Representations of Innocence and Experience in the Novels of Robert Drewe and Tim Winton

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Abstract

Traditionally associated with elements of the British literary canon such as William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the notions of innocence and experience are seldom encountered in Australian literature.

This thesis seeks to demonstrate how these notions of innocence and experience are presented in Robert Drewe's and Tim Winton's fiction. After an examination of innocence and experience as perceived in the literary, philosophical and religious spheres in the first chapter, the geographical and sociocultural background for this thesis is described in detail in the second chapter: this section presents a summary of aspects of Australia's and Western Australia's histories of particular relevance to a study of the two authors' works.

The third chapter concentrates on Robert Drewe's use of these two notions throughout his novels. The order of publication is eschewed in favour of a chronological axis designed around historically distinct subject matters. The author appears to prevent metaphysics from permeating his stories of men and women on a quest of their own, and he frequently juxtaposes points of view and narrative techniques in order to dig under the surface of unquestioned certainties.

The fourth chapter of this thesis is a study of Tim Winton's multilayered portrait of Western Australia's land and people, with a fall from innocence to experience explored through the author's specific spiritual sensibility. In his books, he frequently depicts characters on a tortuous path towards self-knowledge and acceptance, itineraries often leading to spiritual fulfillment.

One common element to their personal approach to the notions of innocence and experience is the strong influence of the geographical setting of their fiction. Indeed, Drewe's youth in Perth has had a lasting influence on his work, whether in his fiction (from *The Savage Crows* to *Grace*) or in his life-writing (*The Shark Net: Memories and Murder*). As for Tim Winton, he is seen as Western Australia's foremost contemporary novelist – the Western state being the unique backdrop of his

books (except for *The Riders*), to the point of being seen almost as a recurrent living protagonist.

The study of novels such as Drewe's *The Shark Net* and Winton's *Cloudstreet* focuses on issues of resilience, forgiveness and acceptance after growing up among life's pitfalls and dangers. At the end of this historical perspective, it is also worth examining how Drewe and Winton tackle turn-of-the-millennium anxieties and post-modern bemusement in *Grace* and *Dirt Music*, two tales of escaping the burdens of civilizations, to return to the wild, the raw natural condition estranged from the conventional march from innocence to experience.

Among other elements, this study encompasses Drewe's and Winton's efforts at dissecting myths and counter myths: what if the innocent Arcadia never existed? I will work on both authors' treatment of past blemishes and scars (as presented in *The Savage Crows*, *Shallows*, and other works) sometimes hidden under layers of nostalgia. This study also shows how innocence and experience are involved in a regionally delineated cartography of problematic places, in which beaches, suburbs, deserts and remote islands are the constitutive elements of a geography of benign, humbling and cruel dealings with nature and man for the characters of Robert Drewe and Tim Winton. Finally, this thesis deals with other options brought forth by Drewe and Winton: experience as the logical corollary to lost innocence – two successive pages or chapters in the book of life; individual or collective guilt dealt with, and now part of a triangular interaction with innocence and experience, through an appeased reassessment of the past.

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A note about quotations

All quotations are given as they appear in the source text. Unusual or non-standard spellings, punctuations and grammatical constructions have therefore not been standardized. This especially applies to quotations of Robert Drewe's and Tim Winton's novels in chapters 3 and 4 of this study. In these specific cases, page references are given for editions used in the preparation of this thesis and these editions are fully referenced in the footnotes and the bibliography.

Introduction

This thesis provides a study of the conceptual dichotomy that opposes innocence to experience in the novels of Robert Drewe and Tim Winton.

The interplay between these two notions is a well-known motif superimposed on many processes of change which humans undergo passively, bring upon themselves or impose on the universe around them – whether one deals with religious images of purity and corruption, moral markers such as blamelessness and guilt, or aesthetic constructs such as infant perfection and wizened maturity.

Because of the apparent familiarity of these concepts of innocence and experience, they need to be clearly delineated. The first chapter of this study starts with an examination of each of these concepts throughout their semantic evolution and their spiritual and philosophical histories. This initial exposition is then followed by a detailed treatment of the employment of the dichotomy of innocence and experience by a selection of notable playwrights, poets and novelists from the early Modern era to the twentieth century. This section on literary productions of Europe and of the New World provides a fuller understanding of the creative territory in which Drewe and Winton may work when they deal with this dichotomy in their works. In this first chapter, various interpretations of the myth of original innocence and the subsequent fall into experience are given particular attention through various readings of the Edenic and Arcadian conditions: from Theocritus and Virgil to Blake and Wordsworth, a whole Western literary tradition is presented in pastoral and georgic declinations of the pre- and postlapsarian human condition.

The second chapter of this thesis explores the various manifestations of innocence and experience in a more specific context: the European settlement on the Australian continent, a historically recent development superimposed on an indigenous cultural and spiritual reality then devoid of any comparable lapsarian mythology. The analysis first focuses on a shifting British colonial agenda for *Terra Australis*, which goes from hellish dumping grounds to challenging but rewarding land of opportunity and renewal for the nineteenth-century British public. This chapter demonstrates how Australia ends up being shown and sold as a virgin land, a blank slate on which European references are inscribed and progressively rephrased to

adapt to the continent's physical alienness and to gloss over the subjugation of the indigenous experience.

The transplantation of the Arcadian myth to the southern hemisphere is thus highlighted through its visual manifestations (the works of several generations of illustrators and painters) and its literary renderings. The tone and images of prose and verse works from the nineteenth century, from the poems of Henry Kendall and Charles Harpur to stories such as Henry Lawson's "The Drover's Wife", reveal a gradual adjustment of the pastoral idyll imported from Britain to the often harsh realities of the Australian physical and spiritual scenery. In order to connect this evolution to the contemporary local reality of Western Australia—the setting of most of Drewe's and Winton's novels, the ongoing debate over Australianized pastoral imagery is examined through John Kinsella's critical comments and his own poetical contributions to an elusive postmodern pastoral sentiment. His vivid descriptions of Western Australia's wheatbelt region underline some consequences of a collective endeavour started over a century and a half ago: the slow development of a colonial establishment on this giant western half of the continent.

The second half of this chapter deals with the successive starts and stops of the local experience, best summed up by Western Australia being described as the 'Cinderella State', long left to its isolation, late at the colonial and national political ball, going through various trials before being finally seen as a force to be reckoned with. All along the episodes of initial difficulties for free-settlers, of convictism, gold rushes, depressions and mineral resource booms, the situation of the local native populations is also evoked, from the betrayed promises of equal treatment in Stirling's Proclamation of Settlement in 1829, to the local acknowledgment of landmark native title decisions or tragedies such as that of the Stolen Generations. The second chapter closes on a questioning of the persistence of a noted circular aspect of Western Australia's history: boom-and-bust cycles punctuated by languid recovery periods as so many iterations of a progress from passive innocence to feverish experience that mixes fulfillment and corruption before deflation and frugal atonement.

The second half of the thesis deals more specifically with the treatment of the dichotomy of innocence and experience in the two authors' body of work analyzed in detail.

The third chapter concentrates on Robert Drewe's use of these two notions throughout his novels. The order of publication is eschewed in favour of a chronological axis designed around historically distinct subject matter. The circularity of the progress from innocence to experience identified in the previous chapter is again perceptible in this broad assessment of Drewe's fiction: the study starts with the mid-nineteenth-century extinction of the Tasmanian natives, 'noble savages' already at the end of their experience, in the stumbling care of Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson in *The Savage Crows*. In the same novel, Robert Drewe starts his complex episodic dissection of Western Australia's forgetful history through the eyes of his main contemporary protagonist Stephen Crisp. Drewe's ironical debunking of local myths is then applied to some weighty material: the life and death of iconic bushranger Ned Kelly. In *Our Sunshine*, Kelly's proclamations of innocence and of being misrepresented allow Robert Drewe to compose rich variations on the intertwined figures of naïve bravura and lapsarian infamy in Kelly-related popular folklore.

The description of the questionable innocence under threat in these novels gives way to a study of the illuminating transgression of crossing over into experience in the next section of this third chapter. In *The Drowner*, Drewe depicts individual as well as collective comings-of-age taking place on the shores and in the near-empty interior of Western Australia, a progress towards maturity that is however contrasted with images of physical and moral foundering back in corrupt old Europe. Drewe's memoir *The Shark Net* then occupies a central place in this chapter as it is here presented as an ambitious project going beyond the nostalgic recollection of the author's youth in Perth in order to give life to displaced characters such as rebellious young Rob and socially deviant Eric Edgar Cooke and to reveal their common position of outsiders looking in. Melbourne-born Rob grows up on the exotic west coast and goes against the grain of postwar middle-class propriety by rushing headlong into experience, as a teenage father and as a junior reporter exploring the shady corners of Western Australia's sun-drenched paradise. Eric Cooke, as remembered and recreated by Robert Drewe, adds his own corrupt yearnings to the torments of his broken innocence in order to violate the self-righteous certainties and security of the prosperous locals. His crimes, his diminutive banality compared to the local folklore's monstrous Night Prowler imagery and his cathartic execution are the

most easily identifiable triggers in Perth's fall from carefree grace commented upon by the author.

Experience is described in the next section of this chapter as a mediated reality with intertextual echoes and a kaleidoscope of references working against a clear delineation of any sense of original innocence. In *Fortune*, the existential trajectories of various characters intersect in public and privates spheres but, throughout the novel, the mirror effects and shifting perspectives underlined by the narrator contribute to bend the supposed linear dichotomy of innocence and experience out of shape. The loose spiral of iterative cycles it produces is also present in *A Cry in the Jungle Bar*, as this study demonstrates how its main protagonist Richard Cullen is doomed to oblivion—his bleeding to death in a muddy jungle a puzzling footnote in the larger scheme of things—partly because his studious achievements have kept him shielded from the ebb and flow of a random universe until he comes crashing into hard experience in an unfamiliar terrain.

Finally, *Grace* is presented in this study as a return to the wide-ranging preoccupations of Drewe's earliest novels from *The Savage Crows* to *Fortune*; the novel's turn-of-the-millennium setting and interrogations as to where Australia now stands on its march towards globalised experience are analyzed through a renewed emphasis on the cyclical patterns shaping the aspirations and itineraries of its protagonists, as well as on Drewe's distanced irony resolutely shying away from immovable certainties.

The final chapter of this thesis is a study of Tim Winton's multilayered portrait of Western Australia's land and people, with a fall from innocence to experience explored through the author's specific spiritual sensibility. The latter is discussed at length through a thematic approach of Tim Winton's fictional universe which has slowly coalesced, novel after novel from *An Open Swimmer* to *Breath*, into a coherent picture of contemporary Western Australia. The analysis starts with an examination of the notion of innocence as used by the author as the foundation for his characters' vivid connection with their natural environment. It is often the ocean wave's indomitable, plastic nature which characterizes the unprejudiced openness to the full spectrum of existence as exhibited by Winton's Innocents. They are wide-eyed children, untamed teenagers or immature adults, with the odd mentally-impaired

liminal traveller—all of them mystical 'seers' in some capacity, only reluctantly giving in to their fallen nature.

The chapter then addresses the author's treatment of the symbol of the fall, with the fateful plucking from the Edenic Tree of Knowledge turned into choices and actions coloured by curiosity and lust. These instances of the fall are often marked by a failed idealistic desire to merge with the otherness, be it human through doomed, destructive intimacies, or elemental through the sensory overload of flirting with one's physiological limits in an indifferently hostile universe. The fusion aspect of the lapsarian crisis may also be one of dissolution into a common lot of compromising, passivity and neglect—with a temporary inability to turn towards one's inner guiding light.

The next section of this chapter deals with Tim Winton's portrayal of experience in his novels. It may take the guise of a collective burden of guilt and stubbornness, as in his fiction's coastal towns built on the predation of the maritime resources; some authentic hellish environments are sometimes even conjured up by the author to entrap and mercilessly engulf some confused interlopers, whether in the harsh cities of the Old World in *The Riders* or in a thankless corner of Western Australia's back country in *In The Winter Dark*. For some of his imperfect spiritual seers/seekers, experience corresponds to the slow existential plodding towards an unpredictable moment of redemption. For many of Winton's characters, experience is also marked by a reconnection with spheres other than the rational as they surrender to the universe's capricious randomness and to its transcendent essence.

Finally, instances of redemption and moments of grace that can be highlighted in the various novels are analyzed to reveal Winton's motif of salvation through humble acts of love and empathy, and of patient, pragmatic atonement. Somehow correlated to Robert Drewe's figures of cyclical progressions from innocence to experience in the previous chapter, the fight for one's nobler part of humanity is here symbolized as each of the first steps taken after the many recognitions and acceptances of one's fallenness.

The conclusion of this thesis is a synthesis of the main findings taken from the previous chapter and an attempt to reinscribe Drewe's and Winton's treatment of innocence and experience in a literary and cultural continuum covering the Australian national experience from the early European settlement to the early 21st century.

Chapter I
The Concepts of
lnnocence and Experience

Why is the dichotomy linking innocence and experience still at the centre of everyday preoccupations, as well as part of scholarly discussions? Maybe because it seems to encapsulate the Alpha and Omega of human endeavours, either individual or collective. Being tangential to oppositions such as good versus evil and nature versus culture, this dichotomy influences decision-making processes in various domains, from personal approaches to child-rearing and education to large-scale initiatives dealing with nation-building. It also determines whether preventive or corrective measures are privileged as solutions to socio-economic ills such as crime and poverty; regarding these and many other problems, the temptations of extreme social engineering allowed by cutting-edge genetics such as genome manipulation and stem-cell research give a vital importance to the debate between innocence and experience and the way it determines one's individual condition.

I.1. "Innocence"

It is useful to return to basic definitions and meanings for the two components of this complex dichotomy since neither term, despite its perennial importance in human thought, is really simple or clear. My main reference here is the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989); its contributions will be complemented by a few other sources. In the English language, the word "innocence" (from the Latin "innocentia") is mostly associated with three declinations of "the quality or fact of being innocent". It first equates to the "freedom from sin, guilt, or moral wrong in general" and to "the state of being untainted with, or unacquainted with, evil". It is synonymous with "moral purity". English reformist theologian and scholar John Wycliffe thus evoked a "state of

innocen[c]e" in his *Selected Works*[1] around 1380, and John Milton wrote about humans' "spotless", "native innocence"[2] in 1667. Ambiguity is already present in this heavily connotated definition, marked by a religious perception: is this "innocence" a "state" (a fairly neutral condition) and / or a "quality" (a trait refined and exhibited with pride)?

The concept "innocence" is also linked with "freedom from specific guilt", "the fact of not being guilty of that with which one is charged" – all this summed up as "guiltlessness". In this judicial sense, the word "specific" is important: indeed, one might witness here the judgment of a person familiar with frowned-upon habits and practices (of which one might find extreme manifestations in a criminal record), but what matters is guilt, or lack of, related to one precise accusation. The person may be exonerated from this moral and judicial burden, but he cannot claim absolute innocence. As mentioned in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on "innocence",

> People who are found not to be guilty of a particular crime are described as innocent. The fact that they may have committed innumerable other misdemeanours which do not fall within the ambit of the law is of no consequence in this regard.[3]

Finally, the innocence that was the privilege of the First Ages of humanity seems to find a twisted echo in individual conditions, for which childlike attributes have been downgraded to childish shortcomings. For innocence is also presented as "freedom from cunning or artifice; guilelessness, artlessness, simplicity; hence, want of knowledge or sense, ignorance, silliness". Depending on one's views of the laws governing the universe (whether the rule of higher design or that of chance), this condition of innocence will be seen either as a blessing or as an affliction, and one's ability to exert control over this situation is subjected to the aforementioned distinction between "state" and "quality".[4]

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[1] John Wycliffe, *Selected Works*. III. 143

[2] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IX, 373

[3] *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Innocence", volume 4, pp. 797-798

[4] A search for "innocence" in the *Roget's New Millennium Thesaurus* (Lexico Publishing Group, LLC, 2006) gave the following results : when "innocence" is defined as **"blamelessness" (antonym : "guilt"),** whether judicial or metaphysical, its possible synonyms are "chastity, clean hands, clear conscience, guiltlessness, impeccability, incorruptibility, incorruption, inculpability, probity, purity, righteousness, sinlessness, stainlessness, uprightness, virginity, virtue" ; when it is described as **"naivete" (antonym : "experience")** , it is linked with "artlessness, candidness, chastity, credulousness, forthrightness, frankness, freshness, guilelessness, gullibility, harmlessness, ignorance, inexperience, ingenuousness, innocuousness, innoxiousness, inoffensiveness, lack, nescience, plainness,

Whether one privileges one or the other aspect determines a specific approach to the dichotomy between innocence and experience: innocence is the human condition before the Fall which, in the Christian tradition, is the highest image of that "freedom from sin, guilt or moral wrong" evoked earlier. Man explicitly "created in God's image" started mythical Prehistory as a perfect being in an ideal environment before the original sin; this vision of Eden was progressively enlivened by leaders and ideologues in charge of the Church of Rome for the first few centuries of our era. They syncretically amalgamated the original paradise with the golden pastures peopled by shepherds described in Theocritus' and Virgil's poems. This composite depiction of the First Ages of humanity seems to have been kept safe from questioning for the whole Middle Ages.

It even withstood the assault of the many paradoxical implications of yet another dizzying theological construction: the fortunate Fall, or *felix culpa* (as famously put by St. Augustine). This came after the perplexing nuances in the definition of the Holy Trinity and the polymorphous nature of the human soul, between immortal essence and well-delineated vital drive obliterated by death and reinstated by the resurrection. Theologians and thinkers across Christendom had to solve the problem of God's omniscience being eroded by His inability to predict the Fall (if not unwillingness to prevent it). The solution they progressively came up with seemed to displace the emphasis from God's defining traits to the magnificence of His designs. There was something of a cosmic "fearful symmetry" in the loss of perfection at the time of the Fall being countered by the willing gift of another perfect human life by a later Saviour in a plan involving innumerable hardships and infinite tests of faith. Perfection would rule the universe through a deliberate common effort and not just because God only had inscribed it in His creation's blueprint. The central ambiguity of the fortunate Fall – the original sin being a blessing in disguise because it would ultimately lead redeemed humankind to something superior to the relatively passive prelapsarian condition – could even be read as some daring instance of quantum metaphysics. If quantum physics allows for simultaneous and/or parallel occurrences of a given process or phenomenon on the basis of new laws going against the Newtonian and part of the Einsteinian principles, one could

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purity, simplicity, sincerity, unaffectedness, unawareness, unfamiliarity, unknowingness, unsophistication, unworldliness, virginity, virtue".

envision God masterfully handling two (or more) possible alternative developments of his initial creative program, ready to anticipate either the path of human full obedience to His commands or the way of enlightening rebellion and self-determination as willing subjects of the Deity. His omniscience had always had a full grasp of both historical streams, and He would not be perceived as having to settle for Plan B after being caught by surprise. Still, in traditional imagery, life in Eden for the first couple before the Fall was at the core of many nostalgic declamations, perfection encapsulated in a few idyllic scenes that stood out as total opposites to the common mortal coil.

However, when one pored over this depiction of the prelapsarian condition, one could already see cracks in this mythical construction. For example, what did God have in store for perfect humans? What was their allotted employment – gentle husbandry of a generous land, or rustic toil to provide for a healthy but frugal subsistence, as was that of the original Arcadians? Another problem was to determine if innocence meant the same thing for a lonely couple in the middle of nature and for a community organized around elementary rules to make the most of a given territory used either for grazing or for crops. How much of civilization/society can innocence take before it transubstantiates into something quite different, whether it is experience, guilt or responsibility?

These issues resurfaced in analytical and speculative research dealing with the significance of unprecedented contacts between European cultures and distant human groups, most notably the indigenous tribes and nations of both American hemispheres. In a perspective that linked Christianity with a higher degree of organizational advancement, some of these discovered societies were seen as barbarous and primitive, and were thought to have remained very close to an ancient original condition of the whole human family, thus being convenient test subjects for some *in vivo* appraisal of long-gone virtues and characters. In their deceptively simple universe and in their near-nakedness, they reminded European thinkers and artists of denizens of the original Golden Age. Since they were living beyond the end of the known world at that time, their otherness was also geographically defined, with traits similar to those of some remote Arcadia cut off from the enlightened *polis*.

That is what Michel de Montaigne seems to demonstrate in his essay “Of Cannibals” in which he comments on the situation of Brazilian indigenous groups:

> These nations then seem to me to be so far barbarous, as having received but very little form and fashion from art and human invention, and consequently to be not much remote from their original simplicity. The laws of nature, however, govern them still, not as yet much vitiated with any mixture of ours.
> (…) [T]o my apprehension, what we now see in those nations, does not only surpass all the pictures with which the poets have adorned the golden age, and all their inventions in imagining a happy state of man, but, moreover, the fancy and even the wish and desire of philosophy itself; so native and so pure an innocence, as we by experience see to be in them, could never enter into their imagination, nor could they ever believe that human society could have been maintained with so little human artifice and solder.[5]

Montaigne was however influenced by the skepticism of his time towards established doctrines and narratives, a profound questioning which already led to the Reformation across Europe. And, whereas the highest authorities of the Roman Catholic Church were discussing the opportunity of leading these heathen nations of the New World into the fold of the redeemed civilized believers (thus letting these "innocent" tribes bypass the Fall – or tending to the ills of its unverified occurrence), thinkers such as Montaigne were turning the tables on discourses of unidirectional evolutions – barbarity to civilization, innocence to fall and to redemptive wisdom (one possible definition of experience). The French essayist thus showed that breaking the taboo of cannibalism was not in itself a sign of lower rank on some human species' scale:

> I am not so much concerned that we should here take notice of the horrible barbarity of such acts, but that, seeing so clearly into their faults, we should be so blind to our own. I conceive there is more barbarity in eating a man alive, than when he is dead; in tearing a body limb from limb by racks and torments, that is yet in perfect sense; in roasting it by degrees; in causing it to be bitten and worried by dogs and swine (as we have not only read, but lately seen, not among inveterate and mortal enemies, but among neighbors and fellow-citizens, and, which is worse, under color of piety and religion), than to roast and eat him after he is dead.[6]

The traditional linearity of the process joining the original innocence and some hard-earned, civilizing experience seemed clearly ruptured: the revealed Word of God (and its interpretations as well as its pagan additions) could no longer be taken at face value to make sense of the human condition. If the contemporary state of affairs was a confusing mix of cold-blooded horror and inspired sublimity, what was one to make of

[5] Michel de Montaigne, « Of Cannibals », trans. Charles Cotton-W. Hazlitt; ed. Blanchard Bates ; Random House, New York; 1949.
[6] Idem.

the infancy of our troublesome kind? The philosophical debate centring on the crucial transition for our oldest ancestors from mindless wandering to gregarious endeavour would then on make ever wider inroads into uncharted territories, with contributions as seemingly antithetical as Hobbes' and Rousseau's works.

One of the common traits of both these authors' visions is their sometimes risky efforts to secularize the concept of original innocence of the ways of the world. It was indeed still problematic to rewrite the history of humankind without mentioning our sinless ancestors in their earthly paradise before the Fall, or God's plan to correct the latter tragedy:

> Hobbes proposed to offer an account of the origins of political society without the benefit of support from Aristotelian or divine teleology. His critics accused him of achieving this goal by postulating a view of man that was "contrary to the Honor and Dignity of God". Hobbes' theory, they were convinced, overthrew the "order, beauty, and perfection of the world" (Clarendon, *View and Survey, p.28)* as established by God.
>
> […] Hobbes' contemporaries criticized him for striking at the foundation of all systems of morality, which rested, they insisted, on the acceptance of the "noble condition of man as a rational creature" (Lawson, Examination, p.71) as a necessary starting premise.[7]

For over a millennium, a vibrant iconography had strikingly reinforced the official description of humanity's infancy: a garden of eternal springtime mixed with the entrancing scenery found in the pastoral poetry of Theocritus and Virgil. Seventeenth-century critics were indeed shocked when they read Hobbes' description of the original state of nature in *Leviathan*, published in 1651:

> Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man, the same consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.[8]

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[7] Edward Dudley and Maximillian E. Novak (ed.), *The Wild Man Within – An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism*; University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh; 1972; p.156.
[8] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651) ; chapter XIII

Hobbes quickly delivers another blow to the orthodox conception of human historical development when, echoing Montaigne's surprising comments on the Brazilian cannibal tribe, he detects specific traits of his vision in some contemporary American nations and weakens furthermore the doctrine of prelapsarian blamelessness that could somehow be confirmed in newly discovered peoples :

> For the savage people in many places of America, except the government of small families, the concord whereof dependeth on natural lust, have no government at all, and live at this day in that brutish manner, as I said before.[9]

It has to be mentioned that Hobbes' vision has often been excessively darkened. As Montaigne demonstrated it before him, barbarity as depicted by these two authors is a relative concept. In what looks like a nod to then-unknown cultural relativism, Hobbes abstains from condemning the first humans he depicts as creatures without legal or moral clear restraints ; the whole world is theirs, with as many superior interests as there are individuals determined to defend them. If innocence exists in Hobbes' primeval world, it is in the absence of transgression since no laws exist to set limits on acceptable behaviour. And, in *Leviathan*, it is in effect a higher interest recognized on a common basis by a group of individuals (and not moral stricture) which leads to the establishment of a social contract.

After the turmoil of Cromwell's Commonwealth and of the Restoration, the democratic advancements allowed in England by the Glorious Revolution appeared as the perfect example of the validity of the social contract theory. This process of merging particular interests into a common will was a radical departure from the traditional representation of postlapsarian communal fate: organized society (or civilization) was no longer a transitory penance between fall and redemption. Nor was it the legacy of countless generations, accumulated trials and errors distilled into a sense of collective experience.

John Locke built upon Hobbes' theory of a state of nature; he softened this depiction of primordial impulses by showing that, even before what Hobbes calls "the mutual transferring of right" (one instance of the numerous agreed obligations between members of a community – the social contract), one could distinguish two sides to the

[9] Idem.

"innocent" human creature. Whether he would prefer the gentle state of nature or the harsher state of war depended on his adherence to the natural law, an organic check on his instincts:

> Though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence […]. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.[10]

For Locke, the natural law is clearly separate from any higher set of rules revealed by God; this distinction constitutes one more step towards a complete secularization of the debate on human progress, from the most elementary condition to a higher plane of sophistication and ambiguity.

Similarly to Hobbes who described the more conciliatory alternative to his much-decried vision of *"bellum omnium contra omnes"* ("war of all against all") as "the passions that incline men to peace [being] fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them",[11] Locke opposed the two parts of the "innocent" psyche:

> Here we have the plain difference between the state of nature, and the state of war […]. Men living together according to reason, without a common superior on earth, with authority to judge between them, is properly the state of nature. But force, or a declared design of force upon the person of another, where there is no common superior on earth to appeal to for relief, is the state of war […].
> Want of a common judge with authority, puts all men in a state of nature: force without right, upon a man's person, makes a state of war, both where there is, and is not, a common judge.[12]

Once again, this embryonic society is shown functioning without higher authority, be it political or divine. And this subtle rejection of divine intervention in human affairs is also underlined by the *a minima* rewriting of the Golden Rule, especially in the case of Hobbes; from the altruistic, pro-active push to do for others, one sees the edict being

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[10] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*; critical edition by Peter Laslett; Cambridge University Press, London; 1967; II.6 – pp.288-289.
[11] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651) ; chapter XIII
[12] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*; critical edition by Peter Laslett; Cambridge University Press, London; 1967; II.19 – pp.298-299.

turned into a ban on violating other's rights and liberties: "Do not that to another which thou wouldest not have done to thyself".[13]

Through a dispassionate approach to Hobbes' and Locke's works, it is ultimately possible to see how, following a conceptual template mixing a state of nature outside the framework of rigid religious ethics, elementary interests kept in check by natural law and a progressive move towards a constructive compromise ruled by a social contract, Jean-Jacques Rousseau would later produce an iconic portrayal of the first ages of humanity, an account of problematic innocence upset by a no less puzzling concept of collective historical experience mostly detailed in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754).

In the same way that Hobbes' vision has often been schematically reduced to the portrayal of a vicious battlefield on which each member of the human species would have to fight for his survival, the implications of Rousseau's description of the "savage man" have somehow been overlooked as some "outgrowth of his various neuroses and personal maladjustment".[14] The innocence of his theoretical test subject is, for that matter, totally unconnected to any "noble" impulse of the soul or any other emotional motivation:

> Let us conclude then that man in a state of nature, wandering up and down the forests, without industry, without speech, and without home, an equal stranger to war and to all ties, neither standing in need of his fellow-creatures nor having any desire to hurt them, and perhaps even not distinguishing them one from another; let us conclude that, being self-sufficient and subject to so few passions, he could have no feelings or knowledge but such as befitted his situation; that he felt only his actual necessities, and disregarded everything he did not think himself immediately concerned to notice.[15]

The "savage man" is not in constant, ruthless competition with his kind, but he does not go out of his way and demonstrate anything resembling empathy either. With no real material elements constraining him, he instinctively enjoys unadulterated physical empowerment and gratifications. This near-perfect physical integrity becomes the first casualty of human socialization, first in family units as part of ever-larger ensembles with new roles, concerns and values :

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[13] Thomas Hobbes , *Leviathan* (1651) ; chapter XV

[14] Edward Dudley and Maximillian E. Novak (ed.), *The Wild Man Within – An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism*; University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh; 1972; p.236.

[15] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*; Oxford University Press, Oxford; 1994; p.51.

> In this new state, […] men enjoyed a great deal of leisure and used it to procure for themselves many conveniences unknown to their forefathers; and *this was the first yoke they unwittingly imposed on themselves* […]. For not only *did these men proceed to lull both body and mind*; through habitual use these conveniences also lost almost all their pleasureableness.[16]

For Rousseau, the fault (even he stays clear of the moral implications of that concept) seems to reside in a progressive search for comfort – the mastery of fire, the 'benefits of keeping [mutual commitments]"[17] and the honing of utilitarian skills of a communication and technical order. With the mounting complexity and codification of human interactions, what remained of the primeval innocence was then crushed under new duties owed to the community:

> Such was, or must have been, the origin of society and of laws, which put new shackles on the weak and gave new powers to the rich, which destroyed natural freedom irretrievably […]. Societies, as they proliferated and spread, soon covered the whole surface of the earth, and it was no longer possible to find a single corner on the globe where one might free oneself from the yoke and shield one's head from the often precariously hanging sword that every man saw perpetually dangling over him.[18]

For Rousseau, there is apparently more violence within the society than without, contrary to the view Hobbes argued decades before. And, far from isolated occurrences, humanity has to deal with collective and ritualized aggression, as in the case of "wars between nations"; coercion is also imposed through systemic material inequality and even enslavement. This is where Rousseau stops his historical demonstration, before a new age of reason that might let humans perfect the social order through the establishment of a superior social contract ; the philosopher thus raises the possibility of seeing the return of some of the savage man's original guiltless glory before his gradual Fall from natural grace :

> Just as an unbroken horse tosses its mane, stamps the ground with its hoof, and rears up furiously at the mere approach of the bit, while a broken-in horse patiently suffers even the whip and spurs, savage man will not bend his neck to the yoke that civilized man wears without a whimper; savage man prefers the most tempestuous freedom to the most tranquil subservience.[19]

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[16] Idem ; p.59 (Italics are mine)
[17] Idem ; p.57.
[18] Idem ; p.69.
[19] Idem ; p.72.

Hope is not completely lost since, for Rousseau, a potent instance of the mythical innocence can be found in every child at birth. It is up to parents and the responsible community to preserve this "original state" of "goodness" against "external sources of evil" and "corrupting external influences". The original "natural condition" which links innocence with "good" will be maintained by a "natural education (….) that interferes as little as possible with their free, natural development".[20] The Fall is here dormant in each individual and can be prevented by an educated stasis of unspoilt natural harmlessness; the original sin seems to have been taken out of the equation by Rousseau, but his "natural" framework may be subject to ulterior questioning by certain extensions of Darwin's theory which reveal that natural mechanisms of selection and adaptation have little to do with high or low moral considerations. Whether unreasonable or not, the use of the notion of "survival of the fittest" in anthropological studies shows, as for its equivalent in the animal realm, that external, material circumstances will dictate the course of adaptive processes more surely than guilt or desire for spiritual betterment and redemption.

I.2. "Experience"

Innocence cannot be understood without the concept of "experience". The definitions collected in the *Oxford English Dictionary* show that in this case, the difficulty in apprehending the notion comes from its internal dynamics, rather than from a set defining feature such as passivity in the case of "innocence". The nuances of meaning for "experience" as a noun (from the Latin "experientia"; from the Greek "empeiria" – "έμπειρία") are presented below as successive steps and end results of a cognitive process, whether individual or collective.

Experience is first described as "the actual observation of facts or events, considered as a source of knowledge" and as "the fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition, or of being consciously affected by an event. [It is] also an instance of this; a state or condition viewed subjectively; an event by which one is affected". The

[20] *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Innocence", volume 4, pp. 797-798 ; Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Emile : ou, de l'education*, trans. A. Bloom, *Emile : or, On Education*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991.

acquisition of knowledge is at that moment still a work in progress, not the conclusion of a set of valuable lessons – a transitory aspect of experience thus described by John Stephens in his *Satirical Essays*: "A complete man know[e]s what experience can teach, but is not taught by experience".[21] Each single experience is described as one building block constitutive of a final architecture of coexisting achievements and conceptualisations; this architecture will, in its turn, be recognised as "experience".

Indeed, this notion is also presented as "what has been experienced; the events that have taken place within the knowledge of an individual, a community, mankind at large, either during a particular period or generally" and as the "knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone". One can envision a more proactive version of this process – and its corresponding results – with this other definition: "the state of having been occupied in any department of study or practice, in affairs generally, or in the intercourse of life; the extent to which, or the length of time during which, one has been so occupied; the aptitudes, skill, judgement, etc. thereby acquired".

The contrast between these two meanings of the noun "experience" can be further delineated through an examination of the suggestions in *Roget's Thesaurus*' related to these nuances : "experience" is first equated with "happening", and the synonyms listed are "adventure, affair, been there, *encounter, episode, event, hap, incident, occurrence, ordeal, test, trial*, trip".[22] The italicized elements above point to all the likely formative stages of a movement towards deeper (self-) awareness – benign, neutral or painful phases, and sometimes a mix of these three qualifications : the French equivalent thesaurus underlines the complexity of these situations, with words such as "une épreuve" (a noun that can be translated as "test", "trial", or "ordeal", whether agreeable or not), and "éprouver" (a verb that can be translated as "to try", "to test", "to afflict" and "to feel"). The thesaurus search can also shed light on a whole gamut of meanings and nuances behind these far-reaching concepts, from the loftiest and most established to the highly subjective and hardly measurable: for "experience" corresponding to "knowledge" can be linked with "*acquaintance*, action, actuality, background, caution, combat, contact, doing, empiricism, evidence, existence, exposure, *familiarity*, forbearance,

[21] John Stephens, *Satirical Essays*, second edition, 1615; p.172.
[22] *Roget's New Millennium Thesaurus*; Lexico Publishing Group, LLC, 2006 – Italics are mine.

intimacy, involvement, inwardness, *judgment, know-how, maturity, observation*, participation, patience, perspicacity, practicality, practice, proof, reality, *savoir-faire*, seasoning, sense, skill, sophistication, strife, struggle, training, trial, *understanding, wisdom, worldliness*".[23]

"Experience" is also used as a verb with the following definition: "to have experience of; to meet with; to feel, suffer, undergo", elements which can be linked with the idea of "trial", "to try". This process is in itself neutral and entails no preconceived assumptions or systematically positive (or negative) results for each event – an open-ended perspective which may be involved in radical questionings of the traditional vision of the Fall as a destructive stage in human development.

As a proof of the difference of interest in the concepts of innocence and experience, it is to be noted that whereas it has surprisingly no article on "innocence", the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* has articles related to "experience" and "experience theology" – the former elaborating on the brief following overview of successive philosophical perceptions of the meaning of "experience".

For Aristotle, experience is an essential connection between the members of our species, a logical mindframe acquired through the exercise of common human faculties that transcends peculiar situations ("a judgment consisting in associating individuals with a generic image").[24] As he explains in his *Metaphysics*, experience is built upon the progressive synthesis of multiple occurrences:

> The animals other than man live by appearances and memories, and have but little of connected experience; but the human race lives also by art and reasonings. Now from memory experience is produced in men; for the several memories of the same thing produce finally the capacity for a single experience. And experience seems pretty much like science and art, but really science and art come to men through experience (…). Now art arises when from many notions gained by experience one universal judgement about a class of objects is produced. […] Experience is knowledge of individuals.[25]

This common wealth of knowledge is also described by the Greek philosopher as "the universal at rest in the soul, uniqueness as opposed to multiplicity, what remains one

[23] *Roget's New Millennium Thesaurus.*
[24] *Grand Dictionnaire Encyclopedique Larousse*, "Experience", volume 4, p. 4064 – Translation is mine.
[25] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I,1 (translation by W. D. Ross).

and the same in all singular beings" (*Second Analytics*, 2, 19).[26] In spite of modifications brought by the Stoics and the Epicureans, the Aristotelian notion of experience remained widely accepted in the Western world for centuries, reinforced as it was by the works of various Christian thinkers such as Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Seventeenth-century English empiricists reformulated this notion to present it as "both [the] starting point and [the] source of the foundations of knowledge",[27] but it is Kant's theory of *Erfahrung* which, in an epistemological vein, updates the fundamental ambiguity at the heart of the concept of experience – alternatively an occurrence contributing to knowledge, the path followed while encountering these occurrences, or the end result made of the amalgamation of hindsights and practices derived from postprocessed occurrences. The first two possibilities are thus developed by the German philosopher:

> That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. For how is it possible that the faculty of cognition should be awakened into exercise otherwise than by means of objects which affect our senses, and partly of themselves produce representations, partly rouse our powers of understanding into activity, to compare to connect, or to separate these, and so to convert the raw material of our sensuous impressions into a knowledge of objects, which is called experience? In respect of time, therefore, no knowledge of ours is antecedent to experience, but begins with it.[28]

At this point, some psychoanalytical comments on peculiar instances of experience may also be of interest. Sigmund Freud indeed described the "experience of satisfaction" as "a fundamental event from which arise ulterior pleasure-seeking attempts through objects substituting for an initial libidinal object (mostly the mother) which allowed this event to happen".[29] In what seems to be a typically Freudian angle, we find here the various figures of the classical myth of innocence superseded by experience: the infant, the temptation, the loss, the Fall, the nostalgia of primordial times, the quest and the lessons learned.

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[26] *Grand Dictionnaire Encyclopedique Larousse*, "Experience", volume 4, p. 4064 – Translation is mine.
[27] Idem
[28] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction to the second edition, "I. Of the difference between Pure and Empirical Knowledge" ; 1787
[29] *Grand Dictionnaire Encyclopedique Larousse*, "Experience", volume 4, p. 4064 – Translation is mine.

To conclude this effort to clarify the notions of innocence and experience, we can note that they have been the object of concrete, applied analysis, for example in the field of organisational ethics and political science. For Machiavelli, for example, innocence was connected to morality and thus part of a set of personal, private virtues which often end up being a hindrance to the exercise of public responsibilities. It is a laudable but fruitless pursuit to try to reconcile ancient impossible ideals and sometimes ruthless necessities existing in the sphere of political experience:

> The decadence of modern nations, that is, their disunity and their loss of civic ambitions and of republican virtues, is attributable, according to Machiavelli, to the ethics of renunciation, the ethics of innocence and of self-abnegation, which had not been known in the ancient world. The morality of innocence is the morality of a people who are resigned to being impotent. Those populations within which this conception of the good prevails will disappear from history without trace, leaving few models or monuments as their inheritance.[30]

In its uncompromising tone, this scathing portrayal of innocence applied to political management may almost sound like a call to return to the merciless fate of humans before the advent of community in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, in a hyper-competitive field of means justifying ends, according to the stereotypical appraisal of Machiavelli's discourse. However, the moral aspects of the notion of innocence still dictate the terms of what a balanced experience of duties and responsibilities should be in the real world, as Stuart Hampshire demonstrates while requalifying Machiavelli's dictum:

> The idea of experience is the idea of guilty knowledge, of the expectation of unavoidable squalor and imperfection, of necessary disappointments and mixed results, of half success and half failure. A person of experience has come to expect that his usual choice will be of the lesser of two or more evils.[31]

The choices required, whether at an individual or collective level, vary according to historical circumstances – to socio-economic conditions, political maturity, or adherence to progressive ideologies. Thus, if the specific temporality of human experience is constantly reasserted, the idea of innocence being an undisputed atemporal component of the human condition has been repeatedly questioned in post-divine debates (with Nietzsche and Freud's contributions being prominent). It has also been the case in

[30] Stuart Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*; Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts; 1989; p.167.
[31] *Innocence and Experience*; p.170.

post-Holocaust discussions by thinkers such as Primo Levi, Albert Camus and Hannah Arendt of what makes us human.

In a curious, distant after-echo, it also seems that the tragic events of 9/11 brutally invalidated the doctrines of the end of history and of the new world order which, in the late eighties and in the nineties, seemed poised to lead to an ideal of peace regained through the self-evident dissemination of liberal democracy around the world in a return to past idyllic visions, whether inspired by the inaugural works of the United Nations' Organisation in the late 1940's or even by distant memories of the iconic ancient Hellenic political system in which innocence (in the guise of self-proclaimed political purity) had, for once, *succeeded* to harsh experience (the fallen condition of barbarity). With these recent developments, our clear-cut semantic systems seem to go out of kilter again.

* * *

I.3. The innocence / experience dichotomy in literary history - introduction

Humans have always tried to get a grasp on their condition by using discursive analogies everyone can relate to. Thus, the supposed blank slate (according to theoretical contributions as varied as John Locke's and Karl Marx' works) that is the human brain at birth and in the early stages of the learning process, identified as "innocence", provides an accessible simile for what is tentatively described as the starting point for evolutions taking place on a larger scale, and which would encompass the establishment, rise and possible decline of human communities.

In this case, what would "experience" equate to? If we keep on with the human life comparison, a collective entity organized around common values and goals would grow by crossing various thresholds or rites of passage towards increased self-reliance and progressive maturity. Accessing a new stage of development would entail a new iteration of this educational process – whether each cycle were smoother or tougher might depend on the conflicting, common urges to retain part of that original innocence and to gain as much experience as needed to confront the ever puzzling twists and turns of the existential path that is the common lot of fools and the wise alike.

The challenge and dread of mortality then enters the picture, and makes that much sought-after experience even more precious – and elusive. In the traditional motif of the Ages of Man, infancy and maturity are followed by progressive decay, where the knowledge gained along the way is slowly lost because of senility. The wheel seems to complete a full circle in this return to innocence, here the result of neurological impairment. In the meantime, the impetus has been transmitted to a new generation and the cycle starts anew. Will insights be passed on, and provide help on the path trodden one more time?

In Western culture, the myth of human origins has long been framed by the biblical tradition, later syncretically reinterpreted by poets and philosophers. Hence, each human lineage supposedly goes back to the original couple in the Garden of Eden, living innocent and naked without a hint of prudishness. But was it Arcadia, population 2? This pastoral vision will be assessed later in this section of the study.

In this version the first transgression brings knowledge, imperfection and death. Here lies one of the main paradoxes of this vision of the human condition: is the Fall a tragic death sentence, or a necessary liberation towards self-fulfillment? Which state should be most desired, blissful innocence or hard-earned experience? Is the assault on the unique taboo imposed from above an accident on the way to greater things, or an essential part of the march towards progress? Can the fall lead to the ascent of man, or has the species turned its back on resplendent simplicity to lose itself in the corruptions of ambition and sophistication? Is Rousseau's description of the noble savage threatened by the contaminations of civilization still a useful secular rewriting of the mythical Edenic tragedy?

On an individual level, we might often wonder if we've really learned important lessons along the way and if we can actually see where we are going. The same doubts might be manifest in the assessment of collective evolutions: can they be traced back to a Golden Age that remains the apex of human contentment, and have they taken humanity to a higher plane of understanding and achievement?

I.3.a – William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience.*

In the specific field of English literary studies, the pair innocence / experience is most explicitly associated with William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience.* In *Songs of Innocence* (1789), the poet depicts scenes with children or looks at the world through their eyes, and the absence of malice in their actions mirrors the prelapsarian picture of humanity's innocent infancy. The exercise of piety witnessed in "Holy Thursday" may echo the perfect compact existing between Man and God in Eden:

> Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean
> The children walking two & two in red & blue & green
> Grey headed beadles walkd before with wands as white as snow
> Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow
>
> O what a multitude they seemd these flowers of London town
> Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own
> The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs
> Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands
>
> Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song
> Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among
> Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor
> Then cherish pity; lest you drive an angel from your door.[32]

As gentle as that vision may be, it is not completely untainted by harsher realities. The newborn's innocence – whether it be a blessed state of perfection, passivity, ignorance – seems short-lived, as seen above or in a poem like "Infant Sorrow", in which a baby may regret ever leaving his own private Eden of flesh and warmth and find only a lesser substitute in his mother's lap, restrained as a punished Prometheus or a child of Adam loaded with the burden of sin:

> My mother groan'd ! my father wept.
> Into the dangerous world I leapt:
> Helpless, naked, piping loud:
> Like a fiend hid in a cloud.
>
> Struggling in my father's hands,
> Striving against my swadling bands,

[32] William Blake's poems are quoted from William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (edited with an introduction and notes by Andrew Lincoln); William Blake Trust/Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J.; 1991.

Bound and weary I thought best
To sulk upon my mother's breast.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell that Blake wrote and printed after *Songs of Innocence* already hinted at the complex connection between innocence and experience beyond a mere polar opposition. Blake's theory of constructive clashes allows the reader to accept Experience as a dual reality associating ideas of Fall ("Hell") and "progression":

> Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human Existence.
> From these Contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.
> Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.[33]

Whatever progress is achieved through the workings of Experience is however bitterly acknowledged by the narrator in poems of *Songs of Experience* (1794) such as "The Fly". From a godlike figure having a benign, careless look at the humble insect ignorant of the constant threat against its existence, the speaker of the poem mutates into a creature of innocent concerns ("summer plays") and of earthly, energetic indulgences ("I dance, and drink & sing"), the latter unable to dispel the anxieties nurtured in the long shadow cast by mortality. Here the voice of Experience warns the innocent about the futility of life:

Little Fly
Thy summers play,
My thoughtless hand
Has brush'd away.

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

For I dance
And drink & sing:
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.

If thought is life

[33] Blake, William, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 3.

And strength & breath:
And the want
Of thought is death;

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live,
Or if I die.

This disillusionment rings as a distant echo of the Old Testament's *Ecclesiastes*: "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!" (*Eccl.*1:2). The speaker may have been seduced, or contaminated, by a nihilistic vision of the road to experience leading nowhere: neither to a progress or ascent, nor to the Fall. This surly pose may possibly be contradicted by the problematic interpretation of *Ecclesiastes* 12:13 ("Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man") : is experience the bland fruit of worthless pursuits outside the one true path, or can it somehow contribute to one's redemption ? Indeed, for humans born as sinners, not as virgin, innocent creatures, experience would be akin to spiritual mileage obtained on a path that started with baptism.

Still, this seemingly unquestioning obedience to "some blind hand" carrying out God's plan cannot completely numb down the older narrator's terrible realisation that he lives in a world full of pain and terror. The illusory haven of innocence at the end of "Holy Thursday" in *Songs of Experience* is but a feeble gasp of irony out of the mouth of an outraged speaker choking on unspeakable horrors apparently accepted by the world at large as part of the common experience :

Is this a holy thing to see,
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reducd to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine.
And their fields are bleak and bare.
And their ways are fill'd with thorns
It is eternal winter there.

For where-e'er the sun does shine,
And where-e'er the rain does fall:
Babe can never hunger there,
Nor poverty the mind appall.

This bleak outlook on the concept of experience gets reinforced by the final poem in *Songs of Experience*, to a provocative end:

A Divine Image

Cruelty has a Human Heart
And Jealousy a Human Face
Terror, the Human Form Divine
And Secrecy, the Human Dress

The Human Dress, is forged Iron
The Human Form, a fiery Forge.
The Human Face, a Furnace seal'd
The Human Heart, its hungry Gorge.

This comes very close to an apparent rebuke of God's design in *Genesis* 1:26 : "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" ; "A Divine Image" somehow underlines Blake's vision of the divine essence reconciled with the human realm, contrasting with Milton's perception of God as a distant arbiter strange to earthly considerations.

I.3.b – John Milton's *Paradise Lost.*

This difference of appreciation between the two poets brings us back to a crucial question: can the original state of Man be likened to a form of innocence, for example in the writings of Milton? In *Pastoral Process – Spenser, Marvell, Milton*, Susan Snyder details the unexpected demands of Milton's Eden on the first couple and excludes *Paradise Lost* from her classification of pastoral texts:

> Since the myth of Eden and its loss underlies all pastoral poetry, Milton's *Paradise Lost* might seem an obvious candidate for inclusion in this study. […] Yet Milton's Eden, in spite of its abundance, its harmony between man and nature, and its eternal spring, is not really pastoral. His Adam and Eve are not lambs frisking in the sun, presexual and undifferentiated the one from the other. They could never claim that they knew nothing of the doctrine of ill-doing. On the contrary, they have been carefully instructed in personal responsibility, the threat of sin, and their separate duties to God and each other – not to speak of their charge to keep the garden in order, even though fruit comes forth without cultivation. Milton's strategy for

> justifying the ways of God to men requires that our first parents be moral agents in the full sense, not propelled into sin by some inevitable developmental process but consciously choosing to disobey the divine mandate.[34]

A close study of Milton's poem indeed reveals that far from the stereotypical view of the Garden of Eden as a prim environment in which Adam and Eve would wander around, gently applying touches of the sophisticate husbandry described in treatises during the 18th century vogue of English landscape gardens, the original paradise was a place of constant toil to contain chaotic overgrowth. Adam thus describes his work in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*:

> Tomorrow ere fresh Morning streak the East
> With first approach of light, we must be ris'n,
> And at our pleasant labour, to reform
> Yon flourie Arbors, yonder Allies green,
> Our walks at noon, with branches overgrown,
> That mock our scant manuring, and require
> More hands then ours to lop thir wanton growth:
> Those Blossoms also, and those dropping Gumms,
> That lie bestrowne unsightly and unsmooth,
> Ask riddance, if we mean to tread with ease.[35]

This environment seems at odds with the traditional image of Eden as a pure, bountiful park in which perfect, innocent humans would pluck their sustenance from sweet-scented trees and quench their thirst at singing springs. This ebullient, "wanton" growth needs to be supervised, lest it become entropic. The cutting and pruning that occupy Adam and Eve mirror the work they have to do regarding their own inner development; contrary to the traditional reading of the first chapters of *Genesis*, Milton's first couple was not created all-knowing and preserved from doubts and interrogations. Under the tutelage of archangel Raphael, Adam, later joined by Eve, progressively figures his place and roles in God's cosmic order after being formed out of "dust of the ground" and being turned into living matter by "the breath of life".[36] It seems thus that even before the Fall, the first humans had started their march to experience and wisdom, progressively educated as they needed to be against the dangers of anarchic growth of

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[34] Susan Snyder, *Pastoral Process – Spenser, Marvell, Milton*. Stanford University Press ; Stanford, California ; 1998 ; p.12.
[35] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667), Book IV, 623-632.
[36] *Paradise Lost* (1667), Book VII, 524-526.

their own compulsions and desires. Neither physical appetite nor curiosity (a mental equivalent) should be left unbridled for fear of dire consequences:

> […] but of the Tree
> Which tasted works knowledge of Good and Evil,
> Thou mai'st not; in the day thou eat'st, thou di'st;
> Death is the penaltie impos'd, beware,
> And govern well thy appetite, least sin
> Surprise thee, and her black attendant Death.[37]

If innocence only equated to a deficit of experience in Milton's poem, Adam would certainly be predestined to fall. However Milton clearly goes against the representation of Adam and Eve as gullible infants in the spiritual and ethical domains, with the unformed judgment of children trapped in adults' bodies and deprived of prior normal successive phases of learning and experiencing. In another text, he describes his vision of Adam's trained ability to assert his free will:

> When God gave [Adam] reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificial *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions. (…) God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence. Wherefore did he creat[e] passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly temper'd are the very ingredients of vertu?[38]

A choice was indeed made, and the first couple chose the road to death. But is the Fall such a radical turn that the prelapsarian human condition can clearly be delineated along the lines of pure innocence, to which painfully acquired experience would later be opposed? To Milton's Adam, his mission to till the land has not been fundamentally modified; and as for his relation to the Holy source of all knowledge, it seems to remain intact:

> […] with labour I must earne
> My bread; what harm? Idleness had been worse;
> My labour will sustain me; and least Cold
> Or Heat should injure us, his timely care
> Hath unbesaught provided, and his hands
> Cloath'd us unworthie, pitying while he judg'd;
> How much more, if we pray him, will his ear
> Be open, and his heart to pitie incline,
> And teach us further by what means to shun

[37] *Paradise Lost* (1667), Book VII, 542-548.
[38] John Milton, *Aeropagitica* in *The Works of John Milton*, ed. F. A. Patterson *et al.*, New York; 1931- IV, 319 (as quoted in Lewalski, "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden").

Th' inclement Seasons.[39]

Once again, the difficulty in apprehending the dichotomy linking innocence and experience and in distinguishing their respective specificities goes against traditional assumptions on the order (or lack of) of the world and its evolutions, whether at an individual or collective level. Literary critics sometimes seem to lock horns while trying to grasp the significance and magnitude of the Fall. The latter might have been in store for mankind in God's plans, but its eventual import seems questionable for Eric Smith:

> The Fall, not simply because its myth decreed it so, but from the logic of the Divine within the poem, had to occur, the Fall portrayed as the gravest sin, producing suicidal misery in Adam and Eve and a vision of history made tolerable only by the mystical notions of grace and redemption. All this was for the greater glory of God. Was it also for the greater happiness of Man?
> That depends very much on how we view the state of innocence in the poem. There are not wanting indications that life in Eden did not strike the Milton who could not praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue as fully satisfying. Those aspects of it which seem nearest to satisfying (most notably the love of Adam and Eve) do not appear peculiar to Paradise as he presents it, but possible to realise in the fallen world. […] It is by no means clear to what extent Adam and Eve fell or what paradise they lost.[40]

For Barbara Lewalski, in spite of its momentous actuation, the Fall does not clearly separate the states of innocence and experience as polar elements of an opposition which traditionally equates them with infancy and maturity in some symbolic discourse applicable to the individual as well as to the community :

> Milton's vision of the prelapsarian life admits no dichotomy between the states of innocence and experience: they are not, as in Blake, "two contrary states of the human soul". Rather, the Edenic portion of *Paradise Lost* displays the process whereby Adam and Eve grow in knowledge and acquire experience within the State of Innocence, and thereby become steadily more complex, more conscious of manifold challenges and difficulties, more aware of large responsibilities, and by this very process, more complete and more perfect. This imagination of the Life in Innocence is emphatically antiromantic, anti-Arcadian, anti-escapist, anti-individualistic: it is an exaltation of humanism, maturity, civilization in happiest conjunction with vitality, change, growth. Such an imagination of the State of Innocence sets the Fall in the proper tragic perspective in the poem, as the event which blasted man's opportunity to develop – without suffering, violence, despair and death, though not in the least without tension and trial – the rich resources and large potentialities of the human spirit.[41]

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[39] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667), Book VII, 1054-1063.
[40] Eric Smith, *Some Versions of the Fall: the myth of the fall of man in English literature*; Croom Helm, London; 1973; pp.23-4.
[41] Barbara K. Lewalski, "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden" in Kranidas, Thomas, ed., *New Essays on 'Paradise Lost*; University of California Press, Berkeley; 1969 - pp. 116-7.

There were earlier hints that Blake's apparent clear separation between desirable Innocence and Experience fraught with ordeal was somewhat nuanced by his theory of Contraries coexisting towards a positive outcome. But the last quotation points to another crucial element that might explain the lasting ambiguity behind the deceptive binary nature of this dichotomy. When Barbara Lewalski describes Milton's treatment of "life in Innocence" as "anti-Arcadian", one might be tempted to go back an ancient proponent of the pastoral myth, Virgil, who seemingly depicted the ideal landscape and spirit of the Arcadian nostalgic dream in his *Eclogues.* His pastoral enterprise has however been reassessed by modern critics, and found less straightforward than commonly thought.

Virgil's visions influenced Christian cosmogony and iconography until the late Middle Ages and even the Renaissance, and the pastoral rendition of the Edenic myth may not be the only element borrowed from Virgil during centuries of Catholic syncretism. The two following extracts from the *Eclogues* seem to show that the condition of Innocence is either a distant, fleeting memory or an uncertain hope, but it remains difficult to isolate and dissect its constitutive features; innocence is first presented in a very intimate setting that may have been a perfect allegory for the Fall:

> I saw you in our garden when you were a little girl,
> Your mother with you, gathering apples wet with dew.
> I showed you round. I'd soon be twelve, and could just reach
> The laden branches from the ground. I looked at you
> And I was lost. And how that frenzy ravished me.[42]

This scene that brings to mind the temptation, the original sin and the subsequent punishment[43] is set in an idealised, decontextualised reminiscence. Details such as "dew" and "the *laden* branches" are but flickers in the slight mist floating on this innocent, nostalgic revery. What could be presented later as Edenic is here just a personal vision of original purity. But was it so? How did the narrator in effect "fall", and to which lower condition? Again, the delineation of the notion of innocence is too uncertain to allow the conceptualisation of a clearly-contrasted notion of experience.

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[42] Virgil, *Eclogues*, VIII, 37-41; translated by Tim Chilcot.
[43] As analysed in Susan Snyder, *Pastoral Process – Spenser, Marvell, Milton*. Stanford University Press ; Stanford, California ; 1998 - afterword, pp.177-178.

And if this original, youthful innocence was the Alpha of the human condition, then Virgil decides to negate the validity of the traditional progress towards maturity and experience, since the Omega of the cosmic cycle framing his poetic vision is another instance of innocence: perfect, untainted order restored in this world along the lines of a puzzling Messianic precognition:

> The great cycle of the centuries is born anew.
> The Virgin now comes back, and Saturn's reign returns;
> A new first-born descends from heaven's height.
> Look kindly, pure Lucina, on this boy whose birth
> Will end the iron race at last, and raise a golden race
> Throughout the world.
> […] All lands will grow all things
> Earth will not feel the hoe, nor vines the pruning knife.
> The sturdy ploughman now will free his oxen from the yoke.[44]

Here again, this ideal environment is part of a speculative displacement and it cannot be made the subject of thorough investigation. Innocence has probably been, and it will certainly be again; but is it experience which serves as interlude (of undetermined duration – and nature) between the manifestations of these two inconclusive hypotheses? For Virgil, as for a long line of authors inspired by his works, innocence and experience may have been the two faces of a transcending intuition which they refused to rationalise to the extreme through simplistic categorization; they rather set out to explore the blurry contours of these notions and the bridges linking one to the other.

I.3.c – William Shakespeare.

When William Shakespeare tackled these specific notions in his plays, he had to sift through all the added figures and conventions crystallised around Theocritus' and Virgil's original visions. The long-gone human innocence had been recreated in various Renaissance pastoral works by Italian and English authors such as Sannazaro, Sidney and Lodge, the latter's play *Rosalynde* he directly reworked to complete *As You Like It*. However Shakespeare's plays indicate that he could perceive the limits and flaws of these highly-codified representations of the myth of original innocence.

[44] *Eclogues*, IV, 5-10, 39-41.

Shakespeare initially acquitted himself of the conventional depiction of a rural land of simplicity and innocence, for example with Valentine's soliloquy in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, when Valentine pictures himself as the shepherd of ancient idylls:

> How use doth breed a habit in a man!
> This shadowy desert, unfrequented woods,
> I better brook than flourishing peopled towns.
> Here can I sit alone, unseen of any,
> And to the nightingale's complaining notes
> Tune my distresses and record my woes.
> O thou that dost inhabit in my breast,
> Leave not the mansion so long tenantless,
> Lest, growing ruinous, the building fall
> And leave no memory of what it was!
> Repair me with thy presence, Silvia:
> Thou gentle nymph, cherish thy forlorn swain.[45]

The same statement of the country's superiority to "flourishing peopled towns" is used to describe the forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, when Duke Senior condemns the unnatural manifestations of civilized spirit among the elite:

> Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
> Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
> Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
> More free from peril than the envious court?[46]

The guilelessness of this idealized natural environment is reinforced by another vision of an innocent soul sitting in the woods and singing with the birds as a tribute to his absent beloved, in a scene similar to Valentine's "forlorn swain" lament:

> Under the greenwood tree
> Who loves to lie with me,
> And turn his merry note
> Unto the sweet bird's throat,
> Come hither, come hither, come hither.
> Here shall he see
> No enemy
> But winter and rough weather.
>
> Who doth ambition shun,
> And loves to live i' th' sun,
> Seeking the food he eats,
> And pleas'd with what he gets,

[45] William Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, V, iv, 1-12
[46] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II, I, 1-4

> Come hither, come hither, come hither.
> Here shall he see
> No enemy
> But winter and rough weather.[47]

One may wonder, however, if Shakespeare is not already breaking through the strict codes of the pastoral portrayal of innocence, especially with the evocation of a carefree forager frisking in the sun in the second part of the above quote. He looks like a strange creature indeed, not completely unrelated to the nihilistic fantasies of Jaques in the same play, when a gentle country retreat is still not enough for him and he wishes he could relinquish all traits of civilization to return to a prelapsarian Adamic state. Jaques' abandonment of the common lot of responsibilities and practical experience is underlined in a report of his anger after the conclusion of a deer hunt which thus seems to conflate in his mind into the primordial, innocence-shattering slaying of many a myth of the origins:

> Thus most invectively he pierceth through
> The body of the country, city, court,
> Yea, and of this our life; swearing that we
> Are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what's worse,
> To fright the animals, and to kill them up
> In their assign'd and native dwelling-place.[48]

For Jaques, humans are almost usurping their *de facto* dominion over the natural world; he seems to reject the idea of humans banding together to form some social unit able to carry out the common endeavour of the deer hunt; in this extreme form of pastoralism not unfamiliar to some twentieth and twenty-first century radical environmentalists, perfect humans returning to the original condition of mankind would step down from their throne over the Creation and impact as little as possible on their natural surroundings.

This nostalgia for an impossible ideal is also at the core of some depictions of lost innocence in *The Winter's Tale*. Polixenes' description of his youth borrows from the traditional Edenic imagery, but it gets somehow subverted into a fruitless fantasy of pre-sexual innocence which contradicts the fertile principles at work in the original garden. One can first see Polixenes and his friend Leontes as creatures of simple motives unaffected by the pace and the concerns of the world:

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[47] *As You Like It*, II, v,1-8, 35-42
[48] *As You Like It*, II, i, 58-63

> […] We were, fair queen,
> Two lads that thought there was no more behind,
> But such a day to-morrow as to-day,
> And to be boy eternal.
>
> We were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' the sun,
> And bleat the one at th' other: what we chang'd
> Was innocence for innocence.[49]

But this dream of everlasting purity is soon broken at the onset of puberty, and what should be the lead-up to the fulfillment of God's command in Genesis ("be fruitful, and multiply") turns into the descent into an inescapable fallen condition – all because of enticements no harsher than the aforementioned sweet memory in Virgil's *Eclogues* ("I saw you in our garden when you were a little girl […] I looked at you / And I was lost"):

> We knew not
> The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd
> That any did. Had we pursu'd that life,
> And our weak spirits ne'er been higher rear'd
> With stronger blood, we should have answer'd heaven
> Boldly "not guilty", the imposition clear'd
> Hereditary ours.
>
> O my most sacred lady;
> Temptations have since then been born to's: for
> In those unfledg'd days was my wife a girl;
> Your precious self had then not cross'd the eyes
> Of my young play-fellow.[50]

Strangely, the "hereditary imposition", or original sin as the condition of all mortals, is here no longer connected to the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge, but to sexual awakening which was part of God's plan for his creatures. By showing how shallow a certain naive vision of the original innocence is, Shakespeare turns his back on a stereotypical mode of nostalgic representation of the first ages of humanity. His concern with humans' sinful condition is in how his characters deal with it, through choices, impulses, reasonings or storms of passion (all parts of a progress constituting experience), regardless of historical circumstances.

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[49] William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, I, ii, 62-65, 67-69.
[50] *The Winter's Tale*, I, ii, 69-75, 76-80

For some of Shakespeare's most famous characters, a single decision (however benign or momentous) can be read as a particular reenactment of the Fall: Othello is very much an Adam-like figure when he lets the demonic Iago pour venomous insinuations in his ear, then loses all sense of reason and truth and turns into a murderer of virtue and innocence. But these doomed choices also often reveal complex insights into a human nature made of all shades of grey beyond a black-and-white opposition of good versus evil.

One can say that this latter opposition is completely reconfigured in the case of Macbeth's actions and motivations. It is but a feeble tug-of-war that torments the Thane of Glamis until his hands get covered with King Duncan's blood. Calvin's ideas of predestination have repeatedly been used by critics to analyse Macbeth's murderous intent,[51] but he is made of such wavering moral principles that it is hard to see a determined drive behind his reckless actions. From Act I, scene 3 (his initial amazement at the witches' prophecies) to Act II, scene 2 (Duncan's murder), the strongest influence on Macbeth's behaviour is his wife and her rhetorical admonitions built on impossible propositions ("I would, while [the babe] was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums, / And dashed the brains out", "unsex me here").[52] Beyond these external interventions and possible effects, there is hardly any fixed sentiment or conviction to be encountered when one surveys Macbeth's inner moral landscape. His condition at the beginning of the play is one of a very limited kind of innocence – he demonstrates neither lasting deference to what is right, nor firm abhorrence of sinful ways; his innocence is made of passive abandon to the course of events, of a lack of resolve for either good or evil – what fate has in store for him is beyond his control, throws him into utter confusion and is denounced as the agency of others, humans or even objects. His initial reaction to the bloody schemes which may be implicit in the witches' vision is not clear-cut rejection or acceptance, just undecided bewilderment:

> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,

[51] See Hunter, *Shakespeare and the mystery of God's judgments* (1976); Stachniewski, "Calvinist psychology in *Macbeth*" (1988); demonstrations requalified in Waters, *Christian Settings in Shakespeare's Tragedies* (1994).
[52] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I, vii, 57-59; I, v, 41.

> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings:
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man
> That function is smother'd in surmise,
> And nothing is but what is not.[53]

Macbeth indeed readily acknowledges his near-total inability to charge towards a goal, as well as his predictable failure at making good of any such painfully-mustered resolve:

> I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
> And falls on th' other – [54]

This weak disposition hardly qualifies for goodness betrayed or for malicious intent and is hard to analyse in terms of innocence bound to be destroyed by the Fall, or of experience patiently gathered from the shattered pieces of prelapsarian Edenic bliss. Even when Macbeth apologises for his less-than-perfect hospitality, the same absence of determination is underlined in his character – for good or evil deeds:

> Being unprepared,
> Our will became the servant to defect,
> Which else should free have wrought.[55]

His is an unwilling Fall, if he is to be believed when he presents himself as the mere agent of a sentient, deceitful blade thirsty for blood – blood that is visible, at least to Macbeth, on the dagger *before* the murder, as if this trick of the mind may exonerate the confused perpetrator of the full responsibility of his actions while his hand is but guided by an external force through fogged sensory perceptions to the bloody conclusion of the plan:

> Is this a dagger which I see before me,
> The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch
> thee.
> I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
> Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
> To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but
> A dagger of the mind, a false creation,

[53] *Macbeth*, I, iii, 135-143.
[54] *Macbeth*, I, vii, 25-28.
[55] *Macbeth*, II, i, 17-19.

> Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
> I see thee yet, in form as palpable
> As this which now I draw.
> Thou marshal'st me the way that I was going,
> And such an instrument I was to use.
> Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,
> Or else worth all the rest. I see thee still,
> And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
> Which was not so before. There's no such thing:
> It is the bloody business which informs
> Thus to mine eyes.
>
> I go, and it is done. The bell invites me.[56]

In this refusal (or total inability) to affect the universe's moral equilibrium, there is no anticipation, no real premeditation – as seen above, tragic instances are a *fait accompli* almost before they appear on the mind's horizon. There is also neither real appraisal of their consequences, nor remorse solid enough to pave the way to hard-earned experience, wisdom or redemption:

> To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself.
> Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst![57]

In the Shakespearean canon, *Macbeth* is listed as a tragedy, but one can wonder if the central character of the play really conforms to the traditional figures of the genre: lost as he is, he does not really leave a blessed condition behind to march towards a striking *hubris*, then to fall and become the focus of a lesson in tragic experience for the audience.

Shakespeare shows how stereotypical figures of the pastoral ideal are but models of limited scope to apprehend humans' standing in a postlapsarian universe when he toys with these conventions in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *As You Like It* and *The Winter's Tale*. The timeless human condition, with its trials and triumphs, is always of more importance to him, as he maps the sinews of human frailty and grandeur – or describes purposeless wastelands as in the case of Macbeth's half-formed intentions.

However, in *The Tempest*, the playwright explores one more time the myth of the Fall from innocence to guilt, to be followed either by redemptive experience or by some

[56] *Macbeth*, II, i, 34-35, 43-50, 63.
[57] *Macbeth*, II, ii, 77-78.

attempted recovery of the original blamelessness through a reversal of history's progress. Yet again, Shakespeare casts a condemning glance at any simplistic notion of innocence free from worldly pursuits, since it was indeed Duke Prospero of Milan's dereliction of political duties that led to his Fall, guilty of the crime of carelessness in a world in which choices and actions have a cost that must be paid in full. His power usurped, he goes into exile to a territory where his newly-found demiurgic resolve allows him simultaneously to recreate a seemingly innocent Arcadian society and to govern it with a sense of necessary involvement in concrete human matters. Magician, artist, philosopher, architect of nature, Prospero challenges restrictive definitions and reforms himself as a man of reasoned intent in a strikingly near-postmodern fashion that might bring to mind concepts as distant from the Elizabethan mindset as Albert Camus' ethos of action and responsibility.

In his paradoxical Eden of an island, Prospero uses supernatural forces to domesticate Nature, including its wildest manifestations such as Caliban, and he gives Miranda an education not unlike the ideal pedagogy later outlined by Rousseau in his *Emile*. But this artificial paradise is under constant threat of contamination or alteration, whether by the rebellious nature of Caliban or by the arrival of Antonio and Alonso's party. These occurrences shall however protect Prospero against his own self-deluded indulgence. In this man-made Eden, the return to innocence must indeed remain a temporary phase in a whole corrective process; Prospero almost succumbs again to the hollow seduction of his passive, contemplative humour when the delights of the "insubstantial pageant" in Act 4, scene 1 distract his mind from Caliban's plotting, a repeat of Antonio's past political maneuvering in Milan. Probably flattered by Ferdinand's clamorous request to "let [him] live here ever! / So rare a wondered father and a wife / Makes this place Paradise",[58] Prospero starts to give too much credit to this display made of thin air, in spite of its surreal character which leads to feverish, unchecked fantasies such as Gonzalo's naïve and contradictory dreamy vision:

> Had I plantation of this isle, my lord
>
> And were the king on't, what would I do?

[58] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, IV, I, 122-124.

> I' th' commonwealth I would by contraries
> Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
> Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
> Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
> And use of service, none; contract, succession,
> Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
> No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
> No occupation; all men idle, all;
> And women too, but innocent and pure;
> No sovereignty –[59]

The reversal of the world's order is the rule here ("I would by contraries / Execute all things"); it is a utopian society without classes or material division ("riches, poverty […], none"). These familiar elements once removed, this whole universe seems out of balance: men and women may be all "idle", but they still remain "innocent and pure", somehow kept away from mischief in a safe but dull environment ("no use of […] wine", "no occupation"). Who is to protect them, however, if there is a "king", but "no sovereignty"?[60] "Govern" is given a whole new meaning here, when government can be exercised without "need of any engine", instrument of warfare or other tool of coercion ; an innocent authority over "innocent people" :

> All things in common nature should produce
> Without sweat or endeavour. Treason, felony,
> Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
> Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,
> Of it own kind, all foison, all abundance,
> To feed my innocent people.
>
> I would with such perfection govern, sir,
> T' excel the golden age.[61]

The return to the Garden of Eden is complete, but there seems to be no betterment of the original humans through husbandry of their inner nature, the equivalent of the attention they were supposed to devote to their natural habitat. In Gonzalo's fleeting fantasy nuanced by elements of comedy, the Golden Age only amounts to base satisfactions and full stomachs. This lethargic paradise may be reminiscent of another myth of a land spared by toil or conflict, where in fact no passions or ambitions come to

[59] *The Tempest*, II, i, 146, 148, 150-159
[60] As noticed by Sebastian and Antonio in II, I, 159-161.
[61] *The Tempest*, II, i, 162-167, 170-171.

stir the narcotic daze of its inhabitants: Ulysses' discovery of the island of the Lotus-Eaters described in Book IX[62] of Homer's *Odyssey*. This episode has been later expanded into a lyrical poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and his vision of the world of the Lotos-Eaters mirrors the passivity of Gonzalo's world devoid of "sweat or endeavour":

> [T]hey came unto a land
> In which it seemed always afternoon.
> All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
> Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
>
> A land where all things always seem'd the same![63]

Once again, in the manner of Antonio deriding Gonzalo's daydream (" 'Twas you we laughed at"),[64] Shakespeare undermines the poetical and philosophical seductions of a certain pastoral tradition which sings excessive praise to icons of innocence and which does not pay its dues to the invaluable lessons of human endeavour, of trial and error, the priceless compendium of collective experience. It seems that this experience would indeed probably be wasted on the aimless dwellers of Gonzalo's imaginary kingdom; one could envision some more stimulating outcome to such an exposure in the case of Caliban, if Shakespeare's treatment of this peculiar character is approached with an open mind.

Centuries of criticism have dressed the son of Sycorax in contrasting fashion: from a monstrous, subhuman disturbance of Prospero's noble designs to the prototypical victim of Western territorial expansionism in postcolonial readings of Shakespeare's play. These various interpretations have been made possible by the complexity of Caliban's positioning in *The Tempest*'s universe; he reluctantly sits at the crossroads of savagery and civilisation, of innocence and experience – a social experiment about to deliver unpredictable results.

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[62] Homer, *The Odyssey*; The Harvard Classics; 1909–14 – "[T]he lotus-eaters devised not death for our fellows, but gave them of the lotus to taste. Now whosoever of them did eat the honey-sweet fruit of the lotus, had no more wish to bring tidings nor to come back, but there he chose to abide with the lotus-eating men, ever feeding on the lotus and forgetful of his homeward way.' (Book IX)
[63] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Lotos-Eaters", 3-6, 24; in *English Poetry III: From Tennyson to Whitman*; The Harvard Classics - 1909–14.
[64] *The Tempest*, II, i, 178.

From friendly native at first contact ("I loved thee / And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle")[65] to rebellious subject ("Caliban / Has a new master. Get a new man!"),[66] from gentle poet of the natural world ("The isle is full of noises, / Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not")[67] to potential rapist ("O ho! Would't had been done./ Thou didst prevent me; I had peopl'd else / This isle with Calibans"),[68] Caliban is the noble savage of an innocent age and the quite imperfect product of the Fall from Grace, the dual embodiment of a *pre*- and *post*-lapsarian condition. He is anagramically connected to Montaigne's Cannibals and their disputed ranking on the human species' chart in the sixteenth century; he is a perpetrator *and* a victim of violent acts, all parts of a predicament similar to Hobbes' later description of the first humans' condition. His lecherousness hardly qualifies him for any kinship with Rousseau's innocent savage,[69] but one might analyse his schooling by Prospero as a fruitless attempt at ideal pedagogy or, indeed, as the Fall *into* civilisation, a process of corruption later analysed by Rousseau. At the end of this process, Caliban is affected with the curse of the *logos*:

> You taught me language, and my profit on't
> Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
> For learning me your language![70]

Language as tool of discovery, as well as instrument of control, may be equated here with the fruit of the tree of knowledge in Eden which, once put in Adam's mouth, led to another curse, capital punishment for the whole human race.

It seems, in the end, that in spite of his alien appearance, Caliban is as satisfying a mythical figure of human primordial condition as can be; in the remnants of his primitive extraction as well as in the traces of his conflicted dealings with civilisation, he encompasses more of the tangled interactions between innocence and experience than the rustic shepherds of countless pastoral tales. Caliban may provide a clear evidence of

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[65] *The Tempest*, I, ii, 339-340.
[66] *The Tempest*, II, ii, 182-183.
[67] *The Tempest*, III, ii, 137-138.
[68] *The Tempest*, I, ii, 352-354.
[69] Not that Rousseau's First Man would either behave according to the standards of eighteenth-century gentle manners : "Among these [appetites] was one which urged him to propagate his species — a blind propensity that, having nothing to do with the heart, produced a merely animal act. The want once gratified, the two sexes knew each other no more" (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality – Second Part*)
[70] *The Tempest*, I, ii, 366-368.

Shakespeare's continuing interrogations of human nature in a play that seems to fulfill a double purpose. First, *The Tempest* comes as an open-ended conclusion to the playwright's exploration of human destiny, whether through comedies, tragedies, historical chronicles or pastoral plays. Second, it encompasses all these angles and concerns by looking backward to hypothetical idyllic origins and by casting a tentative glance at the future of human progress, with its picture of the denizens ("savage" or "civilised") of a new world brought forth by colonial expansionism, and the complex relations and tensions analysed at length by twentieth and twenty-first century critics who acknowledge Shakespeare's peculiar contribution to some anthropological approach to the connection between innocence and experience. Indeed, in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's uncanny anticipation of philosophical speculations such as Hobbes' and Rousseau's is on a par with their later fictional enactments in works such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* – another attempt at recreating the infant stages of Western civilisation in a land already peopled with representatives of a puzzling otherness.

I.3.d – Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

Still treasured today as an enchanting adventure tale celebrating creative genius, freedom and enterprise, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* also offers rich insights into the eighteenth-century vision of an expanding world and the new theoretical tools used to analyse it. Like *The Tempest*, Defoe's novel has been read as an ode to the civilised benevolence of Western colonial expansion, but the civilisation from which Crusoe is removed by his misadventures at sea and the civilisation he tries to recreate on the island are not always the polar opposites of the uncultured environment and creatures Defoe's hero progressively discovers during his ordeal.

It is indeed difficult to read this story strictly as a departure from the world of experience on a trip which leads the main protagonist to a secret corner of the globe where the original innocence of mankind has been preserved. Indeed, the "middle state" in which young Crusoe lives a carefree life under his father's authority at the beginning of the novel looks very much like a benign, personal Eden in which God has not yet imposed work as a punishment for the original sin, at least if one believes the description

of Crusoe's father.[71] But, like the prodigal son of the parable, Crusoe rebels against the wise commands of his parents and "runs away to sea" where he is rapidly tested and punished (when he is captured and sold as a slave), but to no avail until a storm contravenes his plans, in a similar fashion to the biblical character, Jonah. Like the latter, external forces remove him from the usual company of men and entrap him in a strange place where he can examine his conduct and mend his ways.

He is now fallen, but the island on which he is supposed to seek humility and redemption looks nothing like the barren, thorny plains of painful tilling in the postlapsarian world. Crusoe thus recounts one striking moment in his survey of the island:

> At the end of this march I came to an opening, where the country seems to descend to the west; and a little spring of fresh water, which issued out of the side of the hill by me, ran the other way, that is, due east; and the country appeared so fresh, so green, so flourishing, everything being in a constant verdure, or flourish of spring, that it looked like a planted garden.[72]

The "constant verdure" and "flourish of spring" may connect this depiction of the island with the eternal gentle springtime of the Arcadian meadows or even with Eden, but Crusoe is from then on far from indolent in his own little kingdom. With salvaged tools and equipment, he starts to turn this semblance of a "planted garden" into a domesticated habitat and brings experience *inside* this piece of unspoilt, Edenic nature. Crusoe's intervention on his surroundings is progressively mirrored by the moral regeneration of his inner chaotic garden, abandoned to the contamination of ungodly indulgences.

This conversion runs parallel to his effort at transforming a "savage" into a "faithful, loving, sincere Servant". The interactions between Friday, a good pupil and demure barbaric figure, and Crusoe, the teacher and ruler, further complicate the distinctions between innocence and experience, nature and culture, savagery and civilisation. Like Caliban, Friday is as likely to commit heinous acts as to be a victim of the same horrors; he is a cannibal about to be turned into a meal when he is rescued by Crusoe, and the horror expressed by the latter when he finds leftovers of previous

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[71] Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*; Macmillan , London, New York; 1962 – ch. 1, pp2-3.
[72] *Robinson Crusoe* – Ch. 7, p.110.

anthropophagic feasts is not tinged by any of the cultural relativism expressed decades earlier by Montaigne in his essay on such exotic practices.

Friday displays, however, some of the original physical perfection, at least according to Western canons of harmony and beauty referred to by Crusoe in his portrait of his servant:

> He was a comely handsome Fellow, perfectly well made; (…) tall and well-shap'd (…). He had a very good Countenance, not a fierce and surly Aspect; but seem'd to have something very manly in his Face, and yet he had all the Sweetness and Softness of an *European* in his Countenance too, especially when he smil'd.[73]

The rest of the description underlines a very much toned-down otherness in Friday's features: his hair "not curl'd like Wool", "the colour of his skin […] not quite black, […] but of a bright kind of dun olive Colour, that had in it something very agreeable", "his Nose small, not flat like the Negroes". One can find here a whole series of physical markers around which a racialist, and sometimes outright racist, discourse has been built all along the centuries. However they don't apply to Friday – what to make of him in ethnographic terms, it is hard to say. In his attitude, one finds the quite paradoxical pairing of manliness and sweetness/softness apparently common in the European character – manners quite at odds with the typical representation of an exotic cannibal.

Friday's nobility of deportment might explain why Rousseau was so impressed with Defoe's novel that he singled it out as the only one worth reading[74] to Emile, his imaginary pupil in his treatise on ideal education. Friday may have been a worthy model for Rousseau's vision of the noble savage unencumbered by the heavy strictures of social codes. But is Friday ever innocent? Man-eating is a long way from the traits and habits of the first couple in Eden, or from the harmless concerns of the shepherds in the pastoral tales of distant Arcadia and long-vanished Golden Age. Still, in an eighteenth-century perspective, it would be hard to demonstrate that Friday's "grooming" has not corrupted his natural essence. Crusoe's tutoring indeed leads to a problematic outcome – one can

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[73] *Robinson Crusoe* – Ch. 14, p.233.

[74] "This is the first book Emile will read; for a long time it will form his whole library, and it will always retain an honoured place. (…) What is this wonderful book? (…) It is *Robinson Crusoe*." In Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Emile*; J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., London; 1967; element put in its full anthropological perspective by Lieve Spaas in « From Classical to Anthropological Myth » in *Robinson Crusoe – Myths and Metamorphoses* (Spaas, Lieve and Stimpson, Brian, ed.); Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Macmillan Press ; New York, St. Martin's Press; 1996; p.107.

see Friday as the subject of another instance of the social experiment involving Caliban, a process ultimately deemed fruitful by Crusoe. Friday now speaks English, is a faithful servant and has adopted his master's beliefs: "The plain instruction sufficiently served to the enlightening [of] this savage creature, and bringing him to be such a Christian, as I have known few equal to him in my life".[75]

However, while Friday crosses the threshold of civilisation, he remains relegated to an ancillary position below that of the civilised conqueror. He hasn't fallen (or his transformation is, on the contrary, some atonement for his heathen ways), but he is no longer innocent either. The problem is that a very limited amount of experience or self-empowerment is offered to him in the colonial order. He is no longer a savage but, because of remaining socioeconomic and ideological restrictions, he cannot benefit from all the advancements brought forth by the Enlightenment. This ambiguous positioning of subordinated indigenous populations might somehow have been equated with the discomfort of Europeans kept in immature tutelage by obsolete political institutions incompatible with the just social contracts advocated by Locke and Rousseau, among others. In this case, this common intermediary state between innocence and experience on a very concrete plane may have been part of the explosive mix that, near the end of the eighteenth-century, blasted away entire regimes and theoretical systems built upon the persistence of hierarchies and constraining doctrines – with such shockwaves as the American and French revolutions, or the Romantic artist's appropriation and praise of one's elemental inner savage innocence.

I.3.e – William Wordsworth.

The varied revolutions of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century offered many attractions and challenges to authors such as Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth. Initially seduced by the democratic promises of the French Revolution, they later expressed their horror at the senseless drowning of these ideals in the rivers of blood of the Terror from 1793 on. The theoretical framework built by Rousseau and other

[75] *Robinson Crusoe*, ch. 15, p.250.

philosophers of the Enlightenment is abandoned and even trampled upon, at least in the eyes of an interested first-hand witness such as William Wordsworth.

The Revolution Books in his *Prelude* present his observations on the French Revolution's experimental character, a new beginning for humanity based on ideas of equality and justice. The enthusiasm he sees in the French and that he experiences himself when he first visits France turn the country he discovers during his first visit in 1790 into an ebullient land of adventure and renewal, in a march to democratic virtue akin to original innocence, with echoes of Rousseau's vision of the birth of society:

> [I was] driven to think
> Of the glad times when first I traversed France
> A youthful pilgrim; above all reviewed
> That eventide, when under windows bright
> With happy faces and with garlands hung,
> And through a rainbow-arch that spanned the street,
> Triumphal pomp for liberty confirmed.[76]
>
> We summoned up the honourable deeds
> Of ancient Story […]
> How quickly mighty Nations have been formed,
> From least beginnings; how, together locked
> By new opinions, scattered tribes have made
> One body […]
> [We] beheld
> A living confirmation of the whole
> Before us, in a people from the depth
> Of shameful imbecility uprisen,
> Fresh as the morning star.[77]

When Wordsworth contemplates the setting for this major institutional upheaval which is about to shake the European political systems on their foundations, he is sometimes taken to a place outside history – a resplendent country where carefree Arcadia meets gentle Arthurian tales:

> Along that very Loire […]
> [W]as our frequent walk;
> Or in wide forests of continuous shade,
> Lofty and over-arched, with open space
> Beneath the trees, clear footing many a mile--
> A solemn region. Oft amid those haunts,
> From earnest dialogues I slipped in thought,
> And let remembrance steal to other times,

[76] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1850), 10.490-496; Norton Critical Edition, London; 1979.
[77] *The Prelude*, 9.364-365, 376-379, 381-385.

> Sometimes methought I saw a pair of knights
> Joust underneath the trees, that as in storm
> Rocked high above their heads; anon, the din
> Of boisterous merriment, and music's roar,
> In sudden proclamation, burst from haunt
> Of Satyrs in some viewless glade.[78]

As the poet describes it earlier in *The Prelude*, "Europe at that time was thrilled with joy, / France standing on the top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming born again"[79]. But this rebirth is not taking place in an Edenic world before the Fall; the vocabulary Wordsworth uses to give an idea of the magnitude of the changes may in fact convey the image of a postdiluvian[80] *tabula rasa*. Forces of nature are at work on a tectonic scale to build this new world; Wordsworth can see them, even if his perceptions of the phenomena are sometimes incomplete: "I scarcely felt / The shock of these concussions […] / When every bush and tree the country through, / Is shaking to the roots".[81] Later, some events are described again as being "Like earthquakes, shocks repeated day by day, / And felt through every nook of town and field".[82] It seems to Wordsworth that he has just seen the collapse of "A light, a cruel, and vain world cut off / From the natural inlets of just sentiment, / From lowly sympathy and chastening truth;/ Where good and evil interchange their names",[83] and that now will be the perfect rule of

> Man and his noble nature, as it is
> The gift which God has placed within his power,
> His blind desires and steady faculties
> Capable of clear truth, the one to break
> Bondage, the other to build liberty
> On firm foundations, making social life,
> Through knowledge spreading and imperishable,
> As just in regulation, and as pure
> As individual in the wise and good.[84]

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[78] *The Prelude*, 9.430, 432-438, 453-458.
[79] *The Prelude*, 6.339-341.
[80] As analysed in Alan Bewell, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment*; Yale University Press, New Haven and London; 1989 – pp.245-257.
[81] *The Prelude*, 9.86-87, 90-91.
[82] *The Prelude*, 9.182-183.
[83] *The Prelude*, 9.349-352.
[84] *The Prelude*, 9.355-363.

However, this ideal is to be shattered when he returns for a second trip to France and hears the news of the first massacres of the Terror in 1792. Doubt and fear now take hold of him:

> [T]he fear gone by
> Pressed on me almost like a fear to come.
> I thought of those September massacres,
> Divided from me by one little month
>
> The place, all hushed and silent as it was,
> Appeared unfit for the repose of night,
> Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam.[85]

Events then pile up to a crushing disappointment for Wordsworth: further bloodbath, uninterrupted by Robespierre's death; the aggressive military moves of France towards its neighbours; and the curtain falling on the republican experiment when Bonaparte claims absolute power:

> [F]inally to close
> And seal up all the gains of France, a Pope
> Is summoned in, to crown an Emperor--
> This last opprobrium, when we see a people,
> That once looked up in faith, as if to Heaven
> For manna, take a lesson from the dog
> Returning to his vomit.[86]

The strong, evocative words used here reveal the intensity of Wordsworth's feelings towards this historical episode which has become very personal for him, as an artist as well as a political being. "Manna" brings to the reader's mind the vision of the nation of Israel freed from Pharaoh's oppression and undergoing a process of purification in the desert towards a glorious new beginning as God's chosen people – in the same way, France could have been the beacon on the hill for the rest of mankind if it had not slipped back into the abject gutter of despotic rule evoked by the word "vomit". But for Wordsworth, the ways of the fallen world have triumphed, and he will not see the whole of human society turned into a reflection of his childhood memory of the near-uncorrupted Lake District and of its egalitarian spirit:

> [B]orn in a poor district, and which yet

[85] *The Prelude*, 10.71-74, 91-93.
[86] *The Prelude*, 11.357-363.

> Retaineth more of ancient homeliness,
> Manners erect, and frank simplicity,"
> Than any other nook of English ground,
> It was my fortune scarcely to have seen,
> Through the whole tenor of my school-day time,
> The face of one, who, whether boy or man,
> Was vested with attention or respect
> Through claims of wealth or blood.
>
> [W]ealth and titles were in less esteem
> Than talents, worth, and prosperous industry,
> Add unto this, subservience from the first
> To presences of God's mysterious power
> Made manifest in Nature's sovereignty.[87]

The Arcadian myth seems to resurface in the depiction of this "poor district" where "homeliness" and "simplicity" are in no short supply. The people of that land were the chief inspiration for Wordsworth when he stated the "principal object" of his poetry in the 1802 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*:

> Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and […] because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men is adopted (…) because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions.[88]

In Wordsworth's mind, the innocence of these candid interactions is endangered by the temptations of frivolous interests and cynical curiosity; a thirst for bland experiences to try to overcome a feeling of postlapsarian *ennui* in a world in which humans are cut off from Nature:

> [A] multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies.[89]

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[87] *The Prelude*, 9.215-223, 231-235.
[88] William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*; Longman Annotated Texts, Longman, London and New York; 1992 – pp.59-60.
[89] *Lyrical Ballads*; p.64.

The "almost savage torpor" denounced by Wordsworth can be fought by a renewed sense of wonder leading to a personal moral regeneration, a realisation at the heart of "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey". In a purely sensory, "animal" mode, the poet remembers his pure, vital enjoyment of the picturesque Wye years before,

> when first
> I came among these hills; when like a roe
> I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
> Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
> Wherever nature led […].
>
> For nature then
> (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
> And their glad animal movements all gone by)
> To me was all in all.[90]

Then Wordsworth gets attuned to the "still, sad music of humanity" (92), but the connection with the "wild green landscape" (15) remains intact and lights the poet's way through the gregarious necessities of a changing world. He does not forget the value and the power of this elemental experience which has "impressed" (6) its essence deep into his being:

> These beauteous forms,
> Through a long absence, have not been to me
> As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
> But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
> Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
> And passing even into my purer mind,
> With tranquil restoration.[91]

The innocence of the first time is gone ("That time is past, / And all its aching joys are now no more, / And all its dizzy raptures", 84-86), but it is replaced by an assertion of understanding and of submission to a superior natural order:

> Therefore am I still
> A lover of the meadows and the woods,
> And mountains (…).
> (…); well pleased to recognise
> In nature and the language of the sense,
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,

[90] "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey", 67-71, 73-76 – in William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*; Longman Annotated Texts, Longman, London and New York; 1992.
[91] "Tintern Abbey", 23-31.

> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being.[92]

The only thing preventing a full fusion between occurrence and remembrance, as temporally disjointed as candid discovery and nostalgic experience, in "Tintern Abbey" is maybe Wordsworth's self-consciousness in a self-conscious world; he cannot completely isolate himself from a universe in turmoil, whether geopolitical (the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars) or sociocultural (major changes brought by the technological progress and philosophical speculation of the eighteenth century). Nature itself is being transformed around him during the Industrial Revolution and the remnants of an idyllic rural world are few and far between. In this new environment in which soul-searching is moving away from traditional religious doctrines to celebrate some individualised expressions of postlapsarian self-fulfillment, the "low and rustic life"does not appear to be a very palatable subject-matter to some of the Romantic poets. This can be detected when one reads between the lines of Byron's scathing comments on Wordsworth's attempt at "a new pastoral in the *Poetical Sketches*", as analysed by Wallace Jackson in *The Probable and the Marvelous*:

> Byron, reviewing in *Monthly Literary Recreations*, complained of Wordsworth's "abandoning his mind to the most common-place ideas, at the same time clothing them in language not simple, but puerile." If the criticism is harsh, it is that Byron like many others (…) could not envision anything useful coming from what seemed an exceptional interest in the mental vagaries of uninteresting and uncultivated people. Even what was sometimes regarded as Wordsworth's "rapturous mysticism" was frequently regarded as the unintelligible product of interests too low to justify or make clear the poet's vision.[93]

While contributing to the critical appraisal of Wordsworth's enterprise in his *Biographia Literaria*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge requalifies the previous comments and brings specific elements to the debate. He tries to instruct the case of the artistic merits of his friend and competitor in a fair manner, even if differences of view and personal grudges sometimes get the better of his good intentions:

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[92] "Tintern Abbey", 102-104, 107-111.
[93] Wallace Jackson, *The Probable and the Marvelous*; The University of Georgia Press, Athens; 1978 - ch. 5, pp.139-140.

> I am not half as much irritated by hearing his enemies abuse him for vulgarity of style, subject, and conception; as I am disgusted with the gilded side of the same meaning, as displayed by some affected admirers with whom he is, forsooth, a *sweet, simple poet!*[94]

If Coleridge is right, there may be no more simplicity to be found in Wordsworth's style and character than in the European natural and sociopolitical environment of the early nineteenth century. Perhaps it is indeed impossible from then on to reconceptualise the fundamental dichotomy between innocence and experience in this post-Enlightenment Old World setting. But Arcadian re-enactments and prelapsarian reveries may be transplanted in new areas of Western cultural and sociopolitical experimentation. New beginnings offered by the New World may indeed consolidate into unaffected instances of pastoral contentment, as notably depicted in some of Robert Frost's poems.

I.3.f – Robert Frost.

In the New England scenes of Frost's poetry, self-consciousness seems skilfully kept in check by what could be described as benevolent irony; even if he pays sincere tribute to Theocritean and Virgilian traditions, Frost does not try to superimpose a gauzy mist of primordial innocence on rural Massachusetts, and his view of experience reveals an invigorating acknowledgement of life's necessities and of its pleasures.

What cannot be found in Frost's poetry is a direct adaptation of the old tradition of pastoral representation. North America may have once been seen as a potential new Arcadia given by God to Europeans in search of moral and sociopolitical regeneration. However, after the human devastation of the often tragic encounter between the natives and the settlers and of the Civil War, Frost knows it is illusory to find direct equivalents to shepherds and satyrs in the farmlands of New Hampshire and Vermont. One of his greatest achievements is in fact to rejuvenate Virgil's vision by creating informed testimonies (beyond simple descriptions) of the local rural experience and of their universal import.

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[94] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*; Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey; 1983 – volume II, chapter 22, p.158.

Before making this ancient poetical code his own, Frost returns to the Christian mythical source of the fundamental conflict between innocence and experience in human nature: the story of the Fall in Eden. A short poem, “Nothing Gold Can Stay”, recombines several elements of the tale in an ultimately uplifting exhortation:

> Nature's first green is gold,
> Her hardest hue to hold.
> Her early leaf's a flower;
> But only so an hour.
> Then leaf subsides to leaf.
> So Eden sank to grief,
> So dawn goes down to day.
> Nothing gold can stay.

Christian and pagan images are mixed in the first line, with “green” possibly referring to the Arcadian meadows and/or to the Garden of Eden and “gold” to the glorious, legendary era of the Golden Age – three elements with a strong emphasis on human felicity through diligent accordance with Nature’s or God’s superior designs. However, the presence of “gold” is already teasingly mystifying in this setting; if one examines phase after phase of the blooming image used by Frost in his poem, “gold” is the flower that comes out of the bud before dying to leave its place to the fruit. In the poetical language, the flower is heavily loaded with meanings of beauty, perfection of shape, gentleness – various notions that can easily be linked with the idea of prelapsarian innocence. But the flower may also evoke in this poem a more ambiguous view of innocence, one of passivity and even uselessness; by contrast, the fruit that will succeed the flower’s short existence is both negatively linked with the Fall (the fruit of the “tree of knowledge”) and an image of a satisfying conclusion, the intended result and product of many a human endeavour involving utilitarianism, necessity and experience. Thus the evocations of the Fall (“subsides”, “Eden sank to grief”, “dawn goes down”) lose some of their gloom and even collapse into insubstantial mishaps: “So dawn goes down to day”. Indeed, this downward movement would, taken at face value, contradict the image of each dawn as a renewed promise of hope for the day that starts and that will be filled whether with dutiful toil or with sensuous enjoyment. “Nothing gold can stay” for the whole human race at the dawn of History: it is bound to fall and rise again on its way away from Edenic blamelessness towards greater things and heightened experience;

similarly, there is no permanent felicity to be obtained in individual pursuits, only sizeable satisfactions and valuable lessons gained from enthusiastic persistence and curiosity.

The same benign outlook on a reformulated fortunate Fall can be found in “Never Again Would Bird's Song Be The Same”. In this poem, Adam feels that the first of many changes have occurred in Eden since Eve’s creation, but they are not ominous signs of an impending cataclysm for the whole human species:

> He would declare and could himself believe
> That the birds there in all the garden round
> From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
> Had added to their own an oversound,
> Her tone of meaning but without the words.
> Admittedly an eloquence so soft
> Could only have had an influence on birds
> When call or laughter carried it aloft.
> Be that as may be, she was in their song.
> Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
> Had now persisted in the woods so long
> That probably it never would be lost.
> Never again would birds' song be the same.
> And to do that to birds was why she came.

The “eloquence so soft” might of course also refer to Lucifer’s convincing arguments for transgression, but the bird audience of the poem represents a principle as antithetic as can be to the snake crawling on its belly. In the end, the “voice” of Eve that “never would be lost” still echoes long after Eden has disappeared, and its eloquence can be apprehended through evocative poetry and discerning existential pursuits.

This is indeed the specificity of Frost’s project: the merging of apparently opposite concerns and values. A poet *and* a farmer himself, he manages to create a credible twentieth-century North-American rural cosmogony in which the pastoral tradition inherited from Virgil’s *Eclogues* and Wordsworth’s works is consubstantially linked to the rational, industrious exploitation of the land depicted in Virgil’s *Georgics*. Innocence and experience are not so clearly separated any more; in fact, the pairing of pastoral and georgic styles allows them to enhance each other’s virtues, as demonstrated by Harold Toliver:

> Georgic is transformed by pastoral perspectives and pastoral is made “honest” by the farmer’s commitment to the world of labour and “truth”. Having discarded the animation and pretended correspondences between shepherd and nature in the

> pastoral conventions, Frost transfers the feeling of that correspondence to the muscular activity of the labourer.[95]

Tilling the land no longer appears to be the harsh punishment meted out by God on the first couple and their future progeny after the Fall, but rather a very important element of human experience in its most noble achievements; it also fosters authentic bonds between people sharing the same outlook on the universe. These elements are brought together in the remote interaction between georgic toil and pastoral enjoyment of natural beauty in "The Tuft of Flowers":

> I went to turn the grass once after one
> Who mowed it in the dew before the sun.
>
> And once I marked his flight go round and round,
>
> (…) he turned first, and led my eye to look
> At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook,
> A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared
> Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared.
> The mower in the dew had loved them thus,
> By leaving them to flourish, not for us,
> Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him.
> But from sheer morning gladness at the brim.
> The butterfly and I had lit upon,
> Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,
> That made me (…) feel a spirit kindred to my own;
> So that henceforth I worked no more alone;
>
> And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech
> With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.[96]

This pairing of the poet and the farm labourer seems logical enough, given that they occasionally face exactly the same extreme manifestations of Nature's guileless assaults. New England is often characterised by harsh winters in Frost's poetry, and life in a recreated state of nature is not an option in these conditions; in these cases, the wise choice is the one of experience and of awareness of dangers and destructive forces lurking beyond the fences of civilised existence in poems such as "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening":

> My little horse must think it queer
> To stop without a farmhouse near

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[95] Harold Toliver, *Pastoral Forms and Attitudes*; University of California Press, Berkeley; 1971 – p.345.
[96] Robert Frost, "The Tuft of Flowers", lines 1-2, 15, 21-31, 33-34, 37-38.

Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.[97]

Because of its domesticated status, the horse acts as an unexpected intermediary agent between natural temptations and human concerns. On this "darkest evening of the year", he spurs the poem's narrator into resisting the call of the "dark and deep" woods which seem to offer oblivion rather than quiet rest as in traditional Arcadian imagery – the narrator rides on instead to sleep in his bed.

The opposition between the indiscriminate exercise of Nature's power – its "innocent harshness" – and the reasoned use of practical experience is not always so clear-cut for Frost. These are in fact images of harmonious cooperation between the two principles that one encounters while reading "The Wood-Pile". The narrator explains how his walk in a frozen swamp is made easier by "the hard snow" that "held [him]". Then there is his playful game of tag with a small bird, and finally his discovery of something in an intriguing condition and even a bit out of place:

It was a cord of maple, cut and split
And piled- and measured, four by four by eight.
And not another like it could I see.
No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.
And it was older sure than this year's cutting,
Or even last year's or the year's before.
The wood was gray and the bark warping off it
And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis
Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.
What held it though on one side was a tree
Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,
These latter about to fall. I thought that only
Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks
Could so forget his handiwork on which
He spent himself the labour of his axe,
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace
· To warm the frozen swamp as best it could
With the slow smokeless burning of decay.[98]

[97] Robert Frost, "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening", lines 5-8, 13-16.
[98] Robert Frost, "The Wood-Pile", lines 23-42.

In its slow reappropriation of the cut wood, Nature seemingly agrees to play by the rules of human presence and exploitation of the resource. In an unconfrontational manner, the "cord of maple" on which the absent wood-cutter has "spent (…) the labour of his axe" is reassigned to a new practical employment unrelated to human needs. The "decay" mentioned in the last line is part of the natural order, it is not the direct result or corollary of fallible human intervention, and even has a regenerative impact on its immediate environment: the product of georgic effort is returned to its source in order to take part in the perpetual cycle of pastoral regeneration.

Still, for Frost, this pile of wood abandoned in the woods is primarily a factual occurrence rather than a metaphorical signifier of moral claims in dichotomies such as good versus evil or innocence versus experience. Frost may indeed have identified one major flaw in the pastoral vision: some idealized moral anthropomorphism applied to what is no more than a universal ecosystem ruled by laws of chance, necessity and pragmatic selectivity. This point is made clear in "Design", when the living spider, the dead moth and the flower are seen as perhaps guided by the same mindless determinism:

> What had that flower to do with being white,
> The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?
> What brought the kindred spider to that height,
> Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
> What but design of darkness to appall?--
> If design govern in a thing so small.[99]

The sinister undertones of the spider's predatory nature may hint at nothing more than the existence of violence and death as well as beauty and innocence in the Creation, should indeed "design govern in a thing so small". When Frost realizes the futility of ever trying to paint New England with the soft colours of carefree Arcadia and instead reunites pastoral merriment with georgic necessity, one can come to the conclusion that, in a world made of concrete existential demands and constraints, the notion of innocence cannot be postulated as clearly distinct or even antithetical to the notion of experience, as merciless as the latter may be. It is this realization that allows the reader to cope with the paradoxical combination of deep malaise and pragmatic acceptance when confronted with sudden mortality in poems such as "The Death of the Hired Man" (with Mary's

[99] Robert Frost, "Design", lines 9-14.

emotional plea to Warren turning Silas' return into a biblical morality tale mixing the stories of Job, Jonah and the Prodigal Son – only to end up in a cold, monosyllabic obituary in the last line) or in a more spectacular fashion in " 'Out, Out--' ":

> The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh.
> As he swung toward them holding up the hand
> Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
> The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all--
> Since he was old enough to know, big boy
> Doing a man's work, though a child at heart--
> He saw all spoiled. 'Don't let him cut my hand off
> The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!'
> So. But the hand was gone already.
> The doctor put him in the dark of ether.
> He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.
> And then -- the watcher at his pulse took fright.
> No one believed. They listened at his heart.
> Little -- less -- nothing! -- and that ended it.
> No more to build on there. And they, since they
> Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

Apart from the "snarl" and "rattle" of the buzz-saw – a demonic incarnation which is about to bring forth mortality and resignation in this small world, the first lines of the poem convey a seductive image of rural innocent virtue: "the sweet-scented stuff" in "the breeze", the boy working with "them" (his dad? his brothers?), the sister in her apron calling for supper, and the whole setting bathed in the sunset light with the picturesque backdrop of Vermont mountains. The pace of events then increases when tragedy strikes, or is allowed to happen by apparent mutual consent between the mechanical perpetrator and the human victim ("Neither refused the meeting"). The range of emotions and attitudes may be very wide in the second part of the poem, from vivid *pathos* to dry, procedural grief, but one curious effect may be singled out in the narrative voice: some dry humour or existential irony – not such an uncommon way to process unthinkable events. When supper is announced, it is the saw that starts to feast first, and the ensuing arterial damage may outdo the chromatic dazzle of the sunset; for the boy, it is nothing serious initially, deluded as he is by temporary neurophysiologic denial ("The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh") – all this finally internalized in Cartesian economy of emotional display by the witnesses of the accident ("And they, since they / Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs").

However, the narrator's attitude may go beyond disillusioned detachment and be more akin to a methodical debunking of the symbolism of innocence at work in the poem : for all his helplessness, first dazed, then frantic, the child is not a child anymore ("big boy / Doing a man's work, though a child at heart-- / He saw all spoiled"). The vision of this boy entrusted with such a potentially dangerous task may elicit reactions of varying nature and degree, from appalled shock at underage professional exploitation akin to modern notions of child abuse and tacit acknowledgement of the practical necessities in the rural distribution of labour for family units. However, who can ultimately be blamed for destroying the pastoral candor of this country scene – the over-enthusiastic but immature boy, or his parents and their carelessness and misplaced confidence? For Frost, in the end, there may be no blame to cast, only lessons to accept and the weight of this *memento mori* to add to the necessary burden of experience. The American poet ultimately finds out that the rough beauty of Nature and pragmatic contentment with its returns for one's sustained efforts are worthy building materials for one's charmed inner garden. This view of original innocence stripped of its glorious radiance and turned into a mere springboard for the higher achievements of experience is to be taken one step further with Camus' indictment of passivity and his doctrine of superior responsibility, the subject of a brief comment on Camus' *The Fall* to conclude this literary analysis of innocence and experience.

I.3.g – Albert Camus' *The Fall.*

Jean-Baptiste Clamence, the main protagonist of *The Fall*, did enjoy his fair share of prelapsarian felicity, as he describes his privileged position in Parisian circles during his career as a lawyer: "The judges punished and the defendants expiated, while I, free of any duty, shielded equally from judgment as from penalty, I freely held sway bathed in a light as of Eden".[100] But the fall from the title (a woman jumping to her death

[100] Albert Camus, *The Fall (La Chute)*, translated by Justin O'Brien; Hamish Hamilton, London; 1957 – pp.21-22.

off a bridge on the Seine and Clamence's guilt at not doing anything to rescue her) shatters the perfect life of Clamence and he ends up telling his story to a total stranger in a club in foggy Amsterdam. The lot of Clamence is in fact guilt rather than hard-earned experience; Camus also draws a very peculiar picture of original innocence – one of codified play-acting, and even carefully organized self-delusion, such as analyzed by John Cruickshank:

> Innocence, at least as Camus uses the term, is an integral part of lucidity. He argues as follows: Lucidity is negative awareness in the sense that it denies the capacity of the mind to find meaning in experience, except in a very immediate and limited way. More particularly, it denies the capacity of the mind to demonstrate by itself the existence of abstract, universal truths. Lucidity about the absurd therefore reveals a world in which there is no transcendence for human beings, no set of absolute values by reference to which a man's behaviour can be absolutely sanctioned or absolutely reproved. This situation, in which *l'homme absurde* finds himself, is what Camus calls innocence. It follows necessarily from the revelation of the absurd by lucidity.[101]

The guilt that Clamence carries is not only related to his passive witnessing of the woman's suicide, but it is also some expiation for his whole prelapsarian life of make-believe and denial. Despite the bleakness of most of the novel, the consequences of the fall in question can be actively dealt with, in case that fall from Grace *actually* happened. Camus gives an unusual description of that longed-for original state:

> Each of us insists on being innocent at all costs, even if he has to accuse the whole human race and heaven itself. […] But those rascals want *grace*, that is irresponsibility, and they shamelessly allege the justifications of nature or the excuses of circumstances, even if they are contradictory. The essential thing is that they should be innocent. (Italics added)[102]

In Camus' vision of individual and collective fate, the Fall fails to delineate a clear opposition between innocence on one side, and experience or guilt on the other side. Original innocence is for Camus the passive stasis that was regulated by the codes of a now-defunct mental superstructure since its foundations were irreparably damaged by the works of Darwin, Nietszche and Freud. Humans are now burdened with the weight of guilt, a guilt born out the colossal responsibilities induced by the infinity of choices

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[101] John Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*; Oxford University Press, London; 1959 – pp.66-67

[102] *The Fall*, pp.61-62.

offered to them once they refuse the idea of a higher power destined to guide them or even rule over their lives. The good and bad choices made add up to a shared experience, a universal chronicle of tragedies and triumphs, happy accidents and costly perseverance.

But what is this world of experience like in *The Fall*? Camus uses familiar references, only to subvert them in his depiction of Clamence's residence in Amsterdam after he expelled himself from his Parisian Eden: "Have you noticed that Amsterdam's concentric canals resemble the circles of hell? The middle-class hell, of course, peopled with bad dreams".[103] The bad dreams in this toned-down re-enactment of Dante's infernal vision may be confused memories of ancient felicity, vapid impressions eclipsed by images encountered in the inner circles, where "life—and hence its crimes—becomes denser, darker".[104] In this postlapsarian universe, innocence still tries to make good of its pretenses as it occasionally faces the guilt of knowledge and afterthought in the most harrowing circumstances, as in a disturbing anecdote related by Clamence:

> The idea that comes most naturally to man, as if from his very nature, is the idea of his innocence. From this point of view, we are all like that little Frenchman at Buchenwald who insisted on registering a complaint with the clerk, himself a prisoner, who was recording his arrival. A complaint? The clerk and his comrades laughed: 'Useless, old man. You don't lodge complaints here.' 'But you see, sir' said the little Frenchman, 'my case is exceptional. I am innocent!'[105]

In this harsh universe, it is man and woman's own responsibility, through the trials and errors of accumulated experience, to redeem themselves, or at least to accept their fallen condition, whether from a privileged concord with a higher being or from self-satisfaction metastasizing into *hubris*, as in case of Jean-Baptiste Clamence. For Camus, there is no other option for humans; Clamence, a mock Saint John the Baptist, does not announce any messianic reign to come, but describes instead some surreal bureaucratic procedure of collective atonement:

> Over the dead body of innocence the judges swarm, the judges of all species, those of Christ and those of the Anti-Christ, who are the same anyway, reconciled in the little-ease. […] Wherefore, since we are all judges, we are all guilty before one another, all Christs in our cheap way, one by one crucified, always without knowing.[106]

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[103] *The Fall*, p.13.
[104] *The Fall*, p.13.
[105] *The Fall*, p.61.
[106] *The Fall*, p.86-87.

In the end, one may find in *The Fall* some notions he probably tackled when he wrote his Master's thesis on Plotinus and Saint Augustine in 1935-36, the latter being, one of the main proponents of the doctrine of the "fortunate Fall". For Camus, the human experience may indeed consist in walking away from an initial quite hypothetical condition of purity of actions and motives, in order to actualise one's own version of a transcendent potential made of the guilt of challenging freedoms and dues never fully paid. This transition is summed up by Terry Otten in a paragraph that sheds new light on the real nature of Clamence's plight, and by extension all humans' problematic fate:

> Theologians speak of the fall as man's entering history, that is, entering a world dominated by time, conditioned by the consequence of past choices. If one fulfills the freedom to act, one thereby enters time by disrupting the horizontal sameness of his life where every day repeats the pattern of every other day, In Tillich's terms, one moves from essence to existence. Clamence refers to the laughter as the acquisition of memory. […] Compelled to return to "the heart of [his] memory" because he cannot evade the derisive laughter, Clamence gradually had to recognize his own criminality. "Clamence's fall was more clearly a coming to a knowledge of good and evil than was Adam's", William Mueller contends, for he "had mistaken evil for good until he fell; his fall is actually a conviction of sin, an intellectual awareness of what really distinguishes the evil from the good." Able to see his past *after* the Fall, he is tragically aware of his guilt.[107]

Whether one undertakes the daunting march towards experience in order to regain or to outdo some mythical state of innocence, the infinity of choices one is confronted with cannot obliterate the single truth of the irreversibility of our actions. There are no "what if" or "if I could do it again"; realistically, the path from innocence to experience is a one-way road on which a missed turn is what makes the progress more enticing, albeit also more confusing. As one of the many aspects of the complex notion of experience (the single occurrence contributing to global knowledge in Kant's theory of *Erfahrung*), this missed turn, this distraction on the way is better taken in one's stride, a resolve conveyed in the final words of Clamence in *The Fall*: "It's too late now. It'll always be too late. Fortunately!"[108]

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[107] Terry Otten, *After Innocence: Visions of the Fall in Modern Literature*; Institute of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh; 1982 – pp.121-122 (quote from William Mueller taken from *The Prophetic Voice in Modern Fiction*; Association Press, New York; 1959 – p.74).
[108] *The Fall*, p.109.

Chapter II

Innocence and Experience Down Under; Western Australia's Specificities.

As seen in the previous chapter, one of the traditional settings for the interplay between innocence and experience has long been the *locus amoenus*, the 'pleasant place' of the pastoral tradition as established by Theocritus and Virgil. The shepherds of these poems live, work and play in a near-Edenic environment:

> [Its] staple ingredients are trees for providing shade on a hot day and a spring or brook for freshness and the pleasurable sound of running water. Bird-song, fragrant flowers, and a soft breeze may add to the gratification of all senses. Soft grass to sit or lie upon must also be present.[1]

As discovered by European settlers, this soft-hued vision is at odds with the often harsh character of the Australian environment. Even after its domestication, this setting seems ill-equipped for a transplant of the pastoral vision of ingenuity, as Paul Kane explains while underlining the apparent incongruity *and* redundancy of such a prospect:

> To speak of pastoral in a country inhabited by 140 million sheep might sound problematic. After all, nothing is more likely to drain the genre of its charm than actually having to deal with sheep on a daily basis. […] But pastoral – or the theory of pastoral – has always been bedeviled by difficulties (it is its own serpent in the garden), and a consideration of Australian pastoral requires first a recognition or reconnaissance of the genre's historical – its classical – *impedimenta*.[2]

Several elements may be highlighted here: it is indeed true that, through the ages and until the peak and subsequent decline of classical pastoral poetry during the eighteenth century, eclogues depicting the carefree lives and loves of rustic herdsmen were primarily

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[1] E. Kegel-Brinkgreve, *The Echoing Woods: Bucolic and Pastoral from Theocritus to Wordsworth*; J.C. Gieben, Amsterdam; 1990 – p.14 [Footnote # 30]

[2] Paul Kane, "'Woeful Shepherds' – Anti-Pastoral in Australian Poetry" in *Imagining Australia : Literature and Culture in the New New World*, Ryan, Judith and Wallace-Crabbe, Chris (ed.); Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England; 2004.

composed for the enjoyment of a mostly urban, educated elite with little personal experience in rural practices and attitudes. These readers' minds were still opened to the idea of a regenerative interlude in the country before a return to the 'real world'. But this prospect is only one of the two sides of the traditional pastoral vision: the metaphorical visit to Arcadia (the area of Peloponnesus presented as the antithesis of sophisticated Athens, as well as the mythical country of Pan) seen as a spatial displacement from one's daily environment and circumstances, as Susan Snyder defines it:

> In the Arcadian mode, the recreative pastoral space offers along with respite from worldly cares and pressures a concomitant opening up of opportunity, a space in which to deconstruct and reconstitute one's relationship to the complexities of that temporarily distanced civilized life.[3]

The "opening up of opportunity" may have driven settlers in their efforts to acclimatize to their new environment – or perhaps to adapt these precise geographical conditions to the cultural and metaphysical mindset they had brought to these distant corners of the Empire. And on this land which they saw as a blank, rough canvas, they could project the other side of the pastoral vision: the Golden Age.

With this latter notion, the emphasis is on a temporal estrangement from one's daily experience. The Golden Age is described by Hesiod in his *Works and Days* as the first of five Ages, an initial period during which the race of men "lived like gods and no sorrow of heart they felt. / Nothing for toil or pitiful age they cared, (…) and all good things / were theirs, for the fruitful earth unstintingly bore unforced her plenty".[4] Mankind then fell, was destroyed by the gods and went through several incarnations during the Ages of Silver, Bronze, the Age of Heroes and the final Age of Iron. Once again, the image of a blessed Golden Race evokes elements of the prelapsarian condition in the Garden of Eden. However, the wealth linked with the mention of the precious metal may be spiritual, as well as material. The symbolism and the polysemy of the Greek word used by Hesiod may paradoxically shed light on the condition of both Aborigines and European explorers/settlers, as perceived when the two cultures came in

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[3] Susan Snyder, *Pastoral Process – Spenser, Marvell, Milton*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California; 1998 – p.4.

[4] Hesiod, *Works and Days*; 109 ff.; translated by Jack Lindsay (quoted in *The Oxford Book of Greek Verse in Translation*; Oxford University Press, London; 1938 – p.133).

contact. The word "χρύσεον" designates gold – "the metal of the gods, not only rare and precious but spotless and incorruptible. (…) In Greek we find it standing for moral sincerity (…) In the fourth century, [it] comes to mean 'ingenuous', charmingly but inappositely innocent".[5] This ambiguous semantic middle-ground between nobility of character and naivety may indeed apply to hard-working pioneers as well as the natives represented with the traits of the popular "noble savage", as in some of Cook's written comments after his first sightings of the Aborigines:

> In reality they are far more happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary Conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them. They live in a Tranquillity which is not disturbed by the Inequality of Condition: The Earth and sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary for life.[6]

Just as Christianity unified the antiquity of the Golden Age and the rustic scenery of Arcadia into one original garden of perfection in which could be acted out the story of the Fall, the early settlers may have been tempted to superimpose their vision of the dichotomy linking innocence and experience to the Aboriginal cosmogony in order to apprehend this new environment so alien to their European frame of references. But was there anything in the Dreamtime myths of origins that could be so easily transubstantiated? Robert Lawlor brings the following answer:

> For the Aborigines there is no fall; paradise *is* the earth in its pristine beauty. For them the earth remains the primordial garden, the all-nourishing mother who feeds all her creatures, grows them, and finally reabsorbs them. All that is earthly is a reflection or externalization of the events of the Dreamtime. There is no part of this existence that needs to be transcended, repressed, or gone beyond. Through ritual, the Aborigines express the entire Dreamtime Creation. There are many falls in the Dreamtime, the falls and the vicissitudes of the Creative Ancestors, not of humans.[7]

Confronted with this very unfamiliar understanding of the universe, several generations of Australian artists, poets and writers had to turn the imported figures of innocence opposed to experience into curious localized adaptations, from paintings of

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[5] Hesiod, *Works and Days*; ed. by M. L. West; Oxford University Press, Oxford; 1978 – footnote 109, p.178.

[6] *The Explorations of Captain James Cook in the Pacific as told by selections of his own journals 1768-1779*, edited by A. Grenfell Rice; Angus and Robertson, Sydney; 1969 – p.85

[7] Robert Lawlor, *Voices of the First Day – Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime*; Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont; 1991 – p.74.

denial or of mystical awe to prose and verse of pastoral, *anti*-pastoral, *counter*-pastoral and/or *poisoned* pastoral sentiment.

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II.1. Evolving visions of antipodean corruption and redemption

At a time when Australia was a loose group of distinct colonies recently organized (sometimes mere embryonic settlements) under the direct authority of the mightiest empire in the world, it would have been miraculous to see an attempt at self-representation (pastoral or not) emerge that would bear no trace of external influence. One would have to wait until the last decades of the nineteenth century to see the rise of a sense of Australian identity distinct from perceptions and prejudices entertained in London.

Indeed, the various images and concepts used to describe the antipodean experience were mostly drawn from assumptions and traditions grown in Britain. Contrasting representations followed one another, or even coexisted sometimes – whether they were to be found in press articles, works of fiction or paintings. Far from being speculative musings, these efforts often had a clearly utilitarian destination: to promote Australia as a land of new beginnings, even a return to innocence, in spite of the discomfort that the convict issue and the radical otherness of the place (an amalgamation of the distance, the environment and the presence of the natives) could create in prospective settlers' minds. For some commentators and artists, that otherness defied accepted cosmogonies and could be read through the prism of a lapsarian innocence-to-experience dichotomy, as Bernard Smith demonstrates in *European Visions and the South Pacific*:

> [In Barron Field's] *Kangaroo,* Australia is once again a land of monstrous prodigies and antipodal inversions—a topsy-turvey world where all things are exceptional and upsidedownedness is the order of the day. So hopelessly desolate a country, Field observes, could never have formed a part of the original creation. The land, surely, must have been created upon the occasion of the Fall of Man. […] The view of Australian nature which [Field] presents here bears a kinship with the views expressed by such men as Geoffrey Goodman (and echoed by John Donne and others) that nature had also fallen from its state of primal beauty when man fell from

> Grace. But for Field, Australian nature did not fall, it 'emerg'd at the first sinning'. It was in short something separate and distinct from the primal creative intention.[8]

This utter bewilderment may have contributed to the disillusionment that was borne out of the initial forays into the Australian mainland and that was shared on the same level as the enthusiasm created by the previous fantasies about an ill-defined *Terra Australis* of boundless wealth and splendour. Captain James Cook may have likened what he saw on the eastern seaboard of the continent to the familiar abode of the "noble savage", but it was not enlightened principles which dictated the establishment of the Botany Bay colony in 1788. The King and the British government were clearly more intent on dousing the revolutionary fire started in their American colonies and about to engulf France a few months later. With its capacity to dispose of its convicts on the other side of the Atlantic now nullified, Britain found a very practical use for Australia as a conveniently remote destination for the punishment and exile not only of common-law offenders but also of undesired dissenters.

Hence the petty thief, the murderer and the pamphlet writer became the material for a popular literature of heartbreak (the convict separated from his relatives forever – the trip to the other hemisphere as definitive as the crossing to the afterlife) and damnation (the lot of outcasts dragging each other into ever deeper corruption). These stories were, for the first few decades of the nineteenth century, ready arguments in the debate for or against transportation and its practicality for the British social order as well as its redeeming virtue for the convicts. With some pre-Darwinian insight, some commentators indeed thought that some good might come out of this experiment in a not too close future, perhaps through the moderating influence of the few free-settlers leaving Britain for these distant shores – so distant in fact that Australia and Britain seemed separated by almost geological eras rather than mere time zones.

Another revolution was changing essential parameters of British society: the rise of the Industrial Age and its impact on demography and landscape. As huge as the workforce demand was in industrial cities, it was unable to absorb the masses thrown out of basic sustenance by the enclosure movement in the late eighteenth century. And if they

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[8] Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768-1850 – A Study in the History of Arts and Ideas*; Oxford University Press, London; 1960 – pp.171-2.

found work and lodging in the city, it was often in squalid conditions deemed to be fertile soil for further social turmoil. Factories had irreparably contaminated the English Arcadia, much to the chagrin of the Romantic poets. The persistence of the pastoral vision led to prophecies of general corruption of the British soul if millions were to be cut off from the virtues of simple, self-sufficient country life. So spectacular had been the transformations of Britain's economy and society since the beginning of the Industrial Age that a couple of decades was all that seemed to separate the early nineteenth century from a rural Eden of pastoral bliss. This radical evolution reinforced established conceptual correspondences between the dichotomies of country versus city and innocence versus experience, correlations summarized by Raymond Williams at the opening of *The Country and the City*:

> On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation.[9]

The ambiguity of values and characters ascribed to both environments is further contextualized by Keith Thomas in *Man and the Natural World*; he shows how flimsy these categorizations already were when Britain opened its new antipodean dominion to settlement:

> The classical convention that country-dwellers were not just healthier, but morally more admirable than those who lived in the city, was a conspicuous literary theme in English literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was exemplified both by the innocent shepherd of arcadian pastoral and by the sturdy husbandman of Horace's second Epode, living a blameless and independent life in contented obscurity. It had little justification in social fact, for agriculture was the most ruthlessly developed sector of the economy […] and the vices of avarice, oppression and hypocrisy were at least as prominent in the countryside as in the town. But since it was in the city that the rural profits were consumed, it was there that one found the most sophisticated society, the latest fashions and the most expensive vices.[10]

Whether out of lyrical excess or pragmatism, what had survived of this dubious state of rural innocence was then relocated to Australia, with the Golden Age and Arcadia

[9] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*; Chatto & Windus, London; 1973 – p.1.
[10] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: changing attitudes in England 1500-1800*; Allen Lane, London; 1983 – p.246.

fused into a picture of spiritual and social rejuvenation. The focus was thus shifted from the unsavoury crowd of convicts to emigrant settlers and their fruitful experience in the colony (the emphasis being still mostly on New South Wales). Unknown until then to most of the British population, an agrarian middle-class had slowly developed; squatters under temporary leases had turned vast areas into profitable estates. Locally, the Australian landscape, which in the eye of the British public had been anything from a God-forsaken Gehenna to the gentle wilderness of Milton and Rousseau, seemed to turn into a reminiscence of Old England, and more precisely of the picturesque landscape gardens designed by the likes of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown in the eighteenth century. This peculiar representation of innocent, Arcadian Australia was not only present in publications targeting likely emigrants such as the "phenomenally successful *Sidney's Australian Handbook"*[11] in 1848, but it was also prominent in the works of painters who brought European rules and techniques and a British taste which would dominate local colour for some time.

Once again, the depiction of Australian natural scenes was influenced by the varying necessities of successive periods. The first chapter of Australia's visual history as recorded by Europeans started with sketches made by early explorers in the seventeenth century; it was coming to a close with the works of expedition artists such as William Westall accompanying Matthew Flinders or Charles Alexandre Lesueur accompanying Nicolas Baudin. Lesueur and Westall introduced the visual construct of Aboriginal Arcadia: their works were part of a documentary record at a time when Aborigines had had no previous contact with Europeans,[12] but they showed the conjoined influence of theories of the picturesque as well as the myth of the noble savage.

The situation was quite different for an artist like John Glover when he started to paint Tasmanian landscapes after 1831. It seems that his pictures of Australia as an Aboriginal paradise elicited very different responses, from the remote sympathy felt by patrons in England for these nostalgic pastoral scenes to appreciation by purchasers in Australia of these works as testimonies of times past and as markers of the march of

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[11] Coral Lansbury, *Arcady in Australia – The Evocation of Australia in nineteenth-century literature*; Melbourne University Press, Melbourne; 1970 - pp.61-62.
[12] Tim Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition – Australian Landscape Painting 1801-1890*; Oxford University Press, Oxford; 1985 - p.23.

history, now that Aborigines were no longer a threat to the permanent establishment of European settlers. However, even when "in his paintings John Glover chose to ignore the Aborigines' fate and instead depicted them in park-like landscapes, usually made up of an extensive well-watered plain dotted with trees and surrounded by hills",[13] such fantastical images could still be met with displeasure by a large number of the colonists who saw them as a negation of their efforts and or even of their legitimacy, as some unwilling claim to Aboriginal rule over Australia.

This may partly explain why the next phase of Australia's visual history may be labelled as pastoral or even pastoralist Arcadia. From the 1830s to the 1860s, painters like Joseph Lycett, John Glover, Conrad Martens and Eugene von Guerard turned rural Australia into a collection of picturesque scenes glorifying the achievements of rich landholders, the squatters who had made a fortune and were often commissioning the execution of these paintings. In these scenes there were no Aborigine, emu or kangaroo to be seen; they were replaced by the shepherd (the revived icon of the pastoral poetry, later to compete with the shearer and the stockman in Australian painting and verse) and the sheep in rolling fields dotted with neatly-contoured ponds and scattered clumps of trees, in the best tradition of the previous century's English landscape garden. The grand house of the landholder pictured in the distance would often host the finished painting; the house's construction was sometimes finished *after* the artist's preliminary sketches and *before* the paint was put on canvas, the same process often applying to the immediate surroundings of the house with lawns redesigned to blend in with the Europeanised environment.

People contemplating these paintings, often on loan for public exhibitions, may have been aware of the artificiality of these scenes of pastoral innocence, but they nonetheless accepted them as part of the enduring promotion in Britain of Australia as a rural domain where "men […] should go not only to make money but to cultivate the virtues engendered by an agricultural life".[14] The paintings were essential in maintaining a façade ever more at odds with the reality of the colony's demographics: Australia was

[13] *Images in Opposition* - p.29.
[14] *Arcady in Australia* – p.52.

developing an urban civilization and the majority of colonists were not living a carefree existence in an antipodean Arcadia.

It was only a matter of time before these pictures of green landscaped estates, of shepherds content with the sole company of dog and sheep, and of agricultural labourers' unabated toiling until sunset, became as formulaic as the clichéd literary figures of the redeemed convict and the settler beating the odds to make a fortune. Their power of seduction over the British masses had waned; in industrialised England, the possibility for new beginnings offered by the Australian Arcadia was replaced by opportunities to better one's condition at home through unionised workers' fights in the second half of the nineteenth century. Paradoxically, this was the time of the complete transference of the Arcadian myth to Australia; the pastoral portrayal of Australia was no longer relevant to the British audience, but in the colony this compound of half-truths, reconstructed reality and wishful thinking turned into a pervasive, lasting myth. Its grasp on the soon-to-be nation's mind was further consolidated when it was finally fully acclimatized to the local reality, when the green meadows of the traditional pastoral were replaced by the outback in the works of Henry Lawson and A. B. Paterson, whether this bush was described as the "horrors" or "the vision splendid". Both were city-dwellers who undertook the task of offering to the rest of the mostly urban Australian community its own complex pastoral lyric, a vast domain of varied sceneries peopled by idiosyncratic creatures and bordered by horizons of unfettered opportunities behind which would often hide the ghosts of corrupted innocence and of pragmatic experience.

* * *

II.2. Pastoral visions of Australia

If one keeps in mind the basic premise at the core of pastoral poetry – a shepherd and his flock basking in the beauty of the great outdoors – one can find variations of the pastoral idylls with the sheep on the centre stage in early Australian poetry, often with hints of subversive undertones. For example, Paul Kane mentions "an anonymous 1832 pastoral colloquy between two sheep, a merino and a mixed breed, about their relative

merits, which is really a piece of social satire excoriating pretensions to aristocracy".[15] The sheep is also what leads to the swagman's defiant death, as the stolen "jumbuck" in Banjo Paterson's "Waltzing Matilda" which Paul Kane presents as "the most pastoral poem in nineteenth-century Australia [with] a rural person, a sheep, an idyllic setting, a stark contrast between free-wheeling life and legal authority, and an ideal resolution of conflict".[16] The sheep and its predicament can also figure the high price to pay for Australian Arcadians trying to make a living in an unpredictable environment, as shown in Ethel Anderson in one of her "bucolic eclogues", "Squatter's Luck – Flood":

> [The young Australian], seated at ease on the ridge of his roof,
> Sees, drowned, his sheep; sees, perished, his prize cattle'
> Sees on a frail raft his pale wife and children
> Skirting the stack of his half-submerged homestead.
> Sees, twice sighs, and whistles 'Waltzing Matilda.'[17]

Floods, as well as drought and bushfires are some of the elements that defy traditional pastoral representation. The sheep and their shepherds live in a problematic landscape in which the literary familiar is mixed with new sceneries of awe and wonder. In his collection of poems entitled *Leaves from Australian Forests* published in 1869, Henry Kendall depicts parts of the Australian coastal hinterland where innocent creatures of the ancient ages and humans burdened with worldly concerns may find a temporary refuge from the feverish pursuits of Australia's urban civilisation, such as in "Bell Birds":

> By channels of coolness the echoes are calling,
> And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling:
> It lives in the mountain where moss and the sedges
> Touch with their beauty the bank and the ledges.
> Through breaks of the cedar and sycamore bowers
> Struggles the light that is love to the flowers;
> And, softer than slumber, and sweeter than singing,
> The notes of the bell-birds are running and ringing.
> […]
> October, the maiden of bright yellow tresses,
> Loiters for love in these cool wildernesses;

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[15] Paul Kane, " 'Woful Shepherds' – Anti-Pastoral in Australian Poetry"; in *Imagining Australia – Literature and Culture in the New New World*, ed. By Judith Ryan and Chris Wallace-Crabbe; Harvard University Committee on Australian Studies, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England; 2004 – p.274. See also *The Poets' Discovery: Nineteenth-Century Australia in Verse*, ed. By Richard D. Jordan and Peter Pierce; Melbourne University Press, Melbourne; 1990 – pp.136-37.
[16] Kane, "Woful Shepherds" – p.272.
[17] Ethel Anderson,, *Squatter's Luck with other Bucolic Eclogues*; Melbourne University Press, Melbourne; 1942 – p.2.

Loiters, knee-deep, in the grasses, to listen,
Where dripping rocks gleam and the leafy pools glisten:
Then is the time when the water-moons splendid
Break with their gold, and are scattered or blended
Over the creeks, till the woodlands have warning
Of songs of the bell-bird and wings of the Morning.
[…]
Often I sit, looking back to a childhood,
Mixt with the sights and the sounds of the wildwood,
Longing for power and the sweetness to fashion,
Lyrics with beats like the heart-beats of Passion;-
Songs interwoven of lights and of laughters
Borrowed from bell-birds in far forest-rafters;
So I might keep in the city and alleys
The beauty and strength of the deep mountain valleys:
Charming to slumber the pain of my losses
With glimpses of creeks and a vision of mosses.[18]

This feeling of undisturbed peace is even stronger in "A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest" by Charles Harpur, another forest scene in which midday heat stops the smallest creatures in their tracks and blankets the land with near-silence:

Not a sound disturbs the air,
There is quiet everywhere;
Over plains and over woods
What a mighty stillness broods.

Even the grasshoppers keep
Where the coolest shadows sleep
Even the busy ants are found
Resting in their pebbled mound;
Even the locust clingeth now
In silence to the barky bough:
And over hills and over plains
Quiet, vast and slumbrous, reigns.
[…]
O 'tis easeful here to lie
Hidden from Noon's scorching eye,
In this grassy cool recess
Musing thus of Quietness.[19]

In this remote landscape, the deities Noon and Quiet are not always so benevolent. In "A Dedication", Adam Lindsay Gordon shows an unforgiving landscape where the absence of sound is as unbearable as the extreme climate:

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[18] Henry Kendall, "Bell Birds"; in *Henry Kendall – Poetry, Prose and Selected Correspondence*, ed. by Michael Ackland; University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland; 1993 – pp.31-32.
[19]Charles Harpur, "A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest"; in *Three Colonial Poets – Book One: Charles Harpur*, ed. by Adrian Mitchell; Sun Books, Melbourne; 1973 – pp.25-26.

There are rhymes rudely strung with intent less
    Of sound than of words,
In lands where bright blossoms are scentless,
    And songless bright birds;
Where, with fire and fierce drought on her tresses,
Insatiable Summer oppresses
Sere woodlands and sad wildernesses,
    And faint flocks and herds.
[…]
Here rhyme was first framed without fashion,
    Song shaped without form.[20]

Although animals can survive in this environment, survival is much more difficult to envision for humans, sentient creatures sustained by emotions and *stimuli*, whether concrete or intangible. Placed in this wild vacuum, hardened countrymen may not be able to put up with this ghostly Arcadia, as evidenced by Frank Maldon Robb in his introduction to Gordon's poems:

> We have known sleepless men, not easily moved by fear camped out at night on the slope of [Australia's] unpeopled mountains, waking their sleeping fellows to cry, 'For God's sake, speak to me!', so awful has the indescribable silence become, so that the desolation and mournfulness of it seem to have become concrete and living, and as if moving to smite and fell one with a blow.[21]

The Australian landscape may look as unspoilt as the Garden of Eden before the Fall, but it does not elicit the same feelings of soft, carefree cosiness. In 1884, Marcus Clarke famously described "the dominant note of Australian scenery" as "Weird Melancholy" rather than dreamy nostalgia, with one's perceptions slowly entranced by the odd features of an almost pre-human world, a Creation in progress:

> The Australian mountain forests are funereal, secret, stern. Their solitude is desolation. […] In the Australian forests no leaves fall. […] The very animal life of these frowning hills is either grotesque or ghostly. […] The sun suddenly sinks, and the mopokes burst out into horrible peals of semi-human laughter. […] From a corner of the silent forest rises a dismal chant, and around a fire dance natives painted like skeletons. All is fear-inspiring and gloomy. […] In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write. Some see no beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly, and our beasts who have not yet learned to walk on all fours. But the dweller in the wilderness acknowledges the subtle charm of this fantastic land of monstrosities. He becomes familiar with the beauty of loneliness.

[20],Adam Lindsay Gordon, "A Dedication"; in *Poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon*, ed. by Frank Maldon Robb; Oxford University Press, London; 1929 – p.115.
[21] *Poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon*; p.cxxi.

> Whispered to by the myriad tongues of the wilderness, he learns the language of the barren and the uncouth.[22]

The previous quote actually applied to a description of painting, but it gained such currency by being often quoted that it struck a chord. In such conditions, it is understandable that the character of the Arcadian shepherd had to toughen up to adapt to this hostile environment. As "jolly" and good-natured as they may be, the swagmen, squatters, shearers, drovers and stockmen of the Australian pastoral literature are often seen to have a good grasp of the ways of the world, if devious tricks in rural dealings such as narrated in Charles Harpur's "Squatter's Song: Bush Justice" are to be taken at face value:

> A Dealer, bewitched by grain-promising dreams
> Settled down near my Station, to trade with my Teams,
> And to sell to my men too! from whom, through the nose,
> Until then, I had screw'd just what prices I chose;
> And for this, to be sure, I so hated the man,
> That I swore ne'er to rest till I'd settled some plan
> Whereby in the Lockup to cleverly cram him!
> And so to my Super the matter I put,
> Who thereupon 'found' a sheep's head near his hut,
> And the 'how came it there?' was sufficient to damn him,
> The Beak before who I then lugg'd him, as you
> May suppose, being neck-deep in Squattery too.
> […]
> For what care we Squatters for Law on a push?
> And for Justice! what has she to do with the Bush?[23]

The out-of-town dealer is later "acquitted" of the charge of sheep-stealing during a court hearing three hundred miles away from the station, and the scheme that could have gotten him hanged boils down to a mischievous joke. This may be seen as an extreme case of larrikinism, the biting, satiric streak in the Australian character, born out of a pragmatic, knockabout culture and which goes against the mild-mannered pastoral sentiment. The rebellious swagman in "Waltzing Matilda" and Silas, the indomitable shepherd who takes everything Fate may throw at him in his stride (be it flood, fire, drought or war) in Ethel Anderson's "Squatter's Luck", are also proto-larrikin types of Australianness. But moral balance and nobility of character have not disappeared from the landscape. After all,

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[22] *Poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon*; pp.cxxi-cxxiii.

[23] Charles Harpur, "Squatter's Song: Bush Justice; in *Three Colonial Poets – Book One: Charles Harpur*, ed. by Adrian Mitchell; Sun Books, Melbourne; 1973 – pp.101.

Anderson herself claims in her original preface to her *Squatter's Luck with other Bucolic Eclogues* that "[a]s nearly physically perfect as it is humanly possible for a man to be, the young Australian countryman brings back into a living world the glory that was Greece".[24]

Indeed, the most celebrated figure in the early Australian pastoral remains that of shepherd or stockman of uncorrupted manners and of simple enjoyments and concerns, such as "Bill the Bullock Driver", the main character in a poem by Henry Kendall:

> […]
> What trouble has Bill for the ruin of lands,
> Or the quarrels of temple and throne,
> So long as the whip that he holds in his hands,
> And the teams that he drives, are his own?
>
> As straight and as sound as a slab without crack,
> Our Billy is a king in his way:
> Though he camps by the side of a shingle track,
> And sleeps on the bed of his dray.
> […]
> His fourfooted friends are the friends of his choice –
> No lover is Bill of your dames;
> But the cattle that turn at the sound of his voice
> Have the sweetest of features and names.
> […]
> Poor bullocky Bill! In the circles select
> Of the scholars he hasn't a place;
> But he walks like a *man* with his forehead erect,
> And he looks at God's day in the face.
>
> For, rough as he seems, he would shudder to wrong
> A dog with the loss of a hair;
> And the angels of shine and superlative song
> See his heart and the deity there.[25]

This well-entrenched pastoral image of countrymen living a happier, fuller life than urbanites is epitomised in Australian literature in Banjo Paterson's "Clancy of the Overflow", in which Arcadian innocence and freedom runs a parallel course to that of the city's debilitating gregariousness and forced-upon experience:

> […]
> In my wild erratic fancy visions come to me of Clancy
> Gone a-droving 'down the Cooper' where the Western drovers go.
> As the stock are slowly stringing, Clancy rides behind them singing,

[24] Anderson, *Squatter's Luck with other Bucolic Eclogues* – Preface to the first edition.
[25] Henry Kendall, "Bill the Bullock Driver"; in *Henry Kendall – Poetry, Prose and Selected Correspondence* – pp.111-113.

For the drover's life has pleasures that the townsfolk never know.

And the bush hath friends to meet him, and their kindly voices greet him
In the murmur of the breezes and the rivers on its bars,
And he sees the vision splendid on the sunlit plains extended,
And at night the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars.

*

I am sitting in my dingy little office, where a stingy
Ray of sunlight struggles feebly down between the houses tall,
And the foetid hair and gritty of the dusty, dirty city
Through the open window floating, spreads its foulness over all.
[…]
And the hurrying people daunt me, and pallid faces haunt me
[…]
With their eager eyes and greedy, and their stunted forms and weedy,
For townsfolk have no time to grow, they have no time to waste.

And I somehow rather fancy that I'd like to change with Clancy,
Like to take a turn at droving where the seasons come and go.[26]

However, in a poem like Adam Lindsay Gordon's "The Sick Stockrider" (first published in the *Colonial Monthly* in 1870), one can already discern a sunset tinge on the myth of the carefree countryman. A stockman not long for this world has a last look at a landscape full of memories and of nostalgia; the land is still not completely mapped and conquered, but it is already old with stories and experience:

Hold hard, Ned! Lift me down once more, and lay me in the shade.
Old man, you've had your work cut out to guide
Both horses, and to hold me in the saddle when I sway'd,
All through the hot, slow, sleepy, silent ride.
[…]
In these hours when life is ebbing, how those days when life was young
Come back to us; how clearly I recall
Even the yarns Jack Hall invented, and the songs Jem Roper sung;
And where are now Jem Roper and Jack Hall?

Aye! Nearly all our comrades of the old colonial school,
Our ancient boon companions, Ned, are gone,
Hard livers for the most part, somewhat reckless as a rule,
It seems that you and I are left alone.
[…]
I've had my share of pastime, and I've done my share of toil,
And life is short—the longest life a span:
I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil,
Or for the wine that maketh glad the heart of man.
For good undone and gifts misspent and resolutions vain,
'T'is somewhat late to trouble. This I know—
I should live the same life over, if I had to live again;

[26] A. B. Paterson, "Clancy of the Overflow"; in *Selected Poems*; Angus & Robertson, Pymble, New South Wales; 1992 – pp.6-7.

And the chances are I go where most men go. [27]

Finally, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Australian pastoral idyll was nearly shattered to pieces in works such as Henry Lawson's short story, "The Drover's Wife", and its portrayal of bush life. This is no bucolic world where one can stay for temporary regeneration or settle for good. It is closer to the deserts where prophets are tested than to Arcadia or Eden:

> Bush all round – bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of stunted, rotten native apple trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few sheoaks which are sighing above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilisation – a shanty on the main road.[28]

Innocence and experience are no longer so easily differentiated here. In fact, the woman and her children seem to live simultaneously in a pre- and post-lapsarian environment. The intrusion of the snake which triggers the flashbacks and memories is as literal as can be (a dangerous nuisance for settlers) and also an obvious hint at a metaphysical reading of the human condition. Like the reptile in the Garden of Eden, it has the protagonists expelled from their original abode and forced to take refuge in the kitchen. But this Fall is temporary; at dawn, the snake is disposed of, and the family can regain some peace of mind until the next tragedy. The respite is indeed often short-lived: even before the evil presence of the reptile in their personal bleak Arcadia, they had to face "thunderstorm", child death, "drought", "bush fire", cattle disease ("*pleuro-pneumonia*" – "her two best cows died"), a "mad bullock", pests such as "crows and eagles [with] designs on her chicken", "bushm[e]n in the horrors", "villainous-looking sundowner[s]" and "gallows-faced swagm[e]n".[29]

Thus the episode of the snake hardly qualifies as a Fall or even an epiphany. It is a momentary crisis in a universe so harsh that any sustained effort to inhabit it is worthy of praise. And each little triumph over the adverse environment contributes to shape a new national myth. While reviewing past actions and attitudes, the drover's wife ascribes the

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[27] Adam Lindsay Gordon, "The Sick Stockrider"; in *Poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon* – pp.118-122.
[28] Henry Lawson, "The Drover's Wife"; in *The Penguin Henry Lawson – Short Stories*, ed. by John Barnes; Penguin Books, Ringwood, Victoria; 1986 – p.19.
[29] Lawson, "The Drover's Wife"; pp.20-24.

twists and turns of her family life to the fact that "[h]er husband is an Australian, and so is she". What it may mean in term of values will be dutifully transmitted to the next generation, especially to "[t]he last two children [who] were born in the bush".[30]

The bush has finally replaced England's fantasy landscapes in the local rural imagery. It is seen as an essential part of a realistic Australian pastoral. In Lawson's work, its very roughness is romanticised – it is the daunting home of strong, resilient types, relentlessly fighting for their survival and sanity in this uncompromising environment:

> There is nothing to see, however, and not a soul to meet. You might walk for twenty miles along this track without being able to fix a point in your mind, unless you are a bushman. This is because of the everlasting, maddening sameness of the stunted trees – that monotony which makes a man long to break away and travel as far as trains can go, and sail as far as ships can sail – and further.
>
> But this bushwoman is used to the loneliness of it. As a girl-wife she hated it, but now she would feel strange away from it.[31]

The bush people have come a long way from the stereotypical shepherd of the Arcadian myth. In the story, the husband has gotten rid of most of his flock and gone away droving. In this world of day-to-day hardships, he is of no real help to his family, as absent as God in a post-Nietzschean universe (apart from the mother scolding her sons about swearing, there is not one single reference to religious practice in the story). In this rural environment where economic as well as natural hardships force the drover to find employment away from his family, there is then a fertile soil for new versions of the pastoral discourse, adaptations and experimentations on the Arcadian vision, fit to celebrate the bush spirit of staunch resilience against the odds, as distilled from the experience of Lawson's heroine by Brian Matthews:

> The plight of the drover's wife is hopeless, but susceptible of deep compassion and understanding. The story implies that human attributes may well be the ennobling and enduring consolation in a ruthless and spiritually debilitating environment, and though Lawson was later to write 'It didn't matter much—nothing does', the great emphasis on humanity in 'The Drover's Wife' stands as a tempering influence upon such apparent nihilism: life remains hard, cruel, potentially tragic, but human worth rescues it from being a bad joke.[32]

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[30] Lawson, "The Drover's Wife"; p.22.
[31] Lawson, "The Drover's Wife"; pp.24-25.
[32] Brian Matthews, *The Receding Wave – Henry Lawson's Prose*; Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria; 1972 – p.15.

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II.3. Poisoned idyll? – John Kinsella's analysis and his pastoral poetry

In the Australian pastoral discourse, one element plays a crucial role in supporting various conceptual reformulations of the Arcadian / Golden Age myth: the brevity of the European experience on this continent, and its nonetheless undeniable impact on the land. John Kinsella thus comments on the time factor in Australian pastoral representation:

> [T]his is where pastoral motifs in Australian arts differ so decidedly from their European progenitors. There's a code switching in what is seen as harmonious because, other than in small patches, the Australian landscape can never replicate the idylls of European civilizations. This is not to say they are any more or less harsh than those confronted by Theocritus' goatherds, but the pastoral language of comparison was forced in a short space of time—that is, the time since invasion/settlement to the present day—and in the context of the tradition having already been absorbed, translated, relocated, and "refined" as a political device.[33]

Indeed, since the first explorations of the coastline and the first permanent settlement in 1788, the country has witnessed contacts and conflicts between Aborigines and settlers, parallel development of country and city life before urban lifestyle definitely became the norm for a majority of Australians. This city versus country dichotomy has been further complicated by sub-classifications; first, there seems to be a domesticated as well as a true pastoral, according to Ivor Indyk:

> [Frank Dalby Davison's *Man-shy*] develops a crucial, and typically Australian, distinction between wild and cultivated pastoral, by providing not one, but two pastoral worlds. The world of cattle grazing in peace and contentment in "wide-flung paddocks" – what we normally think of as *the* pastoral world – is here presented as a state of bondage, ruled by the profit-motive and by death. True pastoral resides elsewhere, beyond the fences, up in the wooded ranges where the wild cattle gather around the scattered waterholes with the native animals, equally at home with them in "the old and gentle Australian bush".[34]

If these two pastoral worlds provide gradations of innocence, the city as polar opposite and *locus* of multifaceted experience is also made harder to delineate with the

[33] John Kinsella, "Is there an Australian Pastoral?", in *The Georgia Review*, vol.58 no.2 Summer 2004 (pp.347-368) – p.354.
[34] Ivor Indyk, "Some Versions of Australian Pastoral", in *Southerly*, vol.48 no.2 June 1988 (pp.115-127) – pp.122-123.

development of contemporary suburbia. In this new human environment, experience seems indeed doomed to fade away into bland, non-confronting uniformity. An aphorism read on a bumper sticker, "SUBURBIA: the place where they cut down trees, and name streets after them", unwillingly offers an ironic contrast to a feature of the traditional Australian pastoral mode – the naming and mapping throughout the history of exploration and settlement. Ivor Indyk describes it as the "topographic pastoral": "the primitive magic of naming", "the celebration of a landscape which is settled, cultivated, productive" and "the magic, the sense of conjuring a world into existence through the naming of its features".[35] However, for John Kinsella, the magic has gone – if it ever existed. This topographic pastoral is all about self-interest, from basic survival to an economic or even political discourse of appropriation: "Mapping as a means to pastoralizing land is the subpastoral aesthetic of Australian nationalism. Mapping is control and possession. It is the ordering of the country. The loss of coordinates can mean death in the desert or outback".[36] This risk is real for most of the European settlers, perhaps not so for native Australians who have maintained a deep connection to this peculiar environment. This is one example of why, according to Kinsella, Australian pastoral poetry must be acknowledged as loaded with practical ideology, if not irony:

> [L]ooking at agrarian or rural poetries, there has been a long tradition of appropriating the "purity", the "innocence", and "naivety", to give but a few of the patronising labels given to the "rural", for the cause of revolution or political expediency. In idealisations of bucolic verse, it should of course be realised that all rural poetries post the inception of the city-state are political. All are a recognition of an often more "NATURAL" life, alternative to that of the city.
>
> Of course, within this there are the politics of landscape, that is altering the environment, and the State of Nature, the world as it was before intervention.
> […] Writing the pastoral now, here, one must be ironic, and (consequently) political.
> […] Nothing is consistent, and consistency is what the pastoral has always been about.[37]

Just as "post-Holocaust" poets have tried to disprove Theodor Adorno's comment about writing poetry after Auschwitz being barbarism,[38] one can thus find in the modern or even post-modern sociocultural configuration in Australia a "post-pastoral" genre

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[35] Indyk, "Some Versions of Australian Pastoral" – p.117.
[36] Kinsella, "Is there an Australian Pastoral – p.356.
[37] John Kinsella, "The pastoral, and the political possibilities of poetry", in *Southerly*, vol.56 no.3 Spring 1996 (pp.36-42) – pp.36-37.
[38] As evoked in footnote 1 in Kinsella, "The pastoral, and the political possibilities of poetry" – p.42.

which works as a "reassessment of the idyll",[39] taking into account harsh realities such as land dispossession and destruction of the environment. This "hard pastoral"[40] is one of the many subgenres of contemporary Australian rural prose and verse; critics also use labels such as "poisoned", "corrupted", "counter-" or "anti-" pastorals to describe the works of writers such as Philip Hodgins, John Kinsella, Craig Sherborne, Coral Hull and even Les Murray.[41] These efforts to recognise the wrongs of the past and to atone for them seem to point at a redemption made possible by the reactivation of a pastoral mode apparently highly suited to the rural Australian work *ethos*: Georgic poetry.

Whether one finds it in Hesiod's *Works and Days* or Virgil's *Georgics*, this "part of the science of husbandry put into a pleasing dress, and set off with all the beauties and embellishments of poetry"[42] may in fact be the antidote needed for the misleading idealisations of nostalgia of Arcadian bucolic verse, especially when dealing with the evolution of the Australian rural environment and its landscapes reshaped and sometimes damaged in the name of expedient pragmatism rather than of any transcending God-given mission. In this georgic verse, the jargon of agricultural techniques and machinery is turned into a liturgical chant of devotional toil, and the sweat, the cuts and bruises, the swearing and the sighing of the farmer are so many humbling rites of acceptance of the awe-inspiring power and mystery of the unpredictable Australian environment, as graphically staged in John Kinsella's pastoral trilogy composed of *The Silo*, *The Hunt* and *The New Arcadia*.

* * *

The landscape of the West Australian wheatbelt region north-east of Perth depicted in John Kinsella's poems exists on various planes. First it is an agricultural realm that bears almost no resemblance to the bucolic pastures of traditional pastoral poetry. In "The Farmer Checks His Sheep Two Mornings After The Glad Day", the

[39] Kinsella, "The pastoral, and the political possibilities of poetry" – p.37.
[40] Kane, " 'Woful Shepherds' " – p.277.
[41] Kane, " 'Woful Shepherds' " – p.277.
[42] Joseph Addison, "An Essay of Virgil's *Georgics*, in *Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays*, ed. by Scott Elledge; Cornell University Press, Ithaca; 1961 – quoted in Kane, " 'Woful Shepherds' " – p.281.

modern shepherd has his feet in the mud and questions on his mind while he feeds sheep which are not just immaculate dots on a lush green background:

> Transpires from breakfast
> into the morning – sifting
> drifts of bird call and dankness.
>
> Plants and retrieves
> his boots persistently
> from thick-soiled paddocks
>
> […]
> A spoonbill stalks
> its future with primaeval
> staggers; so, this is Grace?
>
> he wonders cutting
> twine from pulpy bales,
> the sheep congregating
>
> and snorting air
> that is sharp,
> shaking glimmers
>
> of an indolent sun
> from burr-bitten wool,
> hooving the ground.[43]

These living, stomping incarnations of a transplanted aesthetic reading of the landscape cannot, however, suppress the vital dealings of other creatures reigning on various planes of the local land and psyche. For the poet, this region is a miniature world in which various religions and mythologies coexist in a state of permanent tension, amalgamated as they are into a tortured cosmogony that defies elementary notions of innocence and experience. What is to be made, for example, of the recurring interventions of snakes in this rough universe? Rather than the agent of corruption from the biblical tradition, they are to be seen as a benevolent principle of a balanced interaction between humans and the environment that supplies their sustenance. Aboriginal stories of the Dreamtime tell of travelling, swimming snake-gods, creatures such as the Wagyl, the green snake which is "treated by [the Aborigines] as the protector

[43] John Kinsella, "The Farmer Checks His Sheep Two Mornings After The Glad Day", in *The Silo – A Pastoral Symphony*; Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle; - pp.16-17.

of fresh water and many different species of fish they depend on for food".[44] The image of writhing, undulating snakes sculpting the Dreamland into gullies and streams and the memory of the people singing this mythical heritage are present in Kinsella's evocation of a drive on country roads away from Perth in *The New Arcadia*:

> They [Nyungars], we, pertained. To crop
> the hay. *Who* writes in their head
> as they drive, the car the head
> of a dreaming snake, cutting out
> the sluice of the Avon Valley, allowing
> the built-up water to flow away.[45]

Sometimes, it is not even necessary to reinterpret the snake stories. They resurface of their own accord, in a new light and out of some unexpected soil, as John Kinsella demonstrates when remembering set-ups, fibs that children told one another, in "Eels":

> As children, my cousins told me snakes
> were eels arrived via the aqueducts
> of underground streams – that all bodies
> of water are linked, that even we
> are not what we seem and begin
> our lives close at hand
> only to retreat and be dragged
> squirming into the light.[46]

These snakes which excite the imagination in both metaphysical and farcical modes cannot be mistaken for the embodiment of the flaw in the book of Genesis. Instead, when "the sun, fixed/ like a blowtorch directly overhead,/ mark[s] their twisting navigations",[47] their contribution as tools in the forge of Creation is clearly established. The moment when one is "dragged squirming into the light" recalls the *fiat lux* of individual lives and of the whole universe. The chaos of primeval eras is evoked with the same figures of bedazzlement in "Lightning: A Parable":

> a fire had broken out
> and we could just see
> the flame on the edge
> of the world's curve

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[44] Chantelle Corbett, "The Wagyl", as quoted in John Kinsella, "Myths of the Wheatbelt", in *Island*.;
[45] Kinsella, "Reflectors: Drive 1", in *The New Arcadia*; Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle; - p.8.
[46] Kinsella, "Eels", in *The Silo*; p.66.
[47] Idem.

[…]
and I was pushed
into fields of light
to put things right

lightning struck close by
and it shook me…
and lightning struck again.[48]

Even if this pastoral world is marked by what the poet presents as the corrupting application of destructive techniques and mindsets, it is hard to determine if its inhabitants have really gone very far on the path leading from innocence to experience. Christianity and indigenous myths frame their vision of the order of things, but some ancient pagan rites also colour the perception of their environment:

Harry spits blood at his crops on the eve of harvest –
warding off rain, high winds, excessive heat.
Jack takes a look over his shoulder and shoots
a cockatoo, divining weather's
intensity from the cast of its feathers,
Sue and Mary, their neighbours, interpret the stars
[…]
And of course a good few say their prayers
or cross their fingers or practise
strange rituals they've told no one about.[49]

The time for harvest then comes, and its arduous chores may lead to dissatisfaction and a yearning to escape the pastoral vision and let oneself be tempted by sophisticated seduction. One possible Fall from the grace "The Farmer Check[ing] His Sheep" was wondering about is presented in a stormy clash between tradition and modernity, obligations and aspirations and Georgic toil and artistic pursuits in "Wrapping The Hay":

The hay has just been stacked
[…] Dad reckons

We'd better get straight to it. Covering
the stack with blue plastic sheeting
and staking it deep in the ground.

School's just finished and next
year it'll be university in the city.

[48] Kinsella, "Lightning: A Parable", in *The Silo*; p.94.
[49] Kinsella, "Harvest – 1 Prayers And Charms", in *The Silo*; p.38.

Art history. None of this landscape

stuff – give me Jeff Koons
[…]
Lightning highlights the installation
and for a dreadful moment
we seem to be furiously adrift

in the vast ocean of the paddock.
[…] Finally
the hay is wrapped. Christo appears
in my head and I keep him there.[50]

The challenge this "landscape stuff" sometimes poses to urban sensitivities unaccustomed to its singularities is even bigger. In "The Trap", the conceptual gap between Hatfield's sterile pseudo-Arcadian private theme-park and the fertile, vital wilderness of his neighbour's "Cesspit" seems gigantic. But for all the perils lurking in this mirror image of the "wanton growth" of Milton's Eden, in the poem the most destructive impulses fester under the manicured lawns of the hobby farm before exploding into drunken, fiery rage after a minor accident involving Hatfield's children:

he set out to create the
perfect farm […]
He stocked the place with a flock of stud merinos,
setting himself up instantly as a breeder
of note. A few thoroughbred
horses and an artificial lake crowned his State.
[…]
The Cesspit was rife
with bird life […]
and they lamented that
their father's place was green but dead. Even the lake

seemed too blue. The Cesspit's dams were rippled and cragged
and the water a murky brown […].
But the fodder was thick
and diverse, and it was
almost as if the sheep belonged to this bizarre landscape.

he approached
the law who said there was nothing they could do as
it was private property and the kids shouldn't
have been there. Normally a sober man, Hatfield
polished off a bottle
of whiskey late one night,
took a drum of petrol, climbed his state-of-the-art

[50] Kinsella, "Wrapping The Hay", in *The Hunt*; Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle; 1998 – pp.54-55.

fence, and brought fire to the pit of his hatred.[51]

However, fire is not the biggest risk to this environment in Kinsella's poetry. In his counter- or poisoned pastoral, it is the poorly considered application of Western agrarian techniques which contributes to the destruction of the wheatbelt's remaining unique character. In various poems describing how the European ways of the Georgic traditions affect this part of Western Australia, the blame seems equally cast on the tools and plans of the settlers and their descendants as well as on their fundamentally predatory nature.

In this universe disfigured by machinery, innocence seems to have disappeared for good, and with it the immortal perfection of the inhabitants of a hypothetical original garden. Tales of violent human deaths abound in Kinsella's rural poems, often by drowning, either in streams ("The Disappearing" in *The Hunt*), quicksands ("The Sinking Sand" in *The Silo*) or in wheatbins or silos ("Drowning in Wheat" and "The Fruits of the Auger" in *The Hunt*). In most cases though, it is the mechanical manifestation of a postlapsarian constant dissatisfaction and of a quest to force one's views upon natural processes that lead the Georgic enthusiast to his undoing. The catastrophe often follows a hubristic moment such as the one conveyed in "The Machine of the Twentieth Century Rolls Through the High-Yielding Crop":

> […] over the crop
>
> the machine of the twentieth century poises – straining
> against dry dock, a Titanic that won't be sunk in those deepest
> spots of abundance […]
>
> […] The art of harvesting is in the hiding
> of the operation. Behind clean lines and sun-deflecting paint
> the guts of the machine work furiously; from point of entry
> to expulsion the process is relentless.[52]

From the gleaming hull to the oily entrails of this harvesting juggernaut, one finds the same proclamation of technological mastery over Nature that was vividly rendered in scenes of James Cameron's *Titanic*, with computerised fly-around shots of the R.M.S.

[51] Kinsella, "The Trap", in *The Hunt*; pp.68-71.
[52] Kinsella, "The Machine of the Twentieth Century Rolls Through the High-Yielding Crop", in *The Hunt*; p.85.

Titanic and mostly in the digital recreations of the ship's gigantic engine room and its tiny, blackened human operators. In the wheatbelt, the tragic end to this unbounded demiurgic ambition is the loss of natural and spiritual riches as well as the occasional, unwilling sacrifice of human lives to this self-propelled and sometimes self-governed version of the golden calf, as in "The Rearing Tractor":

> It was as if the wild
> had got hold of it […]
> and as it reared
> those around got
> caught up
> […]
> watching on
> as if it were
> the thing to do
> as he lay crushed
> beneath its cumbersome
> bulk, the wheels
> still turning.[53]

In other cases, the punishment for cases of Georgic hubris affects both the farmer and the environment he has abused in a pyrrhic, ironic revenge of Nature over Man after he refuses to acknowledge his share of "guilt" in the destruction of a peculiar Arcadia that was not his ("Look, this / is the country someone else stole / but we make good use of"),[54] as in "Why They Stripped The Last Trees From The Banks Of The Creek":

> […] The old man
> couldn't stand the thought
> of bare paddocks with a creek
> covered by trees slap bang
> in the middle of them.
> A kind of guilt I guess.
> […]
> We cleared
> those banks until the water
> ran a stale sort of red.
> Until salt crept into
> the surrounding soaks.
> Furious he was – the salt
> left lines on the bath,
> the soap wouldn't lather.[55]

[53] Kinsella, "The Rearing Tractor", in *The Hunt*; p.80.
[54] Kinsella, "Reflectors: Drive 1", in *The New Arcadia*; p.9.
[55] Kinsella, "Why They Stripped The Last Trees From The Banks Of The Creek", in *The Silo*; p.67.

Beyond immediate utilitarianism, it seems that the root of this environmental evil lies in the ambivalent, fractured psyche of the local equal-opportunity haters and destroyers, "The Shitheads Of Spray":

> […] haters of weeds,
> haters of any more words
> than needed: say it straight,
> vandals, poofter-bashers, migrant-baiters,
> dead gum lovers, parrot killers,
> worshippers of spray-drenched fruit
> that smiles without blight,
> descendants of those who murdered
> Yagan and chopped his head off,
> sending it to Britain, Queen lovers
> but haters of queens, lizard mockers,
> snake beaters, makers of neat gardens.
> There's no getting away from them.[56]

The mention of the killing of a famous Aboriginal rebel leader reveals that the guilt and the harsh lessons of experience which generations after generations of farmers wrestle with in their agrarian practices is indisputably linked with tragic episodes of the history of the white people's dealings with the indigenous populations in this region – the secret history of the wheatbelt exposed by John Kinsella, and its hints and clues found beyond the traditional figures of the Georgic pastoral. There is no original blamelessness or innocence in this chronicle, merely shades of guilt or degrees of corruption on this map of violent dispossession:

> Old families: 'settler' and Nyungar,
> are spoken of with reverence or hatred.
> There seems to be no indifference,
>
> at least behind close doors
> everyone has an opinion.
> Nyungars remember the names
>
> of the whites who didn't murder
> as much as those who did. White
> families are mostly proud
>
> of 'treating them right'
> and take pride in the production
> of footballers. Nyungar people
>
> take pride as well,

[56] Kinsella, "The Shitheads Of Spray", in *The New Arcadia*; p.114.

> but for different reasons,
> also, and at least.[57]

At this present stage of Australian history, and more precisely of the advancement of Western Australia, one can conjecture that symbolic gestures and concrete initiatives of reconciliation may have a real impact on future social and environmental designs aiming at overcoming lingering feelings of innocence corrupted and of the tainted experience acquired on the merciless path towards maturity. But before the ideal solution is found, accepted and applied, John Kinsella shows his readers two ways of confronting material markers of this puzzling past; first, "The Anthropologist" and his fieldwork:

> Because he'd drink with the locals
> And would have a go at chucking a spear
> He thought it okay to take a few relics
> Back to the city. After all, most of them
> Were found objects […]
> […] It wasn't as if
> They were mere souvenirs, each had
> A special sentimental value. Though
> Where he'd store his private collection
> […] he wasn't so sure.[58]

Even under the guise of better understanding the indigenous cultures, it appears difficult to justify what looks like unapologetic looting on the fringes of a sanctioned research, an offence made even worse by the fact that these relics seem destined to undergo a kind of spiritual devitalisation by being turned into fodder for more bureaucratic academia.

This downgrade to an entry in a catalogue and storage allotment on a shelf or in a drawer might still be preferred to the Philistine assault on artefacts taking place in "Relics – 2 Rock Paintings", an attempt at *tabula rasa* and at well-meaning oblivion against unvoiced ancient claims of territorial legitimacy:

> Slim went straight up there as soon
> As he heard and took to them with a hammer.
> By the time we got up there he'd obliterated
> All trace of them. And even then he said
> He'd a good mind to set a stick of gelignite

[57] Kinsella, "Surface Histories: A Town In The Wheatbelt", in *The New Arcadia*; pp.191-2.
[58] Kinsella, "Relics – 1 The Anthropologist", in *The Hunt*; p.41.

And blow the whole lot to kingdom come.
[…]
The boys needled him a bit at the pub
About skeletons in the closet but he'd
Got his sense of humour back and took
It pretty well. When a black guy came in
To get a take-away Slim put his arm around
His shoulder and treated him like some
Long lost friend.[59]

As insincere as it may look, the guilt-stricken demonstration of friendship at the end of the poem may well be a laudable if clumsy effort towards a new sense of experience, a somewhat meandering drive made of false starts and of resolute pushes towards reconciled geographical and spiritual identities in the wheatbelt. The ups and downs as well as the protracted achievements of Western Australia at large, examined as a socio-cultural entity, arguably constitute a fairly relevant test-case for the validation of the dynamic dichotomy between innocence and experience, in its less than two centuries of colonial history and in the literary construction of its particular identity.

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II.4. A Short History of Western Australian Innocence and Experience – Part 1

Successive generations of historians—including J.S. Battye, Geoffrey Bolton, Sir Hal Colebatch, Frank Crowley, Jenny Gregory, Philip Knightley, Bobbie Oliver, Tom Stannage and Frank Welsh—have consolidated a portrait of Western Australia's development which provides a factual, social and historical context[60] for a study of the

[59] Kinsella, "Relics – 2 Rock Paintings", in *The Hunt*, pp.41-2.

[60] See BATTYE, J. S., *History of Western Australia*; Clarendon Press, Oxford; 1924; BOLTON, Geoffrey, *Land of vision and mirage: Western Australia since 1826*; UWA Press, Crawley, W.A.; 2008; COLEBATCH, Hal Sir, *A Story of a hundred years: Western Australia, 1829-1929*; Govt. Pr, Perth; 1929; CROWLEY, F., *Australia's Western Third*; MacMillan and Co Ltd, London; 1960; GREGORY, Jenny, and GOTHARD, Jan (eds.), *Historical Encyclopedia of Western Australia*; University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, WA; 2009; KNIGHTLEY, Philip, *Australia: a biography of a nation*; Jonathan Cape, London; 2000; OLIVER, Bobbie, *War and Peace in Western Australia: the Social and Political Impact of the Great War, 1914- 1926*; University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, W.A.; 1995; STANNAGE, Charles Thomas (ed.), *A New History of Western Australia*; University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, W.A.; 1981; WELSH, Frank, *Great Southern Land – A New History of Australia*; Overlook Press, Woodstock, NY; 2006 – All dates, figures and other historical elements mentioned in the present study have been taken from these works.

dichotomy opposing innocence and experience in this part of the country. The same opposition is at play in some of Robert Drewe's and Tim Winton's stories dealing with certain episodes of local history, whether it shapes a peculiar vision of the 1890s gold fever in Drewe's *The Drowner* or the tensions between post-war economic improvement in Winton's *Cloudstreet* or early 21st century compulsive materialism in *Dirt Music* and the quest of Winton's protagonists for the communal and the spiritual. However, even before one may attempt to analyse the creative filters these two authors have applied to factual historical accounts, the first challenge in this overview of Western Australia's history is to balance the colonial chronicle of the past 200 years with the potent regional myths, whether local or imported. In the latter category, one finds the notions and references attached to the epithet 'Cinderella State' often used to describe a certain mindset of Western Australians towards the other colonies around the continent, "both a defence mechanism and a statement of pride" according to Ted Snell who further highlights the familiar polarities of the fairytale reference: "Cinderella as both the disconsolate wretch sitting in the ashes while her relatives attend the ball and also as the young girl whose noble qualities are finally recognized by elevation to the highest position in the land".[61] This sense of protracted development can be explained through spatial and temporal constraints, as explained by Geoffrey Bolton, Richard Rossiter and Jan Ryan in their introduction to *Farewell Cinderella*:

> Western Australia was not annexed until 1826, forty years after the rest of Australia, and it did not enjoy its gold rush boom until the 1890s, also forty years after the rest of the continent. The timeline of Western Australia's development has never been quite in synchronisation with the eastern states, Geography reinforces the sense of isolation. The Nullarbor Plain and the Great Sandy Desert are more than psychological barriers.[62]

As a defining trait of myths and legends, this delayed or slowed-down history is easily superseded by the timelessness of the Aboriginal stories of the Dreamtime which describe the native communion with the land in a permanent, fixed *now* shaped by ancient supernatural occurrences. In fact, for some of the first explorers sailing along the west coast, the region seemed to exhibit both post-historical dereliction and primitive

[61] Ted Snell, *Cinderella on the Beach*; University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA; 1991 – pp.13,14.
[62] Geoffrey Bolton, Richard Rossiter and Jan Ryan (eds.), *Farewell Cinderella*; University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, WA; 2003 – p.3.

emptiness: whereas the stone columns of the Pinnacles Desert (about 200 kilometres north of the Swan River estuary) had been mistaken for architectural remnants of a long-disappeared civilisation when seen from the sea, the encounters with local populations did not make such a grand impression on Europeans. Their descriptions would restrict the Aborigines to the lowest ranking in the general hierarchical theory of the human races developed by nineteenth-century advocates of colonisation and its civilising mission, with early statements such as William Dampier's: "The Inhabitants of this Country are the miserablest People in the World. (…) And setting aside their Humane Shape, they differ but little from Brutes".[63] Such appraisal was formulated in the wake of Hobbes' grim vision of primeval mankind and before the Rousseauistic revolution: the innocence of these exotic tribes had little in common with Arcadian virtues in this "dry, rocky and barren"[64] remote land.

Other stories interfere with a reading of Western Australian history as a movement from innocence to experience. The one most likely to disrupt standard arguments of internal, entropic corruptions leading to the Fall is the account of barbarity brought on the western shore on board the *Batavia* in 1629, precisely two centuries before the official proclamation of the Swan River Colony. After the Dutch merchant ship was wrecked in a group of islands off the central coast, 125 of the passengers were massacred after a mutiny.[65] The systematic killings may be explained by a desperate attempt to keep the coup secret from outside rescuers, or as a ruthless vital-resources management system; but the sheer cruelty reported by the survivors makes one wonder if the mutineers saw their strange surroundings as a space beyond outer – and inner – limits of the collective experience of Western civilisation. However this Dutch tragedy was at best no more than a half-forgotten memory when the HMS *Success* rounded Cape Leeuwin and took Captain James Stirling to the Swan River in 1827.

The landing of 75 soldiers and convicts in King George Sound on Christmas Day 1826 had been a first move to claim the western half of the continent as British before the

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[63] William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World*; 1697; quoted edition: Adam & Charles Black, London; 1937 – p.312.
[64] Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World*; p.312.
[65] Detailed in, among other works, J. S. Battye, *History of Western Australia*; Oxford, Clarendon Press; 1924 – pp.29-34; and in Dennis Hancock, *The Westerners – The Making of Western Australia*; Bay Books, Sydney; 1979 – pp.16-17.

French could launch a concerted operation of settlement. However, no detailed plan had been established to conquer a territory "more than ten times as large as the British Isles".[66] It was left to individual schemes such as James Stirling's; from collected data and maps, he intuited that the Swan river region might be the best place to start colonising the west coast, and in March 1827 he led a reconnaissance expedition for which he enlisted the services of Charles Fraser, the New South Wales government botanist. Beside their combined scientific knowledge and practical acumen, it seems that Stirling and Fraser were also bringing contemporary European preconceptions of innocent Nature to this surveying endeavour:

> At the time of Stirling's examination of Swan River, Nature had been endowed with the mystical properties of purity, joy, and solitude, which found their expression in the writings of poets like William Wordsworth and in paintings by Constable and Turner. Tastes had become stylized. Emphasis was given to variety of relief, vegetation, light and colour. Still water, with its subtle changes of light and shade, became a focal point for interest. Of all places on the western coast of Australia it was the Swan River which most met these criteria. Its large expanse of enclosed water, an undulating relief of high, reddish cliffs and broad alluvial flats, and its varied vegetative cover […] were cast in the romantic mould. And beauty and fertility were synonymous.[67]

Consistent good luck may also have played a part in Stirling's and Fraser's amazement at the succession of sites they discovered. Gentle early-autumn climate, uneventful navigation through patches of treacherous shallows and an abundance of winged game probably concurred with Stirling's enthusiasm in his description of his base camp:

> Here then on a high bank we pitched our Tent; the richness of the Soil, the bright foliage of the Shrubs, the majesty of the surrounding Trees, the abrupt and red coloured banks of the River occasionally seen, and the view of the blue summits of the Mountains, from which we were not far distant, made the scenery around this Spot as beautiful as anything of the kind I ever witnessed.[68]

Even in his role of the measured man of science in the exploring party, Charles Fraser's appraisal of the region's opportunities for settlement matched the high spirits of Stirling's writing, and he would thus conclude his technical report:

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[66] F. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*; London, MacMillan and Co Ltd; 1960 – p.5.
[67] J. M. R. Cameron, *Ambition's Fire – The Agricultural Colonization of Pre-Convict Western Australia*; University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands; 1981 – pp.19-20.
[68] James Stirling, "Enclosures 1 and 2, Stirling to Darling, 18 April 1827", in *Historical Records of Australia*, III, vi; as quoted in Cameron, *Ambition's Fire*, p.31.

> In delivering my opinion on the whole of the lands seen on the banks of the Swan, I hesitate not in pronouncing it superior to any I have seen in New South Wales eastward of the Blue Mountains, not only in its local situation, but in many existing advantages which it holds out to settlers […].
> Such, indeed, were the attractions of the country that we all felt sorry on leaving it.[69]

Only a fortnight had passed since they had first sighted this remote paradise, but they had to sail back to Sydney to let the whole British Empire know about the bounties of the Swan River region – a striking vision at the core of the enduring cyclical narrative of innocence and experience frequently associated with Western Australia's sense of identity.

However, for the first few years of the Swan River colony, this Edenic vision seemed to be nothing more than a heat mirage among the coastal sand plains. It would take some time and much hard labour before settlers stopped disparaging Stirling's observations, as exemplified in the tone and choice of words in a letter by Eliza Shaw, exploring the Perth region in 1830: "That man who reported this land to be good deserves hanging nine times over… each side of the river is nothing more or less than sand – white sand – incapable of being made to produce anything for the sustenance of man!".[70] This sterile sand became the prime material for the sand-groper theme and imagery with the famous wisecrack: "Western Australia? The finest land ever seen to run through an hour-glass". Later, some colonists corrected this negative image of the place. George Fletcher Moore thus wrote in his *Diary of Ten Years*: "The soil there is loam resting upon a stratum of easily worked limestone, and possessing a fertility almost exceeding belief, with abundant nature near the surface".[71] To accomplish the daunting task of making this land able to support a slowly expanding population, a dedicated kind of pioneer was in demand and indeed made it to the remote settlement. Nathaniel Ogle thus celebrated in 1839 this elite group of free-settlers happy to try their luck without the logistical support of convict labour, Western Australian authorities having initially rejected plans for transportation to the west coast:

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[69] Charles Fraser, 'Observation on the soil, &c., of Swan River', as quoted in Battye, *History of Western Australia*, p.66 and in George Seddon, *Sense of Place*; University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands; 1972 – p.183.
[70] Dennis Hancock, *The Westerners*, p.58.
[71] George Fletcher Moore, *Diary of Ten Years – Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia*; London, M. Walbrook; 1884 - p.150.

> In point of society, the settlement of Western Australia stands pre-eminent. The higher order consists of families well born and well educated, and many of them rank in the army and navy. The elegancies of life are sedulously cultivated by them, and constitute a distinguished feature in their intercourse.[72]

This description that conjures a fusion of Georgian and Georgic ideals may have been on the hyperbolic side as part of an effort to pursue the promotion of the colony as a desirable destination, but there seems to be some demographic truth in this portrait of lofty Arcadians or contemporaries of a reenacted Golden Age, according to a recent study:

> Since [Ogle] the notion that the Swan River colonists were English gentlemen, readily distinguishable from the convict settlers of New South Wales and Tasmania [….], has often been repeated. There is a grain of truth in the suggestion but it requires qualification.
>
> Some of the early settlers did indeed come from the lower reaches of the minor gentry but they were mostly younger sons of younger sons […]. Others were from the respectable middling classes, both commercial and agrarian. Men and women of similar background were to be found in all the colonies but the proportion of them in relation to the population as a whole was perhaps higher in the west.[73]

For all the niceties of this small, organised *polis*, the situation of the Swan River colony seemed in fact to be mostly read in biblical terms, whether as a Garden of Eden where the settlers had been put "to till it and care for it"[74] or as the land of new beginnings for a chosen people, as Nathaniel Ogle identified it when he was describing the colonists' arduous husbandry of the land – an endless task reminiscent of the first couple's taming of Nature's "wanton Growth" in Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

> a promised land,–not… a land of idleness, but of uniform labour; not… a place of varied and continuous bustle and excitement, but where the peaceful occupation of the shepherd, the herdsman, and the tiller of the soil, consume the year;–where the vanities of life have no stage for display.[75]

The immediate result of all these efforts would sometimes support a vision of a gentle English countryside transplanted in the southern hemisphere, an imagery of displaced

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[72] Nathaniel Ogle, *The Colony of Western Australia*; London, James Fraser; 1839 – p.83.
[73] Brian De Garis, "Settling on the Sand: the Colonisation of Western Australia", in *European Impact on the West Australian Environment 1829-1979*; University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands; 1979 – pp.11-12.
[74] Genesis 2, 15.
[75] Nathaniel Ogle, *The Colony of Western Australia*; London, James Fraser; 1839 – p.44.

Arcadia also made popular in poetical works of that period. Marianne North thus recounted some of her impressions of the colony:

> The country was more English-looking in that remote part of Western Australia than anywhere else that I had been to on the vast island. We went for a drive through cornfields and meadows with noble red gums isolated like the old oaks at home, with hedges and numerous gates which had to be opened and shut in the same tiresome way as at home.[76]

The soil of the paradoxical Garden of Eden that was the Swan River settlement may not have been as immediately fertile as expected, but the new inhabitants of the land could nonetheless take to heart the first half of God's command in Genesis 2,16 ("You may eat from every tree in the garden"), gorging on the abundant wildlife as they did:

> The early explorers and settlers were, often of necessity, voracious and seem to have eaten almost everything, though they did not perhaps equal the Tasmanian settlers who literally tried their palates on every creature that walked, jumped, flew or crawled.[77]

In April and May 1829, while Captain Fremantle was preparing the arrival of the first settlers led by James Stirling, he compiled a list of local bird species as well as fish and sea mammals, some of them becoming almost extinct in a matter of weeks. After his crew spent some time on Garden Island south of the Swan River estuary, he wrote: "The Seals have nearly disappeared, the men having attacked them so violently".[78] Other notations in his diaries point to a constant amazement at the natural profusion in the area, with mentions of "an immense number of fish called Snappers" and "quantities of sharks, some large; (…) most numerous and voracious, which renders it very disagreeable, as to bathe even from the beach is hazardous".[79] This hunting and fishing had gone beyond the carefree fruit-plucking that would have sustained Adam and Eve before the Fall, and not-so-innocent Nature was apparently bent on occasional retaliation. The supposed original innocence of the place may even be analyzed in secular terms, with a natural environment not so much animated with evil intentions as merely mindlessly hostile to the settlers

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[76] J. A. Symonds (ed.), *Recollections of a Happy Life: Being the Autobiography of Marianne North*; London, MacMillan; 1893 – Vol.2, p.158.
[77] Peter Cowan, "Diaries, Letters, Journals", p.4; in Bruce Bennett (ed.), *The Literature of Western Australia*; University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands; 1979.
[78] Lord Cottesloe (ed.), *Diary and Letters of Admiral Sir C. H. Fremantle*; London, 1928; as quoted in *The Literature of Western Australia*, p.4.
[79] *The Literature of Western Australia*, p.4.

whose collective enterprise still amounts to a geographically discontinued human experience. In *An Australian Parsonage*, Mrs Edward Millett maps the colony using images of isolated communities such as presented by Hobbes and Rousseau, of the rusticity and cultural frugality of ancient Arcadians, and even of sclerosis similar to the fate of the Lotos-Eaters:

> One of the peculiarities which has militated against the onward progress of Western Australia is the scattered character of its various settled districts, caused by the large intervals of sterile or dangerous country by which the tracts of good land are frequently separated from one another. By the word 'dangerous,' I mean those parts of the country on which the poisonous plants, which have proved so severe a drawback to the prosperity of the colony, exist in such profusion as to render the land unsafe to sheep or castle.
> […] This wide separation of most of the settled districts from one another has been the source of many disadvantages. It has led to a cramped and narrow manner of regarding the general interests of the colony, since each settlement has naturally fallen into the habit of looking at its own interests and its own wishes in the first place, without much reflection as to the general welfare of the whole country… The inhabitants are all employed in the same pursuits, chiefly agricultural farming combined with sheep and cattle breeding, and have therefore similar interests and similar desire (…).The stationary habits involved in these obstacles to locomotion naturally impart a great sameness to life in Western Australia, and furnish little to relate concerning it that is either of exciting interest, or that partakes of the character of adventure. One day is an exact counterpart of the other, with no variety but a change of occupations in accordance with the different seasons of the year.[80]

The settlers had seemingly embraced the work ethic of Georgic poetry, but soon labour meted out as punishment (Genesis 3:19: "You shall gain your bread by the sweat of your brow") would enter the picture as a signifier of loss of innocence and of potential corruption.

In the late 1820s, Captain Stirling's stipulations regarding the Swan River settlement were unambiguous on the question of transportation: the newly-found west coast paradise would be exempt from the convict contamination. Nathaniel Ogle reiterated this principle in 1839: "No polluting example derived from convict servitude or society, exists; for no convict can be transported thither. Western Australia can never be made a penal settlement".[81] During the 1830s, the rule of the free settler was a badge of

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[80] Mrs Edward Millett, *An Australian Parsonage or, the Settler and the Savage in Western Australia*; Edward Stanford, London; 1872 – pp.107, 110-112.
[81] Nathaniel Ogle quoted in Aveling, Marian (ed.), *Westralian Voices – Documents in Western Australian Social History*; UWA Press for the Education Committee of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations, Nedlands; 1979.

honour proudly worn while answering criticism and mockery from the eastern colonies, as demonstrated by this extract from an 1836 edition of the *Swan River Guardian*, in which biblical terminology reinforces the "us and them" dichotomy of blamelessness and corruption:

> Convicts having passed through purgatory, are now the richest people of New South Wales, but such a state of society we deprecate. 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his spots.' If such a miracle is ever accomplished then the man that has been bred up in every wickedness will, after his punishment has expired, be quite pure and undefiled, and become a virtuous, honest and respectable member of society. […] Unassisted by any Government support we have attempted to form a FREE British Settlement on this Coast in the year 1829, and the Settlement by the noble exertions of Englishmen, Scotchmen and Irishmen, has risen to eminence and takes her station confidently amongst the Colonies of Great Britain. We want no Convicts here, nor the contamination of their society in any shape.[82]

However, it looks like the snake was already in the garden, tempting the settlers with that abhorred legal disposition. First, there had been a prior temporary convict establishment in King George Sound on Western Australia's southern coast from 1826 to 1830 with detainees brought from New South Wales. Then, after isolated, unsuccessful requests for small groups of political prisoners and even Indian convicts, the first of about 250 "Parkhurst apprentices" were transported to Western Australia in 1842: they were juvenile prisoners "not above 15 years of age" who had been "educated and reformed" in Parkhurst Prison in England.

Before this unacknowledged transportation ended in 1849, the debate in favour of convictism had gathered momentum in the Swan River colony; in 1845, the Legislative Council of the colony still managed to reject a pro-transportation petition submitted by the pastoralists of the York Agricultural Society, but its resistance was later circumvented. In 1848, the British Colonial Office finally granted Western Australia the statute of a penal settlement and this decision was validated by the Swan River colonists in 1849. The first group of convicts arrived in Fremantle Harbour on the *Scindian* in June 1, 1850.

This date may mark a constitutional turning-point in the history of the colony, but the 21 years that had preceded it and the following two decades (punctuated by the end of

[82] *Swan River Guardian*, no.6, Thursday, November 10th, 1836 – p.22 of collected microform edition, accessed at the Scholar's Centre; UWA Reid Library.

the transportation in 1868 and the persistence of convict labour at least until the 1876 escape of the Fenian convicts aboard the *Catalpa*) can be seen globally as a perfect example of what appears to be an unmistakable characteristic of Western Australia's history: an iteration of a complete cycle, with its initial innocence later superseded by a Fall into harsh, pragmatic experience. This later part of the cycle would come to a close when the opportunities offered by this coastland of plenty would once again be put to use towards significant entrepreneurial and social achievements and the ascent of a new, improved local Age of Innocence.

Even within the lapsarian phase of this cycle, it might be hard to completely lose sight of Western Australia's mythical image of innocence, the convict era being a case in point. Indeed, as had been insisted upon by the colonists, the men transported to Western Australia had to be from "a better class of convicts" and the British authorities initially followed suit, before resorting to sending a less distinguished crowd:

> The best-disposed prisoners in the English jails were selected to make up the first shiploads sent to the colony. As time passed on a much worse class of criminals composed the cargoes, so that to have "come out" in one of the first ships was a point on which a man might deservedly pride himself.[83]

These not-so wretched souls seemed to be further rehabilitated by the inner spirit of Western Australia's *locus amoenus*, and most of them would enjoy the cleansing virtues of work in the open air of the colony's streets, roads and fields. There may have been another explanation for the apparently lax supervision of convict groups outside the walls of Fremantle's Convict Establishment. The innocent, benevolent land was in fact the most merciless warden one could entrust these prisoners to:

> Its geographical disadvantages assumed a different character, for the havenless shore and impassable woods which had excluded trade, superseded in great measure the necessity of building prison walls. In fact, viewed simply as a jail, the colony appeared as if Nature had intended it for no other purpose.[84]

The conciliatory vision of carefree convicts still has some currency, with the 1860s described by Dennis Hancock in 1979 as "for its time, a model of enlightenment, with humane administration on the one hand, matched by grateful good behaviour on the

[83] Millett, *An Australian Parsonage*; p.329.
[84] Millett, *An Australian Parsonage*; p.327.

other".[85] But another work published the same year radically alters this portrayal and shows how it may have originated in the larger picture of good-natured Western Australianness:

> One somehow gained the impression, for instance, that the Western Australian convicts, brought in by request in 1850, were altogether a better class of convict, and that they were treated with that friendliness for which the West is so well known.
> […] Such a view was general in Perth. The reality was far different, The triangles in Fremantle Goal were much in use, dripping with blood as thousands of lashes were inflicted, while 'people outside the walls ran from the fearful and unearthly screams'.[86]

If such harsh treatment was generalized, it may be explained by the fear of moral contamination evoked earlier: the corruption can be contained, perhaps even reversed in those it has taken in its grip, but it remains a mortal threat and must be unflinchingly kept in check. This is especially true in the wilderness, away from the society of pious men:

> Good as the West Australian system of transportation has proved itself to be in the towns, where the warders can find companionship in their own class of society, it fails in the bush in this respect. No warder ought to be exposed to even the *possibility* of being compelled to seek his sole acquaintanceships or friendships in the criminal class; he ought always to have, at least, one man, untainted by crime like himself, to speak and to associate with. It is too much to expect of human nature to ask a man to live alone month after month, without anyone of his own class near him.[87]

One thing seems certain about the convicts' arrival in Western Australia: their condition would supply material for narratives of innocence and experience beyond the restricted scope of the virtuous settlers' diaries and letters or the gazetteers' righteous campaigns which had constituted most of the home-grown literature available. The birth of the West Australian novel is indeed officially dated 1879 – and directly linked with this episode of the local history. Carrying this mantle is John Boyle O'Reilly's *Moondyne Joe – A Story from the Underworld*, an ambiguous amalgamation of the author's personal experience as a political prisoner defending the Irish Fenian cause and as an escapee after his transportation to Western Australia, and also of the true story of Western Australia's iconic bushranger and escape-artist extraordinaire Hector Bolitho Jones ("Moondyne Joe") and his numerous runs-in with the local judicial institutions between 1853 and

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[85] Dennis Hancock, *The Westerners*; p.86.
[86] George Seddon, "Western Australia: Some Changing Perceptions", in *European Impact on the West Australian Environment 1829-1979*; University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands; 1979 – pp.176-7.
[87] Millett, *An Australian Parsonage*; p.31.

1873. In this dark picaresque tale, the figure of Moondyne Joe is a politically-conscious reworking of *Great Expectations'* Magwitch and the Western Australian scenery fulfills only a generic role. As a critic puts it:

> Although deriving from [O'Reilly's] experiences in Western Australia, *Moondyne* is essentially a fictionalized embodiment of the aspirations of the Boston Fenians […]. *Moondyne*, although amalgamating a diversity of historical information, cannot be read as a documentary […]. *Moondyne* is a symbolic melodrama rather than a documentary, and O'Reilly's didactic fantasies make it impossible to discover in it any representative paradigm of Western Australian society.[88]

The documentary value of *Moondyne* regarding the convict period of the colony's history is indeed questionable if one considers the seemingly negligible impact this period has had on the development of the Western settlement. One notable consequence of this "unwilling emigration", as Alexandra Hasluck calls it, is the shift in local demographics: of the total 24,000 inhabitants of Western Australia in 1868, 40% were convicts. After the arrival of the last convict ship, the *Hougoumont*, that same year, convicts completed their terms in their entirety or were granted early pardons to settle as free men wherever they could in a slow process of complete assimilation in colonial society. Their renewed energy would not however compensate for the loss of financial support from the British government, some funding previously guaranteed under the transportation scheme. As Mrs Millett put it in *An Australian Parsonage*, the colony was "left to fight her battle alone".[89]

The two decades that followed remain open to contrasting interpretations in the innocence-experience dichotomy. The slow, careful progress[90] of the settlement between 1870 and 1890 may be read as a post-experience recovery period during which the stigma of transportation was progressively washed away. Some freed convicts left Western Australia, much to the chagrin of the other colonial territories reluctantly welcoming them. Some others stayed and joined the rest of the settlers' population in cleared areas still dwarfed by an immense inland dominion. This vastness that had resisted previous exploring attempts lay there as a challenge for a new generation of pioneers ready to rekindle the spirit of Stirling's exploration up the Swan River in 1827. Here, there seems

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[88] John Hay, "Literature and Society", in C. T. Stannage (ed.), *A New History of Western Australia*; p.610.
[89] Millett, *An Australian Parsonage*; p.393.
[90] Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, p.59.

to be a return to the guilt-free phase at the beginning of a new cycle, with new "virgin" lands to explore—and conquer. There might be new "first contacts" with unknown native tribes, but the interaction would be a lot more pragmatic, perhaps more cynical, the second time around. These territories and their inhabitants would be subdued to allow for an even greater fulfillment of the colony's destiny.

One dominant figure is undeniably attached to this chapter of Western Australia's history (and to later, more significant episodes): John Forrest. Born in 1847 and raised in the southwest near Picton, he and his brothers enjoyed the idyllic childhood of country boys kept safe from the failings of civilized society:

> As the Forrest boys grew up they were taught to help with the household chores and the multitude of little jobs that formed the inescapable daily round on a self-contained family farm. […] There was always plenty to interest the boys. If they were not needed around the house, or out in the paddocks, they played their own boisterous brand of cricket with home-made bats and balls, or went out bird-nesting. Occasionally, as a special treat, they were allowed to join the men on a 'roo hunt. Around the homestead were apple, fig, and mulberry trees which flourished remarkably well in their new environment and provided great feasts for the boys.[91]

After four years in Bishop Hale's School in Perth where his settler's core beliefs were reinforced ("they were taught that (…) European civilization and free enterprise capitalism were harnessed together by God for the advancement of Christianity, the welfare of the British empire, and the progress of the Australian colonies"),[92] John Forrest was apprenticed and later qualified as a land surveyor working for the government. With these specific skills, he was well qualified to lead three major expeditions between 1869 and 1874; his brother Alexander joined him twice as second-in-command. On the first expedition in 1869, beside his search for "clues to the fate of the long-lost [1848] Leichhardt expedition",[93] Forrest seemed equally driven by pragmatic considerations and by semi-mythical visions when he was trying to make sense of the land he was crossing—and of its inhabitants' attitudes and value systems, as Crowley reports in *Forrest 1847-91*:

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[91] F. K. Crowley, *Forrest 1847-1918 – Volume I, 1847-91 – Apprenticeship to Premiership*; University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Queensland; 1971 – p.10.
[92] Crowley, *Forrest 1847-91*; p.19.
[93] Crowley, *Forrest 1847-91*; p.28.

> The natives made good trackers and hunters, but were unreliable for almost anything else. "Good country", to them, meant a small water-hole in a spinifex desert, used by a few kangaroos, emus, and possums. The natives needed little water, because they never washed themselves or used water for cooking, and they rarely had any pets who needed it, except dogs. The country through which the expedition had passed was mainly a worthless desert, useless for agricultural or pastoral purposes, though Forrest thought that it would be worthwhile sending geologists to examine it thoroughly.
> […] [H]e was disappointed that he had made no great discovery of an inland Garden of Eden, or of an inland river system, or even of useful pastoral lands.[94]

After months on end in the remotest parts of the colony and patient devotion to the demands of his successive postings, Forrest's dual appointment to the position of Surveyor-General and to the Executive Council of Western Australia in January 1883 was presented as something of a messianic revolution. In the words of a local newspaper, the Australian-born son of a servant seemed to have walked through the desert to take his seat of power and help steer the colony towards maturity:

> In olden times the scoffing Pharisees once asked, "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" Western Australia has too long been regarded as the Nazareth of the Australian colonies, and, in selecting persons to form our Executive the Imperial Government has hitherto deliberately refused to recognise the fitness of any native-born colonist to occupy the chief seats in our Government. […] [T]he time cannot be far distant when we shall be allowed to enjoy the privilege of ruling ourselves, as are the other Australian colonies.[95]

The time was indeed not too distant: seven years later, in October 1890, Western Australia was granted responsible government and became an autonomously ruled colony on a par with its eastern counterparts; and in December of the same year, Governor Robinson asked John Forrest to form the first ministry of Western Australia. As inaugural Premier of the western colony, Forrest undertook the task of advancing a new age of experience. In the past few years, the quest for paradise had turned to a search for a new El Dorado, in which adventurers hoped to emulate the great gold rushes in North America and the discoveries in the eastern colonies. Goldfields were discovered and proclaimed in the Kimberley, Yilgarn and Pilbara regions; the fever that for a time ran through these areas can however hardly be compared to the socioeconomic and political manic transformation started after the lucky strikes in Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie in the early 1890s.

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[94] Crowley, *Forrest 1847-91*; p.35-6.
[95] *The Inquirer* (Perth), 17 January 1883; as quoted in Crowley, *Forrest 1847-91*; p.126-7.

As for many other gold rushes of that period, the accounts of the first nuggets found lying on the ground have become the stuff of legends, with the celebrated sites of Coolgardie's Fly Flat area and Hannan's Hill in Kalgoorlie. This started a massive influx of adventurers and prospectors, many of them coming from the eastern states. The shift in demographic patterns it entailed, along with its pressing logistical and political challenges weighing on the colony's capacities, made some old settlers uneasy about the sometimes ungrateful manners of the trespassers in their garden:

> The abnormal inrush of people into a country so little prepared to receive them caused congestion in nearly every branch of State work, and the fact that many of the newcomers were from more progressive places, and easily irritated when matters were not entirely to their liking, made the position of the Government even more irksome. This spirit of irritation against and opposition to almost everything proposed by the Government was particularly manifest on the new goldfields, where the miners seem to have thought that they had lifted the colony from the slough of despond and were therefore entitled to dictate its policy. […] It must be admitted that this feeling was strengthened by the attitude of the Western Australians themselves, a section of whom regarded "t'othersiders" as rank outsiders, who ought to be sufficiently thankful for being allowed to remain within the western paradise.[96]

So, was Western Australia undergoing a new corrupting process? And if so, what or who was to blame, the shiny yellow metal in itself or the crowds it attracted in droves to the middle of a desert that John Forrest's cabinet had to make livable at great cost and against the odds of Nature's limitations? Author Henry Lawson declares gold and diggers equally responsible for the irrational fever contaminating the colony and turning it into a mirage of instant wealth:

> W.A. is a fraud. The curse of country is gold—as sheep are the curse of the East: a more vulgar, sordid condition of things it would impossible to conceive. The old Sand-gropers are the best to work for or have dealings with. The Tothersiders are cutting each other's throats—the Boss othersiders are nigger-drivers. There is a ridiculous land and building boom in Perth. The country will be in an awful condition when the mining boom bursts.[97]

His immediate comments on the Perth real estate situation and long-term predictions for the state at the end of the quote seemed to have become a template for the descriptions of the situation for many subsequent economic resources booms, perhaps

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[96] Battye, *History of Western Australia*; pp.424-5.
[97] Henry Lawson, *Letters 1890-1922*, p.62; as quoted in Greg Burns, "Lawson on Westralia", in *Westerly*, vol.27 no.4 December 1982, p.120.

still relevant today, a few years into the 21st century. However, his appraisal of the "Sand-gropers"' attitude may require some adjustments, since it seems to perpetuate the stereotypical innocent benevolence of the Western Australians. Once again, the prelapsarian vision of a guileless land ready for the taking is stronger than any chronicle of human interested endeavours, as J. S. Battye demonstrates in his hybrid allegory of economic progress shaped by a Christian notion of predetermination applied to institutional evolutions of the period and by exotic mythical references:

> The gold almost seems to have waited for the advent of responsible government to declare itself, or perhaps it was that a freer, more independent, and more enterprising spirit came upon the people through the change. Whatever may have been the impelling cause, the story of the rise of Western Australia from the position of an almost neglected territory to the status of one of the greatest gold-producing countries of the world possesses all the elements of a romance. [...] Putting all those aside, however, even the most simple and unvarnished narrative almost suggests that the lamp of Aladdin had found a resting-place under the protecting wing of the Black Swan.[98]

The "romance" of Western Australia's sudden economic and political maturity indeed inspired many a writer at the time, with this "freer, more independent, and more enterprising spirit" expressing itself in the Goldfields literature of the period – whether in fiction, poetry, or newspaper stories. This spirit also fuelled a rebellious political activism in the inland gold cities: the miners' discontent towards perceived neglect from the colony's government amplified throughout the nineties, and threats of secession loomed large with the Auralia project of a new Southern state with Kalgoorlie as its capital and Esperance as its main port city. The western paradise was in danger of being torn apart on questions of insufficient gold profits redistribution to the recently-created communities of prospectors and mostly of Western Australians' mixed feelings about the invitation to "join the proposed Federation of the Australian colonies"[99] at the turn of the century.

In spite of the reluctance of some "sandgropers" to relinquish part of the constitutional responsibilities obtained from the Colonial Office in 1890 to a future Federal government, Western Australians ended up choosing to join the Federation by referendum in 1900, thus preventing the goldfields from separately rallying the continental cause. The sense of belonging to a special community bent on protecting its

[98] J. S. Battye, *History of Western Australia*, p.404.
[99] Dennis Hancock, *The Westerners*; p.123.

traditional values may have been undermined by the unnerving complexities of the momentous political choice, but this pride in one's uniqueness may still have been prime soil for the expression of "patriotic demonstrations"[100] that imbued turn-of-the-century Australia. This sentiment of loyalty to entities larger than the local dominion would lead about 1,200 members of the local Volunteer Military Force to fight of their own accord alongside Imperial troops during the Boer War in South Africa between 1899 and 1902, as part of the first Western Australian overseas contingent.

If it was a first commitment of Western Australia to invest itself in the affairs of the world at large, it may also be seen as an attempt to keep the least desirable aspects of collective experience outside the limits of the state. The departure of John Forrest from WA to join the first Commonwealth Government left a vacuum in political circles on the west coast for a few unstable years until the Western Australian Labor Party's emergence cemented ideological lines in the local debate. However, the era of bold statewide enterprises such as a railway network stretching from Geraldton to Kalgoorlie and Engineer-in-Chief Charles Yelverton O'Connor's controversial Goldfields water supply scheme was over. These logistical achievements were tools for the dissemination of experience and of information that would allow the locals to break free from the sheltered, littoral pockets of provincial innocence all around the state. Nevertheless this physical linking up to the hinterland, the rest of the country and the world at large—and the correlated opening up to prospects that may be as corruptive as empowering—came a decade too late as the gold-related economic and demographic impetuses were petering out, and Western Australians essentially returned to "cultivate their own garden". More of the wilderness was "husbanded" with the state-sponsored development of the Wheatbelt and the support given to the timber industry; the agricultural sector would progressively, over the period 1900-1920, guarantee Western Australia's self-sufficiency in terms of food supplies, its capacity to return profits by exporting wheat surpluses, and the ability to cater to the needs of tens of thousands of new settlers arriving from Europe.[101] Once again though, the state would also send a substantial contingent away from its agrarian heaven to the hell of World War I's battlefields, from Palestine to the

[100] F. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*; p.148.
[101] See F. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*; pp.156-7.

Turkish coast and the trenches of the Western front. Of the 32,000 enlisted men and women leaving from west coast harbours, less than half returned unscathed.

As Western Australia was marching towards its centenary year 1929, it enjoyed its own share of the profits generated during the Roaring 'Twenties. There was no shortage of employment for returning veterans and new immigrants, especially in the agricultural sector reaping the benefits of an ever-increasing export demand towards war-ravaged Europe and enjoying productivity gains through technological advances. Some of the areas cleared for new exploitation offered a farming challenge akin to what the early settlers had been exposed to, but it seemed again that hard work would always lead to contentment in the welcoming plains of Western Australia. One can however wonder in what condition the social and psychological fabric of the local community had been left after the successive shocks of the gold rush, the Federation and World War I, all in less than two decades. From one generation of academics and authors to another, opinions have widely varied over the degree of innocence and harmony shaping this past Western Australian identity. In a city like Perth which counted 200,000 inhabitants in 1929, the influence of a resilient network of old settler families was still pervasive, while the deserving sons and daughters of the lower classes could hope to obtain a say in the affairs of the community, as Sir Paul Hasluck demonstrates in measured terms in his autobiography:

> There were marked social gradations in Perth, not so much of wealth as of family connections. […] Yet at the same time it was an open society with a strong emphasis on opportunity for all. The manual worker's son could aspire to be a doctor and be accepted. The barrier he faced was not so much social as the problem of financing his education. We all did believe that we lived in a land of opportunity and equality and we had no grievance about anything. The social gradations tended to bring respect for one another rather than snobbish exclusiveness.[102]

In Frank Crowley's *Australia's Western Third*, the 1920s are the subject of the 42-page long seventh chapter, "Prosperity", and the general tone is that of resplendent agrarian triumphs enriching the state, the efforts of hard-working, law-abiding and God-fearing farmers contributing to the excitement and the sweetness of life in Perth, "a particularly bright and lively centre in the postwar years […] a city, but not too big a city,

[102] Paul Hasluck, *Mucking about : an autobiography* **;** Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic.; 1977 – p.126.

and certainly not an industrial city shrouded in a pall of smoke".[103] There are dark corners in this city apparently untouched by the excesses of urbanization seen in Europe, America and in the eastern states, but they don't warrant more than a short digression at the end of a paragraph praising renewed "civic pride" and cautious decision-making with the appointment of "a Town Planning Commissioner to prevent haphazard development"[104]:

> Naturally, the city had its seamy side, with its criminals and prostitutes, and one or two areas where shabby houses were crowded together on very small allotments. Nevertheless, Perth had been saved the infliction of large industrial slums and had never known a 'crime wave'.[105]

The implied picture of consensual innocence on the west coast would later be reassessed by historians such as Bobbie Oliver and Jenny Gregory and their works on social and ideological tensions and fractures in interwar Western Australia,[106] but in *A Fine Country to Starve In*, published in 1972 and hardly modified in a new 1994 edition, Geoffrey Bolton revitalizes this picture when he depicts the pragmatic, well-meaning community rejoicing in the anticipation of a historical milestone:

> Good Western Australians disliked extremes in politics, kept on friendly terms with their rivals, and never rocked the boat. (…) [T]hey cherished their tribal loyalties. […] Controversies occurred, of course, but they were kept within limits: they were family rows. […] You avoided political dispute, because this would break the sense of community.
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> Sense of community flourishing in an isolated corner of an under-populated continent: this fed the local patriotism which sought to express its convictions about Western Australia's destiny in the centennial celebrations.[107]

The centenary celebrations came, culminating with a big parade on Perth's Saint George's Terrace on October 2, 1929, and "three weeks after the centennial parade the New York stock market collapsed".[108] The full effect of the crisis was not immediately obvious to W.A.'s mostly urban population enjoying the spring/summer season at Perth's

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[103] F. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*; p.234.
[104] F. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*; p.235.
[105] F. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*; p.236.
[106] See Bobbie Oliver, *War and peace in Western Australia : the social and political impact of the Great War, 1914- 1926*; University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, W.A.; 1995; Jenny Gregory (ed.), *Western Australia between the wars, 1919-1939*; Centre for Western Australian History, University of Western Australia, Perth, W.A.; 1990.
[107] Geoffrey Bolton, *A Fine Country To Starve In*; University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, W. A.; 1972 – p.5.
[108] Geoffrey Bolton, *A Fine Country To Starve In*; p.21.

beaches and the novelty of the first talking movies being screened in the local theatres. But after a few months, unemployment hit the Westerners hard, "[putting] nearly one-third of the state's breadwinners out of work"[109] in the years 1931-33. The vaunted isolation had not been able to protect the Georgic Eden from the global economic shockwave, a storm triggered by irrational speculative moves that could be interpreted as so many instances of a corrupt, unlimited appetite for profit. This Fall from Arcadian felicity led for many to the unbearable guilt of having to resort to sustenance allowances paid by the State Government and local councils.[110]

It seemed in 1929 that maturity had been in sight, leading to expectations of even greater achievements for the second century of the state, only to metamorphose into merciless experience bringing Western Australia to its knees. For those who had not succumbed to utter despair and who sometimes rekindled some fighting spirit by casting the blame on the unsatisfying Federation arrangements, there was the temptation to start anew, to return to innocence and independence by breaking away from the rest of Australia and creating a new nation west of the Nullarbor desert plain: Westralia. The sentiment was apparently popular, as shown by the two-to-one referendum vote result in favour of secession on April 8, 1933, but it may also have been a spontaneous protest against perceived failures by the Commonwealth Government during these desperate times; ironically, the National-Country Party Government which had put the proposal for secession to the vote was defeated at the polls on the same day. It is unwilling irony that can also be read as utter confusion: the majority vote for secession was never to be made into a policy since, after Westminster declared itself incapable of intervening in Australian federal affairs to support Western Australia's claim, there was no hope for the Westerners to convince t'othersiders to let them go their own way—and forceful, militarized secession was never seriously considered. Tentative economic recovery on the horizon helped the sandgropers turn the page; domestic worries started to lighten progressively in the mid-thirties, only to be slowly replaced by anxieties about rising international tensions in the following years.

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[109] Dennis Hancock, *The Westerners*; p.151.

[110] Brian Keating, "The Depression: How Severe?", in *On This Side – Themes and Issues in Western Australian History*; Bookland Pty. Ltd., East Perth, WA; 1985 – pp.190-1.

From 1939 on, Western Australians joined the armed forces en masse again to fight alongside British and, later, American troops; those who stayed at home contributed to the war effort through their paid employment—now in abundance after the Depression years, and the privileged medium of gradual socioeconomic advancement for Western Australian women. Rationing and regulations, first limited when Britain was fighting a distant war against the Axis, became much more pressing when hostilities broke out on Australia's doorstep: fear of invasion was added to everyday constraints and restrictions when, hardly three months after Pearl Harbor's near destruction, Western Australia experienced the first ever foreign military attacks on its soil with a Japanese raid on Broome that killed 65 people on March 3, 1942. In the remaining war years, the state would experience its share of the transformations, whether embraced or dreaded, and the horrors, suffered or witnessed, born out of a conflict fought on almost every continent and characterized by humanly-engineered apocalyptic extremes such as the Holocaust and atomic warfare. In a lot of areas, a turning-point had been reached: Western Australia was advancing in step with the Australian Commonwealth, the Empire and the world, and its portrayal as prelapsarian paradise had to put up with the blemishes of grizzled experience.

What was left of the "original innocence" was also in contention with another notion, that of the "primeval innocence" long attached to the native population of the state. The Western Australian Aborigines had been mere extras in the parade and shows of the centenary celebrations, at the same time taken for granted and believed to disappear in a not-so-distant future in accordance with the dictates of Nature's adaptive processes. Curiously, they were found to be a very concrete problem, even an imminent threat, during the war years:

> In the north of the State, Aboriginal loyalty was in question. White Australians there suspected that some Aborigines might welcome a Japanese occupation and the army refused to allow the formation of an armed Aboriginal auxiliary detachment. Instead a pass system was introduced to control the movement of Aborigines in the Port Hedland area and ensure a workforce for the region.[111]

[111] Murray McNair & Judy Robinson, "War and Peace: Unity or Division?", in *On This Side – Themes and Issues in Western Australian History*; Bookland Pty. Ltd., East Perth, WA; 1985 – p.205.

Paradoxically, after the first centenary of European settlement in Western Australia, the "native question" looked very much like a case closed for good; but was the extinction of local tribes really imminent, and what was their experience of the twists and turns of the colony's and state's history ? What place was left for them in this recreated European Arcadia?

* * *

II.5. Native Australians facing this European dichotomy; and A Short History of Western Australian Innocence and Experience – Part 2

In 1938, Daisy Bates published *The Passing of the Aborigines*, and its "Prologue – A Vanished People" is a nostalgic, even surreal (being half dreamed-up) epilogue to the Aboriginal presence in the Perth region, but the lines between historical facts, imaginative writing and philosophical constructs are blurred in this a-temporal vision not unrelated to the 17th /18th century figure of the "noble savage"

> Perth from King's Park. I can never look down on the panorama of that young and lovely city from the natural parkland on the crest of mount Eliza that is its crowning glory without a vision from the past, the dim and timeless past when a sylvan people wandered its wood untrammelled, with no care or thought for yesterday or to-morrow, or of a world other than their own. […]
>
> Through it all, a kangaroo skin slung carelessly over his shoulders, a few spears in his hands, strode the first landlord, catching fish in the river-shallows, spearing the emu and the kangaroo, and finding the roots and fruits that were his daily bread. (…) Simple in his needs in a land of plenty, knowing none other than the age-old laws of life, and mating, and death, that have been his through the unreasoning centuries, he was a barbarian, but his lot was happy. As far as humans can, he lived in perfect amity with his fellows. […]
>
> The black man survived the coming of the white for little more than one lifetime. When Captain Stirling landed on the coast in 1829, he computed the aboriginal population of what he had marked out as the metropolitan area at 1,500 natives. In 1907 we buried Joobaitch, last of the Perth tribe.[112]

More that a hundred years earlier, the Aborigines had not made any significant impression on the 1827 exploring party. Stirling and Fraser reported friendly contacts with the natives, the usual exchanges of presents and the tribesmen's amazement at their

[112] Daisy Bates, *The passing of the aborigines: a lifetime spent among the natives of Australia*; John Murray, London; 1938 – pp.xvii-xviii.

white complexion—nothing that would distinguish the Western Australian Aborigines from other indigenous populations subdued throughout the British Empire. The contacts and interactions between settlers and natives had actually been given legal consideration before, and were clearly regulated in documents such as the 1829 Proclamation of Settlement drafted by Captain Stirling:

> I do hereby give Notice that if any Person or Persons shall be convicted of behaving in a fraudulent, cruel, or felonious Manner towards the Aborigines of the Country, such Person or Persons will be liable to be prosecuted and tried for the Offence, as if the same had been committed against any other of His Majesty's subjects.[113]

After the cautious contacts of the beginnings, the coexistence became harder and harder to organise when unsubstantiated claims or perceived wrongdoings would quickly escalate into shooting and spearing. It sometimes boiled down to a lack of understanding of alien practices, on both sides, as this account of involuntary destruction of property less than a year after the Proclamation demonstrates:

> The natives had made a large fire to drive the kangaroos. It spread rapidly owing to the dry state of the grass and reached the encampment of Mr Watson which was entirely burnt. He lost everything I believe except his stock. A Mr Smith had his tent also burnt. The fire reached to within a few yards of Mr Peel's stores where his Gunpowder was kept…[114]

Annihilation did not seem to have been the pre-established plan, but even settlers like George Fletcher Moore who defended a benevolent attitude towards the Aboriginal people were unable to stop cycles of offences, punishments and retaliations during a period of tense, violent distrust that rapidly culminated with the 1834 tragedy at Pinjarra. The origins, the number of casualties and the qualification itself of this event are still disputed today,[115] but whether it was a "massacre", a "battle", a "butchery", a

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[113] Battye, *History of Western Australia*; "Appendix II – Proclamation: - p.457.

[114] Diary of Mary Anne Friend, February 17, 1830, quoted in Alexandra Hasluck, *Thomas Peel of Swan River*; Oxford University Press, London; 1965 – pp.87-8.

[115] See Frank Welsh, *Great Southern Land – A New History of Australia*; Overlook Press, Woodstock, NY; 2006 – pp.137,601 ; Ronald M. & Catherine H. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines of the West – Their Past and Their Present*; University of Western Australia Press for the Education Committee of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations, Nedlands, W.A.; 1979 – p.289; Christine Fletcher, "The Battle for Pinjarra: A Revisionist View", in Bob Reece and Tom Stannage (ed.), *European-Aboriginal Relations in Western Australian History; Studies in Western Australian History*, nº8, University of Western Australia Department of History, Nedlands, WA; 1984 – pp.1-6.

"bloodbath" or an "encounter", what happened south of Perth on October 28, 1834, marked the end of armed resistance by Aboriginal populations in the state. After Pinjarra, Governor Stirling laid the foundations for institutionalized protection of the natives; what could have been the equivalent of monitored recovery was more often seen by Stirling, his successors and most of the settlers as palliative care granted to ethnic groups condemned by the march of History, according to the racial discourses of the era. Even if some Christian missions, townships and reserves were set up all through the 19th century so that "Aborigines would be prepared for the contacts which in the long run would be inevitable",[116] the net effect was that of displacement and dispossession for Aborigines whose numbers were decreasing, with estimates of 55,000 in 1829 down to 30,000 across the state in 1890. During these last few years of the 19th century when there actually was a turn around in Aboriginal population from decline to increase,[117] the opinions and political choices of John Forrest, the key-figure of the period, reveal the ambiguity of the official management of the Aboriginal situation and of pragmatic interpretations of virtue, compassion and innocence at the time. He had supported the transfer of official tutelage over the Aborigines from the Colonial Office to the newly-created Aborigines Protection Board in 1886 (to which he would be appointed in 1890), going as far as "vot[ing] for Section 70 of the Constitution Bill which provided 5,000 pounds sterling a year for the Aborigines and a larger figure up to 1% of the gross revenue when that gross revenue exceeded 500,000 pounds sterling".[118] However, whether motivated by reason or compassionate feelings, his sympathy was not equally distributed towards all the tribes he had encountered during his exploration journeys. Some were "very intelligent", others were "grossly uncivilized" or "resembled pigs more than human beings".[119] Ultimately, in his public and private discourse, they all merged in one entity, a "problem" to be dealt with in a practical manner:

> He pitied these poor unfortunate wretches. (…) It did not matter what we may do, in a few years there would be none of them left at all. They were getting fewer in number

[116] A. P. Elkin, "Aboriginal-European relations in Western Australia: An Historical and Personal Record", in Ronald M. & Catherine H. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines of the West – Their Past and Their Present*; p.292.
[117] Elizabeth Goddard and Tom Stannage, "John Forrest and the Aborigines", in Bob Reece and Tom Stannage (ed.), *European-Aboriginal Relations in Western Australian History*; p.57.
[118] *European-Aboriginal Relations in Western Australian History*; p.53.
[119] *European-Aboriginal Relations in Western Australian History*; pp.54; see Crowley, *Forrest 1847-91*; p.46.

> every year, all over the colony, and there could be no doubt that their doom was to be extinguished off the face of the earth.[120]

If what may be done did not matter, it might explain why the same John Forrest let Section 70 be removed during his premiership: it seemed that Western Australia's "wretched natives" and "poor abject creatures" could not be counted as part of the noble savages worthy of the white man's special care.[121] The care in question—1% of especially high gross revenue—would have indeed reached embarrassing amounts during the economic boom of the 1890s gold rushes. Thus the Native population was left with a budget line of 5,000 pounds sterling a year and a new administrative structure under closer state government control, the Aborigines Department established in 1898 and later replaced by the Aborigines and Fisheries Department—a Department reorganization which was another cost-cutting measure detrimental to the welfare of the indigenous population. Soon A.O. Neville, the Chief Protector of the Aborigines appointed in 1915, put some of the remaining funding to a new use: the primeval innocence of "full blood" Aborigines was allowed to run its course towards supposed oblivion, while state officers would see to the best interests of both "half-caste" children and white Anglo and Celtic Australian civilization. The policy of "breeding out the colour" led to the forcible removal of a large number of Aboriginal children from their families for decades under the state guardian provisions of the Aborigines Act 1905 and Native Administration Act 1936. After Neville quit his position as Commissioner for Native Affairs in 1940, the policy remained in use until the 1970s in the name of an even more far-reaching cultural assimilation of the Aboriginal people as a whole—the extent of the practice later called "Stolen Generations" strikingly detailed in the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report.

If children, usually easily associated with the notion of innocence, were first concerned by this historical tragedy, adult workers hardly fared better under a system that refused them any legal status as responsible, experienced members of the community. Until the 1946 Pilbara strike by Aboriginal pastoral workers in the state's northwest, most of them were denied cash wages and were paid in food stocks and other necessities. Their freedom of circulation and their right to change employment were also heavily regulated.

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[120] *European-Aboriginal Relations in Western Australian History*; p.55.
[121] *European-Aboriginal Relations in Western Australian History*; p.55.

The action they started on May 1, 1946, lasted for three years—with a few gains and some broken government promises. Ironically the disturbance to the local wood industry would ultimately profit another important economic sector in the state: the surface mining that helped the Aboriginal protestors make ends meet during the strike drew some renewed attention to the vast mineral wealth in the area.[122]

After that date, the 1967 referendum and the 1976 Aboriginal Land Rights Act paved the way for full citizenship recognition and for a shift in perception of the status of the Australian landscape. After the 1992 Mabo ruling, ancestral lands of the first inhabitants of Australia would no longer be *terra nullius*, and the parallel histories of the Aborigines and of the European settlers in the western state would progressively be freed from the orthodoxy of the continuous ascent towards maturity and progress—the soaring trajectory would be reshaped as a sinusoidal curve of oscillations between innocence and experience. However, mindsets may take longer to alter than the physical landscape and its complex map of mineral deposits and sacred land claims. A century after John Forrest saw the "wretched creatures" as dead weight for the growing economy of the colony, industrial lobbyists echoed his feelings, if not his words, when they pleaded for progress against "darkness":

> [W]hen the newly elected Labor prime minister, Bob Hawke, proposed extending the land rights system of the Northern Territory to Western Australia after his accession to power in 1983, he was forced to back down in the face of opposition from the mining companies which played on the fears of Western Australians that Aborigines were taking over the state. The Australian Mining Industry Council had argued in 1981 that land rights, and the possible curbs on mining development that they would entail, would undermine Australia's 'special responsibility to make its resources available to the world community on equitable terms'. One of their leading spokesmen, Hugh Morgan of the Western Mining Corporation, went somewhat further in 1984, suggesting that the granting of land rights would represent 'a symbolic step back to the world of paganism, superstition, fears and darkness', implying that it would endanger the basis of Australian prosperity and infringe the rights of property-owning suburbanites. Exactly a century before, a Northern Territory pastoralist had compared Aborigines to Siberian wolves who must give way to the 'tide of civilization' or be crushed like 'the venomous serpent' for resisting 'progress'. There was a clear connection across the century between these sentiments and those of Morgan and other miners. But this time there were many more voices raised in support of Aboriginal rights.[123]

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[122] David Noakes, *How the West was Lost* (movie); official website for the DVD release - http://www.roninfilms.com.au/feature/1832181.html (accessed on 14/05/2008)

[123] David Day, *Claiming a Continent – A New History of Australia*; Angus & Robertson, HarperCollins Publishers, Sydney; 1997 – pp.458-9 – on the "Siberian wolves", see footnote number 39 in this chapter.

The excavating of the Edenic state was indeed continuing on an ever-increasing scale, in another occurrence of the boom-bust cycle that regularly shook up Western Australia. The squandered gifts of geological Providence are evoked by local author Dorothy Hewett in her portrayal of an ambiguous land of innocence:

> The country that I once knew in Western Australia was mostly innocent, but it was an innocence, naïve, self congratulatory and deeply conservative, a perfect field for corruption. It had a dream of itself as a kind of eternal, unpolluted Utopia, a world of mild eyed, slightly melancholy lotus eaters staring seaward towards the Indian Ocean.
> Every now and again this society of lotus eaters found the crock of precious metals at the rainbow's end in its desert places, and this was both its wealth and its downfall. In those periods it grew rich and greedy, and eventually a spurious sophistication began to overlie its innocence.[124]

The "spurious sophistication" was still kept in check during the discovery and subsequent processing of mammoth iron ore deposits in the Pilbara in the 1950s and 1960s: Western Australia maintained its image of the "laid-back" state. Perth pictured itself as the heart of a well-meaning, innocent community where people felt safe enough to leave houses and cars unlocked until Eric Edgar Cooke started his random killings across the metropolitan area, the population only experiencing relief when he was arrested and later tried, sentenced to death and executed. At the same time, Perth and WA were put on the international map on various occasions: the "City of Light" shone upward to salute US astronaut John Glenn orbiting above the west coast, the Poseidon nickel stock market bubble sent London resources brokers in a speculative frenzy during the shortest rise-fall cycle ever between late 1969 and early 1970, and the statewide sesquicentenary celebrations in 1979 saw a piece of the space station Skylab displayed on the stage of the Miss Universe pageant a few days after the station had crashed in the southeast of the state—moments before the stage of the Entertainment Centre collapsed under a group of competitors while the event was telecast live around the world.

WAY '79 was the brainchild of Premier Charles Court and of his advocacy of Western Australia as "the State on the Move", with uranium, bauxite and natural gas findings completing the image of the state as a bottomless cornucopia bound to ensure the felicity of the locals for a few more aeons. Elements of the local experience in the 1980s

[124] Dorothy Hewett, "The Garden and the City", in *Westerly*; University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA; vol.27 no.4 December 1982 – p.99.

had a lasting impact on W.A.'s self-awareness and the tackling of issues which can be approached through the innocence / experience dichotomy; Robert Drewe's first novel, *The Savage Crows* in 1976, had already exposed the unsavoury side of local upper middle-class prosperous optimism; this ruthless and sometimes even lethal entrepreneurship was even more strikingly depicted in his 1986 novel *Fortune*, with his main protagonist making a lone, risky stand against the conjoined interests of Perth's bureaucratic and business circles. That cosy proximity was manifest in the overheated local manifestations of Reaganomics during that period when dynamic duo Brian Burke and Alan Bond, surfing on the thrilling success of *Australia II* winning the America's Cup in 1983, were the main architects of the WA Inc house of cards of joint government and business deals. When it came crashing down after the 1987 stock market collapse, the state was left with a loss of more than 800 million dollars; the WA Inc Royal Commission sitting in the early 1990s exposed the pragmatic corruption at the heart of the scandal:

> Some ministers elevated personal or party advantage over their constitutional obligation to act in the public interest. […] Personal associations and the manner in which electoral contributions were obtained could only create the public perception that favour could be bought, that favour would be done. We have observed that the size of the donations was quite extraordinary. In his approaches the premier was direct to the point at times of being forceful. He nominated the amounts he expected. They were far in excess of amounts previously donated in campaign fund-raising in this state.[125]

With ex-Premiers Brian Burke and Ray O'Connor sent to jail for their involvement in the WA Inc schemes, the state seemed to pause to contemplate its situation at the turn of the millennium—a time when the most heated controversy seemed to be centred on the building of a futuristic bell tower on the city riverfront. This collective hangover in public ethics was the background of several of Tim Winton's novels from the eighties to the early 2000s: *Shallows* had chronicled the clashing agendas and violent confrontations around the end of the whaling industry in the fictional Angelus harbour, standing in for real-life Albany where whale-hunting stopped in 1978. Despite its portrayal of earlier decades of Perth's history and its redaction mostly happening in

[125] WA Inc. Royal Commission report, Volume 6, chapters 26 & 27; at http://www.slp.wa.gov.au/publications/publications.nsf/DPC/A234356725D48E544825698400212B21?opendocument (accessed on 14/05/2008).

Europe away from the late 1980s tumult, *Cloudstreet* may be read a nostalgic paean to a more innocent community spirit in suburbs not yet completely ruled by a consumerist, hedonistic rat race. In 2001, Tim Winton published *Dirt Music*, and the unease of his heroine when she confronts the mindless ostentation of Perth's wealthy western suburbs or the prejudice of *nouveau riche* rough-as-guts White Point residents foreshadows some lasting social and economic trends, as well as the questions they elicit about the local psyche at the turn of the millennium. Indeed, the march towards experience, sophistication and the corruption of overnight riches re-emerged with a new resources boom on a par with the demands of a multipolar, globalised economy and which also seemed to send WA back to more simple times of enterprising adventure—a picture made complete with the current scion of the Forrest line being prominent:

> This is not just another night in the outback. It happens to be the final evening of debauchery at Diggers & Dealers, the biggest mining conference in the Southern Hemisphere and possibly the rowdiest corporate confab anywhere. For starters, it's in Australia, where quaffing copious amounts of beer is a national pastime. But it's also in Kalgoorlie, one of the few places on this island continent where you might actually see a real-life Crocodile Dundee belly up to the bar.
>
> The Exchange and the Palace were built during the 1890s gold rush that spawned this desert town, 350 miles inland from Perth. The conference itself started 15 years ago when the former owner of the Palace got together a couple hundred local gold prospectors who were looking for investors and hired some ladies from a local bordello to serve drinks.
>
> That frontier mindset is still in effect. For three straight nights the moneymen from Sydney and Melbourne have been drinking -- in many cases until 5 a.m. or later -- alongside local miners in dusty work clothes. If they were at the Exchange, they even got treated to at least one fistfight that turned into an Ultimate Fighting-grade pummeling before the bouncers stepped in.
>
> […] On the last day of Diggers, one of the prime beneficiaries of the euphoria flew in and took the town by storm. His name is Andrew Forrest, and he's a high-profile and controversial figure in the Australian resource world. (…)His great-great-uncle Sir John Forrest was a famous explorer who became the first Premier of Western Australia.
>
> .In his own career, [Andrew] Forrest first attracted attention as a hard-charging, Harley-riding stockbroker in Sydney in the '80s. Ever since, he has shown a penchant for ambitious and sometimes wacky propositions (…). Forrest is an exceedingly gifted promoter. And this time he may actually be on the verge of gigantic riches.[126]

[126] Brian O'Keefe, "The New Iron Age – Australia's new gold rush, courtesy of China", in *Fortune*; November 26, 2007; pp.114-115 – also available at

With the future peak and the deflating phase of this cycle still undated, it is hard to say if Western Australia's self-representation will survive another iteration of hardening experience to return to blissful innocence and splendid isolation, both made even more unattainable by the accelerator of moral and conceptual particles that modern information exchange processes have become. With our self-imposed 24-hour-a-day diet of electronic media fare, experience and innocence seem harder and harder to extricate when we let ourselves be convinced of the artificial novelty and freshness of fleeting images and notions, if only to fight the *ennui* of postmodern experience.

* * *

The following two chapters of this study deal with local as well universal interpretations of the dichotomy opposing innocence and experience by Robert Drewe and Tim Winton in their works of fiction. Apart from seniority (Drewe was born in 1943 and Winton in 1960), the main reason for starting with a chapter on Robert Drewe is that most of his fiction directly relates to a specific historical context and episode of local experience. Thus, as well as allowing for a practical transition from the present chapter's factuality to the mainly literary concerns of the rest of this study, this aspect of Drewe's writing makes it possible to organize the treatment of innocence and experience along a chronological sequencing linked with the historical subject-matter and context of each novel, from settlers' times in *The Savage Crows* to 21st-century (Western) Australia in *Grace*.

Unlike the variety of concerns and contexts that shape Robert Drewe's fiction, Tim Winton's fiction is marked by a thematic consistency that echoes throughout an ever-expanding network of comparable individual instances of characters stumbling from ethereal innocence to bruised experience, with occasional glimpses of spiritual appeasement and contentment through the numinous wonders of the local natural environment prominently featured in Winton's novels. With the single exception of *The Shallows* offering a snapshot of the struggle to end whale hunting in Western Australia,

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http://money.cnn.com/2007/11/19/news/international/australia_mining_boom.fortune/index.htm?postversion=2007111917 (accessed on 14/05/2008)

Winton's fiction is more concerned with the intimate collisions that punctuate his characters' quest for higher meaning in their lives, whether they wrestle with blind luck, elemental forces of nature, problematic leaps of faith or common human fallibility. This is the reason why the chapter devoted to his work is organized thematically around the successive phases of innocence, fall, experience and redemption, as they may be traced in his novels.

Chapter III
Innocence and Experience
in the Novels of Robert Drewe

Born in Melbourne in 1943, Robert Drewe was old enough to keep vivid memories of his discovery of Western Australia, memories of conflicting images of innocence and experience that would later find renewed vitality in his writing. In a 1988 interview, the author recounts the Drewe family's transcontinental relocation as an adventure mixing new opportunities and fear of the remote unknown, in notes that bring to mind the literature and folklore of the 19th-century settlers' and convicts' experience:

> My father was sent as a young man from the Dunlop Rubber Company head office in Melbourne to be Assistant State Manager in Western Australia. He took his young and protesting Melbourne wife and young children with him. In those days the move was quite dramatic. In 1949 Perth may as well have been darkest Africa. There were tears at the airport and relatives thought they'd never see us again. The plane trip took over twelve hours. I had just turned six, and Bill, my brother, was a baby, and I stayed in Perth until my twenty-first birthday, so I grew up and was educated there, and my sense of place was firmly fixed—and still is—in Western Australia.[1]

The reference to "darkest Africa" adds extra light and colour to the semi-barren hinterland and coast of Western Australia, turning it into a realm of exciting and disconcerting otherness. The 'laid-back' manners and customs had a refreshing appeal for parents and children alike, whether attracted by the languid bliss of middle-class measured ambitions or by the sense of physical, geographical boundlessness one could experience in the middle of Perth's suburban sprawl still dwarfed by the desert and the ocean. In the prologue to the abovementioned interview, Candida Baker thus depicts Drewe's childhood on the west coast, the innocent "island of yesterday"[2] as well as the drowsy outpost of Western experience:

> Perth, Drewe remembers, was then 'a branch manager's town'. He recalls his mother's astonishment that his new school mates went barefoot in summer.

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[1] Robert Drewe interviewed by Candida Baker in *Yacker 3 – Australian Writers Talk About Their Work;* Pan Books, Sydney; 1989 – p8.
[2] As described by Leonie J. Kramer in "Islands of Yesterday: The Growth of Literary Ideas" in *Westerly*, n°2, June 1980; p.91.

> It was a childhood of freedom rare in today's cities. There was swimming and fishing in the Swan River and Indian Ocean, camping on Rottnest, and Saturday afternoon at the pictures. The family lived in Dalkeith, then a quiet middle-class suburb where the baker did his rounds by horse and cart.[3]

However this idyllic setting has many a dark corner; Robert Drewe's progressive access to experience was sometimes smooth but rougher at other times. Episodes of his childhood, his teenage years and his early professional life often find their way into his novels as material for setting and character development. The temptation to interpret his fiction as autobiographical is an indulgence that Robert Drewe has repeatedly derided in interviews and essays, with the reception by Australian reviewers of *Fortune*, his third novel, being a case in point:

> In the novel, because I made a narrator a semi-successful journalist, people assumed I was writing about myself because I had been a journalist and a successful one. I was amazed at the naïveté of Australian reviewers. I wanted a narrator who was on the spot and knew the dirt on things and who when properly placed could talk about rumor and the way small communities operate. In reviews overseas this device was perfectly understood and no one tried to presume that I was writing about myself, sort of dishonestly typing up my notebooks, as was implied here. Here, they reviewed the author instead of the book.[4]

This question of Drewe's subject-matter parallels another reductive analytical approach to his works: can a journalist be accepted as a legitimate fiction writer, a novelist recognized on his own creative merit? As mentioned in the previous quote, Robert Drewe had started his writing career as a young journalist, first for the *West Australian* in 1961, later joining the staff of *The Age* in Melbourne. He had to deal with the ambiguity of the "journalist writer" label as soon as he published his first novel:

> The *Savage Crows* was greeted enthusiastically, but occasionally with a kind of astonishment, like here is a dog that can ride a bicycle and play a trumpet at the same time, which was sort of flattering and slightly offensive. I don't know how many books you have to write before you are actually a "writer". I've been writing for a living since I was eighteen.[5]

By his own admission, though, the journalistic perspective on things and people was bound to be too constraining for his writing project. His dreams about a writing career were still a bit sketchy when he was at school: "I imagined—very romantically—that being a newspaper reporter would be a way of writing, and I would be paid to have

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[3] Foreword to interview of Robert Drewe in *Yacker 3*; pp69-70.
[4] Robert Drewe in *Speaking Volumes – Australian writers and their work* – interviews by Ray Willbanks; Penguin Books, Ringwood, Victoria; 1991 – p.64.
[5] Willbanks, p.65.

adventures and to travel. I thought it would be exciting, and for three or four years that was the case."[6] The traveling away from innocent middle-class Perth would have to wait, but the author had a taste of the other side of the mirror when his journalistic investigation took him behind the headlines and into the news stories, a new shadowy world lurking below the sunny front of postwar quiet prosperity in the western suburbs of Perth:

> What journalism did accomplish was to take a naïve eighteen-year-old from the suburbs of a conservative provincial city and shove his nose into real human drama: courts, crime, politics, the Claremont ladies' croquet results. While still a teenager I covered human conflict for a living. I saw murderers and human corpses and corrupt policemen and drunken politicians. The scales were lifted from my eyes, you could say. […] That period of my adolescence, the time I wrote about in *The Shark Net*, has stuck in my imagination and coloured my work ever since. It has influenced some of my characters. More that anything it showed me the dreadful possibility that life could suddenly go terribly wrong. It gave me a taste for drama.[7]

This exposure to human experience would later enrich the feeling and form of his fiction, if not supply unadulterated material to his characterization and narrative designs. As well as contradicting the common suspicion against journalists' forays into fiction writing as mere "recycled-notebook" literature, Drewe's output (whether his press columns or his novels and short stories) challenges the tenets of the New Journalism school of writing popular in the 1960s and 70s, when Drewe started to work. Bruce Bennett shows how Drewe's journalistic writing was straining against stylistic boundaries—and experimental dogma:

> His frustration with journalism's limitation upon his style, and the amplitude of what he had to say, were the reasons he chose another, fuller form of expression.
>
> Drewe did not turn from journalism to fiction in order to turn fiction into journalism. On the contrary, he was already having trouble in keeping the fiction out of his journalism […].
>
> Drewe's prize-winning pieces of journalism all have a strong narrative line, together with a psychological dimension and hints of mystery.[8]

Even with lengthy editorial pieces as release for his yearning for fiction, Robert Drewe seemed to realize that this early exposure to experience born out of often

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[6] Robert Drewe in *Yacker 3 – Australian writers talk about their work*, interviews by Candida Baker; Picador, Sydney; 1989 – pp.72-3.

[7] Robert Drewe in *Literati – Australian contemporary literary figures discuss fear, frustrations and fame*, interviews by James Phelan; John Wiley & Sons, Milton, Queensland; 2005 – p.83.

[8] Bruce Bennett, "Literature and journalism: the case of Robert Drewe", in *An Australian Compass – Essays on Place and Direction in Australian Literature*; Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle; 1991 – pp.56-7.

corrupting insights came at a damning price. The fruit of the Grub Street Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was threatening to contaminate Drewe's outlook on the world and his ability to interpret its working in his fiction. This realization led to another crossing into experience, a "Saturday afternoon […] a sort of longing, almost sexual, to write novels, to concentrate on writing (…) [a giving] into my urges entirely."[9] It was also a way to protect the literary saplings he was nurturing from the corruption of sophisticated disbelief:

> I just realized [journalism's] limitations for me, and mine for it. By its nature journalism is essentially repetitive and parasitic. […] The other person is always *doing* and you're simply reacting. You become too cynical. I was chafing against the bit. I had to get out there and do it, too.[10]

So he quit and concentrated on his literary plans, rejecting faithless cynicism to reconnect with some fundamental guilelessness more or less manifest in humankind:

> I was right to get out of full-time journalism when I did in my late twenties, when there was still time to balance its inherent skepticism and suspicion – the cynical, seen-it-all-before philistinism embraced in every newsroom I ever worked in. It's a different mindset. While it was valuable for me to learn that many people out there in the world are on the take, it was important for me as a beginning writer to realize that most people actually are not.[11]

Before this career change, journalism for Drewe was also a decent enough way to sustain his young family; whether guided by his own inner nobility or by the expectations of middle-class respectability, he had an early taste of experience when he made big decisions and assumed serious responsibilities when he was just eighteen—even if it seems that the world around him denied his right to relinquish his late teenager's innocence:

> My girlfriend was pregnant, and […] we insisted on marrying, against great parental opposition, and Dalkeith, where we grew up—which wasn't the hedonistic billionaires' suburb it is these days, but a very straight-down-the-middle, hypocritical, Protestant, conservative village—was much agitated by these heterosexual teenagers getting into 'trouble'. And my being a cub reporter, to boot—instead of doing Law or something.[12]

During his ten years as a journalist and later as a full-time fiction writer, Robert Drewe traveled extensively and spent extended periods of time overseas, from various

[9] Robert Drewe in *Yacker 3* ; p.73.
[10] Drewe, *Yacker 3* ; p.76.
[11] Robert Drewe in *Literati* ; p.83.
[12] Drewe, *Yacker 3* ; pp.93-4.

South-East Asian countries to the United States and the United Kingdom. These experiences have been put to use as significant settings for several of his novels, but they have not modified his deep "sense of place […] firmly fixed […] in Western Australia, especially on the south-west coast and the islands like Rottnest".[13] In March 1977, Perth had the honour of being first featured in a 7-part series in the now-defunct *Bulletin*—a 10-page article entitled "Perth: The New West" written by Robert Drewe. In this feature, the author summons the past history of W. A.'s capital city and reconciles it with its present developments to draw a tender, humorous portrait of its "sophisticated innocence".[14] Perth appears as a place where most of its defining contradictions are glossed over—and solved by the general determination to enjoy the bounties of the local environment, from the incredibly blue sky to the long hours of sunshine[15]:

> If there are any identifiable Perth traits they are caused by its origins, its isolation and its mineral-based wealth. Conservatism, parochialism, self-reliance and a general anti-Eastern feeling are obvious, as are those of generosity, friendliness and hedonism. Perth is not a town where people drop out of the rat race; everyone from businessman to student is a part-time dropout anyway, able at a moment's notice to go surfing or fishing—or to sunbathe in the nude.[16]

The very last element of the previous quote is developed further by Drewe, as he analyses a new social custom emblematic for him of the West Australian *credo* of relaxed, carefree innocence:

> The ocean beaches, of course, are clear as crystal and only 10 or 15 minutes from the city. Perth people almost live on them. They have always played an important social role, with each beach having its own clearly defined status. […] Over the past couple of years something has happened to blur Perth's beach social divisions somewhat: nude swimming. Unlike sophisticated, liberal Sydney, ultra conservative Perth turned nary a hair on the question of nude beaches. That's not the way they do things in Perth. In any contest between hedonism and conservatism, hedonism wins hands – or swimming togs – down. […] Any summer Sunday now finds up to 5000 nude swimmers at Swanbourne – from all over Perth. Academics and doctors sunbathe cheek by jowl with soldiers, policemen and laborers. Democracy has finally hit the beach scene.[17]

In the same vein, Drewe concludes the article with an account of a stroll down the Swan riverbank in Crawley where he witnesses an instance of lepidopteric hedonism that

[13] Drewe, *Yacker 3* ; p86 (see quote/footnote #1)
[14] Robert Drewe, "Perth: The New West"; in *The Bulletin*, Sydney; March 5, 1977 – p.62.
[15] *The Bulletin*, 1977; pp.53-4.
[16] *The Bulletin*, 1977; p.61.
[17] *The Bulletin*, 1977; p.54.

ends up extinguishing his last reservations concerning the west coast's unpolished ingenuousness:

> It was quiet and still and as I strolled past where the old Crawley Bay tearooms once stood two butterflies flapped lightly into my face. They were copulating on the wing, fused gently together and just too languid to get out of my way.
>
> Talk about symbolism! I thought, "I've got to get back here." Seduced again.[18]

In this article as in a lot of his writings, Robert Drewe alternates physical settings—here, the social geography of the beach juxtaposed with downtown's financial fever and leafy suburbs' well-meaning languor—and also travels to and fro between historical periods, even between decades in his protagonists' lives. The effect of these collisions is often one of blurred borders between right and wrong, between the acceptable and the unthinkable. Bruce Bennett demonstrates that this applies to the dichotomy linking innocence and experience in Drewe's early fiction, a connection which the latter approaches with constructive skepticism, according to Bennett:

> His three novels […] are characterized by a recurrent dialectic of innocence and experience, in which the option of metaphysical transcendence is never seriously offered. […] In the face of blighted hopes, failed or failing relationships, injury and injustice, the reader is continually confronted by an inquisitive, curious, unresting intelligence in search of 'true stories', which insists on interrogating not just *what* happens but how and why. This element of the quest motif in Drewe's fiction resists reduction to allegory: there are no good or bad angels in his work. The realistic fiction writer, who has served an apprenticeship in the 'real' world of journalism, knows the perilous pleasure of pursuing the truth, but is sobered by the realization that all stories are hints and approximations.[19]

If Robert Drewe is prompt to debunk nostalgic assumptions about the 'good old times', one may still detect a general movement from innocence to experience throughout his novels when examined in a chronological perspective linked with the historical subject-matter and context of each title, from settlers' times to 21st-century (Western) Australia, whether the Fall leads to higher understanding or reluctant acknowledgment of the common postlapsarian condition.

The Savage Crows is organized around two plotlines mirroring each other: the 1830s expeditions throughout Tasmania led by George Augustus Robinson, the controversial Protector of the thought to be last Tasmanian natives, and Perth-born journalist Stephen Crisp's research in the 1960s-70s for his "genocide thesis" designed

[18] *The Bulletin*, 1977; p.62.
[19] Bennett, *An Australian Compass*; p.64 (about *The Savage Crows*, *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* and *Fortune*).

around Robinson's diaries. In *Our Sunshine*, Robert Drewe tackles an even greater Australian myth: the life and death of Ned Kelly, whereby during his last hours of freedom at the Glenrowan Inn, the now-iconic Victorian bushranger remembers various episodes of his life from the late 1850s to 1880. *The Drowner* takes its protagonist William Dance from the Wiltshire county in the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the Western Australian coast and the Kalgoorlie goldfields in the grip of gold fever and of water-deprivation induced typhoid in the 1890s and the 1900s—Will Dance applying his engineering skills (and family craft) in the service of C. Y. O'Connor and John Forrest on the Goldfields Pipeline scheme. *The Shark Net* is a memoir of Robert Drewe's youth, from his arrival in Western Australia six years of age in the late 1940s to his departure for Melbourne—and work at *The Age* newspaper—on his twenty-first birthday. Personal pleasures and family tragedies echo wide-ranging changes and dark dealings under the West Australian sky. *Fortune*'s plotline bounces around Western Australia and beyond, ricocheting as far as the U. S. Pacific coast, in a kaleidoscopic portrait of larger-than-life treasure hunter Don Spargo, a hunted and haunted man at the centre of the intersecting life trajectories of other runaways, nomads and dropouts—all these fortuitous collisions chronicled by a fictional journalist/novelist on his own strenuous path from the 1960s to the 1980s.

A Cry in the Jungle Bar recounts the bewildered, tragicomic meanderings of U.N. buffalo expert Richard Cullen around Southeast Asia in the 1970s, and the last few weeks of his marriage and his career, two things on which he has hardly any grasp left in the torpid, deadening chaos of an unfathomable region of the world for this white Australian out of his depth. *Grace*, Robert Drewe's latest novel, combines the author's sharp insights on Australia's self-questioning at the turn of the millennium and the story of a 60,000-year-old relic impacting on two generations of the Molloys, a post-modern Australian family.

From past to present and back, Drewe brings his own perspective to the ambiguous associations of innocence with country life and experience with city-dwelling. In *The Savage Crows*, which analysis follows this introduction, the ambiguity echoes through generations and distant locations, from contemporary sophisticated and dangerous Sydney or languid and brutal Perth to the Tasmania of colonial agent George Augustus Robinson and of modern community leader Blue Plum—the duality of perception turning yesterday's indigenous victims of European settlement into today's willing partners in the entreprise of assuaging white guilt. In *A Cry in the Jungle Bar*,

Richard Cullen lives under the threat of violent insurrection and dazed locals running amok around his city residence, but he ends up stabbed to death in a remote corner of the Filipino jungle; in *Grace*, Sydney is home to movie-loving hipsters, but also red-light-district lurkers and erotomaniac stalkers, while the Kimberley has its equal share of both human and animal predators and agents of salvation

* * *

III.1 - *The Savage Crows* and *Our Sunshine*

With a prospective title as categorical as "The Genocide Thesis" for his research, one can imagine that Stephen Crisp will try to paint a picture of harmonious dealings between Tasmanian natives and their environment before the world-shattering interventions of European settlers in their insular lives. This discourse is present in a discussion between Crisp, one of his colleagues at the broadcasting commission and an American anthropologist:

> The small family groups multiplied and spread into tribes. For centuries this race remained isolated, cut off by the sea, retaining its simple way of life.
> 'Noble savages,' Charlesworth said, freshening their drinks.
> 'They stayed in this state of suspended animation, like so many ants in amber, until the European explorers arrived in the eighteenth century.'
> 'And the trouble began,' Crisp said.[20]

The "trouble" for Crisp's reasoning is that these "noble savages" are in fact survivors of a merciless, Hobbesian urge for territorial domination: "Those who stayed on the mainland were killed by the Australian Aborigines. […] They were cruel to their enemies. Those negritoes not killed were assimilated".[21] This intellectual construction falling flat is exemplary of Stephen Crisp's expectations matched by disappointment and half-hearted self-questioning. In the parallel construction of *The Savage Crows*, Crisp's stumbling progress towards crisis resolution echoes George Augustus Robinson's itinerary through the Tasmanian wilderness, a *locus* whose harsh reality crushes his lofty resolve. On these paths, numerous images of primeval innocence get smudged and stained by anticlimactic reminders of the flawed humanity always at the core of these Arcadian visions.

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[20] Robert Drewe, *The Savage Crows*; Collins, Sydney; 1976 – p.48.
[21] *The Savage Crows* – p.48.

This downward trend may all have started with Crisp's memories of his childhood in Perth's western suburbs, an Eden of manicured lawns between the Indian Ocean and the Swan River. Holidays were then spent on the beach or along the river in an apparently effortless communion with Nature:

> The seasoned fisherman, he thought himself. […] Twenty yards or so from the fish he stopped and waited for the ripples to disappear and for the river to form smoothly around him. He raised a boomerang-shaped kylie between forefinger and thumb above his head. (…) He stood like an Aborigine, poised and skinny, waiting for the fish to surface. Then he threw one kylie, and then the other. They sliced into the river, into the panicking school, cutting and stunning.[22]

However, the iconic pose of the timeless hunter-gatherer is one single frozen frame in a scene during which young Stephen's earlier "piss[ing] on the lemon tree as usual" looks like a send-up of the waterworks on display across the suburb's lawns in strict accordance with water-saving regulations.[23] Among the teeming wildlife, an italicized human artefact takes precedence over fish, insects and lizards: "A lone inflated condom bobbed near shore. *A French Letter!*"[24] Finally, the fruit of his effort is turned into a prop for good-natured, if insincere, credits to his skills: "His mother acted proud of him. She put the four or five small mutilated fish in the refrigerator, promising to eat them for lunch. She really would eat a little of them if he were home to see. Otherwise the cat might get them."[25]

Stephen Crisp's parents are constantly present in his memories of lost paradise; however Geoffrey, his younger brother, is a striking archetypal signifier in the novel. Whether during his youth or as an adult, he is the true innocent in an unquestioned, conformist Eden. The passive blamelessness of the Lotus-Eaters is bestowed upon him by association at his first appearance in the novel:

> A summer after-dinner scene: Stephen and Geoffrey are flipping through the magazines, reading the cartoons […], then opening the calendars. […] [O]ne picture is a shade more interesting than the others (…). It shows a still green billabong dotted with water lilies and overhung by dipping eucalypts. In the foreground, giggling happily for the camera, are three naked Aboriginal women, waist deep in the lake. They are all slim, wide-mouthed and ingenuously cheerful. One lubra has a lily in her dripping hair, another a flower clasped coquettishly before her thighs. The third, less reserved, flashes white gappy teeth and splashes water at the unseen cameraman with a pink palm. Water ripples about their bellies

[22] *The Savage Crows* – pp.32-3.
[23] *The Savage Crows* – pp.32.
[24] *The Savage Crows* – pp.33.
[25] *The Savage Crows* – pp.33.

> and hips. On the bank of the billabong their crimson Lutheran-issue dresses lie abandoned. The caption under the photograph says *Outback Innocence*.[26]

The elaborate staging of this bucolic excuse for mild titillation is an utter contradiction of its title; it becomes the trigger for an argument between the boys' parents and disappears at the bottom of a drawer – before being retrieved by Geoffrey some time later: "Looking for bus fares, [Geoff] was raiding their father's penny box […] when he came across the calendar. He ran smugly with it to his brother. 'Look what I've got! Natives showing their titties.'".[27] After this neither enlightening nor traumatic episode, Geoffrey goes on to become a respectable member of the West Australian community—a quiet achiever whose defining traits and judgments may not be unfamiliar to 21st-century Perth residents:

> He had made it, Geoff: the Dalkeith house and pool […], clubby and undemanding business interests, a pretty ('best in the State!') and doting wife, the affection and respect of his peers. Such as they were.
>
> 'How do you do it?' Stephen had asked him early on. 'How does everyone do it? Why are you all so bloody rich?'
>
> 'Rich! This is W.A. my boy. Personally I haven't got much dough but this place is rich in every mineral under the sun. This is the biggest quarry in the southern hemisphere. We support the rest of the country.'
>
> 'Oh, come on.'
>
> 'We could be the biggest at everything in the southern hemisphere if the East didn't bleed us dry. No bullshit.'
>
> Actually, Geoff owed nearly everything to his wife […], one of the most photographed (though *never* in a bikini) Miss Western Australias in the history of the competition […]. And Geoff, still in his brother's mind's eye a small kid whingeing along behind him on his tricycle, had married this long-legged El Dorado and never looked back. […] He spent only two mornings a week in his city office, leaving the land speculation (the main money spinner) to his manager. He might play a round or two of golf at Lake Karrinyup or sit around drinking beer with Bernie Caravousonos […]. At night, if there wasn't a lodge meeting, he and Denise usually ate out […]. There were parties and balls and friends popped in with convivial armloads of bottles. There was never a spare moment.[28]

However innocent, Geoffrey is also a docile product of his times, with attitudes towards women and Aboriginal Australians that may not be as tolerated today as they were a few decades ago. When he recounts what amounts to a gang-rape expedition, his own involvement in the story seems to elicit only a juvenile frisson rather than guilt or self-loathing:

> A propos of nothing, or something, Geoff said, 'Ever rooted a coon, by the way?' […] 'About two years ago after a company pissup. We were driving home in

[26] *The Savage Crows* – pp.26.
[27] *The Savage Crows* – p.145.
[28] *The Savage Crows* – pp.95-6.

> Bob's managing director's 280 SE. The boss was flaked in the back and Bob starts cruising through East Perth offering women wine. Two jump in the car. Bob's into one like a flash and the other's spilling wine all over the upholstery.'
>
> Crisp sat silently sucking sweet mouthfuls of port. *Company men at play.*
>
> 'The girls finish the wine and want money, you see. One starts yelling, "Five bucks a fuck" over and over. I couldn't come at mine. I don't play around as a rule, anyway. Bob got shitty and refused to pay and they start screaming like maniacs. Can boongs yell!'
>
> 'Can they?'
>
> 'Can they ever! Bob shook one, you know, to quieten her down and the other one screams out the window for the whole bloody tribe. […] Christ, and we're fighting the Black War. One girl grabs the keys and Bob's got to just about twist her arm off to get them back. They're biting and scratching us, the horn's blaring and their mob's running towards us picking up handy bricks and tearing palings from fences. We got them out of the car just as the first rock hit the roof. That Merc took off like a bloody jet.'
>
> Geoff grinned boyishly into his port. Was that the trace of a blush? 'We had scratches all over our arms. Bob lost a few bits out of his face. The boss stank of bloody perfume and muscatel. What a night!'[29]

Geoff's liberal use of racially offensive terms is in fact common currency among the novel's respectable middle-class figures in 1970s Perth, the sharp edges of a pervasive mindset depicted in the novel:

> Lounging around the pool after a Sunday evening barbecue […] Crisp bridled […] at yet another slighting reference to *coons* and *boongs*, this time in an anecdote by Peter d'Arcy. D'Arcy the pharmacist was relating how he'd been forced to stop serving an Aboriginal woman with medicine because she wouldn't pay her bill.
>
> […] 'You can't run a business on handouts', d'Arcy was saying. 'I had to push her out of the shop in the end. I told her straight. I said, "Listen Mary, lay off the plonk and spend your booze money on medicine for bub." They won't listen to reason.'
>
> […] 'Poor thing', Claire Oakes said. 'Those lubras must have a terrible time. I read in the paper their babies have a mortality rate ten times that of white children.'
>
> 'Unfortunately,' said her husband the sage gynaecologist, 'these people won't help themselves. All the government handouts and health care don't mean a thing without self-help.'
>
> Helen d'Arcy said, 'You can't blame them for being prostitutes, can you? I mean if it was a choice of that or your child starving.'
>
> 'Oh, I could never sink that low,' Denise said.[30]

Unable to listen to this prejudiced ranting any longer, Stephen Crisp barges in the conversation with a catalogue of past atrocities perpetrated by white farmers against the native population.[31] His disquieting tales summarize the horrors George Augustus Robinson details in his exploration diaries, as rewritten in *The Savage Crows*. The native at the centre of Robinson's narrative is a fictional evocation of a significant historical

[29] *The Savage Crows* – pp.97-8.
[30] *The Savage Crows* – pp.98-9.
[31] *The Savage Crows* – p.99.

character: Truganini, often presented as the last full-blood Tasmanian Aborigine. The relation of the most tragic episodes of her life comes a few pages before Crisp's repeated outrage at the brutal disdain of his fellow West Australians towards the condition of the Aboriginal population—with more than passing similarities between two stages of Australian history, separated as they may be by almost 150 years and half a continent:

> The more information I gleaned the more I came to the realization that in the person of Truganini stood the blueprint for the larger tragedy of her people.
> […] Her mother […] had been stabbed to death by white settlers before her eyes. Her elder sister Leena had been raped and carried off by sealers to the islands of the straits. While still a young girl Truganini had been the intended wife of a young warrior, Paraweena. Wishing to return to Bruny from the mainland one day, the young lovers and another warrior, Pogenna, were offered a ride across the channel by two sawyers known to them, Watkin Lowe and Paddy Newall. In mid-channel Lowe and Newall threw the males overboard and dragged Truganini to the bottom of the boat. As the natives swam to the boat and grasped the gunwale, the whites chopped off their hands with their hatchets. The helpless men waved their arm stumps and drowned before Truganini. The Europeans were free to do as they pleased with her. Such were her first encounters with our civilization.[32]

In the midst of insensitive debates and cruel actions, Crisp and Robinson indefatigably try to locate and preserve frail remainders of innocence: their own, that of the settlers' community and that of the intriguing other, the "noble savage" whose experience is always analysed in Western rationalistic terms. However, both moral crusaders' lofty ideals rest on shifting grounds: George Augustus Robinson's efforts are limited to a social-engineering version of palliative care to ease the "passing of a dying race" (the nineteenth century standard justification for the neglect and the hardships meted out on dispossessed natives during colonial expansion) in a country that was only his second choice of destination away from England.[33] His belief that he is serving God's designs cannot completely hide his propensity to self-aggrandizement. Similarly, Stephen Crisp's moral grandstanding is often contradicted by his inability to silence his cynicism in order to embrace the small mercies of newfound Edens. When he ventures out of his urban middle-class comfort zone, the lure of preserved ingenuousness is rapidly lost on him when he is away from Perth or Sydney. In New Guinea, locals' drunken merriments turn exotic passion into petrifying cases of *coïtus interruptus* for him and Anna, his girlfriend:

> At night they made sweaty love to the accompaniment of cicadas, shrill night birds and the soft alarming sound of Beni's feet on the gravel outside their louvered

[32] *The Savage Crows* – pp.93-4.
[33] *The Savage Crows* – p.39.

> bedroom. […] Sometimes, full of beer, a *wantok* [from his home village] would press his face to the louvers and give a blood-curdling yell to terrify the whites. It never failed. The first time Anna clutched at him so frantically her nails tore his chest; his larynx ceased to function, muscles turned to jelly and awaited the headhunter's machete. Only nervous giggling from Beni and the sounds of drunken stumbling in the bushes allayed their white dead-of-night fears.[34]

In North Queensland, a soothingly-named *locus* and some impromptu thrill suffice to generate inhibitive images in Stephen's mind, the noble savage in him being somehow restrained by civilization's nightmarish aesthetics:

> They spent a sensual time in Cairns, the somnolent, dry winter heat driving them to a small watercourse called Lake Placid outside the town.
>
> […] 'Let's swim naked', she said.
>
> 'O.K.' But he was suddenly reminded of the film *Deliverance*. Perhaps it was the rapids and the high and thickly wooded river valley bearing down on them. He had momentary visions of them being sniped at by North Queensland mountain men. Not to mention dark hillbilly sexual images.
>
> 'Don't be silly', Anna laughed. 'We're alone.' She removed her bikini, dropped it at his feet and dived into a deep pool.
>
> […] 'Come in Stephen. Get your gear off!'
>
> He was surprised to realise he felt threatened by her, by her strength and independence. 'We'd better go, it's getting late,' he said, and got to his feet. Anna climbed out of the lake and he tossed a towel to her.[35]

Stephen's spoil-sport attitude and his final abrupt gesture hinting at prudishness echoes an earlier scene in the novel in which, after taking the calendar with the picture of naked natives away from Stephen and Geoff, his father overreacts to what he regards as a case of wardrobe impropriety by Stephen's mother—even if she is described as uncomfortable with marital intimacy:

> 'Your frock is too short, Jean,' he says, addressing the rosewood sideboard. 'Your bottom is showing.'
>
> […] Her mouth contracts into fine creases around the lips. 'It *is* a tennis frock', she says.
>
> […] At forty she is still an attractive woman […]. She sighs a lot, her sons sense half-consciously, and stiffens just noticeably when her husband kisses her hello or removes lint from her clothing with elaborately quiet attention.
>
> […] 'Don't be ridiculous, Murray. You come home tight and start picking at everyone. First the children, now me. Act your age, why don't you.'
>
> 'Thank you very much. Thank you, Jean. I suppose you encourage the children to see filthy photographs. That would be your style.'
>
> 'You're mad! You brought the bloody thing home. You're the one with the peculiar mind.'
>
> The father rises to his feet, eyes bulging.
>
> […] 'Don't swear at me, Jean. Don't ever swear at me if you know what's good for you!'
>
> The mother, face crumpled, throws down the tea towel she has been clutching and runs from the room. […] The bedroom door slams.

[34] *The Savage Crows* – p.49.
[35] *The Savage Crows* – pp.58, 59.

> […] Suddenly, his eyes lit by inspiration, he's on his feet again, digging into his wallet, plucking out a handful of notes, striding towards the bedroom door. He pushes open the door and throws in the money.
> 'Here, buy yourself a dress that doesn't display your privates.'[36]

This scene is at the crux of the novel's complex discourse of real or mistaken innocence in post-war W.A.: before Perth gets shaken up in the sixties by a new resource boom and by the wave of fear and distrust created by the Cooke murders, the idyllic picture of middle-class respectability hides ill-contained sexual repression and potential violence. Murray Crisp is described as a prosperous conformist with middle-of-the-road values who has put to rest the fighting beast he may have let loose during his wartime service. However the dormant urge appears to manifest itself in the way he deals by proxy with his own carnal appetites. In these situations, he closely resembles George Augustus Robinson who gets treated to a live display of native female nudity, an experience whose impact he tries to minimise in cold, anthropological prose in his diaries—even if, as one critic puts it, the spectacle arouses in him a primal desire he later deals with in due form:

> For the sake of camaraderie and at their request I accompanied Truganini and Dray on one of their afternoon fishing excursions. They unashamedly removed all their clothing and dived repeatedly for mutton fish […]. Wet, they presented a most pleasing aspect, even the cicatrix on their arms and chests observing a patterned harmony with their supple limbs.
> […] Hiking back to the establishment with my dripping companions […], I resolved to hasten once more to Hobart Town. Random thoughts of an affectionate nature filled my mind and fixed themselves upon my good wife and children in Elizabeth Street suffering alone the rigours of colonial life.[37]

However, these distractions cannot long compete with his sense of duty towards his grand plans. Even when his wife movingly implores him by letter to return to his family hit hard by disease and the death of one of his sons,[38] his answer is phrased in a choice of words and a closeness of concepts that evoke images of innocence to be preserved or to be redeemed:

> My dear wife, as to your request for me to return home I cannot meet him for some months. […] I shall continue my attempts to ameliorate the condition of the poor benighted savages. I know that the upbringing of our children and the maintenance of our home is safe in your hands.[39]

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[36] *The Savage Crows* – pp.26-8.

[37] *The Savage Crows* – p.67.
[38] *The Savage Crows* – p.136.
[39] *The Savage Crows* – p.150.

The same sense of professional duty—almost of a higher calling—is perceptible in Murray Crisp's dedication to his employer, Hallstrom Gelatine: "He likes to tell dinner guests over the Drambuie that when Jean married him she married Hallstroms, too. 'I told her that right from the onset. She understands that'. At that stage she usually goes out for more coffee".[40] Roles are clearly delineated in Murray's domestic world: he has to put up with the ways of the outside world to put food on his family's table, and he expects his wife to stay at home as much as possible, safe from temptations for her as well as for her sons. His rule seems almost God-ordained in his private suburban Eden, and perpetuates patriarchal strategies of controlled exposure to knowledge of right and wrong. The same style of managerial husbandry was recognised and lauded by George Augustus Robinson when he gave the Governor of Tasmania a status report on his mission of conciliation:

> My reception at Government House was worth waiting for, nevertheless—a generous private interview attended by all the Governor's family (except Mrs Arthur, unfortunately indisposed with what my wife had heard was thrombophlebitis caused by constant child-bearing) and accompanied by the most civilized hospitality.
>
> […] The Governor sighed. At his feet his small daughter had smeared herself with jam and crumbs and was now trying to pull herself up on his red-seamed trouser legs. 'Up, up, Papa,' she begged.
>
> 'Oh, do take her Mrs Humphreys,' he instructed the child's governess, brushing pastry from his knees.
>
> […] Another of his daughters, a pretty, boisterous girl of about seven, romped into the room and snatched a piece of savoury bread from a platter.
>
> 'Your children are delightfully natural, your Excellency.'
>
> 'I try to fit them into my official duties,' the Governor smiled. 'We have a Children's Hour every evening. They repeat several hymns they have committed to memory and twenty verses of scripture.'
>
> 'An encouraging habit in these uttermost parts of the world.'[41]

The wives' exclusion of these male-dominated social occasions, whether forced or voluntary, underlines the existence of a network of stereotypical gender roles and gender symbolism at play in these scenes of organised family life. These depictions can also easily be read as the representation of a strict colonial order and its contemporary remnants. White Anglo-Saxon patriarch Murray Crisp is the prototypical figure of the oppressor for critics with a socio-political agenda, and his wife Jean fits the bill as the oppressed female in post-war middle-class Australia. Her ordeal may also mirror the

[40] *The Savage Crows* – p.27.
[41] *The Savage Crows* – pp.185-7.

silent, objectified condition of Aboriginal women (such as the three models for the *Outback Innocence* photograph) and, by extension, all the subjugated natives. In this case, the innocent manners Crisp would like to see maintained in his home may just be a smokescreen for guilt unexpressed after unatoned sins. What remains unsaid is the mindset that allowed the justification of instinctual satisfaction through "civilised" prioritisation. In a chapter entitled "A Multiplicity of Evils", G. A. Robinson recounts how he rescued native women and children from brutal sexual enslavement by a gang of sealers—and how some of them got "their" natives back through process of petition to the Governor of Tasmania. The barbaric practices reported by Robinson, the protector sent to do God's work, sharply contrast with the sealers' defence of benevolent tutelage on the road to civilization and Christian values—in the end, the only instances of innocence left in this situation seem to be the natives' hapless ignorance of the cruel ways of colonial experience:

> Two more native women also joined me before the commandant could gaol them. One was called Jumbo, the other Sal […] both escapees from the sealers camped on Preservation Island in the straits.
>
> Jumbo had been stolen by an Englishman, James Munro, and had lived with him for ten years. She was now aged about eighteen and had escaped from him a year before. (Cohabiting with children was common in these depraved parts.)
>
> […] The poor creatures were objects of great compassion. Jumbo told me, 'Munro and the other men rushed at us at our fires at Cape Grim and took six women and girls. I was a small girl, was with Munro ever since. The sealers tied us to trees and stretched out our arms and flogged us. Some sealers beat their women with seal clubs and make the blood run down the face, and cut them with knives.
>
> […] We saw the sealers off in their packed and overburdened boats and I sent my men into the hillocks and tussock grass after their women. They returned with six women and four children.
>
> […] 'Don't be frightened,' I soothed them, handing out the usual baubles. 'Iam Mr Robinson, the Father."
>
> […] 'You are going to a happy place,' I told [a] weeping woman. 'Your son will be educated in Christianity and the basics of civilized life. You will be safe from the sealers and there'll be woollen clothing for the winds.'
>
> […] While I had been intent on removing the native women from slavery, the sealers had moved to circumvent me in their sly fashion, going about their plan with skill and cunning. They had sent Munro to Hobart Town as their spokesman.
>
> […] Munro presented two petitions […]. The second was a petition from Thomas 'Jew' Beadon for the return of the woman I had taken from him—the shifty felon had been wily enough to get a receipt from me for her. […] He alleged that […] five years ago he'd come upon a homeless native woman and out of a feeling of humanity had taken her under his protection and had since supported her and 'used every effort to instruct her and our two children in a proper knowledge of right and wrong.'[42]

Finally, much to Robinson's disappointment, Munro the sealer and Governor Arthur seem to concur on how to educate the innocent, whether they are settlers' children or

[42] *The Savage Crows* – pp.175, 193-4, 198.

destitute natives. In an inspired portrait of fatherly endeavours, Munro wins the authorities to his cause and obtains the forced return of "his" natives. However his professed dedication to his children's spiritual salvation is hardly more than a disquieting mockery of the Governor's 'Children's Hour':

> The unctuous rascal [Munro] then removed his spectacles and fixed his watery eyes on the Governor. 'Your Excellency,' he wheedled. 'We've always treated the women kindly, so kindly that they'd hardly do any work. I read the Bible to my children. The youngest is here today, sir, waiting outside to recite his prayers to you. He knows them by heart, and only six years' old.'
>
> 'Does he know, Munro? My own children are experts on the Psalms.'
>
> 'Oh, he's very good on the Psalms too, your Excellency, for a child of his colour. Knows them like the back of his hand.'[43]

The native women 'so kindly treated that they'd hardly do any work' may prefigure the alienated housewife of the fifties typified by Jean Crisp in the novel. Restricted to domestic pursuits after marrying Murray and giving birth to their sons, her main mission is to keep her reputation as spotless as her house and raise her children as decently as possible along the well-meaning strictures of middle-class society. However, despite her best efforts at maintaining an untroubled, ingenuous status quo in her home, she is at the heart of a tense conflict in the family circle played out in the quasi-oedipal triangle that sees Murray being rivalled in his wife's affections and support by Stephen. Through the years, the latter is shown dealing with this developmental phase of the toddler's self-affirmation and its after-echoes as he advances on an undecided path, wavering from initial inarticulate innocence to emotional blackmail and guilty grief.

The fleeting epiphany comes to Stephen at a turning point in his life and his research. Reconnecting with his retired father has brought stability to his dealings with the present and the past: the Saturdays with his daughter and Murray anchor him into an appeased generational continuum, and he approaches the tragedies and dilemmas of his thesis subject in a more settled disposition.[44] His father then makes a move to help him confront forgotten memories and unexpected insights into the often rudderless course of his life:

> 'Why did you always side with your mother?' his father suddenly asked, sipping a thin brandy, turning sad but artful eyes on him. They were standing at the saloon bar of the Greengate. 'I always wanted to ask you that. Geoff never did. He played it straight down the middle.'
>
> 'Did I?' He was stunned as a mullet.

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[43] *The Savage Crows* – p.199.
[44] *The Savage Crows* – pp.161-2.

> ‘You used to be a little pimp as a kid. If we were in the car and I stopped off for a quick beer you’d always spill the beans when we got home. Now why should you do that?’
>
> “I don’t know.’
>
> […] ‘I guess I used to feel chivalrous towards her. That’s normal in the eldest son, surely.’ *Oedipal? Kinky?*
>
> His father shrugged. ‘I suppose so. Never could understand why you two ganged up on me, though.’[45]

If one accepts the broad tenets of Freud’s analysis in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the Oedipus complex can be read in terms of progression from innocence to experience. From a subordinate and apparently passive state, the young male child unconsciously moves towards self-assertion, “to be like his dad” (a deception that may be the psychoanalytical equivalent of the prospect offered by the serpent in Eden to ‘be as gods, knowing good and evil” after eating from the tree in the centre of the garden).[46] In most cases, this internalized rebellion against the family power structure is peacefully settled and order is restored, with the child returning to his simple pursuits until the momentous transformations and challenges of puberty. “Pimp”, as used by Murray, may be a harsh word to describe the special bond between Stephen and his mother and his influence over her; however, partly because of his parents being separated by war, baby Stephen precociously claims special rights in the family circle. When Murray returns after serving in the north of the state and overseas, he confronts a temperamental mother’s boy, or something a lot more malevolent—the “devil” he mentioned has some of the life-draining characteristics of the mythological incubus in his assault on his mother’s constitution, as she tells Stephen years later:

> ‘You drained all the calcium out of my teeth during the war, dear. I fed you the full fourteen months because of the cow’s milk shortage. Trust you to be an early teether with a full set of choppers at nine months! A tiger, squeezing and pummeling at me! “What’s this then?” Dad said when he came home on leave, saw you for the first time, “A devil for the breast!” Poor Dad with dreadful tropical sores all over his body and thin as a rake. I could hardly bear to touch him. There was a bit of jealousy there, I can tell you. You were the little man of the house. Bossy! What a tantrum when he’d give me a bit of a cuddle!’[47]

Young Stephen progressively learns to share the time and attentions of his mother with his father and his younger brother, but some lingering traces of oedipal tensions may enlighten the reader about Stephen’s real initial loss of innocence in the W.A.

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[45] *The Savage Crows* – p.162.
[46] *King James Bible – Genesis* III, 1-5.
[47] *The Savage Crows* – pp.103-4.

childhood Eden. His first active exposure to the ways of the world is when he starts his own trade in guilt with his mother. His manipulative ways can be likened to "pimping" when he harasses her about his near-fatal and late-diagnosed case of meningitis:

> But he hadn't let his mother forget he could have died, basking in self-righteousness for a month or so, occasionally dropping a question on her at the dinner table: 'Why didn't you believe me?' he would ask. 'I knew I was sick. Why would I pretend something like that, for God's sake?' Her eyes showed her guilt, unwarranted as it was what with her own troubles.[48]

A few years later, what may be left of that special exclusive bond is erased through a substitutive process. Another woman supplants Jean in Stephen's affections: Jane, "his first serious, *mature* girlfriend".[49] This anagramic rival witnesses the first of several melodramatic scenes between Stephen and his mother, with all kinds of dirty laundry being aired:

> They had been difficult times for the Crisps for several reasons. Six months before [Jean's] death Stephen had gathered his courage and the attractive and personable Jane Wittaker […] and bearded his mother in the kitchen.
> […] 'Jane's pregnant', he announced. […] She took the news badly—in such a way that she said some surprising things:
> 'I would rather it had been your father,' she said once, her face ravaged by the precariousness of parenthood and other emotions. 'This is worse than adultery. My first child!'
> And: 'Where did you do it? In the car? At the beach? Was Jane a virgin? This is a sordid affair and it will ruin your life. What about your studies?' She cried and moaned that her trust had been abused and left half-smoked cigarettes burning all around the house.
> She also announced (with the air of a Holmes): "I should have realized this was going on. There have been less semen stains in your bed recently."
> […] She informed him she was under Doctor Williams' care. 'For nervous exhaustion over this whole affair.'[50]

With the magnitude of his mother's reaction, it appears that Stephen has lost the advantage in his game of emotional blackmail. His mother now has the upper hand, and, until her sudden death, Stephen is consigned to an infantile condition—and to familiar surroundings:

> So came the denouement (like a classic tragedy): his mother's death twenty days after Wendy's breech birth. Jane a week out of hospital and convalescing at the Crisps with the baby, Stephen there too in his old room, Jane and the baby in Geoff's room and Geoff sleeping on a camp stretcher in with him. (The day after Jane left hospital Stephen had snuggled in with her, nestled up to her in his

[48] *The Savage Crows* – p.144.
[49] *The savage Crows* – p.229.
[50] *The Savage Crows* – pp.108-9.

> pyjamas. His mother's face at the door: 'Get out of that bed, Stephen. I won't have you two canoodling in this house with your brother to see you.'
>
> 'We're married, after all,' he complained, but did as he was told. The chastened smutty child.)[51]

After his mother's death from a burst aneurysm, the weight of Stephen's grief is augmented by other people's not-so-veiled accusations as to his youthful indiscretions sending her to her grave:

> His mother's friends brought strong opinions with their casseroles and queen puddings in the ensuing weeks.
> […] 'All this killed her', [Beryl O'Brien] said. 'The disgrace and so forth.'[52]
>
> Stephen had a telephone call from Doctor Williams. 'Will you call at the surgery after dinner?'
> […] 'I asked you here as a friend of the family. I don't want you to think that your behaviour necessarily killed your mother. (…) It could have been a combination of several things. […] Perhaps shock or worry might precipitate the bursting, perhaps not.'[53]

Stephen remains confused on how to deal with the loss and the ensuing indictment. He sometimes fantasizes on alternative versions of his personal history, as he has done before to cope with the drowning of his best friend when he was a preteen.[54] In this oneiric script, signs of a past rivalry resurface when he tries to deflect the outcome of his experience of sex and death:

> Quite often, he would dream that his father had died instead. In these dreams his own role as the harbinger of parental death was understood but unspecified. He was never actually *asked* to make the decision, to reverse the result, to pull the trigger, but he knew he had done so and it seemed yet another act of treachery.[55]

Another direct aftershock of the family tragedy shows him physically mortified, perhaps on his way to atonement and redemption, in a condition that temporarily sends him to a previous episode in his life: "A month after his mother died he woke up alongside Jane one morning completely numb down one side—eyelid, cheek, tongue, arm, chest, leg. Doctors found nothing really amiss—the numbness remained all morning until he vomited".[56] This incident can be seen as unconscious penitence under the guise of some psychosomatic incorporation of grief and guilt as well as an unpredictable

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[51] *The Savage Crows* – p.110.
[52] *The Savage Crows* – p.111.
[53] *The Savage Crows* – p.114.
[54] *The Savage Crows* – p.233.
[55] *The Savage Crows* – p.115.
[56] *The Savage Crows* – p.144.

relapse of meningococcal disease. Throughout the novel and his adult life, Stephen Crisp wrestles with hypochondriac tendencies which he progressively tames by considering the pros and cons of various death options ("Better to go quickly with an excreta-induced chest spasm on the dunny seat or from a burst brain at forty-six. Perhaps even to drown with sand and weed in the lungs at seventeen, though he wasn't convinced about that.").[57]

It is an experience in pragmatic negotiation of the same kind that concludes the novel and brings some closure to the historical horrors to which Crisp has subjected himself during his research. He decides to walk in George Augustus Robinson's steps, which ultimately lead him to Cat Face Island off the Tasmanian coast and to the Blue Plum's tribe ("a whole new race […] a fourth generation cross. Tasmanian Aborigine on both sides. American nigger and a touch of Polynesian on my old man's side. Also Irish. On my mother's side Australian Abo twice and Scottish.").[58] There, Crisp gets enlightened on Chief Raintree/the Blue Plum's art of reconciling interests, desires and painful duties for the profit of everyone involved—a double-edged weapon Crisp sometimes erratically wielded in his private life:

> 'You know what the Plum's main job is now? Where all his energy goes?'
> […] Talking to the Government. Grafting. Dealing with the Aboriginal Affairs Department on our behalf. Us quaint and unique Straitsmen. The blackness comes in handy. The certified Tasmanian blood…'
> 'But what's the Blue Plum deal in?' But Crisp, above anyone, already knew.
> 'Guilt, of course. Fuckin' guilt. There's money in it boy, and a new tractor or abalone boat when you need it.'[59]

Do you have to sell your soul and heritage to obtain reparation for ancient sins? Can symbolic absolution be purchased through bureaucratic indulgences? Innocence finally appears as relative as is moral posturing at the time of Crisp's pragmatic resolution of his varied quests as he "prepare[s] himself for homeward journeys."[60]

* * *

Modern analytical templates such as Freud's Oedipus complex and its mythical basis, a patricidal primal group, may help shed some light on Ned Kelly's protestations

[57] *The Savage Crows* – p.226.
[58] *The Savage Crows* – pp.252-3.
[59] *The Savage Crows* – pp.262-3.
[60] *The Savage Crows* – p.264.

of his wronged innocence and his occasional pragmatic self-questioning as depicted in Robert Drewe's *Our Sunshine*. From the intimate sphere to some near-eschatological tones and possible national implications of his rebellion against the colonial order, the famed bushranger's claim to folk sainthood is painted by Drewe with a challenging mix of ingenuous outrage and weary bravado, faithfully echoing Ned Kelly's own turn of phrase in his *Jerilderie Letter*.

Like Stephen Crisp in *The Savage Crows*, he is the eldest son in the family and shares a privileged bond with his mother Ellen;[61] he finds himself in a complex situation, however, when his father dies before his twelfth birthday. Before Red Kelly's final escape from all his legal and medical ordeals, Ned already semi-consciously resents what he sees as guilty flaws in the father figure:

> Madam, in this world and the next, these are the ones I hate:
> […] And curse me for thinking just then: my father, Red Kelly. Not saying it but thinking it. Put him on the list for weakness, for having no stomach for prison, for puffing up like a snowman in passive protest, for languishing, squelching, on his bed. For dying of dropsy, an old man at forty-seven.
> […] No Requiem for my soggy father.
> *Oh, mother, truly his name just burst into my head like a blast of duckshot. I'm only eleven and a half. Oh Jesus forgive me.*[62]

The filial sentiment seems already ambivalent in an earlier scene in which the father's orders and the son's reluctance to obey them reveal undercurrents of oedipal rivalry and the seduction of forbidden knowledge. Furthermore, these tentative steps away from passive, childlike innocence take place against a background of coercive civic instruction, as colonial authorities preach a forceful message of guileless compliance to Ned's people, "us ignorant bushmen […] the lower and dangerous classes […] in other words, the Irish"[63]:

> Against his will he does it, recalls life at Avenel.
> […] And a different show: the gaol coach from the goldfields, bound for Beechworth. A small crowd watches this one, grows silent as the thieves and murderers, shackles rattling, peer out ferociously, step down and turn into doddery old men, shuffle between their keepers, and enter the lockup for the night.
> And more, yes, he remembers Dan Morgan's severed head passing slowly through the town when he was ten. People muttering at the open cart, not impressed. Pale Dad, their Red, disgusted, saying, 'Turn away.' Because he's already sick with the dropsy and maybe sensing he has only months to go himself, Dad doesn't look. But himself on tiptoes. What's in the box, a livid blue melting into purple, doesn't seem like a former human anyway […].

[61] See quote 45.
[62] Robert Drewe, *Our Sunshine*; PanMacmillan, Sydney; 1991 – pp.15,16-7.
[63] *Our Sunshine* – p.38.

> They said Melbourne University had claimed the head to study what had ever possessed it to think of crime. Phrenologists longed to feel its bushranging bumps. Morgan's gift to science. But the wonder to him was why the police overseeing the head were laughing.[64]

Whether because of these stern lessons or thanks to some benign moral disposition, young Ned seems destined to an unremarkable existence as a law-abiding country labourer like all his school friends: "We were all selectors' kids growing up around the town of Greta. We were just acquaintances—the Greta Mob. […] Kindred spirits was all we were—mostly Catholic boys and girls and brothers-in-law and people's sisters and mothers and granddads".[65] An early exploit even singles him out as an outstanding citizen of the Empire, a protector of the other innocents:

> [W]hen I was aged eleven back home at Avenel I was the hero of Hughes Creek.
>
> Coming home from school, that studious fat boy Richard Shelton slipped off the tree that bridged the deep reach of the creek. Already dressed and sausagey, then sucking sudden muddy water and disappearing with his goody-goody satchel of books around his neck. Jumped in after him, in the dark part—the reddy-brown when you open your eyes—the water rushing cold, snags plucking at me, imagining yabbies nipping tasty dead Richard in some clay-hole. Found him with my feet, pulled his bag off him and dragged him to the bank, squeezed him till he coughed up mud and cried for mum.
>
> The Sheltons kept the general store and butcher's shop opposite the Royal Mail Hotel. Mr Shelton shook my hand, said a thank-you speech, gave me a green and gold sash for saving his son.
>
> I wore it seriously, my hero's sash of green and gold. See, I can say. Proof I've saved a life as well.[66]

Ned's description of Richard ("studious fat boy", "sausagey", "with his goody-goody satchel of books", "cried for mum") works here as the former's inverted self-portrait. Young Kelly appears as the ever resourceful and fearless country boy preferring physical exertion to bookish pursuits. The local, Irish-Australian version of this type fits a broadly delineated "larrikin pastoral" imagery recurring throughout Robert Drewe's novel. It is especially noticeable in Kelly's description of his best friend and main accomplice, Joe Byrne, the singing, wandering gallant from rural Victoria:

> Another widow's boy, Joe comes and goes around the countryside, gives his girlfriends baby birds and melts their hearts. […] Grew up on a half-acre clearing up against a steep flank of hills. The reason he's footloose was feeling hemmed in by this escarpment as a boy.
>
> […] Joe brings the barmaids poddy lambs and calves he's borrowed from some farmer, and stays the night. He's the one made up the Kelly Song and over a glass of Hennessy sings it sweetly in the back bars after closing time.[67]

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[64] *Our Sunshine* – pp.48, 49.
[65] *Our Sunshine* – p.34.
[66] *Our Sunshine* – pp.43-4.

Somehow, this laconic Arcadian mode gets tinged with brash picaresque touches of mischief and elastic values, but the picture Ned draws of his life before the point of no-return—the shooting of three Victorian police troopers at Stringybark Creek—is one of a series of rambunctious mishaps "owe[d] to raucous misunderstandings and blissful ignorance".[68] In spite of a few run-ins with the law, he sees himself as an easygoing, harmless hedonist in an enviable position: "[I]magine this yellow early-summer's day when I come out of gaol, not long fifteen. […] It seems that life ahead will be one long November Saturday of nougat and girls".[69] Whether as a defining trait of one's sense of place in an idealized rural environment or as the safe place within the confines of legally-sanctioned behaviour, innocence can also be an enticing proposition for Ned Kelly, as he writes out his prelapsarian condition in his own terms:

> [D]id I ever consider going straight?
> Madam, I must say it's not as cut and dried as that. Things flow over into other things. You don't wake up one morning saying, I've seen the lights, today I'll toe the line, be the coppers' boy. But you could say that in the mid-seventies I had two years of intense law-abiding.
> […] Also had some honest paid fun, you'll be pleased to hear, trick-riding around the country shows and boxing for fair purses".[70]

During that period, Ned enjoys "blurry midnight flurries with seasoned barmaids",[71] but none of these encounters can distract him from his unresolved oedipal connection to his mother—a developmental phase of his progress from innocence to experience reactivated by Ellen marrying her second husband George King. The cramped lodgings of the Kelly family exacerbate Ned's filial outrage and rivalry towards George "the Yank"[72]:

> That's my mother you're doing that to.
> The American twenty years younger than her presses his body against hers. Bumps her right there in front of us. Look away, look at the door, look back, he's still doing it, pressing. She's not moving. Her hand on his arm nonchalantly stroking hairs has blood around the nails from gutting rabbits. She won't look at any of us.
> A string of entrails slithers to the floor and Dan's dog leaps in one fast slurp and gulp.

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[67] *Our Sunshine* – p.151.
[68] *Our Sunshine* – p.31.
[69] *Our Sunshine* – p.52.
[70] *Our Sunshine* – pp.64, 65.
[71] *Our Sunshine* – p.62.
[72] *Our Sunshine* – p.28.

> On sullen nights I start awake. The squeaking bed, the oaths and grunts, the shock of a stranger's vowels, and whining kids amid the slops, the slaps, the creaks and free-for-all—all overhung with waves of rum—and now someone's pissing in the pot. Romance.
>
> You're my mother he's doing that to.
>
> *Keep the gutting knife under your pillow. Do it!*[73]

These amalgamated reproaches, harsh judgments and fantasies of gory comeuppance seem to be the flipside of some feelings towards his mother that are only allowed free rein when he is cut away from her. His nocturnal, dreamy escapes to be reunited with Ellen mix guilt and innocence in a picture of arrested emotional development:

> Her breasts were nightly visions bending over me. Yes, I thought them up all round and brown and became something, someone, else again. I was still young is my excuse, but no excuse, got something from it anyway, from these ghostly sights and feels of her. Helped me through the days and nights and daily fights, her dark hair dripping on my face. Me nuzzling with bruised lips and cheeks.
>
> This is difficult to even think of, in case I'm overheard. Wouldn't trust anyone not to read my mind. *Dad in heaven, ginger eyebrows glaring down!* Didn't even say this in confession, in the days I went.
>
> Well, it shocked me once to hear this sucking sound, woke me with a fright, dry-mouthed, but it was only me.
>
> Beechworth Gaol, 1869; just turned fifteen, this was.[74]

As in *The Savage Crows*, the Oedipus complex of the main character is overcome through a substitutive process. Scandalous as it may be according to traditional Christian standards, his clandestine affair with a married woman ("Mrs C.") has all the characteristics of an absolution for his past dysfunctional family conflicts—it even starts with a baptism of sorts in a highly sexualised context:

> This is how she introduces herself: 'Good afternoon, would you come and hold my horse's thing?'
>
> The lady loves the chase, and is famous in the district for hunting on this dark bay stallion. She rides Lord Byron so hard over such long distances that sometimes he doesn't have time to piss. […] This time his bladder is paralysed from the strain.
>
> […] And then the boys and I all need to hold on very hard. Lord Byron trembles and skitters and lurches us back and forth across the paddock because she's got this veterinarian's metal catheter, Jesus, it must be five feet long, pointed at the business end, and she oils it too, and grabs him, pushes it inside and forwards and threads it ever upwards.
>
> A terrible shiver overcomes Lord Byron. Suddenly we're up to our shins, nearly floating in the downpour, and shivering almost as much as him.
>
> 'There,' says Mrs C. 'Watch your boots.'[75]

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[73] *Our Sunshine* – pp.28-9.
[74] *Our Sunshine* – p.39.
[75] *Our Sunshine* – pp.23, 24.

As Ned's escape from his oedipal fixation, Mrs C. challenges him to greater achievements, albeit in a teasing mode of reversed values: "'I thought you'd moved up in the world to murderer,' she says, 'but you're still a shitty horse thief'".[76] This bit of colourful pillow-talk takes place during an intimate encounter in the straw of a stable, between the legs of a mare Ned intends to borrow. It is after one such moment that he is forced to make a definitive choice between his mother and his lover, a decision that steers him away from infantilizing censures—only to burden him with some more mature torments of responsibility:

> I'm riding home in a daze—still tingling from recent flesh events […]. I'm snatching leaves off peppermint trees and munching them, rubbing the minty spittle on my face and neck (a guilty habit to throw my mother off the scent when I'd been with perfumed women), when I hear a horse coming up fast. I pull up behind a tree, and [Constable] Fitzpatrick gallops past me in the opposite direction.
>
> After [a] fight at our house he fled back to the grog shop and reeled home to the barracks at two a.m., spilling out his face-saving drama. Saying I'd been there and shot him in the *hand*.
>
> […] Attempted murder of a policeman by the Kellys! The suddenly, blissfully, dead-meat Kellys.
>
> Can't reveal my alibi, that I was romancing Mrs C. So Dan and I ride off into the Wombat Ranges to Bullock Creek. Rewards posted on our heads. Mother's soon in gaol.
>
> […] *So I damn one woman by protecting another*.
>
> In a winter hiding guilty in the ranges the mind and body quickly turn to whisky.[77]

Ned may have forfeited his filial obligations, but he remains adamant about his innocence from any crime, and any blemish on his good name shall be attributed to constant harassment by the corrupt Victorian police force: "If you want outlaws, you couldn't organise it better. Locking up a mother of ten on perjured evidence is guaranteed to work. Molesting their sisters, raiding homes, frightening children".[78] Thus, whether he steals or kills, he sees himself as correcting wrongs suffered individually or collectively. In a striking passage, his imprecations against the colonial establishment liken him to a larger-than-life agent of God's higher designs, a bushranging Horseman of the Apocalypse as well as an antipodean Moses casting plagues upon rural Victoria to liberate his Irish people from colonial iniquity:

> By the light that shines, this is my warning:
>
> Being pegged on an ant bed with your belly opened, fat stripped out, rendered and poured, boiling, down your throat, will seem the coolest of all pleasantries

[76] *Our Sunshine* – p.123.
[77] *Our Sunshine* – pp.82-3.
[78] *Our Sunshine* – p.37.

> compared to that pleasure of pleasures I will give persons taking blood money from the police.
>
> Fair notice to my enemies. (You know who you are.) Sell out your property, leave the State, give ten pounds of every hundred to the widow and orphan fund.
>
> Neglect this warning and the consequences shall be a thousand times worse than the Drought and Grasshopper Plague and Rust in the Wheat.
>
> I am a widow's son outlawed, and my orders Must Be Obeyed.
>
> While God gives me strength to pull a trigger, if my people don't get justice and the innocent aren't released from prison, I'll revenge everything from the human race.
>
> It will pay the Government to give those selectors who are suffering in innocence their justice and liberty. If not, I will open the eyes not only of the police and the people but also the whole British Army.
>
> […] As I was outlawed without cause, and cannot be held in worse regard, and as I can only die once, I seek revenge for the evil name given to me and my relations.
>
> Horrible disasters shall follow if Fitzpatrick's lies are not righted. Fitzpatrick shall be the cause of greater slaughter to the rising generation than St Patrick was to the snakes and frogs in Ireland.
>
> If I had robbed, plundered, ravished and murdered everyone I met, my character could not have been painted blacker. But my conscience is as clear as the snow in Peru.[79]

Whether through Drewe's poetic licence or Ned's own words in the *Jerilderie Letter*, the Victorian bushranger contributes to the writing of his own legend already consolidated, albeit in a negative mode, by official decrees: "I'm one of them. […] Only four men in the country—in the whole Empire—that any citizen's allowed to kill, no questions asked. […] [A]nd the biggest reward in the world. […] The Queen said so. Regina versus Us".[80] Ned's challenge to the colonial order is his final relinquishment of innocence. As he faces a hail of bullets at the siege of the Glenrowan Inn, he throws himself into inescapable experience. His biggest transgression, the one that earned him deprecating monikers such as "Devil incarnate of the Antipodes, […] outback monster, […] agrarian outcast and social bandit"[81] in the press, may be his contribution to an Oedipal conflict played out on the imperial stage. Becoming one with the Greta Mob and all the other oppressed Irish in rural Victoria, he embodies the infant rebelling against the father-like authority of the British Empire and its local representatives (Governor, Chief of Police, constables—often Irish themselves, and seen as treacherously turning against their own kind) in order to win the favours and propel the advent of a free, egalitarian Australia. This motherly entity is embraced by Ned Kelly as a feverish fantasy, the democratic dream inspired by the Eureka Stockade decades earlier, as well as a physical reality that

[79] *Our Sunshine* – pp.139-141.
[80] *Our Sunshine* – p.155.
[81] *Our Sunshine* – p.5.

he has internalized during his life on the run with his gang. He accepts its unforgiving harshness when he witnesses the efficient aesthetics of animal predation:

> Rounding a bluff, they come upon one wedge-tail tearing at a dingo pup. […] The day extends into a frozen moment of fierce defiance, a frowning standoff, before the eagle grips its meal and the party shakes off its self-consciousness—its leaden, human foreignness—and watches it start arrogantly into the sky. […] Its claws grip without mercy but how admirable the languorous way its wing tips caress the air.[82]

The merging is complete when Ned seems to literally turn animal and mineral while retreating in a cave, mankind's primordial habitat:

> I've lived so quiet in limestone caves that owls and bats ignored and spiders were impressed with my calm spiderness.
>
> I've turned blood-red with cave mud until I looked like some underground formation. I've drunk groundwater so full of iron I pissed red. I've *been* a bloody rock.[83]

Besides echoing elements of Aboriginal stories of the Dreamtime, this laconic transubstantiation mostly reinforces the allegorical dimension of Ned's oedipal rebellion against the Empire. According to Freud, the oedipal phase of development is some instinctual memory of the mythical patricide committed within a primal horde. In this vision, young males join forces to overthrow a tyrannical father figure who, through exclusive access to the tribe's females, maintains them in the passive innocence of imposed chastity. His murder makes them free—and responsible for their fate. They welcome the condition of experience by setting up new moral codes, "totems and taboos" protecting them from chaos. In Drewe's novel, Ned refers to some similarly ancient and codified bloodletting:

> I can hear it, that one question fizzing unvoiced in every timid mind: Did you, *ahem*, or did you not […] CUT OFF KENNEDY'S EAR?
>
> Well, police, papers, Protestants say so, pray for, scheme of, this propaganda. The sadist […] tortured the man, sliced off his ear in some drunken Celtic rite. Revenge, maybe, on a Catholic turning Rechabite.
>
> […] The myth arose of us boys sharing blood guilt at Stringybark Creek, of promising to die as one if necessary. They said the four of us shot him in a pact to split the blame. Wrong. Compared me to a chieftain from the mists of Irish history who forced his men to ritualistically blood themselves by firing into corpses.[84]

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[82] *Our Sunshine* – p.101.
[83] *Our Sunshine* – p.143.
[84] *Our Sunshine* – pp.40-1.

Even if Ned denounces this report as journalistic fiction, he repeatedly addresses his audience, real or imagined, in the various guises of rebel leader, guide or prophet throughout the novel. He somehow believes that he is opening the way to a democratic Promised Land for his fellow disenfranchised Victorians. The sense of shared guilt experienced as a result of the aforementioned clash between pagan and Christian beliefs is present in another analysis of the primal horde's progress from innocence to experience[85]. In *Moses and Civilization – The Meaning Behind Freud's Myth*, Robert A. Paul delineates a network of striking correspondences between the tale of the patriarch guiding the Hebrews out of Egypt and Freud's version of the violent original sin shattering a primeval state of innocence:

> In broad outline, Freud's story of the primal rebellion comprises three separate moments […]. My analysis of the Torah narrative likewise requires three divisions, corresponding to the old regime, the rebellion, and the establishment of the new regime.
>
> […] My understanding of the myth also implicates Moses, but not as the victim of the primal patricide. In my view, rather, it is Moses himself who is the perpetrator of the primal deed. That deed is the rebellion against the pharaoh of Egypt and the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage.
>
> The deed having been identified, the rest follows: the regime of the primal horde corresponds to the era of Israelite bondage in Egypt under Pharaoh, while the aftermath of the rebellion […] is indeed the establishment of a new social, moral, and religious order: that is, the revelation of the Law at Mount Sinai.[86]

Like Moses who dies within sight of the Promised Land, barred by God from entering it after a moment of hubristic weakness,[87] Ned Kelly is executed after the colonial authorities quell his rebellion. His efforts may have had only limited impact at the time, as was the case for other Irish rebels in the Ballarat goldfields in 1854, but the seeds of sedition and emancipation are planted, and these shall rapidly grow in the colony and across the continent, as resilient as Ned's burgeoning legend. Even if his "well-laid plans"[88] of railway sabotage near Glenrowan are to be defeated, Ned clearly foresees the not-so-distant outcome of his personal fall from grace—the coming of age of a nation through the enactment of rogue reveries:

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[85] Sigmund Freud, "The Return of Totemism in Childhood" in *Totem and Taboo – Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (authorized translation by James Strachey); Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London; 1950 – Chapter IV, pp.125-6, 141-6, 151, 155-6 – later re-examined by Freud in *Group Psychology and the analysis of the ego*; Boni and Liveright, New York; 1922 – Chapter 10, pp.90-100: "The Group and the Primal Horde".

[86] Robert A. Paul, *Moses and Civilization – The Meaning Behind Freud's Myth*; Yale University Press, New Haven and London; 1996 – pp.12-3.

[87] Book of Numbers, 20: 2-13.

[88] *Our Sunshine* – p.180.

> Maybe I dwell too much on dreams. They say the trouble with the Irish was that they relied too much on dreams and not enough on men and gunpowder. Whereas the English were shy on dreams as usual but had plenty of the other.
>
> Well, we've got them all.
>
> I have something to say.
>
> At this stage, ladies and gentlemen, we might remind Mr Curnow to consider that tonight in the Glenrowan Inn, […] he is privileged to be a witness to history. And how many schoolteachers, Mr Curnow, dream of that?
>
> Any moment, when that train arrives from Benalla, the order of things in this country will explode to smithereens and be changed forever, Call it the opening blow.
>
> […] Won't you join us, gentlemen, in charging your glasses and drinking to the new Australia?[89]

Only ten years after Ned Kelly's death, the desire to control one's destiny through political and economic self-affirmation was also fuelling the slow-burning development of the Swan River Colony at the other end of the country. When the self-governed colony of Western Australia was officially established in 1890, the gold fever seemed to promise the best and worst possible futures for the region: would its rapid progress from innocence to experience be remembered as a Golden Age, or denounced as an era of irreparable corruption? Robert Drewe brings his contribution to this questioning through the following two fictionalised chronicles of some of the colony's, and later state's coming-of-age episodes mirrored by the individual trajectories of both works' main protagonists as they stumble towards experience.

* * *

III.2 - *The Drowner* and *The Shark Net*

Will Dance, the central character of *The Drowner*, has preoccupations and ambitions often associated with masculinity, such as mastering Nature's, and life's, unpredictable twists and turns. This calling to upset some primeval order of things may force him to face inner contradictions, such as yearnings to jolt a slumbering universe awake that equal a reluctance to surrender to the reasons of the heart:

> In the dark pre-dawn he begins to confide in her, too. He says he wishes to drastically change his life and situation. He warms to the subject: how frustrated he is with this cobwebby century! Now his knees jab and twitch under the bedclothes, his voice rises defiantly from the pillow. He's tired of reacting to long-existing conditions. He wants to experience different surfaces, risks, landscapes.

[89] *Our Sunshine* – pp.136-7.

> For that reason, he confides—his voice drops dramatically—he's wary of ever falling in love.
> 'Is that your secret then?'
> 'Near enough.'
> 'How humdrum. To love is to change. They say.'[90]

In these intimate confessions to his lover Angelica Lloyd, Will tries to portray himself as an agent of change, with his push for technological betterment inspired as well as frustrated by his geographical and cultural circumstances. Born in the Wiltshire county in southwest England in the later decades of the 19th century, he is at odds with the ambiguous character of the moorlands and his family's inheritance, the ancestral science of taming this fluctuating environment:

> So he was told anyway. […] How the first drowner discovered how to govern water. This was the four-hundred-year-old secret of Wiltshire and its clear streams.
> Warmish water streaming through light chalky soil lying over fine flint and gravel. This is a heaven for drowners. This is his father's life.
> […] Drowning is complicated. Alphabetical Dance disciplines his water meadows into an intricate system of trenches, ridges and drains. They draw water from the river and transform it into a shallow, continuously moving film.
> […] In the broad valleys between the downs this drowning and reviving has formed the rhythm of Wiltshire's agriculture for four centuries. These intricate skills, passed from father to son, from master to apprentice, make up the ebb and flow of Alphabetical Dance's days.[91]

Wiltshire, as described in Drewe's novel, is a peculiar amalgamation of ancient elements and symbols and of contemporary aspects—a cold, thick stew of brash, childish mischief and of clotting leftovers of industrial civilisation. The rural innocence of its inhabitants is swamped in the corrupt experience accumulated in strata of civilised endeavour. The land still shows traces of near-prehistoric human presence, with its figures of pagan wisdom unable to conceal manifestations of the original evil within:

> Under the tarpaulin his father could be a Druid. Beyond his hooded figure nothing happens but the swirling of the void. The clouds have dropped so low they now envelop them. […] There is cloud on his own fingertips and cloud blurring his boots, and when he breathes he takes cold damp into his lungs and tastes clouds.
> His father's muffled voice says, 'These hills were Bronze and Iron Age hill-forts, and henge tombs before that. Human sacrifices and plague and wars from Day One.'[92]

In this environment, young Will tries to abide by the Gospel's commands, torn as he is between his parents' opposed religious denomination and his father's pagan rituals.

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[90] Robert Drewe, *The Drowner*; Granta Books, London; 1997 – p.60.
[91] *The Drowner* – pp.9-11.
[92] *The Drowner* – pp.23-25.

He is similarly aware of threats to his integrity hidden in the surrounding geography. Floating and sinking, or rising again after a fall—the options are determined by the will to resist or to surrender to consuming temptation and decay:

> As a boy lying on the downs above Hartbridge with the hard chalk under his back, and the water in the dewponds and water meadows, even in the tea kettle, clotted by the chalk and limestone that had dissolved in them, he would feel himself almost forced up from the earth by the rising chalk, pushed vertical by its straining solidity.
>
> 'Like a horse was under me.'
>
> But the pulpy moors of the Somerset Levels where he had spent much of his apprenticeships were the feminine, the negative, of Wiltshire's downs. He talked of lying dozing after a pub ploughman's lunch on Southland Moor and dreaming of being absorbed. Jellied and spongy substances lolling and quivering under him. Thighs and arms folding around him in a soft, sucking embrace.
>
> 'I had to pull myself out of it.'
>
> 'Of course an engineer would prefer a nice dry clod of gravelly male dirt?'
>
> 'Not if he enjoyed a challenge.'[93]

The spiritual shortfalls, the boggy bondage of the feminine moors and the sinful temptations are all present in a country festival scene reminiscent of Bruegel the Elder's paintings of village life, such as *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent* in which petty amusements are often tinged with bawdy or sinister undertones. On this occasion, Will unwillingly receives a taste of forbidden adult knowledge on the day when Christians celebrate the Saviour readying himself for his sacrifice—Christ's supposed moment of doubt and weakness in Mark 15:34.[94] This biblical episode is somehow an inspiration for the vision of Will disoriented by this assault of evil seduction made possible when his father temporarily abandons him in the middle of the crowd:

> Will's mood, however, is bleak and wintry. Missing chapel on Palm Sunday! Descending the slope, it seems a fast drop to damnation and his unhappy mother. They suddenly they are facing east, and below them the roads from the plain are dotted with people from neighbouring villages, on foot, in carts and on horseback, all heading in their direction, towards the hill. Children's squeals and laughter float up. People are setting up stalls along the road, lighting cooking fires, tapping barrels of ale and tuning up musical instruments. The squeak of a fiddle and the aroma of frying bacon slice the air.
>
> […] Strange that it's here, by the juicy brink of the spring, in the sheep pellets and glinting grass of the meadow, that he faces his mother's worst demons. The pagans of history's, and the future's, mists. The big woman who wakes him by clambering onto him. Laughing and rubbing her arse up and around his narrow thighs. Pressing her strong body. A smeary face with skin like hail damage. Swampy body, cider breath. Her foxy familiar manner.

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[93] *The Drowner* – p.73.

[94] "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" – Mark 15:34, King James Version.

> […] His own astonished breath jolting from him as she rides his skinny belly, pelvis, legs. Hooting at his squirming fright and the wit of her own fat jiggety antics.
>
> A moment later she rolls off him and reels away muttering through the grass.[95]

As devious as some of its inhabitants, the Wiltshire moorland confounds Will; even when he decides to replace the old ways of his forefathers by the dispassionate promises of the technological revolution, there is nothing that his engineering talents can achieve to salvage this shipwrecked *locus* of experience, a rural Atlantis drowning in mud:

> Other things had changed as well. The economic, agricultural and industrial upheaval, the new modes of travel and communication. His imagination had been captured by engineering (in its hydraulic potential maybe just an extension of drowning!), but for him the Levels had exhausted the possibilities of landscape.
>
> The Levels were an engineer's bad dream: of slovenly wandering rivers forever seeping and shifting in the confusion of no gradient. A black joke of perfectly level ground covered with un-level constructions lurching sideways into the ooze. Everything broke the laws and threw out the angles. Entering any cottage, you stepped down a foot or two. Lines of wet on the wallpaper were grubby graphs of the seasons—dampness edging towards the ceiling throughout the spring and early summer, rising above the mantelpiece at Easter, reaching the windows tops by June. Along the cottage walls sloped the ghosts of old doorways that had tipped on the diagonal, been cemented in and replaced by verticals. Pencils and apples rolled off the tables.
>
> […] Strolling home down Bow Street after a hard day of stresses and angles, he would shudder at those rows of buildings leaning drunkenly away from the street. Their lines akimbo. Building yawning and stretching and widening their eaves to the sky. Their foundations settling languidly into the comfort of the moor.[96]

Dispirited with this Sisyphean assignment, Will turns his back on the hereditary title of "drowner" to officially qualify as an "engineer" and proclaims himself to be a "pantheist" with a very practical creed and liturgy: "He talks of development, mechanization. His hands are waving. Progress."[97] He dreams of opportunities to make his mark in "New World places".[98] When he is offered the chance to travel to a land of new beginnings, his encounter with his future employer and mentor is marked by the first hints of Western Australia's exacting otherness:

> After [O'Connor's] investiture Premier Forrest had hosted a dinner at the Savoy. Swans were again the motif, twenty of them carved from ice that melted slowly

[95] *The Drowner* – pp.28-9, 30-1.
[96] *The Drowner* – pp.75-6.
[97] *The Drowner* – pp.35-36, 40.
[98] *The Drowner* – p.77.

> through the seven long courses into numerous little waterfalls, trickling into a central ice pond filled with live—if sluggish—goldfish.
>
> […] The ice swans, the waterfalls, the tinkling fountains were there to attune this City crowd to a particular challenge. As they all knew, gold had already transformed the former Swan River Colony into the Golden West. The next stage had now been reached. If they wanted vastly increased profits they must tackle the water shortage that was holding back gold production and, indeed, infinite wealth.
>
> After dinner O'Connor had outlined his bold scheme to build the world's longest pipeline to pump water three hundred and fifty miles from the coast to the goldfields.
>
> […] 'I'm here to appraise the best materials and methods and pumping equipment in England and the Continent.' He turned to his friend Oates. 'And to employ the most imaginative young engineers to join me on the project.'
>
> […] 'I think we should strike while the iron is hot,' Oates had announced on the doorstep. 'Mr O'Connor returns to London in the morning.'
>
> 'Over a section of your railway track. I trust I'll make it safely,' O'Connor said, shaking Will's hand and giving his nightshirt the once-over. 'I hope you can stand the heat. Up to a hundred and seventy in the sun, a hundred and fifty in the shade.'[99]

In spite of O'Connor's warning, Will's initial contact with the antipodean colony is marked by nearly-unbounded enthusiasm:

> Only Antarctica lay further south. This alone is enough to make Will feel accomplished and adventurous, and when the *Oceana* steams into Albany, […] the optimism of pioneers and explorers floods his soul.
> […] He feels ready for anything.[100]

Informally surveying the scenery between Albany and Perth, he mistakes the whole of Western Australia for a sylvan Eden:

> Through high eucalyptus forests echoing with the carolling and screeching of birds, past an occasional small, lush dairy farm or orchard, they travel the two hundred and fifty miles north and west.
>
> After travelling a hundred miles, Will thinks the Chief has exaggerated. He has never seen such high, thick timber. Desert? This temperate, well-watered place of olive-green?[101]

When he settles with Angelica in South Perth, he creates for himself a garden of primeval delights that mixes elements and creatures of the biblical original paradise with the remote regions peopled by Rousseau's noble savages:

> Woken daily by the lions, he forms the habit of a dawn walk along the sandy shore. The river before him is really more than a river. […] Most morning as he strolls around the rushes and paperback trees of the bank, thin Aboriginal boys are wading in the river, fishing with boomerangs and spears. Hundreds of swans are fishing too, and with their dark, wet sheen and thin angularity—and with their

[99] *The Drowner* – pp.83-4.
[100] *The Drowner* – p.169.
[101] *The Drowner* – p.175.

> necks looping from the surface like sinuous arms—they seem closely related to the dark, darting boys.[102]

Naturally enough, it is in this setting that Will and Angelica re-enact the original sin; she loses her emotional and spiritual balance and drags him down in her fall, before both start on their separate tortuous progress of recovery towards experience and wisdom. While Will enjoys the bounties of this new environment, he is unable to see that Angelica is struck by some metaphysical equivalent to the physical deprivation afflicting Europeans in the arid Kalgoorlie goldfields, with the same symptomatic desperation:

> It was impossible to overestimate the mysterious maddening effect of the water famine. […] But it went beyond the simple lack of life-giving drinking fluid. The lives of the Europeans were made strangely incomplete. […] Without their unconscious but eternal watery rituals for banishing the specters of death, cooling passion and killing the phantoms of the night, their souls seemed wounded and deficient.[103]

This affliction soon makes Angelica vulnerable to false promises of spiritual fulfilment. In Will's absence, she consumes the forbidden extract of knowledge; the partial enlightenment she derives from it is soon shared with her partner:

> She is in a fugue, For weeks she has the look of someone mentally and physically separated from her surroundings. In the face of her distracted intensity, sighing resentments and kelp breath, he is helpless.
>
> So he crosses the river. He escapes into his work.
>
> She couldn't describe to him how she felt disassembled. […] It was a feeling that her soul had left her.
>
> She was desperate to fill the vacuum. So she was quite calm and firm in her intention as she left the house and pushed through the barrier of dark bamboo and paperback trees and climbed over the back fence into the darker market gardens.
>
> […] 'I want to buy … opium.'
>
> She took out some money.
>
> It wasn't her soul back again, but it was a definite light, tingling presence, and through her it began to write with increasing strength.
>
> *Darling*, it began.
>
> She has prepared a pipe. It has a bamboo stem and she offers it to him with the actressy smile of the picnic.
>
> 'Smoke this with me?'
>
> He's astonished. She may as well have asked his mother's son, the boy from the Ebenezer Chapel, to join the pagans. He looks at the pipe, then at her. He nods. […] They lie side by side and share the pipe.[104]

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[102] *The Drowner* – pp.176-7.
[103] *The Drowner* – p.126.
[104] *The Drowner* – pp.190, 193-194, 197-8.

As in Genesis chapter 3, one of the first realisations of this couple treading into postlapsarian experience is one of incompleteness, of deficiency: their nudity, after passing out in a narcotic daze. Their embarrassment about it is played out in front of a censuring God-figure: Hammond Lloyd, Angelica's overbearing father who is likened to the Greek mythological figure "King Neptune" in the novel. His displeasure with their bold new awareness may come from the fact that his interactions with people around him are mostly defined by his egotistic desire to maintain all of them in a condition of adoring submissiveness:

> When they eventually wake on the verandah in strong daylight […] Hammond Lloyd is sitting in a deckchair in a white linen suit, drinking a cup of tea and looking down at them.
>
> He places his cup and saucer on the floor and his jacket falls open, revealing a pistol in a pigskin shoulder-holster. For what seems minutes no one speaks. Someone's breath is whistling, a mucousy catch in the throat.
>
> Angelica and Will are drawn up, all goose-fleshed limbs together, on the same small brocaded cushion.
>
> […] 'You will have to move about in the wilderness while we dress.'
>
> He gets up slowly. 'When you are ready, I have things to say.'
>
> […] As they gather up their clothes Ham is sighting along his pistol barrel at a swan.[105]

The pistol present in this scene underlines the ruthless nature of Ham's character. Like the deity of the Old Testament, he is prompt to severely punish those who disobey or even question his every command, as Will learns when he later gets shot by that very weapon as he tries to pull Angelica away from Hammond's grip:

> There is a closed jarrah door to one side and he moves towards it and reaches for the handle.
>
> 'She is not here,' Ham says, producing the pistol from somewhere and firing it.
>
> He knows instinctively she is there, even with the noise in his head. Or will be there when he opens the door. Although his right hand clutching the handle is shot through, his reflexes continue to turn it and open the door onto the sight standing in a white nightdress just now being patterned with his blood.[106]
>
> […]
>
> This bullet went through the prominent veins and thin flesh on the back of his hand, below the middle and index fingers, leaving a hole an inch across. It severed two tendons, fractured the second and third metacarpal bones and was lodged there until he flicked it out with his pen-knife in a half-swoon onto the deck of the South Perth ferry.
>
> […] What remained was his hand permanently moulded in the gesture of opening a hotel bedroom doorknob.[107]

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[105] *The Drowner* – pp. 198-9.
[106] *The Drowner* – pp.213-4
[107] *The Drowner* – pp.224-5.

What happens here can also be read in non-Scriptural terms: like the King Neptune of maritime folklore who presides over which seafarer deservedly crosses the Equator or not,[108] Hammond has the power to nearly stop Will in his tracks and to freeze his volition in the in-between moment of crossing over, at the threshold of experience. Demoted back to the condition of powerless earthling by the capricious would-be Immortal, Will receives support and guidance from a pivotal character in Drewe's narrative of Western Australia progressing towards experience, as the author explains in an interview:

> As a kid in Western Australia, I was fascinated by the engineer in chief who built the pipeline to the goldfields and designed Fremantle Harbour and was in charge of an area as big as central Europe. C.Y. O'Connor, a fascinating almost operatic person who carried the water uphill to the goldfields.[109]

The author offers a striking description of O'Connor when the latter visits Will recovering at home from his gunshot wound; this portrait is rich with more than one mythological simile:

> The Chief is a formidable sight cantering on his grey hunter out of the dawn mist. Through the shallows and across the spit, scattering swans before him. A thin and straight-back six-footer, all his control coming from his hips, the early sunrays shooting off his spray, he looks something of a centaur.[110]

Beyond this figure of the liminal creature (in itself pregnant with notions of half-realised human experience), Drewe's description of O'Connor hints at grandeur and tragedy of Promethean proportions. The Chief Engineer appears as a larger-than-life character who rescues downtrodden underlings like Will Dance from the coercive yoke of Old Europe's traditions and of backward-looking, intellectually sterile figures of authority and opinion such as Hammond Lloyd or Perth's short-sighted journalists and politicians. O'Connor is first shown using the shovel and the explosive fire to foster the colony's ambitions of prosperity:

> He'd brought in limestone by cart, and granite by night train from quarries in the Darling Ranges, and built long protective breakwaters north and south of the river mouth and protruding out into the Indian Ocean. Then he'd built a bridge and railway line across the river. He blasted and dredged a channel thirty feet deep through a rock bar across the river mouth which had defied engineers and planners

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[108] Rites of the Equator-crossing ceremony in various navies detailed at: http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Line-crossing_ceremony (accessed on July 6th, 2009)

[109] "Robert Drewe – The Diviner"; interview with the author by Murray Waldren in *Dining Out With Mr. Lunch*; University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland; 1999 – p.38.

[110] *The Drowner* – p.216.

> for seventy years. He had the bucket-dredge *Fremantle* working twenty-four hours a day, six days a week, and his submarine blasting had the property owners of Fremantle screaming for peace and compensation. His harbour works finally covered three miles of land, river and ocean and he patrolled all this territory and construction on horseback.[111]

Like the Titan of Greek mythology, he has to deal with unending torment when he undertakes his biggest challenge. In the initial stages of the Goldfields pipeline scheme, O'Connor's biggest difficulty is to wake up the Sunset Coast's lotus-eaters out of their short-term concerns:

> While gold could be shaken from the dust or crushed out of the quartz in batteries and mills, […] the mining world could ignore typhoid fever.
>
> The editor of the *Goldfields' Gazette*, Walter Ravine, warned against this fatalistic attitude. His editorials tried to stir up the community out of its apathy.
>
> […] The water famine was another matter. The miners agitated for the government to solve the water problem. […] The Goldfields Water Scheme, C.Y. O'Connor's ambitious plan to pump water from the coast, was still languishing on the drawing board.[112]

When the project finally materialises and the pipeline starts advancing inland towards Kalgoorlie, O'Connor has to endure the constant assault and accusations of bodies of authority and influence in Perth which don't seem overly concerned with the life-and-death issues of the goldfields' inhabitants. Like the eagle endlessly feasting on Prometheus' liver, these attacks gnaw at his righteous conscience:

> Later O'Connor spelled it out for him in the back bar of the Windsor Castle. 'It might be all beer and skittles here—they want the bloody water to arrive.' But in the city the attacks on him were getting more petty and malicious. 'They're not thirsty there and they don't let up. Every man thinks he's competent to make engineering and economic judgments. I'm supposed to be greasing my palm, stealing millions from the taxpayer. In parliament and the papers I'm the whipping boy more than ever. […] I'm supposed to be nefarious, corrupt, a reckless blunderer!'
>
> 'Surely not.'
>
> 'And Forrest has gone into federal politics, so no bastard in parliament has the courage to stand up for me.'[113]

His final deliverance shows him ultimately regaining control over his own destiny; he contemplates the momentous fruits of experience he has brought to maturity one last time. Then he departs the human condition on horseback, standing above the fray

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[111] *The Drowner* – pp.217-8.
[112] *The Drowner* – p.127.
[113] *The Drowner* – p.260.

as his last gesture loudly interrupts the droning pursuits of a Monday morning in the state capital:

> The start of another week. Early autumn in the crisp coastal air. The Chief saddled up Moonlight as usual, and Arthur Lynch, his groom, saw him cantering off at 6.30 towards Fremantle harbour. Then he turned south along the coast toward Robb's Jetty.
>
> […] The breakwaters he'd built had altered the configuration of the coastline here, changed the surf, dictated how the tides behaved. Regardless of the wind or moon, the waves were now smaller and snappier south of his new harbour. And becoming chilly with the change of seasons.
>
> He urged the horse further out to sea. He let the breeze take his hat. The water was over the stirrups and Moonlight began to swim. The Chief faced across the ocean, took a revolver from his jacket pocket and put it to his head.[114]

After O'Connor's suicide, Will inherits the mission to bring water to the goldfields, and for months on end he is stuck in another in-between universe: the geographical no man's land of the desert—the archetypal wilderness where existential resolve is sorely tested. Even after committing the original sin, he has not fully stepped into experience. His work on the pipeline has the contradictory characteristics of a pre- and postlapsarian ordeal; the team of labourers he commands has the brutish traits and attitudes of the primeval human species described in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, a rough early stage of development akin to the scene witnessed by photographer Axel Boehm and preceding the common experience of civilization:

> He was surprised to find the workmen so intense and surly, on the edge of madness or mutiny. Fights seemed about to break out.
>
> […] The foremen, too, were full of silent umbrage. Even the young English engineer in charge was vague and curt.
>
> The responsibility of taking the pipeline uphill into the desert seemed to be affecting them strangely. The engineer and his men appeared to be fighting against entropy. Against their own disorder as much as water's natural lazy tendency to flow downwards.
>
> On the pipetrack he saw and heard odd things. Labourers flicked hot lead on his hat and suit and stared at him with the wolfish, knowing eyes of convicts. As if daring him to take the picture, they flexed and flashed and pissed and squatted in front of him, and one smirking fellow masturbated openly at noon in the trench in the pipeline's shadow.[115]

These elements and people also belong to a vision of the human condition after the Fall, as they pay the price for transgressing the water flow's natural order. In a burning land that looks like the Gehenna of this world or the Hell of the afterlife, Will's workers live

[114] *The Drowner* – p.273.
[115] *The Drowner* – pp.247-8.

out God's punishment in Genesis 3:19, their efforts visible "in the sweat of [their] faces"[116]:

> The caulking is done by hand. The work is hard and exacting and encourages bad tempers. The pipes absorb the sun. Long before noon a flick of sweat sizzles as it drops on steel. The caulkers have to work on exposed conditions, handling molden metal in cramped and twisted positions, often lying on their sides and backs. Hot lead scorching through clothing and leather aprons can burn their groins and bellies.
>
> On the aqueduct there is no place for sloppy work. A caulker is a special sort of skilled labourer: steady, sober and physically strong. A man who can work with minimum supervision in a small team strung out along a remote stretch of pipetrack. That's the ideal. In the harsh reality of the climate and countryside who could find one of these paragons? Few of Will's caulkers have any experience. Drawn from other states and countries and occupations by the lure of gold, most are failed prospectors—boozers and misfits unused to hard work.[117]

From the beginning of the explorers' and prospectors' presence in the region, their Hobbesian destructive tendencies have clashed with the atemporal cosmogony of the natives. In this dry land of the origins, interactions between the two groups have often been brutal:

> During the water famine some miners bribed Aborigines with whisky or tobacco or trousers to find them water. Others tied them to trees in the sun and fed them salt meat until their thirst forced them to lead them to their tribal waterholes in the remote granite outcrops. These the miners drained or their animals made foul and muddy.[118]

In this existence with short-term goals and prospects, the forces of nature can easily push tempers to the limits of sanity, with scenes of crazed merriment not unlike what Will saw on Palm Sunday as a child in Wiltshire. As in that village fair scene mentioned earlier, the locals seem unrestrained by civilised habits and, for some of them, even reverting to an uninhibited infant condition or some partly animal state, almost merging with the winged wildlife of the area:

> In the newly formed creeks and lakes the miners and barmaids and prostitutes held swimming contests, boating picnics and shooting parties of great hilarity and alcohol consumption. The strange turn in the weather had made both men and women excitable and reckless.
>
> […] [Axel Boehm] captured the miners splashing like toddlers and delighting in their nakedness. Their chests and buttocks gleaming with the blue-white of skim milk.

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[116] "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground" – Genesis 3:19, King James Version

[117] *The Drowner* – p.235.

[118] *The Drowner* – p.124.

> […] Around the lustful water parties, more birds—crows and galahs—now came in clouds to feed. Full of food, they were even easier to shoot. Bloody bird-down smeared the creek banks and barmaids returned to work with sunburned cleavages and wearing pink and grey galah feathers in their hair.[119]

Contrary to the flood in the Old Testament, this unpredictable deluge does not cleanse the region of all sin but, conjugated with the imminent arrival of the pipeline, it heralds an irreversible move towards the common purpose of civil society, with the pitfalls of postlapsarian experience visible in near-Babelic prospects of far-reaching ambitions inadvertently ushering in enduring divisions:

> The deluge had somehow changed the emotional climate. Unlikely people became intense and passionate and unrealistically optimistic.
>
> […] In the commercial side of town, […] previously conservative businessmen suddenly took the rainfall as a constant, like gold or the new railway, and planned rapid development. Talking *Progress* they began to form clubs and erect buildings which would last […]. At the same time a rent appeared in the miners' camaraderie or earlier days when both labourer and lord, smeared with the same dust, had drunk together. A consciousness of social status was stirring.[120]

The approaching maturation of the human endeavour in this hostile environment remains an intellectual, even metaphysical challenge for many, with athletic rituals, practical altars and philistine scepticism used as so many coping mechanisms to deal with the advent of man's technological order over Nature:

> When, after ten months out on the pipetrack, Will returned to the Prince of Wales, […] he found preparations for the celebration of the arrival of water almost complete, and the town in a high state of excitement and expectation.
>
> In the January heat small children were rehearsing dancing around a maypole. Knees pumping high, sprinters and cyclists, horses and camels, in training for various celebratory race meetings, plunged and heaved around the town. Bright new electric trams clanged and clattered up the main street. Carpenters and painters were putting the finishing touches to the new theatre and to the new grandstand at the sportsground. Lacking only its central ingredient to attract custom, the new swimming baths yawned glistening and enticing, a green-tiled, rectangular hole in the ground.
>
> Still the townspeople found it hard to believe that fresh water was already flowing uphill over the ranges and across the plains and into the desert, and would soon reach the town.[121]

The final assurance that the fate of each inhabitant is to about to be changed forever comes with the official inauguration ceremony of the pipeline presided over by Lord Forrest. An explorer turned politician, he seems to morph into the prophet and

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[119] *The Drowner* – pp.230-1
[120] *The Drowner* – pp.231-2.
[121] *The Drowner* – p.292.

leader of the chosen nation in the desert—Moses regally offering his people the life-sustaining liquid[122] as he leads them to the promised land of pious experience. Will anxiously attends the event, knowing full well the human and material cost of this man-made miracle:

> The desert is not completely horizontal. There is a hill outside town, rather grandly named Mount Charlotte. On top of it a reservoir has been built to hold and disperse water from the coast. […] Despite the still scorching heat, more than twelve thousand people are trudging up the hill and crowding around the small circular reservoir to await the arrival of water.
>
> […] Will is confident that by this final stage the procedure is foolproof. […] Everything works. The water can't but flow profusely at the proper moment. And thereafter. All the water has to do is fall, to reclaim the horizontal. Do its job as the transitory element, the essential metamorphosis between fire and earth.
>
> Then why can't he compose himself […]? Like O'Connor's serene, proud widow? Let Forrest's biblical self-satisfaction wash over him.
>
> […] 'I promised to bring you from the west coast a river of pure water,' Lord Forrest entones, and pauses for applause, 'and that river has delivered itself in the arid desert, *351 ½ miles from its source!'*
>
> […] Forrest, the gruff old explorer-turned-politician, is as emotional as anyone in the circle of upturned, cheering faces as he grabs the big tap-wheel, swings it around and turns on the water.
>
> And so is the engineer moved, touched by the gushing scene before him, the round after rounds of cheers under the low burning sun. A sob lodges in his throat and almost chokes him. Water is truly the most receptive of elements. Gratitude flows after it.[123]

Will Dance, the lapsed pagan drowner converted to the gospel of Progress, finally reconciles the various meanings and readings of this elemental revolution in the goldfields and of his own path of rebellion, fall and self-discovery. The druidic insights he has inherited from his father, as well as modern engineering principles and timeless philosophical tenets all partake of his quiet epiphany at the end of the novel:

> He thought of change, of the way events in the desert had gradually become a *becoming*. A change in levels had occurred, from potentiality to a higher level of reality. See, engineering could do it just as well as philosophy. Move against the tide, push water uphill. For a moment you could forget that water always flowed, always fell, always ended in horizontal death.[124]

The italicized term in the quote and the mentions of "potentiality", "level of reality" and "philosophy" clearly point at Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and his analysis of the "becoming" as a constructive process towards a desirable finality, from raw matter to a marble statue, a tree or a human being. With this final reference, Robert Drewe somehow

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[122] Book of Numbers, 20: 2-13 – see note 86.
[123] *The Drowner* – pp.321-2.
[124] *The Drowner* – p.324.

combines the humanistic view of the postlapsarian condition as an enhanced level of existence and a Christian view of this experience as a progression fraught with somehow-empowering challenges, a perspective set within a theological ensemble largely influenced by the Greek master of philosophy. This pragmatic treatment of the Fall applied to a community as well as to specific individuals is again at the heart of the next work examined in this study, a recreation of W.A. as a paradise under threat and a *bildungsroman* based on Robert Drewe's filtered memories.

* * *

Beyond a mere recollection of his youth in Perth, Robert Drewe constructs a complex narrative of individual and collective lapsarian experience in *The Shark Net*. Whether it can be described as "faction" similar to Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* or more experimental "autofiction", it challenges the simplistic itemisation of possible correspondences between the author's early life and the narrator's itinerary of temptation and transgression. The dichotomy opposing innocence and experience is a central pattern repeated through many subtle variations in this tapestry weaving together parallel destinies, contradictory images and oblique references.

The white-hot glare of Western Australia's sun, sea and sand which welcomes the young narrator after his first transcontinental flight—and which blinds him to more unpleasant nuances of the natural and human landscape—could not be more opposed to the memories of his last hours in the Melbourne suburbs his family has left behind. The last stop at his grandparents' before the journey west reveals a bleak, exhausted scenery:

> The bank garden itself always made me feel sad, It was tired and wintry and churchy. Even the dirt in the garden beds looked old and apologetic. It was grey and crumbly and birds shunned it. Not surprisingly, for a threadbare oasis in a grimy industrial suburb, its plants and thin lawn were dusted with soot. Sick-looking black snails clung to the creeper on the common wall on whose dusty upper bricks the faint word UTCHER and a bull's and a sheep's face could still be seen. The only flowers were old-ladyish blue hydrangeas and some sort of lilies that made me think of graves.[125]

The contrast between Melbourne and Perth is so pronounced that extreme images are summoned to convey the shock of this relocation: "My mother's mood about our destination never wavered. In the middle of the farewell photo session, she cried out, 'It

[125] Robert Drewe, *The Shark Net* ; Penguin Books Australia, Camberwell, Victoria; 2000 – p.24.

might as well be Africa!'"[126] Even though she changes her mind soon after landing in Perth, her exaggerated anxiety prepares the way for the narrator's excitement at the strangeness of their destination:

> That made the journey more scary but more interesting. […] Everything I saw was the Great Unknown.
>
> The place that I knew, the ordered Melbourne world of frosty lawns and trimmed hedges […] fell away as soon as I looked out the cabin window at the sharp mauve sky beside me fading seamlessly into the gold and grey desert below.
>
> Life was suddenly more unpredictable.[127]

Once his family settles in Perth's western suburbs, the narrator is progressively entranced by the place and its curious inhabitants, in spite of his parents' reservations. The "Sand People" are unlike anything he has ever seen: the composite picture he paints turns the locals into exotic liminal creatures, straddling demarcation lines between epochs and species. Appropriately enough, the African jungle comes to mind with the following physical details:

> From a distance most of the adults seemed stained a smooth reddish-brown […] but close-up at the beach […] you saw they were stippled like people in newspaper photographs, spotted with hundreds of jammed-together freckles and moles – brown and black on a pink background. There were women with chests and backs like leopards.[128]

Burnt by the sun, they are also whipped by the breeze, sand-blown into physical indetermination and immaturity:

> Some were as eroded as the cliffs, their noses and ears worn and peeled away, so that grown men had the snubbed features of boys. Around their edges – noses, ear tips, cheeks, shoulders – they were pink and fraying. Shreds of skin poked up from their general outline and fluttered in the sea breeze.[129]

This physical instability leads to slightly bemusing behaviour that conjures up images of savage, brutish innocence: "Some boys also ate themselves. Their scabs, of course […] but also nose-skin, cheek-skin, forehead-skin and especially shoulder-skin. By now I was impressed, but not at all surprised, by boys who ate their own flesh".[130] This auto-cannibalism may be a visible sign of the quiet self-absorption of these Lotus-Eaters: "The

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[126] *The Shark Net* – p.27.
[127] *The Shark Net* – pp.27-8.
[128] *The Shark Net* – p.34.
[129] *The Shark Net* – p.34.
[130] *The Shark Net* – pp.41-2.

men and the boys all looked tough but relaxed, even sleepy. My mother said they were half-dazed from the sun. They were indeed slow smilers, but I could see it was because they were being careful of their split bottom lip".[131] In their sandy Arcadia, the local kids are described as going "barefoot most of the year",[132] indulging in the pleasures of sand and surf in a timeless land of the beginning. Only the most fleeting of potentialities may upset the languid order of things:

> The coastline reminded me of ancient religious backdrops at Sunday schools: the Dead Sea and places waiting for a miracle. It looked as old and bare as the moon. It was also like living in a geography lesson here where the land and sea met. The Indian Ocean was supposed to be constantly invading the shore and the land plants forever edging towards the sea. But apart from the wind nothing seemed too busy to me.
> […] From the sea, the houses of the Sand People loomed like Foreign Legion forts. In the sun their quivery roofs melted into Sahara mirages.[133]

For all its carefree innocence and its appearance of a blank slate, this universe always seems to be fighting entropy and disintegration. Besides the millennia of indigenous presence, modern West Australians look towards a future full of promises but feel that these plans may collapse before ever coming to fruition—a fall without experience or possible subsequent redemption, symbolised by houses and sand tunnels apparently always about to cave in. In a personal world framed by games, broad parental strictures and a hyperactive imagination, the young narrator takes these events at face value and sees nothing ambiguous behind these crumbling human endeavours:

> Tunnel collapses were frequent. The walls or roofs simply caved in, or sometimes the boys forgot where the cubbies were and stepped on them. […] Gasping boys crawled out from under the rubble, spitting dirt and shaking their heads as if to say, 'How did *that* happen?'[134]
>
> Our foundation stones were made of sand and they rested on sand. My mother made a rule that children weren't allowed to run madly around the house. Running made cracks in the walls. So did big trucks rumbling past.[135]

This latest occurrence being too abstract a threat, the denizens of W.A.'s post-war conservative utopia turn their attention to more manageable perils, such as real or invented contaminations to the local ecosystem—and to the moral and emotional balance of the place:

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[131] *The Shark Net* – p.34.
[132] *The Shark Net* – p.34.
[133] *The Shark Net* – pp.36, 37.
[134] *The Shark Net* – p.57.
[135] *The Shark Net* – p.67.

> Both fears were to do with our isolation. The ants and sparrows were like fruit flies, Ceylon crows and 'conmen' from the 'Eastern States' – that catch-all description for anywhere outside the state border, but especially Sydney or Melbourne. […] All of them had the potential to make our lives that little bit less harmonious.
>
> West Australians were accustomed to the Nullarbor Plain and the Indian Ocean keeping unpleasantness at bay.[136]

Much as the gritty wind can smooth bodies and faces raw and featureless, the local collective psyche is constantly at work to erase all kinds of disturbing experiences and the ensuing guilt. Especially in the well-to-do western suburb of Dalkeith familiar to the narrator, tranquillity has to be preserved at all costs, with old skeletons dutifully locked up in the local memory's closet:

> In 1924, a taxi driver, John O'Neil, had been murdered in his Buick cab in Westana Road, 'his head smashed with a heavy instrument until the brain was exposed', and his body dumped in the river at Crawley Bay.
>
> […] For the apparent motiveless murder, a twenty-four-year-old socialite, George Auburn, had been tried and convicted.
>
> […] For twenty days the trial excited the newspapers […]. The notoriety greatly concerned Dalkeith's residents and real estate agents. Alarmed at the prospect of falling land values, they moved swiftly to change the street's name. Westana Road became Waratah Avenue. Westana Road and its murder – Dalkeith's bad name – were erased so completely from the public memory that they might never have been.[137]

Indeed, the area's carefree harmony seems to be built upon multiple strata of forgetfulness and denial. This part of Dalkeith has witnessed violent death before; when the murder of a farmer's wife ended up unresolved and unpunished several decades earlier, the abandon and slow dereliction of the farm doomed the remnants of the local indigenous community to oblivion[138]—a cultural and territorial *tabula rasa* reflective of the general mindset in this corner of polite suburbia in the 1950s:

> Dalkeith people prided themselves on living respectable and modern suburban lives. Modernity was as important as respectability. They lived in the immediate present. The past, as I'd heard it described all my life, went back only as far as the war.[139]

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[136] *The Shark Net* – p.104.
[137] *The Shark Net* – pp.217-8.
[138] *The Shark Net* – pp.220-1.
[139] *The Shark Net* – p.216..

Concerted refusals to acknowledge experience, guilt and responsibility partake of the received moral geography of this isolated middle-class Eden. It starts in innocent, respectable backyards with a now much-mourned element of the local social folklore:

> The common belief was that locking your doors was ridiculous and showed an untrustworthy, inhospitable nature. It could prevent friends from walking unexpectedly into your home with armfuls of beer.
>
> Not only was the back door never locked, it was rarely closed. Only the swinging fly-wire screen door kept out the world. People appearing at the back door caught the householder unawares, maybe only partly dressed. While the front door was public, the back door was more intimate.[140]

Then, there seems to be no serious misbehaving or crime to be found in the western suburbs. Such things only come to mind when reading newspapers' accounts of offences, investigations and court procedures taking place in a 'real world' conveniently kept at a distance: "The real world was in a different galaxy (…). It seemed to be populated solely by the police and people in trouble with the police. And reporters, of course. […] It was also situated a long way from Dalkeith and its environs. The real world was somewhere across the river".[141] Finally, a remote, offshore *locus* has been set aside to act as a safety valve for the locals' secret impulses—or their darkest deeds:

> Rottnest was legendary. Only thirteen miles off the coast, it could have been thirteen hundred miles away. […] It had a reputation as the most relaxed and seductive place anywhere. People – well, girls – were supposed to do things which on the straitlaced mainland would give them a 'bad name'. Rottnest was different. It was where West Australians lost their virginity.
>
> There was a strange irony in this. The holiday spot had a long dark past as a Devil's Island. It had been a prison and a concentration camp. Its original role wasn't exactly trumpeted by the tourist authorities.[142]

This collection of locales composes the whole Perth shifting stage, now set for the parallel itineraries of the narrator and of Eric Edgar Cooke. They live on opposite sides of the proverbial "tracks", here the Swan River, and their distinct existences only intersect at key moments in the story: at the narrator's house when Cooke works for his father, at a giant evangelical gathering hosted by American preacher Billy Graham and at Cooke's murder trial when the narrator covers the proceedings for the *West Australian*.

Eric Edgar Cooke is of course the human embodiment of danger in the capital, a two-legged equivalent of the sharks supposed to lurk in the shallow waters of the coastal beaches. He is the dark half of some "Perth idyll"; however, beyond the sensational

[140] *The Shark Net* – p.111.
[141] *The Shark Net* – p.213.
[142] *The Shark Net* – p.143.

elements of his killing rampage, he is progressively revealed as a complex example of a full cycle of human innocence, fall and experience gone horribly wrong. Childhood ingenuousness was quickly denied to him, and it seemed that it had been in short supply for several generations in his family:

> His people were from the country once upon a time. The York district. Three York generations before his old man, before Snowy, and all of them dust-and-stubble farmers, bad drunks and wife-beaters, Great-grandma Cooke dying suspiciously back then but not enough evidence to put Pa on a charge. So his mother said the time she left […]. It's in the blood, she said, the drink, the violence, the chaos.
>
> And then went back to him! Returned to Snowy, drunk all the time and hating him from the day he was born. *If you think I'm going to keep that misfit all my life you've got another think coming!* Banging his head on the wall. *Talk properly, Uglymouth!*[143]
>
> Kids were cruel to Eric. […] He was expelled from school in first grade. […] He was expelled four or five times, until in the end [his mother] just pulled him out of school. He was always getting in trouble. There was no point leaving him there. […] I mean, he was a pretty bad talker. They called him Birdmouth.[144]

Apparently stuck with no hope of betterment on the wrong side of the river, he drops out of school and starts breaking the law, with a series of burglaries, thefts and arson cases. In post-war Perth, the judicial system seems to treat him leniently—despite his lengthening criminal record and his repeated short stints in jail, he is not seen as an irretrievable loss to society. Indeed, avenues are open to him to blend in with various social circles, either to disguise his antisocial tendencies or to attract a small measure of interest on his person beyond his physical disadvantage—even though his presence at the periphery of the innocent, respectable middle-class is barely tolerated, as in the following scene at a Saturday night dance:

> Because the girl was always frowning away towards the band or the Ladies or somewhere […], he had to touch her to declare his arrival and intention. […]
>
> He touched. Tap, tap on her bare skin. The warmth. 'Kews-me-woodya…?'
>
> […] 'Woodya lumph damph?'
>
> And now come down the old and smouldering cloud. As he fought to force it back, his desperate hair tosses and body moves shouted at the girl: Forget the voice, the face, the talking-through-the-nose! You've got it wrong! Announcing the real me, his gestures said: Man of many parts. King of the Embassy. Boss of the ballroom. Also nifty jive-maniac […], Scarborough lifesaver, tenpin bowling ace, hockey player, et cetera. To sum up: Loner, smooth operator, sportsman, proven stud. In other words, Joe Cool.
>
> 'You must be joking!'

[143] *The Shark Net* – pp.227-8.
[144] *The Shark Net* – pp.343-4.

> […] The scorn of these posh girls. But worse […] were the overheard mutters, the whispers. 'Look out, here comes…" He could hardly bear his brain revealing the venomous word. Worse than 'harelip', worse than 'cleft palate'.
>
> 'Birdmouth!'
>
> The trombone sniggered as the derisive Nedlands girls turned their fragrant shoulder-blades on him.[145]

At this occasion, he is shown to be a traveller between two worlds, another liminal creature wandering around post-war Perth's suburban utopia. After the ball at the Embassy, he sprints through the departing crowds and dives into the Swan River to show off his athletic skills, an arresting final impression before he disappears in the darkness on his way to South Perth:

> It was becoming his Saturday-night routine: swimming out three hundred yards or so beyond the glow of the street and jetty lights, then treading water in the dark, letting his clothes billow around him until he got his breath back. The only sound out here was the regular jump and plop of a feeding fish. Under the high moon, he'd float on his back and bask in the way he'd turned things around again. Put himself in the driver's seat.
>
> […] The night river didn't frighten him. The noise of the lions coughing in the South Perth zoo made him smile. Sharks? Not a thought. Everyone knew there were none in the river.[146]

He may indeed smile at the prospects of natural dangers, since he somehow belongs to the same classification. His odd, semi-aquatic nature is confirmed in the arresting impression he makes on a police officer in the first moments of his arrest a few years later:

> When Bill Hawker grabbed him in the dark as he reached for the rifle Hawker wondered what sort of weirdo he'd caught. This creature was blurbing strange nasal sounds and when he went to handcuff him the hands felt slick and smooth, almost slimy. Eric was wearing the kid gloves, of course, and in the policeman's anxious mood the skin of the gloves felt creepy, other-worldly. […] It wasn't until they turned a light on him that he saw the slimy skin was fine kid gloves. And the harelip explained the incoherent speech.[147]

Through looks and deeds, Eric Cooke assumes the part of the half-realised primordial savage in the West Australian Arcadia, almost a Caliban-like[148] hybrid. During the day, he is tolerated as a menial worker attending to the needs of the western suburbs' respectable middle-class (the narrator first meets Cooke when the latter delivers

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[145] *The Shark Net* – pp.47-8.
[146] *The Shark Net* – pp.50, 51-2.
[147] *The Shark Net* – p.279.
[148] See *The Tempest*'s Caliban analysed in terms of innocence and experience in the first chapter of this study, pages 35 to 37.

furniture to the family home in Dalkeith),[149] but he is then supposed to retreat to "the real world across the river" where he has been raised and where he starts his criminal activities. The narrator and the rest of his family, landing in Perth in the fifties to be soon confronted with its otherness and its dangers, somehow share the shipwrecked party's wonderment in *The Tempest*, before they possibly discover a half-human predator lurking in the dark corners of this secluded territory. An intruder in the land of the Lotus-Eaters, Cooke may also recall the unsightly Morlock type in H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, a servant of the lethargic upper-class Eloi during daytime but turning against them at night to satisfy his hunger[150]. The subtext of Victorian social-class struggle in Wells' novella can be read between the lines of *The Shark Net*, but it is the hint of cannibalism in this imagery that connects Cooke's lapsarian tendencies to ill-assumed instincts in the larger community, when Perth's affluent suburbia is turned into a killing ground:

> Every neighbouring male was a suspect. The police were clutching at straws. They ended up fingerprinting my father and me twice, the second time with every other male over fourteen from our side of the river. At this stage they were only fingerprinting males from our side. For some reason they thought we were killing our own.[151]

Experiencing the extremities of the human condition during his murderous rampage, Cooke may be seen as the symbolic figure of decent Perth's repressed impulses violently released. Bedroom indiscretions and other seamy affairs may be discreetly chronicled in the Perth *Mirror* for the guilty titillation of middle-class male readers, but the fleeting stain it leaves on their minds is quickly dealt with, as the young narrator observes in his own backyard:

> My father sprang into the air […] and snatched the newspaper with an outstretched hand. Still on the move, he unfurled the paper and began reading it while he strode across the lawn (…).
> […] For three or four minutes he circled the incinerator, reading avidly while he walked and squinted in the fading light, turning the pages hurriedly and never quite coming to a halt or acknowledging I was there. Then he got to the back page, quickly scanned it and dropped the newspaper in the fire.
>
> It was the *Mirror*, the local Saturday sex-and-scandal sheet. […] Women and decent people didn't read the *Mirror*. It was never seen in our house.
> […] The paper took only a couple of minutes to burn but he stayed by the incinerator, prodding and turning the ashes, until it was dark and I'd gone inside.[152]

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[149] *The Shark Net* – pp.115-122.
[150] Herbert George Wells, *The Time Machine* in *Three Prophetic Novels of H. G. Wells*; Dover Publications, Inc., New York; 1960 – Chapter X, pp.307-11.
[151] *The Shark Net* – p.268.
[152] *The Shark Net* – pp.138-9.

In this collective inner landscape where the memory of violent death is only a concern for real estate value but where the mere scent of a carnal weakness is seen as a toxic risk, Cooke's deeds are somehow in line with the odd ranking of values in Perth's conservative utopia. Sex seems to be a more damning temptation and transgression than murder, as more attention is given to the questioned morality of some of Cooke's victims than to the brutal nature of their demise:

> This was a town where the most talked-about aspect of the Cottesloe-Nedlands was a barmaid and a married man being in a parked car together.[153]
>
> [Patricia Berkman] was the victim some of the papers […] had referred to as the 'naked divorcee' […] with the disapproving inference that any woman wanton enough to be both divorcee and to sleep without nightclothes was asking to be murdered. What's more she'd sold cosmetics at David Jones's department store and had a Greek boyfriend who was a radio announcer. This got the gossip mills humming.[154]

This hierarchy of wrongdoings is also detectable in the words of Cooke's widow, when she confesses how she utterly misread the extent of his destructive potentialities—with a particular use for the verb "kill":

> 'Life wasn't easy with Eric Cooke. He killed every bit of trust. Every bit of respect, admiration, love, was gone at the end. I was just there because I was his wife and that was it […].'
> […] His eight murders had never dawned on her. 'He was never home; he was never a husband, put it that way. […] I suspected him of infidelity rather than crime, oh yes. […] Sometimes he'd go away for a week and then come home and I'd think, "He's been with another woman!" That's all I used to think. I thought it only concerned us, really. Nobody else.'[155]

Finally, even though the eight murders Cooke is accused of are on everybody's minds, his situation in the dock as he is judged for one specific homicide is not unlike Meursault's in Albert Camus' *The Stranger*[156]. Like Meursault, Cooke is mostly cooperative throughout the judicial process that will send him to the gallows; and the moral outrage at peripheral elements of his killing spree somehow mirrors the hostility and disgust of the audience and of the court officials towards Meursault's perceived insensitivity towards his mother's passing. Interestingly, the key character in *The Shark Net* is also being reproached for indirectly causing his mother's death through

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[153] *The Shark Net* – p.253.
[154] *The Shark Net* – pp.16-7.
[155] *The Shark Net* – pp.338-9.
[156] Albert Camus, *The Stranger*; translated by Stuart Gilbert; Vintage Books, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. & Random House, Inc., New York; 1946.

inappropriate behaviour. While he sits in the press gallery at Cooke's trial during the day, the narrator then has to deal each evening with the aftermath of his mother's sudden decease, whether in the circle of relatives or with the family doctor:

> The doctor told me to sit down. He was frowning. "I thought it was time to discuss your mother's death,' he said. […] 'You've probably been wondering,' he said solemnly, 'whether you killed her.' […] 'I want you to know this wasn't *necessarily* the case,' he said. (…) 'What I mean is, we can't tell for sure.' On the one hand, these cerebral haemorrhages were usually congenital. […] On the other hand, he went on, he'd been treating her for depression, anxiety attacks and insomnia brought on by my 'actions'.
> […] 'I think we're looking at a sixty/forty situation,' he said.
> Which way? I wondered. For the life of me I couldn't ask.[157]

In their common approaches to the question of the nature of transgression and guilt, *The Stranger* and *The Shark Net* present trial scenes that strangely mirror each other, whether in the observers' ambiguous feelings or the accused perpetrator's submissive confusion. In *The Shark Net*, the narrator questions his own judgment as Cooke's path and his' cross again:

> Streaked by this ominous light, guarded by two big uniformed cops and hunched in his old-fashioned blue pinstripe suit with the curling lapels, the prisoner looked different, too. He was uglier, smaller, and, with the eyes of the courtroom on him, even more self-conscious than usual. He looked like a criminal in a B-movie or in *Dick Tracy*. He really was the stereotype of a crook. Even so, for my own reasons I was having trouble fitting the headline MANIAC KILLER AT LARGE to him.
>
> […] Now and then he'd patiently inch his chair out of the glare and his guards would look more alert for a moment and make self-conscious adjustments to their own chairs and postures and already grim facial expressions. He had to squint into a stream of rays to see me sitting below the windows, bent over my notebook.
>
> Suddenly I felt him staring at me. I'd been avoiding his eyes, hoping he wouldn't recognize me, but a moment later he winked. I winked back, then I felt a hot wave of embarrassment that quickly turned into anger at myself.[158]

If this scene and its atmosphere could be seen through Cooke's eyes and mind, it could look like Meursault's impressions at the opening of his trial in *The Stranger*:

> There was a great crowd in the courtroom. Though the Venetian blinds were down, light was filtering through the chinks, and the air stiflingly hot already. The windows had been kept shut. I sat down, and the police officers took their stand on each side of my chair.
> It was then that I noticed a row of faces opposite me. These people were staring hard at me, and I guessed they were the jury. But somehow I didn't see them as

[157] *The Shark Net* – pp.282-3.
[158] *The Shark Net* – pp.5, 10-1.

> individuals. I felt as you do just after boarding a streetcar and you're conscious of all the people on the opposite seat staring at you in the hope of finding something in your appearance to amuse them. Of course, I knew this was an absurd comparison; what these people were looking for in me wasn't anything to laugh at, but signs of criminality. Still, the difference wasn't so very great, and, anyhow, that's the idea I got.
> […] The journalists had their fountain pens ready; they all wore the same expression of slightly ironical indifference, with the exception of one, a much younger man than his colleagues, in gray flannels with a blue tie, who, leaving his pen on the table, was gazing hard at me. He had a plain, rather chunky face; what held my attention were his eyes, very pale, clear eyes, riveted on me, though not betraying any definite emotion. For a moment I had an odd impression, as if I were being scrutinized by myself.[159]

This self-examination seems purposeless, since Cooke visibly does not appraise his lapsed condition as the trial audience would expect him to: "Short of holding a smoking gun, he looks as much a serial killer as anyone could. Yet he didn't appear to feel any guilt."[160] Robert Drewe's portrayal of Eric Edgar Cooke is a complex study in free will versus determinism; his treatment of Cooke's various degrees of factual responsibility is thorough but not irrevocably clear-cut. Cooke is shown to have a perfect, highly-detailed memory of each of his crimes and offences, but his contribution to his lawyer's temporary insanity plea veers between malice, candour and bemusement: "I had full possession of my faculties, like speech and hearing, everything like that. But there was a power. I can't say whether it came from my heart or my head, but it was a very, very strong power – as though I were God and I had power over life and death."[161] As seen earlier in this section, his whole itinerary may also have to do with odds stacked well and truly against him, whether they were scars from his past (his family background, his school experience or his social environment) or fruitless attempts at overcoming the repetition of life's cruel ironies. In a tender yet disquieting scene, Cooke administers a grim baptism of cold comfort to his mentally disabled son, calling out to a Higher power and to Its impenetrable ways:

> For a few seconds there on the beach things were pretty strange. Despite the mess of the icecream and the zinc and sand, the boy's face had changed. He seemed on the ball and older than nine, even a normal nine. There was another thing. When he'd said, 'starfish', he'd stared deep into his eyes. His look was sort of wise, like he was gazing right into his soul.
> […] The blind was already coming down. That's the only way he could describe it. Like shutters. The focus had gone again. Now the look in the boy's eyes was just his old lights-on-but-nobody-home look. Then he started making

[159] Albert Camus, *The Stranger* – Part II, chapter 3.
[160] *The Shark Net* – p.281.
[161] *The Shark Net* – p.319.

> the old bossy noises that meant he wanted something right away, and hurry about it.
>
> […] This one was a real tantrum. […] After a few minutes of this, he grabbed him up, a bit roughly, carried him in his arms into the river and kept walking. […] It took a while but he carried him out until the water was up to his own chest and deep enough to submerge them both, and he did.
>
> When they came up the boy was coughing and sobbing, but then he went quiet and just clung on tight all the way back to shore. He felt like a bastard doing it, but he was still so disappointed he was numb. As he waded in to shore he felt like he'd been teased and swindled by the world's most twisted conman. A real sadistic, mocking bastard, that God.[162]

In the Western Australia reconstructed by Robert Drewe, it seems that Cooke's fall may ultimately be a case of wrong turns, of missed opportunities. This angle is notable in another key scene of *The Shark Net*: Cooke and the narrator are both part of the multitude gathering at the Claremont Showgrounds in May 1959 to listen to the message of American evangelist Billy Graham. Less than four months after his first murder, Cooke the respectable churchgoer answers the redemptive call of Dr Graham and joins him onstage. But it is unclear whether he follows an authentic spiritual urge, or if he just wants to bask in the local luminaries' glow and get others to finally notice him. Ironically, Cooke stays clear from the spiritual failings of alcoholism and adultery that Graham loudly denounces: he is a teetotaler ("Eric never drank, never smoked. Coca-Cola, that was his drink.")[163] and, even though his widow mentions his unabated womanizing, nowhere in the book is he shown in unlawful intimate company. Thus his move towards conversion and redemption seems misdirected—and unconvincing, since he will be unable to follow it through.

On this occasion, Cooke's and the narrator's respective paths of temptation, falling and regeneration almost cross. While Cooke makes a half-hearted attempt at fixing his fallen condition, the narrator toys with the possibilities of forsaking his own innocence by refusing Graham's soul-cleansing compact. His dabbling into petty outrages and misdemeanours may have him mistaken for Cooke's apprentice, or junior copycat—his break-ins to read comic books and his more recent frustrated sexual endeavours with older girls[164] recall episodes of Cooke's itinerary; however, while the narrator appears sincerely contrite ("I thought of my Friday-night behaviour and I felt abject and guilty."),[165] he declines the American preacher's offer of salvation, a

[162] *The Shark Net* – pp.330-1.
[163] *The Shark Net* – p.340.
[164] *The Shark Net* – p.168-70.
[165] *The Shark Net* – p.172.

proposition which he somehow describes in terms of an inverted moral seduction which he has to resist:

> I wanted to follow [my mother] into the realm of goodness. I wanted to join her and the Reverend Dr Billy Graham and his celebrated American crusade and the thousand-person choir and the halt, lame and blind, and the Methodist boys from Wesley College, and Methodist Eric with his harelip and funny voice […]. I was sorely tempted. But I sat tight.[166]

Contrary to Cooke who tries to get public acceptance whichever way he can, the narrator prefers to stay in the crowd in order to remain unnoticed. A few months later, he starts his career as a journalist, and his fieldwork in "the real world" provides him with an assortment of human miseries, neatly catalogued and deprived of their contaminating potential: "We were in the vice-squad office. […] The detectives remained standing, lounging in their shirtsleeves against filing cabinets full of wicked case histories. I thought of all the vice details stored in those cabinets. All the sin and obscenity they dealt with every day."[167] Somehow his new professional status leads him to the irreversible act that will catapult him into precocious maturity: his investigative rounds in the western suburbs allow him to spend more time with his girlfriend in the back of his car, and the visible result of their physical intimacy is something that cannot be hidden from the judgmental gossip of their respectable, middle-class neighbourhood. The narrator's fall into experience has several dissociative characteristics, such as revealed in the detached self-examination he performs when he hears the news of his girlfriend's pregnancy:

> As if from a distance I could already see myself and Ruth acting out dutiful movie roles while the world around us gathered momentum. I said things to her from films, the words sounding familiar in my mouth. At the same time I felt far from worldly and knowledgeable. I felt simultaneously much older and younger than my age.[168]

His inner schism is worded in an even more extreme manner when he announces the news to his mother; out of a case of split personality apparently on a par with Cooke's brazen deceptions, he begins to define the contours of his willing fall from grace:

> [My mother] took it hard, much worse even than I feared.
> […] There was no let-up while I was in the house, and when I left the house her bitter remarks and mortifying accusations swam in my head.

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[166] *The Shark Net* – p.175.
[167] *The Shark Net* – p.211.
[168] *The Shark Net* – p.241.

> […] I couldn't speak. The ordinary loving son and boyfriend could say nothing; neither could the country's most loathsome sex-pig. I was silent with self-hatred and embarrassment, and furious at being so misunderstood.
> […] The truth was I was also curious about my behaviour and asking myself questions. I didn't understand myself either.
>
> I'd known the risk involved, yet at a certain point I'd let fate take over. Why had I decided to defy the odds and my own intelligence and be swept away? I was young and naive but I knew better than that. It wasn't just the old uneven battle between balls and brain. For this to happen, I suspected, I must have willed it.[169]

It is at this time in his life that his budding reporting career symbolizes his confused postlapsarian state, but also offers him a way to get a grip on his situation. While his family is both shaken by his mother's death and cautiously dealing with his status as a father-to-be, his involvement in the media coverage of Cooke's trial turns his sense of dissociation into dismemberment and atomization:

> I was one of the onlookers standing in the asphalt courtyard between the lockup and the holding cells. I was just in the picture: on the edge of the newspaper photograph looking in. I was barely in the frame. I was a left ear, a nose tip, a cheek, a piece of jaw, a jacket shoulder, a sleeve, a hand, a notebook. I was present, but only just. I was made of gradations of grey dots.[170]

He then realizes that unsuccessfully chasing news items around well-to-do coastal suburbs is a good illustration of his sense of aimless experience; thus he envisions a creative bending of journalistic rules that may also be a template for existential empowerment:

> I wanted more than to break news. I wanted to be the news.
>
> My fantasy front-page lead – shark attack or boating disaster or freak rip-tide – was a watery adventure story where I became the hero and got the scoop as well. Naturally it would take unusual circumstances for me to step outside the traditional role of neutral observer and modestly but heroically intrude.
>
> […] Just as my dream story required loss of life, it required me to save lives, too. And, importantly, to risk my own. Then, dripping water, and possibly blood, over the Anglia's dashboard, shrugging off medical attention, and modestly keeping news of my own heroism until the fourth or fifth paragragh, I'd dictate the story over the two-way for the first edition.[171]

In the shocked blur of his newfound experience and responsibilities, he has a confused intuition about how this enduring dissociation (now witness *and* active participant) may be reined in through an enlightened sense of place:

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[169] *The Shark Net* – pp.242, 245-6.
[170] *Yhe Shark Net* – p.13.
[171] *The Shark Net* – p.286-7.

> A germ of an idea was growing. […] This coastal knowledge could perhaps give me a background of my own. Maybe it could help me make sense of events in my own life. I'd spent my childhood and adolescence on this sandy moonscape. I was sure I had something to say about it. I just didn't know what.[172]

This geographical self-awareness is finally shown to be a hindrance rather than a driving force in his quest for appeased, reflective experience; it then takes a job interview with a Melbourne news editor for the narrator to finally break the spell of the Sunset Coast and of its tainted idyll:

> I'd planned none of this but I suddenly realized the extent of my frustration and it shocked me how stifled I felt. I wanted to stretch. I wanted adventures. I was tired of being the black sheep, and of supporting three people on a teenager's salary. Far too much had happened here. It was holding me back and perhaps it would hold me back forever. I had to get out.
> […] As soon as I started speaking I forgot the halcyon West Australian way of life.[173]

For the narrator, the land of the Lotus-Eaters on "phenobarbitone prescriptions"[174] has returned to its usual condition of complacent innocence after the collective trauma of the Cooke murders has settled, and he has to move east with his family to have a taste of the real "real world". In the two novels examined in the next part of this study, *Fortune* and *A Cry In The Jungle Bar*, Robert Drewe's characters will often have to venture into even more distant or exotic territories to discard their ingenuity and embrace the trials and epiphanies of experience.

* * *

III.3 - *Fortune* and *A Cry in the Jungle Bar*

While *The Shark Net* concludes on the narrator's imminent departure to the East Coast and all its opportunities, Robert Drewe's *Fortune* presents the reader with another young journalist seemingly forever stuck on the periphery of Perth's coteries, restricted to experiencing by proxy:

> In a country with a small population a reporter with, say, ten years experience feels not only that he or she has interviewed everyone, but interviewed them all at least twice.

[172] *The Shark Net* – p.295.
[173] *The Shark Net* – p.352.
[174] *The Shark Net* – p.283.

> In such a country experienced reporters sometimes feel they are carrying the biographies of the entire residing and visiting population around in their brains.[175]

This journalist, the occasional narrator of the novel, questions the nature and the function of his professional calling while trying to make sense of a series of random encounters with two colourful characters whose adventures are, for a time, his only conceptual gateways to a world beyond the confines of Perth's coastal suburbs. First to capture his imagination is Donald Spargo, a local identity who is trying to apply experience gained overseas (in Southeast Asia, the Mediterranean Sea and England) as he hunts for lost shipwrecks along W.A.'s coast. The second one, press cartoonist Leon Levinson, seems to offer an even wider breath of accomplishments for the narrator to report, in an awestruck prose that betrays his own inexperience and the puzzling multiplicity of Levinson's "missions" and roles as an interpreter of reality:

> I was certainly envious of his life and, as a first-year reporter, new to candour in my interview subjects. I wrote that he travelled, 'inspired by news, nature, cities, jungles and the extremes of human behaviour'. War, elections and criminal trials, disasters, victories and games were his assignments. South America, Hollywood and the Brooklyn Dodgers; Tahiti, the Vatican, the Congo. All over America and the world he flew and drew.
>
> He said he had put himself in many positions, though soon found that few were more advantageous than that of the cartoonist.[176]

While Spargo fights to keep the control of his destiny and to see it validated by getting his name in the papers, Levinson describes himself as a "borderline artist" who skirts around artistic and existential determination and lets himself be carried by events until the latter force him into an anonymous retreat. The narrator's attempt to transcribe these two contrasting experiences gets caught in the struggle between life's unpredictable patterns and the illusory intellectual reconstructions by "authorized" mediators such as journalists—the latter not being above joining the melee of passive-active reception by their audience:

> Journalism imposes its own forms of order on the world's, the nation's, the town's events. It imposes its forms of order on both the facts in a story and on the arrangement of stories itself. Its aim of course is to draw the reader's attention to what in the day's or week's happenings the editors deem most important.
>
> Naturally this violates the larger truth of a chaotic universe. But, as it happens, readers also make their own editorial judgments, their own hierarchical arrangements. They may easily ignore the editors' prescription by dwelling on,

[175] Robert Drewe, *Fortune*; Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood, Victoria; 1986 – p.40.
[176] *Fortune* – pp.38-9.

> say, the story of the rapist on page thirteen instead of the company takeover on page one.
>
> What is interesting is that every now and then the editors are likely to join the ranks of the readers. For a schizophrenic moment they can be imposing their forms of order on the world's events and simultaneously throwing them out the window.[177]

In *Fortune*, this struggle ultimately leads to questioning the respective value and veracity of the actual experience and of its mediation. Without surrendering to the conceptualized chaos of some postmodern Western writing, Robert Drewe still organizes his novel as an elaborate maze, a hall of mirrors where plotlines crisscross and backtrack and where experience is mostly presented in pieces, in segments. From the opening scene being recreated in the book's final chapter to events mostly presented *a posteriori*, the narrator and the putative readers are at pains to identify the beginning and the end of the story ("Journalism couldn't begin to tell the story. It couldn't cope with the subject, let alone the links between the characters and their ramifications.").[178] The challenging circularity of the proceedings is also implicit in a tentative elucidation of Spargo's enigmatic pursuits and of larger mysteries. In this playful comparison between analytic biography and kids' comic book puzzles, things may not be as straightforward as they seem:

> It was difficult for an outsider, an easterner, to get to the essence of Spargo by then. What came across was the recklessness, the tawdry foolhardiness, rather than the obsession and the deep disillusion. Hectic fatalism was beyond most comprehension. The only way to understand him was to go back and start again.[179]
>
> In one type of puzzle based on the continuous line your pencil joins the dots one to two to three and so on and perhaps discovers a giraffe. In another, the pencil has to negotiate a maze of traps and blind alleys before it reaches home.
>
> A child's puzzle hint: if you don't want to go over the edges, if your aim is a free-flowing and continuous line, it's easier to travel through the maze in the opposite direction. Begin at *Home* and work your way back to *Start*.[180]

Indeed, the *Home* sign that marks the end of the course may slightly differ from a possible substituted *Finish* marker. What is presented here is not exactly the reversal of a standard 'A' to 'B' itinerary; *Home* may as well be some spatial signifier for the beginning of the progress, ultimately turning the fractured line into a loop.

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[177] *Fortune* – p.234.
[178] *Fortune* – p.18.
[179] *Fortune* – p.75.
[180] *Fortune* – p.215.

The violent unpredictability of the characters' lives mirrors the fragmentation of experience presented in the novel. *Fortune* abounds with mentions of explosions (a harbour clearance, blown-up shipwreck relics, a dynamited pirate statue) and of discharged firearms (the Lone Avenger's gunfights, Len Lawson's school shooting, Caroline Castle's gory shotgun suicide). The latter's suicide note even refers to "a 727 fly[ing] overhead […] carrying nuclear warheads".[181] Interestingly, the possibility of a nuclear annihilation of the Castles' neighbourhood in the western suburbs, of the Greater Perth and even of most of human presence on W.A.'s coast is discarded earlier in the novel, when an American colonel seeks a way out of the Cold War's potential endgame:

> Before leaving the Pentagon he's discovered just how small the world was. The day of his resignation in August 1970 he had used the Pentagon computer to find the safest location in the event of nuclear war. The computer said Australia or New Zealand. The computer further specified a certain box canyon sixty miles from the small town of Te Anau on New Zealand's South Island or a particular valley above Thirsty Point on the edge of the coastal escarpment in south-west Western Australia.[182]

In this post-war world on doomsday watch, experience even seems atomized. Any attempt to establish causality and consequence out of randomness requires a careful itemization of reality's elementary particles, even in the case of dry court proceedings:

> Rosanna's account separates here, like whey and curds, into fact and non-fact. There was her court evidence, in the compulsory form of such evidence: her answers to strictly specific questions put to her by each side and taken down by the court typist (and reported in greatly abbreviated form, with a different emphasis, in the next morning's papers). That was the fact, the thin milky whey of events.
>
> There was also her subjective account, to me, to others, to anyone who would listen to her after 16 February, 1984. This was the area of non-fact, the inadmissible evidence, the surreal hearsay. The creamy curds.
>
> It doesn't follow that if something is non-fact it is necessarily false, only that it has no validity in legal or journalistic circles. In life, of course, even in the 'real world' so constantly conjured up by lawyer-politicians and editorial writers, the area of non-fact controls and conditions the majority of decisions and responses.[183]

Facts are then set to become the elementary units of verisimilitude, the building blocks employed in the slow, progressive delineation of a truthfully mediated experience. This discursive construction is reflected in the architecture of visual representation borrowed from Leonardo Da Vinci. Half a chapter of *Fortune* is built around a long quote of the

[181] *Fortune* – p.239.
[182] *Fortune* – p.170.
[183] *Fortune* – p.129.

Renaissance master's Notebooks, with at its core the description of a geometric blooming, a design in expansion that illustrates the path from subatomic nothingness to substance; the terminal stage ("the body") somehow evokes the maturity achieved through experience that was present in an earlier simile ("*Ballast* is defined as a heavy substance used to improve the stability and control the draft of a ship. Similarly, it is something that gives stability to character or conduct, a sense of responsibility")[184]:

> A point is that which has no centre. It has neither breadth, length nor depth. *A line is a length produced by the movement of a point, and its extremities are points. It has neither breadth nor depth*. A surface is an extension made by the transversal movement of a line, and its extremities are lines. (A surface has no depth.) A body is a quantity formed by the lateral movement of surface and its boundaries are surfaces. A body has length and breadth and depth.[185]

This theoretical insert is one of the key axes to apprehend Drewe's interpretation of the trajectory that may lead his characters from innocence to experience. The quote from Section IV ("The Arts") from Da Vinci's Notebooks only stops when *Fortune*'s author, in an intertextual effect, replaces the master's comment on the "contact of the liquid with the solid" with Levinson's vision of life as a coastline—an instance of tortured geometry that is matched by a recurring axiom elsewhere defended by another character, the reporter-narrator:

> Not for the last time Levinson considered that life was like a sketch. No, 'sketch' was not quite the word, because a sketch was an outline of something, the basis for a picture, whereas the sketch that was our life was a sketch for nothing, an outline with no picture.
>
> The perfect example of an outline was of course the coastline. Life was like a coastline, of widely differing physical features—from steep fiords to sheltered bays and benign flat sandy stretches—which while serving as the perimeter of possibilities also gave no hint as to what lay within.[186]

This image of life as a coastline—with its various stretches being made of erosive accommodations with random geological determinations—is a proposition well suited to define Levinson's as well as Spargo's itineraries, each being characterized by the laws of the ricochet effect the narrator dwells upon repeatedly in the novel:

> The sensation of knowing everyone is enhanced in the more isolated and self-contained cities […].
>
> In such places individual paths seem to follow each other, crossing and re-crossing over the years, increasing the chances of extraordinary coincidences

[184] *Fortune* – p.139.
[185] *Fortune* – p.197.
[186] *Fortune* – pp.199-200.

> occurring. People and events collide and glance off each other in a ricochet effect.
>
> […] Whereas fiction turns up its nose at coincidence, life insists upon it. Life's tendency to ricochet is why life, in its spasmodic narrative rhythms, more closely resembles a comic strip, say, than it does a novel.[187]

The path of the ricocheting bullet seems to portray existential progress, possibly from innocence to experience, as a line that is as much a chain of cause-and-effect links (the whole shaping the conventional narrative of mediated experience) as the unfathomable ballistic patterns of sheer luck, or "fortune". The interpretative challenges of this approach are presented to the narrator very early on:

> I realized that it fitted in with my belief in life's ricochet effect. Individual paths follow one another. People and events career off each other only to remain inextricably linked.
>
> My cardinal example of the ricochet principle actually begins with me. A factual story. *Dal vero*.
>
> In 1953, when I was nine, the Lone Avenger wrote to me. (…) Each month's Lone Avenger comic book featured a find-the-bullet contest. The contest was based firmly on the principle of the ricochet. The back cover would show a scene where, say, the Lone Avenger had just shot the six-gun from the hand of a whiskered gunslinger […].
>
> You had to work out the angle of deflection, guess the route taken by the victorious bullet and mark with a neat cross (ink, not pencil) where you estimated it was now.
>
> However, what intrigued as a nine-year-old was how the whole premise of the contest depended on time and motion being abruptly suspended. The presumption had to be made that the Lone Avenger's bullet wasn't buried in the wall of a clapboard feed store or in a tree (or even in a person, some goggling cowboy onlooker) a hundred yards outside the cartoon's frame, but hanging weightless somewhere in the dusty air.[188]

Nonetheless the ricochet principle makes a strong impression on the young reporter, and he can see it in action when he starts to work on Spargo's case, with the ricochet sitting firmly on the side of "the larger truth of a chaotic universe"[189] against journalistic rules:

> It's polite and self-protective to take a few notes even if there is no intention of filing a story.
>
> Get the names, ages, addresses, occupations. Lesson One: *Who? Where? When? Why? How?*
>
> […] From that point this became a story which defied Lesson One. It flew in the face of the Golden Rule. It changed tack, altered shape, willfully added and subtracted characters. The constants were very few.
>
> I sensed the story was leading away inevitably to a dramatic conclusion but it veered away from the constraints of journalism and refused to signal its route.

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[187] *Fortune* – pp.21-2.
[188] *Fortune* – pp.48-9.
[189] *Fortune* – p.234; see note # 175.

> At one time there may have been a *Who?* and a *When?* and perhaps even a *Where?*
>
> At no point in the coming months, however, was there a definite *Why?* or *How?*[190]

The questioning words mentioned here can be compared to uncertain X and Y coordinates on a chart, and the twists and turns of the existential bullet and the damages it produces are comprehensively listed: "flew", "changed tack", "altered shape" (which could refer to the projectile's expansion or fragmentation upon impact), "added and substracted characters" (the odd innocent bystanders hit by stray bullets), "veered away" and "refused to signal its route". Innocent bystanders, tortured souls and predators are all lined up along the deadly path in a dark, surreal demonstration of the ricochet principle in full interdiegetic flight.[191] Len Lawson, the cartoonist who created the narrator's cherished *Lone Avenger* and its find-the-bullet puzzle, steps out of the shadow of his creation and starts a murderous rampage with aftershocks that shatter the lives of one of his surviving victims and her psychiatrist—with the details pertaining to the main perpetrator taken straight from Australian true-crime history:

> Was this the end of the bullet's momentum at last? Could I now presume, having charted the angles of deflection, guessed the trajectory, that the Lone Avenger's bullet, having ricocheted off the five photographic models and the 'church-going' sixteen-year-old and the jazz-ballet dancer and her aborted child and finally the psychiatrist, was now hanging, weightless, in the humid air over the dead psychiatrist's BMW on a dirt road off Sydney's northern expressway?
>
> […] So could I now mark with a neat inked cross where the bullet had finally stopped? Where time and motion were abruptly suspended, over a parked BMW on a dirt road?
>
> Not entirely.
>
> The bullet never stops. Worse, it fragments. Splinters fly everywhere. Each shard begins its own flight and the process continues.[192]

Where does the line finish? How is experience defined—and circumscribed? The whole trajectory is characterized by uncertainty: its bouncing dips and climbs, its unreadable coordinates, even its direction (is the end of the progress *Home*, *Finish* or *Start*?). On this reliable axis, it seems impossible to locate any specific original sin or *hubris*, and the Fall coming thereafter. Perhaps the latter occurrence has to be conceived as a global manifestation in the postmodern nuclear age. In Drewe's vision, the Fall into experience may be likened to new opportunities to step out into the public consciousness. Electronic media such as television, conferring its "as seen on TV" laurels, led to the possibility of

[190] *Fortune* – pp.30-1.
[191] *Fortune* – Chapter 11 (pp.48-63)
[192] *Fortune* – pp.61-3.

the universal "15 minutes of fame" suggested by Andy Warhol, a phenomenon Drewe potently illustrates through Spargo's meteoric rise and fall in the local media *psyche*. As for Spargo, feeding his self-reinventing and self-aggrandizing tales to various audiences, it may even hint at the twenty-first century's digital venues for existential self-empowerment: "Web 2.0" or "Web Look-at-me" artefacts, such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter. In the cases of Levinson and Spargo, experience played out in public is defined by their respective attitudes towards the line, the contour of their destinies; and the difference between both men's personal delineations may only be an optical illusion.

Even if Leon Levinson describes himself as "a split personality"[193] on his final meeting with the narrator-reporter, his personal itinerary is described in the novel as the long meandering path of a "borderline artist […] putting off indefinitely what he wanted to be",[194] only peripherally involved in the world's events or in his own artistic fulfilment. Initially unsatisfied with drawing buildings during his architectural studies, he switches to press illustration with a graphic style halfway between sketching and longhand writing that defies critics' categorizing and expectations and land him prestige positions as official artist for *Life* magazine and NASA. For about 30 years Levinson takes this problematic signature (its ambiguity a source of malaise for him and of marvelling for others) around the world and seemingly doodles his way through World War II in Europe and Asia, the "*new* New World"[195] of Western Australia, the Cold War with Saigon in 1967 and Nixon's visit to China in 1972, and through his inner turmoils as well as those of the United States, his adopted land since he left the Old World in 1941. During all these years he skirts around issues and meanings, whether in his art or in his personal progress towards maturity, in a distanced way close to some of the narrator-journalist's preoccupations:

> For thirty of its thirty-six years *Life* had kept him busy being a new American, dancing between art and journalism, dashing around the country and the world in a state of high stimulation.
>
> Most immigrants nestled in somewhere where they could feel secure. *Life* and he had been happier for him not to put down roots. Being an immigrant was a state he actually preferred. It gave him official spectator status.[196]

Only a momentous change in external circumstances can push him to settle for one single pursuit, but this forced realignment with his destiny challenges his "rootless

[193] *Fortune* – p.184.
[194] *Fortune* – p.188.
[195] *Fortune* – p.47.
[196] *Fortune* – p.190.

cosmopolitan"[197] outlook on time and events, with his move towards involvement symbolised by a figure that evokes the narrator's musings on the ricochet principle:

> At least the passing of *Life* made one decision for him. Now he had the chance to bite the bullet. To opt for art, completely and unreservedly. But still he wavered. After thirty years he was used to being on the move, getting good money and having a foot in each camp. […] Why did he have to choose a category anyway? What was the matter with being a borderline artist?
>
> He agonised that he had never tested his solitude or the courage of any single action. Could now be the time to do so? For more than a month he sat tight in his New York apartment […] feeling increasingly trapped by this enforced freedom, encircled by his continuous line.[198]

With his half-hearted grip on self-definition and responsibility, his "biting the bullet" may look as little convincing as the bullet-catch illusion performed by magicians. Still, gone is his sense of borderline experience and he now advances in the wake of the ricocheting projectile that leads him to California and Linda Silver; and it is the bullet that "snap[s] […] through her spine" during a political assassination attempt that forces Levinson to have both of them permanently exiled to Thirsty Point, Western Australia, where he semi-consciously borrows another cartoonist identity, *Lone Avenger*'s Len Lawson. While the latter is in jail serving a life sentence, Levinson is left to meditate on the curious circularity of his delineated experience, another enclosed space where it is other people's task—among them the narrator's—to measure and comment on his achievements:

> Does it matter whether you believe in an editor's view of events or in the larger truth of a chaotic universe?
>
> Does it matter which line you follow? Or that the line might stop abruptly and for no known reason?
>
> Levinson made one remark while we waited in the Sheraton Wentworth for the jury's decision that I remembered even during the dramatic events of the next twenty-four hours.
>
> […] 'At least it keeps the parentheses open,' he said.
>
> Faced by my incomprehension he mentioned a conversation with Spargo back then, while they camped on the beach under the trailing edge of the sudden cyclone.
>
> […] 'I said I felt I was becoming an abstract biography. My life was neatly enclosed by parentheses. It was terrifying the way my existence was beginning to appear in print, like a waiting gravestone.'
>
> He'd complained that his birthdate was always followed by a hyphen: *Leon Levinson* (1920—). His death day was left open. The dash hinted at the end so eagerly awaited by all the art historians and librarians, all those cold vultures—*Not long now, folks*.

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[197] *Fortune* – p.184
[198] *Fortune* – p.195.

> ‘They couldn’t wait to fill in the gap. The essential thing to these people was that I be placed between parentheses. I couldn’t be let free.”[199]

This image of typographic convention and the constrained feelings it elicits in Levinson is indeed suited to a character long defined through a hyphenated professional perspective (writer-cartoonist, or “writer of drawings”)[200] and who has indeed “dashed” without clear objective from one end of the world to the other. The context of this image also affords to perfectly convey how Spargo’s perception of his own march towards experience couldn’t be more opposed to Levinson’s: ‘Do you know what Spargo said? “Fuck your hyphen, Leon. I’m unstoppable.”’[201]

Indeed, Don Spargo seems to embrace his experience forcefully, almost pathologically (the schizophrenia of Levinson’s “split personality” more certainly applies to the shipwreck hunter). His is a new sort of personal accomplishment in a postwar world in which collective ideologies and creeds slowly recede, replaced by individual narratives marketed to the masses, for example through the narrator's work:

> I can barely remember now what my intentions were. Probably something highfalutin. Perhaps I had in mind a cautionary tale for the late twentieth century obsessive personality. Maybe I wanted to wag an admonishing finger about the dangers of gold fever! I know I wanted to trace the extraordinary procession of events which had followed Spargo’s sudden stroke of luck, his wealth and notoriety. At the same time I was urgently trying to justify to myself my return to journalism, and had decided that the profession (craft? trade?) existed to tell stories such as Spargo’s.
> […] I wasn’t too blasé to take up the little man caught in the cogs. But what I was really looking for was the doomed hero, the thwarted genius, the top seed put down by cruel circumstance.[202]

His duality is manifest in his constant straddling of the meandering and bucking line of his destiny, always trying to stay on top of this “unstoppable” wave in order to ultimately remain in control. It is a wild ride, with him always having “one foot in each camp” (another expression that seems more apt to describe Spargo than Levinson). In Spargo’s case, this posture allows him to be alternatively in and out, in or out of his various roaming grounds, be they natural environments or people’s lives. He’s depicted above and below the sea surface, onshore and offshore, in country and overseas, admitted to or excluded from Perth’s elite circles, in or out of gaol, from one relationship to another, and significantly for him in his mediated incarnation, in and out of favour with

[199] *Fortune* – pp.244, 245.
[200] *Fortune* – p.187.
[201] *Fortune* – p.245.
[202] *Fortune* – p.19.

opinion. The latter can easily get lost between Spargo's shifting identities and public *personae*, the product of fused narratives hesitating between the guilty adventurer and the righteous litigant. Spargo willingly enters a quasi-Faustian pact with the press in his own terms:

> He wanted the newspaper to pay his legal fees. He said he had court cases piled up in several states and his bail money was tied up. In return he offered his 'story'. He was quite unabashed about this offer; not a hint of irony or self-consciousness showed in his steady gaze. […] His story, he intimated, was fascinating if not heroic. He seemed to see himself as an amalgamation of Jacques Cousteau, Columbus and Dreyfus.[203]

This amalgamation somehow fits the prospective angles of approach of the Spargo case earlier ventured by the journalist: Cousteau would be the "genius", Columbus the "obsessive personality" struck with "gold fever", and Dreyfus "the little man caught in the cogs", "the doomed hero". Before being played out in the public sphere, a subtle split was already traceable in his character ("I was older than my years").[204] This aspect of age and its possible relation with a shift from primordial innocence to experience in progress are present in his practice of professional diving:

> [A]t fourteen, in 1944, Don Spargo was already a hero. […] young Spargo had loaded the hull of a bombed East Indian freighter with one hundred pounds of plastic explosive and cleared Wyndham Harbour.
> […] After the explosion this cocky teenager plodded into town, into the pub, in full diver's gear, and demanded a beer. A man's drink after a man's job.[205]

In a later diving-related episode, images of birth are merged with elements of adulthood in a conceptual challenge to the figure of innocence giving way over time to experience:

> In his life till then he had welcomed no prize more than his introduction in the Mediterranean in 1951 to Jacques-Yves Cousteau's revolutionary aqualung. He'd just turned twenty-one. Perhaps this was significant: he was independent and miles from home. This new scuba gear released him from the claustrophobic constraints of the bell-helmet and the dead weight of the boots. His umbilical cord was severed.[206]

He has just been reborn and he already looks back on his life in the paragraph immediately following the previous quote; his enthusiasm and hopes at that time mark

[203] *Fortune* – p.36.
[204] *Fortune* – p.78.
[205] *Fortune* – p.77.
[206] *Fortune* – p.96-7.

the beginning of the peculiar dissociation, the split that will define his mediated experience:

> He said at the time (hoping it wouldn't be true): 'This is as good as it gets.'
> At twenty-one he was as restless as he was prescient. On the off-chance that life could be even better he kept moving. In this mood of itchy anticipation he fidgeted around Europe.[207]

Always projecting himself ahead of events and with the reality of his achievements always slightly out of phase with his stated ambitions, his dual apprehension of experience has some of the characteristics of ghosting, or ghost image, the optical effect visible on television screens with poor reception. This phantom echo, perceptible through another technological platform of mediated experience, may illustrate the constant tensions in Spargo's wrestling with his hectic existential trajectory. These tensions are a permanent trait of his public *persona*, its duality at play in his deportment as in the reaction it elicits in the various groups which constitute his "audience":

> "The friends of Spargo's youth were marginally more instructive than his press acquaintances. But again there was polarity of opinion. They agreed that—and the phrase turned up more than once—he had 'a chip on both shoulders'".[208]

Spargo learns to live with this inner schism for a time and masters the faculty to switch between different roles while he keeps some of the burden of maturity at bay:

> It was marriage and career that brought him back to diving. It began again as a hobby. It relieved the itch of responsibility.
> Revelling in its release he swam the reefs north and south of the Swan River mouth.
> […] His life at this period had a fine balance to it, with a precise allotment of time. He was a husband, father, company man, a sociable man-among-men. And in his own time he was an explorer.[209]

This "balancing" act between his various obligations and his favourite pastime mirrors the degree of liberty he grants himself in his accommodation of facts with fantasies. His first exploits are marked by this flexible outlook:

> His transformation from character to celebrity caused people to recall the more flamboyant and attractive things he had done, or was said to have done.
> […] In Australia it isn't often that the facts match the yarns. It's photographs which turn the tall stories into facts and legends usually avoid being photographed.

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[207] *Fortune* – p.97.
[208] *Fortune* – p.96.
[209] *Fortune* – p.101.

> […] Legends aren't unduly concerned with inconsistencies.[210]

This controlled ambiguity is also present when he daydreams about his possible find; the near-frozen quality of the underwater scene (close to the "time and motion abruptly suspended"[211] effect of the ricocheting bullet hanging in mid-air) allows him to waft, undecided, between various planes of public recognition and self-fulfilment:

> He was remembering that exploration was a fascination, not an obsession, in those days.
> […] He was imagining his shipwreck as still a minute coral irregularity, a protruding speck of concretion on the limestone foundations of the continent, and his future preoccupation as still resting comfortably somewhere myth and history.[212]

However, his dreams of fame are about to become reality and he is forced to lucidly confront his dual apprehension of the situation; once more, it is Spargo's control of his destiny which is at stake in a schismatic tug-of-war that leaves no room for a quiet middle way:

> 'I'm in two minds about all this', he confessed to her.
> He enjoyed basking in the limelight, no doubt about it. It was a heady sensation. He felt invulnerable and his horizons seemed endless. But he was being swept along by the momentum of 'news'. It was 'news' that had granted him sudden importance and there was little he could do about it.
> So he felt alternatively powerful and impotent, famous and less than nobody.[213]

Not one to sit on the margins like Levinson, Spargo chooses to go along for the ride even if it means getting always closer to his tipping point; the blur of his fast-changing circumstances is reinforced by the prism of an external gaze, that of the public grasping the meaning of his mediated experience:

> [P]ut yourself in Spargo's place, carried along by the tide of your own quoted remarks and photographed actions. There are your malleable words, rearranged and set down for posterity. There is your likeness, allegedly brave and imaginative, 'preparing to recover the *Fortuyn* treasure' and 'studying a chart of the shipwreck site'.
> It was impossible not to surge forward, much less pause to think or sensibly postpone the momentum for any reason.[214]

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[210] *Fortune* – p.77.
[211] *Fortune* – p.49.
[212] *Fortune* – p.105.
[213] *Fortune* – p.111.
[214] *Fortune* – p.112.

In a recurrence of the "ghosting" effect, the real Spargo has to share the stage with his new printed incarnation, and this personality split is commodified and turned into a space of dissection, celebration, then rejection and mockery by the media and the public; as the object of "a cautionary tale", his inner self has been wedged open to let in instances of intrusive empathy ("put yourself in Spargo's place") and is left vulnerable to accusations as unfounded as some of his claims to glory:

> The newspaper made no explanation to its readers for its abrupt change of heart on the *Fortuyn* story. It dropped the story like a hot coal and allowed it to fizzle out. One or two readers wondered in letters to the editor whether Spargo was being cagey. They surmised that he had had second thoughts and shrewdly wanted to keep his discovery secret. Several others, reflecting the majority, took the paper's sudden rejection of him to mean he was either a liar or a boastful fool. The paper didn't disabuse them.
>
> […] His humiliation was deep and all-encompassing. […] He knew everyone and felt they were all laughing or sneering.[215]

The more Spargo's identity and achievements are objects of public questioning, the sketchier they become—even for his closest relatives, perhaps even for himself; the sporadic mastery of his destiny, which goes hand in hand with his eroded sense of completeness, is once again the key to apprehend his sustained existential drive. One of his partners thus witnesses this chaotic inner struggle:

> While Rosanna was privy to his fears, she wasn't privy to his distant past. She had no way of knowing that this sort of eccentric anxiety […] would once have been completely foreign to his nature. She didn't know that something vital was missing. She presumed that the raw and vulnerable edge to his character had always been there, that she was seeing the complete man, not only the man who had always been, but the man at his peak.
>
> […] 'His emotional system was overloaded. It was inevitable some little wire would disconnect', she told me.
>
> She couldn't afford to consider the alternative. And if he had momentarily blown a fuse he had at least been in control of events again, leading the merry dance instead of being led […].[216]

Spargo's possibility of readjustment, of refocussing to eliminate the ghost image, is noted by the narrator when the treasure hunter defends his case during one of numerous court actions opposing him to the State judiciary: "This was the time, looking back, when Spargo seemed to me most explicitly himself".[217] He is indeed himself when he challenges authorities and expectations; the same definition of his character applies on the night of his death, when his apparent surrender to his gaolers/murderers is a way to

[215] *Fortune* – pp.115-6
[216] *Fortune* – pp.128-9.
[217] *Fortune* – p.146.

regain control of his destiny by escaping his existential confinement, discarding the bounds of factuality like an antiquated diving suit.[218] The confines of his cell dissolve into sensuous light, and he floats off the same stretch of coast where he has found the *Fortuyn*'s shipwreck. His "explicit self" is in tune with "the accidental precision of his alignments", "Nature […] full of straight lines and perfect circles";[219] finally, any certainty regarding the linearity of the progression from innocence to experience is laughed off in Spargo's giddy thrill of finding the elephant's tusk.

The narrative arc closes in a loop around a deceptive object ("an impression of smooth white ivory but of course the tusk was thickened by concretion and encrusted with coral and shellfish")[220] whose rocky, bumpy surface and the sheer incongruity of its presence are striking signifiers of the randomness of life's offerings that Spargo playfully takes in his stride. In his own terms, he once again sits in and out of the frame of experience; by contrast, the main protagonist of Drewe's *A Cry in the Jungle Bar*—the next novel examined in this study—appears irrevocably out of his depth, lost in his Westerner's bewilderment towards restless Asia and his own existential confusion.

* * *

Richard Cullen, the main protagonist of *A Cry in the Jungle Bar*, flies from one Asian country to another in order to impart husbandry lessons on rearing water-buffalo on behalf of an unspecified U.N. development agency; however, as knowledgeable as he seems to be regarding cattle treatment, he is utterly lost when he tries to apply an equivalent set of principles of betterment to himself and to people around him. The narrative takes the reader through a grand tour of agrarian spaces, whether they are the suburban gardens of Cullen's childhood in Australia or the cultivated plains and hills of Southeast Asia visited by the buffalo expert and his colleagues—all of this composing a complex set of variations on the science and art of Georgic husbandry applied to land, beast or man. As seen in the previous chapters of this study, Hesiod's and Virgil's poetry (later revisited in post-Renaissance Western literature) offers an aesthetic and philosophical solution to the apparent dichotomy between the archetypes of original idle innocence in a bountiful garden and the bitter experience of exhausting labour as

[218] *Fortune* – pp.250-1.
[219] *Fortune* – pp.252, 253.
[220] *Fortune* – p.15.

postlapsarian punishment. By his efforts and acumen, the perfect husbandman somehow reinstates God's original plan for His creation;[221] by working the land to extract optimum returns, he helps bring forth fruits of experience marked by the hope of redemption rather than by despair and corruption.

In the line of eighteenth-century treatises of husbandry, Cullen puts the finishing touches to his own contribution to better cattle management:

> Cullen was dictating a foreword to his buffalo book. It would be, he hoped, the definitive volume on the subject. *The Poor Man's Tractor* would be a reference source for the veterinarian and animal production expert, a brief for the practical farmer and a textbook for the serious student. He believed even the general reader could find it interesting. He was anxious to stress the global *significance* of the beast, its importance in the scheme of things.[222]

However, for all his lofty visions of intellectual recognition, Cullen is often reminded of the physical characteristics that link him with his object of study—a printed reference to this interspecies congruence that introduces a rich metaphorical imagery of Cullen as a beast of burden led by internal and external darts and jolts through backbreaking experience towards a sacrifice of illusory import:

> It shouldn't be forgotten that he was now one of the top men in his field […]; published in the *New Scientist*, *Scientific American* and the *Oxford Veterinarian*. In an introductory paragraph the *New Scientist* had even made jocular reference to his size and his record as a 'buffaloing' second-row forward in the early sixties, a parallel which had earlier tickled *Horizons*, the Organization's staff magazine […]. If the joke was wearing a little thin, he was still good-natured about it. Forced to give their mutual traits any thought at all he could find none that weren't commendable.[223]

Cullen's own acknowledgment of this similarity sometimes comes with pride; it is a part of Nature's gifts he has learned to put to good use:

> Ever since he was a boy, a big child with a deceptive rangy ease, he'd used sports to erase his problems. At least momentarily. (…) Even here, a heavy man in the tropics, swallowing salt tablets and nursing his old talent and wily injured body through sweltering contests against younger men, it was pleasurable. Playing the cruel game of experience and guile and laughing about it later. […] Heavy-legged from the spongy ground but serene in his exhaustion—this was when he harmonized with Asia.[224]

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[221] Genesis, I:28; II:15.
[222] Robert Drewe, *A Cry in the Jungle Bar*; William Collins Pty Ltd, Sydney; 1979 – p.28.
[223] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – pp.18-9.
[224] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.32.

Most often, though, his marked physicality sets him apart from sophisticated company and restricts him to one-dimensional bodily experience:

> The familiar stupidity of his size, the unbalanced nature of his position, struck him deeply. Out of kilter once more. He mourned his lack of tropical guile, his missing manipulative ability. What had gone wrong with his genetic inheritance, he'd wondered more than once before, that he'd missed out on George and Dottie's cleverness?[225]
>
> He talked about oneself as a product of genes and environment. That was the only level on which he understood life. The breeding and nutrition angle.[226]

Interestingly, even if the last description hints at a failure of his husbandry enterprise of self-improvement, the fact that it is to be found in his wife's analysis of their marital decay is as much a comment on her own set of inhibitions as on his—with Margaret seen as the product of draconian parental husbandry, raised in the safe biological and ethical confines of an invisible greenhouse, with the occasional escapist move being nothing more than toe-dipping into transgressive experience:

> Her parents, the Catholic hypochondriacs Pat and Ruth Lynch, had brought up their only child in a sterile atmosphere […]. She had been born in their middle age, after a series of miscarriages and a still-birth, a small baby of pale beauty. Little Margaret received a daily delicate thermometer in the armpit. Her drinking water was boiled and refrigerated. […] Mosquito-netted, she was safety-pinned into bed in case of night-time tumbles. At those few friends' houses trusted to safeguard her she would ask surreptitiously for chocolate biscuits and Coca-Cola.[227]
> Give us the child for the first seven years, said the Jesuits. When she thought of her own conditioning she could squirm.
> […] Looking back, there was really only one time when she didn't have that omnipresent tautness. She was a fresher at university, smart and pretty, studying hard yet revelling in the freedom from the nuns. On the one day, a Friday in May, she'd received an A-plus for a European history paper and then […] had been asked out […] by the dazzling, duffel-coated Sam Considine, a very big man on campus. […] As it turned out Sam was a long way from surreal, grabbing her breasts as soon as he parked the car, sulking at the knock-back […].
>
> A vivid image of herself, viewed with the utmost detachment, would remain with her forever: returning home that night, going to bed naked for the first time in her life and , her bottom in the air like a baby, a hand between her legs in flushed need, guilt and disappointment, rocking, rocking, rocking.[228]

These last few scenes which combine frustrated, ambiguous innocence with refused experience and delayed fall are evoked through Margaret's preferred mode of growing detachment from actuality. Her own attempts at self-improvement are mostly

[225] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.170.
[226] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.189.
[227] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.70.
[228] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – pp.78-9.

virtual, with anticipated, scripted experience fantasized in the minutest details and savoured more deeply than the expected occurrence:

> She would have Mina make a special farewell dinner and she would give Richard the shirts as a farewell present. He would like them, she was certain. […] She envisaged him, surprised and grateful, receiving the parcel, kissing her thank you, unwrapping it, perceiving that it was two attractive shirts, getting up from the table to try them on, returning wearing one of them. […] He would sit down again to dinner […] and they would eat Mina's special *adobo* and drink German wine together.
>
> Considering this image with pleasure, Margaret lay back in the rear seat tapping her fingers lightly on the parcels beside her.[229]

This dissociative apprehension of the world gets more and more acute throughout the novel; it is present when she finally turns her back on her marriage, her education and on Western rationalism, and willingly lets her burdened *persona* dissolve into Eastern magic and mysticism:

> She contemplated seeing photographs of herself reading the *National Geographic* while waiting to see a mysterious faith healer and seeing photographs of herself reading and waiting to see a mysterious faith healer and so on until she was a microscopic dot. Was it the same as infinity, this endless progression? *A single movement, endless*—that was oneself. But she confused infinity with geometric terms, something to do with never-meeting parallel lines. How did you describe this ever-diminishing boundlessness?[230]

This progressive disintegration, which echoes Da Vinci's geometry and the ricochet principle both mentioned in *Fortune,* [231] concludes for Margaret with a choice to opt out of destiny through a paradoxically punishing out-of-body-experience:

> The Reverend Doctor hovered over her flesh. She perceived this perfectly from the vantage point of a third, or fourth, person. Suddenly but subtly she had become a hyper-perceptive onlooker. […] She saw this person, herself, screw her face into a concentrated red ball, as if in birth agonies, and was both astonished and embarrassed to watch this naked body heaving and arching. […] Despite all this wild bucking activity, the sweating and fighting, from her unique position she was able to inform herself: *Now! Now!* hear herself shriek these very words, and watch herself […] sob with the relief of having reached the edge and toppled over.[232]

Still, she leaves behind the fruit of the convergence of both hers and Cullen's personal histories: their two children whose idiosyncrasies Cullen observes in a slightly dispirited way, with the eye of a preoccupied husbandman tending to twisted saplings:

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[229] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.43.
[230] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – pp.202-3.
[231] See quotes 183 to 190.
[232] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – pp.204-5.

> Naturally sentimental Cullen was reminded of his daughter Louise, a pale fair girl like her mother but with, more was the pity, a growing tendency to his freckled gingerness and, worse, a physique modeled after his own: broad shoulders, thick waist, sturdy thighs—even at ten. Often he sighed for her sad years to come, for the inevitable rebuffs, for her loving nature, for all her useless co-ordination and redundant athleticism. He could easily torture himself exaggerating her forced future as a rollicking leathery Phys. Ed. Teacher in perennial blazers and tennis shoes or, nightmare, overalled bull-dyked garage attendant.
>
> Mark, on the other hand, though a genuine W. H. Sheldon mesomorph, seemed to inhabit a soft and dreamy pre-adolescent world of skidmarks, green teeth, odd socks and crusty ears. His son could not pull himself together. He still cried. He had no tenacity, for God's sake. He did not wish above all else to tackle the man, to capture the ball, to possess it, to *eat* it! True enough he would rather win than lose, given the choice, but only just. Twelve years old and not enough imagination to change his underpants or brush his teeth! He wanted him to hurry up and be a man. He was also terrified of this prospect.[233]

He is however ready to trade worries for manageable guilt as he entrusts their education to a third party in a manner that reproduces their parents' experience: "He had a paternal urge to see his own kids, undergoing their particular form of institutional sufferings in expensive Anglican boarding schools".[234] This choice may somehow be explained by the fact that in "buffaloing", one-dimensional Cullen has fulfilled one of his main purposes: "breeding and nutrition". Beyond this stage, he struggles to keep the idea of his final demise at bay through physical exertion ("him panting in the garden, fighting his own strange battle with mortality"),[235] but the extremes of the Asian existential maelstrom swirling around him work as a constant, unavoidable *memento mori*:

> She surprised him by not asking about the dead. *He* would have, if their positions had been reversed. He had in fact beleaguered Z. M. with questions that same night.
>
> […] 'I'm not talking politics, I'm talking about a bullock-cart full of bodies being unloaded not a mile from here, outside a mosque.
>
> Z. M. raised his brow at him, leaving him feeling greatly naïve. So where was the dispassion of science?
>
> 'It is charitable work,' Z. M. said. 'Rounding up the bodies of the dead for burial. A daily affair around the streets and parks, outside the gruel kitchens, surely a common practice.'
>
> He was struck by his own gormlessness, yet he rambled on. 'There was a fox in the cart!'
>
> He hadn't mentioned the fox to Margaret; that it had crept under the tarpaulin to eat the bodies, Perhaps he would later, but it was an image he was still considering: whether the animal was itself starving, what fears it had overcome to jump up on the wagon, and suchlike. Later he might also recount his visit to the zoo and the favoured treatment of the Bengal tiger.[236]

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[233] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.65.
[234] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.86.
[235] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.190.
[236] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.120.

> As he peered down into the tiger pit, at an animal in better conditions than all the others, two keepers approached and tossed the body of a deer, perhaps the one he had seen, down to it. The deer was so light it landed soundlessly, only faintly stirring dust. The tiger padded over to the body, picked it up and carried it off to the rear of the pit.
>
> The keepers stared vacantly down at the tiger, muttering softly and wiping their hands on their trousers.
>
> "Excuse me,' Cullen addressed them. 'Apart from this fellow your animals are in very bad shape.'
>
> […] 'The food contractor has stopped supplies due to the non-payment of his bill.' The keeper grinned proudly. 'Only our special tiger is not unusually reduced for want of food.'
>
> […] The tiger ripped a haunch from the deer. Cullen, troubled, tense across the scalp, left the zoo.[237]

Cullen is about to be fatally devoured by the violent tumult of Asian experience—bleeding to death on a mud track in the Mindanao jungle after being stabbed by an angry pimp—and the precise circumstances of his death are hinted at very early in the novel ('You wouldn't want a nice little knife in the gut, hey, Dick?';[238] "Cullen had an occasional quick vision of his own body, pared and quartered with the calamansi knife, floating in the storm-water channel beneath the white-petalled sampanguita in the back garden.").[239] Even though he may accept his fate, he is clueless as to what he will leave behind (apart from a new generation of Cullens): what indeed are the sum and salient points of his experience? Has his life been truly lived—or has he been left stranded on the verge of Fall, of transgression and ultimately of self-fulfillment? If he ever was on an upward trajectory, he seems to have been stranded in mid-air and condemned to never rise higher than hinted-at potentialities: while he was still in high-school, he received a strangely overblown tribute that rang like a recapitulation and that would not have been out of place in any kind of eulogy—except for the vital, focused passion animating its author:

> There was a phrase used about him once in his school magazine: 'The Everest of a Himalayan career'. This article had laid it on with a trowel. 'For Dick Cullen it was the Everest of an Himalayan career to be named captain of the Schoolboys' Team to play Britain….' […] The author had been the English master, one F. E. Turkington, known as 'Gobble'. He had been astonished to see that Gobble was such a fan. […] His article finished with the line: 'He is a young man whom, as Emerson said of Thoreau, "It took generations to make".' Rugby affected some of them like that, especially bachelor school masters, but this grandiloquence had stuck in his mind for twenty-five years while he had forgotten every newspaper sporting story ever written about him. There was a hint of something there that had niggled at him ever since.[240]

[237] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.108.
[238] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.34.
[239] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.15.
[240] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.62.

> ‘*The Everest of the Himalayan career*’! Ha! A pederast’s praise.[241]

He is thus precociously defined as an early achiever who shuns most forms of involvement: “When he smelled politics in something he pulled out, always had, It was distasteful”;[242] “Cullen was always disorientated by mystic surroundings. […] Religion was a secret he did not particularly wish revealed”.[243] It seems that any kind of intellectual construction may be a threat to his innocence, a risk of contamination that will sap any untested resolve of his—and throw him into the turmoil of experience:

> All Cullen heard were snatches of words—‘national security’ and ‘developing nation’ and ‘historical circumstances’ […] all these phrases swimming round in Cullen’s head like paramecia, and each of these particular protozoans had its own complex parasitic life system and capacity for harm to man and beast.[244]

This peculiar disposition of Cullen’s should not be mistaken for stupidity. It is in fact linked with a deeper trait of his personality:

> One of the secrets of his sporting success had been an automatic detachment, an ability of the mind to switch into neutral while his body went through its various layered thresholds of fatigue and pain […].
> His turning off had occasionally irritated people when he did it in emotional confrontations. Funny, it was almost as if they wanted to see him lose control.[245]

This aspect of his character may explain his attitude in a remembered scene which seems to be the novel’s “original sin in the garden” moment and which illustrates the clumsy, reluctant nature of his apprehension of experience. In this bucolic scene whose details recall Milton’s “Wanton Nature”, Cullen/Adam refrains from chastising Margaret/Eve about her enlightened insights on the world around them, and he loses the perfection of innocence without ever making a willing move:

> One picnic, on a dry late spring day drifting to summer, they had walked after lunch along a stream toward a small waterfall. […] He felt suddenly changed and could hardly endure it. He saw her bending happily over clumps of freesias, smelled their high sweet scent, and did not recognize her. […] He fought against his mind. Holding hands they walked upstream along an uncomfortably narrow path. Branches scraped him. […] Swinging her arms she made contented remarks about encroaching summer. Lizards climbed stones. He had to stop himself standing fatalistically still, looking her in the eye and saying

[241] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.243.
[242] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.50.
[243] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.72
[244] *A Cry in the Jingle Bar* – p.177 – According to Wikipedia, paramecia are part of ciliate protozoans, some of which can cause dysentery; Cullen’s recurring intestinal ailments during his missions around Asia may then be explained by moral as well as micro-organic contamination.
[245] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.19.

> intimate damaging things. […] Instead he spoke neutrally, affectionately, and when they came to a warm slab of rock they stretched out and dozed […].
> He recalled his lack of decision whenever he smelled freesias.[246]

Various episodes of his posting in Asia for the U. N. agency see him struggling against physiological entropy through physical exertion: his swimming, jogging and his games of rugby. Local ills like dysentery still catch up with him, but in his unequal fight with his postlapsarian mortal condition, one significant condition hangs over him when he comes anywhere near an opportunity to break his own unsteady moral code: impotence. The buffalo imagery returns with vivid details in a scene in which Cullen's animalistic instincts appear to be kept in check by an unseen higher agent of husbandry—with the word "showering" evoking the splatter of organic matter as well as the liberalities of guilt-ridden Westerners leaving a Sri Lankan cabaret/brothel:

> Cullen almost surrendered to drowsy sensual feelings. But discussing the superstitious branding of the buffaloes recalled the parallel agrarian procedure they had observed that day in the backblocks. At the time of branding, by a local virtuoso, castration of male working animals was also performed. Nimbly the man clamped the cords with pliers. 'Hoy!' he exhaled, and pounded the testicles with an iron bar. Blood and tissue exploded from the split organs. The visiting advisers, cool professionals, had nevertheless winced. Scrotums tightened. Cullen had made a special note of this crude process on his clipboard […].
> Showering the Sunorama Cabaret with money, they left the alleged debauch shortly after. Cullen gave the Tamil girl fifty rupees to assuage various guilts.[247]

In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa experiences an entomological mutation which is evoked in Drewe's novel through a short biography of Cullen's secretary ("She had studied […] *Metamorphosis*: Kafka, Franz. The latter author […] seemed to have some sort of preoccupation with the similarity between people and creatures and Gigi thought he might have something there. […] She enjoyed the image of [her boss] as a big and weathered buffalo, […] her personal office *carabao*").[248] Like Kafka's character, Cullen seems condemned to be burdened with the expectations, jibes and accusations of his colleagues and his wife until he shall ultimately be struck down as expiatory offering. Already on his way to some final nihilistic disconnection, he is still racked by contradictory instincts and desires, as when he toys with inappropriate intentions towards his secretary: "He wished to be intimately alone with Gigi, and paradoxically for the evening to be over and to be safely home in bed with no demerits registered and a clear

[246] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – pp.109-10 – see Genesis III:6-12.
[247] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.132.
[248] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – pp.159-60.

conscience";[249] "Moping home in the car he wondered obscurely whether it had counted as a date".[250]

After this non-event of his fruitless flirtation with Gigi, Cullen gets lectured by Galash, a womanizing American colleague at the Agency. His bumbling outrage at the metaphorical castration executed by his co-worker somehow echoes the wailing of mutilated buffaloes he has remarked on in his field notes:

> The unanswerable staggering injustice had him speechless. Suddenly it was all turned back on *him*—Margaret's polar silences, the Asian ethical malaise, the whole state of contemporary morality. The story of his misunderstood and patronized life. Years of unfair treatment welled up in him. […] 'Up yours, Yank!' was all he could shout. The bellow hung over the office. He suspected he had saliva on his chin.
>
> Immediately he felt grossly stupid.[251]
>
> *The buffalo is not a vocal animal,* he wrote. *Utterances are usually limited to a querulous, interrogatory or nervous grunt* […]. *But during the drawn-out castration process which my colleagues and I observed, the agonizing pain inflicted by the castrator was expressed in the piteous screams of the victims.*[252]

He is on slightly higher moral ground and in a less dubious situation when Margaret surprises him in the Jungle Bar with Z. M.'s girlfriend, but he still feels "guilty and faultless at once".[253] However he is already surrendering to a fate that escapes his control: he accepts his exclusion from the company of men as "a stateless person […] a big sweating anchorite".[254] This severance from the communal human experience is illustrated through an aerial scene that directly echoes (and immediately follows) Margaret's magical healing/out-of-body experience[255]:

> Clattering south above the jungle Cullen was struck by the paradoxical peace of gun-ship travel. […] Right now he welcomed the racket and the diversion of the experience […].
>
> Cullen, also shut in behind dark glasses, was actually feeling, after forty minutes in the air, his most tranquil for days. […] Experiencing the fatalism of exhaustion, he could finally say to himself: so she has gone.
>
> Events carried him on beyond desolation.[256]

When he is exposed to crass titillation and temptation in the "nameless nightclub" with shows of snake-like "ever-uncoiling flesh",[257] his resignation to his haphazard fate is

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[249] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.168
[250] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.171.
[251] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.180.
[252] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.132.
[253] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.191.
[254] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.185.
[255] See note 230.
[256] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – pp.206, 207.

once more emphasized through some astral flight imagery, a dissociative process working as ethical escape mechanism:

> So in a way it was like a dream. She was nameless. She was a face in the crowd. Other-worldliness interlaced it all. Now and then his consciousness seemed to hover over the table, the soggy crowd in the nightclub, floating up against the stained mouldy ceiling noting these vaguely bizarre proceedings. His superego was undecided whether any guilt was necessary. After all, his life was in abeyance. Normal restrictions no longer applied.[258]

When he follows the prostitute out of the club for paid intimacy, he seems to have abdicated all free will: "So the night had taken its inevitable course. The suspense was over. Determinist Cullen reeled down the hill with the girl. His legs seemed to be free-wheeling; loose-jointed and mechanistic".[259] The only trace of resolve left in him surfaces when he takes in the grimy pathos of the prostitute's condition and of his utter alienness and refuses the experience. It seems that buffaloid Cullen was being led to breeding duties, but for breaching this carnal contract, he is punished by the prostitute's pimp and it is now slaughter that beckons for Cullen: "'Fifty pesos even? Seven dollars US? Why didn't you fuck Emeng Bancheng?' the man howled, angry and incredulous, and darted in and stabbed him because of this irregularity".[260]

The shock of the attack jolts Cullen into active self-preservation even if his reaction is still dictated by surrendering to existential freefall and to finely-honed fighting instincts:

> Now that it was happening Cullen felt clear and definite. If inevitable events had occurred, anything further, said sweet reason, was finally in his hands. He was within his rights. Acting by nature's and man's laws. […] He went with his body's guile and heavy momentum and crushed [the man] to the ground. […] He pinned the small body beneath him while his right fist pounded the head, the face, the little animal teeth, repeatedly, like a pestle in a mortar, until the grunts and moans became one sound.[261]

For all his efforts to get out alive of the jungle, he knows he is condemned and some of his final lucid thoughts dwell on "'Methods of slaughter […] *animal must be bled to death*'".[262] As his steps lead him away from the fight scene and straight into the hands of a Muslim rebel patrol mistaking him for a pro-government American, his last

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[257] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.227.
[258] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.230.
[259] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.233.
[260] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.237.
[261] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.238.
[262] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.239.

significant epiphany in the novel appears as vague and shallow as his lifelong half-grip on his condition, from vacant innocence to indecisive experience: "For the first time in his life there was a unique fear of being too weak to cope".[263] While Cullen is left to die in some Hobbesian jungle, there may be some marked existential resolution at the end of a return to primordial wilderness for the main protagonists of Robert Drewe's *Grace*.

* * *

III.4 - Conclusion: *Grace.*

With *Grace*, Robert Drewe returns to the narrative project that shaped *The Savage Crows*, *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* and *Fortune*: a commentary on contemporary Australia and its uneasy dealings with myths and fabrications of the past. This time, it reflects the author's interrogations about the state of the nation at a symbolic moment: the turn of the millennium and the events that closely preceded and followed it, from the first boatloads of asylum seekers off the northwest coast of the continent and the culture wars of the 1990s to Australia's anxieties in an irremediably interconnected world after the World Trade Centre and Bali terrorist attacks. This up-to-the-minute picture of the nation is juxtaposed with the timeless images and beliefs that have coalesced in random strata of human experience in Western Australia's remote Kimberley region. In *Grace*, the dichotomy between innocence and experience is profoundly marked by cyclical patterns, ever-repeated loops organized around mirroring and echoing effects in the novel's narrative structure. However, this iterative circularity, possibly undermining any idea of experience as either decay or betterment, is unable to alter the parameters of another primal instinct for all life forms: the fight for territory. Robert Drewe has underlined this element as a major theme in *Grace* in several promotional interviews for the book's launch, and the territorial contest is a notion that vividly colours human-human / human-animal interactions in the various locales of the novel. Whether these places are thinly veiled representations of primordial Edens, of near-wastelands of corruption and disillusionment or of blank slates for post-experience renewal, their evocative concreteness undeniably matches the pervasive presence of online experience, with the internet described in *Grace* as a dis-located, exterritorial dimension of human endeavour.

[263] *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* – p.240.

The first hard facts about the novel's multi-layered plotting and characterization come at the beginning of the second chapter which title, "GRACE OF THE CROCODILES", already underlines the connection between several themes[264] mentioned earlier:

> Some relevant facts about Grace Molloy. Apart from being named after a 100 000-year-old skeleton whose age, owing to advances in radiocarbon dating technology, had twice increased in increments of twenty thousand years, she was twenty-nine and for much of the past three years she'd been hiding from a stalker.[265]

From the moment of her discovery, prehistoric Grace, also known as Salt End Woman, is a point of contention in all kinds of debates and confrontations, from the personal sphere to the academic arena and to entrenched spiritual frontlines. Of her existence, nothing is known, but with her gracile bone structure once roaming northwestern W.A., she challenges accepted evolutionary timescales and migratory patterns. This may go as far as upsetting cherished scientific readings of 'original innocence', triggering intense reactions:

> If you were urging a whole rethink of the evolution of modern humans, fighting the sheer international political weight of it, you needed more evidence. Another skeleton aged eighty thousand-plus would be very handy. […] Britain was the only country where everyone was a rock-hard Out-of-Africanist. It was like fighting fundamentalists. In a funny sort of way his opponents were really not much different from creationists. That's what they were – scientific creationists.[266]

While working on this paleontological wonder, John Molloy (father of 21st century Grace on the run) graphically "puts himself in the picture" as the potential other 80,000 year-old skeleton and writes his personal version of the myth of the origins, part Genesis and part guileless Arcadia:

> When assessing a skeleton's age at death he tended to flesh out the person, to make comparisons. […] Would I have found this woman attractive? If the woman was young he always presumed so, and immediately pictured their mating – quick, dusty and wordless. […] They ate fish and shell-fish and jumbo-sized marsupials and reptiles and birds, all tossed on the fire. Between meals they chewed nuts and fruits and gritty tubers gathered by his diligent spouse.[267]

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[264] The innocence of both Graces is under attack 102,000 years apart, and they both get involved in an interspecies territorial contest.
[265] Robert Drewe, *Grace* ; Penguin Group, Camberwell, Victoria; 2005 – p.9.
[266] *Grace* – p.273.
[267] *Grace* – pp.101,102.

Picturing himself fathering the first few members of the human race, John Molloy grants himself what he has been deprived of: a narrative of his origins. With only fleeting memories of a motherly figure back in England where he was born, he is mostly a former "little child of the Empire",[268] one of thousands of British orphans whose "details […] have been deliberately destroyed" in order "to clear the decks, burn the bridges, start life afresh".[269] Unable to project himself in the past, he lives a life marked by discoveries and disappointments, epiphanies and betrayals, all organized along a cyclical pattern of departures and renewals.

He is first put on a ship to New South Wales when he is five; he escapes some grim pastoral quasi-servitude when he is fourteen and gets started on the path of intellectual adventure. After this path leads to him to the Kimberley and to Salt End Woman, he is offered a refuge away from Sydney through his wife Kate's family on Lion Island, a fictional insular community where he struggles to be accepted by the locals before being kicked out of the island by his stepfather Reece Prowse. The latter character features only briefly in the novel, but he makes for an evocative fusion of symbolic figures: he is the arch-divinity who expels John from the insular Arcadia ("Reece Prowse's territory"),[270] the revered master of his domain who travels around the island in near-magical vehicles (a whole collection of amphibious cars). Furthermore, the gifts of an undisclosed nature he dispenses to his single female tenants[271] liken him to a fecund alpha male—a mix of Freud's father/leader[272] of the primal horde, enjoying exclusive access to the horde's women until he is slain, and of Gengis Khan disseminating his genetic heritage across two continents.[273] When John complies with Reece Prowse's oblique eviction order, he finds himself involved in a drama at sea in which "he's both audience and actor"[274] (an ambiguous outlook on one's experience already explored by Drewe in several other books). The end of the boat-accident scene marks for him the beginning of a new cycle and the start of Grace Molloy's own existential progress:

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[268] *Grace* – p.203.
[269] *Grace* – p.185,
[270] *Grace* – p.309
[271] *Grace* – pp.308-9.
[272] See discussions of Freud's Oedipus myth earlier in this chapter pp.154-5, based on Sigmund Freud, "The Return of Totemism in Childhood" in *Totem and Taboo – Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (authorized translation by James Strachey); Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London; 1950 – Chapter IV, pp.125-6, 141-6, 151, 155-6; essay analysed by Robert A. Paul in *Moses and Civilization – The Meaning Behind Freud's Myth*; Yale University Press, New Haven and London; 1996 – pp.12-3.
[273] *Grace* – pp.292-3.
[274] *Grace* – p.324.

> So father and daughter sit on the damp sand and wait for something to happen. […] He considers the future life and present thoughts of the ferry skipper – and of others, too. He thinks of choices, spur-of-the-moment decisions that change lives, and hugs his daughter. […] Boats will come. They will get off this island, and the other one as well. This is their starting point together.[275]

John the orphan then gives all his love and attention to his daughter, bar his lifelong preoccupation for fossils sometimes commented on by young Grace ("The people you work with are *too dead*!").[276] Their bond (with Kate having abandoned them for her own quest of self-discovery) allows John to reinscribe his existence in the species' continuum and the global "gene flow":

> Their lives seemed connected in ways that predated her birth. […] As well as his sole genetic link to the future, she was his only connection to the past. […] In her appearance and habits he hungrily sought clues to his own background.
> […] He clung to the idea that in her genes his daughter preceded him as well as followed him. He supposed it was because they had the other connection as well: the link to his discovery. Here, too, father and daughter went right back to the beginning of the age.[277]

Unsurprisingly perhaps, one of the earliest memories they have in common is a scene where baby Grace explores the garden-like universe around her and starts to question the secret cogs in the world's engine while her innocence still shields her from the stain of corruption in the idyllic background:

> How easy it was to recall their first park visit. How recently it seemed that Grace was toddling in the autumn leaves and throwing bread to ducks. […] She'd sat in a contented trance, nibbling duck bread (…) until an oak leaf hanging in the air caught her eye.
>
> How mysterious the leaf looked, twirling yet refusing to fall. As it floated beside their faces her quizzical frown was years beyond her tender age. *What's going on here?* Knowing some elemental law was being flouted. […] She couldn't talk yet but when he indicated the connecting thread [of spider web] her expression said, *'Aha!'*
> […] Even as he experienced the moment he was nostalgic for it. Then from beside her little thighs atop the picnic table a black sentence leapt out and mugged him: 'Cindy M is a skanky slut that sucks Wogs and smells like dead rats – TRUE.'
>
> At once he grabbed up his precious daughter and moved away. That she was years from being able to read didn't matter. […] Was it just the brutal change of atmosphere, the ferocious stripping away of innocence and sentiment, that had angered him? Or the sudden realisation that Grace would eventually grow into an adolescent, and a woman?[278]

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[275] *Grace* – p.331.
[276] *Grace* – p.359.
[277] *Grace* – pp.173-4;175-6.
[278] *Grace* – pp.248,249-50.

Obviously, John Molloy is not able to keep Grace's innocence fully intact; a few years later, he has a glimpse of some duplicitous reaction by Grace during a visit to a Tasmanian zoo during which he is made the butt of some "feed the animals" joke gimmick for tourists:

> What he ached to do was knock the zookeeper to the ground, punch his lights out, then sue him for everything he owned, every last ulcerated wombat.
>
> 'What a weirdo!' she offered later, as she brushed him down and combed the chaff and mucus from his hair. "I felt very sorry for you.'
>
> From where he'd sat, his recollection was quite different. As each snorting muzzle burst into the van, his daughter's face had expressed fascination, wonder and something else besides, something harsher and colder – curiosity to see what would happen next.[279]

Still, their tiny family unit is a haven of love and mutual admiration: as a doting father, John is in awe of her early achievements, such as her swimming talents allowed by superior genetics;[280] as for Grace, she gets the opportunity to observe her dad in his own natural element while is he delivering an impassioned lecture on paleoanthropology,[281] and decides she may try to follow in his footsteps. When that challenge proves too arduous, she falls back on another interest shared with her father: movies. Her first reviews in the student press soon lead to a professional career writing "for *Now*, a weekly celebrity and glossy magazine".[282] Her adult life starts to unfold in a vicarious mode, in which the innocence-fall-experience existential triptych is kept at arm's length and analysed through the prism of filmic discourse, rather than being fully embraced. Once she has left that part of her story behind, she remembers

> her former city self, the movie nerd of daytime darkness, enclosed spaces and professional fantasy. This was the self who'd emerge from a critic's daytime screening like a nocturnal animal, blinking into the headachy sunlight. A pink-nosed urban possum who viewed and reviewed life and art as a three-act drama.[283]

At this stage of his protagonist's itinerary – Grace Molloy the hip, arty Sydneysider – Robert Drewe juxtaposes several images of territories progressively encroached upon: the cave-like screening rooms, the magazine page where her photographs appears above her reviews, and the corner of urban jungle she inhabits and

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[279] *Grace* – p.278.
[280] *Grace* – pp.174-5.
[281] *Grace* – pp.283-96.
[282] *Grace* – p.38.
[283] *Grace* – p.46.

which foreshadow the starker wilderness she will later explore at the other end of the country:

> In both places reptiles roamed below. Under her inner-city window they'd been the men sidling through the doors of the Golden Peach brothel next door, or trawling in their cars for girls or boys or in-betweens. Or they were the muggers and gangs and drunks and junkies, the pimps and dealers and crazies, the bouncers and bouncees – and the assorted lurkers, ferals and drifters of the night. Not forgetting her special lurking crazy – her own personal erotomaniac.[284]

In this setting, Grace gets indeed targeted by a postmodern predator: Carl Gerard Brand, an erotomaniac stalker mistaking her for one of the movie stars with whom he is on first-name basis, a fallacious familiarity born from his own pathological self-delusion as well as from the postmodern cult of celebrity tinged with *schadenfreude* saturating the mass media. In keeping with the aberrant nature of this imagined intimacy, she soon finds herself trapped between innocent helplessness and speculative shared guilt in her predicament—a crisis that terminates her writing career:

> She could no longer write. How could she express herself with any fluency or insight when she knew he was poring over each review, devouring every word in his relentless search for evidence of their blessed and passionate love? (…) Each word she wrote felt like a little suicidal knife-stab in her chest.
>
> *My own words are helping to destroy me*.[285]

Other words in another virtual context come to hurt her afterwards. When she applies for a position as online contention verifier or "mudcrawler", she discovers another dimension of immaterial fallen experience: "the domain of the Sinful Six, […] Pornography, Anarchy, Criminal Skills, Racial / Religious Hatred, Drugs and Gambling".[286] After several hours of manipulating search keywords and trawling through explicit porn websites in order to update listings of restricted content, she seems to question her own detachment towards extreme potentialities of the human experience:

> By the time she reached the last world on the list, the briefest and most horrifying of her investigations ["young"], she'd guessed why the female mudcrawlers chose to dress so bulkily and unattractively. It was to neutralise themselves. (…) Those of bags and magazines were barriers to make their territory unassailable.
>
> They made her reappraise her own limits. She was someone who earned a living observing the human image on film. (…) Visually unshockable was how she'd always regarded herself. And now she found herself drained and aghast.

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[284] *Grace* – pp.48-9.
[285] *Grace* – p.69.
[286] *Grace* – p.84.

> […] As if by typing a simple, everyday word into a search engine […] she'd triggered some brooding, dormant force lurking there […] Just as the churchy extremists had always insisted (indeed their very words!), it felt as if she had *opened the floodgates*.[287]

Even if she cannot be blamed for her troubles with the stalker, she pictures herself as fallen and destitute: "The Mud Room had worsened her condition. […] She contemplated an existence dependent on unemployment benefits and handouts from her father. Right out of a Victorian novel, a sentence kept ringing in her head: *What will become of me?*"[288] The circumstances of her final escape from the city (away from the stalker) already announce what awaits her at the other end of the continent; as she picks the "flight" option in the "fright, flight [or] fight" response,[289] she witnesses a scene of violent territorial contest between predators at different level of the food chain—an unadorned reality she will observe again in interactions between two- and four-legged creatures in the Kimberley:

> Her neighbour Olga, the madam at the Golden Peach, spotted a man on the brothel's security cameras. […] 'Sorry, darling. Is a weirdo climbing in your yard.'
>
> Grace ran to the kitchen window. Even before she saw the ginger hair spikes, the desperate face, she knew it was the Icelander.
>
> […] 'Not to worry, babe,' Olga called out. 'My security's onto it. Those Tongan bastards enjoying catching screwballs. They getting bored and fat without their fighting.'
>
> […] Two giant Tongans with shaved heads were launching themselves at the fence like rugby forwards, trying to dislodge the pale figure from the top of the palings. After several minutes he finally kicked himself free of the fence and the Tongans' outstretched tree-trunk arms and fell headlong into her yard.[290]

The predatory Tongan bouncers seem to reappear later in the novel when "everything repeat[s] itself"[291]as the stalker tracks Grace to the Kimberley crocodile park where she is employed. At that moment, it is up to Armed and Dangerous, the park's nighwatchmen, to try to neutralize the erotomaniac. Most tellingly, the bouncers' primal territorial drive mentioned in the quote above likens them to the top predator on the scene: Clifford, the five-metre saltwater crocodile who lives next to Grace's park lodgings and who almost puts an end to her troubles when the stalker throws himself in its pond in the grip of some mystical delirium.

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[287] *Grace* – pp.87-8.
[288] *Grace* – pp.89-90.
[289] *Grace* – p.388.
[290] *Grace* – pp.92-3.
[291] *Grace* – p.353.

Throughout the novel, the figure of the aquatic reptile as a surviving threat of prehistoric ages connects both themes of territorial instinct and of iterative cycles of experience. After her virtual confrontation with the "Sinful Six", Grace learns that deeper terrors have haunted the human mind for aeons: "'It's okay to be scared when a predator threatens you. We're all born watching out for the Big Bad Six – lions, tigers, leopards, bears, sharks and crocs.'".[292] In her new environment away from the city, Grace traces the reminders of primordial, unsophisticated ages; the dangers are unambiguous ("deep in our DNA we know [crocs] see us as food")[293] and the local human residents (alive or long dead) are fully adapted to the uncompromising simplicity of a universe that "narrow[s] things down to the essentials"[294]:

> Brett was sinewy and lean and his muscles looked more casually capable than the gym-manufactured stacks of no-necked Sydney footballers and vain beachboys. Not only did his body appear to work well, like an indigenous animal's it looked as it served a very useful purpose.[295]
>
> [Salt End Man] was of gracile physique, a relatively fine-boned individual, built for distance running rather than weightlifting. This was another early-modern human.[296]

The Kimberley region around the novel's Port Mangrove (a thinly disguised Broome) is depicted in stark contrast with the metropolitan experience Grace leaves behind when she leaves Sydney. It is first visually arresting: "The colours up here were so intense that tourists were told to get their holidays snaps developed locally rather than when they returned home. The photo shops in the south toned down the photographs because the colours seemed artificially vivid".[297] Opinions and feelings are similarly expressed without subtle half-tints by the locals:

> [Stroller's] cracks about pampered city slickers and left-wing southerners and their bohemian and deviant ways were delivered in the same blunt, ego-battering manner he used to show friendliness. Not that this was his habit alone. Up here, she discovered, even affection – especially affection – was demonstrated like this.[298]

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[292] *Grace* – p.26.
[293] *Grace* – p.24.
[294] *Grace* – p.245.
[295] *Grace* – p.122.
[296] *Grace* – p.301.
[297] *Grace* – pp.163-4.
[298] *Grace* – p.19.

Tellingly, a simple solution to Grace's stalker predicament is suggested by a local elderly widow: "Is there some reason why she didn't just shoot the bastard?"[299] This kind of stark measure has been used in that region in the past, and some locals "had a bit to make up for"[300] regarding the way indigenous populations and other migrants had been treated. However, in the novel, the Kimberley residents seem to have made their peace with this past and are on a path of redemption, of renewed innocence: the humanity with which most of them treat Indonesian fishermen caught poaching trochus in Australian waters[301] and the secret support some of them offer to runaway asylum seekers clearly set them apart from out-of-towner public officials sent by the State or the Commonwealth to implement political agendas. The locals' interpretation of immigration laws often has to do with making amends for past failings, one's own or others', while learning from them:

> Experience had taught Sister Joseph the best way to do things. East Timor and the slaughter of Catholic innocents had toughened her mind and honed a skill for subterfuge and secrecy she hadn't known she possessed.
>
> The first refugees she'd hidden were a sailboat load of Timorese escaping the militia […], running from Muslims, and then from Australian Immigration. She regarded what she was doing then, and thereafter, more as sanctuary than subterfuge – the historic proper role of the Church. Since then the refugees' religions had ceased to matter.[302]

In this context, Grace witnesses life cycles repeating and inscribes herself in that loop pattern: when she takes a group of retired tourists to a mudcrabbing expedition (a literal hunt this time, contrary to her traumatic experience of online mudcrawling) and encounters a "mud-caked creature"[303] in the wilderness, she somehow faces her younger self ("when she entered the world […] she resembled a tiny New Guinea mudman")[304] as well as a possible relative of her distant namesake, Grace the Salt End Woman. Furthermore, the ordeal of the mud-covered teenage Afghan boy (lost in the mangrove after following other refugees breaking out of a detention camp) brings to mind the bleak youth of John Molloy: both have been sent alone across the sea on old ships to discover a new land that may or may not be better than what they left behind. As she first hides him in her small cottage at the crocodile park, he seems disoriented by the man-made

[299] *Grace* – p.12.
[300] *Grace* – p.159.
[301] *Grace* – pp.217-22.
[302] *Grace* – p.222-3.
[303] *Grace* – p.133.
[304] *Grace* – p.173.

enclosed Eden full of well-meaning wildlife and of happy children where he has been brought:

> She flicked hastily through photographs of children picknicking on the park's lawns, frolicking in the pool and speeding down the water-slide […] delighted blond toddlers with parrots perched on their shoulders, boys posing with carpet pythons looped around their necks, mothers and babies feeding kangaroos.[305]

The boy (only known as K167 – his temporary identification number at the detention centre – or Leonardo, because of his Di Caprio-in-*Titanic* hair fetish) finds himself on the run, travelling with Grace whose world has been shattered again by the stalker's apparition in the garden / park. Her resolve shattered, she lets herself be comforted by the teenage boy; she later considers this moment of weakness with "embarrassment and guilt"[306] and wishes she could "castigate herself – to really scald and lash".[307] Her fall takes her through hostile landscapes she analyses through a cinematic filter again:

> So this was what it was like on the far side of a road movie, she thought. On real back roads. Not like a Ry Cooder album at all. Unbearably hot and stuffy. Uncomfortable on several levels. Where was the breathtaking desert scenery? The guitar backing? […] Not in this country.[308]

The next part of the trip is bathed in an even grimmer, post-apocalyptic atmosphere, with Grace and her travel companions stopping at a "hotel [that] looked like a tropical resort. (…) Up close, it was a fortress", with "a heavy metal security grille [that] enclosed the bar itself" and the hotel "lounge's celebration of doom (…) a room commemorating chaos and disaster". With Grace noticing that "in all of these scenes of havoc [air crashes, fires and cyclones] (…) the same people seemed to have turned up at each disaster",[309] Drewe's characters seem to be definitely thrown into the post-experience limbo of *Mad Max* movies' merciless universe and Stephen King's spooky tales. Even the end of their road trip recalls scenes of futuristic dystopias: "Next afternoon they climbed over a jagged range of rust-coloured hills that fell sharply to the

[305] *Grace* – p.141.
[306] *Grace* – p.364.
[307] *Grace* – p.369.
[308] *Grace* – p.377-8.
[309] *Grace* – p.379-81.

sea. They had run out of road – there was nowhere else to go".[310] Ironically, they just have to lower their gaze to discover a synthetic oasis in Technicolor, the seachange / holiday resort version of original paradise:

> Suburbs of modern tropical-climate houses stretched around a wide turquoise estuary, Sprinklers whirred on lawns resembling bowling greens. Heat mirages flickered across the tin roofs and white lattice. […] Swimming pools the colour and shape of opals shone in the backyards.[311]

Even though Grace's little group seems to reach a dead end, closure is reached on this stretch of coast; a loop is closed when Byron O'Malley, their driver, honours the memory of 80,000-year-old Salt End Man whose bones he has been travelling with:

> 'I reckon this is where he would've landed. He wouldn't have gone any further east than this. He brought his bamboo raft right in here. […] And camped here on his first night.'
> […] This time Byron gently lifted the tarpaulin as well and let the sea breeze waft directly over the old man. (…) Then he carefully covered the bones again and joined the others in the front. He said, 'he old man says yes.' […] 'I hope some brother does this for me in a hundred thousand years,' Byron said. 'I think I'd appreciate it.'[312]

By envisioning this 200,000-year continuum, Byron reconnects distant temporalities and contributes to ensuring the continuation of the human species' presence in this universe; there is neither beginning nor end, and the innocence-fall-experience cycle is hard to apply to Byron's indigenous cosmogony. In the opening paragraphs of this study's second chapter, a light was shed on Aboriginal myths of origins and it underlined a very different paradigm: the Dreamland still exists as a stark, stunning *locus amoenus*, and on this transfigured physical space of the bush and the coast, many metaphorical Falls punctuate life's progress.[313] Paradoxically, the cyclical structure of this experience implies that there are many beginnings and ends; this dual reading is underlined by the Janus-like figure of Byron O'Malley. When he is introduced in the novel as a Kimberley indigenous archaeological site curator, much is made of physical characteristics allowing him to embrace past and future: "He sported an arresting new tattoo on the back of his shaved skull – a life-sized tattoo of his own face. (…) He was a unique and imposing figure on two fronts. His fierce, goatee-bearded face dominated

[310] *Grace* – p.383 ; for the motive of the sea as the end of a post-apocalyptic quest for survival, see (among many others) the 1968 adaptation of *Planet of the Apes*, *Mad Max Beyond the Thunderdome*, *28 Days Later* or, more recently, Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road.*
[311] *Grace* – p..383-4.
[312] *Grace* – p.386.
[313] See Chapter II, note 7.

proceedings both coming and going".[314] This duality extends to his ancestral sensitivities towards collective memory:

> Byron was of two minds about these relics, torn between pride at the discovery of his old people, the first *Homo sapiens* ('We're famous, bro!') and the belief that science shouldn't pry, that respect should be accorded to the dead. His extra face made him seem more ambivalent than usual.[315]

His stance echoes Spargo being "in two minds" about his discovery and sudden fame in *Fortune*; more tellingly, it likens him to the Blue Plum, an indigenous leader navigating through the ambiguities of the "trade in guilt" in *The Savage Crows*. Like the Plum who acknowledged researcher Stephen Crisp's positive intentions, Byron O'Malley is ready to accommodate some of John Molloy's demands in exchange for guaranteed peace and oblivion for Salt End Woman and Salt End Man.

John reenters the picture and gets Byron involved in order to rescue his daughter Grace: "He gave Salt End Woman up to Byron O'Malley. That was the deal – a Grace for a Grace. And for the boy as well."[316] Once again, beyond the linearity of a progress from innocence to the experiences of corruption and redemption, it is the curvature of an elegant and moving resolution that marks the transaction. The emotion is indeed very palpable when the process is concluded, with a whole community transported back to ancient origins:

> More than two hundred desert people present at the ceremony. […] Old people previously terrified of touching ancient bones did so with tears streaming down their faces. (…) The people believed that the First Woman had risen to the surface to contact them. (…) Then Byron brought the male skeleton the cyclone had uncovered at the motel – Salt End Man – and repeated the procedure. And that rounded off the ceremony. Now they possessed the king and the queen. […] It was a funeral and a baptism and a coronation, all in all, very solemn, but also a celebration.[317]

As a special guest to this sacred event, John Molloy feels privileged enough that he can accept relinquishing any claims of scientific imperatives – enhanced knowledge and experience can be set aside:

> Science had bowed out. All science could do was stand on the sidelines and wait. […] History awaited and the people waited on history. The same old two-

[314] *Grace* – pp.265-6.
[315] *Grace* – p.301.
[316] *Grace* – p.391.
[317] *Grace* – pp.396-7.

> way relationship. In the meantime they didn't see any rush. They had been around for a long while. These were the world's most patient people.[318]

These bones are now left in peace; other bones are disturbed, near the novel's conclusion, when Carl the stalker prepares to ambush Grace in her dad's fossil storage cabinet; by squeezing himself tightly in Salt End Woman Grace's previous holding vault, he offers 21st century Grace the opportunity to close this terrifying chapter of her life. When she finds him there and makes sure he will stay there, he looks prime to become a specimen of choice for the research of a distant scientific heir to John Molloy:

> Inside, a naked man squatted, long limbs all bunched together, his face resting on his knees. […] He was so jammed in there with his bag that he seemed wedged into position. She couldn't tell if he was breathing or not. […] [She] stepped quickly forward and closed each of the three sealed doors in turn. Tight as a drum, strong as a vault, time-proof.[319]

With this harrowing experience behind her, she is ready to embrace new beginnings. Out of her one-off, guilt-inducing intimacy with the teenage Afghani, she is about to bring a new Molloy into the world; her father decides to take her back to Lion Island for a day in order to reconnect their common past with her future and with the next phase in the mixed gene flow of three generations of Australian Molloys – even if this final scene of the novel—an echo of its opening chapter's dinner on Port Mangrove seafront—finds Grace slightly underwhelmed by her dad's expectations:

> It seemed important to show her the island. There was no bitterness left but maybe she'd get an inkling of her early, other life. […] Shouldn't this gap be filled before she entered her new stage? You couldn't live with gaps in your own story.
>
> 'I want to show where you lived as a baby. Where we all lived when your mother and I were young.' He didn't say, Before you leave me too. Or, Before you become merely one of us.
>
> She went along for the outing, to please him. It was hard to be nostalgic for something you didn't recall.[320]

In spite of this anticlimactic sentiment, Grace and John Molloy seem to have regained some secure existential footing; their march from innocence to appeased experience (through acceptance of unpredictability and the cyclical pattern of self-renewal) takes them a bit farther down the road previously taken by other characters from Drewe's novels. Like Cullen in *A Cry in the Jungle Bar*, they lose themselves in self-

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[318] *Grace* – p.397.
[319] *Grace* – p.412.
[320] *Grace* – pp.413-4.

doubt or self-exile; like Will and Angelica in *The Drowner*, they stumble and pick themselves up while on their way to self-fulfilment through oceans and deserts. Like *Fortune*'s Spargo and Ned Kelly in *Our Sunshine*, they witness – and perhaps even slightly contribute to – changes in the collective psyche as Australia is going ahead on its own path towards self-affirmation. Most evocatively, Grace and John Molloy emulate and pursue Stephen Crisp's quest in *The Savage* Crows, thus offering Robert Drewe's readers ways to negotiate the complex construct of their postmodern existence. Above and beyond the networked informational maelstrom of the cyberspace alluded to in *Grace* and evoked in the conclusion of this study's previous chapter, Drewe enables them, and us, to re-evaluate the nature and significance of the notions of innocence and experience, a dichotomy he puts to the acid test of nostalgic temptations, buried corruption, elusive wisdom and prospective renewal in each of his novels.

Chapter IV
Innocence and Experience
in the Novels of Tim Winton

In the first major critical review of Tim Winton's creation, a quotation from the author himself emphasizes the essential proximity between his personal experience and his literary subject matter. Interestingly, he stresses this point by establishing a clear contrast with Robert Drewe's approach:

> You can only write well about what you know. It would be useless for me to write about seducing sophisticated women at Doyles [a fashionable waterfront restaurant in Sydney]. Others like Drewe can do that brilliantly and I love reading it—Drewe was my first writer hero—but I can't write it.[1]

Tim Winton's writing material and inspiration are indeed first and foremost drawn from his oldest memories which are marked by images of clean slates, of new beginnings in the physical and spiritual worlds. This narrative of origins shows traces of innocence, even though it may be artificially superimposed on an older state of things. Out of sand and swamps arise suburban blocks through the intervention of disconnected higher powers, as Winton describes it in the documentary *The Edge of the World*:

> I was brought up in the coastal suburb of Karrinyup in Perth in the sixties where, literally, they just went up one day with a bulldozer and knocked over some bush, pegged out a few bits of white dirt and said, 'Here's your suburb'.
> The sheer size of Perth's suburban sprawl has made community all but impossible outside of the telly and the football field.
> I think also, as the generations have changed, people have come to expect less of community. I don't think people actually would know a sense of community if it jumped up and bit them on the bum. It was almost as though missionaries came from a much more sophisticated world than ours and spread the good news of individualism and hardcore economic rationalism, and we bought it, big time, as though there was a revival, and mass conversions.[2]

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[1] Richard Rossiter, "In His Own Words – The life and times of Tim Winton as revealed in interviews", in *Reading Tim Winton*; Pymble, New South Wales: Angus and Robertson; 1993; p.9.
[2] *The Edge of the World: Tim Winton – Author* (video documentary); Lindfield, N.S.W. : Film Australia, 1997.

The notion of community that Winton celebrates repeatedly in his novels harkens back to some lost pre-suburbia Golden Age; however, according to the author, its contemporary erosion can be reversed by the restoration of some deeper connectedness, whether through religious affiliation or elemental awareness of one's place in the universe. Tim Winton himself has undergone this process. For all his reluctance to be present in the public eye, his interviews of the last three decades reveal a lot about his early personal experience.

He readily describes his childhood as innocent, sheltered in a secure and loving family circle of humble material resources. The fibro walls (thinner than bricks) of the family house offered him unexpected eavesdropping on harsher realities of the world: he tells how he could hear his father, a policeman, share with his mother some of the tragedies and evil, shameful deeds he was confronted with while on duty. Still, the beach was not too far and during these early years Tim Winton started his lifelong idyll with the Western Australian natural environment. His innocence was nearly shattered when his father had a near-fatal road accident and had to endure a very long recovery. That innocence was lastingly restored when, out of the blue, a member of a local church offered his assistance to the family through these difficult times. This good deed of communal spirit led the Winton family to reconnect with established religion, and there the author found more of the sheltered innocence he enjoyed at home:

> My parents were converts in the 1960s […] to Protestant fundamentalism I guess. They joined a local congregation of the Church of Christ […] they were like Baptists only slightly better-dressed. It was a pretty gentle form of fundamentalism, it wasn't all fire and brimstone.
> I think I appreciated certain things about being in the church […] One of those things was just the fact that a church offered a community that the suburb wasn't offering, because it was the beginning of that sort of atomisation of society; people were living further and further away from each other, and shops were a long way away. There was no communal focus, so we had contact with old people for instance.
> […] I think as I got older, I became a little more forgiving and realised that churches are just groups of people, and whichever organisation you find yourself in, whether it's a sporting one or an educational one, they're all more or less the same, more or less hopeless, because they're full of hopeless people, and I think I was so rigidly unforgiving about people when I was younger, that I found it easier to write off in its entirety.
> So I'd go and try to grin and bear it, and I think about the kind of combined efforts that people are putting in to doing good things, and to being good to each other and sticking up for the poor and the oppressed.[3]

[3] "Tim Winton's Faith" – ABC's *The Spirit of Things*; Sunday 19 September 2004 – transcript at http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/spirit/stories/s1198547.htm (last accessed on July 16th, 2010)

The page of childhood ingenuousness was turned for Tim Winton when his father received a new professional posting to the south coast of Western Australia. There Winton got started on the path of experience through teenage rebellious pursuits and intellectual and spiritual inquisitiveness, all this aggregating in his first writing efforts. Encouraged by early publication and critical praise (and "with no other marketable skill", as he puts it himself), he embarked on an intense creative ride in his twenties: after his marriage, he wrote ten books in ten years (novels, children's literature, short story collections) to help support his young family. He concluded this first phase of his career with a two-year family residence in Europe, moving from Greece to France, the Netherlands and Ireland. The efforts he put into self-expression (and material sustenance) were markedly alleviated when *Cloudstreet*, published in 1991, was a runaway and lasting success.

With this increased financial security and public recognition came new challenges for Winton: the demands of his readership and the scrutiny of academia, as well as various solicitations to get involved in community action. This confrontational aspect of experience culminated in his role in the successful campaign for the preservation of the Ningaloo Reef on W.A.'s northwest coast in the early 2000s. For Tim Winton, this long struggle during which he encountered enmity from "the big end of town" corporate circles in Perth was ultimately an attempt to correct past cases of corruption (of spiritual/environmental nature, as well as of corporate criminal ones) he had witnessed in the previous decades, such as the state-sanctioned defacing of the Scarborough seafront against all building and conservation regulations. Looking forward, it was also for him a duty owed to his children and future generations, so that their experience of their human and natural milieu might stretch beyond just trying "to remember something I never saw",[4] as Winton described his work of recreating Perth's postwar world in *Cloudstreet*.

Throughout this period of public involvement, he continued to write and publish significant works, most notably *Dirt Music*, a novel marked by Australia's turn-of-the-millennium anxieties as well as the possibilities of radical clean starts and returns to innocence, and *Breath*, in which the main protagonist's progress from

[4] Michael McGirr, *Tim Winton: The Writer and his Work*; South Yarra, Victoria, Macmillan; 1999 p.101.

innocence to transgression and bitter experience has a distinct echo of the longings and tensions present in Winton's very first writings, such as *An Open Swimmer*.

Beyond the easy label of "Christian writer", the empathy present in his characterizations remains somehow ambivalent; the wide-eyed innocence of the children populating his novels is as much a sign of ebullient rebellion against adult emotional self-neutering as unblemished naiveté. Against the reflex of grown-ups' condescension, Tim Winton respects children's budding individualities slowly accreting on successive trifles and traumas. The following comment reveals a clear-eyed appraisal of childhood as a wild state between Hobbes' brute and Rousseau's uncivilized infant: "This is not to say that I think of children as angelic beings. They're not – they're beasts".[5] He applies the same unflinching honesty to his own teenage torments: "From thirteen to eighteen was the tyranny of hormones – what a republic that was! […] I was unsociable but not quite anti-social… The teenager is a fascist and a fool as well as a seer".[6] However, the author frequently explores a common spiritual dimension of childhood innocence—the child as a "seer", privy to an intuitive grasp of patterns of the universe which later eludes the adults locked in the rational fortress they have built against the vulnerability of unbiased open-mindedness, as he explains in an interview:

> *Why is [childhood] such an important fictional subject for you?*
> […] I think I'm just interested in the state of vulnerability, innocence is too strong a word for it. I'm interested in people who are vulnerable, who are not yet constrained by their culture into rigid ways of seeing, and I think that's why I've always been interested in child characters […]. Not simply as a device, you know the naïve narrator kind of thing. A child takes you places that are hard to get otherwise. […] I think sometimes we spend our adult lives trying to dissociate ourselves and explain away the strange and miraculous experiences that we undergo, live through as children, almost as though there is a kind of necessary process of distancing. […] I think we get all the wonder beaten out of us about the age of 15.[7]

Thus his characters undergo harsh formative experiences in a physical framework which is itself problematic—but is the most potent source of inspiration in all of Winton's work. Apart from *The Riders*, all of his narratives take place in the same half-dozen coastal corners of the gigantic, near-empty state of Western

[5] [5] Interview on *Three Monkeys Online* – May 2006 - http://www.threemonkeysonline.com/als_page2/_tim_winton_cloudstreet_dirt_music_interview.html (last accessed July 20th, 2010)
[6] Tim Winton, *Land's Edge*; quoted in *Tim Winton: The Writer and his Work*; p.9.
[7] "An Interview with Tim Winton", by Andrew Taylor; *Australian Literary Studies*, vol.17 no.4; October 1996 – pp.373-7.

Australia. The very presence of humans in this place is something of an enigma for Winton; he seems to see it as a liminal intrusion in the apparently virgin space of the western coastland: "I am fascinated by the similarities between the sea and the desert, and in particular the West Australian experience of literally having the desert at your back and the sea in front of you. You do feel marginal, in the most literal sense possible".[8] This near-exclusion may originally come from a transplantation of European codes in an alien, puzzling environment, a clash between two realities which is not exactly favourable to the establishment of a new Arcadia full of promises: "We live with a contradiction in Australia: one of the most antireligious European cultures on the most spiritual and religious of continents. It's tragic—40,000 years of aboriginal wisdom completely ignored".[9] For Winton, once the colonial dispossession is effective, the land turns into a not-so-innocent purgatory devoid of any redemptive empathy:

> Compared with the settlement of America, for instance, which was savage enough on any terms, colonial Australia does seem to have been specially marked by dismay, hunger and disenchantment: place names like Useless Loop, Point Torment and Lake Disappointment are common. Here there was no promised land for the interlopers, little milk and even less honey. When wealth was finally generated, its beneficiaries rarely troubled themselves with old-world noblesse oblige or the ethical gestures that religious Americans were susceptible to. Having at last wrestled something from the waterless frontier, the luckless colonists of the Australian west grasped hard and long at whatever they got. Along with their war on nature they maintained a stalwart resistance to charity; there was no room for softness of any sort, and it seems evident from the passage of time that the fixed mind has been no easier to prise open than the clenched fist.[10]

It may seem that Winton, in his vision of greed exiled from grace, echoes the tenet that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God".[11] However he remains clear-eyed on the subject of the supposed innocence of the labouring masses:

> I don't have any delusions about the working class—they're just as likely to kick you in the guts as the elite… But I'm writing about the working class, people who generally aren't articulate, aren't mobile and are often alienated and powerless. You can only write well about what you know.[12]

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[8] *The Edge of the World*.
[9] *Reading Tim Winton*; p.8.
[10] Tim Winton, "Silent Country – Travels Through a Recovering Landscape"; in *The Monthly*, October 2008; p.34.
[11] Matthew 19:24; *King James Bible*.
[12] Richard Rossiter, "In His Own Words – The life and times of Tim Winton as revealed in interviews", in *Reading Tim Winton*; p.9.

Winton's novels are indeed inhabited by ordinary West Australians of all ages striving to overcome confusion and to find harmony with people around them and with their natural environment; these "innocents", somehow "poor in spirit",[13] look around them for a higher sense of inner peace as they all partake in some idiosyncratic "Battler's Progress"—a possible label for the pragmatic soul-searching that Yvonne Miels thus describes:

> Tim Winton's characters, in working through a variety of human events, are searching for significant certainties. For those who are open to the power of love and in touch with the closeness of the 'other world' there come moments of grace which regenerate and strengthen them. Such moments pivot on innocent acceptance.
> […] In his novels ordinary people celebrate the tough realities of life whilst recognizing other immanences; for some of them it is a world where God's presence is sensed instinctively as the divine within the ordinary. [14]

Thus his characters fall from grace, crawl and stumble on the way to experience and atonement. They put themselves at lethal risk in the often unforgiving natural environment, but once they learn to live with their fallible nature and the awareness of mortality, they may find solace on this plane of existence, often comforted by the spectacle of the ocean's cyclical infinity:

> Winton's coastal utopia may more appropriately be characterized as a "postlapsarian paradise" rather than an Eden in the traditional sense. It is arguably a more positive, sustainable image, where life can prevail over loss in a world that is beautiful but not perfect, where death is acknowledged as part of the scheme of life.[15]

Winton's writing reconciles pragmatic views of experience and mystical intimation of innocence and cathartic renewal; his spiritual views of uncertain denomination (he has said that he feels Catholic among Protestants, and Protestant among Catholics)[16] match a very concrete, straightforward vision of constructive existential responsibility:

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[13] Matthew 5:3.
[14] Yvonne Miels, "Singing the Great Creator: The Spiritual in Tim Winton's Novels", in *Reading Tim Winton*; p.37, 31.
[15] Kathryn Burns, "Landscapes of Australian Childhoods: A Regional Comparison of Edenic Imaginings"; in *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*; vol.4 2005 – available online at http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/jasal/article/view/50/66 - p.94.
[16] "Tim Winton's Faith" – ABC's *The Spirit of Things*; Sunday 19 September 2004 - http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/spirit/stories/s1198547.htm (last accessed on July 16th, 2010)

> My work deals quite a bit with my spiritual preoccupations and my interest in domestic life. My outlook is optimistic. I'm gloomy about people's inherent nature but hopeful about their potential. Which makes me a 'hippy Christian' apparently, as well as 'an eccentric provincial'.[17]
>
> My theory on optimism is that it's not optional; it's not something most people are born with, it's something you have to learn, as a sort of forward necessity for survival.[18]

The spirit of the Aussie battler he celebrates in his novels is familiar to him through his parents' and grandparents' colourful personal histories. Through his determination and his work ethic in the context of a writing career he chose very early on, he maintains this collective heritage which is as much an intimate creed as it can be a source of writing material:

> I dance around the actual specifics of it, as you can understand I would […]. In all of my books there is always some element which has come from a personal, family source of experience. Let's face it, for someone who was starting as early as I was I had nothing else to write about. […] What do you know when you're 17?[19]

For Winton, this inspiration is a quasi-physiological mechanism; he makes the following as to how deeply our memories and stages of existential itinerary can get internalized and preserved: "Everything that happens in the past *stays*. Nothing goes away, it's all present – in DNA, in memory, in collective unconscious, you know, it's in our biology".[20] Thus, some "Winton DNA" can be found in his novels, filtered through images of tender brushes or violent collisions between protagonists, of their agonizing, bumbling epiphanies in a physical environment full of vivid signifiers. The knockabout mysticism of Winton's vision is most fully realized in his novels, in an inclusive thematic itemization of the dichotomy between innocence and experience.

In the previous chapter of this study, Robert Drewe's novels were studied separately because each of them dealt with specific concerns through sharply contrasted setting and characterization; however, in Tim Winton's work, enduring

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[17] Interview with Beth Watzke, "Where pigs speak in tongues and angels come and go: A Conversation with Tim Winton"; in *Antipodes*, vol.5 no.2; December 1991.
[18] *The Edge of the World*.
[19] "An Interview with Tim Winton", by Andrew Taylor; *Australian Literary Studies*, vol.17 no.4; October 1996 – pp.373-7.
[20] "The Quiet Australian: An Interview with Tim Winton"; http://lumiere.net.nz/reader/item/1077 (last accessed on July 20th, 2010)

issues and types are constantly resurfacing, an overall design which justifies a distinct thematic approach in the present chapter.

As indicated above, the author's portrayal of innocence often focuses on childhood and on some nostalgic recreations of the past: Fish Lamb, his brother Quick and Rose Pickles carry that imagery of puzzled and inquisitive ingenuousness in *Cloudstreet*; *That Eye the Sky, Breath* and *An Open Swimmer* also provide snapshots of various stages of a youthful quest for knowledge and longing for transgressive actuation.

For Winton, the fall from paradise, the loss of innocence, is often as graphic as confusing, whether it is presented through the oblique flashbacks and reminiscences of narrative vehicles launched *in media res* (*An Open Swimmer, Dirt Music* or *Shallows*), or in a chaotic riddle of sensory impressions in more linear constructions (*Cloudstreet*, *That Eye the Sky* or *Breath*)

Similarly to innocence and fall, the notion of experience is explored in all of Winton's novels, with a special emphasis on its most extreme chaotic propensities in *The Riders* and *In the Winter Dark*. Nonetheless, at the end of this progress from innocence to experience, each of the novels may offer parting insights into the author's belief in his characters' individual and collective salvation—be it under the guise of resigned acceptance, tentative new beginnings or a more elusive return to innocence.

* * *

IV.1 - Innocence

Innocence, whether untouched or salvaged, is at heart of the constant struggle of Winton's characters to ascertain their place in a sharply-defined physical universe. This emphasis on landscape is indeed one of the defining traits of Winton's writing. While characters' interactions with each other are fraught with confusion, their connection with their natural environment obeys inescapable patterns, non-negotiable laws. Whether it is the enticing ocean's deep and the rough tumble of its surface or the arid bushland of the coast and the hinterland, they dictate an ingenuousness of individual response that is often lacking between the human agents. The fundamental

integrity, and sometimes brutal innocence, of the landscape then mirrors the clarity of self-preservation instincts in man's wordless confrontation with nature.

On land, traces of Arcadia in Western Australia are few and far between, under assault from human designs and passions. The destroyed forest land of *That Eye the Sky* used to be a haven of simple pursuits for Sam and Alice Flack. Their son Morton ("Ort") thus recounts their fondness for this specific environment: "Dad said he wanted to live near trees. Mum said she wanted to live near Dad. I reckon it's made them happy. The trees all being chopped down made them mad, but even dying trees are trees".[21] Nonetheless, its powerless condition now echoes that of Sam, paralyzed for months in his bed; Ort Flack recounts what his parents have witnessed:

> For a long time they cut the forest up at the sawmill. Down around Bankside you can see stumps everywhere, little grey toadstools. All the farms in the district used to be forest. Now the forest is only this small bit behind our place and along the main road for a mile or so. […] And now there's dieback eating them all to death. My dad talks about it a lot. He loves trees. He had a fight with a logger once.[22]

On top of local exploitation of the resource, it is also urban encroachment which gangrenes the forest in the novel, a familiar trope that Winton uses to mirror Ort Flack's feeling of loss and of the irreversible passing of time:

> In a couple of years they're going to pull this school down. It's only a tin shed, so it won't take much. Next year I have to go to high school in the city anyway. […] I don't like thinking about it. […] Funny to think this school will be gone. Bankside used to be the country. Now you can see the city at night. Soon the city will be here.[23]

The same sense of decay pervades the description of Perth's city centre in *An Open Swimmer*, with Jerra Nilsam, the novel's main protagonist exiled from the coast of his teenage adventures and walking aimlessly along the bleak streets of a town which he sees as "gritty with the dry powder of leaves rasping along the footpaths".[24] Through his eyes, these places have the same soul-crushing blandness as the narrator's surroundings at the end of Banjo Paterson's famous "Clancy of the Overflow"[25]:

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[21] Tim Winton, *That Eye the Sky*; McPhee Gribble, Melbourne; 1986 – p.25.
[22] *That Eye the Sky* – pp.18-9.
[23] *That Eye the Sky* – p.9.
[24] Tim Winton, *An Open Swimmer*; George Allen & Unwin Australia; 1982 – p.89.
[25] "[…] I am sitting in my dingy little office, where a stingy

> City streets were cold in the mornings where Jerra wandered, squinting into shopfronts, sitting with the hungover drunks and the picking birds in Forrest Place, walking mornings without recall, looking dully into the brown froth of the river, over the shoulders of bent old men who fumbled with empty hooks, muttering. […] Jerra met eyes he knew, letting them blink by, clacking up the footpaths amidst the stink of rotten flowers, fluorescent windows of scaled, headless fish, the chatter of money in tills, on bars, in pockets, gutters.
>
> Faces in the street had that grin. That tight sucking back of the lips. He was grinning, aching.[26]

Two decades later Perth has that same "suburban blandness"[27] in *Dirt Music*, with the novel's main characters driving without joy across the conurbation, from the poisoned wealth of its leafy suburbs to tacky fringe outposts like Joondalup and "its miserable throughway […] like a landscaped carpark with all the franchises that passed for civilization".[28] The timeless features of the land are now all buried under a uniform, unnatural brownness marked only by the shiny altars to profit fit for a mock City on the Hill, according to Lu Fox: "Behind the vast terracotta roof plain of Perth a clutch of mirrored towers rises in the bronze band of sky. Jerusalem, he mutters".[29] The final religious reference in the previous quote may be read as a challenge to the notion of the country being "holier" than the city. Interestingly, it reactivates a peculiar reading of the correspondence between the dichotomies of innocence-versus-experience and country-versus-city, an interpretation evoked by Keith Thomas in *Man and the Natural World*:

> In Renaissance times the city had been synonymous with civility, the country with rusticity and boorishness. To bring men out of the forests and to contain them in a city was to civilize them. […] Adam had been placed in a garden, and Paradise was associated with flowers and fountains. But when men thought of heaven they usually envisaged it as a city, a new Jerusalem.[30]

Ray of sunlight struggles feebly down between the houses tall,
And the foetid hair and gritty of the dusty, dirty city
Through the open window floating, spreads its foulness over all.[…]
And the hurrying people daunt me, and pallid faces haunt me […]
With their eager eyes and greedy, and their stunted forms and weedy,
For townsfolk have no time to grow, they have no time to waste." - Paterson, A. B., "Clancy of the Overflow"; in *Selected Poems*; Angus & Robertson, Pymble, New South Wales; 1992 – pp.6-7.

[26] *An Open Swimmer* – p.67.

[27] Tim Winton, *Dirt Music*; Picador Pan McMillan Australia, Sydney; 2001 – p.324.

[28] *Dirt Music* – p.76.

[29] *Dirt Music* – p.26.

[30] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: changing attitudes in England 1500-1800*; Allen Lane, London; 1983 – p.243.

This reading doesn't really seem to be supported by Winton—especially in *Dirt Music*, with monetary interests corrupting the community spirit and breaking families apart in Perth's western suburbs, or the crayfishing boom uniting White Point's inhabitants in feral materialism. The only exception to the figure of the urban experience irredeemably corrupting the land's and human innocence is to be found in the nostalgic depiction of the western suburb where the Pickles and Lamb families share lodgings in *Cloudstreet*'s postwar Perth. The Cloud Street neighbourhood is however shown to be a fragile environment always under the threat of obliteration and forced renewal by urban planners and real estate entrepreneurs; beyond the sense of community binding the area together, the most endearing feature of this suburban scenery is its proximity to the sea and to the main natural presence in the novel, the Swan River.

This predominant water element at the centre of Winton's mystical vision of Western Australia's natural world is most often celebrated through the coastal settings of the novels: the southern littoral in *An Open Swimmer*, *Shallows* and *Breath*; the beach and fishing grounds of White Point (a fictional Lancelin) and the mangroves and islands off the Kimberley's coast in *Dirt Music*. As removed as possible from tourism industry postcards and its folklore of predatory wildlife, the ocean Winton describes is inhabited by great white pointer sharks turned surf buddies in *Breath*. In the latter novel, one encounter on the same wave is thus evoked: "The spring morning when Barney surfaced like a sub in the channel, rolled over beside Loonie and fixed him with one terrible, black eye before sliding away again".[31] Other sharks are described as playful pets in *Dirt Music*: "Every day they come like a bouncing, bickering pack of dogs, and after they're sated with food they tug on an empty vine until Fox laughs so hard he get hiccups".[32] These creatures are also portrayed as powerless prey captured and condemned out of cruel sportsmanship rather than out of the need for sustenance in *Shallows*:

> Ted Baer arrives triumphant at the town jetty with a 2,700-lb white shark lashed alongside […]. The twenty-five foot shark is hoisted with pulleys and tackle onto the groaning timbers of the jetty, jaws still flexing despite the nest of bullet holes in its head, and then tail-up onto the gallows where it gushes and bleeds, stretching under its own weight. […] Tonight Angelus is the home of the biggest sharks in the world. There is something to celebrate.

[31] Tim Winton, *Breath*; Penguin Group Australia, Victoria; 2008 – p.91.
[32] *Dirt Music* – p.357.

> On the jetty in the bleary light before dawn, the huge, groaning cadaver of the shark, torn through by its own weight, falls to the boards with a thwacking gout of spray, sending a single beam into the air.[33]

The real, permanent dangers in the watery element are constitutive of its pre-existing otherness, seen by Winton's characters as a challenge to be courted and conquered. The attraction of the deep has Jerra Nilsam, *Cloudstreet*'s Fish Lamb and *Breath*'s Bruce Pike under its spell, and the ocean's reefs and currents are alternately friends and foes of explorers, surfers, fishermen and poachers in *Shallows*, *Breath* and *Dirt Music*. The primeval innocence of this aquatic environment is reasserted in each tide, each wave of its cyclical existence—an atemporal experience that predates any articulate volition, an "eternal present tense" that can be shared with appreciative, focused interlopers such as Tim Winton himself:

> To be under the water is a special feeling for me. I've found it a kind of an addictive thing since childhood, being able to be in the water […], constantly being reminded of the fact that you're a visitor, being in the sea but not of it, and always being on borrowed time, always being under the water for as long as your breath will last. It's the closest I've ever got to sustained deep meditation; […] it's the eternal present tense, you have no past, no future, it's just what's there in front of you. Something you're actually empty of thought, and other times startling things occur to you, or you see things that you wouldn't otherwise have seen if it wasn't for the fact that it was so costly for you to be there; you know, you're getting to the point of pain, and a kind of a physical shrinkage comes upon you and you do see things clearly.[34]

For a writer, the wavering surface of the river or the ocean must be a forceful symbol; on this ultimately blank slate, nothing stays written. Thus, human traces amount to only short-lived ripples, sprays and wakes behind dinghies, trawlers and surfboards in Winton's novels. His characters recognize that this elemental force cannot be tamed, made "civilized" or "user-friendly"; man has to obey the specific laws of this alien environment or die. In its uncompromising innocence, this aquatic universe exists beyond human measure, utilitarian logic: in *Shallows*, the spectacle of the whales' processions fills the protagonists with a reverential awe or a destructive yearning that is matched only by the heartbreak of the cetaceans' unfathomable beachings. The ocean is an ever-virgin territory, a renewed Eden for each generation of children getting their first plunge, swim—or wipeout, like Ort Flack who goes through the whole experience when he discovers the coast's spell:

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[33] Tim Winton, *Shallows*; Allen & Unwin Australia; 1984 – pp.224, 229.
[34] *The Edge of the World*.

> The beach is the whitest flaming thing you've ever seen in your life! […] Tegwyn and me get in the water with a run and a dive like all the other people are doing. […] The wave comes up behind me like a brick wall. […] Another one fills me up with water and sends me along the bottom. The last one drops me on the beach. […] I kind of feel numb. For a long time I sit watching more waves come. Water runs out of my nose.[35]

For Winton's fiction, the river and the sea are also a prelapsarian cornucopia of bounties used and abused by man. In *An Open Swimmer*, idyllic tones colour Jerra's memories of fishing with his dad, although they ultimately get tainted by the unnecessary goring of the fish to find a mythical pearl. In *Cloudstreet*, readers are treated to a Gospel-like scene of a miraculous catch:

> He caught them cast after cast, sometimes three to a hook, with one fish fixed to the passenger fish. […] In the end he stopped casting and lay back in the smother and squelch of fish as they leapt into the boat of their own accord.[36]

This imagery contrasts with the industrial plundering of the ocean resources perpetrated by whalers in *Shallows* and White Point's crayfishermen in *Dirt Music*. However, the real never-ending gift of the aquatic scenery in Winton's novels is its life-force, the limitless energy of the waves and currents that Jerra Nilsam in *An Open Swimmer* and *Breath*'s Bruce Pike try to humbly channel into some sense of awe and of unconscious atonement.

Tellingly, this silent plea for forgiveness comes from Winton's unlikeliest fallen character: Bird Fox, the angelic presence in *Dirt Music*, a wide-eyed innocent creature who dies way before her time: "If anyone saw God it would likely be her. Bird's the nearest thing to an angelic being".[37] Out of intuitions that may echo Ort Flack's uncanny perceptiveness in *That Eye the Sky*, she scribbles some formal penitence for untold offences before she is doomed to be a spotless collateral victim of adults' imperfect nature, as her uncle Luther Fox discovers after her death:

> Fox pulls the tin out and looks at Bird's shared secrets. Amidst the shells and blossoms the little folded bits of paper. Each piece bears a single word – ***SORRY*** **–** in blunt pencil. He'd found them beneath the house. […] Bird was perfect. Funny, fey, sharp. What does a six-year-old have to apologize for? And who was she writing to? Did she know something? See her death? And his failure?[38]

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[35] *That Eye the Sky* – pp.111-2.
[36] Tim Winton, *Cloudstreet*; McPhee Gribble, Australia; 1991 – pp.216, 217.
[37] *Dirt Music* – p.110.
[38] *Dirt Music* – pp.104-5.

Her repeated contrition for the wrongdoings of others is an element of Winton's frequent characterization of children as spiritual mediators between distinct planes of existence, as "seers": Jerra Nilsam and his flashbacks in which he catches a glimpse of the mystical pearl in the fish's head in *An Open Swimmer*; Fish Lamb, trapped on the surface of things and meanings – a lot of them inaccessible to the other characters of *Cloudstreet*; and, most significantly, Morton "Ort" Flack in *That Eye the Sky*. His enhanced outlook on the order of things is thus described by Yvonne Miels:

> *That Eye the Sky* is a powerful novel about a young boy who accepts the presence of another world adjacent to his normal environment, and through an innocent faith experiences a moment of grace—a glimpse of the power of love and a vindication of the positive knowledge he carries within himself.[39]

Ort's innocence is made manifest through the instinctive character of his spirituality: he is the son of quasi hippies who have all but left behind the rationalistic ideology which dominates contemporary Australia and which includes organized religion. At the start of the novel, he is thus a spiritual blank slate open to uncanny visions and impressions—endowed with a seer's ability, almost shamanistic,[40] perhaps triggered or fine-tuned by his near-lethal bout of meningitis. The pathology is evoked in the novel with an array of biblical symbols such as cleansing fire and the ever-present image of water (for flood or baptism), or the fiery furnace in the Book of Daniel and Lazarus' resurrection:

> I was only small, but I do remember. I was dead. Twice. Two times my heart stopped and my brain stopped. 'You had meningitis. Your head was all full of water. You screamed like you were on fire. And then you went asleep and didn't wake up for two weeks.' I remember. It was like a sea, up and down on waves and the light was light after the sun has just gone down, and voices called. […] 'One morning you just woke up. You were a baby all over again. You were born all over again.'[41]

After this trial, Ort sees "rubies and gems" in glass jars on kitchen shelves; he hears bells ringing in the wind and in an abandoned factory. However, what mostly concerns him are signs from above: the sky that looks like "one big blue eye. Just

[39] Yvonne Miels, "Singing the Great Creator: The Spiritual in Tim Winton's Novels", in *Reading Tim Winton*; Pymble, New South Wales: Angus and Robertson; 1993 - p.33.
[40] See the scene of his naked retreat of mortification in the forest at night, on page 42.
[41] *That Eye the Sky* – pp.12-3.

looking down. At us",[42] and some more precise divine presence above the family house later in the novel:

> That cloud-light is still there. Now that's a mystery. Little clouds that shine like moons don't sit on everyone's house. Or maybe they do and nor everyone can see it. Mum can't see it. Not even Henry Warburton can see it. […] It's like a dream that's always with you. But it's there – it's my vision. I know God's in it somewhere. He *is* waiting for something.[43]

Ort's enhanced innocence remains at odds with Biblical symbolism (with Winton's masterful use of Aussie kid vernacular to produce a one-page hilarious summary of the Old testament and the Gospels)[44] and with the liturgical rites of various Christian denominations, from the "hymens […], crackers and grapejuice" of the Watkinses' Protestant circle[45] to the "bloke with a dressing gown and a party hat" lecturing the faithful in a Catholic church.[46] His special insights allow him to see mystical preacher Henry Warburton for what he is—a dodgy prophet whose grasp of the spiritual has already been proved deficient:

> Henry Warburton comes out and sits down by the fire. […] He's taken one eye out and he's got it between his fingers, showing it to me. […] 'This is like the eye of God.' He moves it all over the place. 'Sees everything.' 'I know what it sees.' 'Yes?' 'Bugger all. […] That's glass. Doesn't see anything. God sees everything, and he's got two real eyes. I think you're full of crap. You don't even believe what you're talking about.'[47]

Finally, Ort sees what God has been waiting for, and he is able to identify the signs of His bounty and to follow their lead to deliver a healing sacrament at the very end of the novel; it may be the last flash of immanence in Ort's life, since his childlike innocence is then on the way out, slowly eroded by life and its ebb and flow and unpredictable currents:

> It's funny, you know, even though I'm immature and too young for my age, I feel older since Dad had his prang. I haven't tried to be, though I should've. It's just come on me and I didn't even know it. […] Geez, I don't want to grow up. Being immature is okay.[48]

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[42] *That Eye the Sky* – p.4.
[43] *That Eye the Sky* – pp.117-8.
[44] *That Eye the Sky* – pp.88-9.
[45] *That Eye the Sky* – pp.124-5.
[46] *That Eye the Sky* – p.146.
[47] *That Eye the Sky* – pp.132-3.
[48] *That Eye the Sky* – p.63.

The water symbolism is present in various episodes that mark Ort's transition from childhood to adolescence: first, there is his ritual immersion in the water by Warburton. Then the hazing he is submitted to when he starts high school is a baptism of sorts: "Four big kids yell: 'Melon!' and drag me in the dunnies and pick me up and shove my head in the crappiest bowl and flush. […] Mum bawls when I get home and tell her. I stink like hell. […] I stay under the shower till I half turn into a prune".[49] His discovery of the beach and the ocean is also enlivened by other wonders:

> Next to us, a girl rubs oil on her boobs and makes them move in funny ways and it gives me goosebumps. […] [Tegwyn] looks at me and sneers.
> 'Got a rock in your pocket, Ort?'
> I look down. […] There's the outline of my old fella sticking out like a handle. The girl next to us is smiling.[50]

Other aquatic experiences of a life-changing nature await Winton's characters; one of the most striking examples is the lethal seduction of water for Samson "Fish" Lamb, the liminal seer in *Cloudstreet*.

Nicknamed after the samson fish "for his wit and alertness", Fish's innocence is of a paradoxical nature before the accident which leaves him intellectually disabled. Indeed, he charms everyone around him through his challenges to the limits of acceptable behaviour in the eyes of children and adults. A "cheeky blighter" and practical joker, much like *Breath*'s Ivan "Loonie" Loon, Fish is indulged in his pranks and his slightly forced extrovert demonstrations:

> Quick knows that his brother Fish is smarter and better looking than him, and that people love him more, though Fish doesn't fish as well as his name would suggest, because he's always wisedicking around, talking too loud, being lovable.[51]

The traumatic mishap then takes place; in the middle of a quasi-biblical scene of the fishing group of Lamb boys and their dad casting nets at sunset, Fish gets trapped in the mesh underwater and undergoes a sudden baptism of death that concludes with an incomplete resurrection; when his mother's chest punches restart his heart and lungs, he resurfaces as a neurological innocent, his brain rewired to bear inchoate testimony to the wondrous chaos of existence, in spite of his inner self now split apart:

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[49] *That Eye the Sky* – pp.120-1.
[50] *That Eye the Sky* – p.112.
[51] *Cloudstreet* – p.27.

> Fish will remember. All his life and all his next life he'll remember his dark, cool plunge where sound and light and shape are gone, where something rushes from afar, where openmouthed, openfisted, he drinks in river, whales it in with complete surprise.
> […] Fish feels death coming unstuck from him with a pain like his guts are being torn from him. Fish is having his gizzard, his soul torn away (…). Fish's pain stops, and suddenly it's all just haste and the darkness melts into something warm. Hurrying toward a big friendly wound in the gloom… but then slowing, slowing. He comes to a stop. Worse, he's slipping back and that gash in the grey recedes and darkness returns and pain and the most awful sickfeeling like his flesh has turned to pus and his heart to shit. Shame. Horror. Fish begins to scream.
> […] Quick held his brother's head in his hands and knew it wasn't quite right. Because not all of Fish had come back.[52]

Against his will, he now rules among Winton's innocents whom Yvonne Miels associates with the mystical figures of the "divine fools" and analyses in the context of the author's own literary constructs of epiphany:

> [They] are endowed with special knowledge or insight and provide a link with an encompassing spirit world by their ready acceptance of its reality. Though these characters are sometimes deemed mad by the supposedly sane world, Winton uses their special capacities to evoke moments of grace (i.e. beautiful religious experiences) which display the power of the creation inherent within them.[53]

Trapped between worlds, "stuck somewhere […] in another stuckness altogether […] half in and half out",[54] Fish becomes the conduit, the mediator between a supernatural world of speaking pigs and domestic poltergeists and the Cloud Street house that shelters the industrious pursuits of his disheartened family. Throughout his decades of spiritual vigil over the household and its members' falling out of faith, Fish partakes of the novel's multilayered narrative voice and its frequent use of what Winton describes as the "eternal present tense". However, this guileless stasis is for him a terrible curse of passivity only lifted when he can answer the call of the water at the end of the novel, his reunion with some "other side" bringing back a sense of balance and peace to "the whole restless mob" of Lambs and Pickles and to his own split psyche now mended:

> He hears nothing but the water. The sound of it has been in his ears all his life and he's hungry for it. […] Fish goes out sighing, slow, slow to the water that smacks him kisses when he hits. Down he slopes into the long spiral, drinking,

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[52] *Cloudstreet* – pp.29-32.
[53] Yvonne Miels, "Singing the Great Creator: The Spiritual in Tim Winton's Novels", in *Reading Tim Winton*; Pymble, New South Wales: Angus and Robertson; 1993 - p.33.
[54] *Cloudstreet* – p.69.

> drinking his way into the tumble past the dim panic of muscle and nerve into a queer and bursting fullness. […] I recognize myself whole and human, know my story for just that long, long enough to see how we've come, how we've all battled in the same corridor that time makes for us, and I'm Fish Lamb for those seconds it takes to die […] and then my walls are tipping and I burst into the moon, sun and stars of who I really am. Being Fish Lamb. Perfectly. Always. Everyplace. Me.[55]

At this moment, when Fish finally breaks free from his disjointed condition, his brother Quick, now a husband and a father, allows himself to be relieved of past family tragedies and to surrender to cleansing grief. He relinquishes the last traces of his own kind of innocence—the browbeaten, shellshocked ingenuousness which has weighed on him until he ran away from his parents' house like the Lambs' prodigal son. Young Quick Lamb, Jerra Nilsam and *The Riders*' Billie Scully seem never fully able to process some original trauma and have to grow with the weight of guilt and grief. Quick Lamb blames himself for Fish's accident and subsequent condition; he cultivates that state of anguished, mortified acquiescence by collecting pictures of World War II famished refugees and sticking them on his bedroom walls so they will haunt his sleep. By making a bolt for the highway and the bush, he avoids looking his past in the eye in order to leave it behind. During his self-exile, he undergoes a passive initiation into carnal experience in the hands of cunning Lucy Wentworth. It is later up to Rose Pickles to make him wise in the ways of letting go of his past and of accepting his imperfect nature.

In a similarly indecisive manner, *An Open Swimmer*'s Jerra Nilsam hangs on to innocent stirrings and pursuits which he now only half-believes in: his blood-brother bond with his childhood friend Sean, slowly eroded by the pitfalls of growing up and of class awareness; or his quest for love and beauty which parallels his budding poetic efforts, before it all gets tainted by his intimate involvement with Jewel (Sean's mom). Finally, epitomizing all this disillusionment slowly creeping in is the agony over the myth of the perfect pearl in the fish's head, a nostalgia-imbued vision that carries its own corruption: finding it implies killing and mutilating the fish, symbolically violating its sensory privacy to extract a shiny token of stratified experience. The prize ripped out of the fish's head is thus described as: "the aggregated life, the distilled knowledge of lifetimes, of ancestors, of travel, of instinct, of things unseen and unknown […] the bit he stores and hides in the back of

[55] *Cloudstreet* – pp.423-4.

his head".[56] For the fisher-thief, the pearl ends up symbolizing forbidden knowledge rather than spotless innocence. In order to escape the bitter acknowledgement of change, he wants to somehow relive some of his childhood, and it seems that an Australian Ben Gunn has jumped out of the pages of Jerra's beloved *Treasure Island* to offer the latter a temporary shelter, wisdom and companionship of penitence in an isolated coastal clearing. Tempted by the oblivion offered by the beach hermit's lifestyle, Jerra ultimately turns his back on the gregarious demands of experience and on the limitations of self-conscious communication (which he repeatedly denounces through his frustration with neutered sentiment and with stifled spiritual aspirations).[57]

A similar isolation in silence, crushing her innocence to utmost vulnerability, is forced upon seven-year-old Billie Scully by the shock of her mother inexplicably going missing in *The Riders*. Through her father's memories of apparent family bliss, the reader discovers a little girl that has her dad Fred Scully under the same gentle spell as the one that gets severed between Bird and Lu Fox in *Dirt Music*, when Bird's death almost shatters her uncle's spirit. One can imagine that, had Bird survived the horrific car crash, she might have gone through the same wordless limbo as Billie's. As for the latter, this solitary processing of her family's new reality leads to the manifestation in the last chapters of *The Riders* of a sharp survival instinct (similar to *Cloudstreet*'s Rose Pickles' unrelenting resolve against her family's entropic tendencies) that will supersede her initial innocence and allow her to help save her dad from life's hard knocks and from his own runaway confusion.

Fred Scully is in fact one of Tim Winton's adult characters who can be cast with the "wide-eyed" children in his fiction. He does not get much credit for his passive position of "follower" in the wake of his wife Jennifer's artistic pursuits; all that one of their travel acquaintances can recall about Scully is a mellow, gentle disposition that borders on childish eagerness:

> Those strange Australians. The woman with the legs and the fierce hunger to be noticed. The sponge-haired child with the wild accent. And the big friendly shambles of a man who followed like a ugly hound, loyal and indestructible in

[56] *An Open Swimmer* – p.125.

[57] "Why doesn't anyone tell me anything, he asked himself. Why do they just let you go on and then give you a letter or something or write it down in a poem instead of telling you? (…) What a bunch of cripples, he thought. To resort to writing diaries and letters" (…). "'Why doesn't anybody want to find anything?' 'They get old. […] And Sean got old too soon.' 'No. It's giving up. No one gets old too soon.'" – *An Open Swimmer* – pp.86, 90, 101.

> his optimism, in his antipodean determination to see the best in things. Such a family. The original innocents abroad. He wonders if he's ever encountered a man as strange as young Scully. […] Scully was so easygoing as to appear lazy. […] He was just unnaturally sanguine, and goodnatured to the point of irritation. […] Scully and the daughter, like two peas in a pod, smirking at each other across the taverna table all the time like retards. […] Talked a language all their own. […] A family of primitives. He can't honestly say he doesn't miss them slightly. […] Simply the freshness of them.[58]

In the novel, various flashbacks show a father-daughter relationship built on loving care, but its complicity partially excludes Jennifer, and Scully often looks more like a protective older brother than a more traditional paternal figure—to the point that Billie can associate the most salient traits of his personality (and the bumbling recklessness that almost make him a high-functioning idiot) to the hero of her favourite comic book, an adaptation of Victor Hugo's classic:

> He was like the Hunchback, Scully. Not very pretty. Sometimes he wasn't very smart. But his heart was good. She pressed against him, hearing that pure heart lunking along like a ship's engine, and felt sleep coming again.
>
> Last night he really was the Hunchback, no pretending about it. Like a hurt animal, frightened and scary […]. He was so heavy and crying and awful that it hurt in her heart and she knew even then that only she could save him.[59]

At the end, Billie takes control of the situation and leads her dad to the last place where he could find his missing wife, before they both return to their new home in Ireland with Scully left "wondering how it could happen, how it was that you stop asking yourself, asking friends, asking God the question".[60] Left behind as he has been, he still looks better armed to cope with abandonment than Veronica "Ronnie" Meltwater in *In the Winter Dark*.

The narrator of Winton's near-gothic novella perfectly conveys the impression of browbeaten guilelessness in Ronnie's (as well as Scully's) character: "I got to like her in the end, but everyone likes the helpless and the vanquished".[61] Her partner leaves her alone in the country while she is pregnant for the second time, and these two episodes show her either deprived of control over her life or unable to follow up on her desires:

> What was he doing to her? The money was gone, sure, but what else was going on? […] What about the promises?

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[58] Tim Winton, *The Riders*; Pan Macmillan Australia, Sydney; 1994 – pp.120-1.
[59] *The Riders* – pp.210, 321.
[60] *The Riders* – p.374.
[61] Tim Winton, *In the Winter Dark*; McPhee Gribble, Australia; 1988 – p.3.

> […] She felt this swimming creature in her, and she wanted to speak to it, to explain it all, but she was ashamed. […] Jesus, she thought; one minute you're paying some rich bastard to cut one out of you, and the next thing you're wanting one and you poison it.[62]

In Cloudstreet, Fish and Quick saw a "river […] full of sky […] only sky out there, above and below, everywhere to be seen";[63] the acid Ronnie drops on her first night alone induces sensory impressions not unlike the mystical hunches of other innocents in Winton's novels:

> Up through the shreds of mist and the towering wet blades, the stars glowed. No, she saw, they glowered. […] Cold beneath her, the earth soaked up her heartbeats and the stars showed blood in the dark contusion of sky.
> […] This wasn't the proper world. […] All the colours, all the dyes came unstuck and she walked through them.
> […] There were places here the moon could not follow. No time at all but fast-time, quick-time, hurry-time that she dawdled in.[64]

Her immaturity is revealed to be partly a result of physical abuse, neglect and coercion—all contributing to keep her stranded on the periphery of experience and self-determination, as revealed when she confuses Jaccob, the neighbour taking care of her during her narcotic daze, with her violent dad beating her and forcing her to have an abortion: "Now he'd take her up to her room and beat her and that hopeless twat of a mother'd shout at him but not stop it […]. Oh, they had it all organized. So this was the doctor. With his knife, his fish scraper, his pig-sticker or what-the-hell-ever".[65] Dependent on the good or evil perpetrated by men around her, she is destined to remain a powerless, weak child with no sense of direction. As "a girl who looked as though a good day's work'd kill her",[66] she brings to mind other lazy, irresponsible adults in Winton's novels, such as *Dirt Music*'s William ("Darkie") and Sally "Sal" Dobbins.

In the grip of survivor's guilt, Luther Fox finds it impossible to start over again after the car accident that killed his older brother Darkie, Darkie's partner Sally and their two young children Bird and Bullet. Until he is able to connect with someone alive again, Lu cannot fully face the unpleasant truth about the 'bush bohemian' couple who have in effect put him in charge of the household and of

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[62] *In the Winter Dark* – pp.10-1.
[63] *Cloudstreet* – p.114.
[64] *In the Winter Dark* – pp.12-3.
[65] *In the Winter Dark* – pp.23-4.
[66] *In the Winter Dark* – p.72.

bringing up their kids. A family of musicians being paid for the occasional local performance, they mostly live off Darkie and Lu's late father's life insurance; Lu obstinately tries to scratch some extra income from the land while Darkie indulges himself in vintage cars and guitars. However, the hard facts of Darkie and Sal's teenage-like, self-centred carelessness finally hit Lu Fox and allow him to grow out of his grief:

> Neither of them ever lifted a finger. It was always you out in the melons, you at the fences and up to your elbows in the generator, you in the kitchen and at the bloody school parent nights. […] What a pair they really were. Their need for one another was ravenous but it didn't extend to anybody else. They were fond of you and they loved the kids in their distracted way but there was no passion, no sacrifice in it. (…) The music wasn't *in* them. They barely felt it. […] They were just players, people who knew their licks. Darkie was an inspired mimic. He loved playing but was only fond of music. Both of them were as careless with it as they were with their children.
>
> There it is, […] you've thought it.[67]

This acknowledgement allows Lu Fox to access a new level of experience; all he has left to do is work on rebuilding his own shattered world and leave Bird's doomed purity and her parents' compromised innocence behind:

> He has to mourn his idea of them. […] All he can do […] is to wonder why he stayed, why he persisted. Why he's lived this year in homage to these people even after their death.
>
> Why? he asks himself in the falling dark. Because you loved them. You did it out of love. And owning up to what they were really like won't change that.[68]

For *Dirt Music*'s male protagonist, it seems that rebellious emancipation is long overdue (with self-discovery apparently hindered by the burden of unspoken delegated duties), but for many characters in Winton's novels, transgressive seductions or destructive inclinations and their acting out come in their time, between the recklessness of adolescence and the drag of adult responsibility and compromise.

* * *

IV.2 - The Fall

[67] *Dirt Music* – pp.378-9.
[68] *Dirt Music* – p.381.

Having minimal contact with the rest of the world and making a surreptitious living off the ocean, Lu Fox initially looks like what Jerra Nilsam may become if he extends his retreat on the lonely beach at the end of *An Open Swimmer*. Both have experienced innocence-shattering events and have been thrown out of some primordial carefree paradise.

For Jerra, the lapsarian process starts with unanswered questions; there are his own interrogations: "Geez, what'm I waiting for? To grow up?"[69] There are also those of people around him concerned by his apparent aimlessness. To their repeated interrogations about what he wants to do with his life, he can only offer some half-remembered lines from C.J. Dennis:

> *What is the matter wiv me?... I dunno.*
> *I got a sorter thing that won't let go*
> *Or be denied—*
> *A feelin' like I want to do a break*
> *An' stoush creation for some woman's sake.*[70]

Pretty much every element of Jerra's fall from grace is mentioned in this excerpt from "A Spring Song" in *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*: the fight with nature which turns paroxystic when Jerra mutilates a fish to no avail at the end of the novel—for an illusory quest that has to do with a tragic intimate relationship; the "break", or Jerra's desire to step out of the human world; ultimately, all his confused attempts at making sense of people's expectations, often channelled through his tentative poetical efforts (the ones his dangerously endearing Aunt Jewel describes as getting "better. Quite sexy, some of them. I didn't know you were so advanced" or "well-meant, but lacking in truth").[71]

In the novel, he comes to the full realization that he has grown in a partly delusional paradise, a domestic state of affairs built on adults' secret arrangements that end up pitting Jerra against his best mate Sean. Their strong friendship slowly peters out, no longer sustained by unwritten agreements: "Nothing to say, really. Fathers close friends. Grew up together. Best mates. Us the same".[72] Then Jerra sees through the whole situation and confronts his parents about it:

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[69] *An Open Swimmer* – p.38.
[70] *An Open Swimmer* – p.167.
[71] *An Open Swimmer* – pp.90, 91.
[72] *An Open Swimmer* – p.117.

> All those years, […] having *him* here, like an adopted son, or something. Sean doesn't give a turd. You raised somebody who doesn't wanna remember. We're dirt!
>
> 'Jim owns the house in Perth, doesn't he, Dad?' It seemed a logical enough conclusion: the sudden move from the North Beach house in Jerra's last year of Primary School. Mail for Jim. […] All the uncomfortable talk. Sean's mocking glances.
> 'A favour. We did him one when Sean needed a home.'[73]

Jerra now knows that he is living in someone else's paradise, in spite of his father's efforts to preserve his illusions and offer him better opportunities than the ones he himself has been dealt:

> 'When I was your age, your grandmother came home one day and said, 'Yer an apprentice boiler maker'. No choice.'
> 'And no big decision.'
> 'It's never just one decision.'
> 'Choice is nothin' when there's zero to choose from. A shop with one product. That's choice?'
> 'Take it away, and that's what you'd want most'.[74]

Somehow Jerra fulfills his dad's prophecy and, instead of following a safe path, loses himself on the way to some illusory enlightenment. His obsession about the pearl in the fish's head—which has grown in his mind from a fisherman's folktale to a half-remembered memory—merges with another gleaming pursuit, that of aesthetic and emotional intimacy with Sean's mother—another dissatisfied being lost in a maze of choices, like Jerra or the old hermit on the beach and his late partner:

> 'Some things you can't do anything about.' The old man fidgeted. […] 'So she thought, my lovely Annie. Gave her the pearl out of a kinghie's head, once. Beautiful. An' why do they throw it way an' want what you can't give 'em, eh? Eh?'
> Then it was true. The pearl was true. He had heard nothing else. And he'd let it go, that time as a child in the boat, not letting it be cut up. […]
> *Jewel*. The name wouldn't go away. He couldn't always catch the face anymore. There were so many of them. A new face with each mood, each collapse, each mistake. But he wouldn't forget. Not if he could.[75]

From the author's voluntary sketchy narrative, the reader understands that Jewel's quest for truth and beauty has been ridiculed and crushed by the mind-numbing conformity of her wealthy marriage; the only venue for self-expression left to her is deadening promiscuity, with its lot of embarrassed abortions and forced

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[73] *An Open Swimmer* – pp.70, 82.
[74] *An Open Swimmer* – pp.65-6.
[75] *An Open Swimmer* – pp.45-6.

institutionalizations. In the poems and the letters she exchanges with Jerra, she tries to verbalize her condition[76]—only to trick Jerra into joining her in her fall, and in a grim exploration scene that starkly contrasts with the serene ecstasy of earlier diving descriptions, the teenage boy sinks to the fallen level of other sexual opportunists marching through an objectified field of ruins:

> A lot further down this time. Deeper than he had anticipated. Strands of weed brushed his cheek in the dark, and as he felt his way down the rock bit cold on his hand. There was nothing. He went in darker and found something soft. It trembled, the skin almost tightening. He rolled it over, the legs fanning wide, and saw the open slit reflecting green on the back of his hands. Scars of old slashes gathered, pale on the flaccid pulp. Navel a stab-hole. In a dowdy gown, she was arching pathetically, spreading her speckled hair, clutching […]; and she wanted him to say something nice because nobody did any more. But she wasn't her. Just a bald slit and light showing through. They hadn't made her different, or even someone; just nothing. And he was smiling, hand beneath the open neck that was once curved like a beach, kissing. It giggled, then groaned like dying, but she was dead already, before the butchery, and he wished he was now. He hated himself because she wasn't properly aware, because she couldn't tell half the time, and he was no different from the others taking advantage, helping to destroy, helping her in the delusion.[77]

Guilt then racks Jerra's conscience; it pushes him to run away and embark on a trawler to "stoush Creation for a woman's sake"—with his memories of the merciless pillaging of industrial fishing echoing Jewel's predicament:

> 'Bloody sad business too, seein' a big fish die. […] Ever seen it?'
> 'No,' he lied. 'I always clubbed 'em before they suffered. Didn't like to see 'em die.'
> Hard silver and black, flat against the boards, laced with salty pearls, glistening. The gilts lifting ponderously, straining, lifting, falling […]. Short, guttural death-grunts. Tears of blood tracking the deck. The sleek silver of scales, sinews in the tail wearing to a feeble spasm […] dying open-eyed when they were ready. Jerra always left them there, stalling, his back to the other deckies.[78]

His fallen condition finally imbues his poetry, and a budding verse that has niggled him finally comes to bitter fruition: "*All the severed men / Clutching themselves / Butchering / –And the guilt.*"[79] At the end of the novel, it remains to be seen if his retreat to the southern coast will be as fruitless as the old hermit's or if it is an attempt at redemption through a deeper communion with the buried wonders of his natural environment.

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[76] *An Open Swimmer* – pp.90-2.
[77] *An Open Swimmer* – pp.105-6.
[78] *An Open Swimmer* – p.26.
[79] *An Open Swimmer* – p.167.

While Jerra glides again under the surface to find the secret treasures of the universe, Pike's move out of innocence in *Breath* has more of an Icarus-like quality. The link between air and water has already been established in Winton's work, most notably with the *Cloudstreet* scene showing Quick and Fish rowing up the Swan River, with the two elements fusing in a weightless wonder for the Lamb brothers: "'Are we in the sky, Fish?' 'Yes. It's the water.' 'What dyou mean?' 'The water, the water. I fly.'"[80] Winton's vivid descriptions of extreme surfing sessions and other breathless stunts in *Breath* unite in an ascent out of supposed banality that concludes with the narrator's crashing back down to reality, and other characters plunging into lethal existential freefall. If gaining some experience means partly acknowledging one's mortality, then Pike and his best mate Loon are still basking in resplendent innocence while they are fighting against boredom in their hometown. The first image of unnatural feats of "breathing" comes with the two boys' "riverside panic" game, when they pretend to have drowned by holding their breath at the bottom of the river, with some early hints at later unpleasant outcomes when the darker elements of these games would become obsessive cravings: "We scared people, pushing each other harder and further until often as not we scared ourselves".[81] Their following challenge may shed some more light on their condition at the beginning of the novel and on the peculiar nature of their corner of Western Australia:

> Out on the highway Loonie played chicken with log trucks while I hid in the bracken at the edge of the forest, willing him to desist and urging him on all at once. We had escape tracks that wound back through the regrowth and spoil ground toward town, so that by the time a rattled truckie pulled over and backed up laboriously, we were long gone. It was a boyhood that now seems so far away I can understand why people doubt such days ever existed. If you tried to talk about it you'd be howled down as some kind of nostalgia freak, called a liar before you even got started.[82]

Tim Winton has often professed his admiration for American writers of the South; this time, with a town called Sawyer and Loon and Pike roaming the woods like Huck Finn and his mate Tom, Winton seems to summon his inner Mark Twain. As in the American classics, pre-teenage innocence in *Breath* is fraught with inner and outer torment; defining the nature of Pike and Loon's playground is however a little more problematic.

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[80] *Cloudstreet* – p.114.
[81] *Breath* – pp.14-18.
[82] *Breath* – p.20.

The "log truck" mentioned in the quote above is an element of Sawyer's scenery: the latter is a mill town, and Pike's dad works at the sawmill. The nostalgia it generates is that of a washed-out Georgic vision, the slow pace of the rural community's experience seductive only to outsiders:

> With the passage of time a kind of contempt crept up on me as I saw how tiny and static and insignificant it really was. Like my parents, it was so drab and fixed that it became embarrassing. During the school holidays, in the years before every failing dairy farm was bought up and turned into a winery or a yuppie bed-and –breakfast, people drove down from the city in their Triumphs and Mercs to look at our little timber houses […] and amuse themselves at the pub and bakery. Every time I heard the word *quaint* I was caught between shame and fury.[83]

The woodland that feeds the sawmill is slowly dying out, like the bush receding from the urban assault in *That Eye the Sky*; nonetheless, it still manages to generate the same diffuse anxiety that bears upon the characters of *In the Winter Dark* and that dulls the sunny nuances of the classic Georgic vision. For all their efforts to carve out a cozy shelter of experience for themselves, the locals can't help feeling besieged by Nature's unbearable, mute indifference:

> Whenever I went up through that timber country I made sure to keep the fact from my parents. It was another deception that became routine, for they were like all the other old folks in town in that the forest made them as uneasy as the sea. Locals might venture out in gangs for felling, but no one seemed to like to go alone, and certainly not without a practical reason to be there. Nobody ever said they were scared, but that's all it was and I could understand.[84]

Beyond his solitary walks in the woods, Pike soon discovers another way of merging with and being subsumed into elemental nature when he contemplates a group of surfers in action, a spectacle which changes his life irremediably:

> They hooted and swooped and raced across the bay until they were like insects twitching in the distance. […] I couldn't take my eyes from those plumes of spray, the churning shards of light. Was this what the old man was afraid of? […] Death was hard to imagine when you had these blokes dancing themselves across the bay with smiles on their faces and sun in their hair.
> […] Nothing could touch me, no threat, no expression of disappointment, and certainly no gentle appeal to reason. I was hooked.[85]

The spirit of rebellion that grips Pike at that moment brings to mind Prometheus as well as Icarus; in typical Wintonian prodigal-son mode, he starts to

[83] *Breath* – pp.44-5.
[84] *Breath* – pp.66-7.
[85] *Breath* – pp.27-8, 30.

follow treacherous glimpses of godliness, irresistibly drawn to a quest for hidden intuitions, for the forbidden knowledge of unconventional pursuits—so alien to his parents' small world that he finds it hard to put into words to his best friend:

> Later I understood what seized my imagination that day. How strange it was to see men do something beautiful. Something pointless and elegant, as though nobody saw or cared. In Sawyer, a town of millers and loggers and dairy farmers, […] men did solid, practical things, mostly with their hands. […] For style we had a couple of local footballers with a nice leap and tidy torpedo punt, […] but apart from that (…) there wasn't much room for beauty in the lives of our men.
> […] For all those years when Loonie and I surfed together, having caught the bug that first morning at the Point, we never spoke about the business of beauty. We were mates but there were places our conversation simply couldn't go. […] We talked about skill and courage and luck […] but for me there was still the outlaw feeling of doing something graceful, as if dancing on water was the best and bravest thing a man could do.[86]

Throughout the novel's aquatic scenes, Tim Winton conveys the primal exhilaration of a rich picture of surf pastoral—a curious beast that he artfully brings to life, against all odds, as he explains in an interview:

> It was one of the real technical challenges of the book. Trying to write a literary book about surfing is itself almost absurd, because of the cultural expectations of what a literary book is supposed to be about, and what surfers are supposed to be about. It's hard to write about physical sensation without descending into gobbledegook, resorting to jargon or endless hyperbole. You're trying to walk both sides of the street really, to communicate a particular experience to people who don't know anything about it, and also those who do. That level of immediacy is quite hard to maintain.
> The response I've had to the book from surfers has been quite lovely, passionate and fervent. But what's been really lovely has been that the response from non-surfers has been even more fervent.[87]

This inclusive immediacy may have to do with the metaphorical import of Pike's story; whether he glides on waves, dodges reefs and rocks, tumbles through wipeouts or plays cat-and-mouse games with Barney, the resident white pointer, what emerges is a recognizable desire to access a more privileged sphere of perception and cognition, almost beyond human limitations. First, there is this ephemeral dance on the wave, in ever-challenging conditions and risky spots, that produces beauty for beauty's sake, an exercise similar to Jerra's poetic ambitions, Then, Pike's inquisitive

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[86] *Breath* – pp.28, 29.
[87] Interview by Susan Tranter on May 2008 - http://www.encompassculture.com/readerinresidence/authors/timwinton/ (last accessed on August 3rd, 2010)

rebellion turns out to be much more than a breach of deadening conformist expectations when he starts to butt against physiological edicts:

> It's funny, but you never really think much about breathing. Until it's all you ever think about. […] I've been thinking about the enigma of respiration as long as I can remember […].
> More than one since then I've wondered whether the life-threatening high-jinks that Loonie and I and Sando and Eva got up to in the years of my adolescence were anything more than a rebellion against the monotony of drawing breath. […] As a youth you do sense that life renders you powerless by dragging you back to it, breath upon breath upon breath in an endless capitulation to biological routine, and that the human will to control is as much about asserting power over your own body as exercising it on others. […] It takes quite some concentration and willpower to defy the logic of your own body, to take yourself to the shimmering edge.[88]

A hubristic yearning permeates his quest, egged on as he is by his mentor, surfer philosopher Billy "Sando" Sanderson, to elevate himself above the inhibitions and preconceptions of the common lot:

> You'll be out there, thinking: am I gunna die? Am I fit enough for this? Do I know what I'm doin? Am I solid? Or am I just… ordinary? […] That's what you deal with in the end, said Sando. When it's gnarly.
> […] Was I serious? Could I do something gnarly, or was I just ordinary? […] We didn't know it yet, but we'd already imagined ourselves into a different life, another society, a state for which no raw boy has either words or experience to describe. Our minds had already gone out to meet it and we'd left the ordinary in our wake.[89]

For a time, Pike is a fully accepted member, along with Sando and Loon, of their "select and peculiar club, a tiny circle of friends, a cult, no less".[90] The "cult" mention underlines the near-pagan celebration of sheer vitality in images that even predate a mythical Golden Age—an instinctive seduction that is not lost on Eva, future agent of Pike's fall into experience and as such a transparent take on the near-eponymous female character in the first few chapters of *Genesis*:

> Sando was good at portraying the moment you found yourself at your limit, when things multiplied around you like an hallucination. He could describe the weird reptilian thing that happened to you […]. And when he talked about the final rush, the sense of release you felt at the end, […] Eva sometimes sank back with her eyes closed and her teeth bared, as though she understood only too well.

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[88] *Breath* – pp.50-1.
[89] *Breath* – pp.93, 94.
[90] *Breath* – p.124.

> It's like you come pouring back into yourself, said Sando one afternoon. Like you've exploded and all the pieces of you are reassembling themselves. You're new. Shimmering. Alive.[91]

When Pike starts to have second thoughts about guru Sando's guidance, he is ejected back into the realm of the ordinary; his games of cheating death while pursuing explosive ecstasy then take him, in a fit of bored, revengeful curiosity, in Eva's bed, with his sexual initiation only a prelude to darker attractions. The lapsarian combination of Eros and Thanatos takes the form of bouts of erotic asphyxiation, during which Pike realizes he's just an instrument for Eva's self-centred addiction management:

> I wasn't much of her partner in her game. I was mostly the audience, little more than a bit of bodyweight and a steady pair of hands. […] Eva lay on the pillow and pulled me back into her until we were panting again and then she pulled the bag over her face like a hood, twisting it right against her throat so that it filled and shrank with every breath. […] At her signal I did what I'd been told to do. I lay on her chest. And then I gently throttled her. […] The muscles of Eva's pelvis twitched and clamped and I came before I saw that she'd lost consciousness, before I tore the bag away, before I even let go her neck. […] I was fifteen years old and afraid. Sex was, once more, a confounding mystery. I didn't understand love or even physiology. I was so far out of my depth it frightens me now to recall it.[92]

The reality of Pike's confusion and of his fallen condition sinks in when his dad passes away after an accident at the sawmill—a turning point that overwhelms Pike with the bitter nostalgia of regret:

> My father's death hit me with a force that felt targeted and personal. I felt chastised by it […]. Afterwards, Mum looked at me fearfully, as though I was a stranger. Now I knew there was no room left in my life for stupid risks. Death was everywhere – waiting, welling, undiminished. It would always be coming for me and for mine and I told myself I could no longer afford the thrill of courting it.
> […] People said the old man's death was the beginning of the end for the mill and they were only half wrong – it reeled from crisis to crisis for another decade. […] [Mum] never accused me of having forsaken the old man for Bill Sanderson or abandoned her for Eva, though I couldn't have blamed if she had. I'd absented myself from their lives so long and the unspoken hurt from it lingered for years.[93]

While Sando later sells his soul to corporate thrill-seeking, Eva goes one fatal step too far in her addictive pursuit and Loon is terminally wiped-out when dealing

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[91] *Breath* – p.138.
[92] *Breath* – p.225, 226-7.
[93] *Breath* – pp.248-9.

with the wrong crowd, Pike goes from prodigal son to "no great success as a man"[94] with a long meandering course ahead of him before finding some peace.

Other male characters in Winton's novels have been spellbound and led to their fall by curiosity and lust before Pike has; beside Jerra and his secret intimacy with Jewel in *An Open Swimmer*, Henry Warburton in *That Eye the Sky* goes on his own path of experimental self-discovery in the sixties and gets caught in a destructive relationship, much like Pike and Eva's. Warburton thus describes his partner during his past hippie life: "She had the voice of a man and she smelt like a Labrador. […] I really couldn't say with any conviction that she was even human. She used to lie in her mud-hut in the dark".[95] He then tells how this almost-subhuman creature, closer to Lilith than to Edenic Eve, corrupts his inner self:

> I used to go to her. I'd hate myself. I hated her, but I'd go into that hut and sometimes I wouldn't come out for days. She was slippery, lithe, she had you like a vise. I tell you, that woman, that creature fed on my weakness. […] They said she was a witch, the local people.
>
> I wake up at night with her smell on me […]. A succubus, Sam. That's what it's like. Bobo comes back to have me. It suffocates me. […] She died while we were… She died on me. Over me. I wonder if the bitch didn't do on purpose, to mark me for life. She marked me with death, Sam. The same part of a woman that brings forth life. In the act that makes life. She died on me.[96]

A separation of another kind strikes Scully, the main protagonist of *The Riders*. Before his wife Jennifer disappears to leave him alone with his daughter, Scully has already been singled-out by one of his neighbours in Ireland as "a man doomed by love, snared by a woman […] sheepish like a lamb unto the slaughter".[97] Slowly waking up from his matrimonial delusion, he races across Europe to get answers to the questions and doubts that torture him. From Ireland to Greece, Rome, Paris and Amsterdam, he sinks ever deeper into the painful realization of his abandonment, at the same time as his frazzled judgment puts his traumatized daughter at serious risk. When he slows down enough to get her wounds checked after a dog attack, he understands that his mad rush is hardly more beneficial to Billie than her mother's betrayal:

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[94] *Breath* – p.251.
[95] *That Eye the Sky* – p.74.
[96] *That Eye the Sky* – pp.131, 140-1.
[97] *The Riders* – p.27.

> The doctor proffered the prescription. […] Scully took the papers, seeing it in the other man's face. […] He thinks you did it, Scully. The wounds, the grazed knees. He thinks you're scum, that you're not fit to be a father. And how wrong is he? Really, how wrong?[98]

His own fall is somehow sealed when he has to resort to the same tricks of deception which Jennifer seems to have employed to vanish out of their lives; to go on with his aimless chase, he steals some money from a fellow traveller and disappears with Billie in the middle of night, burdened with an immediate bitter acknowledgment of his own moral demotion:

> That's it, that's all it took to desert someone, to leave a woman behind with his bag of dirty clothes […]. That was how it felt to be an empty cupboard, to know you were capable of the shittiest things.
>
> He sensed people making space for him as though they smelt sex and failure and theft on him. […] They *knew* and it made his teeth chatter. You're no better, their compressed lips said. No use feeling outraged anymore – you bastard. You know how easy it is to bolt and leave them sleeping.[99]

In Winton's fiction, one of the most potent instances of fall from grace is indeed the abandonment of one's flesh and blood, often a tangible metaphor for spiritual dereliction. The most extreme cases may thus be those of the three generations of male Coupars in *Shallows*, Nathaniel, Martin and Daniel turning their backs on their families and rebelling against the natural order by blowing their brains out. In his journals, Nathaniel, the original sinner, refuses to make amends for his past deeds and their condemnation by people around him, or the manner of his final escape to which he confers a grand sacrificial meaning:

> *September 10th, 1875* My family has left. Forsaken me. Am I unclean? Where is respect? If I am cursed, then let them be too. Angelus, the barren. Let them go there. *Eli, Eli lama sabachthani?* I have done nothing wrong, and what others do is their own sin, their own salvation, their damnation.
> *September 12th* I too am angry enough to die. Will I ever be spat from this great void? No work. I have been deceived. God has deceived me. I have deceived myself. God is nothing, worse than evil.
> *19th* Pieces breaking in my head this morning. Smash theses very ideas smash this very God and other. Sometimes in the cool of the evening I hear noises and I call out *Abba* but no one is there. […] I spit in the face. Adam and his slut.
> *20th* Remember when you were twenty, Nathaniel the prophet Coupar? Had God the power to judge you innocent He would have done so. Save yourself. Save yourself. No, I shall.[100]

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[98] *The Riders* – pp.285-6.
[99] *The Riders* – pp.315, 317.
[100] *Shallows* – pp.254-5.

In his last recorded words, he merges the Book of Jonah imagery running through the whole novel and Jesus' sayings in Gethsemane and on the Cross into a final denigration of his lapsarian condition. Seeing himself as innocent and worthy of being saved while he defies his first parents and their curse, he styles himself as an anti-Messiah, almost an Antichrist in his negation of God's nature. The magnitude of his radical pronouncement and subsequent suicide echoing through generations may be explained by the fact that his fall is ultimately that of a whole community. Indeed, his prophet-like arrival in Angelus out of the wilderness marks the beginning of an often tragic common experience for the European settlers and the whales, between incomprehensible strandings and organized hunting:

> Here – it is 1831 on the southernmost tip of the newest and oldest continent, the bottom of the world.
> […] On the outskirts of the settlement, two infantrymen on patrol come upon the wasted hulk of a man on a sand-bar at the mouth of the river. His mad eyes unnerve the soldiers; they are eyes from another world. The man's name is Nathaniel Coupar and his ordeal has left him barely alive, barely a man.
>
> Down on a shelly beach near the entrance to the harbour, a humpback whale lies where it has been jettisoned by the sea, rotting, caving in, rumbling in its decay.[101]

For Nathaniel Coupar, his descendants and several other major characters in Winton's novels, the fall into experience is undoubtedly a narrative of subverting their inner original felicity and burdening their outer environment with their personal and collective baggage of guilt, alienation and failure.

* * *

IV.3 - Experience

From the beginning of *Shallows*, a doubt is cast on the legitimacy of Angelus' existence, the mystery of its persistence: "This town, scar between two scrubby hills, is not a big town, and it has few sustaining industries. But against all odds, all human sense, by some unknown grace, Angelus prevails".[102] The "scar" may be read as a groove cut for no reason, not put to use; this programmed infertility is obliquely underlined by the mention of the first ship mooring in the shallows in 1829, the *Onan*,

[101] *Shallows* – Prologue, ix-x.
[102] *Shallows* – Prologue, xi.

and its eponymous namesake condemned for *coitus interruptus* and spilling his seed in the Book of Genesis. The image of evil sterility is also present in Des Pustling's sexual exploitation of his secretary "disgusted and pinned and invaded by a viscous but sterile torrent"[103] – the whole post-wine-and-dine scene a "repulsive sight to the sensitive",[104] to paraphrase another character contemplating the flensing of a whale. The "scar" is then also an echo to the slashing and dicing[105] of the cetaceans hunted by the locals.

The fruitless experience of the coastal community marks it as some cursed place, burdened with the weight of guilt. The protests against the whaling industry put the town in the spotlight, prompting angry reactions from the locals bemoaning the taints on the town's spirit:

> People coming from everywhere, from *outside*, to tell this town how to live, to shut down *our* whaling station. […] People don't even know how to treat their enemies these days. Bad things, this town's coming to. […] The people of this town have forgotten how to be strong.[106]

This claim to past strength of character seems however refuted by a voice from the past describing Angelus thirty years before—Benjamin Pustling looking over the flock he has cunningly subjugated:

> Watch these people. A lot of old dreamers squat out here on these banks mulling over their lost years and fortunes – even their innocence, I don't doubt. They're a useless lot, but restless at times. You're best to leave them be useless as they are now because bad times'll see them itching. […] God knows, nothing will get them away from their houses around the harbour with its stinking flats. It's as though they believe the Second Coming or the Loch Ness monster will erupt from the harbour itself and they daren't move an inch. […] These people're petty and proud, bred of bad stock, I suppose, and Angelus shows all the blemishes; but it's ours.[107]

The locals' fallenness, whether bellicose or apathetic, seems ordained from the very beginning of the settlement, with British officials imposing twisted Sisyphean challenges on convicts out of sheer boredom:

> All eyes are on the shambling figures of two convicts who roll keg-sized stones up the flank of Mount Clement. […] At the foot of the hill the officers and enlisted men and the handful of free settlers cheer as the two convicts grovel up,

[103] *Shallows* – p.54.
[104] *Shallows* – p.33.
[105] *Shallows* – p.32.
[106] *Shallows* – p.50.
[107] *Shallows* – pp.142-3.

> each inching his great stone towards the peg on the brow of the hill. They toil, pray, push, and find themselves at the same moment at the peg where they let go their stones to race them downhill. Scrub slashes their shins as they career down, and behind them the stones grumble and accelerate and bounce at their heels.[108]

The same surreal logic seems to dictate life's patterns for the later generations of Angelus residents—whalers roaming the high seas for their catch while the giant mammals inexplicably strand themselves on the town's shores. For Queenie Cookson, the latter occurrences have defeated her belief in an inspired Creation:

> Queenie recalled the wallowing bulk of a pigmy sperm grinding through shallows, inching, cudgelling the water with its tail, being forsaken by the receding surf. Had she seen at the age of six she might have thought her wait was over, that a messenger from God had finally come; but she was sixteen and the event struck her as brutal, not mysterious.[109]

Her grandfather Daniel Coupar has witnessed the same scene in his own time, and his distanced verdict on the issue reveals his grim views on experience shaped by hardships and atavistic nihilism:

> He remembered the time when he was a boy that a whale stranded itself on the beach below the farm. […] 'No such thing as mindless suicide. […] Only suicide. When you know what you're doing.' That moment he envied the whales their unalterable pattern. They don't know, he thought, they just *do* and it's enough. Why do we have to know? Why can't we be innocent? […] Those whales. Loyal to their own, loyal to the cycle and to the Creator. And me? Loyal only to this body, this shell of memories. Innocence. When was the last time we saw innocence? Gawd, not in this family – not even Nathaniel Coupar, the first.[110]

Daniel Coupar's adult life has mostly been a long retreat away from gregarious experience; broken by his failure to stop Pustling's takeover of the town, he also ponders his family's responsibility in the local order of things:

> What had he been doing all these years? Thirty-four years? […] Since 1932 much of his life had been spent working hard, hard enough to punish his body, and brooding, mulling over his defeat in Angelus and the nature of his ancestry.[111]

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[108] *Shallows* - Prologue, ix.
[109] *Shallows* – p.42.
[110] *Shallows* – p.246.
[111] *Shallows* – p.74.

Like Jerra in *An Open Swimmer*, Daniel deplores his folks' tendency to "always write the important things and never say them";[112] still, he ends up pouring his heart out to an empty room, as he probably has done for decades. In his confession to his absent granddaughter Queenie, his guilt encompasses his own shortcomings, his ancestors' failures and the town's soulless doggedness:

> Inheritance, Queenie, it's a bugger. Everything done before you by your ancestors, the bad, bad things, even, benefits you and you want to pretend it isn't true. Sometimes I can feel bones underfoot. Dust is like dried blood. People were driven off land, shot and beaten, and now we have land, we have Angelus – roads, cars, houses, parks, beaches – and there's nothing we can do about it.
> […] There's lots've things I wish I'd never done. There's sins of inaction, too, you know. My grandpa could tell you all about that.
> […] It's having the choices that kill a man. It's the best and the worst. You get to choose and you get to regret. Almost guaranteed to bugger it up. And sometimes not.[113]

In spite of all his efforts, it has been impossible for Daniel to escape the chronicle of the Coupar family's experience written all over the land around Angelus; the "bones underfoot" evoked above are present in the depiction of a place loaded with family history,

> the beach directly below where his grandfather had hunted whales a century and a half ago, where his father has shot himself, where the ribs and vertebrae of whales and other mammals surfaced each season in the moving sands.[114]

Like guilty memories returning unexpectedly instead of waning, the relics of the Coupars' past hint at intermingled denial, desperation and self-loathing. It all starts with Nathaniel Coupar, an American whaler trying his luck near the newborn settlement of Angelus in 1831. Reading Nathaniel's journals, Cleve Cookson follows his descent into an abyss of confusion and anger, as he is torn between hunting the "Leviathan"[115] and exonerating himself of the consequences of his pursuits in the company of barely human predators – the other members of the whaling party, rapists, murderers and cannibals fallen beyond salvation. His "sins of inaction" accrete around him refusing to see the sordid truth of their condition. Their common national claim to a higher degree of civilization and experience may manifest itself in the form of a stubborn delusion: "I cannot believe this. Men are not so barbarous as

[112] *Shallows* - p.88.
[113] *Shallows* – p.88.
[114] *Shallows* – p.72.
[115] *Shallows* – p.147.

that; we are Americans".[116] When this smokescreen dissipates, he is cornered into deflecting any personal responsibility for their collective moral devolution: "We have become animals. No – they. Filth, and hopeless barbarity".[117] Finally, he rejects any notion of guilt by lashing out at the universe and God:

> I fell to my knees and cursed them all, cursed the sky and the wind and the fish of the sea, berated and spat upon their Creator. Of all men, all our company, *I* should have been saved.[118]

When he finally looks back at his life, Nathaniel tries to keep clear of any damning acknowledgement by spelling out his own rambling creed of unyielding, alienated experience:

> Sometimes you are at the brink of all knowledge, others you creep along the crumbling banks of all ignorance. I have no guilt. Some men speak of their guilt as though it is a valuable asset […]. Rubbish.
> […] A man is not responsible for his company. I suffered in resisting barbarity. I did not participate. I am innocent.
> […] A man has only himself and his cunningness and his stubbornness, brute strength and wit. He has no need of forgiveness. And, should I have need of it?[119]

Fast-forward to 1978 when Angelus is about to celebrate its sesquicentenary, and it seems that the whole local experience has been shaped by Nathaniel's take-no-prisoners dictum, so much so that when the anti-whaling action starts around the bay, it takes a clearly moralizing turn – with a banner enjoining the locals to "REDEEM YOURSELF: SAVE THE WHALES".[120] It is then only the beginning of a campaign that, in itself, is not exempt from cynical arrangements around a purported objective. Queenie thus discovers an unsavoury side of ecopolitics:

> Oh God, thought Queenie, what am I doing here? 'So,' she said, 'we didn't actively *save* any but we didn't let them kill any more than seven.'
> 'We put one boat out of the chase. That's something. That's news. I've released it like that. We're amassing our own partisans in the press and TV, don't worry. The visuals are the most important. Saturation. Awareness. We prevented the kill total from being twelve or fourteen. That's effectiveness.'
> 'You talk another language, mate,' Queenie said.[121]

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[116] *Shallows* – p.27.
[117] *Shallows* – p.146.
[118] *Shallows* – p.155.
[119] *Shallows* – pp.158-9.
[120] *Shallows* – p.131.
[121] *Shallows* – p.186.

With fringe groups starting to bicker for media attention and journalists themselves spicing up the proceedings,[122] the campaign seems destined to run aground on the shallows and be swallowed in the morass of the local experience—the environmentalists' action reduced to "just another town entertainment, middle billing on the Angelus Show".[123] Cleve's verdict on the protest turns this disillusionment into an all-encompassing castigation: "Your whole little campaign is crook, it's dishonest as hell, as fake as this whole town. […] Trying to manipulate people, being manipulated".[124] When the troubles end, the same environmental activist who earlier railed against Angelus the "goddam town […] full of goddam hicks"[125] now parts company with Queenie by alluding to the possibility of a fiery redemption for the place. In his bitter acknowledgment of conflicting experience getting in the way of lofty goals, he somehow confers on the last Coupar an existential responsibility that her forefathers have always strenuously shunned: "Look after this town (…). Put a match to it".[126]

Playing with fire is something that is not unheard of in the coastal community Tim Winton uses as backdrop in *Dirt Music*:

> In earlier times, when arson was a civic tool and regulatory gunfire not unknown at sea, the locals sorted poachers out with a bit of White Point diplomacy. Back in the fifties it was a perilous, hardscrabble life and crews protected their patch by whatever means came to hand.[127]

This rough policing of local affairs is still in fashion when the novel's events take place, at the turn of the millennium, as one protagonist—a poacher himself—is aware of his potential predicament in this area: "The old White Point story. No witnesses but White Pointers. It'll be another tragic accident at sea."[128]

The locals' nature and the defining traits of their collective experience seem inscribed in their name: "White Pointer". In Winton's *Breath*, it is another name for the great white shark; in *Shallows* Des Pustling constantly grows new teeth[129] like the mighty sea predators. However the locals are probably a better match than Angelus' slimy entrepreneur for the much-maligned aquatic creatures. "They take no prisoners

[122] *Shallows* – p.214.
[123] *Shallows* – p.220.
[124] *Shallows* – p.212-3.
[125] *Shallows* – p.61.
[126] *Shallows* – p.231.
[127] *Dirt Music* – p.16.
[128] *Dirt Music* – p.136.
[129] *Shallows* – pp.53-4.

in that town",[130] as a Broome tour guide puts it; and the White Point experience looks like a mix of Hobbesian unsophisticated innocence and of terminal mindless abandonment in plundering and consumerism. The place is reaping the benefit of its main resource's high demand overseas, going from coastal scrubland to seafood gold town in a few years:

> Male and female, addicted to the frontier way, White Pointers remained a savage, unruly lot. Even after the boom when many families became instantly – even catastrophically – rich and the law came to town, they were, in any estimation, as rough as guts.
> […] The town was a personality junkyard […] where people still washed up to hide or to lick their wounds. Broke and rattled they dropped sail in the bay and never left. Surfers, dopeheads, deviants, dreamers […] sensed that the town was a dog but the landscape got its hooks in and people stayed.[131]

Somehow, this "feral"[132] mob is kept in check by bureaucratic institutions; official regulations seem to act as well-meaning tutelage over White Point's rough innocents: "Fisheries law is about protecting all that export money. To save all those rich bastards from themselves".[133] However, it is a quasi-tribal rule supported by superstition that actually structures life in White Point. The late Bill Buckridge and his son Jim are seen by all other White Point crayfishermen as the guardians of the local rough ethos; the father's and his son's fallenness borrows some aspects of the medieval Fisher King imagery explicitly referenced in the following judgment by a White Pointer: "the fisher kings've gone soft in their old age".[134] The Buckridge dynasty starts with a Second World War veteran left incomplete when he returns home: "He was a prisoner of the Japanese. Tortured to death. Think that's what turned the old man, made him so hard – he never got over it".[135] Still, he holds sway over the stretch of coast until his death, when the mantle is handed over to his son:

> At White Point Jim was the uncrowned prince. People deferred to him. […] Some gravitas seemed to have been inherited from his legendary father, years dead. Big Bill was, by all accounts, not merely a man's man, but a bastard's bastard whose ruthless cunning was not confined to fishing. The Buckridges had been successful, acquisitive farmers in their time but as fishermen they were profoundly, prodigiously superior, and others in the fleet were in awe of Jim's success. To them it was almost supernatural. They lived and died by chance, by fluctuations in weather and ocean currents, by momentary changes in spawning

[130] *Dirt Music* – p.408.
[131] *Dirt Music* – pp.16-8.
[132] *Dirt Music* – p.212.
[133] *Dirt Music* – p.82.
[134] *Dirt Music* – p.201.
[135] *Dirt Music* – p.398.

> patterns and migration. […] Jim Buckridge seemed touched. […] They thought he had the gift.[136]

For all his fishing skills, he is as cursed as his father, the Wounded King in some versions of the legend. Jim the Fisher King appears almost psychologically impotent, with personal issues pertaining to love and lust. He has lost his mother when a child, he was a widower when Georgie met him, and his manhood seems on the line when Georgie falls for Lu Fox—all this being played out for his entire little kingdom to see:

> Watching the caution and deference with which townsfolk treated him Georgie wondered if they thought his fishing luck was special because it was the obverse of his domestic life, if they believed that his freakish touch had come at a high personal cost. She knew they came around to stay in with him socially, but also in the hope that his luck might rub off on them.[137]

Jim's own twisted belief in luck infects his vision of experience, and he analyses his Fisher-King symbolic ailments of loss and guilt as karmic retribution for sins of the flesh. Because everything seemed due to him, he played with fire too many times and got burnt with the worst jinx in town, strong enough to ravage his charmed life. Jim thus tells Georgie how he believes that one indiscretion on his part may have to do with his wife's unpredictable deadly condition:

> 'There was one night at the pub. […] Everyone was off their faces. […] Staggered out with a woman and we ended up in Beaver's wreckyard. […] He just opened the door and flashed the light around and saw us out there. (…) I kept going until I was finished. I was untouchable, Georgie. That's how I was. That was the night Debbie and Josh. Nineteen-hour labour.
> […] And then the day comes […]. You look at the x-ray they've done of your wife's breast and it's like you can read your whole life in it. […] All I could think of was me and that girl. That particular girl. That one night. Like I could see it in the tumour. […] I was thinking to myself, *you've* done this, you've brought it on yourself. Sometimes I thought it was the way others would see it, that the Fox luck had rubbed off, that I'd caught from her like some disease. […] It felt like judgment. Not just for that but every other mongrel thing I ever did to my wife, anyone. Some kind of judgment that wouldn't let up until I changed.'[138]

His postlapsarian torment is strikingly defined by another repentant sinner; Beaver, an ex-biker gang member lying low in White Point, confides to Georgie about what Jim and he have in common:

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[136] *Dirt Music* – p.37.
[137] *Dirt Music* – p.38.
[138] *Dirt Music* – pp.399-401.

> ‘Some men aren’t *embarrassed* about things they’ve done, Georgie. They don’t get *pangs* about their past. They’re fuckin terrified of what they’ve been. And they’re scared they might be the same person they used to be.’[139]

Acting upon this inner agony, Jim plans to mend his fallen ways by dragging Georgie along to a confrontation with Lu Fox on the state’s northern coast; it then seems that she will be forced to make her final choice between the two men. Decisiveness is however not her strong suit, whether in the conduct of her own life or indeed in her relationship history—she once admits that “she’d had her choice of supposedly reconstructed males, and after them Jim was a breath of fresh air”.[140] Until she meets Lu Fox, she has mostly been drifting off course; a bit of a tomboy, she sets herself apart from her shopping-obsessed mother and sisters,[141] but her lofty ambitions quickly run out of steam: “She wondered if those two years when she blew Medicine were the sabotage she presented to her father or the real failure she privately suspected”.[142] Her subsequent career as a nurse hits the rocks when she finds herself unable to deal adequately with the hardships of the profession;[143] she concludes a round-the-world trip of mixed enjoyments and disappointing encounters by literally running her boat aground on the shore of a remote island off the Kimberley coast. After meeting Jim and living with him for three years, she evades her life again by spending her nights online:

> Logging on – what a laugh. They should have called it stepping off. […] She didn’t know why she bothered except that it ate time. Still, you had to admit that it was nice to be without a body for a while; there was an addictive thrill in being of no age, no gender, with no past. It was an infinite of opening portals, of menus and corridors that let you into brief, painless encounters, where what passed for life was a listless kind of browsing. World without consequence, amen.[144]

Even when she then tries to reconnect with physical experience, she longs for the oblivion of virtuality: “She lay back in the water wishing some portal would open, that she might click on some dopey icon and proceed safely, painlessly, without regret or memory”.[145] She later finally realizes that, while she’s trying to rescue weak,

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[139] *Dirt Music* – p.287.
[140] *Dirt Music* – p.38.
[141] *Dirt Music* – pp.167-8.
[142] *Dirt Music* – pp.183-4.
[143] *Dirt Music* – pp.196-7.
[144] *Dirt Music* – p.4.
[145] *Dirt Music* – p.12.

unhinged men, she needs to be rescued from her existential dereliction of duty which she hides behind a façade of pragmatic condescension towards other people's ways of tackling life's currents:

> Georgie had always assumed that an obsession with luck was the preserve of passive people, others unlike herself. […] Trouble was she'd begun to see how little her resistance had brought her. Lately it seemed to her that she'd expended so much of her life's energy digging in her heels that she rendered herself powerless. […] She was drifting, had been for years. Even in the job. There's nothing like an institutional organization for dressing you up in an aura of action and hiding your aimless passivity. She hadn't *made* things happen for years. Things happened *to* her. Wasn't that simply, blindly, trusting herself to luck – without having the honesty to admit it? At least White Pointers owned up to their dependence on fortune.[146]

The tables are turned at the very end of the novel when it is Lu Fox who saves her, physically and spiritually, from irreversible helplessness at the end of an adult life half-experienced – trapped as she is in a disengaged metaphysical stupor as well as in a submerged seaplane cabin.

On the same quest to contented experience, other characters of Winton's novels try a more self-reliant approach. In *Breath* Bruce Pike is still coping with the aftermath of his high-risk, lapsarian encounter with Eva when he tries to close the chapter of his teenage thrill-seeking by going on a solitary surfing trip to Bali. The sense of release he is searching for doesn't come, and he is left living his life on ethical and emotional autopilot through marriage, fatherhood and divorce:

> I was no great success as a man but I had been, I thought, a faithful, gentle husband. Never sexually insistent, I steered clear of oddness. I took no interest in pornography. I made myself quite safe and ordinary – a lab bloke, a threat to nobody. […] I was careful, always backing off. And somehow, somewhere along the track, I went numb. […] I withdrew into a watchful rectitude, anxious to please, risking nothing. I followed the outline of my life, carefully rehearsing form without conviction.[147]

The prospect of experiencing remains a challenge to Pike as he is later forced to tackle the interconnectedness of notions such as intent, actuation, responsibility and guilt. A progressive grasp of these elements dawns on him through his dialectic confrontations with two dysfunctional figures of spiritual guidance in locations removed from the everyday's civilized bustle—a patient in a psychiatric ward, and a defrocked priest in the surreal stasis of an otherworldly wilderness: "We lived beside

[146] *Dirt Music* – p.324.
[147] *Breath* – pp.251-2.

a dry salt lake that rippled and swam against itself all day. Parched and cracked as it was, it seemed the lake was always full, never really empty at all".[148] Watching heat mirages and stars for months on end, he lets the universe's intangible ebb and flow wash over him and smooth the sharp edges of his dislocated experience, turning random sediments into reliable bedrock again:

> I didn't exactly pull myself together – I got past such notions – but bits of me did come around again, as flies or memories or subatomic particles will for reasons of their own. Bit by bit I congregated, I suppose you could say, and then somehow I cohered. I went on and had another life. Or went ahead and made the best of the old one.[149]

Pike's control over his fallen condition is made possible by an apparent reprogramming of his ethical biochemistry; the elementary drives built in his reptilian brain are now efficiently mobilized, whether he rushes to attend a medical emergency or he rides an old surfboard and safely revives past epiphanies. On both occasions, his dedication to experiencing the moment is a mix of intensity and serenity—his mastery in both domains somehow blurring them into the same flirtation with the sublime:

> I discovered something I was good at, something I could make my own. I am hell's own paramedic. When the shit hits the fan, I'm on, […] and it's all go, all adrenaline, fast and filthy.
>
> When the siren's wailing I'm fully present; I am the best of me. I'm charged to the eyelids yet inside there's a still, quiet place like the middle of a cyclone.
>
> I can still maintain a bit of style. I slide down the long green walls into the bay to feel what I started out with, what I lost so quickly and for so long: the sweet momentum, the turning force underfoot, and those brief, rare moments of grace. I'm dancing.
> […] It's important for me to show [my girls] that their father is a man who dances – who saves life and carries the wounded, yes, but who also does something completely pointless and beautiful.[150]

In *That Eye the Sky*, Henry Warburton has also dabbled in the pursuit of beauty before his Fall by publishing a collection of beat poetry. Once he has gone through a combined ordeal of sex and death with Bobo Sax, he also gets started on his twisted, erratic path to understanding. His lifelong effort to make peace with his past is bound to be guided by a spiritual calling; his connection with the divine is initiated

[148] *Breath* – p.258.
[149] *Breath* – p.259.
[150] *Breath* – pp.259, 262, 264-5.

when some neurological trauma momentarily stops him on his own antipodean road to Damascus:

> One morning I woke up with this awful haze in my eyes. It was like looking into a sixty-watt bulb. I had it for three days before I went to the first doctor. […] I couldn't see properly. […] It went on and on. I was staying in this boarding house in Brisbane. […] I ended up completely immobile in my room with this shocking light and pain. (…) It brought on nightmares and I must have been out of my mind in the end […]. I think I just gave up, something inside of me just broke and surrendered. I was utterly exhausted and it went away.[151]

Like Saul of Tarsus in chapter 9 of the Acts of the Apostles, after he is blinded and then recovers his sight, Henry opens his inner eye to God's will by looking for the faithful in the world for a concrete experience of faith's power away from official liturgy and consecrated altars:

> I started travelling again. Met farmers, wanderers, bush philosophers who were believers. Blokes in road gangs. Barmaids. And I realized that the Church did exist. The kingdom without walls. […] There we were, God was with us and in us, without us having to say the secret formula. We didn't need to conjure up God with wafers and wine. He's always been there only we never look. All you need to do is open your eyes. You see, and then you either want it or you don't.[152]

At the end of the novel, his spiritual experience remains incomplete and his redemption still some way away; he still appears existentially unresolved, describing himself as "Esau the see-saw. Up and down. Good and bad".[153] Furthermore, his near-demonic passion for Bobo Sax still haunts him and his persisting torments of the flesh lead to his desperate seduction of Tegwyn at the end of the novel. If his tormented progress does not qualify him as some rural Tartuffe, his salvation is still a work in progress, as Tim Winton explains in an interview:

> And Henry? Well, he's just another flawed messenger. […] He's just a man trying to do his best, trying to live up to something. He's done good, he does some bad stuff, too. A lot of positive things are done by screwed up people. […] I feel sorry for him – he's a mess.[154]

In his role as a confused mediator in *Cloudstreet*, man-child Fish Lamb is another "flawed messenger" in Winton's fictional world; for twenty years, he intercedes between the rambunctious crowd living in the big house at Number 1

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[151] *That Eye the Sky* – pp.91-2.
[152] *That Eye the Sky* – p.92.
[153] *That Eye the Sky* – p.93.
[154] *Tim Winton: The Writer and his Work* – pp.57-8.

Cloud Street and the bitter, angry ghosts haunting its rooms. Throughout the novel, this residence that the Pickles inherit in the forties is the focal point for multiple strands of experience alternating between the individual (Quick Lamb and Rose Pickles' common destiny of turning the two families into one single tribe) and the magnitudinous collective (the house as metaphor for Europeanized Australia), between the latter's Christian cosmogony (a creaking, heaving, slowly-revealed Promised Land) and some less definable impingement of the spiritual sphere on the physical domain (the quarter-acre block a nexus of irrational manifestations).

The Pickles' first impressions when they move in clearly seem to echo the initial shock and doubts of generations of migrants reaching Australian shores:

> The Pickles move around in the night, stunned and shuffling, the big emptiness of the house around them, almost paralyzing them with spaces and surfaces that yield nothing to them. It's just them in this vast indoors […]. They have no money and this great continent of a house doesn't belong to them. They're lost.[155]

This challenge to the senses is only overcome with much patience, and it takes the Pickles and Lambs two decades to turn that house into a home by fully embracing the opportunities it offers them and by tending to its specific needs; Tim Winton describes how this plan has slowly borne fruit in the context of the nation's experience of its environment:

> Australia has not been a friendly land to European sensibilities, agriculture or settlement. It has taken us years to learn how to survive off the land and come to terms with it as an entity. The great aboriginal tenet is that the land doesn't belong to you, but you belong to the land. Maybe we haven't listened enough to our continental wisdom.[156]

The events behind the Fall of the House of Cloud Street are an illustration of one of the nation's larger traumas—the Stolen Generations—played out against the backdrop of ruthless colonial appropriation:

> Back in time there was a big empty house. It was owned by a very respectable woman who had cheated several people in order to get it. […] Missionary purpose came upon her like the flu. Girls were procured and the house filled. She aimed to make ladies of them so they could set a standard for the rest of their sorry race. […] The mission girls climbed into bed with one another at night and cried. […] The widow showed them how to serve at table and wear hats in church. One evening she went into the library to find a girl dead on the floor from drinking ant poison. Before she evicted the rest of them, she made

[155] *Cloudstreet* – p.41.
[156] *Reading Tim Winton* – p.9.

> each of them come to the library and take a close look at the twisted death snarl of the poisoned girl.
> […] She was at the piano a few weeks after […] when her heart stopped. She cried out in surprise, in outrage and her nose hit middle C hard enough to darken the room with sound […] until rigor mortis set in.[157]

The house is still writhing in pain, anger and guilt when, decades later, the Pickles and the Lambs start their coexistence under its roof. The relationship between the abode and its residents is confrontational from the start. Matriarch Oriel Lamb unwittingly picks up a lasting fight within the place at the very moment her family discovers it: "Quick leans around from the back. Looks flaming haunted. Well, Oriel says without a smile, we'll be hauntin it from now on".[158] The ghosts of the widow and of the Aboriginal girl will entertain, puzzle or upset Fish the seer, with other living residents occasionally getting discomforted or downright terrified by the whole supernatural fairground of poltergeists, pigs talking in tongues and wandering native mystics. The spell is lifted only when an existential cycle is completed, with the joy of Wax Harry's birth erasing the tragic bleakness of the indigenous girl's suicide:

> The room goes quiet. The spirits on the wall are fading, fading, finally being forced on their way to oblivion, free of the house, freeing the house, leaving a warm, clean sweet space among the living, among the good and hopeful.
> […] The room sighs, the house breathes its first painless breath in half a century.[159]

It indeed takes a common grandchild born of a marriage between the two families to finally merge their contrasting experiences; in this house symbolizing Australia, two perspectives on life jostle against one another.

Led by Sam, the Pickles live a free-flowing existence that may be characterized as pastoral; Sam believes in surrendering to the unpredictable law of a random universe (which he calls "Lady Luck" or "the shifty shadow"). Only instincts or intuitions tell him when and how he may act upon his destiny:

> Luck was out there waiting on him, puckering for him. […] He saw himself as the kind of man who read things on the wind, living from divining the big wins and taking the losses as expenses on the way. No guts, no glory. […]) There was science in it, and science always wins through.
>
> I only believe in one thing, Les, Sam solemnly uttered. Hairy Hand of God, otherwise known as Lady Luck. Our Lady, if she's shinin that lamp on ya, she'll give you what you *want*.[160]

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[157] *Cloudstreet* – pp.35-6.
[158] *Cloudstreet* – p.48.
[159] *Cloudstreet* – pp.384-5.

Just as the innocent pastoral shepherd is dependent on the universe's cycles while he ambles around in his meadow, Sam relinquishes the control of his existence to the shifty shadow of luck. It is however the innocence of the defeated which young Sam seems to have been blessed with: "People had loved him. He was poor and foolish and people will always have a place in their hearts for the harmless".[161] His helplessness probably started once he found himself left to his own devices when, one day, he woke up near his dead dad; and his theory of chance may also only be a weak excuse for his crippling gambling addiction. The only agent of redemption and reason in his life may well be his daughter Rose, who decides to tame experience with a vengeance; she unequivocally rejects his creed the day she prevents him from slitting his wrists:

> She saw the naked knuckles of his stump whitening in their hopeless effort to make a fist. He set the razor down with great care and began to breathe long and ragged.
> […] Rose grabbed his head and pulled it to her breast, felt his sobs like another heart against her ribcage. She felt pity and misery and hatred and she knew this was how it would always be […].
> 'Rose. People are… who they are.'
> 'Then they should change! People should do things for themselves, not wait for everyone else to change things for em!'
> 'You can't beat your luck, love.'
> 'No, you have to be your luck. There's nothin else, there's just you.'[162]

Through the torture of neglect and betrayal at the hands of his damaged-goods wife Dolly and the support and tough love of his daughter Rose, Sam turns into a hard-knocks philosopher and resets his expectations about the fruits of experience:

> Sam watched the flesh grow back onto his daughter. It was something to see, truly something. […] It was the shadow coming good on him. When you were losing races like he was, with a kind of awesome genius for it, […] you knew you had to be truly gifted with bad luck. Lately he'd surrendered to the notion that his would be an unlucky life, unlucky in epic proportions, and that any turn of good fortune would be a bolt from the blue. Expect bad luck, was his new creed, and now and then you'll be surprised. It saved him from a lot of disappointment.[163]

In this "great continent of a house", if the Pickles' pastoral could be likened to the convict folklore of the nation, the Lambs would be a fair example of another

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[160] *Cloudstreet* – pp.75-6, 101.
[161] *Cloudstreet* – p.11.
[162] *Cloudstreet* – pp.168, 169-70.
[163] *Cloudstreet* – pp.187-8.

contribution to the Anglo-Celtic experience Down Under: industrious free-settlers conducting their affairs in a clearly georgic fashion. This is visible in their beliefs in self-improvement and hard work to better their prospects. Their sustained resolve is almost a heresy against Sam Pickles' creed of chance:

> Those Lambs. No joke, it took his breath away to see them go at it. You'd think they were carrying the nation on their backs with all that scrubbing and sweeping, tacking up shelves and blackboards, arguing over the situation of jars, tubs, scales and till. Stinking dull work, the labour of sheilas at best, with all that smile and how do you do, sir, but you had to admire them for it. They were just scrub farmers green to town, a mob of gangly, puppet-limbed yokels but they moved in like they'd designed the house themselves. Making luck, the hardest donkey yacker there is.[164]

The Lambs have their own superstitious ritual, a game of "spin-the-knife" to distribute quips and chores around the household. It can be a source of mild conflict over parenting values between the Lambs: "'The knife never lies, you know,' Lester says. 'It always knows best.' 'You shouldn't teach em such heathen stuff,' Oriel murmurs with a smile".[165] However this game is mostly a sign of their spiritual helplessness and of the grudge they hold against God after what they regard as their Fall, Fish's damaging near-fatal accident in Margaret River. As lapsed Christians, they find it hard to maintain a façade of devotion in their daily lives or in momentous decisions about the family's future, such as opening their shop or not:

> Say Grace, Lest, Oriel says as she finds her place.
> […] I'm grateful. To you, love. It's good food.
> I suppose the Lord understands, she says, picking up a fork.
> Hope He does. Cause I don't. I'm damned if I do. And neither do you, so let's not be hypocrites and thank God.
>
> We'll pray about it, he said automatically. We'll take it to the Lord. No, wait on… the knife never lies. Lester picked up the smeary butterknife and sent it spinning in the centre of the table.
> If it points to me it's a yes. To you and it's a no.
> She wondered if it wasn't really the way things were, everything just happening by chance in this sorry world. That knife spinning. She thought about her poor dead brother and the ashes and the bones of her mother and sister, of Fish, the farm and every other bad turn that led to this night in a strange street and a makeshift kitchen.[166]

Lester and Oriel try to replace an absent God with more tangible idols that may more readily acknowledge their constant toiling; they now need to occupy a

[164] *Cloudstreet* – p.76.
[165] *Cloudstreet* – p.53.
[166] *Cloudstreet* – pp.64, 66.

domain larger than their cornershop to experience some hard-earned fulfillment: "They were proud and they offered themselves to the nation".[167] However, their new patriotic fervour does not fully support them through their fallen experience:

> 'Since Fish… I've been losin the war. I've lost me bearins.'
> […] 'You believe in the Nation, though. You're the flaming backbone of the Anzac Club.'
> […] Oriel put a blunt finger to her temple: 'This is the country, and it's confused. It doesn't know what to believe in either. You can't replace your mind country with a nation, Lest. I tried.'[168]

Oriel then gives herself to work as a punishing sacrament after her fall from grace, and she reaches the extremes of that georgic dedication when she runs a competitor's business into the ground without thinking of the consequences for the owner's family,[169] and holds the neighbourhood hostage to her commercial strategies (the Great Lester and Oriel Lamb's Amazing Vanilla Double Icecream Victory of 1951 against G. M. Clay).[170] For these failings and for other mysterious reasons, she retreats to a tent in the backyard when she is not busy running the shop at the front; self-exiled from the mourning, creaking house at night, she starts exploring her "mind country" to make sense of its broken, sorrowful features, from childhood tragedies to adult disappointment and confusion. She knows her 15-year-long self-imposed hermitage may soon come to an end when she realizes that the house itself has found peace:

> In the tent at night, and sometimes on her knees on the duckboards, Oriel Lamb looks out at the house and wonders what it is that still holds her from it. It's full of light and sweetness now in a way it's never been before, but why can she still not go back? A whole life of waiting for answers that don't come.[171]

Wax Harry's birth and Fish's final deliverance in the last section of the novel mark in fact the end of a long stumbling progress towards a personal experience reconciled with a universal order of things. For all these years, the big house on Cloud Street has been a kind of Promised Land for both families, tested as they were by bad omens and tragedies in the distant plains of Geraldton and Margaret River before they came to start a new life in postwar Perth's suburbia. At the end of this boisterous

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[167] *Cloudstreet* – p.144.
[168] *Cloudstreet* – pp.231-2.
[169] *Cloudstreet* – pp.172-3.
[170] *Cloudstreet* – pp.170-1.
[171] *Cloudstreet* – p.397.

existential struggle, the house "full of light" is akin to the New Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation, with its "brilliance […] like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal".[172] Just like the country in Oriel's mind, the appeased experience of the house is immaterial but shines in the Pickles' as well as the Lambs' hearts, in the same symbolic mode as the apostle's description of the City on the Hill:

> I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.[173]

The New Jerusalem motive is indirectly present in the church hymn quoted by Tim Winton before the prologue, a hymn starting with the following lines: "*Shall we gather at the river / Where bright angel-feet have trod…*" It is echoed in the first and last pages of the novel, the same scene interrupted by a twenty-year plot digression—"a mad, yokel twenty-year dance"[174]:

> Will you look at us by the river! The whole restless mob of us […]. Unless you knew, you'd think they were a whole group, an earthly vision. Because, look, even the missing are there, the gone and taken are with them in the shade pools of the peppermints by the beautiful, the beautiful the river.
>
> Here by the river, the beautiful, the beautiful the river, the Lambs and the Pickles are lighting up the morning like a dream. […] It's a sight to behold. It warms the living and stirs the dead.[175]

Just as the Revelation's New Jerusalem is crossed by "the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city",[176] the Swan river running through Perth irrigates the whole novel's imagery, from the iconic scene of Fish flying in the "river full of sky"[177] to Quick's solitary meditations:

> The river was a broad, muttering, living thing always suggesting things that kept his mind busy. Every important thing that happened to him, it seemed, had to do with a river. It was insistent, quietly forceful like the force of his own blood. Sometimes he thought of it as the land's blood: it roiled with life and living. But at other moments, […] Quick wondered if it wasn't the land's sewer. […] But it resisted all the same, having life, giving life, reflecting it.[178]

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[172] Revelation 21:11 (New International Version).
[173] Revelation 21:22-23 (New International Version).
[174] *Cloudstreet* – p.422.
[175] *Cloudstreet* – pp.1-2, 423.
[176] Revelation 22:1-2 (New International Version).
[177] *Cloudstreet* – p.114.
[178] *Cloudstreet* – p.300.

Like Fish and Quick on that dreamlike night, the protagonists of *Cloudstreet* have sometimes struggled against the current, paddling upstream against logic, common sense and even love; however, in letting Fish go back into the stream of the eternal present tense, they finally put their lives back on the solemn, secure track of experience. The Pickles, seemingly satisfied with their lot—with or without the intervention of Lady Luck—and the Lambs reconciled with God finally see their house and their urban surroundings touched by some quiet, transient grace. The latter can actually manifest itself at the heart of the city, as Winton explains when he answers a question about the novel's urban setting being a possible "place of foreboding, a kind of corrupter of souls, perhaps a den of iniquity":

> I don't feel that way because I love cities. The problem for me is that if you live in Western Australia you don't have very many interesting options for cities. Usually there's this great wedge of suburbs in search of a city to attach themselves to. I love cities like Paris and Amsterdam, cities that still have a human scale. No, I don't feel that way, and in Cloudstreet, people forget Cloudstreet's a very urban book, you know, the book in a strange way about the effect of people on architecture and vice versa.[179]

However, in the same article, the author is ready to admit that he might have subscribed to a certain defiance of the city, "as a sort of pseudo hippie romantic in the 70's"; and the love that he professes for European cities seems mischievously contradicted by the vexations that Fred Scully, the main protagonist of his following novel, endures from one place to another across the Old World.

In some interviews, Tim Winton has established some connections between Scully's desperate quest in *The Riders* and the tale of Orpheus' search for his Eurydice; beyond this reference, one may also see a link with Homer's *Odyssey* (with a Cyclops explicitly mentioned in the novel);[180] this element then complicates the nature of Scully's postlapsarian experience in the story. Whereas his masculinity would qualify him for the role of Ulysses, the recurrent references to his passivity and nurturing role in his marriage with Jennifer may also liken him to a male Penelope not staying put but dragging his Telemachus / Billie in his trail while he is looking for his wandering partner. However, with the various obstacles that some devious higher force puts in his path, he may still be more of a Ulysses—minus the legendary

[179] "Tim Winton's Faith" – ABC's *The Spirit of Things*; Sunday 19 September 2004 – transcript at http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/spirit/stories/s1198547.htm (last accessed on July 16th, 2010)
[180] *The Riders* – p.163.

cunning of the ruler of Ithaca: Scully has to deal with a Cerberus attacking and biting Billie, he is tempted by a vivid dream featuring Jennifer as a siren luring him overboard, and the characterization of Irma, a fellow traveller he befriends and later betrays, oscillates between the figures of the siren, of Circe or of a Lotus-eater travelling in an alcoholic daze.

Like Orpheus entering Hades to look for Eurydice and like Ulysses conversing with the dead in the *Odyssey*, or even captive of the eighth circle of Dante's *Inferno*, Scully and Billie get acquainted with the darkest corners of corrupt experience in European cities. Their ordeal starts as soon as they reach the continental mainland at Brindisi:

> Scully and Billie were among the first on the dock. […] The quay was grey and close with the shunt and stink of travelers. Everywhere you looked there were people moving and waiting, watching, many of them without any obvious purpose or destination. They were faceless in the bad light, and sinister. […] Monoxide hung between buildings. Garbage crackled underfoot.
> […] 'What is this?' Billie asked.
> 'It's Hell,' said Scully.
> 'No, that's underground.'
> 'Well this is Hell's penthouse suite, Bill,' he murmured.[181]

To Scully slowly coming to the realization of his wife Jennifer's deception, all these European cities appear similarly doomed by viciousness and treachery; the Paris episode sees Scully at his most vulnerable and confused—not completely out of place when, as a haggard Orpheus, he looks for Jennifer among some grimy Court of Miracles on the Seine's embankments:

> In every piss-stinking cavity the mad and lost cowered in sodden cardboard and blotched sleeping bags. Out of the rain and out of sight of the cops they lay beneath bridges and monuments, their eyes bloodshot, their faces creased with dirt and fatigue. […] Maybe he'd walk past her and see some poor dazed creature whose features had disappeared in hopeless fright. Would she recognize him, for that matter? Was his face like that already?
> Beneath the Pont Neuf he stepped among these people and whispered her name. The stoned and sore and crazy rolled away from him.[182]

On their train ride out of the French capital, Billie perceives the same duplicitous, entropic reality of the local experience:

[181] *The Riders* – p.230.
[182] *The Riders* – p.292.

> Paris was pretty on top and hollow underneath. Underground everyone was dirty and tired and lost. They weren't going anywhere. They were just waiting for the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame, the whole town, to fall in on them.[183]

After this trans-European race ends in grotesque scenes this time reminiscent of paintings by Hieronymus Bosch or Bruegel the Elder (Amsterdam and its badly-shaven transvestites, dildo-wielding sex-shop assistants and sinking riverboats), Scully and his daughter fly back to the family's new permanent residence in rural Ireland. There, Scully fully apprehends the peculiar sense of experience he has decided to make his own: he is back to the country house he has started to renovate—a hard task to which he applies georgic dedication, even without anybody but birds to watch him toil:

> The birds lit on an old cartwheel beside the hedge to regard him and the great pillar of steam his breath made.
>
> 'It's alright for you buggers,' he said. 'The rest of us have to work.'
>
> The choughs lifted their tails at him and flew. Scully smiled and watched them rise and tweak about across the wood below. […] He went back to his ragged trench against the cottage wall.[184]

In this environment, the most potent sign of past hubris and decay is an old Norman castle, long-abandoned and an actual image of crumbling desolation after the earlier visions of collapsing metropolises. The ruins are inscribed with experience, whether through traces of their original utilitarian design or the sets of initials etched by "generations of local kids";[185] beyond an ancient order's fall, Scully also deciphers in these stony heaps the chronicle of an entire civilization's postlapsarian dealings with its natural environment:

> He heaved himself over the wall and walked up into the field below the castle […]. He saw it plainly now. Scully had long thought that architecture was what you had instead of landscape, a signal of loss, an imitation. Europe had it in spades because the land was long gone, the wildness was no longer even a memory. But this… this was where architecture *became* landscape. It took scale and time, something strangely beyond the human. This wasn't in the textbooks.
>
> Everything imaginable had been done or tried out there. […] The wildness was pressed into something else, into what had already been.[186]

[183] *The Riders* – p.322.
[184] *The Riders* – p.11.
[185] *The Riders* – p.50.
[186] *The Riders* – p.49, 51.

The "everything imaginable" even extends to supernatural manifestations, such as the quizzical and sorrowful phantom riders which Scully comes face to face with one night near the ruins. The conclusion of the novel shows them forever trapped in their haunting, whereas the main living protagonist accepts his fall from innocence and the pragmatic necessities of experience, a resolve thus summed up by his Irish mentor to a new life:

> 'How can you tell them apart?' said Scully with a smile. 'Good men and eejit bastards.'
> 'Well, if you were God and you couldn't tell you'd be out of a job, no? Us poor mortal friggers have to find out by experience. We have to be on the receivin end of good and evil in order to figure it out.'[187]

In *The Riders*, Australia is described as the place of "the possible, the spaces, the maybes",[188] a sunny place that nurtured Scully's innocence until it gets shattered by his mishaps in the Old World. For the protagonists of *In the Winter Dark*, however, there is no such harmless locale. The four characters somehow trapped in "the Sink", a wooded valley in country Western Australia, paint the surrounding forest black with their guiltiest memories and ancestral terrors which have survived the transplantation into a new natural environment. One of them, Maurice Stubbs, thus describes his family's uneasiness towards the place:

> Dad was a tearer and burner, cleared damn-near everything he could find (…). He was frightened of trees, my old man. Never sleep in the forest, he would say; everything is above you. (…) The old man had his practical side, but there was more to his feeling about the forest than that. Well, there's all those fairy tales for a start, all those stories we brought with us from another continent, other centuries. Whatever it was, the old man did what he could to bash and burn it into submission.[189]

As in medieval nightmares of children "drawn into the thicket, snagged deep beyond the light"[190] by a half-seen wolf, a mysterious feral creature roams around houses and slaughters pets and cattle; however, it rapidly becomes clear that in spite of the gory reality of the attacks, the feline shape in the dark is mainly an outer projection of the characters' past violent confrontation with feral animals—and with their own streak of fallen bestiality. Murray Jaccob once gassed the cat which may have smothered his newborn daughter in her cot; Ronnie witnessed some satanic cat

[187] *The Riders* – p.48.
[188] *The Riders* – p.51.
[189] *In The Winter Dark* – pp.27-8.
[190] *In The Winter Dark* – p.30.

sacrifice and feels guilty by proxy; these cruelties are however dwarfed by Maurice Stubbs' crime, committed decades earlier: to settle a persistent neighbourhood feud, he set a live cat ablaze, the whole scene ending in aggravated arson and manslaughter.

His whole life is then spent in harsh, mindless denial made possible by the constant demands of his georgic ministering of the family farm. Murray Jaccob's arrival in the Sink thus comes as a surprise for the rough-as-guts farmer: Jaccob has spent his whole working life tending other people's suburban garden and for his retirement he has decided to turn the georgic paradigm on its head:

> Jaccob was no farmer. […] He had a policy of doing nothing. He was rigorous about it. […] It was a kind of ritual, that walk in the morning. The rest of the day he'd involve himself in trivial tinkerings that chewed up the time and left him at dusk, looking down through the broken ranks of orchards with the satisfaction of knowing that he hadn't done a damn thing all day.
>
> It was the evenings that took getting used to. Jaccob was teaching himself to do very little and to be content. […] To his new life he'd brought his carved jarrah rocker, some old Marty Robbins records, and a pile of big novels. […] With its great awkward stylus like a plough, his ancient hi-fi was probably, he thought, the only agricultural implement he was ever likely to use.[191]

As for Ronnie, she confines herself to inaptitude and idleness in a pagan sub-pastoral mode taking ghastly overtones with her pregnancy possibly affected by alcohol intake and substance abuse, an image of corrupted fertility turned into demonic work—the coming of the Antichrist, *Rosemary's Baby*-style: "That talk about witches at Bakers Bridge. What was Ronnie up to? Should she trust her? What kind of a baby was she having?"[192]

Ultimately, the sense of experience conveyed in the novel is one of utter doom, with the characters' various doubts and remorses finally endorsed by "Maurice the last man standing".[193] As an anti-Ort Flack,[194] a dark seer, he is burdened by other people's nightmares, a torment which he tries to describe to an invisible listener by recycling a bit of Gospel gothic:

> So I'm the teller. […] This is what I remember, but it's not only my story. It happened to Ida, too, and Jaccob, and the girl Ronnie. It's strange how other people's memories become your own. […] And there's dreams.

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[191] *In The Winter Dark* – pp.6, 8.
[192] *In the Winter Dark* – p.97.
[193] *Tim Winton: The Writer And His Work* – p.66.
[194] Tim Winton has repeatedly explained how he designed *In the Winter Dark* as a "gloomy flipside" to *That Eye the Sky* which "was very much about light" (see, for example, *Tim Winton: The Writer And His Work* – p.66)

> I remember every dream from that night: Ronnie's floating nightmare, Jaccob's terrible memory, I even know what Ida dreamt. Like that old bible story about the Wildman chained up in the tombs, ranting and foaming in all those voices. Call me Legion, he says, because we are many. And the pigs screaming down into the water, remember that? […] What had the Wildman done in order to be mercilessly visited by everybody's dreams?[195]

Cursed with that painful omniscience, Maurice's vision is then able to encompass their fallen, tumbling experience marked by guilt and confusion:

> That was when history started in on me […]. If only we hadn't had so many things to hide, so many opportunities for fear to get us. You can keep it all firm and tidy in you for a time, but, Godalmighty, when the continents begin to shift in you, […] you run just like that herd of pigs, over the cliff and into the water.[196]

To make his postlapsarian situation livable, Maurice considers several options. First, there may be some relief to be found in sharing the guilt with his neighbour Murray Jaccob: "I realized I liked him. It was clear that he had things twisting darkly in him too. I thought maybe, if one day we could swap stories, he might understand mine and me his".[197] He also hopes that his burden may be alleviated by an act of reality-altering clemency, granted by a part of one's mind beyond direct control if not by a higher power:

> When a man dreams things from the past, you'd think he'd be able to rearrange them in new sequences to please himself. You'd think your unconscious mind would want to do it for you, to spare you the grief and shame. But no. In my dreams, it all happens as it happened, and I see it and be it again and again and the confusion never wears off.[198]

Slowly consumed on the inside by his guilt for decades, Maurice the dark seer has become this paradoxical mediator, an empty shell vast enough to allow others' torments to seep and pool into the wizened husk of his fallen experience. The only sincere sound this shell can now produce is that of a useless, rambling confession to no one:

> My dreams are not symbols, they are history. Even the ones I don't understand, the ones I don't even know the characters in, they are all full of the most terrible truths. They settle on me, the guilty running silhouette. Yes, call me Legion for we are many. […] I can't redeem myself. That's why I confess to you, Darkness.

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[195] *In the Winter Dark* – pp.2, 19.
[196] *In the Winter Dark* – p.41.
[197] *In the Winter Dark* – pp.83-4.
[198] *In the Winter Dark* – p.101.

> You don't listen, you don't care, though sometimes I suspect you are more than you seem.[199]

The strongest example of the tragic figure asking in vain for forgiveness in Winton's novels is probably still the old unnamed hermit of his first book, *An Open Swimmer*. As he tells Jerra Nilsam about his past, fragment by fragment, he establishes his credentials as a penitent: "You can't do somethin' like that an' expect to get away with it. […] Confessed a million bloody times, but no one's ever heard it".[200] Whereas *Shallows*' Daniel Coupar was just a powerless witness when his wife Maureen fell to her death and Ida Stubbs' death at the hands of her husband was some hunting accident in *Winter Dark*, Annie's demise in *An Open Swimmer* is the result of a fall from domestic grace, a blissful state which the hermit thus describes: "We lived like bloody royalty. Thought we was the only people in the world. Gawd, I believed in 'eaven, then".[201] What follows then is a crash into destruction and murder. The hermit's answer to Jerra's question about his late wife colours his story with some more hellish images, in which the ferryman's boat on the Styx replaces a scuttled floating house and foundering hopes:

> 'Where's she?'
> 'On the other beach.'
> 'Eh?'
> 'She died. Burnt in the shed on the beach.'
> 'Shit, that's rough.'
> […] 'Some things you can't do anything about. […] Yer just get the feeling of it all comin' down around you. Like sinking. Drowning. […] That was the only time we were together, on the boat. (…) When she sank that there was nothing left to hold her.'[202]

In the same paragraph, he reveals something familiar to Jerra's own experience of searching for forbidden knowledge, and with the same aftermath of dissatisfaction, loss and guilt: "Gave her the pearl out of a kinghie's head, once. Beautiful. An' why do they throw it away an' want what you can't give 'em, eh?"[203] What can't be given here is a child, with the hermit carrying the mantle of the impotent / sterile Fisher King in his turn. Like the mythological figure, he is ready to impart hard-earned lessons to a younger visitor on a quest of his own; he first

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[199] *In the Winter Dark* – p.132.
[200] *An Open Swimmer* – p.60.
[201] *An Open Swimmer* – p.149.
[202] *An Open Swimmer* – p.45.
[203] *An Open Swimmer* – p.45.

reprimands Jerra the apprentice for mutilating a fish, mockingly cursing him with a fate that may echo his own Wounded King's inadequacy: "Why don't you hack yourself open?"[204] Then, as the hermit hints at a planned final exit to conclude his experience of expiation, his disdain for other sinners deluding themselves seems to reinforce Jerra's views of the deadening expectations of society which he wishes to leave behind in order to reunite with an imperfect universe:

> 'Bloody hard life,' Jerra shrugged. […] 'What about when you get too old to look after yourself?'
> […] 'Reckon I'll know what to do.'
> 'And you could die trying to think of something.'
> 'Not too many choices.'
> 'And just die?'
> 'Others are dead an' still walkin' around. […] I take the punishment every day. Why the hell go back for more?'[205]

As the old man performs his own brand of Eucharistic transubstantiation by reading pages of the Old Testament before he uses them as rolling paper, the last bit of wisdom he imparts to Jerra is a firm reminder of the power of the universal principle without which no perfect state of innocence would be conceivable and no trudging course of experience would be bearable. Whether it manifests itself as *eros*, *philia* or *agape*, it is the force "that conquers all" if one is ready to "yield to [it]"[206]—a likely path towards redemption: "I loved, that's somethin'."[207]

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IV.4 - Redemption and grace

For Winton's characters, redemption, forgiveness and atonement are challenging propositions. Except for *Winter Dark*'s Maurice Stubbs who frankly admits that "[he] can't redeem [himself]"[208] and only converses with the beast in the dark and not with any redeeming agent, most of Winton's protagonists are at pains to set out on the right path because they struggle with the mere comprehension of what they have endured—or what they have inflicted on others. Their confusion may come

[204] *An Open Swimmer* – p.158.
[205] *An Open Swimmer* – p.151.
[206] Virgil, Eclogue X, line 69.
[207] *An Open Swimmer* – p.62.
[208] *In The Winter Dark* – p.132.

from the extent of the trauma that has left them confused and stranded out of common experience when they are introduced in the stories; it may also originate in limitations to articulate their spiritual needs or deficiencies. Thus, forgiving themselves, finding the courage to confront their hapless tormentors or victims, or reestablishing a private covenant of atonement between them and the divinity are enterprises fraught with uncertainty and hardship. As they end up being dragged back into the flow of intermingled experience, they are left – as is the reader– with the sensation that this possible resolution of the postlapsarian condition is a long-term plan, a work in progress. What keeps them going is probably not a thorough conceptualisation of their condition; it is in fact a random series of personal epiphanies or rare moments of grace thrown their way by the universe.

In *Cloudstreet*, Sam Pickles has often misread the signs that appeared to him and gone on metaphysical benders every time he felt a strange itch in his damaged hand; his redemption at the end of the novel is linked with his not selling the old house. His final decision seems imbued with his new trust in his brain and guts rather than in "the shifty shadow of luck". His new resolve is in tune with his tenants' own lifelong march towards atonement. The continuation of both families' lodging arrangement partakes of the Lambs' own contrition:

> It does you good to be tenants. It reminds you of your own true position in the world. […] A house should be a home, a privilege, not a possession. It's foolish to get attached.[209]

At the end of the novel, Dolly Pickles also gets redeemed through her love of her grandson Wax Harry; she interrupts the repetitions of past dysfunctions. Her selfish and self-destructive nature is finally partly explained by her shock at discovering the incestuous nature of her parentage. This traumatic discovery has led her to soul-crushing promiscuity and to neglecting her children, apart from Ted the favourite, whose early adult death may be read as a punishment for her wayward behaviour. It is only when her daughter Rose becomes a mother that the deviant rivalry between the two women is buried for good, with an irresistible redeeming agent playing its part:

[209] *Cloudstreet* – p.410.

> Rose was glad of those talks with her mother. She found some parts still left in herself, soft parts in Dolly as well, and in a way she figured it saved her from herself. It was love really, finding some love left. It was like tonic.[210]

The opening / closing scene with the two families by the river bears the imprint of that redemption in progress: a whole group first put together by a house that seemed to resent them, then united by the love they've filled its walls with. This decade-long effort has been observed by a merciful figure who has had his share of graceful epiphanies: Fish Lamb. He is truly the Redeemer, as acknowledged by Tim Winton in an interview:

> It certainly wasn't deliberate, but after a couple of years even I kind of got it, you know. […] There was nothing predetermined or organized or conscious about calling him Fish Lamb, but yes, I guess you're right, you could see part of Fish's position in the book as a kind of, partly influenced, as a Christ figure, but yes, it's so blatant and plain that it seems I'd thought of it, but I actually didn't.[211]

In order to fulfill His mission, the sacrificial Lamb has to embrace the condition of those for which he gives his life, after leaving behind a higher plane of all-knowing experience. This demotion he willingly accepts is called humanity, as the author singles it out when he analyses the peculiar liminal status of his character:

> He's felt something else, the possibility of something else. He's trapped as a ghost in a way, he's neither able to go on to some other life past the physical, and he's not able to fully experience life in the temporal. It's a pretty thwarted existence, but I think that's the human condition; I think we're all—to some extent, we feel like captives; that's why people have a religious dimension, that's why people make art. We're either running away from, or struggling towards being truly human, being truly ourselves.[212]

The love that unites them all is indeed the love that Christ has shown to the lost and the weak in the New Testament and that has allowed him to endure the Passion; its power beyond all pain and infamy is put in simple, strong words by Alice Flack in *That Eye the Sky* when she talks about the connection between her and her husband:

> 'I really love him, you know. People say they don't know what love is. Everyone says it now. They're scared to know. I'd suffer for him and be

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[210] *Cloudstreet* – p.358.

[211] "Tim Winton's Faith" – ABC's *The Spirit of Things*; Sunday 19 September 2004 – transcript at http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/spirit/stories/s1198547.htm (last accessed on July 16th, 2010)

[212] *The Edge of the World*.

> humiliated for him. I'd be ashamed for him and let people hate me for him. I have and still will. People don't want to know love. They might have to get dirty.'[213]

Receiving this kind of love is akin to being momentarily bathed in grace—as Sam Flack is ceremoniously washed by his wife and another carer in what looks like a daily baptism; it is also certainly part of the process of redemption for all parties involved, since they in fact obey the cardinal rule that has superseded all other moral strictures, as Daniel Coupar is reminded in *Shallows*:

> *Be a servant of others, Daniel, and be a fool for God the Father. Remember Romans 13 and remember I have loved you.*
> Ah, now how does it go, ah… *therefore love is the fulfilling of the law*.[214]

The "law" in question is none other than the Decalogue, as explained in Romans 13:9-10. Thus, the stark ("Thou shalt not") prescriptions of the Old Testament have been replaced by what Tim Winton could describe again as an eternal present tense of "love is". Love is even more clearly associated with personal salvation and grace by another character in *Shallows*—Cleve Cookson, who reestablishes a transcendent bond with history and humanity through his union with Queenie Coupar:

> Never before had he felt so close to owning the experience of another […]. It was an almost supernatural feeling, as it had been in the dinghy on the estuary with Queenie when he had been filled with wholeness and absence and an exceptional grace which let him feel what it was to be her and himself at once.[215]

The purest expressions of love in Winton's novels would have to be those of child protagonists. In *Dirt Music*, Bird Fox seems to atone for her entire family when she writes her little "SORRY" notes; most tellingly, in *That Eye the Sky* Ort Flack tries to hold his family together by keeping a constant vigil on the household. Through the pangs of puberty, he relentlessly loves them all, from his near-vegetative dad to his angry sister and his senile grandmother, and he receives a surreal anointment at the end of the novel:

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[213] *That Eye the Sky* – p.77.
[214] *Shallows* – pp.218-9.
[215] *Shallows* – pp.126-7.

> The cloudy white light is coming in – I breathe it in; it's warm and it tastes good. […] All the colours come in the windows like something's pouring them in on us. […] Everywhere, in through all my looking places and the places I never even thought of – under the doors, up through the boards – that beautiful cloud creeps in. This house is filling with light and crazy music and it's like the whole flaming world's suddenly making sense for a second.[216]

This moment of grace seemingly announces the possibility of a near-miraculous recovery for his dad; in most cases in Winton's fiction, these manifestations feel more like nudges and winks of an intangible cosmic force, resembling the sky that looks like a big eye above Ort's family house. There are mystical seizures, fits of literal glowing, like that of Quick the Prodigal Son returning home[217] or Daniel Coupar's rough redemptory baptism in Angelus' Bay of Whales:

> One morning he rowed out into the Sound, past the heads, to fish for sharks. He caught nothing and was capsized by a rogue swell. In a state akin to hysteria or religious ecstasy he swam the mile to shore […] and came floundering into the shallows of Middle Beach, full of seawater and a curious light.[218]

The light comes to him again at the end of the novel, when he writes the final chapter of the Coupar men's refusal to ask for forgiveness; his suicide somehow brings some closure to his tormented lineage and coincides with a change of heart in the community that his family has helped to build—his guilt about the whaling trade and the fallenness his forefathers have refused to acknowledge both dissolving in light and water:

> He was skimming in flight over dark like bitumen blackness and swimming and swimming and swimming strongly without fear. Light, immanent, white, speared about him and he counted as his mother had taught him, to judge the distance between light and thunder, and he felt the water at the back of his throat and himself filling and his breath bubbled as he moved with the thunderless light. As he ceased counting, the hill shuddered with a report that shook the birds from their trees and out into the deluge, and the sea flinched.
> Daniel Coupar lay shrouded in water.[219]

Like the Coupars' family curse, the quest for redemption of some of Winton's characters can turn into a near-mystical obsession, with instances of grace sometimes watered down to become mere coveted prizes or even dutiful burdens. In Winton's first novel, *An Open Swimmer*, Jerra Nilsam is somehow a prototype of all of the

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[216] *That Eye the Sky* – pp.149-50.
[217] *Cloudstreet* – pp.219, 225.
[218] *Shallows* – p.84.
[219] *Shallows* – p.260.

author's later "searchers" exiled of their own volition outside the accepted daily dealings with issues of responsibility. When Jerra disappears into isolated coastal bushland after burying the dead hermit and torching his own smashed VW Kombi, it is unclear if he longs to make his special connection with the beach and the sea permanent, far from civilized corruption, or if he is just running away from what he sees as his guilty involvement in Auntie Jewel's misery and death. A few lines of poetry start to surface out of the turmoil, and he may finally solve the mystery of the fish's pearl; he may finally recognize these occurrences for what they are, brief moments of grace, that keep him going on his path towards some measure of peace.

In *Dirt Music*, Jim Buckridge suddenly reveals an urge that has long been kept in check and that also leads him to a remote coastal area, this time the wild north of Western Australia. As seen earlier in this chapter, he is convinced that his past ways and the corruption brought by his rule over White Point have put a hex upon his family, malignantly sparing him in order to prolong his moral agony. As he explains to Georgie, he believes losing his wife did not cancel his debt of guilt—only a personal gesture may bring some peace between him, Georgie and Lu Fox in order to content the secret forces at play:

> 'I think you have to make amends yourself. Give something, not just have something taken off you. It's the only way to call the dogs off, I reckon – prove to yourself you're changed.'
> 'Like, what... doing some sort of penance?'
> 'Maybe. Yes. […] I've been thinking about it a long time. About you and me and him. And it's like a test. Christ, I've tried to make myself over and here's the situation. Prove to myself that I'm different – and get free. At least in my head. In White Point, no matter what I do, I'm still my father's son. Half the time I think it myself. You need a moment, something that defines you.'
> 'And what am I, the witness to your symbolic moment?'
> 'Won't we both get what we want?'[220]

However, his efforts at redemption seem misguided since they all originate from an immature, self-centred urge—the one Georgie can decipher in his troubled features:

> He looked like a child struggling to swallow something too big for him. […] Such a long time since she'd seen that look of fear on his face. […] He was in the grip of something he could neither understand nor control and she found herself intrigued and repelled.[221]

[220] *Dirt Music* – p.401.
[221] *Dirt Music* – pp.342-3.

His problem is that all he is able to muster to solve his inner crisis is attrition, or imperfect contrition; there is no bowing down to a Higher benevolent rule in his quest, only a desire "to get free" of his own past and of White Pointers' expectations and judgments. Even his noblest motives are ultimately tainted by the merciless grit of his whole metaphysical outlook, as highlighted by Georgie:

> 'He needs it,' said Georgie. 'For his own peace of mind. He's frightened for his children, she said realizing it only as she said it. Jim has this idea that his past is catching up with him and that the world or God or whatever will keep taking revenge on him and his family if he doesn't put things right.'
> […] 'And you believe that stuff. You know, God and revenge?'
> 'I think Jim believes it. But *I* don't think the world is like that. Without some mercy, a bit of forgiveness, I reckon I'd prefer it to be completely random – meaningless. In a sick way I envy the fact that he believes in something.'[222]

As he escapes from the plane crash at the end of the novel, he seems condemned to figure out more authentic ways of redemption: "One of them looks as though he's still waiting to be rescued."[223] The meaninglessness wished for by Georgie, however, somehow epitomizes the extreme pursuit of *Dirt Music*'s central character, Lu Fox. In the documentary *The Edge of the World*, Tim Winton takes the filmmakers to the Kimberley region where the novel's action concludes and reveals the following intention behind his study of a vanishing man:

> Part of what I'm chasing up here is this idea of disappearing into landscape, about somebody who is a kind of fugitive from his own kind, from the human race.
> Every time I come here, I imagine what it would be like to be here alone; the question I always ask myself is, how long would I last before I went mad; which is a kind of a moot point for the novel, and for the purposes of this book, trying to imagine myself in a position of complete and perhaps irrevocable solitude, and what that would mean. What happens when all the other stuff's gone? What happens when all the trimmings are left out, when the only conjunctions you make are the relationships you have to the landscape and the physical environment around you, just the business of shelter, food? What happens to you then?[224]

When he first tells Georgie about his way of dealing with losing his whole family in separate tragic circumstances, Lu Fox uses apocalyptic images and even seems to advocate the zero-visibility ethos of survivalists preparing for a fiery end of civilization and for its aftermath:

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[222] *Dirt Music* – p.429.
[223] *Dirt Music* – p.460.
[224] *The Edge of the World*.

> I did think about goin north, he said. Just wanted to leave everythin and bolt. You know, disappear. I already felt like a ghost. (…) Like I was dead anyway but the news still hadn't got through to my body. Like in a bushfire that rolls over you so fast you're cooked inside but still running.
> […] But then I thought, I'm gone already. Why not disappear without leavin? […] I came back from that last funeral and burned all my papers. Licences, any ID, school reports. Never had a tax file number anyway. Just go off the grid, you know. Live in secret. *Be* a secret.[225]

These are, however, only visible signs of a deeper commitment to some hermitic atonement only fleetingly disturbed by his first encounter with Georgie. As he cuts himself once more from the world outside the now-silent family house, he reappraises his existential posture:

> This return, is it some kind of purifying ritual which some part of him thinks might reclaim the safety and solitude he had only twenty-four hours ago? […] How might he have told her that the way he lives is a project of forgetting? All this time he's set out wilfully to disremember. […] But it's not the same as forgetting. Forgetting is a mercy, an accident. So it's been no triumph, but it's got him here, hasn't it?[226]

He is indeed ready to follow an uncompromising path to forgiveness, with his humanity reduced to primal necessities and his consciousness undergoing selfless atomization when looking into a river's water mirror and plunging into the awe-inspiring furnace of Creation—an encounter that can be counted as a moment of grace, unless the latter is also downgraded to the flimsiest of expectations:

> Stare at the sun-scorched surface and break it into disparate coins of light. Actually stop thinking and go blank. It was harder than holding your breath. You could stand there. Stump-still, mind clean as an animal's, and hear melons splitting in the heat. A speck of light, you were, an ember. And happy. […] And now that is gone there is only work. It's a world without grace. Unless the only grace left is simply not feeling the dead or sensing the past.[227]

He thus shoots off across Western Australia until he reaches a group of tiny islands off the Kimberley's coast. There, as he focuses on the "required […] attention to now",[228] he attunes himself again to the silent, nursing chant of the universe's vitality:

> Dark falls. The air quivers. He oils his eyes and feels the sound in his throat. […] He feels himself within himself. There's nothing left of him now but shimmering presence. This pressing in of things. He knows he lives and that the

[225] *Dirt Music* – pp.98-9.
[226] *Dirt Music* – pp.103-4.
[227] *Dirt Music* – p.104.
[228] *Dirt Music* – p.374.

> world lives in him. And for him and beside him. Because and despite and regardless of him. A breeze shivers the fig. […] He sings. He's sung.[229]

With this grace-imbued spiritual weightlessness he is granted (and he does not try to wrestle out of the world, as Jim Buckridge attempts to), he has access to a full understanding of his own grieving confusion; he can now sincerely atone for his unquestioning brotherly devotion and for his loved ones' fallenness he has glossed over:

> He lies on his swag in a fugue of shock. It's as though he's robbed himself of something. And now, in addition to everything else, he has to mourn his idea of them. It leaves him more diminished than liberated. All he can do […] is to wonder why he stayed, why he persisted. Why he's lived this past year in homage to these people even after their death.
> Why? he asks himself in the falling dark. Because you loved them. You did it out of love. And owning up to what they were really like won't change that.[230]

As seen earlier through the words of Alice Flack in *That Eye the Sky*, love might force you to get dirty.[231] The corrosive melancholy of unguarded grief and love has dragged Lu Fox down and left him on the edge of oblivion, almost sinking in survivor's guilt; but when Georgie and he save each other from drowning in the last few pages of the novel, his capacity to love complements the odd moments of grace along his whole existential itinerary—from fall to redemption—to allow him to find peace and balance again, even in the unpredictable rush of experience that feels like "being caught in a rip. Half of you knows it can't kill you but the rest of you is certain it must. You stay calm, swim across it not against it. Sooner or later it'll spill into placid water."[232]

This comment by Lu Fox seems to perfectly summarize Bruce Pike's highs and lows in *Breath*. The dangerous ride evoked above may first describe Pike's initial experience of surfing, and later his rocky road to redemption after the spills, wipeouts and scars his adolescence and adulthood have been made of.

In *Breath*, Pike—the novel's flawed narrator telling his story in a long flashback—makes a liberal use of the actual word "grace". Even if it sometimes boils down to memories of teenage hyperbole, his description of observing then joining the

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[229] *Dirt Music* – p.451.
[230] *Dirt Music* – p.381.
[231] See quote 209.
[232] *Dirt Music* – p.95.

group of "men doing something beautiful […], pointless and elegant"[233] on their surfboards hints at some otherworldly sublime element, from the "moment of grace" when first standing up on the wave[234] to his first run with a new board, which remains a lifelong benchmark in his mind:

> I will always remember my first wave that morning. […] I was intoxicated. And though I've lived to be an old man with my own share of happiness for all the mess I made, I still judge every joyous moment, every victory and revelation against those few seconds of living.[235]

Pike's surfing mentor, Sando, gives a spiritual turn to their endless squabbling about how to put the primal adrenaline rush into words: "It's about you. You and the sea, you and the planet. […] You feel *alive*, completely awake and in your body. Man, it's like you felt the hand of God."[236] What looks very much like grace gets however soon hijacked by the Cult[237] of Sando the longboard guru and his two disciples, Pike and his friend Loon. Pike temporarily enjoys "a sense [of being] singled out somehow, chosen"[238] by Sando the prophet sincerely claiming that he is "after something pure."[239] The cult of Ando and his partner Eva has its dark side, though; Pike is later granted access to deeper intimacy: "I got to know her better, when she began to tell me about herself; I felt I'd been chosen all over again. I was enlarged by her trust."[240] This enhanced proximity leads in fact to toxic versions of grace when Eva tricks him into joining her for sessions of auto-erotic asphyxiation:

> The last sucking bubble of consciousness. […] I suppose I knew well enough what it felt like. It was intense, consuming, and it could be beautiful. […] You feel exalted, invincible, angelic because you're totally fucking poisoned. Inside it's great, feels brilliant. But on the outside it's squalid beyond imagining.[241]

Thus, through the ever riskier challenges of his apprenticeship of riding the chaos and his near-lethal sentimental and sexual initiation, Pike repeatedly finds and loses grace; only later, when he drifts out of his marriage with Grace Andrews, does he start on his path of redemption. It takes him from religious enlightenments

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[233] *Breath* – p.28.
[234] *Breath* – p.30.
[235] *Breath* – 40.
[236] *Breath* – pp.92, 94.
[237] *Breath* – p.124.
[238] *Breath* – p.137.
[239] *Breath* – p.156.
[240] *Breath* – p.220.
[241] *Breath* – p.234.

dispensed by Bible-bashers in mental institutions or defrocked priests in the bush to the secular, tough-love atoning therapy among AA-style support groups, a form of contrition he struggles with: "People talk such a storm of crap about the things they've done, had done to them. The deluded bullshit I've endured in circled chairs on lino floors. […] I'm through hating and blaming. People are fools, not monsters."[242] Pike ultimately survives his trip near the abyss, bruised and scarred by experience; he keeps the inner calling of the adrenaline in check by channeling this hunger for the rush through his job as a paramedic at the service of humanity in distress. He has to keep in mind that simple, soothing enchantments may still have a dangerous pull on him:

> There are spring days down south when […] you feel fresher and younger than you are. Yes, the restorative force of nature. I can vouch for its value – right up to the point of complete delusion. […] But I've learnt not to surrender to swooning spring. In spring, you can really ease off on yourself, and when that happens you'll believe anything at all. You start feeling safe. And then pretty soon you feel immune.[243]

His redemption finally comes by mixing these tamed instances of grace with the resilient forgiveness of his loved ones, as shown in the last lines of the novel:

> My girls stay with me now and then. […] I tidy the house for a week before they arrive. They've seen chaos at first hand so they value order.
> […] My favourite time is when we're all at the Point, because when they see me out on the water I don't have to be cautious and I'm never ashamed. Out there I'm free. I don't require management. They probably don't understand this, but it's important for me to show them that their father is a man who dances – who saves lives and carries the wounded, yes, but who also does something completely pointless and beautiful, and in this at least he should need no explanation.[244]

The way Pike describes how he conducts his "business of beauty"[245] may very well apply to literary creation; Winton thus explains how his own search for grace has sustained him through tough times of blank pages, false leads (as when he basically rewrote *Dirt Music* in a few weeks) and that dual frame of mind he has to switch to when he starts to work—the experience of his honed craft still having to jostle with the innocence of discovering new images and fresh turns of phrase:

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[242] *Breath* – p.211.
[243] *Breath* – pp.240-1.
[244] *Breath* – p.265.
[245] *Breath* – p.29.

> Writing a book is a bit like surfing. Most of the time you're waiting. And it's quite pleasant, sitting in the water waiting. But you are expecting that the result of a storm over the horizon, in another time zone, usually, days old, will radiate out in the form of waves. And eventually, when they show up, you turn around and ride that energy to the shore. It's a lovely thing, feeling that momentum. If you're lucky, it's also about grace. As a writer, you roll up to the desk every day, and then you sit there, waiting, in the hope that something will come over the horizon. And then you turn around and ride it, in the form of a story.[246]

It thus seems that, as long as he relies on a tidal cycle of inspiration, past impressions and an intact sense of wonder, Tim Winton can carry on with his exploration of gigantic Western Australia to carve some more tales of luminous innocence and gritty experience out of the impassive grandeur of the state's outback and coastline.

[246] "Waiting for the new wave"; Guardian.co.uk; 28 June 2008 – http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jun/28/saturdayreviewsfeatres.guardianreview9 (last accessed on August 24, 2010)

Conclusion

As seen in the previous two chapters, Robert Drewe's narratives question official chronicles of success and failure (such as George Augustus Robinson's in *The Savage Crows*, Don Spargo's in *Fortune*, Ned Kelly's in *Our Sunshine* or C. Y. O'Connor's in *The Drowner*) and isolate cyclical patterns of uncertain innocence leading to often befuddled experience and finally a confrontation with elemental truths. What looks like inquisitive skepticism in his fiction has often been schematically attributed to his journalistic background; however his literary approach is much more sophisticated, as critic Bruce Bennett delineates it in an essay on Drewe first published in the late 1980s:

> While showing the appeal of the fantasy, the fable, the cartoon, the news item and other such non-realistic forms, Drewe's fiction insists upon a referential dimension which links private and public realms and moves at times to a kind of enhanced or hyper-realism. His three novels and his short stories are characterized by a recurrent dialectic of innocence and experience, in which the option of metaphysical transcendence is never seriously offered. Deeply embedded in public events in the history of an emergent nation, Drewe's novels continually seek to render and explain individual and group behaviour against what he calls, in *Fortune*, 'the larger truth of a chaotic universe.' The contained worlds of Drewe's characters continually split open to reveal further worlds of energy and dislocation. In another writer's hands, this vision might lead to a poetry of dissolution or despair. But Drewe's work is more buoyant than this. In the face of blighted hopes, failed or failing relationships, injury and injustice, the reader is continually confronted by an inquisitive, curious, unresting intelligence in search of 'true stories', which insists on interrogating not just *what* happens but how and why. This element of the quest motif in Drewe's fiction resists reduction to allegory: there are no good or bad angels in his work.[1]

Drewe's "buoyancy" can be equated with the inextinguishable sense of wonder present in Tim Winton's novels. Most of his characters search for transcendent meaning behind life's randomness in a quasi post-religious age, a quest that offers them occasional glimpses of redeeming grace while they stumble along a path of chaotic experience, in the midst of a vivid physical environment which may help them to reconnect with some original innocence. Once again, the author's specific outlook is much more nuanced than the born-again pantheistic ecumenism some academics have identified through interviews of Winton juxtaposed with some

[1] Bruce Bennett, "Literature and Journalism: the Case of Robert Drewe" in *An Australian Compass – Essays on Place and Direction in Australian Literature*; Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle; 1991 – pp.63-4.

elements of his fictional creation. Bruce Bennett also clarifies Winton's narrative project and its spiritual intent:

> Tim Winton shows that nostalgia has its valid human uses and that it may even be an analogue to the common spiritual longing for a prelapsarian, Edenic state of existence. Moreover, the longing and desire for home, family and friends, and aspects of the past in most of Winton's central characters reveal important sources of emotional identity and need. (…) From the hints and clues provided by Winton's essay, fiction and interviews, his imaginary community is a heterogeneous, broad church of people who don't fit in any institution. (…) Nor are any of these characters 'religious' in any usual sense. Living on the margins of civilization, Winton's characters are intent on getting by rather than getting on. In this process (…), they have their occasional epiphanies, moments of insight which reveal them to be part of a wider human family.[2]

The lucid views on individual and collective existential options expressed by the two authors are characterized by a postmodern outlook for Drewe and an instinctive theological approach for Winton. Although each of them follows his own distinct path, their approach is not completely unheard of in Australia's literary and cultural history. The local discourse of fallenness and regeneration throughout the two centuries of European presence on the continent was progressively articulated outside the strictures of imported religious tradition in *The Australians – The Way We Live Now*. Ross Terrill describes the laconic secularization of the Australian experience:

> In the first decades of settlement, the language of public life in NSW and Tasmania was quite religious. (…) The practice of Christianity, as one observer put it, was 'part of the punishment'. But the heavy ballast of religion, ultimately Protestant and Catholic alike, turned out to have relatively little influence on Australia's future course. The Christian religion was almost a branch of law, geared to suppressing bad things, bereft of much vision of good things, except the possible ecstasy of heaven. It was a religion that existed in Australia by default, filling a philosophical vacuum. (…) The pilgrims came to America praying; the convicts came to Australia cursing chaplain and warder alike. (…) As religion withered, a secular root of social amelioration came into view. It was Benthamism, based on an unsentimental view that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the best principle for human society. (…) the expressed wants of the people under the gum trees was a sufficient definition of the political good. (…) As God was disappointing on Australian soil, so the god of Australia tended to become Nature. Ideologies did not transplant well. What never faded in Australia was implacable nature.[3]

What seemed to replace the Fall imagery of the Old Testament and the redeeming message of the Gospel was an adaptation of post-Renaissance

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[2] Bruce Bennett, "Nostalgia for Community: Tim Winton's Essay and Stories" in *Homing In: Essays on Australian Literature and Selfhood*; API Network, Perth; 2006 – pp.43-4.

[3] Ross Terrill, *The Australians: The Way We Live Now*; Doubleday, Sydney; 1987, new edition 2000 – pp.36-7.

philosophical interrogations about human nature to the otherness of the Australian physical environment. In *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, Bruce Clunies Ross describes how an influential contemporary West Australian author — Randolph Stow, whose thematic and stylistic preoccupations have left a strong impression on Drewe's and Winton's writings, as will be demonstrated later in this section—inscribes Hobbes' and Rousseau's opposite theories of man's purity and corruption in an Australian context:

> The poet and novelist Randolph Stow once pointed out how these two events in the early seventeenth century—the de Quiros venture [to establish earthly perfection in the south land] and the wreck of the *Batavia* [and the ensuing mutiny, murders and their merciless punishment]—prefigured a pair of preoccupations which became prominent in Australian culture: the idea of Australia as prison or place of exile, and the idea of Australia as paradise. They also illustrate two opposite attitudes to nature and civilization; on the one hand the belief that human beings will fulfill the perfect ideal of which they are capable when they are removed from the temptations and corruptions of civilization and placed in an unspoilt, natural world; on the other hand, the belief that civilization is a restraint on barbarity and an improvement on nature; if it is removed, human beings return to savagery.[4]

In the same chapter, the critic evokes one of the first artistic manifestations of this unresolved existential conflict; first poetic blossoms hint at a problematic European experience transplanted into a challenging environment:

> Harpur was one of the earliest Australian artists to express the hope of future perfection and the disappointment which attends its inevitable defeat. The alternation, and even new conjunction, of these two states is, as many critics have noticed, a prominent preoccupation in Australia. Repeated often enough the cycle instills that other Australian characteristic, stoical resignation.[5]

Early on, the cyclical pattern later reworked by Drewe is identified; the apex of the loop and its polar opposite are then slowly coloured by specific characteristics of the antipodean settlement: punitive transportation and dispossession of the natives' lands, coexisting with pioneering fortitude and an adherence to a British expansionist positivism, a duality underlined by Peter Pierce in his introduction to *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*:

> Australian authors have been troubled by their remoteness, a sense of exile created by what was at first an inconceivable distance from Britain, and guilt at

[4] Bruce Clunies Ross, "Australian Literature and Australian Culture", in Laurie Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*; Penguin for the Association for the Study of Australian Literature and Australian Literary Studies, Ringwood, Vic.; 1988 – pp.5-6.
[5] *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia* – p.12.

> the means by which European settlers took possession of the continent. Exile and doubtful tenure were not the only notes struck, of course. Literary proclamations of Australia's chance to make a fresh beginning, its freedom from what Henry Lawson called 'old world errors, and wrongs and lies / Making a Hell in a Paradise', the utopian possibilities that manifested themselves can be heard as well.[6]

With the mention of Henry Lawson, a turning point in Australian literary history is introduced: the localist claims of the 1890s writers published in *The Bulletin*. Tentative parallels may be established between Robert Drewe and Tim Winton's distinct literary perspectives and some of their predecessors' works and vision. It seems that the convenient label of "journalist-writer" has been promptly applied to Henry Lawson with the same observations, sometimes neutral, often reductive, that have been later directed at Robert Drewe and at his fiction,[7] as Elisabeth Webby demonstrates in *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*:

> It is important to recognize the journalistic origins of much of Lawson's best work. The Sydney magazine the *Bulletin*, where much of Lawson's earlier fiction appeared, was one of the first in Australia to follow the precepts of the "new journalism" of the period (…) and some of this greater emphasis on simplicity and snappiness of style can be seen in Lawson's work of the 1890's. (…) Most of Lawson's best earlier stories could, like "The Union Buries Its dead", be described as "sketches from life". (…) Unfortunately for Lawson, it seems to have been just these close links with journalism (…) which led contemporary critics to fail to fully recognize the true originality and achievement of his stories and sketches.[8]

These sketches by Lawson may also reveal the author's own cyclical reading of individual instances of fall, trudging experience and saving grace. The mindless repetitions of the struggle for survival in the bush presented in Lawson's fiction seem to merge the harshness of a Hobbesian land of origins with an existential realm of the Fallen and the figure of an outback Sisyphus, a composite imagery that Robert Drewe will later reinterpret with a postmodern tonality in the outdoor settings of *Fortune*, *Our Sunshine*, *The Drowner* and even *Grace*. In *A Companion to Australian Literature since 1900*, critic Richard Carr thus analyses Lawson's style and material:

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[6] Peter Pierce, *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Port Melbourne, Vic.; 2009 – Introduction, p.2.

[7] Robert Drewe in *Speaking Volumes – Australian writers and their work* – interviews by Ray Willbanks; Penguin Books, Ringwood, Victoria; 1991 – p.64,65 – point previously discussed in the introduction to chapter 3 of this study.

[8] Elisabeth Webby, "Colonial writers and readers" in Elisabeth Webby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; 2000 – pp.64-5.

> A typical Lawson sketch presents concise naturalistic detail depicting the unrelenting physical environment and the often purposeless existence of its denizens. The sketch form itself is an apt response to the bush setting, a place where nothing happens. "Our Pipes" tells (…) of the painful machinations [Jack Mitchell and his mate] must endure just to find evening comfort around a fire and enjoy yarning.(…) Most important, Lawson portrays the Australian spirit as shaped by the *Bulletin*, a spirit of resignation and acceptance, of the intent to survive and the need to prevent life from destroying life. Mitchell's stories generally unravel in an aimless, amiable fashion (…). The reminiscence of his early love and loss provokes the harangue over the nomadic life and cycle of poverty he sees as never being broken.[9]

In its sometimes harsh realism, Lawson's treatment of the bush experience diverges from a dominant note in the *Bulletin* group of writers, as well as from past trends in travelogues or lightly-veiled propaganda material to encourage new migrants to cross the oceans. Peter Pierce shows how Lawson denounces certain idyllic flourishes of some of his contemporaries:

> On the question of what constituted a proper language for accurate depiction of the Australian reality, Lawson's pronouncements were rough and ready enough, but they have come to be recognized as important indications of his views on literary realism and what he himself was trying to do. (…) Here are some examples: 'We wish to heaven that Australian writers would leave off trying to make a paradise out of the Out Back Hell; if only out of consideration for the poor, hopeless, half-starved wretches who carry swags through it and look in vain for work…' (…) Lawson had various culprits in mind – among them A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson – when he used the umbrella term 'Australian writers'.[10]

In a bold speculative move, the artistic differences between Drewe and Winton might be likened to the stylistic discrepancies between the works and approaches of Lawson and of Paterson. This quotation is taken from a detailed analysis of the three greatest figures of the *Bulletin* 'movement'—'Banjo' Paterson, Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy—carried out by Geoffrey Serle in *From Deserts The Prophets Come*. The critic describes elements of the appeal of Paterson's "rough frontier version of the [pastoral] idyll"[11] which may indeed foreshadow Tim Winton's lush imagery of a primeval environment and its humbling and cleansing effect on stray characters previously lost in mindless civilized pursuits:

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[9] Richard Carr, "Writing the Nation, 1900-1940" in Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer (ed.), *A Companion to Australian Literature since 1900*; Camden House, Rochester, N.Y.; 2007 – p.158.

[10] Brian Matthews, "Riding on the 'uncurl'd clouds' – The intersections of history and fiction" in Peter Pierce, *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Port Melbourne, Vic.; 2009 – pp.346-7

[11] Bruce Clunies Ross, "Australian Literature and Australian Culture", in Laurie Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*; Penguin for the Association for the Study of Australian Literature and Australian Literary Studies Ringwood, Vic.; 1988 – p.14

> [Paterson] and Lawson, more than anyone else, set the notion of the bush and the bushman as the true and admirable Australia and Australian. (…) [Paterson] transmuted the experience of a huge 'uncultured' audience into art. (…) He was not really a radical or a political animal, but he detested what was happening to the pastoral industry—the takeovers by banks, companies, urban capital; there is a strong element in his work of nostalgic harking-back to the pure old days.[12]

By contrast, Serle portrays Lawson as "pessimistic, a radical who sensed the futility of radicalism and of Australian utopianism."[13] This comment might partly apply to some aspects of Robert Drewe's fictional entreprise when he stages the downfall or rude awakening of slightly deluded liberal activists, libertarians or well-wishers in *The Savage Crows*, *Fortune*, *Grace* or even *A Cry in the Jungle Bar*. However, another study of Paterson's and Lawson's works enables a nuancing of this schematic transposition of the differences between Drewe's and Winton's fiction; in another essay published in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, critic Shirley Walker juxtaposes Paterson's and Lawson's visions of a nobler bush scenery and society, with illuminating elements on Lawson's own effort:

> In *Australia for the Australians* (1888), 'Banjo' Paterson records his revulsion from the poverty, 'vice and sins' of the city, and his longing for the 'vision splendid on the sunlit plains extended' probably owes as much to this recoil as to his happy childhood memories of station life. Lawson's case is more complex. His perception of the city, as shown in his verses and short stories, would certainly have been a factor in his elevation of the bush and bush society to a mythic level. On the other hand, after his famous trip to Hungerford in 1892-3, 'his sole experience of the outback' according to A. G. Stephens, Lawson determined never to face the bush again. The power of his vision is probably a matter of balance; the stark realism of his perception of the bush and, at the same time, his elevation of the human qualities of its inhabitants.[14]

Whether his "vision" may be described as reasoned lyricism or benevolent realism, his faith in a resilient bush *ethos* ultimately matching Paterson's praise of intrinsic country moral superiority seems to put Lawson's perspective on human experience somewhere between Drewe's ironical questioning and Winton's unrelenting search for preserved truths and inner light.

This speculative comparison is made possible by historical distance, the same historical distance which has clarified the merits of Paterson's and Lawson's works;

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[12] Geoffrey Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come : the Creative Spirit in Australia, 1788-1972*; Heinemann, Melbourne; 1973 – pp.63-4.
[13] Idem – p.64.
[14] Shirley Walker, "Perceptions of Australia, 1855-1915" in Laurie Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*; Penguin for the Association for the Study of Australian Literature and Australian Literary Studies, Ringwood, Vic.; 1988 – p.164.

this recognition was still beyond the critical horizon in the early twentieth-century when, in an iteration of Harpur's abovementioned cycle of "hope and disappointment", matching Drewe's cyclical vision of celebrated innocence and confusing experience, the whole generation of the *Bulletin* writers fell out of favour in local critics' circles. Geoffrey Serle thus evokes this page of literary history being turned:

> Literary development in the first two decades of the twentieth century was anything but spectacular (…). Nearly all the major writers of the period wrote as though the *Bulletin* had never existed. (…) A. A. Phillips has detected a counter-revolution against the mob of balladists: 'The Australian poets of the 1900s turned their backs squarely on their local predecessors; they felt the insufficiency of Australian writing by contrast with the work of the great English poets, so that it seemed natural to plunge back into the English tradition, and to ignore the Australian… Exasperation with the truculence of the colonial revolt, and the rawness of its poetic expression, dominated their attitudes.[15]

One of the consequences of this change in literary taste and ambition was the successive overseas relocations of several generations of Australian writers, from Miles Franklin and Henry Handel Richardson to Randolph Stow. This choice to leave the questionably innocent world of Australian domestic literary circles to immerse oneself into a more advanced European creative experience was somehow emulated in Western Australia a few decades later, as a willing exile to the East Coast or to Europe or the United States for a handful of authors later coming back to the West Coast to get reacquainted with their naïve/native literary soil. Bruce Bennett describes how, with the notable exception of Tim Winton who has never really been uprooted from the south-west of the state, they have come full circle after their wandering quest for identity and belonging in the wake of their literary foreparents:

> Taking a lead from Stow [who had become an Australian expatriate], Dorothy Hewett wrote of the 'brutal innocence of her fellow West Australians and moved to Sydney in 1974. She kept returning, however, to her 'garden state' to explore the sources of her inspiration as a writer, as did Robert Drewe.
> Coming from a place whose major writers both hate and love so vigorously, I found myself (…) introducing Tim Winton to a packed audience at University House at ANU. (…) His talk and reading were warm, celebratory and humorous, evoking a sense of need for community and belonging to Australia's land and seascapes. My stomach flipped as I heard these lines from *Land's Edge*: 'There is nowhere else I'd rather be, nothing else I would prefer to be doing. I am at the beach looking west with the continent behind me as the sun tracks down to the sea. I have my bearings.' Gaining one's bearings, physically and emotionally, in

[15] *From Deserts the Prophets Come* – p.98.

> Australia has been a major preoccupation of many of our writers, artists and thinkers.[16]

In this overview of how Drewe's and Winton's topical and stylistic treatments of the dichotomy between innocence and experience seem to echo past occurrences in the Australian literary history, it may be worth examining aspects of the work and vision of the greatest of these Australian sometime expatriates, Patrick White. There is of course his famous lambasting of an entire section of the Australian literary creation in his 1958 manifesto "The Prodigal Son": "I was determined to prove that the Australian novel is not necessarily the dreary, dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism."[17] Bruce Bennett quotes this criticism in his collection of essays *An Australian Compass* and demonstrates how Robert Drewe may have been summarily included in that durable critical condemnation.[18] However, various scholarly insights may contribute to a deeper analysis of elements of White's works, elements later manifest in Drewe's and Winton's fiction. In *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, Kerryn Goldsworthy thus nuances the author's pastoral project in *The Tree of Man*—and its limits:

> It was left to Patrick White in *The Tree of Man* (1955), a post-war novel about new beginnings, to psychologise, privatize and poeticize the pioneer experience, using the irresistible trope of the innocent couple in an Antipodean Garden of Eden. The obvious problem with this novel, reading it at the end of the century, is that it uses this powerful metaphorical framework at the expense of Australia's original inhabitants, virtually writing them out of the country's history.[19]

The pseudo-idyllic motif may fare better as an insight into Winton's fiction than into Drewe's but, as demonstrated by Brian Kiernan in *The Literature of Australia*, White's global perspective running throughout the whole novel is a complex process with traces that may be found in Drewe's as well as in Winton's literary visions of innocence and experience:

> White is not a simple writer, nor is his chosen mode of pastoral the province of the unsophisticated writer. Indeed, simplicity – the presentation of a simplistic image of life – is as much a danger as too evident a sophistication. (…) At its worst, this can be a purely reflex dismissal of contemporary civilization (…).

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[16] Bruce Bennett, "A West-Side Story" in *Homing In: Essays on Australian Literature and Selfhood*; API Network, Perth; 2006 – p.223.
[17] Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son" in *Patrick White speaks*; Primavera Press, Sydney; 1989.
[18] Bruce Bennett, "Literature and journalism: the case of Robert Drewe" – p.53.
[19] Kerryn Goldsworthy, "Fiction from 1900 to 1970" in Elizabeth Webby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; 2000 – p.111.

> Or, with equal dismissiveness, it can take on the tone of a heavily flippant satire. (…) But at its best, when diagnosis of particular representatives of society is offered instead of sweeping condemnation, the sophistication, the satiric edge, contributes to the pastoral. (…) Despite the nightmare glimpses of modern mass urban life, the life of Stan Parker is not an allegory of transition from an idyllic past to the chaotic present. Rather, the historical pattern of social change is the background to an individual's attempts to sustain his conviction of the meaningfulness of life as he grows older.[20]

While commenting on White's following novel, Brian Kiernan similarly highlights elements of postmodern characterization that may be likened to Drewe's later experimentations on identities delineated, blurred and reconstructed as in *Fortune* or *Our Sunshine*; the same comments also show an intent that is at the centre of Winton's spiritual preoccupations in his fiction:

> As an historical novel (…), *Voss* is not an evasion of the concerns White shows elsewhere. *As* James McAuley has observed, Voss presents an image of modern man, rootless, no longer believing in God or traditional values (…), uncertain of his nature and his relationship to the universe, ruthlessly engaged in an egoistical quest. (…) In *Voss* [White] stylistically presents a cultural 'history' of modern man's search for transcendence.[21]

A possible direct literary lineage from Patrick White to Robert Drewe and Tim Winton may run through Randolph Stow's own treatment of innocence, guilt and expiation; Kerryn Goldsworthy makes the following appraisal of White's and Stow's common problematic reconciliatory ambition:

> [In *Riders in the* Chariot] White [suggests] that white Australia should look to Aboriginal values and skills as a way of redeeming itself (…). Another novel suggesting the same thing is Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (1958), in which the missionary Heriot uses what he has learned from Aboriginal spiritual life to deal with his own racial guilt; while this novel represents Aboriginal spiritual values as superior to Christian ones, including the nature of relationship to the land, an unsympathetic reading might see it as a story of guilt expiated through a neat act of cultural appropriation from its own object.[22]

The ambiguity expressed at the end of the quotation is present in some of Drewe's novels, when he uses it as a device of dramatic ironic to obliquely comment on the well-meaning quests of characters such as Stephen Crisp in *The Savage Crows* or John Molloy in *Grace* It is more directly reformulated in Winton's fiction. Lu Fox, the Anglo-Australian protagonist in *Dirt Music* appears to be engaged in some

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[20] Brian Kiernan, "The Novels of Patrick White" in Geoffrey Dutton (ed.), *The Literature of Australia*; Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood, Vic.; 1976 – pp.466-8.
[21] Idem – p.470-1.
[22] Kerryn Goldsworthy, "Fiction from 1900 to 1970" – pp.124-5.

mystical walkabout across islands off the Kimberley's coast but, in the novel, several characters explain that his plan is more a whitefella's fancy rather than a traditional indigenous custom. Tim Winton defends this potential fusion of spiritual aspirations when he thus expresses his early and very personal acknowledgement of a possible case of future hybridized identity: "I'm connected to the land and the landscape and the sea, (…) the whole thing. I wouldn't say it's a kind of new Aboriginality, I wouldn't even feel that I had to even chase after the term, but it's a feeling of belonging."[23]

The creative filiation between Tim Winton and Randolph Stow has been repeatedly underlined by critics, with novels like *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* and *Cloudstreet* sharing many elements and undertones. The local geography richly painted by the two authors is far from being the only thing they have in common; in *The Literature of Australia*, Harry Heseltine makes the following enlightening comment on the secret, hectic life in this environment:

> All of Stow's books are situated in Western Australia – in the Geraldton district, or further north into the Kimberleys. His treatment of landscape is one of the most striking features of his prose. That his talent in this regard goes beyond graphic description is suggested by the title of his first novel, *A Haunted Land* (1956). Poetic evocation of landscape is consistently linked with the tortured quality of the lives which are played on its surface. (…) All of Stow's novels take place, as it were, in a haunted land; but it is haunted less by the ghosts of the past than by the unquiet spirits of the present.[24]

The "haunted lands" exist in Drewe's fiction, whether it is the dubious West Coast paradise in *The Shark Net*, the bush "horrors" of *Our Sunshine* or the human 'hunting grounds' of Tasmania in *The Savage Crows*. Haunting and tortured lives are even more consistently present in Winton's novels, starting with *Cloudstreet*. In this book, the 'unquiet spirits of the present' challenge the reader to go along on Winton's teasing ride of metaphysical wonders which Delys Bird attempts to define stylistically in *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* by quoting the author's own words in various interviews: "Not wanting to write either realism or "1970s fabulism" but to "include both realms because I feel that this is true realism", Winton also

[23] Interview of Tim Winton in 1991 quoted in Bruce Bennett, "Nostalgia for Community: Tim Winton's Essay and Stories" – p.33; see Tim Winton's observation in quote #16.
[24] Harry Heseltine, "Australian Fiction since 1920" in Geoffrey Dutton (ed.), *The Literature of Australia*; Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood, Vic.; 1976 – pp.226-7.

avoids the label of "magic realism": for him, the "weird things that happen in my books aren't devices"."[25]

In his recurrent treatment of innocence and experience, Tim Winton's claim of 'true realism' for *Cloudstreet* may also have to do with a unique conjunction of ideological, historical and literary currents and constructs: the somehow problematic national celebrations which took place in 1988. Winton had already experimented with historical explorations in *Shallows*; Robert Drewe had completed what he had originally conceived as a triptych linking Australia's past in *The Savage Crows* to the nation's contemporary endeavours in Asia and its interactions with America in *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* and *Fortune*, but they were about to get involved in a debate on the Australian novel which is still somehow in progress two decades later. The first phase described by Delys Bird was straightforward enough:

> A recent revival of the historical novel (…) may suggest that towards the end of the millennium writers have turned to the past to invest a chaotic present with some order and invoke a communal memory.
> (…) Several historical novels were published around 1988, the so-called Australian Bicentennial year. As a marker of a colonizing history, that moment has come to represent a fracturing rather than a consolidation of nationhood, so that such fictions are often interested in whose voice makes history and what that voice has left out.[26]

A more detailed analysis reveals a more complex agenda, a kaleidoscope of displaced pride, self-validation and guilt: the quest for historical truth which Susan Lever describes in *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature* may sometimes have bordered on ideological schizophrenia:

> By the time of the Bicentenary of white settlement, a revisionist movement was exposing the stories of massacre and mistreatment of Indigenous people hidden in the official account of Australia as a successful settler democracy. (…) Australia's much-vaunted egalitarianism and freedom from oppression depended on a conquest. Novelists are still coming to terms with this changed perspective. On the one hand, white Australian writers felt the need to understand their own heritage, mixed though it may be, and invest some dignity in their own right to speak. On the other, they must be aware of the implications of white success not only for people but for the land itself.
> (…) In retrospect, the revision of history through the subjective historical novel looks like a communal project of the 1980s and 90s, with Carey's *Oscar and*

[25] Delys Bird, "New Narrations: Contemporary Fictions" in Elizabeth Webby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; 2000 – pp.205-6.
[26] Idem – pp.193-4.

> *Lucinda* (1988) and *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000), Drewe's *Our Sunshine* (1991) and *The Drowner* (1996) (…) and many others.[27]

As mentioned above, Robert Drewe then reinvests the quest for Australia's identity and its historicity. With *Our Sunshine*, he reworks the Ned Kelly folklore using vivid imagery of the old country and with a subtle superstructure of mediated innocence and guilt. In *After the Celebration – Australian Fiction 1989-2007*, Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman describe Drewe's re-creation of the iconic bushranger as "an arch, not to say postmodern, character who is aware, as his story is narrated in alternating first- and third-person vignettes, of his future legendary status."[28] In *The Drowner*, Drewe tackles some foundational myths and realities of Western Australia's budding experience which he contrasts with visions of Europe slowly sinking in historical and referential excesses.

According to various interviews and essays, Tim Winton spent most of the 1987-1988 period in Europe with his family, away from the Bicentenary hype. Possibly seeing the celebrations from afar, he was nonetheless busy with his own major contribution to Australia's historical fiction, *Cloudstreet*, finally published in 1991. For all the love and acclaim with which it has been received, the story of "this great continent of a house"[29] has also generated some criticism about the apparent primacy of the Anglo-Celtic sense of community and belonging that would restrict the indigenous presence to the margins of the novel. Such criticism may not have been justified, given the attention granted by the author to the fragile indigenous haunting and spiritual persistence on Cloud Street and in the southwest bushlands; these elements somehow announced to the nation the patient claim that would only be fully acknowledged with the Mabo native title decision in 1992.

This interpretation of *Cloudstreet*'s subtext might appear a bit forced; indeed, Tim Winton has explained that the novel was first and foremost an amalgamation of nostalgic family memories and of his overseas homesickness for Western Australia's natural landscape and for the sense of community that had disappeared after an umpteenth 'regeneration' of popular suburbs ordained by faceless urban planning

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[27] Susan Lever, "The Challenge of the Novel – Australian Fiction since 1950" in Peter Pierce, *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Port Melbourne, Vic.; 2009 – pp.513-4.
[28] Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman, *After the Celebration : Australian Fiction 1989-2007*; Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic.; 2009 – p.81.
[29] *Cloudstreet* – p.41.

authorities. Even when he later got deeply involved in the preservation campaign for W. A.'s Ningaloo Reef, he remained focused on concrete objectives and studiously avoided wavering political endorsements and ideological grandstanding. Nonetheless, the critical debate centred on *Cloudstreet* was an illustration of the scathing attacks and counterattacks punctuating the culture / history wars of the 1990s in Australian political, intellectual and artistic circles. If John Howard's electoral victory in 1996 has commonly been interpreted as a backlash of the Australian public against disquieting rhetorics, it may also be seen as another cycle of innocence, enlightenment, experience and appeasement being concluded—this time played out in full view of the nation. Ross Terrill shows this in his account of a debate on tenets of national identity almost turned into articles of faith—a civic religion perceived to be potentially as restrictive as the Christianity which had been "part of the [convict's] punishment"[30]:

> Is the soil the real Australia and are the environmentalists, or perhaps their mirror-image adversaries, the bushwhackers, the real Australian nationalists? (…) In the 1990s there arose a conservative backlash against a soil-oriented nationalism on the ground that it had shrunk into an unthinking political correctness. The environmental and land rights lobbies, in furtherance of their cause, were willing to subordinate the institutions of Australian democracy to far-away UN bodies, said Australia-first conservatives. (…) Ray Evans, executive officer of Western Mining Company (…) linked this 'supine' attitude towards international authorities to a fundamental negativism about Australia's own moral standing. 'When push comes to shove the question is, "Do you regret 1788, or do you think it was a good thing?" From the 1988 celebrations, to Stolen Children, Deaths in Custody, and the Mabo decision, you find this recurring theme of shame that we are here.' Evans had a point. More and more Australians seem to agree with him in rejecting this ahistorical, guilt-laden posture. Pride in Australia was taking a more conservative form than for decades.[31]

Robert Drewe and Tim Winton have not completely stayed clear of this national debate; they have both published what could be labeled their respective "Australia at the turn of the millennium" novel. Both Drewe's *Grace* (2005) and Winton's *Dirt Music* (2001) are subtle portraits of the national psyche during the Howard years firmly focused on individual experiences of lost innocence, painful experience and tentative redemption (Grace and John Molloy in *Grace*, and Lu Fox and Georgie Jutland in *Dirt Music*). Instead of merely rehashing fleeting headlines and indignations, both novels actually innovate in exploring a new territory of the Fall

[30] See quote #3 of this conclusion.
[31] Ross Terrill, *The Australians: The Way We Live Now* – p.309, 311.

that is bound to durably affect contemporary existence: the online dimension of innocence and experience. *Dirt Music* opens on Georgie losing herself for nights on end in the deprioritized topicalities and ethics of the World Wide Web; and in *Grace*, the contemporary title character gets a few new psychological scars after her exposure to the virtual existential sludge dredged by the software systems of a cyber-policing agency.

With this added digital filter to the treatment of the dichotomy between innocence and experience, the two authors may hopefully add a few more literary contributions to a local and national debate still marked by notions of purity, fall and atonement. The first decade of the new millennium has had its full share of "golden outback nostalgia", from the 2000 Sydney Olympics' opening ceremony to eight seasons of Channel 9's *McLeod Daughters* and to Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* in 2008. More pressing questions have been asked about the merits of contentment versus affluence, of middle-class innocence versus *nouveau riche* experience in the wake of a mineral resource boom leading to an economy in overdrive (at least in Western Australia and Queensland) only marginally slowed down by the financial crisis exploding in 2008. On top of the tabloid-fodder/mock-hubristic fall of sport stars, the backstabbing antics of shallow politicians and the collective hand-wringing over the issue of global warming, this materialistic upheaval of values and references may supply Robert Drewe and Tim Winton with enough matter for new novels of innocence and experience.

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