

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 278

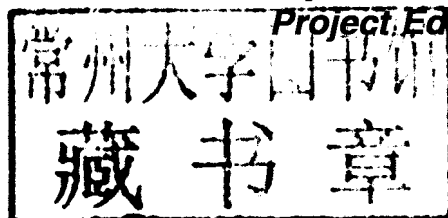
TOPICS VOLUME

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Commentary on Various Topics
in Twentieth-Century Literature, including Literary
and Critical Movements, Prominent Themes and
Genres, Anniversary Celebrations, and Surveys
of National Literatures**

Kathy D. Darrow

Project Editor



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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Topics Volume

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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

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TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author’s works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

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- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Australian Literature

The following entry presents criticism on the history and development of Australian literature from the early twentieth century onward.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of written literature in Australia coincides with European settlement. Colonization commenced in 1788 when the British government—no longer free to house its overflow of prisoners in America—transported its first group of convicts to the eastern coast of the Australian continent. For the next several decades, as more prisoners and settlers arrived, the cultural and economic life of Australia developed on the model of the mother country. There arose an aristocracy of large landowners, including government officials, prison guards, and other adventurers who pushed settlement inward from the coast. By the mid-nineteenth century, mining and sheep and grain farming formed the basis of the economy. Convicts and immigrant laborers worked the land and constituted the bottom rung of a social ladder that did not even include the indigenous population, the Aborigines.

The Aborigines, inhabitants of the continent for over 50,000 years, had developed a unique spiritual kinship with the natural environment and, while they possessed no written language, were the guardians of a rich oral legacy of songs, chants, and legends. Nevertheless, they were considered barbarians by the majority of the white settlers, although they were sometimes romanticized as noble savages in the anthropological accounts of early British colonists eager to record their experiences in their new homeland. In an essay on Judith Wright, a twentieth-century Australian poet renowned for her interest in the indigenous past, critic Toby Davidson noted, "It can be shocking to be reminded that in early Australia, Aborigines were not only constructed as non-humans but even non-humans without souls." Denied any social status, the Aborigines were also denied any proprietary interest in the land they had occupied for centuries. The British claimed the right to settle Australia without benefit of treaty agreements with the indigenous population, declaring the continent a *terra nullius*, or no man's land.

The doctrine of *terra nullius* emerged as the informing principle of the colonial consciousness. The history of the literature of Australia is largely a history of white Australia's relationship with the land, and with the Ab-

origines. Colonial writing often took shape in settler narratives describing the difficulty of containing Aboriginal rebellion and of taming the Australian wilderness. Convict themes were also popular, as were poems and stories contrasting the primitive conditions of the Australian outback with the magnificent beauty of the land.

Nationalist sentiment grew increasingly ardent toward the end of the nineteenth century. The search for self-definition was articulated in politics as well as the arts. In 1901 the six self-governing colonies of Australia were federated into a nation. Twenty years earlier, what was to become Australia's longest-running weekly magazine, the *Bulletin*, had been founded in Sydney. Nationalist, racist, xenophobic, and anti-feminist, the *Bulletin* featured the masthead slogan "Australia for the White Man" from its first issue in 1880 until 1960. (The magazine ceased publication in January, 2008.) The slogan, which ignored the Aborigines, women, and the many non-white immigrants who had come to Australia, became the national political credo. Originally devoted to business and current affairs, the magazine soon opened its pages to literary contributions from its readers. Highly popular in the frontier districts, the *Bulletin* came to be known as the "bushman's bible" for its many stories and poems written by miners and sheepherders and the men who felled trees and worked to make the outback arable.

Helped along by the *Bulletin*, the bush tale became the most popular form of literature in Australia and the symbol of the national character. The traditional bush yarn, perhaps most famously represented by *Bulletin* cofounder Henry Lawson, depicted a challenging wilderness successfully tamed by a courageous "battler" and often endorsed an egalitarian ideal of white male camaraderie, or "mateship." But there were notable exceptions to this general formula, including stories by women such as Miles Franklin, who described the bush from the point of view of a rebellious young female, and Barbara Baynton, in whose fiction the bush appears as a place of alien terror to frustrate the white man's heroics.

The Australian national consciousness was shaped by a culture of white settler nationalism for much of the twentieth century. Pastoral themes popular since the mid-1800s persisted in literature celebrating life in the Australian countryside. Family and historical sagas portraying white Australia's mastery of the land were staples of Australian fiction and were given renewed in-

terest through such novels as Patrick White's saga of the pioneer experience *The Tree of Man* (1955). But there were always dissenting voices not completely convinced of Australia's promise. One of the best-known novels on this theme is Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney* (1917-29), the story of a man who travels back and forth between Australia and England searching for but ultimately never finding a stable identity.

The colonial dilemma also extended to questions about black/white relations and Aboriginal exploitation in works considered radical for their time, including Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardo* (1929) and Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* (1937). *Capricornia* is considered representative of the goals of the Jindy-worobaks, a group of white Australian writers who joined together in the late 1930s to promote understanding of indigenous ideas and culture.

The founding of two literary magazines—*Southerly* in 1939 and *Meanjin* in 1940—helped to both promote a uniquely Australian voice and awaken international interest in Australian writing. But the long tradition in Australia letters of characters defined by their struggle for subsistence prompted many critics to assert that Australian literature was less sophisticated and complex than European literature. The tendency of Australians to judge their own literature unfavorably in comparison with those of other English-speaking countries was labeled the "Cultural Cringe" by Australian social critic A. A. Phillips shortly after World War II. But by the 1950s and 1960s Australian literature had become increasingly speculative. Two of the most prominent exemplars of the new trend were Patrick White and Judith Wright. White, known primarily for epic novels of metaphysical scope, including *Riders in the Chariot* (1961), became in 1973 the first Australian writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Wright developed an intimate relationship with the Australian landscape in poems that at once celebrated its grandeur and natural beauty and mourned the brutal dispossession of the Aborigines by the English settlers. Wright's poems are considered especially remarkable for their haunting evocation of the "absent presence" of the Aborigines and of the white man's alienation from the mysteries of the Aborigines' primordial bond with the land.

By the 1960s Wright had become part of an Aboriginal activist movement that increasingly agitated for civil and land rights. Legislation passed since the 1970s has returned some autonomy to the Aborigines and has made some effort at compensation and apology for a white history of indigenous erasure marked by Aboriginal massacres and displacement, including the now highly publicized government policy (1910-71) of removing Aboriginal children from their homes so as to assimilate them into white society, resulting in the so-called Stolen Generation. The political legislation has

been accompanied by a rise of writing by Aborigines about Aboriginal experience, in both English and tribal dialects. Aboriginal poems and stories have been collected in several anthologies. Among the most famous Aboriginal activists and writers are Oodgeroo Noonuccal, the first Aboriginal Australian to publish a book of poetry, and Sam Watson, a socialist politician whose novel *The Kadaitcha Sung* (1990) portrays the apocalyptic consequences of white colonization of Australia for both the land and its original inhabitants. Thomas Keneally, one of white Australia's most famous contemporary novelists, wrote from the point of view of an exploited and enraged Aborigine in the novel *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972).

In the 1970s and 1980s, as Australian literature and film gained worldwide recognition, the "Cultural Cringe" went on the decline. Escalating Aboriginal activism and European immigration exposed white nationalism as an outdated fiction. A number of literary works—most famously Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000)—called on Australia's outlaw history to severely criticize the conduct of the British colonization. An international best-seller, Carey's narrative of the Irish bushranger Ned Kelly renewed popular interest in the folk hero who had defied the Anglo-Australian ruling class. Other important writers, among them Thea Astley, David Malouf, and Kate Grenville, have published novels of revisionist history portraying the brutal dispossession of the Aborigines in the colonial encounter.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, indigenous writers had firmly established themselves as a legitimate voice of Australian identity. In 2000, Kim Scott, a mixed-race writer from Perth, became the first indigenous recipient of the Miles Franklin Award, Australia's premier literary prize. Winning for his novel of Aboriginal oppression, *Benang* (1999), Scott shared the prize with Thea Astley, who was selected for her novel *Drylands* (1999). In 2007 Waanyi land rights activist Alexis Wright won the Miles Franklin Award outright for her epic novel of Aboriginal life in Queensland, *Carpentaria* (2006), and in 2011 Scott won the prize a second time for a follow-up to *Benang*, *That Deadman Dance* (2010).

REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Anthologies

Up Fellas [edited by Archie Weller and Colleen Glass] (prose and poetry) 1987

Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry [edited by Kevin Gilbert] (poetry) 1988

Australian Literature: An Anthology of Writing from the Land Down Under [edited by Phyllis F. Edelson] (short stories, memoirs, novels, and prose) 1993

The Penguin Book of the Road [edited by Delia Falconer] (fiction and nonfiction) 2008
The Literature of Australia: An Anthology [edited by Nicholas Jose] (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama) 2009

Thea Astley
An Item from the Late News (novel) 1982
The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow (novel) 1996
Drylands (novel) 1999

Barbara Baynton
Bush Studies (short stories) 1902

Peter Carey
Oscar and Lucinda (novel) 1988
Jack Maggs (novel) 1997
True History of the Kelly Gang (novel) 2000

Marcus Clarke
For the Term of His Natural Life (novel) 1874

Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
Draft Document for Aboriginal Reconciliation (report) 1999

Evelyn Crawford
Over My Tracks (oral history) 1993

Eleanor Dark
The Timeless Land (novel) 1941

Miles Franklin
My Brilliant Career (novel) 1901

Ruby Langford Ginibi
Don't Take Your Love to Town (memoir) 1988

Adam Lindsay Gordon
Poems (poetry) 1913

Kate Grenville
The Secret River (novel) 2005

Charles Harpur
Poems (poetry) 1883

Xavier Herbert
Capricornia (novel) 1938
Poor Fellow My Country (novel) 1975

Dorothy Hewett
The Man from Mukinupin (play) 1979
The Jarrabin Trilogy (play) 2002

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
Bringing Them Home (report) 1996

Thomas Keneally
The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith (novel) 1972
A Family Madness (novel) 1985

Joan Lindsay
Picnic at Hanging Rock (novel) 1967

David Malouf
Poems 1959-1989 (poetry) 1992; republished as *Selected Poems 1959-1989*, 1994
Remembering Babylon (novel) 1993
The Conversations at Curlow Creek (novel) 1996

Mudrooroo [pseudonym of Colin Thomas Johnson]
Master of the Ghost Dreaming (novel) 1991
The Undying (novel) 1998

Les Murray
Lunch & Counter Lunch (poetry) 1974

Katharine Susannah Prichard
Coonardo (novel) 1929

Jennifer Rankin
The Mud Hut (poetry) 1979

Henry Reynolds
Why Weren't We Told (history) 2000

Henry Handel Richardson [pseudonym of Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson]
The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney. 3 vols. (novel) 1917-29

Kim Scott
Benang (novel) 1999
Lost (novel) 2006
That Deadman Dance (novel) 2010

Christina Stead
The Man Who Loved Children (novel) 1940

Roberta Sykes
Snake Cradle (autobiography) 1997

Peter Temple
Bad Debts (novel) 1996
The Broken Shore (novel) 2007
Truth (novel) 2009

Sam Watson
The Kadaitcha Sung (novel) 1990

Archie Weller
The Day of the Dog (novel) 1981
Going Home (short stories) 1986
Land of the Golden Clouds (novel) 1998

Patrick White

The Tree of Man (novel) 1955

Riders in the Chariot (novel) 1961

A Fringe of Leaves (novel) 1976

Alexis Wright

Plains of Promise (novel) 1997

Carpentaria (novel) 2006

Judith Wright

The Moving Image (poetry) 1946

The Generations of Men (fictional biography) 1959

Phantom Dwelling (poetry) 1985

A Human Pattern (poetry) 1990

BACKGROUND: WHITE SETTLER NATIONALISM

Stella Borg Barthet (essay date 2009)

SOURCE: Barthet, Stella Borg. "Religion, Class and Nation in Contemporary Australian Fiction." *Kunapipi: Journal of Postcolonial Writing & Culture*, 31, no. 1 (2009): 83-94.

[In the following essay, Barthet argues that the class-based approach to literature in Australia has resulted in critical misreadings, so that a disproportionate number of so-called highbrow texts have been attacked for endorsing white-settler nationalism while more popular works espousing similar imaginaries have regularly remained exempt from such attacks.]

Writing on the interplay of class and religion in the formation of the Australian party system, Judith Brett (2002) draws attention to the tendency for Australian historians to valorise class-based explanations over any others. Brett questions the emphasis on class as the determining factor for political allegiance among Australians, and suggests that the role of religion has been largely ignored by historians writing in the last sixty years because of their bias in favour of a class-based explanation. It would seem that there is similar bias in literary criticism, with class-based assessments predominating over other approaches in Australia. The result is that both works of literature and of criticism are sometimes judged according to the perceived status of the writer rather than on actual content. In this article I will draw attention to some examples of class-based criticism to indicate its limitations and the possible misreading it can generate. Furthermore, through the reading of works by David Malouf and Thomas Keneally, I

will question the connection that has been made between high literariness and the symbolic endorsement of the White nation in Australia.

The tendency to over-emphasise class can be seen in Ken Gelder's article, 'Politics and Monomania: The Rarefied World of Contemporary Australian Literary Culture', where the author writes of 'Tory libertarian literary sentiments' (52) that privilege a 'rarefied aesthetics—epicurean, tasteful, stylish, delicately cultivated, decadent' in much contemporary Australian writing that is canonised by 'Tory' journals (49). In his article, Gelder uses the word 'Tory' at least nineteen times to describe writers as various as Frank Moorhouse, Gail Jones, Helen Garner, Murray Bail, Robert Dessaix, Gerald Murnane, David Foster, Paul Sheehan, as well as several critics. It would seem that Gelder is in search of a highly rarefied political purity that makes him snub too many writers too summarily. Gelder sees Elliot Perlman's *Three Dollars* as 'one of only a few' examples of contemporary Australian fiction that might be claimed by a genuine Left, presumably because all other works show 'Tory libertarian literary sentiments' (54, 52). Moreover, Gelder's highly polarised approach leads him to look on criticism as territory to be possessed and protected from trespassers. The 'important' question the supposedly exceptional *Three Dollars* raises for Gelder is this: 'to which side of the political spectrum does realism—literary realism, critical realism belong?' (55). The defensiveness of this type of criticism and its marked tendency to label so much of contemporary Australian literature as 'elitist' is worrying. There seems to be a certain partisan narrowness at work in this approach leading one to wonder whether some literary criticism in Australia is being hampered in the same way that Julia Brett suggests for its historiography. The question that articles like Gelder's raise is whether this kind of literary criticism is the result of over-emphasising class and ignoring other significant factors.

The charge of elitism has been levelled at some of Australia's most original writers as in the case of Patrick White and David Malouf. Some of the odium directed at these world-renowned novelists spills onto critics who value them, and onto academics who continue to teach them despite their unfashionableness in parts of Australia. In his 2003 Colin Simpson Lecture, David Marr reminded listeners of the inimical reception of Australian critics to Patrick White and showed how the political parties' championing of art and artist has led to a return of that 'exaltation of the average' that almost scared White away from Australia. As Marr notes, 'writers face the same predicament 50 years later as the old philistine culture of Australian politics reasserts itself' (online). Marr points to an arrogant attitude towards

artists, a 'hands-on abuse' where artists are 'directed what to write and paint by politicians, preachers, teachers and journalists' (online).

Like Marr, I believe that some Australian critics need to remember that 'no commentator can ever tell a writer—a true writer—what to write' because 'that's the wrong way round' (online). The focus on class and elitism is influencing critics to subject writers to narrow notions of political correctness that do not make much sense as literary criticism. In her discussion of *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, Brigid Rooney applies Pierre Bourdieu's idea of the embodiment of the sacred in 'high art and literature' (2007 67) to David Malouf, whom she sees as pursuing 'the literary project of promoting settler-belonging, and of sacralising nation' (2007 67). It is, perhaps, a pervasive and excessive class-consciousness that makes even a sensitive critic like Rooney turn prescriptive at times, as she does when she suggests that David Malouf left out an important scene in *Remembering Babylon* (2007 69). Deciding what a writer should have written is surely not a valid way of reading him. Following Gelder, Rooney defines the literary in terms of a classist detachment from the common reader:

I use that slippery term literary . . . an impossibly chameleon category . . . as it's defined by Ken Gelder: the most constant feature of the literary is the writer's attitude, posture or intention towards readerships, which often manifests itself as discomfort with or refusal of the exigencies of mass readerships and the market. The literary attitude signals detachment from the market and its commodifying demands.

(2007 66)

As Rooney suggests, Malouf cultivates 'the national imaginary' through 'his characters' quest for spiritual healing' (2007 66, 68) and also, I would suggest, by complicating distinctions of class and wealth among the white settlers. Rooney writes of Malouf's writing as being 'expressive of a refined literary habitus' (66), a place and role he maintains with care:

He is not alone in such a pursuit: the coalescence of literature, nation and the sacred performs a central role in the legitimisation and consecration of writers, and likewise in the reproduction of the Australian literary field.

(2007 67)

The sacred, it would seem, is little more than the writer's means of obtaining ascendancy in society. Rooney goes on to argue that a 'crucial scene missing from *Remembering Babylon*' (69) is provided in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, as 'Malouf's novel answers critics of *Remembering Babylon* who had 'read the book as distorting and suppressing realities of the colonial frontier, thus itself colonising Indigenous bodies and

history' (69). Rooney suggests that Malouf's answer to the critics of *Remembering Babylon* is in the episode where the trooper Langhurst connects with the black tracker Jonas after Garretty causes him to break into 'a high pitched wailing' by narrating his uncanny experience of border violence (Malouf 114). I think *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* certainly treats not only the memory of border violence but even the lived experience of it. One of the troopers, Jed Snelling, had recently been killed by the spear of an aborigine. I have argued elsewhere that Malouf's description does not allow the reader to accuse the whites of cruelty or of murderous intentions (Borg Barthet 2008). Many settlers who lived through border violence were themselves victims of empire and conquest. They had simply tried to survive in a world that treated them as harshly as many blacks, and thus they were justified in their claim to some share of the land.

I would agree with Brigid Rooney that Malouf spatialises narrative 'to hold back or defer its linear, temporal impulses', thus allowing 'mediative crossings between past and present' for Lachlan Beattie in *Remembering Babylon* and for Michael Adair in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (2009 126). As Rooney shows, 'the observer figure comes to self-acceptance through quasi-sacramental images of metamorphosis or fusion that occur in suspended time' (126-27). Rooney states that 'the arrest of time signals aesthetic rather than political resolution, returning us to and affirming the literary' (128). I would argue that the arrest of time in Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* and *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* affirms the literary by showing its relevance to contemporary politics.

The Conversations at Curlow Creek certainly focuses on frontier violence but this does not mean that the darker elements of colonial history are ignored in *Remembering Babylon*; far from distorting the past in the earlier novel, Malouf helps readers to imagine it in all the complexity, contradictoriness and ambivalence of its humanity. Gemmy Fairley, like Patrick White's Jack Chance in *A Fringe of Leaves*, is a white 'exile' who has lived with Aborigines for several years. He is not a 'fake black' as Germane Greer suggested but a hybrid character that opens up a space between white and black for a contemporary Australian identity (qtd in Davis 4). His position on the edge does not displace the blacks who are portrayed as owners of the land and who accept him only 'guardedly' as was 'proper to an in-between creature' (Malouf 1994 28). I have suggested elsewhere that Malouf creates a grotesque body in Gemmy Fairley to open up a new space between conflicting cultures (Borg Barthet 2001).

For Malouf, the making of Australian consciousness, the construction of the 'imagined community' of the nation, requires a re-working of the relationship between