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"In this kingdom of passing fiction" : Memory and Imagination
in David Malouf's An Imaginary Life and Wilma Stockenström's
The Expedition to the Baobab Tree.

by

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A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

Carleton University

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Abstract

Memory and imagination play an important part in the novels of David Malouf and Wilma Stockenström and they do so in the form of an extreme consciousness of what language may or may not do. Their novels deal with the removal of highly symbolized protagonists from the containment of historical and cultural narratives that most societies, through ideological and ordering necessity, generate as self-explanation. Both protagonists walk out of 'history' through acts of remembering and re-creating, by playing questions of language and private identities, through the filter of memory and imagination.

Both Stockenström and Malouf are writers with a strong sense of marginality and exile; both of them are conscious of the parts they have to play within a script - historical and contemporary - of empire and colony. But they are also writers carrying a full consciousness of the uncertainties of language in the postmodern world, in which language has become destabilized and the project of modernism - to reconcile selves, words and the world - rejected.

Critical commentary of Seamus Heaney, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Witold Gombrowicz are brought to bare on these two writers and the text of this thesis.

Acknowledgements

"Any one of our actions is always determined, of course, by a whole bundle of motives.

But among the cluster of motives there is always one, usually the wildest, most impractical, illogical, often ridiculous, and very often quite irrational secret, which, however, decides everything" (Eisenstein, 72).

To those who kept the faith - thank you.

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The ridiculous thing about our life is
that only death delivers us up to true
solitude, and hence, to true freedom.

(Parain, 12).

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"In this kingdom of passing fiction" : The Language of Memory and Imagination.

If only one could hear a real voice in

this kingdom of passing fiction (Gombrowicz, 3).

The absence of a real voice, suggests Witold Gombrowicz, does not create a kingdom of silence, but an earthly passage cluttered with unreal and senseless voices, haunted by the desire to hear a real voice and not one's own echoes. What is a real voice ? Is it external to the kingdom of fiction, outside of the book ? I want to address these questions of language and perception. How does the writer know his/her real voice? Does it speak with such clarity that all others fall silent? Or is this voice, like the place from which it originates, obscured by the need of the historical/cultural narrative to bury it under the weight of a thousand unreal voices ? Unlike Gombrowicz, I believe that in the kingdom of fiction there are voices which speak to one another, connecting words over the open spaces of the mindfield of the ordinary. Where is the origin of perception, the piece of linguistic ground to stand on ? This was how Kandinsky saw his world:

Just as the explorer penetrates deeply
into new and unknown lands, one makes
discoveries in every-day life, and the
erstwhile mute surroundings begin to
speak a language which becomes increasingly
clear. In this way, the lifeless signs
turn into living symbols and the dead
is revived (Kandinsky, PLP 26, .

Kandinsky's explorer enters into the territory of the unfamiliar, into silent and unknown places which yield language. Malouf and Stockenström also enter the territory of language, in this way, providing a fictional landscape full of voices. This is how I read their novels. In this new linguistic space, the most common-place realities undergo a process of transformation: language gets released from the confines of historical/cultural imperatives, revealing the simultaneous presence of real and imaginary worlds, and in this simultaneity they collapse boundaries which the Western metaphysical tradition often places between the word and object, memory and imagination, art and life. I want to trace in my thesis this process of transformation, in which the elements of external reality and inner experience meet and illuminate one another, are named and interpreted.

As a project of interpretation what I say is an activity of the imagination, in its own way parallel to the Malouf/Stockenström imaginative act of writing.

Interpretation obliges one to enter into the narrative space of language in a personal way. The interpretative capacity to exist within another frame of reference, outside of the ordinary, enables us in Malouf's words to:

...make new discoveries in the world
of the senses, to see new connections
between things, to make leaps of moral
awareness that give us a more complete
hold on our world (Malouf in Tulip, 279).

Arguably, the act of reading is also an act of the imagination and engages a similar process of transformation - the reader enters the realm of the text, exchanging one temporary reality for another. However, in the act of interpretation one must account for the new writing which emerges from the journey into another linguistic landscape, into the spaces between the words.

My point of departure has to be the linguistic separation between the word, the object and the naming. In the postmodern era, language has been destabilized: it moves in ideological fissures, into usages and codes through which cultures, histories, politics speak. We may need, for aesthetic purposes, a distinct language for experiences that occur inside the gravitational pull of the imaginary. The absence of such a language, which is capable of speaking of inner experience, forces all experience, both real and imaginary, to be expressed within the counter-gravitational

pull of the actual. The difficult gap between the authorized certainty of the real and the disembodied unreality of the imaginary emphasizes the dualistic nature of language and seems to confirm the authority of the subject/object split. However, there are writers, like Malouf and Stockenström, who resist the dualistic grain of language, looking instead for a reconciliation of memory/imagination, word/object, mind/body. Thus, the first element to be noticed about these two writers, in my view, is their shared desire to recover, from the territory of contrastive/philosophical difference, a complex poetic language capable of reconciling the gap between external and inner experience opened by Western metaphysics.

If we take the desire to re'(dis)cover a complex poetic language as the first move in the effort of contemporary postmodern fiction to discover its language and voice, the first unmapped territory I want to look at is the Australian writer David Malouf's novel An Imaginary Life. Central to Malouf's understanding of language is his notion of writing as healing process. In An Imaginary Life, Malouf confronts the metaphysical borders which separate word from objects with consequent difficulties for the process of naming. Echoing throughout the poetry and prose of David Malouf we find a whole set of oppositions:

...between suburbs and wilderness;

between the settled and nomadic life; between
a metropolitan centre and an edge; between the

places made and places that are unmakeable or not yet made; between the perceiver in [that] poem and all sorts of things and all sorts of other things which are "other" - and that "other" may be the animal world or simply some other consciousness (Malouf in Tulip, 272).

For Malouf, these oppositions represent an edge, a point of awareness, one at which questions of subject/object are resolved in experience - the outside moves in.

What intrigues me about Malouf is the way in which he invests language with the power to transform perceptions of existence. The transformational power of language is totally dependent upon the ability of the possessor of this gift to recognize that the external world which language names cannot be separated from the world of inner experience. For, Malouf meaning moves:

...from something observed, described - objects, events - straight through into the mind, and the experience it enacts - the belief - is that there is no disjunction between thought and object, between mind and body - that the old subject/object dichotomy is resolved in experience, in being itself (Tulip, 274).

Language, for him, is a means of locating the self in the world and the world in the self. The process of location

recovers an authentic language of the self from an uncertain linguistic landscape.

By taking as his subject the exile of Roman poet Ovid, Malouf is able to examine the relationship between self and language. Ovid's exile is not simply one from place, it is also an exile from language itself. This exile, Ovid, gets separated from the Latin tongue in which his whole identity is defined. This extreme punishment, the separation of poet from his language, precipitates one aspect of Malouf's examination of language. Another associated aspect of this question in the book is that of the Wild Boy, who is not exiled from language, but who does not yet possess language. The possibility that the Wild Boy may be given language and, thereby, a sense of his own humanity, parallels Ovid's original exile from Latin and his eventual recovery of a language for universal experience. The process of transformation is experienced by both the poet of Metamorphoses and the Child.

Exile is the site where the context of Ovid meets the text of Malouf. It enabled Malouf to slip in the Australian dimensions of his own experience, that of the colonial writer making a reverse move from Tomis/Brisbane (Malouf's birthplace) to Tomis/Campagietico (Malouf's domicile in Italy). Ovid's loss of language represents Malouf's own examination of the authenticity of Australian literary experience:

...it has something to do with that question about being at the edge of the known world and having to discover how you make that center. It has something to do with how you make an authentic experience for yourself that may run counter to history and geography (Willbanks, 14).

Colonialism in Australia, suggests Malouf (Willbanks, 14), created a conflict between place and language, the problem of having an imagination and sensory experience firmly rooted in Australia and a literature coming from England. In An Imaginary Life, Malouf created a parallel between himself as an Australian writer, looking for that centre where language and place would be simultaneous, and Ovid as a poet in exile. Ovid becomes an imaginary construction through which Malouf sought to locate an authentic Australian history, geography and culture:

It has taken us a very long time to believe that where you are is the center and I wanted to put Ovid through the experience of discovering that, so in a way the book is an argument about Australia as well (Willbanks, 14).

The notion of exile enables Malouf to move in the spaces of language which are for him, as they are for Ovid, at once familiar and unfamiliar.

The language of An Imaginary Life moves into the open spaces between words, collapsing the boundaries between forms. For Malouf, the exploration of the subject/object dichotomy entails a drama of transformation in which "objects stop being outside in a world perceived and end up inside the perceiver;" in this way, the text changes objects into perceptions (Tulip, 270). In An Imaginary Life, the space between the perceiver and the perceived is reconciled in the silent language which emerges from the transformation of self and world. For Malouf, the subject/object split can be reconciled in experience, in being, and in the belief in the possibility of an imaginary life.

From the open spaces of Malouf's language, one moves into the crystalline language of the South African writer Wilma Stockenström's The Expedition to the Baobab Tree. In my second chapter, the critical language I use to interpret her novel changes. Stockenström's preoccupations cannot be located within the same kind of linguistic landscape as those of Malouf. Although Stockenström is concerned with "otherness" , with the separation of self and language, there are particular kinds of absences which resist the transcendent nature of Malouf's more 'imaginary' language and the kind of interpretative language he uses to address it.

In The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, Stockenström confronted the personal and literary tensions reflected in the inter-relation between subjective experience and the

inscription of the self, as writing subject, into the text. For Stockenström, the self becomes made present in the text as a construct of language, and this aesthetically contextualized identity foregrounds the relationship between the perceiving self (of the writer and her unnamed protagonist) and their perceived external realities. The politics of place, in which Stockenström is both the writing and written subject, is South Africa. Given the cultural/historical/political pressures of the apartheid space from which she has to write, the reconciliation of subject and object appears to be impossible.

Central to Stockenström's writing is a notion of doubleness, in which different selves occupy distinct and seemingly irreconcilable worlds. In The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, the situation of the narrator carries within it echoes of Stockenström's own reality. Stockenström as a white South African woman is both insider and outsider, given her race, class and gender; she cannot be fixed easily within the dominant Afrikaaner nationalist cultural/political paradigm. Her narrator is a black slave-woman who, like Stockenström, exists in two realities: an external one with an imposed identity and her own inner reality which searches for itself. The narrator can only be returned to herself by reclaiming, through the images of memory, the full text of her own suppressed past. The interplay between her self, as a construct of the cultural/historical narrative, and her inner self becomes the Stockenström/narrator's means for examining

the relationship between an emergent self and the surrounding society with its own historically enforced memory.

In Stockenström's text, the gravitational pull of the actual- South Africa as a racist, repressive society - exists as a kind of permanent assumption, an absence constantly present, but never spoken of. The historical and cultural realities of slavery, imperialism and exploitation derive their meaning in the text from the personal experiences of the narrator: as thematic elements, they never get addressed outside of the context of those experiences. The narrator constitutes the sole frame of reference and the whole of South African history has to find expression through the events of her life.

Stockenström is not interested in reconciling the split between the public and the private self of her protagonist's experience. Instead, she displaces her attempt to resolve the subject/object dichotomy into a landscape beyond the reach of the historical, cultural or the political. In this landscape, no selves are brought into a kind of Malouf harmony with the universal; we are left instead with Stockenström's sense of the emptiness of things. In The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, South African history, together with its culture and politics, becomes lost, like the expedition itself, in a landscape in which the only possible alternative reality becomes that of the suppressed "other". In this new and unnamed landscape, only a pared-down self in a minimalized world

void of the social and any sense of history is all that remains for the narrator at the base of the hollowed-out baobab tree.

Malouf and Stockenström are concerned with the notion of transformation - a transformation of selves, words and worlds. In their novels, the necessity of locating a new self in a new language becomes the process through which language itself is altered. My own commentary has to follow the difficult transformative idiom of both writers. The way I write and think in my Malouf chapter reflects the landscape of the imagination that he works with. My Stockenström chapter has to follow a different path, following what is for her a landscape of memory. The notions of imagination and memory, from my point of view, are frames of attention: they have the effect of concentrating both experience and language into tenuously connected fields of meaning. In Malouf's text, imagination is what allows Ovid/Malouf to reconcile words, names and objects through a process of linguistic creation. In Stockenström's text, it is the frames of memory which enable the narrator to recollect her fragmented self and to define an identity for herself beyond the constraining definitions of slavery, imperialism and exploitation. As modes of critical attention, imagination and memory offer the possibility of entering, simultaneously, the gravitational pull of both the real and the imaginary, by laying bare

important features of those narrative spaces in which language and silence come very much to the fore.

My analysis of Stockenström's novel is, to a certain extent, handicapped by the serious lack of English language materials about her of either a bibliographical or a critical nature. This lends a speculative tone to my section on The Expedition to the Baobab Tree. I can reconcile myself to this lack of materials partly because the themes I am working with—language, memory, imagination—permit it and partly because the difficulty that I face in this regard in relation to Stockenström was faced by Malouf in connection with Ovid.

My third chapter, growing out of my examination of Malouf and Stockenström, is a meditation on language. In this reflection, I see language as containing within itself a specific purpose: the desire to reconcile the mind, the word and the object. This human desire for reconciliation has to function in the West within a territory of philosophical/contrastive difference; this desire, in my view, challenges the structures which perpetuate this notion of difference. There are voices in this section other than those of Malouf and Stockenström: Wassily Kandinsky, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Witold Gombrowicz.

CHAPTER TWO

We Live As We Dream: Imagination, History and Self in An Imaginary Life.

An artist is he who says: this man
speaks wisely, but he himself is a fool.
Or: the purest morality issues from the
lips of that man, but, beware, for he
himself cannot keep up with his morality
and turns into a swine. This is valuable,
I believe, in so far as an idea abstracted
from man does not fully exist. There are
no ideas like embodied ones. There is no
word which is not also flesh (Gombrowicz, 86).

"If," suggests Seamus Heaney, "our given experience is a labyrinth, then its impassability is countered by the poet's imagining some equivalent of the labyrinth and bringing himself and us through it" (1412). Heaney proposes two labyrinths: a labyrinth of experience and one of equivalence. The labyrinth of equivalence is "a reality which is only imagined but which nevertheless has weight because it is imagined within the gravitational pull of the actual" (1412). These parallel labyrinths provide us with a formal expression of the simultaneous presence of the real and the imaginary,

thereby collapsing the boundaries that the Western metaphysical tradition often places between word and object, memory and imagination, art and life. This accords with Heidegger, for whom the made-differences between entities grew out of the dualistic modes of thought particular to the "onto-theology" of Western metaphysics (Minh-ha, 90). When these made differences are elevated into absolutes they have the effect of separating the world of experience from that of the imagination. As a poet, Heaney is writing against this grain of Western cultural history; returning, in Heidegger's framework, to pre-Socratic thought, before the subject/object split appeared (Eagleton, 63). Heaney's labyrinths are his attempt to recover, from the territory of contrastive/philosophical difference, a complex poetic language capable of closing the gap opened by Western metaphysics.

At the present time, one that has been called postmodern, the promise of Heaney's kind of poetic language has been destabilized. Language now moves in ideological fissures, into usages and codes through which cultures, histories, politics speak. We do not have a distinct language for experience moving inside the specific gravitation of the imaginary - fiction and reality speak (are spoken of) in the same tongue. This impoverishment of the language within the confines of the postmodern, would absolve the poetic intelligence of its responsibility to locate its kind of rich,

ambiguous meaning within the landscape of untrustworthy linguistic ground:

Even in these conditions it is still
possible to conceive of the poem as
travelling the troubled element of
consciousness with the volition and
integrity of a shockwave travelling
through water: not so much a momentary
stay, as a reactive heave against confusion
(Heaney, 1418).

According to Heaney, a poet, who wants to escape the subject/object dualisms of language, has to possess an ability to recover a past and prefigure a future unified inside an enlarged sense of the present. By acknowledging the power of language to be complex beyond the constraints of the postmodern, the poet makes it possible for the written form to occupy both the labyrinth of the actual and the labyrinth of the imaginary. As a result the poem, as a work of art, in this combination of labyrinths, constitutes a distinctive linguistic space, which influences profoundly the relation between the writer, the written, the reader, and does so in a way that alters the usual borders of reference and communicative affect. This is David Malouf's account of Heaney's labyrinthine process:

[T]he word and the naming and the object
are in some deep sense, for us, absolutely

one, that the gap between these things, which was opened up much later, is the sore we need to heal. Writing, it seems to me, is one of those ways in which the healing takes place. When we read, or when we write, the word and the object are absolutely one, as if there never was any question of the mind and the object being separate. In that way, all my writing is an attempt to make that true against the whole of our cultural history (Kavanagh, 253).

Malouf is extending the argument of Heaney and Heidegger, describing writing as a healing process, a (re)membering of the body and mind as language. Writing 'against the whole of our cultural history', Malouf, too, challenges the metaphysical borders separating the word, the naming and the object. In his novel, An Imaginary Life, Malouf imagined an equivalent to the labyrinth of reality, and in doing so he created his linguistic space free of metaphysical splitting. He does give us, in his text, a shifting collage of language, image and meaning. Malouf's attempt to overcome the certitude of ordinary language was problematical: he sought to name things that cannot be named, because words for them do not exist within the boundaries of orthodox literary discourse. In doing this, Malouf created a text in which the written word moved outward from itself as a continually expanding

linguistic horizon. In An Imaginary Life, the written traces its own linguistic borders, transforming its own interior space, and allowing a new reality to emerge.

Malouf believes it is possible to rediscover a textual reality in which "the word and the naming and the object are...absolutely one" and, in this regard, he can be said to accept Heidegger's definition of truth as dis-closure, discovery, un-hiding (Kavanagh, 252). It is this revealing notion of truth which destabilizes the made/assertive differences between entities - the wounds of culture and history. The act of writing this notion of truth into the construction of a labyrinth of the imaginary becomes, for Malouf, a means of overcoming the gap between public, social, cultural, historical 'truths' and those coming from the inner self. Malouf sees writing as a healing of the "gap between our language and our landscape" which possesses a "very keen sense of loss", thereby making the reader aware of the contradictory force of language as expressive of inner experience and language as an ideological construct (Kavanagh, 252). Malouf attempts to reconcile the correspondences between inner/internal content and external expression/representation, by writing into and out of a landscape of abstraction. For Malouf, the notion of abstraction represents a "magical kind of process that allows a purely arbitrary set of syllables or sounds to stand so powerfully...for real objects, events of weather or emotions" (Willbank, 14-15). Through this

abstract process, one form becomes capable of representing another, but not of replacing it in either a mental or physical landscape. The writing of a word, the creation of an image and the bringing of an object into existence, not in the world, but in the mind or on the page, Malouf suggests, reconciles the gap between inner content and external representation. Abstraction, then, is not a process of drawing forms out of an already present physical reality and simply recontextualizing them, but a process of re-naming, in which forms become the external manifestation of inner experience:

we stumble on their names and they are real
 something of their substantial
 radiance is in
 the breath we draw

lion

poppy

wave

Familiar

out of time swaying forward light up

unknowable inner space in us (Malouf, Poems 10).

Malouf is concerned with the paradoxical relation of external representation to the content of inner experience. Ironically, in this act of naming we are, according to Malouf, separated from what we name through the name itself. This separation, however, by enabling us to distinguish one form

from another helps us to define our place in the world. This gain is, also ironically, also a loss, because it prevents us from returning to an undivided reality:

I think that the paradox of what language is
is again very moving; the way in which
we lose the world by gaining a certain kind
of power over it is something we can't
reject but it is part of the situation....
It is a state we can't go back to, but
we can know what it is we have come away from
(Willbanks, 15).

Writing into and out of the paradox of language, Malouf in An Imaginary Life constructed a text in which both form and content operate as a language of simultaneous presence. This kind of non-representational novel, which has affinities to the renegotiated representations of abstract art, establishes correspondences on the basis of a move towards abstraction. To address the self in this language/image mode of abstraction entails the deconstruction of in-place preconceptions/expectations. An Imaginary Life explores the capacity of the artistic mind to react to the world as both form and inner experience. In the text, abstraction becomes the means by which representation/existence is transformed, revealing the simultaneous presence of the self and the imagistic/linguistic in a landscape of constantly shifting forms. Thus, writing becomes a process which moves the

written word beyond the prescribed borders between word, object, mind.

Malouf's notion of writing as a means of healing the gap between entities relies upon a move toward abstraction in the aesthetic sense. The process of abstraction, like Heaney's labyrinth of the imaginary, does not offer the possibility of a purely imaginary linguistic/imagistic reality, but it places a counter-reality upon the scales, "a reality which is only imagined within the gravitational pull of the actual" (Heaney, 1412). The pull of culture, history, politics, separates the mind/object, word/object and confirms the metaphysical split. Paradoxically, the labyrinth of the actual, weighted by ideological reality, provides the weight to which imagined reality is the counter-weight. Poetic redress, Heaney suggests, does not involve the placing of a symbolic truth in the balance against a historical situation. To establish a poetic notion in harmony with a present political/historical situation is simply to confirm the event by means of an aesthetic project (1412). No knowledge is born of this harmonic balance- "there is no point in achieving a harmony which is parallel to events but not in itself productive of new events" (Heaney, 1418). The reader/writer's passage through the imagined labyrinth may not occur within the pull of the actual, but it does allow for a symbolic event - a poetic revelation. Poetic revelation (in Heaney's terms) is itself a silent and constant reminder of

the potential knowledge that is denied or threatened by circumstances within the labyrinth of the actual. For both Malouf and Heaney, the writer, as representative wo/man, bears witness in his/her own life to the possibility of healing/redress. In the double labyrinth, the writer becomes medicine wo/man performing a ritualized healing/redress of language, in an effort to shift the scales of reality towards transcendence and equivalence.

An Imaginary Life takes, as its subject, the final years of the Roman poet Ovid, in exile on the far eastern borders of the Empire. The poet of the Metamorphoses, of the Fasti, and of the Tristia, the elegantly complex poet of Augustan Rome, becomes Malouf's protagonist in exile. In taking Ovid as his central figure, Malouf is able to question the validity of historical knowledge and write from the unstable space between the real and the invented. The significance of a historical document rests in its potential for revealing some aspect of a truth. An exploration of literature as document became, for Malouf, a way to look at the relation between language and truth, especially the question of whether truth is absolute or attainable. Malouf favoured the case for truth as a variable, as being contingent upon the needs of the present moment. A variable truth, as opposed to an absolute truth, would question the authority of any historical document. Ovid's texts became, therefore, for Malouf, sources for subjective concerns, whose significance was projected into the present

fictional moment of An Imaginary Life. Malouf used Ovid to explore the different ways truth can be validated, and the multiple points at which literary meaning may be said to reside. Literary meaning is located in the complex relationship between the writer, the reader, the text, the events and the materials that it addresses.

Malouf used the life of Ovid as a pre-text for the possibilities of his own creative fiction:

We know very little about the life of Ovid,
and it is this absence of fact that has made
him useful as the central figure of my narrative
and allowed me the liberty of free invention,
since what I wanted to write was neither
historical novel nor biography, but a fiction
with its roots in possible events (AIL 153-154).

Ovid clearly, was a 'real' person, who existed within particular Roman historical context. What interested Malouf's narrative, however, were absences within this context.

The sparsity of historically validated 'facts' made it possible for Malouf to examine the relation between the imagined and the actual. The actual, however, still constituted a base for his reflections. We know that Ovid was born in the provincial centre of Sulmo in the year 43 B.C., into a noble family. Following the death of his brother, he went to Rome and became the poet we now speak of in the same rank as Horace and Virgil. At the height of his literary

renown, in 8 A.D., he was exiled by personal decree of the Emperor to Tomis, a distant barbarian settlement on the eastern edge of the Roman Empire (Lind, IX). We do not know the cause of his exile. Ovid himself never revealed it, referring in Tristia, his poem of exile, only to the "two sins that ruined me, my poem and my grave error." ¹ Malouf used the Tristia for his picture of Tomis and the third book of Fasti for the details of the Roman festival of Parilia (AIL 153). Ovid's texts underline Malouf's fictional recreation of Ovid's character and important parts of the text itself. History is turned into a fiction. The play between the writings of Ovid (upon which Malouf bases his fiction about Ovid) and Malouf's literary creation of Ovid's exile, established an exchange between classical texts and modern interpretation. This literary interchange between the historical and the imaginary is reinforced by Malouf's creation of the feral child, the acknowledged source of which is J.M.G. Itard's account of the Wolf Boy of Avyron, which is, according to Malouf in his "Afterward", "the best account we have of such phenomenon" (AIL 153-154). Malouf meant, of course for the writer, not for the academic historian or anthropologist.²

Malouf, like most writers, worked with inherited historical material for the new meanings he could get them to yield. The past got rewritten from the demands of the present. This reconstruction brought to the fore, interestingly enough, the fictionalizing, ordering process that had been involved in

the original. The traditional view of Ovid, the traditional interpretation of the Metamorphoses, and the Tristia, lose their conventional solidity and yielding to a set of contingent truths, dependent on and co-existent with the present.

In spite of the relationship with Ovid, however, An Imaginary Life gives little suggestion of being connected to an already existing body of writing. These connections are obviously at play in the text; they are part of its play with, and deployment of meaning. The important question may be: why, with the profound intertextuality of An Imaginary Life commanding both its structure and conception, does it give the impression of being so isolated, so sui generis as a fiction? Malouf touched on this when he noted the attraction for him of the uncertainty, the lacunae of knowledge surrounding important aspects of Ovid's exile. The area of the unsaid, the not-known about Ovid, freed his imagination and allowed him "the liberty of free invention" (Malouf, AIL 153).

The area of the unsaid opens up aspects of the sayable in a sense and context larger than what Ovid did say, into an area of what, in Malouf's perspective, Ovid might have said. Malouf, thus, meets Ovid and history on the plane of language. It is to the clarity and integrity of this exchange between them that the novel, in the words of the Czech writer Jan Vladislav, may be explained:

For man, the immaterial, unreal time

of mathematicians freezes and realizes
 itself in memory, for a man's home,
 fixed in time, is also shaped not only
 by his own history, but also by the
 histories of those who surround him,
 by his family and tribe, and by the
 palpable history of tilled fields, of
 ancient villages and new cities, and
 above all by that changeable, unfathomable,
 mythic reservoir of his native language (Glad,
 15).

Malouf transforms the question of the poet in society and the poet as exile into one concerned with language itself. Ovid's exile placed him outside of Roman society, but, more important, beyond the Latin tongue. It becomes, therefore, an exile of the poet's self from his language and of that language from that self. Ovid/language are bound to one another - Malouf's Ovid becomes other to language itself.

"Exile," wrote Vladislav, "is the prerogative of man: of all men, even if only a few - poets, artists, philosophers - know it, or have a premonition of it" (Glad, 15). Exile separates poets from their native land but, far more important, from their native language and it is this separation which, as Socrates knew, involves matters of life and death for the poets (Glad, 15). Thus, the poet and language go into the wilderness together, leaving behind the

place where they had both been at home. Vladislav described exile as a death penalty in effigy, a sentence of death destroying everything; only the poet who refuses this death retains an immunity and will not let it penetrate his/her 'real' life (Glad, 16).

Ovid is separated from his life in Rome and has another way of life in Tomis imposed on him by an imperial decree. He is forced to live an alienated existence, in which he has two choices: (i) retain Latin and his memories of Rome with nostalgic stubbornness, rejecting the barbarian way (ii) give up on Rome and Latin and throw his lot and his language in with Tomis. He actually refuses both, wrestling with himself and the Child for another, more moral, metaphysically satisfying resolution of the dilemmas of cultural, social and political removal.

An Imaginary Life calls attention to itself as a process of writing, which, in turn, affects how it may be read and interpreted. It represents a concern with language - a concern that seeks to push language beyond the borders which confine language to the categories of literature/reality and art/life, expanding it to incorporate the discourses of history, biography and politics. Thus, in the novel, meaning becomes a process of setting the discourses of history and literature in interrogative contact with each other and salvaging from this contact something which is different, in excess of both. Malouf foregrounds the play between the

historical and the fictional - challenging what may be known historically and what would allow itself to be imagined from the original. The space between Ovid's history and a fiction leased to it creates an unusual space, which invites a double reading/interpretation of Ovid as character and of Ovid as language. The notion of language that Malouf works with carries the weight of the historical, cultural and the political, but these are subordinate to the gravitational demands of Malouf's imagination. Ovid does not remain the orthodox figure of the Roman poet in actual exile, he becomes again the poet in a state of transformation - the poet of metamorphosis. This provisional aspect of Malouf's Ovid allows for the provisionary to express itself in the other characters of Malouf's tale - Ryzak, Lullo, the grandmother, the widow and the shaman. In exile, Ovid's poetic self is stripped of its affiliation with his past and gets re-created in a terrible nowness, which resists form/formation. Ovid seeks some echo of a former self in each of the other characters. He finds them, but, as resonances, they offer no possibility of a reconciliation between his former and the new selves. There is a scene in which Ovid, listening to Ryzak's stories, experiences only a dim recollection of something strange, ungraspable, familiar "...I let the strange words fill my head, understanding nothing,...somewhere deep in myself I know this story. I have heard it before. It is the tune that I recognize" (AIL 38-39). In the familiar tune he

finds a trace of origin; it speaks the language of loss, of the separation between the object and the meaning. The past features of his life challenge Ovid's imagined realities. He has no common ground on which to base his dream of former origins, now lost, misplaced, unspoken.

The challenge between his own past reality and the one he now imagines, is played out in the relationship between himself and the feral child. The Child reappears to Ovid during the ritual, seasonal hunt and re-awakens in Ovid's memory the imaginary child from his Sulmo youth. For Ovid, the feral child and his re-imagined child-self are the same child. Ovid and the feral boy are connected by strands of memory, by emotion and by - most important of all - an unspoken dream reality. By associating the child with the figure in the Prologue, Malouf engages in a mythical, ritual process of transformation. The wild boy and Ovid become versions of a single self. Ovid discarded a more primitive, and unconscious self to become a Roman poet; the feral child makes it possible for him to recover the child in himself. This crucial metamorphosis of Ovid repossessing his full self is replayed in his efforts to teach the Child to speak. There are paradoxes and difficulties in this, however. Ovid's sense of himself, of the world, and of the human is available to him through a superlative command of language. But the Child, in all his perfection, exists outside of language, has not yet discovered it. Ovid wants to give him, through language, a

consciousness of himself, his world, his humanity. Although separated by language, the difficulty is ameliorated for Ovid because he and the Child are connected by those extra-linguistic filaments of memory threading themselves into Ovid's dreams.

This realm of the unspoken dream-reality, in which the Child and the renewed Ovid meet, communicate and touch, is the fictional space that Malouf uses to break through the discursive barriers of the historical parameters of his subject. This is the space of language, which operates in language, at the limits of language, in the world, at the limits of the world. This is the place where Heaney's labyrinths become most necessary, most difficult. I now propose to examine the five sequences and the Prologue as stages toward the revelation that these unspoken dream contacts between Ovid and the Child lead to. This is a moment which reconciles selves and universes, that overcomes the separations of minds, bodies and the universe.

The making of any map requires a system which determines how the thing being recorded on it will appear - an overarching structure of lines and numbers dictating where 'X' marks the spot. Malouf maps the linguistic/imagistic territory of memory, imagination and language itself, using numbers as markers and naming only the italicized dream of the Prologue. Paradoxically, the landscape that Malouf attempts to map resists being mapped: it refuses to be confined to

already existing frames of meaning. Malouf's language occupies a linguistic landscape in which language moves towards the borders separating word, mind and object, seeking transcendence and wide open spaces. Like Ovid's dream of the Child, this landscape remains present; caught within the gravitational pull of the actual and obscured by cultural/historical forces. The act of mapping, of tracing the rings of the labyrinth, engages a process of transformation in which the minds, selves, universes are reconciled.

Malouf, in An Imaginary Life, records Ovid's journey into and out of the physical and linguistic territory of exile in five sequences. In my reading of the text, I renegotiate a Malouf-mapped landscape by giving verbal descriptions of the numbered sequences. These descriptions are simply different markers, recording the kind of transformation Ovid/Malouf experience in each of the sequences. The first sequence, Aquae et ignis interdictio, examines the condition of exile in terms of the poet's relation to the political/historical nature of language. In the second sequence, Ritual and Recovery, Ovid's progression toward a new language and the recovery of his former self is explored. The third sequence, Re-Awakening from the Dream, examines the role of the dream in Ovid's journey out of linguistic and cultural exile. The fourth sequence, I/It Thunders, concentrates upon the transformation of language from a separate to simultaneous

presence, a transformation which is mirrored in the altered relationship between Ovid and the Child. In the final sequence, Fire and Water, Malouf, like Ovid, enters a new linguistic landscape in which language transcends traditional borders, moving beyond the limitations of the word into silence. Thus the five sequences become the map of Malouf/Ovid's narrative progression, a tracing of faint lines between word, mind and object. Although it appears at the beginning of the novel, the Prologue closely resembles the conclusion, in which phrases and images from it re-appear. The dream-like quality of the Prologue allows it to drift beneath the surface of the text, a shadow map to a territory which can be re-entered by the re-imagining of a life.

Journeys Through the Double Labyrinth

I. Aquae et Ignis Interdictio

The Romans did not consider exile to be a punishment....A person found guilty of a crime might move to another country. To prevent such an exile returning ...a sentence of banishment, interdictio aquae et ignis, was decreed, i.e., he was to be cut off from the communal fire and water; if the exile nevertheless chose to return, it was lawful to kill him (Glad, 8).

Malouf's story of Ovid's exile and his eventual journey out of that exile involves a radical renegotiation of the notion of exile and its relation to the primacy of language. Ovid's exile to the edge of civilization in An Imaginary Life deprived him of his culturally defined self with its roots in an assured knowledge of origin. Malouf creates a parallel between Ovid's exile and the form and content of language. By exploring exile as a condition of language Malouf tracked the ways in which language and the self are bound together. Ovid's separation from Latin forced him to enter the territory of his own memory and enabled him to discover the previously suppressed language of experiences. Consequently, Ovid's exile is not one so much an exile of place but of self and language. In An Imaginary Life, the problems and possibilities of self and language strike one as being the same. They mutually define and express each other. Meaning, exile, self, language become a point of departure and, eventually of arrival - a point at which the border between language and self, between word and object is crossed. Milan Kundera describes this border crossing as a loss of potential meaning:

It takes so little, so infinitely
little for a person to cross the
border beyond which everything loses
meaning: love, convictions, faith,
history. Human life - and here in

lies its secret - takes place in the
 immediate proximity of that border,
 even in direct contact with it; it
 is not miles away, but a fraction
 of an inch (Kundera, 124).

Ovid's exile, like Kundera's border, is one of mind and not of place: "But I am describing a state of mind, no place. I am in exile here" (AIL 16). The best that place can do is to provide the content of experience. In known landscape, forms are familiar objects to the mind. In exile, the self gets separated from the forms of home, family and origin; to refer to these things in the not-known is to introduce the notion of loss, of a world no longer present. Meaning has to be retained in a context of absence. In Tomis, Ovid is exiled from Rome, the source of his social and poetic identity, and from Latin. In Kundera's terms, the opportunity and the occasion to express meaning are lost, leaving an alien landscape to take up the burden of representation. Faith, history, convictions that had previously given shape to Ovid's existence, are useless in a culture ignorant of them, indifferent to them. Tomis for Ovid became a vast page inscribed in an undecipherable tongue: "the landscape itself when night shadows flow over it, is a vast page whose tongue I am unable to decipher, whose message to me I am unable to interpret" (AIL 17). The physical landscape itself becomes a language - a language of shapes without cultural association,

beyond language, outside of it, their physical concreteness the only means Ovid has to express his inner experience. Latin does not work in Tomis so the task of meaning gets transferred to the forms of the physical landscape. Fields, cliffs and poppies become objects, words, finally names. Gradually, physical and mental landscapes bind, take on shared resonances.

The point of reconciliation between physical and mental landscapes, between the perceiver and the perceived does not happen adventitiously; it is, in Ovid's case, the result of a journey into exile. Exile removes the social/historical certainty of the ground from which Ovid speaks. The absence of home-ground separates Ovid from the language which he carries into exile, depriving him of certain emotions and meanings, providing others which, by not being capable of being re-grounded in Tomis, cannot either be fully felt or thought.

Dreams are important for Ovid and central to An Imaginary Life; "I wandered in a dream, as isolated from the world of men as if I belonged to another species" (AIL 17). The dream is an isolated realm of experience whose meaning is revealed only to the dreamer. By day, Ovid wanders through a meaningless landscape of forms which refuse to be translated into the familiarity of his own language. Ovid is isolated inside in a silent world whose forms reinforce his sense of loss. He cannot communicate his experiences of isolation and

loss to others, because they have no common language. At night, in dreams, different forms reveal themselves. However, Ovid, attached to his Roman self cannot interpret them. In those dreams he searches for his own grave, digging with the wolves in the earth for his own remains. His doubled situation, being buried and unburied at the same time, repeats the contrastive dilemmas of his condition: light/dark, past/present, conscious/unconscious, living/dead. Meaning, for this still-Roman Ovid in Tomis, depends on this exclusive frame of reference: it cannot overcome the boundaries separating word, mind, object. In his waking life, the meaning of his dreams remains unclear; being without place these dreams cannot be named in a Roman reality. His dream (regardless of Ovid's lack of recognition of the fact) unites conscious and unconscious perceptions, overriding the boundary between the real and the imaginary. In searching for his grave, Ovid is symbolically attempting to discover a prior self, freed of its old language definitions. Dreams, as a form of release and freedom, make this possible; in them, objects allow, within themselves, a radical un-naming of his former self into a new, different existence.

These graves and dreams un-name the old as a prelude to re-naming it in the light of the new meaning that exile and Tomis calls for. Ovid is seeking a language which carries with it the capacity to express every potential experience, "that perfect tongue in which all things can be spoken, even

pronouncements of exile" (AIL 21). As part of waiting for the perfect tongue Ovid proceeds through the linguistic rituals of unnamings Rome, naming the poppies of Tomis in their physical, tactile concreteness, and reaching out to the barbaric tongue of the Getae which harbours, for Ovid, echoes beyond his own language, hints and suggestions of meaning deep within his unconscious memory, as yet inaccessible:

I have begun to recognize some sounds in it.
But just to hear the old man shouting in the
yard to his grandson, or muttering in the
twilight to the young woman, comes close at
times to maddening me; it is like trying to
remember something you have forgotten, that
glows at the very edge of your mind but
refuses to reveal itself (AIL 20).

No conscious words can express this; the named remains confined to waking reality. The nothing that precedes naming begins only in the realm of dreams:

I have smelled my way to the very edge
of things, where Nothing begins...
I am dead. I am relegated to the region
of silence. All I can do is shout (AIL 27).

Cut off from his language, Ovid is cut off from the community which shares it with him. For such an audience is attached only to:

...landscapes that have been shaped

for centuries to the idea we all
 carry in our souls of that ideal
 scene against which our lives should
 be played out - of what earth was
 in its original bleakness, before we brought
 to it the order of industry, the
 terraces, fields, orchards, pastures,
 the ordered gardens of the world
 we are making in our own image (AIL 28).

Only those features of the world it seems that have the sanction of one's own culture can be fully apprehended and expressed. Deprived of these consolidations the poet has to resort to dreams, memory, imagination, forms of feeling and thinking with their own imperative. The act of remembering in dreams, or imagining in a poetic world, takes the artist beyond the limitations of socially defined reality, enabling the poet to cross the boundaries separating mind and world, word and self. Access to this creative order, not bound by time or society, gives the poet a truly imaginary life, with meaning no longer dependent on the cultural supports of society. This is Ovid's dream of an imaginary life:

But the spirits have to be recognized
 to become real. They are not outside us,
 nor even entirely within, but flow back
 and forth between us and the objects we
 have made, the landscape we have shaped

and move in. We have dreamed all these things in our deepest lives and they are ourselves. It is our self we are making out there, and when the landscape is complete we shall have become the gods who are intended to fill it (AIL 28).

This metamorphosis of self and language depends on the ability of the mind to recognize the regenerative power of the image - the power to name. Naming, in this sense, brings about the continual transformation of reality. In Malouf's text, the power to name is obscured by the demands of an already-named and all-naming Roman society and it is only after Ovid begins to let go of the Roman names that he becomes capable of fully imagining names. This is the imaginary life at work: Ovid imagines the colour scarlet and creates a poppy:

Poppy, scarlet poppy, flower from my far off
childhood and the corn fields round our farm
in Sulmo, I have brought you into being again,
I have raised you out of my earliest memories,
out of my blood, to set you blowing in the wind.
Scarlet. Magic word on the tongue to flash again
on the eye. Scarlet. And with it all the other
colours come flooding back, as magic syllables,
and the earth explodes with them, they flash
about me (AIL 31).

To think the colour red, simultaneously as word and colour, establishes particular kinds of significance, shaped by the memory and nourished by imagination. Naming occurs once this activity of transcendence has taken place in a distinct realm; the borders between mind and world, word and object are constantly shifting; moving out beyond the smooth, flat, lines of everyday reality. The words of the poet bring ordinary language and everyday reality into an open, infinite field of reference, in which words take on their full power, "We have only to find the name and let its illumination fill us. Beginning, as always, with what is simple" (AIL 32).

Ovid came to the decision that there could be no parallel drawn between Rome and Tomis. When he tries to draw one between his own life and that of Ryzak, the headman, he finds that there is nothing there, "I try to imagine his life, that must year after year have run parallel to my own, but no image appears" (AIL 39). Yet, this attempt does lead him to find his own past life foolish, one given over to material and intellectual pleasures in which he was "moved by nothing that I couldn't give a name to, believing in nothing I couldn't see" (AIL 40). Ovid saw nothing he could believe in, until he began to sense that nothing could spring into the colour scarlet and offer him a new world, a new Tomis in the name of a poppy.

II. Ritual and Recovery

The greatest difference between the Roman and the Tomist approaches to the world was in the kind of consciousness shared by all members of the Getaean community. A patrician Roman was expected to comprehend the world in rational, intellectual and logical terms. In contrast the people of Tomis, according to Ovid, and thus also to Malouf, represent a more primitive culture, understanding their world in mythical, magical, ritualistic terms. Tomis possessed its world in ways removed from the conceptualizations of Rome. The second sequence of An Imaginary Life uses this different mode of consciousness to address a number of questions important to Ovid/Malouf: the mechanisms of perception, the meaning of existence, the various dimensions of linguistic/imagistic expression. The people of Tomis can integrate strangers into the spiritual economy of their rituals and Ovid is drawn into the hunt in this way as a participant. The hunt begins in the early hours of the morning with the chant of the shaman - a chant which is both a prayer and a divination:

The shaman begins to sing and is joined
by the rest. The boy stiffens and shakes
when a bit of it spills from his hands...
the chanting ceases. We stand quiet...
He turns stiffly, and we watch him, very
carefully now, bearing his cupped hands

before him, walk slowly back to the pot
 and spill the remains of the gruel on
 the fire. Which hisses. And with that
 the circle breaks...All the signs, it
 seems, are propitious. We can go (AIL 41-42).

The shaman, as keeper of the mysteries, has nothing in common with the values Ovid has left behind in Rome, and his appearance signifies an important change in Ovid's journey out of exile (Heseltine, 35). Malouf uses the shaman's capacity to influence events to undermine Ovid's rational expectations, thus bringing him to the centre of Tomist beliefs and values. Their being 'other' to him, him being other to them, as a condition of mutual exclusion, is overcome by these ceremonies of inclusion. The hunt becomes the means by which Ovid enters the domain of Tomis releasing him, temporarily, from the limitations of cultural exile. When he found himself riding through the skeletons of dead horsemen at the funeral mound, Ovid also found himself approaching an un-named recognition of something which preceded his acculturated existence as Roman and poet:

Oddly enough as I weave back and forth
 between the towering forms I feel a
 moment of exhilaration, and am reminded
 of something - something that my mind
 fails to grasp, as if all this has
 happened before (AIL 45).

In a world dependent upon labour and magic the homage paid to their ancestors by the tribesmen becomes a means of confirming the bond between what has gone before and the present. Past and present are not distinct categories but a continuum in which the living and the dead are participants in a universal drama. The actions of the hunters at the funeral mounds release, in Ovid's memory, images of his own youth, which serve to emphasize his separation from his own past and family. Tomis was not Ovid's first exile; it was the culmination of an exile that had begun many years before:

I have just told my father, as we move into
single file, that I am leaving and will not
return. I have already begun to leave -
starting away from him on the narrow path
from the grove and keeping the whole horse's
length between us. I am already on my way
to Rome. I am already, although I cannot
know it yet, on my way to exile...(AII 46).

Ovid's participation in this ritual at Tomis released unconscious memories from his past into his present consciousness, eliminating the temporal separation between events, emotions and memory that had formerly characterized the way he channelled his experience. This ritual united his past and present in a sacred/profane dance of memory and imagination. This recognition frees Ovid from a frozen, dead life and in doing so it allows him to perform the most

important task facing him in the novel: to prepare for his own death.

Participation and ritual unties Ovid's individual consciousness from its moorings in his former self, enabling him to contact the unconscious spirituality of his inner nature. Through these rituals of gestures, words and objects, unseen spiritual powers become available to him. The gods are called upon to protect and to perpetuate life through its seasonal cycles and to guide people through the crises of their lives by affirming for them the compact between the external world and the life of each individual. Rituals conserve life, maintaining the continuity of the actual and the order.

The hunt is not only important for Ovid as an introduction to Tomis ritual: it also marks his first encounter with the Child. The Child, at first, is only a trace. A footprint which Ovid mistakes for a whole being, "I touch one with my fingertips, and try to conceive, from that contact, the creature that has made the print. Beginning with some warmth: I imagine I can feel, I conjure him up, I call him to mind. But this is absurd" (AIL 48). The Child is a shadow child; an image collected into memory and imagined into existence. The Child's footprint evokes in Ovid's mind an image at once real and imaginary - taking the form of the child from his own past. The play between the presence of this Child and the image/memory of another child calls into

question the integrity of our usual notions of experience and belief. The Child does not exist yet for Ovid on a conscious level as a real being. The tribesmen, however, who believe in the otherworld, believe him to be real. The "encounter" with the Child draws Ovid closer to that other realm of dream and of magic. After witnessing the shaman's dream journey to the polar regions, he begins an approach to his own dream journey. In this dream he is neither his actual nor his imagined self, but a being arising from the depths of a self that he was not aware of. Ovid's encounter with the Child activates a moment of transformation through which the self/other, real/imagined in a cycle of dream, are made known to one another.

III. (Re)Awakening from the Dream

Autumn is a season of change, symbolically associated with aging, and of death. In An Imaginary Life, autumn becomes the season in which the given forms of existence are transformed. This transformation for Ovid occurs within a dream world - an imaginary world touched into the real, at one point in the novel, by the presence of the Child:

I fall asleep almost immediately, and dream.

What I half thought in the woods yesterday,
while we were watching the Child is true.

We have all been transformed, the whole group
of us, and become part of the woods (AIL 61).

Ovid, here, is separating from his physical conscious self, becoming a pool of water which, in turn, is broken into circles and, in turn, consumed by animals. In this dream, self becomes something paradoxical; a fragmented whole complete in itself, divisible, yet completely present in all its forms. When Ovid wakes from his dream, he encounters the Child and knows at once that they have already spoken to each other, have in effect communicated in a language beyond tongues. From the beginning of An Imaginary Life Malouf had suggested the existence of a deeper extra-linguistic relationship between Ovid and the Child, in which the Child is both a creature external to Ovid's being and also the realization of Ovid's dreams about a reconciled self and a reconciled other. The cycle of the seasons draws Ovid and the Child closer to the moment of complete communication and, as they do, he moves farther away from his displaced, exiled self. He recognizes the true meaning of metamorphosis to be an acknowledgement of an interior process of imagined forms which will eventually find external expression. Forms are no longer locked external representations of conditions which must be endured, but liberated manifestations of inner experience.

IV. I/It Thunders: Beginning of the Final Metamorphoses

Malouf handles the opposing categories of culture and nature in the figures of Ovid and the feral child. Western

philosophical and moral discourse represents culture and nature as related, but mutually exclusive, terms; culture acquires its distinctive meaning in opposition to nature. For culture, nature becomes associated with the primitive, the unconscious and the silent, everything that civilization ought to suppress. The root source of the separation of mind, word, and object that Malouf writes about, resides in this desire of culture to remain dominant. The relationship between culture and nature is rife with hostility, uncertainty and misunderstanding. In Ovid's case, the exile of his civil, conscious self to the realm of the natural, which has been ideologically transformed into a subversive realm of the unconscious, isolates the self from experiences which do not lend themselves to be expressed in the language and meaning of culture. Language is important in the relationship between Ovid and the Child. This relationship ruptures the seeming naturalness of things which is the result of cultural conditioning and, as a result of this questioning, the forces of the conscious and unconscious are suspended between what was, and the possibilities to come. This space of arrested, suspended time, between past and future, becomes the ideal territory for the operation of the memory/imagination. Ovid and the Child undergo mutual transformations and metamorphoses in this uncertain interspace, providing us with an example of how Ovid/Malouf understand the way operations of language make possible alterations of self.

The Child lives in a timeless universe beyond the language of cultural definition. His world makes no distinctions between past and present, real and imaginary. It is only after long hours of watching the Child, that Ovid begins to remember himself back into a previous existence:

I touch again on an experience that I
recognize as mine only because its vivid-
ness can only be that of a life lived in
recall. Imagination could not present to
the mind, the senses, anything so
poignantly real (AIL 82-83).

Images from the memory return Ovid's own childhood to him; this process of recollection draws him closer to the world of the Child. In his memories, Ovid recovers his past, returning to his first life before his second life as a Roman poet. This memory-state releases a flood of images: those of his early childhood in the kitchen of his father's farm, the death of his older brother and his estrangement from his father. In a way not recognized by his conscious mind, these experiences deeply affected him, but at such a depth and with such a force of suppression beneath the weight of his chosen identity as poet, that they were reduced to the status of inchoate, meaningless images. By the act of recovering the ability to relive these childhood experiences, Ovid gains an understanding of beginnings - with origins which deeply root the self into the natural. Ovid's knowledge of the land of

origin does enable him to define himself within a particular personal and historical context; but, still being the old Ovid, he has to question the authenticity of this knowledge. Since, in Ovid's mind, the Child cannot possess this kind of knowledge of his own beginnings, he cannot lay claim to any individuality. Ovid, as an individual consciousness, can say 'I am'. Yet, he cannot dismiss the possibility that a world exists, free of the language and categories of culture, which in being more free, may be more true.

Ovid attempts to teach the Child to speak, making it possible for him to define himself apart from the natural universe, "Speech is the essential. I have hit at the very beginning on the one thing that will reveal to him of what kind he is" (AIL 93). These attempts fail, a failure which reinforces the transcendent nature of the pre-linguistic world that the Child inhabits. This is an idea that, as I have suggested, Malouf introduced earlier in the novel and here he has Ovid enter into this space slowly. This world beyond language goes beyond the need for it. Language permits an individual to distinguish between the self and the universe; it certainly allows that self to extricate itself from the metamorphic, interchangeable world of natural forms. This extrication makes human beings articulate, but it is also deprives them of perceptual sensitivities. This is very different from the world of the Child, for whom the entire

world is one of observed forms, committed to memory, in a language of silence:

All this world is alive for him. It is his sphere of knowledge, a kind of library of forms that he has observed and committed to memory, another language whose hieroglyph he can interpret and read (AIL 193).

The Child translates external visible forms directly into interior invisible forms. The physical world translates itself directly, as image, into the Child's mind. This intuitive response contradicts Ovid's own grammar of memory which can store only what culture permits:

I have long since committed to memory,
along with the names of a thousand gods and
their fables, the rules of rhetoric, theorems,
the facts of science, the facts of history,
the theories of philosophers (AIL 94).

An Imaginary Life is thus everywhere concerned with language: written, spoken, silent. Everywhere the transformations of the world are tied into the possibilities of language. So are the transformations of the perspectives of the natural back into the repressed landscapes of culture. But above all, for Ovid and Malouf the transformations of language are to be most valued for the possibilities they allow to transformations of the self. It is this last feature that enters into the metamorphosis of Ovid in An Imaginary

Life. Ovid's decision to teach the Child the language of the Getae represents a significant turning point in his own life. His willingness to provide the Child with the language of his exile represents an acceptance of the condition of exile itself. An exile from language rather than from place, his decision to accept the Getaen tongue indicates his acceptance of his condition and consequently the abatement of his sense of exile. By accepting the finality of his separation from Rome, Ovid frees himself into a new course of life:

So I admit openly to myself what I have
long known in my heart. I belong to this
place now. I have made it mine. I am
entering the dimensions of myself (AIL 95).

This new life is made both tolerable and possible through the revaluations that his unconscious mind permits. His transformations occur in dreams and in dream-like states. These dreams keep recurring, harkening back to his first dream memory of the Child and his own remembrances of his early childhood. His contact with the Child releases Ovid's memories from the rational, allowing their true significance to surface. These memories gave him a key to his newly recovered self. However, these memories are still leased to the philosophical and historical time of Rome and come off as still flawed, when compared to the non-verbalized experiences of the Child. Ovid's sense of the Child's connection to the natural and of his own inability to shed his cultural self,

contains fear and hope: fear that everything he is striving for will come to nothing, hope for a breakthrough to the primordial perceptual universe of the Child:

It thunders and I say it thunders. The Child is otherwise. I try to think as he must. I am raining, I am thundering, and am immediately struck with panic, as if, in losing hold of my separate and individual soul, ...I might find myself lost out there in the multiplicity of things, and never get back. But I know now that this is the way.

Slowly I begin the final metamorphosis (AIL 96).

The roles are now reversed. Ovid has become the pupil. This acknowledged reversal signals a transformation in Ovid's perception of both the world and of language. 'True language' becomes that speech of silence in which Ovid and the Child first communicated childhoods to each other in dreams. The forms of this 'true language' are not entirely comprehensible to Ovid, remaining intangible and barely audible. Yet, the act of realizing the presence of such a language enables Ovid to begin an irrevocable process of transformation. At this point, Malouf releases his most startling revelation: Ovid, no longer an exile from the Latin tongue, now finds himself exiled from the language of the universe itself. Latin which can speak of all known things, cannot speak of this primordial infinity. As a language of distinctions, definitions and

categories of separation, it cannot follow Ovid across the boundary into a totally metamorphosed, transformed universe.

A complex process of parallels and exchanges runs through An Imaginary Life, each move of circumstance or form makes vivid the way in which otherness and meaning are connected. When the Child registers his terrified reaction to the prospect of winter confinement, Ovid suddenly realizes the extent of the Child's complete separation from society. The Child's exile from his realm of the natural parallels Ovid's own original state of exile as a child. The recognition of shared exiles is sharp and painfully clear. Ovid too, like Augustus, is the perpetrator of exile. In his fifth and final 'winter dream' the bond between Ovid and the Child is solidified. The baleful nature of the connection is emphasized when the Child, in a fit of fever, utters his first word of human speech. The sounds Ovid spoke in his dreams echoed the words of the Child's delirium: and in these unspoken refrains the boundaries between the two of them, old and young, civilized and savage, are overcome. The shared word becomes both speech and the echo of some more primal and essential knowledge. At the precise moment when the Child is brought to the boundaries of the human, Ovid moves to the boundaries of the natural, beginning final stages of his transformation.

The intersection of human and natural boundaries occurs in a period of illness during which, in succession, the Child,

Lullo and Ryzak are possessed by a fever. Ovid and the Child's border crossing of language is reflected in the series of events which ultimately necessitate their flight from Tomis. Initially, the Child falls ill. When he recovers, Lullo, his Getaean counterpart, becomes ill: this, in turn, results in the death of Ryzak. The fever signifies the process of transformation - a process masked by the fear of the unknown and the power of superstition. For the old woman, the companion of the mysteries of sex and death, the fever is the result of the visitation of an evil animal spirit, capable of possession and associated with the Child. No longer protected by Ryzak against the malevolent influences of the old woman, Ovid and the Child are forced to flee Tomis. Their escape is made under the cover of the death ritual in which Ryzak's spirit is beaten from his body, and accompanied by the howls of mourning. In this sequence of events, forms mirror forms. The near death of Lullo reflects the Child's recovery. Ryzak's death parallels the death of Ovid's former socially defined existence. The escape of Ovid and the Child plays out, on the physical plane, the mystical journey of Ryzak's soul and their own shared journey through the 'winter dream'. The closing sequences of An Imaginary Life mirror and repeat themes and actions from Ovid's former life (Heseltine, 38). Thus, Ovid's exile becomes a journey of (re)discovery in which beginnings become endings and distinctions between past and

present, real and unreal, memory and imagination dissipate to the point at which difference becomes identity.

V. Fire and Water

Ovid and the Child's escape from Tomis occurs within this transformed reality. The landscape, formerly incomprehensible, becomes legible and comprehensible, overflows with meaning. In this process the river Ister is represented as the final boundary between the unknown and the known:

I am at last to actual Is-ter. Is-ter.

It has been there always, somehow waiting,
even as my eye noted it on maps, as the
final boundary of my life waiting to be
crossed, and patient year after year for
my arrival...I am the border beyond which
you must go if you are to find your true
life, your true death at last (AIL 136).

Landscape, the river, speaks as the voice of revelation. Ovid, like the Child, can now read the universe. There are no more borders. The shore of the river is a wake of dreams; in this new existence there is no need for distinctive contrasts like dream and reality. As terms and as conditions of existence items have been transcended; all forms merge into one. To get to here, for Ovid, means sending his civil and social self to meet the "otherness" of the Child, a timeless,

natural otherness which transcends society, language, culture.
The merging of this self and that other is the final
metamorphosis:

He is walking on the water's light. And
as I watch, he takes the first step off
it, moving slowly away now into the deepest
distance, above the earth, above the
water on air. It is summer. It is spring.
I am immeasurably, unbearably happy. I am
three years old. I am sixty. I am six.
I am there (AIL 152).

Ovid's death completes his metamorphosis. His death is a very
Christian death, paganized; transcendentalized, the physical
dies, not the self (soul), which becomes part of a universe in
which neither death nor life, as we know them, hold any
significance.

In the final sequence, terms echo forms; endings
return, remember, re-imagine beginnings:

The child is there. I am three or four
years old. It is late summer. It is spring.
I am six. I am eight. the child is always
the same age. We speak to one another.
but in a tongue of our own devising (AIL 9).

All of Ovid's memories of his childhood encounters with the
Child come flooding back at the time of his death:

Strange to look back on the enormous

landscape we have struggled across all
these weeks, across the sea, across my
life in Rome, across my childhood, to
observe how clearly the footprints lead
to this place and no other. They shine
in my head, all those steps. I can,
in my mind, follow them back, feeling
myself with each step restored, diminished,
till I come to the ground of earliest
memories again,It is spring. It is
summer. I am three years old. I am sixty.

The Child is there (AIL 151).

Like a prayer Ovid repeats that the Child is either here or
there, depending upon whether he is recalling the past or the
present. Place, time and the distance between the image and
the word, no longer confined to a limited horizon, recover
meaning in the spaces of silence, beyond the physical
realities of mind and body.

NOTES

CHAPTER TWO

We Live As We Dream

¹ Ovidius Naso, P., Tristia, trans. L.R. Lind (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1975) 39. Many theories have been advanced in an effort to explain the reason(s) for Ovid's exile. The range of speculation centres around the two words Ovid uses to refer to his disgrace: carmen et error (Tristia II.207). The possible explanations are collected and evaluated by John C. Thibault in The Mystery of Ovid's Exile. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1964). For a brief account of these possible explanations see J. R. Lind, introduction, Ovid: Tristia (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1975) x-xi.

² AIL 153-154. For a more detailed examination of the phenomenon of "wild children" see, Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, The Wild Boy of Aveyron, trans. George and Muriel Humphrey (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962).

CHAPTER THREE

Solitude Standing: Memory, History and Self in The Expedition to the Baobab Tree.

Let us look at the individual African slave. I say individual deliberately though this is an obviously absurd label to apply to the persons of slaves in their binding historical context. But since their arrival in the Americas bred a new and painful obscure isolation (which is difficult to penetrate in any other terms but a free conceptual imagination) one may perhaps dream to visualize the suffering and original grassroots of individuality....He (the problematic slave) found himself spiritually alone since he worked side by side with others who spoke different dialects. The creative human consolation...lies in the search for a kind of inward dialogue and space when one is deprived of a ready conversational tongue and hackneyed comfortable approach (Harris, 33).

The Expedition to the Baobab Tree is a novel, fragmented in form, which moves continuously on the surfaces and into the depths of South African memory and of history. Stockenström's novel is a language-conscious rendering of a series of remembered images and

events which it layers and fragments into an inset of storied reflection. Each fragment is a piece of a larger fragment, which can be completed only by its retelling in and of the other. These interlocking memory fragments are recounted by a lone narrator and, although retold from the perspective of a single eye/I, they incorporate a larger frame of reference which includes not only personal recollections, but those of whole a culture as well. Stockenström uses the figure of an expedition to frame her story; it becomes the literary frame on which the other stories are hung. But it is really only a horizon of reference, there as an archetypal, background imperial fiction, an image separated from its reality as a once 'real' image. The internal narratives function within the frame as intertextual memories. Stockenström uses her over-frame of the expedition to examine the relation between personal recollection and historically determined memory. This juxtaposition of personal memory and received social-historical recollection in the novel focuses attention on how language operates in the text and the way memory, for an individual, has to function inside the different conventions and codes of language and assumptions of a dominant white, South African society.

In The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, Wilma Stockenström set out to explore the linguistic and ideological connection between social/historical reality and the representation of self. For her, writing is an expression of a cultural consciousness at the same time that it is an act of social examination. Writing fiction

gives her the means by which she can question the whole problem of social alienation and its binding historical contexts. In this novel, Stockenström confronted the very complex relationship, in contemporary South Africa, between the writing subject and the problems of race and gender. Her writing often presents itself as a substitute for something beyond it, a counter-collection of signs and counters capable of revealing meaning differently in different contexts. At other times, it expresses itself as an activity in and of itself, a closed structure of self-reference (Minh-ha, 21). The Expedition to the Baobab Tree acknowledges these two aspects as mutually connected elements in its colonized written landscape. Her fiction weaves its language into a multi-layered web of cultural fictions - myths, narratives, cosmographies - which outline meaning and determine the forms of representation. In Stockenström's text, her self and her language are simultaneous - that self being characterized by the socio-historical and cultural constraints of her received language. She is acutely sensitive to the given cultural context, to that dense web of meaning, which always underlies linguistic and ideological representations of the self. However, when this cultural context is transformed by Stockenström into an historical/mythological fiction, it gets transposed into an activity of imaginative writing: offering an opening from which a new self can emerge. In The Expedition to the Baobab Tree an inner world of subjective experience gains primacy over the outer world of socio-historical reality, although both, in the novel, co-exist as territories of memory.

For Stockenström, memory is both personal and collective, both aspects operating within a shared frame of linguistic and imagistic reference. As a white South African, Stockenström's collective memory is affiliated with a white historical narrative which, as the dominant Afrikaner nationalist cultural narrative, justifies the oppressive social conditions which prevail in contemporary South Africa. Stockenström's personal memory could have adhered to this, the historical narrative, or it could have brought to bear a contradictory narrative on the present. It chose the latter. The tension that always exists between the personal and the collective memory foregrounds the intertextual nature of all memory by constantly calling attention to its place within the system of reference.

For Stockenström, those personal and literary tensions reflected an inter-relation between her subjective experience and the inscription of her self, as writing subject, in the text. This textualized representation of her self sharpened the tension between her personal and collective memory. This personal probing of her own existence within white South African realities became a means of examining her own existence as a social phenomenon. In The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, the inner experiences of the narrator and of Stockenström herself worked to unite personal and external realities in an effort to retrieve through memory the full story of what, for both of them, were anonymous, subordinated lives. Thus the act of recollection became, at any given moment, a gathering together of the images and experiences which spoke to

an extension of a self reconstituted in the shape and integrity of its own history. Stockenström's novel incorporated history into the realm of the subjective, and in doing this established the project of the text to be one of self-conscious construction. Her concern with self - personal, textual, other - therefore, operated both inside and outside the "outer world" of social/historical reality as well as the "inner world" of subjective experience (Armstrong, 240). Stockenström worked with the notion of a textual self functioning as an historical subject, writing into and writing from that point where the intersection of selves and histories intersect. As a literary process this involved a linguistic and ideologically informed sense of her self as an historically mediated subject.

On the surface of the novel, then, memory and history exclude each other. History here speaks for white South Africans, validated by their own cultural narrative which, for them, defines what was in fact reality. This account is backed-up by the official documents and artifacts of those who control the infrastructures of power in South Africa. Official history everywhere silences and un-names the disenfranchised: women, children, workers and strangers. History, above all in South Africa, favours the chosen class, the ruling gender, the dominant race with a place and a name within the discourse of power. Those who name decide how the past will be spoken of and whose history will be preserved. They offer the possibility of a shared past, a past from which specific groups and persons will be absent. The

novel can be a praise-poem to that power, but it may also be a reservoir of memory for those who do not live in the confines of its dominant language/history. The empowered, not surprisingly, are unlikely to see the limits of their world as limits, which confine their visible reality to the confines of their particular cultural compact.

In his essay "Idleness in South Africa," J. M. Coetzee - who translated The Expedition to the Baobab Tree from Afrikaans into English - described the way differences between the Khoi (Hottentot) and the European in the eighteenth century came to be "perceived and conceived within a framework of sameness" (Coetzee, 13). Coetzee feels that this notion of difference, which was based upon a framework of cultural sameness assumes, that "the categories and subcategories of this framework will constitute sameness extending across all societies" (Coetzee, 13). In my view, the legacy of cultural imperialism in South Africa extended this framework of assumed sameness into a brutal system of segregation based on difference. As a consequence, the black African, who cannot adhere to this signified sameness, gets legislated into a reality constructed on racial difference - apartheid. The Afrikaner, in this scheme, perceives the African as Other. The Afrikaner standing before any object, before the exterior world, before the Black African, confronts something which exists outside of any notion s/he has of sameness. The Other thus becomes a means to an ends, something to be appropriated and used (Senghor, 12-13). There are often 'negative' as well as 'positive' tones to these

uses. In an effort to retain the values inherent in the co-option to sameness, the European, following the benign 'positive' path, invests the Other with an aura of desire, conferring upon it a degree of "authenticity". Within this assumption of sameness, authenticity represents, for certain Europeans and white South Africans, the lost origin of an African culture displaced by the encroachment of Western values. In the hands of the European of existentialist inclination, authenticity in this aspect operates as a tool of oppression, even though it may masquerade as cross-cultural understanding. By deflecting the attention of the Other (Blacks, Natives, Women) from the alleged source of their identity, the reality of their present oppression is down-played in the name of "their" cultural past. The Other takes on the status of an endangered species, safely preserved in an anthropological zoo.

South Africa is a patriarchal/imperialist/racist state. To those with voice and power in that state, the voiceless and the powerless can be addressed only as Other. A large question arises at this point: can a self, anyone's self, black or white, survive beneath the weight of such brutal, externally imposed definitions? The solitude of isolation is one survival feature often adopted in these circumstances. But this is elusive as a strategy as long as one remains confined to plantation, ghetto, township, or more generically in the master's house (Minh-ha, 80). One may have illusions of being free but these circumstances enforce the effacement of such a detached self allowing only for that mode of existence that a patriarchal/imperialist/racist state tolerates.

In white South Africa, the policy of separate development created a system of partition mapping into law solitudes of collective and private existence. The discourse of racism employed under apartheid supports the view of segregation as a natural law of origin. Afrikaner self-explanation offered the ascriptions of blood, birth, colour to establish a naturalist and often creationist discourse to explain the difference between themselves and black South Africans (Gates, 331) taking their support from any racist source available to them:

The old predatory instinct [has] subserved civilization...by clearing the earth of inferior races of men," wrote Herbert Spencer in 1851. "No woolly-haired nation has ever had an important 'history'," wrote Ernst Haeckel in 1873...."The Griqua type of half-caste...is lower than the Kaffir," wrote Sarah Gertrude Millin in 1926 (Coetzee, 137).

Although these explicitly racist judgements may no longer be expressed this crudely in South Africa today, their underlying assumptions were often embedded into even the most everyday human transactions. Blood. Birth. Colour. This naturalist/creationist trinity of origin underwrites the South African historical and cultural narrative. This discourse of racism, which flows into and flows out of Coetzee's framework of sameness, will not easily tolerate a world-view hostile to its essential paradigm.

The unusual feature of The Expedition to the Baobab Tree is

that it shows a white South African novelist attempting to write her way out of these paradigms, while remaining conscious, all the time, of their contextualizing force. To get outside of these historical and cultural confinements she was obliged first to locate the territory from which she spoke/wrote. In that landscape of differences, which make up South Africa, she could find no neutral ground: entrenched within her every word, image and gesture, she was confronted by an endless chain of unwanted historical and cultural signification. The space from which she sought to speak was not fixed, un-mediated or easily available; it was a constantly shifting space within a terrain of displacement, negativity and marginality. This created difficulties and opportunities for a white, Afrikaner woman choosing to write in the voice of a black female slave and using this character to question the cultural/historical underpinnings of Afrikaans literature and of an Afrikaner nationalist state. Her anonymous, fictional slave-woman had to become a vehicle for a doubly questioning voice in a state where such voices, existences, questions were silenced. Stockenström was an insider by race and social position, an outsider by gender and marginal place within the hierarchy of power. Stockenström's insider/outsider status created a critical distance between her inner experience as a writer and her culturally-determined identity as a person inflicted and privileged with a doubled consciousness. In "For the Etruscans", Rachel Blau DuPlessis, the feminist scholar, says that a doubled consciousness of this kind is often reflected in the form of

women's writing - a form which (re)produces "this incessant critical splitting motion" incorporating "contradiction and nonlinear movement in the heart of the text." ¹ For Stockenström, this notion of a doubled consciousness became her way of contextualizing her own textual attempt to recover an authentic language of a liberated and fully expressive self in an excessively difficult set of circumstances.

This, then, was why The Expedition to the Baobab Tree as a novel became a continuous act of exploring and telling, whose images - lodged in complex, doubled memories - get retold in an effort, on the part of both the narrator and the author, to recover the full story of generations of denied, suppressed, black, anonymous lives. Stockenström, as an Afrikaner novelist, had to capture this constructed identity in its fluid process of textual formation, in which the images of the book surface from the memory of the narrator into language and so get transformed by Stockenström's astute orchestration of inner and historical/cultural contexts. Stockenström, in my view, turned inward upon herself to construct these words/images/contexts, eventually moving outward from that exploration to connect up with the public/historical manifestations of their content. The voice of the novel tracks these memories through a series of other memory-images all of which cohere to form representations, reclamations of past experience. What the reader feels is often difficult to distinguish from the image itself or the meaning that gets attached to it as chronological pattern or causal connection.

For example, there is a scene in which the narrator catalogues her artifacts, which include beads. Stockenström places the beads and the narrator's desire for order into her recollections in the following way:

That was the time before the beads. The time
after the beads can be handled more
easily (7).

They lay on my palm, two black and one
green. I carried the useless discovery
to the tree (12).

Here now, the little beads that do not
require imagining and of a kind that I
used to see hanging around the necks of
and wrists of men and women. Once
they used to be accepted in exchange
for things, just as I was accepted in
exchange for something (13).

The beads here are external symbols of an inner process, one with its own chain of emotional signification. In the frameless moment of these memory images, thoughts and things no longer exist as separate categories for encoding remembered or present experiences. They represent, instead, the multiplicity of forms into which imagistic/linguistic significance can fragment and the possibilities of a new coherence. The memory, a limitless landscape of images, becomes the site of the mind's struggle against the loss of identity and the power of forgetting.

The Expedition to the Baobab Tree moves in two directions: outward from the centre of imposed collective memory, inwards as a spiralling into the centre of subjective, not fully apprehended, memory. The play between inner and external representation undermines the notion of sameness/difference, and does so by allowing resonances from within suppressed, black, collective memories to elude the adverse white representations. In the novel, the expedition as over-frame and figure becomes the means by which Stockenström was able to touch these circles of memory. The expedition to the interior of the continent becomes then, for Stockenström, a very important journey into the interior of the collective conscious/unconscious memories of both races. The white collective would see such an expedition as the re-enactment of their own historical narrative, one confirming and justifying their right to power. For the black collective, remembering the expedition returns their fragmented, silenced past condensed and articulate in the life of a single slave-woman. As a stratagem of recollection, the over-frame as a mobile, ever-present fiction, enabled Stockenström to differentiate different pasts and make available different points and different moments in time for idealized black-white South African readers.

The narrator's discontinuous, fragmented account of her life is, appropriately enough, told orally. Her desire to write, and her inability to do so, suggests that there are absences in her story - gaps which can not be spoken of between the experience and the telling:

If I could write, I would take up a porcupine quill...for I have so much to tell of a trip to a new horizon that became an expedition to a tree...the poetic history of a crazy eagerness that was finally all we could cling to, stripped of material things and emaciated and tired to death of ourselves in the endeavour that transported us along, the ballast of the past. (30)

What is being told by whom, to whom, for whom ? The story of the expedition is the account of the ill-fated explorers of the novel, as well as being part of the story of a larger history in which it and they are only fragments. The sole, suggestive certainty provided by the novel is that, at some point, all the stories meet to produce the central and increasingly centring narrative of the book, the narrator's expedition to the baobab tree. How did Stockenström thread her way back to this image/myth of expedition and baobab tree, such that she felt free to re-create the times and spaces of South Africa through the memory and subjectivity of a fictional, anonymous slave-woman ?

One way, I feel, was by working with the distinction that Trinh T. Minh-ha makes between history and story. In the beginning, both have been the same for all societies, both acting as the memory-bank of cultural knowledge. "Advanced," industrial, commercial societies, like those of the West, begin to make distinctions which pull the domain of story apart from that of

history. History becomes itself by accumulating factual evidence/proofs of its own knowable past. History further detaches itself from story by the way it takes the past as an object to be contemplated and researched, a mass of evidences in which the truth lies dormant, waiting to be uncovered (Minh-ha, 119-121). The cultures of the past become distinct blocks in time and space, with continuity made possible by historical knowledge. This identifying of fixed and usable 'true' pasts enables historians, in the eyes of their own cultures, to separate facts and fictions - history and story. The manipulation and appropriation of the past in the name of scientific history established history as the recorder of what happened. Story gets relegated to retelling the fictive past of the Other. Ironically, there are advantages to this 'disadvantage':

What happens at the historical moment when the voiceless and powerless seek to unravel their riddle? (For Caliban does seize his voice, reject the magician of civilization in Césaire's writing of Shakespeare's Tempest.)

ANS: We are cutting into the deep heart of the cultural compacts. They have already lost our allegiance. Something is finished (DuPlessis, 4).

DuPlessis is right. Story becomes available to the colonized as a counter-historical weapon. Stockenström, in the act of telling the story of the slave-woman, in this way, managed to cut into the deepest heart of the Afrikaner cultural compact,

confronting it as "the ineffable, the unspeakable thing for which 'violence' is our helplessly inadequate word" (Deane, 182). At the centre of the deepest cultural compact in South Africa lies the violence of slavery, conquest and exploitation. Stockenström, in her novel, projects this violence as a morality play in which un-named characters, both victimizers and victims, speak to and for an entire body of un-named, silent and spoken others. Similarly, the events of the novel signify in excess of what they mean in their own specific context eventually encompassing entire histories of oppression and brutality. In her morality fiction, Stockenström is able to deconstruct that master/slave convention permeating the whole of South African history and does so by tracking it through the perspective of the narrator's life. The master/slave dimension, which embraces everyone and everything in The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, ensures that the notion of slavery remains everywhere the dominant point of reference. Stockenström roots these meanings into the very core of South African history, without being averse to the implications for other nation-states locked similarly into the same kind of history of domination. She blurs the line between fact and fiction, history and story deliberately giving to her un-naming/re-naming of 'history' (in the name of the stories of DuPlessis and Trinh T. Minh-ha) a sustained intensity.

The history/story distinction and the way she plays the second term against the first is one explanation for the success of the expedition and baobab tree image/myth. But there is, I think, another interesting way Stockenström weaves her way through the

history/counter-history dimension of the South African situation as she renders it. She manages to tie the notion of the body and that of history together, projecting the body of the slave-narrator in history (slaves as historical object/reality) into the body of that slave as history itself, as her history. Her story and the language of history, get translated into the language of the body. The language of this body speaks to her subjective experiences, the thoughts, memories, conceptions of self that constitute her individual consciousness of her existence. The language of history and the language of the body are, for the narrator, a single language - all she has to go on is her body. What it is, what it might have been, what it could be. The narrator's life as a slave, as a possession becomes an historized microcosm of other unrecorded and dispossessed lives:

I had already tried to imagine a kind
of existence in which I was not a possession,
but it did not come easily to me. What would
have become of me in the land of my origin?
Would I, for example, have walked, sat,
stood differently? (55)

Her ability to conceive of an alternative existence, one in which she is mother, wife, grandmother, admits into her captivity the possibility of a different personal history. These possibilities, as identities, certainly could not be accommodated within the historical narrative of her masters. In this meditative way, her life and its imagined alternatives becomes the unwritten record of

a dispossessed people. The slave-woman, as the text of a whole cultural history, re-collects her memories, remembers her body back into her own control, her own life. This is the first step in her expedition to her baobab tree. How does Stockenström trace these body-steps back to that past, which becomes, in the end, all our beginnings ?

In The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, the notion of slavery dominates the territory of memory. Stockenström suggests that her own release, as well as the narrator's, from slavery obliges her to deconstruct the master/slave narrative and to reconstruct an alternative history from an entirely new perspective - black, female genesis. In her effort to re-create the whole - an unwritten, undifferentiated dimension - of South African history out of the territory of her memory, Stockenström first had to confront the historical reality of actual slavery and its legacy in contemporary South Africa. Slavery was a well-documented fact. In 1719, at the Bay of Natal, Captain Robert Drury recorded that:

[he had] traded for slaves with large
brass rings or rather collars and several
other commodities. In a fortnight we purchased

74 boys and girls (Oxford History of South Africa, 121).

A document like this locates the slavery which underlies the realities of contemporary South Africa. In The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, Stockenström translated the anonymity of unrecorded numbers and ill-recorded, but pervasive facts into the specific experience of the narrator - the past takes on the face of a black

slave-woman. All the faceless captors and owners of all the slaves of South African history are given fictional, type-form in the narrator's series of un-named masters; they become stand-ins characteristics of an established slave-culture. Likewise, the narrator herself stands in for all her fellow-slaves of the present and the past. For Stockenström, the narrator's three owners become her way of contextualizing aspects of the history of slavery in South Africa and of deconstructing the image/myth of the expedition. In the novel, the body of the narrator, her story, her history, carry the history/story of a black collective memory.

The narrator was purchased by her first owner as a play thing: "He bought the very youngest. He broke the soft membrane like a blister" (41). She is sold again when she is no longer desirable, "Was sold second-hand. I was a damaged plaything" (42). The narrator's second master, the Spice-Merchant, acquires her not for sexual purposes but for labour. The physical brutality of the Spice-Merchant reveals the human horrors of slavery:

Always still. Frightened mice in the middle
of a great roaring, that was what we were,
the subordinates of the system, apparently
docile, our children taken away from us and
sold while still infants, while our bodies
still hungered for them, our past a past of
pitiless mistreatment or the sarcasm of gifts.
our present without prospect. We were all one
woman, interchangeable, exchangeable....Once someone

tried to run away. She was caught and her feet chopped off. A second time someone tried. She got away. The eunuchs deserted regularly (24).

Under the gaze of the third owner the narrator became no longer a labourer or plaything, but an object valued for her beauty and grace. Initially, the narrator took pleasure in her new existence:

Now for the first time I discovered beauty, my own....It was almost as if I were learning again to talk. I occupied myself in refined tasks like complicated embroidery, which was taught to me by older slave-women, and the preparation of dishes for a banquet for a room full of visitors, and the tasteful serving thereof. In the last named I excelled (28).

Above all I learned to find pleasure in how to look desirable and in the power it was obviously supposed I could exercise to my own advantage in my benefactor-owner's room (28-29).

In her benefactor's house the narrator assumed an almost individual existence, "a new time of life for me here in the looser relationship in which I now lived and in which my talents dared to unfold and there was little to restrict me" - she can almost believe that she is not a slave (29). However, the narrator was

unable to assume an identity other than that of a slave - she remains defined by her own externally imposed identity.

The critical split between inner experience and externally imposed identity is reflected in the narrator's reaction to the arrival of the slave procession. The narrator watches daily for the arrival of this procession and wills herself not to look at it. The spectacle of the arriving slaves is a literal playing-out of images from her own memory. The arrival of the slaves tears the veil away from her present illusion, revealing the horror and the sorrow of her past and present. Although she wants to be different from the chained figures, she cannot avert her eyes from her "fellows in fate", nor from her own past which she sees reflected in their eyes. The narrator tells the new slaves her story, but they remain silent, like her own suppressed memory of origin. Her story is the "memory of a journey with fear at the starting point and fear at the end point" (35). She is unable to reconstruct her own past from these ritual arrivals. The silence of the newly-arrived slaves and her own inability to communicate with them denies her the story of her own history. The silence condemns her to an unofficial existence, leaving her without an identity beyond that of a slave. She can derive only scant facts and those that could represent a possible link to her 'real' past remain silent. Like the hammerhead shark stranded and dying/dead on the beach, the narrator suffers in an unarticulated silence. She turns away from fellow slaves (the damned): weeps for and buries the shark; and returns to her illusory existence as "the head slave-girl of the

richest man here" (36).

The expedition to the interior of the continent is motivated by the desire for and the dream of conquest: it echoes the sentiments of those actual explorers who sought to discover a route to the Orient, the Northwest Passage, and to name these territories into their own histories. In their language the uncharted interior of the continent was a vast unknown landscape needing to be named and known. Riches, power and the dream of exploration/exploitation motivated the expedition of the eldest son and the Stranger:

Fancy and the profit motive. Childish dreams.

Longing for the faraway. Elaborate estimates.

A rebellious streak. Perhaps the last....So.

For that reason we departed for the frontiers
of the spirit (60).

The expedition, for the narrator, becomes one into the frontiers of the self. For the eldest son and the Stranger the expedition takes place solely in terms of physical experience, the land is merely unoccupied space waiting to be claimed in the name of profit.

The intellectualized expedition for profit and glory collapses in upon itself unable to withstand its own fear of the unknown and the unspoken. Outside of the familiar elements which give meaning to order, rationality, and logic the forces of civilization cross the boundaries separating the known from the unknown and meaning from meaninglessness. In the wake of this disorientation, things fall apart - slaves and cattle disappear and there are signs of violence:

The first quarrel between the leaders of the expedition resulted in an uneasy silence. A momentary display of indignation, a knife grinding of reproaches....neither dared to show to the other that he felt guilty and was at least in part to blame for what happened. Certainly both came from the coast, one being from a coastal city and the other a voyager and neither a professional traveller, and they were probably equally ignorant about travel in the interior, though in theory equally interested in it (69-70).

The expedition slowly collapses into ruin - leaders and followers are reduced to parodies of themselves eating antelope struck by lightning and carved with a jewelled dagger - because the leaders insist upon adhering to the structures of culture, to what they know theoretically to be 'true.'

In the text, Stockenstrom juxtaposes the forces of culture and nature - one form deconstructs the other. The first argument between the stranger and the eldest son signifies the break down of the borders separating culture and nature. The theoretical discussions of the two leaders on the topic of slavery resurfaces in the narrator's memory as her fear of the landscape in which they find themselves. The crossing of the mountains is possible only through the pass used as a slave route. Although the narrator has no memory of her own passage through the mountains, the frames of

reference impinge upon each other - earlier discussions, previous journeys and the present moment of collapse and fear merges into a composite memory of both past and present.

The collapse of the expedition traces the process of the break-down of culture in the landscape of the Other. In the early stages of the expedition the leaders refuse to communicate with those who live in the interior and therefore lose a potential source of knowledge. The leaders refuse to communicate with the people of the interior out of imperial pride. The basic elements of survival get lost beneath a veneer of cultural supremacy. As an exercise of intellectual pride couched in terms of the philosophical/ideological conflict between culture and nature and also in terms of the submission of will to fate, the expedition comes to an ironic end: the Stranger is consumed by a crocodile:

Come to his end in the belly of a reptile.

There are times when I really can't help
laughing at it....One is so used to regarding
other inhabitants of the earth as food, to
accepting them, as it were, as self-evident
sources of food, and to putting whatever
is edible in service of one's digestion,
to raising the ingestion of food to an art...
to making a huge fuss of a meal and to developing
customs around it that ossify into rituals,
to making a whole rigamarole of the utterly
natural bodily function of eating - one is

so used to it that it seems terribly funny
 when other-consuming man is himself eaten.
 The untouchably mighty, revealed to be
 nothing but food... (63).

The Stranger is destroyed by the force his power is supposed to have controlled. The crocodile and the slaves become essential symbols of that otherness and nature against which culture and the rule of law was defined.

The image/myth of the expedition is weighted down with the same kind of historical and moral weight as was the notion of slavery. The historical justification of the right to power employed by the white minority in South Africa gets re-enacted in the form of the reaction of the expedition to the cultural signs of the people of the interior. The eldest son and the Stranger see only the evidences of a primitive culture. The writings on the cave wall are, to them, scribblings - signs to be laughed at and disregarded:

The stranger complained about the lack
 of finish and the obvious absence of
 artistic rules in these clumsy attempts.
 Obviously backward painters from a backward
 society. Totally amateurish. The work of
 adult children (87).

These markings are not art and consequently cannot have value - "It has nothing to do with art. It records nothing, it does not mean to communicate anything, or to satisfy aesthetically. It is

functionless" (88). The stranger tries to erase them, a reaction carrying the assumptions of fear and power associated with slavery.

For the narrator these markings are not dead; they are, for her, living echoes of something beyond the border time of European historical domination. As the voice of an enslaved black, woman, the narrator becomes the spokeswoman of all silenced civilizations of Africa, giving them, in her act of speaking, an infinite presence:

I heard myself prophesy feverishly of
languages that yet slept, of strange
trees that would one day march through
valleys and over hills and along the mountain-
sides. I prophesied that huge grey break-
waters would be thrown against the sea...
and when it was all out of me, when all
the fibrous sounds were off my tongue,
I felt as if something had been gnawing
at me, as if I had been gnawed full of
holes and no longer obstructed the wind
and had become without resistance (88-89).

The imposed history, in which the presence of the narrator has been confined to specific contexts, becomes meaningless in the face of this new context. Memory/history, fact and fiction enter her unarticulated vision.

From the violence of cultural (mis)representation the text moves to the physical reality of the implementation of ideological

values. The war between the San (bushmen) and their unidentified enemies carries the weight of historical truth:

Between 1715 and 1862 the hunters [San] were hunted, almost as they themselves hunted animals,and thousands were killed. They fought back furiously and tenaciously: there were no signs among the San of Camdeboo, Sneeuberg and Tarka of that 'timidity' before other peoples which the !Kung manifest. Marais assembles the evidence of the bitter warfare. What we do not know is what portion of the total population of the hunters the three or four thousand certainly killed represented (Oxford History of South Africa, 71).

The historical reality of the extermination of the indigenous population of South Africa is given form in the text. The narrator witnesses the slaughter of the San. The carnage, horror and human ugliness came through the text:

I forgot about the stench and the flies and the vultures watching the spectacle from the trees and the horrible appearance of human beings destroyed, and searched over and over all around the tree as far as there was anything to be seen that looked like a human figure, human remnant, and I arrived at an ant heap and again heard a groan (108).

The groan which the narrator hears echoes the idle dinner-table banter of the Stranger - "As calm and refined as he sat there talking, so barbaric the naked language he used. Chop, stab, mutilate, kick, stalk" (104). The notion of war becomes for the narrator a reality in which she is left alone in her baobab. The narrator's solitude results from the playing-out of a chain of historical signification in which the end result of slavery and cultural genocide is total destruction. In The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, what emerges from destruction is the possibility of a new telling of a different beginning.

The image/myth of the expedition ends with the narrator's arrival at the baobab tree. At this point in the novel, the narrator, like Stockenström, has shed the weight of externally imposed identity and can no longer be defined in terms of the historical reality of slavery - she has arrived at her destination. The territory of memory shifts becoming the personalized time and space of the narrator's own expedition:

The river runs towards where the sun
and moon rise, towards where I once began
to travel, towards the sea of the city from
which we departed in search of a city on the
sea at the other margin of the world.

I long for nothing any more (110).

The baobab tree becomes the site where memories, collective/subjective, white/black, collapse in upon themselves and the borders separating history from story and beginning from end

are transcended. The arrival of the narrator at the baobab tree is the end of the beginning and the beginning of the beginning. At this centre-point beginnings and endings meet and it is from this still-point that history may begin again. All previous forms have fallen away:

Let them fall where they will and lie
and never rust. I was really a mistress
and mother and goddess. Enough to make
you laugh (111).

Stockenström has gone back to the very beginning, to an origin which is African, black and female. Thus, the narrator in her baobab remembers herself to herself, "...I can slip back into a tree-trunk and laugh to myself" (7) and remembers a new beginning from the end of her expedition, "I fold my wings" (111).

NOTES

CHAPTER THREE

Solitude Standing

¹ See Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "For the Etruscans," The Pink Guitar: Writing as a Feminist Practice (New York and London: Rouledge, 1990) 16, for the contextual relation between negritude, women's aesthetic practices and language within nonhegemonic groups.

CHAPTER FOUR

Improvisation Number One

I. The Beautiful Bog

[T]he place in myself where words have authority,
some true and untouched place that does not mutter
what has been said before...and make in the very
telling a proof of authenticity (Sternburg, 198).

Beginning; a dream of origin and of loss; beginning: a desire for knowledge of an origin which is known only through loss. It is in language that this loss is spoken of, through forms which are echoes of origin, not signs. Language enables loss, as an absence of origin, to become present. In language used in this way, meaning gets displaced by the very form which seeks to express it. Language establishes the present at the same time that the features of loss, absence, memory built into it reflexively, disestablishes that present as a hegemonic moment. The act of telling, the (un)speaking of language, engages the endless play of difference inherent in language. In the act of telling, words become signals and counters, and like a landscape, these linguistic contours are

not fixed but continually changing, thereby subverting the notion of a totalizing narrative. The shifting unstable ground of difference, the uncertain space of the beautiful bog, becomes the space from which I/you/we speak. Difference is not only apparent on the surface of language - the movement between forms and surfaces - but between silences, tones and familiar echoes (Minh-ha, ii). It is this difference, the multiplicities of language, which holds us (the possessors of an un-desired and un-recognizable gift) together. Paradoxically, it is also difference which separates us from ourselves and from the dream of origin. There exists no shared origin, only a shared loss, spoken of in fractured and displaced words. In the act of telling, the possibility of meaning resides in a particular voice in a specific moment in time; yet, the voice and its moment in time are constantly moving; floating between the content of the words and the context of utterance.

The notion of difference is paradoxical, offering unity and separation for the story and the teller. The paradox of difference evokes the lethal quality of the gift, the urge to create wholeness by denying the simultaneity of terms. This is the ritual appeasement of orthodoxy - linearity, clarity and totality. If one moves outside of orthodoxy, the paradox of difference becomes "a question of fragmenting so as to decentralize instead of dividing so as to conquer" (Minh-ha, 86). A decentralized non-totalizing notion of difference becomes a means of constantly displacing the dualism to which

analytical thinking is often subjected. In this notion of difference, the subject (teller) and the object (story) are not distinct elements joined only under an erasure, but are fragments of a (dis)integrated self. The i/you/me, who does not place anything outside of language, moves towards a point of inclusiveness where language is all and no-thing.

For writing, like a game that defies its own rules, is an on going practice that may be said to be concerned, not with inserting a "me" into language, but with creating an opening where the "me" disappears while "I" endlessly come and go, as the nature of language requires (Minh-ha, 86).

I/i open my mouth to speak, confront the blank page and the words, which are not mine, any more than i am I. The fragmented teller - the doubled 'I' speaks from one mouth, but what is told is not the same. The doubled I/i is constructed and spoken of as equal fragments each of which incorporates the other. 'I', the majority, public and impersonal. The form which is indistinguishable among the many. 'i', the minority, private and personal. The form which threatens the given ready-mades by shaping and speaking of a personal identity and private experience. In many cases, emphasis is necessarily placed upon a reversal of the hierarchy implied by the juxtaposition of I/i. However, adhering to this hierarchial inversion merely reverses the order of privilege and the existing duality of I/i remains intact. The hierarchy

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may be inverted but it is not displaced. By resisting dualistic interpretations, the I/i becomes a means of displacing, of destabilizing language and I/i walk on the slippery ground of difference. The doubled I/i defies duality by speaking simultaneously, claiming the right to language and disqualifying this same right. What emerges from this (dis)qualification of both self and language is not a void of silence but a voice which does not make I/i the consequence of language or language the product of the I/i. Within the orthodoxy, this concept of self and language is weighted with a mystical irrationality which problematizes the multiplicity of self (I/i) and of language. The doubled tongue becomes a forked one in utterances which perceive the I/i as valid only in terms of duality and hierarchy. Thought systems which ideologically and linguistically perpetuate duality confirm I/i and language as mutually exclusive, thereby rejecting any notion of mutual generation. We create dualism without recognizing that the silence engendered by the spaces between our words is part of the process of linguistic creation. The written and the silent taken together are one process. Writing without the inclusion of the silent, language without the recognition of the presence of the self, denies the dream of origin and accepts the loss of it as the only reality.

In the act of telling, I/i am inscribed within the text. The presence of I/i within the text destabilizes the objective certainty of the writing because I/i includes the subjective

nature of the writing itself. Writing is a process of sameness/otherness which does not distinguish between the impersonal/personal. There is not a detached objective 'I' which floats above the text nor is there an 'i' which speaks solely from personal experience within the text. Identity and experience merge in a multiplicity of language/tongue which does not separate the 'I' from the 'i'. Writing incorporates, gives a body to, both the subject (I/i who writes) and to the practice of writing itself. Thus the I/i made present in language is not a particular notion of self as an individual, but an I/i which inserts the notion of self into the spaces between linguistic givens. I/i is not the 'me' of the individual writer but the identity and experience of the subject made present in a decentralized notion of language.

In Woman Native Other, Trinh T. Minh-ha's I/i formulation, in a postmodernist dance of articulation with the post-colonial, reveals the (self)conscious presence of the writing/written subject. The doubled existence of I/i embodies (gives a form to) a subject which is simultaneously absent and present within the text. In a patriarchal/racist/imperialist state the voiceless, the powerless are those who do not occupy a self-determined place within the language of power -"Power, as unveiled by numerous contemporary writings, has always inscribed itself in language" (Minh-ha, 52). Those who control language possess the power to determine how those that are silent will be spoken of. Consequently, the powerless,

those outside of the dominant tongue, can only be made present in that language as 'Other' - as that against which the 'Not-Other' is defined. The 'I' becomes the sign for an imposed identity and it is an (I) identity which effaces the presence of the subjective, personal reality of the 'Other. What Trinh T. Minh-ha reveals in her I/i formulation is the doubled existence of those who exist in and write from the occupied territories of language. In the occupied territories, language is "one of the most complex forms of subjugation, being at the same time the locus of power and unconscious servility" (Minh-ha, 52). In order, then, to write into/out of a linguistic landscape in which the 'I' is already named, the written/writing subject must negotiate the space between imposed reality and self-determined knowledge of identity. The I/i formulation does not attempt to close the gap between impersonal (imposed) and personal (self-determined) reality but to make these two realities simultaneously present in the language, thereby revealing the doubled identity of the written/writing subject and the multiplicity of language in which the 'I' can no longer be separated from the 'i'.

Trinh T. Minh-ha's I/i formulation expresses the dualistic relation of the (post)colonial writing/written subject to language. A notion of self which plays between the un-reality of imposed identity and the certainties of inner experience lays bare the space between meaning and experience. For a postcolonial writer/reader language frequently betrays, masks

and/or suppresses the experiences of the other - race, religion, culture, gender - because it lacks a source of shared resonances. To write from the landscape of difference, of otherness, is to move between numerous frames of reference - a kind of exploratory mining of language in an effort to un(dis)cover words/images which address the meaning/experience of otherness. The experience of otherness, of the I/i, assumes different forms in the novels of Malouf and Stockenström. In An Imaginary Life, Ovid's exile to Tomis places him in a cultural, linguistic, and physical landscape which is completely foreign. However, Ovid is not made other to himself - the otherness of the culture in which he finds himself enables him to move into previously inaccessible resonances and imagistic/linguistic landscapes. The experience of exile/otherness does not impose an undesired and foreign identity upon Ovid; instead, this otherness becomes the frame for a poetic transformation - the poet of metamorphosis. By drawing his experiences of otherness into the stable space of a poetic "I", Malouf gives them meaning within a linguistic/imagistic frame in which the secure identity of the self is never questioned. For Stockenström, the I/i formulation expresses not only the otherness of (post)colonial reality, but the shared otherness of gender. The divided existence of women between ideological construction and independent being allows Stockenström (white, South African, woman) to write from the perspective of an

enslaved, black, woman. The real/imagined experience of women's otherness provides Stockenström with resonances, forms and meanings of a shared body of pain and it is this pain which rests at the centre of her novel. Malouf, like the character of Ovid, remains I/I, both inside and outside of the text because the otherness of gender, as inscribed within language, is unproblematic in relation to patriarchal language. The otherness of gender becomes, for Stockenström, a means of examining the multiple presence of the I/i both inside and outside of the text.

I/i dreams and the dream is one of origins. To dream of origins is to dream of the construction of both language and self - the endless process of mutual generation in writing. Writing maps the landscape of loss and fixes forms within a given context. Words, the counters of linguistic process, do not cohere to form a general pattern from which the point of linguistic origin may be derived. This is not a quest for the first sound that became speech, nor is it a search for the first mark scratched upon a cave wall. The tracing of language back to its beginnings is but one aspect of the origin dreamed of in a tongue. What I/i is concerned with is the process of language - the creation of a notion of origin from the dream of loss. The dream which dreams of itself. Language may be perceived as a vast landscape in which words are the forms, the shapes and the markings of the silence which engendered them. This is a real/unreal landscape filled

with fragmented forms which name/un-name their own presence. The shifting presence of linguistic forms reveals the conflictual relation between the desire for absolute forms and the simultaneous rejection of this desire. In his Diary, the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz says that:

The most important, most extreme, and most incurable dispute is that waged in us by two of our most basic strivings: the one that desires form, shape, definition and the other, which protests against shape, and does not want form. Humanity is constructed in such a way that it must define itself and then escape its own definitions. Reality is not something that allows itself to be completely contained in form. Form is not in harmony with the essence of life, but all thought which tries to describe this imperfection also becomes form and thereby confirms only our striving for it (Gombrowicz, 93).

Language is constructed upon this endless play between form and formless. And it is in this shifting landscape of the form(less) that we attempt to locate a linguistic reality but we are destined to fail. According to Gombrowicz, the entire philosophical and ethical dialect of Western culture is agonistic, takes place against something, and does so because of its investment in logos, form, reason, an immense landscape of shapelessness. This is a sphere of incomplete form and value, in which neither meaning nor being is consistent. In

the landscape of the formed/formless, the named and the unnamed, the only reference for language is language itself. The notion of origin cannot transcend language; it is a product of language. Meaning and being, the real and the imaginary refuse language the certainties of form and origin. In this shapeless landscape language agonizes with language, in language claiming the right to language and disqualifying this same right by desiring an origin outside of itself.

Writing takes place in a world which is already speaking, in which speaking takes a distinctive turn. Language, in other words, is already there. The writing/immensity confrontation is a mediated process. Writing, as Gombrowicz suggests, is not a process of abstraction, in which ideas are drawn from either the real or the imaginary, but a process in which ideas are embodied in both the writer and the written - "There are no ideas like embodied ones. There is no word that is not also flesh" (93). For Gombrowicz, the writer and the written are not two distinct entities locked in a forced embrace but a mutually engendered and multiple reality:

We, art, are reality. Art is a fact and not a commentary attached to fact.... We are the word that claims: this hurts me, this intrigues me, I like this, I hate this, I desire this, I don't want this.... We are and must remain persons, our role depends on the fact that the living, human word not stop sounding in a world that is becoming

more and more abstract (86).

The notion that the writer and the word constitute a reality - a reality that is form(less) - collapses the traditional boundaries separating order from chaos, art and life. The co-existing longing for and rejection of form is played out in language. This play occurs within a landscape of constantly shifting linguistic/imagistic forms. Form, suggests Gombrowicz, is both the made differences between entities (colour, race, gender) and the creative space from which these inseparable forms emerge.

Beneath the surfaces in the texts of Trinh T. Minh-ha and Witold Gombrowicz one finds a philosophical/theoretical unease with dualism. However, both writers suggest that the aesthetic practice of writing can/does negotiate its way around dualism. The writer must find a voice, search for a word which will tie/untie the tongue, read/unread the visual and linguistic separations, a voice/a word which will shake the structures of grammar, syntax, form and unearth a new linguistic path (Minh-ha, 20). The landscape of shapelessness is filled with images which like a dense undergrowth of vines and roots catch under foot, forcing i/you/we to concentrate on what lies beneath. Here, on the slippery ground of difference, is the image which speaks in and of a language that does not separate one form from the other. The image is word and flesh; real and imaginary; the product of memory and imagination.

The co-existence of language/image is a play of mirrors - light strikes the surface of one mirror and is reflected into the other, which in turn reflects the light and the play continues. The original moment that the light caught on the surface of the mirrors is insignificant. It is not a question of order or of sources, but of the play of the infinite image. The infinite play of image/language reveals the sameness/otherness of the written - "the written bears the written into infinity" (Minh-ha, 36). Language is embedded within the 'already' and 'not yet' written. Like a dance of divination with the ancestors, language consults the past (other texts) in an effort to create a new text. The written becomes an infinite process of recreation; the body of the word merges with, separates from meaning thereby forming a constantly changing cycle of birth, death, rebirth - the immortal presence/absence of the written. Moving outwards, abstracting from the verbal/nonverbal, as well as the other present and absent contexts from which the written evolves, the possibility of entering into infinite linguistic/imagistic spaces emerges. Language becomes a landscape in which forms are consistent only within a chosen landscape and this landscape is the arena of the I/i where the image is both visual and linguistic.

In defining writing in terms of the image, I/i must recognize that, at times, writing refers to other writing, and that no writing can be free of the second - and third order

memories of other writings. At the same time, writing may be considered as a substitute for something which lies beyond it, something which engages writing as motivated activity; it exists as an activity in its own right outside of any prior finalities (Minh-ha, 21). The image, like the written, can not be defined or resolved by a reference to semiological signs. The relation of the written (language) to the image is parallel to that of the 'I' to the 'i'. In the doubled form of image/language and I/i, forms cohere, interpenetrate one another, thereby entering the spaces between words, between the philosophical and ethical dialectic and between the writing of the self in the guise of the I/i. This coherence, of what may be called the realm of appearance, constitutes a visual/linguistic unity in which the image and the word derive from and form the same language. This language operates in/outside, the flat, bordered horizon in which the visual is perceived of as a series of forms which may be transposed into an equally rational, representational language. The image, read as a linguistic/visual sign allows us/you/me/we to take literally:

what vision teaches us, namely that through it we
come in contact with the sun and the stars, that
we are everywhere all at once and that even our
power to imagine ourselves elsewhere borrows from
vision...vision alone makes us learn that beings
that are different, 'exterior' foreign to one

another, and yet absolutely together are 'simultaneity' (Berger, 116).

By defining writing in terms of the image or the image in terms of the written, I/i acknowledges, the mutual dependence of these two terms, thereby avoiding taking the particular for the universal, the partial for the whole.

II. The Rubbish Heap

The rubbish heap. The point is exactly that I come from your rubbish heap. All that you cast off through the centuries as refuse is now speaking out through me. If my form is a parody of form, then my spirit is a parody of spirit and my person a parody of a person. You forgot that man not only is himself but also pretends to be himself. You threw everything that was acting and theatre in your trash can and you tried to forget about it. Now, when you look out the window, you see that a tree has sprung up on that trash heap, a tree that is a parody of a tree (Gombrowicz, 16).

From the rubbish heap; from the highest branch of the parodic tree Gombrowicz rages against the impervious walls of the labyrinth of the real. His rage, the pointed tongue of exile, speaks against and ultimately mocks the dead souls

behind the walls - those that have for centuries been throwing metaphysical garbage over the wall without noticing where it landed. What has grown out of the rubbish heap are forms of meaning which are aware of the soil from which they have grown, yet are able to imagine another existence - the tree that is a parody of a tree. Parody, for Gombrowicz, collapses the borders between art and life, mind and object, image and word because it holds forms up against one another and invites the observer to recognize another face. Perceiving the ideological and linguistic forms which map out the sanctioned realities of culture/history as dead forms, Gombrowicz challenges the blindness and spiritual numbness of these forms by offering a parodic counterweight. The parodic counterweight subverts the stability of reason, order, logos by revealing the simultaneous presence of the irrational, chaos, and silence - appearances cohere, things are what they appear to be and what they pretend they are.

Gombrowicz, with an exaggerated messianic intensity, claims that form binds culture/history into particular meanings which deny the presence of any creative force outside of an already determined ideology - the slavery of form. The role of the writer is to dismantle existing forms by disclosing the meaning, the inner content, suppressed beneath the weight of material reality. Gombrowicz argues for an antimaterialist reality which allows for the spirit:

You hate that which you try and eliminate

in yourself. In me, the hidden Pole is
 liberated, your alter ego, the flip side
 of your coin, that part of the moon that
 has been unseen until now. Ah, but I would

like you to be conscious actors in the game (36).

Although he refers specifically to his experience in relation to the post-war Polish emigre community, Gombrowicz, like his counterpart in exile, Czeslaw Milosz, opens up a diverse landscape of forms in which nothing is certain. The situation of the writer in exile becomes a kind of conversation between the forms of society and tradition and the writer's ties to them, what threatened them and what challenged them. The writer can discover who s/he is by turning his/her gaze inward and can achieve freedom by naming limitations. The possibility of an artistic and spiritual release, suggests Gombrowicz, is dependent upon the writer's ability to un(dis)cover a means of collapsing the borders between entities and the willingness of society to allow the walls to crumble:

There are so many books that could
 ring out like the trumpet of Jericho
 if people would raise them aloft and blow
 into them (Glad, 35).

Gombrowicz's writings in Diary: Volume One offer a means of contextualizing, of wrapping language around the contours of unstable linguistic/imagistic ground. In his text,

Gombrowicz moves into the territories of the spirit, imagination and memory by going beyond the limitations of cultural/historical ideological and linguistic expectations. The unsanctioned and, therefore, uncertain ground of the territory of exile forces the reader/writer to look at things through different eyes; to pick up the book and blow into it. Gombrowicz explores the landscape of form/formlessness and brings back a body of language saturated with the flesh - a language which cannot speak or be spoken of outside of subjective human experience. Like Moses, Gombrowicz leads i/you/we through the desert but he does not leave us with a language in which to tell the story - form/formlessness and spirit are not solely the property of the word or the flesh (Gombrowicz, 36).

III. Conclusion: Take Me to the River

Every phenomenon can be experienced in
two ways. These two ways are not arbitrary,
but are bound up with the phenomenon -
developing out of its nature and characteristics:

Externally - or - inwardly

(Kandinsky, CSA 26).

Gombrowicz's kingdom of passing fiction, Heaney's labyrinths of the real and the imaginary, Malouf's Tomis and Ovid's Ister, Stockenström's South Africa and her narrator's

baobab tree: in the naming of place, of locating meaning in a particular landscape the process of transformation takes and is given place. The naming of place allows for the mapping of external realities and internal experiences through the creation of connections between memory and imagination, self and language.

The image as word, the image of the world, transposed into writing leads us/you/me to believe that the author and the written exist before the text, not with or in it. The image, as origin, locates itself outside of the written/author: it becomes a place, the high solitude of the desert, to which the mind journeys and returns with an image/myth, a history, a story. The written/author is not the source of this recovered language, but the vessel through which the image is conveyed. This image re-collected by the memory or the imagination becomes the means by which meaning is fixed within a definable landscape. The memory/imagination allows the written/author to re-cover, at least in part, the dream of origin.

The dream of origin, which underlies this thesis, stems from my desire to question the borders separating word, mind and object. What connects such seemingly disparate authors as Gombrowicz, Heaney, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Malouf and Stockenström are their own desires to explore these border crossings of language and to re-create, out of a divided landscape, a language capable expressing a borderless, textualized reality. In order to write from the undivided territory of language,

the political, cultural and historical narratives which perpetuate the subject/object split must be deconstructed. For Malouf, the healing of the gap between the word, the object and the naming is possible in the act of writing itself. In An Imaginary Life, Malouf took as his subject the exile of the Roman poet Ovid. Out of the lacunae surrounding the historical reality of the figure of Ovid, Malouf was able to explore the power of the imagination to re-create from the unknown, unfamiliar spaces of exile, of absences, a language of the imagination capable of expressing, in silence, the simultaneity of all things. In The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, Stockenström dismantled the whole of a male, nationalist Afrikaner historical narrative through the telling of the life of an enslaved black woman. Stockenström pulled back the layers of a dominant white history/myth to reveal the presence of silent, unspoken others in that entrenched narrative. The language of her novel is rooted in the territory of memory and it is through that memory that she is able to re-member a new beginning in the silence of a baobab tree.

For Ovid/Malouf the final border crossing is symbolized by the river Ister: for Stockenström and her narrator the expedition ends with the arrival of the narrator at the baobab tree and both journeys end in the silence of death. In An Imaginary Life and The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, death expresses the possibility of a new beginning outside of the limitations of the separated word, mind and object - endings

become beginnings. What emerges from my own examination of language in the contexts of Malouf and Stockenström and in the peripheral territories of others is, quite simply, a notion of language as the place in which all forms may be reconciled. It is through language and the attenuations of memory and imagination that I/you/we become capable of re-collecting a different beginning beyond the separating mind and object and world from word. Thus, language is the dream of origin - the final border crossing, the river and the baobab.

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