reader.

However, the third stanza shows that the effect of this abuse comes with the movement between the two places: "society" and the "dark places" upon which it exists. It is in his return from these "dark places" that the face of the poem's subject holds the "abuse served in an irrational way by society" (line 12). This, like the poem above, echoes the question asked so plaintively in "For the Wake and the Skeleton Dance": is it "better to forget"? In the fourth stanza of "Valley Man", the subject fails to embrace the movement between the two places and rejects the moments of peace the dark offers in favour of a violent forgetting. The final two stanzas express this rejection and contrast it with the acceptance of the dark which comes with the subject's own death. It does so in terms of art, or more specifically, dance.

The dance in stanza five is short-lived and ends in silence and stillness. In this case, the silence is not the achievement of a space beyond language. It is the resulting loss of voice and identity after a fleeting affair with a flight of fancy. True art returns with the fantastic in the Coleridgian sense, in stanza six.

> for when the brolga met his breath
> inviting his dance to join hers
> when,
> once again,
> He felt the dance of the young (lines 25–29)

The fantastic arrives here in the form of the Aboriginal mythic that is typical of Watson, which finds expression here as a dance eternal: "the dance of the young" (line 29).

Aboriginal Gothic Opacity vs Watson's Glossaries

Watson's treatment of the mythic in is poetry reflects a different approach to the function of Indigenous cultural references and languages than is typical of the Aboriginal Gothic. In the Aboriginal Gothic, these are supposed to be impenetrable and uncanny. In contrast, Watson includes footnotes in his poems which explain his use of specific terms, or the relationships involved in his reference to specific people or language groups. For example, the piece "Reflex Point" (Monster's 25–26) contains the following "Glossary of Terms":

> **Jagara**: Tribal language-group on the south side of Brisbane River.
> **Turrbal**: Tribal language group on north side of Brisbane River.
> ***Maiwar***: Generic name of the river as used by language groups in South East Queensland.
> ***Coot-tha***: Correct pronunciation of Mt Cootha – place of owls.
> ***Kuril***: The 'though-to-be' extinct marsupial that uniquely inhabits this bend of the river.
> ***Jurrigarr***: A term relating to breezes/winds from the Yugambeh language group, South East Queensland. (Monster's 26, glossary)

Similar supplementary information can be found in "Blood and Ink" (Love 3–5), "The Grounding Sentence" (Love 11), "In My Mother's '80s Kitchen" (Love 22), "A Postcard from Yarrabah" (Love 56–57), and "Deafening Cold" (Love 61). None of these notes are to be found in Watson's first collection *Smoke Encrypted Whispers*.

There is a shift in Watson's writing between *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* and *Love Poems and Death Threats* which followed. In the first volume there is a sense of ambivalence towards the poet's identity formed from his mixed heritage. In the later collection, he is a great deal more assertive of both his Indigenous identity and his European heritage. In his first volume, his poems still utilise two poles: black (a term he uses in "After 2 a.m. " to refer to himself, for instance) and white. His Indigeneity here is quite generalised. In the later volumes, there is an increase in his use of Indigenous terminology and the highly specific localisation of these references in relation to place and peoples. The poems I explore later in relation to language are largely sourced from *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* and reflect a sense of worry over a hybrid identity.

In contrast, the two volumes which followed assert parallel yet distinct identities. The subjects in these later poems have local and regional identities, which are no longer simply black or Aboriginal, but specific in language group and kinship. On the other hand, this regionalism is paired with an authoritative voice on national and international issues, as already mentioned, and the continued use of self-consciously postmodern forms (see for instance "Intervention Rouge" in *Monster's Ink*, 22), as well as his habit of ending poems with a haiku, or the myriad epigraphs citing classical European literature, science fiction, or archival material. Watson also explains his references to European figures on occasions when the reference might fall outside the realm of common knowledge in Australia: for instance, in "Standard Operating Procedures #2": "Werner Heisenberg, German Physicist, 1901–1976" (Monster's 6, footnote); or "'*Kippis' is the Finnish word for 'Cheers*'" in "Going Rogue" (Love 102–103, italics in original).

The Fantastic Is Reality

It is the interaction between the two elements of realism and the fantastic or mythological in Watson's poems which are of most interest here. I have already noted that Watson's use of the Gothic is, at best, parenthetical to this basic dynamic which recurs throughout his oeuvre. It is, however, worth noting that magic realism is likewise unhelpful in better understanding the interwoven nature of the mundane and the mythological in Watson's poems, because it is so close to the Indigenous Gothic. The distinction between these different modes is a matter of debate, and Katrin Althans provides a useful overview of controversies regarding these terms in her examination of the Aboriginal Gothic (cf. Althans et al. 2010, 27–28).[5]

In the broadest possible terms, however, the relationship between the Gothic in its postcolonial forms and magic realism varies depending on what is viewed as reality: for instance, whether the supernatural is in opposition to a rational reality of Enlightenment thought, or if this reality is fundamentally reshaped through the unquestioned incorporation of fantastic elements. This, in turn, also depends on the context of reading, as magic realism is strongly associated with postcolonial literatures, whereas the Gothic remains a European idea against which colonial and postcolonial forms are measured. Eva Rask Knudsen proposes the term "Aboriginal realism" to show that the difference between the modes is not central to Indigenous-Australian authors, but rather a European one (Knudsen 2004, 226–27).

The concept of *Maban reality* could be helpful in this context. The phrase comes from an Aboriginal shaman figure, the Maban (Althans et al. 2010, 28). Maban reality is grounded in earth and Country,[6] and it "recaptures and continues traditional Aboriginal narrative structures and at the same time questions the validity of European claims to a universal truth" (ibid.). The term has come into circulation in literary studies thanks to the work of the controversial figure Mudrooroo.[7] Mudrooroo writes that an understanding of the world created by the natural sciences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has become the dominant reality, and that this has "changed the consciousness of others as it shape-changed the world", by imposing a "singular European Reality, based on the so-called natural sciences, over the various indigenous realities" (Mudrooroo 1996, 2).

Where the Gothic is a category to be *applied* to literature, Maban reality is true reality which may be *represented* in literature. Mudrooroo's explanation of Maban reality is by no means shared by all Indigenous authors. I include it here as a side-note simply because it provides a vocabulary for confronting the supposition that writing, which utilises figures and ideas which fall outside the contours of realism, necessarily functions on a diametrically opposed fantastic or magic plain, or as meta- or hyperreality.

An Enmeshed Sacred: Layering Place in Watson's Work

"For the Wake and the Skeleton Dance"; "White Stucco Dreaming"; "A Bent Neck Black and Flustered Feather Mallee"

The distinction between what exists in (or rather as) reality and what exists in fiction is useful in order to clarify the difference between literary forms such as the Aboriginal Gothic, Gothic, or magic realism. Samuel Wagan Watson's poetry deals with the tension between two realities, between that of modern rationalism and one which transcends this and is portrayed using Indigenous words and figures (although not exclusively). The use of epigraphs from texts known to be science fiction or fantasy, such as Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (Love 3) or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (Monster's 14) blurs the line between fantasy and reality; or perhaps more importantly, revises what is to be viewed as a carrier of truth. As already noted, in "Apocalyptic Quatrains: The Australian Wheat Board/Iraq Bribery Scandal" (Love 8–9), the citation of Nostradamus brings a spiritual aspect to the piece which begins somewhat sarcastically by connecting him to the bribery rather than to 9/11, which has been the case in popular culture. Inserting the citation again, however, in serious and apocalyptic writing, recontextualises the lines from Nostradamus in a prophetic context.

This is where the question of the sacred in Watson's work becomes interesting. If the fantastical elements in Watson's work are afforded a material status, then they become signifiers of something which can be understood as sacred. In a postcolonial context, the sacred can be caught in antagonistic binary structures, which Watson breaks out of. In his characterisation of modern urban Australia, Watson plays with common signifiers of what at first appear to be diametrically opposing poles of Indigeneity and modernity. The signifier of these two spheres is most visibly depictions of the dreamtime, which stands as "the most familiar signifier to western readers of the Indigenous sacred" (Ashcroft, Devlin-Glass and Lynette M. McCredden 2009, 212). The other sphere is then depicted though concrete, tarmac, indifferent streets, and rusting industrial landscapes, thus presenting the reader with the familiar trope of modernity's concrete jungle. Like his father before him, Samuel Wagan Watson uses images of the dreamtime to "satirise colonialism, westernisation or urbanisation" (ibid.). However, Watson's poems do not retain a strict binary, but reflect Lazarus's suggestion that "the vast majority of 'postcolonial' literary writings point us in a quite different direction [to postcolonialism of the 1980s and 1990s], towards the idea not of 'fundamental alienness' but of deep-seated affinity and community, across and athwart the 'international division of labour' " (Lazarus 2011, 19).

Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs make the point that the kind of agency the Aboriginal sacred holds is the ability to make any and every place uncanny to modernity; not least because in the context of land rights claims based on the sacredness of a particular place, the sacred comes to be produced in a modern framework (Gelder and Jacobs 1998, 25). In Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian relationships, Gelder and Jacobs note the binary structure whereby the non-Indigenous subject is either part of Australian place and therefore an active participant in the inheritance of colonialism, or they are not implicated in the colonial past, but therefore also placeless (ibid., 24). Both these positions can be occupied at the same time in modern Australia (ibid.). Watson can be seen as writing from within a dynamic in which the relationship between the modern and the sacred is one of attraction to, and detachment from, each other. The sacred is an "activating, and soliciting thing" which, in Australia, has the indeterminable potential to be in any or every place, thus making the modern sense of place an uncanny one, which is *unheimlich* or "un-homed" (ibid., 25). For Indigenous-Australian authors, this exchange means renegotiating what is public and what is private, in relation to the sacred.

McCredden places a central importance on Watson's urban poems as those in which "the sacred impact of Watson's two worlds vision is felt most dramatically. Upon the streets, lounges, gangs and suburbs of the city – his childhood Brisbane – Watson practises a hybrid, confronting politics of Indigenous Australian poetics" (Lyn McCredden 2010, 80). Both rhetorical irony and elements of the Gothic contain forms which Watson uses to express an understanding of modern Australia as a hydra-headed place of irresolvable tensions and injustices. His works move beyond this, however, to posit hope in an ongoing, ironic process which makes his readers aware of the limits facing interlocution, while still positing the possibility of reconciliation in an endless process of engagement and approach between all parties. This is where Watson moves beyond the tradition of Indigenous protest poetry to create his own particular ironic approach, which finds power and hope in living in a state of irresolvable complex relationships.

In their examination of Indigenous author Paddy Roe's work, Gelder and Jacobs explore an approach whereby the topsoil which everyone walks on remains public, whilst there is a layer of subsoil underneath which remains entrusted only to those with kinship ties to it, thus preserving the privacy of the sacred to a certain extent (Gelder and Jacobs 1998, 107). Samuel Wagan Watson's work highlights the connectedness of these layers, rather than the subsoil's privacy. His work moves beyond an antagonistic relationship between the modern and the sacred to one of enmeshment. The way that the sacred becomes part of urban and industrial Australia shifts Watson's poems out of a binary structure in which the Indigenous elements are tasked with carrying the entire burden of the sacred, while white Australia carries that of rationalised modernity. The following section explores how the sacred and the mundane collide on the pavements and tarmacked streets.

Watson, like many contemporary Indigenous-Australian authors, makes use of an "area of free play in which Indigenous epistemologies are available for semiotic negotiation", and uses their authority not to polarise, but to present a hybrid image of Australia with all the hope and problems this entails (Ashcroft et al. 2009, 212). This is made possible by a coalescence of times, mythologies, and frames of reference into one space as one presence effect. The almost violent meeting of these different elements creates a dual perspective in which urban Australia is shown through the lens of the dreamtime spirits as part of their world, rather than vice versa. Katherine Bode reveals a similar dynamic at work in her essay on vehicles and travel in Watson's poetry. Bode's essay focuses on the ways in which Watson's subjects traverse the criss-cross of roads paved over the other network of Aboriginal songlines, and how boundaries established through colonialism are thus negotiated by the subject.

Ironic Contingency Through the Sacred

There are striking similarities between the use of irony in Watson's writing of urban spaces which I identify in the following chapter, and Bode's analysis of the way Watson uses the dynamics of home and travel, both to keep the memory of colonialism alive and to use this history to look forward with agency:

> In asserting a home on Boundary Street, the narrators of these poems not only claim the right to move through and disrupt a colonised space—as the Aboriginal youth do in 'night racing'—they also claim this space as their own. The home they build there keeps the scar of colonization in sight and under foot, and thus insists on the continuing importance of the past to the present. In building on the scar, these narrators are asserting a new and future relationship to that colonised place, based on connection with and belonging to the land, as well as links with the wider Australian community. 'Grow[ing] up', for Watson, does not mean forgetting colonial history; but it does mean not allowing that history to determine the present and future for Aboriginal people in Australia. (K. Bode 2011, 119)

The insertion of the dreamtime spirits into urban spaces brings experiences of Indigenous-Australian peoples and the spiritual consequences of these experiences to the same level of immediacy and reality as the city, in which a sacred reality and the reality of rational modernity collide. It also serves to erase the invisible norm of whiteness in Australian urban and suburban space. Anjali Nerlekar writes that "postcolonial poetry is well aware of the drawbacks of the structure of the postcolonial city just as it marks the failures of the colonial spaces. But even through these critical portrayals of the new city (a place that extends the hierarchical structures of the old), postcolonial practices become named and therefore visible" (Nerlekar 2017, 198). Watson's poems practise this kind of naming; however, the destabilising effect produced by these layers also creates an ironic contingency in urban Australia, which contains the open potential to create a new dialogue of the sacred between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians.

In Watson's urban and suburban poems, there is an inherent critique of framings that categorise Indigenous knowledge as separate from the daily experiences of urbanity in modern Australia. The dreamtime spirits are not a thing of the past or the "Outback" here. They are alive under the tarmac and in the madness of Saturday morning ice cream trucks, thus making the Australian suburban dream uncanny. In this sense, Watson is still building on established traditions within postcolonial poetry, such as magic realism and the Aboriginal Gothic. The consequence of this hybrid vision, however, is not only that the injustices visited on the Indigenous population are brought to light. By bringing together both worlds, Watson joins their fates. In the spiritual recession that Watson describes as a consequence of Western rationalisation, even "Morpheus in his arduous attempts to dream / has taken to anti-depressants" (Smoke 53, lines 26–27), and everyone is affected. It is with great ambivalence that Watson's writing turns to poetry and language itself for the expression of a desired unity in the face of the loss of the sacred; this desire itself figuring the existence of that unity. This process of negative assertion is central to the endless process of assertion and negation which lies at the heart of Romantic irony.

The opening five lines of "**For the Wake and the Skeleton Dance**" (Smoke 50–51) set up the basic metaphorical parameters of Watson's Brisbane. The loss of Indigenous cultures and beliefs in Modern Australia is written in the terms of capitalist economic systems:

> the dreamtime Dostoyevskys murmur of a recession in the spirit
> world
> they say,
> the night creatures are feeling the pinch
> of growing disbelief and western rationality
> that the apparitions of black dingos stalk the city night, hungry

> their ectoplasm on the sidewalk in a cocktail of vomit and swill
> waiting outside the drinking holes of the living
> preying on the dwindling souls fenced in by assimilation (lines 1–9)

In broader terms, the old ways and the new illuminate each other rather than being diametrically opposed. The way these two elements intertwine makes them more than a simple metaphor, in which A stands for B and is understood through B; but rather, a Romantic symbol in which a new meaning is created between the two (C. Taylor, publication pending). This is a typical characteristic of Watson's writing, and what creates a sense of new understanding in his works. In the second half of the first stanza, the "night creatures" and "apparitions of black dingos" themselves are portrayed as predators, rather than as simple representatives of a desirable spiritual connection.

In keeping with the poem's refusal to polarise, these creatures are elements of an evil and chaos that is older than colonisation. Their predatory behaviour is not only made explicit in the lines "stalk the city night, hungry" (line 6) or "preying on the dwindling souls fenced in by assimilation" (line 9). It is also reflected in the inversion of the opening metaphor. The spirits are no longer displayed through the lens of the modern, but the modern is viewed through the lens of the spirits. This can be seen in the way the pubs become "the drinking holes of the living" (line 8). The second stanza shifts focus to the "fratricide troopers" (line 14), those people who have betrayed their own cultures. The inclusion of these figures extends the scope of the question in the third stanza. It does not only depict current pressures on Indigenous cultures in Australia, but also questions everything from economic structures through to the state of spiritual life in Australia in relation to evil and chaos, and the wrongs inflicted on Indigenous-Australian nations by their peoples.

There is no sense of differentiated times or places in the first page of the poem. The past, the present, the spirits, the land, and the city are all brought together in one moment and place: "the blood-drenched sands" (line 17) beneath the concrete. What we now refer to as "dreaming" or "dreamtime" is a concept completely outside the spatial and temporal tradition of Europe, and which, as a white reader, I find difficult to truly comprehend.[8] Even the name used for the concept is a mistranslation, though one which has since been widely accepted by Indigenous spokesmen.[9] The history of the term and its use in reference to the unique culture of Indigenous Australians notwithstanding, in Watson's poetry there are some similarities to the concept of spatial hermeneutics, in that it is the stories of how a place came to be without being bound to linear time. This is what the poem does: it brings together the happenings of a wide time-spectrum in the understanding of a single place, people's position in that place, and their relation to the story of the world.

Through the mixture of the different frames of reference, from the material to the spiritual, Watson weaves the sacred into the very fabric of the city streets which are the immediate sphere of experience for so many Australians. This sacred is not an ideal other place, or spirituality, but is to be found in the dynamic exchange between the forces of the land and those of modernity. As such, the reader is not presented with an idealised image of the sacred as "good", but with a politicised sacred in which the "spiritual and the political feed each" (Lyn McCredden 2010, 82). In this constellation, the sacred is not a static element or state, but rather, is situated at the nexus of real political change.

This thematic focus continues on the second page, with a mixture of Indigenous and European mythologies.

> the dreamtime Dostoyevskys feel the early winter
> chilled footsteps walk across their backs in the dark hours
> the white man didn't bring all the evil
> some of it was here already
> gestating
> laughing
> intoxicated
> untapped
> harassing the living
> welcoming the tallship leviathans of two centuries ago
> that crossed the line drawn in the sand by the Serpent
> spilling dark horses from their bowels
> and something called the Covenant,
> infecting the dreamtime with the ghosts of a million lost entities
> merely faces in the crowd at the festival of the dead,
> the wake is over
> and to the skeleton dance the boneman smile
> open season on chaos theory
> and retirement eternal for the dreamtime Dostoyevsky
>
> (Smoke 51, lines 19–37)

The Greek Leviathans represent the ships of the colonisers, and they challenge the authority of the Rainbow Serpent. The "Covenant" which spews out of the tall ships could just as easily refer to the devastating impact of the Christian churches and their influence on government policy, as it could refer to the various treatises and policies dictating white–Indigenous relations throughout the years. The use of the term, which in Judaic and Christian traditions refers to the sacred promise between God and the Jews, perfectly encapsulates the dynamics at play in Watson's modern Australia. It symbolises a connection with the sacred, but also the ambivalence involved in forging a new sacred in Australia under the influence of the colonialism which spewed the covenant from the bowels of its ships. If the covenant here can imply Noah's covenant, then this further highlights the ambivalence of the term in this context: this is due to the story bringing the European-Christian tradition's associations of the rainbow, and its challenge to the boundaries set by the Rainbow Serpent in Aboriginal culture. Yet the covenant is also forward-looking.

Considering that Watson was raised a Catholic, the use of "Covenant" here offers a point of connection for creating real change on an interpersonal and transcendent level, outside the structures of government. Apart from anything else, the promise made in the covenant is necessary to avoid total annihilation.[10] The effects that damage to Country have on the individual are not a relative issue: they are universal, regardless of creed or race.

> As a kid I was always told that on country you do not hurt a tree, you do not hurt anything, because it will come back on you. I have new cars at home, I have a nice house—it's not flash, but it's nice. I have technology. None of this matches the power of spirituality, on country. I was brought up a Catholic. I did mass every Sunday, and communion. I was an altar boy. I really had the fear of God in me at times. But I also remember my pop, my father, and my grandmother saying, 'You have to respect country, when you are on it'. (Watson and Magee 2015)

The piece utilises leitmotivs throughout. The first is the repetition of elements from the title, then the more general tropes of inebriation and death. Dostoyevsky is known for his psychological insights and his writing of the chaos of real society. The attribution of Dostoyevsky's gaze to the spirits in this piece makes their perspective the primary lens through which the reader views modern Australia; it also lends the spirits the role of commentator and observer. Death in the piece occurs in opposition to the position of "the living" (line 8). It also occurs in the two repeated elements of the title: "wake" and "skeleton dance". The skeleton dance evokes ceremonies like the Mokoy, in which dancers painted white teach children to have respect (a wary respect) for the spirits of the dead. In turn, the "wake" conjures up the catharsis of a good party after a burial. The latter is a European tradition, the former an Aboriginal one. Death and chaos are thus shown to belong equally to both cultures.

In their own ways, both the "wake" and the "skeleton dance" keep death from taking hold of the living. The opening of the piece places the blame for the loss of traditional Indigenous spiritual practices on "western rationality" (line 5), with the alcohol issues this leads to when the "dwindling souls fenced in by assimilation" (line 9) seek alternatives in the pubs, as the "drinking holes of the living" (line 8). However, the rest of the piece looks forwards and backwards to a more ancient fear: the universal fear of chaos and death. When the wakers stop their dancing, and the boneman his, and when the last trickle of belief has bled out of the country, then chaos triumphs. More than a call to remember "the old ways", this poem presents a nuanced memory of more than colonialism's evils. As Anne Vickery notes in her analysis, in this piece "judgement itself may be problematic", as the proverbial line drawn in the sand (Vickery 2014, 3). Instead, the poem ties together the fates of both Indigenous Australians and the wider population of contemporary Australia.

Similarly to "For the Wake and the Skeleton Dance", "**White Stucco Dreaming**" (Smoke 17–18) paints a sardonic, yet not unloving, portrait of the Australian suburbs. Watson's suburb is a mixture of Indigenous culture and the surface image of the suburbs with their Saturday lawnmowers and summer sprinklers. This layering allows the mythical to equally occupy the same space as modern suburbia. Thus, those elements which sink into the background in everyday life become the focal point of this poem. The result is a heightened awareness of the permeability of what are too easily viewed as separate spheres, characterised simplistically as "Indigenous spirituality" and "white rationality". The tyre swans and hose-turned-snake are the best examples of this:

> sprinkled in the happy dark of my mind
> is the childhood and black humour
> white stucco dreaming
> and a black labrador
> an orange and black panel-van
> called the 'black banana'
> with twenty blackfellas hanging out the back
> blasting through the white stucco umbilical
> of a working class tribe
> front yards studded with old black tyres
> that became mutant swans overnight
> attacked with a cane knife and a black and white paint job (lines 1–12)

Tyre swans are quintessential elements of an Australian suburban childhood, almost as stereotypical as playing in a sprinkler. However, because of the association between blackness and magic realist elements in the piece, the blackness of the tyres (which are painted white to create swan-shaped plant pots) no longer belongs solely to suburban white Australia. The tyre swans are part of the children's Indigenous identity in the piece. Of twenty-one uneven lines on the first page, seven use the word "black" (lines 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 20). In the poem, this merger of worlds becomes a new kind of dreaming and a new kind of poetics of place. It is a "white stucco dreaming" which brings together dreaming with the interiors of Victorian-era Australia, now the interiors of the working classes. The "white stucco dreaming" in this poem is not a specific piece of wall decoration. It is presented as a new kind of dreaming in general. This invites the reader to read it not as an isolated memoir, but as symptomatic of suburban Australia in general. The opening and closing lines form a frame for the poem: this frame re-evaluates words which would traditionally recall the uncanny, such as "dark of my mind" (line 1) and "insane" (line 21). Instead, these words become part of suburban childhood ideals.

It is the ice cream truck that sends the labrador insane in line 21, and the dark of the speaker's mind is a happy darkness. From the childhood perspective, the "white stucco dreaming" is a happy dreaming. What appears uncanny to the adult reader, such as the transformation of garden objects into animals, the darkness, and the insanity, are aspects of the comfort the children find in their "working class tribe" (line 9) and its blackness. The reader is thus forced into a layered perspective in which the child's reality demands equality with the familiar concrete jungle and lawns paved over the surface of this other place. Finally, the poem also questions the effect which the white stucco dreaming has, considering that architecturally, it brings Australia's colonial era to mind.

The ultimate symbol of (white) suburbia is the ice cream truck. Rather than the happy memories which open the poem, this potent symbol becomes a singer of siren "melodies" (line 19) which enter "little black minds" (line 20), bringing insanity to maybe more than just the family dog. Read in this light, the "bad paint job" on the "mutant swans" becomes a harbinger of what awaits these children culturally as they negotiate two narratives of place even in their own homes (lines 10–12). The political ramifications of this last aspect are brought into greater visibility by the way the police-gaze penetrates the children's homes in the final stanza:

> Chocolate hand prints like dreamtime fraudLaid across white stucco And mud cakes on the camp stove That just made Dad see black, No tree was ever safe from tree-house sprawl, And the police cars that crawled up and down the back streets, Peering into our white stucco cocoon, *Wishing, they were with us...* (lines 20–27, italics in original)

"**A Bent Neck Black and Flustered Feather Mallee**" (Smoke 36) complements the previous two poems in its layering and merging of spatial signifiers, taking an ironic position towards contemporary (sub)urban spaces with a clear postcolonial critique. In this piece, Watson deftly moves from the image of a bird as roadkill to the violent history of European colonisation of what is now Australia. This is played out in the microsphere of insect life on the bird's mangled corpse.

> deadened crow with eternal lockjaw
> a bent neck black and flustered feather mallee

> not as gracious as a magpie
> neck bent into the wind
> and bitumen madness that claimed you
> scorched mark
> and tears
> fallen into the blackened tar and earth
> blood soaked earth through massacre
> war
> and plague (lines 1–11)

It is tempting to read the crow in this poem as representative of past colonial violence in Australia. However, Watson's detailed writing of the crow as roadkill evokes a sense of the present and of immediate experience for the reader. The different levels of time in the piece emerge from the present moment of viewing the crow, as do the various spatial levels. The speaker describes the crow in the present and how it became roadkill in the past, in a correct everyday use of tense and time structure. This means that when the tarmac underneath the crow becomes the focus of the poem, its description as "blood soaked earth through massacre / war / and plague" (lines 9–11) is felt as a present state rather than as a reference to historical events. Or rather, the earth is scarred by all the events which have played out up to and including the present, regardless of who the victims of violence were. Watson states that,

> places carry scars. I always try to get that out in my poetry. There is one poem—every month I am one word closer to finishing it—which I started writing in a place called Barrow Creek, that's north of Alice Springs. It is where the backpacker murders happened. And an incredibly brutal massacre happened there in the early twentieth century. It is a really scary place. You feel the hurt of country there. (Watson and Magee 2015)

Although Watson is not referring to "A Bent Neck Black and Flustered Feather Mallee" in this comment, it is clear that place, as Country, experiences violence indiscriminately of how that violence is framed. Here, history is written in the land and seeps up through the tarmac in a literal sense, and creates a presence experience of multiple time layers. In this context, the dreamtime spirits are a living force, not idealised figures, and form part of the cultural-political landscape in Australia.

The bitumen in this piece is a borderland through which the "madness" of modern rationality merges with the Indigenous spirit beings "locked in the heat and tar" (line 20). The blood of both bird and war soak into the tar, but the exchange, linguistically at least, is an uneven one. Watson demonstrates the limits of the English language in representing the fallen and flattened bird, and by extension, everything it stands for. Rather than a single sign, the author presents the reader with a series of characteristics which are not normally related. The result is that one heterogeneous thing, the bird, is made of enough elements to create a narrative. This turns the roadkill into the story of the nation. The rejection of the rain by the war-waging ants connects the rain as a sign of transcendence in Watson's poetry to violence, showing the violence of the past and the present to be a barrier to a transcendence of the individual, thus preventing a connection to the multifaceted history of the land and other people.

Watson's description of the bird is spread over three lines. The first and the third encase the second in weak comparisons to English species: the crow and the magpie, which are birds of death and theft respectively. These two elements frame the fate of the dead bird in the second line. This bird is composed of the following attributes: a "bent neck", which recalls the gloom swans and mutant swans of Watson's suburbs; "black", which Watson uses to refer to his own Indigeneity; "flustered", which is such a banally human word that it becomes darkly comic in this context; and finally, "mallee", which is a kind of Australian scrub. In this one description of the bird, Watson combines the primary thematic concerns of the entire collection *Smoke Encrypted Whispers*. The black feather mallee simultaneously evokes past genocides of Indigenous nations in Australia, and the modern present of bitumen roads, with the roadkill they create in a never-ending repetition of this killing. It also highlights the limits that English has placed on the possibilities for speaking of those two ways of being in place and these two histories. The poems examined here merge contemporary (sub)urban Australia with Dreamtime spirits and the ongoing history of violence towards Indigenous Australians in one time and one place. In doing so, they destabilise dichotomies of 'White' vs. Indigenous Australia, past vs. present, sacred vs. modern.

The Writer's Voice in the City

"Fly-Fishing in Woolloongabba"; "The Writer's Suitcase"

Language is not only made dumb in the face of the atrocities visited on Indigenous Australians. This limitation effects both the social voice of the poet and his personal artistic one. The following poems explored here, "The Writer's Suitcase" and "Fly-Fishing in Woolloongabba" may be read as explorations of the relationship of the artist to language and to his art. "The Writer's Suitcase" (Smoke 44–45) situates the acts of writing in the dark recesses of the mind, the night, and the natural world. At the beginning of the piece, the poet's language is likened to something living: it is an animal force capable of bleeding onto the concrete of the city. The act of bleeding transgresses the boundaries of skin, as well as those of the mind which contained its words, and the walls of the suitcase the writer held.

> it spilled out onto the bitumen
> like the bursting stomach of a consumed beast
>
> the writer's black suitcase
> bleeding onto the pavement
>
> where he fell for the last time
> and the black moths within escaped
>
> fled for cover in the light they'd been deprived of
> witnesses and prisoners unto his pain (lines 1–8)

In the fifth stanza, the flight of this poem becomes the flight of moths into a "light they'd been deprived of" (line 7). This flight retracts the initial promise opened up at the start of the piece, that of a connection to the world and the other through the transgression of physical and mental boundaries. Thus, the moth-thoughts of the poet's suitcase remain "secrets" even in the light.

> secrets into the wind
> onlookers gasping in shock
> the writer in a ball of terror
> his state exposed to the world (lines 9–12)

Secrets are by definition something unknowable. Were a secret to become known to another, it would cease to be a secret. Those with whom the poet's words should create a connection are themselves defined purely by their status as observers apart, rather than participants in the poet's pain. They are onlookers capable of sight and of gazing from the outside, but not of transcendent connection. The words the poet spills out into the world do not bring the subject closer to the absolute; they are merely engulfed by the city into which they are poured, disregarded and dying. This piece is as it appears. It is a pessimistic judgement on the ineffectuality of language, a self-reflective piece on art as nothing more than the "art in dying alone" (lines 23–24). Yet it does reach for more, even as it reflects on the futility of that endeavour.

The imagery of opening in a visceral way at the start of the poem continues throughout, despite the indifference of the city. Thoughts are "fleeing the open air / pages scatter amongst the breeze" as the poet dies (metaphorically), in which process his soul becomes external to his body (lines 18–20). The suitcase is "an external soul of tattered black cardboard" open to the touch. As the figure of the lover represents the muse in Watson's other poems, then the poems which the children here "laugh-off […] as letters of love" (line 30) in the final stanza contain that "little" piece of transcendence which is the possibility of a true connection, however small. This possibility could not be completely excluded in the assessment of stanza seven, which recognises that there is "little immortality to come of any of this" (line 13). Little immortality is not the same as none.

Rather than simply being symbols of transcendence in the form of the quotidian sacred, in this piece, the poems are transformed through the process of coming out of the suitcase and entering the world. The sacred here lies in productive change and transformation. It is not passively received but must be reached for. McCredden poses the question of the sacred's place in the "dehumanising history" faced by Indigenous Australians, finding Watson's answer in a "jointly political and spiritual openness to recognise history as constructed of human choices, human making and remaking" (McCredden 2010, 83). The sacred, then, is situated in the process of "remaking", which perfectly reflects the deeply embedded irony in Watson's writing, by negating the finality of the creative process of "making". Through the insertion of the "re", it creates an ever-postponed telos, with its sacred process continually begun anew as it reaches the limits of what can be reached through language. If Malouf's and Watson's respective ways of writing suburbia show nothing else, then it is that the Australian sacred must be transformative.

In "The Writer's Suitcase", the man's writings, in their escape from his "external soul of tattered black cardboard" (line 25), meet with a death similar to that of the man "in a bundle on the sidewalk" (line 28), and are "laughed off" in the end (line 30). However, in this end, they are no longer moths, or poems, or ideas, but "letters of love" (line 30). Though they are "discarded", the poet's writings have been transformed from an act of the mind, through the breaking open of the body in an act of sharing, into another written form; this time, a form which expresses the intimate connection of lovers. There is an irony here which points to the limitations facing language as a carrier of a meaning that might create a transcendent connection between people and the world. However, the piece also highlights the role of the reader in responding to the call of the poet's writings, even if it is an imperfect one.

As well as being a means of making these two ways of being in place visible to the reader, language or poetry also limits them, as will be explored later. This is, however, not solely due to the English language's connection to colonialism: Watson also engages in a more general exploration of the possibilities and limits of his art. The same holds true for the way he writes the city. The poems examined in this section all stem from Watson's first volume and focus on a problematic relationship between the land's first places and the ones paved over them. The way Watson mixes and merges the two is typical of this first volume, although he does continue to make use of it in later poems such as "Deafening Cold" (Love 61), where he depicts Melbourne in terms unfamiliar to non-Indigenous readers:

> I whispered an acknowledgement;
> my respect to the Kulin peoples, upon whose country I'd be
> landing. There are songlines here that sing as loud as the day
> the tramlines ripped through the Dreaming… (lines 1–4)

In *Love Poems and Death Threats*, which follows *Smoke Encrypted Whispers*, Watson becomes much more exact in his description of Indigenous places, writing of specific regions and relationships. The same coalescence of Indigenous mythology and contemporary Australian spaces is extended beyond the depiction of place. As previously examined, "Apocalyptic Quatrains: The Australian Wheat Board/Iraq Bribery Scandal" (Love 8–9) reflects this, as does "Bird-song of Imminent Death" (Love 16–17), which merges the cry of the Muk-Muk with the "blackhawks falling over Afghanistan" on the television news (line 2).

"Fly-Fishing in Woolloongabba"[11] (Smoke 39–40) paints a far less nostalgic picture of Australian suburbia than had been presented in "White Stucco Dreaming". The poem is clear a critique of the ills in modern Australia, specifically its roads and drugs. Paying attention to the style and the context of Watson's other poems reveals much of how the situation relates to his poetic voice. The poem avoids lines with a complete grammatical structure. Instead, the reader is presented a series of successive images. The extensive use of the gerund is of particular interest in this regard:

> facing the mirror
> and having a shave
> in the near darkness
> after an evening of watching the wine disappear (lines 1–4)

In the first sentence, for instance, the use of the gerund appears to describe a parallel action in the past. However, the lack of a predicate instead lends the gerund the feeling of an immediate action, underscoring the experience of these images in the immediate present. The two main pieces of information which are left out of the grammatical structuring of the lines in this poem are the main action of the speaker in the first three stanzas, and the definition of the subject in stanza four, which is merely described as "it". The result is that the information which is left, and which therefore becomes the focus of the poem, is that which would otherwise blend into the background. This is in keeping with the tradition of the high value placed on the mundane in Australian poetry. It also has the effect of opening up the first three stanzas to make room for the reader to fill these images with their own feelings, thus creating a space of empathy from which to approach the situation of the "young girl living on a remote, black community" in stanza five (line 17); and by analogy, that of the speaker as well.

The precarious economic situation of the speaker, and the other "little fish sighing, for want of better" (line 36) in the second half of the poem, ties the uneven structure of the majority/minority relationship to violence as the "little fish" are contrasted with "the sharks motionless in the disguise of the undertow" (line 35). The fantastic transformation of the road and its traffic into a living river, and the syringes into fish, brings movement to the piece. However, this movement serves only to create a dynamic between (sub)urban Australia and the "remote, black community" in stanza five (line 17). It shows that there is exchange between these two, but that the exchange is an uneven one. There is "a minority of her / in a majority" (lines 18–19). The river, an unchanging entity made of movement, stands for the nature of this dynamic which both allows movement and change, but which nevertheless maintains its form and existence.

The river is constant in its existence, and unchanging. Yet the river is also made of movement. Here is the doubt which Watson's poetry expresses, as the question in "A Black Bird of My Mind": "why walk a road of bitter sweet?"; and in "For the Wake and the Skeleton Dance": "better to forget?" (Smoke 38, line 15; Smoke 50, line 18). These are questions Watson appears not yet ready to answer in this first volume. What his poetry does contain is a recognition that words can create movement, can make rivers of roads and fish of syringes, and create a longing for more. The question remains as to whether words can change the shape of these rivers or bring these two worlds together as equals.

Close attention to the status of reality and of the sacred in Watson's work makes it clear that, although his poetry utilises different modes common to postcolonial literature, the instability of categories such as real/fantastic/sacred/mundane becomes a central element in what I choose to read as a model of Romantic irony in his work. This is reflected in an enmeshment of the infinite and the immanent, each continuously referring to, creating, and ultimately limiting, the experience of the other, much as each image in the Rubin Vase both delineates and denies the other. In Watson's writing of (sub)urban Australia, this structure is expressed as a presence effect in which past, present, the sacred, the mundane, the topical and subterranean no longer provide distinct frames of reference but are merged and cocreating. This is not only a case of different modes being used to bring the postcolonial condition of Indigenous Australia more sharply into focus. More than anything, it is a joining of fates in which the possibility of moving forward together is simultaneously asserted and revoked in a way that recalls the structure of Romantic irony.

Language: Beyond the Embrace of a Twisted Tongue

> "Language can be figured as a fox entering a hen house. Yes, there is planning, stealth, a desired goal on the fox's part, but there is also an awful lot of feathers and squawking, lunging and biting, with varying effects" –
> *Lynn McCredden 2015*

Language and writing in Watson's poetry hold hope for creating a connection between people and the proximate experience of the sacred, even in (sub)urban landscapes. Language, however, is suspect on two counts. Even as it gestures towards embodied experience, it is trapped by its own mediality. The background against which the epistemological questioning of language occurs in Watson's work is tied to, although not exclusively concerned with, an acknowledgement of the power structures involved in writing in English. Watson reacts to these conditions by making these issues visible and reflecting on them in his poems. The body becomes an important canvas in this regard. Nowhere is the difficult position of the poet clearer than in "Blacktracker…Blackwriter…Blacksubject" (Love 50). In this poem, the fratricidal blacktracker figure is melded with the act of writing which "feeds my Dreaming to the Queen's tongue" (lines 12–13). It is the "Blacksubject" who "will always know … it's with the pen that the lies are used to overwrite the Dreaming, and the written word will never be worth the country it's written on" (Love 50, lines 20–21[1]). Yet in other pieces, there is an urgent and restless desire for a connection with others beyond a binary approach to Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations; or as Watson phrases it, "the black and white frame from which we developed our first glimpse of innocence" (Love 104 "Elsewhere", lines 23–24). The poet's artistic drive, as well as the complex ways in which English has been a force of both oppression and resistance in Australia, find combined expression in the figure of the muse.

A Writer's Musings on Gastank Fumes

"Gasoline"; "Gastank Sonnets"; "After 2 a.m. "

The female body, in the form of the muse figure, is a physical representation of the act of writing in the language of the coloniser. The poet's relationship to the muse exemplifies both the potential of poetry to bridge the self/other divide, and the siren song that is the language in which the poet writes. In his poetic reflections on the nature of writing itself, Watson expresses a deeply spatially rooted understanding of language and meaning. He explores the ability of language to gesture towards a linguistic space beyond its own dimensions, while making the reader aware of the gap between meaning and sign. Typically for Watson, however, these dimensions are expressed in corporeal terms. "Blood and Ink" is not just the title of one of Watson's poems; it is the central tension which runs throughout his second collection of poetry, *Love Poems and Death Threats*.

"**Gasoline**" (Smoke 106) is the first of the muse poems examined here. It is a poetic sleight of hand, in which a petrol-sniffing addiction takes the form of an erotic encounter with a woman. The poem maintains the metaphor of the female body for the petrol and its pump throughout. The effect is that it simultaneously distances meaning from sign in a deliberately obvious way, and also lends voice to what might otherwise be expressed only in a way which speaks in terms of oppression and victimisation.

> you just know where it will lead to –
> the prelude of a lingering kiss
> upon the fumes of a heated and ravenous breath
>
> and you're already a weary veteran of this road
>
> 'cause it's going to combust,
> the spirits of her mouth
> entering yours
> with that NO NAKED FLAMES tattoo
> falling from her lips
> into the curves of her chest
>
> the fragrance of a weathered fuel tank
> leaking unleaded desire (lines 1–12)

Rather than writing of this addiction in terms of power relations, the opening lines express the speaker's resignation in his powerlessness to resist. This resignation and passivity characterise the addiction as less of an action or choice, than an affliction. This affliction, which is deeply rooted in the impact of colonialism, is reimagined in universal terms of passion and desire, even if that desire is "unleaded" (line 12).

Reading this piece in the context of Watson's other poems reveals an equivalence between other lovers in Watson's poetry and the muse figure. Substance use/abuse is connected to the process of writing, in other pieces such as "Chloe in the Window Box" (Smoke 11) or "Shout-Me-a-Wine-Requiem" (Smoke 41).

Aside from the presence of the female figure (however metaphorical), there is one line in the middle of the poem which also supports the association of language with the fuel tank in the piece. The "NO NAKED FLAMES tattoo" (line 8), which should be a sign attached to the petrol pump, is not portrayed as a tattoo on the beloved's body (as would be consistent with the overarching metaphor), but as "falling from her lips" (line 9) as words would. The poet's "veteran" (line 4) status implies a long struggle between the desire for these (English) words and the poison they bring to the mind. Read in this way, the selection of the trope of petrol sniffing, which leads to brain damage through inhalation of the "fumes" (line 3), serves the double function of both linking the piece to a well-known side effect of colonisation on Indigenous communities, and drawing attention to the brain or mind as a space which is also affected, by both fumes and language. The connection between petrol and language, or more specifically poetry, is made explicit in "Gas Tank Sonnets" (Smoke 111–112) a few pages later. The final lines of the piece, like the title, bring together poetry in the form of the "sonnet" and petrol in the form of the "gas tank".

The gas tank sonnets of this piece, however, are differentiated from the muse whom the subject leaves as he exits Byron Bay, in the lines "feelings of withdrawal / leaving / Byron Bay and the muse, / for the likes of Brisbane-town / and this want of becoming a writer" (Smoke 111, lines 15–19). Through the use of the word "withdrawal", the "feelings of withdrawal" the poet experiences from this muse once again circle back to the same connection between substance abuse, the muse figure, and language in "Gasoline". With these lines from "Gas Tank Sonnets" in mind, "Gasoline" also appears to offer not the image of a true muse, but a false muse. The petrol fumes lend the poet a language which masters him, rather than one which offers the possibility of transcending structures of division to create a connection with the poet's readers. The distancing of meaning from sign through the extensive metaphor in "Gasoline" draws attention to the falsehood of this language. No spirits bring a sense of place to this piece. The only spirits are the petrol-fume "spirits of her mouth, entering yours" (Smoke 106, lines 6–7).

The road in "**Gas Tank Sonnets**", with its "days and days of service stations pies" (line 9), is the ultimate anti-place. It offers nothing but movement away from place, and bad food which is always the same. That which the poet truly desires is the food of place and poetry: "the Pacific / looking good enough to eat […] Byron Bay and the Muse" (lines 13–14). The irony of his leaving the muse "for the likes of Brisbane-town / and this want of becoming a writer" (lines 16–19) expresses once more the ambivalence and the gravitational pull the poet feels towards his craft.

In the gas tank pieces, the petrol motif connected the muse to the ongoing negative effects of colonialism in Indigenous communities. The ambivalent position of the Indigenous writer is explored outside this motif in "**After 2 a.m**. " (Smoke 6). The piece makes use of line lengths to clearly introduce the aspects at stake for the poet-figure in the act of writing. The long and short lines in the piece follow a loose pattern in the first half, in which the longer lines contain the verbs and the short lines (between one and three words) contain simple nouns. The rhythmic and visual effect is that whilst the verb lines contain narrative movement, this narrative is brought to an abrupt halt which accentuates the short lines in their stagnant simplicity. This simplicity peels back the process of telling to reveal the core elements of the poem as: "two", "black", "myself", "3 a.m.", "our embrace", and "night". Until "night", these elements are clearly paired and reflect the duality ever present in Watson's poetry: that of the speaker's Indigenous identity and being a contemporary Australian poet.

> I wept along with the night
> two
> black
> hideous dimensions –
> myself and 3 a.m.
> releasing a crystal tide of bottled insanity
> while the shadows mocked
> our embrace
> and from then on
> I knew that forever
> night
> would be my mistress (lines 1–12)

The poem oscillates between seemingly simple pairings and the complexity of the relationship between the two elements of the speaker's identity. The first pairing of night and poet in the piece is an uncomfortable one for both parties. In the first line, the poet weeps, but so too does the night. The relationship between the two then changes as they merge into one. They are no longer separate dimensions but become one through the mutual possession of "our embrace" (line 8). This occurs through the act of writing.

The poetic impetus takes the form of a love affair with a female muse, which continues throughout Watson's work. However, as so often, the muse motif here is perverted, and highlights the unevenness of power in the relationship. This relationship is, after all, that of an Indigenous poet to writing in an imported tongue, which nevertheless also belongs to him. Viewed in this way, it is unsurprising that this relationship is in constant flux between a love affair, an integral part of the poet's self and imaginative impetus, and "bottled insanity" being released. The poet is "mocked by shadows" which could be read as the spirit beings that feature in other pieces. On the other hand, the love affair is situated in the night, which is a borderland on the fringes of society and sanity. This shows Watson's poetic language to possess subversive potential, in common with so many things pushed to the edges of the acceptable.

Writing: A Bittersweet Necessity

"A Blackbird of My Mind"; "Blood and Ink"; "Musing: The Graveyard Shift"

The writer's ambivalence towards language and writing is expressed beyond the muse figure as well. "**A Black Bird of My Mind**" (Smoke 38) likewise questions the act of writing, which is a double-edged sword, being both a necessity and a curse. The poem opens with the movement of "migrating thoughts" and the contradiction of "bittersweet anxieties", which reflect the dynamic of Watson's entire oeuvre (lines 1–2). It is the dynamic whereby Watson's poetic voice stems from the very "road / of stone" and "curse" which has paved over the places and spirits of his Indigenous heritage (lines 6–7, 4).

> migrating thoughts
> of bitter sweet anxieties
> come once
> in a curse
> or on a
> road
> of stone
>
> harshly cut rocks
> of little chance
> that attracts a man
> of word
> of time
> of sacrifice
> to lay against the grain
> but why walk a road of bitter sweet? (lines 1–14)

The poet's description of himself is a general one, "a man / of word / of time / of sacrifice" (lines 10–14), which widens the scope of these three elements to a general predicament facing all Australians in their own way. The first attribute is "word". If this were to stand alone, a simple equation with poetry would be easy. However, "word" cannot be separated from "time" and from "sacrifice": "word" or language is shown to be contingent on time. As such, it is caught up in history, a history which has involved considerable blood sacrifice on the altars of both colonialism and rationalism.

This is the problem with language with which Watson battles in his work, and which he continued to explore in "**BLOOD AND INK**" in his second collection, *Love Poems and Death Threats* (Love 3). The two elements which make-up the title of this second collection perfectly encapsulate its main concern. This is the relationship between the language of colonial and now postcolonial[2] Australia, and the author's Indigenous heritage. The gravity of this relationship is expressed in the selection of the poem's epigraph from Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*: "Blood, Herr Reiss, can never be eradicated like ink" (Love 3). The selection of a science-fiction author appears strange at first, however, considering the central role the Nazis play in this book and their association with genocide, the reference is thematically relevant to Australia's own history of bloodshed. The book's examination of alternative histories and the power of language and representation are likewise telling.

The choice of metaphor to carry the poem's meaning in this case is water. This medium is well chosen, as it has the ability to express the longing for connection represented by the kinship ties in the piece, as well as the feeling of danger and the unfulfilled hope that language holds when carried on these waters. Each subheading in the poem refers to one of these aspects of water. The first section, "**Headwaters**", commences with a connection between water and consciousness: "head" and "water".

> '*I AM A RIVER…*'
> How your words reverberate off the mirror of our conscience. The connection is water. Wanting to pour forth the bubbling within. A well of knowledge, waiting below the surface of us all.
>
> And as you professed, my uncle, we all congregated. Albeit in a dark hour, we dreamed as one, in a pure beast of afternoon light. There were tears, but they were merely spray off the surface of your departure. Young sea eagles danced your wake.
>
> What you gave us cannot be taught in foreign halls; the darkness of humanity and poison pens. How they fashion textbooks to suit the tides of chaos.
>
> Ink can be cleansed in the headwaters of your flow. Wash my eyes from censored images of history. I am not a neo-human of dystopia.
>
> Below your river a dangerous undertow can gather momentum and try to pull us down.
>
> But we always float as estuaries in your memory, a consensus of blood that can never be eradicated like ink. (Love 3[3])

The italicised quotation at the beginning of the poem, "*I AM A RIVER…*", emphasises this connection in a way that further defines the relationship of mind to water, as the specific function of the mind as subject-creating ego. The association of water with the mind expresses the desire, the "wanting to pour forth", for a connection with that which lies outside the subject, but which has its origins inside the individual mind.

The images of unity and community which follow this desire to "pour forth" occur in the context of death, but still with the water. The communal grief which marks the death of kin becomes "spray off the / surface" of the poet's uncle's departure. Death and grief here are communal affairs, a unified dreaming "as one". This sense of unity through communal dreaming, as symbolised by the water, brings together death and new life in the final line of the second paragraph: "young sea eagles danced at your / wake". This stands in contrast to the final three paragraphs of the first section, which identify the "dangerous undertow" of writing that whitewashes history though a fashioning of "textbooks to suit the tides of chaos". Just as it was in "Future Primitive" (Smoke 129), colonial and postcolonial Australia is not characterised as the alien mechanical standing in opposition to the natural: Watson manages to successfully avoid this cliché. Instead, here both are natural in their own way. The natural, however, does not mean harmless. The waters are both what the poet's kin passed down to him and the "dangerous undertow" of an ink which writes the stories of a white Australia.

The second section, "**Ebb Tide**", reflects the departure of the uncle in the retreating tides.

> There is no recession in your departure. The river replenishes and everyone needs time
> to regain buoyancy. We have to
>
> catch our breath and wade.
>
> You taught us never to dive 'headfirst' into unknown depths.
> Feel the water as each one of us is our own burgeoning course.
> There will be low water succeeding at times, but we will always try to maintain a steady
> drift. And in the ebb tide – as
> your decree, my teacher – no one should be left behind.
>
> Question all questions drowned and forgotten. In their
> resuscitations, storm birds break glass and fish shed tears. In
> a consensus of dreams, everything could surface. (Love 4)

The question posed by the uncle's departure and teachings, however, is what the tide leaves behind. This question comes with a new image. It is a premise of unity in a "consensus of dreams" which includes the fantastic: the glass-breaking storm birds and crying fish. The answer the poet seeks must be sought inside himself, and in movement and merger, rather than finality and purity. This seeking within the self is expressed in the title of the third section, "Backwaters".

> As a pupil I must ask: How is it you charted the backwaters before your time? Is it connected with the Dawson River, the conduit of your mother's spring? I am uncharted of the Kungulu ways in my being.
> I have smelt the burnt husks of brigalow leaves and twine, as we have now entwined, in the backwaters of your journey. No heart of darkness has rested here. The river does not rest. What I search for is further upstream, in an essence, the midst of unexplored waters. A whirlpool simpatico belongs there; unrest and calm. (Love 4–5)

The backwaters are the connection to the ancestors. The speaker's lack of orientation on these waters is the result of his lack of understanding of the Kungulu tongue, which nevertheless lies inside him. However, the answers the speaker seeks are not purely in the charting of his living cultural roots and kinship ties, but in "a whirlpool simpatico […] unrest and calm" (Smoke 5). This dynamic shows an unfulfilled hope to be grasped in movement between kinship and ink: the movement between the writer's Indigenous heritage and Australian-English with its colonial history. The reference to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in paragraph two shows that even a language imported by colonialism contains a potential for change that is as fluid as the river in Conrad's novel and in Watson's poem.

In the final section of this piece, "**Postscript in a Bottle**", he plays on the classic symbol of hope, the message in a bottle, to describe the hope he places in languages or ink, and its power to reach others. The replacement of "message" with "postscript" further situates this hope in his own poetic endeavours, but also with that which comes after script, even after language. The irony lies in his acknowledgement that creating a connection (the "collective thoughts" and the water itself which is the connecting force) means movement rather than a stable unity. His hope lies in the "discourse of ink and blood":

> *Uncle, will you please make a beacon; a campfire on the shore of our backwater? I fear some of us could lose our way…*
>
> *The river will never rest, our collective thoughts from the headwaters, through the ebb tide and into the backwaters of our being. We are all rivers, on a discourse of ink and blood…* (Love 5, line 5)

The "discourse of ink and blood" (Smoke 5, line 5) is posited as a way forward. It is able to function in this capacity because of the structure which I identify as that of Romantic irony: it is an endless backwards and forwards which allows both positions to stand equally and neither to become final.

Beyond Language's Limits

"Musing: The Graveyard Shift"; "Author's Notes #2"; "Kangaroo Crossing"

Love Poems and Death Threats also contains poems which are concerned with the self/Other divide in a more universal sense. "**Musing: The Graveyard Shift**" (Smoke 13–14) plays with nature as a source of poetic impetus and its role in bridging the self/Other divide. Rather than setting up the city and nature in opposition to each other, the poem explores the relationship between the writing process and the material world outside, in the context of a modern Australian cityscape. The title itself indicates a connection between poetic inspiration in the form of the muse and the role of the thinking mind as its muses, thinks, or ponders.

The piece shows the writing process to be on the cusp of these two aspects of the self/Other divide. Paper and pen, the utensils of the thinking and writing mind, lie on the window ledge. Window ledges form a borderland between the domestic man-made place inside, and the river outside, which is part of the natural world.

> as I enter a writers' graveyard shift
> sheltered by a desk lamp
> a lover is nesting within the covers
> breathing softly
>
> paper and pen on the window ledge
> third floor
> overlooking the river,
> dark wet stretching leather
>
> red buoys flicker
> on / off
>
> signal thoughts to the writer
> on graveyard shift
>
> looking for inspiration
> in poorly lit boats shuttling past
>
> the crew all strangers to me
> as I am almost a stranger to the person in my bed (lines 1–16)

The poet looks to nature for inspiration, only to be confronted with another language separating him from a poetry which could bridge the gap within himself, and between him and the lover in his bed. Looking out over the river, he does not see a body of water, but the modern electric buoys of the city flashing on and off. In this piece, the flashes from the buoys function as a perverse Morse code which is the antithesis to language's communicational function. Inspiration does not come from these. The poet remains a stranger to the lover/muse figure in his bed, and no connection is made to the poet's fellow man. The feeling of being on the cusp of inspiration, of this connection being just within reach, remains in the qualifier "almost" in line 16. For all the difficulties and deep wrongs Watson's poetry lays bare, not least the murkiness of promises made and the "the ideal machine of consequence" (line 20), there always remains a sense of reaching for a point of touching, where the touching of language and the absolute is possible, and where one mind reaches out to touch another's.

Watson's exploration of the limits of language are reflected formally in his mixed forms (for instance, epigraphs, haiku, typography, and even poems which read like recipes, such as "Intervention Rouge" in *Monster's Ink*, page 22). Particularly, Watson's use of haiku has the odd effect of first presenting the reader with a poem containing detailed writing, which gives the impression of having conveyed that information, and then ending with a form predicated on its fragmentary nature and the immediacy of its vision.

Watson's "**Author's Notes**" (Smoke 155, 159, 170) are meta-lyrical pieces which are presented as part of his body of poetry yet blur the boundaries between poetry and commentary. They present a clear expression of where Watson situates language, meaning, and writing, by conveying a significant distance between the words and any spontaneous organic meaning. Watson treats his words much like fish hung up for smoking, thrown "on the rack" to "stretch" in "Author's Notes # 2" (Smoke 159). The choice to include such reflections on the author's own process, as though these "notes" were themselves poetry, displays a desire for reflexive writing. This makes the reader aware of the artificiality of language as the medium through which he has experienced the poems on the earlier pages of the collection.

> All good wordsmiths get 'the thousand-yard stare'. That's when you're looking beyond the page. Some writers never cross the third or second dimension of a page. After a while, writing on a 'rack' is like reaching into yourself and arranging the words on the inside of your ribcage … you're looking out … visualising the rack and how those words translate to the reader, how those words feel on you. You're always looking out, in and beyond.
>
> The ribcage offers some choice 'wire' for the word. But if you're going to use the ribcage as a rack, don't use permanent ink, and what I mean by 'permanent' is overloading your rack with the dark ink that stains for life. I started making my own rules about writing and devising my own nomenclature: a 'rack' is a page, a 'wire' is a blank line. A 'hump' is a full stop.

> After words are yanked from the pool in my head, I hand them out on the 'wire' to dry, and then after the sun goes down, I throw them on the 'rack' and stretch them out a bit. (Smoke 159)

This piece expresses a highly specific view of language which, by acknowledging multiple dimensions on the page, envisions language in spatial terms capable of indicating a linguistic space beyond its own dimension. This understanding of language recalls the philosophy of early Romanticism rather than later concepts, such as poststructuralism. If there is a "third dimension of a page" to be "crossed", then it follows that there is something further beyond that page to be grasped. This returns to the idea of negative assertion, which lies at the heart of Romantic irony.

The question of language, and poetry's ability to signal a space outside language, is something which Lyn McCredden has written on; and interestingly, she draws on Watson in her analysis. For McCredden, poetry both carries meaning, and at the same time, "points beyond itself, to the limits of language to a space differently configured as erasure, silence, the unsignifiable" (Lyn McCredden 2015, 95). Discussing Ian Almond's comparison of Derrida and Meister Eckhart, McCredden demonstrates that the ontological consequences of acknowledging this space are characterised differently depending on the approach. For Derrida, the extreme indeterminacy of language entails erasure, whilst at the other end of the spectrum, the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart reaches for a space of silence, beyond thought, in which to meet the Godhead (ibid., 105–106).

McCredden proposes a middle path, which is of particular relevance to reading Watson's work. For her, a recognition of language's finitude serves to highlight not just language's limitations, but also the limits of the reader (ibid., 106). As McCredden says, "as language animals, and particularly as writers and readers of poetic language, we have our own finitude revealed to us, at the same time as we continue to reach for meaning, again and again, through the ephemeral structures and forms of language" (ibid.). In her reading of "Kangaroo Crossing" by Samuel Wagan Watson, this is not something she examines further. Nevertheless, the implication for non-Indigenous readers of Watson's work is that they are made aware of the limiting structures of their own thinking, in relation to the Indigenous perspective.

In her musings on the nature of language, McCredden does not look to Romanticism. However, both the hope that language holds in its ability to point beyond itself, and the acknowledgement of its limits, are central to early German Romanticism. This is the middle road between the hope of Meister Eckhart's Christian mysticism and Derrida's assertion that there is nothing outside the text

(Derrida 1978). The reflection on the finitude of the subject in Romantic irony is concerned with language's simultaneous ability to gesture towards that which is beyond itself, and the limits that language itself places on the thinking subject's ability to reach that which lies beyond its own language-based thought structures. This is a train of thought which, on the surface, appears to have nothing to do with the difficulties involved in bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. Nevertheless, Romantic irony offers a useful heuristic for understanding what is at stake in the way in which Watson's work simultaneously makes the non-Indigenous reader aware of the limits to their understanding of the sacred, the modern, and place, whilst at the same time again and again expressing hope through a frail but urgent call to dialogue.

In her analysis, it is not the aspect of the reader's finitude which concerns McCredden, so much as what she terms "the poetic construction of silence" in the piece (Lyn McCredden 2015, 103). McCredden identifies two key spaces in this regard, which "Kangaroo Crossing" (Smoke 88) plays with. These are the space beyond language to which the poem gestures, and a space which is created by the combination of two modes of writing: the realistic and the hyperreal (ibid., 104). The hyperreal in Watson's poetry is most obviously expressed in his use of dreaming tropes. In "Kangaroo Crossing", "dreaming is figured as a sudden, wordless, non-human stroke of power, in the materiality of a kangaroo and a particular stretch of road" (ibid.). The materiality of these expressions of dreaming is central, as it is able to do what language cannot. It brings together all time levels, "from split seconds / to eternity" (lines 16–17), in one moment of experiencing dreaming in its complex combination of the spiritual and material structures. This is something which language is unable to facilitate completely. In the specificity of the setting, "this stretch of road … *this stretch*" (line 9, emphasis in original) echoes the ontologically grounded, proximate sacred discussed previously.

> I know this stretch in my blood
>
> this is where the *Megaleia rufa* song
> cries louder than any car stereo
>
> the dreaming that suddenly crawls onto the road
> and takes it
> out of the living –
> the ones who fantasied constantly on their own immortality
> behind the wheel
>
> but this stretch of road … *this stretch*
> is where the extroverted angels turn their heads
> as the flash that is stronger than steel

launches onto the highway
and brings those of the present
forward to their own judgement day

refraction of light
from split seconds
to eternity (lines 1–17)

The sacred here is grounded, but not just in the material proximity of "this stretch" (line 1) of road and the kangaroo. It is in the knowledge of place which is embodied in the blood of the speaker and the song of the *Megaleia rufa*.[4] The poem contrasts this dreaming, this way of knowing, with the road itself and with the steel of the car. However, these modern fantasies of immortality "behind of the wheel" (lines 7–8) are proven to be weaker than the sheer violent power of the kangaroo. As this "flash that is stronger than steel / launches onto the highway" (lines 11–12), its very materiality disrupts the European traditions of time and the sacred in one moment, as past, present, future, eternity, "extroverted angels", and even "judgement day" condense into one moment of silent experience, on this stretch of road where "the *Megaleia rufa* song / cries louder than any car stereo" (Smoke 88, lines 12–14, 2–3, emphasis in original).

The combination of law, lore, and the proximate material connection of place in dreaming, serves as a deeply powerful foil in Watson's poetry, against which modern Australian life with its search for the sacred in the proximate, material things, and desperate reaching for a sense of place, is measured and unrelentingly brought into the political sphere. As the structures of social interaction and belonging are part of the sacred in Aboriginal dreaming, so too is the sacred a social and political imperative in Watson's poetry. Modern urban Australia is not a world apart, but one that must necessarily, however problematically, become part of a new dreaming.

The Abstract Transcendent

"Raindrops Fall in Vain"; "A Dead Man's Mouth Harp"

In Watson's poetry, there is a subtle reaching for the transcendent just beyond the page, which is never made explicit. The poem that most closely approaches this is "**Raindrops Fall in Vain**" (Smoke 10). This piece addresses a reaching for the transcendent, with all the tensions involved in this process. One of these points of tension is between ending and continuation.

raindrops fall in vain
and abuse

the kindness of my soul

I hear them landing outside,
an audience to a short-lived affair

continuum of vertigo, a song (lines 1–6)

The rain, which dances the dance of the absolute, is both a "short-lived affair" and a "continuum" (lines 5–6). The "continuum" (line 6) is associated with a European image of the transcendent as upwards, a "vertigo" (line 6) of endless upward movement, and a Romantic association of the infinite with music (cf. Dahlhaus 1981, 79–91). The transcendent is found at the moment the raindrops fall to the ground: it occurs at the point when the rain meets its end, rather than in the continuum of its upward movement. The rain's final fall is a paradoxical one, an opening and sharing which occurs in a state of isolation and separation as the rain drops "fall / in the open / and share their end" (lines 12–15).

The final line of the piece accentuates this separation, consisting of only one word: "alone". Rather than this final word closing the piece, it is left open by an odd failing of grammar in line six of the final grouping of lines. The line "remedy to dry spirits / that one can envy such courage to fall / in the open" (lines 11–13) leaves three possible reading open, due to Watson's free approach to punctuation. In each reading there is an unfinished thought which begs for a sense of completion that the poem does not provide. A casual reading such as "… remedy to dry spirits [so] that one can envy" is missing the necessary syntactical preparation. Alternatively, the sentence could refer to a person or thing: "that [person or thing] can envy such courage" – which, however, begs the question of who or what is being referred to. Finally, the least likely reading is that the thought of what the spirits do is broken-off in the middle of the line and left unfinished, "dry spirits that[…]", before the sentence picks up again with a different train of thought. Considering that the rest of the poem provides commas, the confusion here can be assumed to be deliberate. It indicates the possibility of a space in which the spirits reside, and which cannot be entirely expressed in language.

These voices are not always welcome, as becomes clear in "**A Dead Man's Mouth Harp**" (Smoke 26).

walking along a bitumen shoulder
'round the witching hour
it comes through the darkness
an unwelcome companion
that levels the grass and foliage,
a whistle
like a crystal spear

cuts the stillness into fine pieces
a maiden carried in the wind
sultry, yet hollow,
a tune from a deadman's mouth harp
a cry that follows the night
chilled and evil
it echoes the little spirits in the breeze
black lips and diamond teeth
it strays beyond the ebony cover of sky

spat out of a deadman's mouth harp,
played over and over
a monotone symphony
from the tired beast
of damned and lonely eternity (lines 1–21)

The song of the dead man's mouth harp is a song of eternity, but not one of transcendence. This is despite the trappings of inspiration it carries, which occur in other poems in the collection; as well as those of the Romantic poetic tradition, such as the muse ("a maiden", line 9), the night, music (line 19), and the upward movement towards and beyond the heavens "beyond the ebony cover of sky" (line 16). These motifs are qualified by the presence of strong negatives, or are mutated slightly in the piece, such as in "chilled evil" (line 13), "unwelcome" (line 4), or "hollow" (line 10); and not least, "a maiden" (line 9), which, as a description of female virginity, is an unfruitful version of the lover-muse motif in Watson's work.

A closer look at these negative qualifiers reveals two types: the opposite of the transcendent ("hollow", "over and over", "monotone", "tired", "lonely"), and that which transgresses ("witching hour", "levels the grass and foliage", "crystal spear", "strays", "damned"). The key is in the setting of the first stanza, where the dead man's song is an "unwelcome companion" (line 4) while the speaker is walking "along a bitumen shoulder" (line 1). This "whistle like a crystal spear" (lines 6–7) exceeds the borders of modern Australia's bitumen reality. It reminds the speaker and reader of the songs this bitumen has paved over: not living songlines, but the song of a dead man. It casts a darkly sardonic light on the possibility of the sacred or the transcendent, in a place which is haunted by the dead of the place it once was.

A New Way Forward

"Poetry on the Green Bridge"; "Stealing Kisses"; "Let's Talk"

> *"After all this talk and reading my answers were still false, disgusting to me. I wavered politically. First to one edge – this is our country, not yours in your historical murders and current shame – and then to another – we all share country. We all must live here, Aboriginal and Other alike, and the only question is how to do that honourably […]. For all that I walked, slept, breathed and dreamed Country, the language still would not come. My trust in words had finally come to this: Nothing. I began to think I might have to deliver mere rhetoric to you, rather than something that might sustain us both. But if the Aboriginal people of Northwest Australia are correct in their cosmology, then surely Nothing is Nothing"* – Lucashenko 2006, 9–10

Watson offers an alternative to the elegy found in Indigenous poetry of the first generation, although he does pay homage to the tradition in "A Dead Man's Mouth Harp". He uses writing to instead call for an active relationship between the textual practice of the poem, the reader, and the lived landscape of urban Brisbane. Expressed in the terms of the theoretical lens proposed in this book, the relationship to writing and place Watson proposes forms the application when a model of Romantic irony is used as a reading lens. Watson's call can be most clearly heard in his collection of two short pieces, "On the Transom of Ghosts" and "Dreaming River Triptych", under the title "POETRY ON THE GREEN BRIDGE" (Love 33). In "On the Transom of Ghosts", it is unclear if the subtitle "An interactive poem for the commuter" is a serious request for active participation on the part of the reader, or if it serves the same purpose as the use of italics throughout the piece: specifically, to heighten the effect of direct speech and to lend the poem an air of oral communication. In either case, it calls on the reader directly to create a presence experience while reading. The act of reading then becomes an attempt to bridge the distance between word and experience that is inherent in European poetry's concept of language.

> (*An interactive poem for the commuter*)
> *On this transom, the river's dawning skin* … stand
> here … *give your breath to the fleeting mist* … stand
> here … *in the crimson shadow of Coot-tha's*[1] *dusk* … stand
> here … *and whisper upon night's canvas, whirlpool eyes, the*
> *songlines of Kurilpa*[2] *ghosts*…

The poem posits that the material and conscious experience of place can overcome the deafness of the city as described in pieces such as "Crust" (Smoke

43) or "Deafening Cold" (Love 61). It does this by denying fictionality in favour of a socially constructed, presence-based understanding of storytelling and, by extension, poetic experience.

The piece's use of italics and normal type plays with the changing dynamics of movement and stillness represented in the poem by the commuters on the one hand, and on the other, the call to stand still and listen "here" in the piece. The main body of the poem is written in italics, which not only lends it a spoken quality, but also reflects the movement and connection expressed in those italicised lines. On the surface, "transom" in the piece appears to be the "Green Bridge" of the title. Yet the placement of this "transom" on the river implies the nautical meaning of the word,[3] which draws the reader from the simple commuter's bridge outward into the moving water. The section title "On the Transom of Ghosts" transforms the "transom" from a place on a boat, to a reference to the ghosts which make this space an Indigenous place. The first line of the piece situates the reader aboard this "transom", which is a stationary place on a moving river.

A river is a moving thing, yet here it is transformed into a body with "dawning skin" (line 1). The second line likewise encompasses body, movement, the landscape, and the concept of sharing, in the line "*give your breath to the fleeting mist*" (line 3, italics in original). The italicised middle lines are framed by conspicuously static non-italicised formatting, which grounds the reader in space with great authority. These sections invite the reader to pay attention to the movement and the exchange which creates the place underfoot. The words "stand" and "here" at the beginning and end of each line are separate in this poem, but syntactically they belong together as a single command. Their separation into one word of action (stand) and one word of place (here) creates a momentary stumbling block which slows the tempo and draws attention to the interrelatedness of these two elements. Standing "here" in this context means understanding the places and the ghosts on which you stand; otherwise you are simply standing, and there is no "here".

The ellipses between the descriptions of place in italics and the call to stand reflect the separation between the two. This is the gap which the process of standing and listening attempts to bridge. The final sentence of the poem starts with the stationary word "here …"; however, it breaks out of the pattern by allowing this line to run-on into the next, rather than forming a closed frame. In these lines, the reader becomes more than an observer. He is invited to join a dialogue which is based on speech (a "whisper"), but which nevertheless seeks a different language. This language is an embodied language; embodied in a land which carries ghosts and songlines deep within itself. This poem stands as a testament to the hope the poet carries for hybrid places, created through a shared understanding of their deep history as places without "illusion-isms" and "delusion-ism" (Monster's 3 "Enemy of the State", lines 22–23).

The two poems which fall under the title "POETRY ON THE GREEN BRIDGE" (Love 33) do not do so elegantly. The assemblage of words on the page consists of one title, two seemingly unrelated titles under that, and finally, one subtitle which is both in brackets and italics. However, when read as a set, it becomes clear that the first piece describes the conditions under which the second can be read as more than simple sarcasm. The second piece, "Dreaming River Triptych", presents Watson's city as a single image. The river is at the centre, and it is the river which holds power over its surroundings.

> Never the same this river-archaic vein, snaking through
> the land's dreaming cortex-
> submerging provinces; the past, present and future – an
> aquarelle triptych cultured on every tide… (lines 1–4)

This body of water, like the land, is described in Aboriginal terms. The river's movement is that of a snake, and the land has a "dreaming cortex" (line 2), whilst the river of the title also dreams. The city along the banks of the river condenses all time, as the "past, present, and future", into a multidimensional space "on every tide" (lines 3–4). This is not one place layered onto another: all three are equally caught up in the movement of the river, which is itself "never the same" (line 1). The use of the word "triptych" (often referring to the three painted or carved panels of an altar) underscores the connection between these "provinces" (line 3), perhaps even classifies them as part of something sacred.

The word "cultured" to describe the "provinces" along the river carries an air of sarcasm. People become "cultured" in a process of exchanging their original culture for one more influenced by European manners and education. This carries with it a dark set of historical connotations in an Indigenous Australian context. However, the first poem, "On the Transom of Ghosts", invites the reader to offer his own breath, a sacred symbol of life, to the experience of this river and all the many places it encompasses. It invites a kind of movement of the soul which has the potential to mitigate any sarcasm in the final line of "Dreaming River Triptych", and to reveal the underlying desire.

If these poems can be read in contradictory ways, it is because there is both mistrust and anger in Watson's work, as well as hope and desire. The poems "Stealing Kisses" (Love 59) and "Let's Talk" (Love 36–37) represent each of these contrasting instincts. "Stealing Kisses" (Love 59) likens writing to a trick, an act of burglary in which the poet has to steal into the mind of the reader without setting off alarm bells. Language, for the poet, enables an act of deception. “Stealing Kisses” is a light-hearted reminder of other deceptions, such as those in the state archives which the poet speaks of in “In the Light of Two Fires” (Love 6). These deceptions include “itemised accounts of [the poet’s] kin’s value / in pounds and Shillings” (Love 6, lines 14–15), and the juxtaposition of the death-by-stabbing of a young Murri man with the judge’s quotation of Kipling in the courtroom in “The Book, the jungle, the judgement” (Love 100–101). Romanticism, at least Kipling’s Romanticism, does indeed ring “hollow” here. However, the poet refuses to give up on poetry and the endless process of sharing experience and asserting the limits of the knowledge it is possible to have of the Other.

Watson’s poems are startlingly and deeply powerful; yet they are also inherently opaque. His poetic landscape contains forms and ways of knowing to which the non-Indigenous reader has to assume a certain degree of cultural blindness. On the other hand, the author’s biting critique of modern Australia’s interactions with Indigenous Australians and Indigenous place could not be clearer. The irony of the fact that in order to be heard, this very critique had to be written in English, and published for what is still very much an Anglo-Australian dominated literary culture, is an undercurrent running throughout Watson’s oeuvre.

This is part of the two primary concerns examined in this book: Watson’s critique of language, and the dual-reality structure of the mythical versus the mundane rationality of (post)colonial Australian culture. These realities are the primary source of tension in Watson’s poems. Tracing this structure highlights how it is used to subvert the writing of urban and suburban place as white, modern, and rational. It is also clear that Watson’s critique of language is to be read in the context of the continued situation in which Indigenous authors are caught up in English-language publishing and educational structures. This poses limitations on the ability of the poet’s language to truly encapsulate his lived experience, and to facilitate an equal dialogue with the potentially white reader.

The reflection on language’s finitude in the poems examined above contains at once an epistemological stance towards language per say, a long-established critical approach to the role of English in postcolonial literature, and most importantly, it highlights the limitations experienced by the reader faced with Watson’s - and perhaps other Aboriginal - writing. His poetry self-reflectively performs the limits of interlocution even as it asserts the possibility of it. Watson celebrates language’s ability to gesture beyond itself, towards the unspeakable and in doing so, bring that which cannot be articulated to the page. The constant movement between assertion and negation could be viewed as simply ambivalent. However, I have argued that it is more than this because of the value placed on this endless backwards and forwards as both irresolvable and productive. This dialectic has been brought into sharper focus in these readings by a recognition of its similarly to Romantic irony. How the two might be brought together from a theoretical perspective was explored in the chapter "Model Theory: How Romanticism Continues and Adapts". The primary purpose of these readings, however, has been to show that the ambivalence expressed here is itself productive. For all the beautiful words, Watson's poetry ultimately strips away the delusions of the reconciliation narrative and offers a humbler hope for Australia as a hybrid place of deep history.

Opening Up a Dialogue

In her analysis of Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology speech, Liliana Zavaglia argues that the orientation towards the future in the speech "exposes the 'face uplift' of the redemption narrative, that harmonisation by which whiteness is afforded an exit from the ongoing demands of historical justice claims" (Zavaglia 2016, 209). Watson's poems critique the redemption narrative of reconciliation. Instead, they offer a more complex view which shows the history and concerns of black and white Australia to be deeply enmeshed. These poems reveal this in the almost violent juxtapositions of historical, present, global, regional, personal, profane, and sacred into a single presence effect experienced on the streets of (sub)urban Brisbane.

Although Watson's Indigenous heritage is foregrounded in his work, this is not the only level at which these poems function. There is something in these poems which is recognisable and which connects, even to the cultural outsider. While writing from the specific experience of being an Indigenous poet, Watson's work simultaneously engages with the nature of language itself and the relationship between the mundane and the sacred. It is this aspect which bears a level of similarity to the questions early Romanticism attempted to address. Not least among these is the question of how we might have knowledge of the self and of the transcendent, when the period which Watson would later call "western rationality" (Smoke 50) was emerging as heir apparent to the soul of the modern West and its subsequent colonial expansion. The ironic reflection on the limits of language (and poetry) itself is a structure recognisable from Romantic irony. However, Indigenous Australian culture is such a central element in Watson's poetry that to interpret his entire oeuvre as presenting a model of Romantic irony would run the risk of subsuming Watson's voice into the tradition of European transcendental philosophy.

His poetry represents two equal realities and the tension between them: between that of modern rationalism and one portrayed using Indigenous words and figures. Rather than keeping these two realms separate, Watson enmeshes the two. The result is a move away from an antagonistic relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous renderings of place, towards a writing of the city in which the sacred is a natural part of urban and industrial Australia. This denies a binary structure in which the Indigenous elements are tasked with carrying the entire burden of the sacred vs. 'white' Australia representing the rational and modern. Language is also a key concern in Watson's writing, both from a postcolonial and a more general artistic perspective. Even as language gestures towards the possibility of creating understanding between people, or even a proximate experience of the sacred in (sub)urban Australia, it is trapped by its own mediality. There is a negative dialectic at play in Watson's writing which I have interpreted through the lens of Romantic irony. Within this structure, Watson's recognition of the limits of language highlights the limits of interlocution with the reader.

The reflection on the finitude of the subject in Romantic irony represents language's ability to gesture towards that which lies beyond itself, and at the same time, the impossibility of reaching this point. Although this might at first appear an abstract issue at best, Romantic irony nevertheless offers a useful heuristic for understanding what is at stake in the way in which Watson's work simultaneously makes the (likely non-Indigenous) reader aware of the limits to their understanding of Indigenous space and reality, whilst simultaneously calling for dialogue and approach. In the face of a lack of first-hand understanding of Indigenous experience and knowledge, Romantic irony offers an interpretive lens which has been able to reveal the tensions at play in Watson's poems, and which provides a clearer view of the approach the poet takes in his refusal to offer resolution.

Watson's poems reveal two ways of knowing, which are compacted into one space and shown to be deeply intertwined, yet unreconciled. The poems reflect on the limits of language in reconciling the two. However, this is more than a simple "us versus them" call for justice, even as his poems make the reader abundantly aware of many injustices. Watson offers hope by calling for a constantly active dialogue and reaching for understanding. His poetry is a disconcerting reminder that reconciliation, in the sense of bringing a final resolution, is not possible. Rather, Watson's poetry appears to utilise these tensions and limitations to find a powerful way to keep talking, from within the dual inheritances of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

In one of the most energy-charged pieces of the collection *Love Poems and Death Threats*, "Let's Talk", Watson places the past and present, pointless and painful words, against the power of speech. These "voices long-worn on the only certainty that Dreaming-wings are clay pigeons for nothing other / than brutal hunger" (lines 14–15) are called once more to speech:

> But, *Let's talk about drafting a treaty … let's talk!*
> *Let's talk a genocidal monster to sleep; senseless unto its own*
> *demise in peaceful dreams … let's talk!*
>
> *Let's talk reconciliation until we're all too exhausted and the*
> *only imperative to take a stand together is to hold each other up*
> *and find the comfort of embracement … let's talk!*
>
> *Let's talk evil into sensual goodness; speak over the red-taped*
> *triggers that wait silent and deadly, so they will aim only into the*
> *crosshair of an eternal ceasefire … let's talk!*
>
> We cannot fight every evil, but as long as a dialogue and ever
> a daily diatribe exists on the destructive principle of evils, *let's*
> *just talk!*
>
> Let's talk, until Evil bows to listen,
> and the fires burning from voices, that are long-worn, can settle
> into the beautiful warmth of embers.
>
> And even then when we're done,
> let's never stop talking…. (Love 37, lines 23–39)

Here is the only answer the poet can give to the question of language, power, and deception which flows through his work: an embrace of flux, and the imperfect embrace of the Other.

V. Synthesis: The Actualisation of Romanticism in Contemporary Australian Poetry

> "There was the vast town of Sydney. And it didn't seem to be real, it seemed to be sprinkled on the surface of a darkness into which it never penetrated" – *"The Kangaroo", D. H. Lawrence*

According to previous scholarship, Romanticism never quite arrived in Australia. We[1] missed the boat on Romanticism because we were still on the boat to Botany Bay, as it were, and did not like what we saw very much when we did arrive. The view of Romanticism in Australian literary criticism is still very much tied to a way of thinking which determines the conceptual horizon of art on the basis of temporal and geographical proximity. This does not explain why, or how, Romanticism has come to be a perennial part of Australian poetry. Nor does it explain why the term can be used with such ease in scholarship on the work of David Malouf, yet not in relation to the poetry of Samuel Wagan Watson.

Contemporary Australian literature accesses and adapts ideas well outside the aesthetic and epochal schemas of the European or North American canon. This is the double-edged sword of Australian culture in general. Late colonisation, harsh local conditions, and long-lasting cultural dependency on Britain have meant that Australian literature developed relatively late, in comparison to the history of many other literatures. This places it in the enviable position of having a wealth of cultural resources from vastly different times and places to draw on simultaneously. However, it also poses the challenge of working without an organic historical cultural participation in the discourses around historical literary movements. These challenges are exacerbated in an Indigenous-Australian literary context, in which the availability of these cultural resources is deeply entwined with an ongoing history of systematic violence and oppression on the one hand, and the use of English-language writing as a means of resistance, self-expression, and cultural exchange on the other.

An overview of past debates on the presence of Romanticism in Australian literature reveals a desire to compensate for a lack of local literary history. The addition of prefixes to the term (post-Romantic etc.) can be viewed as an attempt to establish some kind of genealogy of ideas rooted in *cultural continuity*. Apart from the fact that this adds very little to the essential qualities at play, it also – however unconsciously – implies an organic connection between race, environment, and artistic vocabulary which is worth questioning.

This is perhaps why I have found approaching the work of David Malouf and Samuel Wagan Watson through the lens of Romantic irony unsettling to a far greater extent than I had at first anticipated. The reception of Malouf's work asserts the presence of Romanticism in his writing as being self-evident, whereas this is not the case for the reception of Watson's poetry. Pairing the two has highlighted just how different the expected frames for reading these two authors are. Both poets probe the possibilities and limitations of language and poetry in transcending the individual's cognitive horizon to connect with the Other. Yet there is an unspoken ease with which Malouf's work can be approached from this perspective, whereas using the same lens on Watson's poetry requires a good deal of thought in relation to his status as an Indigenous-Australian author. The line between respecting the cultural differences Watson writes about, and falling into the trap of inadvertently policing the boundaries of how he is to be read, is a thin one.

It has been my hope that approaching Malouf and Watson through the same theoretical lens can reveal nuances in both authors' writing which might otherwise have been obscured by the implied norms for framing their work. Despite their differences, Watson and Malouf are connected by their negotiation of the Australian condition through a productive negative dialectic; one which is first found in the philosophical and literary concept of Romantic irony. In this book, the concept was approached as both a world-interpreting model and a mode of representation in Malouf's work. In my exposition of Watson's poetry, it became an interpretive lens through which I read his poetry. In each case, the aim has not been to prove each author a 'Romantic' nor to provide yet another definition of Romanticism itself. Instead, this book has attempted to rethink Romanticism as a source of different models and to show that they might be productively applied to the challenges facing the subject in contemporary Australia.

Model theory offers a way of engaging with the presence of Romanticism in Australian literature without the need to establish geographical, temporal, and aesthetic continuity from eighteenth or nineteenth-century Europe to Australia, particularly in relation to an individual author's cultural background. Models reduce a complex original, such as Romanticism, to a specific core idea according to its usefulness for the application of the model. This shifts the focus away from aesthetic markers and historical narratives, towards a purpose-oriented understanding of Romanticism. The focus in this book has been on Romantic irony.

Over the course of writing it, I have come to the conclusion that Romantic irony is a particularly useful model for poetry in a contemporary Australian context, because it does not suggest a false road out of an impossible situation.

The philosophy of early Romanticism shows attempts to address the very real pressures of social change at the end of the eighteenth century (cf. Matuschek and Kerschbaumer 2015, 142; C. Bode 2010, 90–92). The philosophy of natural law which developed during the Romantic period drastically changed the concept of the self from that used in the mid-seventeenth century. Rather than being a part of, and dependent on, a natural whole (communal, cosmic, religious), the individual emerged as an independent being with an identity apart from the communal. In her study on the Romantic political and the social contract, Zoe Beenstock writes that by the time of the Enlightenment, and Thomas Hobbes's exploration of the idea that the individual's social identity is a matter of nurture rather than nature, the "former assumption that the social collective takes priority over individuals had broken down" (Beenstock 2016, 1). It is easy to overlook the almost terrifying aspect of this freedom (so aptly portrayed in Dostoyevsky's *The Grand Inquisitor*). Rather than scrabbling for a new, definitive meaning-making structure for the individual, early Romanticism calls for an embrace of this freedom, of an endless dialectic of becoming: no solution, just the puzzle.

The early Romantics offer a highly philosophical programme, one which deals with the relationship between the material and the metaphysical, the mundane and the transcendent, the finite and the infinite. This programme was developed to address not only these pressing questions of high philosophy, but also very real questions of how the subject may think of itself in the now industrialised world, in nature, and outside religion. The process became a heuristic for thinking about the subject as bereaved of an ordered place in the world and in the cosmos. It is exactly this process which the formerly colonial, and now the contemporary, subject in Australia undergoes.

In an Australian context, nature stands at the heart of this lack of order. As previously noted, the nature with which European settlers were confronted in Australia was not the Nature with an upper-case "N" of European Romanticism. For the European settlers, the Australian continent was not yet landscape. With transportation (willing or unwilling) to Australia, colonial subjects fell out of not only the explicit social order of their home communities, but also the unspoken religious and cultural traditions of nature, and even the most basic cultural-spatial orientation (the rising of the sun in the east, for instance). The supposed emptiness of the land made way for the processes of making sense – literally making or creating meaning – of this land, on colonial terms of possession, transformation, and the repression of its first custodians. However, it also had the side effect of creating meanings between settlers and land from scratch, creating a sense of how the subject fits into the world using only an upside-down compass, in a process that continues to this day.

Gerard Stilz notes that the so-called European "cultural frontier" has developed dynamically, and independently of the general understanding of Australian space outlined above. The interaction between the two becomes even more complex under the aspect that the "gradual shift of the European 'cultural frontier' [...] is not necessarily identical with the frontier of rural or urban settlement" (Stilz 2007, 31). This is a point which becomes all the more important when examining the work of authors such as David Malouf or Samuel Wagan Watson, which is grounded in the cultural centres of the coast. The treatment of urban and suburban spaces in literature is dependent on these cultural frontiers, which are the "mental borderlines drawn by individuals or groups in order to separate those physical spaces which are felt to be exotic, different, fearful or strangely fascinating, from spaces which have become familiar, homely and accepted as common part of everyday life" (ibid.). In other words, the frontier in Australia has less to do with an American concept of the frontier of settlement versus wilderness, than with shifting imagined cultural frontiers which move independently of the real frontiers of settlements.[2] Attempting to read Watson's work through a Romantic lens has shown that these cultural frontiers are drawn differently even in the same city.

The debate around Romanticism in Australia has primarily focused on settlers' relationships to nature, rather than on centres of cultural production. This phenomenon reflects a view of Romanticism as synonymous with a particular understanding of nature in the new world in general. This was the idea that "nature" or the "wild" are spaces for the "creation of a supposedly deeper, truer or more authentic identity, whether understood in spiritual, political or often nationalist terms" (T. Clark 2011, 25). The opening chapter of this book has already traced the arguments which propose that the inability of nature to fulfil this role throughout the nineteenth, and into the twentieth century, was the cause of Australia's lack of an endemic Romantic movement. It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that Australia started down the path of Britain's rebellious sons across the Atlantic, and began to purge itself of all that was European and impure: dollars for pounds, gums for willows, and *Possum Magic* for *Peter Rabbit*.[3] I have used model theory in my analysis as a way of separating Romanticism as a European cultural good from this genealogical structure which always ties Australian literature's use of Romantic elements to colonial era Britain. The conceptual framework which model theory provides made it possible to re-think the interaction of historical European Romanticism and contemporary Australian literature along the lines of usefulness rather than genealogy.

The Australian subject is impossibly in-between and always will be. In-betweenness is the scar tissue of the violence upon which the existence of Australia as a nation is predicated, just as it is a reminder of the unlikeliness of the second chance that Australia became to so many people. There have been recent calls for the humanities to once again take on the task of creating a new progressive national narrative.[4] It would be hard not to agree that a serious conversation about values is long overdue in Australian society, or that the humanities need to step up to the conversation. More than ever, though, the questions we need to address are not those of nationhood, but of what it means to be human in specific environmental and social contexts: that is, what it means to be a human of the reef, or of the city, or of the mines.

Reading Watson's work alongside that of Malouf, the role of poetry in writing the subject into place came under a problematic light. The desire to "come into full procession of a place" (Malouf 1998) revolves around creating a sense of ownership of place through creative processes. It celebrates the things which we make, even as it reflects on their finitude. Malouf's poems express the predicament of the European-Australian relationship with absolute authenticity. His work is empowering in its reflection on the impossibility of ever writing ourselves into place. It represents a letting go of this pressure to reach a point of perfect synthesis. Instead, something smaller is celebrated: the humbling process of reaching for the transcendent while becoming aware of our own limitations. However, these creative processes are conceived of somewhere between the sacred-mundane and metaphysical musings. Malouf's poems probe the limits to what we can know of the Other, from a position where that Other is largely silent.

The readings undertaken here trace patterns and developments within each author's poetry. Watson's writing shows a development away from the writing back paradigm of the first generation of Indigenous poets towards a structure of productive negativity. In the case of Malouf, overcoming the self/Other divide in order to write the subject into place, is shown to be a central aspect of his writing which is negotiated through a pattern of strategies tied to setting in his work. The result of these readings is a much more ambivalent attitude towards the power of the imagination in Malouf's writing than has previously been argued for by scholars.

Place plays a central role in Malouf's poetry. The desired, yet unattainable absolute takes on the form of a desire for placedness. More than postmodern geography, in Malouf's poetry, placedness is configured specifically as transcendent and sacred. Romantic irony is able to account for the quotidian Australian sacred as part of this dynamic in a way that other paradigms are not. Malouf's poetry is not Romantic because it celebrates the imagination. Its Romanticism lies in the value attributed to place-making as a transcendental and sacred process in his writing.

Language is posed as both a method of approaching a unified sense of place, and as limiting the subject's ability to experience the same. Schlegelian irony turns this backwards and forwards into a productive force. Malouf's ocean poems challenge categories such as the human and the animal, nation and borders. By pointing to the fundamentally deceptive nature of such categories, the poet calls into question the hierarchies implicit in the desire to possess the land and the animal Other, thus revealing the deceptive nature of place-making in postcolonial Australia.

Unlike the ocean in Malouf's poetry, (sub)urban space is written and re-written in a process of culture. As such, it is always provisional. Gardens, on the other hand, reflect an understanding of earth as language itself. Malouf merges the quotidian sacred with the concept of the living word to explore the possibility of accessing this language through the body. The body, with its ability to eat functions as a medium between the material and the infinite. Malouf's ideas about communion reflect how the corporeal can be a conduit for the sacred: the transcendent in the immanent. Thus, the different settings in Malouf's poetic oeuvre become testing grounds for different ways for trying to find this connection between the self and the other, and the experience of something which transcends language. In each case, language fails to write the subject into place, but in its very failure, it is able to signify the possibility of a unified sense of place for the subject negatively

Placing Watson's poetry in the same frame of reference as that of Malouf has heightened my awareness of the way that his attempts to imagine the subject into place resonates with my own experience: one which is passively predicated on the silence of Indigenous inscriptions of the land. Watson's poetry unmakes this way of experiencing place, starting at the tarmac line of (sub)urban Australia. His poetry is deeply unsettling, because it does not confront the reader with an image of place which is so different, and so uncanny, that it can be read as though Aboriginal Australia somehow existed in another dimension. Instead, he presents the reader with the self-same world familiar to anyone walking the streets of Brisbane. Watson's work is too deeply entwined with the complex realities of being a poet with Munanjali, Birri Gubba, German, Dutch, and Irish heritage to offer a single coherent model of Romantic irony. Yet it also speaks of irresolvable disjuncts, and the limitations and possibilities of language to overcome these. Ultimately, this poetry finds the only possible solution in a constant process of reaching towards something akin to reconciliation. This is not reconciliation as a sop for an imagined national soul; it is the gritty and hard process of creating a treaty.

The challenge and joy of Watson's poems lies in the way they offer points of connection to all readers, yet reveal the limits of language itself. Watson writes in a way that connects with the reader on a universal level while he simultaneously tells his own story. This opens up possibilities for dialogue in an impossible situation, rather than immediately confronting the reader with impenetrable alterity. Watson merges the injustices of the past with the present and reflects on the role which writing has played throughout this history. Irony in Watson's poetry is conceptualised here as a reaction to social pressures in which the relationships between subject/language and subject/world are fundamentally political. Irony's endless motion reveals political structures to be subject to dialectical change, thus challenging the status quo. Watson's work places the invisible norms of urban Australia under scrutiny. He does not do this by simply increasing the agency and visibility of Indigenous voices and culture in his poems. Instead, he maintains multiple positions, leaving the reality status of the material or fantastic, profane or sacred, Indigenous or 'white' Australia open and unresolved.

In his characterisation of modern urban Australia, Watson plays with common signifiers of what at first appear to be diametrically opposing poles of Indigeneity and modernity. Watson's ironic voice satirizes much that is modern Australia. However, the negative dialectic I identify at play in his writing is not divisive but works towards understanding and community. The destabilising effect produced by Watson's layering of the sacred and the mundane, the present and the historical, creates an ironic contingency in urban Australia, which contains the potential to create a new dialogue of the sacred between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians.

Although Watson's Indigenous-cultural heritage is a central part of his poetry, he writes in a way which invites multiple framings and which makes his poetry accessible and deeply moving, even for expatriate European-Australian readers like myself. Reading Watson's work through the lens of Romantic irony highlights the tensions and dynamics in his writing of the city. His streets are palimpsestic, etched with multiple histories and systems of knowledge existing simultaneously in one place: intertwined, but ultimately unreconcilable. The dialectic movement of Romantic irony highlights the productive potential in the poet's refusal to resolve these tensions. Within Watson's voice of protest there is also a voice of hope. This hope lies in acknowledging the limitations to reconciliation in contemporary Australia and instead engaging in constant approach, dialogue, and negotiation.

Not every Australian poem contains a juicy Romantic centre. Using model theory in these cases has been a way to determine whether or not a model of Romanticism lies at the core of a work. Romanticism has turned out to be central to Malouf's poetry, although in a very different way from that previously supposed. Romantic irony becomes an immensely moving force in his poetry through a simple shift away from achieving ultimate synthesis, towards a celebration of the process of reaching for it instead. This model reflects on the inability of poetry to achieve a true synthesis of subject and place. Instead, it offers an alternative, in which the process of trying and failing, and our awareness of these limits, holds the potential for re-examining our relationship to the absolute, and just maybe, to each other as well.

The irony in both Watson's and Malouf's poetry is a concrete expression of an idea which lies at the core of Australian poetry: its penchant to question narratives which offer simple resolutions and happy endings. Irony makes the reader aware of the poem's position as something which sits between what can be known of the Other, what cannot, and what might be – provided we keep listening to the edges of silence around speech. This is not the voice of a proud nation striving forward or running from its past. It is the silence of an Australia quietly tending veggie patches in the underbelly of the Milky Way.

Notes

Introduction

1. These awards include: The Australian Literature Society gold medal (2009 for *Neighbours in a Thicket*), the Grace Leven Prize (1974 for *Neighbours in a Thicket*), the James Cook Award (1975 for *Neighbours in a Thicket*), the New South Wales Premier's prize for fiction (1979 and 1993), The Age Book of the Year award (1982), the Commonwealth Prize for Fiction (1996 for *The Great World*), the Prix Femina Étranger (1991 for *The Great World*), the Miles Franklin Award (1991 for *The Great World*), the New South Wales Award for Fiction (1991), the Los Angeles Times Fiction Prize (1994 for *Remembering Babylon*), the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (1993 for *Remembering Babylon*), the Neustadt International Prize for Literature (2000), and the Australia-Asia Literary Award (2008 for *The Complete Stories*). He was shortlisted for the Booker Prize (for *Remembering Babylon*), and recently the 2016 Australia Council Award for Lifetime Achievement in Literature.
2. I have chosen to use the term "Indigenous" rather than "Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander" throughout, except where "Aboriginal literature" and related terms have already been used by the secondary sources. Although acceptance of the term varies, I have chosen to use it here as a deliberate generalisation, not of Indigenous-Australian culture, but in order to make it clear that I cannot make qualified statements regarding specific groups within the cultural diversity of Indigenous-Australia.
3. I am an Australian with British emigrant parents, and the focus of this book lies on German Romantic irony and previous debates on Romanticism which have their roots in early colonial history. This means that I am largely working from a European-Australian perspective. In reading Samuel Wagan Watson's work, I am very clearly only able to offer my Anglo-Australian understanding of his poetry and its reception in a wider English-language-dominated literary context. My use of what appears to be a binary opposition – the Australian environment / European-cultural history – is not intended to obscure the wealth of migrant and other literatures which now make up the Australian literary landscape. It is my hope that approaching Romanticism with model theory can open up possibilities for examining its role within the full spectrum of writing in contemporary Australia.
4. See for instance Roy Osamu Kamada or Philip Dickenson's work
5. In *Aufklärung und Romantik: Epochenschnittstellen* (Fulda, Kerschbaumer and Matuschek 2015).
6. For the sake of clarity, I will be referring to the volumes of poetry referenced with short titles: For Watson, "Monster's" for *Monster's Ink* (Watson 2016),

"Love" for *Love Poems and Death Threats* (Watson 2014) and "Smoke" for *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* (Watson 2010). For Malouf, "RD" for *Revolving Days* (Malouf 2008), "P" for *Poems 1959–1989* (Malouf 1992), "EH" for *Earth Hour* (Malouf 2014), "BoP" for *Bicycle and Other Poems* (Malouf 1970), "NT" for *Neighbours in a Thicket* (Malouf 1980), "TM" for *Typewriter Music* (Malouf 2007), and AOB for *An Open Book* (Malouf 2019) all of which are commonly used.

A bad Romance? Rehabilitating Romanticism in Australia

1. I use "landscape" to express the human view of the Australian continent and her oceans. The term always implies a human gaze with its own cultural filters, which is particularly important in understanding Wright's perspective. I follow Kylie Crane's approach in using the term "environment" to "designate all perceivable aspects of the physical world that surrounds a perceiving entity" (Crane 2012, 10). Because landscape implies a pre-existing cultural frame in the eye of the beholder, and the environment is general enough to include urban and non-endemic elements, a term is needed to refer to Australia's endemic flora, fauna, geological, and oceanic forms without recourse to the term landscape. It is in this sense that I have used the term "nature" in the lower case. The term is also discussed in relation to Romanticism in Australia. In Malouf's poetry specifically, my use of the term bears echoes of Romanticism's Nature; however, this is not how I use it. Rather, it serves a structural function as the inaccessible Other to the self, in Malouf's model of Romantic irony.
2. See for instance, Alan Bewell's recent book *Natures in Translation: Romanticism and Colonial Natural* History or the work of the research collective 'Enlightenment, Romanticism, Contemporary Culture' at the University of Melbourne.
3. In this respect, there are parallels between Australia and the fellow colony of Canada. Northrop Frye characterises Canada as a nation without the kind of deep national mythology which enculturates material space into place(Frye 1995). There are also similarities in the focus on the survival narrative in Australia and Canada, in contrast to American wilderness writing (Crane 2012, 3). However, in the case of Canada, the country's inability to function as a new Eden in comparison with the USA was not so much a result of the actual material conditions of the landscape, which certainly contained mild and fruitful areas, but because the wild North became the nation's symbolic space due to its founding mythology (Rosenthal 2011, 21). The bush and desert narratives in the Australian literary canon (formed with a similar delay in Canada) hold strong sway in the nation's mythology; however, it is worth noting that Australia, like Canada, was not without its areas of mild climate and fertile soil. One key difference is that in the case of Australia,

particularly in areas like Tasmania, which bore the brunt of the colony's penal system, Australia was home to two deliberately constructed narratives simultaneously: the vision of hell on earth and the penal threat; and the lure of a new Eden for classed settlement (See Haynes 2006, 31–56).

4. Knut Bull, for instance, painted Tasmania in a high Romantic mode in the mid-nineteenth century, having been highly influenced by Caspar David Friedrich. The Heidelberg school was also a significant influence on early Tasmanian painters (Haynes 2006, 129).
5. Christopher Brennan (1870–1932) lectured in German and French at the University of Sydney. His 1899 essay "Fact and Idea", written after a two-year stay in Berlin, shows Brennan's own development of Romantic epistemology (see Barnes 2010, 2).
6. Taking my cue from the terminology in Malouf's 1998 Boyer Lectures, I differentiate between space and place. "Space" refers to space a raw matter, or space in which the social coding is not visible to the subject (in the case of Australia, for instance, Indigenous understandings of place were not always comprehensible to European subjects, although the act of denoting Australia as "empty" space is itself an act of spatialisation which is by no means neutral). I take "place" to denote the cultural encoding of space imbued with human meanings which interact in a dialectical structure. My chosen differentiation of these terms reflects the focus on the role of language and writing in place-creating processes in Australia that is addressed and problematised by Wright and subsequently by Malouf with his own approach. The understanding of place here is drawn from a range of different termini, such as social spatialisation (Shields 1991), urbanism (Lefebre in Soja 2009), or spatiality (Soja 2009). Although the differentiation I make here between place and space is indebted to the theorists of the spatial turn mentioned above, the understanding of place reflected in Malouf's critical writing focuses less on the Marxist inheritance of these theories, and more on place-images and myths, in the sense of Rob Shields (Shields 1991, 7).

New Approaches to Romanticism: A Model of Romantic Irony

1. See also Edward Soja on the philosophical foundations of spatiality from Kant to Heidegger in *Postmodern Geographies*, 125-137.
2. For further reflection on Derrida and Romantic irony, see Schumacher 2000, pp. 259–298.
3. See "The Syntactico-Semantic Paradigm of Irony: and Beyond" in Finlay 1988, pp. 11–71, particularly pages 20–29.
4. Whereby Socrates knows the result of his dialogue but represents it as though the student is reaching a point of new realisation by himself.

5. See Schlegel's *Athenäum Fragmente* number 51: "Nativ ist, was bis zur Ironie, oder bis zum steten Wechsel von Selbst-schöpfung und Selbstvernichtung natürlich, individuell oder klassisch ist, oder scheint." (Schlegel 1967, 172) [That which is or seems natural, individual, or classic to the point of irony, or the constant exchange between self-creation and self-destruction, is naïve.]
6. For a detailed analysis of the relationship between Fichte's philosophy and Romanticism, see Götze 2001, "Philosophie als Problem der Darstellbarkeit: Die Fighte-Rezeption der Frühromantik" pp. 81–152. See also Simpson's discussion of Romantic irony, in particular Hegel's assertion that Schlegel's irony developed from Fichte (Simpson 1979, 189).
7. See Barth 2001, 229, in particular his discussion of *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung* by Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs.
8. In context of the period of around 1800, the German *Witz*, now meaning joke, is better interpreted as "wit" or "esprit".
9. On Schlegel's irony and wit, see Strohscheider-Kohr, *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung* 1960, pp. 35–38
10. For examples of model-building processes in historical Romanticism, see Kerschbaumer 2018.
11. The *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie* provides a general definition of model theory as "konkrete, wegen >idealisierender< Reduktion auf relevante Züge faßlichere oder leichter realisierbare Repräsentation unübersichtlicher konkreter oder >abstrakter< Gegenstände oder Sachverhalte" (Mittelstraß 1995, 423). [A representation of more complex and concrete or abstract objects or issues which is concrete, simpler or more realisable, due to idealising reductions to relative features]. The model theory used in my research is based primarily on Bernd Mahr's *Ein Modell des Modellseins Ein Beitrag zur Aufklärung des Modellbegriffs* and Herbert Stachowiak's *Allgemeine Modelltheorie*. I have deliberately chosen to return to the work of Mahr, rather than following the latest research on the topic out of Kiel. The expansive nature of the Kiel group's undertaking has led it to replace and expand on the previously established terminology with its own. In my opinion, this has not provided any significant added value for the application of model theory in a literary context (cf. Mahr 2008; Stachowiak 1973; Thalheim and Nissen 2015).

Malouf: An Author in Context

1. Poems from NT, FTL and BoP are quoted as they appear in later editions.
2. Eddie Koiki Mabo, David Passi, and James Rice claimed uninterrupted ownership of land on Mer Island (Murry Island in the Torres Strait) for the Meriam people in 1982. The case was a challenge to the idea of Terra Nullius, that

Australia was no-man's land at the time of colonisation, which had been formalised in Australian law since 1889. Because the Meriam people owned land as groups or individuals rather than communally, they were able to claim a continual ownership of the land prior to, and continuing throughout, colonisation to the present. The Queensland government's cases rested on the argument that when Australia became a dominion of the Crown, it fell under English Law and all its land fell to the Crown. The Queensland government enacted the *Queensland Coast Islands Declaratory Act 1985* in a bid to retroactively remove islanders' land claims, but it was overturned on the basis that it went against the Racial Discrimination Act 1975. Eddie Mabo and the others eventually won the case in the Australian High Court in 1992. For the full details of the case, see: http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/cth/HCA/1992/23.html. While this was a watershed moment in Australia's legal history, the situation of native title in relation to the significant amount of land under pastoral leases remained unclear. In 1993, the Wik and Thayorre peoples took a case to court for ownership of land which was under pastoral lease. The court allowed them to continue with their claim on the basis that shared land usage might apply. As Liliana Zavaglia writes, "this was an unusual moment when true reconciliation might have been enacted in an arrangement of shared land use" (Zavaglia 2016, 9). Unsurprisingly, however, considering the powerful position traditionally held by pastoralists in Australia, the Howard Government amended the Native Title Act in 1997, effectively handing over title rights to the pastoralists in any event of conflicting native title rights (ibid., 10).

3. Paul Keating was Australian Prime Minister 1991–1996, John Howard 1996–2007.
4. Macintyre draws some interesting parallels with the issues around history syllabi and textbook censorship in the UK, Germany, the US, and Japan (Macintyre and A. Clark 2004, 171–90).
5. Macintyre dryly notes that the education in history at the University of Sydney in the 1960s was well reflected in their motto "The same spirit under new skies", where courses "gave such faithful attention to British origins that the First Fleet was often yet to leave Portsmouth when the first term's lectures ended" (Macintyre and A. Clark 2004, 33). This is naturally not a situation exclusive to the history departments at Australian universities during the time Malouf was educated at Brisbane Grammar and the University of Queensland, and when he lectured at Sydney University.
6. Amanda Nettelbeck, *Reading David Malouf* (1995) and *Provisional Maps: Critical essays on David Malouf* (1994a); Philip Neilsen, *Imagined lives: A study of David Malouf* (1990); Don Randall, *David Malouf* (2007); and Ivor Indyk, *David Malouf* (1993) are the most important published monographs and edited collections on Malouf's work. There are also several theses, including Vivienne Hamilton's *Aspects of Metamorphosis in the Fiction of David Malouf*

(2001); Jason Christopher Souter's *Writing Bodies Writing Spaces: The Writing of David Malouf* (1994); Yvette Blackwood's *A Fluid Reading of David Malouf's An Imaginary Life with Echoes of Contemporary Metaphoric Philosophy* (1994); and Jörg Heinke's *Die Konstruktion des Fremden in den Romanen von David Malouf* (2003). In addition to this, the essays: Natalie Seger, "Imagining Transcendence: The Poetry of David Malouf" in *Australian Literary Studies* 22:2 (2005); Martin Hugo Leer, "At the Edge: Geography and the Imagination in the Work of David Malouf" in *Australian Literary Studies* 12 (1985); and Patrick Buckridge, "Astonished by Everything: The Functions of Sublime Discourse in David Malouf's Fiction" in Nettelbeck (1994) are worth mentioning, as is the JASAL edition on Malouf (2014: 2), which includes an article on Malouf as a poet by James Tulip (Tulip 2014).

7. It should be noted that negative capability itself has nothing to do with Romantic irony. Keats' famous phrase refers to the issue of living with uncertainty in the context of the question of truth versus beauty in art. Although it contains the term 'negative' it is not related to the Ordo Inversus figure in Novalis nor the negative dialectic of Schlegarian irony which are the basis of the model of Romantic irony as it is understood in this book.

A Poetics of Place

1. The pseudonym of Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772–1801).
2. Passages in German are quoted true to the source, including spelling and punctuation, which can differ quite extensively from contemporary High German.
3. All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.
4. As Soja writes: "Space itself may be primordially given, but the organization, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience. Socially-produced space is a created structure comparable to other social constructions resulting from the transformation of given conditions inherent to being alive, in much the same way that human history represents a social transformation of time." (Soja 2009, 79–80)
5. The term "natureculture" was coined by Donna Haraway. My use of the term here reflects her ideas' influence on developments in thinking about nature and wilderness as primarily cultural products. It should be noted, however, that there are two sides to this equation: the cultural production of nature, and also acceptance that the radical closing of the gap between nature and culture includes the concept of the human. Particularly in her essay "The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness", Haraway uses the example of the biological cross-influences between humans and dogs to argue that "beings constitute each other" and that they "don't pre-exist their relatings" (Haraway 2012, 6). In this context, the term natureculture expresses the idea that "biological and cultural determinism are both

instances of misplaced concreteness – i.e., they make the mistake of, first, taking provisional and local category abstractions like "nature" and "culture" for the world and, second, mistaking potent consequences to be pre-existing foundations" (ibid.). These potent consequences include the human and the animal body in a way which goes far beyond acknowledging that nature is a cultural concept, or that there is no place untouched by human influence in the Anthropocene age.

6. Nettelbeck follows the established view of Romanticism in postcolonial studies at the time, in which Romanticism is viewed primarily as an aesthetic attribute and "apolitical impulse [which] is still bound to the very traditions it wants to review" (ibid., 104–105). Otherwise, Nettelbeck's reading largely ignores Romanticism, focussing instead on a post-colonial questioning of the power structures around language and knowledge in Malouf's novels.
7. The exception being Malouf's most recent volume *An Open Book* which was released after the completion of this project. There is a second red string running throughout Malouf's poetry and that is memory, particularly childhood memories. *An Open Book* is centred on this interest more than Malouf's previous collections. In this respect, is bears closer thematic ties to *12 Edmondstone Street* than to many of his previous poems. Like all truly good poets however, Malouf's work allows itself to be read through many different lenses, providing a rich array of perspectives.

Water

1. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." (KJV)
2. "Der echte philosophische Akt ist Selbsttötung; dies ist der reale Anfang aller Philosophie" (Novalis 2013c, 320). [The true philosophical act is to kill the self; this is the real beginning of all philosophy.]
3. " 'Communion' often crops up in Romantic writings […]. This picture of eschatology in images of communication is echoed by Novalis in his picture of the 'goldene Zukunft aller Dinge', as an age when 'Menschen, Tiere, Pflanzen, Steine und Gestirne, Flammen, Töne, Farben ... wie ein Geschlecht handeln und sprechen' […]. We can feel here the full ethical force of the Romantic drive to poetic expression." (C. Taylor, publication pending)
4. "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." (KJV).
5. The desire of critics such as Ashcroft to identify a specifically Australian sublime supposes a greater difference between these two differing concepts of the sublime than is justified from the perspective of European Romanticism. The "vertical" aspect is contingent on the images used to illustrate the phenomenon, rather than being central to the concept itself. Perhaps because the merger of art and philosophy was a central tenet of Romanticism, it is difficult

to differentiate between forms of representation and, for want of a better term, philosophical standpoint.

6. To view the idea from a different direction, it is possible to say that the sublime itself is a fragmentary expression, and that it is the fragmentary approach which leads the subject to the realisation of the sublime excess. The exact form of the fragments is perhaps less important than the awareness of incomprehensible excess which they invoke. In McFarland's reading of Coleridge, he comes to the conclusion that the "sublime, in other words, is the perception of very large fragments, such as mountains, with the accompanying awareness that this largeness implies still larger conceptions that can have no such objectivization and therefore cannot be compared. The sublime, so to speak, an implied comparison in which only the diasparactive object exists" (McFarland 1981, 29–30). There is no reason why the vastness of the Australian horizon could not serve the same function without offering a qualitative difference.
7. Ashcroft leans on Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's work on presence culture, in which Gumbrecht argues for a relationship to the world which oscillates between presence and sensory effects. This is an epistemological shift from the supremacy of hermeneutics towards that of "presence" as the spatial, rather than temporal, sphere in which culture impacts on our senses and bodies. He proposes that the attribution of metaphysical meanings should not be privileged over the direct sensory impact of the material world, but there should be an oscillation between the two (Gumbrecht and Schulte 2010).

Interiors

1. Hamilton is a suburb of Brisbane on the north bank of the Brisbane River. The proximity to the desert lies in the image of the desert on the lizard's tongue in the piece, not in its setting.
2. The phrase "garrison mentality" was coined by Northrop Frye to refer to idea that in Canada, there was no clearly defined frontier to push against, like the West in the US. Instead, being surrounded by wilderness on all sides created a sense of being surrounded, both physically and mentally, by a hostile environment, leading to insular communities which provided both support and constant social surveillance (Frye 1995).
3. "In the deep outback there is an almost South African sense of siege; even though the actual numbers of Aboriginals are not always great, the very landscape, the backyard, the dirt sidewalk itself, tells white people that they are intruders and that their European culture and expectations are out of place. […] The spirit of place that challenges the Euro-Australian is an almost physical sensation in central Australia." (Tacey 1995, 15)

(Sub)urban

1. The parallels between Canada and Australia become apparent here once again. Canada's cities likewise fail to carry the same ironic function as cities which have entered the global imagination. See Rosenthal 2011, 23.
2. Tim Winton's novels being a notable exception.
3. "Wir suchen überall das Unbedingte, und finden immer nur Dinge" (Novalis 1981, 413) [We seek the infinite, the un-thinged, everywhere and only ever find things.] I have included both possible translations of *Unbedingte* here to reflect Novalis' play on words.

Of Earth and Clay

1. See "Aquarius" (EH 1), "A Green Miscellany" (EH 58), "Still Life" (EH 67), "Letter from North Queensland 1892" (P 36–37), "At Kew Gardens" (P 44), "Natural History Museum" (P 120–124).
2. For example "Stars" (P 19), "Natural History Museum" (P 120–122), "The Long View" (TM 36–42), "At Laterina" (EH 48–49), "A Green Miscellany" (EH 52–61), "Australia Day at Pennyroyal" (EH 80–81), "At Ravenna" (RD 48–49), "Notes on an Undiscovered Continent" (RD 74–75).
3. There is no meaningful way to attach line numbers to this poem.

Malouf's Imaginary of Endless Becoming

1. In relation to his case studies on Brighton Beach, the Canadian North, Niagara Falls, and Britain's North–South divide, Rob Shields writes that "imaginary geography[ies] of places and spaces, are shown to have social impacts which are empirically specifiable and located not only at the level of individual proxemics (as discussed in the late 1960s and 1970s – cf. Hall 1966) but also at the level of social discourses on space which (1) underpin the rhetoric of ideologues and politicians and (2) pervade and subvert even the rationalistic discourse of planning and regional development policy (e.g. Massey 1984; 1988). In particular, the collective weight of these 'discourses on space' will be linked with the symbolic creation of a sense of community (cf. Cohen 1986) and with nationalism (cf. B. Anderson 1983)" (Shields 1991, 6). My reading of Malouf's writing of place-images is not, in this sense, a spatial reading.
2. Where two images are present, such as two faces and a vase, but it is impossible to view them at the same time because figure and background have a simultaneous but separate existence

Framing the Indigenous Author

1. "At the Ferry", "Seven Last Words of the Emperor Hadrian", "Retrospect", "At Laterina" and "At Lerici".
2. "Carefree", "The Golden Skin of Cowgirls", "In My Mother's '80s Kitchen" and "Blacktracker… Blackwriter… Blacksubject".
3. Sir Johannes Bjelke Petersen held office from 1968-1987. His party later became the National Party. Considering the class reading of the city Watson undertakes in this poem, Petersen's anti-unionism is to be highlighted.
4. Important anthologies of Indigenous literature include *Paperbark: A collection of Black Australian Writings* (1990) edited by Jack Davis et al., which Grossman describes as "a particular kind of watershed moment in the publication of Australian Indigenous texts" (Grossman 2008: 2); Brewster et al. (1996), *Those who Remain Will Always Remember: An Anthology of Aboriginal Writing*; Sabbioni et al. (1998), *Australian Indigenous Voices: A Reader*; and more recently, Heiss and Minter's *Anthology of Australian Aboriginal literature* (2008) and Belinda Wheeler's *Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature*.
5. *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin was highly influential in its postulation of a paradigm whereby postcolonial literature rewrites a master canon of European literature as a kind of counter-discourse(Middeke et al. 2012, 306; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2001).
6. I have used standard capitalisation norms for all poem titles. The original use of capitalisation can vary significantly.
7. Key works from this period include "We Are Going" (1964) by Kath Walker (named Oodgeroo Noonuccal from 1988), the *Yirrkala Bark Petition* (1963), and Jack Davis' "The First-Born" (1970).
8. Important works from this time include Lionel Fogarty's "Ecology" (1982) and later "For I Come – Death in Custody" (1995), and Ida West's *Pride against Prejudice* (1987).
9. Andrew Kings notes that Aboriginal music has been recorded since the 19th century, but that four phases of modern Indigenous pop music can be identified: the 1950s and 1960s musicians who had to negotiate the ideal of assimilation at the time; 1970s and 1980s rock musicians who started to include Indigenous themes in their lyrics and to promote their music as an Aboriginal product; the popularisation of Indigenous music as world music in the 1990s; and today's Indigenous musicians, working in a range of popular music styles from rap through to country (King 2013).
10. The website itself is no longer online; however, information on the project can be found here: http://www.ccd.net/projects/search.html?projectID=1015204304
11. There is very little sustained academic writing on Samuel Wagan Watson, and none of it characterises his writing as Romantic, but rather as being part of the

tradition of Indigenous protest which was traced at the start of this chapter. Criticism which engages with Watson's work can be found in Lyn McCredden's work on the sacred in Australia (Lyn McCredden 2015), Bridie McCarthy's doctoral thesis which was supervised by McCredden (McCarthy 2006), and a smattering of essays. David McCooey briefly mentions Watson in his chapter for *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry* (2017), defining him as a Murri poet and part of a second generation of poets following on from the protest school of Fogarty, Oodgeroo, and David (McCooey 2017, 77).

12. For a recent example, see https://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/36-kinship-and-identity/genetic-testing-and-aboriginality

Two Realities, One City

1. I use the term "mythical" to refer to Watson's references to Indigenous spirit beings and other figures, because the Romantic understanding of the mythical (as opposed to fancy, or something "made-up") is the closest common concept in the Western tradition to dreamtime beings. The term still falls short of encapsulating the spiritual and social role of dreaming and dreamtime beings in the Indigenous-Australian tradition, which has nothing to do with the European concept of fantasy. For further discussion of the use of "myth" in relation to Indigenous dreamings, and an overview of alternative terms, see Parker 2006, 120.
2. The Aboriginal Gothic blends elements of Indigenous culture with the Gothic in a way which disturbs a European-rational view of reality. The Aboriginal Gothic can also reverse the race-based roles established in the Australian Gothic, characterising white figures as monstrous, and addressing colonial violence towards Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander peoples. In the Aboriginal Gothic, the master-discourse of the Australian Gothic, which had silenced Aboriginal voices, is inverted and thrown back on the coloniser (Starrs 2014). Katrin Althans (2013) identifies three levels at which classic Gothic and Indigenous elements combine in the Aboriginal Gothic: the "architextual" [sic], the "hypertextual", and the "intertextual" (Althans et al. 2010, 185). On the architextual level, Gothic tropes are used but their meaning is altered. For example, the novel *The Kadaitcha Sung* by Sam Watson (the poet's father) graphically depicts white male brutality against the Indigenous female figure, inverting the Australian Gothic trope of the black man as the dangerous Other. The landscape in turn may either be "de-Gothicised", in that what would have been a Gothic alien landscape for the white subject in the Australian Gothic tradition becomes no longer Gothic; or the landscape becomes Gothic for the Indigenous subject, due, for instance, to a loss of cultural identity because of colonisation (ibid., 184–185). On an intertextual level, something similar occurs to the reversal of Gothic tropes; and this is where the ghost story with

its tropes of trauma and haunting is changed, so that the ghosts are not the spirits of the dead, but repressed and closely experienced traumata (ibid., 186). Through the combination of Indigenous culture and the Gothic, the Aboriginal Gothic writes the Indigenous subject back into the landscape, and in doing so, completely undermines the "fiction of an Aboriginal absence which is behind many colonial Gothic stories and their postcolonial counterparts" (ibid., 17). As Althans notes, "every binary opposition inherent in the Gothic mode could be projected onto the opposition of white settler vs black native" in colonies such as Australia (ibid., 4).

3. Mudrooroo changed his name from Colin Johnson in 1988. Mudrooroo means "paperbark", and as Knudsen writes, "in a sense the name-change symbolizes a move away from Western perception of the creative writer towards an indigenous reinterpretation of the artist as chronicler of community life" (Knudsen 2004, 34). Colin Johnson represented himself as an Indigenous-Australian for several decades before there was a public controversy over his supposed Aboriginality, when Victoria Laurie's 1996 article "identity Crisis" cast very public doubts on Johnson's identity. That same year, the Nynoongar Elders repudiated his claim to kinship ties with the Bibbulmun people in 1996. This affair was particularly awkward because of Johnson's position as a highly commercially successful author, and a high-profile expert on Aboriginal literature. The matter of Colin Johnson's identity became caught up in debates on how, and by whom, Aboriginality is recognised, leading to varying reactions to his work and identity. Van Roorn writes that "Mudrooroo, Well and Sykes have not been able to establish Aboriginal ancestry, yet after suffering racial abuses on the basis of other people's assumption of their Aboriginality, they positioned themselves socially and politically as Aboriginal" (van Toorn 2006, 42). Regardless of his ancestry, Johnson was an important voice in Aboriginal literature and criticism, and as such, his ideas still form part of the historical landscape of Aboriginal literature and its reception. For more information, see Maureen Clark, *Mudrooroo: A Likely Story: Identity and Belonging in Postcolonial Australia.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2007.
4. The brolga's dance is part of its mating ritual, but also performed for pleasure: it has been captured by traditional Indigenous dances, as well as the modern dance company Bangarra. The bird is also the subject of a dreaming story, in which it was "a beautiful girl obsessed with dancing. A wirrinun (shaman) wanted her for his wife but she refused, as she refused all men. Dancing was her love and nothing else distracted her. He harboured resentment until one day, seeing her dancing alone on the plain he takes his chance, changes himself into a willy-willy (small whirlwind) and sweeps her into it with the intention of abducting her. The Great Spirit intervenes, and she is transformed into Brolga as we see her today. She is still dancing. Brolga emphasises the ability you have to pursue

creative interests and talents, and still be supported. The girl was provided for by her tribe, allowed to practise skills, even though they were unnecessary for physical survival. Also, as a rare token of esteem, she was permitted to dance in the mens' [sic] corroborees" ("Native Symbols", Retrieved 10.11.2017).

5. Althans writes that "the relationship between magic realism and the Gothic is a contested one due to the latter's proximity to the fantastic. According to Amaryll Chanady, the most controversial point of contact is their respective treatment of the supernatural: while the fantastic's dominant worldview is that of enlightened rationality which introduces but ultimately rejects the supernatural, magic realism accepts the supernatural as part of its world. Lucie Armitt goes so far as to call magic realism a counter-discourse of the Gothic, suggesting that whereas magic realism is often read as a postcolonial discourse, the Gothic tends to be read as an Anglo-European tradition. Furthermore, she extends the general criticism concerning the supernatural and argues that in Gothic texts, ghosts are the central source and focal point of the narrative. Other critics like Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, on the other hand, see strong parallels between magic realism and the Gothic, saying that magic-realist writers depart from realism to follow epic, romantic, and Gothic traditions. And like the Gothic, magic realism is suited to explore and transgress boundaries of various kinds; boundaries whose resulting dichotomies are to be fundamentally refashioned in magic realism. According to Jean-Pierre Durix, this opposition between the fantastic and magic realism is even just another European fabrication, which is based on a European understanding of the fantastic as something detached from and protesting against the real world, whilst magic realism allows the fantastic to become one alternative reality among others, thus acknowledging its hybrid cultural status" (Althans 2010, 227–28).
6. "Country" in Indigenous contexts describes a person's connection to an area which is made up of complex and sacred relationships between family, time, environment, and ritual sites.
7. It is worth noting that whilst Mudrooroo's critical work has been important in Aboriginal literature, it has not been received only positively in Indigenous critical circles. Philip Morrissey, for instance, writes that "in his critique of Morgan's work Mudrooroo re-presented a critical position that had once served an important political end but was now [in 1995] in opposition to the natural development of Aboriginal literature. Among other things Mudrooroo identified Aboriginality with certain forms of life experience, reintroduced his notion of scaling works of literature according to the extent of their Aboriginality, and asserted that there was textual Aboriginality […]. Notwithstanding the historical importance of Mudrooroo's cultural and critical work, his rhetoric of Aboriginality was disquieting and exclusionary. A discursive grid was constructed enforcing individuals into restrictive either/or categories of belonging" (Morrissey 2008, 52).

8. Before colonisation, Indigenous-Australian cultures had a concept of time which was neither linear nor cyclic, and was not determinate of being (Swain 1993, 20). Instead, there was "a sophisticated patterning of events in accordance with their rhythms" (ibid,). Swain proposes this understanding of the world as structured by "*rhythmed*" events rather than "time" (ibid., 22). Swain differentiates between two kinds of events, which stand behind what has become "dreaming" and "dreamtime": the first is "rhythmic events", and the second "Abiding Events", which are "more closely separated from the normal rhythms (and chaos) of life, and this is what has been interpreted as the pastness of a Dreamtime" (ibid.). This is not to say that there is no concept of the past or the future in this tradition, but that these concepts were not allowed "to be worked into an ontology which conceded the sovereignty of time" (ibid., 23). Instead, abiding events and rhythmic events are "coterminous, linked not through time but place" (ibid.).
9. The term "dreamtime" comes from the Aranda word *Altjiringa*, whose root means " 'eternal, uncreated, springing out of itself'. *Altjira rama*, literally 'to see the eternal', is the evocative description for human sleep-dreams, but the so-called 'Dreaming' is derived from *Altjiringa ngambakala*: 'that which derives from *altjira*'. Strehlow grasps at 'having originated out of its own eternity' as the closest possible English equivalent" (Swain 1993, 21, emphasis in original). Tony Swain notes that although "in several Desert [sic] languages there is a linguistic connection between the 'self-derived eternal' and dreams", this is not always the case (ibid.). Despite this, the terms "dreaming" and "dream time" (also dreamtime) have "returned from academic coinage through popular culture to spread throughout virtually all Aboriginal English speech: a self-fulfilling academic prophecy" (ibid.).
10. Gen 9: 12–17. "And God said, this is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations. I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud. And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth." (KJV 2008)
11. Woolloongabba is a suburb of Brisbane crossed by the Pacific motorway.

Language: Beyond the Embrace of a Twisted Tongue

1. This is one of many poems in Watson's collections which are written in the extra-lyrical mode. Line numbers are given here purely to help locate the relevant part of the paragraph more easily.
2. Kenny Laughton acknowledges the use of the term to refer to the use of the written word to communicate Aboriginal stories rather than oral traditions, but points out that "as an Aboriginal author, especially knowing the depth, the intricate knowledge, and the elaborate ceremonies that were the blue prints for the Dreamtime generation stories", "post-colonial" may describe the first histories of Aboriginal Australians to be in written form; however, Aboriginal stories "could almost be described as 'post-history' " (Laughton in Heiss 2003, 45). As Indigenous author Cathy Craig points out, "we're still in Aboriginal time, Murri time, we're still in there doing the same things. For me it's a continuation of a culture that's thousands and thousands of years old. It's not something that you cut off because white man has come in" (Craig in Heiss 2003, 44–45).
3. Where possible, I have indicated line numbers for orientation; however, it is not practical here to replicate the formatting of the piece. Instead, each section is given in full.
4. Red kangaroo

A New Way Forward

1. Mt. Coot-tha in Brisbane.
2. The Kurilpa (originally Tank Street) bridge crosses the Brisbane River.
3. The flat surface which forms the surface of a boat's stern.

V. Synthesis

1. This already ties the use of Romanticism to the 'we' of European settlers. Whilst this makes sense in an historical context, it has continued long past its use-by date in Australia's diverse contemporary literary landscape.
2. Stilz identifies this movement in Australia as being historically from "Sydney Cove over the Blue Mountains, over New England and the farmlands of the Riverina, into the Outback, which it has not yet fully digested. At the same time [...] from Melbourne over the goldfields to the North of Victoria; from Brisbane inland and up the coastline to the tropical North; from Adelaide to the Flinders Ranges and across the Eyre Peninsula, from Perth or Cape Leeuwin or the North, and inland to Kalgoorie; from Darwin to Katherine and Kakadu N.P". (Stilz 2007, 31)

3. This is of course an overly simplistic view of cultural changes which occurred in Australia after WWII. Stuart Ward's book, for instance, makes the point that Australia's assertion of a national culture separate to that of Britain had more to do with England's decision to join the EEC in nineteen sixties, effectively letting go of her colonies as a British diaspora when it came to economics, than with any particularly anti-British sentiment or desire (Ward 2001, 4). As Ward notes, "Britain's painful choice between the discordant communities of 'Europe' and 'the British word' provoked a crisis of British race patriotism in Australia, prompting long-overdue reflection, discussion and debate about the changing determinants of Australian nationhood in the post-war world" (ibid.) Australia's drive to better define its own nationhood in non-British terms was also viewed as a response "to the erosion of old global networks based on racism and colonial power and was seeking to capitalise on new opportunities and alliances that were vital to national development and defence while also striving to meet new international standards of democratic nationhood" (Haebich 2008, 30). Nevertheless, the cultural expressions of these pushes towards a more independent image of Australia as a nation can be seen in the native garden movement, for instance.
4. See Julia Schultz's recent essay, "What do we want to be when we grow up?" in *The Conversation* (https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-what-do-we-want-to-be-when-we-grow-up-103443)

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