

## PART ONE

### Introduction

In the process of researching and writing the introduction to this thesis on the representation of Chinese men in Australian fiction after the official end of the white Australia policy, I decided that it would be appropriate to frame the project between 1973 and 2000. The earliest of the novels I intended to examine was Christopher Koch's The Year of Living Dangerously, which was published in 1978. However 1973 was significant for being the year in which the white Australia policy was officially declared abandoned by the federal government, and the year should have been of some symbolic significance. I had begun the thesis with the assumption that, despite the end of the white Australia policy, representations of Chinese men in Australian fiction continued to be affected by what I wanted to call spatial encumbrances of marginalisation, such as exclusion, dislocation, confinement and exile, and that this was happening regardless of the official promotion of multiculturalism. I had thought that the concept of space would also be an appropriate theoretical framing device given that two major spatial practices of domination had historically shaped and continued to shape the national imaginary of Australia since colonisation; these practices being the dispossession of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands when colonised by the British, and the white Australia policy's exclusion of Asian, and in particular Chinese, immigrants. However the more I examined the circumstances surrounding the declared demise of the white Australia policy, the more the supposed turning point of 1973 seemed to become arbitrary. Strangely, 1973 did not appear to register as having any significant importance to the few other researchers and critics examining Asian Australian representations in literature around this period.

In 2002 at the commencement of this study relatively little had been specifically examined in the way of representations of Chinese men in recent Australian fiction. In 2003 Tseen-Ling Khoo, in her study Banana Bending: Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian Literatures, was able to acknowledge that "Asian male identity and sexuality have been arguably the most under-represented areas in diasporic Chinese and Japanese studies... That said, diasporic Asian masculinity studies is currently an area with a fast-

growing profile” (118). Two years after Khoo’s pronouncement, Kam Louie was still able to state, “The number of studies of Chinese Australian masculinity can be counted on the fingers of one hand” (“Decentring” 191)<sup>1</sup>. It is within this context of critical under-representation that this thesis examines the depiction of Chinese men in Australian fiction written after the official end of the white Australia policy in 1973. To reiterate, the thesis seeks to examine in this literature a particular manner of representation that places the Chinese man at the margins. This spatialising effect produces a distance between dominant and central white positions and marginalised male Chinese positions. Marginalisation of the Chinese man, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, comes in the forms of orientalising, fetishising, abjection, incorporative confusion and absence, positional appropriations, and movement inhibitions<sup>2</sup>.

Around the mid-1990s two Australian studies were completed that focused on representations of Chinese in Australian literature. One of these is Dai Yin’s 1994 PhD thesis “The Representations of Chinese People in Australian Literature”; the other is Ouyang Yu’s PhD thesis “Representing the Other: The Chinese in Australian Fiction, 1888-1988”<sup>3</sup>. Dai’s and Ouyang’s studies look broadly over the period since colonisation and examine representations of Chinese men and women. Both studies incorporate Edward Said’s theorisation of orientalism, which, according to Said, is “the corporate institution for dealing with the orient — dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (*Orientalism* 3). Orientalism, argues Said, is a way to impose a European cultural hegemony over the orient, utilising “a collective notion identifying ‘us’ Europeans as against all ‘those’ non-Europeans” (7) through such constructions as difference, exoticism, and stereotypes. Orientalism also deploys a strategic “flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him [or her] the relative upper hand” (*Orientalism* 7, emphasis in the original). Said’s theorisation of orientalism and the idea of flexible positionality is of particular interest in that positionality also constructs the distance between the European self and the Chinese other.

Unlike the broader works of Dai Yin and Ouyang Yu, my focus is on representations of Chinese men and their meanings in eight specific texts written by seven Australian authors between 1973 and 2000. While there has been a dearth of

critical studies of Chinese Australian masculinity, there is not necessarily an abundance of similar studies of Chinese or Asian Australian femininity. Nevertheless the few studies that are available are conscious of the spatial dimensions bearing on Asian-Australian gendered subjects. In her introduction to “Asian-Australian Women's Writing: Literary Re-Orientations”, Shirley Tucker quotes Wenche Ommundsen and Hazel Rowley, saying that “cultural distance is as much a feature of life in Australia as it is in our relationship to the rest of the world” (1). For Tucker “[b]ecause Asian-Australian women write from particular (and in terms of Australian literature, predetermined) cultural and gendered locations” she considers their writing as a “relocation and repositioning that necessarily engages with dominant Australian discourses of nationalism, ethnicity and gender” (1).

In Olivia Khoo's PhD dissertation, “The Chinese Exotic: Con-temporary Visibilities of Diasporic Femininity”, the Chinese exotic is a specifically feminine and “new mode of representation resulting from the emergent diasporic Chinese modernities in the Asia Pacific region” (1). While Khoo's dissertation is not solely focused on Australia it is significant to note that according to Khoo: “Women are the carriers of tradition, culture, as well as disease. It is the feminine that spreads, reproduces, multiplies, and procreates. Hence the [Chinese] feminine travels as the exotic” (39). Khoo perceives the Chinese exotic as representing an emergent disruption of global inequalities that can be differentiated from older colonialist or imperialist exoticism “in that it conceives of femininity/women, not as the oppressed, but as forming part of the new visibility of Asia, connected with the region's economic rise and emergent modernities” (10). What is presently exotic is not old geographic China but the idea of a new China/Asia which is cosmopolitan, increasingly wealthy, modern and technologically astute. Similarly, Khoo states, “What is exoticised about new images of Chinese femininity are precisely these things” (10). Although recognising that such formulations shouldn't deny the continuing oppressions against Chinese women, Khoo argues that “the Chinese exotic consists of both subject and object positions, whereas the old exoticism consisted only of object positions” (10). The Chinese exotic thus enables the reversing of positions of gaze and power.

Rather than perceiving the Chinese male through the movement only of exoticism, I argue that recent representations of Chinese men are characterised by a far greater degree of ambivalence in terms of the space Chinese men are seen to occupy. In contrasting the differences between representations of Chinese women and men, Dai Yin

states, “Australian texts tend to infuse some very attractive attributes into the images of Chinese women. These qualities, embodied in the images of ‘feminine sexuality’, classify Chinese women and Chinese men on different levels. Chinese females almost seem to belong to another ‘race’, superior to their countrymen” (375). In contrast to the appealing individual Chinese female images, Dai Yin says Chinese males tend to have a greater range of types — from those bearing a degree of criminality, the cowardly and servile, through to those of “various kinds of Oriental eccentricity, strangeness” (378). The exceptions to these negative images of individual Chinese men are what Dai calls the “friendly Chow”, such as Henry Lawson’s eponymous Ah Soon, who is honest, helpful and obliging (378). On the other hand Dai observes that “Chinese images represented collectively are invariably those of males and they always appear hostile” (378). Dai attributes the image of collective Chinese male hostility to “an expression of fear since the idea of numerical strength imbued in this combination suggests the idea of a powerful threat” (378). Historically the fear of this collective numerical superiority, whether of gold miners, cheap labour or contaminating cultural influences, no doubt played a crucial role in the enactment of the white Australia policy.

The white Australia policy was implemented by the Australian federal parliament in the guise of the Immigration Restriction Act, 1901. The motivations for a white Australia policy were, as Gwenda Tavan states, “the desire of Australians to build a strong and prosperous society founded upon the principles of racial and cultural homogeneity” (Long 11). Yet, as Tavan notes, “the dismantling of the policy does not mean that Asian immigration has ceased to be controversial” (1)<sup>4</sup>. Nor, in reality, has the declaration of the policy’s end, even after 30 years, convinced some critics that the policy has truly been buried. In recent years the plight of Asian refugees and asylum seekers in Australia has caused academic Sean Brawley to quip, “Earlier reports of the demise of the white Australia policy were premature” (cited in Tavan 2). Don McMaster, in Asylum Seekers: Australia’s Response to Refugees, has also noted the differential treatment received by European refugees from Kosovo and Chinese boat people in early 1999 at the hands of the Australian government and the media. Where the former group were feted and physically free, the latter were vilified and suffered mandatory detention (2).

In their essay “Multiculturalism in Crisis” Ien Ang and Jon Stratton have argued that from its beginnings the white Australia policy managed to remove race from the minds of ordinary white Australians. “Race”, argue Ang and Stratton, “was elided in

daily life: it was the ‘absent centre’ which made it possible to imagine the national community as virtually completely white, where the very issue of ‘race’ could be relegated to the realm of the outside world, far removed from the national domestic sphere” (101). A conspicuous aspect of Ang and Stratton’s arguments is their contention that since the white Australia policy’s demise, multiculturalism, with its emphasis on cultural diversity, has been responsible for the continued repression of the race issue, which in turn has led to the “possibility for the conservative renovation of racializing discourses as an aspect of a renewed emphasis on assimilation and on a ‘mainstream culture’ whose whiteness is unspoken but undeniable” (111). As Ang and Stratton argue,

Given that “race” has been so formative to the Australian national imaginary, it cannot be erased from that imaginary simply by making it disappear from the textual surface of respectable discourse... for all of the state’s efforts to re-imagine the nation in the image of a non-racial paradise of “cultural diversity”, the trace of “race” continues to lead a subterranean life which remains effective in people’s everyday understandings of what’s happening in their country. (107)

It is questionable whether race ever disappeared from the “textual surface” of respectable discourse — either during the years of the white Australia policy or in the era of multiculturalism. My contention is that race never disappeared from the textual surface of either respectable or disreputable discourse; that race leads not only a subterranean existence but also a very conspicuous public one. Race is palpable in everyday politics, in the media, and beyond the text to the street, and in many forms of cultural production. While I do not wish to misrepresent Ang and Stratton by too literal an interpretation of their statements, the presence of race is made permanent and institutionally regulated by such Acts as the federal Racial Discrimination Act, 1975 and the Racial Hatred Act, 1995. These Acts do not amount to a repression of race but rather in their own specific wordings outline a very flexible and attenuated boundary for racial discourse that is not easily transgressed<sup>5</sup>.

It is doubtful that the effect of the white Australia policy in implementing racial exclusion meant a concomitant exclusion of racial discourse. What is of significance is the contention that the white Australia policy and multiculturalism together have made race an issue either to be taken for granted as in the former case or, as in the case of multiculturalism, as Ang and Stratton argue, the mistaken “evidence that the notion of

‘white Australia’ is no longer current in the national imaginary, as if the adoption of multiculturalism were by definition an act of anti-racism” (104).

Notwithstanding official multiculturalism, and given Ang and Stratton’s contention that the notion of white Australia is still very much a part of the national imaginary, what is the importance of such a resilient national imaginary that invests so much in an idealised racist collective vision? One can imagine that there are still political purposes to be served by the distinctions of “us” and “them”. The term “national imaginary” has been described by Annette Hamilton as “the means by which contemporary social orders are able to produce not merely images of themselves but images of themselves against others” (16). Hamilton’s use of the term derives in part from Benedict Anderson’s idea of the nation as an “imagined political community”. The nation, according to Anderson, is “imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (*Imagined* 6). Hamilton also invokes in her idea of the national imaginary Lacan’s schema of the imaginary, which occurs within the space of the mirror-relationship when the child first sees itself in the mirror but mistakes it for another. Hamilton therefore says that imaginary relations, and in this case the national imaginary, “at the social, collective level can thus be seen as ourselves looking at ourselves while we think we see others. Taken a step further, it may be precisely the split-off part of the self, the unrecognised part, which is seen in the Other” (16).

When the alienable parts of the self have accrued to the other, what might change the national imaginary in the transition from white Australia to multicultural Australia — presuming multicultural diversity is broadly desirable and viable? The implication of Ang and Stratton’s arguments in releasing/encouraging race from its supposed repression doesn’t suggest an easy transition. At the basis of Ang and Stratton’s arguments is that multiculturalism has proven to be a weak and ineffective counter-discourse to the “conservative renovation of racializing discourses”. Weak in the sense that multiculturalism helps maintain the status quo of a central “mainstream Anglo-Celtic” culture, and a “tolerated” marginal cultural diversity. Moreover, ethnic cultural diversity is never permitted to challenge or change either “mainstream” culture or its purported values since the very idea of multiculturalism is that it should maintain “social harmony” rather than encourage the contesting of ideologies. Thus “mainstream” Australian culture will continue to maintain its own “flexible positional superiority”

against tolerated, “minority” cultures. Should an assertive discourse of multiculturalism seek to counter conservative racialising discourses, then it would seem that the language of conflict must be introduced — even if this is at the cost of disrupting “social harmony” by claiming the right to participate in wider progressive discourses of change. It should be argued that Australians of all backgrounds have a right to affect and contest the “core” values of the society; that ethnic and migrant backgrounds are not a mandatory disqualification for social and political activism; that the designated core values of the nation, if they exist, are not immutable and unchallengeable — whatever they may be.

Perhaps in some ways the abandonment of the white Australia policy has gone broadly unnoticed or simply has not been worth registering. Among studies such as those that include Dai Yin’s, the end of the white Australia policy doesn’t rate a mention and 1973 certainly doesn’t delineate the beginning of a change in literary representations of Chinese. For Dai Yin a more important temporal divide occurs in the 1950s in the period of decolonisation in Asia, and the shifting from a derivative dominant European discourse including orientalism to a more specifically Australian discourse constructed around “the awareness that Australia is not Europe and that Australia can be understood as being culturally located somewhere between or beyond the east and the west” (434).

Similarly, in former diplomat Alison Broinowski’s The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia (1991), mention of the demise of the white Australia policy in 1973 merits little attention and does not mark in any sense a pivotal moment in history for either Australia’s national imaginary or its changing relations with Asian countries<sup>6</sup>. Although her book chapters are structured around specific dates, her chapter “On the Road: 1968 to 1991” indicates an outward movement of Australians towards and across Asia, not one of looking at either Asia or Asians within Australia. For Broinowski the earlier part of this period is marked by Australians feeling disaffected and disillusioned with Australian involvement in the Vietnam War, although Broinowski’s choice of 1968 seems to gesture as much towards student, progressive and left-wing socio-political movements throughout Europe, Japan, and the United States. According to Broinowski, between 1965 and 1985 more than fifty Australian novels were set in Asian and Pacific countries; these novels she contends “reassessed and mostly rejected the images of the past” (Yellow 176). Broinowski lists six interlinked reasons for this publishing outpouring: “The withdrawal of Britain from east of Suez; prosperity; better education; more contact with Asia, through Asian students, migration, trade, travel, and the media;

the end of the Vietnam War; and the restoration of relations with China” (176). Asia, observes Broinowski, became in the wake of a real and perceived decline in British and American influence in the region “an untrodden beach for Australian Crusoes, theirs until the next wave broke... a place where Australians could stop cringing or snarling at the West” (176). Asia, in the seeming absence of other white Europeans, was suddenly somewhere spacious for Australians to go, explore, enjoy, or help. Among this group of novels is Robert Macklin’s The Paper Castle (1977), in which liberalising Asian immigration to Australia becomes the political cause of its central politician protagonist. The Paper Castle, set in the mid-1970s with its fictitious political parties and leaders still agonising over whether to allow Asian immigration, seems either an ill-timed or ill-conceived novel given its publication four years after the end of the white Australia policy. If Broinowski pays little attention to the end of the white Australia policy then The Paper Castle perhaps exemplifies just how inconsequential the end of the policy was.

In reference to Ouyang Yu’s Representing the Other, Part Five of his study covers the period of 1973 to 1988. Ouyang argues that from the late 1960s, Australia witnessed several significant changes on its political stage, which were “in 1968 the abolition of the ‘white Australia policy’” (225), secondly in December 1972 the formal establishment of diplomatic ties between Australia and China, and finally the adoption of multiculturalism as official Australian policy “making it clear that Australia had walked out of the shadow of ‘white Australia’, and shaken off its colonialist and racist fetters” (225). Ouyang’s choice of 1968 as the end of the white Australia policy seems idiosyncratic, but it is clear that for Ouyang 1973 is about the beginning of formal relations between the governments of China and Australia and not the breakthrough of formally abandoning the white Australia policy.

Thus it seems that marking out 1973 as the end of the white Australia policy is after all of little significance in reshaping white Australian perceptions of Asia and Asians, certainly not significant in reshaping the national imaginary. According to Gwenda Tavan this almost silent passing into oblivion of the white Australia policy is one of the main reasons why Australian attitudes towards Asian immigration have remained controversial. Tavan believes the policy was dismantled slowly and bureaucratically after the Second World War and up to 1973<sup>7</sup>, marked along the way by intermittent reforms and the easing of restrictions. To quote her at length:



The power and longevity of White Australia rested largely on the deep emotional investment successive generations made in it from the late nineteenth century onwards, viewing it as a positive, morally imbued, and commonsense affirmation of national identity and social organisation. Political leaders had contributed to this outlook by refusing to challenge the policy openly, and by relying on diplomatic clichés to fend off criticism both within Australia and in the Asia region. Even as the policy was gradually being liberalised during the 1950s and 1960s, the “softly, softly” approach adopted by bureaucrats and governments deprived Australians of an opportunity to confront once and for all the inevitability of change. (206-207)

In effect the official script of the national imaginary had been rewritten without adequate preparation on the part of the Australian population as a whole. This mostly silent, then perceived as abrupt, change in immigration policy deprived white Australians of the chance to maturely confront the legacies of racism with the benefit of presumably persuasive and rational public debate to prepare the majority of Australians for social change. Tavan’s arguments are in this respect supportive of Ang and Stratton’s contention that race was repressed into a subterranean existence.

However, what is of greater significance is the repression of the historical practice and record of colonisation, indigenous dispossession, the years of exclusion of Asian immigrants, and the later ambivalent inclusion of ethnic minority groups through multiculturalism in order to maintain an illusion of exemplary social cohesiveness. While many non-indigenous Australians may now be willing to admit the historical fact of indigenous dispossession, few, such as Pauline Hanson<sup>8</sup>, want to be held accountable for past practices, and not wanting to be accountable they would especially rather not be made to remember them. The forgetting of such practices of indigenous dispossession and racial exclusion, more than simply the desire to keep something already well known concealed, has a spatial quality, which is particularly germane to the themes of exclusion in this thesis. Freud says, “The essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious” (“Repression” 147). In the consciousness of some non-indigenous Australians, the “something turned away” is not race itself but the insistent reminders of colonisation, and Asian exclusion. Nevertheless in the attempted repression of Aboriginal prior possession of land, the embodied figure of the repressed has a way of making its way back into consciousness and conscience. As Michel de Certeau states,

There is an “uncanniness” about this past that a present occupant has expelled (or thinks it has) in an effort to take its place. The dead haunt the living... what was excluded re-infiltrates the place of its origins — now the present’s clean... place. It resurfaces, it troubles, it turns the present’s feeling of being “at home” into an illusion, it lurks... within the walls of the residence, and, behind the back of the owner (the ego), or over its objects, it inscribes there the law of the other. (Heterologies 3-4).

In this thesis while recognising the part that repression may play in everyday negotiations between indigenous and non-indigenous communities, the possibility that the return of the repressed appears in a different guise leads me to commence an examination of the perverse — the appearance of fetishes and stereotypes themselves as mechanisms of repression, devices that ambivalently negate absences, which in a broad sense affects dominant literary apprehensions of minorities such as Chinese men.

In Part One of this thesis I examine the works of seven authors, all of whom are to some degree award winning and critically acclaimed novelists in Australia. The chapters are organised in a way that examine specific aspects of spatialised encumbrances that affect the Chinese man and that ultimately constitute all forms of exclusion. The majority of the authors are either Australian born or of Anglo-Celtic background. They are in a sense an established generation of writers who lived a significant portion of their lives during the period of the white Australia policy. There are two Chinese-Australian authors, Brian Castro and Hsu-Ming Teo. Both came to Australia at a young age. Castro arrived in Australia in 1960 at the age of ten. Teo arrived in Australia in 1977 from Malaysia as a seven-year old and is the only writer among this group not to have lived in Australia during the period of the white Australia policy. The works of Castro and Teo are included not as a presumed counterbalance to the other works; rather when examined they tend to show how much representations of Chinese men reflect a condition indicative of their uncertainty in inhabiting and moving across space that still bears structures of explicit white domination.

In Chapter One I examine Kate Grenville’s The Idea of Perfection (1999), Peter Carey’s Illywhacker (1985) and Murray Bail’s Eucalyptus (1998), which fetishise the Chinese man in order to conceal the absence of the indigenous figure. A common if seemingly peculiar aspect of these works are their stories of collecting, in private and

public spaces and places, on the farm and in the museum, and how these collecting impulses of white protagonists are implicated in historical but ambivalent acts of selective forgetting and remembering. In these stories the representation of one racial figure, the Chinese man, hides another racial figure in the space of cultural display and collection. I will argue that the persistent representations of the Chinese man as a racial stereotype and fetish is a form of ambivalence that both acknowledges and disavows the absence of the figure of the Aboriginal person from the visual field, as if the two can neither appear together nor be spoken of together. I suggest that the motif of the collection is related to a fear of losing the positional power to control history and cultural identity, which relates to control of space and possession of a central place in the aftermath of the demise of the white Australia policy. The fact that fetishism in these works is focussed upon the Chinese man configures racial fetishism as also gendered within these specific contexts. One racialised figure hides another, but in this apparently post white Australia policy era, it is important that the Chinese male figure be marginally more visible than the more threatening, disruptive indigenous figure, since a greater and broader confrontation exists between historical Aboriginal claims and white interests.

In Chapter Two I examine Christopher Koch's The Year of Living Dangerously (1978) to show the ambivalence of the attempt to incorporate the Chinese man into the white community. In The Year of Living Dangerously we find, in the carnivalesque theatre of postcolonial Indonesia, verging upon carnage, the bodily grotesque figure of dwarfish Chinese Australian Billy Kwan. I argue that Billy Kwan's summary expulsion from the coterie of white foreign journalists in the Wayang club produces what Anne Anlin Cheng in her study The Melancholy of Race (2001) calls racial melancholy, and which informs us of the disruption to social cohesion that accompanies the repetitive attempts at incorporating into white Australian society the seemingly unassimilable other — the Chinese man who tragically attempts to defy the carnivalesque logic and purpose of degrading by reaching above where he belongs.

Hsu-Ming Teo's Love and Vertigo (2000) is about gender conflict played out within a spatial narrative of ascribed east and west cultural positions. Chapter Three examines Teo's steady reproduction of an orientalist cultural and geographical discourse that situates the "west" as a receptively female friendly space for Chinese women and the "east" as a pathologically brutal and patriarchal space from which the Chinese woman is desperate to escape. Under the oppressiveness of Chinese diasporic patriarchy

in Singapore and Malaysia the Chinese women in Teo's text carry and transmit an east/west discourse in which a western education and a western man are their principal means of escaping stifling gender subordination. Western cultural space, such as Australia, fulfils the role of desired utopian space, offering freedom and self-fulfilment, while abjecting the violent patriarchal regimes of Chinese men in Southeast Asia. In Love and Vertigo the mistake that the Chinese woman makes is in insisting that the Chinese man follow her cultural border crossing to the west, thereby perpetuating her gender subordination and her disillusionment with western space. While the Chinese man is reluctantly drawn into western space by his female counterpart, it is not simply his difficulty in adjusting to western culture, since for the most part he is already inculcated with its economic and material values, rather it is the disconcerting observation that his female partner repudiates him by so readily embracing all that is culturally western.

Chapter Four examines two of Brian Castro's novels Birds of Passage (1983) and After China (1992). Both novels reveal aspects of fraught cultural crossings between China and Australia for their principal male Chinese characters. I situate Castro's novels within debates regarding specific forms of Chinese masculinities, such as Kam Louie's proposition of wen-wu (cultural attainment-martial valour) masculinity, which Louie claims accords a greater degree of appreciation for the "soft, cerebral" male than in the west<sup>9</sup>. In addition to wen-wu masculinity I discuss Wang Yuejin's argument that Chinese masculinity is characterised by "lack"<sup>10</sup>. Chinese men, asserts Wang, have a disposition towards crude, rash and unrefined behaviour in a manner commensurate with a Bakhtinian carnivalesque. Chinese men's lack is thus characterised not physiologically or in terms of power but through the lack of feminine refinement. However this feminine refinement becomes appropriated and valorised by men of high social position in the form of a femininity complex. In opposition to this view of lack, when the current position of women vis-à-vis men appears to be stronger than at any other time in China's past, Zhong Xueping considers that contemporary Chinese men suffer a marginality complex which engages them in a search for greater potency<sup>11</sup>. This condition of marginality and lack of potency I argue is at the core of Castro's male characters in their questing through western terrain.

In Birds of Passage, China is established as both an emasculated and feminised space through the decay of traditional patriarchy and the masculine intrusion of western colonialism. Rather than the Chinese woman, in Birds of Passage, it is the Chinese man

who needs to escape the claustrophobic confines of feminised Chinese space for the rough and masculine space of Australian goldfields in order to prove his masculinity. In After China the redemption of a strong Chinese masculinity is thematically repeated and the central Chinese male character escapes the cultural claustrophobia of communist Chinese space inflected by several thousand years of practiced “constriction”. Rather than a generalised feminised space, Castro presents a China that by long tradition emasculates the Chinese male. By escaping the confinement of China the Chinese man is faced with unfamiliar open western space, and suffers a fear of “unfilled space”. I discuss the spatial phobia that afflicts the Chinese man in terms of agoraphobia, which Paul Carter in Repressed Spaces has defined as a movement inhibition. I argue this movement inhibition is not the fear of underlying racial hostility in open space, but the fear caused by the unpredictability of this hostility — whether hostility will remain unexpressed or manifest itself through violence. In After China hostile Australian space is mitigated by the presence of a white woman who metaphorically reorientates and transports the Chinese man across the borders of exclusion into a proper place in Australian community.

The final chapter of the thesis deals with Alex Miller’s The Ancestor Game (1992), which reveals the ambivalent practices of representation — in terms of what Sneja Gunew defines as either depiction or delegation, in terms of “speaking for” (“Playing” 87). Miller’s story of friendship between a European and a Chinese man attempts to place and depict the Chinese man into a positive position within Australian history. Miller has declared that The Ancestor Game was written for a friend in order to validate him (Ryle 1). However representation, in the form of delegation most often in the political sense, is also a practice in the absence of the one spoken for, and as James Moy says, is an invitation to political manipulation (cited in Metzger 642). Despite Miller’s intentions of “speaking for” the Chinese man, I argue that it is also possible to detect how ambivalent, limited and marginal this representation in the form of Lang Tzu Feng is across the text, and how it is in turn predominantly a practice of absenting the other for the purpose of placing the European man within a commensurable minority position, as coloniser, but also self-styled refugee and exile. Thus Miller’s narrative encompasses Aboriginal and non-indigenous identities in a common condition of cultural exile and dislocation. In The Ancestor Game loss of space and place is a contemporary condition shared by all individuals regardless of race and cultural

identification. This is what helps at last to incorporate the Chinese man into the body of the Australian community, and yet he has very little presence in such a story.

Part Two of this thesis comprises a creative work that expands and seeks to engage with the literary works examined and the critical theories brought to bear upon them. The research and creative components explore the regime of spatial practices that place or displace the Chinese male figure in Australian fiction. The research component establishes, through analytical readings of the selected texts, the confusion of incorporating the Chinese man into Australian society, lurching between acceptance and exclusion; the creative component produces what might be the response of the Chinese male figure to collective exclusion, inclusion, or individual isolation when perceived as everyday intersections and negotiations, occurring predictably and unpredictably, randomly and constant.

Prescriptions and proscriptions upon those who are broadly classified as migrant or multicultural authors appear more numerous than those who either belong to the mainstream or who have by reputation managed to enter the mainstream. Wenche Ommundsen has observed that “multicultural writers have been attacked on a number of fronts: for being insufficiently literate, for not being representative... for not doing what they in most cases never set out to do, that is, provide ethnic minorities with a voice to air the social and political concerns of the group” (149). One can also add to this the need to be literary as opposed to simply being literate, heed the demands of authenticity, and not “sell out” — which is a kind of remaining authentic and true to the cause of the minority community from which one writes or is positioned in. On the other hand, it might be good to avoid the multicultural ethnic tag completely, which in turn is a kind of selling out.

In her PhD thesis “Banana Bending”, Tseen-Ling Khoo argues, “In order to constitute Asian-Canadian and Asian-Australian literatures, writers and critics need to position their work within layers of nation, community, and the gendered self. Considering these layers enables the thorough interrogation of the politics of racialisation and exclusion in existing national literatures” (1)<sup>12</sup>. Khoo’s advice for multicultural writers clearly embraces a political dimension and imperative — a cultural creative duty. But what is the duty for an Asian Australian writer who writes romance novels for the Mills & Boon market? The answer might not be as straightforward as first imagined. Why should it be a critical issue if an Asian Australian writer chooses to step away from social and political obligations, when no such obligations are placed upon the

mainstream Anglo-Celtic Australian writer? Are Asian Australian writers contingent upon their genres of writing, or vice versa?

A self-conscious creative heed to any prescriptions of Asian Australian writing might risk writing propaganda. If I have integrated “layers of nation, community, and the gendered self” into the story, it occurred only through following my own writing instincts and inclinations. On the other hand, these writing instincts and inclinations have been shaped by experiences of nation, community and gender, not forgetting class and history, that have influenced me as a Chinese Australian male born in Australia in the mid-1950s.

In 1972 the electoral voting age was twenty-one and I was too young to vote in the federal election won by the Australian Labor Party led by Gough Whitlam. I do recollect post-election announcements regarding the establishment of diplomatic ties with China and the abandonment of the White Australia policy. These were significant events, since both China and Australia seemed simultaneously to have opened up somewhat to the rest of the world.

Although for chronological and spatial reasons I have not included an analysis of Ouyang Yu’s novel The Eastern Slope Chronicle (2002)<sup>13</sup>, I would have liked to have emulated Ouyang Yu with an equally idiosyncratic placement of the end of the White Australia policy to an earlier time. A prolific writer notable for directness, anger, humour and verve, in Australian literature, Ouyang Yu has managed to make an abrasive mark on the literary landscape. For example, at the end of The Eastern Slope Chronicle a character proclaims, “I shall leave Australia, a hopeless country, a country that is designed for our unhappiness. I am sick of it. I just want to go back to China” (390). In a more playful mood he writes:

“Then why did you come back? Why the fuck did you want to find a job in China? Why didn’t you go back and live in your stinking paradise of an Australia until you die and stink and die a thousand deaths? Why? Why? Why?” The headman completely lost his temper and shouted at me at the top of his voice.

The two guards came to me and pushed me out as I thought, “Well said!” (336)<sup>14</sup>

I titled the creative component of this thesis The Migration of Cuckoos because channel-billed cuckoos arrive down along the east coast of Australia every spring and

stay for the summer. It is a bird that migrates from New Guinea and Southeast Asia to Australia. Well known for its opportunistic nesting habits, it lays its eggs in the nests of magpies and currawongs. The title The Migration of Cuckoos also echoes something of Brian Castro's Birds of Passage. Another animal that appears in this work is the antechinus, a marsupial mouse endemic to Australia. The purpose of the antechinus helps focus on the gender aspect of the story, since the male antechinus always dies after mating. Significantly also, and in terms of cross cultural encounters, perhaps some of that death is implied too, and sets up a demarcation of interaction, as is the play on the word antechinus itself — anti-chinese — and the ambivalences and ambiguities of crossing between cultures.

Depicting an Aboriginal woman in a form of racial incognito, with an Asian father, and in an Asian location, may be highly problematic given that it also runs the risk of dissociating her from her Aboriginality. The figure of Queenie Lavada/Miss Yip was perhaps a self-conscious attempt not to absent the Aboriginal figure from the story — which perhaps reflects a kind of colonial guilt given unresolved issues of Aboriginal reconciliation. But I hope I have not merely played with her Aboriginality in the guise of interrogating stereotypes.

A comment on magical realism is necessary given several occurrences in the story that may appear to be “supernatural”. Amryll Chanady has characterised magical realism as “two conflicting, but autonomously coherent, perspectives, one based on an ‘enlightened’ and rational view of reality, and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality” (Magical 21-22). For Chanady, in order that a text conforms to the mode of magical realism, the antinomy between the real and supernatural has to be distinguishable but, he argues, the antinomy in magical realism either “does not disconcert the reader” (24) or the “narrator prevents the reader from perceiving the natural and the supernatural as antinomious” (107). Chanady's overall thesis is that magical realism and “fantastic” literature can be, and should be, differentiated. Chanady states,

Whereas the simultaneous presence of the natural and the supernatural in the fantastic creates an ambiguous and disturbing fictitious world, it is the essential characteristic of a harmonious and coherent world in magical realism. Since exclusive validity is not claimed for the conventional norms of logic and reason,



supernatural phenomena do not threaten the harmony of the established world order. (101)

Other writers may take magical realism to have a greater disruptive and transgressive power. Theo L. D’Haen states that magical realism “creates an alternative world correcting so-called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this ‘reality’ depends upon” (“Magical” 195). Zamora and Faris similarly believe that

Magical realism is a mode suited to exploring and transgressing boundaries... magical realism often facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable... The propensity of magical realist texts to admit a plurality of worlds means that they often situate themselves in liminal territory between or among those worlds — in phenomenal and spiritual regions where transformation, metamorphosis, dissolution are common. (Magical 5-6)

It seems problematic whether magical realism is as corrective and potentially disruptive as D’Haen asserts; however as a minority “ethnic” writer situating oneself in the “liminal territory” of magical realism readily reflects being conditioned by multiple cultures. If there is no antinomy between the natural and supernatural it may be because the space of quotidian magical realism is also the space of the non-rational, where we are not constantly questioning the bases our beliefs, and where we may be most of the time. If this is where we are most of the time then the ambiguous and problematical have a place in it as well.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In fact Louie mentions only three: Louie’s own “I Married a Foreigner”, Tseen Khoo’s “Angry Yellow Men”, and Ray Hibbins’s “Male Gender Identities among Chinese Male Migrants”. Louie is also the

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author of Theorising Chinese Masculinity, and has co-edited Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan.

<sup>2</sup> I borrow the term “movement inhibition” from Paul Carter, who uses it in his study Repressed Spaces to describe the nature of agoraphobia, and who characterises agoraphobia in the following terms: “Whether manifested as a reluctance to cross wide, empty spaces or as a fear of being caught up in the crowd, the universal symptom of agoraphobia is a movement inhibition” (16).

<sup>3</sup> Reference to Ouyang Yu’s Representing the Other: Chinese in Australian Fiction 1888-1988 is to his published version by Xinhua Press in Chinese Biaoxian Ta Zhe: Aodaliya Xiaoshuo Zhongde Zhongguoren 1888-1988. Translations from the text are my own.

<sup>4</sup> In the mid-1980s public controversy was centred around the comments of historian Geoffrey Blainey, warning against possible social unrest due to high rates of Asian immigration to Australia; in the mid-1990s similar controversy was fomented by Pauline Hanson, who aimed criticism at high rates of Asian immigration and discriminatory welfare benefits to Aborigines.

<sup>5</sup> The Racial Hatred Act covers public acts which are: done, in whole or in part, because of the race, colour, or national or ethnic origin of a person or group; and reasonably likely in all the circumstances to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate that person or group. The Act makes these acts unlawful unless one of the following exceptions applies. An act is not unlawful if “done reasonably and in good faith”; is an artistic work or performance; an academic publication, discussion or debate; a fair and accurate report on a matter of public interest; a fair comment if the comment is an expression of a person’s genuine belief. That Pauline Hanson has never been prosecuted under the Act attests to the Act’s inability to suppress very public racist pronouncements.

<sup>6</sup> For Broinowski the white Australia policy had already been dealt its “body blows” by the Holt and Gorton governments, which allowed between 1966 and 1970 some 15,000 “non-European” migrants to settle in Australia. Put in perspective the annual average number of “non-European” migrants allowed entry into Australia in this period was still miniscule compared to the peak annual intake of 185,000 migrants in 1970.

<sup>7</sup> The Immigration Restriction Act, 1901 was replaced in 1958 by The Migration Act, which abolished the notorious dictation test and avoided references to race. Non-Europeans with 15 years of residence were also permitted to become Australian citizens. In 1966 the Immigration Minister Hubert Opperman announced that well-qualified persons with the ability to readily integrate would be accepted as migrants. Non-Europeans could also become citizens after five years, and non-European immigration restrictions would be eased.

<sup>8</sup> Pauline Hanson made a controversial entry into the Australian political arena by her public statements against both Aborigines and Asians that led to her dis-endorsement as a candidate for the Liberal Party in the 1996 federal election, although she was subsequently elected as an independent member of parliament. Indicative of the urge to repress memories of Aboriginal dispossession can be seen in her statement, “I am fed up with being told, ‘This our land’... I draw the line when told I must pay and continue paying for something that happened over 200 years ago. Like most Australians, I worked for my land; no-one gave it to me” (qtd in Ang, On Not Speaking Chinese 126).

<sup>9</sup> Kam Louie, Theorising Chinese Masculinity.

<sup>10</sup> Wang Yuejin, "Red Sorghum: Mixing Memory and Desire," Perspectives on Chinese Cinema, ed. Chris Berry (London: BFI, 1991) 80-103.

<sup>11</sup> Zhong Xueping, Masculinity Besieged: Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> In the published version of the thesis Banana Bending, Tseen-Ling Khoo is less prescriptive of Asian Australian/Canadian writing and has a different emphasis: The book argues that "in order to examine the disciplines and production of Asian-Canadian and Asian-Australian literatures, work needs to be considered within layers of nation, community, and the gendered self" (1).

<sup>13</sup> The title of The Eastern Slope Chronicle is a reference to the Chinese Song dynasty poet Su Shi, who took the literary name Su Dongpo. Su Shi, recognised as one of China's greatest poets, was a scholar official who was exiled to various places in China, including to a farm in Hangzhou named Dongpo. The literal meaning of dongpo means 'eastern slope'. Thus Ouyang's novel parallels the story of exile that recent Chinese migrants feel in Australia — including one of the novel's characters, who is a poet like Ouyang Yu himself.

<sup>14</sup> Ouyang Yu returned to China in 2005 to take up the chair of Australian literature at Wuhan University.

## Chapter One

## Representing Chinese Men in the Absence of the Aboriginal Subject and in the Guise of the Racial Fetish

Chinese Australian author Ouyang Yu in his essay “The Ultimate Other” (1996) has noted that between the years 1988 and 1994, there were seven novels written by Australian authors that featured Chinese characters<sup>1</sup>. A common characteristic running through most of these novels is the persistent representation of Chinese through the use of “old stereotypes”. Stereotypes were applicable to both female and male characters. Chinese women were either prostitutes or overly endowed with sexual potency and Chinese men were either pimps or inscrutable (“Ultimate” 42-43). Ouyang argues that not until the publication of Alex Miller’s The Ancestor Game in 1992 was there any indication of a change from the usual orientalist and stereotypical portrayals of Chinese. Ouyang suggests that Miller’s depiction of the Chinese artist Lang Tzu might be “more an idea than a character”; that the Chinese are an “inalienable part of Australian history” (43). But if The Ancestor Game marks a change for the better, then I will demonstrate in the following discussion that in the wake of Pauline Hanson and her anti-Aboriginal and anti-Asian immigration One Nation party, it did not take long for the reappearance of the racial stereotype — proving again the representational resilience of racial stereotyping.

More recently, Ann Curthoys has observed that in Australia, as a result of Pauline Hanson’s intervention in Aboriginal land rights and Asian immigration debates, these issues have recently “converged and interacted... to a greater degree than at any time in the previous two centuries” (21). In the nineteenth century, contends Curthoys, colonial racism was the unifying feature of discourses on Aborigines and Chinese, “yet these two historical interactions and public debates were conducted almost entirely without reference to one another” (24). Curthoys tells of how she was participant-observer of a conference entitled “The Future of Australian Multiculturalism”, and that despite the good intentions of the organisers to bridge the debates on indigenous issues and multiculturalism the aims were not realised. Curthoys recounts, “The publicised indigenous speaker did not come, nor did her replacement; they clearly did not feel this to be ‘their’ conference. And it was not” (22). Curthoys points to the tendency of multicultural discourse to presume to subsume indigenous claims for land as merely another aspect of cultural diversity, and a failure on the part of ethnic communities to

“acknowledge the distinctiveness and importance of Aboriginal claims” and to be aware of “the colonial features of current Australian life” (34) whereby all non-indigenous inhabitants have been colonisers and the beneficiaries of such colonisation. For Curthoys “the failure of the conference session to bridge the gap between indigenous and multicultural discourses indicated the continuing power, in both indigenous and multicultural communities, of the history of separate discourse and distinct mechanisms of bureaucratic control” (22).

Given the situation outlined above, in this chapter I endeavour to reveal further points of convergence and divergence between indigenous, Chinese, and white European relations. I examine and focus on the figure of the Chinese male in three works of Australian fiction, which fall some years outside of Ouyang’s period of examination; Kate Grenville’s The Idea of Perfection (1999), Murray Bail’s Eucalyptus (1999), and Peter Carey’s Illywhacker (1985). To say that the Chinese male characters in these texts are also stereotypical representations might make them sufficiently connected discursively; however of more compelling significance is the manner in which these representations are positioned within a dominant discourse of white-Australian history and settlement. I will show how in different ways all three texts stake a claim for white-European occupation to indigenous/Australian space predicated on reaffirmations of practices that occlude or at best diminish the presence of indigenous subjects through a fetishised inclusion of a Chinese male figure. The absence of the indigenous figure is not a self-absenting response but rather reflects the dominant spatial practices of colonisation. In these three texts white-Australian history is constructed through the motifs of museums, collections, collecting and taxonomic naming, through a simultaneous invoking of the male Chinese stereotype that conceals the absence of the Aboriginal figure. In The Idea of Perfection, a heritage museum is established with no mention of Aborigines; in Illywhacker a pet shop transformed into a cultural museum includes Aborigines as just another display, sharing a common condition of exploitation with other non-indigenous Australians by foreign economic and political interests; while in Eucalyptus a museum of trees and the application of European taxonomies silences prior taxonomies of indigenous people. My critique therefore examines at the site of the museum the relationship between the visibility of the Chinese male and the absence of the indigenous figure.

In recent years museums have become contested sites of meaning. Henrietta Lidchi has argued, “museums are no longer simply revered as spaces promoting

knowledge and enlightenment, the automatic resting place for historic and culturally important ethnographic objects” (“Poetics” 153). Rather, according to Benedict Anderson in Imagined Communities the museum, along with the census and the map, are three institutions of power that “profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion — the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry” (163-64). Vera Zolberg attributes museums of natural history and ethnography as fundamental to creating the “cultural matrix on which the symbolic community is founded... [and] it is they that define the categories of the ‘human’ as opposed to ‘non-human.’ In this way they reinforce conceptual categories as to who are to be included, and who are to be excluded from the national body” (“Museums” 76). Mieke Bal also claims that it is not so much whether certain objects are exhibited in museums at all but in which kinds of museums they are exhibited, that is, as ethnographic displays in museums such as the American Museum of Natural History or the same objects in more aesthetically elevated art galleries such as the Metropolitan Museum, or Museum of Modern Art in New York, thereby enhancing their cultural value. Such choices in themselves reflect “an aesthetic base for the structures of domination that reign in... society” (“Telling” 556-57). Equally, for Bourdieu and Passeron the museum, along with the education system, the church and media, is a site of symbolic violence whereby one group, usually one class, exercises power over another (Reproduction 38, 51-2). On the other hand Susan Macdonald in Theorizing Museums recognises that while museums may be tied to grand narratives of the nation-state, far from being sites of absolute hegemony, they do inevitably attract questions about knowledge, inequalities of power, identity and difference (2). For Vera Zolberg museums act as contested sites of remembrance because frequently they posit versions of a past that constitute the collective memory of a nation as against that of another nation (“Museums” 76-77). For John Urry the processes of collective remembering are important factors in changing the contemporary world “in which the borders by which societies were kept apart are increasingly criss-crossed by ever-speeding flows of images, information, ideas and people” (“How” 46). Within these transnational and transcultural flows, certain collective memories and cultures are also implicated, as Urry argues, in distorting and consuming the memories of other groups and communities (46). The question in my thesis is whose memories constitute the collective memories? Why are these memories important above others? And have other memories been silenced or forgotten? Since Grenville’s Idea of Perfection, Bail’s

Eucalyptus and Carey's Illywhacker all feature marginal Chinese characters, and at the same time carry the motifs of museums and collecting in stories that deal with history, notions of identity, nation, and belonging, questions of inclusion and exclusion become pertinent to their analyses as texts.

In the individual's pursuit of collecting objects, as opposed to the institutional collecting of the museum, Benjamin writes in "Unpacking My Library" that "every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories" (60). Furthermore he states, "Ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects" (67). Rey Chow argues that the alignment of memories and ownership suggest a "desire for possessing history, even if such a possession can only come in fragmented, incomplete forms... the nostalgia for owning the past that is embedded in collecting is, arguably, inseparable from a utopian sense of anticipation, of looking forward to a future that is not yet entirely known" ("Fateful" 288). In the context of museums, what is the extent that the chaos of memories and histories offers the possibilities for deliberate or inadvertent institutional misrepresentation? How, for example, might the museum's display of Aboriginal artefacts easily begin to obscure the practices of colonisation?

Opposite to the individual chaos of memories is the institutionalised selection of memories — not so much nostalgia for owning the past embedded in collecting but a utopian determining of what will be remembered now and in the future. This is what happens in the conglomeration of memories and histories into museums. While Chow acknowledges the inevitable fragmentation of histories within a nostalgia for owning the past, a fragmentation of history might also facilitate deliberate acts of disowning the past. Julie Marcus in an essay on the Museum of Sydney and its marginalisation of Aboriginal input and representation contends that fragmentation can act as a form of dissimulation, and she states, "The display of fragments focusing on Sydney's foundation and its colonial culture... constitutes a lie — the lie that because truth is ever fragmentary, evaluation and narrative are impossible, because the truth can never be known let alone reconstituted from a vast distance, that there are no regimes of truth" (231).

In contrast, rather than dealing with fragments of either truths or lies as such, Foucault in "Of Other Spaces" argues that museums are "slices in time", a kind of heterotopia "of indefinitely accumulating time", in which there exists "the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes... constituting a place of

all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages” (26). In this way national, ethnographic, and cultural museums, as heterotopias, thus make appropriate places for the accumulation, preservation, and perpetuation of myths.

For Foucault there are two kinds of sites, one being utopias and the other heterotopias, which in relation to all other sites work “to suspect, neutralise, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect” (24). While utopias are sites with no real place, heterotopias are real places, “counter-sites”, which simultaneously reflect, contest and invert other sites of society. Apart from their links with time, heterotopias also “presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (26). Such places either encompass enforced entry, such as prisons, and often hospitals, or necessitate rites of passage, while other heterotopias appear open but in fact hide their exclusions, the very fact that we can enter them concealing their exclusions (26). Certain workplaces are like this, as are museums that purport to simulate the heritage of a nation with displays of objects, photographs and other kinds of recordings. Museums as accumulators of time might also accumulate various kinds of lacunae, and these gaps both represent and reveal, through their absences, both disruptions and constructions of dominant histories. In the following examination of Grenville’s novel The Idea of Perfection we see this museo-heterotopic effect and the constructed accumulations, dissimulations, and absences.

Kate Grenville’s novel The Idea of Perfection is a story of two people from Sydney drawn together in the fictional small town of Karakarook in rural New South Wales. Like many small towns in outback Australia the township faces decline — a lack of visitors, a poor local economy, population decline, failing infrastructure, a wooden bridge that needs replacing. Characterised in another way, Karakarook might be seen as a failing outpost of white settlement upon Aboriginal land. It would have been interesting if, as the township becomes increasingly deserted and dusty, a threatening indigenous figure comes into the town one high noon to reclaim what rightfully belongs to the indigenous community that has been existing on the fringes of the town. But in The Idea of Perfection nothing like this happens; instead some of the townsfolk invite Harley Savage, a textiles artist from the Applied Arts Museum of Sydney, to oversee the establishment of the Karakarook Heritage Museum, which is intended to attract money-spending tourists and thereby keep the town economically alive. Harley Savage’s job is to gather and organise the collection of memorabilia, photographs, and objects that



connect the present-day township with its past and its remote, nostalgic role in the building of the nation.

Of the three works examined in this chapter, The Idea of Perfection is the most explicit in dealing with memory, collecting, the museum and what is included and excluded. In other respects The Idea of Perfection has been characterised in one review as an “intricate study of three characters. Two are wildly imperfect... The third, Felicity Porcelline, is disturbingly inhuman in her obsession with perfection” (Schwarz 112). The two imperfect characters are Harley Savage and mild-mannered Douglas Cheeseman, a civil engineer also from Sydney sent to Karakarook to arrange the rebuilding of the local wooden bridge with concrete. The Idea of Perfection is prefaced with a quote from Leonardo da Vinci that “an arch is two weaknesses which together make a strength”, wherein lies the central metaphor of the novel. Thus Harley Savage and Douglas Cheeseman as the subjects of weakness, imperfection and awkwardness play out this metaphor and gradually tilt towards, if not perfection, then at least an accommodation that rests against the other. The Idea of Perfection also involves Chinese Australian Alfred Chang, known also as Freddy, the town butcher. Reviews of the novel might suggest that apart from the three main characters all other characters are peripheral. In one review The Idea of Perfection is described wryly as the story of a “man, two women and a dog” (King 41).

Freddy Chang may be a marginal character, but a significant proportion of the story depicts an affair that develops between Felicity Porcelline and Freddy. Whereas the novel is narrated alternately from the points of view of Harley, Douglas, and Felicity, Grenville has not given Freddy a narrative point of view or position as a “focaliser”. Kathleen Stewart argues that the ability to “narrate is to place oneself in an event and a scene — to make interpretive space — and to relate something to someone: to make an interpretive space that is relational and in which meanings have direct social referents” (“Nostalgia” 227). Lacking such a narrative position, Freddy’s position becomes a marginal one — one that can be narrated over, and a common mode of representation of Chinese in Australian fiction.

Grenville does attempt to assimilate Freddy into her rural community as an established member rather than strictly as an outsider, yet in Grenville’s representation this is still not without ambiguities. Freddy’s family has lived in Karakarook since the earliest days of the town’s existence, dating back five generations to the gold rush days. A somewhat desperate bachelor, Freddy lives and cares for his mother and aunt on a

small farm on the outskirts of the town. Freddy, moreover, is a member of the Karakarook Heritage Museum Committee. On the one hand the five generations of the Chang family show the established presence of not only Freddy's family but also more broadly of Chinese in Australia; on the other hand that Freddy lives on the outskirts is also suggestive of the marginalisation of that presence. That Freddy is a bachelor with little hope of finding a suitable partner in the town indicates the likely end of that presence. Equally, Freddy's position as carer for his mother and aunt, a position more often associated with the restricted space and opportunities of an unmarried female, is also indicative of that end. Although Freddy has a position on the Heritage Committee he never takes the opportunity to include recognition of Chinese contributions to the town or local area; rather Freddy identifies with the white community in a way that is disconcerting even to Felicity.

At the first meeting of the Karakarook Museum Committee Freddy brings along his uncle's old black and white photographs of Karakarook. In the text, whether the photographs were taken by Freddy's uncle or were simply in his uncle's possession is unclear, but Felicity reflects that Freddy spoke "as if his uncle was just like other people's uncles, whereas of course his uncle must have been Chinese. It was almost as if he did not realise that being Chinese was unusual" (*Idea* 160). Grenville herself seems unmindful of the significance that might accrue to the uncle's photographs, because nothing of this unusualness of being Chinese is captured in the old photographs. Rather than confirm Felicity's expectations of difference, the uncle's photographs lack any semblance of exoticism to be associated with Chineseness. The photographs are neither Chinese family portraits, Chinese at work, those of Chinese Australians disporting, nor pictures depicting contact between Chinese and non-Chinese. Instead the photographs show town buildings, the trees that have been felled to build the town, a picture of the Land & Pastoral Bank showing two men, presumably white because they are not indicated as being "unusual", sitting in a buggy. The photographs recall earlier days of white settlement, reflect the alteration of terrain, agricultural practices, the dominant mode of production, and colonial nation building. In the photographic construction of the former goldmining town, the omission of the Aboriginal and Chinese presence is both clear and consistent with historical acts of partial remembering.

The relationship between museums, their collections and photographs, make them ideal for selective remembering, forgetting, and the cover for other practices. In particular the relationship of the photograph and the museum is one where, as Ronald

Silvers writing for the Canadian Association of Museums' website states, "we read the photograph as a journal of our lives and our society. Photographs possess a potential for finding our heritage" ("Photographs"), and as a consequence agitating collective memories. Through attending museums, unreliable memories can seemingly be set straight or refreshed by the artefact and the photograph. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Benjamin cites the photographic works of Atget around 1900, and how Atget's photographs of deserted Paris streets were like scenes of crime: "The scene of crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. With Atget, photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance" (226). Roland Barthes similarly sees the photograph's essence as a ratification of what it represents; attending a photographer's show is like going to a "police investigation" (*Camera* 85). In the photographs of Freddy's uncle, photographs of European settlement and its strange evoking of abandoned terrain, the notion of a crime scene is appropriate. On one side of the photographic evidence, there are the haunting absences of indigenous and Chinese figures, a suspect's discrete denial of past wrongdoing or a matter of diminishing responsibility. On the other side, photographic evidence attempts to speak for itself; the absences from the picture speak volumes for the national imaginary — Aborigines and Chinese do not fit into the national picture.

Photographs thus have an evidentiary value unlike other museum objects in that they might possess an appearance of spatial and temporal context. Old photographs carry an air of authenticity as true records of some event, but when it comes to evidence they are the first to come under suspicion of being doctored, through an "instant incision into the visible world" (Bourdieu, *Photography* 76). In fact all photographs are inherently doctored, and visually misleading. Wide-angle shots, apart from their two dimensionality, give the appearance of depth through the effect of background, foreground and centre of focus, so that whatever has the camera's point of focus and clarity has its narrative and representational values enhanced. Photographs, in Susan Stewart's view, have the power to "exaggerate" (114); they can suggest the illusion of a larger even total picture, and/or diminish the centrality and the relationships of objects by their focus. From a temporal context, while Stewart argues that the "ahistorical context of the [museum] collection... destroys the context of origin" (165), it could be argued that photographs give the appearance or illusion of being attached to an original context that they perpetually carry. In the uncle's photographs of fallen trees, town

buildings, the Land & Pastoral Bank, men in a buggy, there is a limited context of white settlement which is foregrounded, focused, extending to the background, but what had been marginalised in composing these moments has gone missing. Photographs share with other museum collections what James Clifford, paraphrasing Stewart, says is an “illusion of adequate representation of a world by first cutting objects out of specific contexts (whether cultural, historical, or intersubjective) and making them ‘stand for’ abstract wholes — a ‘Bambara mask’, for example, becoming an ethnographic metonym for Bambara culture” (*Predicament* 220). Here the fragmentary nature of exhibits, collections and memories is no longer the issue — the uncle’s photographs metonymically stand in for Australian history even though lacking indigenous and Chinese involvement.

Sharon Macdonald concedes that while museum accounts of the world may be contestable, “museums remain powerful and subtle authors and authorities whose cultural accounts are not easily dislodged” (4). Freddy’s involvement in the Heritage Museum might have signalled the incorporation of a coloured man within a broader white community, but the possibilities to re-envision the history of the local area, and more broadly Australia, are made from a gendered rather than racial positioning. Women take primacy in the organisation of the Heritage Museum venture and in a subtle way Grenville subverts the traditional dominant historical recording of male endeavours, that is, town building, the inputs of capital, gold digging, and so forth, for things that have been done by women. Harley declares: “What would put Karakarook on the map were things so ordinary that no one had thought of keeping any of them. Ordinary dresses and baby’s jumpers and men’s work-shirts, and all the improvised things made for their houses by people who never had enough money to buy one from shops” (143). The museum becomes centred on the domestically and gendered workspace of white women, so that the museum reflects the home of the white woman and her family. But this gendered perspective fails to intersect with the racial elements hidden in her story. It maintains a museum practice that fetishises cultural artefacts and obscures the acts and practices of colonisation; legacies of European and other non-indigenous colonial settlement; the occlusion of indigenous presence, as well as the precarious existence of other non-Whites living as perpetual strangers in a place meant to be the preserve of white men and women. Harley’s cartographic impulse, to get Karakarook on the map, is contradictorily, in Certeau’s terms, a fixation constituting “procedures for forgetting” (*Practice* 97). For Certeau the points and broken lines that lead to and away are what

might constitute the readability of a map, but this works to substitute “traces” for missing practices. In this instance, analogous to the uncle’s photographs, the museum is map. The images of European land clearing, the establishment of capital, these are admitted into the museum, but the spatial practices of displacing Aborigines does not, nor does the expulsion of Chinese from goldfields, and the implementation of the white Australia policy. The delineation of the map, Certeau states, “exhibits the (voracious) property that the geographical system has of being able to transform action into legibility, but in doing so it causes a way of being in the world to be forgotten” (97). The Karakarook Heritage Museum, like other museums, is selective of its exhibits; what is left out and forgotten and what is not, amounts to who has the power to remember and what is allowed to be remembered.

It is no surprise that the Karakarook Heritage Museum bears only those artefacts and images that are specifically of European colonialism; Grenville forgets, and perhaps so do the majority of her Australian readers, that indigenous and Asian histories have been tightly interwoven with the dominant white history of Australia. But why should Freddy, a Chinese Australian man, be so assimilated into white Australian consciousness as to possess or reveal only photographs of European settlement? When Barthes says, “we live according to a generalized image-repertoire” (118), it echoes Lacan’s notion of the “the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen” (*Four* 74), which David Eng interprets as that group of culturally sanctioned images against which subjects are typically held for their sense of identity (43). As Eng elaborates,

images of the given-to-be-seen provide the ideological point of view from which the spectators are encouraged to identify with those pre-given representations that would most easily accord with the dominant socio-political ethos of their time. (In our present era, the given-to-be-seen would most clearly be those visual images affirming the tenets of whiteness, heterosexuality, and liberal capitalism.) It is at the level of the given-to-be-seen that our normative sense of reality is established” (43-44).

Yet it is not really the point that Freddy identifies with the given-to-be-seen of white settlement, colonisation and history (the absences of others). Freddy’s identification with this European colonialism is merely an indication that he does not exist to disrupt and contest such images and the violence behind them. Freddy’s

presence and his photographic legacy also exhibit two contradictory tendencies: on the one hand the desire to exoticise, and on the other to assimilate. Grenville's Freddy is a victory of assimilation over exoticism, but not without covering the discursive terrain of stereotype and difference. Freddy's photographs and their lack of indigenous and Chinese presence are symptomatic of the difficulty of simultaneously addressing the triangulated issues of Aboriginal/Anglo-Celtic/Chinese relations. While the evidence of Chinese history is limited in The Idea of Perfection, its restricted representation does act to conceal an even greater absence of indigenous people and their relationships with Australian history.

While The Idea of Perfection marks the absence of the indigenous figure, Murray Bail's Eucalyptus is an extreme version of this absence that accentuates not merely absence but concealment. Murray Bail's widely and critically acclaimed Eucalyptus has a striking kinship with Grenville's The Idea of Perfection. Eucalyptus, like The Idea of Perfection, is a beguiling example of where the deployment of Chinese character works not merely on a representational level but also acts to conceal an absence within its narrative, i.e., the absence again of the indigenous subject. Eucalyptus is a tale of a man named Holland who decides to give away his daughter, Ellen, to the first man who correctly names all the varieties of eucalypts on his country property. Eucalyptus brings into question ideas of national importance, identity, icons, and, as Lyn Jacobs states, "pursues disparities between fact and cultural inscription" ("Good" 41). Bail recognises that "stories that take root", such as those of national mythology, "become like things, misshapen things with an illogical core, which pass through many hands without wearing out or falling to pieces, remaining in essence the same" (24). Thus Jacobs says "Eucalyptus is about history-making and story-telling and the powerful effects of the personal and public fictions by which we live our lives" ("Good" 43) and in this way the novel is subversive of notions of cultural identity and national iconography. However the story is intricately bound up with its own narrative deceptions and disavowals. Eucalyptus alternatively proffers a simpler fable of egalitarian masculine opportunity, for a man to be the first to name all the trees in the eucalyptus collection and win a wife. In this dissonant story of egalitarianism no man, not even a Chinese man, is excluded from the contest — a simple contest of knowledge, if not ethics.

The story of Holland and his beautiful daughter had crossed the Tasman; it travelled too up the centre of Australia, along the Stuart Highway, filling up with

petrol on the way. It spread out from the highway, left and right, like the trunk and branches on a tree. As a consequence, a smiling Chinaman knocked on the door, all the way from Darwin. To Holland he gave a slight bow and said he was a merchant of fruit and vegetables. (Bail 65, original emphasis.)

That the words “smiling Chinaman” are written in italics alerts the reader that Bail is self-consciously invoking a stereotype. Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan have observed,

The general function of any racial stereotype is to establish and preserve order between different elements in society, maintain the continuity and growth of western civilization, and enforce white supremacy with a minimum of effort... the ideal stereotype is a low maintenance engine of white supremacy whose efficiency increases with age, as it becomes ‘authenticated’ and ‘historically verified’. (qtd in Li 213)

Homi Bhabha sees ambivalence inhabiting the implied fixity of the stereotype: “a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved” (Location 66). Speaking of his situation in the US, Frank Chin notes how negative traits accrue to the Chinese half of “Chinese-American” while positive characteristics fall on the side of the American, so that submission to white supremacy, under the imposition of its stereotypes, produces among Chinese Americans “suicidal doses of self-contempt... self-contempt [that] is nothing more than the subject’s acceptance of white standards of objectivity, beauty, behavior... and his acknowledgement of the fact that, because he is not white, he can never fully measure up to white standards” (qtd in Li 213). Or in Homi Bhabha’s terms, the equivalent of the inevitable failure of colonial mimicry. Anne Cheng, following Bhabha, argues that the stereotype is in effect an attempted demarcation of the boundaries between different groups. In discussing a National Review cartoon caricature of Bill and Hillary Clinton in which they appear with buck teeth, slanted eyes, Mao suits, and coolie hats, Cheng states:

The complication that renders this clichéd racist image provocative is that we get to witness the collision between the stereotype as the other and the usually unarticulated anxiety of the white self to remain unaffected by its use of stereotype. The introduction of the racial stereotype must therefore always bring into question the unquestionable realness supposedly untouched by the stereotype, the ‘original real’, what the stereotype supposedly cannot speak to: whiteness itself. (*Melancholy* 40-41)<sup>2</sup>

In *Eucalyptus* the smiling Chinaman stereotype helps define an Australianness predicated on whiteness and its specific modes of behaviour without directly addressing notions of white identity. In this instance the white Australian, Holland, is unlikely to reciprocate, or be touched by, either smile or bow. To the contrary, the smiling Chinaman stereotype is a reminder of white-Australian identity, based on indigenous absence and the expunging of Chinese men from the visual and spatial scene.

The Chinese appears in the aptly titled chapter “*Marginata*” (the jarrah). Bail jauntily covers a number of stereotypical characteristics that presumably apply to being a Chinese man. The Chinese is simple and childlike, “Everything he touched made him happy”, and succinctly feminised, “He had what are called ‘eyes as sweet as sugar’.” Ellen decides the Chinese will live to a great age, “A vague feeling, rather than a physiological fact: that an energetic brain can drag the body along for a few extra yards. Long are the lives of the philosophers” (65). An energetic brain may be complimentary to the Chinese, but there is also a hint of an effete body to be dragged those few extra yards. The previous suitor, a New Zealander, full of masculine vigour and with a dark bushy moustache, “burst through the air, striding up the drive to present himself” (64), making yardages through a distinct lack of obsequious, deferential Asiatic bowing. Ellen wonders whether, notwithstanding the philosopher’s mind, “this happy [Chinese] man had experienced envy or jealousy, the confusions of loneliness — the usual mess — not to mention anything more serious, such as sudden gusts of despair” (65). Since Bail presents a stereotypical characterisation of the Chinese man, it is unsurprising that the psychical and physical effects of everyday exclusions, racism, and violence upon the Chinese man may be overlooked. Nothing more serious, no sudden gusts of despair? Although their positions are incommensurable, from her own position of gender subordination and marginality Ellen is not alert to the Chinese man’s racially marginal position in Australian society. Bail is however merely presenting the “given-to-be-seen”



images; the stereotypes, from which the “dominant image repertoire through which individuals are repeatedly encouraged to ‘see’ not only themselves but others” (Eng Racial 44). Here the Chinese man is not just any Chinese man but a “smiling Chinaman” representative of all Chinese men. Not only are Chinese males childlike and feminised, they are also emotionally stunted. A Chinese man is apparently incapable of a full range of emotions, half-human in this respect, a man without sentiment, poetry, paradoxically too, or suspiciously, intelligent and yet shallow, apparently without passions, at least not sufficient to interest a white woman, and ideally he is not likely to be angry or offended. In effect, despite his appearance on the farm, a privileged masculine domain, a place marked by other boundaries and barbed wire, as a male he does not really stand in the field of contest.

To emphasise Bail’s point, before a particularly elegant specimen, the smiling Chinaman is prone to stand back and say “ahhh...” if not quite “ahhh so...” The man has a red handkerchief, which he blows on for luck. Nine days into the test, Holland, the ostensibly ruthless egalitarian, nevertheless remarks to his compliant and passive daughter, “Who’d want someone grinning like that around the house all day?” (64). But with paternal and partisan reassurance, and a touch of spatial anxiety, he tells her, “Don’t worry, he’s going to come a gutser, I can feel it. I don’t know how he’s got this far” (64). Rather than admiration, Holland is incredulous at the Chinese merchant’s knowledge, since the Chinese has come all the way from Darwin in the north, the very margin of Australia bordering Asia. We can read Bail’s spatial trope of “all the way from Darwin” in terms of what Rachel Lee says is “a semiotics of value — i.e. what is near has normative value, what is remote has an alien, degraded value” (“Erasure” 149). In this case New Zealand may be implied to be miraculously closer to a western New South Wales farm than Darwin, which is just short of Asia, or more specifically, China — the “real origin” of the smiling suitor.

In the end the Chinese is literally stumped and fails to correctly identify the shrub-like varnished gum (E. vernicosa), a species from the southern tip of Tasmania. Not only does he fail to name it, he trips over the knee-high gum tree. Presumably a real Australian man wouldn’t trip over a gum tree, so the Chinese man is after all clumsy in a terrain that will always remain foreign to him. Towards the end of Eucalyptus, the Chinese is brought back briefly into the picture when the young man who beguiles Ellen arrives at the property. “At the front gate of the property he met a Chinese man hurrying out, who nodded politely” (253). Even through humiliation, the stereotypical Chinese

man is historically without grievance, a model minority, and remains polite and uncomplaining, quietly, without a chip on his shoulder, vacating and disappearing from the field of contest as he inevitably must to make space for the truly Australian man.

With his brief appearance the Chinese merchant might appear to be a mere token of colour in an Australian literary landscape dominated by white masculine figures of convicts, bushrangers, explorers, priests and drovers. Alternatively, rather than mere tokenism, the Chinese male in this story may act textually as an ornament. Mark Wrigley wrote, "Ornament is only forced to speak of the presence of order because there is some kind of absence in the visual field. It is this visual absence of order that makes the inessential excess of ornament necessary" (qtd in Olivia Khoo "Whiteness" 68). Olivia Khoo has written of the ornamental/supplementariness of whiteness that has occurred in literature by female Asian Australian writers<sup>3</sup>. Here I want to focus on the ornamental effect of the Chinese male figure in this specific white Australian text. Khoo states that the "ornament is a form of detail that highlights the uses and production of space, and positionality in space" (69). Conflicting theorisations of the ornament divide over whether ornamentation may or may not be an intrinsic/integral part of, or supplementary to the total representation (Khoo 66). Taken in a diasporic context this also underscores for Khoo "the issue of what can be 'admitted' into the category of Australia, and specifically into the category of Australian literature" (69). In the case of Murray Bail's Eucalyptus, there is no questioning his authorial centrality in Australian literature, as with Grenville's The Idea of Perfection. What I contend that is significant in Eucalyptus however is the elision of indigeneity created through the use of the ornament as concealment. It is the indigenous subject that is absent from the visual field of Eucalyptus, concealed as it were by the ethnic supplementariness of the Chinese merchant. Ornament in this sense becomes not so much structure as scaffolding, removable at the completion of its narrative task. For Bail to ornament a visible Chinese suitor rather than involve an Aboriginal subject has crucial narrative implications parallel to the historical elisions of terra nullius. Principally, the presence of an indigenous subject would run the risk of exposing the problematic nature of European taxonomies by presenting not only an indigenous classificatory system of flora but also the entire relationship between the natural environment and its human inhabitants. At that point not only the prize comes into question but the rules of the game and the text altogether. The ornamentation of a Chinese stereotype works, as it were, to obscure and nullify the threat of the Aboriginal subject who might take the story out of Bail's

manipulation. In effect Bail has had to consume the autochthonous object that would otherwise resignify, and reclaim, the landscape. It is axiomatically not an easy swallowing, but nor is the smiling Chinaman anything but melancholic — ultimately the Chinese ornament, having fulfilled its occluding obligations, must make way for the ordinary visible presence of whiteness. The ornament then loses its temporary place, much like the removal of scaffolding, excluded once again, leaving the clear edifice of narrative structure.

It is not that Bail totally neglects to mention Aborigines in his story, but when he does it is late and at last token. Bail was probably not tempted to provoke an outburst of Foucauldian laughter in the event that the smiling Chinaman could sabotage the contest and deliver something akin to reading Borges's short story "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins", in which, according to a certain "Chinese encyclopaedia", animals are categorised according to an apparently incongruous taxonomy. Rather the stakes are higher, unlikely to provoke laughter, and potentially discomforting. The nature of Bail's story, precisely because it deals with the premises and rights of naming things, the space of those things, and the ostensibly egalitarian manner in which all are welcomed, does appear to attract the questions: Where is the Aboriginal subject? Who gets to speak after all? While the Aboriginal subject is hidden, another needs to stand in that space, to reorder and conceal an absence in the visual field and perhaps worse still the possibility of the visibility of Aboriginal presence. The Chinese ornament might then resolve this impasse, and if the repressed must return — let it be one easy to dismiss and to make invisible again. The smiling Chinaman having been granted an egalitarian opportunity fails in a fair contest, and according to the rules must leave the field. Ultimately, it shows that Bail is a careful writer, possessed of a bravado style but not quite willing to risk everything, at least not the possibility that what he has crafted so beautifully is actually something quite questionable if not laughable. We see also how this effect of ornamentation runs parallel with Grenville's The Idea of Perfection and how Freddy's presence covers the lack of not only Chinese Australian history but that of Aboriginal prior occupation to white colonisation. But rather than Wrigley's "inessential excess" the Chinese figure does need to appear in both texts and not simply in an ornamental or supplementary fashion. Something deeper runs through these texts and brings into question the unusual nexus of the museum, collecting, and the male Chinese racial stereotype — which I argue is the emergence of the racial fetish.

Holland is a collector, and not averse to taking things out of their place of origin, he has attempted to plant every known species of eucalyptus on his property, creating “an outdoor museum of trees” (*Eucalyptus* 45). The eucalyptus is a genus of native Australian trees that has undergone the classificatory colonisation of Latinate taxonomy. The ability to correctly name all the eucalyptus or gum trees on the farm is somewhat like tests of citizenship in some countries where the applicant has to pass a test of knowledge about the country and its history and culture. The eucalyptus is iconic and ubiquitous in both country and urban areas and yet paradoxically and because of its numerous endemic varieties very few Australians are likely to correctly identify even a small number of such trees. Perhaps this is the irony in *Eucalyptus*, that the eucalyptus has become in Australia, as Lyn Jacobs says, a “cultural signifier” (“Good” 40) that may well defy the colonising order that is imposed upon it. The desire on Holland’s part to collect and classify in one place is then at first glance eccentric but seemingly not perverse. Susan Stewart states: “The boundary between collection and fetishism is mediated by classification and display in tension with accumulation and secrecy” (*Longing* 163). Holland’s collecting goes upon lines of conservation and classification, not mere accumulation and secrecy. But if the character of Holland is unaffected by fetishism in the Freudian sense, nevertheless the entire narrative of *Eucalyptus* is distinctly marked by fetishism’s indication of both lack and concealment, which brings us to two major theoretical positions on fetishism — those of psychoanalysis and Marx’s commodity fetishism.

In *Capital* Marx outlines a commodity fetishism in which the objectification of commodities conceals the exploitative social relations of their production under capitalism: “There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, that fantastic form of a relation between things” (77). Freud’s theory of the fetish focuses on the female’s (mother’s) lack of a penis and the refusal of the male fetishist to recognise this difference by substituting the lack with some other object, or part of the female body such as the nose or foot, which in turn keeps at a distance the fear of castration from the authority figure of the father (“Fetishism” 152-157). Central to fetishism is the male’s simultaneous disavowal of and a recognition of sexual difference. Anne McClintock on the other hand has questioned the value of reading fetishism purely in reference to male castration anxiety, doubting the myriad forms of fetishistic ambiguity such as racist fetishising of white skin, black dominatrices, lesbians cross-dressing as men, nationalistic fetishising of flags and maps, and so forth, could be

“categorized under a single mark of desire without great loss of theoretical subtlety and historical complexity” (*Imperial* 184). Rather, she calls for the opening up of fetish investigations that would include race and class in playing as formative a role as sexuality, and which would also allow the intersection of the private realm of the fetish to meet with the public realm of the market place (184). McClintock contends that fetishes arise from social contradictions, and states,

Far from being merely phallic substitutes, fetishes can be seen as the displacement onto an object (or person) of contradictions that the individual cannot resolve at a personal level. These contradictions may originate as social contradictions but are lived with profound intensity in the imagination and the flesh. The fetish thus stands at the cross-roads of psychoanalysis and social history, inhabiting the threshold of both personal and historical memory. The fetish marks a crisis in social meaning as the embodiment of an impossible irresolution. The contradiction is displaced onto and embodied in the fetish object, which is thus destined to recur with compulsive repetition. Hence the apparent power of the fetish to enchant the fetishist. By displacing power onto the fetish, then manipulating the fetish, the individual gains symbolic control over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities. (184)

Something of these terrifying ambiguities is expressed in a recent article by Alison Ravenscroft, “A Picture in Black and White: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Scene of ‘Race’”. At the outset of her article she cites Hélène Cixous, saying that “writing in its noblest function is an attempt to unerase, to unearth, to find the primitive picture again, ours, the one that frightens us” (“Picture” 233). Ravenscroft then asks how might Australian writing be now read, given what she claims is “the impossible dialectic” between “black” and “white” and “its efforts to ‘erase’, to ‘unearth’, that picture that... frightens ‘us’ as white Australians” (233). For Ravenscroft and, as she says, white Australians, the picture that frightens is the original scene of invasion, colonisation, dispossession of Aborigines, and the fiction of terra nullius, “the scene that continues to structure our perceptions of the Indigenous ‘other’ and of our white selves into the present” (233). Yet I note the absence of her concern for the other scene of impossible dialectic, the one between specifically Chinese and white Australians and the legacy of the white Australia policy. Not all white Australian writers have turned away

from facing the issue of indigenous dispossession<sup>4</sup>, but the picture that frightens is only partially complete without recognition that the white Australia policy was also a formative element of white-Australian identity into the twentieth century. Ravenscroft's invocation of the picture that "frightens us" is I believe precisely what leads to the construction by the writers being examined in this chapter of the racial fetish — that is, the Chinese man who conceals the lack of the indigenous figure in the visual field, and makes possible this disavowal of absence through his substituting racial presence, and permits the white writer the pleasure to manipulate the fetish through the ordering processes of the stereotype.

Anxiety and disavowal may follow Aboriginal dispossession but in comparison, dismissing the Chinese man from any scene will always seem easier to accomplish. In a more recent essay, "The Girl in the Picture and the Eye of Her Beholder: Viet Nam, Whiteness, and the Disavowal of Indigeneity", Alison Ravenscroft considers one of the most famous images of the Vietnam War, the photograph of a naked and badly burnt Phan Thi Kim Phuc, running along Highway 1 after an American napalm bombing raid. Ravenscroft notes how in this famous picture there are soldiers and other children, yet for the most part these other children have been forgotten, in particular the image of the boy who is actually foregrounded in the original photograph but has over time often become elided in reproductions of this picture. The elision of the boy leads Ravenscroft to ask what other children have been forgotten, not just in the photograph but more broadly, and in particular in Australia, where she turns to the elision of indigenous dispossession, and the processes of disavowal in the formation of whiteness and white subjectivity. While Ravenscroft uses the terminology of avowal and disavowal — the notion that white Australians simultaneously acknowledge the fact of indigenous dispossession and at the same time do not — she herself disavows the presence of the fetish from her analysis. While she proffers that, "If as white Australians we always look from the viewing position of whiteness, which is structured on Indigenous presence, ownership and dispossession, then we look at the Asian through these eyes, too" ("Girl" 517). The way white Australians look at Asians, she furthers states, is "not only given meanings by whites in the context of Australian-Asian colonial relations... it also takes its meanings fundamentally from the colonial relations here". But in her notion of "here", it is the primary relationship of indigenous and white relations that matters. Ravenscroft's "look" at Asians is nevertheless only partial, and peculiarly absent of the Asian Australian, her gaze is strictly cast abroad at Viet Nam. Once again she elides the

historical Asian presence in Australia prior to, during, and after the end of the white Australia policy. She omits mention of the end of the policy in 1973, coinciding with the last years of the Vietnam War, and the first arrivals of Indo-Chinese refugees that followed, in the aftermath of the war. On the contrary, the ways in which white Australians have “seen” Asians abroad or on their television sets have their roots in the very foundation of the white Australia policy and the very idea of keeping Asians out of Australia for a period of more than 70 years, which for her entire article she neglects to mention.

The dispossession of the Aborigines and the exclusion of non-indigenous coloured peoples are part of the same frightening picture of Australian history even if they have, as Ann Curthoys has rightly noted, been kept apart in most racial discourses. In Ravenscroft’s analysis this discourse continues to remain separated; the Asian subject she perceives does not exist amidst the Australian population, but is an “Asian neighbour” somewhere abroad. In respect of its fetish character, the picture of Vietnamese children running along the highway in wartime Vietnam, Ravenscroft seemingly makes an avowal of indigenous dispossession but a disavowal of non-indigenous racial exclusion. This is further exemplified when she states, “The white subject, the migrant-coloniser, is understood to be any non-Indigenous subject in the Australian context” (516, my emphasis). Surely then the white Australia policy continues to have such determining force that Ravenscroft fetishises the Asian figure in Asia but is apparently blind to the presence of Asians in Australia either before 1973 or since then.

While I find the vocabulary of fetishism extremely useful and wish to follow McClintock’s contention that “fetishes involve the displacement of a host of contradictions onto impassioned objects, [and] defy reduction to a single originary trauma or psychopathology of the individual subject” (202-3), Homi Bhabha’s linking of the stereotype and the fetish is of particular importance. Bhabha’s fetishised stereotype is itself inferred from Edward Said’s Orientalism. Said himself expresses a notion that in the encounter of the west with the Orient a kind of archive is built up from the literature of colonialism that includes a number of

typical encapsulations: the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation. These are the lenses through which the Orient is

experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West. (58)

In these encounters, according to Said: “One tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing” (58). This median category works to nullify the reception of new potentially threatening things through an ideological filter, which can then impose its familiar values. Upon encounter, things then become either “original” or “repetitious”, and according to Said, “The Orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West’s contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in — or fear of — novelty” (59). Bhabha in turn asks, “What is this theory of encapsulation or fixation which moves between the recognition of cultural and racial difference and its disavowal, by affixing the unfamiliar to something established, in a form that is repetitious and vacillates between delight and fear?” (73). For Bhabha, notions of vacillation, fixation, original and repetitious are sufficient to signal a “Freudian fable of fetishism” circulating “within the discourse of colonial power requiring the articulation of modes of differentiation — sexual and racial — as well as different modes of theoretical discourse — psychoanalytical and historical” (73).

Having established what Bhabha sees as the structural link between the racial stereotype of colonial discourse and fetishism, that is, the recognition and disavowal of difference, Bhabha outlines a functional link between racial stereotype and fetishism that can be seen in the way that “fetishism is always a ‘play’ or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity — in Freud’s terms: ‘All men have penises’; in ours: ‘All men have the same skin/race/culture’ — and the anxiety associated with lack and difference — again, for Freud: ‘Some do not have penises’; for us ‘Some do not have the same skin/race/culture’” (74). Furthermore, the fetish or stereotype, for Bhabha, “gives access to an ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it” (75). What I would like to extend from Bhabha’s analysis is another level of disavowal and recognition; that of the ambiguities of colonisation and the civilising mission encapsulated within the discourse of western liberalism, ideals of democracy, human rights, individual freedom, rule of law, and respect for property rights that are disavowed through acts of imperialism. I



believe these are the crises of social meaning and fetish embodiments of such impossible resolutions that McClintock has in mind in her calls for opening up fetish readings. It is not so much that some have black skins and some white or yellow, but that the exercise of power by one group over another which is so inimical to the espoused social and political values of the western civilisation. This is what produces the fetish “loss of visual acuity”, as Weinbaum characterises it, in the recognition and disavowal of difference (416). In this historical context of colonisation and continuing dispossession, the fetishised racial stereotype helps the privileged white writer and individual gain symbolic control in the encounter of “terrifying ambiguities” and the picture that “frightens”. After the abolition of the white Australia policy the Chinese man as racial stereotype, amidst the ambiguities and frightening picture of indigenous dispossession, becomes by comparison far less terrifying and frightening. Because the white Australia policy officially no longer exists then the exclusion of Chinese appears to no longer exist. Therefore this admittance of one racial presence then disavows all absences and exclusions tout court.

In Eucalyptus we see how Bail self-consciously exploits the stereotype as a way of maintaining narrative and thematic control; in The Idea of Perfection Grenville’s use of the racial stereotype evinces precisely that vacillating quality that shifts between delight and contempt. Although in The Idea of Perfection Grenville attempts to disturb the ways we facilely perceive difference, be it gender, race, or ethnicity, she does this in part through cultural assimilation and a form of “colour-blindness”. Throughout the novel Felicity persistently attempts to interpret something foreign in Freddy. She cannot overcome the discomfort she feels that Freddy is after all Chinese despite the elusiveness from which she attempts to discover and reify Chinese characteristics:

She was no racist, but noticed, every time he spoke, how he spoke exactly the way everyone else did. She was no racist, but listened for something Chinese in the way he talked, the little foreign something. The funny thing was, it was never there... if you happened to find yourself with him in the dark for any reason, you would never know he was Chinese. (16)

Felicity’s surprise that Freddy speaks just like everyone else is a throwback to the white Australia policy era when less than one per cent of the population was Asian.

Indeed her whole range of stereotypical expectations is, rather than contemporaneous ones, precisely of that era.

Freddy's identity persistently revolves around the ambiguity over whether he is Chinese or normalised into an undifferentiated and deracialised man. Felicity cannot conceive of Freddy Chang as "Australian" even though his family has been in Australia for five generations and her own family for only two generations. Felicity might be part of Grenville's foil to disrupt dominant notions of Australianness, notions that have sought to exclude people of colour, but it is a tactic that leads to a disavowal of racism that goes partially to normalizing the Chinese man into the realm of whiteness. What disturbs Felicity is that she does not quite know what is Chinese about Freddy. What eludes her is "the little foreign something" that will fix for her his identity. Her senses give her conflicting messages; he looks different, but sounds the same. Geography and history do not erase his Chineseness, nor instil qualities of being Australian. She is unable to construct a satisfying opposition between his Chineseness and her Australianness. For Felicity, the encounter with this Chineseness is so unsettling it elicits a response that verges on the neurotic: "She could hear that her voice was a little too loud and a little too sprightly in the quiet shop. She smiled too much, and did not know how to stop" (15, emphasis added). What Felicity ultimately grasps at for support in her anxiety is the racial stereotype — the racial boundaries between her own whiteness and that of colour, but in her excessive smiling she has already been touched and afflicted by the stereotype.

Ideas of inscrutability, disease/leprosy, the Chinese man's fascination for white women, eating dogs, and other stereotypes of difference run through Felicity's mind. Although Freddy is nominally Chinese, Grenville herself does not allow Freddy a voice that expresses any sense of Chineseness. Freddy never talks about his Chinese background to Felicity or anyone else. Within the community he is not an outsider, the other townsfolk do not treat him in any way other than if he were a white person. Freddy is a man at ease in town and particularly with himself. In the absence of any subjective, dialogic expression of being Chinese, Freddy is open to readings of Chineseness from Grenville's dominant white-Australian position — those incorporating the stereotype. Felicity looks for difference and cannot find it other than in Freddy's skin colour. Skin, argues Bhabha, "as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype, is the most visible of fetishes, recognised as 'common knowledge' in a range of cultural, political and historical discourses, and plays a public part in the racial drama that is

enacted every day in colonial societies” (78). In the absence of other differences then, skin has to be visible as a sufficient marker of cultural and racial difference. Citing Paul Abbot, Bhabha asserts that skin, as a signifier of discrimination must be, in contrast to repression, which “banishes its object to the unconscious”, constantly brought into consciousness through its representations (79). Visibility and invisibility as David Eng also notes are not opposing indications of progressiveness, but rather “work to fix, shift, and refix the figure of the Asian immigrant according to particular exigencies and historical demands of the nation-state” (110). But as if to disrupt these representational differences, in *The Idea of Perfection*, Felicity discovers that “Naked, Freddy Chang was no longer Chinese... She never thought about him being Chinese when he had no clothes on” (311). If when naked he is no longer Chinese then ontologically what is he now? Ultimately Felicity partially incorporates Freddy into her normative world of whiteness. In effect she closes her eyes to his colour and Chineseness and the differences that she cannot in any stable sense define or elicit from his body or self. It is not that she regards his Chineseness indifferently, but she fails to think of it, or rather overlooks what is there — the skin, the whole existence, of a Chinese man. Yet this incorporation is always on the verge of vacillating.

When outside the realm of visual difference, there is a spatial liminality to which Freddy belongs. In Freddy’s butcher shop Felicity sees that on “the other side of the fly-wire there was something human in size and shape”. The fly-wire is a floor-to-ceiling screen that visually and physically separates the butcher from his customers. As a screen it is not completely opaque, and not enough to conceal; the protection is limited and being mesh it only obscures and distorts whoever is standing on the other side. For Felicity it is like visiting someone in prison. She might wonder who is the real prisoner but it is Alfred Chang who is the one who is at ease in “his cage” (21). It is this positioning of Freddy Chang, a man behind a screen, obscured, in a dark place, necessarily kept physically separate, that spatially defines him. If the historical exclusion of Chinese through the white Australia policy has itself vanished then the traces of exclusion follow and haunt not only the Chinese man but also the representations of the Chinese male and the physical structures surrounding him. Felicity enters the border space of Freddy Chang’s butcher shop but the screen initially denies a more intimate space. The screen offers both a view of the other, restricting the possibility of physical contact, and both sides have perspectives that are inherently blurred, testing — at least from Felicity’s side — a series of stereotypical images and presumptions of the other.

Grenville for her part works with and against the stereotypes, which in effect amounts to ambivalence. Alfred Chang has big hands, “big bland face”, and a body that is muscular — features that might otherwise make him acceptably masculine in the white sense as opposed to the supposed lack of largeness in the Asian male body<sup>5</sup>. In the butcher shop Felicity finds him standing behind the fly-wire, close enough to see his eyes, “dark in his smooth face, but she could not tell what sort of expression he had. She realised you could call this being inscrutable” (23, original emphasis). It crosses Felicity’s mind when Freddy hands to her a parcel through a hatch in the wire that “they have a fascination for white women” (24, original emphasis). The hatch in the screen is like a small passage through which misconceptions are delivered and received. When Freddy hands her another small brown paper bag, she opens the bag and sees a number of heart-shaped objects fall out — she feels a sense of repulsion and thinks, “They eat dog,” but the heart-shaped things turn out to be large strawberries called ox-hearts. They’re so big, she exclaims in surprise, and realises that she might sound as though she were referring to Freddy’s sex organ, not so much disrupting the assumption or myth that Asian men’s sex organs are small relative to white men’s, as to reinforce it. She attempts to refuse the strawberries by saying that she is allergic to them, and would break out into a rash thereby invoking the stereotypical fear of contact and contamination: “More like a ... disease. The word came out in a hiss. She was thinking, Leprosy. His face recoiled and disappeared from the hatch. She had not meant, of course, that Chinese people gave you leprosy” (27, original emphasis). The character of Felicity runs through various stereotypical images of the Chinese man as if following an imperative to counter them, yet the effect of stripping Freddy of not only stereotypical characteristics but Chineseness is a process of whitening Freddy. The historical experiences of racial exclusion therefore leave him as psychically unmarked as the Chinese merchant in Eucalyptus and yet he still occupies a spatial position of confinement.

Grenville cannot resist reverting to racial and cultural stereotype, even if only to attempt to parody. The Chinese male cannot have deep feelings, is incapable of love. Felicity thinks “It was funny, really, and rather sad, a Chinese trying to cut a romantic figure” (247). Felicity thinks of Freddy with a sense of pity, and regards him as “the poor man” (247). For Felicity the idea of a romantic Asian male is incongruous, and instead race and colour need to be temporarily stripped from him in order to make him “no longer Chinese”. Ultimately however the parody is undermined as the author

Grenville and the character Felicity converge in the ambivalent plotting and witnessing of its narrative developments. Disrupting stereotypical features and stripping the Chinese man of them reaches a limit, as underneath the stereotypical characteristics that have been removed still lies an undesirable and unassimilable being, and in the end there is a more pronounced desire to reassert difference and inflict due punishment upon him. Felicity recognises that there was nothing in the relationship that was love, certainly not on her part, she did not even particularly like Freddy; there was “nothing in common. He did not make her laugh, or impress her... His body moving inside hers did not result in anything that could be given the status of passion” (312-313, original emphasis). The affair comes to an end when Felicity’s husband Hugh forces his way into Freddy’s studio and finds Felicity in a state of nudity, dresses her as though she is a child, ushers her down the stairs and out of the studio. Hugh thus regains his rightful place as husband, and reasserts the domain and primacy of the white male.

For his transgressions Freddy is punished by a mysterious fire that destroys his photographic studio. There is something more potent to this punishment because it is exacted anonymously, and cannot be attributed to a known individual. It suggests a wider source of retribution that bears a communal sanctioning; that nothing in the town is a secret for long, that a controlling gaze of some visual acuity is at work — at least in this instance, against the morally transgressive Chinese man. Furthermore, it is the vertiginous Douglas who braves the fire to rescue a precious patchwork quilt made by Harley for the Heritage Museum that had been in Freddy’s studio waiting to be photographed. In all respects the reclaiming of white property and history is complete, and if there is a stable idea of perfection it does not include the moral impropriety of the Chinese man who is left as an abject figure of abandonment. The imperfection of the fetishised Chinese man is thus there to be seen, and Grenville’s representation of the Chinese man is ultimately ruthless and excruciating, while concealing the visual and textual lack of the indigenous figure. Most of all the fetishised Chinese man disavows colonisation in the readily apparent existence of white settlement on Aboriginal land.

Like The Idea of Perfection and Eucalyptus, Peter Carey’s Illywhacker engages in a narrative of nation but in a broader political sweep across Australian colonial and recent history. In the second paragraph of Illywhacker, the narrator and principal character Herbert Badgery declares, “I am a terrible liar and have always been a liar” (11). The personal lies of Herbert Badgery are however merely metonymic of larger deceptions that historically begin with the founding deception of terra nullius used by

the British in the colonisation of Australia without regard to Aboriginal sovereignty. Herbert Badgery is introduced to a book written by M.V. Anderson which claims:

Our forefathers were all great liars. They lied about their backgrounds and the parentage of their wives. However it is their first lie that is the most impressive for being so monumental, i.e., that the continent, at the time of first settlement, was said to be occupied but not cultivated and by that simple device they were able to give the legal owners short shrift and, when they objected, to use the musket or poison flour, and to do so with a clear conscience. (456)

The book intended as a school textbook is deemed “unsuitable for boys” and never used, thus helping to perpetuate and conceal the lie of *terra nullius*<sup>6</sup>. Carey however is not so much interested in narrating a story of white colonisation and indigenous dispossession as a rupture of constructions of white-Australian identity and cherished national icons based on spurious episodes of national sovereignty, and successive periods of social, political and economic domination by British, American and Japanese interests. Unlike the other texts, more than one Chinese character appears in *Illywhacker*. If the racial stereotype as fetish represents an encapsulation of the typical, then, as in *The Idea of Perfection* and *Eucalyptus*, abjection constantly stalks representations of the Chinese male figure.

When Herbert Badgery and Phoebe McGrath enact their troubled relationship in the middle of the street they are aware that “...a pig-tailed Chinaman was watching too. He stood in the doorway of his laundry and Phoebe was her father’s daughter because he saw, not a man, but a cartoon from the *Bulletin*: John Chinaman outside his den” (122). Like Grenville and Bail, Carey also self-consciously serves up the stereotype because it once encapsulated an inscribed national attitude, a textual one that belonged to the era of the *Bulletin* magazine when its front cover banner proclaimed “Australia for the White Man”<sup>7</sup>. When Herbert Badgery turns on the street he sees again the “grinning stickybeak who took a few steps backwards before fleeing for the steamy safety of his laundry” (122). The invocation of the “grinning” Chinese man, just as much as “smiling Chinaman”, is sufficient to evoke any list of other stereotypical traits — opium smoking, doing the work of a woman, and cowardly, writ large. But all this contrasts with the figure of Goon Tse Ying. Herbert Badgery is adopted by a “Chinaman” while evading life as a street urchin. In a scene exemplary of Said’s colonial encounter with novelty,

Herbert likes Goon's gravely voice and is fascinated to see Goon pet a Chinese boy on the head and give him something to eat. Herbert's encounter with Goon is a discovery of the beguiling exotic. By using the stereotype Carey is able to bring into relief the uncommonly masculine figure of Goon Tse Ying — masculinity with Chinese features, and in this case at least kindly and without violence. When Herbert Badgery, as a "self-appointed orphan" child, is hiding out in the Melbourne markets he witnesses the stereotypically "nervous, polite and law abiding" Wong family in an adjacent stall. They attempt to appease him with a bowl of milk but his head is full of his father's stories of Chinese predilections and vices: opium addiction, slavery, the eating of Christian infant hands. The Wong family cannot break his resistance but Herbert discovers "Their cousin Goon... was a different man and it was he who strode right in, knocking crates aside with his gold-capped stick, who grabbed me by the scruff of my dirty neck and lifted me, screaming and kicking, into the air... I bit his hand and made it bleed. He laughed out loud, this giant in a butterfly collar and gold-rimmed glasses. I wet myself in terror" (209).

Goon Tse Ying is not, however, about to eat Herbert Badgery's dirty little hands, rather it is to take the orphan under his wing and "prove himself civilised to the English he despised" (210). The contradiction is that in order to prove himself that "civilised" man requires from Goon a tacit acceptance of the term "civilised" as defined by the dominant "English" population and a direct assimilation and modification of behaviour into that dominant culture which he despises, a process that is logically self-debasing. The assimilation of Goon Tse Ying involves him dressing like the English when it suits him, and speaking English without a trace of an accent. It is a conscious performance of Englishness, and a specific idealised Englishness that is necessarily as much class specific as cultural. Even if it is not necessarily the idealised masculinity a Chinese man would have ordinarily aspired to, it is nevertheless the idealised masculinity recognised by the ten-year-old Herbert Badgery since it is an exoticism that is recognisably Australian for its robustness. For Goon Tse Ying was, according to Badgery: "a giant of a man, not in the sense that he might tower over you... Oh, he was large for a Chinese, but that is not the point — he towered over every man I ever met in the size of his spirit, his indignation, his energy, his laugh, and his ability to drink a tumbler of rough brandy in a single gulp" (210). But it is with the words "prove himself civilised" that echoes Bhabha's colonial mimicry — "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say that the

discourse of mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (86, original emphasis). As with Bhabha’s notion of the fixity of stereotype and its ambivalence, colonial mimicry is also charged with ambivalence. The colonised subject is required to assimilate to colonial (white) standards which are strategically set up as impossible to achieve because the colonised is separated by racial difference and can only achieve an incomplete, partial imitation of that colonial ideal. But for Bhabha this kind of “strategic limitation” upon the colonised ensures colonial authority to “strategic failure” in “that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (86). Mimicry as a practice therefore has the potential for turning into disruption but in Goon Tse Ying’s attempts at mimetic mockery the result is not colonial strategic failure but abjection and self-abjection.

In Badgery’s terms masculinity is encapsulated by spirit, indignation, energy, a booming laugh as opposed to obsequious grin, and the ability to drink alcohol; positive characteristics entirely commensurate with white notions of masculinity. What further distinguishes Goon Tse Ying from other Chinese men is an unaccommodating manner vis-à-vis the dominant white population. He is scornful of Chinese attempts at appeasement, he is not the kind to write polite petitions to the legislature seeking fair treatment on the goldfields or anywhere else, he roars, makes taunts, he does not giggle. The forty-year-old Goon Tse Ying has big shoulders and strong calves, and “amongst his own kind, a voice like a gravel crusher” (211, emphasis added). Race does not preclude Badgery’s notion of masculinity from extending to a Chinese, rather Goon’s variety of masculinity positively distinguishes him from other forms of Chinese manhood. This kind of feisty colonial masculinity allows Goon a limited — in mimetic form — entry into the white-Australian community in which to begin a contestation for an equitable place in society. Such entry is specifically a gendered and racialised one. Carey’s Goon Tse Ying is not in any case a separatist, but a “mimic man”. As McClintock says, “Mimic men are obliged to inhabit an uninhabitable zone of ambivalence that grants them neither identity nor difference; they must mimic an image that they cannot fully assume. Herein lies the failure of mimicry... for in the slippage between identity and difference the ‘normalizing’ authority of colonial discourse is thrown into question” (63). Goon is actually for accommodation with the dominant white population but in the sense that he has something to prove — a kind of mockery. In the eyes of Goon the English are the ones who act like barbarians, but Goon’s position also occupies an ambivalent “no-man’s” land, void of identity, because it is the



“English” that he attempts to mimic, but it is the English that want to expel him from their realm.

For all Goon Tse Ying’s mix of kindness, spirit and indignation, teaching Herbert how to disappear is also a sign of ambivalence. Disappearance is a historical lesson of Chinese terror, a magical disappearance that also has at its roots abjection. It is not the kind of revenge that assuages Goon Tse Ying’s grievances. In the context of the Lambing Flats confrontation between white and Chinese miners in which the very masculine Goon himself learns to disappear, it is not a heroic act of defiance, rather a humiliating invisibility, taken to flight, a disappearance from the goldfields that achieves exactly the goals of the white goldminers to rid the Chinese from the goldfields and ultimately create a white Australia, an acquiescence to a hegemonic white occupation of that space. It is a disappearance of survival and abjection — it does not achieve access to space, not even a begrudging marginal physical place, only to an immaterial place of suspension. Goon Tse Ying’s disappearing trick is metaphorically fetishised absence — since Illywhacker is also devoid of Aboriginal characters — but simultaneously a place of abjection.

Abjection may mean humiliation but also has the meaning to expel or cast away. For Julia Kristeva abjection encompasses a loathing of the improper and the unclean, certain foods, the voiding of waste, blood, vomit, phlegm, excrement: “it is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us” (Powers 4). But, according to Kristeva, it is not just improper practices and uncleanness, “but what disturbs identity, system and order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience... Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law” (4). It is this aspect of disruption that gives abjection its broader social dimension and determines, as McClintock argues, that “certain groups are expelled and obliged to inhabit the impossible edges of modernity: the slum, the ghetto, the garret, the brothel, the convent, the colonial Bantustan... Abject peoples are those whom industrial imperialism rejects but cannot do without: slaves, prostitutes, the colonised, domestic workers, the insane, the unemployed. Certain threshold zones become abject zones and are policed with vigor...” (72). In Australia such abject groups have historically included convicts, Aborigines, necessary as stockmen or domestic workers and police trackers, and also the Chinese, initially as cheap labour, virtually

expunged during the white Australia policy era, but now as a presence that uneasily and ambivalently asserts the dominant ideological commitments to multiculturalism, anti-discrimination, and human rights.

Disappearance has the appearance of magic but conceals powerlessness. For Goon abjection is knowing that the colour of yellow skin can only be expunged through absolute disappearance, and to expel the self in order to achieve a colonial and racial mimicry that no matter how assiduously practiced inevitably fails. For the older Herbert Badgery, the Goon of old age is “not worth a pinch of shit”, his exoticism reduced to eating chops and sausages, roast beef on Sundays; “the only invisibility he would acknowledge was that which comes from dressing like everyone else” (210). The older Goon, whom Badgery finds forty years later in the town of Grafton, is an incontinent, “ancient Chinaman”, shrunken in an inappropriate three-piece English suit. The former indignant, spirited Goon is now a desiccated, emasculated figure, a representative of various small Chinese associations, and a businessman. Goon initially fails to recognise his former protégé, but upon further prompting remembers Badgery but repudiates any magical ability to disappear. A lifetime of mimicry and abjection have reached the point where the emaciated Goon is incapable of controlling basic voiding functions such as passing urine. But it is not Goon Tse Ying’s experience of a lifetime of marginality in white Australia that Carey conveys but the disillusionment and contempt of Herbert Badgery. Rather than a happy reunion, the inexplicable fact that Goon Tse Ying refuses to acknowledge either his own past or magical abilities and instead is increasingly preoccupied with protecting his journal of “shopkeeper’s secrets” from Badgery’s proximity and curiosity further enrages Badgery. Rather than performing a spatial disappearance, Goon now enacts a temporal disappearance. He denies having been at Lambing Flat, and offers another genealogy; he says his children are “real little Aussies”. Badgery insists that Goon is the same man of the Melbourne markets. Each man takes an immovable position over an identity which one insists is the same and the other resists. Goon claims the only thing he can make disappear is the top of his thumb, a trick that he learnt from his Australian grandson. For Goon to admit to being at Lambing Flats, where the Chinese were expelled, and the ability to disappear would be tantamount to the admission of abjection. But in Herbert’s eyes Goon is nevertheless transformed from the invisible man to an equally abject state of corporeally shrunken man. When later they struggle over possession of Goon’s The Book of Dragons, Goon disappears and Badgery is left holding one of Goon’s fingers. With Goon’s finger and

the book, Herbert is literally left with an index to the ungraspable, elusiveness of the Chinese man's existence. Once again, the Chinese man is forced to disappear — this time not because he is to be excluded as inherently undesirable but because he does not or can no longer live up to the ambivalent expectations of idealised masculinity and exoticism.

In the final part of Illywhacker Carey introduces Mr Lo, a Chinese marine architect from Penang, who has slipped through the customs dictation test of the white Australia policy after the end of the Second World War and taken refuge in Charles Badgery's Pet Emporium. Mr Lo is a mild-mannered man, and like Freddy Chang in The Idea of Perfection, also occupies a "cage". The first time Charles Badgery comes across Mr Lo he is hanging from the top bars of his cage, in a moment of literal suspension, waiting for Charles to grant him permission to stay or to expel him from the sanctuary of the pet shop. Subsequently Mr Lo becomes a resident inhabiting a giant pet cage where he somersaults for the pleasure of visitors. Within the confines of Mr Lo's cage, invisibility is not far removed from him, the gentle Mr Lo plays with the invisible — imaginary baseball (rather than English cricket) with invisible bat and ball, invisible players, umpires, and invisible home plate in the largely, at this point, American-owned pet shop. Rather than occupy a position of invisibility, the world of Mr Lo is itself invisible. The contrast between Goon Tse Ying and Mr Lo provides a historical delineation in white Australian and Asian Australian interaction. The white Australia policy post-Second World War becomes more permeable, but the place of the Chinese man remains restricted. Charles Badgery's Pet Emporium represents collecting carried to excess (Huggan 38) and develops as a heterotopic site that is national theme park and cultural museum and that replicates the exploitative world of the outside (Huggan 41). The Pet Emporium at this point disturbs the borders of classification and accumulation, and merges the distinctions between commodity fetishism with the fetishism of psychoanalysis.

When Herbert and his son, Charles, are reunited and go for a ride in Charles's new pseudo-Australian-owned Holden car, Mr Lo is invited to go out in the car but declines. He has been out into the Sydney streets once since arriving in the pet shop but was vulnerable because of his illegal status and the thought that he could be deported and later conscripted to fight communists in the Malaysian jungles. "So he returned, and stayed, and did not try to go out again, sad to be locked away from the world and fearful lest he be forced into it" (509). In fact Mr Lo stays permanently in the pet shop even

after gaining official permission to stay in Australia. Mr Lo is afflicted by agoraphobia. The entry of the Chinese male into Australian space is seemingly irrational. At once excluded, it is a place that he intrudes into and becomes willingly self-incarcerated. Moreover in this situation he exists in a kind of suspension not dissimilar to Goon Tse Ying's disappearing trick; he does not understand what function he has in the Pet Emporium and can only resort to an imaginary existence. He longs for the day when a beautiful young woman would come to fall in love with him and they would then walk the streets of Sydney together, but this never happens.<sup>8</sup> Mr Lo remains in his cage in the Pet Emporium where a permanent state of spatial abjection operates and determines his limited movements. He is both cast away and cannot leave the place where he is trapped.

In its guise as cultural museum, the Japanese-owned Pet Emporium exhibits a collection of iconic figures such as shearers, lifesavers, inventors, manufacturers, bushmen, and Aborigines. "They do not act like caged people. The very success of the exhibit is in their ability to move and talk naturally within the confines of space" (599). In Carey's narrative, shearers, lifesavers, Chinese and Aborigines occupy not only the same space but also share a common historical experience of exploitation and colonialism at the hands of the British, American and Japanese imperialists. Australians have become naturalised to their confined spaces so that they do not look and feel uncomfortable in them, nor like Mr Lo may they know their real function in the Pet Emporium. Yet the position of Mr Lo in this iconic collection is distinguishable from other exhibits in that he is the only uncollected exhibit. Mr Lo is after all uninvited, he is a historically prior — although not an autochthonous — presence in the pet shop's transformation into a cultural museum. He is an intruder within this collection, and doesn't truly belong to it — unmistakably he is not an iconic figure of Australian identity. Mr Lo exists both ambiguously and disruptively as an element within the developing fabrications of iconic Australian identities, yet there is a fetish value to his presence.

While Carey constructs a postcolonial imagining of Australia, the dispossession of the indigenous population is largely peripheral to the novel which, like The Idea of Perfection and Eucalyptus, is also devoid of any Aboriginal characters. Rather the novel is another example of the ambivalence which accompanies the fetish figure of the Chinese man, Goon Tse Ying or Mr Lo, who occludes the absence of the indigenous subject, on the one hand revealing that absence and yet also denying its absence. While indicating the deception of terra nullius, in the process of grouping together such

disparate subjects as Aborigines, manufacturers, and shearers, Carey is also re-presenting an elision, not of how foreign powers and interests dominated Australia but how non-indigenous Australians benefited from the occupation of Aboriginal space.

### Conclusion

As a former colony, Australia is similar to countries such as the USA, Canada and New Zealand where the structures which initially enforced the dispossession of Aboriginal people continue to exist. As long as the situation exists in which Aboriginal people are marginalised and issues such as land rights, the stolen generation, reconciliation and other grievances remain to be fully resolved, Aboriginal presence continues to haunt white-Australian constructions of national identity and collective memory. I have characterised the place of the Chinese male figure as a softening presence in the terrifying ambiguities and frightening picture of disavowal and recognition of Aboriginal presence with the psychoanalytic vocabulary of fetishism. Given the convergence of museum motifs, collecting, and stereotypes across these three works the Chinese male figure has become not merely ornamental but the fetish object that conceals the absence or lack of the indigenous figure in both discourse and the visual field of colonised Australia. In other respects the fetish position in these three texts of the Chinese male is also an indication of the continuing separation that persists in Australia on the issues of race discourse that at the beginning of this chapter was pointed out by Ann Curthoys. In such (con)texts the self-absenting of the indigenous figure and its involvement may be the most reasonable response to the marginalisation practised within dominant literary representations. While this chapter has focused on the position of the Chinese man as racial fetish it leaves open the question as to what places the Chinese woman occupies in Australian fiction. For the moment my conclusion is that the fetish position of the Chinese male reflects the continuing marginal and frequently abject position he occupies in the national imaginary, as I have shown in this chapter and, in different contexts, as I will show in the following chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Ouyang's count of seven novels does not include in this period Asian Australian works such as novelist Brian Castro's After China, and Pomeroy, nor Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made.

<sup>2</sup> The cartoon appeared at the time of controversy over Asian campaign donations to the Democratic Party in the late 1990s.

<sup>3</sup> See Olivia Khoo, "Whiteness and the Australian Fiancé: Framing the Ornamental Text in Australia" and her dissertation "The Chinese Exotic: Con-temporary Visibilities of Diasporic Chinese Femininities".

<sup>4</sup> We can take Ravenscroft's examination of Kathleen Mary Fallon's "how violence made me a real mother-of-a-mother of me" being one case in point. I am not arguing that writers must always include both indigenous and Chinese/Asian presence in their stories, such as Xavier Herbert in Capricornia or Alex Miller in Ancestor Game (see Chapter 5), but in these specific examples of writing that set themselves up as stories of nation, national identity and history, such elisions on either side of indigenous or Asian would make their narratives inherently problematic.

<sup>5</sup> Allan Luke has written: "Looking in the mirror, we [Chinese men] find ourselves without any of the defining characteristics of dominant masculinity — white skin, hairy chests, beards and facial hair. Quite the contrary: we have all the characteristics of something Other, something more feminine in the normative eye of Western sexuality: slender and relatively hairless bodies, differently textured and coloured skin and straight hair." (32)

<sup>6</sup> In 1992 the High Court of Australia in the landmark case Mabo v State of Queensland (1992) 107 ALR 1 effectively discredited the doctrine of terra nullius by recognising under certain conditions the continuing existence of native title not extinguished by Crown ownership.

<sup>7</sup> This masthead was only removed in 1961 by its then new editor Donald Horne.

<sup>8</sup> It is possible to note at this point that in these representations the stereotypical Chinese man, whether Freddy Chang, the smiling Chinaman in Eucalyptus, or Mr Lo, is projected as an abject figure dependent on a (white) woman to carry him across fully into the realm of Australian community. Entry however is ultimately denied or fails in all three texts.

## Chapter Two

### Carnival Trouble and Racial Melancholy in The Year of Living Dangerously

In 1973 the official end of the white Australia policy had been allowed to pass with relatively little fanfare, celebration, public debate or even contention. In 1975 the Vietnam War ended and it wasn't long before Indo-Chinese refugees were arriving in small vulnerable boats on the now officially colour-blind coastline of northern Australia. By the late 1970s and early 1980s there was a minor spate of novels appearing by Australian authors using Asian countries as settings in a seeming gesture of engagement with Asia<sup>1</sup>. Arguably the most prominent of these works was Christopher Koch's The Year of Living Dangerously<sup>2</sup> published in 1978 and made into a film with the white-American actress Linda Hunt, capably though notoriously playing the Asian male role of Billy Kwan the dwarfish camera operator. The Year of Living Dangerously plots, through a carnivalesque and melancholic interplay, the interracial friendship of Guy Hamilton and Billy Kwan amidst a background of postcolonial Indonesian political upheaval. In this chapter I argue that the abject, degrading representation of the Chinese man in the bodily grotesque figure of Billy Kwan and his summary expulsion from the coterie of white foreign journalists in the Wayang club evokes an encompassing melancholy that informs us of the constant instability and ambivalence that accompanies the repetitive attempts at incorporating into white Australian society the seemingly unassimilable other — the Chinese man.

The story of The Year of Living Dangerously begins in the Wayang Bar of the American-managed Hotel Indonesia in Jakarta. The Wayang Bar is where the dwindling number of foreign journalists seek refuge after their day's work in the months preceding the ousting of President Sukarno. When dwarfish half Chinese Billy Kwan enters the Wayang Bar for the first time, Cookie, the story's narrator, can barely conceal his curiosity and astonishment and the effect of this entry disrupting his comfortable sphere of the familiar: "There is no way, unless you have unusual self-control, of disguising the expression on your face when you first meet a dwarf. It brings out the curious child in us to encounter one of these little people" (Year 3). Moreover, since Billy Kwan "added to his oddity by being half Chinese, it was just as well that [they] met in the darkness of the Wayang Bar" (3).

“Through the freak,” says Susan Stewart, “we derive an image of the normal; to know an age’s typical freak is, in fact, to know its points of standardization” (*Longing* 132-33). Billy Kwan’s freakishness is a doubled freakishness, and represents something more than just grotesque stereotype; rather it is a freakishness that exceeds the banality of stereotypes. The stereotypically small Chinese man is reduced to an extreme and made dwarfish; so much that undisguised astonishment might well be a normal response. The everyday ordering properties of the stereotype give way to the boundary demarcations of freakishness. To give credit to Koch, the figure of Billy for the most part resists any simple stereotypical representation. Billy Kwan is a complex figure, not an idealised figure but a self-idealising figure. Nevertheless there is no mistaking that Billy’s character and freakish embodiment are eccentric to the norm of white Australian maleness. Yet, as Stewart argues, the freak of nature is a freak of culture: “His or her anomalous status is articulated by the process of the spectacle as it distances the viewer, and thereby it ‘normalizes’ the viewer as much as it marks the freak as an aberration” (109).

In the presence of the Wayang club members, Billy’s “oddities” take on spatial overtones — nothing could be farther than what Cookie is accustomed to in this disturbing appearance of difference. Yet at the same time it strikes an identification — this, too, is a man. Cookie is literally moved by the sight and taken aback, needing to call upon an unusual self-control, not merely to disguise his expression, but to still his body from its desire for movement that is simultaneously repelled and attracted. This configuration and distortion of size and colour is negatively reinforced when, on seeing Billy and the Canadian journalist Pete Curtis enter the Wayang Bar, Wally Sullivan says to Cookie: “Hullo... Curtis is bringing in the black goblin” (3). As black goblin, Billy is simultaneously a personification of disruption and something less than human, a figure of fear, mischief, and threat to the ostensible cohesiveness, exclusiveness, and normality of white male group integrity.

Wally tells Cookie that Billy is a freelance cameraman whom he knew from their university days, and that, “He [Billy] and Sydney didn’t get on” (4). Wally’s unelaborated comment nevertheless manages to indicate Billy’s exilic condition, and reduces the effects of the white Australia policy to a single statement at a time when the policy was still in place. The psychical effects of that policy on Asians paradoxically living in Australia complicated a sense of disorientation in a nation that was officially an excluded place for people of Asian descent. Observed as something that should not be



there, the Chinese person criss-crossing designated white space could unpredictably provoke anger, derision and even violence. Thus for some Asians, the healthiest response was to depart from space that was, to reiterate, paradoxically opened and yet closed to them. Nevertheless self-exilic, Billy Kwan is enticed into another space of whiteness, albeit a more limited one, inhabited by characters in Koch's own words the "products of a dying colonial world" (qtd in Koh, 21) only to replay the dramatics of assimilation and exclusion. Within this narrative, I argue that The Year of Living Dangerously so clearly exhibits the dynamics of exclusion as loss, and attachment as grief, and is so steeped in melancholy that it is surprising that critics generally overlook it<sup>3</sup>.

To situate the role of melancholy in the story I refer to Freud and his essay "Mourning and Melancholia", which distinguished mourning from melancholy in that the former was "regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (243). The condition of mourning can never be thought of as pathological because over time it can be overcome and is better left without intervention as a gradual detachment from the loved object eventuates and "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (245). Melancholia on the other hand is pathological; the loss seemingly can never be overcome, since precisely what is lost remains at an unconscious level. Unlike one who mourns, the melancholic suffers "an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (246). The melancholic is prone to self-reproaches, however "their complaints are really 'plaints' in the old sense of the word. They are not ashamed... since everything derogatory that they say about themselves is at bottom said about someone else" (248). Furthermore Freud believed the melancholic ego is affected by a desire to incorporate the lost object of love into itself and "in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it" (249).

In The Melancholy of Race Anne Anlin Cheng elaborates upon Freud's logic and states that since "the thing-within is now the ego... the plaint can no longer properly belong to either subject or object since the two are now intrinsically (con)fused" (9). In Cheng's theorisation of racial melancholia, loss at this point becomes exclusion in that the melancholic must deny the loss and at the same time ensure that the "object" never returns "for such a return would surely jeopardize the cannibalistic project" (9). It is

through this imperative that loss in this process gives way to exclusion. And while the melancholic ego may be a “haunted ego”, Cheng argues the object is also ghostly not merely for having been introjected within the melancholic psyche but because of “its ruthless exclusion” and the manner in which the object has been ignored in “its potential for subjectivity” (9-10).

Within this paradigm Cheng outlines the racialisation of America with its institutional practices of white pre-eminence and national ideal, a spatial white centrality and coloured marginalisation, sustained by the “exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others...positing the racial other as always Other and lost to the heart of the nation” (10). It formulates a dominant white identity, which Cheng characterises as melancholic and based on a “psychical and social consumption-and-denial” that affects both white racist and liberal discourses. The racists develop ideologies that justify national repudiations of the constitutional ideals of freedom, liberty and equality while liberals “need to keep burying the racial other in order to memorialize them” (11).

To follow Cheng, racial melancholy is constituted through the “repeated exclusion and staged reincorporation of excluded others... a fantasy built on absences” (127). Also crucial, states Cheng, is a recognition “that melancholic identity is built on an incorporative confusion” (128, original emphasis). Australia, given its own ideological underpinnings of social fairness and egalitarianism, yet history of repeated racial exclusions and re-incorporations, shows precisely the kind of propensity towards “incorporative confusion” that has shaped both its dominant and marginalised subjectivities. While The Year of Living Dangerously stands as a major text of recent Australia literature, we see also the extent to which the narrative is replete with the kind of incorporative confusion characteristic of racial melancholy.

In The Year of Living Dangerously Billy Kwan goes from isolated but free-roaming outsider, to beloved group “mascot”, then to abject outcast, and finally to irrevocable object of loss. Billy is a contiguous figure to the history of repetitive and alternating exclusion and inclusion of Asian presence in predominant white Australian society and the body of its national imaginary. Moreover Billy’s troubled assimilation into the white community is itself at a distance, eight years before the end of the white Australia policy, and in another nation. He has been in Indonesia for four months before being brought along to the Wayang Bar by the Canadian journalist Pete Curtis, introduced to the Wayang club, which is “a refuge for the foreign press corps — all [white] male and mostly unmarried — from the outside” (Year 8). Curtis declares, “I

figured it was high time Billy joined the Wayang club” (5). Unlike the other journalists of the Wayang club Billy has apparently needed an invitation and introduction to join. Billy on the other hand says he has come to the Wayang Bar to meet Guy Hamilton, the ARTC’s representative who has just flown in from Singapore and is coming directly to the Wayang Bar from the airport. The appearance of Billy in the Wayang Bar presents a certain ambiguity, and reveals Koch himself has not been certain whether Billy is invited or comes incidentally in the course of meeting Hamilton — a reflection of the persistent ambiguity that accompanies the presence of the Chinese male figure amidst communities and spaces of white primacy. Whatever the intentions, the presence is an unavoidable, enforced encounter with the otherness of the Chinese man. Billy Kwan’s introduction and entry to the Wayang club takes four months, but Guy Hamilton’s introduction is immediate.

In the Year of Living Dangerously it is the presumption of familiarity that determines the possibilities of subject inclusion and exclusion. Whereas Billy’s ambiguous presence in the Wayang club requires an explanation of him, Guy’s naturalised appearance at the club on the other hand requires an explanation of Indonesia, mapping for Guy the expectations of threatening cultural encounters with the Indonesian population. In a reversal of the colonialist discourse that all natives are bad, even Billy Kwan is drawn to explain that while “all white faces are bad” being Australian is an advantage in that it is not as bad as being a nekolim, a differentiated colonial whiteness that is Dutch, British or American. Koch’s Guy and Billy are both “hybrids”, but they are hybrids of very different kind and acceptance. Hamilton’s monolingual Singaporean upbringing is merely an indication of how his hybridity doesn’t really extend to any aspect of Asianness, rather it is confined to a presumptive originary Englishness and a British colonial/expatriate existence. Billy is Eurasian, of a Chinese father and white Australian mother. Billy’s purported inability to speak Chinese, is used by him as both an act of identification and dissemblance. His sense of hybridity deludes him into believing that he can move freely among the local population while still being a part of the foreign community. In fact he has little standing in either community. Billy’s attempt to use his hybridity as an identification with Guy is moreover rebuffed with the response: “They’re not too keen on the Chinese in Indonesia either, are they? How do you get on?” (10). However in The Year of Living Dangerously it is not a question of how Billy gets on, but how he gets about that becomes a source of anxiety for the Wayang club expatriates.

Given his Asian appearance, in the Asian spaces of Jakarta, Billy does have greater mobility than the foreign journalists, who fear going about places perceived as being dangerous to Europeans. In the context of the postcolonial expulsion of Europeans, the remaining Europeans take on the role of abject figures spatially confined, whilst witnessing suspiciously “one of their own” seemingly free to roam wherever he likes on his scooter. The Chinese Australian figure, for so long allotted a spatial marginality in white Australia, is in Asia suddenly unencumbered by white spatial practices. On the other hand the sight of Guy’s white visage reinforces Cookie’s perception of the Wayang Bar as an escape and refuge from a hostile Indonesian population:

We carried our white faces through the streets like ridiculous badges, ignoring insults and jeers and malevolent brown-eyed stares that had the intensity of religious fervour. Our stories were full of the stoning and smashing of embassies and Western businesses by mobs whose activities were approved by the government: and after we’d filed these stories we retreated gratefully to the Wayang, a foreigner’s bar in a foreigner’s hotel, out of reach of all but the most wealthy and powerful Indonesians. Off-stage, in these cool hours, we could be ourselves, no longer men in white masks (9).

While Cookie alludes to the social construction of race, the on stage performance of whiteness, he fails to realise that behind the unmasking, which can only occur within the darkness of the Wayang Bar, there remains a resistance to the possibilities of identification with those outside the Wayang club. If the categories of race can be rejected by Cookie, that is the anti-colonialist racialisation of the white man; the unmasking of white masks does not affect the unmasking of brown masks, which for Cookie throughout the story are never masks but always apprehended irreducibly as “brown faces”. In this instance the construction of colour is attributed to a postcolonial discourse of anti-imperialism incited by Sukarno’s konfrontasi. There is no hint that a postcolonial exchange of masks and unmasking is in the offing. Rather Cookie, or Koch, is more intent to shift his own gaze to the “off-stage” space of the Wayang club and its own racial negotiations. The Wayang club is also a staging ground, where the correspondents masquerade, as Cookie notes, “in an artificially heightened good fellowship... we welcomed Hamilton with something a little warmer than our usual

spurious camaraderie, and competed to explain what the rules were for survival in the country of Konfrontasi”(9). In effect both within and outside the confines of the Wayang club Cookie admits to a contingent masquerade — the one within the Wayang club and among its members is a performance of homosocial bonding and revelry that is for Cookie all too transparently specious but nevertheless gendered and racialised. Under the overbearing coloniality of excessive heat, filth, disease, poverty, political intrigue, and imported foreign provisions, the Wayang club members coalesce as much upon gendered professional and racial ties as with their sexual exploitations and proclivities, by and large either licentiously heterosexual or homosexual, sexually repressed, fetishistic, or uncommitted. Cookie remains the stable moral and ethical witness of white dissipation amidst tropical Asian chaos, and in this role himself mirrors the character of Billy, except that Cookie attempts a greater degree of detachment.

If the Wayang club is an off-stage space it leaves the rest of Indonesia more thoroughly theatrical, both politically and socially. But then The Year of Living Dangerously, with its wayang allegory and symbolism, is a deliberately theatrical text that invites scepticism on a number of levels when we recall Edward Said’s observations that:

A field is an enclosed space. The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe... In the depths of this Oriental stage stands a prodigious cultural repertoire whose individual items evoke a fabulously rich world... the European imagination was nourished extensively from this repertoire...[and] drew on the Orient’s riches for their productions, in ways that sharpened the outlines of imagery, ideas, and figures populating it. (Orientalism 63)

The stage of Indonesia can be seen as both open and threatening in contrast to the enclosure and safety of the Wayang Bar. The Wayang Bar is cavernous and subterranean or, like a ship, as Roland Barthes says of Jules Verne’s Nautilus, on the one hand a symbol of departure but “at a deeper level, the emblem of closure” (Mythologies 66). The Wayang Bar is a white outpost, like white Australia enclosed within itself,

threatened by the near presence of Asia — only a few coloured people are allowed onboard 1960s Australia or in the Wayang Bar.

Given that Billy Kwan, an Asian man, the one who has fled the spatial oppressiveness of white Australia, finds less trouble inhabiting and moving about in the exterior spaces of Jakarta riding about on his Vespa scooter, he is himself a vehicle for transporting the white central character of The Year of Living Dangerously into broader Asian spaces. Billy is eager to act not only as Guy's cameraman but also his guide, "expert adviser", intent on taking Guy into a hemisphere of difference. When Guy decides on his first night in Jakarta that he wants to take a stroll, Billy offers to accompany him. Not everywhere is safe, but Billy can take him along to the less threatening places. It is from this point when Billy and Guy stroll the half deserted streets that Koch is at his most orientalist, revealing the squalid material conditions of third-world existence and the unnerving presence of its local native inhabitants. The farther Billy and Guy get away from the comfort and security of westernised space in the ironically named Hotel Indonesia, the more Guy witnesses an orient that is a mix of the beguiling, dangerous, sinister and unnerving. Billy simultaneously cautions Guy about the possibility of a street hold-up and goads him onwards as a test of his intrepidity. Guy's venture into the darkness of the Indonesian night is allegorical for the white orientalist encounter with unnerving native blackness:

Moving towards the outskirts, they were entering territory of deeper and deeper darkness; and in their wake came a small procession of giggling followers, male and female, who would not accept the legitimacy of this expedition by the white man and his presumably Chinese companion. (18)

Here darkness and the sense of remoteness, with their Conradian overtones, are established into threatening space, a dark space that might reveal something horrifying. However darkness is also ambiguous in form. In the genre of adventure imperialism it may be orientalist space — space that can be enlightened by a whitening presence and investigation, but darkness may also represent either a lurking truth and reality that is concealed, or the as yet unexplored even unexplorable and ungraspable space of postcolonial existence. Guy has to be led into and through this darkness by Billy. In the figure of Guy Hamilton, Billy Kwan, or for that matter Koch himself, finds a man of "potential" for an idealised masculinity with the highest moral and ethical values. Billy

himself recognises that being physically stunted, and perhaps half Chinese, precludes him from the ideal. Shaping that ideal is the next best thing to achieving it for himself. Characterised in another way, it is the white man, at least one white man, imperfect as he may be, who possesses the potential, while the coloured man is physically and psychologically fixed in a state of abjection. To reach such perfection, the white man must be led to the realms of Javanese and Hindu mythologies, passing through the real realm of Asian material conditions and space as a mere precondition. But Guy like most Europeans is not set upon self-discovery as much as at this point finding something to delight him.

When Billy and Guy come to a little street market, Billy informs Guy that it is “just a pasar. It’s not a bazaar for tourists; they don’t come out here. A little pasar for the poor. Come and have a look. Or are you nervous?” (19) Billy encourages Guy to look at the pasar, but not with the tourist’s gaze of either pleasure or apprehension. In the pasar Guy moves “down the alleys smiling as though at a carnival” (20). Rather than a place that should touch an ethical and moral sensibility, Guy’s appreciation of the same site as a place of carnival — followed here by a “deriding” giggling procession of locals — a mix of the “queer... with the grim; laughter and misery; carnal nakedness and threadbare nakedness; fear and toys” (20) is actually less orientalisng and more involved in the merriment of the pasar than Billy’s vision of it. In this sense Guy is more attuned to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque than the serious/high-minded Billy whose own grotesque body and grating laughter might have made him more an embodiment of the carnival. Billy, despite his grotesque body, is in effect distancing himself from the carnival scene, seeking instead perfection, the ideal, and serious; but carnival is none of these. Carnival, in Bakhtinian terms, is instead about change, renewal, the degrading of hierarchies, laughter, coming into being rather than constancy and completeness (Rabelais 10). Billy sees a scene of the everyday abjectness, but instead of responding to the apparent contradictions of the scene Hamilton is taken in by the pungent smell of kreteks that waft sensually in the air. When they pass by huts that have no doors and glimpse the candle-lit interiors — a small naked girl on a mat, a middle aged woman in a sarong and bra heating water in an old can on a small fire — Hamilton again overlooks the poverty and finds the place “gay”. At this point Billy, probing for the depth of Guy’s social conscience, asks, “This amuses you, doesn’t it?” But whose interpretation of the pasar scene is more appropriate? Billy says the pasar is a little market for the poor. But the everyday pasar takes on a carnival atmosphere because of Guy’s presence — that is, the

provocative presence or embodiment of racial hierarchy. Carnival is inherently ambivalent, and in this sense Guy is vulnerable to moral degrading amidst the poverty that calls for attention and action. Here the narrative trajectory of The Year of Living Dangerously veers from the carnivalesque to Billy's investigation and attempted manipulation of Guy's conscience and subjectivity, to reveal to Guy himself his position in the world and the possibilities of him making any intervention. It is not about Billy's subjectivity, which we learn early on is both disfigured and eccentric, although it is not to be ignored because it also insistently returns.

In The Melancholy of Race Anne Cheng poses the question, what is the subjectivity of the melancholic object? If the Asian man is the object of loss for white Australian national identity then in The Year of Living Dangerously Billy's own sense of loss is also multiple and complex. For Billy Australia is the place that has effectively expelled and excluded him as a coloured man; it is his lost place. Billy can write secret files and take pictures as a direct witness, but in terms of agency, involvement and subjectivity such preoccupations are neither sufficient nor possible to supplement in terms of attaining what he sees as the ideal man. As a man he feels lack and loss. The relationship he develops with Guy is to achieve indirectly certain quixotic ends: making Indonesia (the world) a better place and ensuring that the vulnerable Jill Bryant, the woman he loves, meets a worthy partner in love. Educating Guy as a "man of light" in the wayang ethos and manipulating his relationship with Jill is Billy's measure of agency. But as a man himself, he is more in the position of Don Quixote in loyal Sancho Panza's body. As a cameraman his pictures supplement Guy's reporting; he facilitates Guy's crucial contacts, which help make Guy one of the leading news correspondents in Jakarta. His role in every sense is behind the scenes as much as the wayang puppet master may appear to be behind the screen. Yet Billy's manipulation is much less predictable and authorial, as is his own subjectivity.

In The Year of Living Dangerously the contradictory elements of lack and duality are Koch's explanatory means for narrating Billy Kwan's fragmented subjectivity — Billy's desire for agency in his own right rather than through manipulation, and the surmounting of his incompleteness. Thus Billy develops a compensating dual identification with Guy and Sukarno. Billy tells Guy, "You and I make a good team because we complement each other... have you realised we even look alike?" (82, original emphasis). Billy also tells Cookie "Sometimes I almost feel we [Billy and Sukarno] share the same identity... I could have been him" (99). Billy's



subjectivity is a characterisation of lack when compared to Sukarno and Guy; both exude ideal traits of masculinity — forceful, unimpeded, striding men, sensuous and with the ability to seduce. Neither Guy nor Sukarno, however, is the perfect man. Both could do with a degree of Billy's ethical and moral consciousness, which is what Billy thinks he has, and which is why he craves to be them in body. Sometimes Billy even believes he has their physical characteristics. In the early part of The Year of Living Dangerously either character would suffice for Billy, and to this extent the novel reveals a constitutional ambivalence in the Chinese Australian male. On the one hand being a strong Asian man is most desirable, but such men are apparently few; being a white man is normatively powerful, but Billy is literally only a little of both.

Despite Billy's perceived deficiencies, the moments when Billy enunciates his identification with the figures of either Sukarno or Guy are also when he reveals his narcissism. The problem for Billy is that both ideal men become sources of disillusionment for him. Freud argues "the disposition to fall ill of melancholia... lies in the predominance of the narcissistic type of object-choice" ("Mourning" 250). Freud also believed "the object-choice has been effected on a narcissistic basis, so that the object-cathexis, when obstacles come in its way, can regress to narcissism" (249). Since the object-loss triggers a regression to narcissism, in Billy it's the belief that he possesses a moral superiority — a heightened sense of himself that eventually alienates him from all the Wayang members.

Prior to his downfall Billy achieves a moment of precipitous popularity among the Wayang club coterie. Among those in the Wayang club there is also a presence of narcissism but of a different kind. Popularity is one way of succouring the self-deficiencies of size and whiteness. It is the object of love's brief moment. At Wally's house-warming party, which is to mark Wally's secret indulgence in Indonesian boys, Billy arrives appropriately on the shoulders of Harold Sloane and Pete Curtis. Laughing wildly like a child being tickled, he attains the height of his popularity but in doing so has risen above his true position. Against his natural suspicion of the carnivalesque he forgets the inevitable degrading and bringing down to earth that rising above oneself entails. But it is not only the crowd's affection for Billy that reaches its peak at this point, Billy in turn proclaims to the party exactly what it delights in hearing: "What a marvellous lot you are! I've changed my mind: Anglo-Saxons are better in the tropics" (101). The height of Billy's popularity is also the point of his most thorough incorporation into the group of the Wayang club, if not of Anglo-Saxon whiteness itself.

For the Wayang club members this point of incorporation, their “possessive amusement” (101), turns upon the group’s own narcissism: “He had ridden through the door, on our sudden tide of affection for him and for one another: a mood triggered by alcohol...by an element of guilt, and also perhaps by the mysterious telepathy through which a group dimly perceives its own fleeting uniqueness; group self-love” (101).

Collective narcissism is fundamentally a positive identification that reinforces the distinctions between “us” and “them”. Yet within the revelry of the Wayang club members Billy exhibits his own incorporative ambivalence by revealing his personal narcissism, which amounts to a disengagement from the very group from which he seeks affection. When Billy wears Wally’s black pitji cap he asks, “Who do I look like?” (101). The act is not simply to imitate Sukarno but to proclaim an identification as Sukarno. At the end of the party the pitji is missing and Billy is suspected of taking it. Wally cannot wear his Indonesian cap of indulgence any more than Billy can wear it symbolically as a transformation to an idealised self, since such an individual display of narcissism is fundamentally antithetical to the communal mood of carnival and leads to a carnival “uncrowning” and bringing down to earth. The removal and loss of the pitji cap thus represents for the Wayang club and Billy the beginnings of estrangement, as Billy’s perceived eccentricities spiral him from the centre of acceptance.

If Koch had intended a spiritually guiding figure in Billy Kwan, taking the physical likeness of the dwarf Semar of the wayang plays, then he undermines Billy thoroughly. Billy’s supposed allegiances to Teilhard de Chardin’s Noosphere and Huntingdon’s theories of geographical determinism, are dismissed and ridiculed by the Wayang club members as eccentric ramblings. Eccentric in terms of odd or strange, but also in its spatial configuration of not being of the same centre. Billy is by the standards of the Wayang club entirely ego-eccentric, he may sit cross-legged on top of a desk reading politics and theology but he never shapes up as the stereotypical eastern sage figure that educates a European towards wisdom. Billy is neither wise clown nor god, and unlike the avatar Semar of the wayang kulit is all too humanly fallible in his anxieties and lack of detachment. The opposite of the sage, if he is compassionate and generous, Billy is also emotionally erratic, self-deluded, and egotistical. Secretive and shadowy in his attempts to manipulate Guy and Jill’s affair, his accumulating secret files create suspicion and mistrust in the mind of Guy. Billy’s disillusionment with Sukarno’s misruling of Indonesia is simultaneously matched by his disillusionment with Guy’s treatment of Jill and affects his moroseness and alienation from the Wayang club.

Instead of joining the bar room banter of the Wayang club members over the interest shown in Guy by Vera, the Russian embassy official, Billy warns Guy against contact with her. Billy's advice to Guy is simultaneously a rejection of group masculinity and affiliation, and a rejection of Wayang club protocols. As Susan Stewart reminds us, "The function of 'making conversation'... is mainly the exercise of statements of membership" (*Longing* 19). So too is the function of merriment. Billy's failure to join in is responded to in kind: "All of us," says Cookie, "began to wish him elsewhere. In his tired Hawaiian shirt, crouched at the edge of our group, he looked like a vagrant Indonesian wandered in off the highway" (179). Worn out as *exotica*, already at the margins of the group, Billy is only a short step from total exclusion and loss.

When Billy bluntly alludes to Wally Sullivan's homosexuality, he transgresses the propriety of the Wayang club and provokes the members' anger towards him. Billy rushes out of the Wayang club, and Cookie notes, "Billy, for all his eccentricities, had been one of us in our beleaguered club, even though he had never felt sure of this. Now irrevocably, he was one of us no more. I wondered where he would go" (218). Cheng asserts that there are two levels that the melancholic must go through to maintain the structure of "loss-but-not-loss", which is the incorporation of the loss object: "First, the melancholic must deny loss as loss in order to sustain the fiction of possession. Second, the melancholic would have to make sure that the 'object' never returns, for such a return would surely jeopardize the cannibalistic project" (9). Cookie's reaction is on the one hand to regret Billy's loss, and on the other to resist the impulse to follow Billy and seek his return — for that would, in Cheng's analysis, break the ambivalent process of grieving and attachment to the loss object.

While exclusion has psychical repercussions for the ones excluded, there are equal effects upon those who practise exclusion. In *The Year of Living Dangerously* a dialectic of melancholy affects the main characters. Cheng states that "*loss* becomes exclusion in the melancholic landscape" (9), thus Hamilton is affected by a general disconnectedness, marked by increasing "tension and moroseness". Guy believes that Billy has betrayed him to Jill and is the source of all his troubles, but also he cannot accept that he has lost Billy's friendship, nor comprehend that Billy shuns him and will no longer work for him. Billy too needs to deny the return of the lost object of love. After repeated attempts to find Billy, Guy takes Cookie to confront Billy at his bungalow. Billy, like a true melancholic, in the throes of his own oral incorporative problems, just happens to be sick to the stomach, having swallowed something

unpalatable. For Cookie the confrontation results in an increasing discernment of the racial difference of Billy's Chineseness and his own Europeaness in a conflation of Chinese appearance with illness, and European appearance with health: "Kwan looked ill. I had never thought of him as having purely Chinese colouring, since he always had the appearance of a European with a healthy tan, but now his face had the old ivory hue of the northern Chinese" (224).

After refusing to return to work for Guy, Billy slams the door in Guy's face. Guy is faced with a closed door, and has to retreat "like a pilgrim... from the shrine of a spiteful and inaccessible oracle... fated to return and stand there many more times, in front of that untelling brown door" (226). For Guy the loss manifests itself as "a sense of lost connections in the city: an increasing, insane absence, which played on the nerves. And for Hamilton all connections were snapping now with sly completeness" (229). The reversal of Billy's exclusion is the white exclusion from formerly colonised space — space that would otherwise belong to others — the loss of the colonial empire, and the subsequent rejection by Asia of the colonising west. That the story takes place in a part of postcolonial Asia that is most proximate to Australia reminds us of another loss — white occupation of Australia and in that story the loss of the indigenous subject. If the hybridity of Billy could have acted as oracle, his exclusion has also closed the "brown door" to indigeneity. As a result the relationship between white and coloured is caught in the space of mutual loss and exclusion.

The remaining members of the Wayang club bereft of Wally suffer equally the loss of Billy from their midst, as Cookie recounts: "Having gone to earth," as though he were already buried, "Billy Kwan preoccupied us in the Wayang more than he had done when he was visible" (229). To affirm the exclusion, the others in the depleted Wayang club quickly displace their initial outrage and invest Billy's expulsion and disappearance with an exaggerated sense of amusement as if to offset his ghostliness and the impossibility of his return. As relief, they too need to descend to a level of carnival humour and laughter. According to Bakhtin carnival laughter is ambivalent; "it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding" (*Rabelais* 11-12). However the laughter of the Wayang club is more melancholic than in the spirit of renewal. The Wayang members refer to Billy as the Dying Typhoon, they swap stories about him, recollect his good qualities, comic outrageousness, defects, and turn "Billy-sighting" into a sport. They no longer revile him, instead they obsess over him, and their melancholy is unalleviated because their laughter is also haunted by his ghostliness.

Freud believes the melancholic, unlike the one who mourns, “knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him. This would suggest that melancholia is... related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious” (“Mourning” 245). Cookie recollects the effect of the melancholic Japanese tune “Sukiyaka”, which recalls for him the image of Billy with his rolling walk, the figure receding from him, aggravating his middle-aged grief: “No grief is pure: I miss the Wayang... and Java’s play of shadows, in that decade which already begins to be quite long ago” (238). For Cookie, it is not a singular loss. Grief is not confined to the loss of Billy, it is a grief tied inextricably with the passing of the Wayang club, its members and admittedly spurious camaraderie, their uneasy existence in postcolonial Indonesia and the “brown faces”, the threat of danger, the oppressive heat, most of all the loss of white centrality. Resolutely, long after the events, from the hilltop of his cousin’s farm, in the cool of south-eastern Australia, which he regards as his place of “sanity”, he tells himself that he will not return to (the madness of) Asia. But he does return, like an addict, to his Asian vices. Asia, for whatever part of its geographic breadth, may be the object of this orientalist melancholy, the lone white traveller’s journey through exotic terrain, the burden of conscience, but what is really lost is his own sense of place and primacy amidst the threats of other moral voices of grievance, whether they are indigenous or postcolonial.

The death of Billy, falling from the Hotel Indonesia in an attempt to unfold a banner against President Sukarno, brings Cookie to a sense of awakening: “My grief surprised me; it was like an unbearable balloon in my throat, swelling to bursting. We were all Billy’s murderers... We should not have barred him from the Wayang; we should have borne with him” (252). For all the remorse, the feelings of guilt (which is absent in Freud’s melancholy), there is a residual ambivalence and the object of this love is not absolved of blame. To the end Billy’s eccentricity is responsible for his own exclusion, the failure of the Wayang club was its inability to tolerate Billy’s eccentricities. In Cookie’s analysis, in an idealised situation Billy would have remained in a subordinate position to the primacy of Guy’s whiteness: “He could have continued in Hamilton’s service, faithful as Hamilton’s other self; the auditor of his conscience... He could have lived through big Ham... our mascot, our outlandish spokesman” (252). The white melancholic subject however is not after all interested in the object of loss within an equal intersubjective relationship that might threaten the centrality of whiteness. The cannibalistic project has to proceed and immediately after Billy’s death

Cookie rushes to Billy's bungalow to collect his secret files and journals and later smuggles them out of Indonesia. Back in Australia he confesses to at times wanting to edit and have Billy's writings published. But he decides that the writings could not "stand alone", therefore he determines to take over the story of Billy himself. An act that is, in terms of cultural representation, as Amanda Nettlebeck says, "a profoundly ambivalent one, implying in its range both empathy and appropriation" ("Two" 6). Or in the haunting presence of the other, the act demonstrates the desire to exclude again — through literally consuming the other's narrative in order to give it representation.

### Conclusion

It might be something of a surprise that Australia in 1973 did not publicly celebrate the passing of the white Australia policy with a fanfare reception for its first post white Australia policy immigrants. Perhaps the officials foresaw the repetitive waves of backlash that would overcome the Australian political scene in the wake of the white Australia policy's demise. However nor was there any celebration for Australian military forces returning from the Vietnam War, forces that failed to keep at bay the threats of Asian men and women. For some white Australians the demise of the white Australia policy might well have meant an inconsolable loss of what they imagined as a land without Asian people. The Year of Living Dangerously seems to reflect this moment of loss, not for the coloured man who was never loved in the first place, but for the white Australia that from time to time is so anxiously felt as loss and that has since in the era of multiculturalism embarked on the fraught endeavour of incorporating the seemingly unassimilable Chinese man. Politically and socially Australia has changed irrevocably, and, as seen in the following chapter, the desirable Chinese person does exist and is female.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Among other such works were Christine Townsend's Travels with Myself (1976), Robert Drewe's A Cry in the Jungle Bar (1979), Blanche D'Alpuget's Monkeys in the Dark (1980) and Turtle Beach (1981), Bruce Grant's Cherry Bloom (1980), and Ian Moffitt's The Retreat of Radiance (1982). See Drewe, "A Cry in the Jungle Bar: Australians in Asia".

<sup>2</sup> In 1979 The Year of Living Dangerously was awarded the National Book Council Award for Australian Literature. In 1978 it also won the Age Book of the Year Award for Book of the Year, and Imaginative

Writing Prize. Koch has also won, arguably the most coveted Australian literary award, the Miles Franklin Award twice with two other novels.

<sup>3</sup> In her essay “Asia, Europe and Australian Identity: The Novels of Christopher Koch” Helen Tiffin notes “the pathos of absence” in Koch’s writing and cites a number of instances in which Koch uses the word “lost”; “the lost totality of England”; “the lost northern hemisphere”; “another lost landscape and society” (326) in his own article “Literature and Cultural identity”. In Koch’s essay, specifically discussing The Year of Living Dangerously, Tiffin notes that it is “a novel centrally concerned with the nature of the colonial psyche and with Australian identity. It is not however that absence, that sense of the missing real world which is stressed... but other aspects of the colonial personality” (332). Strangely then, is how missing from Tiffin’s analysis is the role of loss that seems to be so formative of the colonial personality and Australian identity in The Year of Living Dangerously.

## Chapter Three

Escaping Chinese Patriarchy: the Blind Chinese Woman's Journey to the West  
through Love and Vertigo

Hsu-Ming Teo's Love and Vertigo (2000) is about cultural and gender conflict. It narrates a story of gender contests amidst a spatiality of east/west cultural positions, where the west is receptively female friendly for the Chinese woman and the east is brutally patriarchal. Love and Vertigo is about going into western cultural space and the vertiginous consequences of not fully surrendering to it. Whereas during the era of the white Australia policy the Chinese male was persona non grata, the period of post white Australia policy has become discursively more ambiguous for the Chinese male. In a discourse of east and west assimilated by the diasporic Chinese woman that places the west as culturally superior, the Chinese man enters what has become western space marked with the signs of his own positional abjection. Australia is nevertheless a space that has opened up to him, a seemingly safer space physically and politically, but what dislocates him is the Chinese woman's relationship to this shared space of western culture. In Teo's text the Chinese man is carried away from Asian space by the Chinese woman's infatuation with the west (America, Canada, the UK, Australia, it doesn't significantly matter), yet he remains still attached to his Chinese patriarchal ways. The Chinese man thus stands as simultaneously threatening and ineffectual in an abject liminal space as he watches the Chinese woman's attempt to abandon the east and the cultural sphere of his control.

Hsu-Ming Teo's Love and Vertigo is an immigrant story marked by the unpalatable cultural traditions of Chinese patriarchal dominance. The narrator's mother, Pandora, has been driven to suicide by a bullying husband in a marriage and household akin to an existential hell, where love is always misdirected, and violence and abuse find their marks directly and collaterally. Love and Vertigo is a novel that easily falls into a category that Shirley Tucker characterises as "ostensibly satisfying a [western] market fascinated by stories of the pain and suffering of 'other' women" ("Beyond" 125). To paraphrase Tucker, while western patriarchy may be bad enough, women get it much worse in Asian countries (129). Love and Vertigo, an Australian novel set across Singapore, Malaysia and Australia, a matrilineal narrative of three generations of



women's suffering under Chinese patriarchy, parallels American works such as Amy Tan's Joy Luck Club and Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior and China Men, to name a few. Asian American author and critic Frank Chin has criticised these works as "all pushing the idea of the Chinese family... as dysfunctional. Talking about the big change to become Americanized. ...the White supremacist autobiography saying how fucked up it is to be Chinese in America" (Davis, "West" 88). Notwithstanding Frank Chin, Love and Vertigo reveals a deeper level of narrative that cannot be summarily dismissed as a diasporic woman's "selling out" of her male counterpart (Khoo, Banana 124).

While the big change to become Australianised is not really at the core of Love and Vertigo in the same way as some Asian American novels have been about American assimilation, there is a more generalised or generic westernisation that relates as much to a colonial/postcolonial condition. That Love and Vertigo opens with a mythic pronouncement is germane to the discourse of east/west difference. The narrator Grace begins, "These are the myths I tell about my family and, like all myths, they are both truths and lies, simultaneous buffers of love and betrayals of trust" (Love 1). The anticipation of enfolding authorial myths (truth and lies) is nevertheless quickly overlooked as she reveals her position of cultural superiority. On the eve of her mother's wake the narrator is in a karaoke bar in Singapore. She realises that on an earlier visit she had "looked for difference and sought superior disgust... I had gone... with the attitude of a nineteenth century memsahib. I was determined not to belong... because I was Australian, and Mum ought to be Australian too. The tug of her roots, the blurring of her role from wife and mother to sister and aunt, angered and frightened me" (3).

The narrator has arrived back in the unfamiliar disconcerting Asian space of Singapore conscious of the cultural position aspired to by several generations of Chinese women before her; that of being westernised. Unlike those generations of women who lived under the overlapping spaces of European colonialism in Southeast Asia, and Chinese patriarchy, the narrator is a westernised female thanks to the bodily sacrifices of her mother's quest for western space. In Love and Vertigo marriage in a Chinese cultural milieu is ostensibly the passing of a female from the hands of one patriarchal regime to another, and female suicide is one of the few releases from such oppression. The circular narrative traces the marriage of the narrator's grandmother, Mei Ling, to a "timid shopkeeper of little stature and less wealth" (Love 22). Mei Ling had once held aspirations for a school education at a Christian school, to become a schoolteacher, and

possibly to avoid marrying. Such western cultural leanings in colonial Singapore are perceived as one of the main positive, if not the only, means for Chinese women to escape Chinese patriarchy. On her wedding night, Mei Ling unwraps the bandages of her bound feet and clothes herself in her oldest smelliest garments. Her diffident, virginal husband enters the bedroom but is met with a display of untamed resistance. When several nights pass without consummation, the shopkeeper complains to her father (23-24).

To prove that the habits or performance of patriarchy are learned rather than coming naturally, the shopkeeper's father-in-law gathers the extended family to witness the spectacle of him beating Mei Ling into submission. Gender privileges come at a price, invariably paid by the female subordinate. The beating brings to mind Judith Butler's theory of gender performance and performativity. In the act of gender performance a degree of volition is implied, however, in Bodies That Matter, Butler argues, gender performativity is "not a singular 'act' but always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms..." and while performativity is "not primarily theatrical...its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated" (Bodies 12).

When the father gives the son-in-law a bamboo cane and commands: "Now be a man and make your wife obey you" (24). The father sets up an enactment of masculinity for the son-in-law that is performance rather than performativity. Superficially the "be a man" may be an injunction of performativity, but forcing Mei Ling to obey the shopkeeper is only a performance — reinforcing the bifurcated gendering of shopkeeper masculinity and submissive-wife femininity. In this scene at least, it is not the inflicting of violence that makes the shopkeeper a man, but the discursive context of "be a man". Yet the phrase "be a man" and the situational context suggests a gender performativity bound up with gender imperativeness. Regardless of the violence, the imperativeness suggests a questionable authority and draws attention to the source of power to command. Butler herself asks the question "from where and when does ...a performative draw its force?" (224). "Performative acts", Butler states,

are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise binding power. Implicated in a network of authorization and punishment, performatives tend to

include legal statements which not only perform an action, but confer a binding power on the action performed. If the power of discourse to produce that which it names is linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts as discourse. (225)

Butler attempts to dispels the notion of a subject behind performative acts<sup>1</sup>, yet here the son-in-law is not following what Butler calls the “citational legacy” — the reiteration of a norm or set of norms — of say, “you are a man”, but rather complying with the father-in-law’s imperative of “be a man”, and its questionable scope of performance. At the end of the baculine thrashing, directed by the father, meted out meekly by the husband, the wife’s body “battered and broken”, the father looks at the shopkeeper and says: “Next time, break your own wife yourself and teach her to obey you” (25). The statement is another imperative utterance of masculine performance rather than performativity. The expression of violence is handed across from father to son-in-law. The beating is meant to establish the shopkeeper’s right to, and control over, Mei Ling’s body, however it is a situation that surely dispels any notion of the dissimulation of gender performance. The father detects the son-in-law’s timidity as a sign of transgressive masculinity and patriarchy; its evidence is the son-in-law’s failure to control the female body and her will within the marriage. The alternatives mean two types of Chinese male, one violent and authoritarian and the other weak and ineffectual as referenced by control of the female.

Are masculine alternatives, as between father-in-law and son-in-law, indicative of disruptions to gender performativity? Is there also a separation between performance and performativity in the rebellious “battered and broken” body or the ineffectual authoritarian unmanly shopkeeper? The space where the broken body and will is achieved may be the bedroom but for the sake of patriarchy, resistance to it can be put down openly. And yet the female witnesses can perceive only too clearly this simulated mode of gender dominance. Here there is no pretence at dissimulation, from generation to generation the women are all too conscious of the means of gender subordination. The staging of this violence is obviously not capricious but imperative, but whether it is naturalised or dissimulated within the institutional framework of dominance, as Love and Vertigo purports to characterise Chinese families of Southeast Asia, is highly problematic. In another context, but in respect to the division of performance and performativity, Anne Cheng asks: “Surely there must be a play between the two poles,

moments when performance outstrips performative constraints and vice versa?" (Melancholy 58). The timid shopkeeper unaware of his allotted position of power, lacking a "masculine" consciousness, has overlooked his prerogative of violence to control Mei Ling's body. Teo's unmanly shopkeeper and his obviously transgressive behaviour might appear to threaten the position of gender dominance and affiliation, and from the father's perspective to be discouraged and purged. But it also suggests the possibility of questioning the range of gender performativity — the failure of gender to perform the shopkeeper son-in-law according to script. Imperative statements such as "be a man" imply the possibility of non-compliance and dissent in terms of gender performance. So when discourse precedes the subject, but carries its own imperatives, isn't this when performativity seems most vulnerable to the breaking of what Butler insists is the "nexus of power and discourse that repeats or mimes the discursive gestures of power" (225)? Moreover in Love and Vertigo the performance/performativity of gender resistance that Mei Ling and her daughters learn to embody is fundamentally inflected by a culturally displacing discourse of the "west".

The women of the Lim family pass on the story of the beating from generation to generation and yet a certain ambiguity is also handed down.

Nobody was ever quite certain about the point of this story. Was it meant to be an instance of proto-feminist resistance? Or a fable about a Chinese wife's duty of submission to her husband? Or about the eternal cycle of generations of Lim women struggling against their husbands, only to succumb to the inevitability of disillusionment and defeat? (25)

All of the above, the narrator might have answered with: "This story was told and retold until we women understood that ours was a family conceived in violence and rape, raised in sullen resentment and unspoken grief" (25). One lesson the Lim women understood was that escape from the transparent gender regime of pathological violence and the tyranny of Chinese men lay in the direction of a western education, a western man, and ideally both located in a western country; in short a kind of cultural "selling" and moving out. Love and Vertigo thus chronicles the diasporic Chinese woman's repeated failure to realise her dreams. If Mei Ling fails in her hopes of becoming educated and a teacher, her rebellious eldest daughter Lida partially achieves her escape

by rejecting the wealthy but aged Mr Fu's offer to be his number three wife. The eldest daughter instead runs off with Tom, the suitable English sailor, with the allure of witnessing "first-hand the world that Hollywood had translated for her on the flickering screens of the local cinemas" (45). The choice Lida Lim makes is not just the choice of a western man over a Chinese man, but a rejection of the materially endowed masculinity of the decrepit and sexually repulsive Mr Fu with its hierarchies of subordination, for an idealised masculinity in the form of Tom the English sailor. It is Tom who offers a position (by his side) of mobility from which to witness a more glamorous world, even if this illusion is not quite seamless given its "flickering" effects.

Ironically, for her troubles, having made her choice Lida Lim in later life is afflicted with blindness. Tom the sailor is forbidden by his mother to marry Lida, and her mobility becomes the passing off from one white man to another until she is finally cared for by a Pakistani man named Ashis until her death. Blindness affects not only Lida but also the other sisters, particularly Pandora, whose blindness is equally figurative and literal. As Homi Bhabha has ironically put it, "women are blinded because they see too much reality" (*Location* 212). Whatever choices these women make, it inevitably leads to disappointment — just as there is much disillusionment in the sense of vision. In *Love and Vertigo*, for diasporic Chinese women there exists an illusion of alternatives situated between east and west but the certainty of these outcomes is an unhappy end.

Beyond the immediate female Lim members there is the example of the family servant Por-Por, whose parents had been schoolteachers in China at a Methodist mission school. Por-Por has developed an understandable streak of misandry after years of living with the shopkeeper and his sons. When young, instead of gaining a proper education, she had preferred the company of men at the local coffee house until her mother cast her out of the home and she was forced to migrate to Singapore to find work as a servant. "So let that be a lesson to you all, she scolded the kids" (73). In other words, between good male company and a good Christian education, the latter could have saved her from the abject life of a servant.

The Lim sisters are caught up in the postcolonial materiality of Singapore and Malaysia and affected by at least two discursive realms: one Asian, predominantly Chinese, although like many Chinese diasporas highly heterogenous — Cantonese, Fujianese, Hunanese, and Hakka — and further hybridised through Malay and Indian contact and influences; and the other discursive realm of the western. Educated at an

Anglican girls' school, the sisters grow up watching Chinese opera, wayang, and Hong Kong films; they peek at Chinese pornographic magazines, follow the "histrionic adventures of Chinese heroines in comic books" (68-69), and Chinese princesses dressed in peasant clothes running away from overbearing step-mothers; they are awed by the big breasts of Chinese (most likely Hong Kong) film stars. However, the disparate influences of Hollywood and English literature make the greatest impression on their ideals of masculinity and femininity. While the heroine characters of Chinese films and operas are generic, their western and male counterparts are American actors such as Gordon McCrae, Gene Kelly, and Clark Gable, who beguile them with song and dance. As Pandora Lim prepares for her high school certificate exams under the guidance of Miss Liu, with the hope of becoming a teacher like Miss Liu, she muses over whether she even particularly likes her boyfriend Jonah Tay:

She watched love and studied it, longed to be in love, but didn't know if she wanted to be in love with Jonah. Didn't know if, in all her plans for escape through education, she could fit him in just yet. She didn't even know if she liked him very much. This thin, earnest Chinese man in black Buddy Holly glasses scarcely matched her vision of romantic heroes fashioned by characters as disparate as Mr Darcy, Rob Roy, the Scarlet Pimpernel, Humphrey Bogart and Cary Grant. (100)

The younger Lim sisters may take their feminine models, positively or negatively, from Chinese cultural sources or those women closest to them, such as their mother, eldest sister Lida, Por-Por, and Wendy Wu the irrepressible Miss Telecom, but their masculine ideals come from the west, and they are all racially white. They may be aware of strong women such as Lauren Bacall and Betty Davis, or more ostensibly vulnerable ones such as Grace Kelly and Judy Garland, but in both these spatial discursive realms Chinese men are very much absent. Under their English language instruction the Lim sisters' romantic inclinations, in parallel with their gender ideals, are informed by western sources, cinematic and literary. Romantic men are unambiguously western men. Chinese heroines mundanely struggle against tough situations, but it is not the space the Lim sisters desire to be in. Since, due to their English education, the Lim sisters are presumably less literate in Chinese, desirable Chinese models of masculinity

are either restricted or non-existent. In Love and Vertigo, isolated in the colonial/postcolonial world of anti-communist Singapore and Malaysia where diasporic Chinese signs of cultural productions are largely invisible in the text, such ethnic Chinese women were even less likely to be aware of actual social/political changes and modern literary production in China from the May Fourth Movement up to the Cultural Revolution — at least not sufficiently to glean non-European gender and romantic models.

Much as Pandora's English teacher Miss Liu, once loved by an Englishman who walked with her to the British Library carrying her books, Pandora pores over "mouldering leather-bound books of English poetry" (97). The Anglophile Miss Liu nevertheless tells Pandora of her abandonment by her English lover for a Berlin bride after the Second World War. She laments to Pandora, "I should have married a Chinese man... But they never spoke to me the words of love. Now read" (98). Situated in the context of British colonialism in Malaysia it is only through the experience of abandonment and disillusionment that Miss Liu makes such an ambivalent cultural/racial re-identification. For the sceptical Miss Liu who understands love's "false promises that we can't help believing" (98), it is not an unqualified return to the side of Chinese masculinity and patriarchy or its cultural nationalism. The discursive domain of romance is seemingly missing Chinese male players, so there are none to return to. Miss Liu remains unmarried. Romantic love remains an ideal found in western literature, even if in its colonial guise the texts are mouldering and centuries old. Nevertheless romance is a discourse beyond the enunciation and speculation of a Chinese man. In the configurations of necessity and extravagance<sup>2</sup> and overlooking several millennia of Chinese and Asian literature, though perhaps reflecting the conditions of Pandora Lim's social milieu, "poetry was a luxury of the West, not a necessity for the East" (99). Moreover, as Miss Liu urges Pandora to "read on", the implication is that the sustaining aspects of love are after all only textual rather than reality. If there are any Chinese and other Asian variations on love they are obscured and unrecognisable except for the exemplars of female oppression and struggle that crop up at the Chinese opera and the real-life surrounding housing tenements. The east and Chinese men therefore signify everything that is romantically abject and barren for women. Although Olivia Khoo says women are "carriers of tradition, culture and disease" ("Chinese" 39), in Love and Vertigo some Chinese women, for instrumental reasons, become transmitters of western cultural discourse. One aspect of this westernisation of the Chinese woman is her

discursive abjection of the Chinese man. Chinese patriarchy is oppressive and the Chinese woman needs to escape from it. Equally, Chinese men not only lack the language of love but may also be incapable of love. The dilemma for the Chinese woman is that abjection may be a casting aside of something undesirable and contemptible but, to recall Kristeva again, it is something which can never be entirely parted from. Thus the aim of going west is by necessity an attempt by Chinese women to find romance and gender liberation; the only problem is that this frequently entails taking her male counterpart with her.

Where, however, is the west? Edward Said asserts that through its imperialism the west “lingers... in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices...[it] has entered the reality of hundreds of millions of people, where its existence as shared memory... still exercises tremendous force” (qtd in Lee Americas 83). Even if in past centuries the west were not literally everywhere in the form of an occupying colonial power, it has at least spread its influence everywhere since. The west, as Ashis Nandy has remarked, “is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds” (qtd in Chen 18). Not only has western culture become deterritorialised and lingers, thrives and enlarges in the former colonies, internalised as it were, there exists as Shu-Mei Shih says, citing Jameson, a corresponding “imperialist practice of occluding the colonised on the discursive level” characterised as “a strategy of representational containment” (Shih Lure 6). This occlusion doesn’t merely occur in the metropolitan west, but is attempted in the very space of the colonised, in the way in which it comes to dominate various epistemes of science, medicine, law, and education, as well as media and popular culture. In the era of postcolonialism, the west re-exhibits itself seemingly benignly — ultimate refuge is sought in the west, even the appeals of ethnic and national liberation movements are paradoxically and essentially addressed to the west.

In Teo’s text, it is not the political and economic institutions and practices left by British colonialism that she examines but the “imaginative geography”, as Said (Orientalism 55) calls it, not of the orient in this case, but the reversal — the west itself. The west offers romance, alluring men and the Chinese woman’s prospect for liberation, free space, self-fulfilment and gender consciousness. Pandora sees the study of English literature not in terms of extravagance but the necessity that will help her climb out of the “vulgar, violent pit-life of the Lims” (99). She becomes enamoured with English literature and its language of love but she remains uncertain whether “she wanted to be



in love with Jonah” (100), who is, after all, English educated but not Anglo-Saxon. In the figure of Jonah Tay, it is not romance per se that makes him marginally attractive to Pandora but the mere fact that he takes her out, separates her from the crowded tenement where she lives, “breathing each other’s stale air and invading each other’s space” (101). She is affected by a western sensibility to spatiality — proximity is discomforting and invasive, in a manner that is alienating, while mobility and openness signify freedom and individuality, akin to a western experience of space. Jonah Tay himself suffers no such spatial anxiety. And although Teo’s female characters see the west as their means to liberation and better lives, throughout the narrative Teo just as often undermines the west as a utopian space.

In Love and Vertigo the textual nature of love and romance is persistent and beguiling, and it appears unexpectedly. After their relationship has been going on for several years and Pandora is attending university, one night while eating at a street stall under a dark starry night and bright swaying lanterns, Pandora hears several lines of poetry which seem to capture her mood. She looks at Jonah surprised that he has “just voiced the fragment floating in her mind” (108). She suddenly appreciates that maybe he understands her after all. For the first time, impulsively she kisses him and tells him she loves him, but it is a momentary illusion. Several more lines of poetry are spoken, she turns around and sees a young Eurasian man with a “ragged beard” directly behind her reading from a book of Byron to another woman. The Eurasian man lifts his gaze and their eyes meet for a “perfect split second pregnant with impossible possibilities, swiftly followed by the intrusion of reality” (109). For Pandora, like Miss Liu, the romantic choices are intertwined with racial and cultural possibilities and choices. The racially made body of the Chinese man may in some ways seem a better, proper, stable choice, but the language of love itself does not speak from it, rather it comes from a white, sometimes Eurasian, man — yet Miss Liu’s experience at least cautions of the unreliability of the European man. Even the third alternative, the racial and cultural hybridity of the Eurasian male, attractively masculine with facial hair, a marker of corporeal difference, and aesthetically identified with European culture, is for Pandora only a fleeting moment of possibility quickly discounted as impossible. It is an impossible option which although initially proposed is discounted without explication, a missed chance by Pandora and territory unexplored by Teo as if it were too obvious to delve into. In this case reality is truly blinding. Overlooked as well, however, in multiracial Singapore, are other possibilities — Malays and Indians — who seem for the

most part strangely absent or sidelined in Love and Vertigo except for occasional historical references and perhaps testament to the discursive occlusion that happens to the other colonised.

Kathleen Kirby reminds us that while the fear of open spaces, agoraphobia, is considered largely a (European) woman's affliction the home too is in most instances a patriarchal place (99). Space, as Kirby argues, "invades women: we can't push it from our consciousness. Moreover, space might seem a particularly alienating category for women, in that the conflation of women and space has been one of the mechanisms allowing the masculine subjection of both territories" (100). Although Pandora is initially grateful to be taken out of the confined spaces of the Lim family's existence in the tenements, her marriage to Jonah imposes upon her another claustrophobic confinement. Here the stifling presence is not only that of her husband but her parents-in-law, particularly the domineering Mrs Tay. From the outset of Pandora and Jonah's marriage a spatial battle ensues between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, who stereotypically instigates "the time honoured Chinese tradition of bullying her daughter-in-law" (115). In the confines of her mother-in-law's home

Pandora lost her time, her space, her privacy and her boundaries.... she wanted space to collect herself, to remember who she was. But personal boundaries were unheard of in that household, where lives, personalities, tempers, needs and desires crisscrossed the bodily envelopes of individuals and blurred their solidity... Hands touched, skins rubbed, bodies invaded personal spaces and overlapped individual lives. (120)

In the Tay household, as much as in the household of Pandora's parents, Pandora is strategically powerless to alter the hierarchies of domination and subordination. Yet Pandora is not as passive as she seems, and she makes tactical interventions that literally shift the ground of those positions of power. In The Practice of Everyday Life Michel de Certeau makes a distinction between the strategies of the powerful and the tactics of the ostensibly powerless. Certeau argues that strategies are "calculations of power relationships" that belong to a subject with "will and power" such as a business, army, or institution, that operate from a point of place (35-36). A strategy, Certeau states, "postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which

relations with an exteriority composed of targets and threats... can be managed" (36). In other words, strategies are developed from positions of power, power bases — strategies are the plans of the strong. On the other hand, for Certeau,

a tactic is a calculated action by the absence of a proper locus...the space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organised by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to keep to itself, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver 'within the enemy's field of vision'...and within enemy territory. (37)

Certeau's tactics are temporally opportunistic procedures, "that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time — to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favourable position, to the rapidity of the movements that change the organization of a space" (38). Tactics being the "art of the weak" (37) are as such the artifices of women, the racialised, and the proletarian to name a few. In *Love and Vertigo*, Teo provides the reader with a close-up look at relations of gender conflict and the necessary tactics of the weak.

Pandora does not take long to realise that her only hope of improving her situation is to put distance between Jonah and his mother. Rather than simply resign herself to her subordinate position vis-à-vis the Tays, Pandora takes advantage of whatever opportunities that arise to remove herself from the domestic domain of her in-laws and more broadly Southeast Asia. Pandora's earlier adherence to western cultural discourse and the discursive abjection of Chinese men now becomes a matter of practice. Rather than a direct threat to Jonah's primacy, or a usurpation of his position and power, her actions are attempts at assimilating Jonah into her experience — her powerlessness.

Pandora's first tactical success is to make Jonah realise his isolation from her. In the aptly named chapter "Boundaries and Black Holes" the act of sex defines positions of power and space. Sex becomes masculine colonisation and the retreat of female subjectivity. For Pandora not only is there a sense of her own absence in the act of sex, there is also a corresponding tactical desire to put distance between herself and Jonah. Unable to respond to the "invasion of her body" she lies still and unresponsive until

Jonah recognises that Pandora is “slipping away from him” (120). Furthermore, whenever he attempts to talk to her, he has the impression that she is watching him from the other end of a wooden bridge that paradoxically cannot bridge the distance between them no matter how vigorously he attempts to reach her. The bridge, as Certeau tells us,

...[is] ambiguous everywhere: it alternately welds together and opposes insularities... It liberates from enclosure and destroys autonomy...

As a transgression of the limit, a disobedience of the law of the place, it represents a departure... the ambition of a conquering power, or the flight of an exile; in any case, the ‘betrayal’ of an order. But at the same time it offers the possibility of a bewildering exteriority... (*Practice* 128)

Jonah is mired at a point just short of that ambiguity; he cannot reach the other side where Pandora is looking back at him. The bridge may as well represent the span between east and west. The west is the hope of a safe place for the Chinese woman. The Chinese man cannot help losing something should he cross over to the west, for it risks an unbearable melancholy as well — a loss of patriarchy structured around him. The bridge is enticing and threatening for both characters. It offers the possibility of connection, transgressing the limits of their spaces, allowing a flow of contestation, but for Jonah the bridge is tantamount to running on a treadmill — unambiguously it gets him nowhere. For Jonah, a Chinese man, a condition of stasis has been reached since Pandora, and perhaps any other Chinese woman, is unreachable by mere desire.

Jonah’s alternative to the bridge is a black hole. According to Rachel Lee a black hole may represent “the theoretical limits of empirical knowledge” (*Americas* 60). A black hole is also defined by the *Macquarie Dictionary* as “a region postulated as arising from the collapse of a star under its own gravitational forces and from which no radiation [i.e. light] or matter can escape”; it would literally drag anything within its gravitational pull and crush it. Jonah is unable to “escape the loneliness that lodged in his belly like a black hole” (*Love* 121). It is a void inside him, something that he seeks to expunge. Jonah has come to the limit/boundary of his knowledge and understanding of both Pandora and himself. The black hole being the core of him, he draws Pandora into the imprisonment of his relationship with her. He says “Talk to me” and she replies “What do you want me to say?... Tell me what you want to hear?” (122). Her reply

suggests the hierarchical status of their relationship, and just as the Chinese man is not expected to speak the language of love, he is also incapable of conducting anything discursive that effectively communicates with his female other. Despite the frequent repetition of questions asked so that Jonah may understand Pandora, he can only feel again that questions get him nowhere but in a black hole.

Whereas Jonah perceives a bridge separating them, Pandora imagines that the rough hair she holds between her fingers, Jonah's hair, are the "feathers of an owl that would spread its wings and fly off, leaving her on a deep dark forest floor with bloody claw rakings on her white breasts" (121 emphasis added). The owl in this instance portends something sinister and inauspicious. The owl like the vulture smells impending death. In her own being, Pandora goes through a transformation, a transition from life to death, she imagines herself taking root, "blood and bone freezing, then pulping until she became a giant white mushroom, vegetative, still, silent, solitary in the forest dark" (122). Solitary in a dark forest, the owl has departed, leaving her behind, or so she imagines. Jonah's lovemaking does not claw her breasts, it "spurts the black hole that is inside him up her body. She feels it growing within her now, that black forest where she metamorphoses into a white mushroom. Pluck me, eat me, die" (123). It is Jonah's blackness, a lack of light, cultural and masculine, that debilitates and emphasises Pandora's identification with, and aspirations of whiteness, her white breasts, a corporeal whiteness, her education embedded in western culture, the lure of its romantic words. She has however mistakenly succumbed to the Chinese man via the deception of ventriloquy, one man, the Eurasian, as it were, speaking in the space of another.

During her pregnancy, forced to give up her final year at university, confined to the darkness of the bedroom, again she "vegetates and roots in bed", her body "no longer hers to control. Pandora is lost and in her place as a wife, daughter-in-law and mother-to-be" (125), she is relational in contrast to the western individuality she craves. When Pandora gives birth to a still-born girl, she is cursed by the mother-in-law. In a mood of benevolence Jonah asks Pandora what she wants. Pandora takes her opportunity and (tactically) tells him, "I want to move out of your mother's house. I want to go far away" (216). To appease her, he makes arrangements to start a dental clinic in a Malaysian village where they will be away from Jonah's mother. The Malay anti-Chinese riots of May 1969 become another opportunity to put greater space between Jonah and his mother. Pandora forces Jonah into agreeing to migrate to another country — England, America or Australia — she does not care (although Maoist China probably never

occurs to her). She argues disingenuously so that their son may grow up safe from such racial violence. But it is traditional Chinese patriarchy, and a diasporic Chinese culture at large, that are to be distanced and isolated in Southeast Asia. The mother-in-law, situated in her own marginal position of limited authority, is merely complicit within the unequal relations of Chinese patriarchy. The west, operating on its own cultural ideals made glittering by Hollywood cinema, is renewed as a position of emancipation for the Chinese woman, a position from where she might rupture and reshape familial relationships of power. But it is to neither of her ideals, Hollywood nor England, that they go, but the generic western space of post white Australia in 1978.

In Australia, far from the inhibiting limitations of the mother-in-law, Pandora's penchant for extravagant material acquisition is able to find expression. Conversely, the displacement of the mother-in-law merely produces the effect of an increasingly patriarchal and tyrannical husband in his own right. In Australia, diasporic Jonah has transformed into the archetypal immigrant "Patriarch". The relationship between Pandora and Jonah reaches the point where they have become Frank Chin's stereotypical "fucked up" and "dysfunctional family". Pandora's usefulness in the household and kitchen deteriorates, to Jonah's frustration. Jonah reminds the rest of the family that he has sacrificed himself and his career in order to bring them to Australia, whereas he could have had a better career and greater wealth if he had stayed in Malaysia. For Jonah, the site of Australia represents a place of emasculation — not through the expected and usual story of racial subordination but through lost financial advancement. In other words he could have been much more of a material man in either Singapore or Malaysia.

Shu-mei Shih analysing Chinese literary modernism in the 1920s and 1930s notes (with far broader resonances):

The lack of sufficient money for consumption leads to the urban man's sense of disempowerment as a man and drives him to troubling discomposure. ...it is not the modern girl who embodies the urban materiality that emasculates the urban man... but rather a shortage of money which prevents the one participatory relationship he might otherwise have with the city: consumption. In many urban men's minds, manhood equals money and vice versa, so that the lack of money suggests the diminution of manhood. (Lure 352)

While not impoverished, Jonah finds it difficult to establish his dental clinic and blames Pandora for making him migrate. She offers to find a job but he rejects the idea, which goes against work as a masculine privilege. Financial enrichment is closely guarded as the preserve and duty of the Chinese husband and the means of maintaining Pandora's economic dependence. But the movement to Australia has nevertheless not only eroded his financial potential but also his manhood. Jonah's struggling efforts at financial viability are symptomatic of a gendered ineffectuality that ultimately resorts to violence when issues of control arise. At the heart of Jonah's manhood is the necessity to exhibit material well-being.

Pandora's involvement in an evangelical-style Christian church further disrupts Jonah's sphere of influence upon her life — she becomes a “born again” Christian, revives an earlier commitment to western emancipatory urges, and marks another turning away and distancing from Jonah. No longer is it the overcrowded tenements of culturally barren Singapore, the overbearing mother-in-law, murderous Malay gangs — the inchoate feelings of individuality during her youth and early days of marriage are transformed into a full-blown rejection of the Patriarch and his space. This time it is not the popular culture of Hollywood or romantic English poetry that figuratively offer her a release from Jonah's grip, but western religious theatrical performance and discourse. The happiness she derives from church involvement and the time and space away from the Patriarch, however, provoke in him jealousy and curiosity. This forces Jonah into joining the church so that Pandora does not spin eccentrically too distant from his own centrality. Religion, however, does not prevent the family rifts from growing more pronounced but intensifies them as much on scriptural lines. A “spiritual war” ensues between the Patriarch and the son, who allies himself with the mother: “‘Honour thy father and mother!’ thundered the Patriarch. ‘Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath!’ retorted Sonny” (224).

Eventually the Patriarch is isolated in his family and home. The children regard him disdainfully. When he castigates them they walk away from him, and his sphere of influence grows smaller. He tells them, “Don't walk away while I'm talking to you... that's the rudest thing you could ever do to a Chinese father” (234). Sonny, for his unfilial resistance to the father's authority, is thrown out of the home — in any case he renounces the brutality of Chinese patriarchy. In this way it is Sonny who breaks more clearly and successfully from traditional Chinese patriarchy than Pandora, and as a result

he enjoys a more equal relationship with, significantly, a Chinese woman — even if under indigent conditions. Sonny forgoes traditional masculinity, which is tied to material accumulation, and the violence it implies, and pursues the emotional sustenance of music and female intimacy, and by doing so arrives in the place originally sought out by the Chinese woman. Thus Sonny provides an exemplar of Chinese masculinity without pathological violence, one that a Chinese woman may cope with. The lesson may be salutary for the Chinese woman, her power to effect change in Chinese patriarchy is through the younger male, not directly against the older man.

Lessons, however, are never clear cut; in her increasing blindness Pandora has an unsatisfactory affair with Pastor Philippe. Grace takes to working as a house cleaner but cannot clean up the domestic disorder of her own family. She spends as much time as possible away from the home to be with her brother and his girlfriend, or in pubs, and the library. The Patriarch, although he has tried with a certain determination to assimilate into Australian society, has never realised that his position has always been determined as on the margins of it. By maintaining a Chinese patriarchal stance he has resisted unsuccessfully the disintegration of his authority in the household. In the public sphere, he does not have a clearly differentiated position vis-à-vis the dominant white male population — for the most part he thinks and does as other white Australian men may do. In Love and Vertigo this means the Patriarch mimics dominant white racist attitudes against migrants such Chinese, Indians and Lebanese, and those who maintain dual nationality (180-181). Yet with a certain ambivalence Jonah Tay “enjoyed the benefits of multiculturalism in the 1980s but clung to a belief in assimilation.” (180). If Jonah adopted racist attitudes then these racists attitudes never deviated in any critical turn against white Australians themselves.

While Teo gives little space and attention to Jonah and Pandora’s attempts at assimilation into Australian society it might appear that Love and Vertigo is less a story of assimilation than it is of an ethnic family disintegration under the pressures of gender conflict, with immigration issues as a backdrop. While not seeking to underplay the latter component, the disintegration of this Chinese family itself manifests a kind of limited assimilation into Australian society — the Patriarch is left stranded at home alone, his place of empowerment having succumbed to the emasculating tactics of the other family members. The children have turned their backs on him, the wife has long since done the same, seeking comfort with another man, even if that comfort is also



illusory. Finally the most extravagant of her acts, the absolute limit of Pandora's distancing from Jonah, is her return to Singapore, where she commits suicide.

Olivia Khoo has framed Pandora's suicide, the result of succumbing to vertigo, a jump from a high apartment balcony, at a more generalised level relative to the discomfort that Asian immigrants, particularly those from Southeast Asia, feel when moving farther south to Australia. "Going South," argues Khoo, "can therefore be re-articulated as a form of 'vertigo', and a confusion or panic about space" ("Chinese Exotic" 215). Khoo's argument rests with a priori assumptions of an Australian national sense of vertigo rather than just immigrant subjectivities originating from Southeast Asia, the cause being "Australia's various [schizophrenic] attempts to align with or dissociate from Asia, [through which] the country is attempting to find its 'place' in the world" (215). This in turn has influenced Asian Australians to "struggle to find their own space amongst this confusion" (215). While I do not disagree with Khoo on those points and the necessity to be properly located, my view is that it is the cultural direction that matters most here not the geographical one. Pandora's suicide is a cultural act; she kills herself not in the westernised space of Australia but the Asian space of Singapore, another victim of Chinese patriarchy and Chinese men who obstruct a clear run to the west.

### Conclusion

Vertigo in Love and Vertigo, is not so much the draw of gravity as the misalignment of the east/west discourse — the gap between might well be a black hole of abjection for those who do not successfully cross it. The Chinese woman's relationship with her Chinese male counterpart and the patriarchal hierarchy necessitate a spatial tactic of dislocation. The more oppressive the conditions, the more extravagant the tactics required, that is, the farther she needs to displace the Chinese man from his locus of authority. In a reading of Love and Vertigo, adopting Olivia Khoo's analysis, the figure most dislocated by going south would be the male, not the female. The female would relish going south or west. The Chinese patriarch has to maintain familial hierarchies amidst western cultural discourses and practices that assign him to a marginal position. By emphasising the east/west spatial narrative, which is manifestly the real terrain of Love and Vertigo, these ambiguities and ambivalences are better revealed than when the focus has switched to a literal south from Southeast Asia. In Love and Vertigo the west,

which is the Chinese woman's utopian space, hardly mitigates Chinese patriarchy; it may totally disrupt it but in its wake are individuals who are in Frank Chin's words "fucked up" and "dysfunctional". Pandora commits suicide because the utopian space of the west is not real space, whereas the patriarchal space of the east is real. Even in Pandora's blindness she might recognise that what Homi Bhabha has said is right — women go blind because they see too much reality. Yet whereas Chinese women go west to escape gender oppression, in the following chapter we see weak Chinese men go west to recover their lost masculinity.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> To quote Butler at length:

Where there is an "I" who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that "I" and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will. Thus there is no "I" who stands behind discourse and executes its volition or will through discourse. On the contrary, the "I" only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated... and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the "I"; it is the transitive invocation of the "I." Indeed, I can only say "I" to the extent that I have first been addressed, and that address has mobilized my place in speech; paradoxically, the discursive condition of social recognition precedes and conditions the formation of the subject: recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject. (225-26)

<sup>2</sup> In Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance Sau-ling Cynthia Wong posits a reading strategy for Asian-American literary texts that incorporates examination of the tropes of extravagance and necessity. In Love and Vertigo such a reading strategy also elicits Teo's frequent recourse to images of extravagance and necessity. See the "Prelude" for Pandora's tendency towards material extravagance and Jonah's disdain for improvidence and the unnecessary.

## Chapter Four

### Masculine Movements in Brian Castro's Birds of Passage and After China

In 1982 Brian Castro<sup>1</sup> was the joint winner of the Australian/Vogel Literary Award with his first novel Birds of Passage. Remote from China, which had been politically isolated for around two and a half decades<sup>2</sup>, it seems coincidental that Castro's novel of two Chinese men living in different centuries in search of strong masculine identities should appear at the same time that mainland Chinese writers and critics were beginning to focus their attentions on Chinese masculinity, men, and the apparent weaknesses of both. Chinese national weakness had already been a preoccupation of Chinese intellectuals ever since Britain defeated the Chinese in the first opium war and thereafter, along with other European and Japanese colonial powers, regularly humiliated China militarily and politically. For a contemporary diasporic Chinese man such as Brian Castro, this perceived weakness might appear to be the distant point from which his Chinese male characters' sense of masculine identity was historically configured in the face of European strength. In the cultural encounter between China and the west it was China and particularly Chinese men that seemed weak; a legacy that might only now be seen as changing. In this context I approach Brian Castro's novels Birds of Passage (1983) and After China (1992), as representations of male Chinese weakness in opposition to western imperialist strength, western men and women generally.

When in Birds of Passage the character Lo Yun Shan arrives at his mother's funeral and sees his father dressed in women's clothes the unmistakable impression is the feminisation of Chinese masculinity. As a story of journeying from China to Australia, as an individual quest for a manly masculinity, the narrative of Birds of Passage is a movement of the Chinese man into western space, a difficult "rite of passage" in the search for and attainment of a potent masculinity. Here proof of manliness within China is neither sufficient nor adequate; it has to be proved in the space of western men and culture, on the bodies of (preferably white) women, the "locus" as Lu Tonglin claims, "on which male subjects attest their power" (Misogyny 16).

In Castro's later novel, After China, the theme of male potency reoccurs but this time it is the overbearing and repressive Chinese state, backed by the traditional cultural practices of several thousand years, that imposes a condition of emasculation upon the male individual. Once again, western space becomes paradoxically a place to recover Chinese masculinity. The question that arises from these double movements into western space is what do they tell us about the condition and formation of diasporic Chinese male subjectivity and masculinity given their specific settings in Australian space?

While discussions of gender in the west have often focussed on the psychoanalytic concept of lack, in terms of the penis and the phallus, Kam Louie has recently attempted a theorisation of a specifically Chinese masculinity in terms of the Chinese concept of wen-wu; a concept that encapsulates the traditional masculine attainments of both cultural and martial skills. In terms of characteristics wen is about cultural refinement, literary and scholarly learning. The term wu might be more commensurate with western ideals of masculinity, centred around knowledge of the martial arts, physical strength, and valour. In terms of the ideal, a man should possess both wen and wu characteristics. However between men with predominantly wen characteristics and men with wu characteristics, the former has traditionally been considered the superior of the two. Louie considers the wen-wu dyad, which has feudal origins predating Confucius (551-479 BCE), as "one of the single most important Chinese paradigms explaining the performance of gendered identities — in particular masculinity" (Theorising 4). Louie states: "Because it captures both the mental and physical composition of the ideal man, wen-wu is constructed both biologically and culturally" (6).

The necessity for a specific theorisation of Chinese masculinity Louie argues is that Chinese men are never likely to appear as "real men" according to western paradigms of masculinity. In the west there has never been to the same degree as in China an appreciation of the "softer, cerebral male", as in the case of the wenren — the cultivated scholar. Thus, Louie suggests, in comparison with western notions of masculinity, Chinese men are less likely to pass the western test of masculinity (9).

Although there exists a characterisation of Chinese masculinity as "soft" or feminine, historically the predominant Chinese masculine ideal seemed to have undergone significant change during the Qing dynasty. According to Robert van Gulik during the Ming dynasty (1364-1644) male athletes were still admired and male students regularly practised martial arts, riding and hunting, while bodily strength was an attribute of the handsome man (Sexual 295-96). During the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220

CE) civil and military education were integrated within the instruction of students, who studied the “six arts”: rites, music, archery, chariot-driving, calligraphy and mathematics. With the conquest of China by the Manchus and the establishment of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), martial arts, argues van Gulik, were monopolised by the conquering Manchus, and in response such physical activities began to be regarded by the Han Chinese literati as vulgar pursuits worthy only of the Manchus invaders (296). Contextualised in this manner the softer, cerebral Han Chinese male was a product of changing socio-political circumstances and as such a historically contingent one, which in turn brings into question the contemporary desirability or undesirability of the “weak” Chinese male.

At first glance the notion of a contemporary wen-wu masculinity might seem peculiarly outdated, since the Confucian ideal of civil service so integral to the wenren’s *raison d’être* became institutionally defunct at the end of the Qing dynasty with the abolition of the imperial examination system. Moreover, what is the current nature of wen-wu gender specificity when the previously male domains of wen and wu are no longer monopolised by Chinese men but are now accessible to Chinese women? If it is still an important and determining paradigm of gender performance how could it operate to distinguish present day Chinese women and men? Kam Louie seems to give it away himself when he states: “wen-wu may dissolve in time to reveal its true purpose... a power tool to consolidate the interests of certain classes of people and to exclude others” (162). One would add that that time has already been reached, and that wen-wu no longer strictly configures either class or gender boundaries.

Of a different slant, in the early 1990s, Wang Yuejin in critiquing the film Red Sorghum, which glorified the rugged irrepressible male figure, suggested that rather than Chinese women, Chinese men were the ones afflicted with “lack”. “If anything,” proclaimed Wang, “a femininity complex would be a more appropriate form of the unconscious in the Chinese psyche” (“Red” 83). In the early 1980s, female writers such as Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin came to prominence partly because of the unflattering portrayals of Chinese men in their fiction<sup>3</sup>. In the popular media young women also voiced the opinion that there were no “real” men in China<sup>4</sup>. At the same time some male writers seemed to be looking for “strong” men as well. Writers such as Mo Yan, Han Shaogong, Li Hangyu and Jia Pingwa created what became known as “roots-seeking literature” (xungen wenxue), a nostalgic idealisation of rustic, strong and tough men, of which Mo Yan’s novel, Red Sorghum, was seen as representative<sup>5</sup>. In the context of

Chinese literature of the 1980s Wang's notion of lack here has less to do with sexual difference, Freudian and Lacanian notions of the lack of a penis or the phallus, and more to do with the lack of a cultivated feminine "internal stillness and passivity" (83). Rather than wen-wu, Wang's invocation of internal stillness and passivity<sup>6</sup> as feminine characteristics is a direct recourse to the older Chinese cosmological concepts of yin and yang<sup>7</sup>.

The Chinese characters yin and yang have the respective meteorological meanings of overcast and sunny (yang also meaning the sun). In philosophical terms yin has been frequently and facilely associated with the feminine principle, in this case the receptive and calm, while yang the masculine, the active and creative. Unlike wen-wu the essence of yin and yang is about balance and harmony not hierarchical order. However in other respects yin is below and yang above. From this, Confucian ideology inferred the morally subordinate position of women and the superior position of men. This moral subordination of women Wang argues can be traced to the Han dynasty Confucian ideologue Dong Zhongshu's assertion that yin and yang are mutually exclusive, and that yang is benign and yin is base. Thus as Wang says "it is easy to see how the very structure of the [yin-yang concept] allows an easy equation with the 'noble male and the base female'" ("Red" 82). Dong's interpretation however is faulty in that yin-yang theory is not conceptually dualistic; rather it is axiomatic that yin exists within yang and yang within yin. The common view that yin is feminine and yang is masculine is conceptually misleading. For example, in the male body yang is manifested externally and yin internally, while in the female body yin is manifested externally and yang internally. Therefore men are not strictly yang and women are not purely yin, and there is no real correlation between yin-yang and gender distinctions.

Wang nevertheless asserts that the feminine yin attributes of internal stillness and passivity (which, on the contrary must be constitutionally yang and creative in the female body), have historically become appropriated and valorised in the male giving forth the femininity complex that now exists among men. As an example of feminine yin attributes "overcoming" masculine yang, Wang cites the Ming dynasty novel The Water Margin, a story of 108 outlaws and bandits set in the Song dynasty. Among the mostly male bandits a spectrum of masculinity exists in which at one end are bandits "bordering" on feminine while at the other end the more manly males. According to Wang there is a perceptible "moral taxonomy" delineating at one end the more feminine who are talented and clever, and at the other end the more manly who are boorish, crude,

rash, bare-bellied, and swaggering, and whose daring is mostly alcohol induced and dependent (86)<sup>8</sup>. Manly masculinity is thus inherently “flawed”, unruly, and always to be subordinated by the propriety of feminine masculinity. A notion that the dynastic ruling classes, Wang argues, were only too keen to appropriate into state ideology.

Wu Cuncun has also recently argued that “in late imperial China when men identified with women they often tended to do so in one of two fundamental ways: either in terms of an ideal beauty, or as powerless subjects” (“Anti-masculine” 20). Moreover as Wu notes, “it is... important not to assume that the feminisation described here was necessarily understood to be unhealthy or undesirable” (20). Equally, as Wang Yuejin points out:

It does not follow, however, that the femininity complex relieves women of their inferiority, nor is the curse of the ‘lack’ lifted from woman as her place is elevated. What happens is that men usurp women’s proper space so that women are pushed aside... and exiled into the realm of the imaginary to become icons and absences (83).

Although feminine maleness is elevated, in Wang’s analysis masculine maleness exists at a level of Bakhtinian carnival because of its propensity for degrading behaviour, drunkenness, and crudity (88). If we follow Wang’s arguments, Chinese masculinity is also inherently ambivalent. The most manly/masculine state is lacking, while feminine or soft masculinity, as Wang Yiyan calls it (“Soft”), is lacking rugged manliness. Yet in neither situation is it necessarily problematic for the Chinese man — or perhaps has not been until recent times.

In Masculinity Besieged Zhong Xueping takes issue with Wang Yuejin’s characterisation of this non-phallic masculinity.<sup>9</sup> Zhong argues that recent Chinese literature and social attitudes suggest that Chinese men, not to mention Chinese women, have become far less comfortable with the feminine Chinese man. According to Zhong Xueping in the 1980s, after controversies over Zhang Jie’s and Zhang Xinxin’s “not-so-sympathetic representations of men, the term yinsheng yangshuai or ‘the rise of the feminine and the decline of the masculine’ emerged and quickly became a popularly accepted perception of the status of Chinese men and (women)” (5). This was a perception that in the wake of the social policies of gender equality during the Maoist era women had become too strong and men too weak. Thus, far from a femininity complex, Zhong argues that Chinese men suffer from a male marginality complex

measured against the state, their western male counterparts, and women generally. Zhong insists the Chinese man's psyche is "predominantly manifested through [his] preoccupation with the weakness of the country, the culture, and Chinese men. In this sense, the complex is also a male desire, a desire to overcome marginality and to search for (masculine) identity" (37). Zhong's analysis however only encompasses Chinese male intellectuals, that group of Chinese men Wang Yuejin would identify as having appropriated the attributes of internal stillness and passivity. To an extent this also parallels Kam Louie's concept of wen masculinity — except lacking, and in search of, the corresponding wu component. Nevertheless it leaves out the majority of Chinese men from Zhong's analysis and the question of whether they too have a marginality complex and in relation to which centres of potency. It also omits the question whether this latter group of Chinese men by and large feel comfortable as men. In Wang Yuejin's exposition the masculine man lacks a sufficient balance of feminine characteristics, however this is a lack that is ascribed and imposed rather than felt by these men. Zhong's argument is that the intellectual Chinese male both exhibits and is conscious of his own lack — a lack that is decidedly phallic. As Zhong argues, in Lacanian terms it is a condition of "want-to-be-ness",<sup>10</sup> an anxiety that rejects marginality and is fundamentally a desire for "potency" and the search for a central masculine presence and space. It is in this context that I read Castro's two novels and examine the sites of marginality which the Chinese male characters desire to transcend.

### Birds of Passage

In Birds of Passage much of the narrative revolves around a kind of displaced interaction between the haunting figure of Lo Yun Shan and the unstable subjectivity of Seamus O'Young. Each character attempts to bridge a temporal gap of communication and genealogy along a specifically masculine line that in the end results in a physical convergence. The novel commences in epic tone: "My name is Lo Yun Shan". It is Kwangtung (Guangdong) province in China and the year is 1856. Lo explains that his name is taken from the Tai Mo Shan — Big Mist Mountain. Against accepted custom and wisdom, he has climbed past the temple on the mountain only to discover evidence of a meal and human faecal matter. Lo gives details of his life: the respected position of his family, his role as a teacher, and his father's principal tax collector. In contrast to the details of this life, when the narrative switches to the present narration of Seamus O'Young, a passport lies open on a table, but the only details are the place Sydney, and



the name O'Young, Seamus. Other details such as place of birth, height, colour of eyes and hair, "visible peculiarities", are left blank, emblematic of the absences and incompleteness that beset Seamus's subjectivity. Despite the Celtic appearance of his surname, Seamus O'Young is as much Australian-born Chinese as Irish.

Seamus has fragments of a journal he found behind a mirror. The journal was written by Lo Yun Shan and recorded his journey from China to Australia during the goldrushes of the mid-1800s. Having translated and read them over and over, Seamus is struck not so much by an identification with Shan's situation, but with a disturbing and complete identification with Shan's style of writing. As an important disruption to cultural identification, what may in essence be their kinship is not ostensibly ancestry, gender or race but lines of authorship — namely Castro's own. Despite this dissemblance the narrative of *Birds of Passage* is emphatically one of racialised characters transgressing white spaces, where there are frequent moves from one place to another, China to Australia, the search for new homes, the return to old ones, shifts between threatening and safe places. Seamus, haunted by his "*doppelgänger*", carries Shan's fragmentary journals "as talismans for other points of departures" (4). The *doppelgänger*, or double, is characteristically, according to Wong Sau-ling, "symptomatic of a crisis in self-acceptance and self-knowledge: part of the self, denied recognition by the conscious ego, emerges as an external figure exerting a hold over the protagonist that seems disproportionate to provocation or inexplicable by everyday logic" (*Reading* 82). Castro's narrative might appear to parallel the roots-seeking literature of mainland Chinese writers in which a more idealised manliness is evident. However, in *Birds of Passage*, Castro is constructing a story of disillusionment. Castro's backward look to the past is a gaze at the roots of social decay and masculine impotence — the presence of the double is a disruptive reminder that racial and cultural identifications can be uncomfortable when they happen to be marginalised and abjected.

As Seamus's passport lies open before him, he notes the word 'visas' and with pencil in hand declares "it is here that I begin my journey" (3). Thus writing is established with the acts of movement, arrivals and departures, journeys and sojourns of race and gender. While Susan Stewart states that "writing unfolds in space" (*Longing* 21), in *Birds of Passage* it is writing that unfolds space. To where and to what this unfolding of space leads becomes the central question of the novel — for Shan and Seamus it may be the nexus of their male potency. Seamus writes into his passport, a passport that allows him transport across space and time. He treats his passport like a

journal and literally writes passages into his passports. Seamus's wandering away from Australia to France, and England, and a sexless marriage with the Australian woman Fatima is contrasted with Shan's more purposeful escape from China to Australia. When Seamus applies for a new passport the official reprimands him for his mistreatment of the old passport, which is written over with notes and memos — a possible violation of the law, says the official (58). Passports are then not necessarily unfettered free passages, rather they are also indicative of boundaries, permissions or refusals, and points of entry or exclusion; in Seamus's hands they are documents of spatial transgressions.

Where passports are in their usual sense identifications, in *Birds of Passage* they also offer the textual differences, possibilities and proximities of other identities. Through the increasing intertwining of writing and journeying the lives of Shan and Seamus address one another through a writing that moves them closer together — Shan addresses an imaginary future reader, which turns out to be Seamus, while Seamus, through his own writing and translation of Shan's journals, retraces a past journey. Throughout the novel Castro then alters the controlling voice of the narrative; whether Seamus is citing, rewriting, or fully creating parts of Shan's journal, authorship of the journals becomes increasingly blurred: "Shan's journals, real and imagined, have merged. Notice how I'm beginning to harness his voice with quotation marks... Not only am I the author, the originator, but I am his progenitor, having impregnated myself with these fictions" (58). This blurring of subject positions, and the possible reinvention of individual subjectivity, is another concern in *Birds of Passage* and drives much of the narrative.

The initial departure of Shan to Australia can be characterised as a quest for a new form of Chinese masculinity that overcomes a malaise of weakness. Castro's Shan is no ordinary Chinese peasant off to the goldfields; he is educated and literate, he has the right wen characteristics, he feels little affinity with other Chinese, thinks of himself as an iconoclast and has the visual acuity of an orientalist gaze. While he is from a rural village he has the sensibilities of a modern-day first-world traveller's revulsion at seeing for the first time, and up close, third-world poverty. When he visits a coastal town, he apprehends a place of shanties and dilapidated buildings, the chaos of narrow alleyways, more human excrement, streets that run "in no rational manner, some turning around upon themselves, like the people, who walked with their heads turned backwards; poverty stricken, belligerent, mistrustful" (5). Not only is he an iconoclast, his loyalties

divide as he contemplates the backwardness of the country, the feuding clans, his literary but “somnolent father”, and the greater industry (imperialistic and sexual) of the foreigners and “their penetration of China... deeper and more violently” (7).

The extent of Chinese weakness in *Birds of Passage* is equated with feminisation both at the level of the nation and Chinese men. For Castro feminisation at both levels is neither desirable nor healthy. Upon the death of his mother, Shan is overcome not by sadness but professes “a sort of claustrophobia, of wanting to be somewhere else... The smells, sights, sounds, coming from within the house limited and frustrated me; and yet they were the only means, the only windows as it were, through which I could escape” (11-12). To add anguish to the funereal frenzy of chanting monks, incense smoke and deafening gongs, Shan sees his opium-addicted father dressed in a black and silver embroidered gown, silk slippers on his feet, eyes painted, fingernails an inch long, face caked in white paint, lips red, making dainty movements with a fan. He kisses a monk on the head, “his face inscrutable and scandalous at the same time, licensed by the unspoken acceptance in our society of the transvestism of those who are spiritual. I left the room in horror” (13). Castro’s depiction of a traditional Chinese patriarch transformed/transvested into drag is both stereotypical and orientalist. The death of the female, the mother, is replaced by the fearfully feminised father. Castro’s breaking from a Chinese subjectivity to enunciate a horror that Shan feels, unlike those around him, is indicative of a cultural border crossover. Notwithstanding “the unspoken acceptance in our society” (13, emphasis added) the unbearable sight of the transgressively and freakishly feminised father unmistakably disturbs other, western heterosexual, ideas of masculinity. Marjorie Garber contends that transvestism is “a mechanism of displacement from one blurred boundary to another” (qtd in Cooppan 259). Here the blurred boundary of gender is also reflected in the penetrable boundary of the nation. The national body becomes feminised while feminised men occupy the space of absent women. Not only has Shan’s mother died, but as a young boy he witnessed his younger sister being swept away in a river with “a look of peace rather than panic on her face” (17). The look of peace on the sister’s face reflects the idea that for the Chinese female death is after all a release from her abject position in Chinese society. So in the absence of the Chinese female, which occurs across the generations of mother and daughter, the Chinese male can enter freely into female space. Moreover the tendency for Chinese men to pass into feminised form and space is not only strong but also uninhibited.

Shan is driven in horror not only from the room but also from the feminised space of the Chinese nation as a whole. Shan's quest is a redemption of masculinity through modernity and the experience of western space. Upon departing from China he senses "a strange premonition of being in touch with and confident of the future. I was becoming a modern man" (21). In his quest for modernity the only point of incongruity is his choice of actual destination. Although Shan attempts to escape from the soft masculinity of China, in Australia his encounters with Europeans and European culture consign his race and Chineseness unremittingly to the masculinity of the "want-to-be" male-lack variety — wherever he goes Chinese male weakness follows and is enforced upon him. When European miners attack Chinese miners, the Chinese do not fight back but flee in humiliation. At another point, further debasing the position of Chinese manliness, Shan witnesses a European man fondling the buttocks of a young Chinese man. On the goldfields when Shan is drawn to a site of drinking, gambling and whoring, he questions his Confucian education and training and bemoans the passivity and weakness of not himself but Chinese men in general. In his journal he writes: "How difficult it is for me to stand in the middle, how difficult it is to remain impartial, to be part of the fray!... My people are not idealistic men. We do not hoist pennants of defiance. Yet sometimes I feel that this is the only way" (109). The Confucian model of masculinity, or Castro's stereotyping of Chinese as inherently passive, is at a dead end, and if Shan's journey is an attempt to escape from this mortification, the alternative in Birds of Passage is resolved through a relationship with a European woman, Mary Young.

According to Kam Louie, relationships between white women and Chinese men in colonial Australia were rare, however other recent research by Sandi Robb ("Myths") and Jane Lydon (Many) suggests that marriages between European women and Chinese men were more common than previously acknowledged. Robb asserts that despite the loss of respectability and social exclusion this entailed for white women marrying Chinese men, a major factor for white women choosing Chinese husbands and partners was their perceived reliability as income earners, their kindness and generosity, and the protection they could offer against "predatory sexual behaviour by [European] colonial men against single women" (100). In other words it was the kind of comparatively soft masculinity that attracted these women against the rough, coarse and often violent behaviour of European men. Moreover even if Castro doesn't dispel the myth that European women who aligned themselves with Chinese partners and lovers were mostly

prostitutes, Robb's research makes it clear that this was seldom the case and that such stereotypes were more likely the result of European men's rationalisation for the seemingly inexplicable choice made by these women for men of an "inferior" race (98).

Castro's construction of the relationship of Shan and Mary Young puts them in a constant state of movement, and rather than Mary facing exclusion for her choice of Shan as a lover the relationship elevates Shan's position. While standing in line with other Chinese men waiting for a mining licence, Shan leaves the queue, yearns for the open road, the continuation of his journey where "he could not be touched, could not be reviled by his conscience" (131). Leaving the "queue" is both a sign of his cleaving from his Chineseness and the sign of its oppression. Shan positively shuns contact and identification with most other Chinese — a kind of racial dissociative identity disorder<sup>11</sup> that has from the beginning motivated his quest. To the end the journey is not with other Chinese men; he is a modern man uncomfortable in Chinese inflected space and community. Standing in a position of privilege vis-à-vis the abject position of Chinese men, well dressed and with an important signifier of social elevation, a pregnant white woman figuratively by his side, he feels sympathy with the Chinese miners without the commitment of identification.

Throughout the novel as Shan seeks to go forward both spatially and temporally to a point of potent masculinity, Seamus is afflicted by a premature aging as his life becomes increasingly engrossed with the past, "looking for the right train, wanting to journey backwards because there was order in the past; historical sequences, completed puzzles" (36). The hope that a past sense of order might redirect a present-day disorder is illusory because for Seamus this merely proves to be increasingly debilitating. In *Birds of Passage* a reliance on the past becomes highly implausible. When the train reaches the town of his foster parents, the place where he eventually confronts Shan, he feels, "I have arrived, but do not feel that I have arrived, the train moved so slowly that there seemed to have been an infinite regression" (39). The effect of Shan's and Seamus's journeys is to establish a meeting to resolve their conditions of alienation. Yet, as becomes evident by the end, Castro strangely disturbs the possibility of a satisfactory conclusion to the alienation of either character, at least not through each other. Ultimately it is not the brief meeting of Shan and Seamus that resolves their alienation, the sense of masculine lack and incompleteness that they feel, what matters are the sexual encounters with the characters Mary Young and Anna Bernhard. More significant

is not a revision of history but the re-invigoration of Chinese masculinity, for a strong masculinity might as well stand in for a strong presence in history.<sup>12</sup>

From the third chapter, “The Promising Land”, the narrative voices of Shan and Seamus begin to be separated by the narration of a third-person diegetic voice that narrates parts of Shan’s journey. As the third person narration interposes more frequently, the voices of Shan and Seamus become more divided while their stories and places paradoxically converge. At times it becomes difficult to distinguish between the voice of Seamus and that of the third-person narrator, ultimately to the point where all narration is from the same point of time and place. What occurs is not only a compression of time, where the past integrates with the future, but space becomes a common place. As Certeau argues, “The kind of difference that defines every place is not on the order of a juxta-position but rather takes the form of imbricated strata... This place, on its surface, seems to be a collage. In reality, in its depth it is ubiquitous. A piling up of heterogenous places” (*Practice* 200-201). It is clear that Shan’s place in colonial Australia is the same place of Seamus’s white and post white Australia policy, and moreover the identical place of indigenous and *terra nullius* Australia. In other words, as Certeau says, “epochs all survive in the same place, intact and mutually interacting... place is a palimpsest” (202, original emphasis). Similarly Ross Gibson states, “White Australian history must be seen now as a palimpsest; the underlying autochthonous scriptures are emerging ever more insistently” (88). But it is not just the autochthonous scriptures; others that have been buried and repressed seek to return too. In Castro’s affecting of place and time, Seamus, who has come to the same place at the river, witnesses the attack upon Shan. “I was awakened by the two men moving slowly past me... making a zigzag path to the river. They had not noticed me there, lying naked by the fallen she-oaks” (*Birds* 142). If this acts as a moment of historical witnessing, it is also an uncomfortable one for the present-day Chinese subject.

When Shan and Seamus see each other, there is a moment of recognition but nothing that passes for a moment of identification. Seamus asks, “Are you really my ancestor, bearing the mark of Cain, standing there with your pigtail pulled off, your face gaunt and haunting?” (144). One has to wonder what the significance of this killing with sudden biblical overtones is now meant to convey. And which terrain is east of Eden? It is not so much a revelatory moment as one of disillusionment and embarrassment. The naked Seamus attempts to put on a penis gourd, “to maintain the last small vestiges of human civilisation” (144) — perhaps another quasi-biblical reference. Shan having seen

his “reader: a wriggling, blind, white-haired man spawned by the future on a river bank” (144), runs away into the bush or back to the past. The past is as disappointing as the future, and neither passes the promise of alleviating the condition of alienation — one driven from China and the other from a problematic genealogy whose place is always unstable. Castro might be questioning whether the Chinese in Australia have any kind of validating history to recover. In this text, it seems not.

Women however intervene to resolve these men’s problems, either directly or indirectly. The fact that Mary Young takes the top position during their sex and that she deserts him is more than mitigated by the fact that on her account he kills two men and, through some trite writing from Castro, has lost the “Confucian ideal of the Great Man” (150), that is, the embodiment of the feminised Chinese male. Shan initially regrets the loss of both Mary and the Confucian ideal man but this gives way when he realises he is now hunted not as a member of an unwanted group, a Chinese man (which he must dissociate from being), but because he is an individual, and one that just happens to have killed two men — a rather manly man. Killing two white men, one who happens to be a former leader of the Eureka stockade uprising (biblical references notwithstanding), then equates with a robust intercultural masculinity; an act of not only “talking back” to the cultural hegemony and myths of white Australia but an allegorical striking back in self-representation and defence. But to complicate matters, although the glimpse of “his illegitimate progeny” inspires a “responsibility for his lineage, [to] shoulder the burden of being its author” (151), Shan returns to China. It is then not Shan who shoulders the responsibility of lineage, but rather Mary Young, who presumably passes her surname down the genealogical line to Seamus. Intentionally or inadvertently, Castro effectively shifts the bearer of the historical and genealogical lineage from the male Chinese side to the female European side. From the point of historiography this might indicate the overemphasis placed on tracing men’s histories at the expense of erasing women’s presence. In other respects it suggests the continued undermining of Chinese masculinity by feminisation and femininity — whether through the paradoxical absence of “real” Chinese women in China or the presence of European women in racialised settings within the Chinese man’s quest and desire for potency. The more the Chinese man desires potency, however, the more it depends on femininity. For Seamus, it is Anna Bernhard who finally rescues him from the river and initiates their sexual performance.

The stories of Shan and Seamus outline not distinct alternative routes towards the achievement of a potent sense of diasporic Chinese masculinity, but two imperatives of

the same goal — one within a contest with other white men and the other sexual relationships with white women. Equally problematic within this story, however, is the meeting between Shan and Seamus, where a mutual sense of disappointment signals the lingering Chinese male lack of potency and centrality within the cultural encounter of Chinese men and white Europeans. Narratively, nothing actually turns upon this meeting. Shan is compelled to flee back to China as a hunted man, but leaves no validating legacy apart from his journal of travel, which has been used as padding for the last one hundred and more years. Seamus comes to no new positive understanding from the episode. Nor is the conclusion to Birds of Passage an unambiguous statement that strength and potency have been reclaimed by the Chinese man; rather the final sentence, “Tomorrow, if my strength allows” (157) indicates the strong Chinese man has yet to rediscover himself.

### After China

In After China the problem of Chinese masculinity and its lack of potency manifests itself as restraint. The main characters of After China are an immigrant Chinese architect, who has designed a hotel on the northern coast of New South Wales, and a female writer suffering a terminal illness. Both characters are involved in constructions of one kind or another. They tell each other stories, initially to engage and know one another, but in a reversal towards the end of the novel it is the architect, You Bok Mun, who is telling most of the stories and the writer who is requesting permission from him to use them as her own. In Birds of Passage the title suggests a return to the place of origin (and condition), but in After China there is a suggestion of a final departure to culturally western space.

After China begins with the Daoist philosopher Lao-tzu, (Laozi) thinking up aphorisms at a rate of one per sexual partner, with whom he never ejaculates. For the year, he amasses almost twelve hundred aphorisms and sexual partners, but at number 1199 Lao-tzu becomes literally stuck. According to Tseen Khoo the relative importance of this opening episode to the novel’s overall trajectory and telling is that Lao-tzu’s practice of self-control and postponement of pleasure is allegorical of

the way the main character, the architect, negotiates life and his relationships. The architect’s incomprehension of his partner’s emotional needs and his inability to



meet them, especially her sickness, returns the reader to the first part of the novel and the focus on “holding back”. His obsessiveness in gaining control of circumstances and over bodies negates his capacity to empathise fully with others’ problems (“Selling” 168).

While the ebullient Lao-tzu’s postponement of ejaculation is to achieve the ultimate goal of immortality, the architect’s sense of restraint and holding back in his relationship with the writer is due more to his sexual impotency. The architect fears attachments because of his experiences in China — imprisonment, physical injuries that led to his impotence, the deaths of his daughter and an informant female neighbour, his wife Felicity’s separation from him, and the death of the female scientist Me Liao, who escaped with him from China. If death doesn’t stalk him directly it strikes the women around him. As in Birds of Passage, Chinese women seem to disappear regularly and readily, but in After China the architect’s relationship with the writer takes the form of a desultory talking cure. Moreover storytelling becomes metaphoric of restraint with, as David Brooks noted, Scheherezadic overtones (“Scheherezade”). The result is that After China is at times like reading an exposition of Chinese exotica, with its diversionary story-telling episodes of wicked and ambitious courtesans, mad emperors, endless executions, sexual practices and perversions<sup>13</sup>.

The architect tells the writer that Sydney is the only place where he feels comfortable: “Everywhere else a wall. A drawing down of shades. The lack of other faces. In Sydney I can hear the roar, the savage maw of the mob. Sometimes it gives me great fear, but fear makes me who I am.” (After 74). The mention of walls evokes more immediately China than Australia, however in terms of population China is hardly a faceless place. Nevertheless it is China where the architect suffered imprisonment that the significance of walls really equates with confinement and immobility. In contrast, and in a post white Australia policy era, the architect has a place where he may go about freely and where he can design buildings precariously situated by the sea. In Sydney this supposed absence of walls allows for confrontations. For the architect this kind of place is preferable to an absence of faces. The architect is verbally and physically attacked by a stranger, whom he disables appropriately with a kick to the throat (74). More than Shan in Birds of Passage, he is a Chinese man with a degree of physical, if not sexual, prowess — particularly in a confrontation.

Kathleen Kirby argues that “there is a definite relation between the kind of space occupied by the subject and the form the subject takes” (*Indifferent* 7). We find in *After China* that the space the Chinese man occupies is similar to the kind of space that Kirby says is faced by women, that is, space that is belligerent and stands in the way, space that is hostile. But if space is itself unstable, then in Kirby’s formulation the subject must also suffer from instability. For the architect it is “unfilled space” that frightens him (*After* 29), in a sense space is as unfinished as is his own subjectivity, which seeks ongoing design and construction. The architect suffers a spatial phobia — but of what kind? On the one hand the enclosure of walls disturbs him, but then so too does unfilled space. If unfilled space is the same as open space we might assume that the affliction is agoraphobia rather than claustrophobia. Paul Carter’s conception of agoraphobia is of a movement inhibition (*Repressed* 9); however the architect’s movements are ceaseless and restless. Agoraphobia is usually considered a fear of open spaces, though the “*agora*” Carter reminds us means both the ancient Greek place of political assembly and the assembly gathered there (9). And as Kirby points out, with agoraphobia, it is not just space that is unnerving but the people in it (*Indifferent* 99). Carter informs us that Freud suffered from agoraphobia, though Freud dismissed it in himself as of little importance. Carter argues that Freud’s agoraphobia arose from the fact that

in general, in both the cities and the countryside of the Austro-Hungarian empire at the end of the nineteenth century, anti-Semitic sentiment was hidden. The Jew who took care to avoid stirring it up could almost persuade himself that it didn’t exist, and that any anxiety he felt was groundless.

In other words, the agoraphobia Freud felt arose not from the presence of a hostile force, but from its apparent absence. It was the menace of the emptiness that kept him in a constantly repressed state of anxiety. (105, original emphasis)

Between Kirby’s and Carter’s seemingly opposing positions regarding whether it is the presence or absence (which is really invisibility) of hostility in space, the menace within space is menacing precisely because of its unpredictability. After all, what positive actions does an individual take, and is compelled to take, that can “avoid stirring up” racism? In such a situation racism would be seen merely as a response to provocation. If racist sentiment were hidden, and if it were possible to manipulate it in a

way so that it remained beneath the surface, one could get on with one's life without it literally impeding one's movement. The more likely situation was that racist sentiment could not be so facilely manipulated, instead the impossibility of knowing when and where it would occur was the source of such anxiety. Freud, as Carter tells us, might have had trouble crossing open spaces unaided, but once when he was confronted by an angry mob waving sticks and shouting anti-Semitic abuse, Freud charged and dispersed the crowd with his walking stick (98). Freud could manage the predictable behaviour of the mob, but it was the unpredictability of crossing open space that could be unnerving. This also happens to be the behaviour and response of Castro's architect. The architect says, "When terror is set in stone you can face it. It's the unknown that is worst. As Jean Genet said: 'It's only those who have never been to prison who fear it.' Once you get used to a place you don't fear it" (*After* 66). Then it is the encounter of people in space, or the possibility of someone suddenly entering the same space, with unpredictable outcomes, not the emptiness per se of space, that arouses anxiety or, in Carter's words, provokes a movement inhibition, and which in *After China* is the source of the architect's emotional and physical restraint.

It is significant also that Kirby argues that claustrophobia as a condition often precedes agoraphobia (99); in *After China* the architect's existence in China is frequently marked by claustrophobic feelings. The architect tells the writer: "I knew that if I didn't leave I would turn into something else. Isolation, the kind of isolation China was heading into, confused the very basis of existence" (65). Once again, as in his first novel, Castro's China is everything that is limiting, confining, and claustrophobic. "Ancient China and its constrictions, its confined spaces... imagine the largest country in the known world, but the extreme smallness of things, the clutter of miniatures choking, suffocating that other death... Smallness was security, an antidote to phenomena, mutabilities, ejaculations... Solitude is the least experienced and least valued state in China" (66). For the architect, escape to a western country is the real antidote to overbearing national isolation and the lack of individual solitude. The west, or at least Australia in this case, is not, however, necessarily conceived of as utopian space. The west is open space, as opposed to China's stagnated and closed place. It is not that the Chinese man goes west to recline and luxuriate; the west proposes movement as an ideal.

Shortly after arriving in Australia the architect attempts to ride a bicycle across the Blue Mountains, the main physical barrier that early white settlers encountered in

their expansion across the continent. As it becomes dark, he veers off the road and lies down in the bush and falls asleep. He has the sensation of being separated from his body. When he wakes he feels, “There was one side of me and there was another. I shifted uncontrollably between; dizzy, nauseous... I had failed to adjust myself to my crisis. I wanted to bring two ideas together, but all I could hear was something breaking.” (29). At this he turns around and fails to cross the mountains. If we take the two sides of the architect as being his Chinese side and his western(-ised) side, then there is an irreconcilable separation. Crossing from the eastern side of the mountains to the western side is symbolic of the architect’s failing to completely cross cultures.

However, since occupying a position that is both “exilic and hybrid”, Castro throughout his writing valorises the liberating effect of transgressiveness. For Castro, “cross-genres relieve the schizophrenic pressures upon the dichotomy of authenticity and inauthenticity... If you cross borders regularly you do not have to defend them” (Looking 122). Tseen-Ling Khoo on the other hand cautions that the Castro thesis of cross-genres/borders is just as capable of eliding from the equation the “dynamics of power implicated in ‘crossing borders,’ physical and metaphorical” (Banana 101). Moreover, Khoo contends, “By invoking this fluidity as an unmitigated positive condition, Castro risks becoming an individual,” and here she cites Krishnaswamy, “segregated from the collective sites of history” (101). Indeed this is the primary condition that Castro’s main characters effect upon themselves in both Birds of Passage and After China, that is, a withdrawal from their communities of origin. Castro himself may on the other hand be a “man of passage”, or as Certeau would characterise, a “passeur: one who moves people or things across borders or into forbidden zones” (Practice 259). Either way, for Khoo, the “unmitigated positive condition” of border crossing that Castro enacts is never simply a matter of unfettered crossing but must by implication entail significant negotiation. But what finally crosses over? And what power impels the crossing, since it is not the trespass of boundaries that is significant but rather the subject or object that is crossing. The primary contradiction in After China is that having negotiated the physical border the subject nevertheless is still entangled in spatial inhibitions.

Castro has described how in After China he played “upon the exile’s double enterprise of being a self-deluded confidence trickster and a genuine sufferer of loss. Redemption from this is necessarily traumatic” (Looking 76). As a means to achieving this effect, Castro, as in Birds of Passage, engages in the use of multiple narrative voices

from various first-person and omniscient third-person narrative positions. The effect of this is to give greater ambiguity and a general feeling of discordant juxtaposition when the narrative voices alternate. The third-person narrative suggests an objective observation of the architect's behaviour and delineates a character hesitant, passive and reserved, while the first-person narration reveals a far more rakish, opportunistic, and complex personality to the extent that the character appears to be different people. And if the architect is unable to see himself clearly he similarly misconnects with those around him, such as the writer, the librarian, and the ordinary person on the street.

Like Birds of Passage, After China revolves around the tensions of travelling through space and finding a proper place. An episodic narrative shifts from ancient China to 1990s Australia; from Paris to Shanghai; a Chinese prison where he designs a hotel which the authorities mistake for a train station, and then to a railway siding when he is injured by a shunting train and made impotent. In a Sydney library he meets a librarian and has an unsatisfactory affair. The narrative then shifts back to when he escapes from China to Hong Kong. The constant movement is an uneasy search of other places; what Castro himself describes as "a location of the unfamiliar" ("Heterotopias" 179). The initial meeting of the architect and the writer occurs at the familiar Australian location of the beach. But the hotel that the architect has designed is built on a former rubbish tip. The writer tells him, "This was once a paradise" (After 8). She refers to when anglers used to fish there, but the paradise also hints at forgotten earlier periods, pre-dating European settlement and of indigenous domain: "One never knew about landscapes of the past, the continuous transformations of seashores, layered evocations. A figure, attenuated in the distance, swept a metal detector over the sand. She said to him once: Expecting to discover the past is a sort of paradox, isn't it?" (8, original emphasis). The paradox of discovering the past is that it should in the first instance be forgotten. But Castro's invoking of a sense of the past is less directly about historical events and practices than the artifice of a narrative mood.

As a place of pleasure the beach is itself visually barren, and the attenuated figure is like a shadow across the land. Paradise has different meanings for different groups of people. It can also be the place of past genocide, and here Castro merely hints at absences in history. The architect tells the writer that when he designed the hotel, he wanted people to be lost in it: "The guest was not to come round again with any recognition or familiarity. Movement is discovery" (16, original emphasis). The architect wants a dissimulation of the same place; a purposeful instability that this either

leads to a forgetting of history and genealogy, or a re-examination of them, and an interrogation of what has occurred in the past. If the hotel is a place where one becomes lost, a detachment from points of familiar identification, then movement falls between the ambivalence of exploration and discovery and the other possibility of overlooking and forgetting — whether that encompasses revelations of, for example, stolen generation children, or the consigning of such practices and responsibilities to other generations of white settlement.

The hotel situated precariously on an edge also exhibits all that is unstable about the architect himself. The hotel is a place of temporary abode and like a train station is a place of transit. The architect's hotel has a mast, trusses, pods, and outriggers; a ship "which is forever on the point of a journey" (67). The itinerant architect has designed a place that resembles the potential for movement. In the structure "everything obeys, but resists" (67); yet only up to a point. The contradictions and antagonisms in this structure are like the risks of mobility. In *After China* the route from hotel to hospital is a short one. Like trains that derail and ships that founder, the hotel sits precariously by the sea, and is always under threat from the elements.

As much as the structure of the hotel eventually deconstructs, so too does Castro's construction of stories in a piece of writing of self-reflexive proportions. When the dying writer asks the architect to tell her a story, the architect, who has run out of stories, resorts to reading from her books, but we learn that this "is not what she wants, because she wants reassurance from him, wants him to will her into life, doesn't want these stale and static inventions of once believable deceptions" (133). Despite Castro's usually sympathetic treatment of women, it is not the Chinese man who must leave, die, or be abandoned, but once again another sacrificial female figure who facilitates the architect's arrival at a sense of stability. The death of the writer, and the destruction of the hotel by fire and storm, is symbolic of the architect's release from his own self-deluded and unstable Chinese subjectivity. The architect upon the collapse of the hotel is able to return to redesign and reconstruct the hotel. Through reading the writer's posthumously published book "he knew what he was about, knew he had to continue building this wing on the western turret" (143). The western turret is significant here because it faces not the ocean nor the east, but is inward and westward looking. The Chinese architect has realigned himself, and made a pure gesture of accommodation to a community that he hitherto has not felt he belonged.

## Conclusion

The novels Birds of Passage and After China contrast significantly for the shifting position of the author towards a greater alignment with cultural Australia — not that Castro is less prone to deconstruct cultural myths; rather Castro is too intent on creating some of his own. In Birds of Passage the protagonist Shan is forced to flee back to China, the place he originally found claustrophobic and feminised. Its narrative of Chinese masculine identity is ambiguous to the extent that it depends so much on the support of white women and their ability to carry the Chinese man across to a position in Australian space. Simultaneously this search for a strong masculinity also entails a dissociation from a Chinese identity that impedes movement. In After China, no return to the suffocating confines of China is contemplated, rather a complete turn of attention to the open space of the west is envisaged in regard to the unfinished men's business of potency. It seems in the search for masculine Chinese identity, Castro necessarily has to sympathetically eliminate all women. In these stories the Chinese man appears fundamentally uncomfortable being Chinese, but in the next chapter we find that if some Chinese men are uncomfortable being Chinese there are others willing to appropriate that position.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Brian Castro was born in 1950 on a ferry going between Macau and Hong Kong, and is of part Portuguese, English and Chinese descent. He arrived in Australia at the age of ten.

<sup>2</sup> Early in 1972 Richard Nixon became the first American president to visit the People's Republic of China. Considered to be of enormous geo-political significance, the visit was symbolic of China's opening up to the western world. A year later Australia discarded its white Australia policy and opened its borders to coloured immigrants from the rest of the world.

<sup>3</sup> Among the works of Zhang Jie published around the early 1980s are: "Ai shi buneng wangji de" (Love must not be forgotten) and "Fang zhou" (The Ark). Zhang Xinxin's early works include "Wo zai na'er cuoguo le ni?" (Where did I miss you?) and "Zai tongyi dipingxian shang" (On the same horizon).

<sup>4</sup> "Real" men were supposed to be like, significantly, foreign actors Sylvester Stallone, Alain Delon, and Takakura Ken. In 1985 an article written by a female writer Shui Zhu appeared in China Youth entitled

“Where Can We Find Takakura Ken”, with the implication, as Fang Jincai’s notes, that there were no real men in China. See Fang Jincai’s dissertation “The Crisis of Emasculation and the Restoration of Patriarchy in the Fiction of Chinese Contemporary Male Writers Zhang Xianlong, Mo Yan and Jia Pingwa”.

<sup>5</sup> Kam Louie’s Theorising Chinese Masculinity, and Zhong Xueping’s Masculinity Besieged provide good coverage of this period as well as the characteristics and significance of roots-seeking literature. See also Fang Jincai.

<sup>6</sup> Wang’s use of the word “passivity” is problematic in describing yin. The usual descriptive of yin is the Chinese word jing, which means calm or still. The Chinese word for passive, beidong, would be an inappropriate description of yin.

<sup>7</sup> According to Louie the yin-yang paradigm is too amorphous; in dismissing it he states: “Discarding yin and yang is crucial because the potential for interminable interactiveness implicit within yin and yang prohibits gender specificity” (Chinese 10). Strangely, however, in Louie’s own critique of Castro’s Birds of Passage he appears to engage in yin-yang theory as much as wen-wu. See Louie’s “Decentring Orientalist and Ocker Masculinities in Birds of Passage”. As an “indigenous” conception of Chinese masculinity, wen-wu might still be more appropriately subsumed under yin-yang theory, whereby wen is yin and wu is yang.

<sup>8</sup> From a wen-wu analysis the more feminine outlaws are able to outwit the more masculine bandits precisely because of their greater wen characteristics, not because they “act” like women.

<sup>9</sup> The term “non-phallic” masculinity is used by Kaya Silverman in Male Subjectivity at the Margins. Kam Louie’s Theorising Chinese Masculinity with its emphasis on the wen-wu dyad of cultural attainments and martial valour is another non-phallic theorisation of Chinese masculinity.

<sup>10</sup> Zhong’s use of the term “want-to-be” is borrowed from Lacan, and appears in his Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. In the translator’s notes, the translator, Alan Sheridan, states: “‘Manque’ is translated here as ‘lack’, except in the expression, created by Lacan, ‘manque-à-être’, for which Lacan himself has proposed the English neologism ‘want-to-be’.”

<sup>11</sup> I use the term dissociative identity disorder loosely and not in its clinical sense. But it might be apt given the racial component in this instance when Shan constantly distances and dissociates himself from other Chinese who are marked by their weakness and feminisation. This is in contrast to Teo’s text in which the Chinese women prefer to dissociate from Chinese men and patriarchy for western culture and men, but not, and notwithstanding the narrator’s own positioning of being Australian, on the basis of denying their own sense of being Chinese.

<sup>12</sup> Unlike Chinese-American texts such as Maxine Hong Kingston’s Woman Warrior and China Men, or Frank Chin’s Donald Duk, which incorporate the historically elided contributions of Chinese to the efforts of American nation building, Castro’s depiction of Chinese men in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia doesn’t draw on any similar narrative strategies. Rather than the collective physical heroics of railway building and cane cutting, masculinity in Birds of Passage revolves around Shan and Seamus proving their manhood in the presence of women and the overcoming of white men in physical confrontations.

<sup>13</sup> In an interview with Ouyang Yu Castro has criticised female Chinese writers of selling exotica and inauthenticity, and “giving the West some false impressions of exile and hybridity” (“Interview” 77).