

## CHAPTER 3

**Extending the Gesture of the Poetic: 1968-1976**

Heaney's view of poetry's role of redress and counterbalance for societies and individuals has a particular relevance for the period from 1968 to the mid-1970s when Malouf was active in the literary scene in Sydney and achieved success with his published works in poetry and prose. An ongoing media narrative of that time concerned the war in Vietnam, a conflict that prompted local and international protest movements. Popular songs, often linked to poetry, art and media images, developed influential discourses that expressed the ideals particularly of younger generations for a more peaceful world. For many activists in western societies there seemed a great deal to redress and, at least in the counter-culture, an international will to achieve it. The popularity of poetry readings in the UK and the USA, in the 1960s, for example, highlighted the poem as a speech act, formed in the body and on the breath, and encouraging a community of expression open to social change.<sup>1</sup> Alternative ways of countering the "labyrinths" of actual experiences, both personally and politically, were explored. Poets used public occasions for political statements, as for example Robert Bly in his "Acceptance of the National Book Award for Poetry" in the USA on 6 March 1969. Before presenting the prize money to the draft-resistance movement, he noted that his work contained many anti-war poems and asked "if the country is dishonored, where it will draw its honor from to give to its writers".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In New York, for example, poets of the Lower East Side "directed attention to the function of art in society by reinvigorating the tradition of the poetry reading. Readings were not just public presentations of texts, but events that defined a contemporary avant-garde as they defined the way poetry was used in contemporary American culture", Daniel Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2003), 27.

<sup>2</sup> The speech is most readily available at <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a-f/bly/award.htm> (accessed 4 August 2008). See also Peter Pierce, Jeff Doyle and Jeffrey Grey, eds., *Vietnam Days:*

As his opposition to Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War had been an important motivation for his return to Australia, Malouf soon became involved with intellectuals, artists and writers who asserted their place in Australian political discourse, in the tradition of the avant-garde challenging and counter-balancing established positions of power and social control.<sup>3</sup> In addition to broadcasting book reviews for ABC radio each week, giving poetry readings for the English Association composing a version of *The Agamemnon* and lecturing on Australian poetry for the Commonwealth Literary Fund, Malouf promoted poetry readings that proved popular with local audiences. In Brisbane he read in the company of poets such as Judith Wright, Bruce Dawe, Rodney Hall, John Blight and Tom Shapcott. In Sydney he presented his own work in readings that included Gwen Harwood, John Manifold and Roger McDonald. The Cell Block Theatre in Darlinghurst was the venue for "Poets North and South" and included anti-war presentations. Malouf writes to Judith Rodriguez in March 1970:

I've arranged a massive reading for the Vietnam Moratorium (including Hope, Campbell, Fitzgerald, Cowper, Frank Hardy, Keneally, Frank Moorhouse, Roland Robinson – to name only the best known) and am reading myself at the University of NSW.<sup>4</sup>

The last of the Cell Block readings was held on 11 July 1970 and featured Judith Wright, John Blight, Rodney Hall, David Campbell, Eric Rolls and Nancy Keesing.

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*Australia and the Impact of Vietnam* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1991) and James F. Mersman, *Out of the Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry against the War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> In the late 1970s the popular BBC television series *The Shock of the New* was a reminder to western audiences of the role artists (often linked with innovative poetic movements) had played in forming and challenging twentieth century cultural discourses. In the final chapter of the text from the series Robert Hughes comments on what he sees as the decline of this kind of artistic redress: "By 1979 the idea of the *avant-garde* had gone. ... The ideal – social renewal by cultural challenge – had lasted a hundred years, and its vanishing marked the end of an entire relationship – eagerly sought but not attained – of art to life", Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1980), 365-66.

<sup>4</sup> UQFL 75/DM 197, 28 March 1970, Sydney.

# *Gesture of a hand*



Edited by

*David Malouf*



Holt Rinehart & Winston

Fig. 5. Cover, *Gesture of a Hand*, ed. David Malouf (Artarmon, Sydney: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975).

Malouf edited the recording for the ABC.<sup>5</sup>

In 1970 he joined an anti-war publishing venture with Shirley Cass and Michael Wilding from the University of Sydney. They contacted writers seeking contributions for the collection to be titled *We Took Their Orders and Are Dead*, published in 1971, and named others who had already agreed to participate:

We are putting together an anthology of work by writers opposed to Australia's military involvement in Vietnam. ...we plan a good production 200pp paperback selling for around a dollar. Contributors so far include Patrick White, A.D. Hope, Jack Lindsay, Christina Stead, David Campbell, Tom Keneally, David Martin, Judith Wright, and Alan Marshall etc.<sup>6</sup>

In the same year Malouf was working on a poetry publication for secondary students, *Gesture of a Hand*. This book promoted more recent Australian work and he also planned another series for matriculation students that would feature poets such as John Blight, Bruce Beaver, Bruce Dawe, Gwen Harwood, Peter Porter, Rodney Hall and Les Murray.<sup>7</sup> The cover of *Gesture of a Hand* featured a small bird cupped gently in a hand (Figure 5). The image suggests the delicate, tactile “otherness” of the bird’s life and the need for humans to protect the natural world and know it better. The relevance of poetry to contemporary issues about the environment is suggested to the book’s young audience, as well as poetry’s physical nature “projected” (after Charles Olson’s approach) through the hand and breath of the poet.<sup>8</sup> The title also appropriates the phrase “a gesture, a poem” which Malouf liked very much but edited from his first version of the poem “Sheer Edge” (1962) after a critic commented unfavourably that it

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<sup>5</sup> UQFL 75/DM 198, 21 June 1970, University of Sydney.

<sup>6</sup> NLA MS 5614, Folder 2. Draft material from *Johnno* is written on the reverse side of the duplicated letter.

<sup>7</sup> UQFL 75/DM 198.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Olson, “Projective Verse”, in *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*, eds. Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (New York: Grove Press, 1973), 147-58.

indicated Malouf thought of poetry as “merely a gesture”.<sup>9</sup> In the title *Gesture of a Hand*, Malouf gives the term a wider metaphorical meaning that suggests a significant movement of the body conveying a person’s thought and feeling. Such a “gesture” invites a response from its audience such as might occur during the social occasion of a poetry reading. The importance of community for Malouf’s poetic is again evident here.

Malouf influenced the way new poetry was being publishing through his insistence, in negotiations with Frank W. Thompson at the University of Queensland Press, that his next poetry manuscript appear in a cheap paperback edition, rather than as an expensive hardback. Thompson writes:

Few realized the market had changed ... *Paperback Poets* were born at a retail price of \$1.00. They were an instant success and sold in their thousands to a young market rebelling against the Vietnam War and eager to read and listen to the words of their peers rather than their elders.<sup>10</sup>

Recalling the events of that time, Malouf comments that

Poetry in the late sixties had suddenly become the liveliest and most visible of the literary arts. Almost any night of the week in Sydney there was a reading, either formal or informal. ... Each week the *Saturday Australian* and the *Saturday Age* published a poem ... and it was an appearance here, in the popular medium of the press rather than in one of the established literary magazines, that now constituted the arrival of a new voice. ... What I wanted in the new situation as I saw it, was ... a form of publication that would take account of the new popular audience and be cheap, quick to produce and free of the rather top-heavy decisions and bureaucratic delays of the [Commonwealth Literary] Fund ... a full-length, original paperback – a common enough phenomenon in Britain and the United States, but unknown at that date in Australia. ... When *Bicycle and Other Poems* finally appeared, in March, 1970, it was volume one in a series of three (with Rodney Hall’s *Heaven in a Way* and Michael Dransfield’s

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<sup>9</sup> Malouf, Interview with the author, 27 November 2003. In 1969 Malouf refers to his forthcoming collection as *The Moment of Touching*, showing the importance of that image of the poetic in his awareness, UQFL 75/DM 189, 6 August, 1969, Sydney. The phrase, from the final lines of the revised version of “Sheer Edge” (*Bicycle* 60), replaces “a gesture, a poem”.

<sup>10</sup> Frank W. Thompson, “Creating a Press of National Value”, in Munro, *UQP: The Writer’s Press*, 56-57. Tom Shapcott recalls that Thompson, as General Manager of the growing publishing house, was “committed to the brink ... a Californian determined to see Australian publishers bring out Australian books and create Australian audiences”, “The Evidence of Anecdote: Some Perspectives on the Poetry of David Malouf”, in Nettelbeck, *Provisional Maps*, 7.

first collection, *Streets of the Long Voyage*), available either individually or as a boxed set.<sup>11</sup>

These strategic public initiatives to extend poetry's "gesture" were an important aspect of Malouf's work at this time, in addition to his academic teaching. The poetry he was writing showed a less obvious desire to intervene directly in the world of events, preferring (in Heaney's terms) to "[offer] consciousness a chance to recognise its predicaments, foreknow its capacities and rehearse its comebacks".<sup>12</sup> In *Bicycle and Other Poems* references to political conflict tend to be historical rather than contemporary. In "From an Artist's Life: Leonardo" it is the artist's ability to keep his mind "still as the hawk's eye" while "in the eye of the hurricane" of Renaissance political intrigue and military action that is admired:

The campaign fed his notebook: here the custom  
of trailing vines from fruit-trees; how the great bells at Siena  
are worked by levers; how, in the Romagna,  
shepherds blow their horns into the crevices and the whole force of  
the Appenines  
swells their note; on sea-coasts contemplating  
a pattern in the waves. (*Bicycle* 49)

Leonardo is represented as a close observer of nature's patterns and of human engineering of all kinds. His curiosity motivates him continually to learn new things and to value the quotidian amid the shifting loyalties of society. The poem gives the reader the impression of crafting its details from Leonardo's notebooks and close observations, these "gestures of a hand" bequeathing them longevity and importance beyond the urgent political moment.

Malouf's poems also show interest in the anxieties and energies that may be masked by apparent political and social order. The suggested tension beneath the calm surface in the poem "Suburban" causes the reader to reconsider the outwardly safe lives

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<sup>11</sup> Malouf, "Poets in Paperback", in Munro, 67-74.

<sup>12</sup> Heaney, *Redress: Oxford Lectures*, 2. Heaney's poems explore the tensions between political pressures and the sense of self. See "Digging" and "The Tollund Man", in *New Selected Poems*, 1 and 3.

of the inhabitants. The poem offers an oblique comment on disturbances the suburban dwellers choose to ignore, keeping perceived threats at bay:

Safe behind shady carports, sleeping under  
the stars of the commonwealth and nylon gauze ...

Asia is far off, its sheer white mountain-peaks, its millions  
of hands, and shy bush creatures in our headlamps

prop and swerve ...

... In sleep we drift  
barefoot to the edge of town, pale moondust flares  
between our toes,  
ghosts on a rotary hoist fly in the wind ...  
Under cold white snow peaks tucked to the chin, we stare

at an empty shoe like Monday ...  
Sunlight arranges itself beyond our hands. (*Bicycle* 35-36)

What is barely controlled in daylight, however, is almost revealed when the suburban dwellers move in dreams beyond the boundaries of their carefully defined world, a contrast that brings the conscious and unconscious into play, polarities Malouf brings together in “The Year of the Foxes”.

Still using the terms he favoured in the 1960s, Malouf describes in 1970 the works in *Bicycle and Other Poems* as “very personal and interior ... I can’t judge [them]”.<sup>13</sup> As he contemplated what was personal in his own writing and sought to place it in the wider context of literary opinion, he felt uneasy with the ways inner and outer perspectives were placed in prevalent academic views of canonical texts. A comment made to Judith Rodriguez in 1969 as he settled into academic life reveals Malouf’s discomfort with the terms in which literature was being discussed by some colleagues, terms which placed less value on what he calls “the darker tradition”:

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<sup>13</sup> UQFL 75/DM 193, 8 February 1970. He was pleased to have favourable reactions to *Bicycle and Other Poems* from other writers such as Judith Wright, James McAuley (in a letter to Leonie Kramer) and verbal messages of encouragement from Patrick White and Gwen Harwood, UQFL 75/DM 197, 28 April 1970. He notes that the general reception is mixed: “no two people seem to agree on what’s best – or on what they like least”, UQFL 75/DM 196, 21 April, 1970. By the end of 1971 *Bicycle* had sold over twelve hundred copies and was regarded by Malouf as “successful enough” to warrant plans for his next poetry collection, UQFL 75/DM 205, 2 October, 1971, Abbotsford.

They're hooked on the ordinary, the normal, the positive, the rational – and the kind of things I really like best are not of that kind at all. For their Great Tradition: Austen, Eliot, James, etc. I would want to substitute my own darker tradition that goes Kleist, Hoelderlin, Buchner, Hoffman, Melville, Hawthorne, Dickens, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Dostoevski [sic.] – all practitioners of the sensational, all workers at the extreme, all believers in the irrational, the mysterious, the absurd.<sup>14</sup>

His oppositional terms of the “normal ... the rational” and the “sensational ... the irrational, the mysterious” can be seen as offering further reference points for his notion of exterior and interior at this time. The opposition suggests a source of tension in his perception of creativity. To explore these terms in alternative ways through his works, so that the “ordinary” might co-exist with and complement the “mysterious” and the “irrational”, is part of Malouf's growth in imaginative range in the 1970s. This exploration touches an underlying issue for Malouf: self-renewal and growth as a writer. How and why might one move beyond perceived boundaries, defined both personally and culturally?

One reason could be to participate in the life of a poetic community, an activity Malouf valued. Looking back in 1981, Malouf comments, in relation to David Campbell's poetic development, that

new and more ambitious notions ... began to be about at the time [in the late 1960s and early 1970s] about what a poet might be, and what an Australian poet might be. The gentlemanly amateurism that most Australian poets have considered good form was suddenly out of vogue. A poet who mattered had to break his own bounds<sup>15</sup>

He recognises that this is not easily achieved and may over-extend the poetic gifts of many. Citing the later works of Yeats, Auden and Stevens as examples of poets who move in new directions, Malouf observes that Australian poets have generally been “mining the same vein” throughout their writing careers rather than “breaking the rock

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<sup>14</sup> UQFL 75/DM 187, May 1969, Sydney.

<sup>15</sup> Malouf, "Some Volumes of Selected Poems of the 1970s (I)", 14.

to enter a new landscape”.<sup>16</sup> It is something Malouf seems ambitious to achieve, evident in his recurring images, in the late 1970s, of moving beyond a closed room, beyond restrictive walls and mundane scenes to discover another mood or landscape. Malouf’s metaphor of “breaking the rock” of the poet’s own “earth” implies not only an identification of self and earth but an unsettling of identity in the process. In Malouf’s terms, such change should be desired, as well as experienced, in order for the writer to progress.<sup>17</sup> On a similar theme, Heaney’s 1974 essay “Feeling into Words” posits a necessary “raid” beyond “normal cognitive bounds” for poets extending their craft, a task that calls on the “whole creative effort of the mind’s and body’s resources”:

it involves also a definition of his stance toward life, a definition of his own reality. It involves the discovery of ways to go out of his normal cognitive bounds and raid the inarticulate: a dynamic alertness that mediates between the origins of feeling in memory and experience and the formal ploys that express these in a work of art. Technique entails the watermarking of your essential patterns of perception, voice and thought into the touch and texture of your lines; it is that whole creative effort of the mind’s and body’s resources to bring the meaning of experience within the jurisdiction of form.<sup>18</sup>

A further perspective on Malouf’s framework of inner and outer is found in his essay “Poetry at the Seventies” in the *Commonwealth Affairs Bulletin* of August 1970. The essay highlights the qualities that Malouf admires in English and American poetry during the two previous decades, especially those that brought interior and exterior together, here framed in terms of “subjective” and “objective”. He writes of poetry as “the revelation of an unique and personal world” that can be both subjective and

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<sup>16</sup> Malouf, “Some Volumes of Selected Poems of the 1970s (I)”, 13.

<sup>17</sup> There is an echo here, perhaps, from Rilke: “Now it is time that gods came walking out of lived-in Things ... / Time that they came and knocked down every wall / inside my house. New page. Only the wind / from such as turning could be strong enough / to toss the air as a shovel tosses dirt: / a fresh-turned field of breath”) [“Jetzt wär es Zeit, dass Götter träten / aus bewohnten Dingen ... / Und dass sie jede Wand in meinem Haus / umschlügen. Neue Seite. Nur der Wind, / den solches Blatt im Wenden würfe, reichte hin, / die Luft, wie eine Scholle, umzuschaukeln: / ein neues Atemfeld”], “Uncollected Poems”, *Selected Poetry*, 276-77.

<sup>18</sup> Seamus Heaney, “Feeling into Words”, 1974, in Reginald Gibbons, ed., *The Poet’s Work: 29 Masters of 20th Century Poetry on the Origins and Practice of Their Art* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 269-70.

objective in its effect.<sup>19</sup> Poets such as Sylvia Plath “though intensely subjective ... bring us ... reports from our world” (87). Such a comment suggests Malouf’s view that “our world” can be grasped not only through objective details but also through the knowing self.

Malouf sees much poetry of the previous decade as “serious and morally committed” in response to the perceived issues of the times: “The pressure of external events has led poets, at periods, to turn to public issues ... the 1960s have been just such a period” (82). He notes changes to poetic language “to embody its engagement” with that external world and a conviction among many poets that “poetry has a part to play among the forces that are re-interpreting and therefore re-shaping society” (82). He dislikes poetry that is “rather precious verse-making that finds its interest largely in art, travel, gossip and other literature” and remains “insulated from the world largely at hand” (87-88). What poetry needs, he asserts, is “belief, even a humorous belief, in its own validity and in the dramatic presence of the poet who is creating it” (88). The valuing of poetry for its own sake, and the use of the poetic imagination in his prose, are significant for Malouf’s growth as a writer: he regards these forms of discourse as important ways of thinking about, responding to and re-making both self and the relationship to the perceived world. The poetic, in this view, may move the writer and reader to a new territory of experience, a way of knowing which, if sufficiently imagined, may be felt as “real” and therefore potentially influential for the subject’s way of living in the world.

He regrets that poetry in England “has not made itself felt as a necessary activity” in this period (94). American poetry, however, attracts his favour as exhibiting “a largeness of gesture ... sheer range and freedom” (87). Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies*

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<sup>19</sup> David Malouf, “Poetry at the Seventies”, *Commonwealth Affairs Bulletin* 46.6 (10 August 1970), 82. Subsequent page references are placed in the text.

are especially praised for their narrative, critical and dramatic power. Through the dramatic element Lowell “is able to project *himself* [Malouf’s emphasis]” and his growth in and through life, something that Malouf finds very engaging for his own work. Lowell’s “new mode of expression [is] at once narrative and reflective, comic and serious, chronicling both the personal life and the life of the times” (91). He sees Lowell working often like a novelist with “surfaces establishing characters in terms of externals” (89). The success of this technique means that poet and reader come to know the significance of very small details in the text, inviting a close engagement between writer and reader. This is important in Malouf’s poetry and prose and encourages an overlap between them.

Malouf also comments that American poetry is retreating from outer social issues and becoming more “interior”, being “artfully concerned with private experience of a semi-mystical nature” (94). The comment suggests that it is not a direction with which he is entirely comfortable at this point and that he values the connection of poetry with its wider cultural context. He regards poetry as having “lost some of its drive and social concern that made Bly’s ‘Awakening’ and Lowell’s ‘Memories of West Street and Lepke’ central to the 60s” (94).

Other poets whose work Malouf notes favourably in 1970 include John Berryman, Robert Bly, Charles Olson and Robert Duncan. Olson and Duncan offer “big, lyrical poems of great imaginative power, drawing their subjects from mythology or history” (93).<sup>20</sup> The blending of the lyrical, mythological and historical becomes an approach that Malouf begins more clearly to favour, especially as a way of patterning

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Duncan, acknowledging the influence of the historian Ernst Kantorowicz, writes in 1959 of “the creative ground in history that is also in poetry, the concept that to form is to transform ... that we perceive forms because there are correspondences”, Biographical Notes, in Allen, *New American Poetry*, 432. Duncan’s concept of poetic “wholeness” can also be placed in sympathetic relation to Malouf’s later work: “There is a wholeness of what we are that we will never know; we are always, as the line or the phrase or the word is, the moment of that wholeness – an event; but it ... goes back into an obscurity. ... The obscurity is part too of the work, of the form, if it be whole” (436).

places and events important in his own life and times within larger patterns of human history. He seems to sense that such an approach now suits his purposes and will take his work forward. More than in *Johnno*, this becomes evident in “The Little Panopticon” series commenced in 1974.<sup>21</sup> It becomes a strong creative force in *Poems 1975-76* and in the composing of *An Imaginary Life* in 1976.

Poems from *Neighbours in a Thicket* such as “Reading Horace Outside Sydney, 1970” and “Mythologies” also point in this direction. In the latter poem, perhaps with reference to Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* (1957), Malouf regrets the sense of disconnection in contemporary life where traditional cultural myths no longer have meaning.

In the old days it was easy:  
enough to recognise  
a god or two benignly  
winking above the sill ...

And now where are we? Lost  
in the Supermarket, hesitating over  
Gustav Mahler’s Greatest Hits  
and Kitty Kat or Zen ...

Old charms laid out  
in the sun catch nothing  
but a headcold or a bad case of sunburn. For both  
of which we have remedies:  
the right cure for the wrong, the fatal ill. (*Neighbours 22*)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Malouf’s working title for the series was “Great Books of the World”. He comments to Rodriguez that the poems have “a tendency to mix history, autobiography and fantasy quite indiscriminantly and without any sense of chronology to make something that is, I hope, all three. The titles only bear an ironic relation to the books’ titles”, UQFL 75/DM 228 16 April 1974. Malouf regards these poems as “rather a move on from *Neighbours* and [needing] to be kept”, UQFL 75/DM 229 7 May 1974. *Neighbours in a Thicket* was published in August 1974. Poems “From The Little Panopticon” appeared in *New Poetry* 24.3 (1976) and a selection of eighteen was published as “Uncollected Poems” in *Selected Poems* (1981), 93-111.

<sup>22</sup> In the early 1970s Mahler’s music gained popular attention when it was featured in Luchino Visconti’s film version of Thomas Mann’s story *Death in Venice*. Malouf writes to Judith Rodriguez in October 1971 that he likes Visconti’s film, has seen it twice and felt “mesmerized both times”, UQFL 75/DM 205, 2 October, 1971, Abbotsford, Sydney. Recording companies found a new market for classical music by producing collections called “Greatest Hits”, using the term applied to the best-selling tunes of “pop stars”. Malouf’s mention of Mahler suggests that his music is “mythologised” (after Barthes) into the consumer culture by becoming just another commodity or passing fashion, a choice to be made in a supermarket.

Only the “cats [that] come to us out of Asia on snowy paws”, like the tones of an Indian raga, bring any sense of the “gods” (*Neighbours* 23). Patterns of mythical inference may fail but their memory at least prompts a re-imagining of the familiar. Barthes writes of the choice either to “ideologise” or “poeticise” objects as “a difficulty pertaining to our times”, taking poetry generally to refer to “the search for the inalienable meaning of things”.<sup>23</sup> In Barthes’ view:

The fact that we cannot manage to achieve more than an unstable grasp of reality doubtless gives the measure of our present alienation: we constantly drift between the object and its de-mystification, powerless to render its wholeness.<sup>24</sup>

If myth is defined as a type of speech and a semiological system (after Barthes), Malouf’s developing use of mytho-poetic referents can be regarded as a tendency to “poeticise” in order to bring “wholeness” to perceived fractures of contemporary life, a redress for what he calls in his poem “Mythologies” “the fatal ill”. In this view, western societies suffer from an inability to access a satisfying mytho-poetic imaginary able to give a rich foundation of meaning to interpret the flux of daily experience.

Malouf relates the poems in “The Little Panopticon” to Bentham’s circular prison where the warder can see the prisoners at all times as well as a place “where everything is visible; a show-room for novelties” (*SP* 81 93). The title seems to ask whether the subject is the guard or the prisoner of “great books” as they perhaps surround him on the bookshelves.<sup>25</sup> He seeks to re-define his relationship with a variety of texts from a western cultural tradition, including works of poetry, fable, philosophy, theology and mathematical reasoning. Restriction and openness are held in tension, the

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<sup>23</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, 1957, trans. Annette Levers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 158-59.

<sup>24</sup> Barthes, *Mythologies*, 159.

<sup>25</sup> Malouf’s change from the 1974 working title “Great Books of the World” to the 1976 title “The Little Panopticon” may have been influenced by the publication of Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). Foucault discusses the architecture of Bentham’s panopticon prison in terms of its ability to create and sustain systems of power (201).

content of each poem only tentatively shaped by its famous title and the form of the poems experimental (compared to Malouf's earlier work) in their varied patterns of stanza and line. The ironic tones of "Theologica Germanica" and "A Critique of Pure Reason", for example, suggest an unresolved questioning of perspectives in the poet's mind. When is belief appropriate and what is its relation to reason? In "The Fables" a gesture of tentative engagement with the mythical is evident, accessible through a dream of identification with nature:

To interpret the wood you first must fall  
 asleep in it, feel  
 its breathing lift your ribs, turn  
 owls out of a pocket  
 of fog, rub fur  
 in your groin and sense the hardening  
 of fingernails, of toenails  
 to horn. (*SP 81 103*)

However, the reader is reminded that even the beasts of fable must be "forgiven / the crimes they move to in their guise as men" (*SP 81 104*). No vision of innocence is offered in which the subject might rest. A struggle between seeing "reality" in terms of the rational and objective and the intuitive and subjective can be discerned. The question of where the poetic imagination is placed when they blend becomes crucial to Malouf's direction as a writer. The idea-image in "The Fables" of willingly falling asleep in the wood and undergoing transformation suggests his intuitive response. Release is needed, rather than restriction.

Scholars in other disciplines were also giving further consideration to myth in the 1970s. From a psycho-mythical perspective James Hillman, for example, discusses the features of myth in *Re-Visioning Psychology*, a work influenced by Jung. Hillman argues for "recognizing the Gods and their myths and our ideas" as part of the process

of “seeing through” by which the soul searches for itself.<sup>26</sup> Drawing upon the Greek “eidos”, Hillman defines “idea” as meaning that which one sees and by means of which one sees.<sup>27</sup> Malouf’s interest in using mytho-poetic idea-images may be regarded, in these terms, as a means of understanding the spiritual self, as well as a way of representing objects and experiences in terms of their wider cultural resonances.

Hillman gives what he terms “interiorising” a significant role in creating a mythological view:

Moving from outside in, it is a process of *interiorising* [Hillman’s emphasis]; moving from the surface of visibilities to the less visible, it is a process of deepening; moving from the data of impersonal events to their personification, it is subjectivising.<sup>28</sup>

In the early 1970s, while re-drafting *Johnno* and perhaps under the influence of the novel’s Australian setting, Malouf’s work also becomes more fluid in blending views of landscape and time, a further aspect of his interest in understanding identity more deeply. This is evident in a poem such as “Between Towns” where the journey, objects and places are particulars that suggest emblematic sites of discovery for the subject and the society:

The journey is into time. The grassheads sigh, deer lift their antlers  
 alert, prepared to scatter, windows shine in starlit paddocks  
 where strange humped cattle breathe. A town is what we are making for.  
 It might be here, the site of a motor accident, or over  
 the ridge where empty fields await our coming. No signposts name it  
 yet or point directions. The next city we shall inhabit  
 is still in our saddlebags, in the dipper, flashing as we drink. (*Neighbours* 56)<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> James Hillman, *Re-visioning Psychology* (New York: HarperCollins, 1975), 129.

<sup>27</sup> Hillman, 121.

<sup>28</sup> Hillman, 140.

<sup>29</sup> Malouf makes several small changes to this passage in the second edition *Neighbours* 80, 56. “Windows shine in starlit paddocks” becomes “in stony paddocks”, suggesting more directly the upward dynamic of light refracted from the textured surface of the earth, a figure important in Malouf’s work. The imperative “Gaze round you” is added after “humped cattle breathe”, bringing the reader’s world directly into the poem, and “the site of a motor accident” becomes the less emotive but more subtle suggestion of “where two roads cross”.

His comments in a letter to Judith Rodriguez suggest that his work is actually moving in directions related to those of the American poets he discussed in his essay in 1970:

The clue was in all those pieces towards the end of *Bicycle* that tended to open out in a rather mystical way in another direction. People who expect me to be ironic, chatty, reminiscent rather than 'lyrical' will probably be disappointed. ... The direction, I think will be out towards something indefinable and the mode is more often lyrical, than dramatic or narrative.<sup>30</sup>

Descriptive terms such as “rather mystical” and “out towards something indefinable” are new for Malouf’s view of his work, suggesting emerging qualities he is exploring especially through the lyric.

“Stooping to Drink” is important in this regard, a poem that receives encouraging comments at the time from his colleagues Vivian Smith and James Tulip.<sup>31</sup> It is a poem that uses sensual language, parallels and contrasts of imagery, to create an imagined landscape, intricately blending perceptions and observations. The poem shows how Malouf’s terms of “inner” and “outer” are modulating in the 1970s, so that what the subject sees and the means by which it sees (to use Hillman’s concept of an illuminating idea-image) become unified in the consciousness evoked by the poem. Malouf becomes increasingly attracted to what he later terms “the point where objects cross the consciousness and become perception ... where I feel I have most to discover”.<sup>32</sup> In the poem Malouf locates a site for poetic language that embraces the informal register familiar to an Australian speaker, making the realistic fiction of a riverside scene where “schoolkids from picnics / swing on a rope” a place of transforming perceptions (*Neighbours* 51). The poem works outward from Malouf’s favoured image of the “gesture of a hand” – here scooping water from a river dam – to take the reader into suggested possibilities of origins, sensory experiences, memory and

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<sup>30</sup> UQFL 75/DM 207, early 1972.

<sup>31</sup> UQFL 75/DM 207, early 1972.

<sup>32</sup> Malouf, “A ‘Narrative’ Tone”, 275.

narrative arising from that gesture. It expresses extended moments of apprehending through the senses, giving time for the reader to enter the imagined experience while recognising its transitory nature.

Smelling the sweet grasses  
of distant hills too steep  
to climb, too far to see  
in this handful of water  
scooped from the river dam.

Touching the sky where like  
a single wing my hand  
dips through clouds. Tasting  
the shadow of basket-willows,  
the colour of ferns.

A perch, spoon-coloured, climbs  
where the moon sank, trailing  
bubbles of white,  
and schoolkids on picnics  
swing from a rope – head

over sunlit heels like angels  
they plunge into the sun  
at midday, into silence  
of pinewoods hanging over  
a sunken-hill farm.

Taking all of this in  
at the lips, holding it  
in the cup of my hand. (*Neighbours* 51-52)

The narrator is “taking all this in”, even playfully extending the source of his perceptions to “blueblack depths a hundred centuries ago” (*Neighbours* 51). The simile “as the water takes it” is obviously understated as the subject’s mind is far more active than water, although he desires to identify with it imaginatively. For the mind is represented as an active agency that can mirror, absorb, transform and create in a flow of language. The imagined landscape, like the writing and reading of a poem, is an everyday yet miraculous thing “held a moment, and let go again” (*Neighbours* 52).

What remains is the written trace, the poem as object: the artifact made by the gesture of a hand, and by the breath of poet and reader. Its use of varied patterns of word stress and musical sounds (the varied use of sibilants, for example, creates echoes between images in “smelling”, “sweet”, “steep”, “see” in the first stanza and “sunlit”, “sun”, “sunken”, “silence” in the fourth) link the sensory-emotive images to create a harmony of sound and feeling.

It is a poem that represents the permeable nature of interior perceptions and exterior surfaces. Its points of reference (hills, river, children’s picnic, farm, and so on) evoke in a register of everyday language a context in place and time, a setting for the subject’s narrative of shifting perceptions. Through the poet’s choice of accessible language, and the reader’s own imagination, the basis of a shared experience becomes available, one that values both writer and reader/listener. The poem suggests that a scientific explanation of earthly origins (“the hiss / of volcanoes, rockfall / and hot metals cooling”) has replaced creation myths and offers an awareness that blends the scientific and the poetic as a way of engaging with the natural world. Such a style suggests that just as mythologies previously brought meaning and aesthetic expression to daily experience, so the poetic heightening through language of present moments can bring unexpected insight to the reader and, when the effect works fully, an experience of unpredicted aesthetic value. As imagined inner and outer perceptions meet in the mind, like reflections that appear and mingle on the water’s surface, reality constantly shifts and is re-made, its transparency becoming more evident. Body and mind act as one.

The poem can be located in the lyrical tradition of Australian poets such as John Shaw Neilson and David Campbell. It seeks to redress perceived limitations of language of the kind discussed in Judith Wright’s essay “The Writer and the Crises” by showing the underlying interplay of language between perception and object. A

renewed dynamic of naming the everyday is suggested, bestowing upon it a re-authenticated significance. This example of the redress of language foreshadows the desire of Malouf's Ovid when he says

we shall begin to take back into ourselves the lakes, the rivers, the oceans of earth ... The spirit of things will migrate back into us. We shall be whole. (*AIL* 96)

Poems such as "Stooping to Drink" and "Fables", composed in the period 1972 to 1974, show the direction in Malouf's poetic imagination towards the idealised reconciliation of external and internal, subject and object, to be more fully envisioned in the writing of *An Imaginary Life* in 1976/77. He particularly values a restoration of harmonious connection between human and non-human. Its vehicle is a way of perceiving through poetic imagination, by apprehending and expressing what seems deeply inward as well as objectively knowing what seems outward. Malouf's emblematic night creatures, such as "tigers", "messengers" and "centaurs", are moving towards their dawning in his poetic as the creatures themselves. The vision of mind and the object in the world are both valued and co-dependent. Malouf has Ovid sense the limits of what he has thought of as knowledge up to that point, such a way of knowing now limiting his potential being:

But my knowing that it is sky, that the stars have names and a history, prevents my being the sky ... The Child is otherwise. I try to think as he must: *I am raining, I am thundering*, and am immediately struck with panic ... But I know now that this is the way. (*AIL* 96)

The image of the poet "holding to the is-ness of things", this time in the face of exile and death, is found earlier in "A Poet Among Others", also composed in the early 1970s. The poet's lyrical awareness is an assertion of the redress of the poetic imagination in an extreme situation, offering a "shadow" (to use the Jungian term) of the uninhibited celebration in "Stooping to Drink". Here the images that represent being in the moment are varied:

a blade of rye, a moment spiraling

up from the stubble field on a lark's wing  
to enter the whole day's blue, a water drop filled with the light of Caucasus,  
candleflames in brass, a woman's face

clenched on her grief. (*Neighbours* 47)<sup>33</sup>

This leads, in turn, to valuing “the commonness of what is human”. While the “grey winter skies”, “grey faces” and “grey serge uniforms” in the first stanzas evoke a depressing, monotonous scene of human conformity and political oppression, suggesting the Stalinist regime of Osip Mandelstam's years of exile, the individual grains of grey dirt at the end of the poem are “identical and singing”.<sup>34</sup> The earth itself defies the limitations of twentieth century political regimes, just as the grass “goes on growing beyond a wall” while the state “cares only for men”:

The earth in his mouth at last. Heavy as silence where the unkillable grassseed  
takes root under the tongue. (*Neighbours* 47)

Through death, the poet shares humanity's reunion with the earth. He is no longer separated by any special gifts or insights. Like the grass seed, his poems continue to live, showing that “the way to freedom is thin smoke ascending, a road that winds out of the hands”. Inner and outer meet through the physical union of the poet's body with the soil. The poem represents the unity as a melancholy triumph. Here the notion of the imagination's redress can be discerned at a number of levels, suggesting its usefulness as a reading strategy for Malouf's works by the mid-1970s. The poem seeks to redress

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<sup>33</sup> The phrase “candleflames in brass” is removed in the second edition (1980).

<sup>34</sup> The poem takes its epigraph from Nadezhda Mandelstam's account of the final years of the Russian lyric poet. See Nadezhda Yakovlevna Mandelstam, *Hope against Hope* (London: Collins and Harvill, 1976). It can be noted that, in his twenties, Osip Mandelstam wrote a poem about Ovid in exile (“Herds of horses gaily neigh or graze”, *Selected Poems*, 21, and titled his 1922 collection *Tristia*. He was very interested in the natural sciences, Italian and Greek classics and in Lamarck's theories of evolution, suggesting his life may have been a further background influence for Malouf's character Ovid. See Donald Rayfield “Osip Mandelstam: An Introduction”[sic] in Osip Mandelstam, *Selected Poems*, trans. James Greene (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), xxxiv-xxxv. Malouf has commented that he considered writing about Eastern European poets in exile, such as Mandelstam, in his novel but wanted a character removed from the 1970s political situation and the focus to be on loss of language, author's notes from Malouf's address on *An Imaginary Life* at the Wesley Centre, Sydney, 9 March 2007. Note: the usual spelling of the name “Mandelstam” has been preferred here rather than “Mandelstam”.

perceived political injustice, as well as pointing to the need to value the qualities of each moment. The poet's distinct voice is most effective if it shares in the everyday life of society, although such a voice may be perceived as a political threat leading to its silencing, as was the case with Mandelstam. The poet's imaginative art through language offers a vision transcending political control, even while acknowledging its basis in the social realm. In this sense, the concept of social influence in "A Poet Among Others" remains problematic.

The lyrical genre suits Malouf's intentions as a poet at this time as it allows him to explore his perspectives on reality through that broad form and to assert continuity with the lyric tradition in British, European and Australian poetry. In this regard, the American poet Mark Strand has observed:

[lyrics] at their best ... represent the shadowy, often ephemeral motions of thought and feeling, and do so in ways that are clear and comprehensible. Not only do they fix in language what is most elusive about our experience, but they convince us of its importance ... its themes are rooted in the continuity of human subjectivity and from antiquity have assumed a connection between privacy and universality ... It is likely that the lyric, either by its formal appeal to memory when rhyme and meter are used, or simply by its being an artifact, provides a redress to its message of human evanescence.<sup>35</sup>

"Stooping to Drink" and "A Poet Among Others" point to Malouf's experience of the poetic as a way of making the self through language. As he explores his changing emotional and intellectual world, the lyric gives acceptable poetic form to the privacy of the interior he chooses to reveal and the public world of the exterior, a balance he values. Such a poetic form gives the emotions a significant role in the creative process, as well as engaging the intellect. He writes of the continuity of the lyric in Australian poetry as

one of the peculiarities ... that we have retained. Literary historians will put this in negative terms, read it as a failure to receive the good tidings of modernism ... [while] readers of poetry are more likely to be grateful for what they have

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<sup>35</sup> Mark Strand and Eavan Boland, eds., *The Making of a Poem* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), xxii-iii.

been given ... Our disinclination to come in from the edge of things may turn out in the long run to have been a refusal to yield an advantage.<sup>36</sup>

Malouf commends David Campbell's "foolish" belief "that this kind of poetry can still be written and can still speak in the fullest terms for what we are".<sup>37</sup> His liking for "the edge of things" remains important.

While the genre of the lyric was influential and attractive for Malouf at this time, shifts in the wider cultural context led to new perspectives of inner and outer. Works in cultural theory, such as those of Michel Foucault,<sup>38</sup> caused radical redefinition of issues of knowledge, power and authority. Malouf was also writing in a period when fresh insights into the nature of perception, learning, language and the functions of the brain were being investigated and discussed. The nature of consciousness became a particular focus of research from the mid-twentieth century. Neurophysiologist and surgeon Wilder Penfield writes of "Consciousness, Memory, and Man's Conditioned Reflexes" in the essay collection *On the Biology of Learning* (1969).<sup>39</sup> Areas he investigates include speech mechanisms, how memory functions and ways "the neuronal record of the stream of consciousness" has been surgically accessed by inserting electrodes in certain parts of a patient's brain (138-39). Highlighting the flexible, interactive nature of thought, Penfield defines perception as "interpretation of present experience in the light of past experience" (155) and describes metaphorically the rich variety of consciousness:

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<sup>36</sup> Malouf, "Some Volumes of Selected Poems of the 1970s (I)", 13-14.

<sup>37</sup> Malouf, "Some Volumes of Selected Poems of the 1970s (I)", 14.

<sup>38</sup> For example, Michel Foucault, *L'Archeologie du Savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972).

<sup>39</sup> Wilder Penfield, "Consciousness, Memory and Man's Conditioned Reflexes", in *On the Biology of Learning*, ed. Karl H. Pribram (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), 129-68. Subsequent page references are placed in the text.

The content of consciousness ... is never twice the same. It resembles a melody, which must advance to be a melody. In the waking state, the shuttles of the brain weave a meaningful pattern though never an abiding one. The changing content ... corresponds with continual neuronal action in meaningful patterns in the higher brain stem and the cerebral hemispheres ... that action is recorded with great fidelity and can be used and recalled in various ways. (160)

Penfield emphasises the importance of attention in creating the patterns of the conscious mind, concluding that

[by] selecting what he will attend to, the child conditions his own cortex. Thus, as the years pass, the child, with the help of parents and teachers, may be said to create his own brain-mechanism ... we can only say that each man uses his mind to condition and to program his brain. (167)

The link with the concerns of poets and writers is evident, extending back particularly to the modernist period in the early twentieth century.<sup>40</sup> If neurophysiology puts forward the view that every person is creating their own “brain-mechanism”, the writer can be regarded as more like other people than the romantic idea of poetic genius had previously allowed. The writer’s work, in such a view of consciousness, is to give more attention to the moment, discern its qualities more richly and be more eager to form into imaginative language what might otherwise be ignored or repressed in everyday life.

The focus of lyric poetry on creating felt experiences of perception encourages awareness of shared interests among poets and those intrigued by perception, verbal and non-verbal languages, memory and consciousness, including psychologists, neuroscientists and biologists, as well as film makers and visual artists. Robert Duncan, for example, includes neurophysiologist Charles Sherrington’s *On Man and His Nature* in the reading list for his course “Studies in Ideas of the Poetic Imagination” at Kent State University in 1972. The Prospectus for the course encourages students to study

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<sup>40</sup> Virginia Woolf, for example, enquires into the nature of reality and finds it to be erratic and not fixed. She links it to things to which a person may attend, perhaps by chance, “now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun ... but whatever it touches it fixes and makes permanent. That is what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast

scientific references “concerning the nature of our physiological and psychological experience of sight” and to become familiar with “ideas of [sensory] organs and functions current in the scientific’ world”.<sup>41</sup> As well as developing a “lexicon of ideas of the Imagination”, Duncan hopes students will learn “how ideas of Imagination in poetry relate to the fields of religion and the psychological and physiological sciences”.<sup>42</sup> Sherrington’s work, based on the Gifford Lectures given in Edinburgh from 1937 to 1938, blends the natural sciences with a natural theology drawing on the work of the sixteenth century physician-philosopher Jean Fernel and contains chapters such as “The Wisdom of the Body”, “Earth’s Reshuffling”, “The Brain and its Work” and “Two Ways of Mind”. He emphasises that humanity, from a scientific view, has been constituted of the very same fabric as the planet’s substance and is enmeshed in one living system. His famous metaphorical description of the neural activity of the waking mind as “an enchanted loom” remained influential for those like Robert Duncan considering neurological functions and the poetic imagination in the 1970s. Sherrington, a poet as well as a scientist, writes:

The brain is waking and with it the mind is returning. It is as if the Milky Way entered upon some cosmic dance. Swiftly the head-mass becomes an enchanted loom where millions of flashing shuttles weave a dissolving pattern, always a meaningful pattern though never an abiding one; a shifting harmony of subpatterns.<sup>43</sup>

In a poem such as “Stooping to Drink”, and further in *Poems 1975-76* and *An Imaginary Life*, Malouf’s work begins to reflect more noticeably this broad cultural interest, involving the sciences as well as the humanities and the creative arts. Malouf creates images that suggest the dynamics of thought and emotion in the imagination,

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into the hedge. . . . the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality”, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929; rpt, London: Panther/ Granada Publishing, 1977), 104.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Edward Duncan Papers, 1942-1978. Box 1, Item 9, Kent State University Library, Ohio.

<sup>42</sup> Duncan Papers, Box 1, Item 9.

<sup>43</sup> Sherrington, 225.

drawing not only on his favoured poetic traditions but also giving at least passing recognition to popularised research on the activities of the brain and perception. While he values the work of Stevens and Rilke which expresses the mind in motion in poetry, Malouf seeks his own understanding and representation of this key dynamic, especially in the more experimental forms of *Poems 1975-1976*. His interest in this facet of consciousness may partly explain what Ivor Indyk observes to be

an enormous difference between the world of *Johnno* with its catalogues of objects and ironies, and the world on which *An Imaginary Life* opens ... It seems extraordinary that Malouf should have chosen to pitch his standard so far out in the wilderness, so far away from the social world which had provided the substance of his earlier novel and, in a sense, initiated his career as a novelist.<sup>44</sup>

It becomes more important, perhaps, for Malouf to seek what might last in the face of “reality’s” constant flux. His poetic needs to be tested and extended in the face of extreme challenges, such as those faced by Mandelstam and Ovid. What has survived of either poet? The answer is clear: the poems themselves, as long as they endure as artifacts and their qualities communicate with ever-changing audiences. Malouf places high demands on his creative powers by placing them in the tradition of literary survival in the face of almost annihilating historical change. To celebrate and fix in language the “moment of touching” and the “gesture of a hand” becomes a task of survival. Whether the form of writing is considered poetry or prose is less important. Even the “great books” themselves should not restrain the urgent task, providing guides only along the way, a spiritual community of the poetic imagination. This may explain why Malouf seeks his creative “messengers” from more intuitive areas of his mind and finds a greater openness to the natural world a positive influence. These sources of his imaginary assist in meeting the need to return to the basic relationship of language and things and to re-make it in terms he finds authentic. Ovid’s imagined “wilderness” experience is an appropriate site for such an extreme re-making. The even more

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<sup>44</sup> Indyk, *David Malouf*, 9-10.

extreme situation of the Wild Child who has no language or social knowledge at all adds to the writer's testing. The social world can be returned to more fully after this has been accomplished, as is evident in his next poetry collections, *Wild Lemons* and *First Things Last*, and his next works of fiction, *Child's Play* and *Fly Away Peter*. Malouf's working concepts of consciousness and language are enriched and deepened in the period from the early 1970s to 1980.

The nature of language and its acquisition were explored in a variety of academic disciplines in the early 1970s, certainly in the university department in which Malouf was working. G.W Turner writes in 1976:

The University of Sydney is now poised to join Australia's major centres of linguistic study with a newly-established Chair of Linguistics and the appointment of one of the founders of modern theoretical and educational linguistics, M.A.K. Halliday, as its foundation professor ... The English Department ... as well as helping with the linguistics courses and running some of its own, including in 1975 a very popular course on the acquisition of language, has a strong research interest in Australian English.<sup>45</sup>

The work of Noam Chomsky had an enhancing effect in the 1970s on the status of linguistics as an academic study as more detailed investigation of known languages, especially English, progressed alongside study of more "exotic" languages.<sup>46</sup> Linguistics came to be regarded as a branch of cognitive psychology, leading to a new interest in psycholinguistics. Turner notes further that

Chomsky's followers have brought semantics back into the centre of linguistic discussion, gaining the interest of philosophers and helping to close the gap between linguistics and the literary discussion of language.<sup>47</sup>

Theories of the origins and nature of human intelligence added further dimensions to questions of language and learning. By the mid-1960s the seminal work in genetic epistemology of Jean Piaget was becoming better known in the United

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<sup>45</sup> G.W. Turner, *Linguistics in Australia since 1958* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, for the Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1976), 9.

<sup>46</sup> Turner, 3.

Kingdom, United States and Australia, theorising the view that human beings are not passive but active learners who construct meaning constantly through their internal representations of the world and their experiences.<sup>48</sup> This was a significantly different view from the long-dominant theory, associated with Cyril Burt in the United Kingdom, of innate intelligence that was fixed and determined:

By intelligence, the psychologist understands *inborn, all-round, intellectual ability* [Burt's emphasis]. It is inherited, or at least innate, not due to teaching or training; it is intellectual, not emotional or moral, and remains uninfluenced by industry or zeal ... fortunately it can be measured with accuracy and ease.<sup>49</sup>

In contrast, Piaget theorises an intelligence that is fluid and dynamic. He regards maturation, interaction with the environment, social interaction and transmission, and what he terms “equilibration” as the main processes that influence human mental development. Piaget’s concept of equilibration is of a dynamic process that constantly re-balances the workings of what he terms “assimilation” (inward organization) and “accommodation” (outward adaptive coping) in the human mind. Equilibration is continually re-organizing and re-stabilising the living entity as the continuous creative interaction of organism and environment unfolds through time. The flexible state of equilibrium, which Joseph McVicar Hunt describes as a “new and unfamiliar” concept in 1961, is one where “all the virtual transformations compatible with the relationships of the system compensate each other”.<sup>50</sup> In Piaget’s view there is continuous interaction

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<sup>47</sup> Turner, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Jody S. Hall writes that “The sheer mass of Piaget’s research into children’s intellectual activity and the complexity of his framework caught the English-speaking educational world by surprise in the late 1950s. ... In 1959 the *Times Educational Supplement* introduced its readership to Piaget’s research and concluded: ‘This is an investigation of considerable scope, which is still in the pure research stage. The results, it is hoped, will represent a valuable contribution to knowledge in the field of education’”, “Psychology and Schooling: The Impact of Susan Isaacs and Jean Piaget on 1960s Science Education Reform”, *History of Education*, 29.2 (2000): 153 -70. In the decade from 1959 when Malouf was teaching in England, publications about Piaget’s work and education were appearing. See, for example, M. Brearley and E. Hitchfield, *A Teacher’s Guide to Reading Piaget* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963).

<sup>49</sup> Cyril Burt, ed., *How the Mind Works* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1933), 28-29.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph McVicar Hunt, *Intelligence and Experience* (New York: Ronald Press, 1961), 294.

between the interior structures of an organism and the stimulations of the external environment. This interaction transforms or constructs external reality into an object of knowledge.<sup>51</sup> Ongoing transformations are integral to the epigenesis of the mind that is always open to potential change, according to Piaget's theories.

In *The Psychology of Intelligence* [*La Psychologie de l'Intelligence*], Piaget proposes that intelligence is an expression of biological adaptation and "the form of equilibrium towards which all the structures arising out of perception, habit and elementary sensori-motor mechanisms tend".<sup>52</sup> Piaget further defines intelligence as:

the most plastic and at the same time the most durable structural equilibrium of behavior ... essentially a system of living and acting operations ... the indispensable instrument for interaction between the subject and the universe when the scope of this interaction goes beyond immediate and momentary contacts to achieve far-reaching and stable relations. (8)

Piaget views all "structuring" behaviour as "cognitive":

A perception, sensori-motor learning (habit, etc.), an act of insight, a judgement ... all amount, in one way or another, to a structuring of the relations between the environment and the organism. (6)

Placing inward thought and outward action on a continuum of human responses, Piaget writes that

every response, whether it be an act directed towards the outside world or an act internalized as thought, takes the form of an adaptation, or, better, of a re-adaptation. The individual acts only if he experiences a need, i.e. if the equilibrium between the environment and the organism is momentarily upset, and an action tends to re-establish the equilibrium. (4)

Following this view, redress, in the broadest sense, might be regarded as descriptive of general human adaptive behaviour: all responses are re-adapting or redressing an experienced need for equilibrium. The particular redress of the poetic imagination may be consciously to engage the human capacity for a certain kind of making through

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<sup>51</sup> Hans G. Furth, *Piaget and Knowledge* (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 81.

<sup>52</sup> Jean Piaget, *The Psychology of Intelligence*, 1947, trans. Malcolm Piercy and D.E. Berlyne (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), 7. Subsequent page references are placed in the text.

language as one facet of the continuous re-structuring and re-balancing that occurs between subject and environment. The surprise of the unpredictable aesthetic quality of “poeticity” (to use García-Berrio’s term) may be valued as the instigator of a desired equilibrium, felt in the disturbance of energy the poem communicates. Using particular arrangements of sounds and patterns of meaning in language whose aim is a poetic effect may be one possible action the subject might choose, a semiotic act among a multitude of possible re-balancing behaviours.

The choice to communicate in this form may invite further responses from others in the society to which the poet speaks. The extent and range of such responses would depend on the status given to poetic expression in the cultural context. A poet, for example, recognises the crucial need to be expressive when Rilke advises Franz Kappus that “a piece of art is good if it is born of necessity. This, its source, is its criterion; there is no other”.<sup>53</sup> Piaget values the combined thinking of society as well as that of the individual author when he writes that even the person who seems to launch a new movement “is but a point of intersection or of synthesis, of ideas that were elaborated by continuous cooperation. Even if he is opposed to current opinions he responds to underlying needs which he himself has not created”.<sup>54</sup>

From the perspective of semiotics in the 1969, Julia Kristeva writes of “The Bounded Text” as a type of re-adaptation. The text redistributes the order of language as

a productivity ... its relation to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (destructive-constructive), ... it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* [*Briefe an einen Jungen Dichter*], 1929. Trans. Joan M. Burnham (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2000), 12.

<sup>54</sup> Furth, 201.

<sup>55</sup> Julia Kristeva, “The Bounded Text” (1969), in *Desire in Language*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 36.

In *The Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva maintains that, while the poetic function disturbs language, its pathways into

presymbolic semiotic states, not only require the ensured maintenance of ... signification but also serve signification, even when they dislocate it. No text, no matter how 'musicalized', is devoid of meaning or signification; on the contrary, musicalization pluralizes meanings.<sup>56</sup>

These perspectives accord with the climate of discussion created by Piaget's view of the dynamic inter-activity of human intelligence with its environment in creating equilibrium.

Importantly for poets valuing the romantic tradition in literature and the lyric in particular, Piaget connects two concepts often separated in western cultural traditions: thought and feeling, the affective and the cognitive domains. In his view feeling supplies "the energy necessary for action, while knowledge impresses a structure on it ... every action involves an energetic or affective aspect and a structural or cognitive aspect" (*Psychology of Intelligence* 5). He sees the affective life and the cognitive life as "inseparable although distinct" because "all interaction with the environment involves both a structuring and a valuation" (*Psychology of Intelligence* 6). Nor is formal logic

an adequate description for the whole of living thought; formal operations constitute solely the structure of the final equilibrium to which concrete operations tend when they are reflected in more general systems linking together the propositions that express them. (*Psychology of Intelligence* 165)

Feeling is not an impediment to thought, in this view, but an essential part of the origins and development of intelligence.

Rather than the unfolding of innate patterns (as theorised, for example, by Chomsky in regard to linguistic structures), intelligence for Piaget is a biological adaptation that is common across all cultural groups. Development depends on the

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<sup>56</sup> Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 65.

interaction between biological structures that form in the physical matter of the brain, and experiences of the maturing subject within the physical and social environment. Culturally acquired knowledge is incorporated into the child's own internal representations over time. What Piaget calls "organisation" builds simpler processes (such as seeing, touching, naming) into higher order mental structures ("schema"). Individuals thus create their own systems for understanding the world. As the subject assimilates experiences, through adaptive interaction with the environment and society, cognitive structures are modified to allow the inclusion of new experiences that do not fit into the individual's existing schema.<sup>57</sup>

If the poem "Stooping to Drink" is read with Piaget's concept of intelligence as a frame of reference the dynamic interaction of subject and environment acquires greater significance. Even the "scooping" action of the human hand may be highlighted as showing the work of the "organ *par excellence* which allows primates to grasp and touch a thing from various angles" and interact freely with the environment.<sup>58</sup> The hand is emblematic of the facility of mind that links human intelligence to a wider biological and evolutionary framework, something of interest to Malouf, for example, in *An Imaginary Life*. The poem exemplifies the human mind (through the body) extending itself by means of its imaginative capacity. It mimics development from basic sensual apprehension toward more complex schema as the subject's mind contemplates the seen and then the unseen world beneath. The subject can move smoothly and coherently from what is immediately perceived by the senses to what can be imagined

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<sup>57</sup> Piaget's theory of children's distinct cognitive stages has been particularly questioned by subsequent research. Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theories of learning have been compared and contrasted with those of Piaget in recent decades. Vygotsky believed that cognitive development was assisted by the child's interactions with capable members of a society, with such guided discovery mostly communicated through language. See Anita Woolfolk, *Educational Psychology*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Pearson/ Allyn & Bacon, 2005), 48.

<sup>58</sup> Furth, 189. Furth gives evidence of a progression between animal and human intelligence: "By acting on and manipulating objects, the animals highest on the evolutionary scale learn to know things in a manner which strikingly resembles the earlier manifestations of intelligence in humans" (189).

in the past, present and future and constantly constructs “reality” through active engagement with the external world, an energy moving back and forward through the senses and the self. The poem models what may be termed Malouf’s poetic of learning (Figure 2, Chapter 1) as it apprehends imagined or recalled experience (engaging inward assimilation) and reflects on its perceptions (expressed in language that shapes idea-images and feeling-values). These perceptions then enrich the subject’s understanding of the context and lead to the action of composing a language-based mode of expression that promotes accommodation and equilibration for the subject in its setting.

While Malouf is undoubtedly working from his wide general reading and ideas rather than a specific consideration of Piaget’s concepts, he moves toward a model of the essential interrelationship between self and world in his delineation of a natural philosophy of change for Ovid’s transformation in *An Imaginary Life*:

They [the gods] are not outside us, nor even entirely within, but flow back and forth between us and the objects we have made, the landscape we have shaped and move in. We have dreamed all these things in our deepest lives and they are ourselves. It is our self we are making out there, and when the landscape is complete we shall have become the gods who are intended to fill it. (*AIL* 28)

If the emblematic “gods”, belief systems and forces for change are neither “outside” nor “entirely within”, they are placed at a metaphorical border of the self, the site of discovery Malouf favours where objects cross the consciousness and become perceptions. This view may be placed in empathetic relation to Piaget’s notion that the origins of human frames of meaning can be found in our actions on objects working through equilibration in and between self and world.<sup>59</sup> The continuing absence of

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<sup>59</sup> See Leslie Smith, “Piaget’s Model”, in *Blackwell Handbook of Childhood Cognitive Development*, ed. Usha Goswami (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 516-25. A defence of Piaget’s model and its ongoing legacy is offered by Smith, while recognising the challenges posed by subsequent research. Usha Goswami makes the editorial comment that “at the meta-level our new theoretical approaches to understanding cognitive development, namely connectionist and information-processing approaches, are neo-Piagetian and neo-Vygotskian in more ways than might be immediately apparent”, “Models of Cognitive Development”, in Goswami, 514.

formal theoretical models, empirically testable, for Piaget's concept of equilibration has lead one commentator to the view that analogies may be the "best expression of its working".<sup>60</sup> Because of his growing insight into his own thought processes, Malouf's works may offer possible analogies of the concept from the perspective of the poetic imagination.

Learning, in Piaget's view, is broadly defined as a process that involves the individual in comparing new experiences or ideas with current internal "schema" and making desired changes that bring the individual to a new equilibrium. It embraces personal, experiential learning of all kinds, rather than a more narrowly conceived idea of learning as the outcome of formal education. Piaget states that "learning seems to be a complex construction in which what is received from the object and what is contributed by the subject are indivisibly linked".<sup>61</sup> All aspects of the self, including emotions and feelings, are included in this kind of learning. The relationship of Ovid and the Child in *An Imaginary Life* explores the ways personal learning might combine emotions and more intuitive approaches as well as cognitive structures. A poetics of perception exemplified in more lyrical poems such as "Stooping to Drink" develops in Malouf's work, perhaps linked also to his interest in films that offer the viewer subtle photographic shifts in perceptions, such as Jean Renoir's *La Règle du Jeu* (*The Rules of the Game*) (1939).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Leslie Smith, 530.

<sup>61</sup> Furth, 239.

<sup>62</sup> Jean Renoir, dir., *La Règle du Jeu* (1939; Umbrella World Cinema DVD, 2002). In the Australian context Joan Lindsay's novel, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967; rpt., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) features a confrontation between the Headmistress Mrs Appleyard and her pupil Sarah Waybourne about reciting poetry. Peter Weir's film version (premiered in 1975) highlights the conflicting poetics of perception in the novel (landscape, architecture, dress, social manners), bringing to audiences a fresh awareness that the imaginative re-evaluation of language, land and identity had gained importance in Australian creative endeavours. To overcome emotionally-oppressive approaches to learning, formal and informal, was a facet of this awareness in the 1970s. Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) was important internationally in this regard. Malouf's work reflects a significant cultural issue of the time, questioning the nature and purpose of formal learning, an area he knew well through teaching at secondary and tertiary levels for two nearly two decades.

The importance of giving emotions and what has been termed “emotional intelligence” more credible scientific standing in western culture is still being acknowledged.<sup>63</sup> In this regard, Piaget’s work on the development of intelligence in children theorises an enriched framework for understanding how the various aspects of the person interact, building on the earlier work in education of John Dewey<sup>64</sup> and the psychoanalytical studies of Freud and Jung. The meaning and experience of emotion in everyday life moves from the often marginalised aesthetics of the creative arts towards the influential discourses of the sciences. Rather than emphasising the need always to ignore emotion or to assert control of emotion by reason, educators, among others, have been coming to appreciate the role emotions play in personal learning. Concerning emotion and learning in adult education John M. Dirkx writes of connections being explored between emotions, learning and imagination, using a Jungian model (after Hillman):

Emotions always refer to the self, providing us with a means for developing self-knowledge. They are an integral part of how we interpret and make sense of the day-to-day events in our lives. As we look at and come to understand our sense-making practices in daily life and the ways emotions constitute that practice, we reveal ourselves more fully to ourselves and others ... we recognize, name and come to a deeper understanding of the images revealed through our deep, often emotional experiences of the text.<sup>65</sup>

In October 1975, the emerging importance of the new cognitive sciences was apparent in the debate on language and learning between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky held at the Abbaye de Royaumont near Paris. In his Foreword to the English version of the proceedings, Howard Gardner refers to the cognitive sciences as “that recently formed amalgam of disciplines which probes the operations of the human

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<sup>63</sup> Indicated, for example, by the publication and popular reception of Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).

<sup>64</sup> See John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958).

<sup>65</sup> John M. Dirkx, “The Power of Feelings: Emotion, Imagination, and the Construction of Meaning in Adult Learning”, *The New Update on Adult Learning Theory*, ed. Sharan B. Merriam (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 64-69.

mind”.<sup>66</sup> Commenting on the way existing academic hierarchies were challenged by this new hybrid, Gardner writes that

Possibly for the first time figures at the forefront of relatively ‘tender-minded’ disciplines like psychology and linguistics succeeded in involving a broad and distinguished collection of ‘tough-minded’ scholars in debates formulated by the behavioral scientists themselves – with scarcely a hint of condescension by the representatives of such firmly entrenched disciplines as biology and mathematics.<sup>67</sup>

Gardner’s *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983), influenced by the work of Jerome Bruner (himself a student of Piaget),<sup>68</sup> soon offered an important development in neurology, cognitive psychology and learning. It is notable that Gardner credits his questioning of standardized tests and the long-held concept of generalized intelligence to his experience of the creative arts in his youth:

I became convinced that developmentalists had to pay much more attention to the skills and capacities of painters, writers, musicians, dancers, and other artists ... I found it comfortable to deem the capacities of those in the arts as fully cognitive – no less cognitive than the skills of mathematicians and scientists<sup>69</sup>

It was hearing the neurologist Norman Geschwind lecture at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1969 that was, for Gardner, the “epochal event” that commenced his close investigation of the working of the human brain:

Before that, I had not thought about the human brain – indeed, in the late 1960s few of my colleagues [undertaking postgraduate studies in psychology at Harvard] ... thought much about the nervous system.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Howard Gardner, Foreword to *Language and Learning: The Debate between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky*, ed. Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), xix. Gardner further notes that “Pioneers in the fields of neurobiology, ethnology, animal psychology, cognitive anthropology, artificial intelligence and philosophy of mental processes took an active part in the debate between Piagetian constructivism and Chomskian innatism, widening its scope and allowing for an unprecedented synthesis” (xiii).

<sup>67</sup> Gardner, Foreword to *Language and Learning*, xx.

<sup>68</sup> See Jerome Bruner, *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand* (New York: Atheneum, 1966).

<sup>69</sup> Howard Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 28.

<sup>70</sup> Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed*, 28. Gardner now conceptualizes intelligence as “a bio-psychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture” (33-34). Such neural potentials may or may not be activated, in his view, depending on the way a culture values such potentials and the opportunities for developing them made available to people over time.

The importance of better understanding the nature of the human mind and speech mechanisms was now recognised as spanning many research disciplines. A concern with the functioning of the mind linked cognitive science at this time with developments in computer modelling and with insights from biology and neurology.<sup>71</sup>

Two areas of neurological research and discussion that generated interest outside immediate scientific disciplines from the 1970s onwards were those regarding the functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain and what might be termed the history of the brain, associated with Paul McLean's notion of the "triune brain" containing structures from earlier phases of evolution. Both were popularised as paradigms for understanding the human mind, its origins and potential in broader ways, although they were also modified and questioned by further research. Evidence of their influence can be found in Malouf's works of the mid 1970s.

In May 1975, psychologist Robert Ornstein writes of "two minds" that have been revealed by the work of Roger Sperry and Joseph Bogen, in association with experiments and neurosurgery revealing more about the functions of the two hemispheres of the brain:<sup>72</sup>

The belief that there are two forms of consciousness has been with us for centuries. Reason versus passion is one of its guises; mind versus intuition is another. ...What is new is the discovery that the two modes of consciousness have a physical, or rather a physiological, basis. They are not simply a reflection of culture or philosophy. We now know the human brain has specialised, and that each half of that organ is responsible for a distinct kind of thinking. (40)

Ornstein characterises the left hemisphere as "predominantly involved with analytic thinking, especially language and logic", with an emphasis on ordered sequences of

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<sup>71</sup> See the discussion in Piatelli-Palmarini, *Language and Learning*, xxv.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Ornstein, "In Two Minds", *Psychology Today* (May, 1975): 40-43. Subsequent page references are placed in the text. See also R.W. Sperry, M.S. Gazzaniga and J.E. Bogen, "Interhemispheric Relationships: The Neocortical Commissures; Syndromes of Hemispheric Disconnections". Neurologist Joseph Bogen offers his views on possible educational implications of the research in "Some Educational Aspects of Hemispheric Specialization", *UCLA Educator* 17 (1975): 24-32.

information processing, while the right hemisphere “appears to be primarily responsible for our orientation in space, artistic talents, bodily awareness, and recognition of faces” (41). The simultaneous integration and processing of information is noted as a feature of the right brain. Activities of the hemispheres are not exclusive of each other, in Ornstein’s view, a feature confirmed in subsequent research, for example in the reading process.<sup>73</sup> One hemisphere is more efficient than the other in carrying out certain functions and left-handed people often differ in the ways the hemispheres are organised. Ornstein writes that some experiments with split-brain patients provide a “loose analogy to the conflict between Freud’s conscious and unconscious processes”, as theorised in the view of the conscious mind as rational and largely controlled by language and the unconscious as communicating through gestures, face and body movements and tone of voice (42). The two modes work in complementary, though little understood ways in daily life, Ornstein states, also suggesting that hemispheric specialisation seems to be unique to humans and related to the evolution of language, which requires logical and sequential thought (43). His conclusion offers a view that became influential in subsequent years:

The complementary workings of our two thought processes permit our highest achievements, but most occupations value one mode over the other. ... The unfortunate result is that many intellectuals disparage the nonverbal mind, while many mystics and poets often disparage the rational mind. But a complete human consciousness should include both modes of thought. ... We must not ignore the right-hemisphere talents of imagination, perspective, and intuition, which in the long run may prove essential to our personal and cultural survival.

(43)

To establish a physiological basis for different ways of thinking and feeling gives greater significance in western cultures to modes of thought usually holding lesser status in binary oppositions that traditionally favour the rational and logical. If both verbal and non-verbal should be valued and utilised, if the logical and the intuitive

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<sup>73</sup> Woolfolk, 22.

are both important ways of thinking, then the arts which draw upon both elements – the visual, expressive and language arts – acquire greater validity. They are exempla of what has become scientifically desirable. From the late 1960s onwards, the theorised workings of the right hemisphere entered popularised psychology (though were later questioned and regarded as overly-simplified) and were variously expressed in a range of publications.

Making extensive use of research on split-brain patients and theories regarding the right and left hemispheres of the brain, Julian Jaynes addressed the American Psychological Association in September 1969 on a topic that formed the basis of his controversial book, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*.<sup>74</sup> Jaynes introduces mythological referents when he asks:

Could it be that these silent ‘speech’ areas on the right hemisphere had some function at an earlier stage in man’s history that now they do not have? The answer is clear if tentative ... The language of men was involved with only one hemisphere in order to leave the other free for the language of gods. (103-4)

He suggests that certain physiological structures (anterior commissures connecting the temporal lobes of the brain) are “the tiny bridge across which came the directions which built our civilizations” (104-5). Relating neurological research to poetry Jaynes speculates that as song and melody “seem to be primarily right hemispheric activities”, and poetry in antiquity was probably sung more than spoken, poetry may have been more a function of the right hemisphere, similar to our contemporary hearing and appreciation of music (366-67). If poetry “begins as divine speech of the bicameral mind”, Jaynes suggests, it loses that connection as civilisations move toward greater consciousness until “its givenness by the unison Muses has vanished. And conscious men now wrote and crossed out ... in laborious mimesis of the older divine utterances” (374-75). In Jaynes view, the human craft of poetry is now an expression of “nostalgia

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<sup>74</sup> Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 100-25. Subsequent page references are placed in the text.

for the absolute ... the forms are still there, to be worked with now by the analog 'I' of a conscious poet" (375). Claiming a wide notion of potential redress for the poetic imagination, Jaynes asserts that:

even today, through its infinite mimesis, great poetry to the listener, however it is made, still retains that quality of the wholly other, of a diction and a message, a consolation and an inspiration, that was once our relationship to gods. (377)

Thus Jaynes contributes to speculation of a quasi-scientific nature with a re-assertion of the cultural significance of poetry as a potentially authoritative voice, a form of knowing and communication of a mytho-poetic nature that has been lost over time.

While his work has limited influence, it is an example in the 1970s of the purposeful alignment of two areas of discourse to investigate what Jaynes calls "the difference that will not go away" between the outer world of appearances, objects and behaviours (defined from the "objective" stance of the sciences) and the inner world of consciousness, feelings, self-talk, reflections, dreams and imaginings (2).

It is, in this sense, a realignment that touches closely the long-term concerns of Malouf, offering another basis for bringing together his polarities of inner and outer. His familiarity with the general notion of hemispheric preference with its suggestion of cerebral structures for the endeavours of imagination that bring renewal to poetic language is evident in *Poems 1975-76*. In "Twelve Nightpieces (VII)" Malouf uses classical allusions to link "the gods", the hemispheres of the brain and seasonal change from winter to spring. Personal renewal is its underlying theme. Pluto's kingdom, "the age of iron", is challenged by Persephone's dynamic "greenness" which "breaks through", offering a refreshed experience of the natural world. The poem suggests that "the gods" are emblematic of two different ways of perceiving, one now "dark" and "withering" and the other "quickenning" and "luminous", as night gives way to day.

Here in Pluto's kingdom      down under  
     a withering begins      the age of iron  
     leaves lose their hold  
 on green      they decline  
     earthwards

descend

fall into the dark  
 mouths of the gods      into  
 their dark minds

rotting

A seed

sleeps under the tongue

In one half of the brain  
     it dwindles  
     in another  
     quickens      climbs      the right  
     side of my mind  
 is luminous      footsteps

On the farther side of sleep  
     a hemisphere  
     bursts into bud      Persephone  
 in her second nature walks among lighted grassblades<sup>75</sup>

Malouf's figure of the seed under the tongue, featured in "A Poet Among Others", finds expression again. The seed "sleeps under the tongue" and "dwindles" in "one half of the brain" then "quickens" and "climbs the right side of my mind ... is luminous footsteps". Spring is "a hemisphere" that "bursts into bud" on the "farther side of sleep". Terms such as "brain" and "hemisphere" are uncommon in Malouf's poetry, their appearance here suggesting they are particular to his cultural awareness at this time and that he chooses them to associate contemporary thinking on the brain with mytho-poetic images. Past and present paradigms of imagining the dynamics of change in outer and inner worlds are thereby connected. Both are revitalised by the association.

Malouf's recurring figure of walking on light and finding "brightness" from the earth below ("Snow", "Asphodel") is again represented here as a source of imaginative energy. The seed becomes "luminous footsteps / arriving in a field" where a tree "creaks" open. The poem suggests that a power, linked to desire and fertility, from the physicality of the body and the natural world reinvigorates how the subject perceives and creates. Malouf's use of non-standard typespacing in the setting of the poem encourages shifting combinations of meaning as between the brain's hemispheres ("the age of iron / leaves lose their hold", for example, suggests both autumn-winter and the failing dominance of Pluto's kingdom over Persephone). The poem portrays nature and the mind as intersecting sites of ongoing transformation. A flexible and active engagement between subject and world is represented, in more mytho-poetic figures than in "Stooping to Drink".

"Twelve Nightpieces (X)" identifies love as a significant force that "takes us ... deep and deep into green". Love, too, is not static but dynamic and "must be moving on / like the earth has its roundness". In "Twelve Nightpieces (XII)" the image of "roundness" is applied to both earth and the human head and the "two hemispheres" are mentioned:

A tree three times springing  
upward from the feet

the groin and again  
from the shoulders to find

at the branching of the thorax  
this stone shaped

like the world two hemispheres  
demonstrably balanced

and filled with happenings How  
they shine! the greening

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<sup>75</sup> *Poems 1975-76* (Sydney: Prism, 1976). The text distinguishes each poem by title only without pagination. This is now a rare edition as only 200 copies were printed. The first 100 copies "are signed by the author and are not for sale". All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

of seasons and their death    earth  
 metals                    the stars

the gods growing out of  
 their names

The body now becomes a tree, “a threefold / branching out / of space of which the head / is Earth”. While celebrating “two hemispheres ... filled with happenings” the poem does not differentiate their functions in this poem, rather ascribing varied images to them both, these images including feelings (“cruelties / of its blood tides beating outwards” as well as “the calm / of its nights whose images go black on the surface / but dazzle / within”), elemental matter (“earth / metals the stars”), language and beliefs (“the gods growing out of / their names”). There is no separation of ideas of reason and imagination or a need to assert the value of feelings as well as objects. It is implied that they are all of value. The poem suggests that an understanding of self can now be informed by more holistic perspectives, including those of science as well as mytho-poetic imagination.

As poets of the earlier twentieth century explored aspects of mind and self through cultural frames that took account of ideas derived from relativity theory and psychoanalysis, writers and artists in the 1960s and 1970s became aware of the background influence of exploratory shifts in models of the human mind engendered by scientific and technological research.<sup>76</sup> While research on computer modelling encouraged a materialistic, machine-like image of mind, neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield

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<sup>76</sup> A useful study of what she terms “the relative mind” and its various models in early to mid-twentieth century poets is found in Myra Parisoff, *A Study of the Relative Mode of Mind in Pound, Eliot, Stevens, and Williams*, Ph. D. diss., University of Tulsa, 1980 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1980). The “relative mind” is characterised by Parisoff as flexible, holistic and guided by the action of the imagination as a means of achieving a synthesis of apparent opposites. Parisoff is an example of a literary scholar who investigates in the late 1970s emerging theories about the mind, brain structure and their relation to poetry. She acknowledges the influence of Joseph Chilton Pearce and his view, not dissimilar to that of Jaynes, that “poetry comes closest to bringing the mind back to its initial unity with life holistically experienced as by the child or primitive”, Parisoff, 8. See also Joseph Chilton Pearce, *The Crack in the Cosmic Egg: New and Challenging Concepts of Mind* (New York: The Julian Press, Inc.,

concluded in an opposite vein that the mind was still “a mystery” and probably more like a “spirit”.<sup>77</sup> According to his hypothesis, mind and brain are linked through the highest brain-mechanism which functions in an executive role:

after a professional lifetime spent in trying to discover how the brain accounts for the mind, it comes as a surprise to discover that the dualist hypothesis seems the more reasonable of the two possible explanations. ... The mind is attached to the action of a certain mechanism in the brain. ... Late in life, it moves to its own fulfillment [while] the other two [brain and body] are beginning to fail in strength and speed.<sup>78</sup>

Contested positions on the nature and interrelationship of mind and physical brain seem to encourage an individual response on Malouf’s part and for his own purposes. His poems acknowledge in passing recent research while taking from it a greater confidence in the physical nature of his own imagination. Mind, body and spirit connect through the living elements that his acts of imagination extend into language. Ideas and feelings for Malouf are never merely abstract concepts. He is happy to acknowledge, for example, in “White Days White Nights”, that he was “a young man ... to whom clouds occur / as feelings with the sun / at their edge” and that there is “In my body’s depths a shining / as leaves turn”.<sup>79</sup> Affirmed in his intuitions, Malouf seemed to experience a deeply felt transformation in the mid 1970s, linked to events in his private life and particularly to his close relationship with Christopher Edwards, as the dedication of “Twelve Nightpieces” and *Poems 1975-76* indicated publically to his immediate community.<sup>80</sup> It was a transformation that motivated him to experiment with

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1971) and his subsequent *Exploring the Crack in the Cosmic Egg: Split Minds and Meta-Realities* (New York: Pocket Books, 1975).

<sup>77</sup> Wilder Penfield, *The Mystery of the Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) quoted in *The Mind*, ed. Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 214-16.

<sup>78</sup> Robinson, 214-16.

<sup>79</sup> Malouf, *Poems 1975-76*.

<sup>80</sup> The opening epigraph Malouf chooses for *Poems 1975-76* is from Maximus of Tyre, perhaps acknowledging the influence of Charles Olson’s *Maximus* poems and “projective” verse: “We, being unable to apprehend His essence, use the help of sounds and names and pictures, of beaten gold and ivory and silver, of plants and rivers, mountains peaks and torrents, yearning for the knowledge of Him,

his style of imaginative representation through poetic language. In “Twelve Nightpieces (XI)”, a poem that foreshadows the transformation of Ovid’s mind in *An Imaginary Life*, Malouf juxtaposes scientific descriptors (“planet”, “random particles”) and more traditionally poetic images of water and flowers expressing self-discovery (“the spirit moves free / its waters shine” and “I pass on through / to the cornflowers’ kingdom”):

The heavy planet  
lifts

through the water of my sleep  
Pluto    dominion

of thick breath and the dead  
leaving my life

clear    new buds forcing  
upward through my body’s

channel from earth  
energy

restored        with the knowledge  
of how it is done        this

trick of turning light    air        water  
this column of no substance    held together

its random particles  
by unlikeness    into

real leaves        a language  
that crackles like leaves

into greenish air        a shimmer  
of breath

Something  
lifts    call it a planet

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and in our weakness naming all that is beautiful in this world after His nature – just as happens to earthly lovers. To them the most beautiful sight will be the actual lineaments of the beloved, but for remembrance’ sake they will be happy in the sight of a lyre, a little speak, a chair perhaps, or a running ground, or anything in the world that wakens a memory of the beloved.” Malouf’s preference for emotive resonance in the naming of objects is evident in the quotation, with its sources, on this occasion, located in the desire for spiritual essence and related to the expression of passionate human love.

and the spirit moves free  
its waters

shine  
I am given

permission I pass on through  
to the cornflowers' kingdom

Through the sequence of “Twelve Nightpieces”, Malouf blends various kinds of imagery and in the final poems moves to a “kingdom” where all coalesce in the liberated subject who is “given permission” to enter, thereby experiencing a gift of grace from the muses of earth and imagination. A restorative knowledge is felt through “my body’s channel from earth / energy”. The “language / that crackles like leaves” redresses the “thick breath” that has weighed down the subject’s life. In “Twelve Nightpieces” the subject’s transformation becomes a realised experience. The change comes not only by reinvesting classical imagery with renewed life, but also from drawing upon the poet’s reinvigorated capacities to dream, imagine and transform. A metamorphosis linked to the notion of the evolution of mind is evoked in phrases such as “In our sleep and out of theirs / the creatures/ stir uncoil the membrane / throbs with a sudden pulse slow percussive / hooves” (“Twelve Nightpieces (VII)”). What are regarded as higher and lower life forms are present in the mind during sleep.<sup>81</sup> The circular, holistic nature of thoughts and dreams, rather than a linear model, is evoked in the “roundness” of images such as earth, coin and sun (“Twelve Nightpieces (X)”). The brain and hemispheres, too, partake of a partial roundness and “animal air / feeds from the root of the head where / music stammers in a throat” (“Twelve Nightpieces (XII)”). The natural world of plants and animals is represented as integral to mind suggesting

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<sup>81</sup> The cover of *Neighbours in a Thicket* in the 1974 and 1980 editions featured a detail from the painting of Piero di Cosimo, “Battle Between the Lapiths and Centaurs”(The National Gallery, London). The clash of conflicting drives in human history and behavior is suggested by the painting, with reference to the mythical representation of human-animal hybrids whose less rational nature can erupt unexpectedly into the human scene as a form of chaos. The Centaurs, invited to a wedding of the Lapiths, loose their inhibitions as they drink at the feast and become involved in riotous behavior.

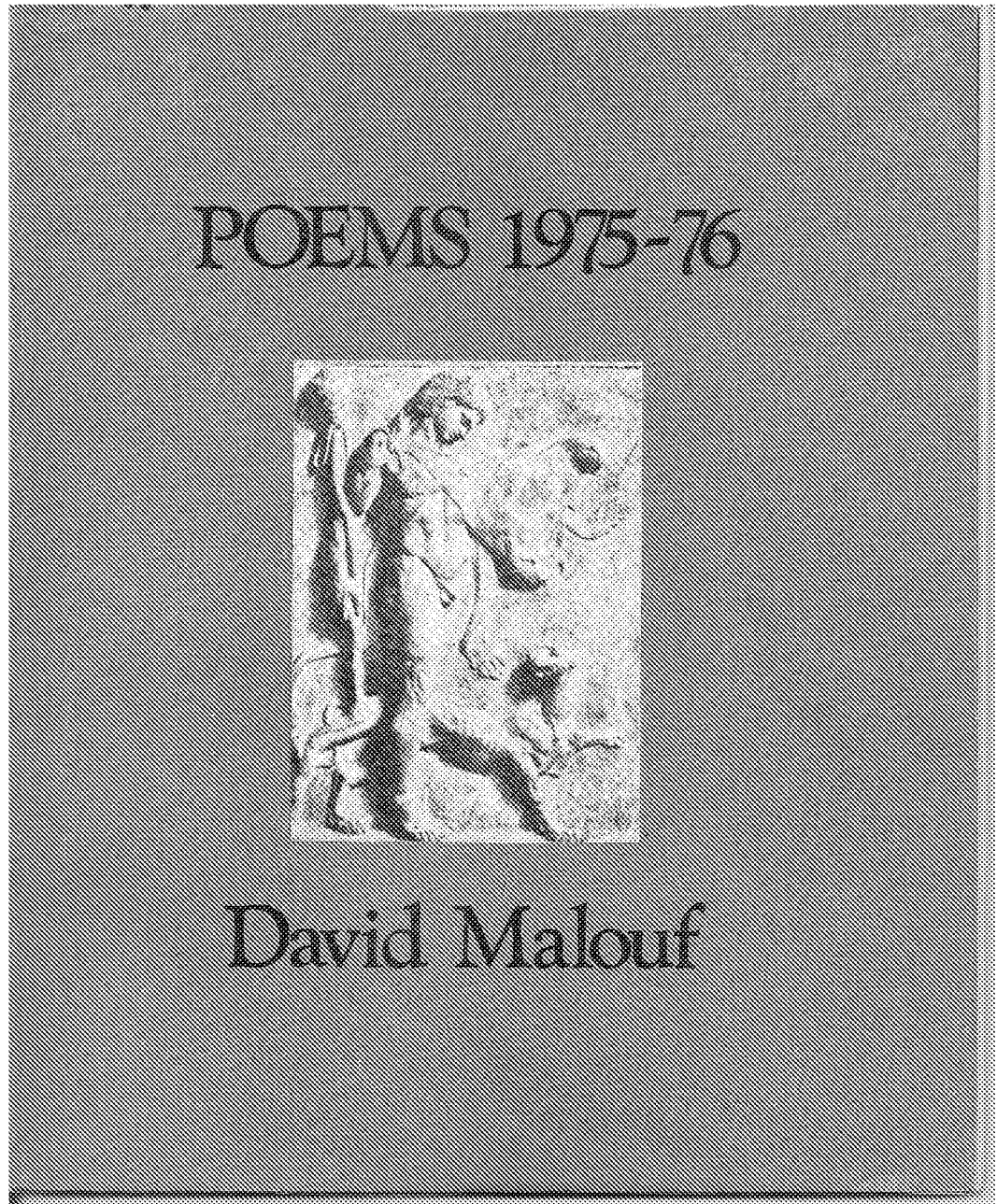


Fig. 6. Cover, *Poems 1975-76* (Sydney: Prism, 1976).

that consciousness itself is also “round”. “Higher” states draw continually on the “lower” linked in evolutionary cycles of physical procreation:

where oceans  
 of sperm whose odysseys  
  
 even in flying  
 dreams            embrace the separate  
  
 kingdoms        fish    fowl    beast  
 and man           even to the feet of  
  
 the gods

These concepts suggest Malouf’s familiarity with ideas of evolutionary “layers” in the mind, as found, for example, in Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*.<sup>82</sup> The cover illustration for *Poems 1975-76* again makes use of Malouf’s ongoing interest in the complexity of human-animal relationships, innate human drives and creativity (Figure 6). It shows a relief from antiquity of a Dionysus figure carrying a thyrsus and draped in an animal skin. The wild animal across the hunter’s shoulder contrasts with the tamed manner of the dog at his feet and the eyes of Dionysus look down at both in a contemplative way. Dionysus was often associated with large cats that tore their prey, a further association with images of the wild and the tame from “Footnote to a Bestiary”.

In the 1970s the work of neurologist Paul MacLean offered the hypothesis of a “triune brain” that mirrors in its physiological as well as psychological structures different stages of evolution. MacLean’s theory states that three brains (the old/reptilian, the mammalian/limbic and the new/neocortical) emerged in the course of evolution and that these still survive and are intricately interconnected in the “modern” human brain.<sup>83</sup> Seeking to bring together work in psychology, neuroscience and

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<sup>82</sup> See Freud’s hypothesis of an evolutionary development from animistic to scientific views of the world in *Totem and Taboo* (1913); *Origin of Religion*, trans. James Strachey, Pelican Freud Library, vol. 13 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 146.

<sup>83</sup> MacLean, *A Triune Concept of Brain and Behaviour*. See also his later work *The Triune Brain in Evolution: Role in Paleocerebral Functions* (New York: Plenum Press, 1990).

evolutionary theory, MacLean theorises that the higher cognitive functions of rationality associated with the neocortex do not necessarily control human behaviour. Instead the “reptilian” brain’s focus on movement and basic instincts and the “limbic” brain’s focus on emotions play important roles in modulating the integrated brain’s responses.

While MacLean’s theories remain controversial, their influence on paradigms of mind from the 1970s onwards can be seen, for example, in American poetry associated with the term “deep image”. In the late 1960s Robert Bly makes use of the paradigm when he writes of the notion of a poem “leaping”:

We see ... a vast effort is being made once more to open the doors of association. When the poet is in the middle of a poem, about to set down a word, how many worlds is he free to visit? How swiftly does he leap from one part of the psyche to another?<sup>84</sup>

Bly takes the view that the poet must be open to images originating in all parts of the psyche, rather than being limited to what is consciously known or apparently “real”. In the early 1970s he discusses research into the physiology of the brain as theorised by MacLean and Charles Fair.<sup>85</sup> That Malouf finds empathy with such views is evident in the blend of images from mythical, scientific and primitive plant and animal worlds in *Poems 1975-76*. He recalls reading the “Black Mountain” poets (such as Olson, Duncan and Creeley) in the mid 1970s and met Robert Duncan when he visited Sydney as a guest of *New Poetry* in late 1976.<sup>86</sup> At the time Malouf writes in his journal that accompanies the composing of *An Imaginary Life*, “I’m trying not to write the first

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<sup>84</sup> Robert Bly, “Looking for Dragon Smoke”, in Berg and Mezey, 162. In the late 1970s, the relationship between concepts of the brain and Bly’s views of poetry came to the attention of literary scholars. See, for example, David Lindsey Elliott, *The Deep Image: Radical Subjectivity in the Poetry of Robert Bly, James Wright, Galway Kinnell, James Dickey, and W.S. Merwin*, 36-101. Elliott comments that “what Bly has done is to hypothesize that the imagery and thought processes in great poetry result from the interaction of various divisions of the brain, either psychological or physiological” (42).

<sup>85</sup> Robert Bly, “The Three Brains”, *The Seventies*, no. 1 (1972), 60-63, discussed in Elliott, 42.

<sup>86</sup> Malouf, Interview with the author, 27 November 2003, Sydney.

5000 words consciously”.<sup>87</sup> Rather than a desire for automatic writing as was sometimes favoured by the surrealists, Malouf implies that he wants to draw into his writing process those elements from other parts of the psyche that complement conscious thoughts, to reach across perceived boundaries in the self. However, a holistic balance of inner and outer worlds continues to be favoured by Malouf. Malouf’s continues to value the visible surface of things as well as inner psychological states, something also found in the poetry of Galway Kinnell. Kinnell was another American poet who visited the Sydney poetry community in the mid 1970s. In an interview published in 1976 in *American Poetry Review*, Kinnell says that he believes the poet should be

going deeper until you reach a level where your own personality isn’t there anymore, where you’re just a person. If you could go even deeper, you’d not be a person, you’d be an animal; and if you went deeper still, you’d be a blade of grass, eventually a stone. If a stone could speak, your poem would be its words.<sup>88</sup>

Such a view might be compared to the character Ovid’s desire to “tune my ears” to the speech of spiders ... I must begin to write again in the spiders’ language”, a quote from the passage Malouf was trying “not to write consciously” (*AIL* 21). Behind such views of accessing the “deeper” self is a desire to find other kinds of language so that human and natural worlds can relate with a freshly-felt authenticity. Such a relation promotes one kind of redress: the healing of perceived divisions and imbalances within human identity.

Malouf’s experiments in poetic style had consequences in the context of Australian poetry publishing in the mid 1970s, suggesting some of the different directions that were emerging. Les Murray, then editor of *Poetry Australia*, took

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<sup>87</sup> From a transcription made by Malouf of an extract from his unpublished Personal Diary, 21 October to 31 December 1976 (Appendix B). The original is in his possession. A copy of the transcription sent to the author has been placed in Fryer Library UQFL 163/D/II-1-2.

exception to Malouf publishing his work in *New Poetry*, edited by Robert and Cheryl Adamson. The work in *Poems 1975-76* was especially of concern to Murray. Malouf recalls:

I had been quite close to Les Murray in the very late sixties and early seventies. Four of the poems from *Bicycle* were published in *Poetry Australia* when Grace Perry was still editing with the help of Jim Tulip – this was in 1969. I continued to publish there when Les became editor. *Poetry Australia* and *New Poetry* ... were seen to belong to opposite sides in the poetry wars. I tended to fraternise with both sides, and through Christopher Edwards saw quite a lot of the Adamsons in 1975-76 and gave some poems to *New Poetry*. Les took exception to this and regarded it as a betrayal. The ‘Inspirations’, and all the work in *Poems 1976* [sic], seemed to him to be a move to the ‘other side’.<sup>89</sup>

Malouf reflects on the differences he perceives between Murray’s and Adamson’s approach to identity and consciousness in the second part of the essay “Some Volumes of Selected Poems of the 1970s” published in 1982.<sup>90</sup> He places himself, with some caution, in a middle position, admiring Murray’s achievement in the “central tradition” of Australian poetry while attracted to Adamson’s challenge to its forms and sensibilities (*1970s II* 308). Quoting lines from Adamson’s “A New Legend”,<sup>91</sup> Malouf writes:

This kind of disembodied voice is not, I think, to be dismissed as a mere solipsism. ... If Robert Adamson represents a new strain in our poetry, and a new way of seeing and feeling, it is one we might have to expand our notion of ‘Australian’ to accommodate, and in doing so we might have to reassess some

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<sup>88</sup> Galway Kinnell, “Interview with Al Poulin and Stan Samuel Rubin”, *American Poetry Review* 5.4 (1976), 6, quoted in Elliot, 129.

<sup>89</sup> Malouf now recalls that “several poets tended to publish in both places. John Tranter and Bruce Beaver both began at *Poetry Australia* when Grace was editor, and Bruce published with Grace and South Head Press”, Malouf, Interview with the author, 27 November, 2003, Sydney.

<sup>90</sup> David Malouf, “Some Volumes of Selected Poems of the 1970s (II)”, *Australian Literary Studies* 11.1 (1982): 300-10. Subsequent page references are identified by the abbreviation *1970s II* and are placed in the text.

<sup>91</sup> The lines quoted are: “as I walk / I create a new legend here / my voice moves over the rock carvings, / my hands net for the moth’s / faint dancing shadow, my eyes / vanish into the back of my head / and a small creature stops running. / The water lies still in granite / waiting for the chance to sing anew; / under the mist I become/ a thousand echoes, sounding for/ the time being. Whatever life emanates / it’s born from my careful presence ... / The mind moves ahead of my / body, feeling the new wings, wondering / if they ever existed before” (*1970s II* 310).

of our earlier poets, Brennan for example ... Shaw Neilson, the more abstract poems of Judith Wright. (*1970s II* 310)

In Malouf's view, "what it is that is central to our Australian consciousness and which forces within it will shape the poetry of the future" are not yet as clear as Murray believes (*1970s II* 310). He finds Murray's presence in his own poetry to be

powerful ... but not active ... he is there as a voice, a focal point for observation ... not as the explorer, in the process of the writing, of a new self, or as a medium for having the poem find its own shape and meaning ... Questions about the nature of perception, any doubt about the observer's capacity to judge what he sees, are kept at a stern distance, while the foreground is filled with a dense bricolage of objects and facts. The result is powerfully convincing, and the power derives from the poet's own assurance and eloquence ... For all the ego of opinion in Murray's poems, the *I* from which he speaks is an unrevealing one. ... Murray stands ... furthest from the utter subjectiveness, of poetry *made*, almost without reference to a real, objective world, that we find in Robert Adamson. (*1970s II* 307)

In American poetic practice Malouf finds evidence that empiricism is not the only approach that the English language need adopt, also evident in the previous century of work in various languages by European philosophers and poets (*1970s II* 309-10).

Malouf's notions of the role of poetry in society are challenged by the terms in which he argues the differences he perceives between Murray and Adamson. He recognises that Murray "has the largest view of poetry and its importance ... that cannot help but shape the forms, including the political forms, with which [a community] will choose to live" (*1970s II* 308-9). Murray's work, following this view, offers a redress of poetry's standing in its community (in Heaney's sense of standing poetry upright in its proper place) and redress, as shaping force and correction, to how a community chooses to live. Indeed, both kinds of redress mark Malouf's own publications and activism on behalf of and through poetry and prose in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>92</sup> His has shown an engagement with the objective realities of an

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<sup>92</sup> Jennifer Rutherford's reading of *Johnno*, for example, highlights the novel's psycho-social purpose in revealing the "relationship between the limits of place and the limits of speech ... [suggesting] the collective forms that the circumscription of desire takes in Australian culture ... the illumination that it offers the reader remains as cogent today as it was in 1975", *The Gauche Intruder*, 159.

outer world: opposition to the Vietnam war; recognising cultural limitations and promoting new possibilities.<sup>93</sup> His media pieces highlight his valuing of critical analysis and informed debate about the arts, while his role in publications such as the *Paperback Poets* series and the anthology *Gesture of a Hand* show his concern to promote poetry to a wider general audience in Australia. At the same time, he is drawn to the work of Adamson and his “utter subjectiveness”.<sup>94</sup> For Malouf, Adamson’s work offers alternative potentials of redress: it interrogates traditions of poetic consciousness and Australian identity. No longer satisfied with Wallace Stevens’ polarities of “imagination” and “reality”, Malouf seeks other ways of understanding how subjective and objective modes interplay in creativity.<sup>95</sup> His unease about Murray’s direction as a poet is perhaps indicative of his questioning of these terms for his own work. In reviewing *Lunch and Counter Lunch* in *Poetry Australia* in 1975, Malouf is troubled that “Murray’s creative intelligence doesn’t seem free in this book” and that he seems to be “in search of a subject that will be fully expressive of his gifts”.<sup>96</sup> In his view, Murray’s creative sources are outside the self and his work is in danger of lacking a “personal tone”, becoming the vehicle merely for “intelligence and verbal flair of a man who can write well on anything”.<sup>97</sup> Such a view has some resonance with aspects of

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<sup>93</sup> For a bibliography of Malouf’s reviews and essays on film, literature, opera and drama for the period 1955-1989 see Neilsen, 201-6.

<sup>94</sup> David McCooey has described Adamson as the poet “who mediates the romantic and postmodern arms of the Generation of ‘68”, “Contemporary Poetry”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Webby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 162.

<sup>95</sup> Stevens’ work is also discussed by other Sydney-based writers in the 1970s. Jerome Klinkowitz considers the American novel of the 1960s and 1970s and the important influence of Stevens’ views on “reality” and “imagination” in “Poetry in the Novel”, *Poetry Australia*, no. 59 (1976), 68. Jennifer Maiden discusses Stevens’ “Angel Surrounded by Paysans” in *New Poetry* 23.4 (1975): 61-67, commenting that “For Stevens, the relationship between the poet and reality is an interplay of amorous shadows, saving both because neither, whilst free in it, needs to be solved or final” (66).

<sup>96</sup> David Malouf, “Subjects Found and Taken Up”, *Poetry Australia*, no. 57 (1975), 71.

<sup>97</sup> Malouf, “Subjects Found and Taken Up”, 72.

identity confronted by the character Ovid in his transformation from disengaged to engaged imagination in *An Imaginary Life*.<sup>98</sup>

Using terms derived from MacLean's hypothesis of the "triune brain", Murray's Aquinas Lecture in 1986, "Embodiment and Incarnation", counters this position by positing the need for a balance between "two main modes of consciousness, one that is characteristic of waking life, one we call dreaming":<sup>99</sup>

The former is said by psychologists and physiologists to be the province of the 'new' part of the brain, the recently evolved forebrain, the latter relates to the older, limbic levels of the brain, sometimes called the reptilian brain. ... Harmony between our two modes of life promotes health, and it is my belief that aesthetic experience is the supreme case of harmony between them. To be real, a poem has to be at once truly thought and truly dreamed, and the fusion between the two represents incipient wholeness of thinking and of life. (317)

Murray views the fusion of the two as a redress to "incomplete" thinking and living, extending the reach of poetic imagination to religious beliefs, ideologies, human relationships and "other loyalties by which we live our lives" (319). He sees a danger that

our need of the good, true harmony which the best art evokes and nourishes may be so great that we will fool ourselves as to the quality of what seems to be supplying it ... it behoves us to be fussy about the nature and sources of the inner equilibrium between the two which we attain. (318)

Both "vision" and reasoning" are needed to create what Murray terms "Wholespeak" rather than a limited "Narrowspeak" confined only to "daylight reasoning" (318-19). However, he believes that poems which are "too indulgently dreamy" will be finally found "arbitrary and unsatisfying ... our unconscious will persuade us of the fraud" (318). Such a view points to the reservations Murray would have, say, about much of Adamson's work, and, by implication, many of Malouf's poems from 1975 onwards. Subjective states and dreams need to be clearly scrutinised by a self that is guided by

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<sup>98</sup> Malouf states that his purpose is to make Ovid "live out in reality what had been ... merely the occasion for dazzling literary display", Afterword to *An Imaginary Life*, 154.

“daylight” reason, in Murray’s view. In the differences between Malouf and Murray, and more so between Adamson and Murray, may be seen tensions between Australian poets who value different modes of re-balancing by the poetic imagination. They take sometimes conflicting positions on how these modes of consciousness inform their work, particularly in relation to the representation of the subject.

The notion of two cerebral hemispheres differing in their functions and of a brain physiologically linked to earlier forms in animals seems to excite Malouf’s imagination in *Poems 1975-76*, and, in offering new possibilities for taking forward his earlier intuitions about the intersection of animal and human identity, to encourage a poetic exploration of the origins of self and world. The subject for Malouf is essentially a constructed identity, formed by inner and outer dynamics of thought and perception not dissimilar to those hypothesised by Freud in regard to the conscious and unconscious mind and by Piaget concerning intelligence and learning. Murray, on the other hand, tends to represent the subject as given in its sense of self. He is apprehensive about the notion of a brain that is open, through its very structure, to the influences of its own evolutionary past. Reason may be overthrown by an irrational unconscious, Murray observes, leading to “monsters” as “Francisco Goya wisely observed” (318). While Malouf believes he engages poetic imagination to open sites for enhanced ways of knowing self and the world, redressing perceived limitations of awareness and being, Murray seeks paths of redemption through the “wholeness of which art is the model” (318). However, both poets believe, in their own way, in the possibility of transforming ways of seeing and in the value of aesthetic experience

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<sup>99</sup> Les Murray, “Embodiment and Incarnation”, in *A Working Forest: Selected Prose* (Sydney: Duffy and Snellgrove, 1997), 317. Subsequent page references are placed in the text.

accessible through the poetic mode.<sup>100</sup> A sense of hope informs the aesthetic of each, perhaps reflecting their view of life as Australian poets in the later twentieth century.

Malouf's comments regarding Murray's view of the self suggest the demands Malouf's own view of the self would place on his writing from the mid 1970s: to explore how the subject can be imagined, sustained and renewed in challenging social contexts.<sup>101</sup> He pushes back against what he perceives as Murray's chosen limitation. This is evident in *An Imaginary Life* and in the work that is in some ways its corollary, *Child's Play*. In such works, as Malouf comments in regard to Adamson's poetry, "the real test is the capacity of the voice to hold, to contain all these shifts of person and remain itself, the capacity of the work to stay whole".<sup>102</sup> What "shifts of person" might the writer imagine and why? How might the writer extend the capacity of the work "to stay whole"? The integrity of the work becomes an aesthetic value guiding his writing, its ability to communicate its "wholeness" to the reader/ listener. Such questions moved Malouf away from overt political activism toward a wider view of human potential, not dissimilar to investigations in the arts and sciences into the nature of language, intelligence, perception and mind.

In the poem "A Commentary on Galatians" from "The Little Panopticon" series, Malouf uses the ceaseless activity of an ants' nest to represent macro and micro worlds

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<sup>100</sup> A difference between the two poets may be read, for example, in a later poem of Murray's, "The Meaning of Existence". Murray's poem suggests a distinction between the moment by moment being of natural objects ("everything except language") and the identity of the subject and he is anxious about "the ignorant freedom / of my talking mind", *Learning Human: Selected Poems of Les Murray* (Sydney: Duffy and Snellgrove, 2003), 199. Murray positions language as a barrier to the "full dignity" of the self, while Malouf regards language as a vehicle for discovering and shaping meaning, whether perceived as internal or external to the subject. His belief in non-verbal (and pre-verbal) forms of meaning ("speech in silence") may give Malouf confidence that language facilitates the subject's participation in nature, something that Murray does not seem to find so convincing.

<sup>101</sup> In a letter to Judith Rodriguez, Malouf comments that "Les is a very inward person, I think, but he has tied his work to what lies outside him", UQFL 75/ Folder 36, Campagnatico, Italy, 29 June 1979.

<sup>102</sup> Malouf, "Some Volumes of Selected Poems of the 1970s (II)", 309.

interacting and creating a substance transformed that “in the suburbs / under us .../  
shines at midnight”:

Ants  
file out of their holes, bearing the fragments of yesterday’s  
light in their bellies,  
the nest a necropolis  
still crowded under the hot squares of an autumn afternoon  
    ... a little Soviet  
a swarm under our shoes, making for crumbs of Marie Antoinette  
or Cassie’s rainbow cake,  
... I watch them on my belly  
in the grass. They carry the sun away, sharing  
its grains of fire between them ... to be buried  
at dusk under our lawn. There in the suburbs  
under us it shines  
at midnight: the godhead  
fallen from our hands to be divided among the humble,  
its sweetness in their mouths. (*SP 81 95*)

Like poets with words “in their bellies”, the ants make “sweetness in their mouths” from the “crumbs” of daily living. There is redress of a spiritual nature in this transforming interaction, as the eucharistic imagery suggests. It commences with what is simple, the “crumbs” that are of the same material, ultimately, as the larger “grains of fire” of sun and stars. Absorbed into the ants’ bodies and the earth, such making transcends categories of interior and exterior, offering instead an envisioned “wholeness” of being, as those who observe them also may choose to experience. In such a poem, and in *Poems 1975-76, An Imaginary Life* is, in Malouf’s own phrase, “preparing to get written”.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Malouf, Letter to the author, 3 December 2003, Sydney (Appendix D).

## CHAPTER 4

**Redress in Exile: *An Imaginary Life***

In Part I of *An Imaginary Life* Ovid declares to himself and his hoped-for reader of the future, “Now I too must be transformed” (*AIL* 33). Malouf’s second novel focuses intensely on the way a character radically changes his way of using his imagination. Malouf’s fresh attention to sensory experience and to intuitions, dreams and feelings enriches his poetic. In choosing one of the most famous classical poets as the protagonist and re-imagining his last and little-known years in forced exile from Rome, Malouf brings his understanding of “interior” and “exterior” to a new border. Informed by the blended ways of perceiving explored through poems such as “An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton” and “Twelve Nightpieces” and gaining confidence from popularised theories of neurophysiology that re-valued intuitive modes of mind, his prose combines apparently objective referents of historical autobiography with the power of subjective impressions. He “makes” an historical fiction, a myth that blends subjective and objective validations of “reality”. Malouf allows the imaginary drives he has previously figured as unpredictable “tigers” and “messengers” in his poetry and as the character Johnno in his first novel to disturb the borders of his hero’s perceptions of self, place and language. It is a disturbance that causes him to draw upon the deeper sources of his imagination. From these disturbances (here figured as unexpected encounters with a scarlet poppy and a Wild Child from the forest who has lived for some time among deer) an enriched consciousness and aesthetic springs up for Ovid. A poetic of fertility (flower and child) is announced in a place he first perceives as desolate (*AIL* 15). He discovers an authentic poetic for making meaning in his life in exile and for negotiating the final border of death. Forming his newly found poetic into expressive language that values the “is-ness of things”, celebrated in “A Poet Among Others”, and the integrity of an

enriched self-consciousness is the writer's challenge. Some commentators use the term "poetic" to account for the effect, often limiting the term to what seems lyrical or musical at certain moments in the narrative.<sup>1</sup> More broadly, however, it is argued here, all the writing in the novel is an expressed search for a poetic. The more intense episodes of heightened feeling are an important aspect but not the total "poeticity" the work may achieve through a reader's imaginative engagement.

García-Berrio suggests that literary entities, such as a text's fictions and characters, are "mimetic or conceptual jackets enveloping pure symbolic forms and narrative myths", defining myth as "the temporal and narrative development of a pure and atemporal symbolic intuition".<sup>2</sup> In his view, symbols in the text become components of a "semantics of the imagination" for a particular author.<sup>3</sup> The way related images are formed in *An Imaginary Life* and their links with his earlier work suggest their importance in Malouf's developing semantics of imagination. While wanting to convey a sense of their "actuality", he also gives them resonances that suggest symbolic referents linked to understanding of imagination, the body and language that is essentially poetic, offering ways to pattern his engagement with the "real". As enunciated in "Inspirations (I)" (*Poems 1975-76*) he perceives "radiance" within familiar things, apprehended through the senses and the imagination and felt in the body, then transferred into "voice" by the breath of the poet as he names and forms patterned, "sustaining syllables":

Something of their substantial  
radiance is in

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<sup>1</sup> Ivor Indyk refers to "poetic flights of fancy", *David Malouf*, 27. Andrew Taylor writes of "the lyricism that Malouf's prose takes on at ... climactic moments", "The Bread of Time to Come", 723.

<sup>2</sup> García-Berrio, 355.

<sup>3</sup> García-Berrio points out that "Mythocriticism has elaborated typologies and functional formulas describing symbols' articulation in mythical narratives [such as] Gilbert Durand's tripartite classification" (355). See G. Durand, *Les Structures Anthropologiques de l'Imaginaire*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Paris: Bordas, 1969).



to the collection MS 5614, containing manuscripts and typescripts of the novel *Johnno*, on December 10 1993. An extract from the typescript (then titled *A Letter from Pontus*) was published in *New Poetry* in 1977, under the guest editorship of Edwards.<sup>6</sup> This, a version of the “poppy passage”, is a midway point of development between the early typescripts and what appears in the published work.

After the typescript was finished Malouf did not immediately pursue any local publication of the work, preferring to consider international publication. He recalls that

Sometime later in the year, probably about July, at a dinner party at my flat in Cremorne Point, Bruce Beaver spoke about the book to Julie Strand, Mark Strand’s wife, and she asked if I would let her read it. She took a copy to Canberra with her and I heard no more for about six weeks, when she called me one afternoon from the airport and asked if she could take the manuscript to New York with her. That was the first I knew that she worked for George Braziller, a New York publisher I had never in fact heard of. A few weeks later they offered for the book (\$1,000). I got myself an agent to deal with them, Curtis Brown here and in the US, and the deal was done. The book came out in 1978. Curtis Brown UK then offered the book in England, and of the three offers we chose Chatto and Windus.<sup>7</sup>

The earliest writing of *An Imaginary Life*, the author now recalls, occurred on Sunday, 24 October 1976, when he was living at Cremorne Point, Sydney. He was keeping a journal at the time and noted on 21 October how his journal writing and mood would interrelate: “For as long as my present state of high feeling lasts I’ll try to put down what I actually feel and think and say, and try to relate it to the world of events”.<sup>8</sup> The comment is significant in light of the interweaving of all these aspects in Ovid’s narration, suggesting that what Malouf terms “mood” has an underlying influence on the fabric of the text, its blending through patterns of language describing inner personal states and external objects and events that a reader experiences as having a poetic quality. Such a view is reinforced by his journal comment on 4 December where he

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<sup>6</sup> The extract was published with the title “Pages from a Novel”, *New Poetry* 25.1 (1977): 41-44.

<sup>7</sup> Malouf, Letter to the author, 18 August 2002 (Appendix C).

<sup>8</sup> Malouf, Extract from his Personal Diary, 21 October-31 December 1976.

notes that “One of the things I realise is how much the mood of Ovid’s writing, his thinking continually of the Child, draws on my own mood. I wonder what sort of exotic glow that gives the writing? Will anyone feel it?”<sup>9</sup> When writing *Johnno* in Florence in 1972 Malouf recalls that he would often visit the Pitti Palace (located opposite the friend’s flat in which he was staying) to look at Rubens’ painting *The Return of the Peasants from the Fields* (Figure 7): “I was going back each day to a mood I wanted to capture in what I was writing. Essential to it – in my memory – is the sky. All that blue”.<sup>10</sup>

On 24 October his journal notes that he “walked up to Spofforth Street and on the way back wrote in my head what may do as the opening paragraph of the Ovid letter, which I think I may write during the long vacation. I see it now as a shortish work: 50,000 words, or even less”. Malouf recalls that this first composing would have been hand-written. It is not in the Fryer collection which does, however, contain a significant folder titled simply “Prologue”.<sup>11</sup> This folder contains early typed drafts of parts of the final published Prologue and Part I, together with sections of Part III and the ending of Part V. It also contains typed passages that were not included in the final text, but which point to Malouf’s flow of ideas and images as the work commenced. The material in the folder is dated in Malouf’s hand “November 1<sup>st</sup> 1976 – January 7<sup>th</sup> 1977, Sydney”.<sup>12</sup>

Extracts from his journal of that time record the growth of the novel:

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<sup>9</sup> This comment may have reference to Malouf’s close relationships at the time.

<sup>10</sup> Malouf, Letter 18 August 2002.

<sup>11</sup> UQFL 163/C/II-2. This document is referred to subsequently as the Fryer Prologue Folder or by the abbreviation FPF.

<sup>12</sup> In an interview with Tom Shapcott in Italy soon after the novel’s publication, Malouf is reported to refer to a preliminary draft “scribbled down maybe a year before” the main period of writing in late 1976, “David Malouf: An Interview by Tom Shapcott”, *Quadrant* XXII.10 (1978): 27-31, 28. The diary Malouf has provided points to the writing having occurred “a few weeks” before, although the first manuscripts are not extant.

Monday 1 November

Worked quietly at home (i.e. marking [examination] papers) except for a trip to town quickly, on one return of the ferry, to buy fruit. When I got back the mail had arrived. A card from V.T. in Rome saying she and Carlo have made contact, and a strange letter from Tim Curnow at Curtis Brown saying that their “client” Patrick White ... is interested in “seeing a new MS Peter Gross mentioned while he was in London, a story about Ovid”. Well, it doesn’t exist, but why not? I sat down immediately and wrote about 4000 words, and really do see the thing pretty clearly. Maybe I’ll do a first draft very quickly, say in three weeks, and see what it looks like. Strange that a week or so ago I should have come back from a walk and written a first paragraph of the book. Needless to say, I had started about 3000 words from the beginning

Tuesday 2 November

Briefly to the university to collect a couple of books on Ovid ... Came back by 11.30 and wrote maybe 3000 words of the Ovid book. It seems to be going very well.

Wednesday 3 November

Worked very solidly on the Ovid book. It’s coming very fast, but seems clear. I have very little idea where I am going before I start – I am writing from the bottom of my mind somewhere, I don’t quite know what I am drawing on, it isn’t direct experience. Everything has to be imagined ... I have at this stage done 12,500 words of the Ovid. ... The whole of Part I will be 15000. So what I have to do now is to get the 5000 words into shape that will take me up to where I began. I see the whole thing as being about 45,000 words. I have a good idea of what will happen in Part II and a lot of that already exists somewhere in my head. But what about Part III? What is to happen? I suppose the village people must drive Ovid and the boy out. This came to me as a notion as I was walking back from the shops and was a new thought. I suppose it’s inevitable. Ovid must be expelled *beyond* the end of the world. He and the Child must start off north into unknown places. Over the ice of the frozen river? Seeking where it is the shaman’s spirit goes on his journeys to the pole?

Thursday 4 November

Writing the very beginning today, a passage that introduces the Child and will be the prologue, and a few passages after, that I think I have been preparing for Part III as it occurred to me yesterday. I’m trying not to write the first 5000 words consciously. I’ve done 2500 and still have a good deal more in the draft of bits and pieces I wrote earlier, including the real revelation of the first 5000 words, the passage about the poppy.

Fri 5 November

Wrote about 1500 words

Monday 8 November

In the evening wrote one of the things I like best in the book so far, the passage about the women. About 1000 words.

Tues 10 (?) November

Today wrote the Parilia passage and the brother's death, about 1500 words. Also read the Fasti in Frazer's translation for the details of this and some other things.

Thus, 12,500 words were completed by 3 November 1976. Malouf confirms that the material on pages 4-4B, 5 and 8 of the Fryer "Prologue" Folder are early drafts of the "scarlet poppy" passage, although the exact order of the composing of these pages is not certain. The journal does point to the writing of the material from the published *Prologue* and all of the beginning of Part I, up to the "poppy" episode, on 4 November 1976.<sup>13</sup> Within the first few days of composing Malouf had brought the Child into the story and considered the final expulsion of Ovid and the Child from the village. That Malouf had developed half the work in first draft by 10 November indicates the fast pace of composing.

During the period November to December 1976 Malouf's writing was in counterpoint to his main task in those weeks of marking first year university and Higher School Certificate English examination papers. He also travelled from Cremorne Point to the University of Sydney every few days for meetings. From 13 November to 2 December he ceased writing altogether because of the illness of a close friend, the poet Bruce Beaver, which involved him in day-to-day care. A brief note in the Fryer Prologue Folder suggests that the writing had progressed to the episode of "the first snow" before

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<sup>13</sup> Malouf, Letter to the author, 29 November 2001.

this break occurred (*AIL* 104-105).<sup>14</sup> He recommenced writing after reading through again and correcting the first 10,000 words. He typed this corrected version and by 10 December had 27,000 words completed. His friend Judith Rodriguez and her children came to stay with him and she also read the work in progress. Malouf notes in his diary that “she spoke of it being very autobiographical (more than *Johnno*), which is true if you mean by autobiographical a record of one’s inner life rather than the life of outer events. It is full of my obsessions”.<sup>15</sup>

On 26 December Bruce and Brenda Beaver visited Malouf and he read aloud to them the Prologue, Part I, most of Part II and part of Part III. Malouf now recalls that one of the reasons he did this was

to reassure [Bruce] that he had not, as he had feared, done the book any harm. (There was a point, just after he went to hospital, when I thought I had lost it; that is, that I would not be able to get back to the mood and flow of it after the traumatic interruption. This would have hit Bruce almost as hard as it might have hit me.) What I wanted him to see, from the reading, was that the book had survived – as our friendship had – and might even be better for my having been submerged for a while in matters of real life and death.<sup>16</sup>

Significantly, in this context, the next day (27 December) the section on the Child’s illness was written (*AIL* 115-18) and on 28 December Malouf’s journal records that he wrote 1200 words “to finish the section dealing with the fever and its transmission up to the second boy’s recovery” (*AIL* 118-24). The last entry in the diary on 31 December 1976 notes that on this day he “finished off poor old Ryzak with rabies and am within sight now of the end of Part IV” (*AIL* 124-33). The depiction of Ryzak’s sickness, as well as that of the Child, may also have been influenced by Malouf’s recent experience of Bruce Beaver’s illness. In the next few days the end of Part IV – the journey across the frozen river Ister – and then Part V were completed (*AIL* 136-52). This included a re-

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<sup>14</sup> UQFL 163/C/II-1.

<sup>15</sup> Malouf, *Personal Diary*, 21 October – 31 December 1976.

<sup>16</sup> Malouf, *Letter to the author*, 4 June 2004 (Appendix F).

working of a draft of the version of the ending from the first days of writing about eight weeks before.<sup>17</sup> Malouf now recalls:

the book was finished, at the latest, by the middle of January, typed up and ready by about the 25<sup>th</sup> January ... I typed up the bad, that is the *corrected* [Malouf's emphasis] typescript, myself ... I remember I saved time by *not* retyping – simply correcting – the original typed draft of the later part of the book and adding it to the second or third typed draft I had made of Parts I, II, III and the Prologue.<sup>18</sup>

In summary, the overall writing takes place on the twelve days between 1 and 13 November (after the initial paragraph on 24 October), and then from 2 December to approximately 10 January, with about twenty days of writing in that period.<sup>19</sup>

What do the early drafts suggest about the author's intentions in the key episode concerning the scarlet poppy in Part I that began a flow of composition that saw the first draft of the novel completed in such a short space of time? The focus here will be upon comparing the published text pages 28 to 33 with several earlier drafts: the material from pages 4, 4B, 5, 8 and 29 to 32 in the Fryer Prologue Folder, and the extract published as "Pages from a Novel" in early 1977. The passage has been recognised as central both by Malouf himself and by subsequent commentators. It is often discussed in studies of *An Imaginary Life* as pointing to the primary place Malouf gives to language and imagination in shaping our sense of reality.<sup>20</sup> In an interview with Tom Shapcott in

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<sup>17</sup> FPF 33-35.

<sup>18</sup> Malouf, Letter to the author, 29 November 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Malouf's diary shows that he did not work on the book every day but rather from November 1 to 5, then November 8, 10 and 13. He continued his work on December 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 20, 21, 22, 26 27, 28, 29 and 31, Malouf, Letter to the author, 29 November 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Karin Hansson writes that "reminiscent of Proust's famous episode with the madeleine cake, a whole range of memories, a whole childhood, is suddenly conjured up through this simple sensuous experience related to the word and the name, [a] telling example of language as an almost physical property ... a prerequisite not only for our perception of reality but also for our sense of identity within that reality", Hansson, 113. Philip Neilsen reads the passage as bringing together a "system of oppositions and motifs" which are central to the novel (wholeness/incompleteness, culture/nature, change/stasis): "Ovid comes to a sudden realisation, to a 'belief' in certain possibilities through a moment of perception that bridges the gap between self and the natural world, by means of language and imagination", Neilsen, 47. Ivor Indyk reads the incident as emblematic of an "immediate relationship between language and reality, without the mediation of social usage or convention, [a] view of language [which] is at one with the primitivist stance Malouf takes in *An Imaginary Life*", Indyk, *David Malouf*, 28. Bill Ashcroft writes that the poppy reminds

1978, Malouf comments that “all the analogies I needed to work away from were in that already conceived episode”.<sup>21</sup> These analogies and correspondences (which Malouf has elsewhere referred to as “idea images”<sup>22</sup>) arise from his initial interest in Ovid as a poet exiled beyond his familiar world, deprived of “the one thing a poet lives by: language”.<sup>23</sup> For his own survival Ovid is forced toward a new belief in the transforming power of imagination, as experienced when he names the scarlet poppy. It is as if he has “brought [the poppy] into being again, out of my earliest memories, out of my blood” (*AIL* 31). Through this experience he discovers a way to connect with his new environment by bringing together what appears “real” to sensory perception and what is fully imagined by the subject, allowing each to modify the other. This causes Ovid to re-assess the natural world as a source of “higher” rather than “lower” forms. He asks whether what is “god-like” can be induced, after all, from what is “beneath”. He comes to believe that ideal forms can emerge from the dynamic interplay of earth and humanity. The shared physicality of all living things is emphasized and acquires great value in the novel.

Ovid’s change from cynicism to belief in turn suggests to Malouf the role of a Wild Child, one who apparently has lived as a “lower” form of humanity, without any language at all, and who can show Ovid’s new belief acted out through the narrative as Ovid seeks to teach and to learn from the Child.<sup>24</sup> Ovid feels that his imagination has in some ways blended the invisible child companion of his early years with the Child,

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Ovid of “a whole way of life” and suggests “language creates being through its creation of experience”, Ashcroft, 56.

<sup>21</sup> “Interview by Shapcott”, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Ray Willbanks, “A Conversation with David Malouf”, *Antipodes* 4.1 (1990): 13-18.

<sup>23</sup> “Interview by Shapcott”, 28.

<sup>24</sup> In the essay “Looking for Dragon Smoke”, Bly uses the figure of “infant abduction” in discussing the preference of some poets of the nineteenth century to escape rationalism and nurture more diverse impulses from the psyche: “In Germany Novalis and Hölderlin abducted a child and raised it deep in the forest”, Berg and Mezey, 161. The notion of a child from the forest nurtured by forces that re-balance and enrich the poetic imagination is in sympathy with the Romantic tradition.

although he recognises that “it exceeds my imagining, that sharp little face with its black stare” (*AIL* 50). The “poppy” passage has importance in its own terms and as the source of the analogical thinking that led Malouf to the “idea image” of the Child, the dramatic focus for the action that would show “the obverse of what [Ovid] had done in writing [*The Metamorphoses*] [so that] the introduction of a Wild Child seemed the only thing” (*AIL* 29).<sup>25</sup> For Malouf this kind of metaphorical thought “is happening in a part of the mind that’s different from the one that’s logical or discursive”.<sup>26</sup> His diary also suggests that he wants to access what he perceives to be different kinds of thought processes as he commences the work: “I’m trying not to write the first 5000 words consciously” (4 November). The drafts reveal aspects of the author’s perceived tension between subliminal/intuitive and logical/rational modes of thought, as he imagines the re-forming of Ovid’s mind and perceived world.<sup>27</sup> In the Afterword, Malouf acknowledges the attraction of locating the text in “an age, the dawn of the Christian era, in which mysterious forces were felt to be at work and thinking had not yet settled into a rational mode” (*AIL* 154).

The scarlet poppy passage seems to be in its earliest surviving form on FPF page 8, a passage of about 700 words in length.<sup>28</sup> The passage commences:

It is impossible to give an impression to you who can know only landscapes that have been shaped for centuries out of their wildness into the place our souls dream of – cornfields a fathom high, solid stacked in <sup>29</sup>sunlight and foaming

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<sup>25</sup> Malouf’s interest in the image of a wild child is evident in the poem “Wolf-boy” composed around 1963 (*Bicycle* 29). He acknowledges the influence of his reading of Jean Itard’s account of Victor, the wild boy of Aveyron, in composing *An Imaginary Life* (Afterword to *AIL* 153-54). Itard’s account is discussed in more detail in this chapter.

<sup>26</sup> “Interview by Shapcott”, 29.

<sup>27</sup> This suggests the different modes of perception represented in “Twelve Nightpieces (VII)” where the dark, withering leaves of the “age of iron” in Pluto’s kingdom contrast with “greenness” that “breaks through” in Persephone’s season of Spring (*Poems 1975-76*).

<sup>28</sup> The consecutive numbering of the pages in the Fryer Prologue Folder does not refer to a chronology of writing, but is a library annotation.

<sup>29</sup> Words typed in the Lucida Handwriting font in this and subsequent transcripts indicate handwritten additions or corrections Malouf made to the typescript.

under the moon; olive groves blowing from green to silver so that a whole hillside is suddenly transmuted at a breath, as if you had stepped out of one world into another without flickering an eye and some god had spoken and the word silver passed over the whole scene, as the leaves turned over in the breeze ...<sup>30</sup> They are sights I have never cared for. Enough, on my terrace, with a view towards the city, to evoke them with a few swift strokes as background to some small god's adventure . . . – but to walk out of the shade and noise and colour of city streets into a dusty landscape (my descriptions of course omit the dust) with its flies and the smell of sheep-droppings and cowflop and sour milk and goats – thank-you, no. A walled garden, with orange trees in pots, lilies, iris, cornflags [sic] round a pond, that was quite enough for me of the lowest orders of creation. And now, smile if you like. Out wandering today in my old sandals and cloak . . . I was suddenly stopped in my tracks by a little puff of scarlet among the wild corn. A poppy! A little wild poppy! Of a scarlet so bright – Scarlet, I kept saying over and over to myself. Scarlet. As if I had forgotten the word till now and just saying it would keep that little windblown flower in my sight. Scarlet. Poppy. The magic of saying the words almost greater than the miracles of seeing. I tell you, reader, I was drunk with joy. I danced . . . scarlet of the little field poppy from my childhood in the country at [space left in typescript], all come back to me at last.

The space left in this last sentence indicates that Malouf wanted to check the detail of Ovid's birthplace, as Ovid would have named it. As already noted, Malouf's journal indicates that he borrowed some books on Ovid on 2 November. This phrase is typed as "the cornfields of our farm at Sulmona" on FPF page 5, and "the cornfields round our farm at Sulmo" in the Edwards typescript and in the published work on page 31, providing evidence that FPF page 8 is actually an earlier draft than pages 4-4B and 5. Further evidence for this view is suggested by handwritten additions in the margins of page 8, phrases which soon emerge as key images in the novel: "I have fallen out of sleep. Vision ... the earth, the gods. We must begin with their names" and "I have wasted my life – real poet: belief".<sup>31</sup> These ideas, which seek to add a mythical,

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<sup>30</sup> An ellipsis indicates that the next words in the typescript have been omitted for the purposes of this study.

<sup>31</sup> The phrase "I have wasted my life" suggests a reference to the same words in the final line of James Wright's poem "Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota", Berg and Mezey, 281. The poem is from Wright's collection *The Branch Will Not Break* (London: Longman, 1963). In the poem, the subject awakens to a new awareness of possibility in his imaginative life by allowing subconscious impressions of the natural world to surface freely in his mind. The everyday world acquires newly-perceived beauty, even when looking at natural waste. Light comes upward from the earth as "The droppings of last year's horses / Blaze up into golden stones". The simple vocabulary and careful



Fig. 7. *The Return of the Peasants from the Fields*, Peter Paul Rubens (1613), oil on panel (121 x 194 cm), Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

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blending of objective detail with subjective connotations in Wright's poem is perhaps a background influence on Malouf's own style as he commences *An Imaginary Life*.

transcendent dimension to Ovid's encounter with the simple poppy, have been developed and incorporated into the typed text on FPF page 5. They point to the significance of the mind-in-the-body: "It requires only belief ... We give the gods a name and they quicken in us ... We have only to find the names and let the illumination of their presence fill us". At the end of FPF page 8 there is a handwritten addition by Malouf: "Poppy! Poppy! You have saved me, you have returned the earth to me. I know at last how to work the spring". Ovid's change of mind redresses his imagination's separation from the earth. On FPF page 5 this is part of the typed text "you have remade the earth for me. I know now how to work the spring" and in the Edwards typescript there is a further shift: "you have recovered the earth for me. I know how to work the spring" (as in the published text page 32).<sup>32</sup>

It is interesting to note, as background, that a passage in the 1972 Florence typescript of *Johnno* includes a passage describing Rubens' painting *The Return of the Peasant from the Fields* as a "a kind of paradise, an attempt to shape in our own image the kind of world we might have been made to live in" (Figure 7).<sup>33</sup> In an early manuscript draft of this passage, the narrator is given the words:

I was fresh from a revelation of my own. Travelling down through Italy, I had stopped for a couple of days in Florence, and wandering among the heavy, cluttered rooms of the Pitti Palace. ... I was suddenly faced with a Rubens landscape ... This, I knew, absolutely was what reality was<sup>34</sup>

The arrangement of figures in the pastoral scene suggests to the subject that they include "workday graces" completing by their actions in bringing home the harvest a "momentary circle that was already about to break up, about to move and change" and he senses an awareness, accepting and joyful, of impermanence and change in the

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<sup>32</sup> The phrase "remaking the earth" also occurs in "Twelve Nightpieces (III)": "One / grain would be enough a single stalk / of the planet a granule / of dust to tempt in others / repopulating / the silence...remaking the earth" (*Poems 1975-76*).

<sup>33</sup> NLA MS 5614, Folder 2 (no page numbers assigned at the time of this research).

<sup>34</sup> NLA MS 5614, Folder 3.

seasonal pattern of life, suggesting the presence of recurrent patterns in nature as expressions of stasis and change in Malouf's poetic.<sup>35</sup>

The image of Rubens' landscape was edited from the published text of *Johnno* but is in the background of what Ovid acknowledges in his readers' thinking as the narrative commences: "you who know only the landscapes that have been shaped for centuries out of their wildness into the places our souls dream of" (FPF page 8). Malouf confirms this:

I'm sure the Rubens, which is a painting I have always had a quiet affection for, did influence my thinking about the relationship between landscape and human habitation (as it is expressed for example in *An Imaginary Life*), but it is more likely to have been a confirmation, an objective example, of what I already thought.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> An early draft of the passage in the 1972 Florence typescript reads as follows. "Suddenly, coming down through Italy, I thought I had discovered something – something that ~~made~~ everything different for me. I had stopped for a few days in Florence ... and was wandering through the heavy, cluttered rooms of the Pitti Palace, feeling depressed by the sheer weight of so many carved and gilded frames, when I was faced by an extraordinary Rubens. A landscape: a long view across evening fields to a summery sky of heaped-up cumulus – a landscape utterly humanized, one saw, by centuries of ~~human~~ occupation, and shaped now, from whatever its primitive form might have been, to an ideal that one recognized immediately; it was the shape Europeans have impressed on whatever landscape they occupy, however unlikely, however hostile – like the lush paddocks around Richmond, with their rows of poplars and willows under the harsh Australian sun; a ~~made~~ landscape that had been very much as the picture was made ... a hint at an untidy paradise. A man in a cart drove diagonally towards the centre of the painting, and a long line of sheep scattered before him, with a dog at their heels. Another man, further off, forked hay in a field of conical stacks, while his wife loaded a wagon below. In the foreground, to the right, three women – one barefoot, the others in heavy clogs, bearing rakes and a hoe, ~~made~~ towards the edge of the frame ... Another two women behind them, their faces hidden by huge bundles of hay and vegetables, formed with the man and the three workday ~~graces~~ a momentary circle that was already about to break up, about to move and change, as they all were – the two birds swooping in opposite motion, but together, high up in the sky, a mare suckling its foal, the water running away between trees already touched with the bronze of autumn, the clouds moving in on a last brilliant patch of blue, high up in the left hand corner of the frame, this season, this moment, into another – an acceptance, joyfully, and with full awareness ... of the simple facts of growth and change, of human industry and power and impermanence. ~~This I knew absolutely was human reality – barefoot, quotidian, imperfect ...~~ even in Rubens' lifetime, even in a landscape ravaged by the thirty year war and all its senseless cruelties, ~~still~~ a kind of paradise, an attempt to shape, in ~~man's~~ our own image the ~~kind~~ of world we might have been made to live in ... another garden, untidy ~~but~~ fruitful, made with the sweat of our own ~~brows~~ labour ... It was, for me, the ~~necessary~~ counterweight to that other ~~experience~~ vision of [*word unidentified*] in the Place des Vosges", NLA 5614, Folder 3 (see *Johnno* 119-20). The contrast between the Australian and the Italian landscapes is mentioned here, suggesting a possible origin (among many, no doubt) of the fictional comparison between Italy and Tomis. A Rubens landscape is also mentioned in Malouf's poem "Natural History Museum" (*Neighbours* 62).

<sup>36</sup> Malouf, Letter to the author, 18 August 2002. Malouf's letter to Judith Rodriguez on 22 April 1959 contains earlier thoughts on the same theme: "the land ... shaped to his own uses and his ordered vision of what is beautiful and true", UQFL 75/DM 3.

The idea of cultured landscape as human artefact is contrasted with the minimal “civilization” of Tomis, although Malouf has commented that he did not research the society of Tomis when writing the novel and acknowledges that it may have been much more developed than his novel imagines.<sup>37</sup> Ovid’s final vision of the northern grasslands is even more of a contrast with Rubens’ representation. There Ovid finds no human cultivation at all to admire but instead “the immensity, the emptiness, feeds the spirit” so that his soul is “glorying at last in its open freedom” (*AIL* 141). His attitude is notably in contrast to that of the two poets whose lives in political exile were influential for Malouf’s composing, Ovid and the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam. Mandelstam, valorized by Malouf in “A Poet Among Others”, writes in January 1937:

I yielded, with a kind of terror,  
to the flatness of the plains,  
And the circle of the sky made me ill.<sup>38</sup>

Malouf’s drafted images suggest a contrast between European and Australian landscapes particular to a poet whose origins are in places considered “unpatterned” by a European sensibility. In celebrating spaces “empty” of human dominance he seeks a fresh way of perceiving his own homeland.

The FPF page 8 passage represents the poet as socially sophisticated. However, it suggests he could write of the natural world mainly from the realm of received experience and classic mythical ideas, and less from his own direct perceptions. According to this view, Ovid’s composing derived from an imaginative distance. The intent of the poppy passage on FPF page 8 is radically to alter Ovid’s way of “seeing” and composing so that they are based more on his direct apprehensions, interacting with his memory, beliefs and visions. They belong more authentically to the poet’s whole

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<sup>37</sup> Author’s notes of Malouf’s comments at a lecture he gave on *An Imaginary Life* at The Wesley Centre, Sydney, 9 March 2007 (unpublished).

<sup>38</sup> Mandelstam, *Selected Poems*, 74. In “Tristia” (1918) he laments the loss involved in parting from a homeland, re-imagining Ovid’s final hours in Rome (*Selected Poems* 30).

self, bringing inner states more closely together with outer events and allowing each to shape the other. In this way, Ovid's ability to make a coherent personal narrative of his experiences, a vital aspect of what neurologist Antonio Damasio terms the "autobiographical self", is given fresh impetus.<sup>39</sup> The text implies an ideal of fulfilment through a renewed relationship with nature and self that corrects a perceived disjunction of self. Such an ideal places the writing in the Romantic tradition of literature. It also offers what Damasio has called the "unsolicited knowledge" found in an "image of knowing" that reveals what is happening between person and object.<sup>40</sup> Such an image shows the relation between the body and things, a key pre-occupation for Malouf. Enhanced attention results from such an experience, strengthening the non-verbal inferences that guide the process of core consciousness: "the organism gets ready for more encounters and for more-detailed interactions".<sup>41</sup> The usually hidden relationship between self and knowing is revealed:

These inferences reveal, for instance, the close linkage between the regulation of life and the processing of images which is implicit in the the sense of individual perspective. Ownership is hidden, as it were, within the sense of perspective, ready to be made clear when the following inference can be made: if these images have the perspective of this body I now feel, then these images are in my body – they are mine ... and I can act on the object that caused them.<sup>42</sup>

What Malouf terms in his diary on 4 November the "real revelation" of "the passage about the poppy" indicates its unexpected quality as an illumination of what he has experienced in his own growth as writer. The basis of the experience in bodily

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<sup>39</sup> Damasio, 174-75.

<sup>40</sup> Damasio, 182.

<sup>41</sup> Damasio, 183. Damasio maintains that while we are not conscious of the base level proto-self ("an interconnected and temporarily coherent collections of neural patterns"), we are conscious of both the core self ("the second order nonverbal account ... that can be triggered by an object") and the autobiographical self ("based on autobiographical memory [and which] can be partly remodeled to reflect new experiences"), Damasio, 174.

<sup>42</sup> Damasio, 183.

feeling is represented when Ovid is “suddenly stopped in [his] tracks”<sup>43</sup> and his head is “suddenly ... full of flowers”.<sup>44</sup> The poppy is represented as “actual” and as an unpredicted “messenger” that has crossed the borders of Ovid’s consciousness, requiring him to enunciate its existence. The suite of images it generates offers readers an imagined experience of the ways a poet’s impressions are felt to “become mine” (to adapt Damasio’s phrase), making it, as Judith Rodriguez’ comments indicate, deeply autobiographical and significant for Malouf’s sense of how his poetic imagination interweaves with “reality”. As in the earlier poem “This Day Under My Hand”, something that appears to have “nothing to do with me” is re-assessed through poetic imagery as having great personal significance (*Bicycle* 40). Malouf’s ongoing process of re-drafting shows he is keen to communicate the high value of such awareness to the reader.

The small, bright appearance of the poppy is emphasised on FPF page 8. It is a surprise to the narrator, a flash of colour, reminding him of fields of red poppies in his homeland. The typescripts show Malouf taking particular care with the choice of words here, re-working them to give finer rhythms and connotations. FPF page 8 and page 5 read similarly:

Though there was, in fact, just a single poppy, a few windblown petals of tissue fineness and brightness round the black centre.

The same lines in the Edwards typescript page 22 read:

Though there was, in fact, just a single poppy, a few blown petals of a tissue fineness and brightness, round the crown of seeds.

The word stress is subtly modified to give “a few blown petals” the stronger emphasis, removing the extra syllable of “wind” and allowing the plosive of “blown” a clearer force with the agent of the “breath” hidden, suggestive of the poet’s inspiration. The

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<sup>43</sup> FPF 8.

<sup>44</sup> FPF 5.

addition of the indefinite article to the phrase “of *a* tissue fineness and brightness” suggests the petal’s soft tactile quality more precisely and gives a more delicate rhythmic foregrounding to the repeated sound patterns of “fineness” and “brightness”. The last phrase commences as “round the black centre”, a denotative image made clear and direct by the strong stresses of “black” and “centre”. This changes to “round the crown of seeds” as the work progresses. Not only are the sounds softer with the assonance of “round” and “crown” introduced and more in harmony with “a tissue” in the preceding phrase, but the whole image engages physical details in a more connotative way. The pollen-tipped stamens that circle the black centre of the poppy become a “crown of seeds”. The metaphor connects the simple poppy with notions of gold, royalty and fertility, linked to Demeter, mother of Persephone. When a little later in the passage the phrase “We give the gods a name and they quicken in us” is introduced, there has already been a preparation for this mytho-poetic suggestion in the description of the poppy. What is lower in the hierarchy of the chain of being is then linked closely with what is higher, just as “the gods” in one of Ovid’s tales might metamorphose into lower forms for a certain purpose before later revealing their true identity.

These are only small details, but in such careful artistry Malouf’s prose integrates his poetic imaginary. The poppy, a traditional symbol of earth, sleep and new awakening, is represented “factually” by Ovid’s eye witness account (“There was, in fact”) as in classical natural philosophy. As well, it is given mythical suggestiveness. The idea-image of the scarlet poppy becomes a “feeling-value” (to use Jung’s term) conveying passion and involvement.<sup>45</sup> Jung’s concept of introverted thinking and feeling

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<sup>45</sup> The term is used by Jung in *Psychological Types* (1921) where he writes that “primordial images are, of course, just as much ideas as feelings. Fundamental ideas ... like God, freedom, and immortality are just as much feeling-values as they are significant ideas”, quoted in *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell (Harmondsworth: Viking/Penguin, 1971), 246.

is also suggestive in this regard. Introverted thinking seeks an underlying image, a “luminous idea” and “its task is completed when the idea it has fashioned seems to emerge so inevitably from the external facts that they actually prove its validity”.<sup>46</sup> Various ways of knowing and the discourses that arise from them are woven together as a result. This is needed because Ovid moves from what John Dewey terms “apprehension” to “comprehension”, two complementary ways of reading the world and experience. Apprehension has an immediate sensory impact, giving the feeling of an experience, leading to comprehension that places the experience in a conceptual framework.<sup>47</sup>

The composing on FPF pages 4, 4B and 5 expands the material on page 8. Here the text commences:

How can I give you any notion, [unknown word deleted] who know only landscapes that have been shaped for centuries to your needs, to the idea that we all carry in our souls of that ideal scene against which our lives should be played out [comma deleted] as we climb towards divinity, of what ~~the~~ our earth was [unknown word deleted] in its original bleakness, before we had [unknown word deleted] brought to it the order of industry, the terraces, fields, orchards, pastures, the irrigated gardens of the world we are making in our own image? / [mark for new paragraph] Do you think of Italy – or whatever land it is you now inhabit – as a place given us by the gods, ready made in all its [unknown word deleted] placid beauty? It is not. It is a made place. If the gods are with you there, shining out of a tree in some pasture, shaking out their spirit over the pebbles of a brook, clear in the sun ... if the gods are there with you, it is because you have discovered them there, drawn them up out of your soul, ~~the need of your body~~, and [unknown word deleted] dreamed them into the landscape around you, and in doing so, made it shine.

The revised opening of this passage, although seemingly minor, points to a significant shift in the tone of Ovid’s “voice” as a narrator, compared with the earlier draft. Ovid is

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<sup>46</sup> Campbell, *Portable Jung*, 237-38.

<sup>47</sup> The terms have had an enduring interest for philosophers and, in the twentieth century, for psychologists. At the end of the nineteenth century, William James writes: “There are two kinds of knowledge broadly and practically distinguishable: we may call them respectively *knowledge of acquaintance* and *knowledge-about* ... the words *feeling* and *thought* [James’ italics] give voice to the antithesis. ... Feelings are the germ and starting point of cognition, thoughts the developed tree. ... The mental states usually distinguished as feelings are the *emotions* and the *sensations* we get from skin, muscle, viscus, eye, ear, nose, and palate. The ‘thoughts’ as recognized in popular parlance, are the *conceptions* and *judgements*”, William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1890; rpt., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 221-22.

exiled to a physical and social locality he finds forbidding, at the borders of Rome's empire. His character is first given the words on FPF page 8: "It is impossible to give an impression to you". The reader is excluded by such an opening, suggesting the place is worse than a future reader could imagine. On FPF page 4 this statement has changed to a question: "How can I give you any notion ...?" Ovid now seeks to include the reader, and implies he will stretch his full resources of language and invention to do so. This will require, in response, an exertion of the reader's imagination. In such a small change, the close proximity between narrator and reader begins: Malouf seeks a tone for Ovid that will make accessible and engaging to the reader his vision of Ovid's imagined transformation.

Other changes are also significant. The encounter between Ovid and the flower is now preceded by Ovid's explanation of his natural philosophy, one that seeks to explain how human life and beliefs interact with the natural world to form landscape, and how earth's objects and living things change over time. His personal change is given continuity by placing it in the context of universal change. In this way Ovid's logical explanation co-exists with his emotive and intuitive insights, holding different ways of thinking in tentative balance. The passage describing Ovid's reaction to the poppy is also extended on pages 4B and 5. It now includes Ovid's identification with the mythical grace of Persephone, returning from the underworld to bring the season of spring to the earth.<sup>48</sup> There is greater descriptive detail of the flowers, Ovid's reactions and thoughts. Whereas in the earlier draft on page 8 he reflects that "if any of these barbarous people had been by they must have thought I was mad", on page 4B he now gives more detail of his former life:

Imagine the astonishment of my friends at Rome to see our poet ~~of the city~~, one whose whole life belonged to the streets, to places of commerce and assignation,

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<sup>48</sup> A similar image is found in "Twelve Nightpieces (VII)": "Spring / On the farther side of sleep / a hemisphere/ bursts into bud Persephone / in her second nature walks among lighted grassblades" (*Poems 1975-76*).

to shops, baths, corners, to the dusty intercourse of crowds, and who had only scorn for those whose whole writing life belongs/ed to the world of pastoral dreams, who barely knew a flower or a tree except by name, as it appeared in the poets – imagine their astonishment to see me dancing about in my broken sandals on the earth . . . and singing to myself the celebration of this humble poppy, flower of my youth and the cornfields of our farm at Sulmona

This is edited on page 31 of the published text, so that the emphasis remains on Ovid in his place of exile, rather than his former life in Rome. It is what Ovid is becoming rather than what he was that prevails.

On FPF page 8 Ovid laments he could not imagine all the flowers he wanted to bring to mind after seeing the scarlet poppy:

I am hungry for *them*, gardens of them. In my imagination I walk round the gardens I have known, begging the flowers in turn: tell me your names so that I can call you up in my mind with a word. But the flowers I see in my mind have no names. And the *lonh* [sic] lists of them out of the poets present no picture. Except the commonest of them: cornflower, daphne, poppy.

On FPF page 5 Malouf alters Ovid's approach to the problem. Ovid moves beyond the need to recall exact names or images of flowers from books. He no longer needs to rely only on what he can or cannot consciously remember. Instead, he discovers naming and believing arising from intuitive associations as blended signifying actions which empower his imagination and seem magically to create what he desires. His way of knowing embraces a wider sphere than logical and conscious thoughts. He trusts his imagination to work on another level and enunciates the "secret syllables" that flower "like seeds upon my tongue":

I have only to name the flowers, without even knowing what they look like, the colour, the configuration, the number of petals, and they burst into bud, they unfold, they spring open, they spread their fragrance in my mind, opening out of the secret syllables as I place them like seeds upon my tongue and give them breath. I make whole gardens like this. I bring flowers to the driest earth, I am Flora, I am Persephone. I have the trick of it now. It requires only belief. And this, as I might have guessed, is how it is done. We give the gods a name and they quicken within us . . . so it is that the beings we are in the process of becoming will be drawn out of us. We have only to find the names and let the illumination of their presence fill us. Beginning, as always, with what is simple. /

[mark for new paragraph] Poppy, poppy, you have saved me, you have remade the earth for me. I know now how to work the spring.

The choice of verbs with plosive and sibilant sounds such as “burst”, “unfold”, “spring”, “spread”, “opening”, “quicken”, “saved” and “transformed” suggest the alert perceptions in Ovid’s mind. A poetic of fertile energy that changes things from within is favoured as the drafts proceed. Traditional images from pastoral poetry, such as flowers, idealised landscapes, harmonious relationships between human and non-human domains, further inform the narrative. In choosing to represent an encounter of a poet and a flower as an emotionally-charged event, Malouf gives his work a clear literary intertextuality.<sup>49</sup>

The passage on FPF page 5 offers a re-created sense of self-in-the-world for Ovid and can be related to Julia Kristeva’s concept of the “thetic” which is theorized as “that crucial place on the basis of which the human being constitutes himself as signifying and/or social” and which is also “the very place textual experience aims towards”.<sup>50</sup> By focusing on the way Ovid’s poetic ruptures the boundaries of his established way of signifying through language, Malouf imagines the Roman poet becoming open to what Kristeva terms a “textual experience [which] represents one of the most daring explorations the subject can allow himself, one that delves into his constitutive process”.<sup>51</sup> Such a process assumes both the semiotic drives and the symbolic, to make further reference to Kristeva’s terms, where “the text offers itself as the dialectic of two heterogeneous operations that are ... preconditions for each other”.<sup>52</sup> The text assumes within its symbolic signifying process a possible semiotic *chora*

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<sup>49</sup> Richard Tallis discusses the way previous writing determines what is “worthy of *literary* notice [Tallis’ italics], even what is noticeable and hence writable ... even in the selection of empirical data”, Richard Tallis, *Not Saussure: A Critique of Post-Saussurean Literary Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 28.

<sup>50</sup> Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 67.

<sup>51</sup> Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 67.

<sup>52</sup> Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 66.

functioning before meaning or despite it. On FPF page 8 Malouf seems to represent the conscious and subconscious semiotic drives as emerging “out of my head, out of sleep, a backward process of the seeds not giving sleep but blowing out of it to germinate again”. In the draft version on FPF page 5 the notion of sleep has been removed and the poppy seed is represented as having “blown in, and taken root”. The drives are now associated with an unidentified wind-like force that brings the seeds

From across the sea, carried high up o/in [correction over-typed] waves of luminous dust, and deposited here among us. Or carried in the entrails of some bird, a swallow perhaps, on its way north, and growing out of the bird’s casual droppings as it passed.<sup>53</sup>

In the passage there is a strong drawing from the semiotic and also a counter-asserting against the force of unsignifying with which Ovid feels he contends in trying to ascribe meaning to his exile. The shapeless “dust” carrying the seed is also “luminous” and the vehicle of potential signification. It is both a natural and a symbolic energy. The passage enacts the dismantling of the symbolic as Ovid laments the “original bleakness” (first mentioned on FPF page 4) to which he has been condemned and the re-making of the symbolic in the very same text as he re-imagines his poetic through the revelation of the scarlet poppy. Malouf positions Ovid’s poetic as hovering over the hypothetical site where language binds signifier and sign (in Saussure’s terms) or a dynamic intervenes to unsettle, unbind or re-shape those potential associations. In terms of the model proposed as “Modes of Poetic Learning” (Figure 2), this may be related to the place where apprehensions (senses, feelings, intuitions) are assimilated and transformed as the subject reflects on experience and finds idea-images and feeling-values emerging in the mind. Malouf, unlike Saussure, asserts an intrinsic relationship in Ovid’s poetic here

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<sup>53</sup> The swallow, a classical symbol of communication between the living and the dead, is removed from the Edwards’ typescript and the published text (*AIL* 32) which both refer to “the entrails of some bird on its way north”. While the changes of detail make the reference more subtle and seem to offer a gesture towards realism, they may be emblematic as in the way light from “last year’s horse droppings” suggest poetic renewal in James Wright’s “Lying in a Hammock ” (see Footnote 38). Mandelstam, too, uses the image of “the blind swallow” which seeks to sustain the free spirit of Psyche who “descends among shades / Pursuing Persephone through half-transparent leaves”, “*Tristia* (112)”, in *Selected Poems* 33.

between signifier and sign. His strong commitment to this view may be based on his intuition about reactions felt at the point of reflection in the subject's body/ mind, an impression he has Ovid convey in detail to the reader. As a result, the names of objects carry an imaginative presence in Ovid's mind that does not seem arbitrary to him. The language of naming carries the idea-images and feeling-values realised in apprehending the object. In this regard, it is notable that Malouf allows Ovid to keep writing (as he did historically) in his years of exile and imagines him doing so even as he and the Child flee across the grasslands. Writing allows Ovid to comprehend more fully what occurs as he extends (as in Figure 2) his understanding into language by means of his recollections, philosophical thoughts and images. A letter/narrative allows him to test "objectively" the evidence of his perceptions. Here Ovid works to balance the tensions of opposite modes of knowing: the "near" of apprehension/reflection and the "far" of comprehension/conceptual thinking. By doing so at least tentatively, Ovid succeeds in sustaining and enriching, against the odds, his "autobiographical self" (after Damasio). He is not lost in despair. It is perhaps the obscure fear that lies behind all Ovid's complaints about losing his familiar spoken language: that he might also lose the ability and means to write. His writing implements are important objects in the narrative and the Child, too, shows interest in them, suggesting the Child's meta-textual source in the play of the author's imaginative invention.<sup>54</sup> It is Ovid's habitual recourse to his parchment, ink and stylus that gives the Child life in the text.

On FPF pages 4, 4B and 5 additional material from earlier drafts preserved on FPF pages 30 to 32 has been included. This concerns what Malouf terms an "anti-metamorphosis". It is a concept that seems deeply to engage Malouf's imagination, in

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<sup>54</sup> "He shuffles across the floor towards the parchment roll and stares at it ... the ink fascinates him ... [he] takes the stylus in his hand" (*AIL* 80-81).

this and later works,<sup>55</sup> and leads to re-drafting in 1976 and in the period before publication in 1978. On FPF pages 30 to 31, the first extant version, this reads:

In the age of the gods and already in the *new* age of the beasts. A kind of backward metamorphosis, that is the process; and *only* that is what I should be writing now: [unknown word deleted] the anti-metamorphosis! Feeling the gods migrate ~~out of~~ *away from* our lives and the shy beasts creep back. [/ paragraph] I sit at night with the sounds of earth around me, and feel their presence. Not the gods, but the beasts . . . Now it is the beasts themselves who will be gods. That is the new age. Out of that long line of creatures stretching back into the darkest places of our dreams shall come, *ascending* as on a ladder, some new idea of man – man will be induced out of the beasts. That is the theme for ~~the~~ *my* anti-metamorphosis. Gods no longer will take the forms of the creatures. The creatures will be themselves, beaked, furred, feathered, fanged, tusked, hooved, muzzled, scaled, finned – and out of them man will be induced. And out of man, *the* God. [p. 31 commences] Having long since moved out of the age of superstition into the age of empty observance, we must prepare ourselves ~~at last~~ *now* to enter the age of belief.<sup>56</sup>

Some of this material is noticeably edited from Part I of the published text, even though it is included in re-drafted form in the Edwards typescript and in “Pages From a Novel”. This suggests that its exact form and position in the novel continues to be problematic in the author’s mind during later editing. In the published text it appears as an indication of Ovid’s “final metamorphosis” (*AIL* 96) and is expanded to include a wider vision of possible human “wholeness”, finding “our true body as men” (*AIL* 96). This episode comes after Ovid has been learning from the Child and senses “a whole hidden life [that] comes flooding back to consciousness” (*AIL* 95):

Slowly I begin the final metamorphosis. I must drive out my old self and let the universe in. The creatures will come creeping back – not as gods transmogrified, but as themselves. Beaked, fanged, furred, tusked, clawed, hooved, snouted, they will settle in us, re-entering their old lives deep in our consciousness. And after them, the plants, also themselves. Then we shall begin to take back into ourselves the lakes, the rivers, the oceans of the earth, its plains, its forested

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<sup>55</sup> Noticeably in *First Things Last*, for example, “The Switch” (*FTL* 26) and “The Crab Feast” (*FTL* 28).

<sup>56</sup> There are intertextual traces here, perhaps, of Rilke’s “Florence Diary”: “As for ourselves: we are the ancestors of a god and with our deepest solitudes reach forward through the centuries to his very beginning. I feel this with all my heart!” *Diaries of a Young Poet*, 1942, trans. Edward Snow and Michael Winkler (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 78.

crag with their leaps of snow. Then little by little the firmament. The spirit of things will migrate back into us. (*AIL* 96)

To enter “things”, and to have them re-enter human consciousness, are represented as bodily and imaginative imperatives. The phrases “feeling the gods” and “feeling their presence” from FPF page 30 have been removed and the process is stated as visionary fact (“they will settle in us”). Ovid’s feelings are now expressed as beliefs and idea-images that suggest life’s abundance, conveyed by words that blend verbal energy with naming and description such as “forested” and “leaps” in “its forested crags with their leaps of snow”. For Ovid, this “anti-metamorphosis” offers a source of renewal for language, giving words a fresh authenticity from a “whole” self as the speaker moves back towards the world of animals which appears to humanity to have “voice” but no recognisable language and then out again through the same “voices” of creatures towards a lost connection with the human “voice”. “I am to imagine myself into its life,” writes Ovid to the imagined future reader, as he holds a small bird (as on the cover of *Gesture of a Hand*),<sup>57</sup> and the Child instructs him in the bird’s sounds (*AIL* 97). The preposition “into” shows Ovid’s desire to cross the borders of his own physicality, to somehow permeate the inner life of the creature, a desire Malouf explores more fully in the poem sequence “The Crab Feast”.

An earlier draft of the passage showing the “anti-metamorphosis” occurring in more detail on “the ladder of things” is found on FPF page 31 (pages 28 and 29 in the published text). A creature, Malouf has Ovid believe, can “dream itself out of one existence into a new one”.<sup>58</sup> Most of this is brought into FPF pages 4 and 4B in the expanded draft of the poppy passage, to enhance the context of Ovid’s encounter. Thus, a sequence of composing seems to commence on FPF pages 31 and 32, develops on FPF

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<sup>57</sup> See Figure 5, chapter 2.

<sup>58</sup> This idea also occurs in “Twelve Nightpieces (II)”: “the stone / has power to change / into all things takes flight / as the bird it has too long imagined / in its mineral sleep” (*Poems 1975-76*).

pages 4 and 4B, survives into “Pages From a Novel” but is edited and relocated in the published text. It reveals a further aspect of the human-creature vision Malouf keeps working through as he composes, perhaps seeking its most effective representation for a reader who would have a “scientific” understanding of evolution and prehistory. That he was finally dissatisfied with the various drafts is evident, but they are important indicators of his desire to represent a dynamic interworking of the human body and the natural world, in life and not just in death. Passages in later works such as *Remembering Babylon*<sup>59</sup> and *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (1996)<sup>60</sup> build on this foundation. The following extracts show the sequence of the drafts:

When we lie down to sleep we forget our pride and are one in the darkness with them, all those forgotten creatures who sleep in our limbs in our sophisticated members, singing in the dark . . . O man, do not despise us, do not ever forget us, with [sic] are your link with the earth. In sleep we lie down with the creatures and they swarm in our darkness. Awake we dream towards some other, further being, feeling it already strain at the limits of our flesh, as if a membrane should stretch, stretch, and breaking at last some winged creature should flutter forth. We have lost that power of dreaming. When we rediscover it, lying down with the beasts, the process will begin to work again: we shall find our wings. There are laws for all this, but we shall not discover them in our waking, by butting our heads against the limits of our world. We shall discover it in our sleep, walking out through the walls of our mind like ghosts through partitions, since the walls are imaginary only, and it needs only belief, a willingness to fall asleep and let the truth occur, to walk through. And on the other side the beasts will be waiting. Smiling [page 32 commences] if the creatures can be said to smile, to welcome us back to the earth.<sup>61</sup>

When we lie down to sleep we may forget all this, that in the darkness we are one with them, all those forgotten creatures whose lives exist in layers within us, who swarm in our sophisticated members, singing in the dark. But they are alive again in dreams. We lie down with the creatures: with fang, snout, muzzle, streaming in the wind, with wattle, wing, tusk, hoof, paw, shard, beak and the many kinds of mouths with their different cries . . . There are laws for all this. The body knows them. We need only to go with our bodies and let its laws unfold. We need only belief, and falling asleep in our frightened disbelief, our terror of being remade, to let the truth emerge, and walk out at last through our

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<sup>59</sup> See the passage beginning “It pleased her to let her mind drift so far”, *Remembering Babylon* (Sydney: Random House Australia/ Chatto and Windus, 1993), 198-200.

<sup>60</sup> See the passage beginning “At last it was enough. The man simply stood, staring down at his clean feet”, *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996), 199-201.

<sup>61</sup> FPF 31-32.

bodies' wall. On the other side the beasts will be waiting . . . and will welcome us back to earth.<sup>62</sup>

When we lie down to sleep we enter that state of flux in which all this has happened and continues to happen. We are one with them again, all those forgotten creatures we have outgrown, whose lives exist in layers deep within us, who swarm in our sophisticated members, singing in the dark. We lie down with fang, snout, muzzle streaming in the air and the many other kinds of mouths with their different cries and may, in our dreams, fall back in our body's darkness into the life of any one of them. . . . There are laws for all this. The body knows them in its secret places. We have only to go to our bodies, ask, and let the laws unfold. We need only believe. Falling asleep in our frightened disbelief, our terror of being remade, we must let the body lead us through its own walls. On the other side the beasts will be waiting. They will smile . . . and greet us in their own tongue. We will discover the earth.<sup>63</sup>

The influence of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* is suggested in such passages:

Could someone but take them right into his slumber and sleep  
deeply with things, how differently, lightly he'd wander  
back to a different day out of that communal sleep.<sup>64</sup>

While much in these particular early drafts is finally edited from the lead-in to the poppy passage, the ideas are taken up in another form in the published text, linking the concepts of metamorphosis and blending into earth. The passage on pages 146 and 147 represents a moment for Ovid when he expresses in a lyrical tone the desired joining of body and earth. It is the identity between subject and earth that becomes the focus, and the language is precise, as natural philosopher, poet and visionary merge in Ovid's narrative voice:

The earth's warmth under me, as I stretch out at night, is astonishing – when I take a handful of it and smell its extraordinary odors I know suddenly what it is I am composed of, as if the energy that is in this fistful of black soil had suddenly opened, between my body and it, as between it and the grass stalks, some corridor along which our common being flowed. I no longer fear it . . . Between our bodies and the world there is unity and commerce . . . A membrane strains and strains, growing transparent, till the creature who is stirring and waking in there is visible in all its parts, forcing its own envelope of being towards the

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<sup>62</sup> FPF 4.

<sup>63</sup> Malouf, "Pages from a Novel", 42.

<sup>64</sup> "Nähe sie einer ins innige Schlafen und schlief / tief mit den Dingen -: o wie käme er leicht / anders zum anderen Tag, aus der gemeinsamen Tiefe", *Sonnets to Orpheus* II. xiv, trans. J. B. Leishman, 115.

breaking point till with folded wings already secure in the knowledge of flight, and all the motions of the air, it flutters free. The whole earth creaks and strains in the darkness . . . I think sometimes that if I were to listen hard enough I would hear my own body breaking forth in the same way.<sup>65</sup>

Rather than speaking of animals and their changes, Malouf now locates the final metamorphosis in Ovid's own body and mind. Malouf has Ovid "envision" (Figure 2) what is beyond the known, yet able to be imagined. The vision affirms Ovid's being and returns "near" to the body and earth where his learning has commenced. The importance of the draft passages in describing this process points to the energy of the inverted "chain of being" metaphor underlying the development of this work. Its mechanism is a facet of mind-dream linked to the physical body and desire. It derives from the human capacity for imaginative vision: to "dream" in sleep or reverie what it wants deeply. In this regard Malouf seems to discard earlier draft passages that located Ovid's search for "hidden" knowledge in the cults of ancient times and their religious systems. FPF page 29 has Ovid questing elsewhere:

I have spoken with astrologers and magicians of many kinds; Rome is full of them, men from Egypt, priests of the goddess Isis, who know ~~how to have~~ passwords that will make great stones swing sideways and shift to the merest piping of a flute; priests from Eleusis, priests of Dionysus, and strange old grey-bearded women from the women's places, who speak out of the knowledge of women and gods older than the male gods we worship – and savage men, shamans, from far in the north beyond the Danube<sup>66</sup>

Ovid is given a vision that brings together the created world, a vision appropriate to the mind of a poet two thousand years ago, especially one steeped in the mythologies and legends of classical Greece. However, it also offers a challenge to the reader at the

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<sup>65</sup> Ponge figures bodily change as "Your hastening towards happiness" in "The Metamorphosis" (1944): "You can twist at the foot of stems / The elastic of your heart / It is not as a caterpillar / That you will know the flowers / When with more than a sign is announced / Your hastening towards happiness . . . / He shudders and in one bound / Rejoins the butterflies" (*Things* 21). In the last lines of James Wright's poem "A Blessing" the subject realizes suddenly that "if I stepped out of my body I would break / into blossom", Berg and Mezey, 277.

<sup>66</sup> The River Danube north of Tomis is figured as a significant boundary in the landscape of the novel. It is mentioned often by the historical Ovid in *Tristia* ("I only to the Danube's sevenfold delta, Crushed by Callisto's icy pole am banned" Book 2, lines 191- 2). In *An Imaginary Life*, Ovid uses its Greek name

time of its publication in the late twentieth century when difficult tensions were felt between human achievements in science, medicine and space travel and the high vulnerability of this “god-like” species to extinction by its own hand through the use of nuclear weapons.

Some of these tensions in western societies are enunciated in the American publication *Whole Earth Catalog* [sic] which commenced publication in 1968 and featured on its first cover a photograph of Earth taken from an orbiting craft during the Gemini space mission. This was a new and engaging visual image for many readers and expressed the *Catalog*'s advocacy of a return to individual empowerment, using a farming/crafting metaphor of accessing tools and encouraging “holistic” approaches to living. “We are as gods and might as well get used to it,” writes the founding editor, Stewart Brand. His words were a response to British anthropologist Edmund Leach's *A Runaway World?* published in 1968 and based on the BBC Reith Lectures of 1967. The series was broadcast while Malouf was still living in England and may have attracted his attention, although this has not been confirmed. Leach writes:

Men have become like gods. Isn't it about time we understood our divinity? Science offers us total mastery over our environment and over our destiny, yet instead of rejoicing we feel deeply afraid. Why should this be? How might these fears be resolved? By participating in history instead of standing by to watch we shall at least be able to enjoy the present. The cult of scientific detachment and the orderly fragmented way of living that goes with it, serve only to isolate the human individual from his environment and his neighbours – they reduce him to a lonely, impotent and terrified observer of a runaway world. A more positive attitude to change will not mean that you will always feel secure, it will just give you a sense of purpose.<sup>67</sup>

Leach advocates moving from “detachment” to participation, an attitude in sympathy with Ovid's change to a more engaged imaginative interaction with his surroundings in *An Imaginary Life*. More photographs looking back to Earth from the Apollo moon

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<sup>67</sup>“Ister” (*AIL* 136), invoking a mythological frame of reference. In the first century AD it was named Danuvius and was the patrolled boundary of that region of the Roman domain.

missions, such as the famous “Earth Rise” in 1969, and the internationally televised first landing on the Moon in July that year, provided memorable vistas of the physical “wholeness” of the planet and also its relatively small size and vulnerability in the vastness of space. Earth as the habitat of the subject blended with the perception of Earth as object in a way not before possible for the human eye. The Viking mission to the planet Mars yielded startling views in July 1976 of its desert-like surface. The canals and oceans once forecast did not appear in the scientific evidence gained. That Malouf was interested in these discoveries is evident in the poem “The Gift, Another Life” which envisions a time when life on Earth may end and humans must travel to other planets to survive. In the 1974 version the poem speaks of:

bare cold worlds we shall  
inhabit when our world snuffs out.  
But later. Light-years away their lavas  
glow, their oceans flash. (*Neighbours* 65)

Although Mars is not mentioned and is obviously not “light-years away”, a change is made for the second edition, published in 1980. Here the phrase “their oceans flash” becomes “their deserts flash” (*Neighbours* 80 65).

With no evidence of recognisable life forms found on the moon or other planets, the definition of “life” was considered more closely in the 1970s by scientists who began to include in its range of meaning the most microscopic organisms in the most hostile environments that could be found on Earth. A new search for extreme life forms in places formerly seen as uninhabited commenced, among the frozen rocks of the high mountain ranges in Antarctica, for instance, and in the ocean depths where tiny life forms were discovered in volcanic thermal currents. The origins of terrestrial life forms, their development and future, including the human species, were the source of fresh speculation, as the success of a publication such as *Whole Earth Catalog* suggests.

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<sup>67</sup> Edmund Leach, *A Runaway World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968) quoted in the editorial by Stewart Brand, “We are as gods”, *30th Anniversary Celebration Whole Earth Catalog* (San Rafael,

In this context, Ovid's initial lament about "the desolateness of this place" (*AII* 28) and "earth ... in its original bleakness" (*AII* 28) changes as Malouf has him invert the traditional "chain of being" to imagine "the gods" emerging from elementary life forms. Opposite terms such as "barren" and "fertile" were being re-framed scientifically in the 1970s and Malouf's re-positioning of these concepts in *An Imaginary Life* not only suggests a perspective influenced by Australia's settler history but a wider planetary view. He offers through fiction a radical concept of change working from within the adaptive learning potential of the human species in conjunction with a re-discovered affinity with all life forms. Malouf wrote about this a little later in *12*

*Edmondstone Street* where he describes his experience in India:

The animals are everywhere, either as companions in labour or as beasts left free to wander in their own lives, but always as creatures who belong to a single creation that has not yet been culled and cowed and simplified in the interests of a dominant species. It is easy to see here how one might develop an attitude of non-violence towards the creatures out of a belief that the same spirit of energy plays up and down from the lowest forms of life to the most complex and refined. (*Edmondstone* 121)

Malouf's vision is not based on existing social or political contexts, although he recognises both as expressions of what humanity has brought forth to date in various cultures. His assertion, through Ovid's fictional experience, is that cultural and physical contexts in which humans live on a planetary basis are constantly being transformed from within and without, often in ways that are unrecognized and linked to fundamental life forms.

Although space missions to investigate Mars, Jupiter and other planets in the late twentieth century showed scientists the need for broader understanding of life forms, the concept of fertility was still most closely linked in the general reader's thinking to producing off-spring and cultivating the soil. In Australia, in particular, the fragile nature of the soil and natural environment received increasing attention from the 1970s

onward. There was greater awareness of how the land had supported indigenous people over the millenia and the work of poet and conservationist Judith Wright – to name one among many – received greater appreciation. Rodney Hall’s selection of poems and paintings by contemporaries in *Australian Aware* (1975) includes Malouf’s “Asphodel”, as well as work by other poets such as Robert Adamson, John Tranter, Jennifer Maiden, Bruce Beaver, Michael Dransfield and Roger McDonald. Paintings by Ian Fairweather, Charles Blackman, John Olson, John Passmore, Brett Whiteley and Fred Williams, among other artists, show the influence of Australian and international art movements in representing complex understandings of self and place. James Gleeson’s “After the Fall”, particularly, evokes the conflicts of body, mind and belief in a desert-like surrealist landscape. Familiar objects are re-visited in a number of poems to discern their significance for the subject and, by implication, the society. Rhyll McMaster, for instance, makes the water tank an occasion for poetry, giving to its quotidian practicality mysterious origins linked to the moon’s apparent emptiness:

Travelling,  
 where darkness hauls the world  
 back under ground,  
 we pass a solid water tank;  
 squatting on wooden stumps  
 its corrugations gleam the dull combusting silver  
 of elephant hide.

Summer nights breed tanks  
 and a belief that the moon  
 was made from a tank smashed into sky passage,  
 empty and dank, corroded by lichens<sup>68</sup>

The “poppy passage” can be placed in this wider context as a catalyst of transformation of the quotidian in an Australian writer’s awareness. As the drafts show, the dramatic sequence conveys in an increasingly complex way the importance of visual and sense-related images that objectify inner vision, of creativity based on bodily

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<sup>68</sup> Rhyll McMaster, “Tanks”, quoted in *Australians Aware*, ed. Rodney Hall (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1975), 58.

sensations, emotions and experience, as well as reconciling concepts and beliefs about the human body, the earth, animals and natural objects.

This blending of personal feelings, subjective and objective discourses and narrated events suggests the importance of the letter form in Malouf's initial composing. It gives freer access to modes of thinking that are intuitive, while still asserting the crucial rational functions of language, allowing the "imagined" and the "real" to blend. The reader, too, is encouraged to reflect on the ways experience is interpreted, not only through various cultural, literary and historical referents, but also through the diverse working of the mind itself as it forms consciousness and language.

The working title of the novel, *Letter from Pontus*, can be considered in this context. As far as the author was concerned, this was the work's title, following Ovid's *Epistulae ex Ponto*, until the very last days of editing in New York. In November 1977 Braziller requested a new title and gave Malouf a list of a dozen from which to choose. In an urgent telegram he was asked to reply by telephone that same night; he rejected all the suggested titles. Malouf recalls that he chose

the present one quite literally out of the blue on the telephone. It came, pretty much as the book had, out of nowhere. I've always been astonished by the way commentators have taken it as essential – as if it had been there from the beginning and the whole book had been, in a way, an elaboration of what it suggests.<sup>69</sup>

To consider the initial drafts as working to create a fictional letter directs more attention to the dramatic voice of the narrator, his fictional representation and the way his tone of voice is established. This balances consideration of the abstraction evident in the suggestion of "an imaginary life" and the pattern of concepts underlying it.<sup>70</sup> The letter

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<sup>69</sup> Malouf, Letter to the author, 29 November 2001 (the telegram from Braziller, dated 29 November 1977, can be found in UQFL 163/C/I-6).

<sup>70</sup> For example, Bill Ashcroft comments that "The title ... seems to point inevitably to Lacan" and argues that Ovid is "going back beyond the symbolic order . . . to the imaginary phase of being", Ashcroft, 54-56. While these terms are certainly useful, Ovid may be read as wanting both "symbolic" and "imaginary" to work together, ideally, in the adult mind so that both ways of knowing influence his understanding. Rilke's poem "Imaginary Career" [*Imaginärer Lebenslauf*] may be a background

communicates particular experiences and their emotional impact on Ovid. The text also includes his more philosophical thoughts and reflections on what occurs. He uses the letter to explore his thinking on the order of nature and society, and to wonder and guess at the future. It allows Ovid some semblance of the conversation he is denied by his exile.<sup>71</sup> By asserting the presence of a future audience and writing, he is pushing back in defiance against the supposed silence into which those more politically powerful have exiled him. He may be exiled from familiar speech, but not from writing itself. The poet's letter, in this view, is an act of resistance and redress, an assertion of identity against threatened extinction. The changes from draft to draft show Malouf working to extend the scope of Ovid's consciousness so that the reader is offered a more intriguing subjectivity with which to engage. There is an appeal to the reader's curiosity in the notion of a long-lost letter and an invitation to intimacy between narrator and reader greater than that suggested by the rhetorical style of its historical precedent. The *Epistulae ex Ponto* are addressed to named individuals who might promote Ovid's cause to those in authority.<sup>72</sup> Malouf's Ovid, in contrast, addresses "the unknown friend" of the future and asks simply, "Have I survived?" (*AIL* 18-19)

Reading strategies for *An Imaginary Life* might take more account of the way the heightened mood of the "poppy" passage is echoed in the final scenes of the novel,

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influence for Malouf in 1976. The poem is related to Ovid's situation: "At first a childhood limitless, and free / of any goals. Ah sweet unconsciousness / ... And now in vast, cold, empty space, alone. / Yet hidden deep within the grown-up heart, / a longing for the first world, the ancient one ... / Then, from His place of ambush, God leapt out" (*Selected Poetry* 259).

<sup>71</sup> Fictional letters between Laura and Voss are a feature of Malouf's libretto based on Patrick White's *Voss*, one of the projects he worked on from 1978 to 1980. See Malouf's account, "The Making of *Voss* and the Libretto", *Voss, Opera in Two Acts* by Richard Meale, Program, including the libretto, ed. Helen Wheeler (Sydney: Australian Opera, 1986), n. pag.

<sup>72</sup> The *Epistulae* pleaded Ovid's case for a return from exile or removal to a less distant location. See Betty Rose Nagle, *The Poetics of Exile: Program and Polemic in the Tristia and Epistulae ex Ponto of Ovid* (Brussels: Collection Latomus, 1980). Malouf has acknowledged Ovid's *Tristia* for his picture of Tomis and *Fasti* for details of the Parilia festival (Afterword 153). The contrast between the Ovid of *Tristia* and Malouf's Ovid who is finally "immeasurably, unbearably happy" (*AIL* 152) could not be greater. In *Tristia* V.2 (lines 7-10) Ovid writes: "But still my mind lies sick, by years not strengthened,

suggesting the importance of “feeling-states” in the pattern of the work. From early in the writing process, Malouf envisaged that Ovid’s change in awareness would be carried beyond exile, even past the village into grasslands beyond the frozen River Ister. As the flower is a natural object without “voice” which becomes a focus for language and the poet’s imaginative transformation, so the Child who has no human speech, beyond initial sounds and imitated words (*AIL* 97), becomes Ovid’s final companion and guide towards the “sighing grasslands that are silence”.

Comparing, for example, pages 28 to 33 and pages 141 to 43, the reader might also consider the view that the drafts of the “poppy” passage suggest a fundamental image-forming tendency sustained with increasing complexity throughout the text. This tendency works to represent Ovid’s interior perceptions and consciousness as external “realities” (objects and experiences) that appear to validate the interior world of the character, giving his poetic language the tone of a “natural” voice. The interweaving of inner and outer worlds established in the early drafts of the “poppy” passage draws on the musical rhythms and sounds of language so that the narrator’s voice conveys both subjective impression and objective “realities”. The text is continually evoking a dynamic inter-relationship between inner and outer perceptions that suggests a process of meaning (as in Figure 2) being constantly formed and extended in the mind, allowing the fabric of the text to embody its own ideal: mind and world have a “unity and a commerce” like that of the physical body and the earth (*AIL* 147). It seems a cyclical process that is only ever complete for a moment before it moves on to its next transformation, a “momentary circle” (after Malouf’s comments on the figures he discerns in Ruben’s painting). The potential limitation of this approach is that its own force of introverted feeling (to use Jung’s term) may make the experience less than

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sensations that I felt before remain. The wounds I thought would close in their due season just as if freshly made still give me pain”, trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 93.

credible to the reader. It may exceed its own terms of balance and seem solipsistic or excessively fanciful. It needs to be anchored, if possible, in sensory awareness a reader can apprehend through the refracting prism of imagination.

In this regard, it is helpful to recall that Ovid speaks in Part I of an “illumination [that] fills us” rather than a “transcendence”, a term often used in critical discussion of Malouf’s poetry and prose.<sup>73</sup> A term such as “illumination” or “brightness” is preferred in this study as it is based on the concept of the unified perception of the subject’s body and mind, representing diverse ways of knowing and imagining his works seek to evoke. Rather than a mystical or transcendental “otherness” that leaves the body behind, “illumination” suggests the shared “commerce” of light Ovid senses between mind, body and earth. It celebrates presence rather than absence. His body and physical apprehension of the world, together with his intuitions, emotions and feelings achieve greater integration and “wholeness”. That these aspects are significant to Malouf in an autobiographical sense is evident from the answer he gives to a question at a “Writer’s Choice Evening” held under the auspices of the Centre for Continuing Education, the University of Sydney, and published in the collection *Writers in Action* in 1990. When asked, “When did you know you wanted to be a writer?” Malouf replies in the following way:

I don’t understand what, for me, the relationship is between objects and words or my own sensual feelings about things and words . . . There are writers you see for whom words are just tools – they’re serviceable objects for saying something; and then there is another kind of writing which is an attempt to create the world *through* [Malouf’s emphasis] the words. The writer does that for his own sake, but it is also done for the reader and the reader feels it. That means that for some of us a particular word in referring to an object has the real, sensual, tactile, voluminous quality of the object. Once again, we get back to the body. I would say that what I am doing when I am writing is shifting my body around, letting it

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<sup>73</sup> See Natalie Seger, “Images of Transcendence: The Poetry of David Malouf”. Seger recognizes that any notion of “transcendence” in Malouf’s poetry is “grounded in the body, the present and the world” (146).

travel and explore. That is just what I feel. It is very, very physical. I think that fits into the writing but I can't tell.<sup>74</sup>

In *An Imaginary Life*, Ovid's "illumination" is related not only to the scarlet poppy but to his relationship with the Child. It is appropriate to explore this more fully. The Child's existence is first recognised when his footprints are found by hunters from the village among the tracks of wolves, bear and deer (*AIL* 47).

And among them, astonishingly, though the others seem unsurprised, the prints of a human foot, bare, small, the prints perhaps of a child. The old man nods gravely and explains with signs. It is a child, a boy of ten or so, a wild boy, who lives with the deer. (*AIL* 47)

The adverbial energy of "astonishingly", emphasised by its placement near the beginning of the sentence and highlighted by the slight pauses in reading indicated by enclosing commas, emphasises Ovid's feeling of surprise that is sudden and questioning. As his discovery of the scarlet poppy is unexpected and triggers a new sense of the power of his imagination, so the coming of the Child is quickly embodied, through the choice of language, with poetic resonance. The Child is both "real" (the footprints offer external evidence) and a figure he immediately attempts to conjure with his transformed imagination. Ovid commences with the physical quality of "warmth" as a "feeling" imagined:

Beginning with some warmth I imagine I can feel, I conjure him up, I call him to mind. But this is absurd. The foot must have touched the ground for the merest flash of a second. The child was running, springing along over the leaves. ... I touch one of them again. They seem miraculous. And suddenly, as if my imagination had indeed summoned him up, I see the child, and stranger still, recognize him. ... Did I really see him? Or did I see suddenly, after all these years, the Child who used to be my secret companion at Sulmo, and whose existence I had forgotten? ... I am skeptical but the men believe. (*AIL* 48-49)

Ovid vacillates between belief and doubt, seeking evidence for what he envisions. Then, by the author's hidden conjuring, "inner" and "outer" are made one for Ovid: "I see the

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<sup>74</sup> David Malouf, "12 Edmondstone Street", in *Writers in Action: The Writer's Choice Evenings*, ed. Gerry Turcotte (Sydney: Currency Press, 1990), 60. The importance for Malouf of his own experience of

child". He can believe and is surprised that "the accidental reality" of the child "exceeds my imagining" (*AIL* 50). The language becomes active and lyrical as Ovid imagines the child "running, springing along over the leaves" and touches a leaf to anchor his imagining in his senses. Feeling the tension between "inner" and "outer" perceptions, the "real" and the "imagined", is represented as activating Ovid's poetic mode of mind. Images come up "out of the dark" when he dreams of being

face to face with something that is not myself or of my own imagining,  
something that belongs to another order of being, and which I come out of the  
depths of myself to meet as at the surface of a glass. Is it the child in me? Which  
child? (*AIL* 52)

Beyond the imaginary, but linked to its sources, is "another order of being" accessible through the dream state. The metaphor of reflection, meeting "as at the surface of a glass", also gathers further resonance, traceable through such images as the "tiger" wondering about the face in the "silver ball" in "Footnote for a Bestiary" and found in many poems thereafter, such as the reflections in the river dam in "Stooping to Drink". In the light of his new experiences, Ovid's former poetry now seems to him only "elegant fables", based on "pretty, explainable miracles", compared to the shock of the child's eyes "fixed on me across the open space between the trees" (*AIL* 50).

That Malouf's composing at this point is continuous with the poetic enunciated in his previous work is clear when he has Ovid set a bowl of gruel "at the edge of the fire's circle" to tempt the Child to approach. The object's "actuality" is conveyed through the naming of its parts, using the primitive plosive sounds of "bowl", "gruel" and then similar plosive and fricative consonants in the details of its contents: "mixed grain seeds boiled in brackish water and flavoured with honey". However, the symbolic link with the saucer of milk for the "tiger" and the saucer of sweat for the "messengers"

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the physical basis of consciousness is suggested here. He values his individual way of knowing the world and does not assume that it can be generalized.

(“Bicycle”) now acquires greater resonance in Malouf’s semantics of imagination.<sup>75</sup>

Where the bowl is placed may be read as an emblematic site between fire (suggesting the conscious mind) and darkness (suggesting the unconscious), a meeting place where unpredictable but desired images come “towards” the subject.<sup>76</sup> For Malouf they do not remain silent but take on a form of language that expresses poetic awareness, reaching through careful patterning of words and cadences for the fresh moment of knowing that is “voiced”, the unpredictable sense of a perspective that seems all at once essential, full of possibility and new beginnings. Learning and language become one. He has Ovid engage with “luminous ideas” that emerge from “darkness” in feeling-images. Ovid now dreams he becomes a mirrored circle as a pool of water from which animals and the Child drink and in which their faces are reflected. His fear of changing to ice (“What would happen to my spirit then?”) and of “losing” part of himself as water inside an animal pre-figures the dilemma he feels later when caring for and teaching the Child (*AIL* 62 and 77).<sup>77</sup> He wishes to enter into things yet retain his separate identity.

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<sup>75</sup> In another resonance with the medieval tale of the glass ball to distract the tigress, Malouf has the Child intrigued by a coloured ball that Ovid gives him. The Child chooses to carry the ball with him like “a talisman, his first possession among us” (*AIL* 89). Patrick White’s varied emblem of the ball in his novel *The Aunt’s Story* (1948; rpt., London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1958) is an earlier example of the spherical shape taking on resonance, sometimes signifying the tension between imagination and the actual as in the following passage: “this was something in which they indulged ... to throw to Father the bright, coloured ball. So now [Isadora] laughed and threw it as she moved towards the door, her brown face, her black hair, glistening under a beaver skin”(69). Helen Verity Hewitt discusses White’s frequent use of spherical and mandala-like images and the influence on his work of modernist painters such as Van Gogh, Munch and Klee, as well as Jung’s understanding of the mandala as representing transformation. See Helen Verity Hewitt, *Patrick White, Painter Manqué: Paintings, Painters and Their Influence on His Writing* (Carlton, Victoria: Miegunyah Press, 2002), 66. Verity Hewitt particularly notes Klee’s use of “mandalic spheres around which cohere many odd and apparently unconnected floating shapes, figures and symbols. Such spheres occur throughout *The Aunt’s Story*: a brass filigree ball that the Indians filled with fire, the hawk’s reddish-golden eye, the swollen red moon ... [and] on the evening of the silver paperknife, Ludmilla’s little crystal ball” (22).

<sup>76</sup> Randall discusses the image of the circular in Malouf’s work, regarding Ovid’s hemispherical bowl as the boundary between self and “other”, the community and an outsider. See Don Randall, “Some Further Being”, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 41.1 (2006): 17-32.

<sup>77</sup> Ovid fears he might be “losing hold of my separate and individual soul. ... I might find myself lost out there in the multiplicity of things, and never get back” (*AIL* 96).

When he wakes and finds the actual Child holding the bowl, he feels that “Something ... has passed between us. We have spoken ... In a language beyond tongues” (*AIL* 63). The physical connections made by eating the gruel and handling the bowl have, in Ovid’s view, moved the Child towards comprehending his human identity. On another level, he has accepted Ovid’s offering, stepping across the boundary between interior image and outer “reality” where language emerges from silence. Where the dream sequence of the pool of water enacts Ovid’s identity being taken by the Child, the successful lure of the bowl of gruel allows Ovid to begin taking the Child from his world of immediate apprehensions, to move him toward human society and naming. Ovid’s choices regarding the use of his imagination henceforth become ethical choices involving his care of the Child. The description of grain “that has been sown and gathered and crushed and boiled” (again, plosive and fricative sounds are used to convey human actions of cultivation, with “and” repeated to stress their repetitive nature) is contrasted with the representation of water that falls simply from the Child’s hand in the dream. A gentle, illuminated action is conveyed by the choice of long vowel sounds and speech rhythms as the Child “scoops up a handful, starlight dripping from his fingers in bright flakes” (*AIL* 62-63). The rhyme of “starlight” and “bright”, together with the onomatopoeia and waterdrop-like stresses in the phrase “dripping from his fingers”, invite the reader to notice a poetic mode of expression and to use reading strategies appropriate to it, such as a more gradual pace, alert to the pauses indicated by punctuation, and to interpreting the narrative in terms of analogous patterns of images and actions. That an underlying mode of poetic imagination is at work within the fictional narrative is indicated to the reader at such times, here used to contrast the “natural” and the “cultivated” worlds, an ongoing tension in the novel. In Part V, however, the Child’s provision of food from the grasslands for the exhausted Ovid as

they travel beyond the River Ister brings some resolution in favour of the Child's world (*AIL* 143).

As it was for the figure of the weary traveller in the early poem "In an antique land", what seems over-familiar, predictable and limiting is also redressed by such a poetic. By the mid 1970s Malouf is seeking something much more challenging than novel experiences. He explores the possibility of evoking in language a consciousness that almost escapes its net because he attempts to deal with things that are becoming, rather than already formed in the mind. Ovid has a sense of communicating with the Child who is human but not yet "humanised" by social interaction. The "language beyond tongues" is also a meeting through the visual senses ("our eyes meet") which crosses into consciousness.<sup>78</sup> Moments of apprehension produce a feeling of knowing, but without a clear awareness of language. The experience is represented as a memorable shock to the consciousness of one who has been as concerned with language as Ovid and it is notable that the word "consciousness" occurs more frequently in *An Imaginary Life* than in any of Malouf's earlier works.<sup>79</sup>

Exactly what the Child knows and feels as the narrative progresses is only represented through Ovid's "voice", making him both "real" and "imagined", a balance Malouf favours. How the world appears to the Child is, Ovid surmises, beyond the borders of language. The Child cannot say "I know" but is released by his "ignorance" into ways of knowing the world that Ovid can only imagine. Ovid believes such knowing is deeply one with the natural world, as desired by the child he once was. When it snows at night, for instance, the Child stands still for hours outside, naked in a lyrical "incandescent blueness, neither of night nor of day, a blueness that sings, it is so clear,

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<sup>78</sup> In "Inspirations (II)" (*Poems 1975-76*) such a moment is also represented as the way passionate love may commence, a popular image in western culture.

so pure” (*AIL* 105). It seems a light from somewhere between the diurnal rhythms of waking and sleeping and requires of the author a use of language that seems to blend seamlessly the poetic with Ovid’s speaking voice. It invites the reader who is open to Ovid’s “believing” to share the perception, as if it were experienced at once through the eyes of the narrator and also the Child who physically embraces the coming of snow. The Child appears to experience the snowfall in his body as an ostensive moment, one that discloses being as its primary mode and towards which Ovid’s poetic imagination aspires through the paradox of “speech in silence”. Paul H. Fry offers the view that

ostension by contrast [with logocenter] is that indicative gesture towards reality which precedes and underlies the construction of meaning ... it is deferral of knowledge by the disclosure, as a possibility, that existence can be meaning-free.<sup>80</sup>

Resonating with Malouf’s earlier poem “Snow” is the passage describing the scene as the Child

stands like that, still in the cold, with the light striking up off the snow, for nearly an hour. I am too scared to wake him. Then when the first light flakes begin to fall again, he opens his mouth to them, rubs his face, his shoulders, his torso, then holds his arms out and his head up so that the light falls directly upon them. (*AIL* 105)

The Child stands still, as if time has been suspended, in light refracted upward off the snow and then awakens as light flakes float “downward”. The dialectic of “near” and “far” ways of perceiving is suggested here (Figure 2). It is in the Child’s body/mind that the bright energy from above and below seem to meet, creating in Ovid a sense of wonder as he stands, motionless, observing him. Ovid learns to place high value on this feeling and its source in the momentary meeting of what seems both “near” and “far”,

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<sup>79</sup> Ovid feels the Child has created energies which “break against the edge of my consciousness” in the room he inhabits with him (*AIL* 79). Ovid tries “to precipitate myself into his consciousness of the world, his consciousness of me” but fails to do so (*AIL* 96).

<sup>80</sup> Paul H. Fry, *A Defense of Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 13. Such an unstructured pre-conceptual is regarded as problematic from a deconstructivist viewpoint, after Derrida, but seems closer to Malouf’s approach in *An Imaginary Life*.

evident in Part V as Ovid and the Child journey across the grasslands that are “further from speech” than anything he has known (*AIL* 145).

As they walk, Ovid comes to desire a way of communicating that enhances and goes beyond the social semiotic of language. In the composing of the novel, this was first expressed in a draft passage on page 25 in the Fryer Prologue Folder:

The true language, I know now, is that speech in silence in which we first spoke, the Child and I, in the forest, when I was asleep. It is the language in which I spoke to him in my childhood, and some memory, intangibly there, but not quite audible, of those marvelous conversations, comes to me again at the very edge of sleep, a language my tongue almost rediscovers that would, I know, open the secrets of the universe to me ... when I think now of the language that has been taken from me, from which I have been shut out, it is some earlier and more universal language than our Latin, for all its subtleties. Latin is a language of marvelous distinctions, every ending divides. The language I am speaking of now is a language of unity, whose every syllable is a sign of reconciliation. We knew that language once. I spoke it in my childhood. We must discover it again.

The passage appears in the published text in Part III on pages 97 to 98. Its presence among material in the Fryer Prologue Folder suggests that the idea of a different kind of language was one of the key analogies that developed through the initial insight of the scarlet poppy passage.<sup>81</sup> The power of spoken language that “makes” the world conceptually but divides it in so doing is contrasted with an idealised “language of silence” that reconciles both humans and other species at a deeper level. Ovid is frustrated that “my knowing that it is sky, that the stars have names and a history, prevents my being the sky” (*AIL* 96). Ovid’s desire to experience a timeless sense of apprehending the world directly is foiled by the instantaneous movement of his mind towards knowing as concept, the cognitive achievement of human reason. Of course, there is a problem in differentiating such a “speech in silence” using the constructs of

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<sup>81</sup> Malouf has said, “I think almost entirely by analogy, or through metaphor or something, and I’m not always conscious of what abstract thought the analogy is hitting off”, “Interview by Tom Shapcott”, 30.

spoken and written language.<sup>82</sup> Its enunciation is also its limitation. It is a challenge the author must face to make Ovid's vision accessible. The reader should not only understand it conceptually but also enter into it imaginatively.

The published passage differs from FPF page 25 in the choice of a number of words, rather than in overall intent which remains firm in each version. (The words in the published text are italicized.) "Spoke" becomes "*communicated*" (line 1 in the above passage) and "in which I spoke to him" becomes "*I used with him*" (line 2). That the language is not at the level of everyday audible speech is given greater emphasis: "those" is changed to "*our* marvelous conversations" (line 4) to heighten the personal nature of the communication. Also, "open" becomes "*reveal* the secrets of the universe" (line 5), suggesting the hidden nature of what is to be discovered. The sentence "*When I think of my exile now it is from the universe*" is added on page 98 to give the widest connotation to the notion of being separated from what exists. It, in turn, is suggestive of the reconciliation expressed by the final words of the novel "I am there." The phrase "language that has been taken from me" is replaced by "*tongue that has been taken away from me*" (line 6). The metonymy gives more emphasis to the physical basis of speech. This is also related to a preceding passage in which the Child attempts to use Ovid's stylus and ink:

the eyes fixed, the tongue pointed at the corner of the mouth and moving with each gesture of the hand ... Is that perhaps where speech begins? In that need of the tongue to be active in the world, like a hand among objects, grasping, pushing, shaping, remaking? (*AIL* 81)

The repetitive phrase "from which I have been shut out" on FPF page 25 is removed (line 7). This might also be superfluous as in Parts I and II Ovid has been shown to have been partly his own agent of separation from a physically engaged language and imagination: he chose irony, the baroque and clever literary display as his dominant

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<sup>82</sup> In Kristeva's view, "Because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily

poetic “voice”. In line 8, “for all its subtleties” is changed to “*subtle as it undoubtedly is*”, an alteration in the small details typical of what Malouf accomplishes in his work-in-progress. He refines the sound and rhythm of a phrase to give a smoother cadence and sometimes alters the pattern of strong and weak stresses, here ending with the verb “*is*”, positioned to connote the ostensive in the text. The word “marvelous” is removed from line 8 so that the distinctions of Latin are less valued at this point in the final text and the phrase “every ending *defines and divides*” is re-drafted with added words to emphasise the differentiating conceptual base of the language. Ovid is now positioned as moving beyond these distinctions rather than celebrating them. The phrase “*that I am almost speaking*” is added to the final text after “The language I am speaking of now” on line 9. This introduces a subtle distinction between “speaking of” (an explanation of language) and “almost speaking” (a desired personal performance of language as “voice”). The sense of Ovid’s emotions, of his reaching “now” for something just beyond his limits of learning, is introduced by this phrase giving dramatic tone to what might otherwise be an explanation. An inclination to “listen” is important in reading strategies here as it invites close attention akin to listening to a musical performance, to the speaking of poetry and, more intimately, to Ovid’s voice speaking quietly in the ear.

In the narrative, the Child never actually speaks except for one “ordinary” word of “no significance” uttered from sleep in his illness (*AIL* 118). The villagers’ reaction to the Child’s first act of speaking a recognisable word ironically warns Ovid that he and the Child must leave the village and human society. It is a dramatic catalyst and takes the Child away from socialisation rather than towards it. The villagers interpret the word the Child has spoken as a sign that he has “snatched away another soul. His suddenly speaking out like that, a word in their own language, proves it” (*AIL* 118). Ovid has been teaching the Child “to put sounds together and make words such as men use” but these

are never represented as direct speech in the text (*AIL* 97). It is a reminder that the Child, ironically, has a life only in the language of the novel, and of the blended nature of a work drawing on limited historical records as well as fiction. The alterity of such a Child would be problematic in most human societies as he seems unable to successfully enter the social realm. Malouf locates the Child's awareness at a limit where human speech begins or is physically lost either because of a lack of verbal modelling or because of cerebral incapacity in some form. A society within the Roman jurisdiction such as Tomis and the trading areas of Pontus in the first century could be regarded as centres of diverse languages in which the Child would be marginalised. The human speech mechanism itself might even be regarded as "imperial" in this sense, particularly in its dominant relation to what neurological research by the 1970s was suggesting are the less verbally articulate regions of the brain.

In the novel, "speech in silence" can occur as communication between people and also as a mode of access for the human to project towards the non-human. Both are desired experiences that draw Ovid deeply toward the Child because he is positioned to represent both possibilities. The Child is human and may learn human ways and can communicate easily with the natural world:

Once or twice in the night I wake to find the Child sitting stark upright beside me, listening. I hear nothing, but know what it is. There are wolves close by. When one of them approaches he rises softly, stands tall in the dark, and makes little growling sounds in his throat, and I see the wolf's eyes flash greenish as it lopes away. (*AIL* 144)

To experience the "speech in silence", Ovid believes, will reveal something crucial in human identity that has been lost or forgotten by the effects of "civilization", of which Ovid regards himself a quintessential representative. He is searching for a mode of apprehension prior to socialisation, although, paradoxically, that is just what Ovid has been trying to take from the Child in teaching him sounds of human speech. It is ironic that Ovid can only have such a desire because his own socialisation has created a clear

sense of self. Only one who has achieved identity can imagine exceeding its boundaries. Such concepts derive from a language-formed mind and present a dilemma for Ovid.

When Ovid makes “small bird cries” at the Child’s leading he senses he is moving towards “speech in silence” (*AIL* 97). As the bird’s voice expresses its being in its own species and environment, so the “speech in silence” will more holistically connect humans with themselves and with the natural world. From such silence, it is implied, a different kind of language may be nurtured that is more inclusive and non-hierarchical, a language of reconciliation. When the human voice is quietened and no longer privileged, other kinds of noises and “voices” may be heard as “speech” in their own right. Whether such “voices” would participate in a social semiotic of language is not clear. It is implied, however, that it would involve processes resulting in recognisable meaning.<sup>83</sup>

In Part IV Ovid senses the Child is eager to return to the outdoor lessons in the marshes:

our daily lessons on the swamp, to the birdcalls, to his fluttering attempts to entice out of the organs of his throat the vowels and consonants that have so long been hidden there and which I am helping him to find. He is disappointed when I make him understand we must go on. (*AIL* 134)<sup>84</sup>

A comparison of the way Ovid relates to the Child and Jean Itard’s account of his dealings with Victor of Aveyron is useful here, especially as François Truffaut’s film version, *L’Enfant Sauvage* [The Wild Child] was well-known internationally in the early 1970s.<sup>85</sup> The notable contrast in Dr Itard’s relation to Victor compared to that of Malouf’s Ovid and the Child points to the importance of a quest for the “language of

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<sup>83</sup> Halliday’s model of language as social semiotic was published in 1978, the same year as *An Imaginary Life*. See M.A.K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978).

<sup>84</sup> The choice for personal learning of a swampland setting full of birdlife is explored more fully in *Fly Away Peter* and may relate to Malouf’s memories of the Valley of the Lagoons in the 1950s.

<sup>85</sup> François Truffaut, director, *L’Enfant Sauvage* [The Wild Child] (Films du Carrosse, 1969; English version 1970; Culver City, CA: MGM/United Artists, 1991, video).

silence” in the overall patterning of Malouf’s novel. Compared with the lack of success that Itard experienced in trying to teach language to the wild boy, it is implied that a different approach to teaching, one more in harmony with the Child’s way of learning, may have been more successful in its outcomes or at least more enjoyable to both Child and teacher.<sup>86</sup> Itard reports a lack of success in his efforts to have Victor learn to speak by imitating human sounds. Victor learns to imitate partly the sounds for *eau* (water) and *lait* (milk) in French but does not finally master any conversation. Itard, a renowned figure in nineteenth century medicine and education of the deaf, is disheartened by Victor’s lack of progress, despite Itard’s dedication and persistence:

If I had wished to publish only successful experiments, I should have suppressed this fourth section from my work, as well the means which I made use of in order to accomplish my object, as well as the little advantage which I derived from them. (116)

However, he does observe in Victor’s reactions another mode of expression which he named “the language of action in all its simplicity; that primitive language of the human species, originally employed in the infancy of society, before the labour of many ages had arranged and established the system of speech” (126). Five years later in his “Report on Progress, 1806”, Itard notes that Victor, when first captured, appeared to be “a stranger to the reflective process which is the mainspring of our ideas, he fixed his attention on no single object, because no single object made any durable impression on his mind” (142). Victor also gradually gained a greater sense of reflection, in his view, and yet still felt “the same passion for the countryside, the same ecstasy at the sight of moonlight and a snow-covered field, the same transport of delight at the sound of storm wind” (172). Eventually, he learned to become responsive to “gratitude and friendship

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<sup>86</sup> See Itard’s initial 1799 report “The Wild Boy of Aveyron: The First Developments, Section IV” in Jean Itard, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron* (London: NLB, 1972), 116 (published in the same volume with Lucien Malson, *Wolf Children*). Subsequent page references are placed in the text.

... and seems to enjoy being useful”, while remaining basically self-focused in his behavior (175).

The evidence from Itard’s observations suggests the particular ways in which Malouf chooses to alter his own creation of the Wild Child in *An Imaginary Life* from that presented by Itard’s historical report which he had studied. That report was important nonetheless for suggesting certain details that are used in the text, for example the effects of thunder, snow and moonlight on the Child. These aspects are also evident when comparing Malouf’s depiction of the Child with Truffaut’s film version. In *An Imaginary Life* the Child is shown to be considerate of the ailing Ovid in Part V in a way not expected from Itard’s account of Victor’s behaviour. The Child’s alertness to his surroundings and his ability to focus, for example, on the “useless pebbles” in the final moments of Part V suggest a degree of intellectual functioning greater than Victor exhibited, although Itard did not observe Victor’s behaviour which had allowed him to survive in the forest, apparently, for many years (*AIL* 135). The Child also teaches Ovid about the natural world, something not considered by the adults designing Victor’s education at the turn of the nineteenth century. This significant difference in attitude is depicted in a scene in the film where the medical specialists Itard and Pinel watch the child outside in the rain, enjoying the storm and taking rainwater into his open mouth. Neither man has any thought that he might learn something from Victor. They fear he will never be brought into “normal” society unless he is educated into their world. Pinel observes, “He sees without looking. We’ll teach him to look and listen”.<sup>87</sup> By contrast, Ovid seeks a way into the Child’s experience, even if this means trying to communicate

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<sup>87</sup>François Truffaut, *The Wild Child*, trans. Linda Lewin and Christine Lemary (New York: Washington Square Press, 1973), 64-65. Truffaut used a diary form when composing the film script with Jean Gruault to try to accommodate the different text forms Itard’s writing suggested. He writes, “To make a scenario from this material [Itard’s reports] we imagined ... Dr Itard had kept a diary. This would enable us to give the story a narrative flow and preserve the author’s style with its scientific and philosophical turns, its moralistic and humanistic sides, its homely passages and its lyrical flights” (13). Malouf’s choice of the letter may also reflect some influence of Itard’s style in dealing with the complex nature of his response to Victor of Aveyron.

without language. Itard's lessons are indoors in a room set up as a traditional classroom. He gradually restricts Victor's leisure time and his walks outside in order to focus on teaching him language. This causes great strain for Victor, as the housekeeper notices in her maternal attitude towards the boy. Although sympathetic and supportive of Victor, Itard is always frustrated that the lack of human language removes the possibility of a satisfactory relationship between them. He uses touch and hand signs as Victor does but only as basic communication. Itard lacks Ovid's desire more fully to explore non-verbal communication with the Child so he might come to know how the Child experiences the world and then reflect on his own way of perceiving.<sup>88</sup>

By contrast in *An Imaginary Life*, Ovid recognises the limited scope of spoken language in communicating with the Child but continues to work with verbal and non-verbal means to reach the Child and extend his consciousness, as a poet with a lifetime of "adventuring" in and through language might persist in doing:

I am the last poet of our age, existing still, working still, even out here beyond the limits of our speech, even in silence. And if other old men must be willing, at the end, to push off their deathbed and adventure out into the unknown, how much more willing must that man be whose whole life has been just such a daily exercise of adventuring, even in the stillness of one's own garden? I mean, the poet. (*AIL* 136)

In Part V the Child is represented as having made enough progress in socialisation to seem closer emotionally to Ovid, although this is Ovid's understanding and has no other validation. The Child "seems closer now than I ever thought possible" and has "this tender kinship with men that is visible now in every moment of his concern for me" (*AIL* 149). However, the Child is never given a personal name by Ovid, as Victor was by Jean Itard, suggesting their "closeness" is still limited and that Ovid remains ambivalent

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<sup>88</sup> Itard finally ceased his efforts to teach Victor who continued to reside with the housekeeper Madame Guerin on the outskirts of Paris. Victor never learned to speak but lived quietly and performed simple tasks. He died when he was about forty years old. Pinel retained the view that Victor was retarded in some way and incapable of learning, although there was no clear evidence of this. Itard held the view that his early isolation had deprived him of necessary socialisation leading to speech.

about the identity of the Child. To his mind, the Child may have moved even beyond naming. He may be as he seems, or a “god”, or part of Ovid himself, bringing his youth and old age together, a figure from “the dark” around the mind’s creative fire.

Yet the Child’s social progress is important for the integrity of the conclusion of the work. The reader is guided to accept that the Child had become more self-reflective from his point of capture in Part I. The evidence of this is the Child’s behaviour noticed by Ovid: his agility and gentleness, his ability to focus on natural objects and to appreciate their colours and textures. His own survival is not his only motivation, it is suggested. That he does not learn to speak is not highlighted as a gross deficiency and almost goes unnoticed by the reader. Ovid’s quest is to experience the “speech in silence” and the Child’s lack of human speech is made an asset in the quest rather than a liability.<sup>89</sup> He may be read as a transparent facilitator, a mytho-poetic mentor who is “seen” and is “the means by which one sees” into a fuller consciousness.<sup>90</sup>

In their final days together, an aspect of the “language without tongues” is enunciated in Ovid’s mind:

Wandering along together, wading through the high grasses side by side, is a kind of conversation that needs no tongue, a perfect interchange of perceptions, moods, questions, answers, that is as simple as the weather, is in fact the merest shifting of cloud shadows over a landscape or over the surface of a pool, as thoughts melt out of one mind into another, cloud and shadow, with none of the structure of formal speech. It is like talking to oneself. Like one side of the head passing thoughts across to the other, and knowing in a kind of foreglow, before the thought arrives, what it will be, having already received the shadow of its illumination. (*AIL* 145)

The action of walking, negotiating the terrain together, seems to Ovid a kind of sharing that needs no speech. The rhythms of the initial extended sentence are carefully varied

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<sup>89</sup> This is an alternative view to that put forward by Philip Neilsen in *Imagined Lives*: “Ovid teaches the child to engage the human, cultural aspect of himself by using his imaginative and linguistic faculties. ... in learning human language the boy for the first time becomes human and enters the social world as well”, Neilsen, 57. As argued here, there does not seem to be clear evidence that the Child actually does learn spoken language beyond a few simple sounds, but Ovid certainly seeks to engage the Child in human socialization.

<sup>90</sup> Hillman, *Re-visioning Psychology*, 121.

by the use of commas to create units of perception that are cumulative in their effect, conveying an impression of the subject thinking “aloud” his ideas and feelings to the reader as he walks. The sentence moves from subjective impressions evoked and repeated through the rhythmic half-rhyme of “wandering along together, wading through”, to more precise terms such as “kind of conversation that needs no tongue”. Here the alliteration of “kind” and “conversation”, together with the strong stresses and consonance of “needs no tongue”, creates a tension between form and meaning. Communication is conveyed in crafted patterns of consonants and vowels that draw attention to their “voicing” while invoking an intuitive way of knowing based on the kinesthetic of the body but not relying on vocalization in the “structure of formal speech”. Instead, such communication is, metaphorically, an indefinable light, “a kind of foreglow”, a “shifting of cloud shadows”. As the paragraph develops, Malouf introduces more objective terms such as “mind”, “structure”, “formal speech”, “head” and “talking” that invite the reader to adjust interpretative strategies from a literary/poetic to a more factual register before moving again to a metaphor that brings together the preceding images. Thoughts are shared. They “melt out of one mind into another”. The verb “melt” denotes a substance dissolving as a result of applied heat and also has a more poetic connotation of warm flowing energy between Ovid and the Child. To Ovid, it feels like a cloud shifting over a pool and “kind of foreglow” of another mind known first by the “the shadow of its illumination”. The “speech in silence” thus blends feelings, concepts and images through Ovid’s “voice”. It reaches for an ideal, yet is celebrated in the net of language. Both seem highly valued by the author despite the obvious compromise involved. If language is Ovid’s boundary, it also gives him a high point on which to stand and view what might lie beyond.

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Ovid's poetic imagination seeks to move his consciousness from what appears "actual" to new possibilities, redressing the limitations of language and giving high value to communication made possible by intuitive, non-verbal perceptions. Malouf's use of the simile "It is like talking to oneself" reminds the reader of Ovid's introverted stance towards experience, his felt pleasure in forming meaning that is first inward in its dominant orientation (after Jung) and then outward in projecting his energy as heightened "illumination" onto the world beyond his body. Experiential learning in a poetic mode is suggested here, as the crafting of imaginative uses of language is made the means by which enlightenment becomes possible. Rather than lingering in "poetic prose", Malouf has Ovid enter an experience subjectively, allowing its images to emerge through reflection and conceptual thinking into the carefully applied crafting of language. Through language his work then reaches beyond perceived limits into "moments" of transformation and celebration. That Malouf turns (and re-turns) to the sensual experience of the mind/body-in-the-world may be an expression of his particular sensibility which shows, even in extreme situations, no desire to leave language entirely behind. To have words meld into the language of music or "a silence approaching music ("At the Ferry") seems the only alternative he will contemplate. The phrase he gives to Ovid, "speech in silence", is an indication of the tentative reconciliation he envisions between the boundary of the "known" and what may lie "beyond".

Malouf's method of linking idea-images to provide subtle validation of Ovid's expanded poetic is also evident in the passage on page 145. It echoes the description just before of evening shadows which "move over the hills, dipping into the hollows and deepening their slopes, which are gentle enough when we come to them" (*AIL* 142). Images from earlier passages are also suggested, for example the "pool of water" evocation in Part II where Ovid feels "softly, the clouds passing through me, their reflections, and once the suddenness of wings" (*AIL* 61). While the image in Part II

belongs to Ovid's dream consciousness, the cloud shadows on page 142 are presented as observed phenomena, as percepts rather than subjective impressions. The idea-image in Part V is required to give authenticity to Ovid's impressions, seeming to arise "naturally" when used again in the passage commencing "wandering along together". The text creates its own memory for the reader of images whose subjective and objective origins intermingle. The reader is invited to recognise the blending of imagining and perceiving through Ovid's "voice", a technique that highlights the value of imagination in enriching his consciousness. The poetic mode informing the "natural" voice adds greater possibility to what seems "actual" and appears to arise effortlessly from the personal nature of the text as letter to a sympathetic reader/listener. Words suggestive of reasoned discussion such as "questions", "answers", "perceptions", "formal speech" are blended with similes such as "simple as the weather". The interweaving of phrases that are sometimes lyrical, sometimes quasi-scientific and at other moments personally idiosyncratic gives a sense of touching boundaries of common speech. Ovid's language is positioned as not quite sufficient to convey what he is experiencing. He draws from many kinds of discourse because none is entirely satisfactory for his purpose. It is his imagination that works restlessly and intentionally to form new ways to communicate.

Ovid does so assuming people of the future will use languages that have evolved beyond those of his time. The future "gods" whom he senses hiding in people and things will comprehend his efforts at extending language because they have a closer relationship with the natural world. It is such an imagined and desired future that Ovid strives to bring into being. The act of creative composing is his gesture on behalf of that future.<sup>91</sup> The "gods" will have learned to name through the things themselves,

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<sup>91</sup> The conclusion of Rilke's "Florence Diary" (April-July 1898) is possibly a background influence here. Rilke writes: "And now in the end, this book's ultimate worth lies in the knowledge of an artistry that is only a path and at last fulfills itself in a single ripe existence. ... every generation sends its tendrils like a chain from god to god. And every god is the entire pastness of a world, its ultimate purpose, its uniform expression, and at the same time the possibility of a new life. How other faraway worlds will

reconciling naming and being, the symbolic and the ostensive.<sup>92</sup> It is an ideal of reconciliation expressed in a passage in the Fryer Prologue Folder as the work develops:

I am to rewrite it all from the beginning, learning the words this time through the things themselves, letting their radiance shine out into me. The new metamorphoses is this: to draw out, slowly, painfully, as it is named, the god that has been hiding from us, the hidden god in things. Slowly, from the bottom up, drawing out of ourselves the world of stones, of plants, of spiders, of rats, of pigs, and on and on till we have drawn out of ourselves the god who is about to be born. That is the poem I have begun to write. I must learn each one's name and make a language.<sup>93</sup>

Ovid's new awareness is conceived in terms of a poetic that allows the "radiance" of things to "shine out into me". His learning becomes identified with enrichment of his poetic mode of mind, his way of "making" and experiencing the world. The prose communicates such learning, taking on some of the qualities of which Malouf writes in his review of A.D. Hope's *New Cratylus* in 1980. While appreciating that prose has been offering writers "the larger possibility" over the past few centuries, Malouf believes:

poetry learned to do what prose cannot: to carry that intense charge of feeling and insight than can be embodied in its peculiar rhythm; to take advantage of the more concentrated attention of its readers, their capacity to jump gaps; to move away from description and the recording of the actual into a demonstration of the way perception itself works or the way the imagination transforms the actual into something other than itself.<sup>94</sup>

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mature towards gods – I do not know. But for us art is the way. ... we are the ancestors of a god and with our deepest solitudes reach forward through the centuries to his very beginning. I feel this with all my heart!" Rilke, *Diaries of a Young Poet*, 78.

<sup>92</sup> In "Elegies of Presence: Malouf, Heidegger and Language" Paul Kavanagh writes of a tension in Malouf's works "between the existing individual in a world of named objects, and an experience of wordless unity with a universe of interdependent animate and inanimate things. This tension remains unresolved and provides, in various forms, the driving narrative of much of Malouf's writing", Kavanagh, 162. It is my view that Malouf's work asserts a possible continuum between "naming" and "being" that is not unresolved in his view, although visionary in its conception. He recognises that consciousness is not dependent on "naming" even though it seems to move into language as its natural human expression. The "wordless" energy of being ("is-ness of things") common to all aspects of life and even within inanimate objects provides for Malouf a basis for a vision of unity. Malouf represents this as an actual consciousness, a "radiance" which "shines out", as in the phrase "letting their radiance shine out into me", FPF 34. To name through a new apprehension of things themselves is imagined by Malouf as a quest for a language of reconciliation.

<sup>93</sup> FPF 34.

<sup>94</sup> David Malouf, "A.D. Hope's *New Cratylus*", *Meanjin* 39.2 (1980): 150-162, reprinted in *The Double Looking Glass: New and Classic Essays on the Poetry of A.D. Hope*, ed. David Brooks (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000), 147-48.

In this last statement Malouf indicates his interest in the phenomenological processes of poetic imagination through demonstrating “the way perception itself works or the way the imagination transforms the actual into something other than itself”. The formation of the image is important to him in this regard, as recurring patterns in his works indicate. To show how an image “approaches” in the poet’s mind, partaking of both “inner” and “outer” worlds as it forms its unique signature, is an important process Malouf features in *An Imaginary Life*. He makes use of the evocation of a poet’s fictional self to discover through the writing the diverse elements that influence his perspectives.<sup>95</sup>

In the same essay, Malouf expresses his interest in “prevailing philosophies of perception” and recognises that poetry can only aspire to go beyond words “too deeply stained with the actual” to reach the purity of music:

For the past two hundred years, the pure condition of music is what all the arts have aspired to. In the case of poetry, with its built in “impurities”, those words that are too deeply stained with the actual to break entirely free, the “aspiration towards” can never be more than an aspiration; but the prevailing philosophies of perception being what they are ...it seems unlikely that we will see a move back to the notion of imitation on which earlier poetry was largely based, or to that firm assurance in the existence of the world “out there”, steady and itself, to be “observed” and “recorded” that made imitation viable.<sup>96</sup>

In a final aspiration towards “speech in silence” created through Ovid’s “voice”, what Malouf has termed “an act of passionate reading” is required. Such an act, in his view, makes a work continue to live in a society and to become part of its shared literary history. It involves imaginative engagement by the reader:

An act of the imagination that is equal to, for all its difference from, the imaginative act of writing. The power of reading lies in our capacity to

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<sup>95</sup> Malouf’s task in the novel may be placed in the context of an ongoing debate in the cognitive sciences about the use of first-person methodologies to study the experience of consciousness. See Francisco Varela and Jonathan Shear, eds, *The View From Within: First-Person Approaches to the Study of Consciousness*, 1-14.

<sup>96</sup> Malouf, “A.D. Hope’s *New Cratylus*”, 149.

enter the world of the book and become a mover in it, to make that world our own.<sup>97</sup>

Ovid approaches his final days with a sense of fate, just as crossing the River Ister, he says, “has always been intended”: “Something deep at the bottom of my mind tells me it is what must be done” (*AIL* 135). It seems there is a higher imperative that orders Ovid’s thoughts and movements to fulfil the potential of the poet’s imagination which has, ironically, flourished in exile, overcoming the limitations of place and Ovid’s familiar habits of perception.<sup>98</sup> The final paradox for Ovid of experiencing life in death seems purposeful in a text whose early drafts have worked to extend and enrich the consciousness of the narrator in the reader’s experience. The poetic imagination has an important role in Malouf’s presentation of Ovid’s final journey, perhaps influenced by Rilke’s letter to Witold Hulewicz in November 1925:

Affirmation of *life-AND-death* turns out to be one in the Elegies ... we are continually overflowing toward those who preceded us, toward our origin, and toward those who seemingly come after us. ... It is our task to imprint this temporary, perishable world into ourselves so deeply, so painfully and passionately, that its essence can rise again, “invisibly”, inside us. We are the bees of the invisible. We wildly collect the honey of the visible, to store it in the great hive of the invisible.<sup>99</sup>

As a poet who now appreciates “the beloved visible and tangible world”, Ovid can move from feeling desolate to feeling hopeful, achieving a final vision of death accepted as part of creation’s cycle, going back into the earth: “From here I ascend, or lower myself,

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<sup>97</sup> David Malouf, “The Making of Literature”, Keynote Address at the Premier’s Literary Awards, Melbourne, 1986, in Tulip, *David Malouf*, 279-80.

<sup>98</sup> In his 1922 lecture “The Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry”, Jung offers the view that “the unborn work in the psyche is a force of nature that achieves its end either with tyrannical might or with the subtle cunning of nature herself, quite regardless of the personal fate of the man who is its vehicle”, *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature, Collected Works*, vol. 15, quoted in Campbell, 313.

<sup>99</sup> Rilke, *Selected Poetry*, 316. In the poem “Preludes”, Malouf includes the following as an image of a writer’s creativity: “Bees fossick gold / where they find it, transmuting / dust into clouds / of froth-pale future forests / that dream in the boughs / of this one”, *FTL* 6. Bees have an emblematic role in a key scene of *Remembering Babylon*. Like the poppy passage this scene is linked to personal transformation of a character through a change of mind in interaction with the physical world, an experience of belief. Here Janet McIvor observes, after being covered, but not stung by bees: “So it had been that that had saved her, the power of her own belief, which could change mere circumstances and make miracles”, *Remembering Babylon* 144.

grain by grain, into the hands of the gods” (*AIL*, 150). It is a positive experience because the earth has become imbued for Ovid with the qualities of “home” rather than those of exile. Ovid imagines his body “pushing at the thin transparent envelope that still contains it, that keeps it from bursting forth into whatever new form it has already conceived itself as being” (*AIL* 148). The final boundary of life is welcomed and a victory announced: “I am immeasurably, unbearably happy. I am three years old. I am six. I am sixty. I am there” (*AIL* 152). Malouf imagines some of the instances of experiential learning which may have informed the poetic that commenced in Ovid’s childhood and sustained his adult life until his final imaginative vision. In defiance of the misery that the historical evidence suggests was Ovid’s in exile, Malouf envisages a journey in which Ovid’s steps “shine”:

Strange to look back on the enormous landscape we have struggled across all these weeks, across the sea, across my life in Rome, across my childhood, to observe how clearly the footprints lead to this place and no other. They shine in my head, all those steps. I can, in my mind, follow them back, feeling with each step restored, diminished, till I come to the ground of my earliest memories again (*AIL* 151)

Perhaps it is, finally, a defiance and an imaginary redress of the many forms of exile imposed on others throughout history, whether political, geographical, social or spiritual.

The drafting and re-drafting of the ending of Part V highlights Malouf’s intention to interweave various modes of mind, with the poetic mode unifying and making possible Ovid’s belief that he will be “there” ( read here as “at home”) beyond the death of the body. He comes to “the point on the earth’s surface where I disappear” (*AIL* 150). The Fryer Prologue Folder contains early versions of pages 150 to 152 of the published text. FPF page 33 appears to be the earlier version, revised on FPF page 35. FPF page 33 does not include, for example, the naming of the “actual” site: “And so we come to it, the place. I have taken my final step” (*AIL* 150). Imagination is distinguished from perception of the “real”: “It is not at all as I imagined. There are no wolves” (*AIL* 150-

51). No paragraphing is indicated in the initial typing of FPF page 33 although they are marked thus / in pen afterwards. The paragraph commencing “Strange to look back on the enormous landscape we have struggled across all these weeks” (AIL 151) is also not included, suggesting it was written after the composing on 4 November 1976 had created the opening scenes of the novel or perhaps in early January 1977. Images from the published Prologue are repeated, such as the goatherd dozing against one of the olive trees with his head tilted back and a goat eating a vine shoot (AIL 9 and 151). The wording is varied to suggest a recapitulation of mood and setting in Ovid’s mind. FPF 33 reads:

The Child is there. He turns for a moment to gaze at me across his shoulder, which is touched with the sun, then stoops to gather another snail from the edge of the stream. He goes on. The stream ripples its light around his ankles as he wades deeper, then climbs on to a smooth stone and balances for a moment in the sun, leaps, leaps again, then ~~walks~~ moves slowly upstream on the other bank, which is gravel, every stone of which, white, black, grey, delicately veined, I see clearly now, as he stoops and gathers one, two, four snails, and with the stream shaking out its light, walks on, kicking at the gravel with his toes, and lost for a moment in his own childish pleasure at being free. I might call to him. I have the voice for that. But do not. To call him back might be to miss the meaning of this moment, and I want so much, at the very end here, to grasp all that it holds for me. ~~And~~ its fullness is in his movement away from me, his stepping so lightly, so joyfully, naked, as he fades into the dazzle of light off the water, and ~~stooping~~ stoops to gather – what is it? Pebbles? Is that what his eye is attracted by now, the greyest, more subtly veined of them? Snails? Or has he already forgotten all purpose, and is simply moving for the sheer joy of it, wading deeper into the light, letting them fall from his hands, the useless pebbles, the living and edible snails. He is walking on the water’s light. He has taken the first step off it and is walking slowly away now into the deepest distance above the earth, above even the water, on the pure ~~light of~~ wash of the air. It is summer. It is spring. I am three years old. I am sixty. I am six. *I am there.*

The typescript on FPF page 35 adds some further details enhancing the effects of light and colour:

picking out *and glittering* in the late sunlight as in a mosaic, ~~as~~ where he ~~bends stops~~ pauses ~~and~~ gathers one, two, four snails, and with the stream rippling as he steps in and then out of it, walks on

Further details add to the reader’s engagement with “the fullness of this moment”:

and I want so much at the very end here, to ~~contain~~ grasp all that it holds for me.

The fullness of this moment is in the Child's moving away from me, in his stepping so lightly, so joyfully, naked, into his own distance at last, as he fades ~~into~~ in and out of the dazzle of light off the water and stoops to gather – what is it? Pebbles? Is that what his eye is attracted by now, the greyest, most subtly veined of them? ~~Snails?~~ Or has he already forgotten all purpose, ~~and is~~ simply *moving* for the sheer joy of it, wading deeper into the light, and letting them fall from his hands ~~the useless pebbles~~, the living and edible snails that are no longer necessary to my life and may be left now to return ~~now~~ to their own. He is walking on the water's light. And as I watch, he takes the first step off it, ~~and walks~~ moving slowly away now-into the deepest distance, above the earth, above the water, on air. / It is summer. It is spring. I am immeasurably, unbearably happy. I am three years old. I am sixty. I am six. I am there.

*The useless pebbles that---where they strike the ground-- suddenly flare up as butterflies, whose bright wings rainbow the stream.*

The addition of the phrase “And as I watch” blends perception with Ovid's imaginative vision, offering validation of what might be read as purely interior images. The Child's moving away is a separation of pupil and teacher, foster-parent and child, roles which Ovid and the Child have exchanged from time to time in the narrative. The movement “upward” suggests the liberating effect of unified being and knowing, an idealised experience.<sup>100</sup> The handwritten addition at the bottom of FPF page 35 is particularly notable as it introduces the metaphor of light as butterflies “whose bright wings rainbow the stream”. The published text places the addition in Ovid's final vision of the Child on page 152:

Or has he already forgotten all purpose, moving simply for the joy of it, wading deeper into the light and letting them fall from his hands, the living and edible snails that are no longer necessary to my life and may be left now to return to

<sup>100</sup> There is perhaps an echo here of the ending of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* [*Der Tod in Venedig*], although in that story Gustav Aschenbach loses his dignity rather than his language and, unlike Malouf's Ovid, fails to radically change his aesthetic. Aschenbach's final vision of Tadzio at the edge of the sea does seem to resemble aspects of Ovid's final moments in *An Imaginary Life* in its use of images of light, water and the physical beauty of a young male. However, its melancholy feeling is very different to Ovid's joy. In this regard, Malouf's ending may be offering a comment on Mann's. See David Luke, trans., *Death in Venice and Other Stories by Thomas Mann* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 263. Luchino Visconti's film version of *Death in Venice* in the late 1960s gave the work new prominence. Malouf writes to Judith Rodriguez in October 1971 that he likes Visconti's film, has seen it twice and feels “mesmerized both times”, UQFL 75/DM 205, 2 October, 1971, Abbotsford, Sydney. His liking for Thomas Mann's work was already well-established, however, and *Death in Venice* would perhaps have served as an example of a writer in mid-life deeply challenging his own aesthetic values through a fresh discovery of sexual and emotional engagement. Mann's style of writing also makes use of “leitmotif” and this may be a background influence in Malouf's recapitulation of certain phrases in the ending of *An Imaginary Life*. See, for example, the description of the goatherd (AIL 151 and 9) and the repeated phrase “...is there” (“The Child is there”, AIL 151; “I am there”, AIL 152).

their own, the useless pebbles that where they strike the ground suddenly flare up as butterflies, whose bright wings rainbow the stream.

The simile suggests the imagination as light ascending as well as the Greek emblem for Psyche, the soul. After the moment of death a butterfly was thought to appear from the mouth of the deceased to imitate the lightness of the soul as it departed the body. The image also reminds the reader of Ovid's first oppressive view of the desolate landscape "without wings" in his place of exile in Part I:

The river flats, the wormwood scrubs, the grasslands beyond, all lead to a sky that hangs close above us, heavy with snow, or is empty as far as the eye can see or the mind imagine, without wings.  
But I am describing a state of mind no place.  
I am in exile here. (*AIL* 15-16)

The wings of butterflies also suggest the creative energy of the poetic imagination, rising from the earth with the light refracted from the mosaic of pebbles. Earth and sky become as one in the harmony of blended light that fills Ovid's inner and outer vision.

The image of light striking upward from pebbles is in opposition to that in Part IV where the women of the village use sacred white pebbles from the river to beat "downward" the death cry of Ryzak:

To deafen the ears of the evil ones to the old man's cries, so that the last of all, the death cry, will pass unnoticed and his spirit may slip by them in the night.  
(*AIL* 131)

On that occasion, surrounded by smoke from herbs, the sound of the pebbles striking in rhythm with the women's chant creates an atmosphere of disturbance for Ovid:

The whiteness of the walls, the blackness of the figures that fill every available space, the hundred hands moving together, the droning, the crash of pebbles – all this creates a vibration in the head that lulls and then deadens the senses. I find myself being gathered into the expanding and contracting of the light, of the sounds as they strike my ear, as if, in regulating my breath, my heartbeat, to these rhythms, I were slowly being drawn apart and scattered, separated from myself and my individual will. (*AIL* 132)

The female religious ritual is represented as threatening his dissolution. He may be "unmade" rather than transformed as he was by discovering the scarlet poppy and again in

the final scene, by watching the Child walk away along the stream. Pebbles and light create opposite effects at these times in Ovid's mind and body, indicating that the final scene is intended to be read as, paradoxically, a positive affirmation of life rather than a negative dissolution.

Ovid's final recollection of his childhood days at Sulmo is also expressed in terms of the energy of wings: "our farm, with wings glittering below the low stone wall" (*AIL* 151). On FPF page 31 an early draft, later edited, makes reference to wings as symbols of humanity's potential to transcend its present limitations:

We have lost the power of dreaming. When we rediscover it, lying down with the beasts, the process will begin to work again: we shall find our wings. There are laws for all this, but we shall not discover them in our waking, by butting our heads against the limits of our world.

The ending is intimately linked to the emotion of joy as feeling-value and its attendant physical sensations. Mythological and spiritual resonances are suggested but any "transcendent" awareness is depicted as an "illumination" of the physical body and the mind that is about to turn into earth (as at the conclusion of "A Poet Among Others").

Behind the final scene, as elsewhere in the novel, is an awareness of the author's role in the "poesis" or "making" of the narrative. It is a fiction that readers are invited to enter through their own bodies in the focused act of reading, with imagination, thought and feeling engaged, yet they are also required to hold the text at a distance because its fabric is the symbolic of language. It offers a way of reading the world that celebrates the deep connection between the human and the physical world and the important role of imagination in creating shifting patterns of interpretative consciousness on Sherrington's "enchanted loom" of the mind from moment to moment. On the other side of this celebration, however, is the possibility of language and consciousness as creators of that which unbinds and oppresses the spirit, of negative disturbance rather than balance and joy. Human intentionality, the key of consciousness, is the foundation of such outcomes.

Malouf explores the tensions between these aspects of human potential in his next works, *Child's Play* and *Fly Away Peter*.

Some final questions linger as Ovid reaches for a state of being that redresses the non-being of death and which he imagines is a joyful “well-being.” Will the Child remain outside human society, living a life whose quality of awareness as he survives from day to day is its own attainment, dwelling in the ostensive moment? Is the Child not already moving, Ovid asks, beyond the animal-human continuum of maturation towards some form of “the gods”? The text positions Ovid as maintaining his concept of human progress and perfectibility, a belief that can only be regarded as at least highly problematic by the late twentieth century reader, given the immediate history of two world wars. The question whether the centuries after Ovid’s death have produced “gods” also opens debate about the achievements of “civilization” in all fields of endeavour. What, the text would seem to ask, might the Child’s ways of perceiving and knowing, if grasped by imagination, still offer to contemporary consciousness in western societies, especially in a situation of environmental crisis already being recognised in the late 1970s?

In epistemological terms, Malouf has Ovid desire both the intuitive and the objective as validating referents of knowledge, preserving the balance of “inner” and “outer” ways of knowing favoured by the poet and imagining harmony between them. The novel offers a re-balancing to ways of thinking in Malouf’s cultural and historical context, giving weight to what has become, in Heaney’s terms, the lighter end of the scales since the development of scientific method gave dominance to rationalist approaches. Heaney’s notion of the redress of the poetic imagination is again relevant as Malouf imagines the transformation of a poet’s mind and its effect on his consciousness. He offers his readership the semblance of an autobiographical experience rather than a logical solution to contemporary problems, the beginnings of a path through the

labyrinths. The novel may be read, it is argued here, as Ovid's unpredicted experience of redressing the basis of his poetic imagination, as well as a quest by his imagination to uncover its greater possibilities. Seeming to draw on his own experience of how images are formed "at the back of my head" (*AIL* 137),<sup>101</sup> Malouf questions through his composing how images enter his consciousness and what "messages" they bring. He dramatises, through Ovid's relationship with the Child, how images may be partly self-reflective and yet felt as "other" by the subject that offers to become their vehicle. How "inner" and "outer" interweave receives a more complex representation than in his previous work as the dialectical nature of poetic learning is explored.

Critical readings of the ending of *An Imaginary Life* have argued for different views of its achievement. Two recent examples point to an ongoing debate in this regard. Carolyn Bliss in her discussion of the moral implication of myth in the novel discerns Ovid's active guidance of the moment of death rather his surrendering to it. She writes of Ovid's "transcendence of time and space while insisting on occupying a central, formative role within them. Ovid has not so much dissolved in nature as mastered it".<sup>102</sup> Andrew Taylor, alternatively, reads the ending as celebrating "a kind of lyric comprehensiveness, a boundaryless state in which distinction between subject and object ... is joyously dissolved".<sup>103</sup> Ovid's identity "dissolves into [a unity] of the body and the world around it".<sup>104</sup> In a further publication, Taylor defines Ovid's final state as "the pre-symbolic, the Lacanian Imaginary Order", achieved only in death as a "transgression and annulment of the limits that define and enable human subjectivity".<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The passage reminds us of Ovid's former life in Rome where he was in the habit of "scribbling exotic romances ... projecting extravagant fables on the unknown" (*AIL* 137).

<sup>102</sup> Bliss, "Reimagining the Remembered", 729.

<sup>103</sup> Taylor, "The Bread of Time to Come", 716.

<sup>104</sup> Taylor, "The Bread of Time to Come", 715-16.

<sup>105</sup> Taylor, "David Malouf, History, and an Ethics of the Body", 68.

Taylor discerns a “significant line of development” in Malouf’s works from the late 1970s and early 1980s to a more “positive” representation of the body in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* as “the site of wholeness ... no longer experienced at the moment of death, but vouchsafed to the living”.<sup>106</sup> The view offered in this study is that such a positive view can be found already in *An Imaginary Life* as the novel conveys an ideal of integrated identity. A “feeling of knowing” (after Damasio) which is also a feeling-value (after Jung) is realised in the final scenes, but it is a mode of consciousness moved towards in earlier episodes as Ovid interacts with his surroundings and the Child. Ovid’s last words “I am there” form the finale of a continuum commenced with the discovery of the scarlet poppy. Both Bliss and Taylor recognise important aspects of the ending that need not, it is argued here, be seen as opposites. If, as Bliss maintains, Ovid asserts ongoing identity, then, as Taylor argues, integration of body, mind and spirit with the natural world is also crucial. Malouf’s ideal requires subjective and objective, apprehension and comprehension, to merge into an integrated adult consciousness rather than wishing the subject to “dissolve” into a non-symbolic realm possible only in very early childhood. Taylor, importantly, recognises this aspect of Malouf’s post-romantic ideal when he relates it to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s view that the poet has the power to “integrate all the parts” as someone “whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other, who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood”.<sup>107</sup> For Ovid, the “adjustment” of his imagination has commenced in Part I and this should be taken into account when considering Part V.

Like other commentators, Taylor tends to focus on what he terms the “transcendent quality” and “lyricism that Malouf’s prose takes on at those climatic

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<sup>106</sup> Taylor, “David Malouf, History and an Ethics of the Body”, 68-69.

<sup>107</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature”, in *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures* (1837-1844), 14-15. Malouf refers to Emerson in his essay *On Experience*, as noted in chapter 1 of this study (footnote 14).

points” such as Ovid’s death when, in Taylor’s view, “narrative is superseded by lyricism”.<sup>108</sup> With little attention to less “lyrical” passages, it is unlikely that the close crafting of apparently more “prosaic” passages will be noted and the underlying poetic discerned. Taylor concludes that Malouf’s fiction often represents the acting out of a transcendental relationship between nature (as landscape) and the human, a link that is “characteristic of Romanticism . . . despite the relative unimportance of Romanticism as a formative influence within Australian fiction”.<sup>109</sup> That Malouf is writing across genre boundaries and in the mode of the lyric as well as the narrative epistle is significant for reading *An Imaginary Life*. Its way of imagining a post-romantic vision of the relationship between subject and object, mind and nature can be regarded as a significant development in Australian poetics, as well as fiction, in the 1970s. An affinity with a number of the poems in the collection *New South*, published in 1980, is indicative of the “local” company in which Malouf extends the range of poetic “making” and renews its mythopoetic potential. In works such as Robert Adamson’s “from The Crossing”, David Campbell’s “The Dream of a Snake”, Rosemary Dobson’s “Flute Music”, Peter Skrzynecki’s “The rainbow-bird” and Jennifer J. Rankin’s “Sea-bundle” there is confidence that language derived from an individual’s encounter with “inner” and “outer” experiences, both in Australia and beyond, can offer renewal of a reader’s over-familiar vision of self, place and time.<sup>110</sup> The background influence on Malouf of romantic perspectives such as found in the following lines from Wordsworth’s 1805-6 version of *The Prelude* is also pertinent in this regard:

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<sup>108</sup> Taylor, “The Bread of Time to Come”, 723.

<sup>109</sup> Taylor, “The Bread of Time to Come”, 723.

<sup>110</sup> David Brooks, ed., *New South* (Toronto: Dreadnaught, 1980). Brooks notes the national and international range of influences at work in the late 1970s in Australian writing. He writes in the Editor’s Postscript: “When first reading some of the poems here included, my thoughts were not, as they might have been ten years ago, of Hardy, Yeats, Auden, or, on another front of Williams, Lowell, or even

Yet the Mind is to herself  
 Witness and judge; and I remember well  
 That in life's everyday appearances  
 I seemed about this period to have sight  
 Of a new world – a world, too, that was fit  
 To be transmitted, and made visible  
 To other eyes; as having for its base  
 That whence our dignity originates,  
 That which both gives it being and maintains  
 A balance, an ennobling interchange  
 Of action from within and from without;  
 The excellence, pure spirit, and best power  
 Both of the object seen, and the eye that sees.  
 (Book XII, Lines 367-79)<sup>111</sup>

Wordsworth's linking of the poetic and the ethical in representing" a new world ... that was fit to be transmitted" with its base in "That whence our dignity originates" has resonance with Malouf's portrayal of Ovid. The balance of "an ennobling interchange / of action from within and from without" would also seem to echo Malouf's approach to his task as a writer.

Again in the Australian context, *An Imaginary Life* offers a poetic that redresses the loss of the moment's vision such as Slessor (an early influence on Malouf) represents in "Out of Time":

The moment's world, it was, and I was part,  
 Fleshless and ageless, changeless and made free.  
 "Fool, would you leave this country?" cried my heart,  
 But I was taken by the suck of sea.

The gulls go down, the body dies and rots,  
 And Time flows past them like a hundred yachts.<sup>112</sup>

Malouf recognizes the power of death but asserts a balance of life and death in an idealized consciousness, even as the body is taken into the grains of earth.

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Ginsberg, but of a short story by Alejo Carpentier, a book by Italo Calvino, poems by Zbigniew Herbert, and ... of Ashbery, Merwin, Strand, James Tate".

<sup>111</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: a Parallel Text*, ed. J.C. Maxwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 508.

<sup>112</sup> Kenneth Slessor, *Poems* (orig. pub. as *One Hundred Poems*, 1944; pbk. ed., Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1963), 89.

Three years prior to composing *An Imaginary Life*, Malouf offers a tribute to another finale which he admires. In concluding his lecture on *The Tempest* for the English Association, Malouf praises Shakespeare's dramatic venture into what he sees as greater possibility, a greater freedom:

Free. It comes to us as the last word of all. And what a lovely conceit it is that we are invited to act out as our applause ends the performance and breaks its spell, bringing the inhabitants of this enchanted world back to our own unfree world, that has been transfigured, while the spell lasts, by a marvellous vision of what it means to exist in a world of more than human possibility.<sup>113</sup>

In the same lecture, Malouf speaks of the “shape of the comedy” as a kind of satisfaction for “the part of our minds that demands some kind of resolution”<sup>114</sup> and comedy as “the realm of the imagination, the realm of freedom” and “an act of faith about the way things might be rather than a picture of how they are”.<sup>115</sup> These views offer a reminder that various expressive forms such as those found in art, literature, opera, film and music allow the reader, viewer or listener to experience at times a resolution of what may otherwise appear irresolvable tensions. If an aesthetic form achieves its intentions in this regard, the resolution that is momentary in the play or novel, in music or in dance may linger in the memory of the audience and become, if sufficiently imagined, a resolution felt in consciousness. Such experience, even when vicarious, may then open further paths of personal learning. In this context, *An Imaginary Life* might be regarded as an historical tragedy made comic by Malouf's imagined hope. For Ovid's works have indeed survived the ages and his name is renowned. To link one's reputation to Ovid is also a gesture of hope in itself, in terms of posterity, another positive imagining of “I am there”. Malouf describes *The Tempest* as “a marvellous act of freedom on the part of the

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<sup>113</sup> David Malouf, *Relative Freedom: The Tempest* (Sydney: The English Association, 1973), 15.

<sup>114</sup> Malouf, *Relative Freedom*, 14.

<sup>115</sup> Malouf, *Relative Freedom*, 5.

man who made it”.<sup>116</sup> In late 1976 Malouf’s composing dares to offer the historical Ovid a “marvellous act of freedom” that the reader can enter as an aesthetic experience of reconciliation between life and death, “inner” and “outer” ways of making and perceiving the “real”. It seems to parallel aspects of his personal discovery, through poems such as “Asphodel”, “Inspirations”, “Twelve Nightpieces” and his first novel *Johnno*, of an earth that “holds firm under my heel” and yet is also “illuminated” by the “radiance” of things. It is a mature, not a youthful vision, but one that privileges a particular intersection of child-like and adult modes of mind by engaging the imaginative possibilities of both. Through its valuing of transformation and possibility, it seeks to offer the reader the experience of a surprising poetic within the context of fiction.

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<sup>116</sup> Malouf, *Relative Freedom*, 5.