

**Leavers, loners and little ones lost: an exploration of Australian suburban fiction**

**Lyn McLintock**

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
Faculty of Arts, Business, Informatics and Education  
Central Queensland University  
November 2011

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted either in whole or in part for a degree at Central Queensland University or any other tertiary institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the material presented in this thesis is original except where due reference is made in text.

This thesis may be freely copied and distributed for private use and study, however, no part of this thesis or the information contained therein may be included in or referred to in publication without prior written permission of the author and/or any reference fully acknowledged.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Lyndal', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Date:

5 June 2012

## Abstract

Although a nation's fiction is typically thought to be reflective of its culture, and its culture the product of its history, fictional representations of Australia tend to ignore the physical site where the majority of Australians live their lives – the suburbs. While Australia's overwhelmingly suburban lifestyle is borne out by the census, documented by a range of social commentators and supported by even the most cursory observation, our national identity is still bound to a vision of Australia that stresses the bush, the landscape and the elements. Inherent in this vision is the view that the suburbs are sites of conformity, oppression and banality; domestic prisons of alienation for women and emasculation for men. This view is commonplace in Australian fiction – when writers engage with suburban life, they do so in an overwhelmingly negative way. It seems that Australia has a national habitus that accommodates both a pro-suburban lifestyle and an anti-suburban sentiment.

My thesis takes a broad view of Bourdieu's theories on habitus and applies them to a range of suburban fictions: George Johnston's *My brother Jack*, David Malouf's *Johnno*, A L McCann's *Subtopia*, Barbara Hanrahan's *The scent of eucalyptus*, Steven Carroll's *The time we have taken*, Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* and his short story 'Aquifer', Sonya Hartnett's *Of a boy*, Jennifer Maiden's *Play with knives*, Johanna Murray-Smith's *Sunnyside* and Peter Carey's *The tax inspector*. I demonstrate how the ambivalence that defines the Australian relationship with suburbia is manifested in our fiction.

My study of Australian suburban fiction exposes not just the anti-suburban subtext of most suburban fiction, but also reveals a number of tropes that provide a way to negotiate the habitus: the expatriate, the lone hand, and the lost child. Ultimately, these themes distort the representation of the suburban, and further feed the anti-suburbanism of the habitus. The 'artist' is driven by the expectations of the habitus to leave the suburban milieu; later, as an expatriate, their rejection of Australian life is justified by depicting the suburbs as cultureless cages. The lone hand myth validates the anti-suburbanism of the habitus by rendering suburban life as unnatural, inauthentic, and essentially feminine. The motif of the lost child, meanwhile, is used to subvert the perceived safety of the suburbs, turning them into dangerous voids populated by pervers. These myths are informed by and are used to perpetuate the anti-suburbanism

that defines the Australian habitus, which in itself reveals a lack of confidence in the very notion of 'Australia'.

## Table of contents

<b>Abstract</b>	3
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	6
<b>Introduction</b>	
Anti-suburbanism and the Australian habitus	7
<b>Section I     The expatriate</b>	
Introduction to Section I	29
Chapter 1, <i>My brother Jack (part I)</i>	34
Chapter 2, <i>Johnno</i>	55
Chapter 3, <i>Subtopia</i>	70
Chapter 4, <i>The scent of eucalyptus</i>	82
<b>Section II     The lone hand (and the suburban woman)</b>	
Introduction to Section II	103
Chapter 5, <i>The time we have taken</i>	108
Chapter 6, <i>My brother Jack (part II)</i>	128
Chapter 7, <i>Cloudstreet</i>	135
<b>Section III     The lost child</b>	
Introduction to Section III	157
Chapter 8, 'Aquifer'	161
Chapter 9, <i>Of a boy</i>	168
Chapter 10, <i>Play with knives</i>	187
Chapter 11, <i>Sunnyside</i>	201
Chapter 12, <i>The tax inspector</i>	214
<b>Conclusion</b>	235
<b>References</b>	242

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to acknowledge the guidance of my supervisor, Dr John Fitzsimmons. His patient understanding and support has been invaluable to me in writing this thesis. I am indebted to Central Queensland University for facilitating my research, especially the staff in the library. I am also indebted to those who read drafts of my thesis and assisted with editing, particularly Sue McLintock, Bríd Morahan and Associate Professor Errol Vieth. Finally, thanks are due to my family, friends and colleagues for their generous support and patience.

## **Introduction**

### **Australia and the suburban habitus**

Australia is an unusual nation. We are, arguably, the most suburban nation on earth, and yet fictional representations of Australian life tend, in the main, to ignore the suburbs. Our cultural imaginary focuses on a hostile landscape, not manicured lawns. When novels are set in the suburbs, they overwhelmingly depict a world that is at best dull and conformist, at worst violent and perverse. This is the result of our nation's inherent anti-suburbanism, a disparagement of domestic comfort that is, and has always been, a tenacious force in both Australian fiction and non-fiction. While the history of anti-suburbanism in Australia has been the subject of study in essays by authors such as Garry Kinnane (1998) and Robin Gerster (1990), it was only in 2008 with Nathanael O'Reilly's PhD thesis, 'Between the city and the bush: suburbia in the contemporary Australian novel' (2008), that an extended analysis of the anti-suburban tradition in Australian fiction was undertaken. In the studies by Kinnane, Gerster and O'Reilly, it is demonstrated that a significant amount of Australian fiction is in some way anti-suburban: as O'Reilly (2008, p. 27) notes, anti-suburbanism 'has both influenced Australian literature and been perpetuated by it'. My thesis is an extension of these earlier investigations, and in it I will argue that Australian fiction writers are in thrall to a national habitus that is strongly anti-suburban. This is evidenced by the way in which tropes common to the Australian cultural imaginary – the expatriate, the lone hand and the lost child – are mobilised in suburban fiction to support an overwhelmingly negative depiction of Australian suburban life. Through an analysis of ten novels and one short story set in the Australian suburbs, I will show how these three motifs are used by writers to support the entrenched and almost unquestioned anti-suburbanism that lies at our nation's heart.

These motifs are neither suburban nor contemporary: indeed, they appear at first glance to reference our inauspicious beginnings as a white nation, and the fears of the convicts and early settlers exiled to a strange and seemingly inhospitable land. However, given the way in which these three tropes have been regularly used and mythologised in the culture, they are clearly part of the nation's habitus, and can be mobilised in fiction to support and perpetuate anti-suburbanism.

Firstly, the expatriate symbolises the alienation that white Australians felt at arriving at a 'space that was turbulent, unpredictable, rebellious', despite the efforts of the authorities to establish the new colony as a clear and 'publicly coherent place' (Carter 1987, pp. 302-305). The gradual turning of 'space' into 'place' over 200 years of occupation has not totally erased the sense of alienation and oppression felt by the convicts and early settlers, and this feeling survives in the habitus. The expatriate remains a powerful symbol of both alienation and the rejection of oppression and is thus easily mobilised by writers of anti-suburban fiction, particularly given the Eurocentricity of both the original designation of Australia as 'alien' and the privileging of European culture in much anti-suburban discourse.

The 'lone hand' is the term I am using to describe the myth of the Australian 'bushman', a myth that promotes a particularly circumscribed model of masculinity, a myth that has become a trope through regular application. The lone hand myth is an exultation of one who is outside the community, disrespectful of civic values, dysfunctional and ultimately lost. This profoundly negative trope is what Christine Wallace (2008, p.140) calls Australia's 'toxic default national iconography'. Despite being a myth that valorises the bush, the lone hand myth is explicitly anti-suburban in its rejection of domesticity and paternal responsibility, and for its tolerance of 'alcohol and absent fathers' (Schaffer 1988 p. 173). In suburban fiction, the lone hand is linked to a particularly feminine view of suburbia, that of the vapid consumer, which serves to perpetuate the denigration of suburban life.

Finally, the lost child is a trope that was first used in Australia as a symbol of the fears the settlers felt toward the alien landscape: a child lost in the Australian bush represented the tenuous hold white Australians had of their new life, and emphasised the adversarial relationship between white Australia and the land. The lost child has been easily appropriated by contemporary fiction writers to support anti-suburbanism as the suburbs are, in many ways, an extension of the first settlement. A child lost in the Australian suburbs rather than the bush is no less powerful in rendering the real and perceived dangers of the environment and in representing the deeper apprehensions of white Australia.

To aid in my analysis of these three motifs and their use in suburban fiction, I am enlisting Bourdieu's theory of habitus, a generalised social theory that attempts to

understand and explain the behaviours of individuals and groups, and which is able to accommodate the inconsistencies and contradictions that inform our national imaginary. Australia is a suburban nation, but its fictional output is overwhelmingly *anti*-suburban: out of the 127 books that have won a major Australian literary prize over the past forty or so years, only 10 of them have a suburban theme. This is astonishing considering the number of Australians who live in the suburbs, but not when viewed in the light of the central myths of Australia – the selector, the pioneer and the lone hand (Fiske, Hodge & Turner 1987, p. 54) – which champion rural living and valorise the wilderness. The concept of habitus makes sense of the anti-suburbanism of our suburban nation as it is a theory that attempts to explain why the characteristics that constitute an individual or group are often contradictory, and shows how behaviours that are apparently voluntary and rational can undermine an individual's happiness and sense of worth. Habitus provides a language for decoding actions and attitudes that are generally accepted as natural and normal, despite being disempowering or even destructive for the individual. In terms of literary analysis, this language allows for the articulation, and consequent understanding, of the assumptions that support a text, and illuminates the place of the text within the wider social context. Throughout my thesis I will apply the theory of habitus at both the national level and the level of the individual; it sits always in the background of my analysis, and informs my interpretation of the texts.

### **Bourdieu's theory of habitus – a brief summary**

Raewyn Connell (1983, p. vii) said, apropos of Bourdieu, that the 'business of theory is to help us think clearly, and see what is difficult to see'. It is difficult to think or see clearly when it comes to our own behaviour, particularly when that behaviour is neither productive nor consistent. However, through the lens of habitus the persistence of anti-suburbanism in fiction can be productively explored, as habitus is a way of looking at the world 'which renders the 'taken-for-granted' problematic' (Reay 1995, cited in Reay 2004, p. 437). My argument is that anti-suburbanism is so 'taken-for-granted' that it affects how seemingly unrelated motifs are utilised in fiction: the expatriate, the lone hand and the lost child, when applied to the suburban novel, can only be used to further sustain the anti-suburbanism of our habitus.

Habitus is a set of rules and expectations absorbed from the family and the social environment which disposes an individual to behave in particular ways. Habitus is knowledge that requires no explanation: it is an implicit, embodied understanding of

boundaries and of intentions. Habitus is socially and historically constructed – it is what has happened to and been absorbed by an individual and also what is *expected* to happen to a person, and it manifests itself in the body by way of demeanour, as well as a physical sense of belonging or otherwise. Pierre Bourdieu spent his entire working life refining, reworking and reiterating his concept of habitus/field/capital\*. In short, one's habitus is one's beliefs, capital is one's material and symbolic possessions, the field is any area of social engagement, and practice is how one behaves. As a simple algorithm it reads as: '(Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice' (1984, p. 110). Bourdieu (1990, p. 1) believed habitus was an applicable sociological practice and was concerned that it did not develop an 'unreal, neutralized mode of existence'; did not become, in other words, only a theory. As Diane Reay (2004, p. 439) has indicated: 'habitus is a conceptual tool to be used in empirical research rather than an idea to be debated in texts...[it is] a way of understanding the world'. Richard Jenkins (1992, p. 67) disagrees with Bourdieu's insistence on the practical application of habitus, claiming that Bourdieu's work 'amounts to nothing less than an attempt to construct a theory of social practice and society'. My intention is not to debate the finer points of Bourdieu's concept but to use it as a tool in my examination of fictional representations of Australian suburban life. Habitus can provide insight into fiction by illuminating the 'taken for granted' aspects of a text. I will be focusing on how the anti-suburbanism of our habitus is reflected in these fictions both at the level of individual characters and at a more overarching, macro level. My thesis is not a sociological study of the Australian suburbs, but it is informed by the understanding that fiction is not created in a vacuum: novels do not fall fully-formed from a writer's imagination but are created from the available cultural raw materials within the expectations of habitus.

The term habitus can be used to describe the local understanding that members of the same family, group, class or nation share, the understanding that makes actions mutually intelligible; it is what Robyn Davidson (2008, p. 20) calls 'an accepted grammar of shared beliefs, reinforced over time, like calcium laid down on a bone'. Habitus is not simply another word for ideology – it is more ingrained, harder to perceive and certainly harder to shake. As Davidson describes, it is like grammar: absorbed unconsciously when so very young that it becomes the backbone of all

---

\* While Bourdieu's theory of practice involves the *interaction* between habitus, field and capital, for simplicity I will follow his example and just use the word 'habitus' when referring to the theory as a whole.

thought. Habitus describes how an individual can operate within varying social environments without having to consider the motivations or the outcomes of their behaviour.

Habitus is a set of dispositions, acquired from infancy, that dispose an individual to act in a certain way in particular situations:

The word *disposition* seems particularly suited to express what is conveyed by the concept of habitus (defined as a system of dispositions). It expresses first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination* [italics as published]. (Bourdieu 1989, p. 214)

That the habitus is acquired gradually from the moment of birth is of fundamental importance to an understanding of Bourdieu's concept. As I said above, habitus is not an ideology – although it includes ideologies – it is not imposed so much as absorbed. The schemes of the habitus are developed initially from the conditions of childhood existence; the experiences of an infant with the family and extended family, and the observations the infant makes when members of the family interact and respond with others both within and outside the family, 'produce the structures of the habitus which become in turn the basis of perception and appreciation of all subsequent experience' (Bourdieu 1989, p. 78). For Quick in *Cloudstreet*, for example, his early experiences within an evangelical Christian family, one which lost its faith at the false miracle that was Fish and so closed in upon itself, have left an indelible mark: 'There was nothing exceptional in him but for the fact that he could never seem to be ordinary. He had some mark on him, like a migrant or a priest. You could tell he was trying with you, trying to fit' (Winton 1998, p. 213). Quick *tries to fit*, but outside the very small field where his habitus is in harmony with his surroundings, he is lost. For Bourdieu (1989, p. 78), 'practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that to which they are objectively fitted'. Quick is trapped in a habitus formed by 'the isolation of queerness' (Winton 1998, p. 304); he is strong enough to withstand the negative sanctions of 'distant' fields – school, the police force, even the suburban street which he and Rose reject – but always finds his best fit, 'the felicitous encounter' (Wacquant 1992, p. 21), when he returns to Cloudstreet.

The dispositions of habitus are installed at the pre-discursive and pre-predicative level through observation and mimesis, leading to absorption and unquestioning acceptance. Some commentators have questioned this aspect of Bourdieu's work, what Bourdieu called 'the doxic experience', on the basis that the inculcation of belief occurs explicitly as well as implicitly, through the exposure to many discursive forms, and to insist that habitus is incorporated at the pre-predicative level reduces Bourdieu's concept to simple determinism (Lane 2000, pp. 131-136). A more general reading can accept that the most entrenched aspects of habitus are those absorbed at this early stage of life, prior to an individual having any conception of conscious interpretation or judgement. These are enhanced and reinforced by subsequent exposure to discourses that support doxa, that support the entrenched belief that certain practices are natural, self-evident: the order of things. As I mentioned above, habitus is capable of change: 'being a product of history, that is of social experience and education, it may be *changed by history*' (Bourdieu 2005, p. 45). Nevertheless, the more fundamental aspects of habitus are firmly embedded because they are incorporated into the habitus at such an early age that they appear self-evident.

Bourdieu (1989, p. 166) uses the term 'doxa' to define the act of misrecognition that allows what is 'one possible order among many' to be seen as the natural order. This meaning of 'doxa' is inseparable from his use of the term 'bodily hexis'. Habitus is revolutionary as a concept as it subtends this idea of doxa – the belief that the social world is pre-determined and indubitable – to an individual's physical body. 'Bodily hexis' describes how the fundamental aspects of habitus, the doxa, are absorbed into the body and manifest themselves by way of physical demeanour and posture. Habitus is somatic – of the body – and by being somatic it is inseparable from one's sense of self:

The relation to the body is a fundamental dimension of the *habitus* that is inseparable from a relation to language and to time. It cannot be reduced to a "body image" or even "body concept"...[the body] does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it *enacts* the past, bringing it back to life. What is "learned by body" is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is. (Bourdieu 1990, pp. 72-73)

Rose Pickles, for example: 'A man'd be stupid to think she wasn't pretty, but then most men are at least a little stupid. Rose Pickles was proud, and difficult to slow down long enough to get a good look at. She never looked anyone in the eye, and as often as not, she went unseen as a result' (Winton 1998, p. 279). Rose has absorbed into her body all

she has experienced as a daughter – despised, mistrusted and (sometimes) loved – as an impoverished member of the working class and as an inhabitant of one half of the sagging, haunted pile that is Cloudstreet. For Bourdieu every tiny exhortation to stand up straight, to put your legs together, to talk more softly, to speak only when spoken to, further enforces those deeply held beliefs until one becomes, like Rose, the walking, talking embodiment of one's gender and one's class: 'The whole trick of pedagogic reason lies precisely in the way it extorts the essential while seeming to demand the insignificant' (Bourdieu 1989, pp. 94-95),

From infancy an individual absorbs the somatic knowledge of their place in the world. While the recognition of this is confronting to a white person, Dubois (2000, p. 84) insists that those 'who do not easily tolerate the unmitigated truth about the social' find habitus disturbing, provocative and even scandalous; it is less so for others. Galarrwuy Yunupingu's (2008, p. 34) description of his country, for example, is articulated as habitus, embedded in the clan's understanding of itself as a whole, and incorporated into the bodily hexis of each individual member:

My land is that of the Gumatj clan nation, which is carefully defined, with boundaries and borders set out in the maps of our minds and, today, on *djurra*, or paper. We have our own laws, repeated in ceremonial song cycles and known to all members of our clan nation. Sung into our ears as babies, disciplined into our bodies through dance and movement – we have learnt and inherited the knowledge of our fathers and our mothers.

Bourdieu's theory is founded on two fundamental tenets: one, that society is stratified, or class-based, and that there are systems of distinction which differentiate the classes; and two, that all behaviour is based on a form of misrecognition whereby attributes that are learnt are misrecognised as natural, and decisions which are made by habitus are misrecognised as being rational choices based on free and individual will. Habitus is a strategy for engagement with the world; it is created by experience and influences how an individual or group *responds* to experience: 'The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history' (Bourdieu 1990, p. 54). Habitus is a set of beliefs about oneself, one's place in the world, about others and about their rightful place, that imposes upon all interactions, all relationships, all decisions. It is the tiny voice that whispers: *yes, you can* or *no, you can't*. Habitus 'functions as a sort of social orientation, a "sense of one's place", guiding the occupants of a given place in social

space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 466).

The habitus is absorbed into the body and interacts with the habitus of others in areas of life that Bourdieu refers to as fields, likening the spaces of social interaction to both the scientific field – with the magnetic pull of forces – and playing fields. 'Games' of status and power are played out in these social spaces which are always differentiated and hierarchised. Fields are both autonomous and overlapping, and all are part of what Bourdieu calls the field of power – for example, 'the literary field is contained within the field of power where it occupies a dominated position (In common and much less adequate parlance: artists and writers, or intellectuals more generally, are a "dominated fraction of the dominant class)"' (Bourdieu 1992, p. 104). In the field of power, the social field, the most fundamental differentiations are gender and class. The development of the suburbs in Australia did, in many ways, smooth over existing class distinctions: indeed, Gilbert (1988, pp. 44-45) argues that traditional Marxism was anti-suburban because the material comforts of suburban life reduced the awareness of class differences, leading to 'false consciousness'. Australians have always promoted the myth of egalitarianism: Hancock (1961, p. 232) famously said that '[t]here is no class [in Australia] except in the economic sense'; which, although inaccurate, prefigures Bourdieu's argument that class distinctions are as much symbolic as economic by some forty years.

Individuals and groups possess a certain amount of 'capital' which allows them to participate in the social field and determines the position they will occupy. Capital is anything that can be translated into power or status, and all interactions are struggles to 'appropriate the specific products at stake in the game' (Bourdieu 1992, p. 102). In other words, all interactions are undertaken to increase one's capital and thus one's power. Bourdieu refers at various times to economic, cultural, social, academic and symbolic capital, although broadly speaking there are just two categories: economic and symbolic capital. Economic capital can translate to symbolic capital, and vice versa. However, that translation is not automatic and can be stymied by habitus. The Lamb family from *Cloudstreet*, for example, are rooted in their habitus and continue to 'live poor' even after they have become financially secure: 'It's the way we are somehow' (Winton 1998, p. 245).

Capital is retained, or sometimes transferred, through a process of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is not propaganda or other forms of coercion, such as that exercised by governments or other hegemonies. It is the persuasion ‘exerted, quite simply, by the *order of things*’ (Bourdieu 1992, p. 167). Bourdieu uses terms such as power and violence which, when used colloquially, imply the use of force and assume anger as a motivation. While these terms are clearly used deliberately, it is important to draw the distinction between the explicit and the symbolic: symbolic violence is ‘the *violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity*’ (Bourdieu 1992, p. 167). Symbolic violence is not recognised by either party as violence: it is simply the way things are. Symbolic violence is a significant factor in the maintenance of the class hierarchy, and, as I mentioned above, is intrinsically connected to capital. In the field, individuals and groups struggle ‘to appropriate the specific products at stake in the game’ (Bourdieu 1992, p. 102). Capital can be both the specific product at stake, and a piece of symbolic power that facilitates success in the field. For example, tertiary education is an item of symbolic capital more likely to be found among those living in the inner-city suburbs of Australia’s major cities; those who live in the outer suburbs are, according to Simons (2005, pp. 18-23), far less likely to have completed a university degree. Education affects attitudes: Margaret Simons (2005) and Katharine Betts (1999) argue that those Australians with university qualifications are more likely to be pro-immigration and to support the rights of asylum seekers and the issues of Indigenous people, and less likely to be strongly nationalistic. The tertiary-educated consider their values and opinions, and therefore themselves, to be ‘morally superior’. This moral superiority is a form of symbolic capital that serves to differentiate between the members of different classes in Australia. Despite Simons’ (2005, p. 25) contention that those with lower education levels living in outer suburban areas consider the ‘elites’ to be ‘unAustralian’, the attitudes of the less educated cannot be converted to capital in the social field.

Betts (1999) refers to class differentiation as ‘social closure’. She uses the work of sociologist Alvin Gouldner to argue that the Australian intelligentsia – variously called ‘cosmopolitans’ (p. 10) and the ‘new class’ (p. 35) – have tried to ‘maximise their share of wealth, influence and prestige’ by effecting social closure; that is, by closing ranks against others. To do this they need a way of recognising each other, and that recognition comes through an individual’s use of language (pp. 75-77). While many aspects of Betts’ argument are problematic, her comments on the development of the

new class are perspicacious, especially when considered in terms of habitus. The new class described by Betts is 'habitus-in-action': their acquired habitus, which is the very way they think, functions within the social field as a form cultural capital and differentiates the members of this class from others (Bourdieu 1996, p. 179). This 'new class' is also a clear example of the way habitus may only partly adapt to changing circumstances and changing times: the 'new class', for example, retains the anti-suburbanism of the old one.

Habitus can and do change, as Bourdieu (2005, p. 45) was at pains to point out: 'The habitus is not a fate, not a destiny'. However, it is only in recent times that significant change has occurred within a generation. While the rate of change in the traditional Kabyle society, upon which Bourdieu based so much of his work, was imperceptibly slow, life in contemporary western society provides for the possibility of accelerated habitus change, either through migration, or through the deliberate escape from or challenge to the habitus (Friedman 2005, p. 319). Australia experienced many years of extraordinary material and economic wealth from the 1940s to the 1980s, which resulted in an overall change to the collective habitus of the working classes. Moving to the suburbs, they became 'embourgeoised', and in the process became somewhat different to their parents who remained in the inner suburbs. While the baby-boomers like to see the inner suburbs as the site of authentic life (McCalman 1994, p. 549), it was the introduction of free tertiary education and the migration of middle class students – the sons and daughters of those who renounced urban poverty for suburban plenty – from the suburbs to the inner-city to attend university that turned these areas into the ghettos of Simons' 'elites' and the breeding grounds for Betts' 'new class'. Many tertiary educated Australians were the first in their families to go to university – Betts (1999, p. 80) cites an increase in the proportion of the Australian population with university degrees from 1.5% in 1966 to 10% in 1996. In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu (1990, p. 68) refers to 'a second birth', which is how he describes the process of education and initiation by which an individual may change their habitus and acquire the cultural capital necessary to successfully engage with the social field. In Australia, a large proportion of the population has experienced a 'second birth' through suburban expansion and increased levels of tertiary education. However, as I noted above, while this has altered parts of the habitus and created new methods of differentiation within the social field, there are deep-seated aspects of the collective habitus which are more resistant to change. While dispositions may be changed by historical action, the habitus

imposes limits upon the extent to which an individual or group of individuals can enact improvisations within such change (Bourdieu 2005, p. 46). The anti-suburbanism of the Australian habitus and its corollary, the celebration of the bush ideal, are two areas around which the nation seems to have been unable to improvise.

### **Pro-suburban head, anti-suburban heart**

A number of Australian historians – Graeme Davison, Alan Gilbert, Tim Rowse and Lionel Frost, among others – have researched the history of Australia as a suburban country and all agree that Australia was suburban more or less from its inception as a British colony. Davison (1997, p. 10) comments that

Within months of his arrival at Sydney Cove in 1788, Arthur Phillip had drawn up a town plan that exhibited the preference for fresh air, space and detached housing that was to distinguish Australian urban living.

Suburbanism was encouraged by the very abundance of land, and by the offering of mortgages to working class families (Chambers 1997, p. 91 and Gilbert 1988, p. 33). Successive governments financed transport links (Gilbert 1988, p. 33), schools, hospitals and other infrastructure (Davison 1994, p. 104), and zoned as residential large tracts of land that could have been used for industry or other purposes (Morgan, n.d.). Davison cites the ideologies of evangelism, romanticism, sanitarianism and capitalism as driving the development of the suburbs in Australia: evangelism promoted the home as a temple, romanticism saw the suburb as being a refuge from the trials of industrialisation and sanitarianism was a reaction against the diseases associated with the city (Davison 1994, pp. 100-101). Capitalism provided the economic structure that allowed it all to happen.

What historians such as Gilbert and Davison, as well as Gerster, Kinnane, McCalman, Donald Horne and others have also noted is that suburbanism in Australia, the dominant mode of living for currently around 14 million of our 20 million residents, is not something that is celebrated. Instead it is frequently derided, despised, condemned, satirised or completely ignored. Gilbert (1988, p. 38), writing with reference to Horne's assertion in 1964 that all intellectuals hate the suburbs, says that

a negative view of suburban life and culture was something common...to practically all understandings of Australian social reality, part of practically all the cognitive systems through which different sections of the Australian intelligentsia made sense of their

culture. Divided on almost everything else, the left and the right of the intellectual spectrum agreed on this one thing at least. They hated suburbia. They despised it.

More than two decades on, they still do. However, it is important to understand that it is not, and never has been, only the intellectuals who despise the suburbs: anti-suburbanism is an egalitarian prejudice. Many of those who reside in the suburbs – which, after all, is most of us – understand, accept and even promote anti-suburban views. The huge popularity of television and film which parody suburban life – the work of Barry Humphries, for example, *Kath and Kim*, and *The castle* – cannot be accounted for as simply an opportunity for the intellectuals to ridicule the suburbanites, as McCalman (1994, p. 551) claims; those in the suburbs are watching too. All of the novels I analyse in my thesis express anti-suburban views, but the two that are the most consciously anti-suburban are also two of the most popular Australian novels: *My brother Jack* and *Cloudstreet*. Clearly, negative portrayals of the suburbs are not resented by Australians; indeed, the ABC television show *My favourite book* (2004) placed *Cloudstreet* at number five on the list of ‘the nation’s 10 favourite books’, the highest rating for an Australian novel. Marieke Hardy on the ABC’s *First Tuesday bookclub* (2010) described reading *Cloudstreet* as being ‘like coming home’. Hardy went so far as to declare that *Cloudstreet* was essential reading for new Australian citizens: ‘Bugger the citizenship test...get everyone to read *Cloudstreet* before they enter the country.’ One can only imagine with what confusion an immigrant, whose only introduction to Australia was a copy of *Cloudstreet*, would meet the country.

Anti-suburbanism is not, of course, confined to Australia – it is also part of the intellectual culture of both Britain and America. The British have always had a strong anti-suburban streak fuelled by snobbery, and as early as 1888 *The diary of a nobody* (Grossmith & Grossmith 1977) parodied the perceived bourgeois pretensions of London suburbanites. More than a century later, the British academic Roger Silverstone (1997, p. 8) was still conflating the suburban and the bourgeois in the introduction to his edited collection, *Visions of suburbia*, insisting that ‘Suburban culture is a consuming culture ...There is an intimate and indissoluble link between suburbia and buying’; apparently people in the home counties do not shop. In her analysis of American suburban novels, *White Diaspora*, Catherine Jurca (2001, p. 161) argues that the fictional American suburb is ‘sold on the assumption that although millions of people choose to live there, it is the environment we love to hate’. However, both the British and the American suburbs are redeemed by their cultural output: in Britain, popular music; in America,

literary fiction about the suburbs, such as that by Updike, Cheever and Ford. The sociologist and music critic Simon Frith (1997, pp. 270-271) argues that British pop music is shaped by a 'sub-urban sensibility', drawing its inspiration from 'both the ironies and the secret desires' of suburban life. American suburbia, meanwhile, is derided in fiction but that derision is paradoxically undermined by the proliferation of novels set in the suburbs. Jurca (2001, p. 160) argues that 'tales of the suburb have become a national [American] literary speciality', and notes that as the suburban population has increased since the 1920s, 'literary representations of the American suburb have also flourished'. Yet, in Australia, there is actually an inverse correlation between the number of novels set in the suburbs and the number of people who live in them; as Kinnane (1998, p. 42) has argued, Australian writers give preference to imagination over observation, 'such that the worlds in which we [Australians] have attempted to locate our myths of identity and aspiration have been other than the ones we inhabit daily'.

Anti-suburbanism may not be unique to Australia; however, to paraphrase Robin Boyd (1968, p. 14) on Australia's ugliness, it is worse here than anywhere else. As author Hugh Mackay (2005) said on the radio program *Australia now*: 'if you want to denigrate a lawyer, you call him a suburban lawyer'; similarly, to be called a 'suburban housewife' is great insult to many. There is a character in the Australian crime novel *Lugarno* who is mightily offended at being called a 'suburban' housewife as she is, in fact, an extortionist and murderer (Corris 2001, p. 111). As O'Reilly (2008, p. 32) suggests, Australia's anti-suburbanism is both a result of a generalised western worldview against suburbia and of a more specifically Australian 'postcolonial obsession with national self-image'. The subject of 'Australian identity' has always been part of the national discourse, complicated by the unsettling understanding that our existence as a western nation began as a prison. All nations require a foundational myth (Hall 1992, p. 294), and Australia's is that we began as the receptacle for England's criminals. Although the popular view of the convicts has, for many years, been that they were good, ordinary people, transported for crimes committed in desperation (Grenville 2005, *The secret river*), or crimes not committed at all (Clarke 1983, *For the term of his natural life*), the convict stain has nevertheless been 'passed down, not just genetically to individuals, but as a community birthmark' (Smith 2008, p. 322), and convictism continues to haunt our contemporary habitus. Gunew (1994, p. 103) argues that Australia's convict beginnings undermined any attempt to see the country as a 'new

Eden', leading to the privileging of culture over a nature that was 'designated hostile'. The Australian bush landscape is still considered hostile; however, this hostility has not resulted in a celebration of suburban culture. Indeed, the suburban landscape is frequently mobilised by fiction writers to further perpetuate anti-suburbanism.

Australia also occupied a complicated and conflicted power position in the first century or so of its existence as a white nation, being both the colonised (operating under the British) and the coloniser of the Indigenous people (Plumwood 2005, p. 371). Because of that dichotomous role, Australians carry what Alan Lawson calls 'the repressed knowledge' of Indigenous displacement and disenfranchisement (cited in Tilley, 2002) – our guilt at *terra nullius* – as well as a heritage that cuts us culturally adrift from other countries in the geographic region and ties us emotionally and constitutionally to another. It is not surprising, then, that we Australians are 'a people persistently fearful of where we are lodged in place and time' (Pierce 1999, pp. xvii-xviii). The result is a national focus on 'what and where we are not' (Kelen 2006, p. 560); as Julianne Schultz (2008, p. 7) has noted: 'For much of the last two centuries, Australia has been defined by *what it was not...What is not* provided raw material for countless writers'.

As Kinnane (1998, p. 42) has argued, Australians rarely write about the suburbs. This reluctance to engage with suburban reality seems to relate to the same deep-seated national anxieties that cause us to focus always on the bush – on the other, on 'what and where we are not'. Australians appear eager to embrace a vision of ourselves and our country that is counter to observation, and a stereotype that is 'toxic' – the lone hand.

### **Lone hands in the suburbs**

The lone hand legend exerts a powerful hold on Australia's national identity, despite having been exposed as a myth; and it is regularly employed by advertisers and artists who wish to harness its symbolic power (Devlin Glass 1994, p. 161). Australian fiction is thick with protagonists who leave their troubled lives in the city or the suburbs to 'find themselves' in the outback. In Eva Sallis' *Hiam* (1998), Winton's *Dirt music* (2002), Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* (1995) and Robert Drewe's *Grace* (2005), the bush is metonymically associated with inner strength, peace and spirituality. It is also symbolic of hard work, of endurance, and of aching loss: 'Australian pioneers...are thought to have endured the harshest continent on earth, with its endless drought, fire and flood' (Curthoys 1990, p. 19). Bill Bryson (2001, p. 30) says that 'Burke and Wills...are far

and away the most famous of Australian explorers, which is perhaps a little curious since their expedition accomplished almost nothing, cost a fortune and ended in tragedy', but Bryson is missing the point. Our self-image depends upon the understanding that our land is harsh, impenetrable and unforgiving, and that we are trespassers on it. Think, as Christopher Kelen (2006, p. 562) has done, of our national song: we celebrate a down-and-out, a sheep thief who is both jolly and despairing, who kills himself rather than submit to the taming forces of the law. Clearly, and despite the efforts of the official myth-makers, Australians have a 'failure orientation'. Even our positive national attributes can be read as manifestations of this: John Rickard (2001, pp. 130-131) notes that 'an attractive aspect of Australian culture has been the scepticism with which we view triumphalist expressions of nationalism...Australians still tend to be dismayed by the emotional expressions of national sentiment which come so naturally to most Americans'. This reluctance to hoist the flag indicates an ambivalence towards the Australian nation and underlines a deep-seated lack of confidence in the very notion of 'Australia'.

The long history of anti-suburbanism in Australia and the manifestation of the anti-suburban tradition in fiction has been comprehensively explored by O'Reilly. Yet, it is the *persistence* of the anti-suburban tradition in all discursive practices that is so remarkable and difficult to comprehend, particularly given the overriding preference of Australians to choose a suburban lifestyle over any other. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2006 Census data (2007) shows that almost 71% of all Australians – over 14 million people – live in just twelve urban areas: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Hobart, Darwin, Canberra, Newcastle, Wollongong, Geelong and the Gold Coast. Of these, less than 1,000,000 live in the CBD or inner urban areas of those cities, such as Carlton, Fitzroy, Newtown or Bondi. This leaves 66% of the population living in 'suburbia', yet anti-suburbanism remains a significant force. It is difficult to reconcile these two simultaneous yet opposing views of suburban life. However, Bourdieu's theory of habitus provides a way of accommodating such contradictions; as Reay (2004, p. 438) says, 'there is indeterminacy about the concept that fits in well with the complex messiness of the real world'.

### **Australia's national habitus**

Habitus relates to individuals, and to groups of individuals, primarily class groups, and therefore easily lends itself to being applied collectively – at the level of the nation. People who have been the products of similar social conditions often acquire similar characteristics – this is foundational to the concept of habitus. The more similar the social conditions, the more alike the habituses. While there are clear class differences in Australia, the lack of the more obvious signifiers of cultural legitimacy, such as strongly regional or class-identifying accents, hereditary titles or ancient chateaux, have provided an environment where certain characteristics of habitus are common to a large proportion of the population. One of these characteristics is anti-suburbanism.

A national habitus is made up of those aspects of national identity that are deemed to be positive, but also those that are negative. It is ‘constructed’, but not in the sense of being fabricated or consciously built. Reay (2004, p. 435) describes habitus as ‘a deep, interior, epicentre containing many matrices. These matrices demarcate the extent of choices available to any one individual. Choices are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds himself/herself in, her external circumstances...[and] by an internalized framework that makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable’. Extrapolated to the level of the nation, our national habitus contains many unpalatable and contradictory components that limit how we view things. Our habitus may change and adapt with changing times, but it is always constrained by the ‘internalized framework’.

Anti-suburbanism is part of Australia's collective habitus, a method of symbolic violence, and a type of cultural capital. While an individual's position in the social field determines how significant a part anti-suburbanism plays in their construction of the self, the majority of Australians seem to accept anti-suburban beliefs despite living in the suburbs and enjoying the suburban lifestyle. This dichotomy is difficult to understand; however, habitus provides a language that makes sense of our propensity to despise the very lifestyle that defines us. Our national habitus is informed by all the iterations of identity the nation has gone through. Richard White's (1981) *Inventing Australia* describes the various versions of ‘Australia’ up to 1980, covering ‘Terra Australis Incognita’, the convict era, land of the working man, the conflict between city and the bush, ‘white’ Australia, the digger, and suburban paradise. Although White exposes them all as myths, each lingers atavistically in our national habitus, as

evidenced by their regular appearance in fiction, film and advertising. From these mythical 'Australias' the motifs of the expatriate, the lone hand and the lost child are drawn; all three are historically connected to important aspects of early white settlement: forced migration; the pioneering imperative; and fear of the unknown. These motifs have remained both constant and fluid despite two centuries of social and technological change, and affirm the resilience of the habitus.

Bourdieu (2005, p. 45) describes the habitus as being

...very similar to what was traditionally called character, but with a very important difference: the habitus...is something *non natural*, a set of *acquired* characteristics which are the product of social conditions and which, for that reason, may be totally or partially common to people who have been the product of similar social conditions.

The use of the word 'character' is instructive, as the Australian 'character' has been discussed and dissected by cultural commentators from all sides of the political and ideological spectrum. The nature of the Australian national identity has been the subject of 'anxious cultural debates' (Gunew 1994, p. 103), not least because the dominant stereotype of the bushman marginalised women and non-Anglo Australians. Terms such as nationalism and patriotism have been mediated through these debates and now have a metonymic association, at least among those possessing a particular brand of academic capital, with anti-intellectualism, racism and violence. Nationalism is also defined as 'practices which *define, legitimate, or valorise* a specific nation-state or individuals as members of a nation-state' (During 1994, p. 138 – my italics). Nationalism – the national character, or the national identity – has therefore come to be understood as referring to individual qualities which, although problematic when deconstructed, are, at least superficially, positive; qualities such as: heroism, mateship, stoicism, and an easy-going sense of humour. The national identity does not include less valorising characteristics such as unresolved guilt over Indigenous dispossession and white Australian self-loathing. A national habitus, however, can absorb both positive and negative qualities, as well as competing ideologies: the pro-suburban ideology supported by successive Australian governments (Gilbert 1988, p. 33, Davison 1994, p. 104 and Morgan n.d., p. 2) can coexist in the habitus with a general, more inchoate anti-suburban animus. Semantics helps to smooth over the ontological fissures: the term 'suburbia' is useful as it is as much 'a discursive fiction' as a real place (McCann 1998, p. viii). Silverstone (1997, p. 13) calls suburbia a 'virtual place...a state of mind', and

certainly it appears to defy a specifically geographic definition: I may live in the suburbs, but I do not live in suburbia. Thus, *suburbia* provides an all-purpose term of denigration and a method of differentiation that can be used by just about everyone. To coin a term, Australians are not so much anti-suburban, then, as anti-*suburbian*. I will not use the term ‘anti-suburbian’ in my thesis as it is too unwieldy, and it overlooks the anti-suburbanism of characters such as David Meredith, Johnno and Julian, which is both generalised and very, very specific; that is, they despised the suburbs in general and their own suburbs in particular. However, it is important to note how the anti-suburbanism of the Australian habitus can adapt itself. In her article ‘Romancing the suburbs’, Jean Duruz (1994, pp. 20-23) interviews a resident of Sydney’s middle class, suburban North Shore. The interviewee, Sue, is quick to establish her anti-suburban credentials: she is scornful of suburban uniformity, of project homes, of brick veneer. As a resident of a leafy, long-established suburban area, Sue believes ‘the suburbs’ to be a place other than where she lives; she can therefore accommodate both her address and her anti-suburbanism simply by placing the suburbs elsewhere.

Wallace (2008, pp.134-138) has described how Australians embraced Russell Drysdale’s and Sidney Nolan’s post-war paintings of the Australian landscape as if they *needed* them, as if these paintings of desolation, emptiness and melancholy, depicted in varying shades of red, were the cultural drink we were thirsting for. So embedded in our ‘cultural synapses’ have these visions become that paintings of the outback that use green paint rather than red appear inauthentic. Similarly, when *My brother Jack* was published in 1964, it became the rubric for assessing all subsequent representations of Australian suburban life. Four decades after its publication, in two separate novels, we find fictional young men living in suburban Melbourne reading *My brother Jack* and finding, for the first time, a depiction of the world as they knew it – or at least, as they felt they knew it. For Julian in *Subtopia*, the reading of *My brother Jack* ‘was the first time that any of this [suburban life] had made sense as the kind of thing about which someone might write a book’ (McCann 2005, p. 56). In *The time we have taken*, Michael not only ‘sees, for the first time in his reading life, the world from which he comes’, he also knows that ‘[h]is world – his past and present (and quite probably his future) – has been made different’ because of it (Carroll 2007, p. 201). Like Drysdale’s red landscapes, *My brother Jack* was the vision of the suburbs Australia was thirsting for:

Most everyone I know who has read *My brother Jack* has an affection for the book but not once, when I have asked why, have they explained that affection in terms of plot. The success of the book seems to rest on Johnston's ability, born of his experience as a journalist, to re-create an authentic sense of Melbourne in the 1920s, thirties and forties... (Flanagan 2002, p. 8)

In *My brother Jack*, Johnston provided a dystopic vision of the Australian suburbs and established the tropes which would be used in most subsequent suburban novels: the desire to escape; the denigration of the feminine; and the abuse of children.

My thesis is an analysis of these three tropes – expatriatism, the lone hand, and the lost child – in a range of suburban novels. It is disturbing that so few Australian novels are set in the suburbs; more disturbing still is why most of those novels that are set in the suburbs depict lives of emptiness, perversion and despair. It seems that anti-suburbanism is so strongly fixed in Australia's 'cultural synapses' that any attempt to dislodge it can become didactic. Hugh Mackay's *Winter close*, for example, a novel set in a prosperous Sydney suburb, was written because Mackay (2005) said that he found it 'extraordinary that while most Australians live in the suburbs we tend not to celebrate the virtues of suburban living'. The novel is full of little sermons that express disapprobation at the common criticisms aimed at the suburbs: 'Why do people have to talk about the suburbs as if living there is an admission of social or cultural failure?' (Mackay 2002, p. 65); 'People never seem to think of the suburbs as the best of both worlds; only the worst' (Mackay 2002, p. 66); 'Suburbia offers a wonderful cloak of anonymity for those who want the security of proximity without any of the demands of intimacy' (Mackay 2002, p. 9). While admirable in intention, these lectures do not fail to irritate. Moreover, Mackay cannot escape the standard suburban perversions, creating a voyeuristic protagonist with an unhealthy interest in the pubescent daughter of his next-door neighbour.

My study focuses on how, by using common tropes not necessarily associated with suburbia – expatriatism, the lone hand, and the lost child – writers are complicit in the perpetuation of anti-suburbanism in Australian fiction. I also use the habitus in a more generalised manner to explore the major themes of the novels, all of which are set in a suburb of a major Australian city. That the tropes are not specific to the suburbs indicates the depth of anti-suburbanism in Australia's collective habitus. To this end, my study covers ten novels and one short story: George Johnston's *My brother Jack*; David Malouf's *Johnno*; A L McCann's *Subtopia*; Barbara Hanrahan's *The scent of*

*eucalyptus*; Steve Carroll's *The time we have taken*; Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* and short story 'Aquifer'; Sonya Hartnett's *Of a boy*; Jennifer Maiden's *Play with knives*; Joanna Murray-Smith's *Sunnyside*; and Peter Carey's *The tax inspector*.

Nathanael O'Reilly also wrote on anti-suburbanism found in *My brother Jack*, *Johnno*, *Cloudstreet* and *The tax inspector*; however, my thesis has a different focus and adds a different dimension to the anti-suburban argument. I have focused on expatriatism, the lone hand and the lost child as these are motifs that are often used to define Australia and they haunt the nation's cultural imaginary. White Australia is, as is often noted, a land of migrants – our ancestors were all expatriates from elsewhere. These expatriate beginnings, coupled with our origin as an open prison, have left their mark on the habitus in the desire for freedom and the persistent understanding that life must be better elsewhere. The lone hand is the toxic legacy of imperialism, while the lost child represents the fears of a people unsure of their tenure in a country seemingly vast, inhospitable, and very far away.

The novels I have chosen depict an essentially white Australian suburban experience. This choice was due in part to what was available – as I indicated above, there is not a large range of published novels set in the Australian suburbs – and also as a function of my thesis, which relates the Australian habitus to fictional representations of the suburbs. Despite Australians coming from a large number of different ethnic groups, according to the 2006 Census (ABS 2007) the most common ancestry of Australians is still British. Moreover, no matter how one's ancestry is perceived, to identify as Australian requires at least a cursory understanding of the origins of white settlement: that is, Australia began as firstly a prison, and then a colony, of Britain. While Australia has, like other countries that have experienced significant post-war immigration, experienced significant change since the 1940s, no other *single* culture has had an impact on the Australian culture in the way that the culture of Britain has. This is not to privilege the British over any other ethnic group, but simply to justify my focus on novelistic interpretations of the white Australian suburban experience. I could have touched on the immigrant suburban experience – Christos Tsiolkas' *Loaded* (1995), for example, has much to offer in terms of the anti-suburban habitus – however, I felt that to do so would distract from my main argument.

In the spirit of Bourdieu, I will come clean on my own habitus and my own place in the social field. I grew up, like Winton, on a ‘sandy quarter acre’ (Winton 1998, p. 328); like Julian in *Subtopia* I had ‘hopes of escape’ (McCann 2005, p. 57); and, like Johnno, I got out of there as soon as I had sufficient economic capital to do so. Without realising it, as is the way of these things, I had absorbed the general anti-suburbanism of my country, and the more specific anti-suburbanism of my socio-economic group. As an adult I have lived in various Sydney suburbs, London, Edinburgh and Wollongong (NSW). This thesis was motivated by the realisation that despite being in the geographic and cultural majority, there is little fiction written about my way of life. My research provides an answer to the question, why? Simply, it is ‘the order of things’. I have used Bourdieu’s theory of habitus because it is beguiling – it can make sense of the senseless, explain the inexplicable and make clear the incomprehensible in a great deal of human behaviours. Habitus is so apposite to the study of Australian suburban fiction – both *why* it is written and *how* it is written – as it is concerned with ordinary, day-to-day behaviour, and the suburbs are where the bulk of the Australian population live their ordinary, day-to-day lives. The Australian habitus is anti-suburban; consequently, so is our fiction. It could not be anything else.

## **Section I      The expatriate**

## Introduction to Section I

*“Richard went away too,” she said. “They never see him...” She picked up a leaf and began shredding it nervously and then dropped it. She ventilated herself again, holding the dress away from her skin, shaking it lightly. “Everyone’s children went away.”*  
(Janette Turner-Hospital, *North of nowhere, south of loss*)

In his 1984 paper on George Johnston’s *My brother Jack*, Chester Eagle (1984, p.35) claims that the novel is based on a view of Australia which is informed by ‘a strong ambivalence about Australia in the minds and feelings of its artists and writers, a love-hate which leads them to deal with Australian life in terms of mythic preoccupations... of mockery, ridicule and satire...and in terms of alienation and expatriation’. It is the latter preoccupation that I am concerned with – that of alienation and expatriation. One, it seems, leads to the other – the alienated individual feels compelled to escape, and to seek acceptance elsewhere. These are not concerns limited to those who live in the suburbs: indeed, the themes of alienation and escape feature strongly in Australia’s canonical literature, particularly Marcus Clarke’s *For the term of his natural life* and the novels of Patrick White. They can easily be seen to relate back to our convict beginnings in an unfamiliar and potentially hostile landscape: as White (1981, p. 18) says, Botany Bay combined the fear of the unknown with the anguish of exile. All unfamiliar landscapes can be perceived as menacing, but the Australian bush has always been described in fiction as evoking a particular fear. In *Kangaroo*, D H Lawrence (1960, p. 9) anthropomorphised the bush in its natural state as ‘unnatural’, a malign force that is stalking his protagonist, Richard Somers:

It must be the spirit of the place. Something fully evoked tonight, perhaps provoked, by that unnatural West-Australian moon. Provoked by the moon, the roused spirit of the bush. He felt it was watching, and waiting. Following with certainty, just behind his back. It might have reached a long black arm and gripped him. But no, it wanted to wait. It was not tired of watching its victim. An alien people – a victim. It was biding its time with a terrible ageless watchfulness, waiting for a far-off end, watching the myriad intruding white men.

This quote expresses the fear of an unknown landscape that lurks in the background of the Australian habitus, the notion that the bush and the spirit of the land is actively hostile to the white inhabitants.

The sense of living in a foreign and unfamiliar world was exacerbated for many years by Australia’s social, economic and political association with Britain; indeed, so strong

was that connection that as late as 1994 Davison (1994, p. 102) could describe Australia as ‘the farthest suburb of Britain’. This cultural connection to another country has left an indelible mark: A A Phillips (2010, p. 52) talked of ‘the cultural cringe’ being the result of our twentieth century national response to ‘the intimidating mass of Anglo-Saxon culture’. The cringe became our way of looking at the world: Hilary McPhee (2001, p. 56) describes Australia in the time of Menzies as ‘an insecure, often sycophantic nation, its cultural baggage a complex mix of adulation and hostility’. The response to the cringe by the educated middle class was flight: ‘Intellectuals headed to Oxford or Cambridge almost as a matter of course. The centrifugal pull of the great British metropolis was irresistible...’. To a large extent it still is: according to the Federal Minister for Immigration and Citizenship (2008), over 76,000 people left Australia permanently in 2007-08, and a further 102,000 left for a year or more. Expatriatism has become part of Australia’s habitus, undertaken by those of a certain class or disposition almost, as McPhee says, as a matter of course. Britain may no longer be the default destination, however there still exists a profound desire among many to flee – albeit often temporarily – what they see as the conventional safety of suburban Australia (Carr 2009, p. 64).

Anti-suburbanism is also firmly entrenched in the national habitus: when, in 1912, Louis Esson (1973, p. 73) wrote that ‘the suburban home must be destroyed’, he was indicating how pervasive anti-suburban views were in intellectual circles at the turn of the nineteenth century. However ‘relentlessly’ Australians have ‘pursued the quintessential suburban lifestyle’ over the past 200 years (Salt 2001, p. 3), there has been an equally relentless undermining of the suburbs as an authentic site for living. As Brendan Gleeson (2006, p. 12) notes: ‘For much of its existence Australian suburbia has been a heartland embraced physically but denied emotionally’. It is not surprising, then, that the themes of expatriatism and anti-suburbanism are interconnected and can be used in the service of each other. The simultaneous ability to embrace and deny suburban life that underlies the Australian habitus makes sense of the common desire to flee.

The Australian habitus incorporates both a denigration and loathing of the suburbs, and it provides a response – flight. This response is most clearly delineated in literary novels, particularly those set in the suburbs, where escape is coded as the only reasonable reaction to a life of mediocrity and conformity. The suburbs are metonymic for a prison or a cage – gilded, sometimes, like the home of the narrator in *The scent of*

*eucalyptus*, but a cage nevertheless. Images of cages and prisons proliferate in literary representations of the Australian suburbs – fences, roads, doors and halls, clothes that stifle and shoes that pinch. Perhaps Australians see the suburbs as cages even more than those in other countries due to our beginnings as a prison; certainly, tropes of entrapment are prevalent in much Australian fiction (Birns 2005, p. 2), and many novels set in the suburbs are an account of the protagonist's desire to escape from the suburban, domestic prison. The habitus is made by history, and Australia's habitus is influenced by our convict beginnings – Australia began, after all, as an exercise in social control. Foucault (1991, p. 176) suggests that the late eighteenth century marked the beginning of a major change in the individual's relationship to power, when the control over an individual's behaviour became increasingly a major, social objective. As Graeme Turner (1986, p. 75) notes, this was also the time Australia first became colonised; moreover, it was the time that the suburb emerged in Europe and Britain as a solution to the social problems associated with high density urban living (Davison 1994, p. 99). The concepts of Australia as an open prison, and Australia as a suburban nation, are therefore historically linked in the habitus.

McCann (1998, pp. vii-viii) argues that as suburbia became synonymous with everyday experience, it came to represent what people wanted to escape from, and so 'solicit[ed] fantasies of escape or flight'. The problem, according to McCann, is that everyday experience, the 'mundane cycle of work, consumerism and domesticity in which most of us are, in varying degrees, implicated', is by its very nature banal, and consequently worth fleeing. This is a valid argument – stories of escape from banality are, as McCann suggests, in many ways 'narratives of wish fulfilment'. However, the issue is more complex than a simple rejection of the 'everyday' for a life more interesting. At the core of these narratives is a belief that the suburban experience is somehow invalid, and that suburban life renders one inauthentic, particularly if one is an 'artist'. Expressions of anti-suburbanism have often been expressions of anti-intellectualism, as noted by Horne in 1964 (1971, p. 25). Not a great deal has changed; forty years later the academic Natasha Cica (2006, p. 5) described the lives and houses of the inhabitants of 'McMansions', large houses in affluent suburbs in Sydney's west, as follows:

...eaveless windows faced to property limits; his-and-hers petrol guzzling 4WDs parked in the multiple garages; vast expanses of plasma in home theatre zones; over-resourced, increasingly obese and Ritalin-dependent children in their Game Boy/study nooks; and the massive debt levels underpinning the whole folly.

The subtext is obvious – suburban parents are unthinkingly neglectful, immature and irresponsible, unlike the author and her intended audience, members of the ‘new class’ (Betts 1999, p. 81). In many ways this ‘new class’ does not appear vastly different to the old one, except that there are now more members, as more people go to university. The status markers remain the same: a deep antipathy to suburban life.

Because they are able to write a piece of fiction and have it published, writers of literary fiction are members of this new/old class, so it is not surprising that novels set in the Australian suburbs tend to feature a protagonist who must escape: indeed, the repeated representation in literature of escape from the suburbs is one of the most potent expressions of Australian anti-suburbanism. In this section of the thesis, entitled ‘The Expatriate’, I will analyse four novels in the light of the trope of escape, or expatriatism – *My brother Jack*, *Johnno*, *Subtopia* and *The scent of eucalyptus* – but there are many more where the desire to leave the suburbs is taken as given, for example: *Kindling does for firewood* by Richard King (1996); *Hiam* by Eva Sallis (1998); *Pegasus in the suburbs* by Jennifer Kremmer (1999); Peter Carey’s *Bliss* (1994); *Camille’s bread* by Amanda Lohrey (1996); Melissa Lucashenko’s *Steam pigs* (1997); Luke Davis’ *Candy* (2006) and *Tirra lirra by the river* by Jessica Anderson (1982). All of these novels depict escape as being the natural, even the expected, response to Australian, suburban life.

In the four novels analysed, the suburbs represent an expectation of sameness, of a continuation from one family to another and from one generation to another, which is in itself a type of cage. The protagonists of all four novels contest this notion of sameness by being in some way special – they are ‘existential’ expatriates, in the sense that they are depicted as being beyond or above their habitus. Each of the novels analysed is a *bildungsroman*, an autobiographical coming-of-age novel, and as such is concerned with demonstrating the specialness of its protagonist. Richard Coe (1981, p. 131) contends that the Australian *bildungsroman* charts the development of the special child – special, as he or she will later become a writer, who is a ‘poet’ or ‘artist’ – overcoming the impact of growing up in the perceived cultural desert which is Australia. He cites *My brother Jack*, *Johnno* and *The scent of eucalyptus*, among others, as examples of the genre. The whole notion of the *bildungsroman* – or, more specifically, the *künstlerroman*, which is a subset of the *bildungsroman* specifically related to the growth of an artist – appears counter to Bourdieu’s theory: the point of

habitus is that an individual is the product of their family, the place and the times in which they live; learnt practices are internalised as mimesis and reproduced as common-sense. This contention has not gone uncontested: in Jenkins' (1992, p. 91) view, Bourdieu's 'social universe' is one where events simply *happen* to people, and individuals have little or no capacity to effect any change to their environment or their destiny. The deterministic element inherent in Bourdieu's theory of habitus is against the very idea of the artist as a special individual who exists despite his or her upbringing and environment. However, it is the strength of habitus as a theory that makes the story of an individual who rises above their habitus so compelling. As Connell (1983, p. 152) says, habitus is not a strange or original theory:

[Bourdieu's] ideas are, in fact, strikingly traditional: they are about the gradual inculcation of information and habits of thought in children by instruction from adults delegated to do the job and given sufficient disciplinary powers for it.

Most of us do, after all, behave more or less as we always have, and as is expected of us by our families, our teachers, and our contemporaries. What is compelling in fiction, and in these four novels in particular, is the portrayal of a character who is both of their world, and beyond it; a product of their habitus, but something beyond habitus alone.

Together with the fears of isolation and entrapment that stem from our beginnings as an island prison thousands of miles from our cultural homeland, anti-suburban feelings are part of the Australian habitus in that they are always apparent but rarely thought of – they are part of that which 'goes without saying because it comes without saying' (Bourdieu 1989, p.167). The combination of anti-suburbanism, Australia as a prison, and the notion of individual genius that drives the *bildungsroman*, come together in these four novels, which are essentially narratives of expatriatism. Expatriatism is the ultimate escape, and is encoded in our habitus as an alternative – perhaps the only alternative – to a particular perception of suburban, Australian life.

## Chapter 1

### *My brother Jack (part I)*

Towards the end of *My brother Jack* David Meredith, now an experienced World War II correspondent for the *Morning Post* who has travelled ‘to the obvious places and to the not-so-obvious places, because by this time it was pretty much a whole world at war’ (Johnston 2001, p. 333), is billeted in a palace of Caserta in Naples, in a ‘splendid room with marble walls and a marble floor which was ice-cold as a tomb’ (Johnston 2001, p. 336). In this freezing room, unable to sleep, desperately lonely, David has the epiphany which is really the denouement of the novel, its *raison d’être*:

It is not just curiosity that makes an expatriate, there must also be something that happens in the very soul of him. Gradually I began to sense that already, and deliberately, I had begun proceedings of divorcement from my country and my people, and it was at this point that I got up and walked down the room to the huge baroque mirror at the far end, and the glass had the same cloudy, muddy opacity of the mirror in Gavin Turley’s house, and I stared very intently at the indistinct reflection that looked back at me through the clouded darkness and the pin-spots of time. I saw change in it at once. I saw it as older than I had realized, and becoming a little world-weary, and a shade too cynical around the deep-set eyes, and then I looked closer and I realized that it was not at all the same face as those other faces under the broad-brimmed hats...not the same, for instance, as my brother Jack’s face. A difference had grown into it, or developed out of it. I turned my head this way and that, studying it, and suddenly I realized that there was a sort of calculation in it, that this was a face watching for opportunities, that what was lacking in it was the truth those other [Australian] faces had for the passionate regard for the adventure in itself, and I knew then that I was not quite one of them, that I had never been, and that I never would be. Yet I went back to the camp stretcher still wondering why this had come about... (Johnston 2001, pp. 337-338)

All of David Meredith’s preoccupations are summed up in this paragraph: his belief that the expatriate is existentially different to others, that the expatriate experiences something different ‘in the *very soul* of him’. The use of the word ‘soul’ is deliberate in its reference to the spiritual, the essential, the uniqueness of a single individual. David has realised, with a startled wonder, that he has just such a soul, that he is, in his most essential being, an expatriate, and that he is not, in any way, like his brother Jack, the brother who represents Australia. In being an expatriate, in being unlike his brother Jack, David is no longer a typical or authentic Australian; indeed, part of his realisation at Caserta is that he never *was* an Australian – at least, a mythical Australian like Jack. This is his dilemma – if he cannot identify with those other Australian faces, then who does he identify with? It is the dilemma of the perceived outsider, and it is dealt with in all the four novels of expatriation I am exploring.

Throughout the novel, Johnston is leading the reader to this scene of revelation at Caserta. The novel charts David's development and ultimately defines his character as being both a product of his family and his country – a product of his *habitus* – and something entirely unique and special, much greater than his family and, somehow, unrelated to them. David is special. He has 'brilliance' (Johnston 2001, p. 259); he is what Richard Coe calls, with some irony, an *Artist*, a *Poet*. David is an individual who is both the result of *habitus* and simultaneously something greater, something *beyond* *habitus*. The novel is, as O'Reilly (2008, p. 131) rightly attests, strongly anti-suburban. The vehemently anti-suburban stance serves a purpose, providing justification for David's eventual expatriation. As Maryanne Dever (1985, p. 19) says in her analysis of the David Meredith trilogy:

[*My brother Jack*] serves to establish a context for David's equivocal attitudes toward Australia...it is in this novel that David discovers the potential for his artistic aspirations to separate him from his country and its people, and conversely, the capacity of that same country to evoke in him a very deep seated empathy.

Johnston uses the negative attitudes to the suburbs encoded in our *habitus*, as well as the generalised sense of alienation and desire to escape that is also there, to provide a reason for David's antipathy and his longing for expatriation, and also as an explanation for the intense guilt, shame and bemusement he feels at being not 'quite one of them'. For it is a *desire* he has to be an expatriate, a desire as well as something defined in the novel as being unavoidable, a result of his specialness, and this desire is both exhilarating and shameful. In the scene at Caserta, David momentarily abandons his habitual self-castigation regarding his so-called evasiveness and diffidence, and admits that he has 'deliberately...begun proceedings of divorcement from my country and my people'. David is a product of his *habitus* but he chooses, as much as possible, to reject it. He is not, he never was and he never will be, like his brother, Jack.

### **Habitus and the nascence of 'the Artist'**

Brian Matthews (2001, p. xv) describes *My brother Jack* as 'the story of the strange fated maverick who, against the odds, some parents produce in powerless collaboration with their ancestry and the times in which they live; the catastrophes and the triumphs of those times, and the fatality of crossing paths and interweaving lives'. This description is particularly apposite when considered in terms of the tension between the theory of *habitus*, and the notion at the heart of the *bildungsroman* or *künstlerroman*,

that of the 'natural' artist. David Meredith has been produced by his parents, his ancestry, his place and his times, but by some special force – a force against which he and his parents are 'powerless' – he is able to rise above it all to become greater than certain expectations would have him.

In the scene at Caserta, David attributes to himself an innate quality of difference – 'something that happens in the very soul of him' (Johnston 2001, p. 337) – that is nevertheless a product of the values and the expectations that he grew up with – 'my country, my people'. Throughout the novel, Johnston has David describing his life in terms of his family, particularly of his brother. Jack is both a member of David's family, and a representative of Australia. In many ways, the novel is an exploration of David's personal habitus seen in conjunction with certain aspects of the national habitus, such as anti-suburbanism and the idea of a 'national type'. Jack gives David someone and something to be constantly compared to, someone truly 'Australian' who can prove that he, David, is an expatriate.

The title, *My brother Jack*, gives a clear indication of the importance of family and family relationships in the novel. The novel's beginning sets up the concerns with which it is preoccupied:

My brother Jack does not come into the story straight away. Nobody ever does, of course, because a person doesn't begin to exist without parents and an environment and legendary tales told about ancestors and dark dusty vines growing over outhouses where remarkable insects might always drop out of hidden crevices. (Johnston 2001, p. 1)

Jack is important, but so is the realisation, encapsulated in this paragraph, that a person only exists within the context of their environment, within their habitus. David's family, like everyone else's, consists of family myths and 'legendary tales', of things strange and remarkable that drop out unexpectedly, of darkness and dustiness, of events and circumstances hidden in crevices. Lee Brotherson sees the tones of this opening paragraph as those of a fairytale, which 'appeals to the adult reader's recollection of children's literature and its traditional emphasis upon place.' He goes on to suggest that this emphasis indicates the essential connection in the novel between character and place (Brotherson 1997, p. 85). It is David's response to his childhood place, the 'flat and dreary suburb far away in Melbourne' (Johnston 2001, p. 1), that turns him into the expatriate he eventually becomes.

All the aspects of his family that have an impact on the young Davy are mentioned in the first few pages: the 'undistinguished house' in the 'flat and dreary suburb' (Johnston 2001, p. 1); the lack of safety in that house, symbolised by the insects, the vines and the hidden crevices; the death and sickness that pervade the house, both in the paraphernalia of walking sticks and wheelchairs that clutter the hallway, and also in the smell of ether that accompanies his mother (Johnston 2001, p. 2); the fact that his parents have left their children to be part of the war and that his mother is 'still something of a stranger' to him (Johnston 2001, p. 2); and the way Jack and Davy are both turned out of their bedroom to sleep on a 'make-shift bed on the floor of the sleep-out, which was really only a section of the back veranda partitioned off by flywire screens and a lot of damp ferns' (Johnston 2001, p. 5). Fear, death, abandonment and rejection: by the age of seven these were the lessons absorbed by the young David Meredith.

So too was the sense of familial continuation, represented by the successive 'Jacks' in the family. Brotherson (1997, p. 85) notes how Jack's position in the novel as the representative Australian is demonstrated by the naming of all the first-born sons in the Meredith family 'Jack': 'Johnston is keen to underline an unending sameness, an eternal modelling of one generation upon the other'. The expectation of the family, and of Australians generally, is that each 'Jack' – each man – will be more or less the same as the one who came before. There is no anticipation of difference or exception, but David is different from the very beginning: he hates the weekly visits to the hospital that his brother and sister enjoy (Johnston 2001, p. 8); he is 'a namby-pamby' while Jack is wild (Johnston 2001, p. 10); and his mind is invaded and infected by the experience of war and death (Johnston 2001, p. 11).

Johnston establishes David's differences early in the novel, but he also affirms his Australian antecedents and asserts his character's 'Australianness' through David's descriptions of his family history: the first mate Jack Meredith who came to Australia during the convict times; another ancestor who arrived in 1788; his pious and hypocritical maternal grandfather, who is described most wonderfully as being reminiscent 'of a ringbarked tree'; and his embittered paternal grandfather who had no less than nineteen children (Johnston 2001, pp. 18-19). O'Reilly (2008, p. 134) notes how David is keen to claim a particular ancestor, one who worked on the goldfields and then for the police who sought Ned Kelly, in order to confirm his family's status as representative, true Australians by establishing a link between the 'suburban present and

the colonial past'. This is also achieved by David's suggestion that his family history is quite commonplace and nothing out of the ordinary: 'I suppose it was all pretty typical of what happened in Australia in the first century or so of colonial life' (Johnston 2001, p. 18). David's family are thus established as authentic, true Australians.

But if David is an authentic Australian, he is not a representative one: that role is assigned to Jack. 'The thing I'm trying to get at,' says David early in the novel, 'is what made Jack different from me. Different all through our lives, I mean, and in a special sense, not just older or nobler or braver or less clever' (Johnston 2001, p. 17). David is 'more clever', and more insightful. This is shown late in the novel, when the two brothers attend a military march. Both turn away, Jack through shame and disappointment at not being in the march, and David through guilt and a first-hand understanding of the pointlessness and loss of war (Johnston 2001 pp. 361-363). At a very young age, before his parents return from the First World War, David climbs the roof of the house after causing his grandmother to fall. Although shivering and fearful and 'desperately unhappy', David is elevated by this experience and the realisation, when he eventually comes down, that his granny loves him – 'she put her arms around me very tightly and kissed me' (Johnston 2001, p. 11). David's higher level of understanding, his symbolic height, is manifested physically in his adult body: he is tall and thin (Johnston 2001, p. 53), while Jack is shorter and stocky (Johnston 2001, p. 51). It is significant that only Gavin Turley, who is arguably the noblest character in the novel, is depicted as being taller than David.

Grandma Emma's hugging and kissing of David when he gets down from the roof is the only instance of affection in a depiction of childhood and adolescence that spans 116 pages. David's youth is blighted by the First World War and what it left in its wake. His parents are associated from his earliest memories with death, sickness and a less defined sense of abandonment and terror. Both David's parents leave him and their other children to participate in the war, and when they return, the maimed and sick who are too ill or alone to go elsewhere come home with them, infusing the house with the sense of death. David's first memory of his father is one of terror: a small boy, surrounded by marching men much taller than himself, his stranger-father lifting him high in the air, laughing while David sobs with fear. The words used in this description – 'seized', 'engulfed', 'gigantic', 'hammering', 'thunderous' – define the child-David's fear of being trampled to death (Johnston 2001, pp. 4-5). Years later, David feels that the

troops 'were still marching, marching inside my brain, marching through my whole life' (Johnston 2001, p. 363).

### **Failed fathers and the need to flee**

Jack Meredith senior is one of the worst fathers in Australian fiction. *My brother Jack* is an autobiographical novel, and a good deal of early attention to the book was related to how accurate a depiction it was of George Johnston's own life. In his biography of Johnston, Kinnane (1986, pp. 1-3) reports that Johnston's brother and sister vehemently denied that their father beat his children, and suggests that Johnston turned his father into a monster in order to engender sympathy for the young Davy. O'Reilly (2008, p. 137) sees the portrayal of Jack Meredith senior as an anti-suburban device: 'Johnston conflates the ugly behaviour of Mr Meredith with the ugliness of suburbia in an attempt to draw a grotesque portrait of the suburban male'. As a method of engendering sympathy, it was an effective approach albeit not necessarily an original one – Coe (1981, pp. 159-160) maintains that one of the 'odd and rigorous entrance requirements' for the serious writer who writes an autobiography or autobiographical novel is to have had what he calls a 'failed-father' – one who is 'violent, domineering, drunken, fanatical or insensitive...or...dead'. Mr Meredith satisfies all these criteria except for the last: he beats his children, terrorises his wife, and he is weak, bitter, resentful, ill-mannered and bigoted. As a young child, David was regularly kept awake by what he calls, with deliberate understatement, his parents' 'quarrels'. During these episodes of domestic abuse, his mother would 'often run from the house in the dead of night', and on one 'particularly terrible occasion' she hid, whimpering, in the Dollicus vine that covered the sleep-out, while his father rampaged around the garden brandishing his gun (Johnston 2001, p. 37). David is terrified that his mother 'would be brought to such a point of resentment of her husband's tyranny that she really *would* run away and leave us all' (Johnston 2001, p. 40), and he hides in the big sea-chest devising ways of murdering his father without implicating his mother. This Oedipal scenario informs David's personal habitus and foreshadows his later escape overseas as a war correspondent.

Throughout the novel, additional small references add to the portrait of Jack Meredith senior as a failed father, husband and citizen: he stops playing snooker with Jack when Jack begins to win (Johnston 2001, p. 40), and he is the first in the suburb to put up the sign 'BEGGARS, HAWKERS AND CANVASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED'

during the Depression (Johnston 2001, p. 154). He is miserly too, relentlessly castigating his wife for the ‘cripples’ she brought to the house, but as Jack says: ‘I’ll bet the old bugger was glad of their disabled soldiers’ pensions’ (Johnston 2001, p. 151). Johnston carefully positions a moment where David suggests to the reader that his family life was not all bad immediately before the recount of his father’s systematic beatings:

There were Sunday mornings in the kitchen, or Saturday afternoon if there was to be a party...Enmities and prejudices were forgotten and there was always a lot of joking and laughing and singing of popular songs; these were good days. Even Dad would join in sometimes...He would surprise us all by getting out his old violin, and in a dusty haze of flying resin would play Irish jigs for us... (Johnston 2001, p. 41)

This is followed by the story of his father systematically and violently beating his two sons every month for offences he thought they had committed:

So on the last day of every month Jack and I would be summoned in turn to the bathroom and the door would be locked and each of us would be questioned on the sins which we had committed and which he had not found out about. This interrogation was the merest formality; whether we admitted to crimes or desperately swore our innocence it was just the same; we were punished for the offences which, he said, he knew we *must* have committed and had to lie about. (Johnston 2001, p. 42)

David’s desire to demonstrate some lightness in his childhood – ‘I don’t want it to be thought that Dad was always brutal or that Mother was always weeping’ (Johnston 2001, p. 41) – effectively draws attention to its darkness, and further emphasises the stark brutality of his father’s monthly assaults. This is a pattern that Johnston follows throughout the novel: David tells us something and then shows it to be otherwise. Generally, such incidents have the effect of emphasising David’s nobility; for example, he insists that he helps Jack go to the Wimmera for purely selfish ends: ‘I’d made him sign up for the Wimmera job only so that I would have an excuse for going home’ (Johnston 2001, p. 116). However, in the light of Jack’s obvious happiness and genuine gratitude, David’s protestations simply highlight his goodness.

The depiction of David’s father as a violent, unjust and unpleasant man serves to render David as an exceptional character in that he is able to overcome this childhood brutality. It also acts as an excuse or explanation for some of David’s own later bad behaviour, most particularly that towards his own wife. David effectively blames his father for his injustices towards Helen – ‘I brought the razor-strop down again across her back to

punish her for the crimes she had never committed’ (Johnston 2001, p. 283) – and he seems to believe that he is absolved of responsibility in that area because of his childhood experiences (Johnston 2001, p. 89). It also provides him with a further reason for his eventual escape, and in this Mr Meredith’s portrayal is, as O’Reilly (2008, p. 137) suggests, an aspect of the general anti-suburbanism of the novel.

### **Time and place – the anti-suburban context**

As I noted in my Introduction, Flanagan (2002, p. 8) contends that Johnston gives an ‘authentic’ description of Melbourne but, physically and psychically, the Melbourne of *My brother Jack* is an ugly place. Nevertheless, readers evidently remember it with ‘affection’. That the depiction is perceived to be authentic despite the brutality of the portrayal is significant – clearly, this perception is aided by the ingrained and persistent anti-suburbanism of our habitus. Having said that, the ability to render a convincingly authentic picture of a place is a skill Johnston shares with Malouf in *Johnno* and Hanrahan in *The scent of eucalyptus*, despite the differing styles of the three books, and is consistent with the themes of expatriatism and artistic awakening that I am exploring. The past – all three novels are set in a remembered past – must be drawn in specific detail so that it is clear to the reader what it is that the protagonist is rejecting. The clarity of description in *My brother Jack* is extraordinary; Flanagan (2002, p. 4) notes how Johnston provides rhythmic lists of descriptive detail, and quotes Charmian Clift who described Johnston’s style as ‘the old trick of dazzling observation’. It is *remembered* observation in *My brother Jack*, which seems to give the language an added potency: when David describes Sam Burlington’s studio, for example, he notes how the orange and black colour scheme was ‘all the rage then in Melbourne’, which provides a kind of nostalgic glow to the details that follow, like Vaseline over the lens of a camera:

...there were a good many fringed “Spanish” shawls tossed about and parchment lampshades which Sam had decorated either in flat geometrical shapes or in the swirly, elongated, prancing and pirouetting nudes of *art nouveau*, and there were the books that everybody then was making such a fuss about – *The Green Hat* and *Private Lives of Helen of Troy* and *The Sun Also Rises* – and lots of prints pinned up on the walls – some Picasso reproductions and Modigliani’s illegal “Red Nude” (you could always be perfectly certain that Sam would have anything that had been banned by the Customs Department), and a Conder fan and a whole collection of the naughtier Norman Lindsay prints and some Aubrey Beardsley illustrations torn from old copies of the *Yellow Book*. On an easel in the corner was a large stretched canvas of a not-quite-finished but extremely frank female nude which Sam was working on. There were also some bronze incense-burners and pink jade horses and a New Guinea totem drum which Sam, for a

joke, had stolen one night from the museum's ethnological collection and had never been able to smuggle back and a Mexican straw hat. (Johnston 2001, p. 98)

I have quoted that passage in full to show the sense of rhythm, accentuated by the minimal punctuation, the asides and diversions, and the 'piling up' of image after image. The final few words – 'and a Mexican straw hat' – provides a wonderful visual closure to it all. The passage is also a simple but effective evocation of the social field that Sam Burlington inhabits, a social field with which David's habitus is out of sync. The 'frank female nude' symbolises the openness of Sam and his milieu, so different from the closed up world of the suburbs, while the list of books emphasises the anti-intellectualism of David's own family.

The novel is full of descriptive passages, but most of them lack the sense of fond nostalgia that characterises the one quoted above. As I have said, the Melbourne that Johnston recreates through the memories of David Meredith is not an affectionate portrayal: indeed, it is portrayed as a flat, suburban wasteland, alternately boundless and limiting, indefinite and constrained. Johnston uses the term 'wilderness' many times throughout the novel, suggesting that David is lost in an uncultured, primeval environment. When he first sees the beauty in the docks, David perceives 'a way out of the wilderness' (Johnston 2001, p. 70); his relationship with his parents is 'a wilderness of baffling terrors and prejudices' (Johnston 2001, p. 91); and the suburbs between the wars are generally described as a 'wilderness' (Johnston 2001, p. 117). In Beverley Grove the sounds of the Sunday morning are the sounds of the wilderness: the lawnmowers have an oxymoronic 'snarling chirrup', the garden-hoses *hiss*, the secateurs *snip* and the cars *cough* (Johnston 2001, p. 263). Two years after *My brother Jack* was published, Alan Ashbolt (1966, p. 373) used very similar imagery in his attack on the suburban male: 'Behold the man – the Australian man of today – on Sunday mornings in the suburbs, when the high-decibel drone of the motor-mower is calling the faithful to worship. A block of land, a brick veneer, and the motor mower beside him in the wilderness – what more does he want to sustain him, except a Holden to polish...?'. Hoskins (1994, p. 2) suggests that Ashbolt deliberately refers to the wilderness to show how the 'suburb stood as a negation of the symbolic honesty of "the bush"', and certainly Johnston's description of Beverley Grove is an attack on what he saw as the pretension, shallowness and lack of honesty of the suburbs. Beverley Grove is everything that Esson (1973, p. 73) despised when he claimed that the suburban home 'stands for all that is dull and cowardly and depressing in modern life'.

At various times in *My brother Jack*, the suburbs are described as a 'desert' (p. 123), as 'alien' (p. 142) and – relentlessly – as 'flat': 'a flat and dreary suburb...' (Johnston 2001, p. 1); 'flat and diffuse'; 'drab flatness'; 'the horrible flatness' (Johnston 2001, p. 29); 'grey and flat and treeless' (Johnston 2001, p. 232). As Brotherson (1997, p. 86) notes, the flatness is overwhelmingly oppressive, and the landscape and its people, particularly David, appear weighed down and suppressed by the flat surroundings. The flatness is a symbol of the very worst aspects of the Australian national habitus – the oppressive conformity, the anti-intellectualism, the 'awful fetish of respectability' that stifles difference and promotes mediocrity. Indeed, the flatness is entirely symbolic, as David himself notices when he climbs onto the roof of the house at Beverley Grove and sees that 'there were little folds to [the estate] and faint graceful rises and declivities, not anywhere near definite enough to be thought of as hills or gullies, but the place was not really *flat*' (Johnston 2001, p. 274).

Carter (1987, pp. 290-291) suggests that the development of the Australian suburb and the individual home within it was an attempt on the part of European migrants to *occupy* the land, to render 'the wilderness habitable'. The process failed, however, as the mass of individualised houses has created a 'visual chaos that...is, spatially speaking, no different from the wilderness'. In order to gain perspective on the chaotic flatness of the suburban wilderness, it is necessary for David to achieve some height. I have already noted that David is tall, thus physically 'higher' than others; his disposition is also of a 'higher order' – as an adolescent he reads 'Ibsen and Chekhov and Tolstoy, Balzac and Flaubert, Gibbon and Defoe' (Johnston 2001, p. 57) in an attempt to find something higher than his father's bigotry and his brother's physicality, something he feels must exist. Brotherson (1997, p. 88) uses the analogy of dimensionality to describe David's search – the suburbs in which he lives are two-dimensional, and he seeks the three-dimensional experience by always looking for height. Carter (1987, pp. 284-288) argues that the 'vertical deprivation' of the Australian bush and suburban settlements has contributed to its perceived claustrophobia and sense of spiritual barrenness, as there is no spatial ability to be 'borne aloft to dream'. David's planting of the sugar gum in Beverley Grove is thus a *vertical* symbol of the alienation he feels, an utter transgression in the infinitely flat suburb (Carter 1987, p. 292).

David must symbolically rise above the suburbs in order to escape his habitus. On climbing the roof he sees the treelessness of Beverley Grove, and the barrenness of his own existence. His initial reaction is not, however, to flee, even though it is at this

moment that he realises that he is ‘not like the others’, but to plant a gum-tree. The sugar gum may be, in this instance, a symbol of David’s rejection of his oppressive habitus, but it is also a symbol of *Australia*. In his first step towards expatriation, David chooses as his weapon a native representative of the very forces he is trying to escape.

The sugar-gum in Beverley Grove is a metaphor for the ambivalence that David feels towards his life in Australia, an ambivalence that is shared by all those readers who see affection in Johnston’s ugly portrayal of Melbourne. The anti-suburbanism of the novel is undeniable but expected and almost overlooked in the context of a national habitus that valorises the bush and devalues the suburbs. The suburban lifestyle is seen as politically and socially repressive, ecologically wasteful, childish and irresponsible (Davison 2004, p. 4). Within this framework, the conflation of the washing of cars on a suburban estate with the murder of Jews in the gas chambers – which David does while loftily surveying Beverly Grove from the roof of his house – (Johnston 2001, pp. 272-273) could pass almost unnoticed. Yet it is a pivotal scene, providing David with justification for the contempt he feels for his compatriots.

David’s description of himself is as an expatriate in his very heart. As an apprentice at Klebendorf and Hardt, he is uplifted by the European images that line the walls: ‘it seemed wonderful to me to be working in that grubby, crowded, utilitarian place with the vision always before one’s eyes of Tintern Abbey and the front at Scarborough and the stained glass of York Minster and the chalk cliffs of Dover and the Welsh mountains and the fishing trawlers bucking out of Grimsby’ (Johnston 2001, p. 60). Matthews (2001, p. x) sees David as having a European sensibility in that he perceives meaninglessness in and of life; certainly David is affected by the times and the place in which he lives in ways that others are not. David has an acute awareness of death, directly stemming from his experience in the death-house of Avalon that seems to have passed by Jack, his brother. It is this that he recognises in himself at Caserta, when he sees that he lacks ‘the passionate regard for the adventure itself’ that other Australians have.

Death and war accompany the pivotal events in David’s life as depicted in *My brother Jack*, from his earliest memories of the family home full of the detritus of injury, to the murder of Jessica Wray, to his epiphany at Caserta during the Second World War. Death has always been used as a trope for the suburbs and suburban life, and David is a

product of the death-in-life suburban experience. According to Kinnane (1986, p. 218), Johnston's notes on *My brother Jack* 'suggest that Meredith's faults were...virtually imbibed as a disease of mediocrity from the very atmosphere of his dreary Australian suburban boyhood'; and Gerster (1990, p. 566) contends that Johnston uses the name 'Avalon' for David's childhood home due to its association with living death. It is significant that Jess is strangled in *suburban* parkland (Johnston 2001, p. 124), as her death reinforces the metonymic connection between death, violence and the suburbs that begins with the gasmasks and artificial limbs in the hallway of Avalon. Images of pollution abound in David's recollection of reading the news of her death and hearing it discussed by the suburban commuters: 'smoke wreaths and the chipped mahogany and the string mesh of the luggage-racks and the dead matches and empty cigarette packets beside the cuspidors and the old blotched tourist photographs of Porepunkah and Toolangi' (Johnston 2001, p. 123). Jess's death is in some ways the beginning of David's expatriation: it comes shortly after David is rejected by his father, and indeed, David would never have met Jess had he not been turned out of his family home. David sees both Sam and Jess as being destroyed by suburban violence and hypocrisy, and it is after these events that David begins to realise that the values he has inherited are hollow.

### **A way out of the wilderness: the artist develops**

Coe's (1981, p. 131) article on the autobiographical Australian novel contends that the predominant myth of the Australian childhood is that of an Artist or Poet who recognises the cultural desert in which they live, their own destiny as an Artist, and also, most importantly, the fundamental incompatibility of the two. Gerster (1990, p. 568) also sees a 'central issue in Australian autobiographical narrative' as being 'the conflict between the artistic consciousness and an incompatible suburban environment'. In this version of the *bildungsroman* the artist, in claiming to be one, ceases to be Australian in any cultural sense. David's difference from other members of his family is alluded to early, but it is with his writing that he gradually begins to appreciate that he is 'special' and that his environment is not just incompatible but actively hostile towards him. His sense of self only becomes clearly defined when his first article is published: 'I was fifteen. And I was a writer. Lonely and secretive, and desperately anonymous, but still a writer' (Johnston 2001, p. 75). To his father, David's writing is an affront, and he describes it as if it were a secret perversion, like masturbation: 'I told you the sly young devil was scribbling all that muck in his room: hiding it away in his mattress!' (Johnston

2001, p. 92). Mr Brewster is bemused by Mr Meredith's reaction to his son's writing – 'Really?' he says, when David tells him that his father does not approve of his writing, 'How extraordinary' (Johnston 2001, p. 112). Mr Meredith, however, is incapable of appreciating his son. In Coe's analysis this is because, under the terms of the autobiographical novel, David must be in conflict with his father in order to develop as an artist. Mr Meredith's rejection of David-as-writer is a rejection of the 'real' David, as it is as a writer that David defines himself. This rejection allows David to begin to free himself from some of the shackles of his habitus; when he returns to Avalon after his time at Sam Burlington's he sets up his bedroom with the typewriter and a work-table – 'Nothing had to be concealed any longer' (Johnston 2001, p. 118).

David's development is, however, slow and painful; after his first piece of writing is accepted he says: 'I was torn between a lofty exultation and a blushing shame' (Johnston 2001, p. 74). This is his reaction to his abilities and his success throughout the novel, a reaction that sets David up as an artist in conflict with the anti-intellectual aspects of the Australian habitus. In one of the contradictions that defines the Australian habitus, anti-intellectualism is perceived as both a positive trait, related to the privileging of nature over culture which I will explore in more depth in Section II, and a negative one, related to philistinism and small-mindedness. David wishes to be seen as an artist, but recognises how incompatible the very notion of the artist is with that of the typical, authentic Australian. In the second book in the Meredith trilogy, *Clean straw for nothing*, David says that he wants to 'keep hold on instability...I want to stay identified with a dilemma, because this makes me part of what is unorthodox and unstable' (Johnston 2001(2), p. 10). A E Goodwin (1973, p. 146) contends that this desire to be unorthodox and unconventional is David's tragedy: he suffers because he does not *want* to fit into the Australian mould. Seen in this way, *My brother Jack* is a victimology narrative, which could account for its enduring popularity. As Curthoys (1990, pp. 13-14) notes in relation to Australian history in general: 'There is a special charge associated with the status of victim in Australian historical consciousness and it is notable how *good* non-Aboriginal Australians are at memorialising their own sufferings'. That historical consciousness is part of our national habitus and Johnston exploits it in his characterisation of David Meredith as much as he exploits our national loathing for suburbia.

David spends childhood 'engulfed' (Johnston 2001, p. 70) in the suburbs, which he describes as a world 'without boundaries or specific definition or safety, spread forever, flat and diffuse, monotonous yet inimical, pieced together in a dull geometry of dull houses behind silver-painted fences of wire or splintery palings or picket fences and hedges of privet and cypress and lantana...' (Johnston 2001, p. 29). Burns (2007, pp. 167-169) contends that the fences in *My brother Jack* are a comment on the narrow-mindedness of suburban society; that they provide barriers to growth, but do not represent safety. As a child, the boundaries of suburban life, the walls and fences which allow Mr Meredith to have such control of his children's lives, are a source of danger to David. They are also representative of the suburban prison from which the child David cannot escape. As an adolescent, however, the fences provide him with enough safety to begin to develop properly as an artist: 'Within the safe, comforting shelter of the wire fences and the privet hedges' (Johnston 2001, p. 120), David is given the opportunity to realise his specialness. He tells us of his desire to become an Egyptologist ostensibly to demonstrate his adolescent naivety: 'With a glib audacity which I now find quite surprising...I decided I would become an Egyptologist!' (Johnston 2001, p. 119). However, his success at learning the hieroglyphics within just six months (Johnston 2001, p. 120) is more than a simple example of callow enthusiasm: it also attests to David's intellect and his difference. Indeed, the references to fences in general are more than a symbol of the closed-in narrowness of the suburban world – they also serve to emphasise David's specialness as he ultimately succeeds in scaling them, something the denizens of Avalon and of Beverley Grove seem unable to do.

The fences of Beverley Grove, where David lives with his wife Helen after they are married, are as much emotional as physical, and David comes to feel that he has erected them himself. Goodwin contends that David undertakes three journeys in *My brother Jack* which lead him to a sense of self-understanding: the first is when he goes to the wharves with Paul Klein and recognises the beauty in the environment; the second is at Caserta, when he looks in the mirror; and the final journey is in Melbourne immediately after the war when David wanders aimlessly, not wanting to return to Beverley Grove, and meets Cressida (Goodwin 1973, pp. 144-145). In this sense he is Odyssean, making many journeys until finding his home with, or in, Cressida. But David's convoluted journeys to a real or imagined home do not truly begin until after the action of *My brother Jack* has ended; the realisation that he is an exile in his own home, an expatriate, must come before the journey, and it is this realisation that occurs in *My*

*brother Jack*. The mirror in Caserta acts as the catalyst for the culmination of this realisation, and that particular mirror reminds David of another: of the mirror at Gavin Turley's mansion that he saw on the night when he first recognised himself as an artist. The mirrors are an obvious metaphor for seeing oneself, but it is significant that neither mirror is capable of providing a clear image: the Turley's mirror gives back 'a mysterious muddy reflection such as one might get from a stagnant pond' (Johnston 2001, p. 253), while the mirror at Caserta has 'the same cloudy, muddy opacity' as Turley's, and provides an 'indistinct reflection...through the clouded darkness and the pin-spots of time' (Johnston 2001, p. 337).

David sees himself as an artist in the mirrors, but not clearly: the image is muddled by the host of contradictions that define his and the Australian habitus. The only way he can resolve these contradictions is to reject Australia and its suburban way of life, and expatriate himself. David depicts himself as being above his habitus, but in truth he simply embraces the alternative provided by the Australian habitus – expatriatism. While David – and Johnston – promote David's eventual expatriatism as being something unique, it is not an uncommon response. As Kinnane (1986, p. xi) points out, the rejection of the 'nurturing culture' by the Australian artist is a well-trodden path in autobiography:

The common pattern is to show the child undergoing a disillusioning education, whereby it perceives the flatness and mediocrity of its cultural environment, only to find as an adult that this is the painful reality that must be adjusted to if Australia is to be accepted; otherwise it may be abandoned.

David and Helen, in moving to a house so new it was 'still damp from the plasterer's trowel' (Johnston 2001, p. 237), fulfil the expectations of their generation: David talks of the move to Beverley Grove being 'an advancement in caste' (Johnston 2001, p. 238), but such advancement was not unusual. The time, after first the Great War and then the Depression, was one of 'broken or changing values' (Johnston 2001, p. 31) where an elevation in income and social status was achievable and within the bounds of the habitus. Friedman (2005, p. 319) talks of the twenty-first century as being a time of 'accelerated change of habitus', but the twentieth century saw arguably more radical economic and social changes that impacted upon the collective habitus. Subdivisions like Beverley Grove were developed for just such a social shift, as were the mortgages and other financial arrangements David so despairs over when he realises he is legally

obliged to continue to pay for a life he now despises (Johnston 2001, p. 273). The visit to the Turley's mansion is the night when David first dares to think of himself as not just a writer but a *Writer*, and with that realisation comes the total rejection of what he now perceives with coruscating clarity to be the mediocrity of Beverley Grove.

The viciousness of David's depiction of Beverley Grove and characterisation of Helen is drawn from the well of ambivalence that David feels for his family, his country, and his place in it, and that ambivalence is manifested in a sense of shame. As I said above, David desires his specialness, but it is a guilty desire. As a novice writer, he feels shame and guilt simply at being who he is, or rather, who he is not: he is not a dedicated commercial artist, as his parents think he is; he is not strong enough to stand up to his father; he is not socially or sexually successful; he is not, in short, anything like his brother Jack. As a young husband in Beverley Grove, his shame is related not to what he is in 'the very soul of him' – an artist and an expatriate – but what he has allowed himself to become: the very epitome of successful suburban mediocrity. David's shame is fully realised after Gavin Turley reminds him not only of his potential for greatness – 'you have brilliance, don't make any mistake about that!' – but also his potential for mediocrity and the strong possibility that David will remain 'a pond skimmer' (Johnston 2001, pp. 259-262). What David despises about suburbia, particularly the aspirational suburbia of Beverley Grove, is not mediocrity per se, but a lurking sense of his *own* mediocrity. Gerster (1990, p. 566) castigates Australian writers for ignoring the suburbs in their novels, claiming that they 'shrink from close encounters with the suburbanites, perhaps because they are afraid of seeing an image of themselves'. David – and possibly Johnston too – saw an image of himself as a suburbanite and felt obliged to destroy it in order to develop into the artist he felt he was born to become.

Johnston uses a particularly anti-feminine view of the suburbs to denigrate Beverley Grove, and I will talk more of Helen and her characterisation in Chapter 6. David is relentlessly unkind to Helen, never more so than when he recollects her response to the untidiness of the Turley's house: 'And there was I thinking the Turleys would probably have a butler! David, how *can* people like Gavin and Peggy live in such a shambles! In that *midden*! Goodness! wouldn't you just love to put a vacuum-cleaner through it?' (Johnston 2001, p. 262). David and Helen's respective responses to the Turley mansion are written to indicate that David is a 'naturally' superior being who is able to distinguish 'true' aesthetics, while Helen is a tasteless suburban harpy. Geoffrey

Thurley (1974, pp. 72-73) compares Helen's desire to vacuum the place to driving 'a team of bull-dozers through the streets of Florence!', while seeing David as far superior for his 'capacity for heightened perception'.

This view – that an ability to appreciate true art, beauty and nobility is an inherent capability bestowed upon the exalted few – is exactly what Bourdieu (1984, p. 68) is arguing against in *Distinction* when he speaks of 'the ideology of natural taste'.

Bourdieu (1984, p. 7) contends that 'art and cultural consumption are predisposed...to fulfil a social function of legitimatising social differences'. The ability to recognise a work of art or a lifestyle as 'superior' is a skill generally acquired in childhood without conscious thought, but it can be learned (Bourdieu 1984, p. 68). David has, through observation – he is, after all, a journalist and former commercial artist – and his relationship with friends such as Sam Burlington and Gavin Turley developed an appreciation of the artistic lifestyle that justifies his own feelings of superiority and specialness. His anger at his life in Beverley Grove and his own collusion in its development – 'I had chosen it, of my own free will' (Johnston 2001, p. 273) – is justified by his belief that he is a special person. At one point he concedes that Helen is behaving better than him, yet he does not relinquish his right to abuse her: 'with a deep and passionate certainty I knew that I was right and she was wrong' (Johnston 2001, p. 268).

That David is so impressed by and so jealous of Gavin Turley's house is not evidence of a higher mind, but of a consciousness that has acquired enough knowledge and experience to see what it could be while recognising its own desperate bourgeoisness. It is significant that David accepts the possibility of being an artist at the Turley's house; Gavin Turley had already brought up the subject of David's remarkable ability at one of Helen's parties (Johnston 2001, p. 249), but it would be impossible for David to come to this realisation in his own suburban home. As Gerster (1990, p. 568) says (hilariously):

For the Turley residence's decaying nineteenth-century splendour, inside and out, and its "dense", "dark", "damp" garden, read "PROPER ENVIRONMENT FOR THE REAL ARTIST"; for the Beverley Grove brick veneer "tastefully" decorated by Meredith's wife, with its levelled, treeless, sixty-foot frontage, read "HOW COULD ANYONE WRITE HERE?" It really is that simple.

### **The special man and his habitus**

In her study of American novels set in the suburbs, Jurca (2001, pp. 6-7) suggests that American novelists have taken the complaints against the suburbs – allegations of conformity, consumerism, dullness, what Jurca calls ‘a broad-based intellectual resistance to the suburbs’ – and used it to develop a literature where the white citizens of suburbia begin to see themselves as lacking in both spiritual and cultural wealth as a result of their material success. The belief that the people who live in the suburbs are inauthentic is a persistent example of anti-suburbanism: Gilbert and Kinnane have both noted how Australia’s anti-suburban intelligentsia up to the 1970s saw the lives of working-class slum-dwellers as more ‘audacious’ than those of the suburbanites. George Johnston’s David Meredith says of his family home:

What was so terrifying about these suburbs was that they accepted their mediocrity. They were worse than slums. They betrayed nothing of anger or revolt or resentment; they lacked the grim adventure of true poverty; they had no suffering, because they had mortgaged this right simply to secure a sad acceptance of a suburban respectability that ranked them socially a step or two higher than the true, dangerous slums of Fitzroy or Collingwood. (Johnston 2001, p. 35)

Jurca (2001, p. 146) also notes how anxiety and discontent at suburban life are seen as markers of superiority in American fiction, and this is certainly the case in *My brother Jack*. However, David’s ability to assert a ‘cultural superiority to the suburb by repudiating it’ (Jurca 2001, p. 151) is problematised by his relationship with Jack and, by extension, his relationship with Australia itself.

Jack is ‘all Australian’: he is tough but honest (Johnston 2001, p. 34), good at sports (Johnston 2001, p. 43), quick to learn (Johnston 2001, p. 49), handsome and attractive to women (Johnston 2001, p. 51), and a hard worker (Johnston 2001, p. 161) who meets every challenge full-on (Johnston 2001, p. 51). He also fails in many endeavours but still survives, and in that he fully subscribes to an Australian mythology that ‘stresses struggle, courage and survival, admits pain, tragedy and loss’ (Curthoys 1990, p. 14). Jack goes to the Wimmera and ‘proves’ himself a man, and later, during the Depression, he travels alone to abandoned mines looking for gold, and makes ‘his lonely camp fires...under the scraggy gums, cooking his damper in the ashes, playing to the heedless night for his own solace the mouth-organ he always carried in his pocket’ (Johnston 2001, p. 162). When Kinnane (1986, p. 219) says that Jack is ‘held up as a model of heroic Australian virtues...the Australian stereotype which...Johnston treats with total

lack of irony', he is no doubt thinking of passages like that. But Jack is also irresponsible: as a boy he puts his and David's lives in danger in order to release the hand-brake of a car during a violent storm (Johnston 2001 p. 31), and as an adult he is desperate to go to war, despite having three children – 'Christ, Davy, I wouldn't miss out on this if I had fifty bloody kids' (Johnston 2001, p. 289). He is racist, sexist, inarticulate and a merciless bully of the young David. Most tellingly, he does not attempt to save his brother from their father's beatings: "'Christ almighty, nipper, you can fight your own battles, can't you?" But I couldn't' (Johnston 2001, p. 47).

Flanagan (2002, p. 8), Mares (1964, p. 246) and Thurley (1974, p. 66) all suggest that David sees Jack as his hero, but the relationship is far more complex. Nor is Jack's role as Australian hero straightforward: that role is gradually undermined by the action of the novel. Mares (1964, p. 245) notes that David defines himself against the world he lives in, and in particular against Jack, but feels that Johnston has failed in this respect as Jack is a cliché. But what David is defining himself against is the cliché at the heart of the Australian habitus, represented by Jack; a cliché that is as limiting for those who subscribe to it as those who cannot. When David describes Jack in the army as 'a proper *man*', he is describing a man who has finally found his place – Jack is a man *designed* to go to war. Wacquant (1992, p. 21) refers to the 'felicitous encounter with the world whenever our habitus matches the field in which we evolve'. For Jack, the field of war is the field in which his habitus finds true felicity: 'What had changed about him, I began to realise, was both subtle and profound: it was almost as if he had been fined down to the "essential Jack", as if this was what my brother really *should* look like' (Johnston 2001, p. 291).

David analyses his brother's 'almost passionate response' to the war, and sees it as a product of the Australian landscape, which excites the desire for an 'earth-challenge' in the hearts and minds of its populace but denies its realisation. Due to the 'intractable central grimness' of Australia, Australians have 'been obliged to look elsewhere for the great adventures, the necessary challenges to the flesh and spirit' (Johnston 2001, pp. 285-286). Certainly, the desire for Australian men to seek adventure was part of the national habitus at that time, which is why Jack 'could not have made articulate the reason for his excited eagerness' to join up (Johnston 2001, p. 285) – the desire was inculcated in him at such an early age that he can find no words for it. But – and this is the central irony that informs the novel – Jack's desire to go to war and fulfil his

‘realization of his true self’ (Johnston 2001, p. 295) is ultimately denied. The fall of Jack is more wretched because it is gradual: at first he is embarrassed at the injury that has kept him away from active combat, as if David might think ‘him guilty of a physical weakness’ (Johnston 2001, p. 310). Later, he is consumed by a ‘rage of desperation’, (Johnston 2001, p. 322) and it is clear that he would rather go to war and die than stay at home and live: ‘a little squirt like Dud Bennett got himself *killed* at Tobruk, didn’t he? While I sit here on my arse for three flamin’ years’ (Johnston 2001, p. 323). Finally, David realises that Jack has begun to live vicariously through him: ‘I had become surrogate for my own brother. He had given up, and he limped, and he had invested all his brave pride and passion and purpose in me: I had become *his* vicarious adventure. I was *his brother Davy!*’ (Johnston 2001, p. 365). The undermining of the Australian Man is complete.

Jack is the ideal Australian of a particular age, and his fearlessness allows him as a young man to take advantage of ‘the “pot luck” quality of life in general and growing up in particular’ that David sees as characterising his world as an adolescent and young man (Johnston 2001, p. 31). As Matthews (2001, p. ix) says, Jack ‘runs with the momentum of the times’; however, the times change and ultimately, it is David who succeeds, while Jack becomes an anachronism. Thurley (1974, p. 77) argues that *My brother Jack* is all about success, specifically David’s success – ‘What in fact the novel celebrates is the intoxication of sheer success’. Johnson and Tiffin (1983, p. 168-169) argue against this reading on the grounds that David feels guilt and unhappiness rather than intoxication at his achievements. In this sense, Johnson and Tiffin take David’s own professed assessment of himself and his motives at face value – ‘David seems almost incapable of relating a creditable action without undercutting it by suggesting a self-interested motive...What this masks is David’s increasing guilt at a sense of his own success which he construes as a privilege’. Certainly David does appear to feel guilty at being successful, and as I noted earlier, he is often overwhelmed by a sense of shame at not subscribing to the dictates of his habitus, but that does not mean that he feels *unworthy*. David recognises himself as being superior. Why else would he recount the praises of Brewster? David tells us that Brewster said of him: ‘He can make you see a thing. You read his piece and you are *there*, Mr Condon’ (Johnston 2001, p. 201). There is also his recount of the time when he stood up to Condon by refusing to interview the bereaved widows of the shipwrecked *River Tamar* (Johnston 2001, p. 206). Nevertheless, David is a product of his habitus and as such he is stingingly aware

of the contempt which intellectual and cultural difference is accorded. On one of the few times he openly asserts a difference from his family, he is crushingly brought down to size by Jack:

You seem to have got it into your head that you're a pretty superior sort of person – and maybe you are, for all I know – but it doesn't necessarily follow, remember, that we're not good enough for you. This is still *your* family. (Johnston 2001, p. 230)

David appears to be anticipating the charge of being 'up himself' by constantly reiterating how unworthy he is of success. He rebels against his habitus but is product of it enough to feel compromised by his rebellion, which leads to him seeing his own behaviour as evasive and lacking in courage. As Johnson and Tiffin (1983, p. 170) note: 'Meredith's consciousness is too acute and too complex to accept the straightforward code and beliefs of Jack, yet he is too imbued with the same myths not to castigate himself for failing to subscribe to them'. David is not, however, full of self-disgust, as Johnson and Tiffin (1983, p. 169) argue, but more full of an overwhelming awareness of his own difference and superiority. The conflict between this conscious difference, and an unconscious habitus, is at the heart of the novel; it is a conflict that can only be resolved by expatriation.

*My brother Jack* was one of the first highly successful Australian novels set in the suburbs, and it set a precedent for many that came after it. The novel charts the life of a man who sees himself as an artist and is consequently in constant conflict with the anti-intellectual expectations of suburban life, resulting in a need to flee. This desire to escape, to become an expatriate, is part of the greater Australian habitus, and is successfully used in this novel and others to strengthen our inherent anti-suburbanism. The next novel I will cover in this section, *Johnno*, covers similar territory to *My brother Jack*; however, it lacks the withering contempt for suburbia that is so explicit in Johnston's novel. *Johnno* is less scornful and more ambivalent in its approbation, yet the notion of expatriatism is still paramount. Indeed, in *Johnno* expatriatism is barely seen as a choice: so entrenched is it in the habitus of the protagonist's cohort that it has become, simply, the order of things.

## Chapter 2

### *Johnno*

Only eleven years separates the publication of George Johnston's *My brother Jack* from David Malouf's *Johnno*, but the novels are from different eras. In 1964, when *My brother Jack* was published, Australia seemed less worldly: Aboriginal people were not included in the Australian census, the Vietnamese war had not yet reached its full horror, Soviet tanks had not rolled into Czechoslovakia, few Australians had television and travelling to Europe from Australia was by ship. By 1975, the year of *Johnno*'s publication, Australia was arguably more sophisticated – the first steps towards legislation against various forms of discrimination were being taken, the contraceptive pill was easily available to all women, the White Australia Policy had been officially dismantled, and travel to Europe was by plane. The world had become closer – television brought it into Australian lounge rooms every evening – but more complicated: the Cold War was at its peak, the middle east appeared constantly at war, and Australia was still a long way away. What did not change was Australia's paradoxical anti-suburbanism, and the desperate need many felt to flee.

In the two novels, this generational change is manifested in the protagonists' different responses to expatriatism. For David Meredith, expatriatism is the rejection of a clearly delineated set of customs and traits which are defined as Australian and symbolised by the houses in Avalon and Beverley Grove, and the character of Jack; for Dante, the narrator and main character of *Johnno*, expatriatism is a far more complex affair.

#### **Australia and the expatriate habitus**

*Johnno* tells the story of two boys, Dante and Johnno, who grow to manhood in Brisbane before leaving for Europe, via Africa in the case of Johnno. The Australia that they leave behind is an ill-defined place, at least for Dante, and their relationship to it is characterised by ambivalence. While David Meredith goes to lengths to cite his "Australianness", Dante makes it clear from the outset that he is Australian only by accident: 'What an extraordinary thing it is, that I should be here rather than somewhere else. If my father's father hadn't packed up one day...if my mother's people...hadn't decided to leave...I wouldn't be an Australian at all. It is practically an accident, an entirely unnecessary fate' (Malouf 2004, p. 73). Not only is the narrator Australian by accident, the very country itself seems almost accidental. Australia in *Johnno* cannot be

easily delineated: it is aimless and shifting and hard to pin down, much like the River Condamine in which the eponymous hero eventually drowns. Dante cannot conceive of a delimited Australia, unlike David Meredith, for whom “Australia” is geographically concrete. The Australia of *My brother Jack* combines Melbourne and a series of places where ‘real Australians’ live – it’s the Wimmera, where Jack meets Sheila, the abandoned gold fields where Jack pans unsuccessfully for gold (Johnston 2001, p. 162), the ‘grim wet forests of Cape Howe and East Gippsland’ where Jack looks in vain for hospitality when he is forced by the Depression to walk from Sydney to Melbourne (Johnston 2001, p. 166). *My brother Jack*’s Australia is clearly defined; Johnno’s Australia is opaque.

Johnston’s novel is characterised by a sense of assuredness in the very existence of “Australia”, a confidence which is absent from *Johnno*. In its place is a profound anxiety over the nature of being Australian. While in *My brother Jack* David’s Australian antecedents go back to the first fleet (Johnston 2001, p. 18), Dante’s family are relatively recent migrants not yet fully separated from their previous lives. His mother is English and his father a first generation Lebanese Australian. His grandfather does not speak English, but works all day in his vegetable garden ‘winnowing wheat by tossing it in the air with a shovel or shaking it in golden showers from a sieve, or making white cheese by slapping it from palm to palm’, activities which are like ‘strange rituals’ to his grandson (Malouf 2004, pp. 50-51). Dante’s Australianness is not assured – he lives his early years in a simulation of his mother’s ‘own orderly childhood as the last of a big family in pre-war...London’, although, as he points out, this childhood life was ‘no different from the life that was lived in other houses where we went to play in the long evenings after school’ (Malouf 2004, p. 44). The Australia of *Johnno* is not the confident entity of *My brother Jack* and, outside Dante’s family home and the world of his own direct experience, it has a blurred and undefined quality. Martin Leer (1985, pp. 9-10) contends that the drawing of maps, which is referred to a number of times in the novel, is an important symbol of how Australia is perceived: like Johnno’s glasses in the photograph that inspires Dante to write, the ‘only feature is a frame, a limit, an outline, an edge’. Dante knows the outline of Australia; he has learned – ‘painfully, for homework’ – the names of certain towns and landmarks, and the journeys of the explorers, but for all that he knows nothing of his country – ‘what is beyond that is a mystery. It is what begins with the darkness at our back door. Too big to hold in the mind!’ (Malouf 2004, p. 74). Lacking the confidence to conceive of

Australia, Dante lacks the confidence to either embrace it or reject it. It remains 'impossible! Hardly worth thinking about' (Malouf 2004, p. 74).

*My brother Jack* ends with David on the cusp of expatriation, having rejected the suburban Australia he despises. In the next novel in the trilogy, *Clean straw for nothing*, he comments on his later, conflicted feelings towards Australia: 'I found myself thinking what a very strange thing it was for me to have grown to love this country, after having hated it so much' (Johnston 2001(2), p. 58). It is only after he has departed the country permanently that David can in any way appreciate what he has left behind. Dante, however, is in this state before he even leaves, and it is his love/hate experience of Australia and of expatriation that forms the basis of *Johnno*. In this novel, the characters leave and then return to Australia, unable to either fully embrace or fully reject the country of their birth. In this, the novel charts what Helen Daniel (1977, p. 193) refers to as 'the expatriate search for meaning', a search that is portrayed here as unending and inconclusive, even in death. Johnno, Dante's childhood friend, is vehemently, even violently, anti-suburban and anti-Australian; when he leaves for the Congo, he declares: 'I'm going to shit this bitch of a country right out of my system' (Malouf 2004, 137). His response to Australia is a profound and inexplicable anger. It begins in childhood with juvenile crimes against his society, such as breaking windows and shouting obscenities at old ladies (Malouf 2004, p. 43); in adulthood, Johnno sets churches on fire (Malouf 2004, p. 190) and shouts obscenities at the entire city: 'This must be the bloody arsehole of the universe!'" (Malouf 2004, p. 117). Of course, part of Johnno's anger at Brisbane is simple adolescent rebellion; however, it is violent, vehement, directed at the place rather than at particular people. Johnno's rebellion is informed by and supports the anti-suburbanism of the Australian habitus.

Johnno and Dante both escape Brisbane and Australia – they are, in this, expatriates. But unlike David Meredith, neither has confidence that their decision to leave has been the right one. Dante's prevarication is characterised by an inability to accept that he has made a conscious decision to leave his country:

Meanwhile, after three years, people at home began to think of me as an expatriate. An extraordinary denomination. What did it mean? It seemed too grand to fit anything I felt about my position, or any decision I had made to leave Australia and start again elsewhere. I had once found it odd, gratuitous even, that I should be an Australian. I found it even odder, more accidental, that I should be anything else...[I] had never left

Australia in more than fact...Expatriate? What did it mean? Nothing it seemed to me...I was here, that's all. I had never left *anywhere*... (Malouf 2004, pp. 178-180).

This quote sums up Dante's views on himself as an expatriate in much the same way as the scene at Caserta sums up David Meredith's. Australia is so indeterminate that it is almost a non-place, and being non-place, how can Dante leave it? – 'I had never left *anywhere*...'. For Dante, his escape from the suburban mediocrity that is Brisbane and Australia is compromised by a lack of clarity around the very idea of Australia. As such, his decision to leave is vague, unrecognised, and ultimately unfulfilled.

So why the impetus to leave? In *My brother Jack* David paints a picture of a world so empty and ugly that leaving it is the only rational response. In *Johnno*, it is almost as if the characters are *expected* to leave – escape from suburbia has become part of the habitus of an entire generation, so it is done almost as a reflex. McPhee (2010, p. 57) recalls the 'deep roots' of the cultural cringe at Melbourne University in the 1960s, where Australian literature was ranked 'second rate'; the effect of the cringe was that the expectation of expatriatism was absorbed into the habitus. It combined with anti-suburbanism so that escape from the stultification of suburbia became, at least in fiction, the motivation for expatriatism. Johnno escapes Brisbane as soon as possible, but when he urges Dante to 'give up shadow boxing in the suburbs of limbo and follow him [to Europe] before it was too late' (Malouf 2004, p. 150), Dante stubbornly remains in Brisbane, more or less alone as all his friends have already fled. It is instructive that Johnno felt that there was a time limit on escape, that Dante had to leave 'before it was too late'. When he returns to Australia briefly after his first trip abroad – I say briefly, as the narrative suggests that he does not stay for long – Dante sees 'the ghosts of schoolboys still visible behind the solid, dull presence of friends I ran into' (Malouf 2004, p. 202). These ghosts have grown up and grown dull, bolstered by Beverly-Grove style indicators of success – 'colonial furniture, the pennants for swimming and football in the children's rumpus room, a Blackman lithograph' (Malouf 2004, p. 203), examples of their small, suburban desires. Their lives leave Dante 'depressed and saddened' (Malouf 2004, p. 203) – clearly, these were the ones who left it too late to leave.

When Dante ultimately leaves Australia, it is less of an escape for him than a forcible breaking of the ennui that threatens to overwhelm him. In early adulthood, Dante is gripped by a lassitude that, according to Coe's thesis, is symptomatic of the love/hate

relationship he has with Australia: 'I was determined, for some reason, to make life reveal whatever it had to reveal here, on home ground, where I could recognise the terms' (Malouf 2004, p. 152). For Coe (1981, pp. 134-136), there is a dialectic between the love the Australian child/writer feels for the magic and mystery of Australia, and the 'uneasy, half-nauseated contempt' that they feel for the ugliness and philistinism of Australian suburbia. This dialectic is not resolved in *Johnno*, but is manifested in the ambivalence Dante feels about leaving Australia, his reluctance to admit that he is an expatriate when he is living in England, and his subsequent travel away from and back to Australia, suggested by the fact that when his father dies, he is 'out of the country *again* [my italics] on study leave' (Malouf 2004, p. 1).

Coe (1981, p. 159) sees love/hate as being part of the child/writer's relationship with Australia – 'an emotional situation in which they can live neither with that tantalizing and frustrating country, nor without it, neither with nor without its "culture", neither with nor without its ugliness'. It is not just the child/writer who feels this way, however: it is part of Australia's national habitus, part of our confused and conflicted view of the Australian suburban lifestyle. It is something that we cannot articulate, this love/hate. Dante cannot articulate it either. When they are in Athens, Dante tells Johnno – without thinking – that he's going to go home. Johnno regards him 'scornfully': 'He looked hurt, as if I had betrayed him, then shrugged his shoulders and went back to his drink. He found my decision incomprehensible; but didn't bother to ask why. I'm not sure I could have told him if he had' (Malouf 2004, p. 189).

The expectation of expatriation is part of the Australian habitus, particularly of Dante's generation; this is why it is almost inexpressible in words. It seems to relate to Eagle's (1984, p. 35) comment, noted in the introduction to this section on the expatriate, on the ambivalence many writers and artists feel about Australia, and to an atavistic desire for adventure. David Meredith sees himself as lacking 'the passionate regard for... adventure' that he sees in his brother and other Australians (Johnston 2001, p. 338), but still he rejects the comfort of his suburban life and embraces the uncertainty of expatriatism. David, Dante and Johnno are doing more than just 'seeing the world', or 'doing Europe': they are actively and – at least in the case of David and Johnno – aggressively rejecting the lifestyle that defines their homeland.

### **Anti-suburbanism in *Johnno***

O'Reilly (2008, p. 160) is highly critical of the anti-suburbanism of *Johnno*, calling it 'an extended postcolonial manifestation of the cultural cringe'. *Johnno* is set in suburban Brisbane, but the suburbs of Brisbane – sub-tropical, hilly, intensely green and wet – are the antithesis of the flat suburban sprawl of Johnston's Melbourne. Malouf (in Tulip 1990, p. 263) claims that Brisbane 'shapes in those who grow up there a different sensibility, a different cast of mind, creates a different sort of Australian'. Brisbane's climate promotes a fecundity that draws attention to the tenuousness of white Australia's foothold on the country – at the beginning of *Johnno*, Dante notes how 'Deserted for just a fortnight, my father's garden was already half wild' (Malouf 2004, p. 10). The buildings in central Brisbane are 'still mostly weatherboard and one-storeyed, so little a city that on Friday morning the CWA ladies set their stalls up in Queen Street and sell home-made cakes and jam...' (Malouf 2004, p. 72). There is no sense in *Johnno* that Brisbane has any sort of centre, of there being an area for the demi-monde or a place for a studio like Sam Burlington's; even the brothels have a 'little front yard with...geraniums' (Malouf 2004, p. 110). The Brisbane of *Johnno* is entirely suburban.

The suburban nature of his upbringing has, of course, affected Dante in a way he cannot articulate, it being such an ingrained part of his habitus, but nevertheless fears: 'Have I been shaped in any way – fearful prospect! – by Brisbane?' (Malouf 2004, p.72). Of course he has – Brisbane, and Australia, however vague and despised, have created Dante as much as his family. Malouf (in Tulip 1990, p. 261) himself talks of knowing Brisbane 'from my body outwards', as if as a child he had physically absorbed the city. Bourdieu (1990, p. 69) would say that he had – the lessons one unconsciously learns in childhood are absorbed into a 'durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking'. The dispositions of the body – the 'bodily hexis' in Bourdieu-speak – are created by habitus in the same way as the dispositions of the mind. This is why a definitive expatriation is so difficult for the characters in *Johnno* to achieve – they carry around Australia in their very skins.

Nevertheless, expatriatism is a necessary response to the mediocrity Dante and Johnno see as being synonymous with Brisbane: 'Brisbane is so sleepy, so slatternly, so sprawingly unlovely! I have taken to wandering about after school looking for one simple object in it that might be romantic, or appalling even, but there is nothing. It is

simply the most ordinary place in the world' (Malouf 2004, p. 72). *Johnno* uses the conflicting attitudes towards suburban life that characterise our collective habitus to develop a narrative where flight is the only possible alternative to suburban stagnation. As noted above, Brisbane is portrayed as being suburban at its very core, with no city as such, a place utterly ordinary and of no consequence: 'People suffered here without significance. It was too mediocre even to be a province of hell. It would have defeated even Baudelaire! A place where poetry could never occur' (Malouf 2004, p. 118). What Dante despises about Brisbane is what he sees as its lack of respect for the old and demand for the new, the old argument used by Boyd (1968, p. 90) before him, and countless others afterwards – 'The pioneer never has a moment's doubt that what he puts up will be better than what he tears down'. Dante fetishises the original family home in an old, inner-city suburb:

My loyalties remain where my feelings are, at the old house, with the corrugated-iron fence at the bottom of the yard...disreputable, certainly, but warmer, more mysterious than Arran Avenue Hamilton, where everything is glossy and modern: electric stove, washing machine, built-in cupboards instead of the old pantry, a tiled niche for the refrigerator'. (Malouf 2004, pp. 69-70)

Burns (2007, p. 109) points out that the consumerism that the Hamilton house represents is against the landscape, rather than part of it; Edmonstone Street is wooden, organic, with a front veranda that was 'almost the outdoors' (Malouf 2004, p. 47), while Arran Avenue was 'huge, ugly, show-offish...stuffily and pretentiously overfurnished and depressingly modern' (Malouf 2004, p. 5). Dante does not appreciate the desire for this house, which represents 'an aspect of my father, of his earliest ambitions perhaps, that I had never understood' (Malouf 2004, p. 5). The suburban house is almost always attacked for its ugliness and its relationship to consumer culture, but simple, anti-consumerism is made complex in the novel when Johnno accuses Dante of being 'intimidated by objects...You're a complete product of the consumer society. A credit to the power of advertising!'. After stealing and destroying piles of books 'with a daring so outrageous he was never even questioned, let alone caught', Johnno would declare: 'There are too many books anyway...And cars!...And toasters, Mixmasters, washing machines!' (Malouf 2004, pp. 122–123).

The world of Dante's suburban childhood is restricted and constrained to the point of suffocation:

When I came in from school I changed out of my good things into a sweater and shorts; hung my uniform in the closet by the bed, put my socks in the washbasket, my shoes in the cleaning cabinet, and was allowed on the back verandah...I didn't shout indoors; I never said "she" (She was the cat's mother); and I never swore...I ate my vegetables, even the horrible silverbeet, without complaint; always washed my hands after the lavatory and never called a shilling a "bob". (Malouf 2004, p. 52)

It is no wonder he thinks of rebelling, of 'sneaking over, as it were, to Johnno's side' (Malouf 2004, p. 55). Indyk (1993, pp. 3-5) sees Dante as being constrained by the clutter of his middle class life, and notes the significance encoded in the lists of insignificant items described in the novel. Dante calls his mother's dressing table 'the Library of Alexandria, a suburban V and A' (Malouf 2004, p. 9), and lists the items there to be found. In the middle room of Edmonstone Street he details the furnishings – 'chromium smokers' stands and brass jardinières full of gladioli; on a heavy sideboard, cut-glass decanters of whisky, brandy, port; and a big central lampshade of silk brocade' (Malouf 2004, p. 45). The items appear heavy and wearying – *brass* jardinières, *heavy* sideboards, *cut-glass*. His aunts and grandmother read the neighbourhood's mail, went to mass every morning, and 'never spoke if they could help it to known Protestants'; these rituals 'even the war could not change' (Malouf 2004, pp. 40-41). There is the strong sense that, even though Dante's grandparents were Lebanese immigrants and had therefore only been in the country for half a century, there is an expectation of sameness, of lives repeating lives in an endless litany of mediocrity. The family is caught in a deadening habitus that the child Dante assumes will not change.

This life is 'an image of derangement' (Indyk 1993, p. 6), a suffocating derangement that Dante escapes firstly through Johnno. This first escape remains the most significant event in Dante's life. As Burns (2007, p. 141) notes, Johnno's final letter to Dante does more than indicate his love; it also reveals that Johnno has already been part of Dante's fiction – Dante is right when he says: 'I had been writing my book about Johnno from the moment we met' (Malouf 2004, p. 16). In a similar way to Gavin Turley in *My brother Jack*, who confers the status of writer upon David, Johnno bestows the name of Dante upon the narrator and thus gives him the moniker of a poet. Moreover, Johnno provides Dante with an endlessly fascinating subject as well as giving him the final push towards a writing career by popping up in a photograph that he should never have been in.

Dante escapes into Johnno, and both escape into fiction and fictional European worlds. Dante and Johnno's schooling is characterised by readings of the classics; the narrator wrote a poem entitled 'Beatrice', the inspiration for his nickname, when in the early years of high school. O'Reilly (2008, p. 163) notes that the 'constant repetition of the name "Dante" serves as a reminder that both the narrator and Johnno privilege European culture'. This is the result of an education based on Latin unseens, Tamburlaine and Baudelaire as much as on Australian geography and the Anzac legend. Brisbane is compared unfavourably to Rome – 'I have been reading Dante. His love for *his* city is immense, it fills his whole life, its streets, its gardens, its people... Queensland, of course, is a joke' (Malouf 2004, pp. 71-72). The Australian anti-suburban habitus does not encourage respect or love, only contempt. Johnno's plan is to read himself out of barbarism while saving money in Africa – 'Schopenhauer, Berdiaev, Wittgenstein, Bonhöffer, Sartre...he would arrive in Europe with six thousand pounds in his pocket and the capacity for living at last among civilised men' (Malouf 2004, pp. 149-150).

Dante, Johnno and their friends – those who 'took jobs with the Public Service and were sent interstate...[or] got scholarships and went to Europe' (Malouf 2004, p. 150) – were members of a generation that experienced a significant habitus-shift. Friedman (2005, p. 319) notes that the collective habitus can be challenged by social movements, and cites the feminist movement as being particularly effective in changing the habitus of all members of society, at least in the West. Dante and Johnno are members of a generation that consistently challenged the collective habitus, such that they had many different expectations and desires than their parents. By the end of adolescence, Dante feels like 'a stranger in the house' despite having, by his own admission, 'ideal parents, I have nothing to complain of' (Malouf 2004, p. 71). Soon, but with none of the anguish or guilt that characterised David Meredith's break from his family, Dante rejects both his parents – 'What I am, what I will be, can have nothing to do with them' (Malouf 2004, p. 71). This is an explicit and, it seems, successful repudiation of his familial habitus: Dante becomes neither the self-made man his father wants nor the doctor or lawyer his mother has in mind. Instead, he continues reading books and ultimately leaves his family and his country. In this he does not, however, reject the habitus of his own peer group, for whom the notion of expatriation is a viable option.

While the theory of habitus places most weight on the experiences of infancy and childhood as producing an individual's emotional and mental predispositions (Bourdieu 1989, p. 78), these dispositions can be augmented by subsequent experiences: being the product of history, one's habitus can be changed by history (Bourdieu 1992, p. 133). The influence of a person's school and peer group has a significant influence on the habitus, and consequently on subsequent behaviours and expectations: 'the habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences...and the habitus transformed by schooling, itself diversified, in turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences...' (Bourdieu 1989, p. 87). Dante is changed by his school experience and the friendships he forms there, particularly with Johnno. School is, as Coe (1981, pp. 142-143) notes, a significant event in autobiographies and autobiographical novels, often providing a route to cultural integration for those who perceive themselves as outsiders. In *Johnno*, it provides Dante and his cohort with a conception of Australia that is at once both vague and inchoate – 'too big to hold in the mind' – and detailed and specific – Woolworths, the *Courier Mail*, the Trocadero, Kyogle Station. Leer (1985, pp. 7-8) sees Malouf's Australia as being both a void and a density, and it is these contradictory notions that are absorbed by the young Dante and Johnno, resulting in a view of Brisbane and Australia that becomes part of their habitus: loathing mixed with longing.

### **Rejection of the substitute father**

Coe (1981, p. 160) maintains that Dante was the only male protagonist of an Australian autobiography or autobiographical novel in his study who did not have an unsatisfactory relationship with his father. Dante's father is not like the terrible Mr Meredith; he is depicted as a kind man, if rather constrained by his mother's apron strings. His generosity to others is particularly notable after reading of Mr Meredith's 'BEGGARS, HAWKERS AND CANVASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED' sign in *My brother Jack* (Johnston 2001, p. 154) – 'My father had a dozen old mates like Peg-leg, who had fallen on hard times, or had never fallen on good ones...He never failed to stop when they hailed him, and never refused the few bob that they would immediately, my mother assured us, drink away...' (Malouf 2004, p. 236). Typical of the *bildungsroman*, the novel begins with a reference to the father, once again directing the reader to the familial habitus which will ultimately be rejected by the writer – 'My father was one of the fittest men I have ever known' (Malouf 2004, p. 1). Indyk (1993, p. 1) notes how the death of the father gives birth to the novelist, as it is when sorting through his father's

effects that Dante comes across the photograph of Johnno which precipitates his decision to become a writer. In Coe's (1981, p. 161) thesis, Johnno is an elder-brother substitute/reduced father-figure to Dante, allowing him to maintain his aspiring identity as an artist while Johnno burdens the 'descent into limbo'. In this sense it is necessary for Dante to reject both his 'fathers', which indeed he does, in order to become the artist he is destined to be (Indyk 1993, pp. 2-3).

Of course, Dante does more than simply reject Johnno – he appropriates him in a way that he does not do at all with his father. Dante's father hovers gently and ineffectually in the background of his life, 'a mixture of knockabout worldliness and the most extraordinary innocence' (Malouf 2004, p. 102). Like Mr Meredith with David, Dante's father worries that his son's love of reading is unhealthy and possibly effeminate – 'You don't want to read *too* much' (Malouf 2004, p. 71). Describing Johnno as a child, Dante says that he was one of those 'wiry, barefoot state-school kids that my mother preferred me not to play with and my father, I suppose, wanted me to be like' (Malouf 2004, p. 26). Johnno performs a similar function to Jack in *My brother Jack*, providing a foil or point of comparison for Dante, and acting to undermine the Australian myth. Johnno is a larrikin figure like Jack, especially as a child when he engages in reckless and daring behaviour:

We were all awed, I think, by his sheer recklessness. He would do *anything*. Get up with a shrug of his shoulders and accept any dare. Accept with the same lift of his shoulders any punishment. No other boy in the school appeared so regularly on detention lists or made so many trips across the gravel to the office. (Malouf 2004, p. 20)

However, there is an irony to Malouf's portrayal of Johnno that is entirely lacking in that of Johnston's Jack. He soon moves on from schoolboy dares to reckless risk-taking, indulging in wild fantasies and absurd conspiracies. He is a 'wildly anguished' character (Ericksen 1976 p. 333), alienated and disaffected, feeling 'the need to reach out only when he was either desperately miserable or in some sort of ecstasy' (Malouf 2004, p. 148). Towards the end of the novel, when he has returned to Australia, Johnno declares to Dante that they need to 'destroy the myth', without defining what the myth actually is. If it is the myth of the Australian man, the myth that is simultaneously exalted and undermined in *My brother Jack*, then Johnno's very presence back in his home country, 'baffled and stricken...sodden and morose' (Malouf 2004, p. 208), has already destroyed it. He finishes the job by destroying himself. Gelder and Salzman (1989, p.

86) contend that Johnno 'ends up as a parodic representation of the mythic Australian adventurer, drowning, significantly, in the Condamine, either through accident or intention'. However, the character of Johnno is ultimately too sad to be a parody. His death might be a kind of joke, 'an accident so aesthetically apt as to have all the elements of a humorous choice' (Malouf 2004, p. 230), but it is not funny. Unable to live in or out of Australia, he chooses not to live at all.

In his 'Afterword' to *Johnno*, written in 1997, Malouf says: 'Readers of a later and more knowing time have taken this to be a gay novel in disguise' (Malouf 2004, p. 244). Fourteen years later, in 2011, the times have moved again such that it seems the unspoken element in the novel is not homosexuality but Johnno's mental illness. His lies, his fantasies, his violence and alcoholism all point to a mind tortured by inner demons. Dante suspects that it is the 'theatricality' of the whores they visit in Brisbane that appeals to Johnno (Malouf 2004, p. 99), but I suggest it is their marginality. He insists on believing the more outrageous of post-war conspiracy theories – 'But it's the only thing that would explain it all...The unfairness of things. The absurdity' (Malouf 2004, p. 109). His stories, possibly true, include the pointless theft and destruction of cars in Germany (Malouf 2004, p. 181) and of setting fire to churches (Malouf 2004, p. 190), all of which indicate an almost pathological attraction to the aberrant.

It is significant that despite being so clearly drawn, Johnno's inner character remains a blank. Malouf writes most vividly in this novel when describing Johnno: the picture of Johnno, kissing the cuffs of the Greek priest's trousers and beating his head upon the garden path while the priest flings his hands about in helpless bewilderment is one of the few examples of laugh-out-loud humour in a Malouf novel, while this description of Johnno in the Congo, as imagined by Dante, is filmic in its exaggerated detail:

I used to imagine him sitting in a pair of faded khaki shorts on a camp stool, somewhere on Lake Victoria; flamingos would be flocking away into the sun and big game animals swaying across the horizon; Johnno, swatting insects with one hand, thumbing pages with the other, would be hunched over one of his newly arrived consignments, and as he turned the last page of each crisp, new volume he would toss it lightly over his shoulder, where it would sink, with a few gobbling sounds, into primeval African mud. (Malouf 2004, pp. 149-150)

Nevertheless, despite the detailed picture painted of Johnno, he remains elusive, with seemingly significant aspects of his character, such as his conversion to Catholicism while in Paris (Malouf 2004, p. 165) more-or-less passed over. As Brigid Rooney

(2007, p. 69) notes, Johnno remains 'enigmatic and beyond reach', an object rather than a subject, serving as a 'resource for the personal transformation of the observing protagonist'. Dever (1986, p. 66) suggests that Johnno is created by Dante as 'a figure in whom he may realize his own half-acknowledged desires and aspirations...The fiction or fantasy that Dante creates around Johnno in the course of the novel becomes ultimately a method of defining himself...'. Dante does define himself against Johnno, seeing himself as less spontaneous, but more centred. He also uses Johnno, encouraging his excesses as a way of validating his own, more timorous views on the world. This is particularly so in the case of Brisbane and Australia: when Dante has the feeling that Brisbane 'might even be beautiful', Johnno's exclamations on his city – 'What a place!' – lead Dante to 'admit then that it was difficult to see how anything could be made of Brisbane' (Malouf 2004, pp. 116-117). As Pierce (1982, p. 527) notes, Dante encourages Johnno's rages against Brisbane, and uses him as his 'surrogate risk-taker'. Yet Johnno uses Dante too, as Dante recognises: 'As for me, I was just a tool in Johnno's process of making Paris real for himself...' (Malouf 2004, p. 174). Their relationship is, like many childhood friendships, symbiotic, bringing out both the best and the worst in each other. Unlike David and Jack Meredith, Dante and Johnno are united in their despair over Australia and their love of European culture – Johnno may be a larrikin, but he is a larrikin who reads Rimbaud. Coe (1981, p. 146) claims that a love of the poetry and culture of the Old World intensifies, in the heart of the nascent writer, the despair of the non-culture of Australia, and certainly Dante makes unsatisfactory comparisons between his own relationship to his city and country, and those of the poets Dante and Baudelaire (Malouf 2004, p. 71 and 118). But he is not alone in this, as Johnno is always there, disaffected and nihilistic, ready to 'shit' the country right out of his system.

Stephen Kirby (1987, p. 390) claims that Dante learns the art of subversion from Johnno, both overtly from his outrageous behaviour, and also as a subtext, when he looks back on their relationship in the light of Johnno's belated declaration of love. Kirby cites as evidence of Johnno's homosexuality his love of prostitutes and pimps and the plan to launch Dante as a male tart, and insists that the sexual connection between the characters is what defines the relationship. Dale and Gilbert (1994, pp. 91) suggest that Dante discovers his own homosexuality retrospectively, after Johnno's death and the receipt of his final letter, and Indyk (1993, p. 7) claims that the revelation of Johnno's love towards the end of the novel casts doubt upon Dante's reliability as a

narrator: 'Dante...now appears far more implicated in the story he has been telling than we might have assumed'. Certainly the declaration of love comes as a surprise to the reader, if only because of Dante's reaction to it, which we read before we read the contents of the letter: 'Its tone was that of every letter or postcard I had every received from him' (Malouf 2004, p. 214). It is true that the revelation – 'I've loved you – and you've never given a fuck for me, except as a character in one of your funny stories' (Malouf 2004, p. 216) – changes the story. Like Dante himself, who now thinks 'disquietingly of moments when the whole course of events as they stood between us quivered expectantly, and might have gone another way...' (Malouf 2004, pp. 214-215), the reader must reassess the narrative after the letter is read. But the possibility of a homosexual romance, unrequited or otherwise, is of less importance than the very deliberate use of the word 'love', which illuminates the irony of the Australian myth. The term 'mate' is never used in the novel, but *Johnno* remains the story of two men, two mates, who love each other, even if only one of them is brave enough to say it, and then only after he has prepared for death. It is this acceptance of love that distinguishes *Johnno* from *My brother Jack*, and perhaps accounts for its less strident expressions of anti-suburbanism.

### **Escape from the everyday**

'What ordinary fate was he in flight from?' Dante wonders of Johnno when he visits him in Athens (Malouf 2004, p. 189). Johnno might have replied that it was the ordinary itself that he had flown from, the ordinary as represented by Australia and Brisbane in the 1950s. In 2002, the actor and writer David Tredinnick (2002, p. 165) described reading *Johnno* as a teenager:

...a novel that for me, tortured as I was by the living death that passed for adolescence in an Australian outer suburb of the early 1980s, hinted at the rough poignancy to be found in the moral and cultural ambiguity of this milieu. The book wasn't a life-changer, but "life-saving" wouldn't be too far off the mark.

There is a sense in the novel that Johnno's fate is pre-ordained, that he has a mark upon him. The epigraph from *The Tempest* suggests that Johnno has been born with a curse. Johnno himself appears to have a deathwish – indeed, a *drowning* wish, first jumping into the flooded Brisbane river before he leaves for the Congo (Malouf 2004, p. 142), and later suggesting to the young woman in Athens that the world could quite possibly have ended, by a flood, as predicted by 'the foolish man in Italy', and none of them had

noticed (Malouf 2004, pp. 196-198). As the thirteenth member of the Stillwater Lifesaving Team, Johnno is anomalous and does not belong. He has, as Leer (1985, p. 10) points out, 'death's number'. The fact that it is the Stillwater Lifesaving Team's photograph in which he pops up is prophetic, as Johnno ultimately drowns in still water – 'No rocks, no snags, no currents' (Malouf 2004, p. 228). He drowns in the river they drew as children, accompanied by his childhood shadow, the Mango. Johnno, who rejects Australia and all it stands for – its conformity, its consumerism, its suburbanism – ends up drowning in an Australian river that was as safe as a 'suburban swimming pool' (Malouf 2004, p. 228).

Pierce (1982, p. 526) contends that Malouf's chief preoccupation in his novels is 'not expatriation, so much as provenance – the matter of where people come from, how they became as they are, the ways their destinations are determined...'. In other words, in how habitus shapes lives, and how where you come from has the final say over what you will become. In *Johnno*, his first novel, expatriatism is a response to 'the matter of where people come from' – Dante and Johnno are destined by their habitus, by where they come from, to flee. The ill-definition of their home, however, does not allow for a definite break, and in the case of Johnno, the shame of his inability to leave eventually destroys him.

If Johnston's *My brother Jack* was the first anti-suburban novel, Malouf's *Johnno* is its successor. Both novels use a generalised desire to escape to support a narrative steeped in anti-suburban sentiment. The difference between the novels is one of subtlety and of certainty: Johnston's novel expressed great confidence in its anti-suburbanism, such that David's eventual expatriatism is perceived to be a rational response. *Johnno* is less definitive in its approach: anti-suburbanism is tempered by diffidence, expatriatism is seen more as an expectation, a part of habitus, rather than a response. The next novel I will discuss is A L McCann's *Subtopia*, a contemporary reworking of anti-suburbanism and escape. What sets this novel apart is its unrelentingly dystopic vision of contemporary Australia, encapsulated in the quasi-artistic pretensions of its protagonist. The novel shows that even in the twenty-first century, the Australian habitus remains resolutely anti-suburban, and the desire to escape is coded as the only alternative.

### Chapter 3

#### *Subtopia*

Thirty years after David Malouf published *Johnno* and forty years after Johnston won the Miles Franklin for *My brother Jack*, A L McCann wrote a novel that is a direct descendent of these two books, incorporating into the *bildungsroman* expressions of anti-suburbanism and a desire to flee. To paraphrase Malouf, *Subtopia* is a product of a later and more knowing time than its literary antecedents, and it wears the knowledge of its time heavily. *Subtopia*, a conflation of suburb and utopia, is in this novel a dystopic, twenty-first century suburban hell. Escape is the only possible response to such a life, but escape does not ameliorate the despair that was born in the Australian suburbs: expatriation is as necessary as it is futile.

*Subtopia* charts the relationship between the protagonist and narrator, Julian, and his friend Martin, characters remarkably similar, as O'Reilly (2008, p. 230) has noted, to those in *Johnno* and *My brother Jack*. However, as members of a later generation, the Australian habitus of Julian and Martin is one that has incorporated the anti-suburbanism and desire for expatriatism expressed in these earlier novels. Habitus is not fixed, but responds to discourse and events according to previously established dispositions. Johnston and Malouf cannot be blamed for establishing anti-suburbanism or the notions of alienation and expatriatism – both were present in the national consciousness before David Meredith left the country. However, novels such as *My brother Jack* and *Johnno*, both of which were popular and critical successes, reinforced those pre-existing components of the Australian habitus. Both of the earlier novels and writers are referenced in *Subtopia*: Julian reads *My brother Jack* before university, and recognises his life experiences within its pages. As an adult he deliberately references David Meredith's *Avalon*, the land of living death, by referring to the suburb of his childhood as a 'corpseworld' (McCann 2005, p. 36).

*My brother Jack* consolidates Julian's 'fantasy of flight', and it is interesting that Richard Carr (2009, pp. 63-64) sees Julian's Australia as being the same Australia that David Meredith abandons in *My brother Jack*, and that for Julian 'Conventional Australia is something to flee'. When Julian reads *My brother Jack*, he is reading it within the context of a habitus which has been affected by the themes present in the novel; similarly, McCann wrote *Subtopia* within a post-*My brother Jack/Johnno*

habitus. O'Reilly (2008, p. 227) comments that as McCann is an academic with an interest in suburban fiction (he edited a 1998 edition of the journal *Australian Literary Studies*, entitled 'Writing the everyday: Australian literature and the limits of suburbia') 'the anti-suburbanism of the novel is surely not accidental'. The novel is indeed self-consciously aware of its anti-suburbanism, but I do not see this as a criticism. What *Subtopia* portrays is the disaffection of a young man so immersed in the anti-suburbanism of the Australian habitus that he must try, however ineffectually, to locate his identity somewhere else.

Many a *bildungsroman* describes a 'fish-out-of-water' character who must discover their intrinsic artistic self in order to become whole. What characterises *My brother Jack*, *Johnno* and *Subtopia* is the need for the protagonist to denigrate the suburbs in order to demonstrate their own inherent specialness. Julian's Melbourne is as ugly as that of David Meredith: 'Red-brick dumps along the highway, filthy, snotty kids in the commission houses, the intolerable feeling of being stuck in some sort of corpseworld...' (McCann 2005, p. 36). The suburbs are 'wide' and 'flat' (McCann 2005, p. 10), with 'miles of brick veneer, asbestos and scalloped roof-tiles' (McCann 2005, p. 65). The ugliness is relentless: even in the city Julian sees 'the homeless people huddled outside St Paul's Cathedral and beggars drifting along in front of McDonald's' (McCann 2005, p. 65). Unlike Dante's Brisbane or David's docklands, there is no possibility of beauty here. The motif of cancer is used repeatedly to characterise Australian suburban life as malignant and unnatural: Moorabbin is described as 'silent brick-veneer crags multiplying like rogue cells across the southern suburbs, a giant tumour composed of brick and asbestos cement...' (McCann 2005, p. 75); Julian describes himself and his girlfriend, Sally, as 'good, law-abiding citizens' who are victims of 'the malignancies of society, and of our own frustrated fantasies: hungry cells and dammed-up energy turning against the host' (McCann 2005, p. 102).

At one point in the novel, Sally is diagnosed with skin cancer. She sees the disease as the price she must pay for her happy middle class life: 'Why am I dying? Because I'm white in a country that Celts were never meant to inhabit? Because I had a nice childhood playing on the beach?' (McCann 2005, p. 107). Julian simply blames the suburbs, imagining 'carcinogens proliferating as...dark, shaded groves were being bulldozed...to clear space for more sun-drenched brick-veneer and fibro subdivisions'

(McCann 2005, p. 106). In both responses, there is a strong sense of guilt, a feeling that skin cancer is the price we Australians should pay for our affluent suburban lives.

Julian and Martin are defined from an early age by an enervating discontent which is only exacerbated by age. Often, Julian describes his childhood as a futile attempt to counter an obdurate force:

...our furtive longings for something too ineffable to name [were] virtually crushed out of us by the world of mute, inexpressive detail spreading out from the highway, ossified in the bitumen, the gutters, the little fences, the red-brick tedium that, as dusk thickened around us, seemed to insist that we give ourselves up to its wearing indifference.  
(McCann 2005, p. 51)

While Julian claims to have few writerly ambitions – indeed, he has few ambitions at all – he still sets himself up as being above the suburban milieu in which he is mired. He describes his longings as ‘ineffable’, a word which hints at a lofty transcendence quite at odds with the deadness of the Melbourne suburbs, which have ‘ossified’ to blandness. The passage above gives the impression of the two boys wading through a heavy fog – crushing, thickening, and wearing. Earlier, Julian talks of his world being ‘an intractable and obstinate suburban expanse that could survive any aspiration pitted against it’ (McCann 2005, p. 36). Again, there is the sense of life being like a force that he cannot counter – intractable, obstinate, and solid. Sometime later, he describes himself being ‘trapped...like a fly in amber, unable to embrace life or rebel properly against it, unable to speak up, unable to act’ (McCann 2005, p. 39). Julian is reacting against Australia using an anti-suburban discourse that sees the suburbs as being oppressive yet bland, expansive yet narrow. It is significant that he sees himself as being ‘trapped’, and that he defines the suburb by its ‘little fences’ – there is a strong sense that Julian needs to escape from what he perceives as little better than a prison.

Julian is determined to set himself and Martin up as living contradictions to the other part of the Australian habitus that insists on seeing suburban life as being ideal for children. Stretton (1970, p. 21), arguing against the prevalent anti-suburban view of his cohort, described the alternative view as follows:

For children [suburban life] really has no rivals. At home it can allow them space, freedom and community with their elders; they can still reach bush and beach in one direction and in the other, schools to educate them and cities to sophisticate them.

For Stretton (1970, p. 15), the suburbs are safe havens for children and adults alike – ‘In many cities, the landless city apartment is where the rich get most neuroses and the poor get most delinquents’. This pro-suburban view is completely undermined by the experience of Julian and Martin in *Subtopia*. For them – one a would-be delinquent, the other fully qualified – the suburbs are unsafe, violent and claustrophobic. Julian and Martin become friends after they both witness a car crash, an episode of day-to-day suburban violence so commonplace that Julian’s mother’s only response when he tells her about it is to remind him that he’s going to be late for football training (McCann 2005, p. 22). The adults in *Subtopia* are vague, addled or lecherous. Julian’s parents are kind but weak, in thrall to Julian’s uncle, the Silver Fox (McCann 2005, p. 20). Martin’s mother is full of anger – ‘Wish I never bloody well had yah’ – (McCann 2005, p. 33) – while his father abandoned him as a baby (McCann 2005, p. 26). The hypocrisy is palpable:

Adults [used] children as pretexts, or as a way of hiding something. I was getting sick of it, conscious of watching an easy hedonism developing a slightly sinister, slightly hysterical edge. But my mother’s insistence on manners give it all an odd sort of legitimacy. (McCann 2005, p. 18)

### **Broken trusts**

David Meredith’s violent, ineffectual father is replaced in *Subtopia* by the loathsome Silver Fox, Julian’s uncle. The pivotal moment in his childhood, the event which begins the action of the novel and which informs much of his subsequent behaviour, is Julian’s witnessing of an act of sexual abuse by his uncle against his sister, Connie: ‘When I was ten, nearly eleven, I saw my uncle – a fit, well-tanned man in his forties – slip his hand into my sister’s bathing suit. My sister was about to turn nine’ (McCann 2005, p. 13). The trope of child abuse and neglect is used here to undermine the ‘Hugh Stretton’ view that the suburbs are safe havens for children – Julian wants to make the point that there was no safety in his suburb. Part One of *Subtopia*, subtitled ‘Notes from suburbia’, begins with Connie’s abuse, indicating Julian’s association of the suburbs with child abuse and lechery (O’Reilly 2008, p. 231). The depiction of the abuse is disturbing in its casualness and in the reaction of the perpetrator who, when he realises that the narrator has observed him, looks at him ‘blankly, as if nothing had happened’ (McCann 2005, p. 13). The act is highly significant to Julian, the witness, and comes to signify to him all that is corrupt and unhealthy in suburban life. Later, Julian finds his uncle’s collection of pornography, which adds to his conflation of suburban prosperity with depravity, and

his rejection of the sporty, sun-tanned kind of health the Silver Fox represents: 'These visions of health were...embodied in my uncle's copies of *Penthouse* and in his hands shamelessly slipping into Connie's one-piece. And the patio by the pool, the deep shagpile of the Silver Fox's living room, the huge tiled bathroom...The promise of sex...was encrypted in these spaces' (McCann 2005, pp. 28-29).

However, far more disturbing than the fact of the abuse against Connie is Julian's subsequent appropriation and exaggeration of it: firstly to Martin (McCann 2005, pp. 31-32), and later to Ingrid (McCann 2005, pp. 156-157). David Soring (2007, p. 68) suggests that in doing this, Julian is attempting to 'exceed the banality of Australian suburbia', a suggestion also made by Carr (2009, p. 65). In appropriating Connie's story, however, Julian is doing more than making his life more interesting – he is perpetuating the abuse visited upon his sister and putting her into the category of suburban victim, a category she actively resists. It is, as Connie rightly points out towards the end of the novel, not only hurtful but 'a weird thing to do' (McCann 2005, p. 257). Weird, but not out of character – Julian's life is a confused tangle of sex, ennui and fear, and a desperate desire to 'get clear of the burdens of being so terminally middle-class' (McCann 2005, p. 81). His distortion of Connie's abuse is an attempt to escape the corruption of the suburbs, but it fails as it is itself corrupt – Julian employs as his escape mechanism the very violence he purports to despise.

Julian is determined to see suburban life as corrupt, violent and unsafe, and distorts or exaggerates events to support this view. In this, he is tapping into a more generalised anti-suburbanism that sees the suburban home as the manifestation of a social hierarchy based on symbolic violence:

...popular understandings of the modern family are premised upon the overlay of these mutually reinforcing components: father-mother-child/ren hierarchical relationship (the nuclear family), the ascription of specified roles for males and females, and the single family domestic dwelling...the 'everyday' spaces of the home act to construct particular activities, relationships and subjectivities – systematic processes of symbolic violence. (Carrington 1999, pp. 5-7)

In discourses such as the one above, the suburban, nuclear family home is negatively coded as a site of oppression and conformity, a numbing straightjacket of habitus. Yet, this negative view of suburban life is also part of the habitus, the national habitus, and it informs Julian's perverse behaviour.

Julian's attitude to life is shaped not only by what he witnesses, but also by his own decision not to tell his parents because of their financial ties to the Silver Fox: 'And as this galling sense of dependence dawned on me, I knew I wouldn't be saying anything, at least not to my parents, about the Silver Fox's hand on my sister's arse' (McCann 2005, p. 20). Dependency, consumerism, resentment and sex merge in the young Julian's mind with the ugliness he sees in his surroundings, including the images of terrorism he sees on the television. While David in *My brother Jack* was brought up in the deathly shadow of World War I, and the child Dante feared that Hitler and Mussolini were hiding in the staghorns of his Brisbane backyard, the wars of Julian's childhood were less clear, more numerous, and in the living room. Terrorism becomes for Julian the stuff of real life, while his own existence is dull, claustrophobic and static.

O'Reilly (2008, p. 231) is right when he stresses that Julian, like Dante and Johnno, privileges European culture: 'the novel, like *Johnno*, is packed with references to European writers, including Dostoevsky, Ibsen, Camus, Dickens, Fielding, Trollope, Kant, Hesse and Adorno'. However, where Dante looks to the beauty and poetry of Europe to lift him from Australian suburban turpitude, Julian's fantasies of transcendence are all of European terrorism, of violence and disorder. In one scene, Julian puts down the copy of Henry James' *The Europeans* he is reading, and while the Australian sun shines through his family's suburban windows, he lazily daydreams of 'terrorist cells and police raids...line-ups along the streets, boots kicking in doors in the dead of night, guns trained on naked bodies, face down, handcuffed on the floor' (McCann 2005, p. 77). Europe and civilisation is represented not by Baudelaire, Schopenhauer and Sartre, but by a poster of Ulrike Meinhof and Martin's role as an axe-murderer in an amateur sex film, described as 'Like Goethe, but with porn and blood' (McCann 2005, p. 95). For Julian, Ulrike Meinhof, Marx and the Soviet Union were from 'another world, a world of activism, risk, passion, intensity and tragedy' (McCann 2005, p. 69). In order to justify the oppression he feels in the suburbs he must create the violence in his head: 'the only way to render it tolerable was to imagine that the ordinariness was only a surface, that the sheer weight of all that empty detail – slow traffic, stalled trams, piles of books, the sound of a chair scraping across lino tiles – masked a brutal exercise of political power: surveillance, interrogation, secret arrests' (McCann 2005, p. 98). For Julian, the Australian suburbs are inert and inauthentic, while Martin and his friends have 'something real about them...a capacity for dissidence that wasn't laboured' (McCann 2005, p. 102). For Julian, like Dante, the

*expectation* of expatriation is an inexpressible part of his habitus. It comes not only from the cultural cringe, but also from novels such as *Johnno* which inculcated in the minds of Australian young people a 'natural' desire to flee. Julian's obsession with terrorism can be read as a late twentieth century expression of the same privileging of Europe, of the same desire to reject Australia, that affected David, Dante and Johnno. The difference is that European culture has been conflated in Julian's head with terrorism and violence.

The relationship between Julian and Martin may be compared to that of Dante and Johnno, but, like much else in this novel it is darker, bleaker and without love. Julian meets Martin just after he witnesses his uncle's abuse of Connie, finds his stash of pornography and realises his aunt is having an affair. His consequent disaffection finds an outlet in the lonely and delinquent Martin. O'Reilly (2008, p. 239) notes how the car crash which initiates their friendship is described like a terrorist attack, and it is Martin's understanding of war and his affinity with violence that attracts Julian. Martin is a natural outsider who refuses, or is perhaps unable, to conform to the expectations of others. In a sense he is "anti-habitus". The theory of habitus has been criticised for not accommodating the likes of Martin, those who do not absorb 'the primary pedagogic work' (Connell 1983, p. 152), but in fiction characters such as Martin can function as foils to other characters, and illuminate aspects of the social milieu the novel depicts. Martin is Julian's foil; as Soring (2007, p. 68) notes, Martin 'gives Julian the chance to vicariously live a dangerous life while never having the need to move beyond his own conventionality and safety'. In this, Martin shows Julian to be so much a product of his habitus – anti-suburban on the outside, but nevertheless desirous of the security provided by suburban life.

Of course, Martin is a product of his own family and his own habitus, which may explain his ability to reject the meta-habitus of society. His father rejects him – 'His father had left when he was a baby, perhaps even before he was born. Somehow Martin had found him. It hadn't gone well' (McCann 2005, p. 26) – and his grandfather died slowly and painfully of asbestosis. When Julian first meets Martin, he is living 'in a brown brick house that had fallen into disrepair. The place was surrounded by giant weeds...Waist-high grass concealed all sorts of junk' (McCann 2005, pp. 24-25). O'Reilly (2008, p. 232) suggests that in its lack of conformity to suburban norms, Martin's backyard symbolises Martin's radicalism. It also demonstrates Martin's

mother's refusal to abide by suburban expectations, a repudiation of conventional behaviour that is absorbed by Martin.

When his mother remarries, the family move from the outer suburbs to Elwood in inner-city Melbourne. Elwood would become fashionable in a later era, but at that time was far removed both geographically and ideologically from places such as Moorabbin: 'in the late seventies Elwood was just eccentric, a place that jarred against the suburban desire for neat, well-organised spaces aspiring to a sense of ease always just out of reach' (McCann 2005, p. 42). O'Reilly (2008, p. 235) sees Martin's Elwood home as being 'reminiscent of the Turley's Toorak mansion in *My brother Jack*...[it] serves as a signifier of cosmopolitan difference, in opposition to the brick-veneer "boxes" of suburbia'. But the Turley house is a place of beauty and soul: Peggy and Gavin are 'obviously devoted to each other' (Johnston 2001, p. 253); the house may be in disrepair but it has as its centrepiece 'a gorgeous round table with a surface polished to the feel of soft old silk' (Johnston 2001, p. 254); and, most importantly, it is the place where, after a 'very simple and very wonderful dinner' (Johnston 2001, p. 255), Gavin gives David permission to see himself as an artist. At Martin's Elwood house, by comparison, Julian is confronted by the unsettling character of Frank: "He was a youngish man, in his twenties, with a close shaven head, shaven eyebrows and an impish, almost toothless grin...He was like a skinhead gone soft' (McCann 2005, p. 43). Frank is a homeless, paranoid alcoholic who spends his nights sleeping on Martin's floor, presumably without the knowledge of Martin's mother or stepfather. Frank is the first intimation in the novel that Martin is not simply delinquent, but possibly outside society altogether. He succeeds in transcending suburban conformity before the end of high school by embracing an alterity symbolised by Frank's death-camps and his own inscrutability. It is too extreme a move for Julian, who is both attracted and repulsed by Martin's behaviour which he recognises as being dangerous:

I was...driven into little rituals...by the superstitious presentiment that if I didn't wash him out of my thoughts, I might turn into him, the Mongrel [Martin], an abandoned creature precariously perched on the border between the human and the animal.  
(McCann 2005, pp. 54-55)

Unlike Dante, who feels himself immune to Johnno's violence – 'I believed somehow in my own immunity. Johnno's rages always broke beyond me' (Malouf 2004, p. 121) – Julian is a bit afraid of Martin. Their relationship is darker and slightly threatening.

McCann does not ignore or obfuscate around the potential for a homosexual connection, but confronts it in a disturbing scene when Julian and Martin are in late adolescence and almost have a sexual encounter. 'Do you think you're a cock-tease?' Martin asks Julian the next day (McCann 2005, p. 60). Julian is convinced that Martin is working as a prostitute: 'Martin dropped one clue after another, as if he were sprinkling breadcrumbs so that I could follow him back home through a forest of thorny insinuations' (McCann 2005, p. 57). But the sexual side of their relationship remains as vague and undefined as the rest of it. While Julian's motivation in maintaining their friendship is based on his conflicted desire to 'cross the line' into nihilism and reject his suburban habitus (McCann 2005, p. 97), Martin's reasons are less clear. Perhaps he is attracted by Julian's ordinariness: Julian calls himself 'stubbornly normal' (McCann 2005, p. 257), which could be what Martin desires all along, but is incapable of achieving.

Julian's first escape from suburbia is into Martin and his fantasies of violence:

Addled with whisky I travelled through labyrinthine cities, putrescent sewers, vast, barren wastelands and fortress prisons, and battled evil tyrants, sexual sadists, goblin armies that sodomised their captives and primitive cults that took hallucinogenic drugs. (McCann 2005, p. 53)

Like all of Julian's subsequent escapes, this first one is only a fantasy, a game of "Dungeons and Dragons". This fantasy world of escapist violence reaches its apotheosis in Julian's relationship with Ingrid. In keeping with the anti-suburbanism and the desire for expatriation that informs the novel, Julian leaves Australia and the safe, suburban world it represents for Europe, travelling first to London. As O'Reilly (2008, p. 245) notes, Julian follows a 'well-worn expatriate path' in going to London, a path he is highly critical of earlier when musing on the life of Germaine Greer: 'Her life repeated the great tropes of Antipodean longing: education, exodus, envy...No doubt they [Greer and Clive James] were both relieved to have escaped to the centre of an empire that had died half a century earlier' (McCann 2005, p. 73). O'Reilly (2008, p. 242) points out that 'Julian's attitude towards Greer is curious, since her escape from suburbia and subsequent success abroad is precisely the trajectory he would like to follow himself'. Indeed, before he leaves for London he describes his plans:

I had it all figured out. I'd work in London, save money, make a name for myself doing something literary, see Martin, prove to him what a great friend I was, and if none of that worked out, I'd turn up on Sally's doorstep in the frozen wastes of Long Island. (McCann 2005, p. 113)

This passage is instructive in that it shows how leaving Australia is, for Julian, essential if he wants to ‘make a name for myself’. Sally’s move to America to advance her academic career is part of the same Australian desire to leave, to escape suburban conformity, to find an authentic life elsewhere. It is the expression of the Australian habitus.

### **The Australian expatriate overseas**

Like *Johnno*, a significant part of *Subtopia* is set outside Australia. O’Reilly (2008, p. 231) goes so far as to suggest that, as most of the novel takes place overseas and the protagonist is ‘ambivalent about his nationality, lacks a strong desire to return home, and rejects mainstream Australian society...the novel is barely Australian’. Certainly Julian does not agonise over his Australianness in the way of David Meredith or Dante: there are no passages in which he ponders the term ‘expatriate’ in the way both of his fictional predecessors do. There is also a sense in *Subtopia* that the suburban malaise is as much a global dilemma as a purely Australian one. This is because of its time: with air-travel Australia is no longer isolated by distance, and with television news of important events arrive in Australian homes contemporaneously. Nevertheless, Australians can still use their comfortable standard of living to turn away from world events. This is Julian’s observation on Australian suburban complacency, one he determines early on when his drunken Aunt’s response to a hijacking in Africa being shown on the TV is a dismissive: ‘Well, so what?’ (McCann 2005, p. 35). It is Martin’s understanding of world events that makes him so attractive to Julian when they are young adolescents: by having a different perspective on the Second World War, Martin elevates himself from Australian suburban indifference: ‘That was how Martin was different. He was full of conviction, and it had nothing to do with football or cricket’ (McCann 2005, p. 26).

It is with such conviction that Martin rejects Australia totally: ‘“You don’t like your country?” the woman beside us asked. “Cunt of a country,” Martin said’ (McCann 2005, p. 142). Towards the end of his illness, Anja asks him if he wants to go back to Australia:

“He looked at me like I was mad, like he didn’t know what I was talking about, like the place had never existed.”

“He didn’t want to go home?”

“It wasn’t that. He didn’t remember ever having had one”. (McCann 2005, p. 273)

However, by rejecting his home Martin rejects himself; as Julian says: ‘He was ready to demolish things if they didn’t measure up, and finally he was ready to demolish himself’ (McCann 2005, p. 10). Like Johnno, Martin clearly suffers from a pathological sense of alienation, exacerbated by drug use. Ingrid, Julian’s German girlfriend, is also mentally ill. It is significant that the two people who, in Julian’s eyes, most clearly reject suburban complacency and conformity, to whom he looks for an authentic version of life, are unbalanced. Julian’s rejection of Australian suburban values is undermined by the fact that Martin kills himself and that Ingrid is exposed as being deranged. Terrorism and violence, long considered by Julian to be an antidote to suburban conformity and smugness, are revealed to be a false escape, as is the refuge of the conspiracy theorists.

The other characters who reject suburbia are similarly deranged. Penny is a drug addict and eventually dies of an overdose, while Chips Fischer is psychotic, living in an underground cavern overrun with rats. His insane missive, a re-telling of the Nazi death camps in an Australian setting, details a conspiracy theory based on an inversion of white Australian dreams – discovery, colonisation, the White Australia Policy – and an undermining of the Australian reputation for friendliness and egalitarianism. Julian’s obsession with Chips Fischer, and his belief that he is Martin’s father, symbolises his own unbalanced state:

I couldn’t drag myself away from the certainty that Chips Fischer’s basement archive, no less than the man himself, contained a purpose so intimately related to me that parting with it now that I’d stumbled across it would have been like turning my back on a lost relative, or a schizo know-it-all alter-ego I didn’t know I had. (McCann 2005, p. 250)

Chips Fischer rejects suburbia entirely and lives in a parallel world: ‘a world of cellars, vermin, lunatics, outrage and festering resentment...’ (McCann 2005, p. 254). He is like an expatriate in his own country, living literally ‘down under’, having rejected entirely the civilised world. Julian, however, ultimately rejects nothing. He returns to Australia, grieving for Martin and his own lack of ambition: ‘[I] wondered what kind of transformation I might be capable of in the sobering wake of Martin’s death. I think I knew that it was the last time I was every going to pursue that thought with any conviction’ (McCann 2005, p. 279).

*Subtopia* is a clear descendent of *My brother Jack* and *Johnno*; it is a novel that charts an ineffable longing for expatriatism within an anti-suburban mindset. As a descendent,

the novel incorporates its predecessors in an expression of the Australian habitus, a habitus that has been informed by the views of those earlier works. The difference is its nihilism. David Meredith sees expatriatism as an answer to his discontent at suburban life and an affirmation of his artistic nature; Dante questions both anti-suburbanism and expatriatism as an answer to his angst, but ultimately accepts them; while Julian eventually comes to see escape from the Australian suburbs as available only to the demented.

One of the fears of the artistic suburban child, as evidenced by the *bildungsroman*, is that they have been created by the very culture that they despise and ultimately reject. It is the fear of habitus, the fear expressed by Dante when he worries that he may have been ‘shaped’ by Brisbane. In *Subtopia*, Julian is particularly affected by this inarticulated fear, which explains his attraction to the subversive Martin. Martin and Johnno are both catalyst characters who provide an alternative to the numbing possibility of simply falling, unthinkingly, into the pro-suburban habitus. That alternative is, however, also part of the habitus – the rejection of Australia and the acceptance of expatriatism. For Julian, neither alternative provides a solution to his disaffection and he ends the novel still in the air, flying over the ‘sandy abstraction’ that is Australia.

In the final chapter in the section ‘The Expatriate’, I will analyse Barbara Hanrahan’s *The scent of eucalyptus*. The narrator of this novel realises, more than any of the other protagonists, that she has been shaped by her family and by the suburb she grows up in, both her personal habitus, and the national habitus she shares with her peers. Ultimately, however, she rebels against accepting the narrow life presented to her as the future, choosing escape over the confines of suburban married life. The novel is a narrative of wish fulfilment that nevertheless recognises the narrator’s own potential complicity in the perpetuation of a habitus which she realises she cannot accept.

## Chapter 4

### *The scent of eucalyptus*

*My brother Jack*, *Johnno* and *Subtopia* are novels written by male writers, with male protagonists. The suburban milieu that they depict is an essentially male environment: despite the persistent popular contention that in the Australian suburban home ‘women often rule the roost’ (Horne 1971, p. 82), these novels suggest that Australian suburban life is as male-dominated as many other aspects of our culture. Jack Meredith senior in *My brother Jack* and the Silver Fox in *Subtopia* are particularly potent reminders that suburban domestic spaces are not necessarily places of feminine empowerment.

In her novel *The scent of eucalyptus*, Barbara Hanrahan presents a detailed picture of life in suburban Adelaide in the 1950s and 1960s in which men feature only by their absence: this is a life that revolves around women. The habitus, as experienced and embodied by women, is different to the habitus experienced and embodied by men. The ‘natural’ role of women as homemakers and carers is an example of the doxic understandings that underlie the habitus and which account for its seemingly unquestioned self-evidence. For the nascent female artist/poet, the suburban habitus is therefore doubly constricting, as she must confront expectations of behaviour which have been absorbed at the most fundamental level. While the male narrators of *My brother Jack*, *Johnno* and *Subtopia* escape because they feel that life elsewhere is more authentic than the small suburban life they experience as children and young men, or because they feel that expatriatism is an expected response to the perceived inadequacies of suburban life, Hanrahan’s narrator escapes because she feels she has no choice. Her character is diminished by the impositions of a life she cannot accept. She feels that she can only survive as an artist if she flees.

#### **The artist, born to be special**

*The scent of eucalyptus* records its narrator’s ‘coming into creativity and her recognition of the divine spark within’ (Lindsay 1994, p. 15). Like David Meredith, the narrator of *The scent of eucalyptus* sees herself as essentially different to others around her. The novel is a *Künstlerroman*, and has at its core a belief in the immanence of artistic ability and sensibility, a belief that was popularised by the Romantic discourse on artistic subjectivity, and which remains strong today. This is what Bourdieu (1984, p. 66) calls ‘the ideology of natural taste’ – the popular belief that artists are born, not made, are

more sensitive than others and are essentially unique. Hanrahan explicitly links her protagonist to these inherent qualities of specialness with the inclusion of an epigraph by Andrew Marvell: 'See with what simplicity/This Nymph begins her golden days!'

Throughout the novel, the narrator is like a nymph or other, special creature, with an affinity to the natural world and an ability to see the beauty in the small and commonplace. The novel stresses the child protagonist 'looking, seeing, watching, peering; they are verbs of perception' (Brydon 1982, p. 42). She has a heightened eye, the eye of an artist:

As a child and ever after, the minute, hidden facets of things intrigued me. I was for ever walking with my head bent, looking at the ground. I saw an ant picking its way across the earth, the moss at the base of the wall, the wings of the bee in the hyssop. (Hanrahan 1985, p. 12)

As she gets older, the inability of others to look and to see distresses her:

I feel hurt by the talk and laughter of the others; the way they tramp uncaring through the grass – ignoring the orchids, the curly rims of the geraniums, the sweet-scented fluff of the thorn... (Hanrahan 1985, p. 131)

Thomas (1989, p. 60) notes how in popular discourse the 'essential' artist is intensely perceptive, particularly visually, and must flee the bourgeois conventionality of her peers. The narrator of *The scent of eucalyptus* often runs from what she sees as the boorishness of her peers – as a very little girl at kindergarten she must run home to her mother to quell what she describes as the 'bird...in my chest' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 41); later, she runs to her grandmother. At a Sunday School picnic she leaves the party with its childish, suburban pleasures to observe the natural beauty that goes unrecognised by the others:

I exchanged egg-and-spoon races and warm raspberry cordial for the cicadas, the wild flowers, and the trees. I left the picnic grounds with their see-saws and weary swings; I fled from the kiosk selling hot water...I walked over grass dotted with rabbits' turds; I found scabs of moss, a speckled egg-shell – a creek. And waded over pebbles and ferns, my feet lapped by coldness, my fingers gemmed. I was alone with a bird's strange frog-like call. Then a twig snapped and tea-tree buds fell into the creek; my reverie and the frog-bird's melody were broken by a band of Baptist youths. (Hanrahan 1985, p. 90)

Even then, as a little girl, she must escape – it is notable that she fled from the kiosk which sold hot water to make tea, the ultimate 1950s suburban Australian drink. Her

perception is acute as, nymph-like, she communes with a natural world which is unappreciated by the Baptist youths, whose very presence stops the birds from singing.

Bourdieu (1992, pp. 132-133) notes that ‘the founding myth of the uncreated creator...is to the notion of habitus as the myth of genesis is to the theory of evolution ...the notion of habitus provokes exasperation, even desperation...because it threatens the very idea that “creators...have of themselves, of their identity, of their “singularity”’. Throughout *The scent of eucalyptus*, but especially in the early sections, the narrator intimates that she was created differently to others, with an innate sensibility: ‘I was born...with an excitement mark on my left cheek...[it] was left to flicker on and off – a perpetual warning of something yet to come’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 8). Later she says: ‘My mother told me how my grandmother prophesied over my cradle like a Good Fairy that I should be too sensitive for this life; that I should have a thorny path to tread’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 50). The path is thorny indeed, made more treacherous by the expectations encoded in the suburban habitus.

The narrator of *The scent of eucalyptus* is ‘both isolated and saved by the special qualities of her perception’ (Brydon 1982, p. 43). She is always an outsider, happiest as an eavesdropper or a voyeur. The first sections of the novel, which describe the narrator’s early childhood, are almost claustrophobic in their relentless depictions of watchfulness and separateness. Even as a little girl the narrator knows she is separate, although desperate always for the love of others. As Coe (1981, p. 139) notes: ‘we find the Australian child simultaneously cultivating his [sic] solitude, his exceptionality, his rare vision of beauty, his awareness of his role as a predestined painter, novelist or poet; and yet plunging desperately into the crowd, forcing himself to share its values, to participate in its violence and vulgarity, and to be accepted by it’. The narrator is haunted always by the vagaries of friendships, by the loneliness caused by her “specialness”. At the Gymnasium camp she is friendless, so turns to herself: ‘I went for a walk by myself. I found an empty box, and decided to fill it with beautiful things... When I showed my garden to the others, Yvonne Heath said it was pretty and Phyllis Hood said it was nice. But someone giggled’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 130). Masgrau-Peya (2004, p. 65) sees the building of the box garden as representative of the narrator’s desire for the safety of her family, while its subsequent destruction, by a storm in the night, is a symbol of the narrator’s growing awareness of the fragility of home. This reading is insightful – the narrator is away from home for the first time, at a period in

her life when the inevitability of change is becoming apparent. It is significant that the description of the camp is preceded by her witnessing the onset of another girl's menses (Hanrahan 1985, p. 129), as the camp is the first step in the narrator's tortured process of growing up.

But the box garden is also another example of the narrator's artistic sensibility and affinity with natural things: she lines the box with moss that resembles silk, fills it with 'toadstools, an empty snail-shell, ivy leaves that looked like stars, pebbles that were cool against my cheek, some wattle, gum leaves with holes, a feather' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 130). The sensual nature of her artistic ability is illustrated by the pebbles, that were 'cool against my cheek', and the level of imagination characterised by seeing stars in ivy leaves. The giggle that undermined the beauty of her box garden is the giggle of the suburban habitus, the thoughtless, ignorant suburban habitus, that the artist/poet must overcome.

Like David Meredith as Stunsail, the narrator of *The scent of eucalyptus* is, as a child, precociously bright and writes like someone older. When the radio preacher comes to visit he is expecting an adult, and is embarrassed when he realises that the author of the letters is actually a child (Hanrahan 1985, p. 125). Like David Meredith, who taught himself hieroglyphics, the narrator avidly learns the lessons from the bible, and describes herself as 'a scholar' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 125). She is a high achiever academically – 'I learned I was clever in Grade Five when I got 97½ in the exam' (Hanrahan 1985, p.111). But at the end of primary school, before leaving to go to the Technical School, she is given a prize – a book called *Hope's Last Chance* (Hanrahan 1985, pp. 154-155). The irony of the title reads as a deliberate reminder of the fading hopes of the girls who are going to the Technical School: in the primary school they 'are at their prime...then, like Janet when she dreams of the spangled circus life, they can do anything. Three years later the dream will be gone...' (Hanrahan, p. 179). While David Meredith, Dante and Julian are confronted by an Australian stereotype that sees men as sporty, strong and only semi-literate, Hanrahan's narrator must overcome the expectations of a habitus that seeks to bind her to 'the ranks of the magpie girls at the Tech School...[who] learn to cook and clean and dressmake and type and book-keep and do shorthand...' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 160). Her way out of such a prison is through isolation and observation, but it is an escape that comes at a price.

Thomas (1989, pp. 56-57) notes how in the struggle against her own habitus, the nascent female artist must render herself as unnatural in order to challenge the expectations of her gender. The child/poet narrator is one who is unnaturally attracted to the ugliness as well as to the beauty: 'I came inside, and found the dust that lay under the mat, the stale hair in the brush, the soap's awful underside like a sweating sore' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 12). The child/poet is obsessed with the abject – she talks of pus and blood, pimples and blackheads (Hanrahan 1985, p. 13 and 31). She is monstrous, cruel and secretive, tormenting her Down Syndrome great-aunt (Hanrahan 1985, p. 23). Her cruelty and secrecy is not characterized in negative terms – there is no David Meredith-style self-castigation – but as an intrinsic part of her own artistic being. The narrator's artistic self 'is imaged in terms of darkness and Gothic possibility, particularly in its association with her fits and faked suicide attempt' (Thomas 1989, p. 60). She is self-destructive, has seizures, stops eating – 'I refused to eat; locked myself away...One day I made holes in all my pants...One day I swallowed three aspirins; pretended I had taken more' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 165). The association between her violent behaviour, her unique, artistic self and that self's opposition to suburban norms is made clear in her description of her self-mutilation: 'I decorated myself with a pretty pattern (something like a rose) of scratches and a little blood...It is strange to sit in a classroom all neat and nice and know that the scratches are there under a cuff' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 166). The narrator chooses a picture of something 'pretty' to disfigure herself, and enjoys the secret undermining of suburban expectation that comes from hiding her scratches under her school uniform.

The narrator sees her fits, her obsession with the abject, with ugliness and self-mutilation as indicators of her specialness – 'I had fits...I thought perhaps they were traces of some exotic degeneracy...' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 164). These are the traits that keep her from suburban mediocrity: 'I was saved by the crudity that made me pee into the bath, and revel in the tar-black shit that poured out of me and stank' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 158).

Saved by the times and her family from the images of war and death that permeate the childhoods of David, Dante and Julian, Hanrahan's narrator sees the ugliness in the everyday, the ugliness that is ignored or overlooked by a domestic discourse that valorises the clean and the pretty. She is attracted to dirt and ugliness and the rejection of conformity. Carol's house, antithetical to the suburban ideals of cleanliness and

order, which stinks of chamber pots under beds, cat excreta and stale milk, is a place of great attraction to the narrator, who is 'drawn from cut-glass and damask proprieties by its feckless glamour' (Hanrahan 1985, pp. 72-76). The narrator's obsession with the abject is an implicit rejection of the role of suburban housewife that has been planned for her (Masgrau-Peya 2004, p. 65), and an explicit embracing of herself as artist.

The artistic self presented in *The scent of eucalyptus* is a complex joining of two separate and opposing selves who provide support to each other and allow for the creation of a single entity: 'I had always been two; I had always had my fits. But my two selves were complementary, they came together' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 183). The narrator sees her existence as being a complex and delicate division between the beautiful and the ugly, between life and the internal forces that threaten it: 'It was a delicate world that waxed and waned; constantly threatened by my grandmother's depressions and possessiveness, my mother's materialism and secret longings, Reece's stomach that rattled, my fits' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 182). Unlike David Meredith, who rejects suburbia to the extent that he is blind to the possibility of it being beautiful, the narrator of *The scent of eucalyptus* is able to see both the beauty and the ugliness of her life. Lindsay (1994, pp. 14-15) claims that Hanrahan portrays the world 'as a paradise garden where the divine is present in all things and in all people and where creativity, loving kindness and joy are the ways to God'. Certainly, *The scent of eucalyptus* focuses on the spiritual nourishment accessible through an aesthetic appreciation of nature, but Hanrahan's garden is as much post-lapsarian as it is paradisiacal. It is associated with what Thomas (1989, p. 56) calls the narrator's 'night-self' – her artistic side which rejects the conformity of the daytime for the freedom of the night. The garden is often described in terms of darkness and mystery, such as the dank, mossy section at the side of the house where there is a mysterious plant that blooms every seven years (Hanrahan 1985, p. 36). The flowers of this plant can be seen only at night. These flowers represent the hidden beauty and creativity that lie dormant in the suburban house of women where the narrator lives.

Sykes (1983, p. 50) notes that when the narrator experiences intense unhappiness she uses the metaphor of a bird to describe the feeling. For Sykes, birds are associated with hysteria, thus the connection in Hanrahan's novel. However, Hanrahan often describes strong feelings by using metaphors from the garden – the narrator's hair, for example, 'shivered like a thistle brush' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 159). As a child, the narrator first

identifies sensuality in the garden: 'I walked down the path with [my great-aunt] and she pulled up my sock by the agapanthus – and there was a lovely warmth I didn't know was sensual, and I felt dizzy' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 9). Later, as an adolescent experimenting with masturbation, she describes the wonder of it as 'the agapanthus feeling' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 173).

The garden is a place of peace and beauty, but it is not an uncomplicated space, nor is it, despite the romantic, pastoral elements of its description, anything but a suburban garden:

It could be the Garden of Eden, but made little: no animals but Tinker – he is blind, and perhaps a mouse, and rats – for there are rats in the ivy; but mainly birds and lots of insects and pink earthworm whom I like. And daffodils yellow gone green in the hollows and jonquils milky cream, and a basin of pink that is arabis...It was quarter to seven. There were men with kitbags on bicycles, and at the end of Dew Street the milkman and his horse. Dog excreta blossomed from the pavement. (Hanrahan 1985, pp. 145-146)

The garden is associated at all times with the domestic, the feminine and the suburban. The grandmother, Nan, who is the narrator's most beloved, is always working in her garden, and it is she who makes it paradise. There is something earthy and pagan about the grandmother: 'her fingers are green: for the broom is all threaded with yellow, and in autumn there are dahlias and the Mother's Day chrysanthemums, and fires full of leaves. And in spring the violets and hyacinths'. The suburban plants in the garden – 'snapdragons, marigolds and pansies' – are given significance by being cared for by this strong woman, who plants them with her granddaughter in the moonlight (Hanrahan 1985, p. 32).

When describing the garden, the metaphors used are domestic and nurturing, reinforcing the connection between the house, the garden, and the security and peacefulness of home: the rose is a *mop*, the larkspur a *poker*, the sky is *peppered* with birds (Hanrahan 1985, p. 186). The house is described in similar terms of comfort and feminine domesticity: 'The kitchen was warm, suffused with smells of cooking. My grandmother's arm *cradled* china as she beat eggs for a cake...' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 186). The joy and wonder of a happy childhood is described in this extract, describing Christmas morning:

Sugared fish flickered in the sheets, flower-scented cachous starred my pillow, ju-jubes quivered, plaited liquorice twined. A Christmas stocking of raspberry mesh was a cage for a celluloid kewpie doll, a whistle that curled and tickled my nose, a peppermint walking-stick, a mouse with a string tail. There were three picture books and a monkey with a spotted waistcoat, a globe that filled with snow when I shook it. (Hanrahan 1985, p. 57)

We are reminded that the house is entirely female when, after lunch, they all ‘stumbled away...slept in our petticoats’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 57).

This is a novel of women and the domestic, yet the paternal presence is, nevertheless, ever-felt. Men feature in tales of deception and irresponsibility, in a family history of lecherousness and violence. The narrator’s own father died while she was a baby, and the novel can be read as a record of the effect his absence had on the little girl (Thomas 1989, p. 54). She listens to her mother’s stories of her father when they go to the outside lavatory in the dark, and she wonders over the mementoes of him that have been left to her – a copy of *Lorna Doone*, letters from his friend Paul, a picture of the Madonna (Hanrahan 1985, pp. 46-47). She recognises his reluctance to conform – ‘My father strained from the tameness of marriage’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 15) – and is attracted to the idea of her father’s bad behaviour being somehow linked to her own artistic core (Hanrahan 1985, p. 164). Nevertheless, she does not overlook his failings as a husband and father:

While she was giving birth to me...he found the thirty pounds she had hidden in the wardrobe to pay the bill: took it, and bought drinks for Jock Beresford and Fred Juncken and all the others whose names are forgotten. (Hanrahan 1985, pp. 15-16)

Later, she refers to him as ‘the husband who bought friendship with my mother’s thirty pounds’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 47).

All the men in *The scent of eucalyptus* are violent, lecherous or irresponsible. One great-uncle, Willie, became an alcoholic and died of malnutrition (Hanrahan 1985, p. 19). Nan’s second husband, the mother’s stepfather, was a sadist. The mother and grandmother will not talk of it but eventually the mother ‘brought herself to tell that he drowned puppies and kittens and made her watch; that he trod on her fingers when she played at his feet’. The impression is given that there was still worse abuse, but the mother refuses to elaborate (Hanrahan 1985, pp. 28-29). Only one man, the grandfather baker, is kind, but he is kind to the point of irresponsibility: ‘My great-grandfather was

a baker who was too generous: gave countless Depression loaves on credit, went into liquidation' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 9).

Like many other children in novels set in the Australian suburbs, the narrator of *The scent of eucalyptus* is sexually abused. Disturbingly, it is a family member, Great Grandfather Collins, who is the perpetrator:

His hand comes out to love me but I say that it is hot. He doesn't answer – just draws me close. He even hurts my arm, but doesn't seem to care. And the sofa cuts my leg and then his tongue comes out and he starts to shake. And he asks me what is under my dress. I nearly get the giggles, but then I feel scared, for my arm still hurts and he comes too close. And I tell him the petticoat and the singlet (it has a hole) and the pants of course. He smiles more then and I see spit along his mouth and more tongue and then it is really awful, because he puts his hand right up my dress and feels and a great-grandfather shouldn't do that. (Hanrahan 1985, p. 54)

The narrator does not tell of the abuse, yet the very air of the suburb is heavy with sexual threat. There are numerous references to the sexual harassment of girls by men (Hanrahan 1985, p. 93, 95 and 154) which creates an atmosphere of menace totally at odds with the safety and comfort of the narrator's domestic space.

The narrator's beautiful childhood is brought to an end by her mother's decision to marry again – 'my mother tells me she is to marry the man with the moustache and the RSL badge who is her friend. As the last leaves fall from the trees, she tells me that we will leave the house in Rose Street...And the chrysanthemums are sullied, the earth is hard, rain falls on iron' (Hanrahan 1985, pp. 186-187). It is significant that the entrance of a man into this world of women is described in terms of destruction and despoiling of the garden – the flowers are sullied, the earth is no longer fertile. The domestic space, which in this novel is entwined with the garden, loses its regenerative power with the introduction of a man.

Masgrau-Peya (2004, p. 62) contends that *The scent of eucalyptus* is simultaneously a 'presentation of the fiction of domestic bliss and the repudiation of the ideological tenets that inform it'. I take issue with the word 'fiction' here, as it implies that the experience of domestic happiness described by the narrator is essentially false. It is not false, but it does come with conditions that become evermore apparent to the narrator as she grows. These conditions are the product of the suburban, paternal habitus – what Masgrau-Peya calls the ideological tenets – and certainly the novel repudiates the

sully of the domestic bliss experienced by the child narrator by the false desires of a homocentric world. The family habitus of *The scent of eucalyptus* may be feminine, but it is still constrained by the patriarchal habitus of which it is a subset.

The beauty of the lives of the Rose Street women is subtly celebrated: Nan in particular is seen as strong – at one point she is described as being like ‘a thickly-padded bolster’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 67), suggesting comfort and protection. Stewart (2010, p. 22) sees the brooch of marcasite elephants that Nan wears as being a symbol of her role as ‘ruler’. Certainly Nan appears to be the strongest of the Rose Street women, but it is significant that elephants are known as much for their intelligence and their nurturing qualities as for their strength. Nan protects and cares for the narrator, repelling the frightening and the dangerous simply by her presence – ‘We walked past the sinister lane that was no longer sinister with Nan beside me’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 66). The relationships between the three women and the girl are almost always depicted as comforting and safe: ‘once more we sat in a tight circle about the evening – lulled by murmuring wireless, Reece’s needles, the newspaper, the scratching pen’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 186). Despite the gothic undertones of the novel, the desires of the mother and grandmother are portrayed as restrained and manageable – the copies of *True Confessions* hidden under the grandmother’s mattress (Hanrahan 1985, p. 35), the single cigarette smoked by the mother before bedtime (Hanrahan 1985, p. 36). For the narrator, while she is a child, her home and garden is a miniature paradisiacal world of women; it is only as she grows older that she realises how constrained her mother and grandmother are by their habitus, by what is expected of them as suburban women.

### **The suburban home as a cage**

The suburban home in *The scent of eucalyptus* is drawn as a haven of domestic bliss, a nest. But, as the narrator grows, she becomes aware that the nest can also act as a cage, and the resultant dialectic – the house as both nest and cage, protecting and confining – is what drives her development as an individual and as artist. When she begins to recognise that her mother and grandmother have a life-plan in mind for her, a life-plan that consists of marriage, children and a suburban house, the narrator begins to move consciously in a different direction. Her recognition of the smallness of her mother’s and grandmother’s ambitions for her and her resistance to this are described in terms of the garden: the suburban home that is planned for her is explicitly removed from the natural world by its ‘flowers that are not really flowers but annuals or perennials’

(Hanrahan 1985, p. 160). The narrator describes herself as a 'canker', and her refusal to conform as a 'blight', terms associated with roses and other cultivated plants. Her rebellion is fuelled by the scents of the garden at night – 'the dark green perfume of rosemary' – which is seen here as natural and alive, sending the narrator 'cryptic messages' through the plants: 'the prunus-tree stuck with red paper blossoms rustled, oranges glowed through closed-in cloud; the Easter daises fluttered, the climbing geraniums winked, lilies stared' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 161). The garden where the narrator comes alive is clearly alive itself, unlike the suburban garden of her possible future, which is defined by the lawn which is mowed – controlled – by her possible future husband.

The home in *The scent of eucalyptus* is both a place of protection for its inhabitants, and a place of confinement (Masgrau-Peya 2004, p. 64). The idea that the suburban home is a prison for women is a persistent one, driving a good deal of anti-suburban discourse. Detached housing away from the central business district is deemed to support dominant patriarchal relations by providing men with domestic comfort away from the toils of work, while isolating women behind closed doors. This view is a common one: 'The development of detached single dwellings may have provided a haven and retreat for men from the hurly-burly of the inner-city world of work, but for women in many instances they may only have provided a prison' (Watson 1988, p. 19). What is interesting about *The scent of eucalyptus* is how a suburban home without men still manages, at times, to resemble a prison, and not just for the narrator. The mother and grandmother are as restricted and constrained as their daughter/granddaughter; the only difference is that they do not question the constraints of their lives. The other women in the novel – the mother, the grandmother, and particularly the girls at school – accept without thought their habitus and their life: 'Not once have thoughts of the meaning of life – or its lacking of meaning, which is the same – been allowed to enter their heads' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 179). The aching loneliness of the narrator comes from her refusal to do the same.

The restrictions on women in suburbia are manifested and symbolised by the grandmother. The grandmother may be a pagan goddess in the garden, but in the house and outside in the street she is a 1950s suburban woman, constrained by expectations. The clothes she, her daughter and her granddaughter wear are representative of the restrictions of the habitus: '[Nan] climbed grunting into stockings...She sighed as she

squeezed her bunions into too tight shoes and plucked bobby-pins from her snail-curved hair...' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 100). The social rules of the habitus require the grandmother to submit to physical tortures – too tight shoes, snail-curved hair – that she sees as onerous, but will not reject because they define her. This can be seen in the oxymoronic description of her corsets – 'the *embrace* of stays that fastened with *spiteful* teeth' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 70). Bourdieu talks of bodily hexis – how the habitus is absorbed physically, manifesting itself in how one moves, sits and stands – but he does not extend the concept to clothes. Yet the clothes of the 1950s/1960s suburban Australian woman are an extension of the constrictions and restraints imposed upon her, as described so often and so well in *The scent of eucalyptus*. The female teacher, prim and ordered, has 'lots of little buckles on her shoes' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 168); the grandmother stands in the city 'sweating in navy tussore' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 70). At night the restrictions do not cease: the mother sleeps in a hairnet with 'rows of bobby-pin curls' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 13); the great-aunt irons pin-tucks, pleats and folds into night-dresses, emphasizing the strictures that remain in force even in bed (Hanrahan 1985, p. 21). It is significant that the adolescent narrator wears gloves, the symbol of middle class 1950s suburban respectability, to stop herself from masturbating, as if this reminder of constraint will break her connection to her natural, sensual self (Hanrahan 1985, p. 174).

Even as a child the narrator must wear clothes that restrict – 'short pleated skirts that show my pants...a velvet bow fastened to a bobby-pin in my hair; my socks are carefully turned over twice' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 107). Later: 'My body, which was a child's body still, was caged in a blouse; under the collar of the blouse snaked a tie; the tie slashed the neck of a box-pleat tunic' (Hanrahan, p. 167). The use of adjectives of violence – caged, snaked, slashed – emphasises the symbolic violence being inflicted upon the child forced to wear these clothes. After school, the narrator 'took off the shoes and the hat and the tunic, and was free.' She became 'the wild one' – her natural, poetic self – free of the restrictions and subtle brutality of her school clothes (Hanrahan 1985, p. 184).

The women of Rose Street are constrained by more than clothes, however: the grandmother is characterised by her nurturing quality which may give her life meaning, but which just as surely traps her in a kind of servitude. This is exemplified in her relationship with her Down Syndrome sister, Reece, who Nan has cared for since their mother rejected her as a baby. It is a relationship that is defined by the small things –

‘[Nan] pares the child’s corns...curls her hair with spit and bobby-pins, cuts her nails when they are soft after the bath’ – and is extraordinarily intimate – ‘Nan and Reece share each other’s bath water, sleep in twin beds...They sit together before the slit eye of the electric fire...Sometimes they link hands over the leaves that swirl statically on the carpet. Sometimes Reece’s fingers caress her sister’s cheek. They are a pair’ (Hanrahan 1985, pp. 24-25). Nan is trapped by the love she has for her sister, love supported by a habitus which insists that women – particularly widowed women of a certain age – are naturally nurturing and self-sacrificing.

Reece is described as being both her sister’s frustration and her fulfilment. While caring for Reece restricts and constrains Nan, in accepting the role of nurturer Nan’s life is given purpose. It is this tension between self-sacrifice and self-fulfilment in the lives of many suburban women that fuels much suburban discourse. Gilbert (1988, p. 45) contends that, ‘For feminists, the equivalent of [Marxist] false consciousness that obscures class realities is the view that women are the beneficiaries of suburbia, not the victims’. The sociologist Lyn Richards (1990) spent five years in the 1980s researching the thoughts and desires of the inhabitants of one suburban development in outer Melbourne, nicknamed ‘Green Views’. The resultant study is informed by a strong belief that women must be unhappy in the suburbs. The responses of the women in Green Views, who admit to loneliness but do not want to move from the suburb, bemuse Richards (1990, p. 306): ‘Yet so many women at home were lonely, and the puzzle was that they seemed to want isolation’. Judith Brett (1995, p. 50), reviewing an article of Richards’ based on her Green Views research, noted the following: ‘Many feminists see the suburb as a trap for women, and Lyn Richards’ essay is instructive in its determination to find some support for this, despite reported high levels of satisfaction’. *The scent of eucalyptus* gives an insight into both Richards’ bemusement and Brett’s response: the narrator’s mother and grandmother are trapped, but it is a trap that provides solace and protection. Moreover, it is part of their habitus and almost impossible to reject. The women of Green Views are happy despite their loneliness because they are fulfilling the expectations of their gender and class. Similarly, the narrator’s grandmother fulfils the expectations of her habitus by being nurturing. The narrator may rail against the cage her mother and grandmother attempt to erect for her, but still she recognises that it was their love and sacrifice, their acceptance of their role of carers, that allowed her to become an artist:

They did not acknowledge that they were different – that they had made me different by my upbringing in that house of the red verandah, where beauty lay all about; in Reece's ugly face, Tinker's milky gaze, my grandmother's wrinkles, the lilac shadows beneath my mother's eyes; where life, under its sham layer of studied conformity was strangely original, strangely unworldly. (Hanrahan 1985, p. 183)

### **The suburban habitus in *The scent of eucalyptus***

Bourdieu's theory of habitus allows for a multitude of 'selves', as life is a series of interactions between one's habitus and various 'fields', and each field provides a different opportunity for the habitus. Bourdieu (1992, p. 102-104) sees all social systems – 'The school system, the state, the church, political parties...unions' – as fields. He goes on to describe a field as 'a game devoid of inventor and much more fluid and complex than any game that one might ever design'. When Hanrahan's narrator claims that her upbringing had made her different, she is recognising that her family habitus made it difficult for her to succeed in the schoolyard. Other than the immediate family, school is the first and, arguably, most significant field in a person's life. A failure to succeed in this first field will reverberate for a long time, as one's habitus is affected by interactions with the field. The narrator recognises this, sees herself how her inability to fit in, even in the pre-school, has affected her future interactions within the field of school: 'The split that began when I ran from the sinister wooden tower [in pre-school], from those who claimed the Pierrot costume...had always been with me' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 183).

Dante in *Johnno* imbibed a primary, familial habitus that was little different to his peers – except perhaps Johnno – and his experience at school was therefore a positive one. He did not feel like an outsider, and his schooling provided him with a secondary habitus that became more significant, as the years passed, than that of his family. The female narrator of *The scent of eucalyptus*, however, never reconciles her primary habitus with the field of school, leading to her vision of herself as divided.

The narrator's unhappiness and despair at school is described in a style of unflinching truth:

And what did I learn in those Infant School years? I learned to read and write and spell and count. But more than that, I came to know other children and myself. And I found that other children could be cruel and cunning and a thousand years old. I found that I must provide myself with some kind of armour, and so I became wary and learned from them – and was divided in two. (Hanrahan 1985, pp. 64-65)

In *The scent of eucalyptus* bullying is pervasive and practised by children and teachers alike; the children who laugh when the narrator falls on the gravel (Hanrahan 1985, p. 109), are the same children who cry when the teacher beats Michael Saradakis ‘longer and harder than anyone else, because he was Greek and did not understand’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 110). The school, anthropomorphised as a kind of monster, ‘red-brick...slit with eyes of classrooms and a wide-mouthed door’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 60), conspires with the habitus of its pupils to crush out potential and to reward conformity and obedience. The rewards for good work in infants’ school – ‘red ticks and gummed-paper stars and early minutes; there were scraps embossed with violets, kittens in baskets and angels dreaming on scalloped clouds’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 62) – are continued throughout primary and the technical school: ‘And even as the litmus paper in the science lesson soaks up the acid and is transformed, so we soak up obediently the veiled references to our status, with which we are fed daily’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 179).

Bourdieu’s theories have been widely embraced by the educational community as a way of understanding how cultures of disadvantage are manifested in the school environment. Deborah Tranter’s (2006, p. 9) investigation into the tenacity of disparities in higher education participation in South Australia revealed that economically disadvantaged students must overcome not only their own community and family habitus in order to enter university, they must also overcome the expectations of their teachers and the subsequent limited range of courses offered at their school. This is Bourdieu’s argument, paraphrased by Jeremy Lane (2000, p. 61):

...the low objective chances of lower-class children entering higher education were internalised into their habitus, into an implicit sense of what did or did not constitute an objectively possible future, at once a subjective disposition and a class “ethos” which encouraged such children to rule out university as a “practical possibility”.

Hanrahan’s novel is in many ways an artistic exploration of this very phenomena; the expectations of the suburban milieu in which the narrator and her cohort live are supported by, and in turn support, the expectations of the school community:

Subtly, with silver tongues, these bland-faced directors and superintendents and inspectors reduced us to our stations; their highest modicum of praise was that one of us would make an admirable girl in an office. Yet no director or superintendent or inspector compelled me to enter the school. I was sent there by my mother and grandmother who loved me. (Hanrahan 1985, p. 181)

Perhaps the most important sentence in this passage, in terms of my analysis, is the last. The recognition by the narrator that her mother and grandmother, in their desire that she conform to the expectations of the community, are motivated by love, supports Bourdieu's contention that habitus is durable. It is passed on from one generation to the next not only by bitterness, but also by love.

As the special, artistic one, the narrator is able, through her sensibility and insight, to rise above her habitus, but she observes how the potential for greatness is crushed out of others:

And Carol told me that she would become a spangled lady in a circus...(How are we to know that already Carol's future has claimed her? – that she will live out her life in Rose Street...that her future will lead no farther than the Cowandilla Road, where she will tread five days a week to wear out her nails at a battered Remington? – that she will sit on alone at night, shorn of all the secret radiance that slumbered in her pigtailed; imprisoned by a television screen...). (Hanrahan 1985, p. 77)

The novel is informed by the romantic notion that the child is born perfect, until it is eventually corrupted by the expectations of others – by habitus. In an interview with Julie Mott (1983, p. 43) Hanrahan said: 'I think the truest part of you is the child and the child is still in you all the time – it doesn't matter how old you are in years, the truest part of you is that child'. The narrator of *The scent of eucalyptus* imagines herself as a baby, 'pink and perfect as a rubber dolly', while recognising her role as a child in the perpetuation of a suburban dream she sees as based on the false desires of others (Hanrahan 1985, p. 7). This is the artist's interpretation of Bourdieu's concept of doxa: the child's innocence is tarnished by the expectations of her family and community before she even has a memory. Still, the child is more innocent and gifted than the adult, and does not want to grow up: as the narrator and her friend play in the high school classrooms after everyone has gone for the day, they 'cling to the last remnants of childhood'. But the playing becomes violent – 'My heart leaps to her cries. The cleaner at the door tears us apart' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 171) – they are children no more.

Brydon (1982, p. 42) contends that in all of Hanrahan's novels, the 'adults have become trapped by social definitions from which the child is still free'. The adults in *The scent of eucalyptus* are restricted, particularly by the suburban world in which they live. While Rose Street is located in what would now be considered an inner-city suburb, it is coded in the novel as suburban, with many of the signifiers of the 'typical' Australian

suburb: lawns are mowed on Rose Street (Hanrahan 1985, p. 92), the narrator's house is a bungalow with a proper verandah at the front (Hanrahan 1985, pp. 92-93). The houses have big yards – Joan Stott's is big enough for a 'house for her grannie at the back' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 98), and the narrator's has the paradisiacal garden. Nevertheless, the suburb is a comparatively poor one: while the narrator describes a childhood of abundance, of Christmas pillowcases stuffed with presents, fish-dinners at Balfour's café, piano lessons and other examples of lower-middle class affluence, she is aware that there is a difference between Rose Street and Linden Park, where her cousins live: 'I knew I wasn't as good as them' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 51). *The scent of eucalyptus* is set in Thebarton, where Hanrahan grew up. Annette Stewart (2010, p. 18), her biographer, contends that a person living in Thebarton in the 1950s, 'would be painfully aware of the stigma of poverty attached to [the] area'. Certainly the narrator is aware that Linden Park is 'better' than Rose Street, but she does not aspire to join the ranks of the Annabels and Alistairs she mocks in Chapter 25, recognising in their lives, as reproduced in the social pages of *The Advertiser*, restrictions and constraints only marginally different to her own.

Restriction is what the narrator sees around her, what she detects in the suburban worlds she and the rich in Linden Park inhabit. Hanrahan has a way of subtly noting the little details that emphasise the sameness and conformity, the smallness of suburban lives. The narrator repeats this phrase about her mother twice in two pages: 'She went each day in a tram and a creaking lift to an office on a fourth floor. She sat there, from nine to five (with an hour off for lunch)' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 17 and p. 18). The parenthesis – '(with an hour off for lunch)' – emphasises the smallness, the pettiness, of her mother's life. That her mother draws advertisements for a department store is significant, as consumerism is considered in anti-suburban discourse as the very basis of suburban life. From the very first page, the narrator sees herself as being an unwilling participant in some sort of monstrous exchange, whereby "real life" is traded for suburban consumerism and safety:

I was a prize, presented on an off-chance, that for an instant deceived – tricked them into thinking that real life bore some resemblance to the thing they thought was life: a wan pretence fabricated by newspapers and politicians; made safe by shops that sold lounge suites and latest season's costumes on hire-purchase, bearable by wireless jingles and long-range forecasts. The paltry thing they were offered bound insidiously – in a moment that became all future time. (Hanrahan 1985, p. 7)

Even the spirituality the child narrator searches for in her religious quest is corrupted by suburban smallness: the representative from the Church of Christ ‘told jokes about Catholics and did not pronounce his aitches; he made the disciples sound like a football team’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 123).

The narrator’s suburban world sits inside an Australia that is both familiar and foreign: familiar, in that the idea of the sunburned land is part of her schooling, inscribed in every history book, but foreign, in that she cannot see it:

But where were the hills of the history book, stitched with the pathways of Burke and Sturt and Leichhardt? – the hills of the sun-burned earth and budgerigar grass, the azure skies and fiery mountains we sang about at school before the flag spangled with all the stars of the Southern Cross I was never sure of seeing? Where were the old dark people I did not link with the lost couples on suitcases at the railway station? Where were the crocodiles and brolgas, the billabongs and snakes? (Hanrahan 1985, pp. 90-91)

Coe (1981, p. 146) talks of the poet, absorbed in the culture of the Old World, becoming ‘inauthentic’ in relation to their own country: this is what Johnno and Dante experience. For Hanrahan’s narrator, however, it is *Australia* that is inauthentic; as a woman, the Condamine, the Wimmera, the outback and the bush have no relevance – ‘I looked about me for the sunburned land. In vain’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 91). The narrator is trapped within a national habitus where she has no relevance.

Nevertheless, she is Australian, and establishes her Australian antecedents early in the novel. But in doing so, Hanrahan suggests that time is both linear and circular, and that memory is both real and false. In the following paragraph, the narrator creates a connection between the past and the present:

My great-grandmother...was born at Houghton in the Adelaide Hills. Her father was an adventurer who died seeking El Dorado at Alice Springs. Her mother was Welsh. She had three sisters and a brother: Poll and Mill and Annie and Jack. Some of them were people I knew. (Hanrahan 1985, p. 9)

Over the page, the past is erased: ‘Elizabeth was my great-grandmother. She went, vanished utterly – leaving behind four children that do not exist’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 10), before it is related back to the present when she describes her dead father: ‘For being my father he lived a life – didn’t he?’ (Hanrahan 1985, p. 11). By questioning the Australian myth of the sunburned land, and by confusing the linear view of settlement, Hanrahan undermines both masculine and feminine Australian stereotypes. As

Thompson (1996, p. 136) points out, referring to visits to the art gallery by the narrator and Nan, 'the narrator and her grandmother explore and discover a "British" Adelaide while squeezed into their best clothes; the implication is that they must adhere to false feminine appearances in order to negotiate the unreal Australia beyond Rose Street'.

While the narrator talks of immersing herself in the world of nineteenth century England through the old children's books she finds in the shed, her 'real' world is the Australian suburbs. The suburban world, augmented occasionally by trips to the beach or the Adelaide hills, is presented as the 'true' Australia in the novel – small, circumscribed, but real. The adversaries of this Australia are not the land itself, but the small-minded people who inhabit it – the council workers who deliberately blind the narrator's dog, Tinker, the people who stare at Reece in the street, the thick-lipped art teacher who is cruel. By references to a future where 'iceflowers bloom at the window in a white city' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 188), it is implicit that the narrator eventually leaves Australia for Europe, but in the action of the novel, Europe barely exists. Nevertheless, the narrator is still, at the end of the novel, an expatriate, in that she is clearly on her way to rejecting Australia and embracing her 'night-self', on becoming the artist she is destined to be.

### **Fleeing to save the self**

The sense of a self rendered in two is a central theme of *The scent of eucalyptus*, Hanrahan's first novel, and it is one she was to return to throughout her work. Sykes (1983, p. 47) says that 'the divided self is one of her most constant motifs', while Lindsay (1994, p. 16) notes that Hanrahan was always searching for a unified self. For Lindsay, the division was between the physical and the spiritual worlds, and *The scent of eucalyptus* does in some way chart the narrator's search for religious or spiritual solace. But in this novel, the protagonist's yearning for religious acceptance and understanding is depicted as part of her struggle to accept her difference, as a step she must take as she journeys towards a rejection of her habitus in favour of her authentic, artistic, self.

The narrator sees herself as having two, disparate 'selves' – her social self, which is the self she presents to the world, and another, pure self. The narrator's realisation of her split self is her way of explicating the conflict between her need to be social, and her stronger need to embrace the solitude of the artist (Thomas 1989, p. 61). The narrator

sees her two selves as being wrought by her inability to conform: she describes the suburban habitus as trying to claim her, like a prize: 'I pulled myself clear of the mediocrities of the world that sought to claim me' (Hanrahan 1985, p. 159). There is a sense here that she – the true, artistic she – is rising above this world, pulling herself up and away from a life that tries to drag her down. Her decision to reject the expectations of her family and community is couched in terms of a rescue – 'I was saved', she says. Significantly, it is she who saves herself. Although the novel ends with the move from Rose Street to another Adelaide suburb, it is clear to most readers that the narrator will eventually go to London. Portrayed as she is as an Australian artist, it would be part of the narrator's habitus – an aspect of the habitus she would acquire after she has left Rose Street – to travel to London. At the end of the novel the narrator is in a state of 'nihilism and despair' (Coe 1981, p. 157). However, as the novel has been written, it is clear that the narrator did, at some point, overcome these feelings: as Thomas (1989, p. 60) points out, 'Hanrahan suggests implicitly that as an adult [the narrator] triumphs over ambivalence about her night self in presenting it as part of the personality which rescued her from a suburban fate to be the author of a high cultural literary work'.

*The scent of eucalyptus* is a feminine exploration of anti-suburbanism within a narrative of self-development. The strange paradox at the heart of the Australian habitus – that we choose to live in and yet disparage suburban life – is given depth and understanding in this novel, where life in the suburbs is presented as being both nurturing and constricting. The artist who is the narrator is constrained by the Australian suburban habitus in ways unimaginable to her male peers. Nevertheless, like them, expatriatism is her final response, the only way she can finally imagine overcoming expectation and embracing her artistic self.

## **Section II     The lone hand (and the suburban woman)**

## Introduction to Section II

*...men live and struggle and fight out in the open most of the time. When they go to their homes they go to beat their wives. We live in the home. All our real life is home life. All our moral and mental life is the moral and mental life of men who are half women in their habits, men breathing always a domestic atmosphere... (The Bulletin 3 November 1888, cited in Lake 1992, p. 158).*

The suburban family home has been, at least since the 1920s, associated with a dream of a better life predicated on the narrative of the nuclear family (Carrington 1999, p. 9). After the Depression and particularly post-war, Australian experienced an economic boom and consequent period of social change, encouraged by urban planning laws which assisted in imposing the ideology of the family by supporting the development of single family dwellings in suburbia (Butler 2005, p. 13). Within these dual paradigms of progress and the family, the lone hand myth was not diminished, ironically. Indeed, it was in the 1950s, as the suburbs became more and more to be associated with femininity and domestication, that the lone hand became *the* national signifier of masculinity, assisted by the publication of Russel Ward's *The Australian legend*.

*The Australian legend* is a celebration of Australian bush nationalism written as an historical account of the development of the 'stereotype' of the 'typical Australian', based on 'the characteristics...widely attributed to the bushmen of the last century...outback employees, the semi-nomadic drovers, shepherds, shearers, bullock-drivers, stockmen, boundary-riders, station-hands and others of the pastoral industry.' (Ward 1966, p. 2). The construction of this stereotype was first created by 'literary men' like Furphy, Lawson and Paterson, whose works were published in periodicals such as the *Bulletin* and the *Lone hand* (Ward 1966, p. 13). The term 'lone hand' has been adopted by Marilyn Lake (1992, p. 157) from the name of the nineteenth century periodical to describe this model of masculinity that embraces bachelordom and rejects the domesticity associated with family life. I have also used the term 'lone hand' in my thesis, as it is more broadly applicable than that of 'bushman', and encapsulates the underlying negativity associated with the trope. As I noted in my Introduction, that such a model of masculinity is still exalted today indicates how strongly it has been absorbed into our habitus; despite being exposed as a myth, the lone hand remains an identifiable stereotype. It is part of our habitus, and it sits unquestioningly beside the ambivalence we feel about life in the suburbs.

The lone hand myth has as its corollary the myth of the suburban woman. This woman, grasping, consumerist, snobbish and stupid, is epitomised by Edna Everage and Patrick White's Mrs Flack, but she appears in less explicit guises in many portrayals of Australian life. The suburbs are regularly disparaged in anti-suburban discourse for the perceived power it gives women over men: in White's *Riders in the chariot*, for example, the suburban harpy Mrs Flack encourages her nephew and his friends, successfully, to crucify Himmelfarb. Boyd (1968, p. 101) claims in *The Australian ugliness*, apparently without irony, that 'the female community [in the suburbs]...saw to it that the doors began closing on the rumbustious life of their wild colonial boys'. As Gilbert (1988, p. 47) points out, rather more drily, two decades later: 'The recreational customs of Australian men have frequently transformed the homecoming of the "breadwinner" into something less than the celebration of domestic bliss'. Gilbert (1988, p. 35) explains how 'suburbia was from the beginning virtually synonymous with domesticity. Suburbs were places for families and children...'. In Malouf's descriptions of his family home in *12 Edmonstone Street*, it is the feminine space of the old suburban house that he mythologises. This is a space that, being male, he only has access to as a small child (Burns 2007, p. 107). But celebrations of femininity in suburbia are few; generally, the perceived feminine domination of the suburbs works to disparage them (Sowden 1994, p. 83). Even Malouf (1986, p. 25) refers to his beloved 12 Edmonstone Street as a 'house of children. Even my parents are more like older children playing Mothers and Fathers than real adults...', as if the femininity of the suburban renders the house somehow infantile.

Ironically, although the traditional masculinist view is that the suburbs give women power to curtail the behaviour of men, feminists have also traditionally seen the suburbs and the nuclear family as confining and curtailing for women:

The more "the family" came to dominate personal life the less were women's opportunities for self-assertion and independence; they had no choice but to stay within, and make the best of, their domestic prisons. (Summers 1994, p. 217)

The nuclear family was, according to Summers (1994, p. 212), developed as an ideal around the beginning of the eighteenth century. This was the same time that white Australia was founded, and the same time that the suburb began to be championed in Europe as a solution to urban problems (Davison 1994, p. 100). It is no surprise, then, that Australia was to pioneer a style of living that had a mother, father and their children

living in a single detached dwelling. That Australia was a nation of migrants supported the development of the nuclear family in its single house, as for many years most Australians had little extended family living in the same country.

In Australia, at least in the twentieth century, the suburb was inextricably linked to the ideology of home ownership. Menzies (1942) famously declared that ‘one of the best instincts in...[Australians] is that which induces us to have one little piece of earth with a house and a garden which is ours...’. When Rose Pickles in *Cloudstreet* declares ‘I want to live in a new house’ (Winton 1998, p. 326), she is expressing the desire of generations of Australians for whom home ownership was the first step in gaining both independence and respectability. Home ownership, involving as it does, banks and mortgages, is associated with the bourgeoisie and capitalism in the way that paying rent is not. From capitalism it is a small step to consumerism, and as I noted in my Introduction, the suburbs have always had a metonymic association with consumerism. Horne (1971, p. 26) declared last century that ‘Australia was one of the first nations to find part of the meaning of life in the purchase of consumer goods...’; while Knight (1990, p. 10) describes Australia as ‘an open prison...built of fetishised objects’. With the suburbs being defined by both femininity and wasteful over-spending, consumerism has come to be considered a feminine pursuit. Helen in *My brother Jack* is characterised in particular by her consumerist, suburban desires, and it is significant that the narrator’s mother in *The scent of eucalyptus*, the mother who desires a suburban house and family for her daughter, is a commercial artist in a department store.

Consumerism is linked to concepts of taste and class, and is also blamed for the perceived isolation of suburban life:

The upward mobility of suburbia, we are told, with its abundant supply of desirable household appliances, supplanted the authentic social relations of the extended family. (Clarke 1997, p. 132)

Isolation, lack of community, empty materialism – these are the characteristics of the feminised suburbs, which are compared unfavourably in the national imaginary with the myths of the bush. Indeed, it can be argued that the construction of the masculinist Australian identity was in direct response to the development of a ‘feminised’ suburbia (Turnbull 2008, p. 19), and the lone hand mythology is instructive in its absolute negation of the feminine and the domestic. It is, as Lake (1992, p. 157) argues, a

rejection of the 'cult of domesticity', which was imported to Australia from England with the free settlers. Fundamental to the cult of domesticity was the suburban home; the lone hand trope is thus the embodiment of anti-suburbanism. Ironically, the lone hand is also linked to Australia's pioneer spirit and the idea of progress, two significant drivers in the development of the suburbs. The pastoral industry, with which the lone hand is symbolically associated, is allied to the cult of the pioneer – after all, it was Ward's (1966, p. 2) drovers, shepherds, shearers and stockmen who enacted the gradual colonisation of Australia's interior – and, consequently, to the post-Enlightenment concept of progress. The suburbs were the outcome of progress, and progress is perceived as a masculine pursuit, allied to conquest and domination. To mobilise the lone hand in fictional representations of the suburbs, particularly the suburbs that were built in the more affluent Australia of the 1940s, 50s and 60s, is therefore entirely acceptable within the habitus. However, due to its intrinsic position as anti-feminine, the lone hand can only exist in the suburbs while they remain a simulacrum of the frontier: as soon as the suburbs become comfortable, the lone hand becomes anomalous.

As I said earlier, the beauty of Bourdieu's theory of the habitus is how it sheds light on entrenched aspects of an individual's or a group's behaviour which are contradictory and even destructive. Australia's habitus is a complicated and inconsistent mix of pro and anti-suburbanism, a belief in the pioneer spirit and a discernible, if discredited, attraction to the myth of the lone hand. There are of course other aspects to the habitus that are outside the scope of this thesis, aspects related to multiculturalism, economic stability and urban sophistication. As Gleeson (2006, p. 103) contends, despite the significant social and cultural changes that have occurred in Australia in the past half-century, despite the massive number of non-British migrants, the influence of feminism and the gay-rights movement, the proliferation of technology and a growing economic disparity between the classes, 'Australians overwhelmingly continue to prefer living in the subregions of our main cities.' At the same time, Australians continue to refuse to 'recognise our seemingly innate [sub]urbanism' (Gleeson 2006, p. 5). Australia's habitus includes a collective desire for suburban living, as well as entrenched anti-suburban views; these contradictory positions exist simultaneously in the national subconscious. The character of the lone hand and its corollary, the suburban woman, can, therefore, be utilised by writers in fictional representations of the suburbs to both perpetuate and question the anti-suburbanism of our habitus.

In this section of my thesis, 'The lone hand', I will analyse Steve Carroll's 'Glenroy novels', particularly the third novel in the trilogy, *The time we have taken*, as well as Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*. I will also revisit Johnston's *My brother Jack*, focusing in this section on the depiction of Helen. In each of these novels the character of the lone hand is used to support the anti-suburbanism of our habitus, while portrayals of suburban women discredit the suburbs still further. In the Glenroy novels and *Cloudstreet*, the notion of progress is also explored, and the texts reveal, in very different way, how the lie of *terra nullius* lurks at the back of the national consciousness, informing the habitus and representations of everyday life. These three novels were written from the early 1960s to 2008, and depict the period from the 1920s to 1970; they consequently cover nearly a century of suburban development in Australia. They are fiction, not history, but are nevertheless social documents, documents which expose the tenacity of the anti-suburbanism of the Australian habitus.

## Chapter 5

### *The time we have taken*

Steven Carroll's 'Glenroy novels' are set in a Melbourne suburb and cover the period from the mid-1950s to 1970. There are three novels: *The art of the engine driver*, published in 2001, *The gift of speed*, published in 2004, and *The time we have taken*, published in 2007. The novels are known collectively as the 'Glenroy novels' as it is widely assumed that they are a fictional representation of Glenroy in Melbourne, where the author grew up (Carroll 2008). I will refer to all three novels in this chapter, particularly the third in the trilogy, *The time we have taken*, which is set in 1970. In this novel, the suburb has moved on from its beginnings as a series of timber houses thrown up on treeless streets, 'built on grass and thistle' (Carroll 2007, p. 271). It is now, a mere twenty years later, a place of some substance, celebrating its newly recognised centenary and seeing itself as the apotheosis of Progress.

There are three main characters in the novels –Vic, Rita and their son, Michael. They are a family, but the concept of the suburban, nuclear family is problematised in the trilogy. The ambivalence towards the suburbs and suburban development that lies at the heart of the Australian habitus, the ambivalence that characterises our equivocal relationship to settlement, is presented and explored in the Glenroy novels. The conflicting and contradictory views Australians have of suburbia are exposed here in all their simple complexity. And, while the tone is unrelentingly nostalgic, it is not a wistful nostalgia like that of *Cloudstreet*, for example, where the past is presented as a bucolic golden era now lost to the mindless march of progress. The Glenroy novels are expositions of the small tragedies that make up a life in the 'infinitely complex organism of the suburb' (Carroll 2007, p. 95), and the events presented gently destabilise the myth that a suburban life must be inauthentic. In this, the novels are pro-suburban. However, at the same time the assumptions that support pro-suburbanism, particularly that of happiness in marriage and the security of the family unit, are exposed as illusions. The untrammelled belief in progress, on which suburban expansion depends, is also problematised, as the text reveals it to be based on the lie of terra nullius. The destructive myth of the lone hand haunts the novels in the character of Vic, while his wife, Rita, suffers for the suburban dreams she holds within her anti-suburban habitus. Michael represents the new generation, one that experiences a significant habitus shift that should signal the birth of a better world, but which is

relegated to the annals of history even as it is happening. There are no ‘artists’ in Carroll’s novels, no-one who sees themselves as particularly special; these are narratives of ordinary people experiencing the interaction of their habitus with the field of life.

### **The lone hand**

Ashbolt (1966) despised the Australian suburban male because of his willingness to accept domestication and its consequence: emasculation. Within the androcentricity of the Australian habitus, the acceptance of a feminised suburbia undermines a man’s very identity – without a masculinist persona a man may still be ‘a sentient being, but hardly rational or purposeful’ (Ashbolt 1966, p. 374). However, the persistence of a particularly anti-female style of anti-suburbanism, such as that perpetuated by the ever-popular Barry Humphries (Turnbull 2008, p. 19), suggests that Ashbolt’s lawn-mowing castrati have not willingly accepted the feminisation of suburban life, and the fictional accounts of the lives of ordinary Australians analysed in this Section of my thesis indicate that the lone hand is alive and well, even in the very place where he is most anomalous, the suburbs.

The lone hand has been described as ‘a male who has acute problems with women and with all other intimate relationships...fleeing the cities in which other Australians live because he cannot survive in them, not because he loves nature or the land’ (Hodge and Mishra 1990, p. xvi). For Ward (1966, p. 2), the lone hand is, among other things: taciturn, anti-intellectual, sceptical about religion and culture, a cutter-down of tall poppies, independent, and much given to drinking, swearing and gambling. Despite his apparent lack of positive qualities – or perhaps because of them – the lone hand is what some Australians ‘may want to believe is true’, of themselves and the nation (Schaffer 1988, p. 11), and he is used as a weapon in the denigration of the feminising suburbs.

Despite being a husband and father, Vic is the archetypal lone hand, one who would be ‘a fool to ever marry’ (Carroll 2003, p. 106). He does marry, of course, but like the narrator’s father in *The scent of eucalyptus*, he strains within the confines of the family. Vic is the type who ‘never knows when the night is over’ and who is prone to bringing strangers home after the pub closes (Carroll 2004, p. 63). He was reasonably happy when the suburb ‘was like the main street of a wild west town, all weeds and dirt and long swaying grass’, as it was when he and Rita first moved there, but once it becomes

‘just like anywhere else’, that’s when Vic knows he has to leave (2004, p. 151). Vic does not just leave though – he ‘shoots through’ (Carroll 2004, p. 244) – there is something about the deliberate use of the vernacular that emphasises the definitiveness of the action. Being a lone hand is an active state. Vic is not like the women in the novel, Rita and Mrs Webster, who are left – Vic is the one who does the leaving. But in leaving he is activating what is essentially an absence. Nairn (2009, p. 94) claims that the Glenroy novels are about the ‘personal quest for meaning’ of the characters, but for Vic that meaning is pared down to such an extent that it barely exists. He congratulates himself on the simplicity of his life after he leaves Rita, on his ability to reject the ‘comforts of home’ (Carroll 2007, p. 23), but his life as a born-again bachelor has meaning only in the memories it triggers. Vic spends his retirement in Tweed Heads performing empty rituals, ‘each day is a duplication of the other’ (Carroll 2007, p. 23), in a state of endless reminiscence. As he approaches death his memories are all of moments of connection, either with his wife and son, or with his mother, yet he deliberately rejected the connectedness of relationships when he finally embraced the lone hand and shot through. The emptiness of the lone hand construct is represented by the black bin bags that are outside his flat in the afternoon of the day he dies, ‘waiting to be collected so that the next tenant can move in’ (Carroll 2007, p. 206).

Vic epitomizes the lone hand; he is an engine driver, a job that is an industrialized version of the bushman. Engine driving, a typically masculine job, takes Vic away from domestic life, where he can become a single man at one with his machine. Vic finds a sense of self in his job – ‘it will always be a source of wonder to Vic that it was his job, his labour...through which meaning entered his life’ (Carroll 2007, p. 297). While this sentiment elevates the everyday to something close to the sublime, and in doing so defies the anti-suburbanism that seeks to diminish everyday experiences as unworthy, it also supports the lone hand myth by moving Vic’s wife, son and mother to the periphery of his life. The suburbs in this sense are simply dormitories, separated from the world of work where men can find the true meaning of life.

The lone hand mythology is entrenched in an anti-suburban discourse that is oppositional to the domestic and the feminine. Lake (1992, p. 162) suggests that the reaction to the women’s movement in Australia has always been informed by our masculinist construction of identity, a construction that has had, in its manifestation, ‘deleterious consequences for the lives of women’. In 1960, the time setting of *The art*

*of the engine driver*, the closest most suburban men got to the freedom espoused by the lone hand myth was the ‘six o’clock swill’. The six o’clock closing of hotels in Australia was introduced in 1916, and is a rare instance of the needs of women coinciding with those of industrialists and other employers, who required their workers to be sober (Lake 1992, pp. 162-164). Ironically, while the negative impact upon women and children of their husbands and fathers spending time in the pub was intended to be ameliorated with the introduction of six o’clock closing (at least by the early feminists), that negative impact was quite possibly exacerbated by it. As described in this passage from *The art of the engine driver*, six o’clock closing encouraged some working men to drink quickly, desperately, and to excess:

We hit the pub, The Railway, just near the yards, at five o’clock when the shift finishes and walk through the door into the roar of all the talk and the transistors, into the smoke, everybody either throwing them down or at the bar with their empty glasses plonked on the counter for quick service because every minute is precious. We walk through the door with legs beneath us and we leave an hour later with limbs of rubber. We are ridiculous. We are a joke, and we know it. (Carroll 2003, p. 144)

Vic drinks too much and too often. Rita blames his colleague and mentor, Paddy Ryan, for teaching ‘the young Vic how to drink’ (Carroll 2003, p. 143), but both Paddy and Vic are products of a model of masculinity which valorises one who ‘swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion’ (Ward 1966, p. 2). The lone hand is indeed a toxic icon (Wallace 2008, p.140), particularly after an hour at The Railway.

Vic is convinced that the lone hands, the ones who shoot through, are the strong ones, while those who stay in the suburbs, ‘those who rot rather than shoot through’ are ‘too weak to live’ (Carroll 2007, p. 22). Vic sees the death of Webster – suicide in a car driven at high speed – as a legitimate response to the suburb becoming comfortable: ‘In the flicker of a bored eye, a paddock becomes a suburb, the frontier shifts, and all the types that the place was once wild enough to take in, must either adapt or go’ (Carroll 2004, p. 301). Webster himself is a lone hand, albeit one who represents industry rather than bush. He is also the epitome of progress, who kills himself just at the moment that his factory is going into decline, at the moment that he becomes redundant. Vic and Webster are both happy in the suburb while it retains vestiges of the frontier; at that time, it is possible to reconcile the myth of the lone hand with that of the pioneer legend. Once progress mellows the street into ‘a pleasant walk’ with more graceful

gardens and decorated windows (Carroll 2007, p. 14) the suburb loses its edge and becomes feminised. The myth of the lone hand sits well within pro-suburban ideology so long as the suburbs are of the frontier. Once the suburbs become domesticated and feminised, they can no longer accommodate a construct that is anti-domestic, anti-family and anti-female. The lone hand must either adapt, leave, or die.

### **The pioneers**

The pioneer legend is another aspect of Australia's cultural imaginary that has entered the habitus. It is different from that of the lone hand, but linked to it, coming into being at around the same time and through the work of the same poets and writers who first espoused the bushman myth (Hirst 1992, p. 206). While the pioneer legend glorifies hard work and perseverance, characteristics not always associated with the lone hand, both myths serve to celebrate the bush at the same time as they accentuate its harshness.

The pioneer legend, while allied to the lone hand myth, has a stronger association to the pro-suburban ideology of Menzies' 'little piece of earth', and to Australia's status as former settler colony. The need to differentiate ourselves from our parent culture, Britain, has resulted in an emphasis on the harshness of our environment; as Fiske, Hodge & Turner (1987, p. 54) note, even the beach in Australian mythology is constructed as dangerous and hostile. Barbara Davison quotes an elderly couple, reminiscing on their suburban house when they first moved to it in 1947:

...there wasn't [another] house to be seen, not anywhere round was there a house...rabbits, snakes, lizards and things used to run here...In the early years when we first came here we didn't have much – we had bare boards... (Davison 1993, p. 51)

The emphasis is on the isolation, danger and deprivation they had to endure when they moved to the suburbs, thus elevating them from deserving accusations of *embourgeoisment* and justifying their now comfortable existence.

Throughout the Glenroy novels, the suburb develops: 'once all mud or all dust and where dogs once howled like beasts from the Middle ages' (Carroll 2007, p. 14), it mellows into 'a wide, solid community of lawns and gardens and tree-lined streets' (Carroll 2007, p 73). The very use of the word 'suburb' in the books tracks its development from something insubstantial, a step away from 'grass and thistle', to a place of substance, as if describing the development as a 'suburb' has willed it into

existence: in *The art of the engine driver* the words 'suburb' or 'suburban' are used 55 times; in *The gift of speed* they are used 107 times; while in the final novel, *The time we have taken*, 'suburb' and 'suburban' are used 212 times. By the time of the third novel in the trilogy, the suburb is no longer part of the frontier; yet, once the stick houses and dirt tracks become lawns and gardens they become emasculated and therefore devalued. This is the irony of the Australian habitus – so influenced are we by the masculinist construction of the lone hand, we cannot accept a feminisation of the landscape. Evidently, the more successful we are in creating a comfortable – that is, femininised – suburban lifestyle, the more we despise it.

Shortly after Webster's death, a death that he 'will instantly respect upon hearing of it' (Carroll 2004, p. 302), Vic himself decides to shoot through – he is 'always happiest walking away' (Carroll 2007, p. 230). In shooting through, he leaves Rita but, in doing so, Rita and Vic become intimate. It is an irony not lost on Rita that she can only become intimate with her husband after he has left her (Carroll 2007, pp. 15-16). Like the men in *The scent of eucalyptus*, Vic is present in his absence, waking her in the mornings with the snores she only hears now in her dreams (Carroll 2007, p. 10).

### **Suburban women**

Turnbull argues that as a result of the conflict between the bush focus of Australia's cultural iconography and the suburban reality of most of our lives, Australia has developed a 'dysmorphic national identity' (Turnbull 2008, p. 19). The term 'dysmorphic' is particularly apt, as Australian identity is not malformed so much as perceived to be so. Like those who suffer from body dysmorphic disorder, who see an ugliness in themselves that no-one else can see, Australians see the suburbs as malformed and unnatural as they do not conform to the expectations encoded in a national identity based on the bush myth. This dysmorphia has created a national habitus where anti-suburbanism co-exists with the desire to live in the suburbs; where pro and anti-suburban feelings vie for precedence.

In *The time we have taken* Rita is living alone in the suburban house she built with her husband for her family, Vic having long shot through and Michael grown up. Rita embodies Australia's 'dysmorphia' in the love/hate relationship she has with her suburban house. Although she claims that her 'real home' is back in the city (Carroll 2003, p. 21), Rita does not leave the suburb after her husband and son leave home,

although nothing but her own ambivalence is stopping her. She stays, partly out of inertia, partly because she does not want to admit that her marriage has been a failure, and partly because to reject suburban life would be to go against a habitus that supports suburban living at the same time as it denigrates it. Rita's dissatisfaction at the house, the street and the suburb is amplified in the next-door-neighbour, Mrs Barlow. In *The art of the engine driver*, Mrs Barlow rants to her husband Desmond that the 'suburb is stuck out on the edge of the world' (Carroll 2003, p. 34), and she ends up in the third novel making those same accusations to an empty room. Desmond is dead, but Mrs Barlow doesn't leave the suburb: 'She has been here so long she can now no longer leave. But she can never admit this to herself, for to admit this would be to concede that she is, in fact home...Sometime, during all the years she fought so hard against the place, it became her centre' (Carroll 2007, p. 127). The antithesis of Mrs Barlow is Peter van Rijn, the shopkeeper who determines that the suburb is 100 years old, 'an idea of such significance to the suburb that it will become the reference point for all official events in the coming year. And the unofficial' (Carroll 2007, p. 5). Peter van Rijn loves the suburb with the uncomplicated pride of one committed to progress, his faith in his neighbours only briefly shaken by the youthful maliciousness of the future mayor, who once threw a brick through the van Rijn shop window (Carroll 2007, p. 74). It is significant that Peter van Rijn is a relatively recent immigrant, who left Holland after the war for a new life in Australia (Carroll 2003, p. 136). Perhaps because he arrived in Australia as an adult, he has managed to avoid absorbing the anti-suburbanism of the Australian habitus; by 1970, Peter van Rijn is able to see the suburb as 'a grand achievement' (Carroll 2007, p. 77), an uncomplicated and untroubled achievement: 'He gives no thought to the fact that...earlier inhabitants, for millennia, walked the very ground that they have, just now, collectively decided to call Centenary Suburb. He simply does not think of it' (Carroll 2007, p. 75).

Rita's characterisation both supports and undermines the myths of the suburban wife and mother, the myths that are derived from and sustain the anti-suburban aspects of our habitus. However, this is done gently, with great subtlety: the Glenroy suburban novels are exceptional for their balance, for their lack of shrillness. Rita is a working mother, an epithet that is almost antithetical to the ideology of the suburban home and nuclear family. It is an accepted wisdom that the mothers of the baby-boomer generation did not work, but of course some did, either by desire or necessity. When Michael is a child and the family first moves to the suburb, Rita's job is as a demonstrator of washing

machines, blenders and other consumer goods (Carroll 2007, p. 14). It is significant that Rita, an anti-suburban character who nevertheless endeavours to realise the 'suburban dream' of the nuclear family and home ownership, earns her living by promoting the sale of kitchen appliances. These goods helped housewives of the post-war period complete their daily chores, but in doing so they had the effect of trapping some women even more securely into a model of femininity based on domesticity and home-making. The omniscient narrator of the novels describes what Rita did as 'the future contained in the present' (Carroll 2007, p. 14), which it was in two significant ways: the appliances themselves were examples of industrialisation and progress; and Rita's job anticipated a future where the desire for an increasing array of consumer goods and larger houses to put them in would lead to working mothers becoming a financial, as much as a social, necessity.

Rita's desire for a home and family are informed by the habitus and incorporate the conflict inscribed therein: she resents the suburb – 'stuff the street!' (Carroll 2007, p. 61) – but chooses to live there because she wants a chance at ordinary happiness and sees a house and family in the suburbs as the way to attain it. When she looks back on the early years they spent in the suburb, she realises that she and Vic were 'having a shot at being happy. Maybe not even happy, just happy enough' (Carroll 2007, p. 286). The novels remind us that people moved to the outer suburbs in the post-war period because they were striving for security, comfort and a better life for their children – they wanted that 'shot at being happy'. Even Vic, a man who chafed against the very notion of the suburb and the family can remember wanting to 'give their son room for his long legs...to run', a desire which led to them moving 'to the fringes of the city', a desire which was born out of love for his wife and child (Carroll 2007, p. 113).

Yet, Rita's pro-suburban desires are compromised almost from the outset by loneliness and isolation, which are the standard accusations made against suburbia in terms of women. As noted in Chapter 4, Richards' (1990, p. 306) analysis of her five-year project on suburban women was informed by an expression of anti-suburbanism that sees suburban life as causing female isolation, despite her research indicating otherwise. Gilbert describes a similar project to that of Richards', conducted in Baulkham Hills in the 1980s, which reported similar high levels of satisfaction among suburban women. As Gilbert (1988, p. 46) notes, there is a conflict between the surfeit of testimony that describes suburban women as alienated, and the result of surveys and studies that

suggest that they are not. This conflict is explored in the novels through the character of Rita, who chooses to focus on her family and her suburban home, just as Nan in *The scent of eucalyptus* focuses on nurturing her daughter, sister and granddaughter. This is what is expected of these women within the habitus, and they are prepared to sacrifice other avenues of fulfilment in order to achieve it. The difference is that Nan is satisfied by her role as nurturer, while Rita is desperately unhappy and uses anti-suburbanism, another part of the Australian habitus, to justify that unhappiness at the same time as she subscribes to the pro-suburban desires of home and family. Richards (1990, p. 274) deduced from her study that some women may avoid making friends with other women in the suburbs, because such friendships ‘threaten the dream they are there to create – the private world of family, marriage and home’. This conclusion is supported by the friendship Rita has with her neighbour Evie in the first novel, which sours when Evie, overcome with loneliness, comes on to Vic (Carroll 2003, pp. 239-243). However, Rita’s isolation is also something she actively chooses:

Sometimes, she can look like she prefers to keep to herself. And sometimes, like tonight, she wears dresses that she, and everybody else knows, are just a bit too good for this street. So she doesn’t make friends much. (Carroll 2003, p. 164)

The women in the Glenroy novels appear to have no place in the suburbs except as wives and mothers, and accept their own redundancy if they cannot play that role. The tragic Mrs Bruchner smokes herself to death in despair at her childlessness:

The Bruchner house was constructed in anticipation of children, but no children came. The lounge room is wide with curved corners, and floorboards, of the best Tasmanian hardwood, are polished and shiny like glass. The plastered walls are perfectly finished. In the evenings their footsteps echo throughout the house...Just one [child], she is noting, just one makes all the difference. Just one more makes a couple a family... (Carroll 2003, p. 42)

On the death of her husband, the childless Mrs Webster finds herself so unnecessary that she seeks to become her husband (Carroll 2007, p. 27), taking over his factory and almost appropriating his death (Carroll 2007, p. 181). It is Mrs Webster who characterises the suburb as being soporific, who feels the contentment of the suburb working on her ‘not like a balm, but like an anaesthetic’, who thinks that if she stays in the suburb it will be ‘a kind of death’ (Carroll 2007, p. 47).

### **The illusion of community**

It is not just the women in the Glenroy novels who suffer from isolation; there is an undermining of the very idea of community and family in this extended narrative. The tenuousness of family relationships is grasped by Michael when he is just 12 years old:

There were only three of them...The house, with its radio, the dishes and talk makes them large. But the arithmetic is true. They are only three. And sometimes, when his mother's work takes her away, they are only two. Then, when the house is empty at night, one. There always seemed to be more than there are, but suddenly one is never far away. (Carroll 2003, p. 116)

In a subversion of the view that the suburban family home is the best place to raise children (Stretton 1970, p. 21), the safest and happiest home in the novels is the Children's Home in *The gift of speed*. For Kathleen Marsden, the Home has been her home 'forever', and although 'she never speaks of her love for this rambling old place ...it is there' (Carroll 2004, p. 147). The Home is represented by the 'brown paper bag containing her [Kathleen's] sandwiches and the freckled banana' which Michael imagines being 'prepared and carefully cut by the sisters of the Home' (Carroll 2004, p. 97). Michael's home, on the other hand, is characterised by tension rather than love, as are the other homes on his street; when he looks back as an adult he remembers 'the loud, unhappy couples from his old street, when, it seemed, there were days when everybody was fighting and nobody's lives were private' (Carroll 2007, p. 197).

The street is a crucible of misery – Carroll (2008) himself admits that the characters in the books 'are all deeply unhappy' – and Ramona Koval (2007) notes that the suburb at the beginning of *The time we have taken* is 'a place of failed relationships and unhealed wounds'. The suburbs are to blame: laden as they were with expectation, they were bound to disappoint. Rita stays in the suburb long after her husband and child have left because she can't let go of the possibility of happiness, happiness of the sort that is implicit in the pro-suburban ideology of home ownership and the nuclear family. She is so desperate to have a happy family that while Michael and Vic still live in the house, she settles for a simulacrum – a polaroid transformation, a staged photograph that will allow her to 'look back fondly and see only the smiles and remember only the laughter' (Carroll 2004, p. 91). Her staying in the suburb after the family has finally dispersed is borne of the same desperation.

The sense of a failed opportunity to create a community pervades the novels: ‘community is both offered here, and taken away’ (Gelder & Salzman 2009, p. 46). Fiske, Hodge & Turner (1987, p. 31) talk of ‘the ideology of fundamental community’ – whereby the idea of community takes precedence over that of the individual – that has sustained suburban development in Australia; this is part of Australia’s habitus, part of the sense we have of ourselves as a friendly and egalitarian society. Anti-suburban discourse declares that such a commitment to community is false, that the suburbs are in fact places of alienation and isolation. Gelder & Salzman see the Glenroy novels as conforming to that view, as does Nairn (2009, p. 94): ‘Even though people [in the novels] may seem to be linked by simultaneous events, the connections among them are often arbitrary and tenuous’.

And yet, there also exists in the novels, particularly in *The time we have taken*, a sense that the suburb *is* a community, even if it is not of the close-knit kind that is idealised in anti-suburban discourse. The sense of connection that comes from simultaneity may indeed be imagined and inauthentic, as Nairn suggests, but the sound of a car accelerating is enough to stir Rita into action of a morning, and make her feel part of the life of the suburb:

...she knows that out there life is beginning to stir...Kitchens blinking into light, kettles billowing steam, the babble of radios, the opening and closing of doors, and the first footsteps of the morning resounding out there on the porches and driveways of the suburb as a new day revs into action. The sound of just one car can do that. Make you feel like you’re part of something. (Carroll 2007, p. 11)

When Peter van Rijn determines that the suburb is 100 years old, and a committee is formed to promote its Centenary, it becomes clear that the suburb is ‘alive with events and celebrations’. The description of the secret life of the suburb – the religious organisations, sporting, science and reading groups that ‘seemed to have mushroomed overnight’ (Carroll 2007, pp. 242-243) – undermines the strain of anti-suburban discourse that insists that the suburbs are inimical to the idea of community. Even Rita, the most consciously anti-suburban of all the major characters, ultimately recognises she is no different, and no better, than the other people of her suburb (Carroll 2007, p. 227). This is not sufficient to reconcile her to the suburb – like the protagonists of the novels discussed in Section 1, Rita ultimately escapes the suburbs and her own failed hopes. The difference is that Rita rejects the suburbs after reaching a point of maturity and recognition of her place within the suburban community.

### **Consumerism, femininity and class**

Rita's acknowledgement that the street and the suburb house 'her kind of people' (Carroll 2007, p. 227) is reached after years of great resistance to the suburb and the small-mindedness she sees in it. Rita's dresses and French windows are resented by the street, as they indicate that she is unwilling to subscribe to the 'ideology of community' and expose the falsity of the egalitarian myth. Fiske, Hodge & Turner suggest that the conformity of house style and structure prevalent in the Australian suburbs serves to repress any sense of class conflict, even while it may indicate wealth. Gratuitous differences in house style undermine the ideology of fundamental community, and consequently are represented as dangerous (1987, pp. 31-32). Rita's choice of dresses and style of house decoration were always taken as 'an insult' by her neighbours as they 'spoke of other places, of the great world beyond the suburb...' (Carroll 2007, p. 61). Rita's dresses emphasise the narrow lives that her neighbours have chosen, which leads them to denigration. Similarly, their response to Mrs Webster's sports car includes this nexus of narrowness and denigration: the car, 'an object complete in itself', encourages wonder but also a sneer, because to be 'roused to wonder is to be reminded that such things are not of the suburb and come from out there beyond its boundaries' (Carroll 2007, pp. 115-116).

The suburbs have always been denigrated by their connection to consumerism, particularly feminine consumerism, but the subtext has always been contempt for what those in the suburbs choose to consume. This is David Meredith's major complaint against Helen in *My brother Jack* – that she lacks good taste. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Bourdieu deconstructs the ideology of natural taste by pointing out its roots in childhood indoctrination; 'taste' is a product of our habitus, which is a product of our class. However, taste can be learned, as in the case of David Meredith, who takes on the cause of taste with all the zeal of a convert. Rita appears to have 'natural' taste; although the novels tell us of her obsession as a teenager and young woman with movie stars and films, which could account for her 'gift of a designer's eye' (Carroll 2007, p. 46). It is this gift that so offends her neighbours, who see in her dresses a refusal to conform to their expectations.

Despite her 'impeccable' judgements (Carroll 2007, p. 46), Rita is still a product of the 'consuming culture' so maligned by the likes of Roger Silverstone. Rita puts all her frustrated love into her suburban house, which 'the house happily accepted'. The house

is the repository not only of her love, but also her creativity:

The French windows, the lace curtains, the brilliant white of the weatherboards, the garden lights that shone like so many full moons on summer nights, the new fence, the fancy European number on the letter box. (Carroll 2007, p. 13)

Rita's house comes close to mimicking Boyd's (1968 p. 24) dreaded featurism – 'the living room thrust forward as a feature of the façade, a wide picture window as a feature of the projecting wall, a pretty statuette as a feature of the picture window', and so on. However, the novels do not trivialise the importance of the house as a major creative outlet for Rita. The social historian Lesley Johnson (1997, pp. 121-122) argues that within the pro-suburban ideology of the 1940s and 1950s, women defined themselves positively in relation to the suburban home: the 'home was a place to be actively created'; it gave women responsibility and, with that, a sense of empowerment. Johnson goes on to suggest that it was the empowering, feminine aspect of suburbia that so offended Robin Boyd and other male commentators, such as George Johnston. This analysis supports Carroll's depiction of Rita, her relationship with the house and with the suburb. It also points to a wider understanding of the suburb itself as something being 'actively created' by the inhabitants, to the suburb as a representation of the pioneer legend.

### **A new generation**

For the Centenary Committee, the suburb was created out of 'sodden dirt and clay' (Carroll 2007, p. 285), by those with the pioneer spirit. However, this understanding is based on a false assumption: the assumption of *terra nullius*, an assumption which is utterly undone at the end of *The time we have taken*. Gelder & Salzman (2009, p. 46) claim that *The art of the engine driver* is a 'suburban apocalypse novel. The stories it tells of settlement and occupation...turn out also to be stories of alienation and vulnerability, where "the right to start over again" collapses into a sense that things will never again be the same'. *The art of the engine driver* is the first book in the trilogy; by the end of the final book, *The time we have taken*, it is clear that the "right" to start over has become a responsibility; the desire for progress that accompanied the pioneers who created the frontier suburbs has changed, and a habitus shift is on its way.

Michael is the son of Rita and Vic, and a somewhat reluctant representative of the new generation. At the beginning of *The time we have taken* it is 1970 and Michael is 21, at

university finishing his degree. Although it is not stated, one assumes Michael is on a teacher's scholarship, as he also begins teaching at his old school during the course of the novel. The passing of time, a central concern of the novel, as indicated by the title, is embodied in Michael, a young man who 'has been the nostalgic type for as long as he can remember' (Carroll 2007, p. 32). Time is the leitmotif of the trilogy and, by the final novel, each of the three main characters is able to acknowledge and understand the effect the past has on the present. Michael, although young, does not want to let go of the 'tricks' he learnt as a child, tricks that taught him to 'feel nothing when feeling nothing was required' (Carroll 2007, p. 267), tricks that got him through living in the suburb, in the house of 'an unhappy family...[and] a failed marriage' (Carroll 2004, p. 89). This is his habitus, and he uses it when he is inculcated into the field of love through his relationship with Madeleine. The novels employ an elegiac tone to gently but relentlessly pursue the notion of time and our relationship to it. The first novel is divided into sections that represent the weekend – 'Saturday evening', 'Saturday night', 'Sunday morning'; *The gift of speed* covers the time of one cricket test between the West Indies and Australia; while in *The time we have taken* it is the seasons – Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring – which structure the narrative.

The seasons simultaneously represent both linear time and cyclical time, both progress and continuity. Progress is an outcome of linear time, which is considered to be a journey from one point to another. The novels chart the progress of the suburb – a typical, post-war Australian suburb – and show how easily, and yet how thoughtlessly, we as a nation have embraced the idea of progress, which is itself undermined in many ways throughout the novels. The most quietly insistent tone is the one of nostalgic melancholia. Carroll (2008) describes his characters as being:

...in a sort of frank and constant state of becoming. They yearn towards some state of perfect being where they imagine they have the happiness or they're looking back to some state of perfect being they once occupied and which gave them happiness but all the time they miss the moment of their life, the here and now of existence, the sheer miracle of the fact that we are existing right now in this combination of us and place and time.

His characters are unable to fully live the moment, but instead live in a state that is simultaneously past, present and future. They live, in other words, as others do: in their habitus, where 'the past, the present and the future intersect and interpenetrate one another' (Wacquant 1992, p. 22). In their personal habitus, however, the past is not

simply absorbed into ways of behaving, or into expectation: the past haunts Rita, Vic and Michael, and gives lie to the idea of linear time and to progress. Clearly, these characters are part of a cycle that includes their own past and the past of others, as well as their uncertain futures.

As already noted, *The time we have taken* begins with Peter van Rijn determining that the suburb is 100 years old. The Centenary celebrations that result from his epiphany are informed by the assumption that progress is both the best and the only way to live, and by an expectation that progress will stop once it has reached a certain point; as the mayor says: 'There is a line, he says, a straight line and a true one, that runs all the way from then until now' (Carroll 2007, p. 306). What the 'then' refers to is not stated by the mayor – it doesn't need to be: 'then' is the past and 'now' is the perfect present, epitomised by the suburb: 'Is not the suburb...the very picture of Progress: only twenty years ago a frontier community of stick houses and dirt tracks, now a wide, solid community of lawns and gardens and tree-lined streets?' (Carroll 2007, p. 73). As Allon (1994, p. 47) has noted, a 'new house in a new suburb became a personal metonym for the "social progress" of the nation as a whole'. After a few short years, years which transformed the stick houses and dirt tracks into lawns and tree-lined streets, the nation that 'saw History as a soon-to-be-concluded journey to Perfection' (Carroll 2007, p. 216) felt itself to be almost complete.

Michael is part of the generation known as the 'baby boomers', a generation that even at the time saw itself as special. This sense of specialness is both celebrated and resented by the older members of the suburb. Michael's father Vic, sees in Michael the possibility of perfection:

...perhaps, in time, from time to time, a generation comes along that gets what it wants. Perhaps Michael's is that generation. The one that all the work was for, the one that it was all about – the shame, the slog and the being shagged over time and again by smart bastards. Perhaps the look of great expectation in Michael's eyes was always going to be at the end of it all. (Carroll 2004, pp. 69-70)

Mrs Webster, however, sees the look in Michael's eyes not as expectation, but as smugness. Not just Mrs Webster, but the whole of the Centenary Committee takes in Michael's 'sideburns...and the amused look in his eyes', registers them with the fear of the superseded and pronounces Michael 'smug' (Carroll 2007, p. 98). It is an epithet that Michael himself would be surprised to hear applied to him; Michael is characterised

as the very antithesis of smug. Michael is old-fashioned – he and his girlfriend, Madeleine, are described as being ‘of the Age, but *not* children of the Age’ (Carroll 2007, p. 82). He wears ‘fuddy-duddy old man’s trousers’ (Carroll 2007, p. 81) and his relationship with Madeleine is never consummated. Michael is melancholic, the offspring of an unhappy union, the product of a suburb, ‘cursed to carry the street wherever he goes’ (Carroll 2007, p. 129).

Nevertheless, Michael is of his generation, a generation that is referred to in *The time we have taken* as ‘Michael and his kind’ (Carroll 2007, p. 271). The characters in the novel, both the old and the young, see Michael’s generation as something special, as the inevitable outcome of progress: ‘Michael, his kind and this Whitlam of theirs are a wave...a wave that has been steadily building over the years and will not be stopped. They *are* History, their every word and gesture tells you’ (Carroll 2007, p. 245). There are references throughout to the then future Prime Minister Gough Whitlam as being someone who belongs to Michael’s generation – ‘this Whitlam of theirs’ (Carroll 2007, p. 99, 192, 244) – to Whitlam being how this generation will make its mark. Whitlam belongs to this generation, because he understands the motivations behind ‘the pancake suburbs’ that incubated Michael and his kind when they were children, the motivations that lead to progress (Carroll 2007, p. 271). Mrs Webster notes, with the disdain of someone who is about to be on the blunt end of a habitus shift, that Michael’s generation is a generation of university graduates and it is this ‘learning’ of theirs that will dent the old social structure (Carroll 2007, p. 97-99). Michael himself attends a ‘new, small university’ (Carroll 2007, p. 55), built for the children of the pancake suburbs, where the students not only attend lectures but absorb new ideas, represented by the red moratorium badge that Michael wears on his lapel (Carroll 2007, p. 98).

Like Dante in *Johnno*, Michael is part of a generation which challenged the Australian habitus. However, Michael’s generation is a decade later than Dante’s, and for his cohort the challenge became more of a confrontation. Michael is patently not a lone hand; indeed, the bushman myth seems irrelevant to his generation. The habitus of ‘Michael and his kind’ was stretched by the creation of new fields in which an individual could learn new rules – the university that Michael attends is an example, as is the student house he shares with Mulligan, Bunny Rabbit and Pussy Cat. New forms of social capital were also developed in this time, such as Pussy Cat’s beauty – she is ‘what the Age calls beautiful’ (Carroll 2007, p. 83) – and proficiency in the guitar, an

instrument that Michael sees as being representative of his generation:

[A guitar] has the look of trouble about it. Like a stranger on the doorstep, who slips into the house, unwanted and uninvited, by dint of sheer front. Unpredictable, with an attitude suggestive of it being permanently up to no good. (Carroll 2007, p. 105)

At the insistence of Michael's generation, the Australia of *The time we have taken* is experiencing a habitus shift. But for Michael, his part in this confrontation is almost entirely passive – he is simply part of the tide of change. Other generations paved the way for this shift: Michael's grandmother, for example, actively confronted her habitus when she became pregnant with Vic. She 'kept her boy when everybody told her to farm him out' and in doing so she 'took them on' (Carroll 2007, pp. 263-264). In many ways, Michael's grandmother paid for the privileges of Michael's generation, and the novel reminds us – gently, as always – how 'in that not-too-distant world' of domestic servants, of an unbridgeable gap between rich and poor, people like Michael's grandmother 'paid for their futures, day after day, shift after shift, with the best hours of their lives...' (Carroll 2004, pp. 163-164). Even Mrs Webster, who resents the impending wave of change, has nevertheless made adjustments to accommodate the wave: 'Webster's chauffeur has moved on. She never hired another, and unlike Webster who viewed the world to and from work from the spacious rear seat, she views it from the wheel' (Carroll 2007, p. 29).

### **The tenaciousness of habitus**

Part of the power of the Glenroy novels, and of *The time we have taken* particularly, comes from dramatic irony – from the safety of forty years hence, the reader knows that Whitlam's time as Prime Minister was short-lived, and that the History of the novel has become simply part of history. The age-old dictum that the mayor subscribes to, 'that for things to stay the same things must change' (Carroll 2007, p. 272), is acknowledged by the narrative, which works in both a linear and a cyclical way, weaving past, present and future. The future will be different but still essentially the same; the resilience of the habitus is not underestimated by the text. Bourdieu (2005, p. 47) claims that

...in rapidly changing societies, habitus changes constantly, continuously, but within the limits inherent in its originary structure, that is within certain bounds of continuity (wholesale conversions are very exceptional and, in most cases, provisional...).

Mrs Webster and Rita do not become friends, despite being *sympatico* – they are ‘too far apart, as separate from each other as that part of the suburb that lies beyond the boundary of the railway lines is from Rita’s house’ (Carroll 2007, p. 288). Like the children of bourgeois parents, cited by Bourdieu (2005, p. 47), who converted to radical politics in 1968 only to revert to conservatism in middle-age, Bunny Rabbit will discard the trappings of his radical youth, his ‘long, dark hair...droopy moustache...making him virtually unrecognisable in later years, even to those who knew him well...’ (Carroll 2007, p. 195). Bunny Rabbit, Michael’s flatmate and lover of the doomed Pussy Cat, will eventually become a lawyer; he ‘is from a family of lawyers and his life will unroll before him like a carpet’ (Carroll 2007, p. 252). Life will change – ‘Michael and his kind’ will continue the process of *embourgeoisement* begun by their parents by learning from those around them: Michael’s exposure to the social field represented by Bunny Rabbit gives him a lesson on the sartorial accoutrements of the middle classes which he absorbs into his personal habitus: ‘Michael never knew what a Brooks Brothers shirt was until he met Bunny Rabbit. Didn’t he know that Scott Fitzgerald wore Brooks Brothers shirts? No? Really? Well, now he would always know’ (Carroll 2007, p. 83). As the ‘new suburban frontier’ has moved inexorably outwards (Carroll 2007, p. 188), the novel leaves us with the feeling that there is a new generation on ‘the wrong side of life’ (Carroll 2007, p. 83).

The most potent element of anti-suburbanism in the Glenroy novels is the pervading sense that progress is not necessarily a force for good. As Gelder & Salzman (2009, p. 46) argue:

[The novels] are tied to a sense of settlement – of the ordinary fact of settlement, its sheer *givenness* – that is constantly troubled by a felt need to move on, to do things differently, to change...The related notion of settlement as a matter of progress – that sense that settler Australians are moving steadily towards something better for themselves – is also played out here as an inescapably ubiquitous sentiment, a sign of the times; even as these novels simultaneously and carefully pull it apart.

The people of the suburb, or at least the representatives of the suburb who are on the Centenary Committee, are constantly using the term *progress*, ‘but it is thrown in such a way as to suggest that nobody really knows what it means. Rather, it is spoken like some article of faith’ (Carroll 2007, p. 73). That faith was what built the suburb, but it is a faith consistently undermined. The crashing of a train called ‘The Spirit of Progress’ in *The art of the engine driver* is an obvious – if wonderfully ironic – metaphor for

progress as out-of-control. In *The gift of speed* and *The time we have taken*, the metaphor is speed: in the second novel, Michael's spine is ruined by his desire to be a fast bowler, and speed is responsible for the death of Webster, who represents industrialisation – indeed, he is known throughout the suburb simply as 'Webster the factory' (Carroll 2007, p. 15). His factory represents suburbanism: it makes 'the parts that combine with other parts and become indispensable domestic objects' (Carroll 2004, p. 73). Webster kills himself in response to what he sees as 'the unrelenting, irrefutable sense of the utter uselessness of it all' (Carroll 2004, p. 75). The suburbs are implicated in Webster's death by their inhabitants' desire for the useless, yet indispensable, items produced by Webster's factory.

### **Belonging, legitimacy and terra nullius**

Problematising the notion of progress in the novels is that of white belonging. As Curthoys (1990, p. 21) notes, both the pioneer legend and the myth of the lone hand focus on the hardships endured by white Australian settlers and 'obscure the dispossession of indigenous peoples almost entirely'. Suburban expansion in Australia is based on the imperialist objective of settlement and on 'the process of transforming space into place', which occurred discursively as much as physically (Carter 1987, p. xx). Central to this objective has always been a refusal to recognise Indigenous possession. In *The time we have taken*, the Centenary Committee commissions the mysterious Mulligan to paint a mural of the growth of the suburb. Mulligan deftly undermines the legitimacy of white Australia's tenure simply by including Indigenous people in his painting. The reaction of the Centenary Committee to the inclusion of these earlier inhabitants reveals the hubris of white Australians and the Eurocentricity of the whole notion of progress. The Aborigines are not in the picture long – they are quickly 'written out of the grand story that it tells' (Carroll 2007, p. 309) – leaving the space to be filled with fences, farm houses and the other accoutrements of progress. The suburban worthies who Mulligan has incorporated into the mural, those who see progress as stopping at their own, perfect moment, have been painted 'looking not forward but backwards. Like – and the conclusion is inescapable – yesterday's men' (Carroll 2007, p. 311). As Nairn (2009, p. 94) notes, the committee members 'appreciate progress only when it has been safely accomplished in the past and not when it involves changes in their present or near future'. Moreover, they are only looking for a *story* of progress, one that legitimises their own place in the country and does not include attempted genocide. In the mural, these men have been painted to look 'just a

little bit silly' (Carroll 2007, p. 311) as they look back on the History of their suburb. Silly, because they had never before considered the fate of those who came before them; silly, because they have not yet realised that progress is impersonal – progress does not know when its job is done. The unveiling of Mulligan's wall takes place on the day of the moratorium, the march 'that shut the city down' (Carroll 2007, p. 305). All the young people are at the march; it is only the old people, 'yesterday's men' who remain behind to look at the wall, which shows how wrong they have been.

Mulligan's wall is a most potent symbol of anti-suburbanism, exposing as it does the moral cost of the development of suburban Australia. But the wall is presented within the context of the novels, which portray the complexity of attitudes to suburbia entrenched in the Australian habitus. They cover a period of great suburban expansion in Australia, and demonstrate how the realisation of the 'Australian dream' was caught between the demands of competing myths: the pioneer legend, the notion of progress and the myth of the lone hand. The resultant impact on the lives of men and women is portrayed with great sensitivity, and although the narrative is an anti-suburban reading of Australian culture, it is balanced enough to suggest an alternative.

In the next chapter, I will briefly revisit George Johnston's *My brother Jack* in the light of the lone hand myth. In Chapter 1, I focused on expatriatism, a theme that is crucial to an understanding of the novel, and which works to sustain the anti-suburbanism of the narrative. However, Johnston also employs the lone hand myth and, more potently, a consequent denigration of women and the feminine to perpetuate the anti-suburbanism of *My brother Jack*.

## Chapter 6

### *My brother Jack (part II)*

The title of George Johnston's prize-winning novel is clearly intended to be ironic: at the end of the book it is David who has succeeded in life, who has become Jack's brother David. The novel is, among other things, an evocation of the development and modification of the lone hand myth, and in this it supports Bourdieu's contention that while the habitus may change, it is always within the bounds of continuity. Certain aspects of the habitus, such as the lone hand, remain obdurate, possibly because they can be used to support other persistent aspects of the habitus, such as anti-suburbanism. In *My brother Jack*, Johnston explores and exploits both the lone hand myth and its corollary, the shallow, consumerist suburban woman. Both motifs serve to support the characterisation of David as morally and intellectually superior, and further strengthen the intrinsic anti-suburbanism of the text.

Australian anti-suburbanism has always had a distinctly anti-female animus. The comfort and domesticity associated with suburbia does not support the still dominant view of Australia as a primarily hostile landscape. Even popular travel books make much of Australia being dangerous: for example, Bill Bryson (2001, p. 6) cheerfully claims that Australia has 'more things that will kill you than anywhere else'. As Turner (1986, p. 37) has noted, in such a world heroism lies in simply being able to survive. That the majority of Australians live, and have always lived, comfortable lives in the suburbs of major cities has not changed the vision we Australians have of ourselves as being 'battlers'; the appropriation of the term 'battler' by politicians illustrates how tenaciously this view of ourselves is embedded in our habitus. Women struggle to find a place in such a landscape, unless it is, as Schaffer (1988, pp. 22-23) argues, as a metaphor for the very land itself. In Western European discourse the land is constructed as 'mother earth', but in the case of Australia, mother earth is harsh and unforgiving rather than nurturing. Within this construction, women are feared and despised rather than loved, even when they are considered to be representatives of culture – that is, urban, or suburban, life – rather than of nature.

#### **The demonisation of the suburban woman**

David Meredith's characterisation of his suburban wife works within the construction of Australian suburbia as a feminised space, but also references the notion of Australia's

‘mother earth’ as hard and unyielding. David’s list of crimes against Helen focus on her lack of maternalism and her hard surfaces and brittleness. In a seminal scene in the novel, David takes Helen to his mother’s 60<sup>th</sup> birthday party; it is the first time Helen has met the Merediths, including the heavily pregnant Sheila, Jack’s wife. Matthews (2001, p. xiii) refers to the encounter between Sheila and Helen as ‘an encounter between vitality and inertia, creativity and unproductiveness, between a commitment to life and a turning away from it’. Matthews overlooks the inherent misogyny in the scene, which works on the classic Madonna/whore binary. Sheila is depicted as the ideal woman, fulfilled in her natural role:

The womanly things agreed with Sheila, motherhood and fertility and family devotion ...one sensed the subdued vigour of fulfilment tempered by a powerful and deeply-lodged serenity; it was almost as if the fruitfulness of her womb was like some great riparian flooding which gave a renewal of richness to all the other humours of the body. (Johnston 2001, pp. 215-216)

Everything about Sheila is described in terms of curves – her ‘heavy rich ripe figure’, the ‘swollen mound of her stomach’ (Johnston 2001, p. 215); the alliteration of the soft ‘r’ of *rich ripe* and the sibilance of *swollen stomach* adds to the general tone of softness. Conversely, Helen’s clothes and demeanour are hard and unyielding: she is wearing a jacket with ‘severe pleats and leather buttons...gunmetal silk stockings...and handbag of some reptilian skin’ (Johnston 2001, p. 212). The emphasis is on harshness – *severe* pleats, *gunmetal* stockings, *reptile* skin. The ‘mannish’ effect is exacerbated by the way Helen sits ‘stiffly, with her handbag and gloves still on her lap’ (Johnston 2001, p. 220). She is repulsed by the children, who affect her ‘like an electric charge’ (Johnston 2001, p. 221). Helen’s description of the day, recounted later to David when their relationship has finally broken down, illustrates her unnatural repugnance to maternity:

The place stank of a shameless fecundity...damp patches on blouses and a stink of mother’s milk and urine and soggy napkins, and children crawling around your legs and dribbling, and jelly stains on bibs... (Johnston 2001, p. 213)

During it all, Sheila sits like a Madonna, superior in the field in which her habitus is best suited, observing Helen’s discomfort ‘with a kind of secret watchful amusement in her eyes’ (Johnston 2001, p. 221).

Helen is portrayed as being unnatural, more like a mannequin than a real, living woman. Her refusal to eat at the party and her refusal to embrace maternity – ‘there were tacit

understandings that Helen did not propose to have children' (Johnston 2001, 239) – even undermine her role as a whore; with so little vitality she is really an anti-whore, devoid of passion, death personified. She embodies the sterility and artificiality inherent in suburbia, particularly aspirational suburbia, in her hard surfaces. Beverley Grove is unique in the suburbs of Australian literature in that there are no children – they are too organic, too authentic for such an antiseptic environment. In the childless Helen, resident of Beverley Grove, the transition from woman as the embodiment of an unforgiving landscape, espoused by Schaffer (1998, pp. 22-23), to woman as the creator, designer and beneficiary of a suburban environment that is 'nothing but a great red scab grown over the wounds [of] the bulldozers' with 'not a single tree' (Johnston 2001, p. 274) can be easily made.

Esson (1973, p. 73) declared that the suburban home is 'a female institution' that 'denies life', and it is Helen's lack of passion and rejection of the natural that most clearly demonstrates her role as an anti-suburban device. She denies life not only in her refusal to have children, but in her rejection of David's sugar gum in favour of plants that are contrived and unnatural: the 'mock orange' and 'Japanese dwarf-maples' (Johnston 2001, p. 277). She doesn't dance, and doesn't like party games (Johnston 2001, p. 85). Her love-making is described on numerous occasions (Johnston 2001, pp. 183, 236-237, 243 & 307) as being efficient but passionless. Even the meals she prepares are unnatural in that they have no smell (Johnston 2001, p. 268). The age difference between Helen and David – she is four years older – is reiterated throughout the novel and further suggests that Helen is unnatural. Women are still expected to be younger than their husbands – witness the current denigration of 'cougars', the derogatory moniker for women who go out with younger men, in the media. Older women are assumed in such discourse to be unnaturally dominant, and David uses this assumption to excuse his embracing of the suburban lifestyle: 'I think that subconsciously it was the disparity between our ages that led me to entrust so much of the material construction of our new lives to Helen's decisions' (Johnston 2001, p. 237). After David's awakening at the Turley's, he begins to actively use Helen's age against her – 'for the first time I noticed that there was a dark discoloration at the roots of her hair, not grey really, but dry and dull and flaky, like the ashes of a fire' (Johnston 2001, p. 269). The ash at the roots of Helen's hair is a metaphor for her death-in-life existence, and Helen continues the theme that the suburbs are synonymous with death, which begins with Avalon and the house of cripples. It is significant Helen and David are

married the day that Guernica is bombed (Johnston 2001, p. 233), associating their relationship with death from the outset.

### **The aspirational suburbs**

The anti-suburbanism of *My brother Jack* is unrelenting and unforgiving. There is no suggestion, however fleeting, that suburban life may not be all bad. David Meredith does not think, like Dante in *Johnno*, even for the briefest moment, that the suburbs may be beautiful, nor can he imagine that security and peace may at times be found in a suburban childhood, as experienced by the narrator of *The scent of eucalyptus*. The only time that David can see anything positive in his childhood suburban home is when he compares it to the house in Beverley Grove, a ‘double-fronted, ultra-modern, red brick, three-bedroom villa’ that David is at first ‘inordinately proud of’ (Johnston 2001, p. 237), but which in only a year comes to represent everything he despises about himself. As I said in Chapter 1, what David despises about the aspirational suburbia of Beverley Grove is what he fears most in himself: the potential for mediocrity. Rather than acknowledge this, however, he instead employs the effective and age-old solution of blaming his wife. Eagle (1984, p. 38) notes that

“Helen” is based partly on a “real” person in Johnston’s life, and partly on his need to blame women for the feeling of imprisonment he felt in suburbia. Johnston transposed his feeling that Australia was an impossible place for an artist onto his notion that suburbia was an impossible place for a man. Women – in this case, Helen – had to carry the can for this.

David rejects the suburbs at the same moment as he embraces his own intellectual superiority; in a sense, he replaces the pro-suburban dream of *embourgeoisment* with the anti-suburban desire for intellectual and artistic superiority. As he and Helen had shared the original, pro-suburban dream, it is necessary for him to reject both Helen and their shared suburban life: ‘Johnston’s overwhelmingly negative depiction of suburbia and suburbanites such as Helen can be read as self-loathing and a repudiation of his former suburban self’ (O’Reilly 2008, p. 158).

As he does throughout the novel, Johnston employs the narrative trick of suggesting that David blames himself for his own predicament – ‘I had chosen it, of my own free will’ (Johnston 2001, p. 273) – while making it clear that when David moved to the suburbs he was under the influence of Helen. Avalon is associated with men: Mr Meredith, Jack, the wounded soldiers, the references to war and fighting render it inherently masculine.

Beverley Grove is associated with the feminine – the name “Beverley” is a woman’s name, and even some of their male neighbours have female qualities: Phyland, for example, has a ‘pale, pinched-up little widowed woman’s face’ (Johnston 2001, p. 270). The femininity of this suburban space is not celebrated, but is derided and demeaned. While anti-suburban discourse from Britain and the USA denigrates the suburbs for being politically, socially and intellectually conservative, women are not necessarily held as being responsible for suburban sterility. Indeed, as Jurca (2001, p. 167) points out, if the husbands of *The Stepford wives* murder and replace their unhappy spouses with robots, it is because the husbands have ‘a profound commitment to the suburban home’. This is not to negate the level of sexism inherent in the notion that a real woman can be replaced by a robot; however, it is significant that these husbands blame their wives for being *discontented* with suburbia. In her analysis of American suburban fiction in general, Jurca (2001, pp. 6-9) argues that American novelists have had a major role in promoting the view that affluent, privileged white middle class suburbanites are actually victims, ‘spiritually and culturally impoverished by prosperity’. While this is a view espoused in *My brother Jack* – David sees himself as being a victim of the suburbs, ‘defeated by the forces of conformity’ (Johnston 2001, p. 282) – *My brother Jack* is not a satire, and Helen’s shortcomings are inextricably linked to David’s realisation of her suburban, consumerist desires.

Helen represents everything for which the suburbs are condemned: she is depicted as being aspirational and grasping – ‘To this day I do not remember that I actually proposed marriage to her’ (Johnston 2001, p. 192); conformist – ‘If Sandra Solomons has a page-boy you’ve got to have a blasted page-boy!’ (Johnston 2001, p. 283); and false – ‘I was too naïve then to realize that the great suburban artifice is to be smart on nothing’ (Johnston 2001, p. 178). She epitomises the ‘new’ middle class suburbia, post-Depression wealth and modernisation: ‘Beverley Grove, the house, the subdivision, the suburb, even that bottle of Sparkling Hock, were immediate tokens and symbols of social progression’ (Johnston 2001, p. 238). She is condemned even for being ‘gay, charming [and] vivacious’ to guests (Johnston 2001, p. 305) and ‘perfectly agreeable’ to her husband (Johnston 2001, p. 307). As Gail Reekie (1992, p. 153) has noted, it is necessary within the lone hand construct for the feminine to be presented ‘as that *against which* the male national character defines itself’. The characterisation of Helen as the agent of David’s downfall confirms his own status as victim of his habitus – the

suffocating suburban habitus – an artistic genius able to overcome the crushing forces of conformity.

### **The lone hand**

The novel charts the process of David's maturation, from the fearful and oppressed little boy to the successful war correspondent, and the simultaneous descent of Jack, from the personification of Australian manhood to a sad and limping simulacrum. While Jack's downfall is partly a device to emphasise David's development, it is used in the explication of the lone hand. Jack's demotion from the lone hand personified to a pathetic, broken man is related partly to his acceptance of himself as Sheila's husband. While Jack's lone hand credentials are enhanced in some ways by his relationship with Sheila, particularly in his sexual prowess and fathering of many children (Johnston 2001, p. 18), it is also undermined from the outset through his inability to financially provide for her. It is David who lends Jack money when he and Sheila first return to Melbourne (Johnston 2001, p. 151), and it is David who finds Jack a job, as a storeman, at Klebendorf's (Johnston 2001, p. 171). In a contemporary world where making money and being successful are far more impressive than being a bushman, David's status has risen while Jack has become marginalised. Jack is domesticated by Sheila, a process that is briefly interrupted by the war. However, Jack's inability to participate in the one event for which his habitus has prepared him leads inexorably to his feminisation: in the army he works in the stores department, 'wrappin' up parcels like some flamin' counter-jumper in the haberdashery at Myer's!' (Johnston 2001, p. 323).

As Jack descends into a feminised version of his former self, David takes on the role of lone hand. By now he has the credentials: he has taken on Brewster in a metaphoric fight, and won; he has found himself successful with women; and he has been successful in the war for which Jack was not considered 'man' enough. In becoming a new-style lone hand, David rejects Helen for Cressida, rejects the death-in-life of suburban middle-age for the wildness of youth – 'she was the youngest thing I had ever seen in my life' (Johnston 2001, p. 326). Cressida 'represents virgin nature' (O'Reilly 2008, p. 157) and is the antithesis of the contrived and unnatural suburbs – 'she would never have known a suburban street in her life, or a garden subdivision'. Cressida is described by her friend Gavin Turley as 'An authentic savage...born on a barren mile of Pacific beach' (Johnston 2001, p. 354). The use of the word 'authentic' here is deliberate and significant in the light of the constant references to Helen's falsity and

the lack of authenticity associated more generally with suburban life. Cressida reads *Tristram Shandy*, a book that celebrates the unorthodox and eccentric, rather than the fashionable political tomes of the 'Left Book Club', which Helen reads but, it is assumed by David, does not understand (Johnston 2001, p. 179). Cressida is passionate, strong, and alive, full of 'latent forces...of joy perhaps, of excitement, of some pure intensity of living' (Johnston 2001, p. 353). She is strong in her sexuality and her convictions but soft and feminine in her looks, and it is significant that David sees in her something of his brother: 'there was something about her, some absolute and perfectly directness that reminded me of my brother Jack...she was not the same sort of person as Jack, no, but she was the same sort of *thing*...' (Johnston 2001, p. 354). At this point Jack, in being compared to Cressida, is thoroughly feminised. David rejects Helen for Cressida at the same time as he supplants Jack as the new lone hand, and it is ironic that he then expatriates himself, at the very moment that the lone hand is refashioned.

Critics have condemned the novel for its portrayal of Helen: Mares (1964, p. 246) claims that the contrast between Helen's fashionable parties and the Turley's uncontrived dinner is 'too pat, too obvious, too easy a way of showing up the pretentious emptiness of the Meredith's way of life', while Kinnane (1986, p. 30) notes in his biography of Johnston that Helen is not consistently drawn – 'her intelligence and serious interests before marriage are not satisfactorily compatible with her bossy stupidity and shallowness afterwards'. She fills a complex role, however, both as a representative of the superficiality of suburban desires, and as part of the motivating force for David's development into a new style of hero. As Mitchell (1981, p. 163) says, *My brother Jack* is 'a story in which he [Johnston] could depict the process of the gradual replacement of the cult figure, the traditional male hero, by the more plausible, less heroic, successful but treacherous narrator, Davy'. David's transformation into a new version of the lone hand comes at the expense of a proper characterisation of his wife; Helen remains simply a device for the castigation of the suburbs.

## Chapter 7

### *Cloudstreet*

Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*, published in 1991, is described on the cover of the Penguin edition as 'The modern Australian classic'. The oxymoron is deliberate and emphasises that the novel is a modern celebration of what many would consider 'classic' Australian traits: stoicism, humour, thrift and strength. *Cloudstreet*'s enduring popularity both in Australia and abroad is based on many aspects of the novel, not least its easy charm. The novel basks in the golden nostalgic glow of a past that is not-too-distant to remember, but distant enough to mythologise. The use of a rollicking vernacular gives the prose rhythms and cadences that render it distinctly Australian, while it presents a narrative that follows the tradition of the pan-European epic. The spiritual themes are steeped in the Western, Christian tradition – loss, redemption, enlightenment, and transcendence – but enriched by references to a deeper, more ancient spirituality, while the post-colonial issue of fragmentation is epitomised by the divided character of Fish Lamb. The characters are likeable, engaging, and recognisable, and both the thematic concerns and the narrative are satisfactorily resolved at the end of the novel, which is also its beginning, reaffirming the cyclical nature of time and the comfort afforded by the past. In addition to these aspects of the novel, as well as the humour, the magical realist qualities, the attention to detail that brings the landscape to life, and the sense of overriding optimism, *Cloudstreet* is also – perhaps mostly – popular because it confirms, rather than challenges, many aspects of the national habitus.

As Curthoys (1990, p. 11) has noted:

The past is hotly contested territory in Australia. Perhaps it is everywhere, though it seems especially unsurprising that a settler society whose processes of invasion and dispossession of indigenous people are relatively recent and in some respects still continuing, has some particularly difficult issues to confront.

The popularity of *Cloudstreet* rests in part on the impression it gives of confronting those difficult issues. David in *My brother Jack*, written three decades earlier, does not even consider the original landscape of Beverley Grove; he is only able to envision it after white settlement, imaginatively recalling the suburb's beginnings as a knoll of stringybarks 'where rabbits would have made little squats' (Johnston 2001, p. 274). In this, he resembles the suburban worthies of *The time we have taken*, who are bemused

by the inclusion of the original inhabitants in Mulligan's wall. Winton on the other hand, is acutely aware of the dispossession of the Indigenous people; however, his attempt to explore the subject is compromised by his simultaneous exploration of the issue of white belonging, which is in turn affected by his professed desire to recreate the Australia of his parents and grandparents (Winton in Taylor 1996, p. 375). While the novel has been lauded for its restoration of the vernacular, the novel is also characterised by some of the less appealing aspects of the Australian habitus: the veneration of the lone hand, the demonisation of women, and an anti-suburbanism that sentimentalises poverty and idealises the past. *Cloudstreet* is a novel that rejects the future, one that is our suburban present, and presents as an alternative the restoration of the most conservative aspects of our national habitus.

### **The lone hand**

In his article on Winton's *Cloudstreet*, Michael McGirr (1997, p. 57) compares the novel to Joyce's *Ulysses*, both novels being 'elaborate reconstructions of a world from which the author is absent and to which he feels unable to return'. But, as McGirr notes (1997, p. 59):

If Joyce is nostalgic for a *place* to which he can't return, Winton is nostalgic for a *time*. The period in which the book is set is just beyond the fingertips of his own experience, its nostalgia an articulate lament for a period of greater moral security, greater cultural diversity, a larger lexicon of words.

The events in the novel take place from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, but while the reminiscences of Lester and Oriel at times take the action backwards, it never goes forward to the future. The novel ends as it begins, at the moment Fish Lamb reconnects with his spectral self and all becomes whole. It is a perfect moment, and while 'the world goes on regardless' with the execution of the Nedlands monster (Winton 1998, p. 423), the novel manages to suggest that it could just about stop moving on such a perfect day. This is, of course, part of the novel's enduring charm – the way it suggests that on one day in 1964 we could have reached perfection. It is exactly what the mayor and his cohort in *The time we have taken* expect to happen – progress will reach its apotheosis and then sit down – something which Mulligan's wall so deftly exposes as a myth. The time the novel is set is significant not simply because it ends 'about the time at which Winton, born in 1960, dates his first memories' (McGirr 1997, p. 59): it was also a time before feminism and the sexual revolution, before multiculturalism, before

the Aboriginal rights movement. By ending in a perfect moment in 1964, *Cloudstreet* denies everything that Australia will ultimately become.

In 1964, Ward's *The Australian legend*, had been in circulation for six years; the second edition was published in 1966. Ward and others credit the development of the lone hand myth to the writers published by the *Bulletin* and other, similar magazines in the 1890s. As various cultural commentators have noted, it is remarkable that the nationalist meanings associated with the work of Paterson et al. have been stable for over a century (Hodge & Mishra 1990, p. 148) and that the discourses of nationalism are still rooted in a vision of the past that is incompatible with contemporary, everyday experience:

What is most immediately apparent about the Australian construction of national identity is that the particularities of the 1890s version of nationalism have outlasted most of the political and social conditions which produced them without losing their potential for signifying Australian-ness. (Turner 1986, p. 110)

This is an example of *doxa*, which is the very basis of habitus – the sense or unquestioned belief that certain attributes within the habitus are ‘natural’ and pre-determined. Bourdieu (1989, p. 164) argued that ‘when there is a quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order’ – that is, what is perceived – ‘and the subjective principles of organisation’ – that is, the world of tradition – ‘the natural and social world appears as self-evident’. Bourdieu referred to this experience as *doxa*, ‘so as to distinguish it from an orthodox or heterodox belief implying awareness and recognition of the possibility of different or antagonistic beliefs’. *Doxa* is only questioned when the habitus confronts opposition in the form of a crisis within the objective order. Crisis may not be sufficient, however, to engender change, as to question what is beyond question is close to inconceivable (Bourdieu 1989, pp. 168-169). The lone hand has survived within the habitus despite its confrontation with feminism, with historical analysis, and with significant social change, because it has become fundamental. The lone hand is inextricably linked to other aspects of the national habitus, such as the vision of ourselves as battlers, as pioneers, as stoic and brave and egalitarian, a vision that most Australians believe to be true, even when they know it is not. Curthoys (1990, p. 16) has admitted, while discussing Australia's attraction to the victimology narrative and the neo-Liberal attempts to undermine it, what many Australians would also acknowledge in themselves:

And while my own sympathies and historical understandings may lie more with the critical [black armband] historians, it has to be said that there are aspects of the victimological narrative that I, being an Australian, actually like, such as the carnivalesque irreverence and the preference for the “battler” – the worker over the employer, the ordinary soldier over the general.

It is this *doxa* that Winton exploits in *Cloudstreet* – our view of ourselves as irreverent battlers, unpretentious and authentic, linked to our inherent anti-suburbanism, our valorisation of the bush and continuing attraction to the lone hand.

Superficially, *Cloudstreet* appears to undermine the lone hand myth. This is a domestic novel, centred around the family; it values the community over the individual, the collective over the singular. Unlike the lone hand, the men in the novel are distinguished through their ‘inter-connectedness’ and not through separation (Murrie 1998, p. 174). Quick leaves his family for the bush, but, significantly, he returns and embraces his responsibilities, first as a son, then as a husband and father. He physically cares for his brother and his baby; he cries; he suffers from depression. Lester, Quick’s father, is ‘a daft beanpole of a husband’ who bakes cakes (Winton 1998, p. 59), makes ice-cream, has a vaudeville act (p. 143), plays the fool (p. 120). Sam, Rose’s father, is a chronic gambler, a failed jockey ‘on a lifelong losing streak’ (Winton 1998, p. 12) who lost his fingers on a prawn trawler. There is a Dad-and-Dave gormlessness about these men, a knock-about foolishness of the sort that is an anathema to urban sophistication. Winton’s great strength is his ability to venerate his characters’ credulousness, to turn their lack of sophistication into a virtue and a strength. He does this through the evocation of the lone hand.

Throughout the novel, the bush is valued over the urban, and particularly the suburban. As O’Reilly (2008, p. 173) has argued, the central characters are all ‘involuntary transplants from the bush’, and the life they lead, the life the novel sets up as being worthy of emulation, is essentially a rural life. As soon as they arrive in Cloudstreet the Lambs plant seedlings in the backyard and Quick builds a chicken coop ‘from broken teachests and an old forty-four gallon drum he found under the house’ (Winton 1998, p. 51). The Lambs have ‘stickability’ (Winton 1998, p. 60); they may be ‘a mob of gangly, puppet-limbed yokels’ but they are irrepressible, ‘going at it night and day, singing, working, laughing’ (Winton 1998, p. 76). Their values – hard work, loyalty, independence – are the values of the bushman; their skills are the practical skills of the bushman; and their bodies are the bodies of the rural poor – tall and lanky like Lester

and Quick, 'plain and plain bossy' like Oriel (Winton 1998, p. 52). The daughters too are metonyms of poverty and bush thrift 'with their dresses sewn from the same conglomerate of scrap material their mother seemed to tack together in bolts' (Winton 1998, p. 63).

### **The journey**

Quick is the novel's epic hero; the novel, like the *Odyssey*, 'charts the story of a twenty year journey back home' (Morrison 1999, p. 139). While all the characters ultimately find a home in the united Cloudstreet, it is Fish's reconciliation with his spectral self, the self that drowned, that begins and ends the novel. Quick is there at the moment of Fish's division and at the moment of unification. Quick's own journey home begins with the imperfect resurrection of Fish, and ends with him letting Fish drown: he 'stops running before he even reaches the jetty. Quick makes himself stop and already he's crying' (Winton 1998, p. 423). As Morrison (1999, p. 142) argues, Quick's journey to maturity is typically epic, in that it 'involves separation from the maternal and from home, the completion of heroic tasks, and a return with wisdom for the community'. At sixteen, Quick leaves Cloudstreet for the bush, although he does not just leave, 'he bolts' (Winton 1998, p. 146), a lifetime of grief pushing him out the door. At first it seems that in leaving the family home, Quick is rejecting the idea of nation; he runs while his parents are working at the Anzac Club, a bastion of the 'glorious memories of manhood and courage' that Lester and Oriel fully subscribe to, for they 'were patriots like no others' (Winton 1998, p. 144). Due to the intervention of his History teacher, Mr Krasnostein, Quick intimates that war may be less glorious than the Anzac legend would have it, and it is his inchoate suspicion that the faith that supports the Lamb family may be flawed that sends Quick into the wilderness.

However, Quick's rejection of these aspects of Australian identity is both temporary and imperfect, as it requires a simultaneous acceptance of that tenacious signifier of Australian masculinity, the lone hand. In the bush, Quick embraces the qualities of the lone hand such that he is almost erased as an individual: when we first meet him again working as a shooter, he has become simply 'the man' (Winton 1998, p. 195). He qualifies as a lone hand on many counts: he is 'the best shot in the district' (Winton 1998, p. 203) able to row and fish, and he prefers to work alone (Winton 1998, p. 198). More significantly, he is attractive to women and has, according to Lucy Wentworth, a 'huge whanger' (Winton 1998, p. 204). But Quick is a new-style lone hand, a feminised

alternative suitable for a contemporary audience, modestly demurring at Lucy Wentworth's assessment of his manhood – 'It isn't *that* big' (Winton 1998, p. 204).

Cultural historians wonder at the durability of the bushman myth, of which the lone hand is an integral part:

...the most important single problem facing the student of Australian culture [is] how so many people have been able to say such silly things for so long about the nature of Australia itself. (Hodge & Mishra 1990, p.143)

But the strength of the habitus is its ability to adapt sufficiently to continue to be acceptable. Habitus 'may be reasonably durable, but it is not immutable' (Hillier & Rooksby 2005, p. 21); as part of the habitus, the lone hand myth has renewed itself for a new age. Quick embodies the feminised characteristics of contemporary middle class Western men – sensitivity, delicacy of feeling – as well as the most appealing aspects of the lone hand – practicality, a natural reserve, and physical attractiveness.

Quick knows in his soul that being away from his family is gradually erasing him, hence his vision of himself running: 'it's a human, a man running raw and shirtless in the light...It's Quick Lamb barrelling by right before him' (Winton 1998, p. 204). As Murrie (1998, p. 174) argues, 'Winton valorises the non-rational: the emotional, the intuitive, the spiritual and the psychic are constantly privileged in Winton's male characters, who often "see" things and "know" things, outside of the acknowledged possibilities for masculine "knowing" in mainstream culture'. The role of visionary provides a bridge between the seemingly incompatible traits of nurturer and lone hand, between domesticity and masculinity (Morrison 1999 p. 140). The men in *Cloudstreet*, particularly Quick, are blessed with a visionary power that renders them both superior and unique. Quick is transcendent, numinous, other-worldly: 'he could never seem to be ordinary' (Winton 1998, p. 213). It is a quality that enriches his status as a lone hand, this ability to commune pantheistically with nature, with the very spirit of land and sea and river, a quality that comes to him 'unbidden and unsought – it is simply given as a gift' (Miels 1993, p. 39).

The other men in the novel are also granted visionary gifts: Fish, caught in the liminal space between life and death, is a conduit of transcendence. It is Fish, transformed into the thousands of fish that leap into Quick's boat and embrace him 'in their scaly way'

(Winton 1998, p. 217), who brings Quick back from his epic voyage; and it is Fish who ultimately gives Rose and Quick their proper home, by asking the spirits of the dead to show themselves to them when they are camping in the wheat belt (Winton 1998, p. 420). Fish and Quick touch the divine in these moments – Quick’s boat vibrates ‘like a cathedral’ (Winton 1998, p. 216), and both Fish and Quick become physically luminous at times of great stress: Fish literally lights up the night when they are out in the mallee (Winton 1998, p. 419). Fish communes with the ghosts of the house and sees the ‘blackfella’, always (Winton 1998, p. 178). Lester sees him too, and even Sam is blessed with a visit (Winton 1998, p. 405). The ‘blackfella’ is a metaphor for many things in the novel – home, belonging, forgiveness – but he never appears to any of the women. Oriel, the most masculine of the women characters, is permitted certain visionary qualities; indeed, it is the intimation of those qualities that sends Oriel into exile in the tent:

It wasn’t actually one thing that’d moved her. The pig, the sound of middle C ringing in her ears, the sudden claustrophobia of the house, the realization that Fish didn’t even know her, and the feeling she had that the house was saying to her: wait, wait. She didn’t know, but whatever else she was, Oriel wasn’t the sort to argue with a living breathing house. (Winton 1998, p. 134)

Oriel accepts the strange – ‘Strangeness is ordinary if you let yourself think about it’ (Winton 1998, p. 231) – but she is denied transcendence. Oriel never sees the ‘blackfella’ and Fish, her son, the almost-angel, ‘looks through her like she’s not there, like she’s never been there’ (Winton 1998, p. 69). The other women are allowed no access to the divine, no sense of the spiritual, nor are the less worthy male characters such as Toby Raven, Ted, Chub and Lon. The non-rational is generally associated with the feminine and dismissed as ‘female intuition’. By denying his female characters visionary qualities and appropriating these as markers of a superior masculinity, Winton reinforces the ‘patriarchal ideology which insists that power properly rests with the masculine’ (Hopkins 1993, p. 49). Throughout the novel, Winton subverts what is traditionally considered feminine and attributes it to the male characters. While water is archetypically associated with the feminine (Hopkins 1993, p. 55), the river is used as a symbol of life and living for the men in the novel, particularly Quick: ‘Every important thing that happened to him, it seemed, had to do with a river’ (Winton 1998, p. 300). Feminine nurturant qualities are also appropriated by Quick who, through a domination of the domestic sphere as well as the landscape and the divine, becomes a contemporary version of the lone hand as does, to a lesser extent, Lester. This domination comes at the

expense of the female characters, who are consequently disenfranchised and disempowered (Murrie 1998, p. 174). To paraphrase Summers (1994, p. 88), although Australian literature has undergone numerous innovations since the original gestation of the lone hand myth, there has been no alteration in the pattern of diminishing women.

### **The suburbs and the feminine**

For Murrie, the disempowerment of the feminine in *Cloudstreet* is most clearly seen in the marginalisation of the maternal in the characters of Oriel and Dolly:

Constructed according to the patriarchal binary of “Madonna” and “whore”, the two women have their claims as mothers constantly undercut in the narrative. Dolly is the absent promiscuous mother, denied maternal power through being an object of contempt for her daughter Rose...while Oriel is the humourless authoritarian mother whose youngest son [sic] – the retarded “Fish”, around whom the narrative revolves – denies her any recognition as mother. (Murrie 1998, p. 175)

Fish refuses to recognise Oriel and subverts the traditional archetype of the journeying son by desiring to return not to his mother, but to himself. His eventual homecoming is a union of his divided self, one that was split through an act of will on his mother’s part, an act that is masculine in its violence: ‘the woman beat the water out of him...To little Lon, awake now with all the screaming, she looked like she was giving Fish a good hiding for his cheek’ (Winton 1998, p. 30). Oriel appropriates masculinity, but there is no celebration of this gender transference: Oriel’s violence causes only grief and a division that takes twenty years to heal.

As Gelder & Salzman (2009, p. 29) indicate, Dolly and Oriel are stereotypes: ‘Dolly Pickles is a good-looking and obligingly promiscuous woman...while Oriel Lamb, her opposite, is an unfeminine, judgemental and asexual woman’. Rather than representing a generalised Madonna/whore binary, however, Oriel and Dolly conform more specifically to Summers’ famous maxim of ‘damned whores and god’s police’. Summers (1994, pp. 196-198) contends that women up until the time of the sexual revolution in the mid-1970s were defined solely by the roles as wives and mothers. Hence the binary good/evil becomes localised as damned whores – those who are bad mothers – and god’s police – those who uphold traditional family values. As wives and mothers are devalued in a patriarchal society, the damned whore/god’s police stereotype disallows the existence of a ‘good’ woman, and indeed of any woman who is not a mother. *Cloudstreet* is instructive in its perpetuation of this conventional repudiation of

feminine individuality, as is Winton's (in Taylor, 1996, p. 376) own evaluation of the novel, in which he contends that all 'the strong characters are women'. In this he seems to be suffering from the same misapprehension as the academic Dan Adler who, according to Summers (1994, p. 498), analysed various families in the 1950s and, 'After discovering that women both made more decisions and carry out more of them than their husbands...reached the amazing conclusion that this meant that women are more powerful than men within the family'.

Like Adler, Winton is clearly confusing 'activity with power' (Summers 1994, p. 498) in his assessment of his own characters. Oriel is certainly bossy and organised and wilful, but it is Lester who makes the original decision to turn Cloudstreet into a shop (Winton 1998, p. 56), and Lester who makes the cakes and pasties and ice-cream for which the shop is famous. Oriel brings Fish back from the dead but is powerless to make him whole, or to make him recognise her. By refusing to recognise her as his mother, Fish denies Oriel's very existence, and it is her realisation of this that sends her into self-exile in the backyard, away from the family home. Dolly, the 'damned whore', has only sexual power – and when that fades she is just a 'rumpled old woman' (Winton 1998, p. 375). The text revels in demeaning descriptions of Dolly's aging body – when her son Ted dies and she collapses, it is 'her angry slash of a vagina' that is exposed (Winton 1998, p. 338); earlier, Rose watched as her 'breasts slapped together like applause' (Winton 1998, p. 162). Her desire to be a good grandmother – 'I'll give im lollies. I'll spoil im filthy if only he comes to see his old granma' (Winton 1998, p. 376) – is a belated attempt to embrace the only other alternative open to her now that she can no longer be a whore, that of de facto mother.

Kinnane (1998, p. 42) has argued that in our literature 'imagination has been given preference over observation'. The lone hand legend and its associated stereotype, the suburban woman, is a triumph of imagination over observation, a triumph that disavows the obvious desire of many Australian men to live in the suburbs. The suburbs are constructed as feminine spaces, incompatible with masculinity. In *Cloudstreet*, the anti-suburbanism is focused on the outer, newer suburbs, and Rose is the one who desires to live there:

I want to live in a new house, said Rose. In a new suburb in a new street. I want a car out the front and some mowed lawn. I want a small, neat house that only *we* live in,

Quick. I don't ever want to live anywhere old, where people have been before. Clean and new, that's what I want. (Winton 1998, p. 326)

Rose's emphasis on newness, her rejection of anywhere 'where people have been before' reduces her moral standing in a novel that valorises the past. The intellectual's disdain for the working class desire for newness is starkly apparent in this paragraph, with its repetition of 'new' and 'I want'. The new house is Rose's desire – 'This girl wants to buy a house' (Winton 1998, p. 327) – and the reference to it being Rose's dream – 'Small dreams, chuckled Rose' (Winton 1998, p. 328) – emphasises the meanness of her dreams against the expanse of Quick's waking visions. Morrison (1999, p. 142) argues that Rose's journey to maturity involves traditionally masculine 'rites of transition' – working in the city, going to parties, interacting with the middle class; however, these are not given the privileged status of Quick's journey. Rose's adolescence and early adulthood are described more in terms of stasis than action, and at twenty-four, when she meets Toby Raven, she is still living at home and working in the job she has had since she was sixteen. Rose does not move out of Cloudstreet despite having both the financial means (Winton 1998, p. 326) and, at least when she is a teenager, the will to leave 'this stinking old house and the smell of death and sick' (Winton 1998, p. 170). As she grows older, Rose becomes like Stan the cockatoo: 'Stan's wing was never clipped. He could always have flown away' (Winton 1998, p. 89). She stays, a victim of her dysfunctional and unhappy childhood – a victim of her habitus.

Dolly, Rose's mother, is not only promiscuous, drunk, irresponsible and vicious – 'Dolly tried not to think about how she hated Rose these days' (Winton 1998, p. 154) – she also denies her daughter the ability to recognise herself as beautiful. Rose's relationship with her body is troubled, and initially, when she is a child, her mother is the cause of it:

Yer gettin skinny. Look like a bloody skeleton. I hate it. People think we starve yer. Rose said nothing. It pleased her somehow to know that it annoyed the old girl...From then on, Rose got thinner everyday. (Winton 1998, p. 143)

Rose has absorbed her mother's hate into her body; Bourdieu's work (1990, pp. 72-73) emphasises how the habitus is *em-bodied* – literally incorporated into one's physicality:

The relation to the body is a fundamental dimension of the habitus...[the body] *enacts* the past, bringing it back to life. What is “learned by body” is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is.

Rose physically enacts her unmothered past not only in her anorexia, but also in the look on her face ‘which she wore underneath every other expression she ever had’ (Winton 1998, p. 279). Even after she can afford good clothes she carries with her ‘the humiliations of being poor’ (Winton 1998, p. 162), and never mentions Cloudstreet ‘out of shame’ (Winton 1998, p. 291). Nevertheless, she does not leave it.

Rose’s habitus has rendered her unsuitable for life outside of Cloudstreet, particularly the suburban life she desires on two occasions in the novel. It is entirely reasonable for Rose to aspire to a suburban life: it is part of Australia’s collective habitus today and in the time that *Cloudstreet* is set. The 1960s saw rapid suburban expansion into the ‘greenbelt’ and Rose would have absorbed the pro-suburban rhetoric of the time that emphasised the safety of the suburb, and the association with upward mobility and social progress (Allon 1994, pp. 45-47). It was ‘natural’ – that is, part of the country’s collective habitus – for the generation who endured the Depression and the Second World War as young people to seek a better life for their own children in a new house in a new suburb (Davison & Davison 1995, p. 47), despite a co-existent anti-suburbanism. Rose first dreams of a middle class suburban existence with Toby Raven:

On the pillow beside Toby, she even imagined herself married with children, with a house in the clean new suburbs...She’d wear a cashmere sweater tied loosely round her neck, her hair would be always wet and combed back after swimming, her children would be sweetfaced and adored by every passing stranger. (Winton 1998, p. 291)

This dream soon sours as Rose becomes more aware of Toby’s inadequacies. Toby is the antithesis of the lone hand – he is characterised as intellectually pretentious and a physical coward: he reads the London newspapers, *Lady Chatterley*, writes bad poetry and refuses to bodysurf at Cottesloe Beach. This last is his biggest failing: as Fiske, Hodge & Turner (1987, p. 54) argue, the surf beach has come to serve the same purpose in the construction of the lone hand as the bush, providing an alternative site for a ‘real Australian’ to demonstrate his harmony with the natural environment, his strength and bravery. Toby’s decision to sit ‘in the shade with an Evelyn Waugh’ while Rose bodysurfs (Winton 1998, p. 291) undermines his masculinity. Any credibility Toby retains is undone when he – ‘a gossip columnist who writes sex poems’ (Winton 1998, p. 298) – is confused with a war poet. As Gelder & Salzman (2009, p. 30) point out:

The novel gleefully exposes Toby as a manipulative fraud...it has no time for literary cosmopolitanism, having invested so much effort in tying its idea of authenticity to the local, to the provincial and the vernacular.

The pretensions of Toby represent 'intellectualism and materialism, both of which are seen as potential agents of corruption' (Hopkins 1993, p. 56). Rose escapes Toby but her suburban dreams are not abandoned; they are simply adapted to suit her new circumstances. These circumstances are those of the new working class and based on the assumption of the time that couples would live within the structure of the nuclear family 'or if they didn't, they should' (Summers 1994, p. 17). The nuclear family centred around the expectation of children, and the best place for children was in the suburbs. Winton destabilises this expectation through Rose's miscarriage and subsequent anorexia. If Rose's first anorexic episode is depicted as a response to her family situation and her bad mother, the second is a reaction to the miscarriage and Rose and Quick's incipient move to the suburbs.

In *Cloudstreet*, the outer suburbs are a rehearsal for death. In 'the orderly quiet suburbs' (Winton 1998, p. 345) Rose miscarries, vomits, starves herself and blocks out the world. Even the sky in suburbia is deathly, described as 'the colour of a suicide's lips' (Winton 1998, p. 345). Just before Rose and Quick make the decision to stay in Cloudstreet, when it seems that they will leave for the suburbs, Sam's cocky flies away, the talking pig is mauled by dogs, and the Nedlands monster, the suburban serial killer, begins his spree (Winton 1998, pp. 362-363). As O'Reilly (2008, p. 181) observes: 'Winton's inclusion of the Nedlands monster supports the notion...that suburbia is an environment where evil develops and resides'. The monster is from the suburbs and, like the suburbs, he is unnatural, with a hare lip and a cleft palate (Winton 1998, p. 364). He is able to unleash his evil because in the suburbs people are isolated and vulnerable; Rose says of the suburb they are expecting to move to: 'Have you seen that street? There'd be no one to talk to' (Winton 1998, p. 366).

Ultimately, Rose and Quick reject their suburban house. Rose's decision to stay in Cloudstreet is described as a choice of life over death:

Don't you want to be independent?

Quick, I don't even know what it means anymore. If it means being alone, I don't want it. If I'm gunna be independent do you think I need a husband? And a kid? And a mother and father, and inlaws and friends and neighbours? When I want to be

independent I retire. I go skinny and puke. You've seen me like that. I just begin to disappear. But I want to live, I want to be with people, Quick. (Winton 1998, p. 419)

The subtext is simple: the suburbs equals death; independence equals isolation equals death.

The decision to stay in Cloudstreet is a rejection of the nuclear family and an embracing of kinship which is lauded as a cause for celebration: 'Quick and Rose drove home wild as kids, roaring down the scarp into the city with a happy madness up their noses like lemonade bubbles' (Winton 1998, p. 420). Their return home is designed to be read as a triumph of community – the picnic, the healing of divisions, the healing of Fish – but it can also be read as a triumph of Rose's personal habitus over the pro-suburban discourse of the time. Rose says that staying in Cloudstreet will give her 'another childhood, another go at things' (Winton 1998, p. 418), suggesting that she has a vague, inchoate understanding of the power of her personal habitus. Viewed through the prism of the anti-suburbanism that lurks in Australia's collective habitus, Rose's decision seems not only reasonable and right but a great, crowning achievement. It is the wonderful, penultimate event in the process of healing and reconciliation which reaches its climax when Quick allows Fish to enter the water. But, viewed another way, Rose's decision is incomprehensible: it will only serve to trap her into the horrible dependencies of childhood. Her once grand visions of escape have been narrowed by experience to consist only of Cloudstreet, her family, and the boy-next-door. Rather than resisting the pro-suburban aspirations that saw the expansion of the suburbs and the *embourgeoisement* of the Australian working class, aspirations to which the text is actively hostile, Rose's decision can be seen as giving up. Can anyone believe that Rose's life will be better lived in the bosom of her extended family? With her broken-down drunken mother and domineering mother-in-law? Winton has given the appearance of offering a happy-ever-after tale, but how happy will Rose really be?

### **The lone hand and the working class**

As O'Reilly (2008, p. 187) has pointed out, while the bush is privileged over the city in *Cloudstreet*, the inner-suburb in which the novel is set is privileged over the outer suburbs. The characters are originally rural, lending them authenticity, and while Dolly and Sam do not embrace the rural virtues by building a chook house in their backyard, neither do they succumb to suburban tidiness: 'The grass is shin high out in their half of the yard. Bits of busted bilycarts and boxes litter the place beneath the sagging

clothesline' (Winton 1998, p. 78). The superficially drawn characters, such as the Lamb sisters, prefer the city: 'The time it took to fold a lace hanky, that's all it took for Hat Lamb and Elaine Lamb and Red Lamb to know that they liked the city better than the farm' (Winton 1998, p. 62). Quick, Lester, Oriel and Sam prefer the country; the girls prefer the city; no-one, it seems, likes the suburbs. Consistent with his privileging of the bush over the city, Winton privileges the suburb with the house that resembles the free selector's bush cabin, with its chickens, corrugated iron and other symbols of practical, country life. The inner-city suburb is thus seen as an 'authentic' site. Rose and Quick's house in the suburbs is described as the antithesis of the half-wild bush cabin: it is fortress-like – a 'clean, orderly, separate place with fences and heavy curtains' (Winton 1998, p. 360). Moreover, it is silent (Winton 1998, p. 405). Cloudstreet, in contrast, is a house of sounds:

The house didn't heave and sigh the way Cloudstreet did; it wasn't restless in any way at all, and there weren't the mobs brawling through, the clang of the shop bell, the rattle of crates and smokers' coughs, the tidal sounds of people stirring up and settling down. This was orderly, calm suburbia. This was merely a list of things missing. (Winton 1998, p. 339)

Cloudstreet and the inner-suburb it resides in are depicted as life itself compared to the death-in-life of the 'antiseptic' suburban street (Winton 1998, p. 404), which is separated from both the life of the city and the life of the bush, as symbolised by the river. The river is the manifestation of nature in the city, a place where 'you could be in the city but not on or of it' (Winton 1998, p. 138). Rose and Quick connect as lovers on the river, and the final celebration of community is enacted on the river. However, the river does not flow in the outer suburbs, denying the residents access to the authenticity that comes from nature.

In privileging the inner over the outer suburb, Winton taps into an aspect of anti-suburbanism that McCalman (1994, p. 549) relates to 'the baby-boom legend':

The "suburbia" of the baby-boomers sprang to life in the 1950s, *sans* history, *sans* class, *sans* chic. It is a place of safety and predictability, and its tropes are back yards (Melbourne), the beach (Sydney), Hill's hoists, Holden cars, Mum's in the kitchen, Dad's in the toolshed, Grandma's still in the inner suburbs (where real life goes on).

In the 1950s and 60s, the aspirational working classes fled the crowded inner suburbs of Australia's major cities and moved to detached low-density housing in the middle and

outer suburbs (Gleeson 2006, p. 15). In the 1970s and 80s their now middle class offspring began to move back (Gleeson 2006, p. 36):

I wanted to buy in Glebe and took Luke back to Richmond Street. It was really changed. Most of the old residents had been removed long ago...and my dream of transforming one of the ugly little terraces was obviously not unique. Everyone was doing it. Backyard toilets had been converted into wine cellars, floors were covered with cork tiles and hanging baskets swayed from every second balcony. The prices were way out of our range. (Sayer-Jones 1988, p. 177)

As I noted in my Introduction, the residents of the inner-city suburbs often perceive themselves to be ‘morally superior’ to those who live in outer suburban areas. Part of this sense of moral superiority comes from their repudiation of the type of consumerism associated with the suburbs. As I have argued throughout this Section, allegations of consumerism have always been used as a weapon against the suburbs. In recent decades anti-suburbanism has had new material to work with, as environmental concerns have added to the discourse. Even though, as Salt (2006, p. 56) points out, there has been no published study that indicates that growth on the edge of a city is more costly either economically or environmentally than urban consolidation, there is an assumption that suburban life is ‘inherently unsustainable in ways rural and urban forms of life are not’ (Davison 2004, p. 4). Winton uses this assumption to denigrate the outer suburbs – ‘they’re bulldozin streets and old places, fillin in the river’ (Winton 1998, p. 411) – and sustains the views of the ‘new class’ by locating his morally superior characters firmly in the inner suburbs.

The Lambs ‘live poor’ (Winton 1998, p. 245), and even though Lester wonders at it – ‘He noticed how patched together everything was, everything in the room. What had they been saving for, anyway?’ (Winton 1998, p. 255) – their inherent thriftiness is valorised above the pretentious wealth of Nedlands, where the murderer lurks, and the grasping of the aspirational classes whose desires are all material: ‘furniture, neat rugs, lino tiles, a TV...’ (Winton 1998, p. 360). In the text, capitalism is constructed as ethical only if it is both necessary and old-fashioned. The Lambs begin the corner shop because they have to feed their family, and it is characterised by ‘jars and jugs...Crates stood on the stained floral carpet loaded with second grade fruit and vegetables and the air was thick with midges and fruit fleas’ (Winton 1998, p. 57). The shop fills a vacuum in the community – ‘After a time the shop *was* Cloud Street, and people said it, Cloudstreet, in one word’ (Winton 1998, p. 60). Oriel’s shame when the shop succeeds

in wiping out the local competition and destroys the business and marriage of Ex-AIF-Clay (Winton 1998, p. 172) emphasises the destructiveness of rampant commercialism. The novel sentimentalises poverty in much the same way as Johnston did in *My brother Jack*, a sentimentalisation that sees 'life' in the slums as being infinitely more authentic than the death-in-life of the suburbs, as voiced by Esson (1973, p. 73) in 1912:

...if one had the choice, it would be better to live in a slum area than in a bourgeois suburb. The slums have more character, perhaps base character, and decidedly more potentialities. Life is more vivid and picturesque there. People dance, and have passions, and live, in a sense, dangerously. In the suburbs all is repression, stagnation – a moral morgue.

This view locates poverty in the inner suburbs, but that view is dated and has been for decades. The urban poor in Australia no longer live in Surry Hills, or Fitzroy, or Subiaco, they live in Macquarie Fields, St Albans and Balga, in suburbs far from the city centre. Yet their lives are not sentimentalised. Novels set in contemporary outer suburbia focus on violence, particularly to children, as I will explore in the next section: there is nothing sentimental about the poverty and violence in Michelle Moo's *Glory this* or Joel Deane's *Another*, and no life or vitality in the mindless, unrelentingly dull and drugged-out suburban existences of Damian McDonald's *Luck in the greater west*. It is ironic that *Cloudstreet*, a novel which celebrates the community and vitality of the poor, should support the prejudices of the contemporary urban elite. As McCalman (1994, p. 553) has argued, anti-suburban discourse 'has always been complicated by the intellectuals' distaste for the bourgeoisie'. In order to retain their status as morally superior, Quick and Rose must resist the *embourgeoisement* of their generation and reject the suburban house. In this, they are not representative of their era, but of ours.

### **White belonging and anti-suburbanism**

Winton uses the expansion of suburbia as a metaphor for the western imperial project of colonisation and the usurping of the land from its Indigenous owners. This is a major concern of the novel, along with its corollary, the legitimacy or otherwise of white Australian settlement. Australia's collective habitus has been affected by the contradictions inherent in our beginnings as a white nation: we were both 'the colonised (in relation to the British) and coloniser (in relation to Aboriginal people)' (Plumwood 2005, p. 371); both prison and self-sufficient outpost of Empire (Hodge & Mishra 1990, p. 117); both eager and reluctant beneficiaries of the lie of *terra nullius*. Australians do not feel unquestioningly entitled to their country and are consequently on an 'unceasing

and doomed quest for symbolic forms of legitimacy' (Hodge & Mishra 1990, p. x). *Cloudstreet* is a narrative of belonging that seeks to justify white settlement by celebrating a particular type of settlement, that of the extended family or 'tribe'. O'Reilly (2008, p. 173) argues that 'Suburbia, colonialism, Indigenous land rights and non-indigenous belonging are fundamentally intertwined, since all Australian suburbs occupy land stolen from Indigenous Australians'. *Cloudstreet* appears to engage with all those concerns, but ultimately champions a vision of belonging and reconciliation in which the problem of Indigenous land rights is resolved by their substitution. As Gelder & Salzman (2009, p. 30) argue:

Aboriginal histories are removed from the novel; the only Aboriginal figures who manage to appear are cast as non-real, spectral, ethereal...This is a novel...which has a spectral Aboriginal character effectively hand over property to the non-Aboriginal characters who have moved in, giving them his blessing into the bargain. Native title isn't even an issue here, as the novel leaves its Aboriginal characters behind in order to charge a fully realised *non-Aboriginal* form of belonging...at the end of *Cloudstreet*, the house is fully occupied by its two white families, with babies on the way. Rose describes the two families to Quick as "a bloody tribe, or new tribe" – as if they have now themselves all become "aboriginal", literally replacing those Aboriginal people who had previously come and gone.

The novel's claim to legitimacy is deeply flawed but supported by a national habitus that sees the land as 'won through suffering' (Curthoys 1990, p. 36). As Carter (1987, p. 343) argues, guilt over the dispossession of the Indigenous people has resulted in the creation of 'a new dialectic, no longer between invader and invaded, but between pioneer and nature'. In this way the discourse on land ownership in Australia can focus on the legitimisation of white settlement based on conquest of the land itself. Winton urbanises the traditional fight for the land, anthropomorphising the inner-city house as an adversary which is eventually won over:

You might say I've come to love this awful old house...It never made it easy for us – and I tell youse, there's times I've thought the place has been trying to itch us out – but I reckon we've made our mark on it now, like it's not the house it was. (Winton 1998, pp. 410-411)

There is an unsettling sense here that 'making a mark' on the land is sufficient grounds for the granting of moral tenure.

The ghosts of the house – the racist old woman and the suicidal Aboriginal girl – are exorcised by the birth of Rose and Quick's baby, Wax Harry, the first generation of this

new, white tribe (Winton 1998, p. 385). Prior to this, the 'blackfella' appears to Quick and tells him to abandon the suburban dream and 'Go home to your home, mate' (Winton 1998, p. 362). Later, Sam sees the 'blackfella', who says: 'You shouldn't break a place' (Winton 1998, p. 406). As O'Reilly (2008, p. 186) argues:

Winton seems to be suggesting that non-indigenous Australians can legitimately claim to belong on the Australian continent, whilst simultaneously arguing that further suburban development/occupation should not take place and that Indigenous cultures should be respected.

The clear message here is that the 'worthy' can legitimately belong to Australia and claim a new style of indigeneity. The unsettling subtext is that the original inhabitants are replaceable, and that any claim to indigeneity must involve a repudiation of the future, symbolised by Rose and Quick's suburban house. There is also the implicit exclusiveness of this claim to legitimacy – this is a novel that offers acceptance to only a small number of characters. Winton's case for legitimate occupation of the land is undermined by the way it simply erases the physical presence of the Indigenous people by depicting them as merely spectral, and its restriction of acceptance to the worthier inhabitants of Cloudstreet.

The lone hand myth is not only anti-domestic and anti-suburban it is also anti-Aboriginal. Like the pioneer myth, the lone hand myth 'obscure[s] the dispossession of indigenous peoples almost entirely...In both, it is the hardships endured by white people, especially British and Irish white people, which is at the heart of the narrative' (Curthoys 1990, p. 21). For both the Pickles and the Lambs, their suffering grants them tenure of the house and of Australia itself. Quick's lone hand credentials add further support to the claims of legitimacy made by the text. The house in Cloudstreet represents colonial Australia; when the Pickles first arrive it is described as a 'great continent of a house [that] doesn't belong to them' (Winton 1998, p. 41). But they take over it, live in it, inhabit it, and it is notable that it is not only the old woman's ghost that fades after the birth of Wax Harry, but that of the young Indigenous girl too (Winton 1998, p. 383). As Hopkins (1993, p. 56) suggests, the novel attempts to create 'a new mainstream...suggested in the naming of both new babies born at Cloudstreet: "Wax Harry" fits with the working-class heritage, whereas Lon and Pansy are marginalised by the choice of "Merrileen-Gaye" (surely a reference to the pretensions of working-class aspirations towards middle class lives which characterised the 1950s)'.

This 'new mainstream' is not only anti-suburban, it is also anti-future, denying the imperative of progress that was embraced by Australia in the post-war period, denying the fashions of the period, refusing to conform: Wax Harry, for example, is 'outrageously uncircumcized' (Winton 1998, p. 389). As Gelder & Salzman (2009, p. 30) note, *Cloudstreet* 'draws its key characters together and makes them conform, reconciling parent and child by making the children adopt the parents' old school conceptions of Australian masculinity, motherhood and occupation. This is, in other words, a conservative novel'.

The conservatism of the novel is seen in its celebration of the old-fashioned virtues of hard-work and thrift, singing and simple fun:

Quick thought about it. They lived like some newspaper cartoon – yokels, bumpkins, fruitcakes in their passed down mended up clothes, ordered like an army floorshow. They worked their bums off and took life seriously: there was good and bad, punishment and reward and the isolation of queerness. But there was love too, and always there was music and dancing and jokes, even in the miserable times after Fish drowned. (Winton 1998, p. 304)

Winton's much-lauded use of an almost lost vernacular creates a mood of nostalgia that is emphasised by the cadences of the language: 'They turned the churns, skimmed, sluiced, measured and poured' (Winton 1998, p. 170); the Lambs 'worked and whistled and chicked around' (Winton 1998, p. 106); 'they all lay in bed, tossing, askew, asleep, awake' (Winton 1998, p. 120). A sense of plenty despite the poverty is given in the constant and repetitive descriptions of food: 'at lunchtime their mother always brings warm pies and pasties to the gate' (Winton 1998, p. 89); 'buttered pumpkins scones and...fresh Anzacs' (Winton 1998, p. 144); 'bread and butter, brown vinegar, chopped onions and tomatoes, and a drum steaming with boiled crabs' (Winton 1998, pp. 177-178); 'chook and two veg with gravy, jugs of beer, sherry and lemonade' (Winton 1998, p. 320); 'roast lamb, cauliflower cheese, mint sauce, a tray of roast potatoes, parsnips, onions, pumpkins, cabbage, slabs of butter, hot white bread and Keen's mustard.' (Winton 1998, p. 409); 'hams, cold chickens, lettuce salad, hardboiled eggs and asparagus, potato salad and shredded carrot, chutney, bread, a jar of anchovies and a vat of pickled onions.' (Winton 1998, p. 422). Food is symbolic of love, care and nurturing, particularly in the extended family environment which *Cloudstreet* is so obviously valorising. The food is abundant, homemade, simple and unaffected, and in this it references the dinner at the Turleys' in *My brother Jack*. It is significant that Rose and

Quick's final rejection of the suburbs is celebrated with the abundant picnic of simple food on the banks of the river that flows through the inner suburbs and connects them to the natural world, while in the outer suburbs they are filling the river in (Winton 1998, p. 411).

Hopkins (1998, pp. 56-57) notes that the novel is a narrative of 'love and acceptance, but only for those who are accepted...Winton's attempt to challenge the dominant middle-class ideology is flawed by his creation of a substitute, which in turn excludes'. The fabulist quality of the writing, a style which in the 1990s was still associated primarily with the family epics of South American writers such as Marquez and Allende, gives the impression that *Cloudstreet* is writ on a large canvas, a canvas as big as Australia. However, the world of the novel is in fact very small, and the idealised community at its end includes only those members of the two families who agree to conform to outdated, conservative values. This is a text that valorises the local over the global and which reduces the historical to the personal. Ffion Murphy (1993, p. 79) accuses Winton of diminishing the importance of historical events such as the Holocaust and Aboriginal genocide, of using them to support his characters' own quest for legitimacy: 'Winton's characters are aware of history, but its impact is continually circumscribed by...immediate incidents and emotions'. On the scene where Quick sees Rose's anorexia-ravaged body and thinks that her silhouette 'was just like something out of Belsen', Murphy exclaims: 'So this is the lesson of six million Jews exterminated in Nazi concentration camps! Poor Rose Pickles – it's a bit like using a sledge-hammer to bludgeon a butterfly'.

*Cloudstreet* may be read as a novel of great hope, but it is ultimately nihilistic in that it repudiates the future and misrepresents the present. The novel is well-loved because it provides a resolution to difficult and disturbing aspects of white Australian settlement: it resolves the problematic relationship with Indigenous people by rendering them unreal; and it reconciles the simultaneous desire for and denigration of the suburbs, the central dilemma of our habitus, by explicitly rejecting the suburbs and the future they represent. It focuses on the past and provides retrospective legitimacy by depicting characters who know and love the land, but it gives no sense of a way forward. The use of the lone hand myth is instructive, as the lone hand is backward rather than forward looking, focusing on a time that has long passed in Australia, if indeed it ever existed. The lone hand myth is anti-domestic, anti-female, and anti-suburban, and it fits snugly

within the world of *Cloudstreet*, a novel that venerates the natural over the cultural, the bush over the city, and which reserves for the suburb, stuck between the city and the bush, a special contempt. *Cloudstreet* is a novel of regress rather than progress, and as such its status as 'The Modern Australian Classic' is disturbing rather than heartening.

In *The time we have taken*, *My brother Jack* and *Cloudstreet*, the lone hand motif is depicted in a suburban context. In the case of Carroll's novels, the lone hand is used to explore the problematic relationship Australians have with suburbia; in *My brother Jack* and *Cloudstreet*, the lone hand is mobilised in order to sustain the anti-suburbanism of our habitus. Like the lone hand, the motif of the lost child is one that has been used since the early days of white settlement. The lost child has traditionally symbolised the anxiety that comes from living in a land that was, at least initially, distant and unknown. In the next Section I shall explore the application of the lost child in five contemporary Australian works, and argue that this motif, like the lone hand, is sustained by an anti-suburbanism which is a product of our past, our present and our future.

### **Section III    The lost child**

### Introduction to Section III

*They looked for him for five days. On the sixth, his father and another came upon something, lying, half-hidden, in the long grass at the bottom of a gully in the ranges. A little army of crows flew heavily away. The father sprang to earth with a white face. Pretty Dick was lying on his face, with his head on his arm.*

*God had taken him home. (Marcus Clarke, 1896)*

The anti-suburbanism of much Australian fiction is persistent because it exists within the broader project of construction of Australian national identity. As Australia was suburban more or less from its inception (Davison 1994, p. 102), our sense of ourselves has always been affected by the discourse surrounding suburbia; we imbibed the doctrine of anti-suburbanism from the British at the same time as we inherited the ‘Anglo-Saxon desire for privacy’ attainable in a detached villa in the suburbs (Frost 1992, p. 190). White Australia has no distant Arcadian past in which it can claim its genesis, and our foundational myths have always been compromised by the knowledge that we are, and always have been, a suburban nation, one that occupies land acquired in morally dubious circumstances. This is the basis for the most tenacious aspects of the national habitus – our simultaneous desire for a suburban life we also denigrate, our continued referencing of the bushman myth and a radicalised, ‘Lawsonesque’ past (Turner 1986, p. 108), and our insistence on a vision of Australia as being ours by right of suffering (Curthoys 1990, p. 36).

The stories that contribute to national myth-making can be mobilised relatively easily to support all aspects of the habitus: the pioneer legend, for example, works to absolve guilt over Indigenous dispossession by seeing the land as empty (Curthoys 1990, p. 29), while it supports a pro-suburban ideology by giving the ‘suburban pioneers’, such as those interviewed by Davison et al. (1993, p. 51) a discursive framework within which to tell their individual stories of hardship. The lone hand legend supports white settlement through its evocation of a natural sympathy between the bushman and the Australian landscape, while simultaneously sustaining a generalised misogynistic anti-suburbanism.

Like the lone hand, the lost child trope has proved itself to be remarkably durable and adaptable for more than 200 years, representing as it does our continuing concerns of legitimacy and the fear that lurks at the back of our collective subconscious: ‘a fear of being cast out, exiled, expelled, made homeless again, after two centuries of securing a

new home far away from home' (Curthoys 1990, p. 35). A number of scholars have researched the persistent motif of the child lost in the Australian bush in stories both 'true' and fictional: John Scheckter (1981), Robert Holden (1991), Peter Pierce (1999), Kim Torney (2005) and Elspeth Tilley (2009) have all investigated what Tilley calls 'the Australian white-vanishing trope'. The lost child trope sustains the view, persistent in the Australian imaginary, that the land is dangerous, even hostile to white habitation. This view is supported by the nagging thought that perhaps we should not be here, that the land is literally trying to expel us, like the house in *Cloudstreet*; from this perspective, the paradigm of suffering becomes a way of coping that ultimately is naturalised as part of the habitus. Within the habitus, the lost child comes to represent the level of sacrifice of the white settlers; as Kociumbas (2001, p. 51) has noted, 'the stereotype of the lost white "baby" as the victim of the bush was...of great utility, conveniently suggesting that it was the white family which had borne the brunt and paid the price of colonisation, not the stolen Aboriginal child'.

The lost child motif is not, of course, exclusively Australian; it was adapted from the traditional European 'babes in the wood' legend, made distinctly Australian to support both our European antecedents and our claim on the country (Torney 2005, pp. 31-32). Pierce and Torney have both written extensively on the representation of the Australian lost child and have come to marginally different conclusions regarding its function. For Pierce (1999, p. xiii), the lost child 'stands in part for the apprehension of adults about having sought to settle in a place where they might never be at peace'. Torney (2005, pp. 51-52) argues against Pierce's analysis, suggesting that to see the lost child lost as an extension of the white settlers' fears of the landscape is invalid because it was not 'explicit in the understanding of the colonial settlers themselves'. Torney's argument rests on the view that the colonial settlers actually felt at home in the bush, a refutation of the common assumption that they were alienated from it. For Torney (2005, p. 79), the significance of the image of the lost child lies in the symbolic importance of children in the new colony: the wellbeing of children 'became touchstones for the developing nation...Thus, to lose a child to the environment was a failure of the colonial society, one that called into question its rightful place in country'.

I would suggest that both Pierce and Torney are correct in identifying fear at the heart of the lost child trope: fear of the landscape, fear of failure, fear of starvation – these were all entirely reasonable responses for the new settlers. O'Reilly & Vernay (2009, p. 5)

argue that ‘Australian history...is crammed with a vast array of fears and anxieties, many of which are evident in various forms of cultural production from the past two centuries...’. They go on to list the fears Australians have been able to lay claim to since white settlement:

...fear of being robbed, attacked and killed by the indigenous peoples; fear of the natural environment, including floods, droughts, bushfires, and deadly animals, fish, reptiles and insects; fear of being invaded by foreign powers, especially the Russians, Chinese, and Japanese; fear of failing to populate and thus fully lay claim to the (stolen) continent; and fear of immigration and multiculturalism.

The lost child trope encapsulates those fears in a single image of innocence lost, of potential thwarted. It is also utilised to support the perpetuation of dominant ideologies, particularly those to do with ‘proper’ parenting: the image of the desperate and pathetic lost child can be easily read as a warning to ‘errant women not to abandon their responsibilities within the private sphere’ (Kociumbas 2001, p. 45). Pierce (1999, pp. 49-54) argues that Lawson’s ‘The babies in the bush’ and the true story of Clara Crosbie mark a cross-over period in Australian lost child narratives: prior to the late nineteenth century, there was never any suggestion of parental neglect in the stories – the children were simply victims of an enticing yet malevolent landscape. However, in Lawson’s story the father was away drinking when his children went missing, implying culpability for their deaths; while Clara Crosbie went missing on the way to visit her mother, with whom she did not live. As Pierce indicates, these stories engage in a ‘darker re-reading of the lost child narrative’ where the parents are at fault. Clara, particularly, is a child abandoned before she is lost, and in this she anticipates twentieth century literary renditions of the abandoned child.

Australian suburban fiction abounds with children lost and abandoned. Children have a contradictory role in popular culture – they are either representative of innocence, vitality and happiness, as seen in television commercials, or are used to illustrate the depravities, violence and fears of their parents. They function differently in pro and anti-suburban discourse – there is a metonymic exchange that occurs depending on which part of the habitus is being supported. In the novels analysed so far, the children are almost all abused, abandoned or rejected in some way: David Meredith’s father is violent towards his son and ultimately rejects him; Johnno’s father has died, abandoning him; and, in *Subtopia*, Martin’s father abandons him more cruelly by simply disappearing. There is sexual abuse in all the novels except *Cloudstreet*: David

Meredith's friend Jess is 'criminally assaulted and strangled to death in a desolate area of suburban parkland.' (Johnston 2001, p. 124); in *Subtopia*, Connie's uncle 'shamelessly [slips his hands] into Connie's one-piece' (McCann 2005, p. 28); the narrator of the *Scent of eucalyptus* is abused by her great-grandfather (Hanrahan 1985, p. 54); and even in *Johnno* there are references to the war-time concrete pill-boxes that 'appeared in the streets and became places where people "did things" after school, or where children who took sweets from strangers were discovered with their heads cut off...' (Malouf 2004, p. 38).

The novels and short story analysed in this next section were published in the fifteen years from 1990 to 2005. They all utilise, in one way or another, the lost child as a metaphor for suburban life; suburban life that moves from the 'battler's blocks' of 1960s suburban Perth, through the generalised middle class suburbia of the 1970s and its more upmarket twenty-first century descendent, to the poverty and social breakdown of Sydney's western suburbs. The trajectory of the lost child motif in these narratives shows how the bush no longer represents the sinister and scary – it is the outer suburbs that now take on this role. In these chronicles of despair and sorrow, our fear of the landscape has united with our anti-suburbanism to create a monstrous interpretation of the world most of us inhabit.

## Chapter 8

### ‘Aquifer’

Tim Winton’s short story ‘Aquifer’, from the anthology *The turning*, is set in a state housing development in outer Perth in the early 1960s. The suburb of the story is exactly that which is rejected by Rose and Quick in *Cloudstreet*: the house is the same ‘boxy double brick’ (Winton 2008, p. 39) as Rose and Quick’s house, characterised by the ‘scrubbed bricks, the dinky letterbox, the planted lawns’ (Winton 1998, p. 404). *Cloudstreet* is an anti-suburban novel that never takes us to the suburbs – they are only glimpsed in passing before they are discarded. *Cloudstreet* depicts a rejection of suburban development, a rejection that patently did not happen: the Australian suburbs rapidly expanded in the post-war period, assisted by such organisations as Western Australia’s State Housing, referred to in the text (Winton 1998, p. 328). The rejection of the suburbs is essential to the novel’s vision of a reconciled community. In ‘Aquifer’ Winton abandons the rollicking, expansive sentimentalism of *Cloudstreet* and provides a terse commentary on his abiding themes: the inescapable past, white belonging and Indigenous dispossession, and what he has referred to elsewhere as the ‘autism that comes from bland suburbia’ (Winton in Taylor 1996, p. 375). He does this through the trope of the lost child.

The plot concerns a middle-aged man, the narrator, who returns to the suburb of his childhood when he sees on the television news that human remains have been revealed by the receding waters of a small lake. The bones belong to the son of English migrants, Alan Mannering, who drowned in the lake, known as ‘the swamp’ by the local children, in the early 1960s. The narrator was the only witness, and he never told anyone what he saw. Now, decades later, ‘without waking my wife or even leaving her a note’ (Winton 2008, p. 38), he leaves his house in the fictional country town of Angelus and returns to the suburb.

The story concerns the past but unlike *Cloudstreet* the mood of ‘Aquifer’ is not nostalgic or cheerful – there is no whistling, chacking, waking, caking or baking in ‘Aquifer’ and the tone is relentlessly brooding. At the beginning of the story, Winton (2008, p. 37) gives us long, unbroken sentences followed by short, sharp ones:

Very late one evening not long ago I stirred from a television stupor at the sound of a familiar street name and saw a police forensic team in waders carry bones from the edge of a lake. Four femurs and a skull, to be precise. The view widened and I saw a shabby clump of melaleucas and knew exactly where it was that this macabre discovery had taken place. I switched the TV off.

The short sentences resound like bullets after the long, unpunctuated ones, and undermine any potential for nostalgia that could be gleaned from the evocation of what is clearly a defining moment: this is a memory, we are being told, but not a good one. The narrator is caught up in his past but not because he yearns for it; he simply can't escape it – 'Life moves on, people say, but I doubt that. Moves in, more like' (Winton 2008, p. 37).

The suburb of the story is a State Housing development, designed 'in the smoky, fly-buzzing office of some bored government architect' (Winton 2008, p. 38). It is on the edge of bushland, a liminal space only just 'scoured' from the surrounding landscape – the bush was 'in the beginning, only a fence away' (Winton 2008, p. 38). The fence represents the flimsiness of the metaphorical barrier between culture and nature, and recalls the fences around the huts of the original white settlers, fences that were desperate attempts to impose order upon a chaotic landscape. Carter (1987, p. 377) sees in both the original settlers' huts and the sprawling twentieth century suburbs a 'desire to inhabit, to cultivate those intimate spatial qualities bound up with the sense of home'; elsewhere, Carter (1987, p. xxiii) talks of 'the process of transforming space into place'. The erection of fences is a manifestation of that desire and that process: the fence represents possession by turning an empty landscape into a private place. For the child in 'Aquifer', this is a visual reminder of his parents' preference for culture over nature, a preference which is devalued in the text as it is explicitly connected to the desperate emptiness of the adult lives in the suburb:

The men of our street went to work and left the driveways empty. They came home from the city tired, often silent. They scattered blood and bone on their garden beds and retired to their sheds. All day the women of the street cleaned and cooked and moved sprinklers around the garden to keep things alive. (Winton 2008, pp. 38-39)

The death-in-life existence of the suburb, which requires the artificial application of fertiliser and sprinklers to keep it alive, is compared to the natural aliveness of the bush. Tilley (2009, p. 37) contends that Winton's description of the bush in 'Aquifer' is of a landscape that is 'disorderly, even slovenly' compared to that of the suburb. She reads

the bush in the story as ‘ever-menacing’ and only barely contained by the suburban fences. Certainly the disorder of the bush is compared to the order of the suburbs – the suburbs are described as ‘straight lines’, while the bush ‘rolled and twisted like an unmade bed’ (Winton 2008, p. 38) – and there is a sense of threat in the ‘noise of frogs and crickets and mosquitoes’ (Winton 2008, pp. 40-41). However, the bush is also a site of wild beauty, of ‘lupins and wild oats’ (Winton 2008, p. 41) that are valued over the ‘buffalo grass and roses and...rubber trees which brought havoc to the septic’ (Winton 2008, p. 38) that characterise the suburb. It is not the bush that threatens settlement in this story, but settlement that threatens the bush: ‘From high on the ridge the city could be seen forming itself into a spearhead. It was coming our way and it travelled inexorably in straight lines’ (Winton 2008, p. 38).

Even early in the story the swamp, which is the focal point of this piece of bushland, has taken on the qualities of the suburb that will eventually destroy it: the reeds bristle ‘like venetian blinds’, and the water bleeds from the ground ‘with a linoleum gleam’ (Winton 2008, p. 43); the swamp shakes itself like ‘hung washing’ (Winton 2008, p. 46), and the drowned Alan Mannering is encased in a ‘black cake-mix of sediment’ (Winton 2008, p. 47). The swamp is ‘natural Australia’, (Winton 2008, p. 51), scruffy, potentially dangerous, seemingly robust but delicate, sensitive: at one point the narrator’s next-door neighbour, recently arrived from England, says ‘Looks dry this country, it does, but underground there’s water. Caves of it. Drilling, that’s what this country needs’ (Winton 2008, p. 42). By the end of the story, the swamp is so reduced from all the bores that the suburb is defaced by ‘gory stains on fences and walls’ (Winton 2008, p. 51), and the bones of a young boy are finally exposed.

### **A contemporary white vanishing story**

‘Aquifer’ is what Tilley (2009, p. 37) refers to as a ‘white-vanishing text’; it is contemporary, but it shares with colonial white-vanishing narratives a ‘separated semiosis of regular, deliberate, and finite settled space versus haphazard and infinite unsettled space’. Tilley’s (2009, p. 37) argument is that white-vanishing texts operate within a ‘dominant spatial metanarrative’ that characterises the land as either hostile space or home space. Within this thesis the home space of ‘Aquifer’ is the suburb, and the hostile space is the swamp. However, this theory is not strictly applicable to this text as the suburb and the swamp are not clearly delineated. The order of the suburb – ‘the meagre grid of limestone streets’ – is compared to the irregularity of the swamp; the two

are not completely distinct: the street winds down a 'long gully', its straight lines merging with the chaos of the bush (Winton 2008, p. 38). The separation of the suburb (home space) from the bush (hostile space) is not neat or exact, nor is the swamp 'unfamiliar, exotic [or] savage' (Tilley 2009, p. 37). Moreover, the swamp is at risk from the suburb, rather than the other way around – indeed, by the end of the story the swamp is 'fenced' by a cycleway, a bird hide and signs that 'bristle with civic exhortations' designed to protect it from the suburb that has already destroyed it (Winton 2008, p. 51). In this white-vanishing narrative, Winton subverts the home/hostile space binary so that it is the suburb that is hostile while the swamp, as representative of natural Australia, is the originary home.

The text shares with other nineteenth century stories of lost children descriptions of the bush as alluring – in Marcus Clarke's 'Pretty Dick', for example, the little boy sees the bush beyond his hut as 'a strange, dangerous, fascinating, horrible, wonderful place... how much he would like to explore it!' (Clarke 1896). So, too, in 'Aquifer': the narrator and his friends talk about the swamp but dare not go. Finally, the narrator gives in to his own desires, rejecting the admonitions of his parents, and goes to the swamp: 'It felt bad to be cheating on my parents but the wild beyond the fences and the lawns and sprinklers was too much for me' (Winton 2008, p. 43). He is drawn to it, as if he had little choice: 'I surrendered to the swamp without warning. Every wrinkle, every hollow in the landscape led to the hissing maze down there' (Winton 2008, p. 43). Far from the gothic hell of Clarke's story, the swamp in 'Aquifer' is a place of adventure and beauty for the children of the suburb:

I found eggs in the reeds, skinks in a fallen log, a bluetongue lizard jawing at me with its hard scales shining amidst the sighing wild oats. I sat in the hot shade of a melaleuca in a daze... We dug hideouts and lit fires, came upon snakes real and imagined... (Winton 2008, p. 43)

Indeed, the swamp is safer than the suburb, where the young Charlie Mannering's toes are lost in his father's lawn mower (Winton 2008, p. 42), where one neighbour is drunk every night (Winton 2008, p. 47) and another makes passes at little boys (Winton 2008, p. 48). Alan Mannering, the boy who drowns, relentlessly bullies the narrator – 'He never said a thing, just poked and prodded and shoved [me]' (Winton 2008, p. 41) – and on one occasion 'someone hung a snake from our jacaranda out front' (Winton 2008, p. 42). The snake is a symbol of the bush beyond the suburb, but it is 'headless and

oozing', and its murder is another indication of the encroachment of the suburb onto the bush, another marker in the bush's gradual demise.

When Alan Mannering vanishes into the swamp, he is paddling a makeshift raft made out of an abandoned car. The swamp had become a repository for dumped cars (Winton 2008, p. 45), further signalling its degradation. That Alan Mannering drowns in the swamp while on a raft made out of the most potent symbol of suburban expansion and environmental destruction, the car, is highly significant. Although the swamp swallows him soundlessly and does not give him up – 'Police dragged the swamp, found the car roof but no body' (Winton 2008, p. 46) – the sense that it acted malevolently is tempered by the boy's own culpability in furthering the swamp's degradation by taking the car-raft onto the water, and the violence he shows to the narrator immediately before the drowning: 'Alan Mannering lifted the jarrah picket he'd ripped from someone's fence and pressed the point of it into my chest' (Winton 2008, p. 46). Alan Mannering is not an innocent Pretty Dick, but a bully, and the swamp is not constructed in the text as malevolent so much as innocent, a victim of relentless suburban expansion.

### **Colonialism, anti-suburbanism and the lost child**

'Aquifer' is an allegory of the consequences of suburban expansion, with suburban expansion itself a symbol of the colonisation of Australia by the British. The Aborigines in 'Aquifer' are not ghosts but real people, the Joneses, 'although it seemed that these were Joneses who didn't need much keeping up with' (Winton 2008, p. 39). The Jones children were dark, loud and angry and they 'never went near the swamp' (Winton 2008, p. 44). On the last page of the story, when the suburb has become 'middle class', the narrator watches the Joneses being evicted from their home (Winton 2008, p. 52); they lasted longer than the swamp, but eventually they also succumb to the relentless straight lines of suburban conformity. The eviction of the Joneses is a noticeable departure from the scene of reconciliation in *Cloudstreet*, when the 'blackfella' gives the house to the Lambs and the Pickles.

Alan Mannering, the lost child, is English, and he represents all that was vicious and corrupt in the original British colonialists. His teeth are decayed (Winton 2008, p. 46), symbolic of the rotten morality of the first settlers; he doesn't speak but communicates only through assault. Like a dog marking his territory, Alan Mannering pisses around the narrator as he lies by the side of the swamp with a jar of tadpoles (Winton 2008, pp.

44-45). This act could be read as a metaphor for the brutality of colonialism and the violence that accompanies the seizing and claiming of land that belongs to others. A more general reading sees the act simply as bullying. Either way, the reader feels little sympathy, the cries of his weeping mother notwithstanding,

The lost child, Alan Mannering, is literally absorbed by the swamp and the narrator imagines him 'raining silently down upon the lawns of our street' (Winton 2008, p. 48). That he vanishes so completely recalls other stories of lost children, particularly *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, which Schaffer (1988, p. 56) describes as depicting for Australians the 'ultimate threat, that the land might actually absorb its inhabitants'. However, in 'Aquifer' the suburb is unperturbed by the child's death. The narrator finds the thought of Alan Mannering's absorption into the swamp 'strangely comforting' (Winton 2008, p. 50), as he considers how everything is ultimately absorbed by the land, how the cycles of life and death continue. This is Winton's glimmer of hope in an otherwise overwhelmingly pessimistic story: 'beneath the crust, rising and falling with the tide, the soup, the juice of things filters down strong and pure and mobile as time itself finding its own level' (Winton 2008, p. 50). In death, Alan Mannering has become part of the land, and far greater than he ever was in life.

The narrator never tells anyone of the fate of Alan Mannering – his bones are not revealed for decades, until the environmental degradation caused by the suburb reduces the water level and exposes them. Consequently, there is no chance of redemption for the narrator. He represents those white Australians who saw the crimes against the Indigenous people and the land, but refused to act as witnesses, who did nothing and now feel a vague but persistent guilt. This manifests itself in the narrator's obsession with time, beginning with the talking clock in the red telephone box at the end of the street, where the narrator would 'reach up and dial 1194 to hear a man with a BBC voice announce the exact time' (Winton 2008, p. 40). It is the authority that the man has that inspires the boy, but soon he realises that time 'wasn't straight and neither was the man with the BBC voice' (Winton 2008, p. 43). Ben-Messahel notes how the past often weighs upon the present for Winton's characters (2008, p. 76), and for the narrator of 'Aquifer' the past infects his entire life with guilt and shame. As Murphy (1993, p. 77) argues:

Time in the mind...is capable of assimilating past moments within the present. Because of this human capacity we are unable to escape the past. This is the crux of our dilemma; it is central to notions of sin and guilt...Winton's characters are consumed by a desire to undo the past which leaves little energy for confronting the present and the future.

The narrator witnesses the vanishing of the lost child and suffers a consequent obsession with the past that cannot be resolved: 'the past is in us, and not behind us. Things are never over' (Winton 2008, p. 53). In this he demonstrates the insinuation into the habitus of our collective guilt over white settlement, for if the image of the lost child 'stands in part for the apprehensions of adults about having sought to settle in a place where they might never be at peace' (Pierce 1999, p. xii), these adults must have absorbed this anxiety into the habitus.

In 'Aquifer', Winton has taken an enduring trope and subtly subverted it, so that it no longer supports a metanarrative of white victimology, but of anti-suburbanism. Alan Mannering may have drowned in the bushland swamp, but the swamp was in the process of being conquered by the suburb. The swamp was an extension of home-space for the boy; as such, his death is not the archetypal sacrifice of white settlers to a hostile landscape, but something more complicated and sinister. Torney (2005, p. 52) argues that contemporary accounts of colonial children who were lost in the bush did not suggest that the children or their parents feared the landscape – 'Paradoxically, children became lost because they, and often their family, felt quite at home in the bush'. This is the case with Alan Mannering and with the children in the novels that make up the rest of this section: these children are lost, but not into hostile space, rather into home space. Indeed, for these children, their home space is hostile space, and their home space is always suburban.

## Chapter 9

### *Of a boy*

The lost child represents atavistic fears that have been absorbed into Australia's collective habitus: fear of vanishing into an unknown land; guilt at the dispossession of those who were here before; resentment at being prisoners, whether convicts or settlers, all movement being circumscribed by the great distance between Australia and Europe. Torney (2005, p. 52) may argue that the Australian settlers 'felt quite at home in the bush'; however, such a view is not that which has entered the cultural imaginary. The view of the Australian landscape that forms the basis of our habitus is that of a hostile, unwelcoming place: Schaffer (1988, p. 149) describes the landscape within the Australian tradition as 'variously represented as funereal, absorbing, pliant, passively resistant, actively destructive, barren, cruel, wretched, a wilderness, a wasteland'. It is this historio-cultural construction of the landscape that informs the collective habitus, for history – true or imagined – helps create the habitus.

Within the paradigm of the habitus, all aspects of culture and history are absorbed and used to create 'the context within which we later perceive and evaluate all life experiences' (Tranter 2006, p. 4). In a context that sees the land as a hostile space and fears the legitimacy of tenancy, the lost or vanishing child becomes a powerful trope, further justifying the existing perception of the land's active hostility to white settlement.

The habitus consists as much of images, symbols and tropes as it does beliefs and behaviours. The image of the lost child supports the remnants of colonialism that we carry around with us as a form of cultural baggage: guilt, fear and marginalisation. Anti-suburbanism is, among other things, an expression of our collective guilt at settlement; the more suburbia spreads, the more the white man invades and dispossesses the original inhabitants. The image of the lost child can, therefore, easily be transported to contemporary, suburban Australia and used to perpetuate the anti-suburbanism of our habitus.

*Of a boy* is set in the 1970s, an era that added more confusion to the existing ambivalence about suburbia and white settlement in general due to the impact of feminism and the gradual post-war habitus shift. Vivienne Muller (2008, p. 2), in her

essay 'Lost children and imaginary mothers in Sonya Hartnett's *Of a boy*', contends that the suburban context of the novel defines the patriarchal social order that was 'the dominant patterning of life in 1970s Australia'; however, *Of a boy* reveals 'more disquieting family formations'. The 'disquiet' comes from these families' lack of conformity to accepted patterns, a breakdown that is related to – but not blamed upon – the changing nature of motherhood, the viability of the nuclear family, and the role of community. In *Of a boy*, the lost child represents the lack of safety for children in the Australian suburban environment, while the suburb represents the Australian landscape itself. While the novel explores issues of loneliness, innocence and vulnerability, on a macro level the novel reveals a national habitus still shackled to a colonial past despite our suburban present.

Our national habitus includes concepts and constructs of the landscape that are no longer current, but which still resonate. Being part of the habitus, they are easily adaptable, so the metaphoric move from the hostile bush to the hostile suburbs is not so great, despite the physical disparity. Pierce (1999, p. 179) acknowledges that the true stories of Australian lost children from the 1960s and 1970s – Graeme Thorne, the Wanda Beach murders, the Beaumont children from Adelaide, the Mackay children from Townsville – 'underlined how insecure suburban life in Australia could be, however beguiling its appearance of, and reputation for safety and ease'. These children did not wander into the bush and perish from dehydration and despair, nor did they fall off a precipice or down a pothole; these children were taken from the suburban streets near their homes. Nevertheless, their disappearances recall the stock images of children lost in the bush.

*Of a boy* opens with a four-page description of the last half an hour in the lives of the three Metford children, who disappear from their modest suburban neighbourhood one Sunday afternoon in 1977 on their way to buy an ice-cream. Witnesses confirm their journey to the milkbar, but there are no witnesses for the journey home, as the Metford children are never seen again. For most Australian readers the description of the Metford children is redolent of the Beaumont children, Jane, Arna and Grant, who vanished from the Adelaide suburbs in 1966. Even Australians who were years off being born in 1966 know the case, as it is routinely revisited by the media and the police: in 1996 a warehouse floor in Adelaide was dug up, in the hope that the bodies would be recovered (Pierce 1999, p. 186), and only a few years ago, on the 40<sup>th</sup>

anniversary of the children's disappearance, the South Australian Police (2006) issued a media release in which it is described as 'an active case.' The story of the Beaumont children has become the stuff of myth – 'an angst ridden point of cultural reference' (Benson 2005, p. 50) – sustaining the lost child trope and marking the transition of fear from the bush to the suburbs.

Of those who saw the Metford children walking to the milkbar, two claim that they were accompanied or being followed by a young man, 'thin, tall, unhealthy' (Hartnett 2002, p. 4). This person, later known as the 'Thin Man', encompasses the fear of all the parents in the fictional suburb and beyond: the fear of losing one's children, 'a terror as recognisable as [one's] own reflection' (Hartnett 2002, p. 51). The Thin Man begins to function as a bunyip or bogeyman in the minds of the parents, grandparents and teachers of the suburb: an unknown malevolence in the wilderness of the suburb. The story of the Metfords weaves through the novel as an extended metaphor of child vulnerability. The Metfords are analogous to Adrian, the nine year old protagonist, and the three children, Nicole, Joely and Giles, who move in across the road. Adrian, forsaken by his troubled mother, abandoned by his father and unwanted by his grandmother, is a boy who gradually disappears, not in a violent act of abduction like the Beaumont/Metford children, but through a process of gradual wearing down: 'Like the bundle that gets handed about in the game of pass-the-parcel, he's been unwrapped and made smaller as he's been pushed from each to the next' (Hartnett 2002, p. 156). In brief, the novel depicts Adrian's sad and lonely existence, his new and precarious friendship with Nicole and her siblings, and his desperate fear that he will lose this friendship as he has lost every other important relationship in his life.

The initial story of the Metfords and their disappearance concludes with a summary of the other historical events of 1977: the Queen's Jubilee; the journey of the space shuttle Enterprise; the United Nation's ban on the sale of arms to South Africa; the death of Elvis Presley. The placing of this summary gives the story of the children's disappearance the weight of history: it tells the reader that this, too, is a significant event. The last line of the prologue – 'Three children bought no ice-cream, did not return home' (Hartnett 2002, p. 5) – deftly sums up the simplicity and devastation of their vanishing.

### **Lost in suburbia**

In *Of a boy*, the primitive and antagonistic landscape has been colonised by the suburbs. The park where Adrian first meets Nicole is unquestionably suburban: it is 'enclosed by the backsides of houses, by the dead-ended stump of road, by the fence of the local swimming pool'. Everything about the description suggests a landscape tamed and imprisoned: the grass is mown by the council, the meandering path is not dirt but gravel, the trees have been deliberately planted. Nevertheless, it is a lonely, isolated place, in a 'perpetual state of desertedness', empty like the original landscape was claimed to have been. In a phrase that recalls both the fears of the early settlers and the repressed guilt of Aboriginal genocide, Adrian 'wonders if everybody knows a terrible truth about this land which he alone has not been told' (Hartnett 2002, p. 42). The desertedness of the park is echoed in the quiet street where Adrian lives with his grandmother; the house is on a hill, it is 'difficult to see the neighbouring houses' so it appears solitary, alone (Hartnett 2002, p. 30). There is a sense of ominousness in *Of a boy* that is heightened by the unnaturally quiet, suburban setting. The suburban streets from which the Metford children vanish are characterised by twists and turns which aid and abet their disappearance, turning the streets into a malevolent maze – the 'result of all the twisting was that no one who saw the Metford children walking through that clear afternoon would see them for very long' (Hartnett 2002, p. 2). The streets are like the wilderness, twisting and turning, the park is a suburban simulacrum of a deserted landscape, and the municipal swimming pool where Adrian and Nicole eventually drown is synonymous with the rivers, creeks and potholes of the bush.

While replacing the traditional bush landscape with that of the suburb, the novel also replaces the stereotypical Australia of warm and sunny days with descriptions of winter cold – mornings 'misted by fog and diamonded by dew' (Hartnett 2002, p. 134). In setting the novel in winter, Hartnett explicitly rejects the dominant pro-suburban image of light and sunshine: the park is wet, and the wind that blows against Adrian 'is so cold that he can feel himself wearing his skin' (Hartnett 2002, p. 43). When Adrian determines to run away he wears his 'warmest jumper, the thickest jeans, the longest socks, the strongest boots' (Hartnett 2002, p. 164). The cold weather emphasises the vulnerability of the missing children:

It is sad to think of children being out in such weather, and there's a stirring of strange grievance at the knowledge that they haven't been given a warm place to lie. (Hartnett 2002, p. 134)

The suburb in *Of a boy* is not a safe haven, the apex of a civilised life where ‘no stranger can come against our will’ (Menzies 1942). It is instead the physical manifestation of fear: cold, grey and dangerous. The finding of the sea-monster in the first chapter, immediately after the description of the Metfords’ disappearance, turns their vanishing into something mythic at the same time as it grounds it in the everyday. The sea-monster is a mythical creature, a ‘colossal beast’ dragged up from the ocean floor, speaking of untold mysteries (Hartnett 2002, p. 7). Later, the sea-monster is revealed to be ‘just a big dead basking shark’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 157), an everyday beast that is nevertheless dangerous: as Ruth Starke (2003, p. 31) notes, the sea-monster acts as a metaphor for the monsters that can be found closer to home.

In *Of a boy*, the lost child myth acts as an indictment of the perceived insularity and lack of safety of suburbia: the concept of home that underpins pro-suburban sentiment is completely undone in this novel. The suburb is designated in pro-suburban discourse as a site of safety and freedom, and the best place to bring up children. In 1970, just before the time this novel is set, Stretton (1970, p. 19) argued that suburban life offers children autonomy and freedom, giving them the opportunity to ‘develop versatile activities of their own which don’t require innumerable permissions, or collide with all the prohibitions that have to apply to crowded private apartments and crowded public spaces’. In anti-suburban discourse, that freedom is subverted into vulnerability, and the suburb into a place of danger. *Of a boy* ‘burrows beneath the family suburban dream’ (Muller 2008, p. 2) to reveal an atavistic fear of the Australian environment, manifested in a fear of the suburb. Hartnett has said that the depiction of the Metford children was based partly on the Beaumont children, who went missing in 1966, and partly on the case of Eloise Worledge, who was abducted from her bedroom in the middle of the night in 1977 (Sullivan 2002, p. 2). The case of Eloise Worledge is instructive:

Eloise was meant to have come from a happy family and to have disappeared on a quiet, uneventful night. In fact, at the time of her kidnap, her parents were so bitterly estranged her mother at times wondered whether Eloise had been taken by her father... In contrast to the image of a sleeping, middle-class suburb, witnesses later reported more than 200 suspicious incidents in the area on the night she disappeared. (Silvester 2003, pp. 1-2)

*Of a boy* stresses the sameness of the Australian streets from which the Metfords were abducted and where Adrian lives:

[Adrian] does not know those Metford children, but they are children just like him, just like the children he sees every day at school. On the TV, in the Metford yard, he had glimpsed a black and white striped basketball exactly the same as his own. He does not recognise their street, though it's only twenty minutes' drive away, but he feels as though he has seen it before. The trees, the fences, the rooftops, the clotheslines – that is middle-class suburbia, and Adrian is a suburban boy. (Hartnett 2002, p. 28)

The very ordinariness of the Metfords underlies their essential vulnerability – they are like everyone else, except that they are gone.

The novel abounds with lost children – the Metfords, Adrian, even Rory. Although an adult, Rory was little more than a child when he had the car accident that ruined his friend's life and he chose the same fate as the Metfords – to disappear, literally. The text makes explicit the connection between the disappearance of the children and the gradual erasure of Rory:

Rory will never shuffle through a grassy field. He won't feel pebbles beneath his boots...The sun won't blind him with its brightness, the wind won't pull his hair. None of this will happen to the children, either. (Hartnett 2002, p. 95)

Hartnett artfully sketches the children in the school playground who have no friends, 'the excluded boys and girls, most of them sitting in shadows by themselves' and Adrian's own precarious state, his 'meagre reputation' that he is not prepared to risk by befriending any of them. The use of words describing physicality underline the real, almost corporeal loneliness of these children: 'teeter', 'abyss', 'searing', 'aching' (Hartnett 2002, p. 17). The most obvious symbol of lost children, however, is St Jonah's.

St Jonah's is a home for abandoned children, but it is not the safe refuge of Kathleen Marsden's Girls' Home in *The gift of speed*. It is separate from the suburb, 'enclosed by a towering fence', its charges stigmatised by the failure that St Jonah's represents, a stigma that the other children can smell and sense and from which they shy (Hartnett 2002, p. 18). As Clinton explains to Adrian, St Jonah's is not an orphanage, as the parents are still alive – alive but 'no good...So the kids get taken away and put in the Home' (Hartnett 2002, p. 19). The very existence of St Jonah's compromises the ideology of home and family that underpins the suburb – the nuclear family.

### Lost at home

The nuclear family was defined in post-war Australian pro-suburban ideology as ‘the ideal stable network: each member had a clearly defined role and position and thus it was a buttress against collapse – individual elements in a harmonious whole...’ (Allon 1994, p. 49). The nuclear family – two adults plus children, generally two or three – was what the suburbs aspired to, demonstrated in the model houses available for viewing in display suburban villages (Dovey 1994, p. 146). When Menzies (1942) said in his paean to the suburban home, ‘The forgotten people’, ‘My home is where my wife and children are’, he was linking home to the nuclear, not the extended, family. He was certainly not referring to a Home like St Jonah’s.

Adrian fears St Jonah’s because he sees how he and his family do not fit into the nuclear mould, and recognises his social vulnerability. Robert Dessaix (1998, p. 357) remembers how, as an only, adopted child living with his elderly parents, he felt isolated from suburban expectations: ‘Everyone at school seemed to have fathers and mothers in their prime and a car and a block of land to live on.’ He recognised that there were other ‘odd-shaped’ families living in the neighbourhood, families that did not fit the strict nuclear patterning, but it made no difference: ‘I *felt* we were differently shaped and that feeling was enough to change absolutely everything’. For Adrian, the existence of St Jonah’s does not validate his living arrangements with his grandmother and uncle, but exposes its weaknesses and his potential vulnerability.

Adrian’s home life is anything but happy – like Clara Crosbie, he is abandoned long before he is lost. He lives with his frustrated grandmother and agoraphobic uncle; his mother is the victim of an unspecified addiction and his father does not want him. His home resembles St Jonah’s more than it does the nuclear ideal, its existence a quiet response to Stretton’s championing of the freedom granted to suburban children. Adrian does not want freedom, he ‘wants a calm and rosy world’ and is prepared to ‘accept anything, if anything is what keeps the peace’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 34). Despite undermining the pro-suburban ideology of home and family, the text does not judge the characters who fail in their duties to Adrian; Hartnett renders them as flawed but not as monstrous. Only Adrian’s aunt, Marta – the single truly anti-suburban character in the novel – and Adrian’s father are characterised as having no redeeming qualities. The understanding that goes into the depictions of the adult characters who fail Adrian are what makes the novel bearable. Gelder (2005, p. 179) contends that *Of a boy*

‘systematically and sadistically goes about its business of humiliating its 9 year-old boy protagonist Adrian’, and asks ‘why does Hartnett continually punish young boys?’. The novel is harrowing and desperately sad, but Adrian’s ‘humiliations’ are put into context, blame is not apportioned: this is the tragedy of the novel, that Adrian is destroyed even though no-one meant to deliberately harm him. In this he is more like the colonial lost children, a casualty of the indifferent landscape rather than the victim of a pre-meditated crime.

All the parental figures in *Of a boy* are failures of one sort or another. Pierce (1999, p. 114) argues that, while the lost children of colonial fiction represented their parents’ lack of confidence over white settlement, the lost children of the later part of the twentieth century suggest that many adults wish to be ‘free or rid of their children’. This is certainly the case of Adrian’s father, who gives as grounds for abandoning his only child his need ‘to be free’. Adrian’s father denies him an existence by referring to him as ‘tame’ and ‘boring’ – ‘You’ll hardly notice he’s here’ – which Adrian overhears (Hartnett 2002, p. 155). The father is punished in the text by not being given a name – he is only ever referred to as either Adrian’s father or ‘the man’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 154) – however, it is not his identity that is erased, but Adrian’s. Adrian loves his mother, Sookie, but her neglect has him taken away; he ‘knows why he’s been taken from her. He doesn’t like putting this reason into words; he dislikes making Sookie take the blame’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 92). Beattie, Adrian’s grandmother, is the bad mother substitute, her barely contained rage giving some indication as to why her daughter Sookie ended up an addict:

Much of what is best in [Beattie] is warped on the voyage from within to without. Concern emerges disguised as cruel rage, and breeds a corrosive, truculent remorse. She will not ever say sorry. (Hartnett 2002, p. 53)

Nevertheless, Beattie does genuinely love Adrian, and the text ‘gestures towards the recuperation of the mother as woman in its switch from Adrian’s to Beattie’s perspective for periodic segments of the narrative’ (Muller 2008, p. 6). Beattie’s own experiences – a husband who ‘had taken years to die’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 66), her children damaged and spiteful, for whom she ‘feels a surge of grief’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 67) – render her incapable of caring for Adrian, a fact of which she is well aware: ‘he’s a part of me – but I know he isn’t mine. And I sometimes worry that’s the way I treat him, as if he isn’t mine. I think, How can he possibly thrive?’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 151).

Rory, the potential father-substitute, is so damaged that he can provide nothing but words of support for Adrian, words which Adrian himself recognises as hollow. Rory was not abused or neglected by his father, but he was not supported either, so that Rory ‘cultivated a grudge’ against him. The grudge led to the purchase of an MG convertible – ‘the single item most likely to appal his father’s utilitarian heart’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 35) – which led to the accident which left his friend a vegetable and Rory unable to leave the house. Rory’s father, Lester, blames himself for the accident, seeing it as ‘a symbol of mistakes he had made’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 37). In this, he too is recuperated from father to man; he is not blamed, despite the devastation. Rather, it is as if the suburb itself has created the provincial solipsism that defines the adult characters. As Gelder (2005, p.179) notes, *Of a boy* describes an insular existence, a world defined by separateness rather than togetherness. This is particularly so between the adults and the children: there is a separation between the generations that undoes any sense of nurturing assumed by the suburban home. Adrian is separated from his mother, but what is more devastating ultimately is his forced separation from the adult world when inside his grandmother’s house. When Marta comes to dinner, Adrian is exiled to the den; this leads him to inadvertently overhear and misinterpret a conversation between his grandmother, aunt and uncle, a conversation that he is convinced is about him being sent away. This breakdown in communication, which results in Adrian running away to find his mother and ultimately drowning in the municipal pool, underlines the insularity of this suburban world.

Muller (2008, p. 2) reads the novel in the light of Kristeva’s work on the abject, seeing Adrian as ‘deject’, one who incorporates abjection, who exists in a liminal state between the order of the mother (the semiotic) and of the father (the symbolic), thus failing to ‘fully repress the desire for the “lost mother”’. Adrian’s mother is “lost” both physically and psychically, hence the breakdown in his transition from the semiotic to the symbolic realms. The novel focuses on mothers and how their ability to care for their children is compromised by forces outside their control: Sookie clearly loves her son – ‘Occasionally she’d woken him in the depths of the night only to tell him how much she loved him’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 92) – but cannot, according to ‘Authority’, care for him. When he was taken away, ‘Sookie sat and wept’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 94). Nicole’s mother is too ill to care for her children, a fact that sits uncomfortably in a suburban lifestyle that is the ‘material and cultural expression of the ideology of feminine domesticity: woman as homemaker’ (Chambers 1997, p. 87). Nicole speaks what is unspoken within

the pro-suburban/woman-as-homemaker discourse, that women who cannot mother their children are failures: 'She shouldn't be anyone's mother, if all she does is lie in bed all day and die' (Hartnett 2002, p. 136). However, the text itself does not judge the 'failed' mothers it presents:

The mother who cannot care for her children, who fails to nurture and protect them is a recurrent motif in the novel, but it is not held out as an accusation. On the contrary, the "failure" of mothering in the text reveals the pressure on women to meet the oppressive social expectations of the "good" mother... (Muller 2008, p. 8)

The suburbs are implicated here, with their emphasis in the nuclear family and consumption. Clinton's mother, Mrs Tull, has no identity outside her children (Muller 2008, p. 7): 'she seems to float without purpose, like a gaudy balloon, when they step out from her expansive shadow' (Hartnett 2002, p. 119). She is overweight – 'Beattie has her own opinion of Mrs Tull, including the prognosis that the woman will be deservedly dead from a heart attack before she's forty years old' (Hartnett 2002, p. 121) – and in this she is representative of a future time when middle class suburbs such as the one in *Of a boy* are characterised in anti-suburban discourse as refuges of the fat. She buys ornaments, dolls and mass-produced memorabilia, 'great hordes of tackiness which are advertised in women's magazines and which Mrs Tull is unable to resist' (Hartnett 2002, p. 120). She is the ultimate suburban mother/monster, dominating her children and her husband, who 'exists in his house unobtrusively, a tiny spider sharing the web of a giant' (Hartnett 2002, p. 119). As with Mr Tull, all the men of the novel fail to live up to the masculine expectations of the nuclear family and an ideology which valorises the 'protective and acquiescent mother, and the authoritative and dominant father' (Muller 2008, p. 2). All of the men are feminised or emasculated by their suburban existence: Rory is a tragic caricature of the lonely suburban woman, trapped inside her house, watching others through the venetians (Hartnett 2002, p. 33). He mirrors Mrs Jeremio across the road, the street's 'lunatic-fringe dweller' (Hartnett 2002, p. 79), who believes Nicole, Joely and Giles to be the missing Metford children (Hartnett 2002, pp. 88-89). Nicole's father is feminised by having to undertake the primary care of his children, and Adrian's father simply is not there. Only the Metford family seems to have a traditional, nuclear structure, a structure that is utterly undone by the disappearance of the children.

The teachers at the school also fail in their duty to provide a nurturing environment for

their charges. Adrian's school is an unsafe place, alluded to initially by the reference to Adrian's satchel as a 'swinging snake' (Hartnett 2002, p. 12). The school playground is likened to a hardened wilderness – the asphalt is 'black, gnarled and grassless', the little kids 'swarm' over the monkeybars (Hartnett 2002, p. 17). The children play 'a painful game of Brandy' (Hartnett 2002, p. 20), a game where – as I remember it from childhood – the point is to hit each other with a tennis ball thrown at high speed. The children are relentless bullies, but so are the teachers: they 'yank', 'smack', 'swat' and 'shake'. The substitute teacher, betraying an animalistic madness that matches that of the pupil they call Horsegirl, 'brays' (Hartnett 2002, p. 54). As a microcosm of the suburb, it is a frightening dystopia where violence is always threatening to break out and over the fragile controls. In this environment, the children without friends are left to fend for themselves with no adult support: 'school is a terrible place for a rejected child' (Hartnett 2002, p. 12).

The lost children in *Of a boy* represent the failure of the suburban lifestyle which, as the majority of Australia is suburban, represents a failure of Australia as a nation. If losing a child in colonial times was seen as a failure for that society, one that 'called into question its rightful place in [the] country' (Torney 2005, p. 79), then a lost child in suburban Australia must destabilise our 'right' to be here at the same time as it reactivates the notion of the land as won through suffering. The land-as-adversary aspect of our cultural imaginary is difficult to acknowledge as it is based on a lurking guilt over the legitimacy of our tenure, hence the desire to find explanations for the disappearance of the Metford children other than them being abducted and murdered by a member of society. When the parents first appear on television they are shown getting into a police car, the husband guiding the wife: 'It's a picture that makes the mother look guilty of some wrong' (Hartnett 2002, p. 24). Later, after a televised press conference, Beattie says: 'There's something suspicious about the father' (Hartnett 2002, p. 56), recalling the public response to the death of Azaria Chamberlain in 1980: 'It was less scary, non-indigenous Australians perhaps felt at the time, to believe in an ability to do violence to each other than to perceive of the land (the space of the nation) itself (in the figure of the dingo) turned violent against us' (Tilley 2002, p. 6). More specifically with the Azaria Chamberlain case, the public chose to believe that a parent murdered her own baby, rather than acknowledge the symbolic link between the dingo, the Australian landscape and our own tenuous claims to it.

In *Of a boy*, the Thin Man is representative of the suburban 'space of the nation', and consequently viewed with suspicion by many. Of the various rumours that go around about the children's disappearance, one has the parents as members of a cult and the children as victims of a sacrifice, another that the children have been sold into slavery. More disturbing is the rumour that 'Veronica, Zoe and Christopher never existed – that they themselves are a hoax' (Hartnett 2002, p. 81), as if the perpetuation of the lost child myth and the resultant fear is a necessary part of Australia's identity, so necessary that it must be invented if it does not exist.

While the media response to the Metford children's disappearance concentrates on the Thin Man and then emphasises the stranger-danger phenomenon, the text implies that danger to children is most likely to come from within the home. The homes in the novel are sad places: Adrian's grandmother's house 'frowns' (Hartnett 2002, p. 29) and is full of hard, fragile objects – crystal glasses and Royal Doulton figurines. Nicole's house is characterised by its lack of furniture, its 'thick porridgy smell' and dirty footmarks on the carpet (Hartnett 2002, p. 107). Even Clinton's house, which Adrian initially sees as 'friendly', is over-heated and noisy and guarded by an 'irate dachshund' who bites (Hartnett 2002, p. 120). Muller (2008, p. 6) sees the bronze cherub bowl to which Adrian is attracted as representing 'the mother/child bond'; however, it can also be read as a generalised representation of the suburban home: soothing, attractive, but ultimately harmful. It is a comfort to Adrian in the comfortless zone of his grandmother's house, but when it is in the satchel at the end of the novel, its weight drags him down and drowns him. The cherub is strong, solid but ultimately treacherous, like everything else in his grandmother's house.

### **Children, unloved and neglected**

The suburbs are described in terms of falsity and artificiality – Mrs Jeremio's nylon skirt (Hartnett 2002, p. 88); the 'false flavour' of Adrian's Chikadees (Hartnett 2002, p. 100). Adrian is eating the Chikadees, 'phosphorescent yellow balls', when Horsegirl goes completely wild and the tenuousness of suburban civilisation is exposed, the empty calories of the Chikadees acting as a quiet metaphor for the empty suburban world that has failed to care for Horsegirl. The girl, Sandra, known as Horsegirl, is the 'most unlovely and unloved of the Home children, and the most defiantly crazed.' She acts like a horse: she 'prances, gambols. She tosses her long mane of hair. She paws the asphalt and shakes away flies' (Hartnett 2002, p. 20). A horse represents strength, spirit

and freedom, three things that an incarcerated and clearly disturbed child lacks. Adrian sees his own unloved state reflected in Horsegirl – he sees in her what he could become ‘if his own frail sense of self fully disintegrates (Muller 2008, p. 5). While watching her he ‘fears for the soundness of his own mind’, a fear exacerbated by a memory of his father telling him that his mother, grandmother, uncle and aunt were mad, and warning him that ‘sharing as he did this unhinged blood, Adrian might well be crazy too’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 74).

The missing Metford children make clear to Adrian his own unloved state: ‘Adrian has never thought that an ordinary child...could be worth taking or wanting, a desirable thing’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 29). The fact that the children’s parents need them ‘so very very much’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 58) emphasises to Adrian how unnecessary he is, how insignificant his existence is to those to whom he is supposed to matter most. Adrian’s personal habitus is defined by his many rejections: he feels he that he has ‘nothing to offer’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 127) and describes himself as a ‘useless, hopeless boy’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 115). He lacks any of the symbolic capital valuable in the schoolyard: he is not gregarious (Hartnett 2002, p.127) or academically gifted or good at sport. The only talent he has is drawing (Hartnett 2002, p. 15), but this is not a pursuit that accords him any status in the field of the suburban school, and when sports teams are chosen he is ‘unfailingly one of the last to be selected, left waiting with the fat boy and the immigrant’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 16).

Habitus is somatic – it is of the body – and Adrian’s many rejections and the early childhood he spent with his mother are manifested in his fastidiousness (Hartnett 2002, p. 25), in his lack of coordination and in his desire to be overlooked (Hartnett 2002, p. 15). Bourdieu (1984, p. 474) claims that the way one’s body appropriates social space – how much physical space one takes up, how expansive or constricted are one’s movements, how much ease or self-consciousness is exhibited – is the physical manifestation of one’s ‘relationship to the social world’. Adrian takes up as little space as possible and always tries to blend with the crowd, even when it troubles his conscience to do so. When Horsegirl is on the classroom roof and the other children are shouting ‘jump!’ Adrian joins in, despite his misgivings: ‘He feels the gnawing of guilt and remorse, but it’s a fair price to pay for not singling himself out’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 102). Despite a desire to be invisible, Adrian’s bodily hexis identifies him as a victim,

and he is brutally attacked and shamed in class by his former friend, Damien (Hartnett 2002, p. 126).

Adrian's hair – 'dense and yellow and strangely, stiffly wild' – is a symbol of what he sees as his essential difference, the potential madness that he fears in himself: 'he worries that he will never be a normal person, that his impossible hair is a symptom of some inescapable failing' (Hartnett 2002, p. 11). Adrian is afraid of quicksand and spontaneous combustion – things that will make him disappear (Muller 2008, p. 4). Most terrifying is the fear of being 'lost or forgotten or abandoned' (Hartnett 2002, p. 28), the very things that he already is. Most tellingly, the 'idea of being locked inside a shopping centre fills him with absolute horror' (Hartnett 2002, p. 27). The closed-in shopping mall represents the apotheosis of the consumerist culture, of late twentieth, early twenty-first century suburban life, and it is significant that it is here that Adrian most fears being abandoned, as if he could be literally swallowed up by suburbia. This fear recalls the fears of the early colonists of being absorbed by the very land itself. Adrian's life is 'full of frightening examples of the various fates that can befall hapless children – abduction, abandonment, madness, a Home...' (Starke 2003, p. 30). He exists in a personal habitus that provides no sense of hope – indeed, it provides no sense of self. Muller (2008, p. 4) argues that Hartnett's description of the sea-monster 'connects the shapelessness and fearfulness of its strangeness with [Adrian's] own perceived lack of definition'. The sea-monster's 'flesh looks melted, it is a thing in ruins...There's something sad in the way the animal hangs its head, its attitude of defeat and shame' (Hartnett 2002, p. 8). Adrian recognises himself in the monster, in its shapelessness, its attitude of defeat. Rory, too, identifies with the sea-monster – as Muller (2008, p. 7) suggests, the references to Rory's inner-most self as an 'abattoir' echo the description of the monster, which is dead and putrefying.

Despite the notion prevalent in both pro and anti-suburban discourse that the suburbs are places for children, the suburb in *Of a boy* is a devastating place for the children who live there. But the text subverts the notion of inherent childhood innocence by depicting the children as less-than-good. Hartnett has written many books specifically for children and refuses to pander to an adult revisionist image of childhood: her children are often violent and unkind. They have no mercy when Horsegirl is on the roof, clearly deranged; they throw stones at her, rubbish, paper bags and chewing gum. At her despair the 'crested crowd of innocents laughs, claps, alive. It hoots and whistles

with glee' (Hartnett 2002, pp. 98-99). These are children always looking for a rise in status: Damien punches Adrian when he no longer needs him (Hartnett 2002, p. 126); Clinton abandons his friend when he finds a new one (Hartnett 2002, p. 123); Paul sees himself victorious when he replaces Adrian as Clinton's friend and dances a victory dance 'solely for him' (Hartnett 2002, p. 143). The children are often described using animal metaphors: the teacher, clearing the playground during the Horsegirl incident, 'slings them aside like cats' (Hartnett 2002, p. 100); earlier they are referred to as 'wolves that have spotted the weakling' and 'a mass of wasps' (Hartnett 2002, p. 99). They are 'nasty little dogs', animals 'on a chain' (Hartnett 2002, p. 101), and, like Pavlov's beasts, they have learned to respond to the power of the school bell (Hartnett 2002, p. 102). The innocents in *Of a boy* are barely innocent at all, complicating the notion of the lost children as representations of innocence lost and underlining our own complicity in the images we valorise and the metaphors we endorse. The children in *Of a boy* represent the suburban community of which they are a part – insular and fundamentally uncaring. At one point in the novel Beattie exclaims 'you don't die for other people's children – only your own' (Hartnett 2002, p. 151), which is a damning indictment of how narrow the notion of care extends in this community.

Gelder (2005, p. 33) sees the representation of the local in this novel as insular and deranged, 'as if the local and the pathological go hand in hand'. The novel undoes the adage that 'it takes a village to raise a child', suggesting instead that none of the adults in this community are capable of raising anybody: Rory is trapped inside his own neuroses; Beattie sees Adrian as 'shackles' hanging from her arms; while Marta, in a breathtaking declaration of selfish callousness, rejects Adrian as she refuses 'to be the dumping ground for other people's mistakes' (Hartnett 2002, pp. 65-66). There has long been a strain of anti-suburban discourse that celebrates an idea of community that is incompatible with suburban life; this is what Winton exploits in *Cloudstreet*. Carter (1987, p. 281) argues that the basis of white Australian settlement was a desire for personal space; the settlers 'colonized privately, not communally', and the suburban house, like the settler's hut, is a place of 'intimacy and closure', a private, not communal, space. In *Of a boy* the desire for privacy has become, as Gelder says, deranged, with the personal being pathologically valued over the communal. Mrs Tull, Clinton's mother, knows full well that her son is victimising Adrian, but 'she will never fault Clinton, never lay any blame on her son' (Hartnett 2002, p. 130): she mothers

personally, not communally, and the community, as represented by Adrian and Nicole and the other lost children, suffers.

The lost Metford children underline both the fragility of Adrian's sense of self and the fragility of the suburb. In his description of the Beaumont children, Pierce (1999, p. 186) recounts various events in the police investigation, some of which Hartnett uses in *Of a boy*, such as the clairvoyant who claimed to know where the children were buried. The tragedy of the case is that the children had vanished, never to be found, and, significantly, that the site of their vanishing was not the 'trackless bush' but a 'benign, suburban beach in the middle of the day'. In *Of a boy*, the Metfords are also lost in the middle of the day, and the surrounding suburbs no longer seem benign: indeed the suburb is implicated in their disappearance, symbolised by the attempted suicide of one of the witnesses: 'The husband says his wife will probably never forgive herself for letting them just walk on' (Hartnett 2002, p. 118). More disturbingly, the text suggests that the children possibly knew their abductor – alone in the park Adrian is not scared: 'If the Thin Man came, Adrian would simply run, and he wonders why the missing children had not done the same' (Hartnett 2002, p. 43). This innocent question leads the reader to suspect that the Metford children did not run because they were not afraid, that the Thin Man was not a stranger to them. As I noted in Chapter 8, Tilley (2009, p. 39) claims that in colonial Australian white vanishing texts, there are no vanishings in 'home space', as the white-vanishing trope is a strategy of legitimising that space as being homely and therefore settled. The vanishings happen outside of the home, in spaces of fear, thus securing a 'sense of belonging to those spaces designated as "home"'. Within that paradigm, the disappearance of the Metford children is extremely troubling as it restricts the space of home to the immediate house and garden, and the suburb within which the house sits among thousands of others is consequently a space of fear. More troubling still, Adrian vanishes because his *home* space is dangerous: he deliberately leaves his grandmother's house because he feels that 'if he stays here, he is doomed' (Hartnett 2002, p. 166).

Muller (2008, p. 13) notes, but does not explore, the notion of the Thin Man as a Pied Piper figure. The Pied Piper is an interesting motif as it leaves Adrian as the lame boy: Adrian is unathletic, he 'can't run fast' (Hartnett 2002, p. 15), and he is socially lame and ostracised by his cohort, like the crippled child in the legend. Moreover, he is rejected by the Piper, the Thin Man, who takes the happy Metford children, the children

who will be missed, but leaves Adrian behind. By extending the connection to the Pied Piper, the suburbs are seen as greedy and dishonest, as in the most common version of the story the villagers refuse to pay the Piper for getting rid of their rats, so he takes the children in revenge. The connection to the Pied Piper subverts the story of the children being abducted and turns it into something more sinister – that the parents did not deserve their children and that the children possibly wanted to disappear. Even though there is no explicit link in the text to the Stolen Generation, the allusion to the Pied Piper makes an implicit reference to the forced removal of Aboriginal children from homes that were not considered appropriate, and complicates the image of the lost child. In twenty-first century Australia the image of the white child lost in the bush cannot be disassociated from the image of the stolen black child. The Metford children, lost in suburban streets, and Adrian, left behind, work as potent reminders of the continuing impact of colonialism on Australia's collective habitus.

### **The Australian context**

The novel starts with a reference to the original journey to Australia of the first white settlers – for the Metford children, ‘at their age, a trip to the milkbar could take on the dimensions of a voyage’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 1) – and ends with a litany of loss: the Metfords, Horsegirl, Adrian, Nicole. Torney (2005, p. 224) argues that, up to the first half of the twentieth century, the notion of unfulfilled potential was a powerful motivating force in the development of national identity: ‘The benighted explorer, the child lost in the bush, the young dead Anzac were all part of an understanding that national character was created in adversity and through loss...’. Yet there is no sense in *Of a boy* of adversity actively being faced, worked through or learnt from. The Metford children go missing and it is clear in the narrative that they were abducted and murdered – ‘When the Metford children have been missing for exactly two weeks, there comes the unspoken realisation that they are not coming home’ (Hartnett 2002, p. 94). The text passively accepts the loss of the children, and offers little in the way of compensation.

John Scheckter's 1981 article, ‘The lost child in Australian fiction’, looks at three classic lost child stories in the light of the development of Australian nationalism from colonial times to the beginning of the twentieth century. For Scheckter, Australian nationalism gradually moved from a strong connection to Britain, through to an acceptance that Australia, however dystopic, was now home. In Henry Kingsley's *The recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn*, the chapter on the lost child is a lesson in maintaining

Australia's English heritage, the subtext being that if the lost child had stayed in his familiar, English-style garden, he would never have been lost. In Clarke's 'Pretty Dick' the effect of colonialism – loss of innocence and possible death – is explored, while the story of Mary O'Halloran from Furphy's *Such is life* is a lesson in dashed hopes, with Mary's death a metaphor for the death of the utopia that Australia could have been:

Mary's death precludes the possibility of an Australia so free and independent in its thought that its idealism would not even be based upon opposition or reaction to the European past...Mary O'Halloran was a symbol of that future; its ruin is complete with her death. (Scheckter 1981, p. 70).

In its suburban context, the image of the lost child references Mary O'Halloran, representing as it does a failure of the possibility of a better society; the possibility that drove colonialism and suburbanism, that created the pioneer spirit. This destruction of hope is inextricably connected to the landscape, the landscape that was responsible for the death of Mary O'Halloran. Gelder (2005, p. 33) says of the novel:

*Of a boy* is in one sense slight and rather pointless; but from another point of view it is a radical novel that marks the post-Whitlam years in Australia as the beginning of the end, the unleashing of a "symptom" which refuses to allow the local to find its resting place: which refuses to allow its people to feel at home.

*Of a boy* presents a vision of suburban Australia that is bound up in a view of the landscape that sees it as being inherently hostile. Anti-suburbanism is supported and sustained in the novel by the explicit references to danger, and the implicit connecting of that danger with the land itself. In this novel, the suburbs do not tame or destroy the natural, primitive land as they do in *Cloudstreet* or 'Aquifer', they simply sit on top. Underneath the true nature of the land – and those who live on it – remains the same. As I said in the Introduction, in Lawrence's anti-suburban (and anti-Australian) novel *Kangaroo*, the dark, mysterious and antagonistic landscape that so frightens the protagonist, Richard Somers, is rendered more terrifying to him because of what it symbolises: his own primitive self (Burns 2007, pp. 14-15). In *Of a boy* the suburbs are the physical manifestations of the most base and primitive of human behaviours: the pack behaviour of the school children, the mad despair of Horsegirl, the predatory violence of the Thin Man. *Of a boy* uses the aspects of anti-suburbanism encoded in our habitus to make its point, but it is not inherently anti-suburban. The novel does not suggest that the suburbs are worse than other places; it offers no alternative site where true community flourishes, where the landscape, and what it represents, is overcome. In

this it reminds the reader that issues of white Australian tenancy remain no matter where we live; there is no mythical Cloudstreet in this novel, no place of residency that is more valid than another, we are all at fault.

*Of a boy* presents suburban Australia as unsafe and, in doing so, questions white Australia's right of occupancy. The insularity of the suburban homes depicted in the text implicitly references the original insularity and disconnectedness of the colony, and reminds the reader that in any community the global will always be subordinated by the local. The Metford children go missing in the same year that Deng Xiaoping once again becomes the leader of China; that the first computer goes on sale; that an Egyptian president is voted 'Man of the Year' (Hartnett 2002, p. 5). The impact of these global events may be more spread throughout the world, but in the Australian suburbs the missing children will resonate more loudly and for longer.

In referencing the child lost in the bush, *Of a boy* undoes two centuries of white Australia's search for a home. The child lost in the suburb symbolises the death of hope, for a country without children is no country at all. Just as the Metford parents will eventually disappear with grief – 'If they can't get their children back then the parents are likewise destined to vanish, just empty skins left behind, walking, talking, breathing, hollow...' (Hartnett 2002, p. 57) – so the nation could ultimately be erased. *Of a boy* may be, as Gelder (2005, p. 33) said, 'slight and rather pointless'; certainly, it is unrelentingly sad. However, by taking a motif traditionally associated with the bush and moving it to the suburbs, Hartnett engages seriously with the 'true' Australian landscape.

## Chapter 10

### *Play with knives*

The power of the suburban landscape in Hartnett's *Of a boy* was in large part based on its being generic: Adrian's suburb could have been an off-shoot of any of Australia's larger cities. It had houses, trees, fences, a school, a municipal pool and playing fields; a shopping centre is nearby, and most journeys are taken by car. By making the suburb non-specific the metaphorical power of the lost children is enhanced: they become representative of the entire, suburban nation. Jennifer Maiden has taken a completely different approach in her lost child story, *Play with knives*, grounding it expressly and particularly in Mount Druitt, a suburb of Sydney's west. This approach weakens the symbolic power of the novel, localising the depicted violence and serving to marginalise further an area of Sydney that has for many years been characterised as the city's 'other'.

While a small number of critics have briefly analysed *Play with knives*, the author herself has written and talked about her novel if not extensively, then certainly regularly: in *Meanjin* in 1994, *Australian Literary Studies* in 1998, *Overland* in 1999 and 2002, and again in *Jacket Magazine* in 2005. It is clear from what Maiden (1994, p. 559) says that her intention in writing the novel was not to denigrate the western suburbs; indeed, Maiden chooses to be known as a writer from western Sydney, and insists that living in Penrith she feels 'at home in the air'. Nevertheless, *Play with knives* is a powerful addition to anti-suburban discourse, particularly that which saves its most strident commentary for the hotter, flatter, poorer suburbs of Sydney's west. Maiden mobilises the lost child trope in a narrative that explores notions of childhood innocence and intrinsic evil against a background of poverty, fear and violence. The story concerns a young woman, Clare, who at the age of nine murdered her siblings. She is paroled at age nineteen after three years of analysis and review, and moves to Mount Druitt where she becomes part of the social group of George, her parole officer. A short time after her release the suburb is terrorised by a serial killer, the gladbagger, who is ultimately revealed to be George and Clare's friend and physician, Clem.

Martin Duwell (1996, p. 262) describes *Play with knives* as a 'distorted genre novel. As such it takes great risks in that it asks to be read (and even be marketed) with the ethical simplicity of a whodunit, but the non-generic features mean that we cannot read it

simply this way'. I have not included traditional 'crime' fiction in this thesis, even though crime writers such as Peter Corris, Gabrielle Lord, Marele Day and Shane Maloney do engage with the Australian suburbs in their novels. I have concentrated on literary fiction as it is less constrained by the limitations of genre. Literary fiction also tends to be marketed as 'serious' fiction – it is the genre considered for prestigious prizes such as the Miles Franklin and the Vogel and as such is more likely to reflect the 'serious' concerns of the nation. It is significant that only four books to ever win the Miles Franklin award have had a primarily suburban setting: Patrick White's *Riders in the chariot* in 1961, George Johnston's *My brother Jack* in 1964, Peter Carey's *Bliss* in 1981 and *The time we have taken* by Steven Carroll in 2008. Novels which touch on suburban themes have won the Vogel Prize just three times since 1988 (*Kindling does for firewood* by Richard King in 1995, *Hiam* by Eva Sallis in 1997 and *Pegasus in the suburbs* by Jennifer Kremmer in 1998); the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction three times since 1979 (*Bliss* by Peter Carey in 1982, *Milk and honey* by Elizabeth Jolley in 1985, and *Seasonal adjustments* by Adib Khan in 1994); the Vance Palmer Prize for Australian Fiction only once since 1985 (*Camille's bread* by Amanda Lohrey in 1996); and the Age Book of the year only once since 1975 (*Three dollars* by Eliot Perlman in 1997). None of the seven Australian books to have won the Best Book category of the Commonwealth Writer's Prize have had a suburban theme (*Book awards of the world* n.d.). The lack of literary fiction set in the suburbs is a reflection of the anti-suburbanism of our habitus. *Play with knives* is an interesting book in that it is both a crime novel and a work of literary fiction. Duwell (1996, p. 262) suggests that its themes are 'power, attraction and fear'; these are certainly important in the novel, but more so are notions of innocence and evil, habitus and free will, parenting and community, all set in the strikingly realised suburbs of Sydney's west.

### **Lost children and lost innocence**

The characters in *Play with knives* tend to use the word 'evil' rather more often than would be deemed usual, except I suppose when dealing with child murderers and serial killers. Maiden (1994, p. 116) claims to be interested in what she calls 'the problem of evil' which, in binary terms, suggests that she is also interested in innocence. Innocence and evil have always coexisted in the popular imaginary, as has the notion of the intrinsically evil child, the 'bad seed'. However, the novel does not characterise Clare simply as a bad seed: she is described as being 'usually very, literally, obedient' (Maiden 1990, p. 25). Neither are other children, such as the victims, depicted as being

fundamentally innocent; simple notions of innocence and evil are compromised by the text. Most disquieting is the suggestion that evil exists as a more interesting alternative to innocence, that evil is a choice.

In his analysis of Bourdieu's theory, Jenkins (1992, pp. 73-74) argues that Bourdieu's refusal to recognise the impact of conscious action in an individual's life is a fundamental flaw in his work. Certainly, the theory of habitus does not account for individual genius, or individual strangeness, or individual decisions which are outside the expectations brought about by the circumstances of one's childhood and subsequent life: 'Any substantial deviance from the imperatives of habitus is so inconceivable that [Bourdieu] does not even consider it' (Jenkins 1992, p. 97). According to Bourdieu's theory, neither Clare nor Clem, the serial killer, can be accommodated by habitus; either their individual decisions to do wrong must therefore indicate a psychopathology that is medical, not social; or they have deliberately and intentionally corrupted their own habitus. The habitus is used by Bourdieu and others as an explanation for the perpetuation of social structures and behaviour which maintain existing class structures. Jenkins (1992, p. 141), for example, argues that Bourdieu's thesis insists that practices are determined by 'the history and objective structure' of the existing social world, and, as 'the nature of that social world is taken to be axiomatic, those practices contribute – without this being their intention – to the maintenance of its existing hierarchical structure'. The existing social hierarchy is, therefore, in this analysis, deemed a negative structure as it perpetuates class divisions and inequalities. However, what is not examined is the way in which the habitus maintains certain behaviours and expectations that are positive, indeed, necessary for any functioning society – manners, for example, and morality, and the understanding that murdering other people is not acceptable. So, while the performing of inherited 'morality' may act to maintain the hegemony, it may also act as a social cohesive. Clare and Clem are both deviant in that they are not constrained by the most fundamental aspect of the collective habitus.

Maiden (1998, p. 120) has suggested that the habitus of the western suburbs is different from that of the 'middle class' suburbs; and that in its difference it weakens the hegemony that she sees as existing outside the west:

Whilst *Play with knives* and *The blood judge* [Maiden's unpublished sequel] are not based on specific events, they are true to my factual observations of the suburban moral landscape. The undermining of social and aesthetic hierarchies, however, can also lead

to the undermining of moral absolutes, and this can be seen as a form of corruption. Indeed, it may sometimes be corrupt, and the characters' conversations often reflect this concern...

This convoluted championing of moral relativism supports the basic tenets of Bourdieu's work: that the differences in the social classes are maintained through the differences in the dispositions and expectations of individuals, acquired in the habitus. The habitus of most residents of Mount Druitt would be very different from the residents of Sydney's more affluent suburbs. However, what Maiden refers to as the 'undermining of social and aesthetic hierarchies' will only have agency in the limited social field of the western suburbs. Outside it, in places of social and economic power such as elite schools, universities and large corporations, the social and aesthetic hierarchies of the middle and upper classes retain absolute power. The author's refusal to recognise this weakens the novel, as the moral landscape it valorises is indeed presented as corrupt, and no amount of talking about it by the characters can render it more acceptable.

Evil is presented as a corruption of the local habitus, a corruption that is aided by the habitus itself, its 'moral landscape'. The novel reminds us how attractive a notion evil is, perhaps because it indicates a triumph of free will over habitus. All of the characters, even George's elderly mother, seem to experience a vicarious sexual thrill from Clare, the evil one, and her crimes: George's mother was more interested to hear about Clare than about her granddaughter (Maiden 1990, p. 32). George worries about his mother's interest in Clare, thinking it 'might be prurient' (Maiden 1990, p. 141), which is not surprising considering his own interest in her. Before he has even met Clare, he is imagining 'the illicit joy' her possible future husband would experience in learning of 'the lethal details' of Clare's crimes, which she would naturally 'tell her future man' (Maiden 1990, p. 2). Clare, George appears surprised to note, 'seemed to arouse enormous curiosity in people' (Maiden 1990, p. 33). Her premature aging – white hair, wrinkled palms and foot soles – is described as 'a normal psycho-biological, self-protection device', but is nevertheless sexualised:

"She has pubic hair?" Elinor asked.  
"Yes, and its grey. Not as white as the head hair". (Maiden 1990, p. 8)

There is a power game at play here, where sexual references are used as weapons against Clare. She understands this and quickly learns to respond in kind, retaining her

power: when George asks her just before she is released if she enjoyed her crimes she replies: 'Only in retrospect. Isn't all memory a form of sex?' (Maiden 1990, p. 87). Maiden (1994, p. 554) has claimed that 'the demonic manifestation of power is intrinsic to the civil one. The projection of violence is tempestuously intimate with the real phenomenon'. This is reflected in the 'electric shock conditioning' that Clare undergoes in prison, the violence of which is clearly a form of punishment rather than rehabilitation:

They show me pictures of knives and blood and things – boy's things and girl's things, you know – and bodies, I mean dead ones, and tell me not to like it. They don't always hurt me. (Maiden 1990, p. 5)

The comment 'They don't always hurt me' indicates that the electric shock treatment Clare is subjected to clearly does hurt most of the time. George's reasoning for asking Clare to describe this torture reveals the extent of his exploitation of her: 'I wanted her to describe it. I was both aroused and repelled by the idea' (Maiden 1990, p. 5).

Maiden (1998, p. 119) claims that the suburbs are 'an area of increased free will' because of the amount of space and associated privacy, and when violence occurs in the suburbs it is an expression, or corruption, of that free will. In the novel Clare is presented as being both fully formed and of sound mind – therefore capable of exercising free will – and also as amorphous and not yet human. When George first sees Clare he describes her as being 'unformed' (Maiden 1990, p. 2); later he calls her 'my animal' (Maiden 1990, p. 3); later still she has become 'my murderess' (Maiden 1990, p. 89). The use of the possessive determiner – *my* animal, *my* murderess – emphasises Clare's powerlessness in the relationship, and also serves to suggest that she is not responsible as she belongs to others. There is doubt, then, whether she is in fact able to exercise free will, as to do so assumes a character fully formed. Clare stabbed her stepbrother and then 'whittled...stars and flowers into every orifice' (Maiden 1990, p. 1); she did that, she says later, so that she could be convinced of her 'murder of him' (Maiden 1990, p. 41), a statement that certainly suggests that she was aware of her actions; that she was exercising free will.

Clare's actions presume the existence of intrinsic evil, but also the existence of intrinsic innocence: both presumptions are compromised in the text, although not resolved or even fully explored. Like *Of a boy, Play with knives* implies that children are not

necessarily innocent, that they are indeed violent, or capable of violence. The novel is, as Pierce (1999, p. 141) notes, 'uncomfortably overstocked' with dead baby jokes; interestingly, these jokes are told by George's daughter, Sheridan, and her friends – by children, not adults: 'What's black and furry and knocks on the back door? A baby covered in funnel webs...What's blue and sits quietly in a corner? A baby with a plastic bag' (Maiden 1990, pp. 20-21). In one scene, George, his wife Heather, their friend Clem (who turns out to be the gladbagger) and his wife Daphne recall their own episodes of childhood violence: George 'used to drown two ants at a time to see which would survive longest'; Heather 'tormented my younger cousin. I told her ghosts would haunt her at night'; Clem tells of the enjoyment of cock-fighting, while Daphne admitted to pulling girls' hair. As Daphne is shy and beautiful, George sees 'her tiny confession' as 'the most shocking of all' (Maiden 1990, pp. 49-50). This is a bit rich, considering George also tells of his emotional and physical abuse of a family dog (Maiden 1990, 38), and explains an adolescent game 'which involved the younger ones being held underwater for a long time – you'd often feel yourself losing consciousness before they'd let you surface.' That this torture of young children is referred to as 'an ordinary game' (Maiden 1990, p. 66) suggests that all children are intrinsically evil. Indeed, there is a sense in the novel that children are a strange combination of both original innocence and original evil and, more disturbingly, that they may be complicit in their own abuse – when George asks Clare if Anthony, her stepbrother, may have 'meant to die' as he put up no resistance she responds: 'He felt that he should die because I wanted him to' (Maiden 1990, p. 52).

Pierce notes the similarity – unremarked upon in the novel itself – between Clare's murders and the death of the children in *Jude the obscure*. To note the similarity is not gratuitous, as the text draws attention to a possible link through George's references to Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Connecting the names of the dead stepsister, Tess, and Angel Clare, George asks Clare to read Hardy's novel as 'her attitude to the fictional Tess might illuminate her attitude to herself and the real one' (Maiden 1990, p. 29). It is not made clear if Clare does read the novel, as she and George never discuss either the real or the fictional Tess again, and I suspect that the scene is included so that Clare has an opportunity to make a heavy-handed joke – says George to Clare: 'It's beautifully written but Hardy didn't invent credible plots', to which she responds: 'Neither does the President of the Immortals' (Maiden 1990, p. 29). Nevertheless, Maiden must have been aware of the connection readers would make with *Jude the*

*obscure*, considering the circumstances of Clare's murders and George's other references to Hardy: as Pierce (1999, p. 141) notes, the 'episode that George forgets or chooses not to mention to Clare, has more to say of the forlorn and perilous state of children in contemporary Australia than is to be found in all of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*'. In *Jude the obscure* the eldest child of Jude and his first wife Arabella kills his half-siblings and himself because he feels them all to be a burden to their parents: 'Done because we are too menny' (Hardy 1985, p. 410). The connection to Jude 'darkens all that we learn of Clare's killings' (Pierce 1999, p. 141), suggesting that Clare was in some way anticipating the desires of her parents by murdering her siblings – or, at least, anticipating what she thought to be their desires. The saddest lines in the whole novel are when George asks Clare if Anthony knew 'that nobody wanted him?' to which she replies: 'We all know that no one wants us' (Maiden 1990, p. 52).

Clare is described as both innocent and evil, which perhaps explains why the authorities think she has 'a low-to-average IQ' (Maiden 1990, p. 19) when she is actually intelligent. She is extraordinarily passive except for the one occasion when she smothers two children and knifes another. Early in the novel George insists that she has a 'sinister quality' and that, even had he not known about her crimes, he 'would have mistrusted her' (Maiden 1990, p. 27). Clare's stepfather kills himself after she has been imprisoned because his guilt has been transformed into a belief that Clare is evil: 'I wouldn't listen to my own thoughts that Clare was evil, even though I could hear her heart beat and her breathing following me...' (Maiden 1990, p. 35). This physical manifestation of the demonic, the noise of her beating heart, is echoed in her prematurely grey hair. According to Pierce (1999, p. 140), Clare has lost – or never had – 'that moral sense, that reckoning of guilt and the consequences of her actions, which adults wish to find or to implant in Clare. Not least, Maiden implies, this is because of their own tormenting intuitions of a moral emptiness within themselves'. There are many references to the expectations people have of Clare's behaviour, of how they will resent her experiencing pain or guilt or remorse. Clare does not, it seems, have 'a right to genuine responsibility for the things she had done', as this would give her the right to redemption (Maiden 1990, p. 39). At one point Clare takes cocaine so that she can be caught violating the terms of her parole and be returned to prison; she is, she says 'helping the inevitable to happen with less suspense and pain' (Maiden 1990, p. 109). Clare believes that the 'Authorities' have conspired to release her so they can conspire to lock her up again, and her taking cocaine will simply speed up the process. George responds with anger, as

by implicating him in the scheme she has insulted his 'professional integrity'; she ends up having a panic attack (Maiden 1990, p. 110). The entire scene is convoluted and exhausting but suggests that the 'Authorities' and the general public are more prepared to accept that a child can be intrinsically evil than that they, or anyone else, has any responsibility for said child's behaviour.

### **Lost in poverty**

The novel is explicitly set in Mount Druitt, an area of predominantly state housing, low incomes and single parents: according to the 2006 Census data (ABS 2007), for example, only 13% of households in the Hornsby local government area were single parent families, compared to 24% in the Blacktown local government area, while only 1.5% of households earned more than \$2000 per week in Blacktown, compared to 8% in Hornsby. Mount Druitt is part of the Blacktown local government area, while Hornsby is on the upper North Shore, an area traditionally associated with middle class affluence. The North Shore is where Sheridan's grandparents live and where she prefers to be: 'Sheridan stayed more than a week at her grandparents. She didn't want to come home' (Maiden 1990, p. 122). Most public housing in Sydney is in the outer western suburbs, and this affects perceptions of life in Mount Druitt. As Gwyther (2008, p. 157) has noted, areas of state housing are seen to be 'dangerous sites of dysfunctionality, delinquency, broken homes and riotous behaviour'. Even if a reader is unfamiliar with the discourse regarding Mount Druitt, the text's references to 'housing commission and rented dwellings' (Maiden 1990, p. 21), of non-biological fathers and casual family living arrangements (Maiden 1990, p. 23), firmly places the action in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. From the text, it appears that the local habitus accepts a style of parenting that would not be acceptable in more affluent areas. George, for example, refuses to hold Clare's mother responsible for her daughter's behaviour – he insists that Coral is not 'negligent, just dim and conventional'. He absolves Coral of responsibility on the basis that she believed that it was 'good for Clare's moral character to babysit on a night when there was emptiness in her face and her friends were at the pictures' (Maiden 1990, p. 82). This comment comes at a time when Coral's dog has died of milk fever because she had puppies too young. The puppies are also dead.

What George – and perhaps Maiden – does not realise is that Coral's behaviour will be refracted through the negative discourse surrounding Mount Druitt and 'interpreted by people outside the ghetto' (Powell 1993, p. xiv) – namely those readers who do not

come from the local area – whose habitus finds such neglect abhorrent. Coral is a failure as a mother; this is seen in her inability to care for a pet – the first one died after having puppies, another dog was run over and ‘another canary had died when the cage broke’ (Maiden 1990, 125). For a reader ‘outside the ghetto’ her behaviour to animals is negligent bordering on the criminal, and suggests that Clare was indeed acting at being a mother – at least, the only kind of mother she had experience of – when she abused the children.

The lack of responsibility shown by the parents in *Play with knives* is remarkable in a text that indicates, through its reference to the ‘pretty neighbourhood’ (Maiden 1999, p. 21), that it may be attempting to ameliorate the negative discourse surrounding the western suburbs. At just nine<sup>1</sup>, an age where she should have been being babysat herself, Clare is an experienced babysitter (Maiden 1990, p. 25). Her parents returned home the night of the murder at 1 am (Maiden 1990, p. 6). When she is a toddler, George and Heather encourage their daughter Sheridan to play with knives on the basis that if she cut herself, they were there to stop the bleeding, and ‘she’ll only do it once’ (Maiden 1990, p. 14). It is scenes such as this which undermine the credibility of George and Heather not only as moral characters, but as characters with any sense of verisimilitude. Indeed, Maiden seems intent on shocking the middle class sensibilities of potential readers by combining highly complicated and obtuse dialogue with extreme crudity: dogs, for example, are referred to as bitches when there does not appear to be any textual reason for doing so (Maiden 1990, pp. 55, 82 & 125). At one point George, referring to the gladbagger’s mutilation of his victims’ sexual organs, said ‘I would probably have shown much more curiosity about the individual anus and heart than the killer did’, saying that he found the heart ‘obscene’ but making no further reference to the anus (Maiden 1990, p. 91). George and his colleague Elinor go to see a pornographic film together at one point (Maiden 1990, p. 71), in the spirit of conviviality. Far more disturbing is George’s suggestion that he buy his thirteen year old daughter a vibrator, and his wife’s cheerful rejoinder that Sheridan was still a virgin (Maiden 1990, p. 100).

---

<sup>1</sup> In an article written some years after the novel, Maiden indicated that Clare was eleven at the time of the murders, not nine (Maiden 1998, p. 117) – perhaps Maiden had forgotten how truly at risk she had made her young protagonist.

There is a sense that these unnecessary asides are designed to give readers a kind of vicarious thrill by having the characters live up to the expectations others have of their suburb. If that is the case, the novel is a failure because all it does is reinforce the negative stereotypes of Mount Druitt and other areas of western Sydney. Describing the novel, Powell (1993, p. 132) said that it is 'as if the most strident and brutal images of western Sydney have been inscribed into the national psyche to become the dark side of an Australian imaginary'. Maiden (1994, p. 554) took offence to this; however, the brutality of the novel is unrelenting. Quite apart from the serial killer and Clare, most of the relationships are based on some sort of violence: even the affable Greg, Clare's boyfriend, puts her in a headlock at one point, and pretends to choke her (Maiden 1990, p. 100). In a particularly depressing scene, a group of drunk children accost George outside the local pizza shop, and offer him the sexual services of a little girl 'around nine'. The connection between this hapless child and Clare, who was nine at the time she committed the murders, is obvious, suggesting that the little girl at the pizza shop is not a victim but complicit in the arrangement. This is made more explicit when George muses, after being presented with the child's naked body: 'Before this, I had often wondered how anyone, however drunk, would take on the physical conundrum of penetrating a nine-year-old virgin' (Maiden 1990, p. 43).

Maiden appears to have a curious double brief in *Play with knives*: to both valorise and sensationalise the outer suburbs. George describes his neighbourhood as being 'pretty' in the same breath that he notes the urban garbage that pollutes it: 'shell-cars, tyres, newspaper and those internal dark almost man-size plastic bags' (Maiden 1990, p. 21). Bourdieu talks of bodily hexis representing the personal habitus; in *Play with knives* it seems that the built environment of the suburb is representative of the habitus of the populace, a habitus that accepts violence and neglect as the norm: 'people in this area seem more alarmed by the arsonist than the gladbagger' (Maiden 1990, p. 92). The residents of the suburb are depicted as violent and neglectful, and so with the streetscape: the building where the gladbagger tries to murder Clare is described as 'the closed skeleton of a block of flats, unfurnished and unpainted but nearly ready to be occupied. It already looked dead and was starting to decay' (Maiden 1990, p. 150). The streets of this suburb are 'full of angry dogs' (Maiden 1990, p. 63), gunshots, sirens (Maiden 1990, p. 12) and garbage (Maiden 1990, p. 85). The physical environment is ugly, a manifestation of the social and moral environment in which the characters live. One woman who is walking home, drunk, is harassed by passing drivers: 'They divided

evenly into three kinds. Those who were trying to run her down, those who were trying to fuck her, and those who seemed, by their yells, inclined to do both at once' (Maiden 1990, p. 13). The woman is 'old from drink more than years'; she later becomes one of the gladbagger's victims. The garbage, the neglected buildings, and the drunk and violent residents paints a picture of a society in a state of moral and physical decay. Even George, who is a parole officer and the novel's moral centre, is a drunk and a gambler who, before he embarks on a premeditated drinking binge, literally locks himself out of his own house so that he will not be tempted to harm his wife and child when in his cups. His wife seems unconcerned by this behaviour, and simply 'waved goodnight through the kitchen window before she went to bed' (Maiden 1990, p. 77).

There is a sense that the novel tries to show how 'picturesque' the neighbourhood is, perhaps to channel that strain of anti-suburbanism that sentimentalises poverty. However, the sentimentalisation of poverty is a specifically anti-suburban device, and does not migrate when the poor move to detached housing in the outer west. Powell (1993, p. xviii) notes how Sydney's western suburbs are seen as:

...the repository for all those social groups and cultures which are outside the prevailing cultural ideal: the poor, the working class, juvenile delinquents, single mothers, welfare recipients, public housing tenants, Aborigines, immigrants from anywhere but particularly Arabs and Asians.

Maiden's characters are doubly damned, being both poor and suburban. They also fail to engender any sympathy; part of that is a result of the dominant discourse around the western suburbs, which sees the suburban poor as undeserving (Powell 1993, p. 10), but the text does nothing to disrupt that discourse. When George comments that 'Elinor was following the local custom of referring to stepfathers as "fathers", even if they were de facto and of a few days' duration' (Maiden 1990, p. 66), he adds to the perception that Mount Druitt families are unstable, unreliable and unsafe for children.

## Parenthood and neglect

In one scene in *Play with knives* George asks Clare, in mixed company, if she planned to have children, to which she replies: 'I won't marry. And I've had my children' (Maiden 1990, p. 115). Pierce (1999, p. 141) sees that comment as fundamental to the understanding of parenting portrayed in the novel:

In murdering the children, Clare had played at being a parent, at the same time as she was a child. Invested with the power of life and death in the one guise, she was powerless in the other. To have killed three children, as Clare had done, seems – from her comments – to have had all the essence of the experience of parenthood. That is to say it meant the power to do harm to the young. This intimation, Clare's retrospective interpretation of her actions, is the most truly disturbing of the novel's many-faceted reflections on the figure and fate of the lost child in contemporary Australia.

Parenthood is associated with neglect at best, and at worst, violence. George comments that 'there was no real evidence that Clare had earlier been spoiled, or that she was ever badly beaten by anyone' (Maiden 1999, p. 24) – as if there are only two alternatives to raising children: spoiling them or beating them. Mothering in the novel is presented as particularly violent: George makes the comparison between smothering and mothering to Clare: 'It's very like mothering isn't it? Like giving someone the breast?' (Maiden 1990, p. 51). There is a brief sense that Clare's violence to her siblings could represent the difficulty mothers, particularly mothers from less affluent suburbs, have raising children. The discourse on suburbia is often dominated by the assumption that mothering – which is what women are supposed to do in the suburbs – is both 'natural' and rewarding for women. Such an assumption undermines the difficulty many women have fulfilling the role of mother. George's mother remarks, apropos of Clare, that it is 'so easy to want to kill children. Or at least to sit and stare at them, or at a closed door, until they die' (Maiden 1990, p. 32), suggesting that she wanted to kill her own children, at least fleetingly. However, Clare's potential as a symbol for frustrated motherhood is undone by her embracing of the power associated with parenthood: 'what I remember most is feeling that they simply belonged to me, that I had a right to judge them, even if cruelly' (Maiden 1990, p. 145). Another client of the Parole Board rapes his own child (Maiden 1990, p. 10); eventually he is stabbed to death by his wife and daughter (Maiden 1990, p. 47). In his analysis of the novel Pierce (1999, p. 143) asks when it is that children lose the quality of innocence? The novel seems to indicate that innocence is a middle class preoccupation: George wonders 'why people are more shocked by the murder of innocent, unaware children than by the murder of self-aware, death-aware adults' (Maiden 1990, p. 28). In a final twist on the subject of proper

parenting, George surmises at the end of the novel that Clem, the gladbagger, may in fact be Clare's father (Maiden 1990, p. 157), in which case a murderer begot a murderer.

The novel implies that the individual is linked to the social, hence the grounding of the text in such a specific location, and the valorisation of the Mount Druitt community. Heather says: 'I can never associate any sort of murder with an area like ours. We all help each other so much' (Maiden 1990, p. 85). However, Heather becomes one of the gladbagger's victims, and the gladbagger himself turns out to be Clem, one of her's and George's dearest friends. The community is thus revealed to be a sham, as no-one knows or trusts each other: Clare suspects George of being the gladbagger and George suspects Dick and Clem. At one point George pretends to be the killer so as to frighten Clare into taking care of herself, an action so extreme it implies that his motivations are less noble than he would have us believe (Maiden 1990, p. 139). Even the virtuous Heather is found to be false when it transpires she had a short affair with Clem (Maiden 1990, p. 152). The social is utterly undermined by the actions of Clem and Clare, who are not defined respectively as evil and innocence, but as a messy combination of the two. Clem attempts to justify his murders by describing all his victims, even the adults, as children who he is returning to innocence (Maiden 1990, p. 152). However, the narrative suggests that innocence is always compromised by evil, even in children; Clem's justifications are therefore nothing more than an expression of madness.

*Play with knives* is a complicated novel that suggests that innocence and evil are both projections of free will, elements of choice. At one point George claims that to tell Clare of her stepfather's paranoid belief that she was demonic would require the teller to possess 'authentic evil' (Maiden 1990, p. 66), but it is George who gives Clare this information eventually, in a fit of premeditated, calculated cruelty (Maiden 1990, p. 110). The choices the characters make are compromised by a habitus that cannot but be affected by the vilification of Sydney's western suburbs, a habitus that is symbolised by a physical and moral environment that is degraded and decayed. The novel does not extend beyond the borders of western Sydney – there is no sense here of Australia as a nation, or of wider moral issues. The one Aboriginal character, Ruth, a shoplifter, seems to be included simply because the Mount Druitt area has a large number of Indigenous residents. There is one uncomfortable reference to Clare believing her golliwog to be possessed when she was little (Maiden 1990, p. 23), but it does not appear to reference

Aboriginal dispossession or any *Cloudstreet*-like sense of haunting. The novel is set in a very specific location, and references a very specific, localised habitus. The children are, as Pierce notes, imperilled and vulnerable, but that vulnerability is connected to their address. *Play with knives* is a novel that uses the lost child trope not to explore deeper notions of belonging, but to perpetuate the prejudice against Sydney's west and, in doing so, help to sustain the anti-suburbanism of our habitus.

## Chapter 11

### *Sunnyside*

Sunnyside, a wealthy bay-side suburb modelled upon Mount Eliza in Melbourne, is a thousand miles away from that other mount, Mount Druitt in Sydney, both physically and psychologically. The children here are not ‘imperilled’; there are no child murderers, arsonists or serial killers, the residents don’t shoot their dogs (indeed, there is a strange absence of pets, which seems odd in a suburb that is so family orientated). Sunnyside is everything Mount Druitt is not – ordered, beautiful and rich; it is a ghetto of a different sort. The children may not be imperilled here, but they are still lost – they suffer because of their parents’ behaviour, although not as violently as they do in *Play with knives*. The use of the lost child trope is subtle in *Sunnyside* but it is there, along with an attitude to suburbanism that sums up how pro and anti-suburbanism coexist within the Australian habitus.

The novel follows the lives of one family, Alice and Harry Haskins, and their two children, Grace and Joe, who have recently moved to Sunnyside. Alice and Harry are part of a group of friends who live in the suburb, all married with children, all ‘refugees’ from the inner-city. The novel satirises white, upper-middle class Australia, particularly its angst about child-rearing and parenting. It quietly undermines the notion that the suburbs are the best place to bring up children by exposing the unspoken subtext of that belief – that the suburbs can make up spatially for what is missing emotionally in the lives of children. Pro-suburban discourse has traditionally championed the abundance of space in suburban areas as being desirable for child-rearing (Stretton 1970, pp. 15-17); this is the view Vic remembers subscribing to in *The time we have taken*, when he gave Michael the space to be able to run (Carroll 2007, p. 113). However, the children in Sunnyside are all dysfunctional despite their palatial houses, expansive yards and inground swimming pools. The novel suggests that increased wealth and space, the desire for which is the lynchpin of the expansion of Australian suburbia, is fundamentally flawed, and that children can easily be lost within it.

*Play with knives* attempts to resist portraying its characters as victims of their habitus; however, the environment it depicts disallows such a portrayal. The picture of Coral lighting her kerosene fire in the wasted surrounds of an empty and decaying block of flats while the gladbagger attempts to murder her daughter inside, is a stark image of

familial victimhood. These people are victims of poverty and its associations – violence and criminality – however, importantly, they do not see themselves that way. It is not only George who refuses to blame Coral for her daughter's murders; Clare, too, blames neither her mother, her stepfather nor her environment for her actions. The children of *Sunnyside*, on the other hand, define themselves by their perceived victimhood. They are highly sensitive to their parents' inadequacies – particularly their mothers'; says one of the children: 'You could not trust parents. They were full of bad impulses that they could not or would not control' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 386). The use of the word *trust* is instructive, referencing the sad truth that children are more at risk from those they know and trust than they are from strangers. Pierce (1999, p. 114) contends that contemporary stories of lost children reveal a disturbing lack of responsibility on the part of the adult generation:

...the circumstances in which Australian children are lost in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have sharply changed from the colonial period. If men and women of those earlier societies had been unconvinced of their rights of tenure in Australia (when they thought of the issue), many members of later adult generations – according to the imaginative witness of this fiction – wished to be free or rid of their children. Selfish this sentiment often was, and on occasions covert and celebrated, cruel in issue beyond belief, yet its desired outcome was clear: to be relieved of the burdens of children, thence to disclaim responsibility for the future.

Pierce's reference to 'responsibility' is important here, as the parents in *Sunnyside* both embrace and resist their responsibilities to their children. In an instructive scene Alice's friend Molly, whose affair with the pool-man destroys her marriage and her relationship with her son, Justin, says to Alice:

I love that boy. But this is the thing, Alice. Where is it written that *their* life is more important than *yours*?...Tell me where it was written when we signed up for motherhood. Where did it say that they win, always and inevitably? (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 307)

Perhaps more disturbingly, Alice, although shocked by Molly's remarks, ultimately agrees that 'there was no contract.' The breathtaking selfishness of these two women is what costs them their children, but it is not the nature of the novel to judge them too harshly. Murray-Smith is well aware that her readers are likely to consider themselves middle class, even if they are not as rich as the residents of *Sunnyside*. If they are of a certain age they will also have engaged with the mores of middle class Australian parents. Murray-Smith does not seek to offend her readers; nevertheless, she does

expose middle class pretensions, vanities and selfish failings, particularly as regards children.

### **Motherhood, conformity and the suburbs**

Throughout the novel, parenting, particularly mothering, is seen to be in conflict with individual happiness. Molly is aware that her affair with the pool-man has left her son in despair, but she is not prepared to give it up: 'He's reminded me of who I am alone. I'd forgotten that. It's *powerful*' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 305). When she talks to the swami at the Ashram, he asks her what the 'selfish immature hedonist' part of Molly is saying to her. She replies:

She's saying you've been a good, organised, responsible person all your life and now is the time to find out what else you are. She's saying that maybe it's not such a bad thing if sometimes your conscience gives way to your imagination. (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 175)

The wonderfully parodic depiction of the Ashram – the \$50 yoga class, the \$65 stillness meditation class, the swami's reaction to Molly's Gucci handbag – does not weaken the effect of Molly's decision to choose imagination over responsibility. Her child, Justin, is fifteen years old when she leaves, and he sees his mother's behaviour as a defection. He drives her car into the local reservoir while she is at a dinner party (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 58); later he burns her shoes, just one of each pair (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 304). Molly's shoes, as Grace later reminds us, were expensive: 'One pair cost *seven hundred dollars!*' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 284). By burning one of each of his mother's shoes, Justin is making a powerful comment on how her defection has literally cobbled him. More specifically, he is making clear the connection between her infidelity and her abandonment of him: shoes are sexual, fetishised items, and it is because of sex that Molly leaves her family:

Sometimes I drive to school with no underwear on. I stand there on the lawn waving him into his educational facility without any knickers...And if you're wondering why I would risk everything for the pool man, I'll tell you why. Because I'm as high as a fucking kite. (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 69)

That Molly chooses sexual gratification over her husband and child is an example of anti-suburbanism that references the well-worn arguments against the suburbs – that they are boring, that they are sterile, that they deny life. Molly's affair with the pool-man is similarly well-worn – as her friend Lily says 'Couldn't you find a less clichéd

member of the domestic support industry?’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 64). Molly’s attraction to the pool-man is another version of the sentimentalisation of poverty that has been such a mainstay of anti-suburban discourse. As writers like Esson (1973, p. 73) would have it, life in the slums is ‘more vivid and picturesque...People dance, and have passions, and live, in a sense, dangerously’. As the slums have moved inexorably towards the outer suburbs, poverty has become less appealing to the anti-suburbanites; however the frisson that characterised the inner-city slums can still be found in the bodies of the poor. Molly is attracted by the pool-man’s raw sexuality, by his lack of middle class self-censorship, by the way he ‘uses words. Real words. *Fuck and cunt and suck and cock*. David never used those words.’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 306). Molly, lost in the throes of new passion, high as a ‘fucking kite’, is attracted to those words when it suits her; at other times – particularly when her ex-husband David calls her a whore – she admits to liking the civility that comes from suburban niceties:

They could be cynical about the suburbs, she and Alice and Harry and Tess and Raph and all of them. They could laugh at their own little pocket of privilege like all nice small-L liberals embarrassed by their choices. But the truth was, it was a comfort to live in a place where no-one used the word whore, where monotony was a small price to pay for general niceness. (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 168)

The pool-man is from the insalubrious suburb of Deptford, just five kilometres from Sunnyside, ‘the heart of the suburban badlands; a whining, miserable repository of people so defeated they rarely seemed to stray beyond their car-yard fringes’ (Murray-Smith 2005, pp. 34-35). Molly and the pool-man conduct their affair initially at the Deptford Motel, an institution which now, to Molly’s friends, ‘took on significance, flagging the invitation to enter a new, exquisite realm, the universe of thrilling degradation’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 69). Later, when Alice determines to reignite the passion in her marriage, the Deptford Motel is the site of her contrived assignation with Harry, the association with the ‘badlands’ and good sex seemingly irresistible.

Life in the suburbs – at least, in the suburb of Sunnyside – is seen as dull, monotonous and sterile. Alice is a writer, but since moving to the suburb eighteen months earlier she has become literally life-less (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 188); she cannot write, and she cannot have sex: the ‘suburbs had dried her up’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 15). Alice moves to the suburbs because of its reputation for safety and ease:

She had been motivated, in part, by a desire for the outside world to be simplified; this and the colossal love for her children, which made an attraction of the blandness and sterility of the suburbs. It took only a headline, a TV trailer about a terrorism alert on a tabloid current affairs show to reassure her that they had done the right thing...This was the place to raise children. (Murray-Smith 2005, pp. 21-22)

Allon (1994, pp. 46-47) argues that suburban expansion in post-war Australia was based, at least in part, on the fear of attack, with densely populated cities being seen to be more of a target than dispersed suburban areas:

The suburb, with its emphasis on domestic life, came to be seen as a retreat, an escape from the pressures, the horrors and experiences of the outside world...The image of the suburb as a sanctuary was entirely dependent on the exclusion of the “outside world” and the threat it was perceived to represent. A hostile world and the uncertainty of the future were therefore symbolically central in the construction of the suburb as a refuge.

Alice and Harry move to Sunnyside where ‘they were surely safe from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 8), where they could cocoon themselves and their offspring from the ugliness of life. Alice rejects the ‘outside world’ when she leaves the inner-city suburbs; however, she finds that she misses the danger of it, ‘the junkies and the alcoholics’, the different nationalities, the variety of urban life (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 21). She brings her anti-suburban baggage – ‘her own self-image’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 6) – with her from the city: the suburbs are ‘twee’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 5), full of ‘bored housewives’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 112). Life in Sunnyside is repetitive (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 18), and Alice ‘disgusted herself’ by trying to conform to it (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 165). Harry, her husband, is happy in Sunnyside, but only because he has given up on vitality: it was far better, he says, ‘to live in the half-life of ordinary contentment, even if it meant boredom’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 135).

Wetherell (2006, p. 178) claims that Alice’s ‘principal illusion is that peace and good working space are to be found in this garden paradise’; but peace and working space in the suburbs cannot co-exist with anti-suburban prejudice. The irony is that Alice does eventually rediscover her creativity, but only by cannibalising the life of her teenage neighbour, Scarlett, who is herself a conflicted combination of pro and anti-suburban impulses. On the one hand, Scarlett idolises Alice and her family, seeing them as ‘something worth fighting for, this family with its simple, perfect symmetry: mother, daughter, father, son’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 378). Scarlett is captivated by the symbolic power of the nuclear family as manifested in the Haskins. At the same time,

however, she is disgusted by the rampant materialism and lack of humanity she sees in the residents of Sunnyside; echoing David Meredith, Scarlett declares that the men and women of Sunnyside 'had forfeited any small stray instinct for originality. There were no artists here. No policy makers for a better world. No humanitarian aid workers. Scarlett could not, would not allow this place to dictate to her what she might expect' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 268).

As Sowden (1994, p. 87) notes, in the post-war years in Australia, 'suburbia set the standard of what was normal in society – the nuclear family'. Despite that standard coming under attack in the latter part of the century with the impact of feminism, it still exists in the popular imagination as some sort of ideal. This is revealed in the children of *Sunnyside* who are just as bound by the conventional images of the family as are their parents – indeed, more so. Both Scarlett, Alice's neighbour, and Justin, Molly's unhappy son, prefer the Haskins' home; 'Things felt kind of normal there' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 56). Scarlett's and Justin's parents are both divorced and neither have siblings; the nuclear model does not fit them as it fits the Haskins. The children have expectations of the family unit, defined by habitus and ideology, and when Molly leaves her family both Joe and Grace see how precarious that family unit is: 'Molly and David were not her parents. But they could have been' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 181). Grace in particular feels as if her life is threatened by Molly's affair and the breakup of her marriage:

If Alice and Harry ever said they were breaking up, Grace would kill herself. She had thought about it. It wasn't just that she didn't know who she'd live with. It was more that she *was* them. If they ruined themselves, they would ruin her. She would be finished. (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 203)

As for mothers, they should be at home: what was the point, Joe thinks, of a kitchen without a mother? 'The mothers were the lights in the houses' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 144). Feminism may have changed society – women can now have 'jobs in shiny offices' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 24), but the mothers at the school gate, that 'gaggle of suburban contentment' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 18), remind the reader the family ideal has changed little, even if its realisation is ultimately unsustainable.

The novels depicts a host of women and children who are essentially unhappy, undermining the pro-suburban myth that the suburbs are a paradise for women and

families. Joe believes that they all need to escape Sunnyside, 'except Harry, who seemed happy here' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 377). Harry and his friends are suburban men, who no longer, if they ever did, subscribe to the lone hand myth. They are Ashbolt's lawnmowing emasculants, ridiculous in their contentment: it 'was hard, sometimes, not to laugh at them' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 50). These men aspire to 'family life' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 64) and work to maintain it. Significantly, it is Molly who has the affair, not David who, like his male friends, is 'steadfast' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 64). Their wives, however, are discontent and their children unhappy. Alice tells a story about a woman in Sunnyside:

...a lovely woman who was always baking cakes and spring-cleaning in the service of her husband and four children. One day, she had left. Gone to live in the city, taken up with a new man, abandoned the family to whom she had previously enslaved herself, including two four-year-old girls. Alice sometimes saw the stoic husband, left in a wife's wake, as he dropped the younger children to school. Perhaps it was all his fault for believing in the Martha Stewart version of his wife. Perhaps he should have been wise to the fact that anything so perfect had to be false and the more frenetically his wife had baked, the greater the ballast to her precariousness. (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 189)

The details of the description – the woman was 'in the service' of her family, she was 'enslaved' – give an indication of Alice's own state of mind and remind us again of the constant conflict in these women's lives between 'conscience' and 'imagination'.

Alice moves to Sunnyside for her children, but finds that the sense of stillness she needs in order to create has disappeared in the move from the inner-city: 'The suburbs, perhaps, had stolen it from her. Suburban life, a kind of psychic kleptomaniac, stealing the personalities of its newcomers, the talents, the small eccentric ways' (Murray-Smith 2005, pp. 187-188). Moving to Sunnyside is, for Alice, an admission of failure – a failure of ambition, a failure of resistance to habitus: 'The thing was, certain kinds of women fell into this life. It was the life they automatically had if they failed to resist it' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 217). In his 1988 essay, 'The roots of Australian anti-suburbanism', Gilbert (1988, pp. 43-45) argues that intellectuals, particularly Marxists, were traditionally anti-suburban because they resented the obfuscation of class conflict that came with the aspirations associated with suburban living: if everyone has the same goals, the inability of some to achieve those goals becomes harder to see. For feminists, he goes on to argue, 'the equivalent of that false consciousness that obscures class realities is the view that women are the beneficiaries of suburbia, not the victims'. Two

decades after this essay was published the argument as to whether women are victims or beneficiaries is still part of contemporary discourse, as *Sunnyside* attests. The stay-at-home suburban mother is criticised for her 'happy laziness' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 24) – indeed, she criticises herself – so to overcome the guilt the Sunnyside women turn themselves into superwomen: 'We are wives and mothers and nurses and teachers and mentors and we are also *goddesses*, you know what I'm saying?' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 219). The pro-suburban image of the ideal family, with the mother at its core, and the anti-suburban image of dullness, conformity and a denial of creativity are tenacious aspects of the Australian habitus that have not been erased by the social shifts of the past half a century: they have simply adjusted themselves to fit the new world. In Sunnyside, mothers are expected to be both domestic goddesses and have 'real jobs in shiny offices'; as Harry notes:

It seemed crass even to acknowledge it, but here your worth was directly assessed by the income you generated. Ten years before it would have applied only to the men, but the women now counted...(Murray-Smith 2005, pp. 130-131)

Grace, at age eleven, has already absorbed both the pro and anti-suburban aspects of the habitus: on one hand she expects her mother to be home for her after school (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 231); on the other, she has already determined to quit Sunnyside as soon as possible: 'One day, she would share a very modern apartment somewhere like Zurich with a French industrial chemist, whatever they were, or a spy from Siberia' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 201).

Grace's desire for the global – Zurich, France, Siberia – defines the insularity of middle class suburbia: indeed, Grace is another expatriate in the making. The safety of the suburbs comes at the price of isolation – it is not simply in jest that the northern beach suburbs of Sydney, which include a number of 'Sunnysides', are known as 'the insular peninsular'. Alice desires a white middle class life, she wants to escape the 'Greeks and Italians and Jews and Asians' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 21), but in doing so, she moves to an area where mortgages are more important than morals. As Harry says:

It was awful that refugees were drowning. Nobody wanted that. The government had lost its humanity, but frankly, despite it being wrong and selfish and mean-spirited, Harry wasn't so sure he *wanted* boatloads of swarthy foreigners flooding the border. (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 53)

Sunnyside is a suburb so inward focused that all world events are refracted through its own concerns: Alice sees the world as being ‘so much about herself. The starving children seemed, at times, to be starving so that Alice could eat. The suicide bombers seemed to be exploding their bombs out of hatred for Alice herself, for all that she was and all that she came from’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 209). This is a community so ignorant of the issues affecting the wider world that when Justin drives Molly’s car into the reservoir – an act calculated to harm only his mother, to draw attention to his feelings towards her abandonment of him – it is interpreted as evidence of a violent sociopathology: ‘I could be wrong’, says one neighbour, ‘but something has to be done about Justin McLelland before he gets himself a weapon on the internet and takes out Sunnyside village’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 139). This is not an insularity that comes from being Australian, but from being suburban and middle class. Harry wishes at one point that he has the confidence, the ‘tight-fisted self-belief’ of Americans, feeling that Australians ‘didn’t quite belong to the land on which they trod their first steps’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 149). This is the only reference to Australia in the novel: the characters are so insular that they barely register a world outside their own suburb, let alone one outside their own country.

Indeed, the suburb of Sunnyside often appears more American than Australian: the very name, Sunnyside, is more Stepford than Toorak, more Palm Springs than Palm Beach. Its pertness is satirical but it has no Australian resonances – it is simply a parody of false suburban happiness, of the ‘phony families’ Scarlett sees all around her (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 297). The flora too recalls north America – there are ‘huge elm trees and birches and liquid ambars’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 8); ‘wisteria and clematis, the bouquets of lilac and jasmine and piles of crisp, singed autumn leaves’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 7); ‘birches and lilacs’, ‘old fashioned roses’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 205). The children do not appear to wear uniforms to school like most Australian school students – Scarlett describes her classmate Ingrid Pettigrove as wearing ‘some strange plaid skirt shaped like a poncho’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 10). Even the names of the adult characters seem American: in the 1960s when these characters would have been born the most popular girls’ names in the state of Victoria were Susan, Jennifer, Karen, Michelle and Julie, not Alice, Lily and Molly (Births, Deaths and Marriages, Vic). The novel is also more like an American novel in that it concerns white, middle class suburban families, a topic avoided by most Australian writers but embraced by their American counterparts; indeed, Jurca (2001, p. 160) contends that tales of the suburb

‘have become a national [American] literary speciality’. Reviewers of *Sunnyside* have compared it to the novels of John Updike, who is famous for exposing the ‘hypocrisies and shallowness’ of middle class, suburban Americans (Wetherell 2006, p. 177), as Murray-Smith does in this novel about Australia. What is interesting about *Sunnyside* is its clear references to class and wealth: Sunnyside is a rich suburb and Deptford is a poor one. They both exist, according to Harry, because of ‘life’s inevitable need for contrast...If everywhere was like Sunnyside, what would be the point of living there?’ (Murray-Smith 2005, pp. 35-36). This comment explicitly undermines the notion of egalitarianism that is so much part of the Australian mythology, and explains why Harry is so happy in Sunnyside: it is his opportunity to show off.

### **The lost children of affluence**

The rest of the characters are too self-absorbed to show off; they are, like the denizens of American suburbia, ‘prostrated by privilege’ (Jurca 2001, p. 18). The narcissism of these middle class suburbanites is manifested in their children who are lost both emotionally and morally. Joe is completely preoccupied by the fate of the contaminated Australian sheep stranded on a ship in the middle of the ocean. This story, which Joe watches obsessively on the television news, is based on a real event – according to the RSPCA Western Australia (n.d.), in 2003 a Saudi Arabian importer rejected a shipload of more than 50,000 live Australian sheep. The sheep were incarcerated on the ship for 81 days until the Australian government paid Eritrea to take them. Joe ‘couldn’t get those sheep out of his mind. Every day that passed, every hour, the sheep were still there on the boat. *They were still there!* Nobody would save them’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 88). The sheep, like these middle class, privileged children, are floating within the abyss of an adult world that puts their own needs before the needs of those for whom they are responsible.

Of all the children in the novel, none are more dispossessed than Scarlett. She is a ghostly anorexic (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 141); friendless, desperately lonely, she is a ‘unable to get close to another human being’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 161). Her father has left the family and she lives with her mother, whom she despises: ‘The thought of turning into her mother was enough to send chills down Scarlett’s spine’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 11). She is, as Alice notes, ‘one of those daughters who spent every waking moment resisting her mother’ (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 206). Scarlett obsesses about the Haskins with an intensity bordering on the pathological – David, Molly’s ex-husband,

calls her the 'creepy red-headed babysitter' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 251). She is constantly watching the Haskins' house and coming over unannounced. It is this habit of watching and listening that results in Scarlett observing Alice's reawakening – a reawakening that ultimately involves the theft of Scarlett's own story. Scarlett rejects the consumerism of the suburbs as displayed by her mother – 'the Diana dolls, the Swiss-chalet birdhouse' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 123) – but is in thrall to its manifestation in Alice – her colour-coded wardrobe, her shoeboxes with polaroids attached, her all-cotton undies – 'incredibly stylish' – her cashmere robe (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 157). The text is similarly conflicted, dwelling on the details of Alice's clothes, of Molly's shoes, but putting them into social and economic perspective: Alice's Martin Grant dress, for example, 'had cost roughly the equivalent of a discount fare to Europe' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 126). As one of the characters says early in the novel: 'Maybe our moral inadequacies are less forgivable because we can't blame poverty' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 53).

Private swimming pools, that symbol of consumerism, feature strongly in *Sunnyside*, but as Dooley (2005) notes, none of the characters actually go swimming. For Dooley, pools 'represent the dangers and troubles which are involved in the upkeep of expensive and basically useless status symbols'. Pools are a potent symbol of suburban life: in *Of a boy*, Adrian drowns in the municipal pool, representing the failure of the whole community to care for him; in *Sunnyside*, Scarlett dies when she falls into the Haskins' empty swimming pool, suggesting that it is Alice's refusal to fully engage with suburban life that is responsible for the girl's death. Pools are a symbol of corruption in the novel, the corruption that comes from narcissism and status. Molly runs off with the pool-man, precipitating the breakdown of her marriage and causing her son to despair. Alice and Harry's pool looks beautiful at the beginning of the novel, set as it is 'in two acres of established garden' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 7), but mid-way through it begins to leak. This is the time when Alice and Harry's relationship is at its most vulnerable: Molly has defected, an act which undermines the assumed strength of her friends' marriages; the children are desperate and lonely; Alice has writer's block and can't have sex; and Harry is being quietly seduced by one of his students, Olivia Mathers. In one scene, driving home from a party, Alice is silently reflecting on how unhappy she is, while Harry is simultaneously congratulating himself on his marriage and his life: 'Things were so good. His wife was magnificent, his kids were true and kind, his work had meaning, the stars were out, there was good ham in the fridge' (Murray-Smith

2005, p. 166). When the leak is fixed it seems that Alice and Harry are also fixed – Alice has rediscovered her creativity and her sexuality and Harry has definitively rejected Olivia's advances. The pool, however, remains empty, and it is there that Scarlett dies.

### **The price of suburban creativity**

Alice reconnects with her creativity in the empty pool. She lies naked in the bottom of the pool and masturbates, symbolically connecting suburbia and creativity as she orgasms. The connection between her fingers rediscovering sex in the pool and her writing is made explicit: 'Her fingers were moving over the keyboard and words were pouring through them like water' (Murray-Smith 2005, pp. 310-312). As Alice masturbates, she is watched by Scarlett, and if there is a price to be paid for that voyeurism Scarlett pays it, for Alice takes Scarlett as her story: 'Alice had opened her eyes with the irrepressible shock of a real idea. And there had been Scarlett' (Murray-Smith 2005, pp. 313-314). Rather than be angry at this appropriation of her life, however, Scarlett sees it as an affirmation: 'This was the proof that Scarlett was not ordinary!' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 381). The tragedy of the novel is that Scarlett is not who Alice thinks she is: she is not the 'ultimate warrior', willing to battle the combined forces of 'biological bequest' and suburban conformity (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 314). And, even if she was, she ceases to exist as an autonomous being when Alice begins writing about her, when she becomes 'the subject and Alice her interpreter.' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 359). Interestingly, Scarlett herself is aware that Alice writing her life is a kind of abdication, but she is so obsessed with Alice that she is happy – indeed, ecstatic – 'to be cared for in the secure embrace of Alice's imagination' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 379).

Scarlett is metaphorically abducted by Alice, and her submission to this abduction recalls the lost children who wandered into the bush because mesmerised by its beauty, not realising that they could never return. Scarlett sees herself as having 'the starring role' in Alice's novel, but does not seem to realise that such a role must be, by definition, a passive one. The other children in the novel fare better, but all are at the mercy of the adults who surround them and their impulses and desires. Dooley (2005) argues that the novel is 'intent on exploring difficult questions about modern life, about motherhood and feminism and sex as both a creative and destructive force'. For Alice, sex and creativity are inextricably linked; what she does not realise, however, is the

destructive power that comes from sex. There is a sexual element to Scarlett's attraction to Alice – even before the pool incident she sees Alice as beautiful, 'like a Scandinavian model' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 12); at one point, when she is babysitting, Scarlett goes through Alice's wardrobe and caresses her bathrobe: 'Scarlett put her face into the downy folds of the cashmere robe and closed her eyes and smelt Alice' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 158). Afterwards, Scarlett is torn between admiration and attraction: 'Scarlett felt the insistent tug of war inside her head between her hunger for Alice and her need to hold her clear, separate, superior' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 379). Alice herself seems to have no idea of the effect she has on Scarlett, seeing her simply as a resolution to her own creative dilemma.

Early in the novel Harry, who is feeling uncomfortable talking to the soon-to-be-divorced David, secretly congratulates himself on his own happiness: 'For a few seconds, Harry believed he was in possession of The Perfect Family, the original example against which all other versions struggled to compete' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 76). *Sunnyside* reveals that the perfect family is a myth. It is not an obviously anti-suburban novel, nor is it pro-suburban; instead, it depicts how entrenched anti-suburbanism can infect a life that could be close to perfect if only there was a little more consideration, a little less 'me-time'. The lost children of *Sunnyside* are abandoned by parents too self-absorbed to care about anything other than their own fulfilment; moreover these children are aware that they are lost and find solace in their victimhood. Notions of Australianness barely exist in this suburban world that is defined by the insularity of its inhabitants, a people 'who had renounced the wider world, closed in on themselves' (Murray-Smith 2005, p. 384). However, like other fictional Australian suburbs, in the world of *Sunnyside* there is little safety for the children; they may be financially secure, but they are emotionally lost.

## Chapter 12

### *The tax inspector*

In *The tax inspector*, Peter Carey mobilises the trope of the lost child, the anti-suburbanism of our habitus as well as a more specific social antipathy to the western suburbs of Sydney in a narrative that depicts endemic and far-ranging corruption at all levels of Australian society. Set in Sydney, the action crosses the city, from the wealthy areas in the east and north to the far western suburbs where the residents were ‘just getting used to the idea that they would now be poor for ever’ (Carey 2005, p. 109). The novel confirms the tenacity of the habitus at both an individual and national level, and undermines the individualist philosophy of the New Age by demonstrating how fundamental changes to one’s life and circumstances cannot necessarily be wrought simply through one’s own volition. The moral corruption that drives the narrative is centred around a distorted lost child figure, marooned among the perverts of the outer suburbs, trapped in a habitus that is abusive, destructive, and from which he cannot escape.

The novel takes place over four action-packed days, and follows the attempt of the heavily pregnant tax inspector, the soon-to-be single mother Maria Takis, to undertake a tax audit of the crumbling family car business, Catchprice Motors, in the outer suburb of Franklin. Her ability to fulfil this task is frustrated by her own anger at being given such an insignificant client – ‘She was accustomed to adversaries with marble foyers and Miele dishwashers...’ (Carey 2005, pp. 30-31) – and by the actions of the various members of the Catchprice family who are caught in a web of familial violence. The moral and financial corruption of the Catchprices is set against a background of endemic tax evasion, fraud and criminal activity in greater Sydney, which is linked to the Catchprices and their tax audit through the character of Jack, the exiled second son. The corruption of Sydney as a whole is not, however, the focus of the novel – that belongs to the Catchprice family. The novel begins and ends at their home and business in the suburb of Franklin, ‘a collection of soiled and flaking white stucco buildings... stranded out on the north end of Loftus Street opposite the abandoned boot-makers...’ (Carey 2005, p. 8). The novel does not depict Franklin as representative of Sydney as a whole, but as an outer limb that is more rotten than the city’s central core. This rot is manifested in Benny Catchprice, the contemporary lost child.

### **Lost in suburbia**

As Pierce (1999, p. xi) argues, the lost child in Australian narrative symbolises ‘essential if never fully resolved anxieties’ within the white community. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, those anxieties have not been assuaged but the community has changed – a country largely unmapped by white settlers has been replaced by the world’s most suburban nation. The suburbs are considered by many to be intrinsically unnatural – being neither city nor country they are ‘an offence to binary logic...an in-between...’ (Hartley 1997, p. 186). Contrived, unnatural and therefore essentially corrupt, the suburbs have come in some discourses to represent the corruption of contemporary Australian society: the average suburb is seen to be a ‘community of strangers...[all] working madly to pay off new mortgages, and feeling safe in the knowledge that the price of real estate was increasing’ (van Loon 2007, p. 118). Within that representation, the lost child is a powerful motif, symbolising guilt, fear and innocence lost. This is particularly so in *The tax inspector*, where the lost child has not been swallowed by malevolent bushland, or abducted by a silent stranger, but is lost in a psychic wilderness created by the deliberate actions of his suburban family.

Sixteen-year-old Benny has been sexually abused by his father, Mort, since infancy, a sustained act of parental cruelty which has left Benny with ‘a temper which you [could] only describe as violent’ (Carey 2005, p. 87). He is a lost child in the psychic sense only – physically, he is very much present. In this he represents the contemporary version of the lost child, one who has been emotionally abandoned by his or her parents to survive in the psychic wilderness of the outer suburbs. In popular discourse, the lost child continues to represent the anxieties of settlement, but is easily distorted to support anti-suburban views, and particularly that subset of anti-suburbanism directed at the outer, less affluent suburbs. As Powell (1993, p. 87) has noted, ‘Central to the image of western Sydney and to the stigma surrounding the working class is the behaviour and welfare of its youth’. The youth in Franklin are abandoned, violent, drug-addled and terrifying:

Sarkis was young and strong, but he would never walk at night alone in Franklin. There were homeless kids wandering around with beer cans full of petrol. They saw fiery worms and faces spewing blood. They did not know what they were doing. (Carey 2005, p. 115)

The twelve-year-old children of the suburb have ‘light-fluid breath’ and behave ‘like dogs in a pack’ (Carey 2005, p. 123); they are wild, unpredictable and terrifying. Rombouts (1994, p. 245) sees these feral children as ‘contemporary versions of the original feral creature of the bush, now adapted to the city streets and wearing the face of society’s fear’. The depiction of these feral children suggests a shift in the application of the lost child motif in late twentieth century fiction: Australians used to be afraid *for* the children; in this novel, they are afraid *of* them.

Benny and his cohort are products of their degraded, outer suburban environment:

The Franklin Redevelopment Region now had a hundred thousand school kids. The banks of the Wool Wash were littered with beer cans and condoms and paper cups... Stolen cars were abandoned here, virginities were lost, although not his. At weekends you could buy crack and speed by the gas barbecues. It was the sort of place you might find someone with their face shot away and bits of brain hanging on the bushes. (Carey 2005, p. 154)

As Huggan (1996, p. 43) notes, the redevelopment of Franklin has become a ‘reverse metaphor for moral degeneration’, emphasised by the ironic use of precious stones as the names of some of its areas, such as Emerald and Sapphire (Carey 2005, p. 109). Franklin is a suburb corrupt from its inception by its association with the Catchprizes and their dubious moral and financial practices. The land that ultimately became the Franklin suburban estate was once the site of Catchprice Poultry, the first battery farm west of Sydney (Carey 2005, p. 121). The land that Frieda and Cacka Catchprice used to develop their vast chicken prison was pristine meadow before they bought it; land ‘that had never seen a cow on it. There were tiny bush orchids and native grasses with seeds like yellow tear drops – it had probably been that way for ever’ (Carey 2005, p. 120). The desecration of the land begun by Catchprice Poultry and its ‘two thousand laying hens in twenty-three separate electrically heated sheds’ (Carey 2005, p. 116) continued with Catchprice Motors, where ‘perfectly good soil’ was concreted over ‘like a smothered baby’ (Carey 2005, p. 216). Both the poultry farm and the car yard were created by and presided over by Cacka and Frieda, the grandparents of the debased and disturbed Benny. Like many of the names in the novel, such as Catchprice, Mort (death) and Maria Takis (tax-it), the name of the patriarch, Cacka, is instructive, being as it is a baby’s euphemism for faeces. Cacka, Mort’s father, was also guilty of incest, and his abuse of his son began at the ‘base of a peppercorn tree’ on land now part of the Franklin estate (Carey 2005, p. 287). The suburb is thus corrupted by its association

with the abuse of the land, animals and children, all committed by the Catchprice family. The legacy of this corruption is a generation of lost children who are so infected that they have relinquished the innocence typically attributed to the lost child. As in *Of a boy* and *Play with knives*, there is a disturbing sense in *The tax inspector* that Benny is in some way complicit in his own moral abduction: even at three years old his ‘little eyes seemed alien and poisoned’ against his mother, who tries, ineffectually, to take him from his abusive father (Carey 2005, p. 140).

### **An anti-suburban novel**

O’Reilly (2008, p. 354) argues that in *The tax inspector* Carey writes ‘about a suburb and its inhabitants without ridicule or judgment, thus rejecting the anti-suburban tradition’. O’Reilly (2008, p. 359) cites the lack of ‘diatribes against suburbia that are prevalent in anti-suburban novels such as Johnston’s *My brother Jack*’ as further support for his argument. While the novel is indeed free of anti-suburban tirades, it is also true that Carey made a conscious decision to set the novel in the outer suburbs, in an area that O’Reilly himself concedes is ‘a stigmatized locale’ (O’Reilly 2008, p. 360). Carey deliberately utilised this stigma when he chose to situate the incestuous Catchprice family in Franklin and not in, say, Rose Bay, the site of the wealthy Corky Missenden’s dinner party. The moral degradation of the Catchprice family is inextricably connected to their physical location in the outer suburbs.

*The tax inspector* is unusual in Carey’s oeuvre as it is both contemporary and set in a clearly identifiable location. While *Bliss* is also contemporary, its setting, while assumed to be Brisbane and the northern rivers of NSW, is less specific than that of *The tax inspector*. Rombouts (1994, p. 274) claims that ‘Franklin does not exist as a place’; however, Franklin is clearly a pseudonym for Penrith, a large suburb in Sydney’s outer west. Penrith is on the F4 (now the M4) and faces the Nepean river; it has a Loftus Street which, like the Loftus Street in the novel, is adrift from the commercial centre which shifted some years ago with the development of a shopping mall (Carey 2005, p. 8). Loftus Street in Penrith backs onto a tributary of the Nepean river, a waterway named as School House Creek, the inspiration for the Wool Wash in the novel. *The tax inspector* is grounded in its geography, not only in its depiction of Franklin, but also of the rest of Sydney; as Gelder & Salzman (2009, p. 102) argue, it is a novel ‘insistent upon the realism of its setting’. Suburbs, streets, even restaurants and bars are named: Chez Oz, where Jack takes Maria for dinner, really was a popular up-market restaurant

in the late 1980s, described by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, ‘Twenty defining moments that shaped Sydney’s way of eating’ (2002), as ‘the mecca for business boys and fashion girls’, while the Hare Krishna restaurant where Vish works, Ghopal’s, is clearly based on the Hare Krishna restaurant Govinda’s which has been an institution of the Sydney suburb of Darlinghurst for decades. The novel is designed around roads, landmarks, and other suburbs: Balmain, where Maria lives on a street ‘made for a single woman with a flat stomach and a healthy back...a street you walked down arm in arm with a lover, stumbling, laughing after too much wine...’ (Carey 2005, pp. 172-173); Newtown, which still had the old Greek families in the 1980s, where Maria’s father lives along with the ‘Katakises and the Papandrious’ (Carey 2005, p. 250), neighbours so judgemental of Maria’s status as pregnant and single that when she visits her father she feels she is ‘slipping into Greek territory like a spy in a midget submarine’ (Carey 2005, p. 172); and the wealthy suburbs of Rose Bay in the east and Bilgola in the north. Lamb notes how ‘the world of *The tax inspector* is real, familiar and present’ (Lamb 1992, p. 52), a comment that remains true two decades after its publication and is due to its clearly delineated geography. *The tax inspector* is set in a city, a real city with a variegated topography – this is not a homogenous space like that of *Of a boy*. Yet those readers not familiar with the city and its suburbs are not at a loss, for Carey has described each of the areas using elements of discourse that are easily decoded – the road to Franklin is defined by ‘service stations, car yards [and] drive-in bottle shops’ (Carey 2005, p. 220), while in Rose Bay there is a ‘terra-cotta tiled terrace, flapping striped awnings [and] elegant men and women in black dresses’ (Carey 2005, p. 316). Like all cities, the Sydney of *The tax inspector* has both rich and poor, yet while all appear to be corrupt, only the most perverse seem to live in Franklin.

Franklin is a contemporary hell on earth, symbolised by Benny’s cellar. When taken hostage by Benny in the cellar, Maria wonders at its very existence: ‘Even while she had fought to stop his grandmother being committed, all this – the innards of Catchprice Motors – had been here, underneath her feet’ (Carey 2005, p. 342). Being a subterranean space the cellar ‘represents the lower bodily stratum’ (Ratcliffe 1998, p. 186), the corrupt underbelly of the suburban space above. Within this cellar lives Benny, who is the demented incarnation of the family secret. The cellar is the manifestation of Benny’s corruption and resultant madness – polluted, damp, the walls ‘covered in mould like orange crushed velvet’ (Carey 2005, p. 235). In Benny’s attempt

to imbue it with some level of comfort the cellar has become a tragic simulacrum of a suburban lounge room:

The concrete floor was half an inch deep in water. It was criss-crossed with planks supported by broken housebricks. A brown-striped couch stood against one end. Its legs on bricks. The bricks were wrapped in green plastic garbage bags. Electric flex was everywhere, wrapped in Glad Wrap and bits of plastic bag with torn ends like rag; it crossed the planks and ran through the water. Two electric radiators stood on a chipped green chest of drawers... (Carey 2005, pp. 133-34)

The cellar is Benny's self-imposed prison and also a desperate sanctuary from his father: 'Where else could I have come except down here?' he says to Vish, who left him five years earlier to join the Hare Krishnas: 'You think I was going to stay with Old Kissy Lips alone?' (Carey 2005, p. 137). That Benny is so unprotected while living in a community and attending school is an indictment of the suburbs and their reputation for safety. The Catchprizes are an extended family but all live in separate spaces within the compound, mimicking the separateness of homes on standard suburban streets. The text indicates that even Benny's aunt, Cathy, is unaware that her brother is having sex with his son, despite living next door; only her husband Howie has suspicions – 'You would not want to know about that kid's [Benny] life, his brother either. They were like institution kids with old men's eyes...' (Carey 2005, p. 80) – yet he does not act on them.

Carey undermines the sense of security that is the suburbs' greatest asset, both through the image of the feral youth outside the gates of Catchprice Motors, and the evil that lurks within them. He also undermines the role of mothers as nurturers and homemakers, a role that discursively underpins the positive view of the suburban nuclear family. Frieda takes on a masculinist role in the family, symbolised by her double mastectomy: 'in the privacy of the Catchprice home there was never any doubt about who the smart one was meant to be: not Cacka, that was for sure...' (Carey 2005, p. 220). In doing so, she sublimates her role as the nurturer and protector of her children. As the novel opens Frieda is becoming more and more aware of her own complicity in the corruption of her family, comparing herself to a snake mother:

It was as if all her past had been paved over and she could not reach it, as if she was a snake whose nest had been blocked while she was out and could only go backwards and forward in front of the place where the hole had been, finding only cold hard concrete where she had expected life. (Carey 2005, p. 129)

Frieda's unwillingly amassed collection of porcelain bride dolls are 'lined up in a way you might expect, in an Australian house, to find the sporting trophies' (Carey 2005, p. 291), emphasising the inversion of the typical male/female roles in the Catchprice family. In their state of decay the dolls are Frieda's own Dorian-Gray-like portrait, gradually becoming masculinised by 'streaks of mould and mildew which, at a distance, looked like facial hair' (Carey 2005, p. 10). Sophie, Benny's mother, also fails as a mother, abandoning him when she witnesses his abuse, while Cathy, Benny's aunt, is so caught up in 'all that mad Catchprice shit' (Carey 2005, p. 80) she is unable to assume the mantle of protector. In the suburbs, it seems, the mothers abandon their children, both literally and metaphorically, while the fathers abuse them.

The sexual abuse of suburban children by their parents and the lack of care by others in the community undermines the concept of the nuclear family, and the reputation the suburbs have of being places of care and safety. There is an interesting reversal presented in the novel, when the bona-fide criminal Wally Fischer takes offence at some sexual comments made by Maria's friend Gia in a restaurant because 'I don't like my daughter having to listen to smut' (Carey 2005, p. 105), while the upstanding suburban father Cacka abuses his children while his wife does nothing: 'For Christ's sake, Mother, our father was a creep...He used to do things to me while you were *knitting*' (Carey 2005, p. 307). Frieda is not responsible for her children's abuse but she is responsible for ignoring it; as with her collection of decaying bride dolls, she refused to look – 'She ducked, dodged, avoided' (Carey 2005, p. 9).

The novel is not only an indictment of suburban corruption: Carey depicts an entire city in decay. Even Jack's house in Bilgola, so architecturally beautiful it gives Maria 'a feeling of such serendipitous peace that she felt she could, if she would let herself, just weep' (Carey 2005, p. 269), is infested with mosquitoes and surrounded by rotting vegetation. At the heart of the city's corruption is tax evasion, an activity in which most of the characters appear to indulge. Maria, the tax inspector, is a passionate advocate of a just and equitable tax system:

Do you know that one child in three in Australia grows up under the poverty line? You know how much tax is evaded every year? You don't need socialism to fix that, you just need a good Taxation Office and a Treasury with guts. (Carey 2005, p. 285)

Maria is presented as a woman of integrity, with ‘a clear and simple sense of right and wrong’ (Carey 2005, p. 224); she is, as Rombouts (1994, p. 271) claims, the ‘only opposing force that can stand against the corruption and perversion of the Catchprices’. Her integrity is called into question in her relationship with Jack, as Robert Dixon (1992, p. 41) notes, ‘in sleeping with the wealthy property developer, Jack Catchprice, she allows herself to be seduced by the evils of the city’, and in her aborted attempt to pull the Catchprice file. Nevertheless, she is a moral figure who, significantly, was brought up and continues to live in the inner-city suburbs.

Corruption is presented in the novel as widespread and endemic. Even the ashram, a place symbolically associated with peace, calm and integrity, is polluted: the rain has soured the devotees’ quilts with mildew, and the staircase walls ‘were marbled with pink mould’ (Carey 2005, p. 11). In the novel, the Hare Krishna movement is depicted as essentially corrupt, with allusions to the Jim Jones massacre and other crimes associated with religious cults of the 1970s:

Govinda-Dasa...had been a devotee since the years when Prabhupada was still alive and nothing that had happened since his death had shaken him, not the corruption of the Australian guru whose name he would never pronounce, not the expulsion of Jayathirta who was accused of taking drugs and sleeping with female devotees, not the murders at the temple at California. (Carey 2005, p. 12)

As Rombouts (1994, p. 247) notes, Govinda-Dasa ‘creates dirt in a clean world’, finding ‘spots on tables which had been perfectly clean before his eyes had rested on them.’ (Carey 2005, p. 12). That the ashram is in the red-light district of Sydney, where Vish, formerly Johnny Catchprice, can see ‘the hooker in the red bunny suit’ as he runs for the train (Carey 2005, p. 16), is both geographically correct and metaphorically significant: in *The tax inspector*, the ashram is as impure as the rest of Sydney.

Dixon (1992, p. 39) argues that *The tax inspector* employs a process, used in the media as well as in fiction, where ‘the systemic and institutional nature of corruption is symbolically displaced into the private sphere’. For Dixon (1992, p. 41), ‘the blame that properly belongs to the wealthy and powerful’ is displaced on the Catchprices who, as residents of the modern slums, the western suburbs, are designated as the ‘other’ by the powerful middle class. In this argument, western suburbanites coded as the ‘other’ become the scapegoats for a society that recognises but does not admit to social and

cultural corruption. Cultural commentators have referred for some years to the ‘othering’ of western Sydney:

...western Sydney has been excluded [from Sydney’s identity] as impure, because its existence threatens representations of Sydney as affluent, coastal, and at the core of Australian life. If negative elements can be confined to the western fringe, then Sydney can have a uniformly positive identity. (Mee 1994, pp. 61-62)

It is clear that the residents of Franklin have been coded as Sydney’s impoverished ‘other’ in the novel – the children are feral, the houses are poisonous and ugly. Frieda’s kitchen has a ‘torn vinyl floor’ and broken appliances (Carey 2005, p. 18); in Maria’s tiny Balmain house there is a kettle which Cathy Catchprice recognises as both a “nice thing” and a symbol of Maria’s middle class good taste: noting ‘the obvious quality of the kettle, its good taste, its refinement, the sort of shop it must have come from...Cathy felt coarse and vulgar’ (Carey 2005, pp. 178-179). Maria’s tiny house with its beautiful kettle is clearly preferable to the mansion on a ‘double block at Franklin Heights’ to which Benny aspires (Carey 2005, p. 134). Indeed, Benny’s desire to remain in Franklin indicates the depth of his corruption; he does not want to leave Franklin – ‘He wanted this life. It was all he ever wanted’ (Carey 2005, p. 6) – because he has absorbed its most debased qualities.

Carey makes the connection between physical and moral corruption when Jack looks at the Cahill Expressway (a freeway that connects the eastern suburbs of Sydney to the Harbour Bridge) and claims: ‘You can read a city. You can see who’s winning and who’s losing. In this city...the angels are not winning’ (Carey 2005, p. 267). The architectural ugliness of the Cahill Expressway is connected to big business – it is an ‘investor...from Strasbourg’ who initially makes the comparison between the expressway and corruption. However, the ugliness of the F4, the road to Franklin, is of a different sort: desolate, tawdry, and poor – and suggests the isolation that the act of ‘othering’ requires:

It was the path [Jack] had taken from childhood to adulthood and it always forced some review of his life on him. Its physical desolation, its lack of a single building or street, even one glimpsed in passing, that might suggest beauty or happiness, became like a mould into which his emotions were pressed and he would always arrive in Franklin feeling bleak and empty. He would drive back to Sydney very fast... (Carey 2005, pp. 220-221)

Jack connects the ugliness of the Cahill Expressway and the even greater ugliness of Franklin. He is associated with all three levels of corruption – the organised crime world of Wally Fischer, the less tangible corruption of the Rose Bay dinner party guests and their tax-free ‘funny money’ (Carey 2005, p. 321), and the financial and moral corruption of western Sydney as represented by Catchprice Motors. His association symbolises the spread of corruption through all levels of Sydney society. As Ratcliffe (1998, p. 185) notes, ‘the text reveals the connections and similarities between the more powerful socio-economic groups in the city and the people living on the urban margin’. Jack is the physical manifestation of this connection, being originally a Catchprice and now a wealthy property developer. That he began in Franklin and moved to the city suggests, however, that corruption spread not from the city centre out to the suburbs, but the other way around. While all of Sydney is presented as corrupt in the novel, it is in the outer suburbs where both physical and moral corruption are most acute. Franklin is literally poisonous, full of ‘asbestos sheet houses’ (Carey 2005, p. 115) and polluted waterways: ‘Benny failed every science subject he ever took, but he knew this water in Deep Creek now contained lead, dioxin and methyl mercury...’ (Carey 2005, p. 155). The water in Franklin is toxic, while in Rose Bay ‘the light was mellow, the water of the harbour pearly, touched with pink and blue and green’ (Carey 2005, p. 316). There is an obvious connection being made here between beauty, wealth, poverty and perversion: in Rose Bay, wealthy tax evaders make unpleasant small talk; in Franklin, poor tax evaders abuse their own children.

However, as O’Reilly argues, the novel should not be read as a simple denunciation of the depravity of suburban life. It is more complex and nuanced, as seen in the name of the suburb – ‘Franklin’, which is the name of both a pristine area of Tasmanian wilderness, and of a cut-price supermarket. The use of the name ‘Franklin’ counters a strict anti-suburban reading of the novel and suggests a connection between the uncorrupted land that the original white settlers encountered and contemporary Australia. A critical comment in the novel is made by Maria after Gia makes her forced apology to Wally Fischer: ‘This is the only big city in the world that was established by convicts on the one side and bent soldiers on the other’ (Carey 2005, p. 245). Brady (1991, p. 80) sees this line as indicative of the novel’s larger theme of the past weighing upon the present:

The Sydney which opens out here before us, from the car yards of Parramatta Road to the Opera House and the Eastern Suburbs and to Kuringai Chase and the luxury houses of developers on the other side of the Harbour, is shadowed by its history...

The corruption that Carey depicts as being endemic is a result of Australia's corrupt beginnings, a part of our habitus that we cannot escape. The novel contains numerous references to prisons and cages, a reminder of our convict antecedents. As Rombouts (1994, p. 250) notes, the Catchprice family 'is locked up each night like chooks (or convicts)'. Granny Catchprice is the jailer; she holds the only set of keys, and 'she would not give them up...When they shut the gates at night it was as if they were severing connection with "The General Public" until the morning' (Carey 2005, p. 81). Sarkis, the unemployed Armenian who Frieda hires as a salesman, is described as 'a prisoner' of the Catchprice estate (Carey 2005, p. 122). He has no money, no car, and no prospects. On the first day of his tenure at Catchprice Motors, Benny imprisons Sarkis in his cellar, strapped to a homemade device Benny originally saw in a pornographic magazine. Both Woodcock (1996, p. 97) and O'Reilly (2008, p. 369) see Benny's treatment of Sarkis as referencing the brutal treatment of convicts and the exploitation of immigrants by those in positions of power. It is significant that the torture of Sarkis takes place in Benny's cellar which, being literally 'down under', references the first white settlement which was at once a prison, a place of exile and, for some, a place of last resort.

All of the immigrant characters suffer what Rombouts (1994, p. 254) describes as a 'Gothic entrapment, held either by their dream of an Australia that does not exist or by the stubborn continuities of their past'. Sarkis' father has abandoned his wife and son to a prison of poverty and despair, while Maria's mother dies in her own emotional cage, holding onto the prejudices of a habitus created in a Greek village, prejudices that see her unwilling to love her own daughter. Sarkis is exploited by Benny, as Maria's mother is exploited by her employers when she goes deaf working in a factory making 'national brand name shirts' (Carey 2005, p. 47). It is a mistake, though, to see the novel as a 'reverse romanticising of immigrant families' as Rombouts (1994, p. 248) does:

While the homes of the immigrants are neat and sweet-smelling (oil and spices), the Catchprices live in foul-smelling rooms, situated behind the letters of their company name, breathing in the oil and petrol fumes of the car-yard. Maria's father offers "keftethes", freshly cooked by a devoted daughter, while Frieda...has only sour milk in the fridge.

While Maria's caring relationship with her father is lauded – 'Every night she comes, or if she can't come, she calls' (Carey 2005, p. 253) – this is a valorisation of Maria's character in particular rather than that of immigrants in general. Pavlovic, the Yugoslav taxi-driver, preys on the abandoned and lonely women of Franklin whom he despises – 'If they didn't have cunts you wouldn't talk to them' (Carey 2005, p. 110) – and the owner of the factory where Maria's mother went deaf 'was Greek, from Salonkia. He would say, if you don't like it, leave' (Carey 2005, p. 47). Maria's mother is devoid of love, and her sister does not speak to her father, for reasons not explained in the novel (Carey 2005, p. 171). All the families in this novel are unhappy, immigrant or otherwise, and all are in some way imprisoned. Even Alistair, the father of Maria's child who she insists on seeing as an honest man, traps himself in marriage to 'his drunk, unhappy wife' (Carey 2005, p. 96).

In the Sydney of *The tax inspector*, the city's immoral past has infected its present, leaving a legacy of corruption, of excuses and of justifications. Maria does not want to ruin the Catchprice family as she sees their tax evasion as insignificant. So too do some critics: Ratcliffe (1998, p. 190), for example, insists that the Catchprices are less ethically reprehensible, or responsible than their wealthy counterparts as they avoid paying tax 'in order to keep their family business alive', rather than 'to increase their wealth and conserve their power'. This justification for their behaviour is supported by the same originary myth that sees all the convicts transported to Australia as victims, guilty of only minor crimes such as stealing a loaf of bread to feed their family. In *The tax inspector*, Carey undermines this excuse by providing a detailed picture of a corrupt suburban family. As Lamb (1992, p. 54) notes:

The fact that Maria's task [the tax audit] leads her to secrets far more obscene than anything to be found in a balance book draws a strong connection between deviousness in all its forms. Silence and inaction – the kinds inherent in sexual abuse against children, as well as in not declaring income – are crucial parts of maintaining deceit. Moreover, the hand-me-down nature of Catchprice cruelties, and the recurring family pattern of sexual abuse, makes it impossible to think in terms of behaviour – any behaviour – without moral consequences.

The novel explicitly links moral corruption to economic and financial malfeasance, and situates the worst of it firmly in the outer suburbs. Ratcliffe (1998, p. 191) would argue against this analysis; in his article he asserts that 'the text demonstrates the pervasiveness of corruption which cannot be attributed to any one group'. Woodcock (1996, p. 96), too, argues that:

The Catchprice family generally, and Benny in particular, are not seen as the cause of corruption, but rather as its perpetrators and victims...The different levels of corruption portrayed are related, interlinked, juxtaposed, but are not necessarily equated with each other.

Dixon (1992, p. 41), on the other hand, argues that in focusing on the revelation of incest in the Catchprice family, the novel shifts the blame for corruption onto 'the low-life characters of the western suburbs, re-enacting the othering of popular culture that is constitutive of middle-class sensibility'. Certainly, the corruption of the Catchprice family is presented as having far greater moral consequences than the economic and political corruption alluded to by the sale of the de Kooning painting and the subsequent discussion of *Droit de Suite*, and the moral degradation of the Catchprice family is inextricably connected to their physical location in the outer suburbs.

### **An undermining of anti-suburbanism**

Carey explicitly locates the site of the worst corruption in the suburbs; nevertheless, he insists upon presenting his corrupt characters with a depth and compassion which undermines the anti-suburbanism of the novel at the same time as it uses and supports it. Huggan (1996, p. 76) argues that in Carey's fictions, the grotesqueness of the characters 'serves to distance us from their actions, making it hard for us, at times, even to see them as identifiably human'. Significantly, in *The tax inspector* it is only the characters living in Franklin who can really be characterised as grotesques: the dinner party guests and Wally Fischer are vicious and unpleasant, even repellent, but they are not monstrous, unlike the Catchprices. The descriptions of the Catchprice's various physical appearances paints them as carnival freaks: Frieda, for example, "liked to smoke Salem cigarettes. When she put one in her mouth, her lower lip stretched out towards it like a horse will put out its lip towards a lump of sugar" (Carey 2005, p. 9). Later, after he has done her hair, Sarkis compares Frieda to 'Ranga the Witch' (Carey 2005, p. 295); when she smiles at Maria 'you could think that all her teeth were made from carved and painted wood' (Carey 2005, p. 296). Benny is a monstrous waxen doll, Cathy a fleshy forty-six year old in a 'chamois leather cowgirl suit' (Carey 2005, p. 179) and Howie sports a 'pencil-line moustache, a ducktail and secret rash which stopped in a clean line at his collar and the cuffs of his shirt' (Carey 2005, p. 3). Mort, the current family patriarch, is a paedophile. As monsters, they are easily boxed: the old witch, the young delinquent, the losers, the rock spider. However, as much as they conform to the role of

‘other’, the Catchprizes insist on revealing their own humanity. Mort is a monster yet he is also a victim. He says of Benny:

...he will have a kid and do it to his kid, and he will be the monster and they’ll want to kill him. Today he is the victim, tomorrow he is the monster. They do not let you be the two at once. They do not see: it is common because it is natural. No, I am not saying it is natural, but if it is so common how come it is not natural? (Carey 2005, pp. 208-209)

His confusion and despair at his abuse of his son, as well as his own self-serving justification of it, is summarised here. It is profoundly disturbing to the reader, as is Mort’s later justification of his father’s abuse of him and Cathy: ‘It’s not for us to judge him. What would they have done to him if it all came out? How could they understand he loved us?’ (Carey 2005, p. 324). As Hassall (1994, p. 150) notes, ‘Most readers would be more comfortable with a less pitiable child molester than this’.

Throughout the novel, Carey both sustains and undermines our anti-suburbanism and our prejudices against the poor, and forces us to consider the humanity inside even the most polluted heart. Our expectations of isolation and lack of community spirit in the suburbs are confirmed when Sophie, Benny’s mother, having shot herself in the back of the neck in a botched attempt at suicide, is offered no assistance by passers-by: ‘She was dripping blood and nearly fainting but no one looked at her particularly. No one tried to stop her. She just kept going’ (Carey 2005, p. 142). Yet a few chapters on the reader is reminded of middle class snobbery by Cathy’s response to Maria’s perceived elitism:

Country music is about those places people like you drive past and patronize. You come to Franklin and you’ve decided, before you even get off the F4, that we are all retards and losers – unemployed, unemployable. Then you find we have an art gallery and some of us actually read books and you are *very impressed*. (Carey 2005, p. 184)

Carey uses existing prejudices within the habitus in *The tax inspector*, but he also exposes them: when Maria tells Gia she is working in Franklin, Gia says: “‘Franklin. My God. Who’s in Franklin?’”, to which Maria responds: “‘No one’s in Franklin’” (Carey 2005, p. 101). Maria and Gia are inner-city elites, members of Betts’ new class – what Cathy calls, in reference to Maria, ‘your sort of person’ (Carey 2005, p. 184). They are what Simons would describe as ‘little better than snobs’ (Simons 2005, p. 30), contemptuous of Franklin and the outer suburbs; yet they are the only two characters in the novel who are in possession of moral compass. *The tax inspector* reveals the

snobbery that sustains the prejudices against the outer suburbs; however, it ultimately supports it. Mort and Benny may be characterised as human, but that does not make them good. In the final analysis, the outer suburban characters are morally reprehensible, while their salvation comes in the form of Maria, a member of the inner-city elite.

### **Religion and corruption – broken trusts**

Maria, pregnant, unmarried, moral, is an obvious reference to the Virgin Mary, and she offers the only hope of redemption to the degraded Catchprices of Franklin. The use of religious imagery in the novel emphasises the depths of corruption to which the Catchprices have descended, and suggests a moral vacuum at the heart of Sydney society. When *The tax inspector* was first published in 1991 it did not receive favourable reviews, due in part, according to Hassall (1994, p. 145), to its confronting subject matter. Andrew Riemer (1991, p. 1) referred to it as ‘nasty and brutish’, Baker (1991, p. 37) called it ‘strongly – even bitterly – contemporary’, while Larsson (2005, p. 65) described it as ‘perhaps Carey’s most puzzling novel’. Since its publication the world has borne witness to the cases of Elisabeth Fritzl, Natascha Kampusch and Jaycee Lee Dugard, who were all imprisoned and sexually abused, as well as to many publicised cases of clergy abuse. In this context, Carey’s use of a figurative angel was tragically prescient.

Frieda’s allusion to herself as a snake mother is one of many religious references in the novel, culminating in the birth of Maria’s baby in Benny’s bunker as the rest of Catchprice Motors is blown apart in a suburban Armageddon. Larsson (2005, p. 54) sees the religious references as ‘formal features’ only, there to assist in the telling of the story but not necessarily to aid in its interpretation. The use of religious images, Larsson (2005, pp. 66-67) claims, are varied and an analysis of them ‘will not lead to a consistent interpretation’; at most they should be seen as ‘part of the confused world the characters inhabit’. Yet, in a novel concerned with corruption, religious references cannot be so easily dismissed: it is significant that the first page of the novel has references to both the Catchprice family smell, which was ‘like almost-rancid butter’ combined with ‘things they had touched or swallowed’, such as ‘altar wine on Sundays’ (Carey 2005, p. 3). The combination of the family’s inherent rancid smell with that of the altar wine suggests a connection between their corruption and the church – or, at least, with images of the church. Frieda and Cacka went to church, and so does Mort,

despite his guilt; Howie says to him: ‘Why do you mime the words of the hymns in Church?...Barry Petersen asked me why someone with such a good voice wouldn’t sing out loud. I wondered if this had something to do with Cacka’s philosophy’ (Carey 2005, p. 91).

In *The tax inspector* the use of religious references emphasises the insidiousness of corruption in the Catchprice family in particular, and Sydney in general. Religious imagery abounds but, as Huggan (1996, p. 76) notes, religious reassurances do not. Angels are used through the text to connect the themes of sexual abuse, redemption, and transformation. Carey references the story of the Annunciation in the character of Maria, who is pregnant and unmarried and ultimately visited upon by the angel/demon Benny.

Benny’s own desire to turn into an angel stems from his grandfather’s disturbed conflation of angels with sexual desire, leading to the ritualised abuse of his children: ‘He made me [Mort] dress up like an angel and sing the “Jewel Song”... You wouldn’t want to know what else he did’ (Carey 2005, p. 326). Cathy explicitly refers to the Annunciation when she tries to explain how Benny had managed to talk her into going to Maria’s house late at night to ask her to abandon the tax audit:

“It was like your dog stood up and talked to you. If the dog said get your guitar, you would. Just to see what happened next.” She lied about the dog. She did not think dog at all. What she was thinking of was that holy picture where the angel appears to Mary. Only later she said dog. (Carey 2005, p. 177)

Linked to the religious references in the novel are references to music, which is seen as both a corrupting and a liberating force. Cacka’s abuse of his children is inextricably connected to his ‘secret passion’ for music, to the ‘complete HMV recording of *De Zauberflöte*’ which was hidden beneath the bed of his childhood home (Carey 2005, p. 77). Jack escapes his father’s corrupt attentions because he cannot sing: ‘If I was musical I’d still be there. Mort and me, side by side’ (Carey 2005, p. 262). Mort and Cathy sing the music beloved of their father, and suffer for it. Both ultimately reject music from their lives, Mort by miming, Cathy by embracing country and western:

At ten years old, you should have seen her – a prodigy... She sang “Kyrie Eleison” at St John’s at Christmas before an audience which included the Governor General. There were no “Hound Dogs”, or “Blue Suede Shoes”. (Carey 2005, pp. 303-304)

Jack himself claims to love music but not to understand it – ‘I love it, but I listen to it like an animal’ (Carey 2005, p. 262). In this he betrays a residual link to his corrupt family, a link that is also seen in his relationship with his mother and through his fascination with Maria’s pregnant belly. Jack has a confused and contradictory relationship with Frieda: ‘If it was true he felt no affection for her, it was equally true that he craved her admiration’ (Carey 2005, p. 222). This manifests itself in his attraction to ‘unattractive geniuses who he seemed to select from the ranks of those would despise him – academics, socialists, leaders of consumer action groups’ (Carey 2005, pp. 219-220); women, in short, whom he perceives to be like his mother. His attraction to Maria both perpetuates this oedipal displacement and also suggests he is not entirely free of the Catchprice corruption (Ratcliffe 1998, pp. 188-189). There is something both touching and disturbing about Jack’s attraction to the heavily pregnant Maria, especially when juxtaposed with Benny’s equally ardent – if violent and deluded – feelings towards her. Maria’s soon-to-be realised maternity offers both Jack and Benny an opportunity for redemption: to Jack, Maria ‘had arrived complete...with a child that was not, in any way, a reproduction of himself’ (Carey 2005, p. 281), thus providing him with the opportunity to ‘sever his kinship roots’ (Ratcliffe 1998, p. 188); for Benny, abused child, she is the final, integral part in his fantasy of transformation.

### **Transformation/habitus**

Benny wants to become an angel, to shed the corruption of his childhood and become pure. On the morning of Maria Takis’ first visit to Catchprice Motors, he rises from his cellar, Lucifer-like, with his hair ‘a pure or poisonous white’ (Carey 2005, p. 25). His hair symbolises the true nature of his perceived transformation – he is, as Carey acknowledged, both angel and serpent (Carey in Willbanks 1997, p. 11).

Metamorphosed into ‘clean-skinned possibility’, he looks at a picture of a woman being sexually tortured and compares it, tellingly, to ‘a new piece of music’ (Carey 2005, p. 63). He is damaged, deranged, deluded; his ‘ulcerated mouth’ (Carey 2005, p. 18) shows how corruption has infected his body. He has a tattoo of an angel wing on his back, its tattooed feathers turning into scales as they get closer to his buttocks (Carey 2005, p. 201). Vish calls him an insect (Carey 2005, p. 240), and at the very end, as he lies dead in the cellar, Maria compares his tattoo firstly to a serpent, and then to a dragon fly ‘smashed against the windscreen of a speeding car’ (Carey 2005, p. 367).

An angel is the ultimate transformation – from evil to good, from life to death. Transformation is part of Australia's originary myth: the cast-offs from Britain were, in Australia, transformed into a great society; *terra nullius* was transformed into fertile ground. Immigrants still move to Australia in the hope of a better life. Frieda's refrain in the novel is that 'she did it to herself' (Carey 2005, p. 79) – she transformed virgin bush into a poultry farm, and the poultry farm into a car yard and a low-grade suburban housing development; in the process she fostered the Catchprice corruption. Everyone in the novel is attempting to transform themselves: Benny into an angel, Vish into a Hare Krishna, Cathy into a country and western star, Maria into a mother, Jack into someone morally righteous. Only Frieda is of the view that transformation can only come with obliteration. Woodcock (1996, p. 98) suggests that as Benny's behaviour is 'socially produced' – that is, the result of his father's abuse – it is capable of being changed; however, from a Bourdieuan perspective change is difficult, if not impossible, particularly for one so indelibly marked by habitus as Benny. Ironically, it is Vish who says to Benny: 'Even if you had plastic surgery, you couldn't change. I couldn't either' (Carey 2005, p. 135). Yet Vish has attempted to transform himself from Johnny Catchprice to Vishnabarnu, to cast off his 'attachments' and become closer to God. But, 'his voice was high and raspy' (Carey 2005, p. 13), and, as Rombouts (1994, p. 255) notes, the thick arms and wide shoulders he inherited from the Catchprices do not suit the Hare Krishna robes. He does not escape his family: at the end of the novel he lies with his grandmother, aunt and father 'in a heap of [Catchprice] bodies' (Carey 2005, p. 357).

Huggan (1996, p. 63) contends that the Catchprice brothers 'are easy prey...for New Age's salvation industries, industries that cater to the desperate need to believe in other futures (Benny) or to redeem oneself by surrendering to an endlessly recycled past (Vish)'. The tragedy of Benny and Vish's childhood renders them both vulnerable to those who offer transformation, and ultimately, unable to change. Carolyn Bliss (1995, pp. 101-102) describes *The tax inspector* as an allegory, and complains that the characters are incapable of change because they are 'weighted down by the allegorical baggage they carry'. Certainly they are weighted down, but while the depiction of child abuse in the novel represents corruption in the allegorical sense, Carey's exploration of its effect on individuals is far deeper than that of an allegory. For Bliss (1995, p. 102), the theme of the novel is that 'Biology seems to be destiny'; however, this analysis fails to recognise that Benny is not a victim of biology, but of habitus, and to undo one's

habitus is extremely difficult. The novel demonstrates with alarming clarity the danger of the 'New Age culture industry' (Huggan 1996, p. 83) beginning with the simplistic aphorism that love can solve everything. Cacka's 'love' for his children was an excuse for sexual abuse; Frieda's love for Cacka made her deliberately blind to his reprehensible behaviour: 'I couldn't have loved a man who was doing that to my children' (Carey 2005, p. 325). Benny's self-actualisation tapes are a desperate parody of an industry that claims that the effects of years of abuse can be ameliorated, even erased, by reciting a few affirmations: 'When my past is dead, I am as free as air' (Carey 2005, p. 155). As Benny himself admits, however, the effects of his abuse are ever-present: 'It's never over. I think about it every day' (Carey 2005, p. 203).

Lamb (1992, p. 51) claims that the novel is 'certainly about change and transformation', but notes how the changes Benny and Vish try to make in their lives are circumstantial, and that 'emotional realities remain horribly stagnant'. Vish's escape to Krishna is simply that: an escape – or attempted escape – into 'a nullifying moral absenteeism' (Lamb 1992, p. 55). It is significant that the two Catchprices who do manage to leave Franklin, Vish and Jack, are the two who were not sexually abused; indeed, both were effectively exiled from their home because they escaped the attentions of their fathers. Carey describes with great compassion the isolation of those who are left alone in a family of abuse, who are effectively ejected from their own destructive family habitus. Jack says: 'it was definitely my father who decided there was no room for me in the business.' (Carey 2005, p. 263), while Vish felt himself excluded from the abuse that linked his father and brother: he 'sat outside the blessed circle of affection, outside the blue centre of the flame, safer but more lonely, excluded but responsible' (Carey 2005, p. 147).

*The tax inspector* depicts a clash between habitus and New Age individualism that ends in a violent attempt at obliteration. Bourdieu's theory of habitus has been decried as determinism, but Carey's novel supports his argument that fundamental change is extremely difficult to effect. Benny attempts to transform himself into an angel; however, he cannot escape the corruption of his habitus. His dreams of the future are as exploitative, destructive and violent as the experiences of his past. The first thing he plans to do once Cathy is on the road is cut down 'the giant trunks of camphor laurels' that line the driveway of Catchprice Motors (Carey 2005, p. 28), thus continuing the destruction his Gran wrought upon the environment. He is instinctively attracted to the

pregnant Maria as she represents potential redemption, but can only respond to her violently. At the end of the novel, as Benny takes Maria down to his cellar at gunpoint he thinks: 'He said he was going to fuck her. He did not want to fuck her, not at all. On the other hand: this was his course' (Carey 2005, p. 343). By 'his course', Benny means the outcome he had visualised as part of his self-actualisation tapes; however, the text also suggests that this is also the course that life had mapped out for him. Hassall argues that Benny's status as a victim is 'scripted' into his life (1994, p. 11), but so is his role as monster. Rombouts (1994, p. 272) claims that 'there is a sense that Benny's life was taken at the moment of the transformation or metamorphosis for which he had so longed', but what was it he was transforming into? Certainly not an angel, despite his apparent love for Maria's baby – after all, he and Mort are both victims of Cacka's 'love' for his children. If he transformed into anything in that cellar, it was into the monster he was, tragically, destined to be.

Carey (in Willbanks 1997, p. 11) argued after the novel's publication that: 'At the end Benny respects life. He hands the child across to Maria. The child is Benny. It is his possibility'. There is certainly possibility in the birth of the child, but that possibility can only be realised with the death of Benny. The climactic end of the novel echoes the Annunciation, the Nativity and also Armageddon, as Frieda and Vish begin to blow up Catchprice Motors using Frieda's ancient gelignite while Maria wrestles with Benny in his underground hell. Armageddon is the ultimate destruction and, for this family, the only effective way of changing their habitus is through annihilation – indeed, the novel can be read as the triumph of habitus in the suburban milieu as it literally takes a cataclysmic event to effect any change to the lives of the Catchprices. Interestingly, Carey (in Sibree 1991, p. C7) has also said that he wanted the birth of Maria's baby to be 'so absolutely redemptive that it would change the poison person [Benny]', but in the end he had to be true to his characters. The truth of Benny, and the other Catchprices, is that their habitus has denied them redemption. Frieda describes her grandson as 'a stringy weed that could get slashed and trampled on and only come back stronger because of it' (Carey 2005, p. 10). Stronger, perhaps, but still a weed.

The personal habitus of the Catchprice family has developed over years of corruption – moral, financial and environmental. It is symbolised by the Catchprice smell which 'came from deep in their skin, from the thick shafts of their wiry hair' (Carey 2005, p. 3). This smell represents their 'bodily hexis' – the somatic internalisation of their

habitus. Jack may have cast off the family smell but he cannot cast off the corruption: he is an unscrupulous property dealer who is prepared to pursue corruption so as to impress Maria who, ironically, he recognises as having some integrity – ‘I did the fucking impossible for you. I crawled down sewers. I shook hands with rats’ (Carey 2005, p. 314). So too with contemporary Sydney, a city that cannot cast off its corrupt beginnings. It may look beautiful in Rose Bay and Bilgola, but the suburb of Franklin betrays the city’s moral ugliness.

In *The tax inspector*, the outer suburbs can be read as both somewhere quite divorced from Sydney, its ‘other’; or as its (a)moral centre. Trapped there is Benny, the lost child, who is a victim of the child abuse that has become metonymically associated with poverty and the outer western suburbs of Sydney. While he and his abusive/abused father are given human faces, this does not ameliorate the perception of the outer suburbs as places of corruption on all levels. The conclusion of the novel is ultimately positive, as Maria gives birth despite the destructive efforts of both Benny and Frieda; however, there is no sense of redemption – Benny, Frieda and Catchprice Motors are all destroyed. The toxic habitus of the Catchprices renders them incapable of change – their only hope of salvation is through a literal Armageddon. The representatives of the inner-city middle class, Maria and her baby, are saved, but the representatives of the outer suburbs are destroyed by their own corrupt actions.

## Conclusion

At the end of his thesis on Australian suburban novels, O'Reilly (2008, p. 381) called for new investigations into the place of suburbia in Australian literature, claiming that 'the time is ripe'. My analysis takes up this challenge, putting the Australian suburban novel into a broader context – that of national identity and myth creation. Through the process of close-reading, informed by the application of Bourdieu's theory of habitus, I have demonstrated how, as evidenced in selected literary texts, anti-suburbanism is entrenched in the national habitus. The perpetuation of this tenacious hostility is linked inextricably to other aspects of national identity; it does not exist in isolation and cannot be separated from other parts of the habitus. Both Gerster (1990) and Kinnane (1998) call for Australian fiction writers to engage more positively with the suburbs; however, my investigation indicates that this is difficult to achieve in a country where the major literary symbols valorise a life that is antithetical to that found in the suburbs.

Andrew McCann (1998, p. vii) calls Australia a 'postcolonial society unsure of its past and its future'. One should add: 'and its present'. When the nation was in its infancy, the inhabitants absorbed the primary pedagogy that the landscape was hostile and that our place in it was uncertain. This interpretation of the physical environment, coupled with our beginnings as a penal settlement, were instrumental in the development of a national habitus that remains tenaciously anti-suburban, the notion of comfortable suburbia being incompatible with those of hardship, endurance and uncertainty. The fundamental tenet of Bourdieu's concept is that the habitus is acquired from early childhood, and white Australia's 'early childhood' stressed a way of looking at the world that encouraged anti-suburban feelings at the same time as it supported suburban development. It also led to the absorption into the habitus of three significant myths: the expatriate, the Lone Hand, and the lost child. As my analysis shows, these myths are used and abused in fiction to support another aspect of the habitus, anti-suburbanism.

My thesis is informed by the understanding that while Australians live in the suburbs, we are nevertheless persistently, and sometimes virulently, anti-suburban. When I began my study, I read as many novels set in the Australian suburbs as I could source. What struck me was the way these novels fell into three broad categories: they were either narratives of flight, distorting suburban life to support expatriatism; expositions of anti-suburbanism that exploited the myth of the Lone Hand; or chronicles of child neglect or

abuse. This early assessment informed my decision to divide the study into three sections: the expatriate, the Lone Hand and the lost child. Of course, no novel fits neatly into any particular category, yet the persistence of these tropes in suburban fiction indicates how aspects of the Australian habitus intersect each other and can be used in fiction to support their perpetuation.

In Section I, I demonstrated how the theme of the expatriate is inextricably linked to the still-current view of the suburbs as sites of oppression, conformity and death.

Expatriatism is both a response to the fear of the intractable landscape, and to the shame of being a delinquent colony of England. Both the landscape and the ‘cultural cringe’ are evoked in the narratives of escape analysed in Section I; narratives that see expatriatism as a legitimate response to the stultifying oppression of life in the Australian suburbs.

Each of the four novels – *My brother Jack*, *Johnno*, *Subtopia* and *The scent of eucalyptus* – are examples of the cultural cringe in action. They each work to privilege European culture over Australian culture; indeed, there is a strong sense in these fictions that Australia has no culture at all. The exaltation of European culture justifies the eventual decision of each of the protagonists to flee, even when, as is the case of Julian in *Subtopia*, the culture so venerated is one of violence and decay. In these ‘expatriate’ novels, Australia is defined as quintessentially suburban – Hanrahan’s narrator, for example, searches in vain for Dorothea MacKellar’s wide brown land within the streets and lanes of working class, suburban Adelaide. She cannot find it; it does not exist. In *The scent of eucalyptus*, as in the other novels, Australian life is suburban life, so that the deficiencies perceived in suburbia are projected onto the nation, from which the protagonist must flee.

Each of the novels in Section I explores notions of alienation associated with the incompatibility of suburban life with the needs of the nascent artist. Using notions common to anti-suburban discourse, such as conformity, oppression and anti-intellectualism, these works insist that the suburban milieu is full of expectations that are inimical to the needs of the artist. These novels emphasise difference and specialness; each of the protagonists is portrayed as being a unique individual who must rise above the expectations of those who would wish to bring him or her down. David Meredith, in particular, is described as being higher both literally and figuratively than

his fellows, while the narrator of *The scent of eucalyptus* portrays herself as one who can, and ultimately must, fly away. This Romantic concept of the natural artist is counter to that of habitus, and it is ironic that each of these suburban child-artists fears they may have been created by the very culture that they despise and ultimately reject.

The suburbs are seen as cages in these novels and are devalued by their association with everyday experiences and everyday expectations. The suburban everyday is portrayed as, at best, mundane and constricting; at worst, violent and oppressive. The anti-suburban context of these four works is particularly strong in the novel published first, *My brother Jack*, and that published most recently, *Subtopia*. This indicates the tenacity of anti-suburbanism in Australia, and of the motif of expatriatism. The influence of *My brother Jack* can be seen in many of the subsequently published novels, particularly *Johnno*, *Subtopia*, and *The time we have taken*, which all feature young boys growing into men in the Australian suburbs. The virulence of Johnston's anti-suburbanism becomes more complex and ambivalent in the later works; however, the understanding that expatriatism is a reasonable response to the perceived oppression of suburban life becomes something that is almost expected of subsequent generations, fictional and otherwise. *My brother Jack* began a process that was followed by all the novels analysed in Section I: the rendering of suburban life as being so unbearable that to survive one must escape.

*My brother Jack* not only made explicit the connection between expatriatism and anti-suburbanism, influencing the novels that came later, it also developed new parameters for the Australian hero. While the Lone Hand retained his essential qualities, he ceased to be exclusively a bushman. In the novels analysed in Section II, the Lone Hand is used to support anti-suburbanism in fiction through a valorising of the natural, and a denigration of the feminine. The 'natural' varies depending on the character and the circumstances: in *My brother Jack*, for example, the natural refers to David's gift as an artist/expatriate; while in *Cloudstreet*, the natural is directly related to rural people and the skills of the bushman. In all of the novels, the Lone Hand stands against the 'cultural', which is defined as suburban. The Lone Hand is anti-domestic, anti-female, and anti-suburban; it stresses individuality at the expense of relationships, privileges the dysfunctional over the effective, and remains a consistent, if toxic, national icon. In *My brother Jack*, the motif of the Lone Hand is used as a harbinger of change, indicating the shift in Australian cultural values between World War I and the end of World War

II. It is also used as a foil to the anti-suburban character of Helen, whose desire for a pleasant house in the suburbs is coded in the text as unnatural. The outer suburbs in *My brother Jack*, *The time we have taken* and *Cloudstreet* are feminine spaces, and consequently devalued within a habitus that venerates the Lone Hand. In *My brother Jack* and *Cloudstreet*, suburban women are denigrated and undermined, particularly if they do not fit into the ‘damned whores and god’s police’ stereotypes. Helen Meredith and Rose Pickles are vastly different characters, yet in their desire for the newness of outer suburbia and their – in Rose’s case, temporary – childlessness, they represent the very worst of contemporary post-war suburban culture: consumerism, sterility and a lack of authenticity. Helen does not progress from that role as representative of unnatural suburbia; however, Rose becomes a mouthpiece for anti-suburbanism, rejecting the ‘antiseptic’ outer suburbs for inner-city Cloudstreet.

Implicit in Rose’s rejection of the house in outer suburbia is the rejection of the notion of the nuclear family as the preferred model of domestic life. The nuclear family is inextricably linked to suburban development, to progress, and to consumerism and is itself a target of anti-suburban discourse. In *The time we have taken*, the nuclear family of Vic, Rita and Michael is compromised by Vic’s inability to abandon the Lone Hand myth and accept the role of ‘domestic man’. His interpretation of suburban life is informed by the tenets of a myth that sees the land as an adversary: while the suburb is of the frontier he can accept its constrictions, but once it becomes comfortable he is obliged, within the structure of the myth, to ‘shoot through’. *The time we have taken* reveals the myth of the Lone Hand to be destructive to both families and individuals: Michael and Rita suffer because of Vic’s rejection of suburban, familial responsibility; however, Vic himself suffers too. The novel is a subtle evocation of the malignancy of the Lone Hand myth: trapped within a dysfunctional construct, Vic feels compelled to reject the intimacy of his suburban family, ultimately dying a lonely death.

The image of the nuclear family is attenuated in Carroll’s novels and with it the certainties of suburban life. *The time we have taken*, in particular, reveals the certitudes that inspired suburban development as being based on many unstable assumptions: that the ideology of the nuclear family is strong enough to overcome the Lone Hand myth embedded in the habitus; and that the land on which the suburban dream was enacted was free from moral accountability. Both notions are undone in the novel, yet the text remains free of the virulently anti-suburban subtext of the other novels studied in this

section. *The time we have taken* is a portrayal of the anti-suburban/pro-suburban paradox that informs the Australian habitus, demonstrating, through the character of Rita, how these two conflicting views can co-exist in an individual who is, as we all are, a product of habitus.

In *Cloudstreet*, the Lone Hand myth works to reject the nuclear family by privileging the rural and the inner-suburbs over outer-suburban areas, which are coded as sites of domestic and spiritual isolation. The inner-suburban districts have become favoured sites in anti-suburban discourse, places of ‘moral superiority’ which are pitted against the environmental, social and political deficiencies of the outer suburbs. *Cloudstreet* is a deeply nostalgic and intensely conservative novel which valorises the traditional, extended family structure and demonises the nuclear family and suburban development. While presenting a manifestation of masculinity that purports to privilege the traditionally feminine characteristics of nurturing and intuition, the text ultimately affirms conventional gender roles within the family. *Cloudstreet* explicitly denies the future by rejecting the suburbs and embracing a vision of family and community that is contrary to the reality experienced by many Australians. That *Cloudstreet* has always been such a popular novel indicates how pervasive, entrenched and unquestioned anti-suburbanism is in the Australian habitus: the text is unrelentingly anti-suburban, championing the inner-city suburb as a site of authenticity at the expense of the outer suburbs, which are depicted as lonely and perverse. The popularity of the novel also rests on its resolution to the problem of white belonging, a resolution that works to further privilege the inner-city residents of *Cloudstreet* and emphasise the moral emptiness of the suburbs.

The assurances of *Cloudstreet* are notably absent from the novels analysed in Section III. The symbol of the lost child has remained a consistent trope in the Australian cultural imaginary, representing white Australia’s uncertainty and guilt over occupation. Like the myth of the Lone Hand, the motif of the lost child works to support the dominant view of the land as dangerous and hostile to white settlement. This is what I referred to in the introduction to Section III as the national ‘paradigm of suffering’: the model of expectation which sees surviving the land as an achievement, a model which has become naturalised over generations and is now part of the habitus. The novels I analyse in Section III are each set in a place of perceived comfort and security which is

undone by the introduction of the lost child, who serves to render the environment as actively malevolent.

In Section III, I demonstrate how the motif of the lost child can be mobilised to present a distorted view of the Australian suburbs. In ‘Aquifer’, *Of a boy*, *Play with knives*, *Sunnyside* and *The tax inspector* the Australian suburbs are transformed from sites of safety to sites of danger through the loss of a child, either physically or psychically. Winton (in Taylor 1996, p. 375) claims that he often uses children in his fiction because ‘A child takes you places that are hard to get to otherwise’; similarly, a lost child can take you even further. Children are ready symbols for so much that we consider important in the world: love, innocence, family, community. The loss of a child undermines all of these notions and more: the very future is defeated with the loss of a child. In Australia, the symbol of the lost child replaces presence with absence and thus undermines the very fact of settlement. My thesis demonstrates that it is this understanding of the symbol that is so usefully mobilised in anti-suburban fiction.

Like *Cloudstreet*, ‘Aquifer’ is a powerfully anti-suburban piece concerned with notions of white belonging. The lost child, Alan Mannering, is literally swallowed up – consumed – by the bushland swamp that the suburb itself is actively working to subsume. However, the land here is not coded as hostile, but friendly: the children use the bush and the swamp as an extended playground. It is the suburb that is hostile, the suburb that is dangerous to children. In *Of a boy*, the suburb and everything in it – the streets, the school, the local park, the homes – is a source of danger to the children it has been designed to protect. While *Of a boy* is not anti-suburban in the style of *Cloudstreet* or ‘Aquifer’, the lack of safety afforded the children in the novel undermines white Australia’s claims to legitimacy by undermining its ability to care for its children.

‘Aquifer’ and *Of a boy* are both set in the non-specific suburbs of one of Australia’s capital cities. There is a sense of undifferentiated sameness that further intensifies the symbolic power of the lost children. In the remaining novels analysed in Section III, the locations are powerfully specific, which allows for notions of belonging to give way to those of good and evil. In ‘Aquifer’ and *Of a boy* blame is not apportioned to individuals; in ‘Aquifer’, in particular, there is the sense that it is simply the suburb which is, in an ill-defined way, at fault. In the other novels, blame is laid clearly at the feet of the social and familial milieux depicted. *Play with knives* and *The tax inspector*

are both set in the poor, outer Western suburbs of Sydney, an area already coded in popular discourse as Sydney's other. The stories of lost children in these narratives are disturbing for being clearly attributable to the actions of individuals who are products of their disturbed, suburban lives. The suburbs in *Play with knives* and *The tax inspector* are breeding grounds for violence, murder and incest, and the children are the victims. The lost children in these novels work as powerfully anti-suburban images, symbolising all that is corrupt and rotten with suburban life. *Sunnyside* is set in a beautiful and wealthy suburb, the very opposite of disadvantaged western Sydney, yet the children it depicts are also victims of their selfish, suburban parents. In this novel the lost child distorts the beauty of the cultured landscape such that it becomes actively hostile: Scarlett, the child whose life-story is stolen by her neighbour, who was emotionally marooned by her parents' divorce, eventually dies in a backyard swimming pool, that potent symbol of Australian suburban life.

In the Introduction I argued that it was the *persistence* of anti-suburbanism in Australian fiction that was so remarkable, especially in a country that is, physically, so overwhelmingly pro-suburban. Habitus can account for that persistence, conceptually accepting of the competing binaries that make up Australia: we are both new and old, desert and coast, definitively suburban in our choice of lifestyle and tenaciously anti-suburban in our attitude toward it. Australia's persistent anti-suburbanism is absurd, but no more so than the Lone Hand myth, or the atavistic desire to flee, or the nagging fear that the very earth will swallow our children. Social commentators talk of 'the everyday sense of themselves that most Australians share, in spite of it being so manifestly absurd when looked at more closely' (Hodge & Mishra 1990, p. 143); this is the Australian habitus. We carry around the vestiges of our uncertain beginnings in this 'everyday sense of ourselves', as evidenced from the motifs of the expatriate, the Lone Hand and the lost child which are all historically connected to early white settlement and which are all in current use.

In this thesis, I have argued that anti-suburbanism is an unquestioned part of the habitus, so 'taken for granted' that fiction can only work to perpetuate it. Even in those novels that are not expressly anti-suburban – The Glenroy novels, for example, or Hartnett's *Of a boy* – aspects of anti-suburbanism persist. Indeed, it cannot be avoided, so entrenched is anti-suburbanism in how we Australians see the world and our place in it. Australia is anti-suburban: that is our habitus and that is our fiction.

## References

- Allon, F 1994, 'The nuclear dream', in S Ferber, C Healy & C McAuliffe (eds), *Beasts of suburbia: reinterpreting cultures in Australia suburbs*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria.
- Anderson, J 1982, *Tirra lirra by the river*, Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria.
- Ashbolt, A 1966, 'Godzone 3: myth and reality', *Meanjin Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 373-388.
- Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2004, *My favourite book*, ABC, viewed 6 July 2010, <http://www.abc.net.au/myfavouritebook>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007, viewed 5 December 2007, <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/Home/census>
- Baker, J 1991, 'Peter Carey: the acclaimed Australian novelist has moved to New York - and to a new kind of novel', *Publishers Weekly*, vol. 238, no. 54, pp. 37-38, (online Expanded Academic ASAP).
- Ben-Messahel, S 2006, *Mind the country: Tim Winton's fiction*, University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, WA.
- Benson, T 2005, 'Sonya Hartnett's *Of a boy* as a "lost child" narrative', *Idiom*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 48-53.
- Betts, K 1999, *The great divide*, Duffy and Snellgrove, Potts Point, NSW.
- Birns, N 2005, 'Receptacle or reversal? Globalization down under in Marcus Clarke's *His natural life*', *College Literature* vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 127-145, (online Proquest).
- Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria, viewed 9 February 2011, <https://online.justice.vic.gov.au/bdm/popular-names>
- Bliss, C 1995, 'Time and timelessness in Peter Carey's fiction – the best of both worlds', *Antipodes*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 97-105, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Book awards of the world* n.d., viewed 2 February 2011, <http://www.literaryawards.com.au/ausawards.html>
- Bourdieu, P 1984, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, Routledge, London.
- Bourdieu, P 1989, Nice, R (trans), *Outline of a theory of practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Bourdieu, P 1990, Nice R (trans), *The logic of practice*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California.

- Bourdieu, P 1992, 'The Purpose of reflexive sociology (the Chicago workshop)', in P Bourdieu & L Wacquant, *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bourdieu, P 1996, Emanuel, S (trans), *The rules of art: genesis and structure of the literary field*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bourdieu, P 2005, 'Habitus', in J Hillier & E Rooksby (eds), *Habitus: a sense of place*, 2nd edn, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot, Hants, England.
- Boyd, R 1968, *The Australian ugliness*, Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria.
- Brady, V 1991, 'Birth, death and taxes', *Overland*, vol. 185, pp. 80-83, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Brett, J 1995, 'The Circus is in town', *Arena Magazine*, Feb-Mar, pp. 48-50, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Brotherson, L 1997, 'Three-dimensionality and *My brother Jack*', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol.18, no.1, pp. 84-89, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Brydon, D 1982, 'Barbara Hanrahan's fantastic fiction', *Westerly*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 41-49.
- Bryson, B 2001, *Down under*, Random House Australia, Milsons Point.
- Burns, K 2007, *This other Eden: exploring a sense of place in twentieth century reconstructions of Australian childhoods*, PhD thesis, The University of Sydney, viewed 13 June 2008, <http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/1822>
- Butler, C 2005, 'Reading the production of suburbia in post-war Australia', *Law Text Culture*, vol. 9, pp. 11-33, (online Informit; Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).
- Carey, P 1994, *Bliss*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.
- Carey, P 2005, *The tax inspector*, Vintage/Random House, Milsons Point.
- Carr, R 2009, "'A World of...Risk, Passion, Intensity, and Tragedy": the post-9/11 Australian novel', *Antipodes*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 63-66, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Carrington, V 1999, 'Everyday family spaces: systemic symbolic violence', *Language, Society, Culture*, Issue 5, viewed 6 June 2007, <http://www.educ.utas.edu.au/users/tle/JOURNAL/Articles/Carrington/Carrington.html>
- Carroll, S 2008, 'The Glenroy novels with Steven Carroll', *Moreland Library Talks*, viewed 7 February 2011, <http://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/about-council/news-media/podcasts/steven-carroll.html#transcript>
- Carroll, S 2003, *The art of the engine driver*, Flamingo, Harper Collins, Australia.
- Carroll, S 2004, *The gift of speed*, Fourth Estate, Harper Collins, Australia.

- Carroll, S 2007, *The time we have taken*, Fourth Estate, Harper Collins, Australia.
- Carter, P 1987, *The road to Botany Bay*, Faber and Faber, London.
- Chambers, D 1997, 'A stake in the country', in R Silverstone (ed.), *Visions of Suburbia*, Routledge, London & New York.
- Cica, N 2006, 'The incorruptibles: where are they today?', *Overland*, vol. 183, pp. 4-12, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Clarke, A 1997, 'Tupperware', in R Silverstone (ed.), *Visions of Suburbia*, Routledge, London & New York.
- Clarke, M 1896, 'Pretty Dick', in *Australian Tales*, viewed 9 February 2011, <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks04/0400711.txt>
- Clarke, M 1983, *For the term of his natural life*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.
- Coe, R 1981, 'Portrait of the artist as a young Australian: childhood, literature and myth', *Southerly*, vol. 41, pp. 126-162.
- Connell, RW 1983, *Which way is up?: education, class, sex and culture*, George Allen & Unwin Australia Ltd, North Sydney.
- Corris, P 2001, *Lugarno*, Bantam Books, Transworld Publishers, Random House, Milsons Point.
- Curthoys, A 1990, 'Mythologies', in HK Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and narration*, Routledge, London & New York.
- Dale, L & Gilbert, H 1994, 'Edges of the self: topographies of the body in the writing of David Malouf', in A Nettelbeck (ed.), *Provisional maps: critical essays on David Malouf*, The centre for studies in Australian literature, Nedlands.
- Daniel, H 1977, 'Narrator and outsider in *Trap* and *Johnno*', *Southerly*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 184-195.
- Davies, L 2006, *Candy*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW.
- Davidson, R 1995, *Tracks*, Vintage Books, London.
- Davidson, R 2008, 'The wanderer', *Monthly*, no. 37, pp. 19-20.
- Davison, A 2004, 'Illegitimate natures: suburban dreaming and the imagining of nature in Australia', paper presented at the *Imaging Nature: Media, Environment and Tourism Conference*, 27-29 June, viewed 4 August 2007, [www.utas.edu.au/arts/imaging/davison/pdf](http://www.utas.edu.au/arts/imaging/davison/pdf)
- Davison, B & Davison, G 1995, 'Suburban pioneers' in G Davison, T Dingle & S O'Hanlon (eds), *The cream brick frontier: histories of Australian suburbia*, Monash Publications in History, Dept. of History, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria.

- Davison, G 1994, 'The past and future of the Australian suburb', in LC Johnson (ed.), *Suburban dreaming: an interdisciplinary approach to Australian cities*, Deakin University Press, Geelong, Victoria.
- Davison, G 1997, 'The great Australian sprawl', *Historic Environment*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 10-17 (online Australian Public Affairs, full text)
- Davison, B, Kendig, H, Stephens, F, & Merrill, V 1993, *It's my place: older people talk about their homes*, Australian Government Publishing, Canberra.
- Deane, J 2004, *Another*, Interactive Press, Carindale, Queensland.
- Dessaix, R 1998, (*and so forth*), Pan Macmillan Australia, Sydney.
- Dever, M 1985, 'Artist and nationality in G Johnston's trilogy', *Commonwealth*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 19-30.
- Dever, M 1986, 'Secret companions: the continuity of David Malouf's fiction', *World Literature Written in English*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 62-74.
- Devlin Glass, F 1994, 'Mythologising spaces: representing the city in Australian literature', in LC Johnson (ed.), *Suburban dreaming: an interdisciplinary approach to Australian cities*, Deakin University Press, Geelong, Victoria.
- Dixon, R 1992, 'Closing the can of worms: enactments of justice in *Bleak house*, *The mystery of a hansom cab* and *The tax inspector*', *Westerly*, vol. 37, no. 4, pp. 37-45.
- Dooley, G 2005, 'Joanna Murray-Smith: *Sunnyside*', *Writer's Radio*, Radio Adelaide, viewed 23 March 2010, <http://hdl.handle.net/2328/909>
- Dovey, K 2005, 'The silent complicity of architecture', in J Hillier, & E Rooksby (eds), *Habitus: a sense of place*, 2nd edn, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot, Hants, England.
- Dovey, K 1994, 'Dreams on display: suburban ideology in the model home', in S Ferber, C Healy & C McAuliffe (eds), *Beasts of suburbia: reinterpreting cultures in Australia suburbs*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria.
- Drewe, R 2005, *Grace*, Viking, Penguin Group Australia, Camberwell, Victoria.
- Dubois, J 2000, 'Pierre Bourdieu and literature', *SubStance*, vol. 93, pp. 84-102, (online Humanities International Complete).
- During, S 1994, 'Literature - nationalism's other? The case for revision', in HK Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and narration*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Duruz, J 1994, 'Romancing the suburbs', in K Gibson & S Watson (eds), *Metropolis now: planning and the urban in contemporary Australia*, Pluto Press, Leichhardt.
- Duwell, M 1996, 'Ages of reason: ethics, metaphor and the work of Jennifer Maiden', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 254-263, (online Australian Public Affairs).

Eagle, C 1984, 'Myth, mockery and expatriation – love/hate of Australia in George Johnston's *My brother Jack*', *Commonwealth*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 34-41.

Ericksen, R 1976, 'Mirrors and backward glances: some recent autobiographical novels', *Meanjin*, vol. 35 no. 3, pp. 330-333.

Esson, L 1973, *The time is not yet ripe*, Currency Methuen Drama, Sydney.

Ferber, S, Healy, C & McAuliffe, C (eds) 1994, *Beasts of suburbia: reinterpreting cultures in Australia suburbs*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria.

First Tuesday bookclub 2010, *Cloudstreet* by *Tim Winton*, ABC television transcript, 2 March, viewed 6 July 2010, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s2795575.htm>

Fiske, J, Hodge, B & Turner, G 1987, *Myths of Oz: reading Australian popular culture*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

Flanagan, M 2002, 'George Johnston and Charmian Clift: the journalist as writer, the writer as journalist', *Overland*, vol. 168, pp. 4-11, (online Australian Public Affairs).

Foucault, M 1991, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*, Penguin, London.

Friedman, J 2005, 'Place-making as a project? Habitus and migration in transnational cities', in J Hillier & E Rooksby (eds), *Habitus: a sense of place*, 2nd edn, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot, Hants, England.

Frith, S 1997, 'The suburban sensibility in British pop and rock', in R Silverstone (ed.), *Visions of Suburbia*, Routledge, London & New York.

Frost, L 1992, 'Suburbia and inner cities', in A Rutherford (ed.), *Populous places: Australian cities and towns*, Dangaroo Press, Sydney.

Gelder, K 2005, 'Plagued by hideous imaginings – the despondent worlds of contemporary Australian fiction', *Overland*, vol. 179, pp. 32-37, (online Australian Public Affairs).

Gelder, K & Salzman, P, 2009, *After the celebration: Australian fiction 1989–2007*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria.

Gelder, K & Salzman, P, 1989, *The new diversity: Australian fiction 1970–1988*, McPhee Gribble Publishers, Melbourne.

Gerster, R 1990, 'Gerrymander: the place of suburbia in Australian fiction', *Meanjin*, vol. 49 no. 3, pp. 565-575, (online Informit, Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).

Gilbert, A 1988, 'The roots of anti-suburbanism in Australia', in SL Goldberg & FB Smith (eds), *Australian cultural history*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Gleeson, B 2006, *Australian heartlands: making space for hope in the suburbs*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, Australia.

- Goodwin, AE 1973, 'Voyage and kaleidoscope in George Johnston's trilogy', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 6, pp. 143-151.
- Grenville, K 2005, *The secret river*, Text Publishing, Melbourne.
- Grossmith, G & Grossmith, W 1977, *Diary of a nobody*, J M Dent & Sons Ltd, London.
- Gunew, S 1994, 'Denaturalizing cultural nationalisms: multicultural readings of "Australia"', in HK Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and narration*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Gwyther, G 2008, 'Once were westies', in J Schultz (ed.), *Griffith Review 20: cities on the edge*, Griffith University, South Brisbane.
- Hall, S 1992, 'The question of cultural identity', in S Hall, D Held & T McGrew (eds), *Modernity and its futures*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Hancock, WK 1961, *Australia*, The Jacaranda Press, Brisbane.
- Hanrahan, B 1985, *The scent of eucalyptus*, Chatto and Windus, London.
- Hardy, T 1985, *Jude the obscure*, Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood, Victoria.
- Hartley, J 1997, 'The sexualisation of suburbia', in R Silverstone (ed.), *Visions of Suburbia*, Routledge, London & New York.
- Hartnett, S 2002, *Of a boy*, Penguin Books, Camberwell, Victoria.
- Hassall, AJ 1994, *Dancing on hot macadam: Peter Carey's fiction*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.
- Hillier, J & Rooksby, E (eds) 2005, *Habitus: a sense of place*, 2nd edn, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot, Hants, England.
- Hirst, JB 1992, 'The pioneer legend', in G Whitlock & D Carter (eds), *Images of Australia*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.
- Hodge, B & Mishra, V 1990, *Dark side of the dream: Australian literature and the post-colonial mind*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney.
- Holden, R 1991, 'Lost, stolen or strayed: from the Australian babes in the woods to Azaria Chamberlain', *Voices*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 58-69.
- Hopkins, L 1993, 'Writing from the margins: representations of gender and class in Winton's work', in R Rossiter & L Jacobs (eds), *Reading Tim Winton*, Angus and Robertson, Pymble, NSW.
- Horne, D 1971, *The lucky country*, 3rd edn, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Victoria.
- Hoskins, I 1994, 'Constructing time and space in the garden suburb', in S Ferber, C Healy & C McAuliffe (eds), *Beasts of suburbia: reinterpreting cultures in Australia suburbs*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria.

- Huggan, G 1996, *Peter Carey*, Oxford University Press Australia, Melbourne.
- Indyk, I 1993, *David Malouf*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Jenkins, R 1992, *Pierre Bourdieu*, Routledge, London.
- Johnson, L 1997, 'Western Sydney and the desire for home', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 32 no. 2, pp. 115-128, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Johnson, G & Tiffin, C, 1983, 'The evolution of George Johnston's David Meredith', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 162-170.
- Johnston, G 2001, *Clean straw for nothing/A cartload of clay*, A&R Classics/HarperCollins Publishers, Australia.
- Johnston, G 2001, *My brother Jack*, A&R Classics/HarperCollins Publishers, Australia.
- Jurca, C 2001, *White diaspora: the suburb and the twentieth century American novel*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford.
- Kelen, C 2006, 'Who am I? How is my soul stirred?', *Social Semiotics*, vol. 16 no. 4, pp. 553-571, (online Academic Search Complete).
- King, R 1996, *Kindling does for firewood*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW.
- Kinnane, G 1986, *George Johnston: a biography*, Nelson Publishers, Melbourne.
- Kinnane, G 1998, 'Shopping at last!: history, fiction and the anti-suburban tradition', in A McCann (ed.), *Writing the everyday: Australian literature and the limits of suburbia*, *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 41-55, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Kirby, S 1987, 'Homosocial desire and homosexual panic in the fiction of David Malouf and Frank Moorhouse', *Meanjin*, vol. 46 no. 3, pp. 385-393, (online Informit, Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).
- Knight, S 1990, *The selling of the Australian mind: from first fleet to third Mercedes*, William Heinemann Australia, Port Melbourne, Victoria.
- Kociumbas, J 2001, 'Lost in the bush: searching for the Australian child', *History of Education Review*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 37-54, (Australian Public Affairs).
- Koval, R 2007, 'Steven Carroll's The time we have taken', *The Book Show*, ABC Radio National, 14 March, viewed 23 December 2009, [www.abc.net.au/rn/bookshow/stories/2007/1871302.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bookshow/stories/2007/1871302.htm)
- Kremmer, J 1999, *Pegasus in the suburbs*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW.
- Lake, M 1992, 'The politics of respectability', in G Whitlock & D Carter (eds), *Images of Australia*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.
- Lamb, K 1992, *Peter Carey: the genesis of fame*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney.

- Lane, J 2000, *Pierre Bourdieu: a critical introduction*, Pluto Press, London.
- Larsson, C 2005, 'Cross references: allusions to Christian traditions in Peter Carey's fiction', in A Gaile (ed.), *Fabulating beauty: perspectives on the fiction of Peter Carey*, Rodopi, Amsterdam/New York.
- Lawrence, D H 1960, *Kangaroo*, William Heinemann Ltd, London.
- Lawson, H 1901, 'The babies in the bush', in *Joe Wilson and his mates*, viewed 9 February 2011, <http://freeread.com.au/ebooks/e00025.txt>
- Leer, M 1985, 'At the edge: geography and the imagination in the work of David Malouf', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 3-21, (online AustLit).
- Lindsay, E 1994, 'Women rising: spirituality in the writings of Barbara Hanrahan', *Kunapipi*, vol.16, no. 1, pp. 13-21.
- Lohrey, A 1996, *Camille's bread*, Angus & Roberston, Pymble, NSW.
- Lucashenko, M 1997, *Steam pigs*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.
- Mackay, H 2005, 'Understanding Australia – suburbia', *Australia Now*, ABC Radio transcripts, viewed 4 October 2005, [www.radioaustralia.net.au/australia/now/program\\_5.htm](http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/australia/now/program_5.htm)
- Mackay, H 2002, *Winter close*, Hodder Headline Australia, Sydney.
- Maiden, J 1994, 'Still alive', *Meanjin*, vol. 53, no. 3, pp. 553-559, (online Informit, Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).
- Maiden, J 1999, 'Magic, power, guilt and deep and sincere regrets', *Overland*, vol. 157, pp. 68-73, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Maiden, J 2002, 'George and Clare do New York', *Overland*, vol. 167, pp. 39-42, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Maiden, J 1990, *Play with knives*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney.
- Maiden, J 1998, 'The suburban problem of evil', in A McCann (ed.), *Writing the everyday: Australian literature and the limits of suburbia*, *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 115-125, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Maiden, J 2005, 'In conversation with Catherine Kenneally', *Jacket Magazine* 27, viewed 8 February 2011, <http://jacketmagazine.com/27/maiden-k.html>
- Malouf, D 1986, *12 Edmonstone Street*, Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood, Victoria.
- Malouf, D 1990, 'A first place: the mapping of the world', in J Tulip (ed.), *David Malouf: Johnno, short stories, poems, essays and interview*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.
- Malouf, D 2004, *Johnno*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Mares, FH 1964, 'Recent novels', *Southerly*, vol. 24, pp. 244-248.

Masgrau-Peya, E 2004, 'Towards a poetics of the "unhomed": the house in Katherine Mansfield's *Prelude* and Barbara Hanrahan's *The scent of eucalyptus*', *Antipodes*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 60-66, (online Australian Public Affairs).

Matthews, B 2001, 'Introduction', *My brother Jack*, A&R Classics/HarperCollins Publishers, Australia.

McCalman, J 1994, 'Suburbia from the sandpit', *Meanjin*, vol. 53, no. 3, pp. 548-553, (online Informit, Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).

McCann, A 1998, 'Introduction: subtopia, or the problem of suburbia', in A McCann (ed.), *Writing the everyday: Australian literature and the limits of suburbia*, *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. vii-x, (online Australian Public Affairs).

McCann, AL 2005, *Subtopia*, Vulgar Press, Carlton North, Victoria.

McDonald, D 2007, *Luck in the greater west*, ABC Books, Sydney.

McGirr, M 1997, 'Go home said the Fish: a study of Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*', in *Meanjin*, vol.56, no.1, pp. 56-66, (online Informit, Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).

McPhee, H 2010, 'Timid Minds', in *Meanjin*, vol. 69, no. 4, pp. 56-62, (online Informit, Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).

Mee, K 1994, 'Dressing up the suburbs: representations of western Sydney', in K Gibson & S Watson (eds), *Metropolis now: planning and the urban in contemporary Australia*, Pluto Press, Leichhardt.

Menzies, R 1942, 'The forgotten people', viewed 4 January 2007, <http://www.liberals.net/theforgottenpeople.htm>

Miels, Y 1993, 'Singing the great creator: the spiritual in Tim Winton's novels', in R Rossiter & L Jacobs (eds), *Reading Tim Winton*, Angus and Robertson, Pymble, NSW.

Mitchell, A 1981, 'Fiction', in L Kramer (ed.), *The Oxford history of Australian literature*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Moo, M 2004, *Glory this*, Local Consumption Publications, Australia.

Morgan, G n.d, 'A city of two tales: distinction, dispersal and dissociation in western Sydney', viewed 4 January 2007, [www.uws.edu.au/download.php?file\\_id=18509&filename=Morgan\\_Final.pdf&mimetype=application/pdf](http://www.uws.edu.au/download.php?file_id=18509&filename=Morgan_Final.pdf&mimetype=application/pdf)

Morrison, F 1999, 'Figures of the many and the one: genre and narrative method in Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*', *Sydney Studies in English*, vol. 25, pp. 133-151, (online Australia Public Affairs).

- Mott, J 1983, 'Interview with Barbara Hanrahan', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 38-46, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Muller, V 2008, 'Lost children and imaginary mothers in Sonya Hartnett's *Of a boy*', *Hecate*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 159-174, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Murphy, F 1993, 'That eye, the past: history and Tim Winton's fiction', in R Rossiter & L Jacobs (eds), *Reading Tim Winton*, Angus and Robertson, Pymble, NSW.
- Murray, S 2003, 'Tim Winton's "New tribalism": *Cloudstreet* and community', *Kunapipi*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 83-91.
- Murray-Smith, J 2005, *Sunnyside*, Viking, Penguin Group Australia, Camberwell, Victoria.
- Murrie, L 1998, 'Changing masculinities: disruption and anxiety in contemporary Australian writing', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 56, pp. 169-179, (online AustLit).
- Nairn, L 2009, 'Finding meaning in the mundane', in *Antipodes*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 94-95, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Office of the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, 2008, 'Australia's brain drain biggest on record', media release, 7 October, viewed 22 June 2010, <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08098.htm>
- O'Reilly, N 2008, 'Between the city and the bush: suburbia in the contemporary Australian novel', PhD thesis, Western Michigan University.
- O'Reilly, N & Vernay, J 2009, 'Terror Australis Incognita?: an introduction to fear in Australian literature and film', *Antipodes*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 5-9, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Phillips, AA 2010, 'The cultural cringe', *Meanjin*, vol. 69, no. 4, pp. 52-55, (online Informit, Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).
- Pierce, P 1982, 'David Malouf's fiction', *Meanjin*, vol. 41 no. 4, pp. 526-534, (online Informit, Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).
- Pierce, P 1999, *The country of lost children - an Australian anxiety*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York & Melbourne.
- Plumwood, V 2005, 'Belonging, naming and decolonisation', in J Hillier & E Rooksby (eds), *Habitus: a sense of place*, 2nd edn, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot, Hants, England.
- Powell, D 1993, *Out west: perceptions of Sydney's western suburbs*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, Australia.
- Ratcliffe, G 1998, 'Urban cannibals: Peter Carey's *The tax inspector*', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 57, pp. 184-193.

- Reay, D 2004, "It's all becoming a habitus": beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 431-444, (online SocINDEX with Full Text).
- Reekie, G 1992, 'Contesting Australia: feminism and histories of the nation', in G Whitlock & D Carter (eds), *Images of Australia*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.
- Richards, L 1990, *Nobody's home: dreams and realities in a new suburb*, Oxford University Press Australia, Melbourne.
- Rickard, J 2001, 'Imagining the unimaginable?', in *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 32, no. 116, pp. 128-131, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Rierner, A P 1991, 'Brutish and nasty', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 August, (online Factiva).
- Rombouts, A 1994, 'Admitting the intruder: a study of the uses of the gothic in five contemporary Australian novels', PhD thesis, The University of Queensland.
- Rooney, B 2007, 'Remembering inheritance: David Malouf and the literary cultivation of nation', in *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 90, pp. 65-75, (online Informit, Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).
- Rowse, T 1978, 'Heaven and a hills hoist: Australian critics on suburbia', *Meanjin*, vol. 37 no. 4, pp. 3-13, (online Informit, Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).
- RSPCA Western Australia n.d., *End live exports*, viewed 2 February 2011, [http://www.rspcawa.asn.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=140&Itemid=642](http://www.rspcawa.asn.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=140&Itemid=642)
- Sallis, E 1998, *Hiam*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, Australia.
- Salt, B 2001, *The big shift: welcome to the third Australian culture: the Bernard Salt report*, Hardie Grant Books, South Yarra, Victoria.
- Salt, B 2006, *The big picture: life, work and relationships in the 21st century*, Hardie Grant Books, Prahan, Victoria.
- Sayer-Jones, M 1988, *Little sister*, Allen & Unwin Australian Pty Ltd, North Sydney.
- Schaffer, K 1988, *Women and the bush: forces of desire in the Australian cultural tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Scheckter, J 1981, 'The lost child in Australian fiction', *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 61-72.
- Schultz, J 2008, 'Introduction: first define, then see and act', in J Schultz (ed.), *Griffith Review 19: Re-imagining Australia*, ABC Books, Sydney.
- Sibree, B 1991, 'Novel difficult to live with, difficult to write', *Canberra Times Magazine*, 27 July 1991, p. C7.

- Silverstone, R (ed.) 1997, *Visions of Suburbia*, Routledge, London & New York.
- Silvester, J 2003, 'Who stole Eloise?', *Age*, 5 July 2003, viewed 6 March 2011, [www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/07/04/1057179154768.html](http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/07/04/1057179154768.html)
- Simons, M 2005, 'Ties that bind', *Griffith Review 8: People Like Us*, pp. 6-10, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Smith, B 2008, *Australia's birthstain: the startling legacy of the convict era*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, Australia.
- Soring, D 2007, 'Specters of Berlin in A L McCann's *Subtopia* and Christos Tsiolkas's *Dead Europe*', *Antipodes*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 67-71, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- South Australian Police, 2006, 'Disappearance of the Beaumont children', media release, 25 January, viewed 9 February 2011, <http://www.sapolice.sa.gov.au/sapol/home/search.jsp?xcid=4955&type=and&rpp=10&rst=all&orderby=rank&daysold=&str=beaumont+children>
- Sowden, T 1994, 'Streets of Discontent', in S Ferber, C Healy & C McAuliffe (eds), *Beasts of suburbia: reinterpreting cultures in Australia suburbs*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria.
- Starke, R 2003, 'Of a boy by Sonya Hartnett', *Viewpoint*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 30-31, (online AustLit).
- Stewart, A 2010, *Barbara Hanrahan: a biography*, Wakefield Press, South Australia.
- Stretton, H 1970, *Ideas for Australian Cities*, The Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Sullivan, J 2002, 'The writing life', *Age*, 1 July 2002, viewed 6 March 2011 <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/202/07/01/1023864702090.html>
- Summers, A 1994, *Damned whores and God's police*, revised edn, Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood, Victoria.
- Sydney Morning Herald 'Twenty defining moments that shaped Sydney's way of eating', 2002 in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 June 2002, viewed 6 August 2011, <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/06/25/1023864572930.html>
- Sykes, A 1983, 'Barbara Hanrahan's novels', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 47-57.
- Taylor, A 1996, 'An interview with Tim Winton', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 373-377, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Thomas, S 1989, 'Writing the self: Barbarah Hanrahan's *The scent of eucalyptus*', *Kunapipi*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 53-66.

- Thompson, V 1996, 'You are what you eat: women, eating and identity in Kate Grenville's *Lilian's story* and Barbara Hanrahan's *The scent of eucalyptus*', *Ariel*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 129-137.
- Thurley, G 1974, 'My brother Jack: an Australian masterpiece?', *Ariel*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 61-80.
- Tilley, E 2002, 'Space, memory, and power in Australia: the case for no nation', paper presented at the *Australian & New Zealand Communication Association Conference*, July 10-12, Gold Coast, viewed 2 April 2008, <http://www.anzca.net/conferences/conference-papers/41-adam.html>
- Tilley, E 2009, 'The uses of fear: spatial politics in the Australian white-vanishing trope', in *Antipodes*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 33-41, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Torney, K 2005, *Babes in the bush: the making of an Australian image*, Curtin University Books/Freemantle Arts Centre Press, Freemantle.
- Tranter, D 2006, 'Becoming self-conscious: exploring habitus', paper presented at the *AARE conference*, December, University of Adelaide, viewed 2 April 2008, <http://www.aare.edu.au/06pap/tra06173.pdf>
- Tredinnick, D 2002, 'David Malouf: a confession', *Meanjin*, vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 165-169, (online Informit, Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).
- Tsolkias, C 1995, *Loaded*, Vintage/Random House, Milsons Point.
- Tulip, J (ed.) 1990, *David Malouf: Johnno, short stories, poems, essays and interview*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.
- Turnbull, S 2008, 'Mapping the vast suburban tundra: Australian comedy from Dame Edna to Kath and Kim', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 11, no. 15, pp. 15-32, (online SAGE).
- Turner, G 1986, *National fictions: literature, film and the construction of the Australian narrative*, Allen & Unwin Australia, North Sydney.
- Turner Hospital, J 2003, *North of nowhere, south of loss*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.
- van Loon, J 2007, 'Boom! Excursions in fantasy land', *Griffith Review 15: Divided Nation*, pp. 111-120, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Wacquant, L 1992, 'Toward a social praxeology: the structure and logic of Bourdieu's sociology', in P Bourdieu & L Wacquant, *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Wallace, C 2008, 'Clean, orderly and laminex coloured', in J Schultz (ed.), *Griffith Review 19: re-imagining Australia*, ABC Books, Sydney.
- Ward, R 1966, *The Australian legend*, 2nd edn, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

- Watson, S 1988, *Accommodating inequality: gender and housing*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney.
- Wetherell, R 2006, 'Subtopia or Sunnyside?', *Meanjin*, vol. 65 no. 2, pp. 174-180, (online Informit, Humanities and Social Sciences Collection).
- White, P 1996, *Riders in the chariot*, Vintage/Random House, London.
- White, R 1981, *Inventing Australia: images and identity 1688-1980*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- Willbanks, R 1997, 'Peter Carey on *The tax inspector* and *The unusual life of Tristan Smith*, a conversation with Ray Willbanks', in *Antipodes*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 11-16, (online Australian Public Affairs).
- Winton, T 1998, *Cloudstreet*, Penguin Group (Australia), Camberwell, Victoria.
- Winton, T 2002, *Dirt Music*, Picador, Sydney.
- Winton, T 2008, 'Aquifer', in *The turning*, Picador, Sydney.
- Woodcock, B 1996, *Peter Carey*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.
- Yunupingu, G 2008, 'Truth, tradition and tomorrow', in *Monthly*, no. 41, pp. 30-38.