



FRAGMENTATION
AS A CONCEPTUAL MODE
IN THE NOVELS OF
RANDOLPH STOW AND DAVID MALOUF

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-SYNOPSIS-

The legacy of the colonial experience is a visionary schizophrenia, a duality of vision deriving from culturally different ways of constructing the world, which has often been perceived as disorienting or even fatal. However, this divided condition of the consciousness tends to be reconsidered in more positive terms nowadays. Randolph Stow and David Malouf belong to this trend of revision, as attested by their treatment of fragmentation, a conceptual mode which pervades their work as a strategy used to reconstruct the world in terms that are freed from the assumptions of universality (and hence of homogeneity) inherent in Europe's imperialistic discourse.

This ambivalence of perspective is given expression in a number of ways in their fiction. In The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea and Johnno it is apparent in the contrast between the two major protagonists. Indeed, in each book one of the characters is symbolically connected with Europe, while the other stands for a peripheral, de-centred outlook on the world. Their dealings with each other at the level of plot then assume an allegorical significance, since the irreducible tension between the two positions leads to the eventual separation of the protagonists, on which each novel closes. The dynamics here is one of fragmentation, of movement from a unified to a multiple mode of perception.

The contrast between unity and heterogeneity is examined in different terms in Child's Play, as well as in the novelistic 'dyptich' formed by Visitants and The Girl Green as Elderflower. One can discern a tension here between the urge to invent, in imagination, a world that would be absolved from fragmentation, that

would proceed directly from the subject's consciousness, and the discontinuity brought about by the documents one needs to support this reconstruction of the world, and which are interposed between the creation and the mind of the inventor, between subject and object. Again, this tension between two images of the world (seen as either unified or fragmented) proves typical of the colonial dilemma, and unity is presented here as essentially decreative, concomitant with death.

A study of the house symbolism in Stow and Malouf reveals the house as an enclave of transplanted culture encapsulated in a space of otherness, and utterly discontinuous with it. It emerges as a structure of confinement, supposed to keep at bay the intractable strangeness of the landscape. It thus stands out as a pouch of unity from which the Other has been expelled, and again unity is presented as decreative : the house is a womb of death, redeemed only by such mediating structures as the verandah or the open window, which allow for some renewed conversation with the Other 'out there'.

The pursuit of unity is considerably foregrounded in To the Islands and An Imaginary Life, two journey novels where the protagonist embarks on a quest for reconciliation with the Other. Both books can be read as reversals of the narrative of imperial conquest, since they involve a meeting with otherness in which the Other resists subjection and even converts his travel companion to his own modes of perception and behaviour. However, such an encounter with otherness remains hegemonizing : it privileges the One above the Other -- although this must be qualified in the case of To the Islands, where Heriot keeps vacillating all through

between the unsilenced demands of his own ego and the fascination of the Other, in a way which prefigures Tourmaline.

Tourmaline, which considers Taoism as a possible counter discourse to the voice of the imperium, never attempts to give predominance to any one set of cognitive codes. Fragmentation is now maintained : the world is reassessed in terms of a split, doubled discourse which largely informs the narrative given by the Law. The dialectical relationship which links the two perspectives makes the novel akin to Fly Away Peter and Harland's Half Acre, where the ^{imperium and the} antipodes are involved in a dynamic interaction with each other. In these novels too the two standpoints are examined inside a more flexible framework, within which singular codes are considered in terms of one another, as the actors of a self-interrogating conversation rather than the fossils of a self-perpetuating ideology.

The ultimate fragmentation, then, is the discontinuity that can be observed between one's reading of the world and one's de-centred (re)writing of it. Stow and Malouf use this fragmentation to break from a tradition which favours homogeneity, as a device to emancipate the post-colonial consciousness from the hegemony of a constricting, monolithic ideology.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and (to the best of my knowledge and belief) no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text or notes.

I am willing to make this thesis available for loan and photocopying if it is accepted for the award of the degree.

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