his time was a land of both fear and hope, and makes predictions, most of which have eventually come true.

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Ambivalent Oppositionality
David Malouf's *Fly Away Peter*: A European View

MARC DELREZ

S TEPHEN SLEMON, IN HIS SEMINAL ARTICLE entitled "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World," identifies the Second World as a paradigm of a particular kind of ambivalence which may possibly have a generalized relevance for postcolonial literary resistance. Roughly, the argument runs as follows: While most postcolonial theory still seeks to anchor its models of oppositionality in Third-World patterns of frontal resistance to the hegemony of the First World, which tend to lock the writer/critic into the polarity of Self/Other, or here/there, a new aesthetic of resistance can be derived from the peculiar cultural schizophrenia inherent in settler culture. As Slemon puts it, what is particular about the white literatures of Australia, New Zealand, or Canada, is that they promote a form of anti-colonialist resistance which "has *never* been directed at an object or a discursive structure which can be seen as purely external to the self."

They therefore testify to an "*internalisation* of the object of resistance" which has two important consequences. The first is that the literatures of the Second World [1] must be considered as part and parcel of the oppositional project of postcolonialism itself, a claim that has now become something of a critical truism – which possibly attests to the efficacy of Slemon's interventions and of others of its kind. The second is that these literatures offer a model for a theory of textual resistance which acknowledges at last the compromised nature of all 'writing back,' as always "*necessarily complicit in the apparatus it seeks to transgress*,"[2] and ought therefore to be adopted within any theorizing on literary resistance, in the Third World as well.

The argument is persuasive but complex, relying as it does on a paradox that is left unresolved, but which we are asked to accept as such. The paradox can be

[1] Stephen Slemon, "Unsetting the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World," *World Literature Written in English* 30.2 (1990): 39.

articulated like this: on the one hand, white settler literatures can be seen to further native dispossession, insofar as the authors aim to secure for themselves and for their readership a sense of cultural rootedness which effectively displaces prior claims. To this extent, the 'postcolonial settler writer aids and abets the project of European appropriation, territorial and otherwise. On the other hand, the white set-tler's defining predicament becomes one of cultural tension, or dividedness, which can be seen to figure forth a new, dynamic relation between such traditional oppo-sites as colonizer and colonized, invader and indigene, centre and periphery. For Slemon, it is precisely this sort of ambivalence that must be turned into a system of resistance against hegemonic discourses.

Although this argument may seem empowering, it is still not clear to what extent it conveys the implicit suggestion that the reticence displayed by white settler cul-ture on the subject of invasion is sufficient to atone for the continuing realities of oppression and dispossession. Accordingly, it is the aim of this essay to examine ways in which orthodox postcolonial nomenclatures, which only recognize, between the Second and the Third Worlds, a difference of degree and not of kind, in fact promote a looseness of historical fit, a misrepresentation of existing cultural hier-archies, which tend to be concealed behind a rhetorical smoke screen that I like to call the "binge."

I do not wish to claim any particular originality in inventing a concept which is, in fact, as old as the cultural cringe. When A.A. Phillips first proposed his descrip-tion of the "cringe" in the 1950s, he allowed for the simultaneous existence of an "inverted cringe,"[3] which finds its source in the same inferiority complex as the cringe itself, but takes the unexpected form of a compensatory over-emphasis in the assertion of one's cultural identity. The cultural binge, then, may not be all that dif-ferent from the inverted cringe, but the coinage offers the advantage of connoting self-indulgence – a certain lack of restraint in the exercise of intellectual expendi-ture. Moreover, the binge positively differs from the cringe, in that, while Phillips identified only a kind of psychological phenomenon (at the collective level), the binge denotes a much more deliberate gesture, which is both rhetorical and ideo-logically motivated. The function of the binge has something to do with keeping alive the ghosts of past enemies in order to reaffirm one's "oppositional creden-tials."[4] This may be why Alan Lawson pointed out that "commentators in Australia and Canada have, perhaps, shown an even greater obsession with the problem of

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3 A. A. Phillips, *The Australian Tradition: Studies in a Colonial Culture* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1959): 89.

4 David Carter, "Australia/Post: Australian Studies, Literature and Post-Colonialism," in *From a Distance: Australian Writers and Cultural Displacement*, ed. Wenche Ommundsen & Hazel

national identity than those of other emergent colonial or postcolonial nations.[5] Al-though Lawson puzzles over this, the binge might offer an explanation. While it is of course true that the versatile nature of the culture of Australia, which is largely a nation of immigrants, makes it worth exploring again and again, it can also be argued that the postcolonial desire to oppose, and indeed to reiterate one's opposi-tion to, the traditional bugbear of European imperialism, in fact springs from a per-ception of embarrassing proximity to that very same Europe.

For example, the proverbial "tyranny of distance," which is usually seen to result in a preoccupation with exile on the part of many writers, possibly indicates, in its more recent literary manifestations, a need for ever-finer distinctions and discrimina-tions, felt to be urgently necessary in order to screen out the emerging awareness of Australia as "a lapsed colonial power locked in an unresolved and undeclared struggle with the original possessors for legitimacy and land."[6] In other words, the theme of exile might fulfil the function of inscribing distance, as an attempt to pre-serve a postcolonial stance in the context of a new crisis of legitimacy, brought about by the Mabo case but also, partly, by the publication of *Dark Side of the Dream* by Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra. This book is unlike many others on Australia, in that it presents the construction of national identity in this country as massively deter-mined by the sense of its own complicity with an imperialist enterprise. This is an aspect that most postcolonial criticism overlooks, with the result that, as David Carter suggests, "the boom in career-making 'subversive' readings of canonical authors such as Malouf, Stow and White"[7] only testifies to a dubious form of inter-pretative agility on the part of critics who all too willingly tone down these writers' metaphysics of transcendence, in order to foist upon them a ready-made postcolonial aesthetic.

The case of David Malouf is particularly interesting, inasmuch as he openly presents himself in interviews as a writer with a mission, which is specifically to create "real spiritual links between us and the landscapes, us and the cities, us and the lives we live here."[8] Naturally, this formulation begs the question of belonging, as one wonders who might be included in Malouf's personal "imagined commu-

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5 Alan Lawson, "Patterns, Preferences and Preoccupations: The Discovery of Nationality in Australian and Canadian Literatures," in *Theory and Practice in Comparative Studies: Canada, Australia and New Zealand* (Sydney: ANZACS, 1983): 67.

6 Bob Hodge & Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Post-Colonial Mind* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991): xiv.

7 David Carter, "Australia/Post: Australian Studies, Literature and Post-Colonialism," in *From a Distance: Australian Writers and Cultural Displacement*, ed. Wenche Ommundsen & Hazel Rowley (Geelong: Deakin UP, 1996): 110.

8 Julie Copeland, interview with David Malouf, *First Edition*, ABC Radio (15 August 1985).

nity." He himself may supply the answer when he concedes, in a nonchalant aside in his autobiographical *12 Edmonstone Street*, that "we discount the abos."[9] Already, this alerts one to the possibility that Malouf is deliberately writing to, and on behalf of, a specific segment of the Australian population, when he engages in the imaginative exploration of a national mythology. It is in keeping with the self-conscious nature of his project that Malouf should explicitly acknowledge the existence of a "fated affinity"[10] between the settler and the colonizer, and further, between the writer and the conqueror. This aspect of Malouf's "mission" has been aptly pinpointed by Amanda Nettelbeck, who writes that his poetic "interpretation of Australia's changes as a community" has been regarded as betokening "a gradual national shift away from England's legacy" that is, in essence, postcolonial; but that commentators have said very little about "the ways in which the processes of mapping" which form the core of Malouf's writing, are in fact "still encoded by the politics" of the *imperium*.[11]

The latter is notably apparent in his privileging of exploration as a metaphor of cultural attunement to what is perceived as a foreign space. Nettelbeck further suggests, very interestingly, that the notion of "exploration without end," developed by Paul Carter in his *Living in a New Country*, adequately describes Malouf's aesthetic project, which consists in rehearsing the evolutionary possibilities contained in the open narrative of the past. Each of Malouf's novels can be seen as one in a succession of attempts to release from the colonial past a promise of change, of cultural metamorphosis, which is embraced as the hallmark of Australian identity. This kind of exploration, indeed, never ends, since what characterizes the subjects under scrutiny is precisely their inexhaustible capacity to transform themselves. In spatial terms, this can be represented as a kind of deferred arrival or, perhaps, as an exploration without conquest, in which the activity of investigation becomes an end in itself. It may be argued that this suspension of conquest is in fact what makes Malouf's project different from a fully-fledged colonialist one. In my view, this aspect also feeds the binge, because the "always incomplete or provisional nature"[12] of his project creates an unstaunchable flow of discourse, literary and otherwise, which is at once self-justificatory and self-generating.

Nettelbeck, then, warns that the "impulse to explore and map new conceptions of the world" may, of course, signal an ambition to break from received cultural

⁹ David Malouf, *12 Edmonstone Street* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986): 44.

¹⁰ David Malouf, "Putting Ourselves on the Map," *Saturday Age Extra* (28 January 1988): 2.

¹¹ Amanda Nettelbeck, "Cultural Identity and the Narration of Space: A Reading of David Malouf," in *From a Distance: Australian Writers and Cultural Displacement*, ed. Wenche Ommundsen & Hazel Rowley (Geelong: Deakin UP, 1996): 73–82.

traditions, such as the "colonial patriarchy's tradition of claiming space,"[13] but it also paradoxically reinscribes them in the very act of possession, albeit an imaginative form of possession. Again, Malouf has the merit of being candid about the extent to which his narrative strategies, which creatively invest the universe of settler culture, also bring about a repression of perspectives that cannot be viewed from his assumed vantage-point. For example, in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, there is a sense in which the narrative itself represses its own awareness of the figure of the native guide who emerges as yet another manifestation of the figure of the native guide, that staple of Australian fiction. The novel's impersonal narrator only acknowledges the existence of Jonas as a member of the party when the story is well underway – with a sense of belated (and astonished) discovery:

> He was [...] an opening there into a deeper darkness, into a mystery – of the place, of something else too that was not-place, which might also be worth exploring – but all traffic through it, in either direction, was blocked.[14]

Curiously, Malouf seems to distinguish here between two degrees of inscrutability, perhaps because he *needs* to utilize Jonas as a guide to the mystery of the place, thus recognizing the indigene's exclusive competence in this respect, while not wishing to take on board the constraints that would derive from a consideration of further ethical principles particular to Aboriginal culture(s). This would be in keeping with Malouf's avowed intention of creating links with the place, a project for which he may have to take his cue from the natives, although his ulterior aim is to supersede native culture through the establishment of alternative, white mythologies about Australian history and its landscapes:

On the other hand, the observation that the cultural border is blocked in both directions possibly points to Malouf's acute consciousness of the methodological difficulties encoded in any cross-cultural blueprint. In *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, the stigma of near-invisibility which sticks to Jonas – "he had been there all this while, but as if he were not there at all"[15] – derives from a deliberate suspension of vision on the part of the author, who knows only too well that, in Australia, "the literary representation of Aborigines by white writers has become a contentious issue."[16] Thus, Malouf's E.M. Forster-like decision to freeze all traffic – not here, not now – with a no-go zone of culture which might, in another context, be "worth exploring" amounts to a well-pondered refusal to lapse into a form of 'Aboriginalism' comparable to the kind of 'Orientalism' denounced by Edward Said. The same

¹³ Nettelbeck, "Cultural Identity and the Narration of Space," 75, 76.

¹⁴ David Malouf, *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996): 112.

¹⁵ Malouf, *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, 24.

¹⁶ Justin D'Ath, "White on Black," *Australian Book Review* 154 (1993): 35.

refusal informs *Remembering Babylon* (1993), Malouf's previous novel, which can be regarded as his most committed attempt to acknowledge Aboriginal experience as part of a mixed Australian tradition, but without presuming to pick the lock of a culture which is perceived as out of bounds for the white writer.[17]

This novel's initial image shows the protagonist, Gemmy, hovering in precarious balance on the top rail of a fence which separates the paddock from the bush; white from black; settler from native. On the face of it, then, Malouf here appears to gesture towards a twin representation of Australianness as hybrid or "geminate." However, on closer examination, Gemmy on his fence, "[his] arms outflung as if preparing for flight,"[18] also emerges as an embodiment of the writer's ascensional urge, by virtue of which he ultimately eludes historicity in favour of a metaphorized idealization of cultural metamorphosis. By the same token, I would claim that Malouf's postcolonialism forms a very limited branch of his utopianism; and, while the two can be found to be compatible, it is certainly not the case that they can be equated. In other words, perhaps because of his awareness of political and epistemological boundaries, Malouf is swift to desert the postcolonial battlefield for a superior dimension of sublimated ontologies which can be seen as universal.

My point, then, is that postcolonialism is only a facet, in Malouf, of a much larger scheme; and this is confirmed by the fact that the image of Gemmy on his fence, which signals a striving for a form of cultural equilibrium encompassing white and black, in fact echoes an earlier moment in Malouf's work which, though very similar, ultimately carries different implications. I am thinking of the ending of *Fly Away Peter* (1982), a book which closes on another vision of precarious balance, with the vignette of a young surfer poised on the crest of a wave. This, as the final image of the novel, carries particular resonance. The surfer's figure is "sharply outlined against the sky [...] his arms extended,"[19] as if he, too, had mastered the gift of flying, so that he can be seen as an extension of the bird metaphor which is central in *Fly Away Peter*, and which, by virtue of the birds' capacity to migrate between hemispheres, signifies a reconciliation of opposites. The surfer brings together the "seemingly opposing elements of change and continuity, motion and immobility,"[20] and, because he reminds the viewer of the late Jim Saddler, who died in the war, he also emerges as an emblem of the future, seen as a creative variation on the past. More-

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17 Marc Delrez & Paulette Michel–Michot, "The Politics of Metamorphosis: Cultural Transformation in David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*," in *The Contact and Culmination: Essays in Honour of Hena Maes-Jelinek*, ed. Marc Delrez & Bénédicte Ledent (Liège: Liège UP, 1997): 155–70.
18 David Malouf, *Remembering Babylon* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993): 3.
19 David Malouf, *Fly Away Peter* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1983): 133.
20 Amanda Nettelbeck, "Languages of War, Class and National History: David Malouf's *Fly*

over, the surfer keeps falling in the trough of the wave, only to rise up again, so that the novel's final scene ties up another metaphorical loose end – the image of the fall, which is invoked to represent Jim's expulsion from his colonial paradise, while the war is presented as a collective rite of passage from innocence to the harrowing experience of twentieth-century international history. In short, the image of the surfer encapsulates and entwines a variety of discursive threads, which went into the making of Australian identity as constituted through the mythologizing of the First World War. On the one hand, the surfer can be seen as a moving monument to the memory of Jim Saddler, which betokens Malouf's "humbling respect for the experience itself and those who endured it"[21] – an experience that the writer wishes to acknowledge and assimilate. But, on the other hand, the surfer emerges as yet another emblem of novelty, an opening onto the unknown (like Jonas), which implies the need to move beyond the institutionalized myth of ANZAC and its ideological cargo of "Anglo-Celtic xenophobia, militarism and red-necked philistinism."[22]

Amanda Nettelbeck has beautifully unravelled the rich array of discourses which Malouf spins around his version of the First World War in *Fly Away Peter*. In particular, she suggests that the myth of pre-war innocence in Australia is a deceptive one "that was always shadowed by its opposite."[23] This becomes clear in the light of Jim's inventory of birds in "The Book," whereby he recognizes "their place in the landscape, or his stretch of it,"[24] in a way that is fraught with imperialist presumptions. Jim's "Book" thus emerges as a metaphor for the activity of colonial exploration or mapping out, in a way which ironically reflects on Malouf's own writing, at the same time as it alerts one to the fact that pastoral innocence in the "Sanctuary" is "complicitous with the invisible exercise of cultural power."[25] In other words, the dream of arcadian innocence in the South Seas simply depends on a silencing of the history of bloodshed that made it possible in the first place. As Nettelbeck puts it, "the absence of Aboriginal presence [...] in either the urban or the 'sanctified' landscape [...] indicates the naturalizing of the settler culture's own violences."[26]

Although I agree that *Fly Away Peter* problematizes the myth of prewar innocence by suggesting that Jim's universe is vulnerable to the Fall – to the point when the Sanctuary begins to tilt "in the direction of Europe"[27] – I am not at all sure that

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21 David Malouf, "Statement," *Kunapipi* 18.2–3 (1996): 332.
22 Malouf, *Fly Away Peter* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1983): 331.
23 Nettelbeck, "Languages of War, Class and National History," 257.
24 Malouf, *Fly Away Peter*, 44.
25 Nettelbeck, "Languages of War," 255.
26 "Languages of War," 256.
27 *Fly Away Peter*, 36.

Malouf's reader is invited to read the book as an indictment of colonial presence in Australia. Significantly, when Jim finally punctures the myth of the place as a pre-lapsarian Eden, it is by coming to terms with a vision of violence which is either accidental or casual. Looking back on his youth after his initiation into violence in the war, Jim remembers the violent death of his brother in a harvesting accident, as well as the cruel torture to which a kestrel is subjected by some "innocent" children. These memories force Jim to revise his earlier perception of a sunny place: "That was how it was, even in sunlight. Even there."28 Thus, even as violence is reintegrated into Jim's moral universe, it continues to be depoliticized as a form of inescapable evil. This is a far cry from recognizing the foundations of violence on which the dream of utopian Australia is in fact constructed.

This elision of historical responsibility becomes all the more problematic since the idyllic presentation of Jim's relationship to the land borrows from identifiable stereotypes of Aboriginal spirituality. In this sense, the narrative undertakes to dislodge the natives prior to plundering the imaginative privileges which seem to be theirs by right. Indeed, Jim's claims to the land are justified in terms of his unique understanding of a place experienced as "unmade." His vision, which goes beyond "mere convention or the law," is simply presented as inalienable. At the same time, the authenticity of this vision is attested by Jim's gift for nomenclature, by his having "names for things, and in that way possessing them," by virtue of a familiarity with the land which is "ancient and deep." Malouf appears to be playing a curious game here, which consists in deliberately confusing the time-scales, in order to erase the unfortunate evidence provided by chronology. Similarly, when he introduces the character of Ashley, the British landowner, he insists on the continuity of ownership, hinting at funeral monuments which are "so chipped and stained that" they might have been real monuments going back centuries rather than a mere score of years to the first death."29 Again, the suggestion is that the settlers enjoy a sense of belonging to the land which, viewed from their own perspective, reveals a tradition seen as immemorial.

Because no rival claim is acknowledged in Fly Away Peter, this presumption of belonging is never at any stage seriously contested. One may even argue that the novel as a whole inscribes itself within a context of self-affirmation which is strongly coded ideologically, quite in keeping with the rhetorics of roots that I have called the binge. In as much as Malouf's work in general seeks to rehearse crucial historical landmarks in settler experience in order to release a sense of imaginative possession in these same settlers, it also paradoxically responds to a logic of cultural dispossession of the land's original inhabitants. Therefore, any postcolonial con-

28 Malouf, Fly Away Peter, 104.

struction of the work is bound to appear somewhat shaky, since Malouf's revisionary impulse rests on a colonialist substratum, which is possibly inherent in settler culture itself. Without wishing to deny the settlers' claims a validity of their own (of course), I would like to point out that this kind of tension raises a number of questions concerning the status of settler literature within the institution of postcolonial studies. To my mind, by accepting Australia without further ado 'into' the post-colonial mansion we run the risk of overlooking the peculiar slippage that occurred at the pivotal moment when the beneficiaries of conquest began to "identify with the conquered land."30

On the other hand, David Malouf may not be paradigmatic, in this respect, of all that is going on in Australian literature, despite his visibility as a living figurehead on the international scene. This is why I would like to add, as a very brief coda to this essay, a note on the work of Nicholas Jose — who, perhaps significantly, belongs to a younger generation of Australian novelists. Jose's latest novel, The Custodians (1997), provides an interesting comparison with and counterpoise to Malouf, on account of its peculiar structure. Each of the main sections of the novel is followed by a brief chapter recounting the story of Daniel, an Aborigine whose life was stolen, quite literally, as a result of child-removal policy. Daniel is a gifted painter who, unable to endure incarceration, finally commits suicide by ramming the slender handle of a paint-brush into his right eye. Although he remains, by all accounts, a minor character in the book, it becomes clear that the denial of Daniel's vision, which is the other side of Australian history, emerges as the condition on which the lives of all the other protagonists, white and black, depends. Jose thus acknowledges the suffering on which Australian society is based, in a way that precludes the possibility of arcadian nostalgia. It is in keeping with this that all the characters, again white and black, should somehow belong to the land in The Custodians, while at the same time the land itself belongs to no one. Indeed, Nicholas Jose is at pains to re-place the notion of exclusive possession by the alternative one of custodianship, which implies shared responsibility for the land, which in turn extends into a form of commitment to mankind as a whole. In Australia, then, a renunciation of ownership would seem to be a prerequisite for any convincing claim to the label 'postcolonial'; a situation which is emblematic of the country's curious predicament.

30 Diana Brydon & Helen Tiffin, Decolonising Fictions (Sydney & Mundelstrup: Dangaroo, 1993): 41.

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Reinventing the Future(s)
Peter Carey and the Dystopian Tradition in Australian Fiction

RALPH PORDZIK

The Dystopian Strand in Australian Writing

COMPARING THE UTOPIAN TRADITIONS of New Zealand, Canada and Australia, one finds that utopian novels written in Australia lack a clear sense of faith in the creation of an improved society in which peace and stability are universally and permanently obtained.[1] The beginnings of the land as a hell on earth for transported convicts have fuelled an imagery of imprisonment rather than one of a virgin paradise "lowered down from heaven,"[2] effecting a view of the environment as hostile and violent, and creating a dispirited cultural self-image that has figured large in utopian and speculative fiction ever since. This lack of confidence is already reflected in the earliest writings on record; many novels, tracts and poems concerned with the notion of utopia exhibit a bizarre millenarianism (Hannah Boyd, *A Voice From Australia*, 1851; Edward F. Hughes, *The Millerium: An Epic Poem*, 1873), indulge in a thinly disguised racial exclusiveness (James A.K. Mackay, *The Yellow Wave: A Romance of the Asiatic Invasion of Australia*, 1895), or present fictive accounts of mythical kingdoms in the interior of the conti-

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1 See Lyman T. Sargent's bibliographies of New Zealand, Australian and Canadian utopian literature for a great variety of fictional and non-fictional writings since the early nineteenth century. For detailed discussions of utopian literature in Britain see Richard Gerber, *Utopian Fantasy Since the End of the 19th Century* (London: Routledge, 1955); Lewis Mumford, "Utopia, the City and the Machine," in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1966): 3–24; Hans Ulrich Seeber, *Wandlungen der Form in der literarischen Utopie: Studien zur Entfaltung des utopischen Romans in England* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1970); and Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse UP, 1990). A bibliography of British and American utopian fiction has been compiled by Lyman Tower Sargent, *British and American Utopian Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (Boston MA: G.K. Hall, 1979).

2 Mumford "Utopia, the City and the Machine," 14