

CHAPTER 5

Journeys and Travesties: 1978-1981

Malouf's achievement in *An Imaginary Life* presented him with a challenge to develop his work in new directions, a challenge he embraced from 1978 onwards. To devote more of his time to writing he resigned his university position in Sydney and settled mid-year in the village of Campagnatico in southern Tuscany. He spent the larger part of each year there until he moved back to Sydney in 1985. In an interview during the making of the short biographical film *David Malouf: An Imaginary Life* Malouf comments that one of his reasons for re-locating in his mid-forties and leaving behind a secure livelihood was to have some distance from others' expectations so that he might more freely discover how his work would develop.¹

While based in Italy, Malouf returned to Australia quite regularly and had ongoing contact with Australian cultural developments. From April 1978 to early 1980 he worked on a commission from The Australian Opera for the libretto of Patrick White's *Voss*, bringing him into partnership with the composer Richard Meale and the director Jim Sharman as the opera was developed for full production in 1986. Letters to Judith Rodriguez indicate that Malouf's village home regularly accommodated visitors from Australia and he continued to write reviews and articles on Australian literature and culture.²

Given the importance of mood in his writing of *An Imaginary Life*, it is reasonable to suppose that the atmosphere of Campagnatico well suited Malouf's

¹ Richard Kelly Tipping, director, *David Malouf: An Imaginary Life* (Sydney: Artwrite Pictures, with the assistance of the Australia Council, 1987; Film Australia, 2003). Malouf was awarded a three year Literary Fellowship by the Australia Council in 1978, providing him with financial support from 1979 to the end of 1981.

² For a detailed listing of approximately sixteen newspaper and journal reviews by Malouf published from 1978 to 1982 see Neilsen, 203-4.

intentions at this time. He mentions his memory for moods in a letter in June 1978 and describes his recently purchased house:

My excellent memory is for moods not facts. What I have imagined hard enough to create a mood in my memory tends to become the memory of a fact [Malouf's emphasis], whether it happened or not . . . [The house is in an area] mentioned by Dante and is a stone house, seventeenth century with all its original doors and beams, two storeys above a "fondo" where the cattle used to be kept, within the walls of the village but detached, and with a marvellous view to the south.³

While apparently remote in location, his new home was not too distant from the cultural milieu of Florence and Rome and journeys within Italy and to neighbouring countries brought Malouf into regular contact with European art, music and opera. Complementing these interests, his prose poem "Ladders" suggests that he found attractive the close connection between the village way of life and the local land:

Peasants appear. They shift about and smoke, they consider the ladders, testing them for spring, for weight, for balance, counting the rungs; imagining how they will go up into the grey light of the olives, on uneven ground in wind.

It is still today. But the peasants have already moved into November; they walk as in heavy wind, swaying metres above the earth. (*FTL* 25)

The local people seem to Malouf to inhabit an imagined place, as well as an attractive geographical location, terms he uses in *An Imaginary Life*. Even in practical details like selecting ladders for olive picking Malouf has them imagine how they will balance with the earth (probably an idealizing view, on his part).⁴ He perceives that the locality has been taken into their minds and re-imagined there through the necessities inherent in

³ UQFL 75/Box 3/Folder 36, Letter to Judith Rodriguez, 11 June, 1978, Il Convento, Batignano. (Note: there is no library numbering of the correspondence in this series.) Malouf comments that he needs the proceeds of the sale to Fryer Library of earlier correspondence with Judith Rodriguez to set up his new house. Both writers' self-conscious view to the future in the correspondence of the 1960s and 1970s needs to be kept in mind. It may have influenced the selection of material for the Fryer collection, including what is excluded. There is little correspondence from 1975-76, for example, an unusual silence given Malouf's writing of *Poems 1975-76* and *An Imaginary Life* in these years.

⁴ Malouf comments in a letter on the delivery of the ladders: "yesterday all the new ladders arrived and were bargained for and carted off: lovely solid affairs of raw wood. I'd like to have had one just for the look and feel of the thing". He writes to Judith Rodriguez that he has been helping friends pick olives and "worked one day at a vineyard at the top of the hill", UQFL 75/Box 3/Folder 36, 17 October, 1978, Campagnatico.

everyday living, a vision he has already admired in Rubens' painting *The Return of the Peasants from the Fields* (Figure 7). In "Ladders", the olive gatherers move their bodies with the long-accommodated harmonies created between themselves and the trees amid the forces of local wind, weather and land. Malouf imagines an "exterior" that has been taken into the "interior" of the people's physical sense of self. The simple necessities of everyday life – a need for ladders to harvest the olives in season – create the conditions for making a blended identity.

A continuing challenge for Malouf at this time is how the writer could imagine such an integrated sense of identity in the Australia setting, as the Tuscan countryside is not his by birth and thus always remains at a distance from his physical sense of origins and geographical memory. However, it provides him with one form of perceived ideal. The struggle of White's Voss to "become" the land keeps the question of Australian settler identity before him as he works on the libretto: "This country is mine by right of vision. ... I have already entered it in dreams and walk there among its shadows".⁵ However, as his first writing for *An Imaginary Life* reveals, Malouf is aware that it is more than an asserted colonial "vision" of possession that is needed. What kind of "commerce" (to use a term he favours) between the embodied self, imagination and earth is transformative in a longer view of human cultures and societies, sustained beyond private moments of epiphany? The form of the prose poem in which Malouf seeks tentative answers suggests that both the objective statement and the intuitive image will make important and complementary contributions to his search:

I would like to set my foot down on the bottom rung and climb; setting the ladder's foot in the street and climbing slowly hand over hand into next month's snow. Between here and the mountains there is commerce. (*FTL* 25)

⁵ Malouf, Libretto for *Voss*, Act I, in Program for *Voss: Opera in Two Acts* by Richard Meale, ed. Helen Wheeler (Sydney: The Australian Opera, 1986), 2.

The rhythm of the prose combines the prosaic and the poetic with the rustic single stresses of “set my foot down” developing into the more complex pattern of strong and weak stresses in “climbing slowly hand over hand”. The added “breath” of exertion needed to cross the boundaries of time to reach “next month’s snow” is implied in the slow-paced repetition of “hand over hand”, giving the connection between “here” and “the mountains” more ambiguous, extended and potent connotations than the term “commerce” implies in its merely economic sense. The mountains are perhaps a place of origin as well as a destination.

The small collection entitled *Wild Lemons: Poems* and the more extensive *First Things Last* take these questions forward by exploring diverse ways of imagining identity, origins and destinations.⁶ Then, in the novella *Child’s Play*, a “scherzo in which his deepest themes reappear in travesty”,⁷ Malouf interrogates strongly the ethics of imaginative transformation through the characters of the terrorist and great author. A further test of imaginative redress follows immediately in *Fly Away Peter*. With this novella, however, he enters with new confidence a vision of the ongoing work of the poetic imagination in daily living. The “surprise” of the poetic moment of turning towards fresh beginnings becomes crucial. A “ripening” of imaginative possibility occurs, as envisioned in “Ladders”:

High in the grey-green light something is ripening. Like a boy on stilts the ladder talks with clouds. Its shadow lies like a track across my sleep. (*FTL* 25)

⁶ David Malouf, *Wild Lemons: Poems* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1980) appeared early that year. This small volume, edited by Les Murray and Vivian Smith, includes “Wild Lemons”, “Deception Bay”, “First Things Last”, “Odes” (to Bruce and Brenda Beaver) (re-titled “Preludes” in *First Things Last*) and “Ode” (to Sybille and Vivian Smith). *First Things Last* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980) was published toward the end of that year and includes the poems in *Wild Lemons: Poems*, together with new works. Malouf’s first *Selected Poems* was published by Angus & Robertson, Sydney in 1981.

⁷ David Malouf, *Child’s Play* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), 79, referring ostensibly to the work of the “great author” but also an insight into Malouf’s purposes, both playful and daring, in the novella. This view is shared by Ivor Indyk in his comments: “It is as if Malouf were parodying his own artistic assumptions and pretensions in the Author, so that the description applied to the Author’s own *Child’s Play* ... might equally well be applied to this book”, Indyk, *David Malouf*, 35.

In *Fly Away Peter* (another title suggested by Malouf was *The Cloud Keepers*)⁸ he writes of landscapes that have lived in his memory for many decades. He chooses the fertile wetlands, birdlife and coast of his homeland that offer a basis for imagined identity, for resisting feelings of alienation and loss found in Australian writing that takes the dry interior landscape as the “true” territory with which imagination must come to terms. Malouf re-positions Australian settler identity in terms of a fertile rather than an arid land. However, with potential redress Malouf juxtaposes an extreme test of its worth – the destructive power of war that annihilates individuals yet might make a more self-aware nation of Australia. Personal recollection, imagination and cultural memory converge in particular ways for Malouf in *Fly Away Peter*, offering him a potentially rich direction in historical fiction that takes Australia as its setting. It is a creative source that takes him forward into *Harland’s Half Acre* (1984), stories in *Antipodes* (1985) such as “Under Southern Skies” and “Sorrows and Secrets”, and the autobiographical *12 Edmonstone Street* (1985). His novels, stories and essays of the next two decades extend the direction of *Fly Away Peter*, although, in this reader’s view, never surpassing its integrity of form, style and vision.

In an important way, it is the works of Malouf’s first years in Tuscany, from 1978 to 1982, that provide the direction for his subsequent achievements. They offer, to appropriate his image from “The Garden”, a “green shoot, a co-ordinate” linking his works so far:

As when a songbird sketches
three notes on the air: one
then another at a tangent,
then the first found new again. (*FTL 2*)

His imagines the blending of “near” and “far” with greater clarity so they are “found new again”. His works are “experimental” in the way Malouf describes in an interview with Tom Shapcott in Italy in August 1978:

⁸ UQFL 75/Box 3/Folder 36, Letter to Judith Rodriguez, 8 September, 1981, Campagnatico.

I'd want to think that all good writing was experimental in that it means the writer himself is pushing into the areas where he hasn't been before. The context ... for experiment is the writer's own consciousness and his work.⁹

Links between what Malouf terms "experiment" and his notion of "discovery" are found in other comments at the time:

I always think the most exciting thing in a poem is the point where the poet discovers in the writing itself what he is doing, and that the excitement of that discovery, to him, is what is made available as an experience to the reader.¹⁰

It does come down to the incandescent capacity of language. ... [You] use it and you find what is there.¹¹

These comments foreground the self-creating activity of the writer more than the social context of the work. They suggest that a writer should make a committed effort to bring fresh dimensions of perceiving, thinking and feeling into the work, from whatever sources are available. This effort is helped, in Malouf's view, by the ability of language to bring "light" from within its own nature. There is inner brightness ("incandescent capacity") underlying the nature of language that assists the writer's purpose.

Language, for Malouf, brings its own illumination to a writer's desire for the work and in the work. Language, paradoxically, creates presence even while it represents what is absent. The excitement of the writer's "discovery" is sensed, in turn, by those who read with empathy. While this approach has an affinity with Charles Olson's notion of the "kinetics" of projective poetry ("a high-energy construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge"),¹² Malouf's use of a metaphor of illumination suggests more than the transfer of energy. Rather the effort toward understanding inherent in language provides "light" that invites readers' attention, alerting them to fresh imaginative

⁹ "Interview by Tom Shapcott", 28. A typescript of the interview can also be found in Judith Rodriguez' papers in UQFL 75/Box 3/Folder 36.

¹⁰ "Interview by Tom Shapcott", 28.

¹¹ Note on half page, in UQFL 75/Box 3/Folder 36.

¹² Charles Olson, "Projective Verse", 148.

perceptions. The possible result is a celebration of what is discovered, a new sense of joy and hope. Readers, if motivated, may test this “newness” against what is formed in their own thoughts and feelings, as they engage with the work, through the work and even against the work in order to find their own place of discovery. To uncover what is made “silent” in a work, as encouraged by post-structural theories, may also generate a sense of hope.

The terms “experiment” and “discovery” suggest Malouf’s concern with writing/ speaking and reading/ listening as expressive forms of personal learning. His experiments begin in the self while engaging by necessity with the world beyond the self. Discovery becomes a combination of “outer” and “inner” perceptions, blending imaginatively the subjective and objective. His comments show a strong commitment to his own “unexplored territory” encompassing intellect, feelings, memory and images that can be lured from the margins of consciousness. As already noted, recurring motifs of “roundedness” (saucer, bowl and ball) represent the writer’s quest to bring together the centre and hidden borders of the self. This leads to various ways of perceiving and feeling, the bases of shifting “moods” that acquire increasing importance in his poetry and prose. They open into modes of consciousness that give colour to narrated events and engage, in turn, the further refracting hues of the reader’s imagination.

As evident in the poem “Preludes” in *First Things Last*, Malouf lives his inner life “at home wherever I am” (*FTL* 6). With his poetry and prose earning the recognition of literary awards and a three year Fellowship granted by the Literature Board of the Australia Council, Malouf senses the promise of his work to date. Given the crucial interrelationship that poetry and prose have had in these achievements, how will he now proceed? Will success as a recognised writer of prose (a better prospect

than poetry in international publishing markets)¹³ mean less time for poetry as an integral part of his creative expression? How will poetic imagination be expressed in his next works?

Rosemary Huisman discusses the view that poetry by the mid-twentieth century is recognised as “a discourse, not a text-type or particular genre, characterized primarily by ... the productive and interpretative procedures invoked in reading and writing it”.¹⁴ In forming this view, Huisman draws upon David Perkins’ *A History of Modern Poetry* and her re-interpretation of Basil Bernstein’s sociological terms of “classification” (power to differentiate and identify categories of discourse) and “framing” (control of how to write or interpret kinds of texts).¹⁵ She suggests that reading strategies for prose, tend to emphasis silent, private, *extensive* reading while poetry (whether in traditional forms or free verse) calls upon strategies that are silent and also “sounded” more than prose in the mind of the attentive reader. Such strategies are private and *intensive*.¹⁶ While *extensive* reading arises from the abundance of printed books and other texts found in the strong visual orientation of culturally-defining media as the twentieth century progressed, *intensive* reading of a printed text such as a poem might now be compared, in Huisman’s view, to the attention given to religious texts in previous ages. In this intratextuality the text provides a context for its own interpretation more than drawing on the extensive interpretative context of other contemporary texts. The reader

¹³ He notes, for example, that *An Imaginary Life* has “sold out after the first two months [in the U.S.A.] and had to be reprinted”, Letter, 17 October, 1978. Five months later, he comments that the novel is to be “out in France in October” and that he has been invited to the launch, Letter, 31 March. 1979. Both letters are found in UQFL 75/Box 3/Folder 36.

¹⁴ Rosemary Huisman, *The Written Poem* (London and New York: Cassell, 1998), 24.

¹⁵ Huisman, *The Written Poem*, 12-14. See also Basil Bernstein, *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996); David Perkins, *A History of Modern Poetry* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), vol. 1 (*From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode*), 1976 and vol. 2 (*Modernism and After*), 1987.

¹⁶ Huisman, *The Written Poem*, 153. [Italics added by the author]

expects to give closer attention to connotations of language in a way not usually required by prose. Huisman concludes that reading poetry

is now reading against the contemporary grain against the more general habits of interpretation. It is therefore more difficult, less accessible. ... Such intensive reading promotes, as it did for religious texts, the intratextual reading of patterns and symbolic possibilities, which would probably go unread in the hastier and varied habits of extensive reading associated with other discourses.¹⁷

By using “framing” strategies in *An Imaginary Life* that invite the reader to give close attention to “breathing with” the musicality of words, phrases and sentences, and to discerning patterns of feeling-images, Malouf draws the reading of his prose closer to that of his poetry, more so than for his first novel, *Johnno*. In Huisman’s terms, he is asking (and also educating) his readers to interpret his fiction “against the contemporary grain”. He requires “leaps” of imagination (after Robert Bly) on the reader’s part to associate the flow of images and propositions his works contain. Such intensive reading strategies associated with poetic writing and appreciation may be regarded as another form of imaginative redress in the late twentieth century context, countering faster extensive reading associated increasingly with electronic and digital media. A carefully crafted poem invites a slower pace of reading, creating a space of time in which the reader or listener is quiet and attentive to the quality of language, its sounds and imaginative connotations. By “framing” interpretative strategies in ways that are empathetic to the more intensive and intrapersonal patterns of thinking and feeling derived from intuitions, dreams, moods and feeling-states, as well as logical narrative sequences, Malouf also makes more permeable the boundaries of genre in twentieth century writing between romantic-lyrical poetry and “realist” prose. His

¹⁷ Huisman, *The Written Poem*, 153. Huisman qualifies these generalisations, noting that the “academic close reading of novels” transfers some intensive reading practices to other discourses (Huisman, 154). Such ability would depend on the educational experiences of particular readers in their cultural context and may not be too widely generalized.

practice of working outward from images and analogies in poetry and prose suits such strategies.

Such permeability of traditional boundaries is empathetic to new understanding of the continuous adaptability of intelligence (after Piaget) and emerging evidence of complementary modes of brain functioning, as well as to the work of American poets and prose writers after 1945. Malouf's work could be said to evidence a desire to bring "poetic" discourse and "plain" discourse of everyday speech more into harmony, enriching both in the process. To do so is to challenge the prevailing perception that the lyrical, poetic voice is only private, subjective and individual, while the "realistic" voice prevails in public and political discourse. If the poetic voice has come to be positioned as culturally marginal among western discourses, there is a need, Malouf's work implies, to re-balance this situation by recognising the formative roles imagination and language play in making meaning of all kinds. As "A Poet Among Others" indicates, a poet is, in Malouf's view, always living in a shared society and drawing upon potentials of mind and imagination intrinsic to being human. By re-positioning the poetic image in closer relation to everyday speech the sense of its separate "literariness" is reduced so that notions of elite culture and obscurity of expression are modified. The poetic imaginary becomes associated, in Malouf's work, with discoveries drawn from life experiences and appreciating the qualities of each moment. How the subject makes meaning is a strong impetus in each work and such meanings blend "inner" and "outer" to imply social attitudes and actions, especially those arising from experiences of "poeticity" as unpredicted aesthetic value. What is felt to be intuitively of value, as well as the idea of what should be valued, come together with subjective perception and objective data informing each other, as in the case of environmental issues from the 1970s onwards.

Malouf's relation with what has been broadly termed "deep image" poetry is also relevant in reading *First Things Last*. Galway Kinnell, Robert Duncan, Louis Simpson and Mark Strand were all visitors to the very active poetry scene in Sydney in the mid-1970s and each had published some work in the "deep image" mode. Like Malouf, Bruce Beaver and Robert Adamson among other Australian poets, the American "deep image" poets of the 1960s and 1970s had a special regard for Rilke's poetry and prose, especially its example of informing outward "realities" with inner life. Beaver's "Ode IX" in *Odes and Days*, for example, pays tribute to Rilke's "magic door within his being / that transformed into poetry / everything from a jug to an angel".¹⁸ Rilke provided an opening into greater possibility for the poetic. In *Charmed Lives* Beaver includes a twelve-poem sequence titled "R.M.R. A verse biography of Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)". Beaver recalled many years later:

I first read the *Elegies* in 1950 when I was 22 and felt that I had found a modern master poet to stand with Yeats, Pound, Eliot and Auden. I soon got hold of every translation I could find ... especially the wonderful translations by J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender ... and reveled in the glorious inventions in imagery and fluidity of form.¹⁹

In the USA, Robert Bly published translations of Rilke's poems and included his work in the anthology *News of the Universe: Poems of Twofold Consciousness* (1980).²⁰

The basic sense of deep image poetry, according to Robert Kelly, is to "generate a kind of poetry not necessarily dominated by the image, but in which it is the rhythm of images which forms the dominant movement of the poem".²¹ In 1962 Jerome

¹⁸ Bruce Beaver, *Odes and Days* (Sydney: South Head Press, 1975), 34.

¹⁹ Beaver, Letter to the author, 5 December 2002, Manly (Appendix G).

²⁰ Robert Bly, ed., *News of the Universe: Poems of Twofold Consciousness* (1980; rpt., San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995). In a comment that has resonance with Malouf's concerns in *An Imaginary Life*, Bly notes: "At the time of Ovid, people still remembered when the route between the human body and the countryside was extraordinarily open", *News of the Universe*, 291.

²¹ Quoted in *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History*, eds. Elliott Anderson and Mary Kinzie (Yonkers, New York: Pushcart Press, 1978), 400. Kelly was one of three editors of the magazine *Trobar* which published five numbers in Brooklyn, New York from 1960 to 1964 and was influential in raising awareness of "deep image" poetry.

Rothenberg writes in his essay “Why Deep Image?” of the need to see “through the self (emotively)” with a poetic emphasis on “a heightened sense of the emotional contours of objects (their dark qualities, or shadows)” and “the recognition of the poem as a natural structure arising at once from the act of emotive vision”.²² A perceived need to connect more deeply with self and other through feeling is evident, leading to alternative ways of “seeing” that are not always apparent to the intellect. Exploring other pathways, Galway Kinnell’s poems such as “The Bear” and *The Book of Nightmares* (the latter modeled on Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*) seek to bring the surreal and the unconscious into play with the observed world of “things”, especially in regard to the poet’s inner creative processes:

In her ravine under old snow the dam-bear
 lies, licking
 lumps of smeared fur
 and drizzly eyes into shapes
 with her tongue. And one
 hairy-soled trudge stuck out before me,
 the next groaned out,
 the next,
 the next,
 the rest of my days I spend
 wandering: wondering
 what, anyway,
 was the sticky infusion, that rank flavor of blood, that poetry, by which
 I lived?²³

These poets are working from the “kinetics” and “composition by field” of the projectivist approach to create an extended flow of feeling-images that seek to engage the emotive, intuitive responses of readers. Charles Olson writes: “a poem is energy

²² Jerome Rothenberg, “Why Deep Image?” *Trobar*, no. 3 (1962), n. pag., quoted in Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, eds., *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing 1960-1980* (New York: New York Public Library/Granary Books, 1998), 131.

²³ Galway Kinnell, “The Bear”, from *Body Rags* (1968), in *A New Selected Poems* (Boston and New York: Mariner/ Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 59-61; Galway Kinnell, *The Book of Nightmares* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971).

transferred from where the poet got it ... by way of the poem itself ... to the reader".²⁴

Reading, in this view, is an event with an important physical and creative basis in both poet and reader.²⁵ Both play a crucial role, a view appreciated by Bruce Beaver in his comments about *Letters to Live Poets*, a work that was influential in promoting a more spontaneous, open style in Australian poetry in the late 1960s:

The *Letters* began as an elegiac address to an American poet, the late Frank O'Hara, who lives on in his quirky communicative verse. It continued as a series of journal letters to actual and imaginary friends, each poem a kind of intimate one-way dialogue between myself and a not-impossible creative reader, a live poet in his or her own sense.²⁶

Beaver's aim is to

encapsulate the universal equivalent of the San Francisco Beat scene, so enlivened by the novels of Jack Kerouac and the poetry of Frank O'Hara, Gary Snyder, Charles Olson and Allen Ginsberg. The Beats wanted to "tell it as it is" and I tried over a period of six weeks in 1969 to write a poem a day doing just that.²⁷

Malouf also comments on the open energy moving between poet and reader as a feature of the "elasticity" of contemporary poetry, such as free verse, the projective and the surreal:

There is a kind of elasticity in the poem's being that allows the reader to translate the poem into his own body-rhythms, to make it his own; the poem is a living thing. But the rhythm is the poem: it is the poet's energy made active and available to the reader.²⁸

²⁴ Olson, "Projective Verse", 148. The phrase suggests that poetry, too, can have its own force in the atomic age of the 1950s, drawing on the physical energies of the body. Attention in the 1960s to the physical energies of sensory perception was evident in the popularity of R.L. Gregory's work, *Eye and Brain: the Psychology of Seeing*, 1966, 5th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). The book was in its third edition by 1977.

²⁵ Kristeva theorises that a semiotic "chora" "precedes and underlies figuration ... and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm", *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 26.

²⁶ Bruce Beaver, *Letters to Live Poets: Poems by Bruce Beaver* (Sydney: South Head Press, 1969), comment printed on the inside front jacket.

²⁷ Beaver, Letter to the author, 5 December 2002.

²⁸ Malouf, "A.D. Hope's *New Cratylus*", 143.

Malouf's comments suggest his appreciation for the way recent writing had opened a less confined space for poetic impulses of many kinds, while acknowledging that "there is no one poetry at the moment and no single view".²⁹ Such open activity, an important aspect of projectivist and "deep image" approaches, may be seen as encouraging diverse ways for the poetic imagination to engage with contemporary experience. By using the apparently enclosed spatial and temporal aspects of a poem as opportunities for opening outward, the poet seeks to "tell it as it is" (after Beaver) and discover new possibilities for the poetic imaginary. This freedom, in turn, encourages a poetic of engagement so that the voice of the poet can arise once more to redress the complex dilemmas faced by individuals and societies in the later twentieth century.

Other Australian poets in the 1970s also notice a sense of authenticity in American poetic voices, particularly the "predisposition ... towards the idiom and rhythm of actual physical life and its location in sense perception, the particular personal experience of the writer".³⁰ As a reader, Vincent Buckley values the "ease of American language" which conveys the physical qualities of perception, "a matter of intimate and prolonged sensation, the sensation of *noticing* [Buckley's emphasis] being used as the focus for the other more clearly animal sensations".³¹

In an essay published in *Southern Review* in 1979, Dennis Haskell considers the main features of work he groups broadly under the term "deep image", including poetry from the late 1950s to the 1970s by Robert Bly, W.S. Merwin, William Stafford, Donald Hall and James Wright. He also considers poets of the late 1970s such as Louis Simpson, Mark Strand, Robert Kelly and Jerome Rothenberg, among others, whose

²⁹ Malouf, "A.D. Hope's *New Cratylus*", 148.

³⁰ Joan Kirkby, ed., Introduction to *The American Model* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1982), 2.

³¹ Vincent Buckley, "Ease of American Language", in *The American Model*, ed. Joan Kirkby, 138.

work he relates to the “deep image” mode.³² Some of the features Haskell notes include a general tendency towards open poetical forms, an antagonism to poetry that is mainly ironic and “intellectual” (after T.S. Eliot and conservative, formalist approaches) and a reaction to the “mechanising” impact of technology. Referring to the views of poets such as W.S. Merwin, Haskell summarises the “deep image” approach as a reaction against an “artifice-laden, intellectual poetry which ignores the senses [and] is seen as integral to an artificial, dehumanising society which is busy destroying all natural modes of being” (139). A revaluing of sensory perception and the natural world is important to these poets. He notes that Bly seeks “poetry that reaches out in waves over everything that is alive” (140)³³ rather than poetry dominated by intellectual rationalism, and that Merwin decries the way “the senses themselves / Are to be taken away like clothing / After a sickness” (139).³⁴ Haskell places Noel Stock’s comment from the mid-1970s in the context of such poetic redress:

If all things are reducible to matter, then the formulas of physical science are the only possible poetry and anything else is a poor joke. ... [As] technology expands life must diminish, unless there is a corresponding gain on the spiritual side. (140)³⁵

The poets of “deep image” seem to Haskell to favour simple diction to engage complex emotions that value the interior life and release the unpredictable. Both the conscious and the unconscious minds are involved in creating poetry, while the poet seeks particularly to draw images from the unconscious to express the perception of inward reality (141). The “deep image” is subjective rather than objective in the Imagist style of Pound and, in Haskell’s view, “presupposes that the two worlds [of inner and outer

³² Dennis Haskell, “The Modern American Poetry of Deep Image”, *Southern Review* XII.2 (1979): 137-166. Subsequent page references are placed in the text.

³³ Quoting Robert Bly, “The Work of James Wright”, *The Sixties*, no. 8, 2.

³⁴ Quoting W.S. Merwin, “The Finding of Reasons”, in *The Lice* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 74.

³⁵ Quoting Noel Stock, *A Call to Order* (Sydney: South Head Press, 1976), 67.

life] exist, and that the psychic life can parallel the outer life” (141). While different poets take the relation of “inner” and “outer” to various points on a continuum, with Bly’s position the more extreme, others also value the imaginative grace within the poet that can speak with special insight about the world and the self, linking them closely by such a gesture (142). Haskell quotes Donald Hall’s view that the “deep image” poem works as “images set free from realistic narrative or from logic grow out of each other by association, and poems move by an inward track of feeling” (143).³⁶

James Wright’s poem “Rain” is discussed by Haskell as an example of a “deep image” poem in which images reinforce each other cumulatively but in ways that are not easily “rationalised” by the reader’s intellect. They are linked emotively, however, in his view, by a “track of feeling” suggested by the “sinking of things” in the first line:

It is the sinking of things.

Flashlights drift over dark trees,
Girls kneel,
An owl’s eyelids fall.

The sad bones of my hands descend into a valley
Of strange rocks. (127)³⁷

Haskell suggests that the emotive “track” linking the images evokes sleep, loss and death, and that it uses pace and silent spaces to create this impression: “If the poem works it pierces you before you realise what has happened” (147). When such poems are unsuccessful, he observes, it is because the “track of feeling” is not clear enough to engage the reader and the associations “do not touch a *general* [Haskell’s emphasis] subjective life” (147). When successful, however, the poetry values humility and

³⁶ Quoting Donald Hall, “The Expression without the Song”, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, no. 8 (1969): 227-28.

³⁷ Quoting from the collection by James Wright, *The Branch Will Not Break* (London: Longman, 1963).

receptivity to the “real” as a resource for renewal and greater possibility. He sees Merwin expressing this attitude of acceptance and celebration in the poem “Gift”:

I have to trust what was given to me
 if I am to trust anything
 it led the stars over the shadowless mountain
 what does it not remember in its night and silence
 what does it not hope knowing itself no child of time. (148)³⁸

The poem creates a sense of emotional freedom which Haskell links with the Romantic tradition of Wordsworth, Whitman and Keats’ “negative capability”. Unlike Keats’ poet who “has no identity [and is] filling some other Body”, Haskell sees the “deep image” poet as having an identity “created by all other bodies filling *him*” (149).³⁹ In the open forms of “deep image” poems, Haskell notes the importance of sound patterns, rhythm and line breaks as a way of connecting images or giving them additional resonance. Careful use of pause and modulation of pace are also features. The implications of statements in a poem are usually more important than their direct meaning. Contrast and repetition of precise but suggestive images build the connections underlying the “track of feeling”. While acknowledging the debt of “deep image” poets to the French Symbolists and to poets such as Neruda, Jiménez and Vallejo, Haskell concludes that “deep image” is the least publicized of the various recent movements in American poetry yet offers a great deal in its “discovery of simple expression” and “communicative vitality” (163). Such poetry, for him, represents “an act of faith in answer to the skepticism and irony prevailing in the decades following Eliot” (163).

Haskell’s essay offers useful points of comparison and contrast with Malouf’s technique and purpose in his poems from the late 1970s in *First Things Last*. His empathy with many of the tenets of this kind of poetry – such as re-valuing the human

³⁸ Quoting from the collection by W.S. Merwin, *Writings to an Unfinished Accompaniment* (New York: Atheneum, 1973).

³⁹ John Keats, Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818, in *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-21*, I, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 387.

relationship with the non-human environment and being aware of the poet's mind and body as subconsciously open to learn from other life forms – is apparent. Malouf's linking of "inner" life to "outer" objects through "tracks" of idea-images and feeling-values is also clear. His use of "mood" as a connecting device in narrative fiction is evident in *An Imaginary Life*, as is a reassessment of the "primitive" of language as a way of "seeing" the world afresh.⁴⁰ The "rhythm of images" (after Kelly) is also a feature of the structure and movement of many of Malouf's poems in *First Things Last*.

The first poem in the collection, "Wild Lemons", is indicative of the comparison and contrast in this regard. Although it offers a sequence of images linked to the poem's title that takes the reader/listener into the realm of emotive memory, favouring a "deep image" style, its structure is also shaped by linked propositions about time and its passing. Idea-images informed by feelings emerge and a balance of rational and intuitive thoughts and associations is sustained. The trope of the journey or quest is a shaping energy in this first poem, as it is in many others in *First Things Last*, such as "The Crab Feast", "A Poor Man's Guide to Southern Tuscany" and, finally, "Ode: Stravinsky's Grave" whose brief pilgrimage concludes the collection. To move through a landscape ("An die Musik"), walk among statues ("Ode: Schubert Sonata"), row across a lake ("For Two Children"), step out in a new direction ("The Garden") and come down from the "highlands" of sleep ("Ode One") are all images that point to the questing nature of a poetic that values the subject's ongoing movement whether physical or emotional. The poems seem ostensibly to lead the reader/listener away from "beginnings" yet they often turn again towards what was "early" while bearing within them the changes of later times, as in a musical form such as the sonata. To fully grasp

⁴⁰ A desire to reassess the fundamental uses of language was a concern of ethnopoetics in the 1970s, evident in a magazine such as *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* described by its editors Jerome Rothenberg and Dennis Tedlock as "a first journal of the world's tribal poetries". It appeared from 1970 to 1973 with a second series from 1975. An issue entitled *New Wilderness Letter* appeared as Number 11 in 1982, discussed in Clay and Phillips, 34.

the nature of change becomes the purpose of such journeys, giving them the quality of experiential learning (Figure 2).

This is evident in “Wild Lemons” whose opening lines create a mood of discovery, associated with childhood and youth in Queensland, that widens to inform the subject’s understanding later in life, as he travels to other places, of the inevitable passing of time and his destined place in it. It is “the light of just this moment” that is first apprehended, a paradox of past yet present instances when an awareness is felt that makes life’s narrative feel connected. Such “moments” encompass both private and social spheres. The pronouns “I” and “we” of the opening lines (the subject and companions) widen to include the reader in a generalised proposition after a mid-point refrain:

Through all those years keeping the present
open to the light of just this moment:
that was the path we found, you might call it
a promise that starting out among blazed trunks
the track would not lead nowhere, that being set
down here among wild lemons, our bodies were
expected at an occasion up ahead
that would not take place without us.

. . .

The present is always
with us, always open (*FTL* 1)

Past, present and future carry the paradox of a changing yet continuously refreshing “scent of lemons”, a destiny glimpsed in commonplace social events like relaxing with friends in the early evening or enjoying together the “warmth of our island”. The subject’s tone is conversational, questioning and reflective, moving to a more serious note in the concluding lines:

I lie down
in different weather now though the same body,
which is where that rough track led. Our sleep
is continuous with the dark, or that portion of it
that is this day’s night; the body
tags along as promised to see what goes.
What goes is time, and clouds melting into

tomorrow on our breath, a scent of lemons
run wild in another country, but smelling always of themselves. (*FTL* 1)

The image of “wild lemons” moves between metaphor and sensory object. The fruit’s feel, look and taste are emphasised. It becomes an emblem of the chaos of impressions and experiences taken “wild” into the body along life’s “rough track”. Such experiences are “breathed out” in the shapes of words, thoughts and behaviours, all carrying on their “breath” the process by which meaning is made, the acts of human “making” which are allowed to “run wild in another country” of mind/body before being expressed into the world. The poem implies that this is not only true to the subject’s experience in making poems but also to that of readers who might create their own lives in ways perhaps they have not yet considered. The poem offers itself as a redress for habits of perception that let everyday moments pass without noticing that underlying “tracks” are present, like a captivating and recurring “scent of lemons” that is always available to invoke new possibility amid the apparently mundane. The common domestic fruit run “wild”, now “tough-skinned ... among their thorns”, also suggests the “weathering” effects of life experiences and perhaps the hardy awareness of the immigrant settler, forming a hybrid identity between cultures and lands.

“Wild Lemons” suggests the importance for Malouf of ongoing friendships and his links with places that continue to engage his memory and imagination. Such relationships, it is suggested, are among the “first things” on which one may rely during the sometimes difficult “commerce” of living when the sense of self may be less secure. The subject in the poem “First Things Last” struggles with this, as after the suggested trauma of illness or a medical procedure:

It takes days
of accounting for each hair
on your head, each grain of dust,
to imagine yourself
back into the frame

You argue with the sky
 in your mouth; you breathe out
 clouds, get them moving
 behind you, they lift
 the grass, a little nightwind

arrives at your skin.
 slowly you manage
 your head into the room. If you
 can glue a face back on it,
 you win. (*FTL* 39)

Many of the poems are dedicated to close friends or recall family memories. “Ode One”, for example, placed after the more sombre “First Things Last”, is dedicated to Sybille and Vivian Smith. Its tone is lighter, more confident and joyful, offering a contrast with the tone of the previous poem, and recalling themes from *An Imaginary Life*:

The new day finds us here. We have come down
 from the high lands of sleep in the company
 of dreams, shy beasts whose scent is still upon us;
 invisibly we herd them, feel the heat of
 their breath. We are at home. The same sky stretches
 on past yesterday. (*FTL* 41)

Here the subject’s identity is confidently in “the body’s self, a known country, / but caught in a foreign light” (*FTL* 41). The poem explores how the self seeks to know another place and its cultural expressions, as through a statue, legend, painting or a landscaped pathway. Tension between a matter-of-fact definition of things and being open to the “actual-fabulous” is apparent:

We turn aside from miracles
 to the plain facts of a case, having put ourselves
 in service to *this* and *that*, the denominative
 clowns who are double agents in an affair
 more actual-fabulous of *is* and *were*. (*FTL* 41)

It is hard for the subject to enter into the habits of belief of former times, as his mind “brings these fictions forth to explain ourselves / before bicycles and clocks” (*FTL* 42).

The mechanical, rational viewpoint throws doubt on the wisdom of having too much

“commerce” with “spells” and “brilliant transformation scenes” (*FTL* 42). It is through the unity of the mind/body, however, that the subject projects a solution to these divisions. The way forward is detected by engaging more fully the human capacities of sensory perception and imagination that enhance apprehension, leading to richer ways of comprehending experience, envisioning possibilities and acting upon beliefs. Malouf’s metaphor of the “tiny receiver of another harmony” (*FTL* 42) that permits such enriched awareness, uses a technological referent to suggest a biological capacity already intuitive in the body, one radically linked with nature’s patterns. It brings knowledge that blends the opposites of light and dark (“the colours of the night / rainbow”), again suggesting Malouf’s awareness of “knowing” as a dialectical process:

Though the body’s ear
is deaf to it, some other part, the tongue,
a hair, is tuned to catch (tiny receiver
of another harmony) its messages
...
It is all there in the music our bodies are
the score of, and will take place there. Skies
already cover the event
...
Green jumps out
of leaves into a distance where our head
is dark but knows the colours of the night
rainbow just the same that arches over
our bed, and the creatures too are within reach. (*FTL* 42-43)

These last lines point to a “deep image” mode that carries the reader forward along a “track” of associations that bring a feeling of expectancy. “Green jumps out” like a surprising source of light and blends with “colours” of a nocturnal rainbow, with its arch suggestive of spiritual promise as it forms a dome over the vulnerable curve of the head. The run-on lines cause the reader to take in the images in one long “breath” so that the associations accumulate quickly, striking off the reader’s own imaginative “flashes”. Like a night-light beside a bed, the “green” energy offers a comforting feeling, illuminating the presence of nocturnal “creatures” that are “within reach” like

trusted companions. Animals and the dark of night, usually sources of fear for the sleeper or traveller, are transformed using this technique into portents of hope. The surprise of the poetic is essential to the effect.

First Things Last explores such themes through a variety of perspectives that are personal for Malouf although made “objective” through the work itself.⁴¹ As well as paying tribute to friendships, the “first things” of remembered places in Queensland create the locations for “Deception Bay” and “The Crab Feast”. “The Garden” offers a view of a re-interpreted tropical Eden where humanity’s loss of “first things” becomes a new beginning, one that is lasting in its influence on ways of seeing and understanding:

When they stepped through
 they were not themselves; far off
 seemed closer, they stood
 on flat boards in a world
 of perspectives ...

It must have seemed
 the far end of things.
 It was in fact a start
 in a fresh direction, a green
 shoot, a co-ordinate. (*FTL* 2-3)

Malouf’s “interiors” from his early poems are re-visited and explored in more complex, tentative ways notably in prose poems such as “The Switch” and “A Poor Man’s Guide to Southern Tuscany”.

In “The Switch”, the subject begins by “looking for the switch in a darkened room” (*FTL* 26) and leads the reader through an exploration of interior space in which

⁴¹ Malouf comments in a draft of his review of A.D. Hope’s *The New Cratylus* that the reader needs to know little about T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens or W. H. Auden to appreciate their poetry. He continues: “I suspect the same is true for poets, like Lowell and Berryman for example, who might seem to be practising self-expression but whose use of personal material is very much more important than the material itself, whose poetry, I mean, is also ‘impersonal’ in that what it makes is an objectification, a dramatization for the reader, of something quite other than what the poet himself felt.” The draft was received by Judith Rodriguez in December 1979, UQFL 75/Box 3/Folder 36.

walls and floor merge with the dark life of a forest, reminiscent of scenes in *An*

Imaginary Life but more surreal in its depiction:

I settle for the dark. I lower myself into it and drift. It enters my ears, passes in and out of my mouth so I barely notice, touches my skin, touches the secret place on my surface that is the switch. Suddenly all the tracks that lead to this room are clearly visible, shining with footsteps. There are fingerprints, also visible, all over the walls. (*FTL* 26)

The “room” becomes identified with the subconscious nocturnal realms of the mind/body in sleep, a permeable site that other kinds of consciousness might enter, both animal and human, and the location from which an ideal of expanded vision becomes possible. Although affinities with the “primitive” strain in “deep image” poetry are apparent in this work, its structure as a prose poem gives it a sequential logic that makes its images seem strangely “real” rather than purposefully connotative or emotive in their effects. The walls and floor planks, for example, are named simply and evoked as surfaces apprehended by the senses (“The walls creak ... the floor planks have softened”). The subject brings the reader into his intimate experience of “the dark”, using a verbal sequence of precise movements (“I settle for the dark. I lower myself into it and drift. It enters my ears”). The room and the subject’s body become one, inhabited by the “footsteps” and “fingerprints” of earlier lives of many kinds, the “flutterings” of a heartbeat that might also be that of the reader. The belief in the possibility of such unity of interior and exterior is offered not just as a dream or feeling but as a “reality” apprehended without fear by the visionary subject. The pattern of Malouf’s idea-images moving towards vision is again apparent, an important aspect of his mode of learning by means of poetic insight (Figure 2).

A contrasting approach is offered in “A Poor Man’s Guide to Southern Tuscany” where the ironic tone of the subject/narrator seemingly praises but also quite



Fig. 8. Henri Rousseau, *Joyeux Farceurs*, c. 1906, oil on canvas (145.8 x 113.4 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

anxiously interrogates an over-obsessive focus on “interiors” of mind.⁴² The opening statement forecasts the imaginary voyages “to be made in this room”, a confined space (also the body and the self) inviting the play of the subject’s mind.

The introductory paragraph seems inventive and descriptive yet noticeably disconnected from the location of Tuscany indicated in the title:

⁴² In August 1979 Malouf writes to Rodriguez that he has purchased a new sound system and is listening to Schubert and the last songs of Strauss. He is writing “a set of journeys out of the room” through a painting, a spot on the wall and one through a note from the mad scene in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. He has a book “ready to be typed up. ... I’m fairly pleased with it. At least it’s ambitious and different from most of what I’ve done before”. He has also “sent off multiple copies of the libretto [of *Voss*] from Germany”, UQFL 75/Box 3/ Folder 36, letter, 13 August 1979, Campagnatico.

There are many voyages to be made in this room. It is an air-balloon, a yacht, an island among other islands, hot on occasion as Sumatra, when it sails in among the archipelagoes, at other times, as chill white as a submarine in one of the passages under the ice-cap, with the sky grinding solid overhead. (*FTL* 44)

The vocabulary evokes a shifting atmosphere of fantastical explorations and tentative possibilities. A tale of the fabulous might be anticipated but instead the reader finds “the corridor we have stumbled along” (*FTL* 45) via the painting *Joyeux Farceurs* by Henri Rousseau (Figure 8) quickly shifting from fertile forest (where the reader might also place Rousseau’s tiger from *Surprise!*, his first “jungle” painting of 1891) to rugged polar ice drifts suggesting to the narrator’s memory and imagination Casper David Friedrich’s painting *The Sea of Ice* (also known as *The Wreck of Hope* [Figure 9]). The subject associates the two paintings by evoking the animal heat of Rousseau’s



Fig. 9. Casper David Friedrich, *The Sea of Ice* (also known as *The Wreck of Hope*) c. 1823-25, oil on canvas (96.7 x 126.9 cm), Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

monkey-like creatures connecting with that of an imagined polar bear through a “channel of blood” (*FTL* 45). The heat from the closed-in foliage of Rousseau’s work also compares and contrasts with the frigid surroundings of Friedrich’s, the juxtaposition suggesting a leaning towards extremity in the subject who recognizes that both paintings project surfaces of mind as much as ideas of landscapes. In *The Sea of Ice* the glimpse of a wrecked ship trapped by ice (importantly, not mentioned at all by the subject) offers a disturbing image of a human journey curtailed by larger natural forces. Neither painting gives much comfort to a traveller who might follow this “Poor Man’s Guide”. Malouf’s choice of paintings for the narrator’s imagined journeys suggests that he is aware of the dangers of over-reliance on interpretations that may distort the viewer’s perspectives. At the same time, they demonstrate his continued interest in the way an inner view shapes representation of an apparently outer world.

As well as paintings, a hat-shaped stain on the wall, musical recordings and favourite arias are all offered as vehicles to facilitate imaginative journeys. The narrator praises them over-eagerly as if seeking an antidote for alienation from what is beyond the room. The use of incomplete sentences, asides, sudden exclamations and rhetorical questions creates a sense of uncertainty:

The bear has slipped away through a hole in the ice (like Kasper [sic] David Friedrich’s brother). ... This fleecy grey-white sea, with its polar highlights, must be his pelt (or have we at last got into the bear’s cranium, where the tide of blood flows blue?) – Well, enough for one brief excursion. ... This far or a mile further, what does it matter? (*FTL* 46-47)

The subject finds that his imagined “exits”, too, can be tiring:

There is only one final point to any journey, and for that we are not yet ready, are we? If we were the quickest way out would have been via the window.

Let us swiftly turn back: across the smoky ice-plain, between the fronds, so! We are back in the room again and ready to start out now in a new direction.

(*FTL* 47)

The narrator's "poverty" is represented as one of balance and outlook, proud that he has a fine sound system but dislocating the arts he enjoys from any sense of their origins and influence through a shared sense of humanity. All "exterior" reference points are removed. Unable to find interest or identity in the much-praised landscape outside the room, he invents inner worlds that are disconnected from his actual location. The poem implies that such imbalance can be destructive, as several allusions to potential suicide and death suggest. Even the "hat" stain on the wall brings thoughts of death and an urgent exclamation demanding greater certainty:

the hat tossed on the bed is a fatal gesture, a momentary end in the course of things that will lead inevitably to a death (But whose? That is what we want to know, and right now; it's no good saying Later, or We'll tell you when the time is ripe or when we get there. Now, we say. Now!) (*FTL* 47)

The subject's delight is that there are so many musical recordings on his shelf that he is distracted from the tedium of going into the next room or looking out the window at the drop beneath (44). There seems no possibility of a staircase or even a ladder as a means of exit for the body. The focus is only "interiors" and "escape":

It's a great way out. One, as you will appreciate, of so many that the mere possibility of all those journeys stacked on the shelves quite takes our breath away. How could we ever, in one lifetime, take even a hundredth of them? It offers one a vision of eternity (*FTL* 50)

The reader may keep the opening caution in mind: "Getting out of the room is, in the end, your own affair. It's every man for himself" (*FTL* 44). The "commerce" of mind and "reality" is depicted as a delicate one in this prose poem, open to delusion and potential imbalance if there is too great a reliance on any of its elements. The subject's empathy with the "mad scene" in *Lucia di Lammermoor* is suggestive and the closing reference to Schubert's "An die Musik" may bring to the reader's mind the song's more sombre opening words as well as the tone of gratitude in its ending.⁴³ It is music,

⁴³ "Du holde Kunst, in wieviel grauen Stunden, / Wo mich des Lebens wilder Kreis umstrickt, / Hast du mein Herz zu warmer Lieb' entzunden, / Hast mich in einer bess're Welt entrückt!" ("You blessed art,

particularly the voice in song, which finally brings the subject back to himself. As the singer “turns away and draws breath out of silence” renewal comes to the subject from an emotive site. The subject’s anxious journeys finally reach a calm haven.

As a prose poem whose form and structure suggest the interweaving of genres, “A Poor Man’s Guide to Southern Tuscany” can be read as an experiment in which Malouf explores a consciousness that draws a great deal from his own interest in the creative arts. It also uses this interest subversively as a resistant energy. The piece explores something new in his work: a consciousness whose way of imagining may be destructive rather than enhancing of self. The prose poem also questions whether the imaginative use of language as an end in itself always leads to good, an ethical query with ongoing socio-political resonance for a later twentieth century poet. Is it a creative energy that makes worlds the writer and reader should always inhabit without caution? Is there redress needed for poetic imagination itself when the balance of “inner” and “outer” is skewed? To use Piaget’s term, how might equilibration be functioning in a consciousness moving toward imbalance? It is only a few steps from the tentative explorations in “A Poor Man’s Guide” to the consciousness of the terrorist/narrator in *Child’s Play*, a work commenced in March 1980 amid the murderous activities of the Red Brigade in Italy.⁴⁴

in so many grey hours / when the savage ring of life tightens round me / you have kindled warm love in my heart / have carried me to a better world!” (author’s trans).

⁴⁴ Malouf writes: “I’ve spent the past fortnight in a blaze of creativity and have actually finished a longish prose piece”, letter, Campagnatico, 28 March 1980. In the same letter, he says he wants to read “more about weapons” from books obtained in late 1979 in Boston and New York where he was invited to read (with Les Murray and Vincent Buckley) by the Academy of American Poets. The invitation to the U.S.A. is mentioned in a letter dated Campagnatico, 27 September 1979. Both are found in UQFL 75/Box 3/Folder 36.

Commentators at the time tended to find *First Things Last* less accessible than Malouf's earlier works. Philip Neilsen, quoting reviews in 1981 by Martin Harrison and Les Murray, comments:

The collection is weakened by a straining after abstractness, a private, mental landscape, and Malouf has been accused of concentrating too much "on symphonic texture and not enough on lyrical economy and tautness", and of a prosaic straining after "sophistication and artifice".⁴⁵

James Tulip finds that a "discrepancy between the ideas and the imagination of Malouf's poem ["First Things Last"] remains" and points to

an abstracting tendency in Malouf's poetry that hovers around the actual imaginative life of the poem; it comes after the complex experiencing which the language of the poem creates.⁴⁶

These commentators are perhaps sensing the underlying tensions in the collection between the inner and outer life as Malouf explores alternative representations of poetic imagining, as in "A Poor Man's Guide". However, the collection as a whole, in the reading offered here, is rich in works that subtly shift between "near" and "far" ways of perceiving and imagining to create engaging narratives of discovery. In "For Two Children: Lelo and Alex Tesei" an imagined trip to take children across a lake becomes a day spent closer to the shore:

Instead we trail our hands under the jetty
and stay close in to the shore. The water is clear,
metallic, deep, with an edge so keen our hands
are struck off at the wrist, set in Peru, say,
or Alaska, in a reliquary of solid
rock crystal. No longer ours, they seek
adventures. In the houses opposite, across
the blue-black glassy lake they stroke a cat
or crumble cup-cakes, saying we should have come there
too. And indeed we should (*FTL* 15)

The precise sound-patterns of "close", "clear" and "keen", as well as "crystal" (from Alaska), "cat" and "cup-cakes" (in the imagined house across the lake) create a teasing

⁴⁵ Neilsen, 55. See also Martin Harrison, "It Is Our Body We Move Through", *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 3 1981; Les Murray, "A Consumer's Rundown", *Compass* 3.2-3 (1981): 89-92.

fantasy which retains its integrity as one a way of experiencing what the day offers, despite the adults' query at its conclusion: "Where have you been all day? They ask at the boatshed on the beach" (*FTL* 15). The images form a narrative of surprises as in a children's tale, with the arrangement of word stress in each line highlighting the next detail (such as "struck off at the wrist", "reliquary of solid / rock crystal"). The poem's oblique comment on its own making is framed within its "track" of images, rather than as an abstract proposition:

We lean to where the boat tugs at its shadow
down there, blue-black and deep. (*FTL* 15)

Malouf's new poetic territory is explored in its diversity of past and present moments. His perceptions are grounded in the intersections of subject and world, with a strong underlying awareness that any perceptions are themselves created things. Their value is open to greater clarity or greater distortion, as the eye of the perceiver chooses its own adjustments for its own purposes. Such perceptions may also be intuitive as in "Ode One" where the subject describes

a landscape touched
with such surprises as at twilight send
angels over the fields, though we interpret
their light as circus wagons, take their silence
for bells. (*FTL* 41)

With suggestions of Baudelaire's "Correspondances", the poem offers a further way of perceiving that is barely available to the everyday senses, one that may be apprehended intuitively at certain moments as when light plays on landscape. The energy of light and the underlying silence hint at transformation that begins as a meeting of the intuitive and the observed in the subject's mind. In "Preludes" such "otherness" is formed through being open to experiences that begin in the present moment of the body and "push through out of themselves / to the far side of the picture" (*FTL* 8). Its physical emblem is breathing in the air which "feed[s] our bodies with its blue, or / our

⁴⁶ James Tulip, "David Malouf as Humane Allegorist", *Southerly* 41.4 (1981): 392-401.

spirit with what trickles / up, invisible” (8). A “shadow enters” and “we wait, eyes covered / by the hands of one who steps out of the fog behind us”:

Let the angel
speak before you answer. The first word
that flies into your head,
but *now*, will be the last word of its text. (*FTL* 9)⁴⁷

Seeking ways into this experience, which remains grounded in the “reality” of the senses as well as the imagination for Malouf, reinforces the importance of music in this collection. In “*An die Musik*” (“To Music”) he recognises its power as a pathway to transformation in the Romantic tradition celebrated in Rilke’s ode of the same title and in Schubert’s song. Rilke speaks of:

*Musik: Atem der Statuen. Vielleicht:
Stille der Bilder. Du Sprache wo Sprachen
enden. Du Zeit,
die senkrecht steht auf der Richtung vergehender Herzen.*⁴⁸

Rilke regards music as able to transform feeling “into audible landscape” (“*in hörbare Landschaft*”) and to make what is innermost stand outside at a distance “as the other side of the air” (“*da uns das Innre umsteht / als geübteste Ferne, als andre Seite der Luft*”).⁴⁹ Malouf echoes these thoughts and links them to his poem “The Garden” earlier in the collection:

We might have known it always: music
is the landscape we move through in our dreams, and in the Garden
it was music we shared
with the beasts. Even plants
unbend, are enchanted...
...
What else does it make,
this *concert champetre*, if not a space we might re-enter
in innocence, pure steps

⁴⁷ This phrase suggests Rilke’s angels as well as Baudelaire’s “Correspondances” with its apprehension through nature and the mind of “*de confuses paroles*” (“a tremor of mixed words”) trans. Alan Tate, *Baudelaire in English*, eds. Carol Clark and Robert Sykes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), 17.

⁴⁸ “Music: breathing of statues. Perhaps: / silence of paintings. You language where all language / ends. You time / standing vertically on the motion of mortal hearts”, Rilke, *Selected Poetry*, 146-47.

⁴⁹ Rilke, *Selected Poetry*, 147.

of sound on which the creatures
descend at almost dusk to recognize, as in a pool,
their names (*FTL* 51)

The first person plural pronoun “We” introduces the main proposition, immediately extending the belief of the lyric speaker to an assumed understanding with the reader. The simple vocabulary and word stresses on “known” and “always” give a sense of authenticity to the speaker’s voice. Music, the subject asserts, links our dreams and our waking and is the shared experience of all of nature. He seeks a form of “knowing” that makes “innocence” again possible, so that nature might “discover a fifth season to push through to” (*FTL* 52). It is an “innocence” like “simple: versions of green, leaf and underleaf” (*FTL* 2) in “The Garden” and like primitive music of “shuffling ... flutterings” (*FTL* 26) in “The Switch”. Specific pieces of music are linked to vegetable production in stanzas three and four, reflecting the practical application of music to growing large vegetables and fruit crops which was reported with some astonishment and humour by the media in the 1970s.⁵⁰ News reports showed large pumpkins fitted with headphones through which recordings of orchestral and other kinds of music were played and farmers pointed to larger than usual crops they claimed had been influenced by music in their growing cycles. Malouf clearly finds this humorous (“Bruckner coaxes the zucchini”, for example in the fourth stanza) but also appealing and unexpected, a use of music that seems to give practical value to what might seem otherwise an abstract and ethereal ideal. “An agricultural boom” in “real market gardens” is unpredicted territory for poetic celebration, but not unfamiliar to Malouf who elsewhere describes his grandfather as “the lord of vegetables” and remembers his

⁵⁰ See P. Weinberger and U. Graefe, “The Effect of Variable-Frequency Sounds on Plant Growth”, *Canadian Journal of Botany*, no. 51 (1973): 1851-56. The research over recent decades is summarized in Frank W. Telewski, “A Unified Hypothesis of Mechanoperception in Plants”, *American Journal of Botany* 93.10 (2006): 1466-76., See also Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird, *The Secret Life of Plants* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), a pseudo-scientific work which popularized a broader concept of reactions in plants.

own childhood “where I nose through dusty bean stalks”.⁵¹ To cultivate “a new species [which] taps at the boundaries” (*FTL* 52) of present conditions is something desired in Malouf’s works, especially when earth and imagination are interwoven.⁵²

The ode, with its suggestion of musical divisions responsive to a tonal centre, is featured as a poetic frame in “Ode: Schubert, Sonata in B Flat Major, D.960 (op. posth.)” which immediately follows “*An die Musik*”. Here the sonata form is also inferred in the movement of images that are developed and recapitulated throughout the poem, following a “track of feeling” (after Haskell) that begins with surprise and ends with celebration. Its carefully patterned structure of seven twelve-line stanzas offers a progression of images that has resonance with poetry of “deep image” although incorporating philosophical statements that direct the reader’s response beyond the emotive. Memory and feeling are important modes the poem invites the reader/listener to use: “but you remember as I do how it was” (*FTL* 53). Phrasing, punctuation and word stress give fluid energy to the “voice” that is lyrical, intimate and reflective while placing words in visually contained order like notes on a musical manuscript. Light on autumn landscape provides an imagined perspective, arising from an unexpected moment of discovery affecting the subject’s mood as influenced by Schubert’s music. Both the ability to imagine and the images themselves are facets of a “gift”:

the clear gift
shines through all its wrappings, unwraps itself
of haze and is distributed as stubble
and small stones take the sun. (*FTL* 53)

Again the first person plural generalises the subject’s view and invites the reader’s accord: “All this was ours from the start” (*FTL* 53) and “We could live forever here”

⁵¹ David Malouf, “Early Discoveries”, *Neighbours* 7.

⁵² Stephen Benson does not take into account the contemporary agricultural context (perhaps now little remembered and not clearly noted in the poem) when he comments that it “seems a little deflating to have such pristine sounds [in the first lines of the poem] tethered to surprisingly particular works from the canon”, Benson, “Malouf’s *Moments Musicaux*”, 6.

(*FTL 55*). The “river” that “here re-enters our lives” links images from past and present and is transformed into fresh water springs, thunderous surf and the pounding of blood (*FTL 54*). It creates “reprises” and “echoes” like “raindrops flinging a river’s light / in fragments on the pane” (*FTL 54*). A balance of continuity and change is celebrated as “the old life [is] re-invented” (*FTL 54*):

A door flies open

in the new house and the same paddock dazzles
our eyes, the still earth murmurs with its many
mouths, oracular springs, fresh waters running
away through cleft and channel to odd places
of exile, or the sea whose larger music
they enter as a sigh – their exit thunder
on a far beach at dawn...
...

Though we stand staring
at blank mirrors sheeted with our prayers,
the pollens glow, the avenues lead out
from here; we have only to catch our breath, reversing
the image, reversing time, to walk back into
the room with its open door and the earth unwrapping
gifts out of the mist. Wet furrows shine (*FTL 55*)

The trope of light shining upward from the earth is again present here as a positive energy facilitating ways of perceiving that recapitulate a vision of origins. Progress will occur, paradoxically by going back into the “room” with the “open door”, a return to what is “there” all along:

Take heart, we say.
Take heart, take all, and make of it what you will. (*FTL 55*)

It balances the tendency to be

singular, absorbed in a solemn cloud
of knowing too much to enter the charmed circle
of things (*FTL 55*)

The Schubert “Ode” conveys a sense of trust that it participates, through poetic language, in a patterning at work in all things, represented here in a vision of “the limbs of tall gods locked within” the stone of the hills and “requiring only / breath, faith – our

faith – and the sculptor’s hand / to wake and walk among us” (*FTL* 54). To recognise such possibilities, the poem suggests, is to open a “door” within the mind/body to potentials inherent in life at all levels. The attentive poetic moment brings unpredicted aesthetic value underlying the “surprise” that awakens the senses and intuitive powers. It is a form of making as found in “the sculptor’s hand”, giving outer life to inner vision. Even the unmaking of autumn as leaves fall offers “a clue of gold” that heralds summer’s renewal: “green returns, that is the point” (*FTL* 55). A post-romantic humanist ideal of fulfillment is evident here, working through the consciousness of the individual accessing gifts of perception that form meaning even between disparate realms.

The trope of brightness is also discovered “under” the surface and “within” the body in “The Crab Feast”, an important poem sequence that dramatises the quest for a transformed identity with a creature placed both outside and within the self, a complex evocation of Malouf’s relationship with his developing vocation as a writer and his preoccupation with death, the last frontier of discovery.⁵³ As Karin Hansson has observed of Malouf’s work:

In various contexts the “other” is symbolically included ... to denote the carrier of transformative values from an *alternative* [Hansson’s emphasis] existence. Johnno, the Child ... and ... the Crab have such functions.⁵⁴

Unlike the Child, the crab is not drawn into the subject’s realm by an inviting lure but is aggressively hunted by the subject’s fierce desire:

I wanted the whole of you, raw poundage
in defiance of breathlessness
or the power of verbal charms,
on my palm, on my tongue. (*FTL* 29)

⁵³ Malouf’s letter to Judith Rodriguez from Florence on 10 March 1979 refers to his “working on a longish poem (ten parts, about 300 lines)”, UQFL75/Box 3/Folder 36.

⁵⁴ Hansson, 117.

The image of hunter, tiger and glass ball finds a further transformation. The subject seeks the crab as a symbol of the habitat of the coastal estuary that has lived powerfully in his imagination since childhood. Like the child with “sweet mud-chocolate” fingers recalled later in “*Nostalgie*”, the crab scurries about in a harvest of mud under mangroves, its claws nimbly gathering the dross of other small life forms to feed into its own mouth. The crab is identified with the poet as both seem to feed on the cycle of life and death. The crab’s shape is symmetrical like a “tropic sun” (*FTL* 29) and its body is “like a star” (*FTL* 35), identifying the crab also with dominant sources of light. Such a connection is prefigured in “This Day Under My Hand” in which a vital aspect of the poet’s self “blooms” in images of the energy of sea and sun:

From the dark bay hissing
like crabs, red tropic suns. (*Bicycle* 41)

The crab becomes an emblem of imagination’s work, as the scarlet poppy does for Ovid. The narrator/subject in “The Crab Feast” seeks to grasp this energy through the physical act of eating the crab, an attempt to assimilate the creature’s way of knowing the world it inhabits. As recompense, he envisages the crab feeding on him. It is a quest for subject and object to become one that is also a power struggle ending in the subject’s acceptance, paradoxically, of the death of both rather than an enhanced life. They are both “broken” as the culminating event, the “love feast”, takes place in the imagination in Part X. The poem takes further the mysterious and potent relationship of human and non-human life forms already found in *An Imaginary Life*. However, the subject in “The Crab Feast” desires to identify with a creature in a way that is more sacramental than Ovid’s yearning for the speech of spiders or a bird’s voice. He regards the crab as “myself in another species, brute / blue, a bolt of lightning, maybe God” (*FTL* 37). It has a consciousness and a pattern of life that inspires respect. Commenting

in 1981, James Tulip notes a comparison between “The Crab Feast” and Galway Kinnell’s “The Bear” as expressions of a “new imagination”:

What is happening here is something general in modern feeling. ... All the progressivist doctrine of man as superior to animal is sloughed off; evolution is being used against itself. It is a way back into nature, a movement out of the mind into the body. ... The ecological unity of all living things is rediscovered by this new imagination. It belongs equally to modern poetry and politics. ... There is the discovery – or should we say recovery of the meal as a sacramental moment in the poem.⁵⁵

In a reverse image of Ovid as water in a pool to be lapped up by deer, the opening of the poem offers a scene where “My tongue slips into / the furthest, sweetest corner of you” (*FTL* 28). Commentators have recognised the human erotic in such scenes,⁵⁶ but their force as representations of an intense curiosity to know the non-human “other” is also relevant, in the way an animal may lick its offspring or taste a pleasing food source. The setting on the coastline of Queensland provides a place where human and non-human habitats intersect, a location of transitional states where the “other” is present in its natural home and may indeed treat humans as part of the food chain, as humans also treat other creatures.

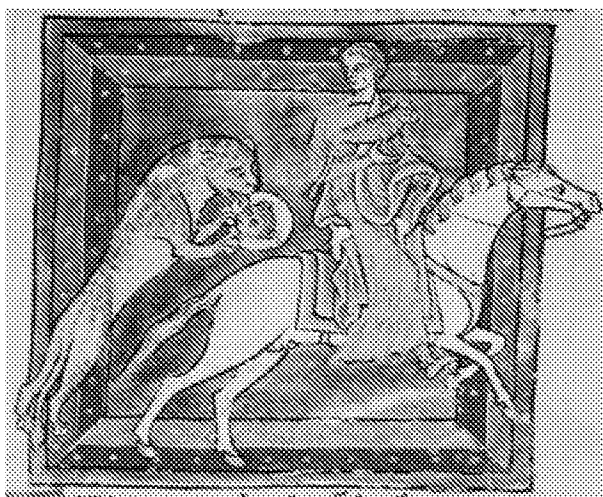


Fig. 10. The tiger and the image in the glass ball, Royal MS. 12 C., xix, Folio 28r., British Library, London.

⁵⁵ Tulip, *David Malouf*, 394-96.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Neilsen, 55; Indyk, *David Malouf*, 14-15.

It is interesting in this regard, that a further medieval image of the tiger and the hunter, read in this study as an influential mytheme underlying Malouf's poetic, shows the animal crossing into the frame like a floating figure concerned not with the "real" cub held by the hunter but intent on relating to the image in the glass, her tongue licking its surface seeking connection with the illusion of what she has lost and found (Figure 10).

With an awareness of the artifice his imagination is creating, the poet/subject in "The Crab Feast" seeks to enter the crab's muddy realm of land and water. He is initially the aggressor, consuming the creature ("crab feast" being a commonly used term for shared meals in coastal areas where crabmeat is readily available or a delicacy served in an up-market restaurant). In turn, the narrator imagines the crab making a final feast of his decaying body so that "the weights are equal" between them (*FTL* 37). He will be subsumed into the cycle of nature, the wholeness Ovid imagined when facing death in *An Imaginary Life*.⁵⁷ The poet's power of imagination creates the fate of both through the language of the poem. The vibrant life form the subject seeks is just beyond reach and he desires to catch it in the way fireflies seem to trap light as they "switch on, switch off" (30) among the mangrove trunks:

They too
Have caught something. A chunk of solid midnight
thrashes in the star-knots of their mesh. (*FTL* 30)

The positioning of words at the start or end of a line, the rhythms and half-rhymes here convey a sense of the object's struggle, giving particular force to "chunk", "solid", "thrashes", "star-knots" and "mesh". The poem similarly offers a "trap" of ten divisions, each with a varying number of stanzas, a "mesh" that is at the same time dynamic and open, allowing the reader/listener to tune to a voice that self-consciously engages the imagination yet catches in words its own limitations. For the dilemma of human power remains inescapable, despite the desire for shared dominion: the power of

the human mind and its impact through action on creatures and places. The poem tries to redress the imbalance by granting the crab its own existence but the force of the poet's imagination in forming this "reality" resists the attempt like an undertow. The reader is warned as the subject recognises that he has been building "kingdoms of cloud castles":

Night
comes on and I am caught

with a whole life on my hands,
in my mouth raw words,
the taste of so much air, so much water,

flesh. It was never to be weighed,
this dull shore and its landscape, water
poised above water

and all its swarming creatures, against the kingdom of cloud castles
we build with our breath.
But words made you

a fact in my head. You were
myself in another species, brute
blue, a bolt of lightning, maybe God.

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

with a splash I do not hear breaks into
the dark. We are one at last (*FTL* 36-37)

The subject recognizes, finally, that the crab always has its own existence beyond any words he might use to create its image. He seeks to give the crab the benefit of his own complex consciousness of it but the "gift" casts a deep shadow over the creature. The subject must accept that the crab lives in its own "reality", co-existent with the life of the subject and thus "the weights are equal". The image of the sun's shining circle entering the water and giving light from below suggests an event of completion which the subject accepts from nature rather than creates (he does "not hear"). The ending offers a recapitulation of the act of eating in Part I where the subject "Prepared / a new

habitat under the coral reef of my ribs” (*FTL* 28). Now it is the subject who is “open” and “ready” to be broken (*FTL* 37).

Light is an important source of images throughout the poem. The site of quest and struggle in Part III, for example, is the “rip of light” in the subject’s dream-memory:

Matchwood pier, brackish estuary
that flows on into
the sun, a rip of light over the dunes.

I enter. It is all
around me, the wash
of air, clear-spirit country. (*FTL* 30)

Light comes from below and above, as well as from within creatures themselves. The subject seeks “the rainbow” of possibility as well as the “fog” of death:

I hunted you

like a favourite colour,
indigo, to learn
how changeable we are, what rainbows
we harbour within us

and how I should die, cast wheezing into
a cauldron of fog. (*FTL* 31)

Yet the subject is faced with his difference from the creature as well as any imagined kinship. The crab when it is being eaten has “nothing to hide” (*FTL* 34):

That sort of power
kills us, for whom

moonlight, the concept blue,
is intolerably complex as
our cells are, each an open universe
expanding beyond us, the tug

of immortality.
We shall reach it and still die. (*FTL* 34)

The “tug” of what may lie beyond life is not satisfied by the subject’s attempted identification with the crab and the final “love feast” they share is only satisfying if

their common earthly matter “Assembled here / out of earth, water, air” is accepted with its mortal limitations (*FTL* 37). The subject has already recognised that he is “cut off / here in the dimensions / of pure humanity, my need for air a limiting factor” (*FTL* 32).

The subject’s strongly desired identification between human and non-human remains problematic, according to this reading of the poem. Language itself remains a barrier against it. To imagine entering “the charmed circle of things” (as desired in the Schubert “Ode”, for example) involves compromises that cannot fully account for the poet’s awareness of the complex human state, expressed in the semi-scientific metaphor that “our cells” are an “open universe expanding beyond us” (*FTL* 34). To what exactly they reach out “beyond” is not fully clear. To the subject even “the concept blue, / is intolerably complex” (*FTL* 34). In this sense, transformation to a desired unity is limited by the subject’s cognitive frame even as it is drawn, tide-like, toward a desired mood-event (a crab feast) rather than a clear epiphany. The poem suggests that there are limits to grasping identity and change through analogies with other living things, giving the work resonance with Charles Olson’s influential poem, “The Kingfishers” (1949). Here, too, the complexity of life cycles and change brings pause:

And the too strong grasping of it,
when it is pressed together and condensed,
loses it
This very thing you are.

...

if I have any taste
it is only because I have interested myself
in what was slain in the sun

I pose you your question:
shall you uncover honey / where maggots are?

I hunt among stones⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Allen, *New American Poetry*, 5-8.

Malouf's hunt "under mangrove roots and berries" (*FTL* 28) in "The Crab Feast" highlights the similarities and differences of power between human and non-human that attend on such a quest, making it difficult to overcome the division of subject and object. The poet as hunter regards his prey with desire for its life and its death. He, in turn, is partially "slain" as his energy, focus and identity are given to form the work. Malouf's exploration of the tensions facing the writer in works such as "The Crab Feast" and "A Poor Man's Guide to Southern Tuscany" make *First Things Last* a significant point of reference for his next prose work, *Child's Play*. The collection reveals a relationship between poet and imagination in which there is greater complexity and much more at stake than depicted in Dante's relation with Johnno or Ovid's with the Child. Rather than resting in the solace to which music gives "colour and key"⁵⁹ Malouf braces for a closer exploration of the undertow.

Malouf comments in an interview shortly after *Child's Play* was published that he "really created the terrorist from what I knew of the writer", referring particularly to the discipline and isolation he felt were necessary for both to accomplish their separate purposes.⁶⁰ Malouf moved to Italy in 1978, the year statesman Aldo Moro was kidnapped and murdered by terrorists of The Red Brigade, a radical Marxist group formed in 1970 by Renato Curcio, Margherita "Mara" Cagol and Alberto Franceschini as the student movements of the late 1960s came to a close.⁶¹ Thousands of individual acts of violence were attributed to the Brigade in the 1970s. The public outrage at Moro's murder commenced an all-out assault by the police on clandestine Brigade members and activities. The media's reporting of Moro's ordeal was extensive both

⁵⁹ David Malouf, "Ode: Stravinsky's Grave" (*FTL* 56).

⁶⁰ Julie Copeland, "Interview with David Malouf", *Australian Literary Studies* 10.4 (1982): 429.

⁶¹ See Giovanni Fanella and Alberto Franceschini, *Che Cosa Sono Le Br* (Rizzoli: BUR Biblioteca Univ. Rizzoli, 2004).

locally and internationally, including the discovery of his bullet-riddled body in the boot of a red Renault car on 10 May 1978, a time only shortly after Malouf had arrived to settle in Italy.⁶² This detail is perhaps echoed in Malouf's choice of a blue Renault as the terrorist's escape car.⁶³ Any social support the Brigade had gathered gradually waned among the general populace and police arrested many Brigade members in 1980. The media regularly reported on developments. This was the year Malouf was writing *Child's Play* in Campagnatico (from March onwards) so the political context for writing about terrorist activities was immediate.⁶⁴

A further international context is significant for reading *Child's Play*. Writing at a time when structuralist and post-structuralist views of language and literature were increasingly debated and studied, Malouf (as many critics have remarked) may be addressing in his own way the anti-authorial and anti-realist concerns raised by Roland Barthes in works such as "The Death of the Author" (1968) and *S/Z* (1970). In the former, Barthes asserts that

Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.⁶⁵

In *S/Z* Barthes views any attempt towards realism as an artifice since "what we call 'real' (in the theory of the realist text) is never more than a code of representation (of

⁶² Malouf's letters to Judith Rodriguez are addressed from "Il Convento/ Batignano" in May – June 1978, a period when he was looking for a property to purchase.

⁶³ Malouf, *Child's Play*, 143. All subsequent references are placed in the text after the abbreviation CP. Quotations are from the first UK edition published with "Eustace" and "The Prowler" by Chatto & Windus, London, in 1982. The work was first published with *The Bread of Time to Come* (an alternative title for *Fly Away Peter*) by George Braziller, New York in late 1981. Malouf recalls planning that the novella *Child's Play* and the two short stories be published as a whole but found Braziller did not like the idea of a composite book, Malouf, Letter to the author, 18 August 2002.

⁶⁴ A further notable incident occurred in 1981 when members of the Red Brigade kidnapped US Army Brigadier General James Dozier. He was subsequently rescued in a police operation.

⁶⁵ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 142-48.

signification)”.⁶⁶ Such codes are part of systems of socio-cultural phenomena that exist in the minds of readers and writers in a community. In reading a novel, a poem, a newspaper or viewing media programs, according to Barthes, the text is “installing in us ... the narrative code we are going to need”.⁶⁷ The reader becomes the focus, in this view, not the author or the critic, for “the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up the writing are inscribed. ... a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination”.⁶⁸

The role of the reader/listener as the receptor and interpreter of the poet’s transfer of energy in projective verse makes awareness of this integrative role already strongly felt in Malouf’s works. The notion of poetry as a discourse in which what is “closed” may be “opened” and “projected”, together with changing views of intelligence and brain function, also provide Malouf with a wider cultural frame of reference already evident in his poetry and prose. In *Child’s Play*, Malouf goes further and daringly interrogates the codes of perceiving and knowing with which he has invited the reader to engage empathetically in his fiction to date. How might the thoughts and actions of a terrorist make use of imagination? Is it the great writer’s particular style of imaginative representation and the terrorist’s reading of it that lead to the assassination and death of both? If the skeptical Ovid in *An Imaginary Life* could be transformed through an act of imagination, what of the violent fanatic? Can the redress of the poetic imagination, already tested in the demanding circumstances of Ovid’s exile, have any role in discerning the extreme behaviour of terrorists in the 1980s? In the novella the reader is invited to sometimes comply with and, at other times, resist the

⁶⁶ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 80.

⁶⁷ Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, 116-17.

⁶⁸ Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, 146. Malouf’s awareness of current cultural debates is evident when he writes to Rodriguez on 11 June 1978 that he has been attending a seminar on literary matters at which Jacques Derrida is “also offering a lecture”, UQFL 75/Box 3/Folder 36.

apparent angle of the narrative so that, as Malouf writes of Proust's *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, "its process is cyclic and its ultimate reality, as it exists for both writer and reader, is in words, in the act of reading and writing".⁶⁹ However, the novella also explores the way reading and writing can lead to action of a most radical kind when it is combined with a tenacity of the will. The relationship between the written word and its context is recognised as almost impossibly complex and reflective of some of the mysteries of human behaviour.

Commentators have taken psychological and meta-textual approaches to the work, recognising, for example, what Karin Hansson calls the "self-begetting" nature of this novel and *Johnno*, both of which draw on father-son relationships, the search for identity and the desire for continuity of life:

The complex relationship between author, implied author, narrator, protagonist and reader is in fact the theme of this book where the Writer is composing a text which creates the killer whose act is to complete the Writer's Memoir.⁷⁰

Ivor Indyk notes the "extraordinary shift in perspective" between *An Imaginary Life* and *Child's Play*, one that appears to reverse and interrogate the imaginative achievements of the earlier work while actually working through irony to make a strong case in its defense. In his view, Malouf shows "the ability he displays in *Johnno* to inhabit a perspective about which he has reservations, precisely in order to demonstrate its limitations".⁷¹ Philip Neilsen points to the "self-conscious and unreliable narrative" of *Child's Play* that gives the work the "teasing" quality that might be associated with contemporary metafictional stories such as Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* and further notes:

⁶⁹ Malouf, "Marcel Proust – The Book", 310.

⁷⁰ Hansson, 124.

⁷¹ Indyk, *David Malouf*, 31.

a shifting and multiple narrative point of view [which] underlines the subjectivity and incompleteness of individual perception; it offers meticulous descriptive details that reveal little and leave much uncertain. The reader is encouraged to regard the negotiation of meaning in every day life as a detective might, searching for clues in a mystery.⁷²

Neilsen particularly finds a reading of the terrorist's death at the conclusion of the novella problematic, finding little "hard evidence" to support the view that the terrorist dies from wounds as he seeks to escape from the site of the assassination: "Readers can be forgiven for missing the subtle clues".⁷³

It is the intriguing question of an insightful commentator "missing the subtle clues", together with Indyk's reading of a breakdown in the novella between what he terms "imaginative expression and theoretical elaboration",⁷⁴ an apparent confusion of clues similar to Tulip's reservations about abstraction and detail in *First Things Last*, that suggests the need for further reading strategies assisted by closer study of the novella in its development. By locating the "imaginative" and the "theoretical" as aspects of ongoing personal learning that Malouf purposely explores, placing them sometimes in opposition and at other times in tentative balance, the dilemma of the terrorist and the limitations he perceives in the great writer gain greater clarity.

As apparent in the manuscript study of *An Imaginary Life*, Malouf gives very close attention to establishing moods and images at the beginning of a work so that they underpin its subsequent development and are recapitulated in the ending, often in an ambiguous way. He favours both intensive and extensive reading strategies, bringing the reader's experience of the poetic into reading his prose so that the movement from one to the other is naturalized. His comments on his own reading show that he values a novel where, as with Proust, "we have only to tune ourselves to the music and read

⁷² Neilsen, 88-89.

⁷³ Neilsen, 89.

⁷⁴ Indyk, *David Malouf*, 34.

on”⁷⁵ or, in reading *Jane Eyre*, “the voice of the narrator ... is irresistible; so close, so much part of your own inner world”⁷⁶ or, in enjoying *The Raj Quartet*, the reader finds “something you can get right inside”.⁷⁷ In Malouf’s view, each writer has a “peculiar way of receiving and transforming reality that amounts, once he has got it down, to a created universe”.⁷⁸

Malouf reports writing the first draft of *Child’s Play* “in great sweeps, in less than ten days, much as I wrote *An Imaginary Life*”.⁷⁹ He comments after the initial drafting:

I had great fun with my terrorist who is quite normal, but a monster none the less; and even greater fun doing his intended victim, a great writer of the old school.⁸⁰

He also notes extensive re-working of the text as the year progresses. The beginning and the ending, particularly, acquire more detail. Passages that describe “our great man of letters” (commencing in chapter 6) receive extensive re-drafting beyond the second typescript of December 1980, suggesting that Malouf gave considerable thought to the kind of life and literary works that might make a terrorist think it was acceptable to kill a “great writer” in the late twentieth century. Even in early February 1981, when he was soon to begin the first draft of *Fly Away Peter*, he writes that “in a great burst of energy and new ideas [I] re-wrote about a third [of the novella] in ten days or so”.⁸¹ The extensive re-drafting may also point to a tension in the composing between moving into

⁷⁵ Malouf, “Marcel Proust – The Book”, 299.

⁷⁶ David Malouf, Introduction to *Jane Eyre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), v.

⁷⁷ UQFL 75/Box 3/Folder 36, Letter, 10 March 1979, Florence.

⁷⁸ David Malouf, Foreword to *Evening under Lamplight: Selected Stories of David Campbell* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1987), vii.

⁷⁹ UQFL 75/Box 3/Folder 36, Letter, 28 March 1980, Campagnatico.

⁸⁰ Letter, 28 March 1980.

⁸¹ UQFL 75/Box 3/Folder 36, Letter, 10 February 1981, Campagnatico.

the psychology of the great writer and preserving a separate identity from him.⁸²

Malouf clearly does not identify himself with either of the main characters, although he is certainly drawing on aspects of his own experience in the portrayals.

Chapters 1 to 5 of *Child's Play* lead the reader towards a tentative understanding of the terrorist's way of perceiving his world, his barely glimpsed motives and his decision to accept recruitment by a terrorist organisation of which he knows practically nothing. His is essentially a decision of the will, perhaps linked to his temperamental desire for some heroic notoriety, to a moment of illumination and to an implied monetary payment (allowing him to consider buying the old farmhouse on the hill) but it is never clearly so. Passages offering detailed, apparently "realistic" descriptions of people and places in the town around him (*CP* 11-12, for example) are disrupted by perceptions that immediately undercut or distance any emotional engagement the reader might begin to make with his world. The planned "event" will "at last become part of that rich confusion" of street life, an assassination that is, in his view, "neither here nor there. Violence too has its place" (*CP* 13). Like "that marvellous Japanese who set out to ski down Everest" he will have a "few ecstatic seconds" as his terrorist act takes place, giving him a reason to celebrate:

I shall be flying, tumbling, skiing down all the hours of my sitting here day after day, my papers and photographs and newspaper cuttings flashing past now in a continuous stream, too fast to be read, but every fact recognized, known and brought into focus in the high strange air, in the piercing light of it and of the little mirrors I have set up to catch and hold its spirit, the pure accessible sky peak. (*CP* 27)

That this vision implies the Japanese skier's death in the "outcrops and crevasses shockingly concealed" by snow is already suggested (*CP* 26), just as the terrorist's death at the hands of the police (or at least his imprisonment) might reasonably be

⁸² Chapter 6, for example, which introduces the "great man of letters", was still being re-drafted in the final typescript (UQFL 163/A/V-2). Malouf's handwritten note (163/A/V-1) describes this as "late writing of pages for the final typescript", yet it still does not contain all the material eventually included in the published work on pages 40-42, indicating that further drafting occurred closer to publication.

expected when he murders his victim. His faulty logic, however, does not extend to this possibility. The clues are presented in the text as warnings to the reader not to trust the way of thinking of the narrator, to maintain a distance from his voice even while engaging with its intriguing, shifting tone. The novella sets up its own reading tensions in this way, confirmed by the end of chapter 5 when the terrorist admits that

I come as a man who is deaf, who cannot feel the warmth of the sun or the sudden coolness of the shade, who has no sense of smell; a ghost, a tourist/ photographer/ assassin composed of nothing but mind. It is to deal with at least one other of the senses that I imagine myself buying an ice cream at the corner café. (*CP* 39)

The reader may contrast his denial of the senses at this point with his description in chapter 1 of the positive effect upon his mood of the scent of apples (*CP* 3). The terrorist uses such details selectively to reinforce his theoretical position and his imagination struggles at times with the containment. The clues or guides to reading are firmly in the text, although they require intensive reading strategies that pay attention to intratextuality and nuance rather than to the immediate flow of the plot. A slower pace of reading leads to a fuller engagement with the clues in what is, in some ways, a mystery – why would an apparently educated, rational person kill another whose work he generally admires?

A closer consideration of the drafting of chapter 1 reveals that Malouf works to add important detail to the opening scene and particularly to the way the narrator constructs his world in interaction with the natural world around him. He seems responsive to making meaning from the play of inner perceptions and outer events that is valued in Malouf's earlier works, but he is subtly different in his judgements. It is this difference to which the reader is alerted by the apparently "natural" details of the description. If there is a message for the terrorist to heed, there is also one to be missed as he willfully chooses his course of action and contemplates his future. Processes of perception can lead to what may be considered illusion according to contemporary

social norms as well as to a mood-state valued as heightened reality. The dividing line becomes a matter of the reader's perception, drawing attention to the process of equilibration in everyday life, the epigenesis of mind which Malouf recognises commences, as in "The Crab Feast", with the assimilating physicality of the cells and the body.

The first handwritten draft of chapter 1 is found in UQFL 163/AI-2. It is a much shorter, more factual version of the material in the published work and it is the absence of the later nuanced detail that is noticeable, pointing to the conscious working towards subtle effect that Malouf undertook in subsequent drafts:

One day, during that week I spent with my father at the end of the autumn, I walked alone to an old farmhouse on the other side of the stream that was up for sale and which I half-thought I might buy – a way, perhaps, of ~~assuring the future~~ putting down roots in the future. / [new para. indicated] I had known the house as a child and always loved it. It is [^{insert}] on a slight rise at the bottom of the valley. Two ancient cherry ~~ancient olive~~ trees grow hard against the stone walls; there are pears and apples, & a small olive grove. What had always fascinated me about the place was [sic] the markings on the step, a single stone, deep sunken & hollowed with feet, that my father suggested might have been an Etruscan altar. It was still there, when I went back. I found the key, tucked into a crack between the bricks, slapped the bay roan mare that followed me to the door, nuzzled my hand, put her head inside after me, & stood in the big half-dark stall where I had often come as a child to play, & later, as an adolescent to daydream or read. Above, I knew, were two rooms and an attic. The whole house smelled of apples. I climbed the stairs. There were holes in the windows, up there, and the whole place was filled with the soft golden-autumn light that smelled intensely of apples, and in the front room had taken the form of a spilled heap of them, wrinkled now, and some of them quite wizened, but when I tasted one still deliciously sweet. It was like biting into the sun. I sat on the stone floor and munched, first one, then another. Downstairs the horse stamped her foot on the stone steps, that might once have been an altar; up here I felt transparent to the light, filled with the breath of apples, biting into the future suddenly [sure? then?], that I would come back here, that I did not have to buy the house or anything else to insure it, that I would be here – for years, maybe forever.

It is difficult to explain these things without seeming foolish. ~~They arrive~~ They come from with [sic] deep ~~inside~~ in our bodies, & ought at least to be given a hearing. ~~They are the~~ Our cells know what they are about. Even if we translate their message into the smell of apples, the gold of a late autumn afternoon, the taste, as we put it, of the sun.

The next extant version appears to be in UQFL 163/A/III-2, described in Malouf's handwritten note (163/A/III-1) as "Rejected chapters – also earlier typed versions of the book replaced by present 1st typed version". Page 14 is a heavily corrected typescript, marked XXI at the top of the page with a word count of "250" at the bottom.⁸³

One ~~day~~ *afternoon at the end of autumn, during ~~that week I spent~~ my brief time at home with my father, ~~at the end of autumn I went~~ walked alone to an old farmhouse on the other side of the stream that was up for sale and which I half thought I might bid for [insert ^ .] It was a way perhaps of *assuring that the future would exist for me by it putting down roots in ~~the future~~ it.*[sic] I had known the place as a child and always loved it. It ~~on~~ stands on a slight rise ~~at the bottom of a~~ *looking out across the valley. Two ancient cherry-trees grow hard against its stone walls; there are pears and apples, and an olive grove: [^ ;] but what had always fascinated me about the house was [sic] the markings on the door step, a single stone [^ ,] deep sunk and hollowed with feet [^ ,] ~~that~~ which my father suggested might once have been an Etruscan altar.*[^ / new para.] It was ~~still there when I went back.~~ [^ left of typescript] *smaller than I had remembered it, but the markings were there, cut so deep you could feel them with your fingertips - and I had the odd memory, in doing so in the bright sunlight, of the first time I had done this as a child. The letters my father had told me were indecipherable. I had had the odd notion then that if I shut my eyes and traced them with my fingertips the darkness itself could reveal the meaning to me. I would be able to read them. The notion now made me smile. But I shut my eyes just the same and traced the letters in the dark. [/] I found the key where the agent had said it would be tucked into a crack between two bricks, slapped the big roan mare that followed me to the door, now stood nuzzling my hand. The horse poked her head inside after me *sniffing apples,* and ~~stood in~~ stepped into the big half-dark stall. ~~where~~ I had often come [change position of words] to play as a child [sic], and later [^ '] as an adolescent [^ ,] to read or daydream [^ ,] or *try once again to decipher the obscure markings on the Etruscan writing step.* Above, ~~I knew~~ were two rooms and an attic. The whole house smelled of apples.**

I climbed the stairs. The roof was broken; jagged holes in the plaster [sic] showed the lath beyond, and the whole place was filled with *a soft autumnal light that smelled intensified [sic] of apples and in the first room I came to ~~taken~~ had taken shape as a spilled pile of them, wrinkled now, and ~~some of them~~ wizened to the size of walnuts, but still deliciously sweet. I bit into one and it was like biting into the *autumn sun.**

I sat on the stone floor and munched away, first one, then another. *I might have been a child again.* Downstairs the horse rubbed *her* flanks against the doorframe and stamped her foot on the step ~~that might have been an altar.~~ Up above I felt transparent to the light, filled with the breath of apples [, changed to -] biting into the future with an assurance, suddenly, that it would be there, that *I could survive the brief moment in the Piazza San'Agostino and I*

⁸³ The transcript uses *italics* to indicate a handwritten addition or insertion by Malouf. Words or phrases deleted are struck through.

would come back, that I ~~did not have~~ had no need to buy the house or anything else to *a en* sure it [^ .] That I would live...for years[^ .] ~~in~~ Maybe forever. It is difficult to explain these convictions without seeming foolish. They come to us from deep in our bodies [^ ‘] Our cells know what they are about [^ ,] even if we ~~translate~~ receive their messages ~~into the~~ as a smell of apples, the gold of a late autumn afternoon, the taste, as we put it, of the sun.

The narrator/subject is being located in a setting that the author makes increasingly resonant with signs by which the narrator might read (or mis-read) his world. The light of day is subdued to a late autumn afternoon; the time with his father is now “brief” rather than a week. The old farmhouse and its fruit trees, loved in childhood, now look out across the valley. The doorstep, perhaps once an Etruscan altar, suggesting a site of sacrifice or oath-taking, is made part of the narrator’s world of signs in childhood. The narrator recalls trying to decipher the markings with his fingertips, not accepting his father’s view that they were indecipherable and feeling them with his fingertips so that “darkness itself could reveal the meaning to me”. His need to discover his own pattern – “to discover what I am doing here and whose destiny it is I have been summoned to fulfill” (122) – surfaces again as the narrator realises (in chapter 18) that he has not discerned the larger “reality” underlying the assassination at all. He has known nothing of Dora Cavani’s fateful role, ensuring by her death that the great writer will attend a funeral at a certain time and place. In the second typescript (UQFL 163/A/ IV-2) the narrator’s attempt to decipher the mysterious letters is further internalised. His touching them in the “bright sunlight” of childhood contrasts with the “darkness” he prefers as an adult:

The doorstep was smaller than I had remembered [^ ,] but the markings [^ ,] *two rows of them*, were still there [^ ,] cut so deep you could read them with your fingertips [^ ,] and I had the ~~sudden~~ *sudden* clear recollection, in doing so in the bright sunlight, of the first time I had tried this ~~when I was~~ as a child. The letters script [CP/2 commences here] [author’s note] my father told me [^ ,] were was [sic] indecipherable. ~~But I had had the notion~~ *been convinced then that the stone stood in some special relation to me and* that if I shut my eyes and traced them the letters [sic] with my fingers, the darkness itself would reveal their meaning to me. The idea now made me smile. But I shut my eyes just the same

and ~~traced the letters in the dark~~ *my fingers found their way up, down, and around in the ancient grooves.*

In the published text the markings on the doorstep are further emphasised: “I had been convinced that the stone stood in a unique relationship to me” (CP 2). The narrator assimilates the potential significance of the stone markings to his own actions and understanding. Their hidden meaning is a sign of his own as yet undiscovered pattern and purpose which is finally not even revealed at the time of the assassination. He does indeed become a victim, a sacrifice to some unknown “god”, ostensibly the clandestine terrorist organisation, but more disturbingly the author whose guiding imagination has bequeathed his character a life and death through fiction which he cannot escape. The reader may sense, according to this reading, that Malouf’s chosen vocation of writing (or has it, perhaps, chosen him?) is questioned in terms of its moral purpose. The imaginative use of language becomes a dangerous territory to enter, in this view, and writing an ethically-charged undertaking rather than a mere flight of fancy.

The associations between the “breath of apples”, the horse stamping its hoof and the narrator’s thoughts about his hoped-for future are strengthened as the drafts develop. The images are recapitulated in the final scenes after the assassination and suggest, ironically, images of death rather than life. The horse which “raised a foreleg and struck the pavement, *clang, clang*, with its hoof” (CP 144) is now attached to a hearse while the apple into which the terrorist finally imagines biting is taken from trees that are not only fruit-laden but also covered with “early blossoms” (CP 145). The ready acceptance of this disruption of nature’s pattern belongs to a disorientated mind, the consequence of the narrator’s mistaken reading of earlier signs that might have re-directed his actions towards a positive rather than a negative outcome. In the next extant version of the opening, found in UQFL 163/A/II-2, further details of the narrator’s approach to the old farmhouse are added:

It was a clear day without a cloud, and unseasonably warm, which I took to be, on the sky's part, - a special dispensation in my favour, a kind of blessing. I undressed, waded to my ~~neck~~-waist in the icy stream, stretched on the gravel shore, in a *flamelike* humming of *all* my blood *after the intense cold*, til I was dry enough to pull on my clothes ~~again~~, then climbed to the house.

This receives further elaboration in the remains of the second typescript, UQFL 163/A/IV-2, and is preceded by a passage that gives a darker tone to the site of the farmhouse that the narrator desires to own:

I had known the place as a child and always loved it. It stands apart on a slight rise looking ~~into~~ *back down* the valley [[^],] ~~a dark~~ *an unusual view that suggests that before there was a farmhouse here the site might have had other ~~more mysterious~~ darker uses*. Two ancient cherry-tress grow hard against one wall, there are pears, apples, a half-dozen stunted olives; but what had always ~~fascinated~~ *attracted* me ~~about the house~~ *to the place* was [sic] the markings on ~~the~~ *its ancient* doorstep...

...

...I undressed, waded waist deep in the icy stream, stretched *out afterwards* on the gravel shore ~~in the a flamelike humming~~ till I was dry enough to pull ~~on~~ my clothes ~~again~~ on, ~~then and climbed to the house~~ *began the climb through thickets of tangled thorns and deep, thickset brambles, that tore at my hands, and again and again, caught my shirt in its sharp thorns*. It took me nearly an hour.

The originally more attractive “small olive grove” has now become “a half-dozen stunted olives” and the site of the farmhouse may have been used for “darker” purposes in the past, perhaps linked to the altar. While the unusually warm autumn day invites the narrator to swim and enjoy its “special dispensation in my favour, a kind of blessing”, his difficult climb “through thickets of tangled thorns, and deep, thickset brambles” suggests that the “blessing” may be questionable. Other signs in nature are less favourable, even though Malouf makes these less obvious by removing from the published version the phrases “tore at my hands, and again and again, caught my shirt in its sharp thorns”. These authorial choices may make the reading more ambiguous so as to create “missing clues” in the ending for some readers, as Neilsen observes. When more intensive reading strategies are favoured over extensive strategies, the narrator's fate as a victim of a strong will that misreads self and the world is more easily

discerned in the opening scenes and is less ambiguous in the ending. A test of imagination, the text implies, is the ability to read and follow the signs that point to a positive enrichment of life.

The drafts of the ending show an elaboration of detail that points to the destructive, negative outcome of the narrator's first choices. In the first typescript, UQFL 163/A/II-2, there is a minimum of detail:

Out here, in the big deserted square I have come to, there has been no rain, not a sign of it. I cross the square, go down a narrow street opposite, and an [sic] surprised to discover that I am already at the edge of town. There are derelict sheds standing among weeds, and a yard where boys have been tinkering with an old car.

The second typescript, UQFL 163/A/IV-2, represents the scene as more derelict:

[I] am surprised to discover that I am already at the edge of town. There are derelict sheds standing among weeds, broken fences *covered with old man's beard*, ~~weedy~~ *brambly* ditches, and a yard where boys have been tinkering with an old car.

The opening chapter, when read in this way, suggests that the narrator has the propensity to move towards delusion, mistaking through egotistical self-interest the "messages" from his environment, both social and natural. His viewpoint may seem secured by inner conviction informed by images of light and fertility that Malouf retains from the first to the final draft (as on page 3, for example, "the smell of apples, the gold of a late autumn afternoon, the taste, as we put it, of the sun"). However, even intuitions from "deep within" ("our cells know what we are about" in the first draft) may be misleading or ignored. In this sense, Malouf explores an important qualification to his view of the redress of the poetic imagination. Its powers may be directed and trained toward negative ends. As the terrorist observes in the first manuscript draft:

It is, above all, our imagination that is being trained, sharpened, perfected in these sessions, and made one with our nerves. Our bodies are being trained to ~~think~~ do the thing, ~~to~~ the...imaginary for us.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ UQFL 163/A/I-2, 15.

Yet this negativity is represented as based on a removal of direct engagement especially from sensory perception of the natural world, a necessary basis for the celebration of the poetic imagination in *An Imaginary Life* and essential for further exploring and questioning the nature of the writer's imaginative powers in the collection *First Things Last*. Ovid's transformation comes through his recognition of a fresh perception of nature and its images in his mind and in death he imagines being reunited with the physicality of the earth itself. The terrorist's final vision, by contrast, is a delusion of the senses: he can no longer distinguish spring from autumn. The great writer has become for the terrorist a focus of what is termed, in Piaget's concept of childhood thinking, symbolic or imaginative play:

the purest form of egocentric and symbolic thought, the assimilation of reality to the subject's own interests and the expression of reality through the use of images fashioned by himself.⁸⁵

That this kind of "child's play" could in some way describe a writer's creative use of "reality", especially projecting interior images into the outer world, suggests its attraction for Malouf as a propensity to test in his own fiction. In *Child's Play* he works with both a serious intent and a more playful self-conscious artifice to extend his own tendencies in writing to a perceived limit. To be "composed of nothing but mind" (*CP* 39), as the terrorist comments about himself, and consistently suppress the senses which offer experience of a shared world of nature and humanity is to walk a dangerous path towards delusion, the novella implies. Alternatively, to make judgements and take actions based only on the feelings and the senses without the balance of a "realistic" world view is, in the value frame of the novella, also inadequate. The purposeful self-directing of both will and imagination are presented as necessary to create the desired harmony with "reality" found in the blending of poetic perceptions and outward necessities. For the terrorist, "the earth has contracted to this pebble" (*CP* 62) and it is a

“power” in his mouth that distorts language (*CP* 64). His plaything is not, for him, “a channel between us and nature that feeds us and keeps us whole” (*CP* 62). He rejects this view of nature (strongly represented in *An Imaginary Life*) even though he has invoked it earlier in giving to the “breath of apples” in the old farmhouse the power of confirming his vision of his future. His sense of intuition is a power that is only valued selectively.

The great writer seems, to the terrorist, to offend because his works show a precarious balance of “recklessness and ease” (*CP* 42), a “moral strictness and a disarming openness to the destructiveness of things” (*CP* 48-49). He uses, the terrorist believes,

his special trick [which] depends upon his playing, quite deliberately, with forces that he is by nature immune to and others are not. He flirts with destructive passions – madness, perversion, and the flight into illness – to test his own capacity to resist, calling up the correlative and bracing forces that add tension to his work. ... I have begun to develop a nose, among all that beautiful architecture ... for the smell of drains. (*CP* 53-54)

Such criticism resonates with Malouf’s own explorations in a piece such as “A Poor Man’s Guide to Southern Tuscany” and again raises the question of the ethical impact of the imaginary. The terrorist comes to despise the great writer’s devotion to “The work, the Work” as “everything in the end becomes simply another proof of his extraordinary genius, his capacity to turn life’s bitter hardships into the stuff of art” (*CP* 60). It seems that Malouf allows himself to elaborate on the terrorist’s perspectives of the great writer, including aspects similar to Malouf’s own preferred ways of creating, so that he can feel the impact of entering a viewpoint strongly oppositional to his own. He even seems to make fun of significant themes that have featured in his earlier works such as the need for re-identification with the animal world, linked here to a scene with the dog, Manfred:

⁸⁵ Piaget, *Psychology of Intelligence*, 140.

The dog, the domesticated wolf, is the starting point for a disquisition on the long relationship between man and the animal kingdom...on the creative energy, the moral energy even, that belongs to our animal nature, its essential innocence, and on our need to make contact with it again, to find our way back into the garden and lie down, in all our dangerous knowledge and power, with the beasts. (*CP* 78)

It is astounding, given the trouble Malouf took with these ideas in successive drafts of *An Imaginary Life*, to read such an ironic view of concepts he had placed with such care into Ovid's transformed sense of the re-ordering of nature. As well as creating a perspective on the ego of the great writer that justifies the terrorist's criticism, Malouf seems to purposely invoke his earlier work to test its veracity in the mouth of a self-created "other", to give it a harder edge honed by a critical re-working in another text.

The terrorist also criticises the shorter pieces the great writer is now producing, "desultory excursions ... brilliant fragments of his life that have not yet found expression in some other form, bits of surviving blue, as he puts it" (*CP* 79). This is another particularly relevant phrase for Malouf, the term "blue" being variously applied in his poetry to suggest a positive mood ("We have arrived at the near edge / of a stubble field that shelves toward bluer weather"),⁸⁶ something mysterious yet potent ("They tore the voices / away, silence was blue")⁸⁷ and a suggestion of transformation ("You were / myself in another species, brute / blue, a bolt of lightning, maybe God").⁸⁸ For the subject in "The Crab Feast", "the concept blue, / is intolerably complex as / our cells are ... [suggesting] the tug of immortality".⁸⁹ To have the great writer drawing on "bits of surviving blue" has strong inter-textual resonance for Malouf. The terrorist's view that the writer's "superiority is insufferable. I feel as if he had publicly humiliated

⁸⁶ "Preludes" (*FTL* 5).

⁸⁷ "The Garden" (*FTL* 2).

⁸⁸ "The Crab Feast" (*FTL* 37).

⁸⁹ "The Crab Feast" (*FTL* 34).

me” (CP 56), makes his judgement one the reader comes to question. It implies, in fact, the validity of an opposite frame of values to those of the terrorist.

On the morning of the assassination an “openness to the common life of things” which the terrorist regards as a “point of powerful weakness” (CP 128) is represented as light coming out of darkness:

the light that slowly advances out of the darkness of things, out of leaves, stones, pools, scraps of paper, out of hands and faces, out of the depths of space itself, and which cannot be resisted as it pours out endlessly, endlessly, giving each thing shape, colour, solidity, making reality something that knocks against all five senses to prove us real. (CP 127-28)

This intuition offers a final chance for the terrorist to step away from his crime by perceiving it in relation to the common life of humanity. He fails to understand it in this way, unable to interpret the potentially positive meaning of his own impressions which remain as dark as the Etruscan inscription.

In this way, Malouf’s testing of positions he has valued in his work to date reaches a limit that leaves much intact, as if he has been trying the strength of a spring and then allows it to return to its own shape. For the reader looking back across his body of work, it suggests that he is not content to settle into any one position without questioning and re-evaluating its veracity over time. Another way of reading this tendency, referring to Figure 2, is to recognize that he likes to take his present ways of knowing at any time into further cycles of personal learning. There they will be pummeled and stretched by the dialectics inherent in receiving and transforming experience. If “the present is always / with us, always open”, as stated in “Wild Lemons”, Malouf also expressed such “openness” by maintaining a flexible attitude in the early 1980s in regard to his own imaginative frameworks. In *Child’s Play* he seeks to shock the reader by engaging empathetically with a terrorist’s viewpoint, but implies through the narrative the value of nature and community as checks on “reality” that redress the tendency toward destructive obsession or fanaticism, whether in the mind of

terrorist or great writer. The importance of heeding the intuitive voice as well as that of reason is implied, giving value, by implication, to the poetic imagination and its weaving of “inner” and “outer” to create a potent world through words. In allowing the terrorist a critic’s position, Malouf tests whether his intuitions will be sustained in a different light. Can he still have confidence in their authenticity for him? Should a new work of prose show his capacity to stand back from previous works, able to negotiate irony as well as his beliefs and offer a different tone than that found in *An Imaginary Life*? Above all, how can he make the process of writing this work a discovery, a breaking of new territory so that he maintains his impetus as a writer?

It seems that Malouf finds answers to these questions by allowing the deeper patterning of *Child’s Play* to create its own interweaving of intuition and logical narrative. He allows the ambiguities he desires in the identities of the terrorist and the great writer to emerge through a blend of intensive and extensive reading strategies the prose is positioned to encourage. The reader may be invited to slow the pace of reading and enter a poetically detailed description in one paragraph and then pushed out if it towards critical judgement in the next, for example in the passage describing the swallows flying below the writer’s window each morning (*CP* 75-76). Increasingly, as the day of the assassination approaches, the mind of the terrorist is represented as contending fiercely with what he dreams and imagines, as well as what he knows rationally (*CP* 126-29). Malouf extends his ability as a prose writer in such passages. He is neither over-elaborate in evoking the tension of the terrorist mind, nor lacking in depth of treatment of his emotional states. The interweaving of perceptions, feelings and external situations is dense and engaging for the reader whose curiosity as to the outcome gives a linear energy to reading the story. By writing a first person narrative that places the author as “insider” and “outsider” at the same time, Malouf further explores his sense of individual identity on the edge of things, even as he seeks

continuity in community. *Child's Play* suggests that he finds it a challenge to identify fully with the society which engages him.

In the accompanying works "Eustace" and "The Prowler", further examples are found of individuals making choices not defined comfortably by conventional social rules and trying to read the directions implied by "signs". The school girl Jane and the boy she calls "Eustace" both step outside the orderly, prescribed world they inhabit in a school dormitory, family and workplace in order to find new perspectives on their lives, especially in regard to sexuality, and for Jane "to cross into the further reaches of herself" ("Eustace" 158). Dream, imagination and intuition, associated with the night, are placed in tension with the constricting regimes of "daylight". In "The Prowler", fantasy, dream and "reality" again merge as a suburban prowler is sought by police, with the identities of the mysterious intruder and those who pursue him merging in a final confusion of roles. Has the knowledge gained by Senior Detective Pierce also made him the prowler ("The Prowler" 214-15)? As in *Child's Play*, the characters' choices are linked to ways of imagining that are not confined to the particular realm of literature. It is the implications for everyday life that now have greater significance when the intuitive and the imaginary must be weighed as factors influencing outward actions.

For Malouf, the intuitive nature of much of *Child's Play* is evident in a passage that leads immediately into *Fly Away Peter* in February 1981. As the terrorist reflects on the work of the great writer Malouf gives him the following observations:

But for all [the great writer's] insistence on human folly and waste, and for all the darkness of his view, he never loses sight of the fact that day by day, even in the years of deepest horror, the life of things continues in the old patterns and according to the oldest and most ordinary rules. Spring arrives in the midst of battle with the same radiance of pear-blossom and hawthorn and little wild-flowers on banks in the wood. Birds sing above the slaughter. There is a harvest to be got in. A field of barley, sighing like the ocean, its long ears heavy with dew, has its own time-span and cannot wait another day to be brought in,

whatever the facts of history. Grapes in September, olives in the clear cold days at the turn of the year. Wholeness and balance – that is the key-note. (*CP* 41-42)

He may allow the terrorist to criticise this view, but in doing so it is the vision itself which remains, a balance of darkness and light that celebrates the cycle of nature and the harmonious relation of human activity with that cycle. The balance of rhythms and images in such a passage offers a “music” to which Malouf “tunes” the ear of the reader in the opening of *Fly Away Peter*. A strong sense of the ethical role of poetic imagination emerges, one that seeks to connect humanity with the positive energies of continuity while contending with the “darkness” of twentieth century warfare whose disruptive powers challenge even natural recovery. Moving from the notoriety of a terrorist and a great writer to the common life characters of Jim Saddler, Imogen Harcourt and Ashley Crowther locates the work in an historical period with international relevance and sets a new direction for Malouf in exploring his imaginary through Australian history.

CHAPTER 6

A Severe Test: *Fly Away Peter*

What can stand, he asked himself, what can ever stand against it?

Fly Away Peter

The poem of the mind in the act of finding
 What will suffice ...
 It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.
 It has to face the men of the time and to meet
 The women of the time. It has to think about war
 And it has to find what will suffice. It has
 To construct a new stage

“Of Modern Poetry”, Wallace Stevens

When Malouf commenced what he refers to as “the bird book” in Italy in February 1981 he planned “a long story of about fifteen to twenty thousand words”, a novella to be “the opening of a collection which would include ‘Sorrows and Secrets’, ‘Musica Viva’ and several more”.¹ In a letter to Judith Rodriguez on 16 February he writes that he has already “six longish stories” on which he had been working for some time and a new work:

about birds and bird-watching [which] has kept me poring over Australian and European bird-books to establish which birds are likely to be in which place when. It’s set in 1914, somewhere on the coast south of Brisbane, and is about the beginnings of a bird sanctuary, though not the one at Currumbin. One nice thing is to use the Coast as it was before surfing, and before Brisbane had discovered the new kind of swimming that lay beyond the English watering-establishment style you got at Southport. The story is really about maps in the head ... maps especially of paradise and the opposite. I’ve done about six thousand words in a burst²

¹ From a hand-written note accompanying the first draft, UQFL 163/B/I-1. A note also indicates that “Sorrows and Secrets” was written in Brisbane in mid-1981. It has an obvious thematic connection with *Fly Away Peter* in the sense of giving “voice” to deeply felt losses, often unspoken between those most affected by them. This story and “Musica Viva” were first published in the short story collection *Antipodes* in 1985.

² Letter, 16 February 1981, Campagnatico, Grosseto, UQFL 75/Folder 36/Box 3. Malouf left gaps in the first handwritten draft to be filled in by his research. For example, in Chapter 1: “Jim’s eye was on the -----”, UQFL 163/B, I-2, 3. The name of the bird, the swamphen, is added in a later draft.

Malouf's writing of "the bird book" in Italy and then in Brisbane occurred in conjunction with several other projects: articles on Australian poetry, short stories that might accompany the novella, the opera *Voss* and a possible film script of *Johnno* under discussion with interested writers.³ What now appears as the conclusion (chapter 18) was composed in Brisbane when the novella was re-drafted there between March and early May 1981. Malouf added material to the second draft of the chapters dealing with the war in France (chapters 9 to 17 in the final text) after researching the history of the 41st Battalion Queensland for the period June 1916 to October 1917.⁴ The first full typescript was produced in Brisbane in April 1981. The process of publication proceeded quickly. Malouf returned to Italy in late June and by September was awaiting the publisher's proofs for correction of *Child's Play* and the "bird book", now titled *The Bread of Time to Come*, to be published in New York in late 1981.⁵ Malouf anticipates that the two books "will be out [in London] in April and May [1982] and if they go well, a book of stories soon after. That is, pretty well, all the work I have done over the past two years".⁶

An important motive for writing *Fly Away Peter* was the author's desire to address, through his creative "re-making", an episode of violence far greater than that represented by the terrorist in *Child's Play*. In turning to the history of international warfare, and specifically the Australian experience of World War I, Malouf not only returns to his home landscape of Queensland but takes on wider questions about the

³Letter from his sister's home in Hamilton, Brisbane, 10 April 1981, UQFL 75/Folder 36/Box 3.

⁴UQFL 163/B/II-1 (one page) and 163/B/III-2, 17-20.

⁵Letter, 8 September 1981, Campagnatico, UQFL 75/Folder 36/Box 3. *The Bread of Time to Come* was the title preferred by Braziller, Malouf recalls, because "peter" was considered a colloquial term for "penis" in the USA: "They suggested publishing the two novellas together, which I never really liked as an idea, and we found a new title [for *Fly Away Peter*], never very satisfactory I think – it's obscure and pretentious – in the Wallace Stevens quotation ...which might have made more sense if I had begun it earlier. The opening lines of the section 'That generation's dream, aviled / in the mud' makes its application (I take it) to the Great War a bit clearer", Letter to the author, 18 August 2002.

nature of organised political violence in the twentieth century. In his 1998 radio lecture series *A Spirit of Play* Malouf expresses the view that, in relation to the Australian experience of the Great War:

The lack of tradition in our writing for dealing with anything but the external life, mainly action in the open, meant that the experience of the trenches, that moment in Western history when a break occurred in our long-held belief in progress and the benign nature of technology went unexpressed here. There was no local equivalent of the poetry of Wilfred Owen or of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The horror, the deep pain of that experience, was not recreated here in the kind of imaginative form that allows a society to come to terms with itself in taking what it has suffered deep into its consciousness and reliving it there in the form of meaning rather than as muddle and shock.⁷

He elaborates further on these views in his 2000 Neustadt Award Acceptance Speech, “A Writing Life”:

When Australia was still a small nation of just under four million, at the time of the First World War, we lost sixty-two thousand men at Gallipoli and in the trenches in France. I grew up in the shadow of that loss, which struck every small town and virtually every family in Australia, but did not produce ... a reparative literature – poems, novels, plays – through which the deep horrors of that experience could be remade and taken in and come to terms with ... When a significant body of writing about the First World War did appear at last in Australia, it was in poems and fiction produced nearly forty years after the event by my generation; I did it myself in *Fly Away Peter*. It’s a matter, as always, of the writer’s dealing with what touches him personally – these things cannot be taken up coldly or out of duty – but by doing so, he also provides a kind of healing for the world he comes out of, whose sorrows and losses he shares with the rest.⁸

In *Fly Away Peter* Malouf carries forward also his exploration, evident in *Child’s Play*, of the potential ethical choices implicit in the imaginative capacity he

⁶ Letter, 29 October 1981, Campagnatico, UQFL 75/Folder 36/Box 3.

⁷ David Malouf, *A Spirit of Play: The Making of Australian Consciousness* (Sydney: ABC Books, 1998), 84.

⁸ David Malouf, “A Writing Life”, *World Literature Today* 74.4 (2000), 703. There were, in fact, many novels written about the Great War in the decades before Malouf’s generation took up the theme. That these works of fiction were attempts to invest the memories of war with diverse meanings not limited to “heroic” narratives of soldierly courage is discussed by Christina Spittel, “Remembering the War: Australian Novelists of the Inter War Years”, *New reckonings: Australian Literature Past, Present, Future, Essays in Honour of Elizabeth Webby*, eds. Leigh Dale and Brigid Rooney, *Australian Literary Studies*, 23.2 (2007): 121-139. See also Robin Gerster, *The Heroic Theme in Australian Writing* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1987).

gives to his characters, such as the terrorist and the great writer. The value of offering “healing for the world he comes out of” and which he “shares with the rest” gives the novella a broad social and cultural purpose, different from the more individualistic final vision of Ovid in *An Imaginary Life*.

In an earlier poem, “Report from Champagne Country”, Malouf explores his reactions to visiting the former war fields, now beneath the French countryside, in 1967. The poem seeks to bring past and present together by imagining a dynamic interaction between the war dead and subsequent generations. Fruit “swells to bursting point” from the blood-stained soil and the energy of those who died lives again through “green-gold summers” felt in the body, a force which finds “a voice” and “a dance” of new life:

And still the dead climb back. From battlefields, ghettos of ash

in the blacksoil lands the *Untermenschen* stir, all energy
in a free state finding eyes in tubers, limbs in pale birch saplings.
The plump fruit swells to bursting point. An excitement not our own

too long held back, bursts through us, green-gold summers on a time-fuse
exploding in our flesh. In the glare and oven-heat of wheatfields
grain crowds towards a fence, the cry of more than insects wavers

ascendant on the breeze. Their lives, our lives too deeply mingled
to speak with a voice that is not theirs, who find in our drunken shambling
the first steps of a dance. At the threshing even dust is gold. (*Neighbours* 43)

The urgency of the language with its plosive consonants and verbal energies that are “bursting” and “exploding” through the flesh of fruit and the bodies of those now living has a double effect. It reminds the reader of the shock and grief felt by so many in wartime (“the cry of more than insects wavers / ascendant on the breeze”) and imagines their bequest as voice and dance, finding new life through memories that allow feelings to surface as well as past events. In *Fly Away Peter* Malouf takes further the challenge to bring memory directly into relationship with the present and the future through the narrative of Jim Saddler. The story of his journey from a bird-filled swampland near the

Queensland coast to the trenches of France during the Great War becomes emblematic of many such lives lost in war. However, its intent is more than historical. The desire to promote the reader's awareness of the profound connections of all living creatures, a consciousness to be reinvested in and through everyday living, can be read as an impulse directing the narrative. Malouf sets himself a demanding task in which historical, political and social contexts must be confronted in life which is ongoing rather than culminating in death, as occurred in his characterization of Ovid. It is in the nature of what he perceives as the "woundedness" of the world and what he offers towards its "healing" that Malouf creates a fictional site of severe testing for a writer who values a poetic imaginary.

The epigraphs he chooses to frame *Fly Away Peter* immediately confront the reader with a perceived dilemma: the danger of humanity acting as "an exception" to the rest of nature like an animal that "went entirely off its head", according to the quote abbreviated from G.K. Chesterton. How else, it is implied, can destructive world wars be explained than as a loss of a species' natural orientation toward survival and continuity of existence?⁹ The second epigraph from the conclusion of Wallace Stevens' "The Man with the Blue Guitar" warns of the loss of human capacity to form a sustainable sense of "reality". If the mind can no longer interact with an external world of trees and birds, the poem implies, but only with one mentally projected ("The imagined pine, the imagined jay"), it may lose its capacity for balance and creative renewal. The epigraph is reminiscent of Stevens' "The Angel Surrounded by Paysans" from *The Auroras of Autumn*:

⁹ The reading offered here differs from that in Phillip Neilsen's study, *Imagined Lives*, where it is argued that *Fly Away Peter* represents the destruction of war as "subsumed into the greater struggle that is nature", Neilsen, 91. In my reading, the epigraphs and the narrative highlight the intense disruption of war as an aberration apart from nature. Advanced technological warfare, represented by the machine gun and long-range cannon, is shown in the novella to have the capacity to destroy life in a way distinct from nature's patterns. The threat to come later in the century from atomic weapons is implied.

I am the angel of reality,
Seen for a moment standing in the door ...

Yet I am the necessary angel of the earth
Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,
Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set,
And, in my hearing, you hear its tragic drone¹⁰

In a world “man-locked” by industrial technology and disregarding natural forms and species “we shall forget by day” and eat an impoverished “bread of time to come”.

Stevens asserts in his essay “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words” that the imagination needs a balance of exterior and interior functioning and loses its vitality as it ceases to adhere to what is “real”, having “the strength of reality or none at all”.¹¹

While acknowledging Stevens’ influence, Malouf continues to develop his own sense of “inner” and “outer” perceptions interacting through the various narrative modes of *Fly Away Peter*, especially valuing, as in *An Imaginary Life*, sensory perceptions and feeling-images that blend subjective and objective awareness. Those arising from an Australian setting now feature. For instance, when Ashley Crowther wakes up in his childhood home to which he has returned after his education in England and Europe, he is “overwhelmed by the familiarity of things” (*FLP* 9)¹² and celebrates their continuity in his life:

the touch of air on his skin – too warm, the sharpness of the light even at twenty to seven – it might have been noon elsewhere; above all since it was what came closest to the centre of his being, the great all-embracing sound that rose from the dazzling earth, a layered music, dense but deeply flowing that was clipped insects rubbing their legs together, bird-notes, grass-stems chaffing and fretting in the breeze. It immediately took him up and carried him back ... the ground-bass, he saw, of every music he had ever known. (*FLP* 9-10)

¹⁰ Stevens, *Collected Poems*, 496.

¹¹ Stevens, “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words”, 6-7.

¹² David Malouf, *Fly Away Peter* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982). All subsequent quotations are from this edition and are placed in the text after the abbreviation *FLP*.

To Ashley's love of classical music is now added the "layered music" that blends the natural world of his Australian childhood with his senses and emotions. It is an unexpected moment of homecoming to his deeper self and the language is given poetic tone and rhythms to convey the surprise of knowing something in a fresh way. The extended sentence accumulates precise details in rhythmical phrases ("clipped insects ... bird-notes, grass-stems") and feeling-idea images ("the centre of his being, the great all-embracing sound") allowing time for apprehension and comprehension to weave together a parallel music in the reader's ear and imagination. The third person narrative takes on the intensity of a first person perspective as Ashley's inner map of his identity and emotions shifts its points of reference towards a new equilibrium, bringing his inner life into greater harmony with an exterior world. His decision to employ Jim to record the birdlife of the area extends into action this moment of closer identity with the life of the land.

Imaginative representation of the historically "real" is important to Malouf, especially in the wartime scenes set in France, where the rhythms of sentences and phrases blend "realistic" details with the feelings and thoughts of those involved:

The loading took hours as the various companies were assembled beside their packs and then urged up into the wagons, the last men pushing in. It was cold at first, then hot, and the cars stank. Even after they had hung their packs up on hooks in the roof there wasn't room for them all to sit or sprawl. (*FLP* 65)

The maiming of Eric and the death of Clancy bring the war into Jim's experience with shocking immediacy:

Jim dipped his knife in the tin and dreamily spread jam, enjoying the way it went over the butter, almost transparent and the promise of thick, golden-green sweetness.

Suddenly the breath was knocked out of him ... wet clods and buttered bread rained all about him. ...

The truth hit him with a force that was greater even than the breath from the "minnie". He tried to cry out but no sound came. It was hammered right back into his lungs and he thought he might choke on it.

Clancy had been blasted out of existence. It was Clancy's blood that covered him. (*FLP* 82-84)

A contrast is made between the domestic gesture of Jim sitting quietly spreading bread with jam and the sudden horror of war. The anticipated “golden-green sweetness” of the jam becomes the gruesome remains of Clancy’s disintegrated body that spreads over Jim’s body. His innocence ends and “the hosing off, never, in his own mind, left him clean” (*FLP* 84).

Jim’s life in his home environment establishes a context for his subsequent experiences, setting up the oppositional landscapes of the fertile Queensland coast and the destroyed farmlands of France. Jim’s “journey” between these places may be partly identified with that of the mythical hero, after the model found in Joseph Campbell’s influential mid-century work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), drawing particularly on the psychology of Carl Jung.¹³ To seek what will suffice as redress involves an heroic quest to face and battle the “darkness” within and without. That Malouf wants to convey a sense of the archetypal resonance of his three main characters is suggested in the novella. Ashley, for example, observes Jim as a Charon-like figure, a guide to an underworld parallel with everyday existence, as he steers the boat through the swamp, pointing out different species of birds:

he occasionally shivered, and might, looking back, have seen Jim, where he leaned on the pole, straining, a slight crease in his brow and his teeth biting into his lower lip, as the ordinary embodiment of a figure already glimpsed in childhood and given a name in mythology, and only now made real. (*FLP* 31)

The vision becomes prophetic when Jim dies believing he is digging down and through the earth to return home in the company of the underworld of war dead (*FLP* 128). In the first section of the book, Ashley envisions himself as an ancient pre-Homeric traveller among “the mists before creation” experiencing boat trips across the swamp as

¹³ The features of the mythical hero’s adventure are summarized in Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 245-51. Its stages may include some of the following: the call to adventure, the appearance of a mentor/helper, battling obstacles at the threshold, encountering further tests and helpers, an apotheosis or atonement, a final battle, flight, further struggle, resurrection or return with an elixir.

“translated ... back, far back, into some pre-classical, pre-historic, primeval and haunted world” in which the birds are “extravagantly disguised spirits of another order of existence” (*FLP* 30). In the final scene, Imogen mourns Jim’s death as women have grieved over their loss of loved ones after battles throughout history and in ancient myths: “There was in there a mourning woman who rocked eternally back and forth; who would not be seen and was herself” (*FLP* 134). In the Afterword drafted to accompany the novella, although not published with it, Malouf comments that:

the progress of the characters in this story is towards the twentieth century present. Where they started from, which century, which state of feeling or understanding, which place, which paradise, is another matter altogether.¹⁴

It is noticeable that the novella, despite its initial Australian setting, invokes a European framework of myth, suggesting by its absence and silence a more ancient and indigenous view of the Australian environment not available to the author’s consciousness or language, though desired. Such desire may be read in an apparent ambiguity placed in the text. It occurs when Jim is first called by Ashley to a paid position recording the birdlife in the sanctuary. While Ashley wishes to learn from Jim as well as guide him, the new role engages and promotes Jim’s intuitive gifts of empathy with and knowledge of the land and its wildlife. Ashley recognises that:

Jim too had rights here, that these acres might also belong, though in another manner, to him. Such claims were ancient and deep. They lay in Jim’s knowledge of every blade of grass and drop of water in the swamp, of every bird’s foot that was set down there; in his having a vision of the place and the power to give that vision breath; in his having, most of all, the names for things and in that way possessing them. It went beyond mere convention or the law. (*FLP* 7)

A suggestion may be read in these phrases that Jim might have indigenous ancestry, at some distance from his immediate parentage, but gesturing towards different way of perceiving the natural environment than that found in Ashley Crowther’s white settler

¹⁴ UQFL 163/B/VII-3, 137. An edited version of the Afterword was first published in the program of the ballet *1914*, based on *Fly Away Peter* and premiered by The Australian Ballet in May 1998 at the Victorian Arts Centre with choreography by Stephen Baynes and music by Graeme Koehne.

culture.¹⁵ Jim's knowledge combines the intuitive and the rational. He has vision for the intrinsic life of the place and what Malouf particularly values as the power of language to name things, thereby expressing their existence in a way that brings them from immediate sensory apprehension into human imagination and understanding. In his creation of Jim, Malouf brings into play qualities he has valued in his earlier characters, such as the Wild Child and Ovid. Jim is a man of silence as well as speech, though not highly articulate like a poet. In the third person narrative mode of the novel, it is the author who gives the reader the "voice" of Jim's thoughts on many occasions, offering a level of articulation that Jim does not provide in direct speech and adding related imagery that "breathes" poetic phrases into Jim's way of seeing the swamplands and the birds, such as in the following passages from Chapter 4:

Ashley would be in the bow, his knees drawn up hard under his chin, his arms, in shirt-sleeves, propped upon them, like some sort of effigy, Jim thought – an image of whatever god it was that had charge of this place, a waterbird transmuted. (*FLP* 29)

‘There,’ Jim breathed, ‘white ibis. They’re common enough really. Beautiful, but.’ He lifted his eyes in admiration, and at the end of the sentence, his voice as well, to follow their slow flight as they beat away. They might have been swimming, stroke on stroke, through the heavy air. ‘And that’s a stilt, see? See its blue back? It’s a real beauty!’ (*FLP* 31)

By positioning Jim's informal register ("Beautiful, but.") in the same flow of language as the lyrical evocation of birds "swimming, stroke on stroke, through the heavy air" the text requires an act of belief on the reader's part, an assent to reading the passage as a continuity of perception between Jim's "voice" and the authorial "voice". Jim's

¹⁵ This reading is given support by a passage about a character with more openly-stated indigenous ancestry in Malouf's later work based on his experience in the 1950s, "The Valley of the Lagoons", in the collection *Every Move You Make* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2006), 3-59. In that story, Matt Riley's has knowledge of "his grandmother's country ... a phrase that referred, without raising too precisely the question of blood, to the relationship a man might stand in to a particular tract of land, that went deeper and further back than legal possession ... and which, the moment he stepped into it, became a language he understood in his bones and through the soles of his feet, though he had no other tongue in his head, or his memory, than the one we all spoke" (*Every Move You Make* 40-41). A similar claim to the land that is "deeper and further back than legal possession" thus occurs in the portrayal of both Jim Saddler and Matt Riley. In both stories, too, it is the characters representing the white settler culture who recognise an alternative type of claim or at least imagine its possible existence.

thoughts possess fluency of expression not necessarily found in his direct speech. He is ascribed qualities of lyrical perception described as “poetic” shortly after in the narrative, although not without some sense of condescension from the viewpoint of Ashley’s city friends:

And Jim’s voice also held them with its low excitement. He was awkward and rough-looking till they got into the boat. Then he too was light, delicately balanced, and when it was a question of the birds, he could be poetic. They looked at him in a new light and with a respect he wouldn’t otherwise have been able to command. (*FLP* 31)

In the first typescript draft, Jim is described as “almost eloquent”, then “quite eloquent” in the next draft with “almost poetic” as a handwritten correction.¹⁶ The final choice of “poetic” is therefore considered and deliberate. The ambiguous valuing of the quality of language expressing the “poetic” is conveyed. It is positioned by the text as an insightful way of knowing and speaking inherent in Jim’s way of seeing the birds and, as a result, gaining the respect of Ashley’s educated friends. However, society may place the term as an authorial and socially constructed mode of perception and representation. Certainly the blending of Jim’s thoughts with those of the author implies the intrinsic value of lyrical poetic perception and the text encodes experience in ways that favour the expression of poetic imagination in language. However, there is also a nuanced recognition that how speech deemed to be “poetic” is valued will be decided by larger cultural and social forces. The interpretative frames applied to such language are in competition with other powerful forms of discourse, such as those expressive of political, military and economic concerns. Jim becomes aware of these larger forces as he visits the wounded Eric in hospital after Clancy’s death and Eric worries about who will look after him now he has lost his legs:

¹⁶ UQFL 163/B/III-2, 1st typescript draft: “and when it was a matter of birds, almost eloquent” (26). In UQFL 163/B/IV/-2, the phrase in the same place is “~~quite eloquent~~ [deleted] he could be almost poetic” [handwritten alteration].

Faced with his losses, Eric had hit upon something fundamental. It was a question about the structure of the world they lived in, about who had power over them and what responsibility those agencies could be expected to assume. (FLP 85)

By the time Jim is facing the horrors of battle in the trenches, the reader has become accustomed to the partnering role of the voices of Jim and the author, the latter giving breath to the character's inner thoughts and feelings that might otherwise have passed unarticulated. In doing so, Malouf represents and redresses the way speech often functions in Australian society as a brief, suppressed glimpse of what is deeply felt, rather than its fuller expression. Jim's intuitive way of knowing the world is also highlighted and given legitimacy, as when he waits near a disused railway station with his comrades, ready to be called over to the front near Ypres:

No, I am not going to die ...

One fellow, with calm grey eyes and a thin mouth, was smoking. Pale clouds drifted before him, greyer than his face, and his eyes were like flints in a wall. He cupped his hand and drew again on the cloud-machine. Another long drift, smoky-grey. And behind it the hand that was square and solid earth.

I am getting too far ahead, Jim thought. That is for later. I should get back to where I am.

None of this came to him as so many words. He perceived it or it unfolded in him. What he saw in clear fact was a line of children, sleepily and soberly intent, who waited with their knees drawn up for a journey to resume after a minor halt. He thought that because the place where they were waiting had been a station on the line from Menin to Ypres. Children might once have waited here in slow trips to the city. He closed his eyes and could have slept.

He felt out of himself. (FLP 115)¹⁷

What Jim is noticing (the soldier smoking and waiting, as he is, for the whistle to sound) is expressed in language that combines realism with the rhythms and images of the poetic. Phrases such as “long drift, smoky-grey”, eyes “like flint in a wall” and the hand “that was square and solid earth” use word stress and sound patterns reminiscent

¹⁷ During his research in 1981, Malouf found that companies of the 41st Battalion were heavily bombarded as the soldiers rested near Zonnebeker Railway Station near Ypres on 3 October 1917. They were called over the front at 6am on 4 October and experienced heavy casualties. The Battle of Broodseinde took place that day, part of the Third Battle of Ypres also known as Passchendaele. The detail of the troops following “white tape, and stakes, also white” (FLP 113) is also based on factual records, UQFL 163/B/II-2, 19.

of the “grey” world of “A Poet Among Others” where the “self is like smoke drifting up at dawn” and soon to become part of the earth in death (*Neighbours* 46-47). Jim, too, is shortly to be lying wounded and gazing at the clouds that “send long fingers into the blue, till the fingers growing longer and thinner, dissolved” (*FLP* 118). The section of the passage representing Jim’s mind at work receives some attention in the first typescript version pointing to the care Malouf is taking to convey to the reader how intuitive and realistic impressions are blending in Jim’s awareness:

None of this ~~did he actually articulate~~ Jim put into clear words. ~~But it revealed itself to him, he~~ He perceived it ^, though All he ^really saw in fact was a line of sleepy children¹⁸

The final choice of “unfolded” (“He perceived it or it unfolded in him”) for the published text (*FLP* 115) rather than the earlier “revealed itself” to convey Jim’s perceptions establishes a movement echoed in the final chapter as Imogen watches the ocean waves unfold as they “build, hang and fall” (*FLP* 132). “Unfolding” in Chapters 16 and 18 is a metaphor connecting Jim’s perceiving and later Imogen’s, offering the reader subtle correspondences that imitate intuitive ones found in poetry and music.¹⁹ Jim’s heroic quest commences with Ashley’s call to work in his newly-named bird sanctuary, a proposition that raises Jim’s sense of self-worth and purpose:

[Ashley] laid out his plan; and Jim, who till then had been drifting, and might have drifted as far as the city and become a mill-hand or a tram-conductor, saw immediately the scope of it and felt his whole life change. A moment before this odd bloke had been a stranger. Now he stuck out his hand to be shaken and there was all the light of the swampland and its swarming life between them, of which Jim was to have sole charge. (*FLP* 4-5)

¹⁸ UQFL 163/B/III-2, 1st typescript draft, Brisbane, April 1981, 92.

¹⁹ The composer Richard Meale’s correspondence with Malouf at this time points to the importance of the intuitive. Meale writes of the musical correspondences that “abound” in his score for *Voss*: “The intuition is far deeper in thought than the intellect ... I don’t really understand all the meanings of these correspondences because I allow them to occur intuitively”, Letter to Malouf, 11 August 1981, Adelaide, UQFL Acc 051219 Box 1 (as accessed October 2007). It is perhaps indicative of their shared values regarding the intuitive that Meale seeks Malouf’s comments on the musical score itself, as well as discussing the libretto.

To enter the role, however, he must confront and overcome the power of his father's more negative view of Jim's life and his future. He achieves this by allowing his personal vision of the birds to be empowered by Ashley's vision of a sanctuary. Their combined vision creates the actuality of the sanctuary as a new way of relating to their environment.²⁰ The poetic of observation in Jim's speech now transforms into action as he monitors and records the presence of each bird in Ashley's book, his acts of naming promoting human respect of the extraordinary world of the migratory bird in particular. It is a poetic that leads to an ethic of valuing other species and the environment shared by all. The savagery Jim resists in his father's character is held back momentarily and harmony between the human and natural worlds is idealised in boat trips around the swamps. Jim as ferryman guides the spectators across the threshold of a world of perception touched by ancient myths.²¹ He achieves a new sense of himself as a man of valuable and practical knowledge. He is of use because of his mastery of the names of birds. He moves between speech and silence with greater assurance, again suggesting the poetic of Jim's way of seeing the world.

The coming of the Great War is a threat not unrelated to Jim's father's violence "that could blast the world" (*FLP* 6). Because of the war Jim senses a call to a further quest, one that challenges and endangers his just-acquired belief in his life's vocation. The reader's question as to why Jim would leave such an ideal place is answered not just by the traditional view of war-time adventure promising a strengthening of

²⁰ It is indicative of Malouf's sense of the trends of the time that business strategies to build sanctuaries around Australia to protect native flora and fauna were commenced in the decade after *Fly Away Peter*. It was a period of growing environmental awareness, most evident in Australia in the successful political battle to stop the proposed damming of the Gordon River in Tasmania. See Greg Bearup, "To Save a Sunburnt Country", *Good Weekend Magazine, Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 January 2007, 17.

²¹ After the boat trips, Jim receives coins from Ashley's visitors, again suggesting the Charon figure as related to Jim's destiny in the narrative (*FLP* 33). The overtones of death are found in a passage deleted from the 1st typescript, UQFL 163/B/III-2, 25: "A shadow, as [Ashley] watched, passed over... Jim's face, a bar of dark. And he would, if he could, have stopped the boat a second and prevented it passing over Julia and the rest."

masculine identity but by a deeper, more ambiguous sense of Jim's fate and his quest for self-knowledge:

Jim felt the ground tilting, as he had felt it that first day in Brisbane, to the place where the war was, and felt the drag upon him of all those deaths. The time would come when he wouldn't be able any longer to resist. He would slide with the rest. Down into the pit. (*FLP* 55)

Jim seems almost inevitably drawn to "the pit" where so many of his generation will die. The incentive to join the war is encouraged by his father's hint that Jim might be a coward when he says, after Jim's plane flight, "I don't s'pose you seen any white feathers flyin' about up there" (*FLP* 24). Yet his decision is, finally, his own and linked to his overall understanding of the world, where the geographical map of the coast recently confirmed with his own eyes from Bert's aeroplane matches his inner vision. Jim likes the two ways of "seeing" to match and inform each other, as Malouf also prefers. The decision is presented as a matter of self-discovery, of the need to learn through his own experience what is happening to him and the world around him:

If he didn't go, he had decided, he would never understand, when it was over, why his life and everything he had known were so changed, and nobody would be able to tell him. He would spend his whole life wondering what had happened to him and looking into the eyes of others to find out. (*FLP* 55)

His quest is not so much for heroic action as for a grounded sense of knowledge. He wants his way of knowing the world to continue to be based on his own experience of it, not acquired through others. He wishes to feel that his way of knowing "reality" is broadening, a quest he achieves, sadly, even as he runs forward on his final battlefield:

He saw it all, and himself a distant, slow-moving figure within it ... his own life neither more nor less important than the rest, even in his own vision of the thing, but unique because it was his head that contained it and in his view that all these balanced lives for a moment existed: the men going about their strange business of killing and being killed, but also the rats, the woodlice under logs, a snail that might be climbing a stalk, quite deaf to the sounds of battle, an odd bird or two ... He continued to run. Astonished that he could hold all this in his head at the same time and how the map he carried there had so immensely expanded. (*FLP* 117)

While Jim's decision to go to war expresses some desire for a fuller realisation of masculine identity, it is qualified by the regret felt by Imogen Harcourt who is aware that Ashley's vision and Jim's special knowledge may be lost even before the bird sanctuary is securely established.²²

Jim's second call becomes a dark quest of tests, ordeals and death on the fields of war in France, a place apart from anything Jim has imagined and like arriving "at the dark side of his head" (*FLP* 58). It also connects Jim with a culture of mateship, although he "made no close friends in the platoon" (*FLP* 59). Jim does value his friendship with the larrikin-like Clancy Parkett, an electrician "in real life" (*FLP* 59). It is a comment that implicitly questions an Australian cultural image of the hero as one exceeding the "average". Working within a tradition that views national self-esteem as historically strengthened by ideals of heroism and mateship in the Great War, Malouf allows the individuality of Jim Saddler to challenge the underlying conformity of much idealised Australian male identity. The complex tension within the mateship tradition of independence and equality is an issue explored subsequently in studies of Australian literature and culture.²³

There is a greater test for Jim than establishing his own form of mateship or showing bravery in war, both of which he is represented as achieving at a level which sustains his self-esteem among his peers.²⁴ The most demanding test is whether he can sustain his unique way of experiencing the world that is his own poetic and which led

²² While Ashley and Jim agree that "the birds could wait. The timespan for them was more or less infinite", Miss Harcourt "was not so easy. She seemed angry, but cheered up a little after they'd had tea" (*FLP* 56).

²³ See, for example, Graeme Turner, "Mateship, Individualism and the Production of Character", *Australian Literary Studies* 11.4 (1984): 447-57.

²⁴ Evident, for example, in his "breaking bounds" with Clancy and Eric (*FLP* 71-75) and his determination to rejoin the platoon when caught in a shell hole with his former adversary, Wizzer Green (*FLP* 90-93).

to his first call to the living world of the bird sanctuary. Will it suffice and in what way? To underscore the nature of the test Malouf positions the sanctuary as a site expressing the value of each unique and connected living thing, contrasted with the destructive, disconnecting force of war that defines people and nature as expendable commodities, purposely devoid of individual identity. The land is the location of a physical home for Jim as well as Ashley, a nesting place for migratory birds and a habitat accommodating both the human and natural worlds. As Gaston Bachelard suggests, such a domain, if poetically represented, may invoke for the reader “all the resonances in a harmonic reading”, touched by an awareness of temporality and the desire for return to a lost intimacy of place and self.²⁵ The bird that flies away also wishes to return one day. Bachelard writes that:

A nest-house is never young ... For not only do we *come back* to it [Bachelard's emphasis], but we dream of coming back to it, the way a bird comes back to its nest ... The sign of *return* makes an infinite number of daydreams, for the reason that human returning takes place in the great rhythm of human life, a rhythm ... that combats all absence. An intimate component of faithful loyalty reacts upon the related images of nest and house.²⁶

That war disrupts and can potentially destroy this rhythm indicates the depth of its disturbance. The bright sunlight of the sanctuary contrasts with the blackened and muddy landscape of war, the latter indicating the effect of a growing, industrially-based force that threatens to annihilate natural habitats completely, whether in war or peacetime. Ashley Crowther observes that

what was in process here was the emergence of a new set of conditions. Nothing after this would ever be the same. War was being developed as a branch of industry ... and industry from now on, maybe all life, would be organised like war. (*FLP* 112)

²⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 99-100.

²⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 99. Malouf takes further the intuitions of home present here in *Fly Away Peter* when he explores in the Blaiklock lecture in 1984 his experience of his first home in Brisbane. See “A First Place: The Mapping of a World”, in Tulip, *David Malouf*, 261-69.

Chapter 14 is crucial in this regard. In Malouf view, “nineteenth century technology and the bureaucratic structures of the industrial state, found their final expression in the Western front”.²⁷ To Jim, it seems that the world of violence he is now experiencing derives from a destructive power that cannot be opposed by the individual. He seeks to apprehend its “reality” in relation to his earlier experiences of the sudden death of his brother in a harvesting accident and the cruel disabling of a kestrel, but neither feeling-image of mechanical or human-induced destruction seems adequate for what he is now facing. He regards his former life as “a state of dangerous innocence”:

The world when you looked from both sides was quite other than a placid, slow-moving dream, without change of climate or colour and with time and place for all. He had been blind. (*FLP* 103)

Jim feels despair as he looks to the future: “They had fallen, he and his contemporaries, into a dark pocket of time from which there was no escape” (*FLP* 103).

Malouf brings Jim’s fearful thoughts and feelings together in a passage he re-drafted several times and which appears on page 104 in the published work. The passage again aligns the inner language of Jim’s mind and the authorial voice in an interior monologue which introduces lyrical elements not probably expected in Jim’s speech yet suggestive of his consciousness in its pre-articulated state. The first typescript draft gives initial emphasis to the power of metal and machines, while images that might oppose that power are tentative:

What can stand, ~~Jim~~ *he* thought, what could ever stand, against it? The metal, and all that force behind it, ~~that~~ *which* went back beyond the machine that had fired it, or the hand, or the brain, into some sort of darkness he would never penetrate – the metal, when it struck ~~as the palpable equivalent of that darkness,~~ was ~~too hard~~ *invincible*. ~~It lifted men bodily from the earth. It sliced through them~~ It hurled them ~~about~~ *aloft* in a terrible parody of their defiance of gravity, their hunger for flight. It thumped them down like sacks ~~of the earth~~ *of grain & they burst open and spilled*. It tore their limbs off. It scattered them like bloody rain. How could anything stand against that? ~~How could it count?~~ A ploughed

²⁷ Afterword, UQFL 163/B/VII-3, 135.

~~field~~ hillside *with all the clods gleaming where they were cut,*
 [handwritten addition] ~~a row of planted saplings,~~ or a keen eye for the
 difference, minute but actual, between two species of wren that spoke for a
 whole history of divergent lives? Worth recording in all this? He no longer
 thought so. Nothing counted.²⁸

The order is reversed in the published text, with the handwritten addition in the first typescript (“with all the clods gleaming where they were cut”) placed immediately after Jim’s initial question and re-drafted to include the phrase “where the share had cut”:

What can stand, he asked himself, what can ever stand against it? A ploughed hillside with all the clods gleaming where the share had cut? A keen eye for the difference, minute but actual, between two species of wren that spoke for a whole history of divergent lives? Worth recording in all this? He no longer thought so. Nothing counted. The disintegrating power of that cruelty in metal form, when it hurled itself against you, raised you aloft, thumped you down like a sack of grain, scattered you as bloody rain, or opened you up to its own infinite blackness – nothing stood before that. It was annihilating. It was all.
 (FLP 104-5)

Here the power of war has been changed into a dramatised energy felt by Jim’s body rather than the abstract force emerging from “some sort of darkness” in the human psyche in the earlier draft. War is being taken into Jim’s poetic of learning and for him this means feeling the idea as direct apprehension rather than just as a concept (as modeled in Figure 2). Malouf has Jim test his feeling-values by evoking idea-images from his memory of farming’s steady patterns and a bird’s individual life. He weighs these against feeling-images of war’s destruction. The comparison suggests his values are fragile indeed. In the published passage Malouf has made the connections Jim forms here seem less authorially imposed and more intuitive, embedded in Jim’s way of learning from experience and linked to the wider patterning of images in the narrative so that both seem to be in harmony. Importantly, the ploughed field is featured as an ideal in Jim’s final vision (FLP 127).²⁹

²⁸ UQFL 163/B/III-2, 82. The first handwritten draft is found in UQFL 163/B/VI-2, 11 (reverse side).

²⁹ The conflict between western farming practices and environmental sustainability is not explored here, although it became a significant issue in Australia in the following decades.

When Jim notices an old man digging in preparation for sowing the soil, an action now seen as “crazy” in a shattered landscape, he is reminded of Miss Harcourt and a similar sense of intuitive memory is evoked:

There was something in the old man’s movements as he stooped and pushed his thumbs into the earth, something in his refusal to accept the limiting nature of conditions, that vividly recalled her and for a moment lifted his spirits.
 ...Shortly after that, however, to keep hold of himself and of the old life that he had come close to losing, he went back to his notes. Even here, in the thick of the fighting, there were birds. The need to record their presence imposed itself on him as a kind of duty. (*FLP* 106)

The last sentence of this quotation from the published text is a handwritten addition in the first typescript draft, indicating the emphasis Malouf wishes to add at this point.³⁰ Jim’s noting of the bird’s presence is a kind of vocation that accords his own presence value. Again, Jim responds to an intuition informed by the bird as both natural creature and feeling-image and allows it to become a means of recovering his former life and resisting war’s destruction of his consciousness.³¹ The old man’s assertive action as he “pushed his thumbs into the earth” and Jim’s simple acts of recording his observations of birds provide two images of imaginative resistance to the “limiting nature of conditions”. Both images portray habits of “making” that value intersecting rhythms of human life and nature, whether planting crops in season or taking notice of the routines of birdlife. Jim continues to lay the basis in his memory for his own “bread of time to come”, to use Stevens’ phrase, forming habits of perception based on the “actual” chosen attentively by his senses and recorded in language, however much abbreviated. He builds his poetic in everyday life, even though what he produces would not be culturally defined as “poetry”. Rather than dwelling on the “scattered remains of both

³⁰ UQFL 163/B/III-2, 84.

³¹ The work of the poetic imagination in forming an image that is both a representation of what “is” and a metaphor to which the poet assigns feelings and intuitions is explored in Wallace Stevens’ poem “Thinking of a Relation Between the Images of Metaphors”: “How close / To the unstated theme each variation comes... / In that one ear it might strike perfectly: / State the disclosure. In that one eye the dove / Might spring to sight and yet remain a dove. / The fisherman might be the single man / In whose breast the dove, alighting, would grow still”, Stevens, *Collected Poems*, 356-57.

sides” that he sees all around him as “one vast rag and bone shop”, Jim chooses to keep on experiencing the natural world in an ordered way as a counter to despair (*FLP* 105). In this way, his mind seeks to actively make what will suffice so that he continues to envision the living earth as home/nest.

Jim’s diary entries confirm his more hopeful outlook. The language is descriptive rather than lyrical in a manner suitable to his speaking voice: “Skylarks. They are so tame that when they are on the ground you can get real close and see the upswept crest” (*FLP* 107). Jim’s perception as he is lying awake in an old cemetery introduces a more authorial and lyrical tone, evoking the opposing images of birds flying away to nesting sites while men’s bodies must settle into the deadly, artificial “nest” of trenches, sites of destruction rather than fertility. It is not only the seasonal flight of the geese that offers an alternative image to the wartime scene, but Jim’s noticing them purposefully and being reminded of an alternative sense of space and time:

he saw great flocks of birds making their way south against the moon. Greylag geese. He heard their cries, high, high up, as they moved fast in clear echelons on their old course. When he fell asleep they were still flying, and when he woke it was to the first autumn rains. All the damp ground, with its toppled stones, was sodden and the men, lying among them or already up and preparing to move, were covered in thick Flemish mud that stretched now as far as the eye could see and entirely filled the view. (*FLP* 107)

While Jim’s physical return home to conclude the hero’s journey with the “elixir”³² of his expanded understanding is denied by his death from battle injuries, his passing is represented as a release into the soil, another way “home” via the earth that symbolises his “nest”.³³ It offers tentative hope of continuity with future generations

³² The probable origin of this word through the Arabic “al-iksir” to the Greek “xerion” (a dessicative powder for wounds) is apt in this war context. See *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 6th ed., s.v. “elixir”.

³³ Malouf’s use of images of clouds dissolving as Jim becomes conscious of his battle wounds (*FLP* 118-19) suggests an affinity with Wallace Stevens’ poem “The Death of a Soldier”: “The soldier falls ...As in a season of autumn, / When the wind stops / When the wind stops and, over the heavens, / The clouds go, nevertheless, / In their direction”, Stevens, *Collected Poems*, 97.

who will remember those who did not return. In a sequence combining death-dream and fading reality, the narrative portrays and then moves beyond the horror of the make-shift hospital tent where Jim lies fatally wounded and avoids any overwhelming sense of the brutal finality of Jim's death (*FLP* 125-28). Instead, he is assisted by his mentor/guardian figure Ashley Crowther who re-appears to lead Jim towards his point of entry to the underworld of the war dead, the *Untermenschen* of "Report from Champagne Country". Jim believes he recognizes the field in which he stumbles with Ashley as the place where the old man was digging some months back. He has an idealised vision of a garden in autumn with the leaves from trees renewed in summer after the blasting of war now lying "in thick drifts underfoot" and birds singing among vegetable crops (*FLP* 126). Details of the trees renewing themselves are added in the second typescript draft.³⁴ The focus of the description is downward towards the earth. He joins other human figures "dark-backed and slowly moving" that are digging and finds joy once more in his physical connection with the soil. His senses come alive:

He freed himself of Ashley's support, and staggered towards them. The earth smelled so good. It was a smell that belonged to the beginning of things, he could have put his nose down into it like a pig or a newly weaned calf, and the thought of filling his hands with its doughy softness was irresistible. (*FLP* 126)

In his vision as death approaches Jim again encounters Clancy, his mate who was blown to pieces by war's "disintegrating power" (*FLP* 104). Even so powerful a force, it is implied, can be redressed by a transformed way of perceiving such as might occur as the body nears death. It is a trope used already for different purposes in the ending of *An Imaginary Life* and *Child's Play*, allowing the author's voice to guide the reader beyond fictional realism to an intuitive "speech in silence" that seeks to go beyond conventional ways of knowing and conveys Jim's unspoken perceptions. It may be read as a force opposing the "anti-breath of a backward-spelled charm, the no-name of

³⁴ UQFL 163/B/IV-2, 118.

extinction” (*FLP* 114). It is foreshadowed by an earlier “speech in silence” in chapter 17 as Jim responds deeply to the piano playing of Ashley Crowther and seeks, through that moment, to understand bird song:

Notes, he thought, that might have been taken over from the nightingale’s song and elaborated, all tender trills. . . . it was like the language, beyond known speech, that birds use, which he felt painfully that he might reach out for now and comprehend; and if he did, however, briefly, much would become clear to him that would otherwise stay hidden. (*FLP* 124)

The two kinds of “speech in silence” are connected in the text by musical language: the bird song whose meaning will reveal what is hidden, and the silent speech of Jim’s mind expressing in musically crafted phrases his hidden self. The narrative technique thus exemplifies the artistry of language as emblematic of Jim’s desired poetic of living, seeing, recording and celebrating individual life and natural continuity through the life of the birds.

In his final vision Jim sees lines of muddy, uniformed men “stretched out forever” in an expanding space that is first a “clearing”, then a “field” and finally a “landscape” that “stretched away to the brightening skyline” (*FLP* 127). “Brightening” of earth and sky continues “as the early morning sun struck the furrows . . . you could see the curve of the earth”, recalling the important image added in chapter 14 of “a ploughed hillside with all the clods gleaming where the share had cut”. The description of the “field” and the early morning light shining off “furrows” is added in the second typescript draft, indicating Malouf’s intent to emphasise the image of light reflecting up from the earth and the human action of making the furrows.³⁵ Both offer to the reader a counter-force, simple yet enduring, against destructive human energies. Jim values digging and ploughing as actions that are as purposeful as the seasonal flight of birds over the curve of the earth:

³⁵ UQFL 163/B/IV-2,120. The re-drafted passage appears in UQFL 163/B/V-2 and in the published passage *FLP* 126-28.

It might be, Jim thought, what hands were intended for, this steady digging into the earth, as wings were meant for flying over the curve of the planet to another season. He knelt and dug. (*FLP* 128)

While the reader may consider the image of Jim digging “straight through” the earth back to Australia simplistic rather than visionary, its naïve tone creates an ambiguity that encourages both readings. Malouf’s liking for figures that seek nutrition through working the soil or the mud (as in “The Crab Feast”) is evident and Jim’s memories of Ashley Crowther’s farm or the farm of his childhood are suggested. Although Malouf has Ashley recognise the value in the Australian setting of “what was unmade here and could, without harm, be left that way” (*FLP* 11), the farmed earth exists in tension with the “unmade” in the novella. Malouf seems to have in mind that the European concept of farming connects the ancient “turning” of the furrow with the “turning” of a line of poetry, as the etymology of the word “verse” from the Latin “versus” (furrow made by a plough) and “vertere” (to turn) reveals. Images of “neat rows”, “lines” and “furrows” in *Fly Away Peter* counter the disorder of war with the order of nurturing ongoing life through food crops, implying that the poetic also is a kind of “food”. While images of traditional farming may be read in a linear fashion as encoding an idealised pastoral “realism” in the narrative, an “harmonic reading”, to take up Bachelard’s distinction, focuses on the resonance of related images of life-giving practices. Malouf’s renewal of the images of the nest/burrow as “home” and the tilled furrow of the poetic may be placed in Bachelard’s domain of carefully-crafted “simplicity”³⁶ as he finds in Jean Caubère’s poem “*Le Nid Tiède*” [“The Warm Nest”]:

The warm, calm nest
In which a bird sings

³⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 99. Bachelard points to a domain where “everything takes place simply and delicately. . . . the lines are so simple that one is surprised at the poet’s delight in them” (99). Poems by Wallace Stevens such as “The Silver Plough Boy” (*Collected Poetry and Prose* 42) and “Ploughing on Sunday” (*Collected Poems* 20) offer precedents familiar to Malouf for the renewal of the image of tilling the soil, as do Seamus Heaney’s poems “Digging” and “Follower” (*New Selected Poems* 1 and 6).

...
 Recalls the songs, the charms,
 The pure threshold
 Of my old home.³⁷

For the reader this may offer, in García-Berrio's terms, an experience of "unpredictable aesthetic value" in a story ostensibly about war and death. It is an emotive quality evidently felt by others in composing "harmonic" works in the languages of dance and music inspired by *Fly Away Peter*, notably the ballet *1914* and its richly thematic musical score by Graeme Koehne. The choreographer Stephen Baynes writes in the Program for the premier season in Melbourne in 1998 that the novella

may seem an unusual work to select for an interpretation in dance, or in the theatre at all. The poetic symbolism is probably most satisfyingly realized in the imagination of the reader. It is, however, that poetic sensibility, more than anything else, that I hoped to convey in the theatre. Underlying this simple, eloquent story are issues and concerns which are fundamental to the human condition.³⁸

The images of waves that build and fall into watery furrows are represented through Imogen Harcourt's eyes in Chapter 18, continuing in the conclusion the tropes of "turning" and "making". However, they also suggest the opposing energy that "unmakes" linear forms. Waves, like perceptions or feelings in the mind/body, may be poised "on a breath" like the writer's line and then drawn apart, as Imogen senses, by the "pull of the earth" sending them "rushing down with such energy into the flux of things" (*FLP* 131). While furrows inscribe human patterns on the earth, the "flux" implies an unmarked space of energies that may both nurture and disturb such designs, as Kristeva's concept of "chora" implies in regard to poetic language. By contrast, the disordering forces portrayed as being at work in human society in *Fly Away Peter* can potentially annihilate the pattern-making energy of both "line" and "flux". Each of the

³⁷ "*Le nid tiède et calme / Où chante l'oiseau ... / Rappelle les chansons, les charmes / Le seuil pur / De la vieille maison*", quoted in Bachelard, 99.

³⁸ Stephen Baynes, Choreographer's Note, *1914*, program for The Australian Ballet production, May 1998, n. pag.

main characters resist such force in their own preferred way by imagining an alternative response that does continue to pattern experience.³⁹ Jim chooses to notice the continuing presence of birds amid war and to express his observations in his written notes, while Ashley continues to play music and considers political and social action:

It seemed more important than ever now to hang on to the names ... and if his luck held, to go back. And having learned at last [as an officer in the army] what the terms were – and in expiation of the blood that was on his hands – to resist.
(*FLP* 112)

Imogen decides to continue expressing her awareness of the “is-ness” of life through photography, exploring through that visual medium new images such as the surfer “to catch its moment, its brilliant balance up there, of movement and stillness, of tense energy and ease” (*FLP* 134).

However, the novella positions each character’s understanding of “reality” (their maps in the mind) as transitional and always open to the shifting contours of inner and outer worlds. At important points in the narrative a mobile equilibrium may be achieved by a character, as when Jim perceives his world from above and below (*FLP* 116-17) showing how perceptions and intuitions can build a new balance. Jim’s perception of his situation expands and is not limited to geographical perspectives. It is a way of forming “reality” that involves his whole mind and body and its place in the world. It is physical as well as cognitive and affective in its range. In Piaget’s terms, such moments represent “the sudden mobility which animates and co-ordinates the configurations [which] were hitherto more or less rigid”.⁴⁰ A grouping of intuitions is affirmed by the subject as a certainty in his thought:

³⁹ The image of the furrow is also found in Malouf’s poem “Footnote to an Anthology” where the poet works like a labourer “in his unlettered world” and “The words / his raw breath pumped towards / make gardens where imperial wheelspokes turn on a nice point / of order, between rows / of gilt spines high windows cast the light of pastoral / on fields not yet furrowed”, *Poems 1959-89* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992), 236.

⁴⁰ Piaget, *Psychology of Intelligence*, 153.

[Jim] continued to run. Astonished that he could hold all this in his head at the same time and how the map he carried there had so immensely expanded.
(*FLP* 117)

The scene in chapter 18 also moves between distance and close-up, evoking the dynamic, ever-shifting space where sea and land meet. A reprise occurs of the two levels that characterise Jim's outlook in chapter 1:

A clear October day.

October here was spring. Sunlight and no wind.

The sea cut channels in the beach, great Vs that were delicately ridged at the edges and ribbed within, and the sunlit rippled in them, an inch, an inch and a half of shimmering gold. Further on, the surf. High walls of water were suspended a moment, held glassily aloft, then hurled themselves forward under a shower of spindrift, a white rush that ran hissing to her boots. (*FLP* 129)⁴¹

The rhythmic quality of the prose focuses the reader's attention on the carefully positioned flashes of detail, the pace, for example, being slowed by the extended phrases in the longer sentences, with details accentuated by alliteration ("delicately ridged" edges, "ribbed within" and "sunlit rippled in them"; "high walls of water", "held glassily aloft", "hurled themselves forward", "hissing to her boots"). Malouf's close attention to bringing together the outer object and inner perception by the character is evident in small details such as his description of sunlight on water as "shimmering gold". In the first typescript draft it is "ever shifting light", then changed to "shimmering light".⁴² It is altered again to its published form in the second typescript draft.⁴³ Sentence lengths vary, reinforcing the idea, expressed at the end of the paragraph, that it was paradoxically a "still scene that was full of intense activity and endless change" (*FLP* 129).⁴⁴

⁴¹ In the first handwritten version it is "A clear mid-winter light. August here was mid-winter", UQFL 163/B/II-2, 4. Malouf changed the month and season after researching the position of the 41st Battalion in 1917 and making the battle in early October important in the narrative.

⁴² UQFL 163/B/III-2, 102.

⁴³ UQFL 163/B/IV-2, 126.

⁴⁴ This sentence is added to the second typescript draft UQFL 163/B/IV-2, 121.

As Imogen reflects on her identity, wondering why she is still carrying all her photographic equipment and what she is doing in this place, her separation from society is particularly emphasised. She is a “lone figure with her hat awry” on an isolated beach where “Nobody came” (*FLP* 130). Her deep grief at the news of Jim’s death cannot even be shared with Jim’s father: “She said nothing. He didn’t invite sympathy” (*FLP* 131). The conclusion of *Fly Away Peter* offers the final vision of a female character, a new development in Malouf’s works. Imogen shows surprise then courage as she engages with the new image in her mind, even as she mourns for Jim. Surfing is a relatively unknown activity at that time:

She had seen nothing like it ...
 ... the balance, the still dancing on the surface, the brief etching
 of his body against the sky at the very moment, on the wave’s lip, when
 he would slide into its hollows and fall.
 That too was an image she would hold in her mind. (*FLP* 133)

The rise and fall of the surfer’s body on the wave offers her renewal. To engage with it becomes an act of hope, connecting her again with the earth as she walks away up the sandy slope and the “grains rolled away softly behind” her boots (*FLP* 133). In the first handwritten draft of chapter 18 the image of the surfer is repeated in the closing sentence: “The youth was still against the sky, brilliantly riding”.⁴⁵ However, Malouf deleted this sentence in correcting the first typescript draft, choosing to emphasise instead the pause in Imogen’s action:

But before she fell below the crest of the dunes,
 while the ocean was still in view, she turned and
 looked again. (*FLP* 134)⁴⁶

The action of “turning” offers a further variation of images of renewal in chapters 14 and 17 of the earth turning under the plough and the hand turning the soil in cultivation.

⁴⁵ UQFL 163/B/II-2, Document 4, 3.

⁴⁶ The A5 size of the page and the spacing of the words also suggest the overlap of prose and poetic text. The correction is found in UQFL 163/B/III-2, 100.

The phrasing of the final sentence leads rhythmically to the heightened moment when “she turned and looked again”, inviting the reader to pause at “turned” and “looked” in a way suggestive of intensive rather than extensive reading strategies. Such a strategy slows the pace and invites reading towards the more concentrated effect of the poetic while retaining the syntax and flow of prose. This suggests the interaction of the prose form visible on the printed page and the poetic use of correspondences and analogies informing the novella’s composition. Through her photographic skills, the narrative implies, Imogen will continue to share the imaginative significance of each unique moment with others. As it will be for Ashley, the legacy of Jim’s friendship will be expressed by the way she represents and participates in the world around her. The text suggests that Wallace Stevens’ “necessary angel” will be at work not only in literature but in photography, film and other emerging media, as well as in the political and social action that draws inspiration from ideals and beliefs.

To reach a point of at least tentative redress and restoration also becomes possible, the novella suggests, through the “turning” of writing and reading. By imagining and sharing a story of what might have occurred in the Great War, taking in historical records and creating characters, events and feelings, Malouf engages his energy as a writer and extends it towards further generations of readers who may, through translating its pulse and breath into their own responses, come to possess the past in a deeper way. While never denying the overwhelming loss of lives that affected many societies for decades to come, the novella suggests that it is possible and necessary to “turn and look again”, opening society and self to the next moment of discovery. As Malouf asserts in “Wild Lemons”, “keeping the present open to the light of just this moment” is necessary even if “to what, out there / in the dark we are making for” is not yet clear (*FTL* 1). “Turning” offers a suggestive closure to the narrative, emphasising the importance of an act of individual choice and the insight of the

moment that brings surprise and renewal. Such moments offer new apprehensions of the essential being of things so that personal learning again begins its cycle (as in Figure 2). Imogen expresses it in words that balance mourning and hope:

It was that intense focus of his whole being, it's *me*, Jim Saddler, that struck her with grief, but was also the thing – and not simply as an image either – that endured. That in itself. ... That is what life meant, a unique presence, and it was essential in every creature. ... A life wasn't *for* anything. It simply was.
(FLP 132)

Avoiding a nationalistic stance and preferring to focus on the Australian experience as one possible telling of a wider story, *Fly Away Peter* may also be read as an evocation on Malouf's part of an imbalance in the way western societies have come to regard the natural and industrialised worlds. By ascribing great value to human perceptions formed in intimate relation with the natural world, in the romantic tradition of poets such as Goethe and Wordsworth and taken forward by others such as Rilke and Stevens and "deep image" poets in the twentieth century, Malouf's work represents an interiorizing of everyday experience as a redress of the over-valuing of exteriorizing life through industrialization, a process that has provided the powerful material basis for destructive activities on an unprecedented international scale.⁴⁷ Through imagining the way Jim and Ashley begin to create a sanctuary, the novella invites readers to participate in their own process of homecoming to self and place. It is a process, especially in Australian society, that Malouf has deemed "a work for poetry, and for the kind of fiction that dares to take on what is too often left for poetry alone to do".⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Malouf's concerns are more extensive than a separation of thinking and feeling among poets which T.S. Eliot termed in 1921 a "dissociation of sensibility" in his well-known essay "The Metaphysical Poets". In Eliot's view the poet is always "forming new wholes" by "constantly amalgamating disparate experience" and is able to "devour any kind of experience", whereas the "ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary", Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 270. Malouf shows awareness (evident in the epigraph he chooses from Stevens for *Fly Away Peter*) that all humans, not only poets, order meaning in daily interactions between inner and outer perceptions. His concern, shared by others in the later twentieth century, is not so much with a division between thinking and feeling but with the way meaning is increasingly made in human society with little regard to connections with the earth and other living creatures.

⁴⁸ Malouf, "A Writing Life", 705.

In this regard, it is important that Jim's quest to bring name and object together, as in making his book for Ashley Crowther, also gives his own name an attachment to the land:

Out of air and water they passed through their name, and his hand as he carefully formed the letters, into The Book. Making a place for them there was giving them existence in another form, recognizing their place in the landscape, or his stretch of it: providing "sanctuary". (*FLP* 44)

Amid the growing national confidence and development of the creative arts in Australia in the 1970s and early 1980s, Malouf is not alone in creating a fresh imaginative reading of an historical period foundational to subsequent Australian identity. Roger McDonald's novel *1915* (published in 1979) and Peter Weir's film *Gallipoli* (premiered in 1981) offer further representations and interpretations of the World War One period. While Weir links the impulse of young Australian men to join a distant European conflict with issues of male identity and mateship, Malouf places greater emphasis on Jim seeking his own understanding of the war as a crucial experience for his generation. The evaluation of what is lost in Jim's death, apart from the general sense of loss of a young life in war, depends upon each reader's engagement with the first part of the novella. Its evocation of the relationship between Jim, Ashley and Imogen discovering and celebrating the life of birds is crucial for what follows. Malouf does not evoke idealised domestic or social scenes which the young men leave behind, but an even earlier and perhaps more powerful memory of his own about an aspect of Australia that gives a poetic resonance to *Fly Away Peter* in its very conception and is still at work in Malouf's most recent publications more than two decades later.

To discover this source, close attention needs to be given to the Afterword which he drafted in Brisbane in late April 1981 to accompany the typescript, though it was not finally, on the editor's advice, published with the text. Although parts of it have

been published in other forms,⁴⁹ it is important to discern the way Malouf reflects here on the energies of memory that motivate his initial writing of the novella. He writes of an experience from 1955 that pre-dates any of his published work:

The “story” was my first sight of a place I hadn’t heard of till then and have never heard of since, though it exists. It is called the Valley of the Lagoons and it lies inland from Innisfail on the far side of the Great Divide. All the great rivers of North Queensland, those that flow south and east to the Pacific ... and those that flow north-west to the Gulf of Carpentaria, have their source there in a chain of waterlily swamps, lagoons and tropical forest the size of a modest republic. It is a kind of primeval garden, and was, for me, an early vision of nature untouched, a great green place that existed entirely without man but did not resist his appearance, was neither hostile nor predatory. It presented a different Australia from the one that is sometimes offered as the real, the harsh, the authentic one. It was not a desert but a vast water-park crowded with creatures. I went there for five days on a shooting trip and have never forgotten it. Its paradisaical light at all times of the day, the great flocks of birds that haunted its shores, filled its skies, and were reflected in its waters, stayed with me for years afterwards – I could summon them up at will, and knew always that I would write something one day that would owe its existence to them and would try to give that existence back. When I returned to Brisbane I tried to catch the place in poems. It would not be caught. Recently, reading a few paragraphs in a literary review, the whole scene suddenly swarmed about me; I found myself as if at the centre of a marvellously recaptured dream; the suggestion of a plot presented itself, a little complex of characters appeared, and the thing I wanted to write, and had always meant to write, was there complete. I had only to enter the landscape and let it occur ...

No piece of writing, of course, is ever that inevitable, so effortless, as that first glimpse may suggest. The clarity of that first view is exceptional. It is not, in itself, the work. But whenever I wanted, after that, to ‘see’ what I was doing, I had only to let the light into my mind of what I had recalled of the Valley of the Lagoons as it was some twenty-five years ago and all was clear ... though the story was not in fact set there, and what I had in mind had no source in the events of my five days in that extraordinary place. ... The sight of spur-winged plovers rising out of the early-morning mist, with the sunlit waterdrops flying from their wings and the swamp-water breaking in circles below – the white of them, and the brilliant yellow of their wattles and the scarlet of their feet, is one of the clearest of those images I carry about with me, and one that returns, unbidden, with a freshness as of something utterly new-made and springing into the world as if for the first time, on occasions to which it is in no way relevant but to which it brings, as I see afterwards, an energy that was itself the source of renewed being. It means something more than itself. It is the real beginning of this novella, and the work, however far it stands from the original

⁴⁹ As well as an extract published in the program for the ballet *1914* (1998), Malouf includes the passage quoted here in his essay “The Exotic at Home”, *Up North: Myths, Threats and Enchantments*, *Griffith Review* (Spring, 2005): 35-40.

is an attempt to recreate it ... by my allowing the landscape it leaps out of to surround me, yield up its events, and through them, its significance.⁵⁰

Malouf's recollections about the origins of *Fly Away Peter* offer a further instance of landscape (here perceived as an idealised "primeval garden ... nature untouched", apart from mankind), heightened mood and the effects of light strongly informing Malouf's perceptions and memories. When the lift into flight of the spur-winged plover is given his special focus in this setting, the result is an interiorised feeling-image that rises from earth and water into air imbued with what he apprehends as restorative energy, the fourth mythical element of fire. The account shifts from factual and descriptive language towards prose that is more evocative. Rhythmical patterns of strong and weak stressed syllables become apparent suggesting reading strategies of lyric poetry, for example, in the phrases "spúr-wínged plóver rísing", "súnlit wáterdrops flýing" and "swámp-wáter bréaking". The writer allows perceived boundaries between self and the natural world to become more permeable in his mind, as an act of surrender and engagement to achieve deeper understanding of both. Malouf's rhythms of language also become more permeable between the prosaic and the poetic at such a point, as if such a choice opens desired spaces to step through and beyond the surface reality he evokes.

He seeks to represent by means of the poetic voice the moment when his eye and mind engage, the transformation from external object to interior perception that he finds so essential to his creative task. Simple terms that name everyday things – bird, water, and sunlight – are given resonances of sound and connotation by the lyrical tone, suggesting a mythical dimension. Landscape, in turn, is given volition that allows it to "yield up its events and ... its significance" in return for the writer's openness. In a gesture of belief he finds relationship, meaning and redress as revitalised energy, a

⁵⁰ UQFL 163/B/VII-3, 129-132.

“source of renewed being”. To value an image as “something utterly new-made” in its “freshness” implies that opposite images, worn from over-use, may be all too readily at hand. The renewal of language and creativity is associated for the writer with experiencing the place “as if for the first time” and allowing memory to enrich his imagination. Remembered scenes move into dreams and “swarm... about me”, taking various shapes of released energy in the author’s conscious and unconscious mind. The image of the bird gives Malouf a visual focus for his memories of the Valley of the Lagoons.

That he found it difficult to “catch” his experiences in language (“I tried to catch the place in poems. It would not be caught”) suggests that his poetic composing is challenged by the surprise of the place and by the unfamiliar rhythms of its abundant life. He comments earlier in the Afterword that “it took another eye – which was also mine, but whose visions had not yet surfaced in my mind – to see [North Queensland]”.⁵¹ It remains “exotic”, attractive yet strange, in his memory, an experience still “exo” or “outside”, as the etymology from the Greek suggests. It is not yet available to his writing as an articulated interior, rich in feeling-idea images, characters and narrative that can bring re-imagined apprehension and comprehension into dynamic balance and be extended into the making of literary forms that are sites of discovery. In his essay “The Exotic at Home” Malouf comments:

There are many elements in the North that remain outside control. And wasn’t it just this, the belief that there might be “up there” a place that was uncontrolled and uncontrollable, that first attracted me and attracts me still? Isn’t that what I mean by exotic? A hope that somewhere close there was a place that belonged to us ... that had escaped the laws we like to impose, and the interpretations, and remained unknown within us: darkly mysterious; overgrown and hard to find our way into; not yet mapped or fully described; where we too, when we entered it, might become other and unknown, even to ourselves.⁵²

⁵¹ Afterword, UQFL 163/B/VII-3, 128.

⁵² Malouf, “The Exotic at Home”, 40. Malouf also comments in the essay that he gradually came to discern the “exotic” as a source of creative energy in his familiar environment of Brisbane and in the first

In *Fly Away Peter*, he partly tames the “exotic” by locating it in the more “controlled” setting of the coast south of Brisbane and , in so doing, shows his drive to bring opposite sources of awareness into a creative union. He values “interpretations” that bring meaning he can “enter” and where he can “belong”, as well as the “darkly mysterious ... overgrown ... not yet fully described” that allows discovery of what is “unknown within us”. What is perceived as “uncontrolled” remains enticing to his imagination as a blending of interior and exterior consciousness. To be transformed into an “other ... unknown even to ourselves” is desired. The ongoing strength of Malouf’s drive for continuous experiential learning through a renewing poetic of self is evident here. In this context, the image of the spur-winged plover can be read as the writer’s quest for “surprise” by approaching the exotic. This, in turn, gives impetus to the poetic but a further process is essential before it takes the shape of a recognised literary form. That the form is a novella reveals the integration of the poetic and the prosaic in Malouf’s writing at this time.

The experience of surprise in Malouf’s encounter with the “exotic” effects what Martin Harrison describes as a poet’s “modality”: how a poet perceives and feels while “going about in the world in this or that poem”.⁵³ A “modality” involves such questions as:

What styles of seeing and feeling occur? Which atmospheres, which climates, which assumptions about the place and the texture of experience are let into the poem and which are not?⁵⁴

Such questions have resonance with Malouf’s account of his memories. The texture of the moment he wishes to form into poetry remains available to his consciousness but

family home in Edmondstone Street (40). *Johnno, Fly Away Peter, Harland’s Half Acre and 12 Edmondstone Street* are works which particularly benefitted from his recognition of this source.

⁵³ Martin Harrison, “Land and Theory”, in *Who Wants to Create Australia?* (Sydney: Halstead Press, 2004), 25, first published in *Southerly* 57.2 (1997).

not yet to his hand forming words on the page. Harrison asks how such a “modality” of perception works in the Australian context:

What is this function, then? Can it be named as some sort of “feeling-for-place” or a deeply acquired understanding and sensing of one’s location? ... perhaps what occurs is more like what the ancients called geomancy: a sense of the magic of a place, a knowledge derived from it (by looking at its light changes, its weathers ... the passage of birds and animals across it, the striations and surfaces which form it) and an intuitive attraction or connectedness with its particulars ... what the adverbial trace is pointing to in such seeing is a sensing of the world which is not just already interpretable and culturally meaningful but which is also beyond code.⁵⁵

The first part of the novella may be read as creating a site defined by a term that is new to the characters yet intuitively felt to be appropriate and desirable: “sanctuary”. The term implies an encoded space that is safe from destructive forces, homely and nurturing, and where what is “wild” (interior or exterior) comes under some control. It may represent the author’s own tentative sense of expressing in words his long-felt modality, his way of being in the realm of transforming memory that motivates the story. Malouf gives his characters modalities that have tentative relevance to the world they represent, evident, for example, in the European mythology invoked in the boat journeys in chapter 4. The still ambiguous, slowly-forming relationship between settler culture and the Australian environment seems to be present in a way that disturbs the surface of the text. Like the “maps in the head” which Malouf states are a significant theme of the novella, the work’s schema suggests an ever-forming and re-forming consciousness yet to be fully imagined in its cultural context. As a beginning, writing the names of the birds in a special book is represented as a gesture towards bringing the modalities available to Jim and to Ashley into closer harmony with the place where they dwell:

⁵⁴ Harrison, “Land and Theory”, 25.

⁵⁵ Harrison, “Land and Theory”, 35.

Making a place for them there was giving them existence in another form, recognizing their place in the landscape, or his stretch of it: providing “sanctuary”. (*FLP* 44)

The oppositional pairing of “The Book” and “silence” develops in Jim’s thinking as he begins working for Ashley. He realises the tentative ability of language to convey what they experience while observing the birds:

“Beautiful!” Ashley said for the names, the writing, as he never did for the actual birds, to which he brought only his silence. And that was right. It pleased Jim to have the verbal praise for The Book and silence in the face of the real creature as it lifted its perfect weight from water into air, since in that way Ashley’s reaction mirrored his own. (*FLP* 45)

The lyrical image of the bird rising from the surface of the water described in the Afterword finds its expression here as a foundational energy for Jim’s vision and actions. His life is an expression of his modality which moves from silence towards speech and then forward to the intuitive understanding beyond speech. That he comes to share this respectful silence with his more traditionally well-educated mentor Ashley enhances its potential value for the wider society in which Jim is a still little-recognised or valued participant. While he (with others like him) becomes a national hero through his sacrifice in war, his poetic of knowing and feeling about his world, his modality, is represented as an equal loss to the life of his community. Jim’s knowledge has been formed not only through curiosity but as an expression of his own nature in relation to place. When he first speaks to Ashley the quality of his voice communicates his whole-hearted focus:

“What were you doing?” he asked. It was a frank curiosity he expressed. There was nothing of reproach in it.

“Watchin’ that Dollar bird,” Jim told him. “You scared it off.”

“Dollar bird?”

“Oriental,” Jim said. “Come down from the Moluccas.”

His voice was husky and the accent broad; he drawled. The facts he gave were unnecessary and might have been pedantic. But when he named the bird and again when he named the island, he made them sound, Ashley thought, extraordinary. He endowed them with some romantic quality that was really in himself. An odd interest revealed itself, the fire of an individual passion.

(*FLP* 14-15)

Malouf also represents Jim's passion through the focus of his eye on the intimate life of the bird:

Jim's eye was on the swamphen. He had been watching it for nearly an hour with a pair of fieldglasses provided by Ashley Crowther. There was a nest on a platform there among the reeds, with maybe five or six creamy-brown eggs.
(FLP 3)

The bird appears in the roundness of the eye and the fieldglasses, giving a further development to Malouf's image, across many of his works, of subject and object meeting in a circle of perception, here from the outer world rather than the unconscious. Jim's activity is "a whole stretch" of his life, as Imogen's photographic work seems to Jim when he first is invited into her darkroom (FLP 26). Her ability to catch via the camera the moment of a bird's "brief huddle of heat and energy" (FLP 27) is something of a gift:

Did she know so much about birds? Or did some intuition guide her? *This is it; this is the moment when we see into the creature's unique life.* That too might be a gift. (FLP 27)

The word "sanctuary" enters a shared silence between the three main characters, an understanding that does not require speech (FLP 28). The redress of the poetic imaginary here is to move through and then past the limitations of speech to a less bounded sense of a community of shared modalities, to use Harrison's term. They seek a shared experience between humanity and nature, as Malouf's desires in "The Crab Feast". At best, this can be approached for these quite diverse characters through observing life forms very closely. A wider view emerges when what is close-up is first valued. For Malouf, the "near" view and the "far" held together, as he has Jim imagine, in the eye of a migratory bird, embody not only the uniqueness of its particular life but his belief, regarding the war and human history, that

you live in both [centuries and places] and carry both in your consciousness at the same time. That too was one of the central facts of what I meant to write, and the birds I began with offered a nice embodiment of it.⁵⁶

Malouf's imaginative use of his memories of the Valley of the Lagoons confirms the importance of his view of abundance as an aspect of Australian landscape, countering the notion of a dry and infertile land that the settler culture often finds hostile and fearful, as expressed in his libretto of *Voss*. A resonance can be felt with the work of other Australian lyric poets where renewed ways of understanding arise in relation to observing birds in settings of abundance. In John Shaw Nielson's "The Gentle Water Bird", for instance, the bird brings the subject not only the beauty of its own nature, as he perceives it, but a kindlier sense of the divine. The God of his childhood teaching is "terrible and thunder-blue", causing fear of the "ungracious scheme"⁵⁷ that robs delight from his experience of life:

And in the night the many stars would say
Dark things unaltered in the light of day:
Fear was upon me even in my play.⁵⁸

Already the subject has "learned the recompense of song" but his imaginative range is extended when the "courtly crane" comes to "a lake I loved in gentle rain" and he attributes to it qualities of grace, kindness and wisdom. He invests his feeling-image of "the gentle water bird" with a narrative of unexpected friendship whose grace takes away his life-long dread, bringing a fresh understanding of God:

Pity was in him for the weak and strong
All who have suffered when the days were long,
And he was deep and gentle as a song.

As a calm soldier in a cloak of grey
He did commune with me for many a day
Till the dark fear was lifted far away.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Afterword, UQFL 163/B/VII-3, 138.

⁵⁷ John Shaw Nielson, *Collected Poems of John Shaw Nielson* (Melbourne: Lothian, 1934), 176.

⁵⁸ Nielson, *Collected Poems*, 176.

The “truth” he perceives through his encounter with the “gentle water bird” extends beyond reason but is convincing to him: “his speech was true”. Similar to key moments of insight in Malouf’s works, it is a speech in silence and for Neilson’s subject imbued with light and song that enriches his daily experience:

Sometimes, when watching in the white sunshine,
Someone approaches – I can half define
All the calm beauty of that friend of mine.

Nothing of hatred will about him cling:
Silent – how silent – how silent but his heart will sing
Always of little children and the Spring.⁶⁰

The final vision of the poem links the divine with fertility in all life forms, contrasting a joyful view of childhood with the subject’s earlier life. Neilson’s poetic imaginary creates its own experience of redress. He offers this to the reader as an experience of personal learning and a way of finding courage and wisdom in daily life.

In Judith Wright’s “Birds” the “perfection” of the bird in itself offers an image of the subject’s desired inner harmony:

Whatever the bird is, is perfect in the bird
...
... If I could leave their battleground for the forest of the bird
I could melt the past, the present and the future in one
and find the words that lie behind all languages.
Then I would fuse my passions into one clear stone
and be as simple to myself as the bird is to the bird.⁶¹

“Birds” is also written in a fertile landscape, the lush rainforest of Tamborine Mountain, and reveals the subject’s desire for “the words that lie behind all languages”, a form of speech in silence.

⁵⁹ Neilson, *Collected Poems*, 177.

⁶⁰ Neilson, *Collected Poems*, 178.

⁶¹ Judith Wright, *Birds: Poems by Judith Wright* (1962; rpt., Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2003), 1.

Elizabeth Riddell, journalist, poet and a personal friend to whom Malouf dedicates *Fly Away Peter*, writes in “Occasions of Birds” of the often destructive effects on birdlife of human contact:

As Governor Hunter and his men marched west
the sun struck gold from epaulettes
and sparkled on the cages ready for the feather,
the bright eye, the tender claw, the beak
of the lyrebird and the cockatoo...

One hundred and eight years later
a man is out there in the dunes
searching for the paradise parrot.
Listen as he walks, crab-scuttle on the sand.
He has not much to offer this bird
which saw the gold and heard the sound of fife and drum.⁶²

The dedication to a fellow poet of a story about a proposed bird sanctuary would seem very appropriate in view of such a poem. It contrasts the freedom of the bird and the confined life the British settlers intend for it. Their “cages ready for the feather, / the bright eye” make the wildlife increasingly wary of human contact, as the second stanza indicates.

Malouf’s recollections in the Afterword suggest his underlying pattern of experiential learning, commencing with direct sensory apprehension of a lived event, an immersion in perceived actuality, flowing into a reflective consciousness creating powerful feeling-images that emerge as he forms ideas about what he sees in the Valley of the Lagoons. He develops a conceptual frame for placing his feeling-images in the context of previous knowledge and experiences and applies this fuller understanding as he composes, extending and transforming the energy of his imaginings into carefully-crafted literary forms. His process of discovery and what he calls “map making” may be framed in terms of Kolb’s model of experiential learning, which itself takes into account Piaget’s theory of the physicality of the ongoing assimilation, accommodation

⁶² Elizabeth Riddell, *From the Midnight Courtyard* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1989), 26.

and equilibration between subject and setting. At each point for Malouf outer and inner perceptions interweave and transform each other until they become a holistic consciousness, a way of being-in-the-world that is unique to the individual concerned. That Malouf's writing habitually moves towards a vision that seeks to reach out beyond limitations and then turns back into the world of apprehended being is an outcome of his pattern of poetic learning. His celebration of personal learning, as represented in Jim's digging down into the earth in company with the fallen, delights in hopeful vision and grounded presence. It is from Jim's appreciation of his relationship with the soil and cycles of natural life that his vision comes.

Malouf's intuitive understanding of the way he derives empowering personal meaning from his experiences is an important foundation for the textual cohesion of *Fly Away Peter*. It can convey to readers an impression of internally consistent apperception, of cognitive and affective veracity. It allows him to appear to write from inside the consciousness of his three main characters as they, in individual ways, come to terms with international warfare based on industrial power and the challenge and dysfunction of the new in their life and times. Jim, Ashley and Imogen are each represented as learning to see the world from different perspectives, yet engaged also in shifting intersections of consciousness as their life stories touch and separate over a period of several years. Each individual's way of seeing is highly valued, no matter what their social status, while recognising that it is shared views of the world that allow social groupings to form and to co-operate, challenge and resist challenges in ways they value as positive, such as setting aside land for a bird sanctuary. However, actions can become problematic, the epigraphs suggest, when either the individual or the society does not sustain a viable sense of inner and outer "realities" working to inform each other and to sustain the ongoing imaginaries that lead to survival. Ways of seeing, understanding and believing, from this perspective, are the vital basis of human

continuity as a species and not just important to the individual. To be aware of learning from experience in a way that carries life forward, as in Imogen's view of the surfer or Jim's sense of his expanded awareness, becomes an essential human skill, a survival mechanism rather than an aesthetic gift against potential self-destruction of the kind introduced, for example, by nuclear weapons during Malouf's childhood in the mid-twentieth century and brought to global awareness by the growing evidence of an environmental crisis from the 1970s onwards. The threats to human existence that were apparent when the novella was published in the 1980s add urgency to the historical setting, placing it in a continuum beginning with the Great War. Its frame of reference is thus both Australian and international in scope.

Malouf's observation in the Afterword that he tried to "catch the place [Valley of Lagoons] in poems ... it would not be caught" also raises questions about the working models of writing and imagination that strongly influence *Fly Away Peter*. What does the choice of prose for this work and at this time make possible for Malouf that poetry would not? Given the example of other Australian poets such as John Tranter, Les Murray and Dorothy Porter who have worked in extended verse narratives in recent decades, why does Malouf not employ such a form? His comment in 1980 that "there can be few of us who do not long for the larger breath of the narrative [poetic] forms" suggests that he holds no strict view of narrative as being better left to prose by the late twentieth century.⁶³ The wider potential audience for prose fiction available through established international publishers is one answer. Another is suggested by comments he makes several years later in introducing David Campbell's collection of stories *Evening Under Lamplight*. In explaining why a reader should find particular interest in narrative prose by "one of our finest lyric poets" Malouf asserts that, for the writer, poetry and prose are not "separate categories" such as a critic might posit:

writing is a place of intersections. There are points in a writer's life when the interesting intersection between his own experience and the more open textures of prose is just where his spirit is most fully engaged, and where he wants for a time to work ... he will not be intimidated by the formal difference, let us say, between descriptive sketch and lyric, or the adjustment that may be necessary in his language to relax its rhythms to the leaner but tougher lineaments of prose. What will sustain him is the assurance that it is the same world he is moving in and that he, however different the demands of the medium, is the same man, bringing with him the same sensory equipment, the same eye and ear for things, the same peculiar way of receiving and transforming reality that amounts, once he has got it down, to a created universe. Which is to say that David Campbell is as fully present in these fictional pieces as in the lightest and most profound of his lyrics ... All writing is one.⁶⁴

By abrogating the critical use of the terms "poetry" and "prose" as a relevant way of approaching the act of writing, Malouf highlights his underlying awareness of a many-faceted process that, for him, makes and transforms reality through the senses and imagination into the "created universe", the written work, whether poetry or prose. His comments reveal a strong confidence in his own ways of perceiving and an assurance that extending his perceptions in poetry or prose will be productive for him as a writer. Figure 2, as discussed in Chapter 1, offers a tentative model of this process. It assumes that an underlying poetic imaginary is present in Malouf's approach to receiving and transforming inner and outer "realities" (learning through primary experience, as in the Valley of the Lagoons) and is always significant in his making of literary forms (secondary experience). The model shows modes of poetic learning that are dialectically opposed, as well as cyclical after Kolb's model of experiential learning. The "places of intersection" essential to writing, in Malouf's view, form where the modes are most in tension and in need of some kind of resolution such as apprehending versus comprehending and reflecting versus extending and envisioning. Rather than narrowly defining or over-simplifying an individually unique dynamic of mind and body, the model seeks to broaden reading strategies by placing Malouf's

⁶³ Malouf, "A.D. Hope's *New Cratylus*", 148.

⁶⁴ Malouf, Foreword to *Evening under Lamplight*, vii-viii.

work in relation to experiences and concepts to which he habitually returns in his work across the decades. It offers a fresh way of discerning the writer's "imaginative signature"⁶⁵ in relation to a form of redress between ways of knowing that is particularly relevant to Malouf's work.

By referring to the model, it becomes more apparent why literary forms based on an open, projective-style poetic imaginary allow him best to explore ways of seeing, feeling and communicating his perceived world. His focus is less the genre or form and more the need to capture the inner/outer dynamic of certain moments at the point of their imminence in becoming language, as image or word. The flow between the different modes of grasping and transforming experience are perhaps the indefinable places of becoming where the ambiguities, nuances and "negative capability" of the poetic may be most at home, where the semiotic "chora" opposes yet finally accepts the lure into literary consciousness and accedes to making. The model assumes a mind/body that is aware of its own constant change, with resolutions and action tested and re-tested in a present "that is always with us, always open" (*FTL* 1). Evidence based on the senses, intuition, reason and the integrity of the work itself in its making are all important measures of authenticity for such a mind.

The endings of *An Imaginary Life*, "The Crab Feast" and *Fly Away Peter* may be read, according to the model, as stretching to envision and celebrate a modality beyond the writer's perceived limits of knowing. Such moments represent the farthest reach of his poetic of learning and are notably lyrical in their use of imagery, a tone suitable for such learning. Merging into the earth or into the being of the crab becomes a physical and symbolic act of persistent hope, representing another level of extending into imagined forms. It acknowledges for the subject the value of direct experience of the world, negative and positive, which has "come home" as personal meaning. The

subject or character turns, as does Imogen Harcourt, towards grasping what is “near”, apprehending anew and preparing for further experiences of knowing.

Swift “leaps” between modes (after Bly and the “deep image” style) and an emphasis within the movement of the poem on the “far/ abstract” mode of comprehending may sometimes lessen the felt immediacy of a poem, especially in initial readings. If the poem blends perspectives and images quickly in an intensive reading style there may be less call for strategies where the reader/listener lingers more on reflections and imaginings. In the poem “Reading a View”, for example, the direct evocation of the scene is only briefly sketched in terms of the verbal energy released (“Light soars”, “Fires are lit”, “smoke disperses”) before “the eye moves deeper”, seeking the underlying patterns rather than the evoked presence of nature:

Light soars twelve thousand feet into perfect blue. Fires are lit,
 smoke disperses
 between one line of hills, one fold
 of cypress and the next, the next – the eye
 moves deeper. Everything
 in this view has occurred
 before and is repeated leaf on leaf; all’s aligned
 in the one direction: a spade handle, rain
 in broken verticals; even our bodies
 when we lay them out together
 a distance from the earth. Reading a view
 is seeing where each thing points to, irrespective
 of the plane it’s in, the arc on which it enters. (*FTL* 24)

The mode of comprehending is primarily engaged here in “reading a view” of objects both distant and close-up to the eye. Rather than first being apprehended, the objects are represented as idea-images that show the angle of their being (“rain in broken verticals”) and as signs “where each thing points to” rather than as sensory experiences the reader may enter. The concept of gravity’s severe grasp on the life and shape of all things is suggested in the form of an image that intuitively juxtaposes small and great, extending outward to the movement of the planet in space:

⁶⁵ Heaney, *Redress: Inaugural Lecture*, 6-7.

What
 does a sparrow in a hawk's foot
 weigh against rocks
 in their slow flight, the air
 all dust and shelves of light,
 arena of the day's real happenings? (*FTL* 24)

Even the unfolding shoot of a leaf, the fulcrum for related images of natural and cultivated change, is offered as concept rather than as texture or actual presence in the poem. Modes of knowing that build on reflecting, comprehending and extending are featured. While this is appropriate to idea-images involved in "Reading a View", the poem suggests that the dynamic of such "reading" includes the near and the far view being held together in the mind, as they may be in the hawk's eye as it takes a captured sparrow into flight. It is the leaf, finally that "would show us where" our direction may be, an image that aligns seasonal change in nature and the human action of burning off summer's abundance of growth. Renewal seems promised: "The landscape burns to be replaced". Through the far perspective of the subject, "dust and shelves of light" are "the day's real happenings", as much as the near glimpse of seasonal fires ("whatever flaps, wads, spirals, hurls up sparks"). The concept of the leaf returns the reader to what is near and pointing towards the future, but without evoking its feeling-value in detail. The phrases abbreviate impressions rather than extending them further into the physical world as in "The Crab Feast". The poem, in this sense, is mainly discursive and propositional yet the vision at its centre is also intuitive, as the "deep image" style of the image of hawk, sparrow and rock indicates.

The reader may prefer greater sensory detail such as is found in "Wild Lemons", for example, or in "For Two Children". While "Reading a View" is a successful poem in its own terms of engaging the reader's eye and ear in its perspectives, it is less obviously a blending of apprehending and comprehending than others such as "Stooping to Drink". The tentative comments from critics when *First*

Things Last was published suggest that Malouf's work was beginning to create its own expectations, especially after the success of *An Imaginary Life*. For his growing readership the difference between his work and the more highly self-conscious style of "language" poetry and "concrete" poetry was perhaps something to be encouraged. The need to consider again a poem such as "Reading a View" is evident so that its achievement can be placed in the context of Malouf's explorations of ways of knowing. Modes of perception that cross between distant and close-up and between inner and outer views were the sites, he was finding by the early 1980s, where he had most to learn but they did not always need to be represented in similar or familiar ways.

By comparison, the opening of *Fly Away Peter* is also "reading a view" but the reader is invited here to apprehend its details more fully, even though the scene is depicted through a third person narrator:

All morning, far over to his left where the light of the swamp ended and farmlands began, a clumsy shape had been lifting itself out of an invisible paddock and making slow circuits of the air, climbing, dipping, rolling, then disappearing below the trees.

The land in that direction rose gradually towards far, intensely blue mountains that were soft blue at this time of day but would later approach purple. The swamp was bordered with tea-trees, some of them half-standing in water and staining the shallows there a tobacco brown. Its light was dulled by cloud shadows, then, as if an unseen hand were rubbing it with a cloth, it brightened, flared, and the silver shone through. (*FLP* 1)

The identity of the "clumsy shape" is at first ambiguous and distant from apprehension – a bird, perhaps, or an early plane – and is only confirmed as that of a bi-plane in the third paragraph. The adjective "clumsy" leads into feeling-image as the plane "made Jim Saddler uneasy" and seems to him to be "a disturbance and new" (*FLP* 2). The setting is initially evoked in terms of its massed shapes and colours in an impressionistic style rather than by directly naming its geographical location. The reader is invited to apprehend the quality of its changing light and movement of colours from intense blue and brown to purple and shining silver. The longer "breath" of its

sentences gives more time for readers to bring their own images, senses and memories to the work, compared with the compressed images in “Reading a View”. A broader canvas on which to explore diverse ways of knowing can be found here and it may be this reason, above all, that moved Malouf more towards prose from this period on, while still retaining the underlying value of his poetic and writing poetry as occasional pieces, as is evident in the poems placed in Part IV of his 2008 selected poems *Revolving Days*.⁶⁶ Prose presented the greater opportunity to break new ground within the self as a writer while exploring tensions between modes of poetic learning through historical settings and characters. Whether in poetry or prose, his works suggest the transformative possibilities of personal learning for the poet, the officer, the soldier and people in all other walks of life. The testing of his poetic imaginary, as occurs in *Fly Away Peter*, results in a confidence that produces perhaps his most finely-tuned performance.

⁶⁶ David Malouf, *Revolving Days* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2008). Poems in Part IV cover the three decades after 1978 and “Reading a View” is included among this group. Malouf highlights the important beginning that direct apprehension (or the memory of it) offers for his poetry when he observes in an introductory note: “For the most part, the poems in *Revolving Days* appear at the point where they were touched off by something seen or felt rather than the time, sometimes years later, when I found words for the experience”.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

The continuing importance for Malouf's work of the redress of poetic imagination, in its various facets, may be read in *Typewriter Music* (2007) Malouf's first collection of new poems since *First Things Last* in 1980. Although most of his work in the intervening period has taken the form of prose, the foundation of his writing in the poetic imaginary remains crucial. Two poems from *Typewriter Music* are especially relevant to this study.

"Ombrone" provides clear evidence that the dynamic of inner and outer perceptions remains central to his poetic imaginary across the decades. The poem evokes shifting states of mind and each is alternately the "light" and the "shadow" of the other, with musical language revealing their interplay in the lyric. Taking as its title the river Ombrone near Grosseto in the region of his home in Campagnatico, the poem explores the shadows (playing with "ombra") that reflect on the moving water as shimmering patterns of light:

Of trees their lucent shadow
on water, each leaf

remade, tumultuous drops
of light coalescing.

to be at once
in two minds and the crossing

made without breaking
borders, this

the one true baptism, flames
by water

undoused, and sound by silence,
each rinsed leaf stirred

by a giant's

breathing, deep underground. (*TM* 43)

The “lucent shadow” is perceived as a re-making of the actual leaf by the subject’s imagination as each couplet is crafted in careful sound patterns imitating the “drops of light” in the opening lines. It is at once what is seen outwardly and what is perceived as inner experience. The energy of “tumultuous drops / of light coalescing” enlarges the force at work so that it seems a synaesthetic whirlpool of brightness, a tumult for the senses, with the word stress reinforcing the impression. Sensing, feeling and concept are already working together as the reader/listener enters the poem. There is no lingering in moments of sensory apprehension but a purposeful remaking of the quickly-changing moment so that the exterior world becomes interior, the intimate view of the subject shared with the reader/listener. The third couplet states the purpose clearly: the subject desires “To be at once in two minds” so that outward and inward perception are one with “the crossing / made without breaking/ borders”. It is both an aesthetic value and a personal desire of the subject.

It is the poetic imagination that can bring “this one true baptism” about as it redresses the gap between outer objects and inner feelings and ideas. By implication, “brokenness” is washed away in this act of renewal. In the mind itself the pulses forming images of light and weaving patterns of thought work instantaneously and mysteriously in harmony, as suggested in neurophysiologist Charles Sherrington’s metaphor of an “enchanted loom”. However, they can only be grasped here through the displacement of metaphorical language. The “crossing / made without breaking / borders” remains a belief, a poetic vision, like “flames by water / undoused, and sound by silence”. The terms “baptism”, “flames” and “water” suggest a spiritual and mythical frame of reference which allows opposites to co-exist in a higher order, a realm where “sound” and “silence” complement each other, fulfilling Malouf’s ongoing

quest for “speech in silence”.⁶⁷ The poem returns to its beginning in final couplets where “each rinsed leaf” is held as object for a moment, then grasped inwardly again by a playful mythic vision as it is “stirred / by a giant’s breathing, deep underground”. While the volcanic geological base of the river is suggested in the image, it also links the poet’s creative breathe in composing with the earth’s forces of creation and destruction here underground yet felt in the gentle movement of a leaf. The poem has thus offered the reader/listener an experience of the “two minds” of the named, observed world and the inner imagined world united in the rhythms of the poet’s breath. The redress of the poetic imagination is to balance the awareness of both subject and audience so that all are open to a more holistic form of consciousness. It is both playful and serious in valuing the experience as it suggests that other views and actions, whether social, political or cultural may arise from such awareness.

The second poem, simply titled “Towards”, has clear links with the poem of four decades earlier, “Snow”, with which this study commenced. Already “piecing things together” as the poem opens, the subject envisions snowflakes giving a “common light” that enlivens the mainly rural scene. Particulars are highlighted by the plosive “t” of “twig” and “tile” and the fricative of “furrow”. The patterning of the ploughed earth, suggesting the printed lines of verse, is again featured here as in the Schubert “Ode” and *Fly Away Peter*. The appearance of the couplets in open form on the page emphasises this connection:

The land lies open. Twig, tile, furrow
wait to be decorated. Let it fall.

It eddies over the sill and window-panes
are brighter for it; glad to reflect a morning

⁶⁷ The poem “At the Ferry” concludes with speech becoming silence and then music, a desire for harmony between all three that may come as death approaches: “I stand and listen. / Silence/ approaches. A silence approaching music” (*TM* 22). The reference to the ferry suggests transport to the underworld and offers a later recapitulation of the image of Jim Saddler as a Charon figure in Ashley Crowther’s view of him as they float among the bird-filled swamps in *Fly Away Peter*.

of one colour at last after so much turmoil,
red leaf, bruised cloud, the old glooms of a year (*TM 76*)

Something unexpected arises as the poem assumes a narrative tone:

The wet hills are littered
with shapes we cannot fit to the known shadow
of any leaf or bird, schoolrooms hum

with sounds that fit no music nor the syntax
of any local speech (*TM 77*)

As in “Snow” the disturbance of the natural light is related to everyday scenes with children particularly affected in their schoolroom setting. Traditional learning, focused on comprehending, is challenged by apprehending as snow approaches. A new balance must be struck, valuing both the external world and the internal perception of that world.

The essence of the poetic is again represented as the bright snowlight of surprise that transforms the earth and turns the subject (and reader) towards a fresh and unpredictable moment from which new perceptions and understandings may emerge. The subject gathers the reading/listening audience (“towards us”) and all find their footprints anew on the “stilled earth” as if their lives were also suddenly distanced, refigured and appreciated anew. Like Imogen leaving the beach after seeing the surfer riding the breaking waves, “we turn” at the ending when “a stranger taps our shoulder”. Is it an angel, ourselves transformed, or an alternative self perhaps? Belief is the key by which the poetic imagination itself is reinvigorated, redressed in its own essence, Malouf’s poem suggests:

Those who believe will see it, having
opened in their mind a way for snow

to swarm out of the empty dark towards us,
transforming all we know, familiar paths,

familiar plots and proverbs to what we did
not know the land would bear: our footprints

approaching over the stilled earth towards us.
A stranger taps our shoulder, and we turn. (*TM* 77)

By standing poetic imagination upright again among creative arts, by asserting its importance as a way of accessing more holistic ways of perceiving, Malouf's work represents that imagination's capacity to help find alternatives through the labyrinths of contemporary experience, whether personal or cultural. As evident from his first publications in 1960, to 1982 and the many achievements of subsequent decades, Malouf's body of work continues his deep commitment to "making" through the poetic of language, building for his readers who share the belief a home in the ear:

That a man should wonder
what he might find
at day's end beyond darkness,
something made
that was not there till he made it, ...

...

... and whether of breath

made, or stone, egg-white,
earth, old sticks, odd clippings,
to be, as the child lost
in his own story seeks it,
a home, another home. (*TM* 24)⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Malouf read this poem at the conclusion of his acceptance address for the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2000.

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- 3 December 2003, Chippendale, Sydney: regarding the "poetry wars" in Sydney in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Appendix D).

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