

A SENSE OF TASMANIA

**Post-war Tasmanian writers - their sense of place and
analysis of the Tasmanian condition.**

by

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

**David Samuel Bird
Hobart
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INTRODUCTION:

Considering the size of its population and cultural isolation, Tasmania has produced a singular number of talented writers, both of fiction and non-fiction. No generation of writers has been more prominent in the field of Tasmanian letters than that of the post-war generation, that is, those either born around 1945, or those born in the thirties, reaching their maturity in the post-war world of the fifties.

This generation was the best educated and the most widely travelled since European settlement of the island in 1803. For these reasons, amongst others, no earlier generation had so plied itself with questions over Tasmanian identity and the Tasmanian condition. No earlier generation had so distanced itself from its formative childhood and from the island itself in order to undergo the catharsis of self-examination.

This generation was perhaps the first to be concerned about its colonial status. Their parents had revelled in the Empire; it caused this generation only angst. They felt that they were victims of a colonial frame of mind and they knew that their role as artists was to create their own country and landscapes in their mind's eye; formidable and daunting tasks.ⁱ

For writers such as Koch and Conrad, the two most important of the group, the island had set the terms of their lives and despite their periods of "exile", they had carried off inside them the home they could not return to.ⁱⁱ

Their role was to examine their society and its past and to rework it with new insights, thus to "cast shadows into the future".ⁱⁱⁱ Tasmania's past was grim, but not inescapable. Their artistic hope and optimism survived, as,

"Though the ghosts of Tasmania's past have not been laid to rest, it is possible to go forward with hope."^{iv}

ⁱ C. Koch, Crossing the Gap: A Novelist's Essays, London, 1987, p.106.

ⁱⁱ P. Conrad, Down Home, London, 1988, p.232.

ⁱⁱⁱ C. Koch, Crossing, p.6.

^{iv} L. Robson, A History of Tasmania, v.2, Melbourne, 1991, p.585.

The task that this generation set itself was thus one of exorcism. This dissertation seeks to examine their attitudes to the Tasmanian sense of difference; their reactions to the burden of Tasmanian history; their response to the Tasmanian sense of isolation and finally their varying responses to the Tasmanian environment.

Despite their diversity, there is a unifying theme. This generation of writers accepts Tasmanian difference and recognises that Tasmanians, whatever the cost and pain, must come to terms with themselves without the use of outside references. They must achieve some sort of spiritual autonomy. They must accept the challenge postulated by the Rev. John West in the last century and attempt to create a new society based on a new spirit of place.^v

The selection of Tasmanian writers in this dissertation is by no means exhaustive. Limitations of space have demanded ruthless selection and for that reason, the field has been limited to native-born Tasmanians with the single exception of Helen Hodgman. Her inclusion was initially in error, but she remains as an interesting contrast to the sympathies of the native born. For the native-born, even the highly critical, the island retains a certain charm, but Hodgman quite obviously detested the place. For although the island is no longer the principal place of residence for most of these writers, it is clearly an ineradicable part of their psyche, for,

"We are like birds, we human beings; in the end we fly back to where we come from."^{vi}

^v quoted in M.Roe, "Engaging with Tasmania", Centennial Bulletin of the Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, Vol.3, No.1, 1990-91, p.80.

^{vi} C. Koch, The Doubleman, London, 1986.

CHAPTER ONE:

1.

Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

Tasmania is different; different from the distant world and from the less remote mainland. Tasmanians are acutely aware of this difference and most appear to be quite comfortable with it. The physical distinction between a compact, mountainous, temperate island and the larger, flatter and arid continent is apparent to all, but in particular to the acute sensibilities of the native-born writer. Of the post-war circle, none are more observant than Christopher Koch, a writer cognisant of and, indeed, insistent upon, Tasmania's differences, suggesting as he does that such differences lead to the unassimilability of Tasmanian ways and conceptions with those of mainland, metropolitan Australia¹. It is these obvious physical differences which initially give rise to a sense of place and the sense of difference which comes with it. Koch notes these differences in both his fiction and prose writing. In his essay, "The Lost Hemisphere" in Crossing the Gap, he notes that this island, entirely below 40 degrees latitude, with its mountains, lakes and wind ravaged coasts "genuinely" belongs to a different region from mainland Australia.² The sense of difference then is one founded on discernible physical differences and thus not entirely the product of the collective imagination of the island's inhabitants. The island's climate duplicates that of "northwestern Europe"³ while the continent is more "Mediterranean and then African"⁴; a fair analogy. The air traveller is in the best position to confirm Koch's assertion. He himself noted,

"All colours have the glassy intensity of a cold climate; the greens greener, the dark blue of the numberless hills and mountains appearing almost black, from the air".⁵

¹ See P.Pierce, "The Fiction Of Christopher Koch" in the Bulletin of the Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, (1990-1), vol.3,no.1,p,98.

²C.Koch, Crossing the Gap: A Novelist's Essays, (London 1987), p.92.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p.85.

The traveller has indeed left Australia.

Koch's fictional characters and scenarios reflect this view of their author. Richard Miller and Brian Brady, the chief protagonists of The Doubleman are both very conscious of Tasmania's physical differences being,

"...children of a green marine landscape; subject of the stern winter cold. Our spirits were conditioned by the blood-thrilling Westerlies".⁶

It is this shared genesis which partially explains the close bonds between these two characters, bonds which persist during their later mainland adventures in The Doubleman. Similarly, Francis Cullen, the chief character of The Boys in the Island, Koch's first novel, forever remains conscious of the identity and distinctiveness of the island,

"He lived in an island", and seemed doomed to remain there, becoming conscious at the age of six of its distinctiveness from Mainland Australia,"...an island of hills, a fragment separated from the parent continent by a wide stretch of sea. It is different from the mainland, facing the sharp breath of the South, facing the Antarctic."⁷

Always the sea, isolating, protecting and in the north of the island indicating that sense of remoteness and separation from the mainland, from Melbourne,

"...where the world began",⁸

and in the south of the island, the southern ocean looking towards that more remote and bleakest of all continents, Antarctica, with frequent climatic reminders of its relative proximity.

Peter Conrad, writing largely for a non-Tasmanian audience is equally insistent upon the physical dissimilarities between Tasmania and the remainder of Australia, referring to the contrast of "...an overcooked desert

⁶C.Koch, The Doubleman, (London, 1986),p.32.

⁷C.Koch, The Boys in the Island (London, 1958) p.15.

⁸Ibid.,

(with his native)...cool,dripping jungle."⁹

Contrasting his schoolroom pictures of a red Ayers Rock with the outside reality of a blue Mt. Wellington with its storm clouds and "toupee of snow for half a year"⁹, he receives the first of many significant psychological shocks. In Conrad's mind, Tasmania is certainly a very distinct entity in its relationship to water. Mainland Australia, he observes, like Southern California, has the desert's love-affair with water, whilst Tasmania is likened to a subsiding Atlantis.¹⁰ The battering of real oceans replace the mainland substitutes of "coppery distances" and "waveless oceanic skies".¹¹

The gulf between Australia and Tasmania is equally apparent in the fiction of the northern Tasmanian writer, James McQueen. Fegan, the alcoholic and self-destructive artist of A Just Equinox, returning to his native island in search of new artistic inspiration is shocked, after his eight years absence on the mainland to find that the island now seems foreign and unfamiliar,"...a book turned to a new page".¹² He notes like Koch, from the air with his artist's

sense of colour,

"...the vivid green of the land after the parched carpet of the continent. It lay vivid, sappy, lush, even now,at the height of a dry summer. The air seemed clear, and thinner, the earth moist and brown after the ochres and dusty blues of the mainland."¹³

McQueen is here depicting the incomparable volcanic soil of his native north-west coast, quite unlike anything on mainland Australia. This quality of air and freshness of climate are also commented on by the returning Astro in Martin Flanagan's Going Away.

"The air was so clean it sang, and the autumn sun was a gentle reminder of life in temperate places."¹⁴

⁹Ibid.,

¹⁰Ibid., ps.47-8.

¹¹Ibid., p.30.

¹²J.McQueen, A Just Equinox,(Melbourne, 1980), p.159..

¹³Ibid...

¹⁴M.Flanagan, Going Away, (Melbourne 1993), p.161.

The Tasmanian sense of place then begins with the realisation and acceptance of these physical and climatic differences. These writers accept that the relative gentleness of the Tasmanian climate and its temperate setting are desirable commodities. Koch's adult Richard Miller finds himself in agreement with Katrin the Baltic refugee, another product of a temperate zone, in finding the Sydney light uncomfortable; "...a glare of delirium", quite unlike their native "soft elusive light"¹⁵ Katrin is one post-war migrant who would have shared the delight of the Tasmanian born with the more temperate climate of the island, unlike McQueen's Josef in "Josef in Transit" in who declines the offer of a more permanent stay in such a climate.¹⁶

Koch fully delineates this native preference for things temperate. To the native-born, he states,

"Tasmania is normality, and the sun-levelled continent to the north is alien."¹⁷

Few of the fictional characters find the climate unsettling, other than McQueen's Fegan, who in a depressed state and inspirationally barren finds the southern winter insufferable, being "...hunched within a kernel of unrelenting cold".¹⁸ It could be argued that Fegan's discomfort is as much due to his futile search for meaning in his restless life as it is to the climate.

The Tasmanian sense of place begins therefore with a sense of physical distinction from the mainland, distinctions generally considered to be desirable and indeed to be celebrated. The island seems benign in contrast to the continent's harshness. However such differences bring manifold complications, not the least of which is the anxiety of isolation, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. The social distinctions between Tasmanians and their mainland cousins are many. Whilst Tasmanians might rejoice in the

¹⁵C.Koch, *The Doubleman*, p.191.

¹⁶J.McQueen, *Uphill Runner*, (Melbourne, 1984) p.50.

¹⁷C.Koch, *Crossing the Gap*, p.116

¹⁸J.McQueen, *A Just Equinox*, p.135.

natural beauty of the island, the social impact of being different has more sinister effects. For, as Koch observes, geography is a great shaper of character. Landscape and climate will inevitably impact on the human spirit¹⁹ It is this theme which interests all Tasmanian writers of the post-war generation, far more than the theme of the effects of the physical environment, important though that is. Chapter 4 will provide a discussion of the effects of the environment on their psyche.

The sense of physical difference between Australia and Tasmania brings with it an additional psychological complication. If Tasmanians find it difficult to relate to an alien mainland environment, many of them do not appear to have equal difficulty in attempting to relate themselves to other environments which are perceived to be similar, inevitably those of the northern hemisphere. Such comparisons come easier to the writers of a generation which could still be termed "colonial", having grown up at a time when Tasmania was still considered to be an integral part of the British Empire. However, this generation of post-war writers has also been touched by the "post-colonial" mentality and this may account for the peculiar tension which they feel on the issue of a relationship to the northern hemisphere. They remain psychologically influenced by these comparisons, but they are either able to look forward to a time when Tasmanians will accept their own identity, or they are able to believe that this time of acceptance has arrived. Future generations of writers may not feel this peculiar tension.

As Conrad observed, it is easier to comprehend the unknown by relating it to the known.²⁰ Tasmanians have behaved in such a fashion from the beginning, with their folk memories of England, Scotland and Ireland. The Tasmanian sense of place has been very much modelled on its English forebear in the minds of this generation. The child Koch, despite his Germanic origins, was brought up on English literature; Pickwick, Christopher

¹⁹ C.Koch, Crossing the Gap, p.118.

²⁰ P. Conrad, Down Home, p.130.

Robin, Sherlock Holmes; seeing London as the city of cities, an "all wise, half-forbidding Friend".²¹ His generation were accurately described by the maxim that a country remains a spiritual colony as a result of its history²². So too with its literary influences. London was, to Koch, "the great ancestral metropolis" of The Doubleman, which could bestow the fame and fortune that Sydney, "the provincial miniature" could not. Koch maintained remnant fears of being tainted as non-British at school, reflected in the experience of Richard Miller in The Doubleman, whose grandfather Karl remains resolutely "German"²³. But despite these fears, the child Koch appeared to be quite as comfortable with his scrapbook of "...the doings of the little princesses" as any good little Anglo-Saxon. So too with Conrad, who incidentally is quite right in regarding The Doubleman as portraying Tasmania as an upside-down England, with Hobart as Gothic London of pea-soupers and Baskerville clouds.²⁴ Conrad is also from a family of less than impeccable Anglo-Saxon credentials, but he too recalls the school indoctrination of the 1950's, when Tasmania was portrayed, with its hops and orchards, as an expatriated England by teachers ignorant of the original.²⁵ He too spent his childhood absorbing English literature as a chosen alternative to his "current world"²⁶. At least these childhood fantasies assisted him to assimilate with ease into English life and letters once the dream transformed into reality.²⁷ The child Conrad's Anglophilia even extended into recalling the names of English football teams, a formidable feat for a boy so contemptuous of the sporting life.²⁸

Steven, the chief and autobiographical character of Altman's homosexual novel, The Comfort of Men, had also grown up surrounded by English

²¹C.Koch, Crossing the Gap, p.27

²²Ibid., p.95.

²³C.Koch, The Doubleman, p.27.

²⁴P. Conrad, Down Home, p.206.

²⁵Ibid., p.41

²⁶P.Conrad, Where I Fell to Earth: A Life in Four Places, (London 1990).,

²⁷Ibid., p.45

²⁸Ibid., p.39.

professionals, reading English books, such as Blyton, Ransome, Shaw (sic) Maugham and Wodehouse, playing with London sets of "Monopoly", engaged in an education system with an identifiable "British" curriculum.²⁹ Visiting a pub in the oldest part of Hobart, Steven finds the city, with its narrow, crooked streets and small dwellings to be a passable imitation of an English town, rather than reflecting the reality of Antipodean outpost.³⁰ This, of course, was precisely the intention of those in the colonial period and the post-war writers are conscious of these intentions in their work. Martin Flanagan's Astro hitchhikes as a school boy through the "little England" of the Tasmanian Midlands, with its green paddocks, hawthorn hedges and Georgian houses as examples of history surviving to influence present conceptions.³¹

The Tasmania of this post-war generation sought to emphasise the more idealised and less brutal manifestations of the British connection. Tasmania's sense of place was to fit comfortably into a certain stylised English mould, with, for example, even the acidic Helen Hodgman, a somewhat bitter English expatriate, able to see the black rocks of her deserted beach as forming "...an Antipodean Stonehenge".³² Carmel Bird's "Trekking Tasmania" pamphlet found in The Woodpecker Toy Fact and Other Stories, cheerily relates that the ruins of the first settlement on the north-west coast include the ruins of an imposing gateway, which formed the entrance to a deer park, "...of particular note are the hawthorn hedges reminiscent of old England, and the tiny church of St.-Mary-in-the-Fields is as fine an example of the architectural traditions of Europe and Britain as the visitor could hope to see."³³

Conrad chronicles in detail the attempts by colonial Tasmania to find its sense of place in an English world, from the Woolnorth of Bird's pamphlet to

²⁹D. Altman, The Comfort of Men, (Melbourne, 1993) p.93.

³⁰Ibid. p.40.

³¹M. Flanagan, Going Away, (Melbourne, 1993), p.64.

³²H. Hodgman, Blue Skies, (London, 1976), p.9.

³³C. Bird, The Woodpecker Toy Fact and Other Stories, (Melbourne 1990), p.95.

the English Gothic of Government House, home of absentee royalty, and the Botanical Gardens.³⁴ The British did indeed seek to see Tasmania as Lt. Bowen described it as,

"...more like a nobleman's park in England than an uncultivated country".³⁵

For a considerable period of time they appeared to succeed in their pretence. The process of naming the unfamiliar with familiar titles was important to them and Conrad documents for his non-Tasmanian audience the extensive usage of English, Scottish and Welsh nomenclature in Tasmanian place names; from the Scottish fantasies of Ross and Glenorchy, to the more obvious English references of Devonport and Torquay, to the Welsh Swansea and Orford. ³⁶ He notes a certain aptness in the employment of Rokeby and Deloraine from the world of Sir Walter Scott, writing as he was of,

"...the historical defeat of a culture left behind by industrial modernity".³⁷

For ultimately these colonial attempts to familiarise the unfamiliar failed, in the views of these post-war writers. Tasmania could not continue to find its sense of place through English, Scottish and Welsh analogies and the post-war generation of writers was in the forefront of rejecting any attempts to continue to do so. They were emphatic in pointing out that the English path was a false one. Ultimately, only wish-fulfillment sustains the impressions of the likes of Richard Miller when he likens the Tasmanian east coast to a "Scottish moorland".³⁸

Conrad the Rhodes Scholar, whilst at home in the literature, initially felt an outsider at Oxford, "...at an extra remove of dispossession".³⁹ The real Kent, he noted, bore precious little similarity to the hop and orchard country of

³⁴P. Conrad, Down Home, ps.155, 152-3.

³⁵Ibid., p.143.

³⁶Ibid., ps.126-8.

³⁷Ibid., p.127.

³⁸C. Koch, The Doubleman, p.70.

³⁹P. Conrad, Where I Fell, p.31.

Tasmania, where the "glowering bush" was never far away from the cultivated regions.⁴⁰ Tasmania's "replica and source" in the northern hemisphere was as dissimilar in general as the Tasmanian features of a cliffless Dover, a beachless Brighton and an unindustrial Sheffield were from their particular English examples.⁴¹ Ultimately, that British sense of place gained by the post-war generation in their childhood play, reading and education was revealed to be little more than "...stage sets and giant mirrors" in Koch's description.⁴² This generation was to confirm the "odd twinge of doubt"⁴³ which had already produced a crisis of identity. Their juvenile absorption in English literature, magazines and theatre likened them to Koch, to the denizens of Plato's cave, studying shadows on the wall, living a second-hand and false existence.⁴⁴ Their Tasmanian sense of place had employed art in order not to perish from the truth⁴⁵, but ultimately this generation was the first to reply "yes" to the question of whether Tasmania was different from its European sources; whereas earlier generations would emphatically have said "no".⁴⁶

The longing for the English connection, once so encouraged, has now become to these writers somewhat ridiculous and futile. Altman's authoritarian, ant-libertarian, reactionary independent Tasmania, in The Comfort of Men, looks back towards this period of Anglo-Saxon innocence, with its new Tasmanian flag featuring a silver lion superimposed on a Union Jack and its Independence Day bunting featuring the Queen, all officiated over by a royal princess.⁴⁷ The new Governor is an Englishman, with Altman observing that the new Tasmania has revolted against Canberra and Melbourne, but not against London and Cambridge.⁴⁸ The new regime, in its

⁴⁰P. Conrad, Down Home, p.41.

⁴¹Ibid., p.6.

⁴²C. Koch, Crossing the Gap, p.93.

⁴³Ibid., p.94.

⁴⁴Ibid., ps.93-4.

⁴⁵P. Conrad, _____ p.180.

⁴⁶C. Koch, Crossing the _____ p.91.

⁴⁷D. Altman, The Comfort of Men, ps. 1, 194.

⁴⁸Ibid., p.83.

attempt to recreate an Anglo-Saxon Eden, reintroduces images of the monarch on the new "pounds and pence" currency, with new school courses in social cohesion and Bible readings intended to instill a sense of "British" law and culture, which includes greater censorship and moral rectitude.⁴⁹ Ireland seems to be the example here, not England. Clearly, to Altman, any emphasis of the British connection is a retrograde step and as risible as Conrad's citation of the views of one newspaper correspondent in favour of secession as a separate Dominion under the Crown.⁵⁰ A sense of difference from the mainland cannot be replaced by a false identification with the northern hemisphere.

"In dropping off Australia, we had tumbled south to begin a long northward climb...towards...England".⁵¹

This exercise of association with "another family, another place" is merely, in the view of Marilyn Lake in her discussion of Peter Conrad's Tasmania, one of the two sustaining myths which Tasmanians employ in order to counter their hurt, their resentment and their self-doubt", a futile process of "self-invention".⁵²

If not England, then perhaps Ireland might be an appropriate analogy and psychological anchor for the Tasmanian seeking a substitute, northern sense of place. The immediate likenesses are obvious; an off-shore island overshadowed by a mainland; somewhat of a backwater, blessed by nature but cursed by its history; the unremitting flow of emigration; the strong local pride bordering on belligerence; a certain sectarianism. John Mitchel, the nineteenth-century Irish political exile, whilst conscious of the intellectual error of seeing Van Diemen's Land through northern hemisphere eyes, nevertheless could not prevent himself from seeing images of Ireland

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, ps.242-3.

⁵⁰ P.Conrad, *Down Home*, p.113.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.6.

⁵² M.Lake, "Peter Conrad's Tasmania" in the *Bulletin of the Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies*, v.3, No.1 (1990)-1., p.118.

everywhere.⁵³ The contemporary expression of this view is found in Martin Flanagan, whose chief character in Going Away feels himself to be Irish, despite his family's residence for generations on the north-west coast.⁵⁴ His farming family are Irish in appearance and character, surrounded by red soil and green fields, no doubt planted with potatoes.⁵⁵ Once Astro makes his pilgrimage to Europe, he is conscious of Ireland's great age and its relatively good fortune in having been sheltered from the winds of strife and change which have devastated larger neighbours.⁵⁶ His conclusion on Ireland could be equally applied to Tasmania, that it has, "...preserved somewhat within itself a connection so old as to be beyond reckoning."⁵⁷

That the Tasmanian population contains a strong Irish element is undeniable. Steven, in The Comfort of Men notices the profusion of redheads in the pubs he frequents, commenting on this Celtic ancestry.⁵⁸

However, the Protestant dominance in Tasmania and the preponderance of the Anglo-Saxon over the Celtic would seem to preclude an overemphasis on an "Irish" sense of place..

Whilst sectarianism in Tasmania has never been entirely absent, it could not be said to have been a dominant theme in Tasmanian history. Of course in Tasmania as elsewhere, Labor politics remained under a Catholic sway for some time and it is her association with such politics which is perhaps responsible for bringing sectarianism into the works of Amanda Lohrey. Premier Coughlan, her fictional evocation of Robert Cosgrove in The Morality of Gentlemen is a do-nothing "populist" Catholic;

"They lull you into thinking that their religion is quarantined by their politics when really it's the other way round."⁵⁹

⁵³C.Koch, Crossing the Gap, p.108.

⁵⁴M.Flanagan, Going Away, passim.

⁵⁵ibid., p.57.

⁵⁶ibid., p.60

⁵⁷ibid.

⁵⁸D.Altman, The Comfort of Man, p.175.

The closed society she depicts, run by the Freemasons and other members of the Anglo-Saxon establishment, does not take too kindly to the dissident waterside worker and Catholic, Moseley. He is a man referred to by his enemies as "...the Pope's cousin".⁶⁰ The eminence grise, Archbishop Green is not however as confident of his powers and influence as say the Archbishop of Sydney.⁶¹ Yet the sectarianism portrayed by Lohrey is real and as ugly as the confrontation between the two waterside factions on St.Patrick's Day where various insults are traded including references to the Vatican and to Belfast bogs.⁶² But in the final measure the references to Tasmania as "little Ireland" are as unfitting as those of "little England." Lohrey's sectarianism is arguably a part of the general level of violence in a society still marred by the brutalities of its past.⁶³

If not England and not Ireland, what then? The post-war writers who have addressed the issue are of one mind: Tasmania must come to accept and celebrate its uniqueness and difference. It must slough its sense of inferiority\superiority which its isolation gives it (see Chapter 3) and it must lay to rest forever the false analogies of Europe. It must listen to the distant voice of John Mitchel, whose Jail Journal is confident that the beauty of a place like Lake Sorell needed no European comparison and that one day, as yet unborn native writers would extol the virtues of their native land.⁶⁴ Koch the Asianist wants Tasmania, as part of Australia to accept that there is a distinct "mystery and presence" which cannot be interpreted through northern hemisphere "obverse images" and "hieroglyphs".⁶⁵ As part of the Asian-Pacific region, even little Anglophile Tasmania must accept an Asian-Pacific identity, although without sacrificing its European heritage.⁶⁶ Post-

⁵⁹A.Lohrey, The Morality of Gentlemen, (Sydney, 1984), p.94.

⁶⁰ibid., p.176.

⁶¹ibid., ps.128-30.

⁶²ibid., ps.151, 157.

⁶³see T.Thorne, "The Gothic Keeps Breaking Through: Amanda Lohrey's Tasmania" in the Bulletin of the Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, (1990-91), v.3, No.1, p.121.

⁶⁴quoted in C.Koch, Crossing the Gap, p.107.

⁶⁵ibid., ps.100-101.

⁶⁶ibid., p.104.

colonial Tasmania, in common with the rest of Australia must cast around for a wider stock of myths other than just European ones, bringing into play the influences of a wider Indo-European mythscape, including influences such as India and Indonesia.⁶⁷ Anything more remote from the Tasmania of Koch's boyhood would be difficult to imagine. His generation has undergone the full gamut of cultural transformation.

Even the most Anglophile of the post-war writers, Conrad whose childhood was spent entirely in reading English literature⁶⁸ recognises that Tasmania must find its own identity, in an effort intended to ensure that there will be no future, little, pining Conrads. More conscious perhaps of the essential silliness of the English comparisons due to his intimate knowledge of the original, Conrad's long-standing residence in America has made him especially aware of the dangers of Tasmania replacing an old comfortable English identity with an American one.

"Having unlearned its deference to England, must Australia now play a surrogate America?"⁶⁹ Surely Tasmania would be the least likely part of Australia to accept an American analogy? Not according to Conrad, who quotes at length the behaviour of the employees at Woolnorth, exaggerating for the benefit of his overseas readers the extent of US influence on rural Tasmania.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Conrad makes his point well; Tasmanians should not replace one foreign point of reference with another.

None of the fictional characters exemplifies this as well as Martin Flanagan's Astro. Astro has travelled the world in Going Away convinced that he will there find the meaning of life and the real world, denied to him at home. On his return, he initially finds little attractive in Hobart, being very

⁶⁷ibid., p.15-16.

⁶⁸P. Conrad, "Pictures Over the Window. Kate Jennings interviews Peter Conrad", Quadrant, (October 1993), p.34.

⁶⁹P. Conrad, Down Home, p.162.

⁷⁰ibid., p.155.

sceptical of his brother's claim that Hobart is essentially the world, or at least an integral part of it, rather than an isolated speck.⁷¹

"The one country you've never travelled in properly is your own", his brother maintains.⁷² By the close of the novel, Astro has practically and spiritually come to terms with his native island. He accepts its unique physical beauty as a born-again Romantic (see Chapter 4). He accepts that there is,

"...a whole, a presence that was particular and distinctive to this place."⁷³

Astro has finally come to terms with the place and one suspects that there will be no further journeys of self-discovery. He at least is no longer between the devil and the deep, blue sea, but at peace with himself and with his native environment and society.

⁷¹M. Flanagan, *Going Away*, p.172.

⁷²*ibid.*, p.173.
⁷³*ibid.*, p.197.

The Burden of History

"...our history here is nasty, brutish and short-lived: convicts and one exterminated race."⁷⁴

The twentieth century has popularised the concept of collective guilt. Communities and nations have been saddled with the responsibility for acts and atrocities committed generations earlier. The notion has been extended to societies which are the children of colonialism. Tasmania has been allotted a generous share, indeed, a double portion. The burden of its terrible penal history has been a constant theme in Tasmanian history. Being Tasmanian has brought with it sensations of guilt, as if in,

"...a nightmare from which you cannot awake."⁷⁵

The Vandemonian shadow has lingered and has now been darkened by an additional and more recent pang; that of guilt over the treatment of the island's indigenous people in colonial times and beyond. The Hated Stain has been paired with the Not-So-Final Solution. Tasmania entered this century with the penal burden; it will apparently enter the next with an aggravated sense of the aboriginal problem.

Tasmanian writers of the post-war generation are very conscious of the island's double burden. Emerging in the post-colonial period in which the former taboos over convict ancestry were falling away, they have been equally influenced by the aboriginal consciousness of more recent times and are thus better poised to view both burdens than earlier generations. It is as if they were standing in the middle of a set of scales; one side marked "convict" and the other marked "aborigine". They have accepted the notion of collective guilt and turned their attentions towards observing the responses of their fellow Tasmanians to such notions. They have generally found the responses wanting. They have recognised that the Tasmanian condition brings with it some responsibility for past actions, although Richard Flanagan

⁷⁴M.Roe, quoting G. Hetherington in "The Burden of Tasmanian History"; The Flow of Culture: Tasmanian Studies, (Canberra, 1987), p.7.

⁷⁵R.Flanagan & C.Pybus, The Rest of the World is Watching, (Melbourne, 1990), p.205.

is more strident than most in asserting that such notions of guilt should now be buried.⁷⁶

The notions of guilt over the penal period and its brutalities are well documented. Conrad draws the attention of his non-Tasmanian audience to the distinction between Marvellous Melbourne and Gothic Tasmania.⁷⁷ Tasmania, he suggests, belongs inescapably to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the time of its distinctive formation. The past cannot be held at a distance here and he observes with accuracy that behind Koch's Tasmania in The Doubleman, lurks that "...other island" of Van Diemen's Land, an observation which could equally be made of other writers.⁷⁸ The Hated Stain will not be removed.

Koch's family background is not atypical of many in the island with direct links to the colonial past.

"The past is like a trunk in the attic here, very close at hand; ancestors are not far away."⁷⁹

The ghosts of convict horrors, he suggests, hover in Tasmanian minds, quoting James McQueen's Night Run⁸⁰, where a nocturnal drive through the Midlands inescapably recalls the convict builders of the sandstone structures of Campbell Town, Ross, Tunbridge and Antill Ponds; wan, decaying and sweating; the everyday reminders to the present generation of the suffering of the former.⁸¹

Koch's own characters are better examples of the vivid nature of the Hated Stain and its resilience. The fictional Greendale of The Boys in the Island seems replete with convict memories, with the poignancy of a convict suicide at the bridge. More importantly, Miles the brutal and insensitive father of Heather is portrayed as the direct inheritor of the brutalities of the convict

⁷⁶ibid where he uses the past tense.

⁷⁷P. Conrad, Down Home, p.225.

⁷⁸ibid., p.206.

⁷⁹C. Koch, Crossing the Gap, p.87.

⁸⁰ibid., p.115.

⁸¹J. McQueen, The Electric Beach, (Wynyard, 1978), p.60.

past.⁸² Equally, Brian Brady, the devious and somewhat sinister protagonist of The Doubleman is said to be descended from Matthew Brady, convict and bushranger⁸³, singing his mournful Irish convict ballads to a not entirely appreciative audience.⁸⁴ The childhood paralysis of Richard Miller in The Doubleman, with its leg irons so reminiscent of the convict period seems a peculiarly Tasmanian condition to Koch, a childlike society, something which the adult Miller can grow out of and by walking tall he can leave behind the obvious manifestations of his guilt.⁸⁵ However, whilst Miller may be able to shake off his malady, the post-war writers do not seem to believe that the society can so easily dispose of its guilt, notwithstanding its efforts to do so. Koch's own experiences in the State Archives at a time when selective destruction of the records of convict ancestry was not unknown⁸⁶ are reflected in the distaste he attributes to his Tasmania characters at the mention of convictism, likening their responses to fear.⁸⁷ The attempt to wallpaper over the past by replacing Van Diemen's Land with Tasmania has clearly failed in Koch's view, with a smell of fear, an air of tragedy and sorrow still apparent in Hobart and Port Arthur.⁸⁸ Conrad agrees, citing the name change from Port Arthur to Carnarvon as being of no substance, with Port Arthur defiantly maintaining its character.⁸⁹ The attempts of an earlier generation to destroy the physical remnants of the Hated Stain at Port Arthur are matched in Conrad's estimation by the equally risible attempt today to turn history into a kind of cute historicism, to give the Hated Stain a tourist veneer. He documents the transformation of convictism into "romantic ruins"; Disneyland; the Pirates of the Caribbean, the "triumphant fiction" of modern Tasmania's attempt to cope with the horror, as equally despicable as the

⁸²C.Koch, The Boys, ps.126-7.

⁸³see P.Pierce, op.cit., p.100.

⁸⁴C.Koch, The Doubleman, p.105.

⁸⁵ibid., p.16.

⁸⁶C.Koch, Crossing the Gap, p.113.

⁸⁷C.Koch, The Doubleman, p.35.

⁸⁸ibid., p.34.

⁸⁹P.Conrad, Down Home, p.134.

earlier collective amnesia.⁹⁰ The reality of the horrors of Port Arthur, Richmond and Saltwater River still seem too awful to contemplate for modern Tasmanians. If Altman envisages the potential triumph of a performance of "Fidelio" at Port Arthur⁹¹, then it is as much an act of catharsis for modern Tasmanians as an act of exorcism for the Gothic horrors of the past. Altmann clearly has little confidence that Tasmanians will ever come to terms with that past, for his fictional independent Tasmania has recreated its authoritarian heritage and will prove a worthy successor to the condition of convict control. His Tasmania is as much caught in a time warp of the 1850's as it is of the 1950's and its attempts to elaborate its history can never be more than "...embarrassingly cute".⁹² The post-war writers see Tasmania as carrying that onerous Gothic baggage of the penal period⁹³ in what Mark Twain termed,

"...a sort of bringing of heaven and hell together".⁹⁴

Modern Tasmania has clearly failed to come to terms with its convict past to an adequate extent in the views of these writers, preferring instead to find a certain juvenile thrill in its reputation for delinquency.⁹⁵

The moral vacuum of the response to the Hated Stain is dwarfed by the moral response to the challenge of the aboriginal problem. Whereas convictism has at least disappeared in its human manifestations, such could certainly not be said of the aboriginal problem, which is more apparent today than for decades. The post-war writers see the guilt and anxiety over the treatment of the Tasmanian aborigines as being an essential part of the Tasmanian condition, assuming an immediacy and relevance which the guilt of convictism has lost. To these writer if Tasmanians were remiss in their

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, ps.88-89.

⁹¹ D.Altman, *op.cit.* p.98.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁹³ A.Lohrey in Flanagan and Pybus, *The World is Watching*, p.91.

⁹⁴ quoted in P.Conrad, *Down Home*, p.135.

⁹⁵ see *Ibid.*, p.135 for a discussion of local pride in the Tasmanian Devil.

ability to come to terms with convictism, then this failure is compounded by a much greater inability to accept the guilt of the aboriginal issue.

That Tasmanians have inherited a burden of guilt due to the actions of their forebears is absolutely beyond question in the view of the post-war writers. Tasmania is indeed a "community of thieves" as Pybus describes them, using Xavier Herbert's colourful phrase.⁹⁶ Their guilt goes back to the beginning of European settlement at Risdon in 1803, with Pybus describing the now notorious massacre as,

"Drunken blunder it certainly was, but no aberration."⁹⁷

Martin Flanagan's fictional character emphasises the continuing connection of the site with modern Tasmania, as Astro is playing cricket in the vicinity where the present prison stands. Convictism and its brutalities thus neatly complement this site of the first clash between black and white.⁹⁸ Flanagan describes in detail the massacre itself and the subsequent clinical preservation of the aboriginal bodies for "the Great God Science".⁹⁹ Whilst Tasmania is certainly not unique in his view with a responsibility for the actions of warder and settler, it certainly bears a more than usual burden for the wholesale theft of aboriginal land.¹⁰⁰ The Black War is an episode of particular interest to him. The subsequent removal of the blacks contributed substantially to that "emptiness" which is an essential part of the Tasmanian condition. The aborigines had understood and indexed the land, assigning spirits to its various locations. Once dispossessed by the colonial administration, there followed that futile attempt to tame the unfamiliar with British nomenclature,

"...an attempt to change identity into a genteel community of graziers."¹⁰¹

⁹⁶C. Pybus, Community of Thieves, (Melbourne, 1991), p.5.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p.38.

⁹⁸M. Flanagan, Going Away, p.29.

⁹⁹*Ib* p.30.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p.33.

¹⁰¹P. Conrad, Down Home, p.71.

When that failed, the era of Tasmanian industry arrived with new methods of tormenting the formerly gentle land, according to Conrad.¹⁰² Europeans have transformed gentleness into a Gothic horror.¹⁰³ Similarly, Koch's Richard Miller journeying on the east coast now sees details of lust and fear in what he had once imagined to be an innocent bush.¹⁰⁴ Vandemonian crimes had left an indelible impact on the aboriginal spirits with a sense of torment still lingering. To Koch, it lingers over the entire island. Rowra, the Tasmanian daemon spirit who had tormented Truganini for her acts of collaborations, continues to watch over the entire island in, no doubt, an air of malevolence.¹⁰⁵ In Hodgman's Blue Skies, there is a similar sense of terror permeating the bush, a similar sense of a watching malevolent remnant spirit,

"Alone on the hill, I knew I was being watched - being willed away by a people who no longer existed."¹⁰⁶

These writers feel a deal of resentment at their own generation and its immediate predecessors for failing to come to terms with these terrible episodes in their history. The exhibit at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery of an aboriginal family in traditional times has obviously made a significant impact on generations of Tasmanians in a way which would have been unforeseen by its designers. Hodgman recalls it vividly, displeased at its juxtaposition with "...stuffed native creatures" and with the paraphernalia of ancient, extinct Tasmanian fauna.¹⁰⁷ Conrad too has vivid memories of this family group, referred to by Pybus.¹⁰⁸ To Conrad, they are not savages, but rather people who are preoccupied, preparing to make themselves invisible. Pybus recalls what she calls her persistent childhood memory of Truganini's skeleton, although she did not personally see it, but probably a

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³see Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁴C.Koch, The Doubleman, p.74.

¹⁰⁵Ibid. ps.74-5.

¹⁰⁶H.Hodgman, op.cit., p.71.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p.92.

¹⁰⁸C.Pybus, Community, p.179.

photograph.¹⁰⁹ She also recalls her childhood lessons on the death of Truganini and thus of Tasmanian aboriginality and the alienation which was stressed, as if the aboriginal story was not part of the mainstream of the Tasmanian condition. This alienation accounts for the absence in some of feelings of loss or remorse.¹¹⁰ As a Tasmanian who feels strong connections to the Channel district, Pybus is resentful of not being told in her childhood of Truganini and her role in the district.¹¹¹ Similarly, Martin Flanagan had grown up with the name Truganini on his lips and he too feels her presence on Bruny, whilst sharing Pybus' resentment that his generation were denied the truth.¹¹² His sense of her presence belies his childhood teaching that she was dead. Thus in the final measure, earlier generations failed in their attempt to alienate the aborigines in the minds of this generation of writers, who continue to damn their fellow Tasmanians for their ignorance and inability to accept the aboriginal experience as part of their own. If, as Martin Flanagan wryly observes in reference to Bruny, the place is a paradise, then it is a paradise lost, associated with atrocities committed against a gentle people.¹¹³

Certainly, generations following the post-war one have shown a more profound interest in aboriginal issues. Progress has been made from the time when Hodgman's character in Blue Skies can borrow only the single book in the State Library on aboriginals.¹¹⁴ Although times have changed, the author would seem to share the view of another of her characters, a laconic old-timer, whose assessment of the new-born interest in things aboriginal is, "Bit bloody late, innit?"¹¹⁵

Europeans have left only bones where once stood a sense of place and proportion.¹¹⁶ Pybus delves beneath the surface of the changing attitudes

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, ps.176-7.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, ps.178-9.

¹¹²M.Flanagan, *Going Away*, p.167.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, p.172.

¹¹⁴H.Hodgman, *op.cit.*, p.90.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, p.92.

towards aborigines to show that the more things change, the more they stay the same, for in her view the old attitudes have survived relatively intact. She employs the intricate and instructive example of Fanny Cochrane Smith in support of her argument. Pybus presents a strong case to illustrate that Cochrane Smith was not in fact a half-caste aboriginal woman, as maintained by Crowther, Bonwick *et al.* during the late nineteenth-century.¹¹⁷ She rejects the genetic arguments of Ling Roth employed to deny Cochrane Smith her status of full aboriginality¹¹⁸, whilst showing that what the geneticists denied was tacitly accepted by the Tasmanian legislature of the time, when the Tasmanian Parliament granted her 300 acres for the loss of aboriginal land.¹¹⁹ To Pybus, the continuing denial of the status of this woman is a way of denying any aboriginal moral claim to the land, there being no dispossession in this instance if Cochrane Smith's father was white. This search for white patrimony is something she describes as,

"...quite integral to the psychological fabric of white Tasmania."¹²⁰

The modern view thus complements the older one on Truganini's death and the extinction; under these circumstances there could be no land claims., with the period of dispossession being allegedly over.¹²¹ In 1990, she continues to hear Tasmanians singing "the same sour song", bitter at any suggestion of land compensation.¹²² What Croome refers to as "the guilt ridden silence" on the issue of dispossession has been broken, but the voices heard are not usually those of reconciliation.¹²³

The aboriginal problem and burden of guilt has left folk memories, unpleasant folk memories of

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, p.55.

¹¹⁷C.Pybus, *Community*, ps.179-80.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, p.187.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, p.183.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, p.185.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, ps.178-9.

¹²²*Ibid.*, p.188.

¹²³R.Croome in *The World is Watching*, p.113.

"...piratical men who slaughtered seals and captured aboriginal women",¹²⁴ of memories felt in Blue Skies of aboriginal men being slaughtered and of aboriginal women being used as decoys to live seals.¹²⁵ As Pybus shows, some, like the Van Diemen's Land Company and some north-west local historians want these memories to be dispersed, encountering as she did hostility to her desire to research Woolnorth massacres.¹²⁶

Tasmania thus remains permanently disfigured by its failure to acknowledge the full implications of the aboriginal problem in the view of these post-war writers. Europeans will have difficulty in gaining a true sense of belonging to a land which seems forlorn without its original inhabitants¹²⁷, a melancholy land of "vanished populations".¹²⁸ Melancholia will continue unless reconciliation is made. The alternative seems grim, as when the fastidious neighbour Ollie is killed by a stone in the electric lawn mower of Blue Skies. The stone turns out to be the weapon of a long dead aboriginal hunter.¹²⁹

CHAPTER THREE

The Neighbour of Lilliput

The Tasmanian sense of difference, of not belonging to Australia or anywhere else has been discussed at length above. The disgruntled child

¹²⁴M.Flanagan, op.cit., p.185.

¹²⁵H.Hodgman, op.cit., p.100.

¹²⁶C.Pybus, Community, ps.89-90.

¹²⁷C.Koch, The Boys, p.16.

¹²⁸P.Conrad, Down Home, p.80.

¹²⁹H.Hodgman, op.cit., p.103.

prodigy Conrad would trace plastic maps of Australia, with no room or place for Tasmania, "...an embarrassment to this cut-out continent".¹³⁰ For Tasmania is, in his words, "Australia's Australia"¹³¹ or "Australia's pet Australia"¹³² or "...an off-shore island off the shore of an off-shore continent."¹³³, doubly isolated from the world, particularly that Eurocentric world so beloved of Conrad. It is this sense of isolation which gives Tasmania its particular feel. Living on the edge affords its own peculiar sensations, some good, most deleterious. Chapter Four will discuss the Green rejection of the notions of centre and periphery, as some writers such as Lohrey view suggestions of cultural isolation as being colonialist notions.¹³⁴ But for the purposes of this discussion, it is accepted that the general notions of Tasmanian periphery are valid ones.

The sense of isolation had been particularly poignant in the penal era with Tasmania selected as an even more remote version of the larger Australia gulag.¹³⁵ This had its impact on the Tasmanian psyche, with continuing sensations after the penal period of incarceration and isolation. For Tasmania remains in the views of the post-war writers an Antipodean Dwarfland where people try to forget that this had once been another island,¹³⁶ an unreal island appropriate for the discussion of Koch's faery Otherworld. The siting by Swift of Lilliput to the northwest of Van Diemen's Land seems appropriate in that it is the ultimate place of distance from Gulliver's Wapping, as well as being an appropriate setting for a miniature society.¹³⁷ Tasmania's distinct characteristics are a twofold product in these eyes of these writers; a product of both the isolation and of the diminutive scale of its society.

¹³⁰P.Conrad, Down Home, p.4.

¹³¹Ibid., p.117.

¹³²Ibid., p.110.

¹³³Ibid., p.3.

¹³⁴A.Lohrey in The World is Watching, p.100.

¹³⁵P.Conrad, Down Home, p.3.

¹³⁶C.Koch, Doubleman, p33.

¹³⁷Ibid., and P.Conrad, Down Home, p.112.

Tasmania's isolation seems devastating from the Eurocentric point of view. Here is a "bereft speck" of land so remote that Conrad's Portuguese friends are amazed that their navigators overlooked it.¹³⁸ Altman wryly observes in his characters that the place seems even more remote than the Chinese-Soviet border to one unfortunate Jewish family.¹³⁹ This is truly the end of the world, literally so, Conrad notes in Nevil Shute's On the Beach. Conrad can see appropriateness in Tasmanians being the last people on earth, being "...an epilogue to life."¹⁴⁰

It would be an error to believe that all Tasmanians view the isolation of the Tasmanian condition and this diminutive society as being impediments to human development and progress. Some rejoice in this isolation and small scale. Chapter Four will examine the Green view that much of the marginalisation of Tasmania is a thing of the past¹⁴¹ and that the periphery can produce valuable ideas.¹⁴² This new Green perspective is not entirely without support from some of the more traditional analyses of isolation, for some Tasmanians do not feel angst at isolation, but rather, welcome it. Insularity, in Conrad's analysis, is a Tasmanian creed¹⁴³ and Tasmanians have generally in his view accepted the Lilliputian connotations eagerly, being quite content to coin their own diminutives, such as "Tassie" or "Taswegia".¹⁴⁴ Even the highly critical Conrad concedes that isolation stimulates self-sufficiency, from the time of the Risdon settlement to Ida West's Flinders Island, a state of being where, "...everyman is - or wants to be - an island."¹⁴⁵ This isolation has produced an exaggerated form of the Australian defensiveness in his estimation.¹⁴⁶ Fragile towards criticism the islanders certainly are, exemplified by the battle

¹³⁸P. Conrad, Where I Fell, p.50.

¹³⁹D. Altman, op.cit., p.229.

¹⁴⁰P. Conrad, Down Home, p.54.

¹⁴¹R. Flanagan, The Rest of the World is Watching, p.206.

¹⁴²M. Wescombe, in Ibid., p.173.

¹⁴³P. Conrad, Down Home, p.112.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p.110.

over the Franklin, where conservationists were often seen, in Robson's description as "contemptible mainlanders", "...aloof visitors who were suspected of secretly laughing at Tasmania and making jokes about intermarriage".¹⁴⁷ Such defensiveness contains that inability to accept criticism. Conrad likens the hostile reception in Tasmania of his writings as being as if it was,

"...a crime against the Holy Ghost for me to say that I was not happy as a child there...The society must be pretty fragile if it can't cope with the testimony of one of its members."¹⁴⁸

This is a "...small, timid world", but one where most Tasmanians are at least "middlingly contented".¹⁴⁹ This is a world which will reclaim you when hope or money runs out, rather like the dull American suburban life he glimpses when travelling across the USA.¹⁵⁰

Clearly, Conrad does not regard isolation as being beneficial, but others do. Fegan, McQueen's alcoholic, expatriate artist needs to return to his native soil in order to gain fresh artistic inspiration. He will only return to Sydney following his rejuvenation, having realised that,

"...it was all right; that he could begin again, and go on."¹⁵¹

He has noticed many changes in his home town, Castlereagh and with the old familiars disappearing, he feels sad and abandoned.¹⁵² McQueen's alter ego and most memorable character, Hook, acutely feels the splendours of his Tasmanian isolation and the particular way of life it affords, quite deliberately constructing his house facing south, away from the world and in defiance of nature, on a site which "...commanded isolation".¹⁵³ Hook has found anonymity in his isolation, whilst Conrad could never find the anonymity he so craved in such a miniature society¹⁵⁴, so full of relatives and

¹⁴⁷ L. Robson, A History of Tasmania, (Melbourne, 1991), v.2, p.562.

¹⁴⁸ P. Conrad in Quadrant, op.cit., p.33.

¹⁴⁹ P. Conrad, Fell, p.42.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.166

¹⁵¹ J. McQueen, Just Equinox, p.137

¹⁵² Ibid., p.159.

¹⁵³ J. McQueen, Hook's Mountain, (Melbourne, 1982), ps.32-3.

¹⁵⁴ P. Conrad, Fell, p.28.

acquaintances. He can never return "home" without connotations of failure, unlike an artist friend.¹⁵⁵ His relatives are defiant,

"Well, I'm happy enough here"¹⁵⁶ is a comment of the Conrad relatives quoted by him to illustrate their vacuousness, but it is an attitude which other Tasmanian writers regard as acceptable. Martin Flanagan's *Astro* has suffered and become wise. After initially believing that Hobart was dead, silent and young, he will learn to accept the advice of his brother that the place has its own spirit.¹⁵⁷ He does not ultimately crave a Conradian anonymity, for he finds his family structure supportive rather than a burden. Altmann's Sean seeks Melbourne anonymity for sexual reasons¹⁵⁸ as does the sexual deviant of McQueen's *The Sadist* seeking,

"...a large city where commerce might be expected to cater for his needs" away from the constant fear of exposure in "...this town,...this town" where there are no secrets.¹⁵⁹

Sexual deviance is not of course, the norm, for the homing instinct is strong amongst Tasmanians, albeit matched with a desire to flee amongst many. But it is accepted that isolation is not entirely a bad thing, that Tasmania can sustain a decent and intelligent life. Conrad assesses his nondescript London street by submitting it to his rule of the home-made microcosm, that, "...a sampled square inch of earth is abundant, all-sufficient, no matter how paltry its contents; wherever you are is the centre of the world."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵P. Conrad, *Fell*, p.46.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p.38.

¹⁵⁷M. Flanagan, *Going Away*, ps.172-3.

¹⁵⁸D. Altman, *op.cit.*, p.104.

¹⁵⁹J. McQueen, *Uphill Runner*, (Melbourne, 1984), p.132.

¹⁶⁰P. Conrad, *Fell*, p.78.

The perceived isolation of a particular spot is thus problematic. Unfortunately, Conrad does not seem to extrapolate his rule of the home-made microcosm to that landscape inside him; Tasmania. Others do.

The isolationist mindset is an attempt to maintain something seen as desirable from evil, outside influences, exemplified perhaps by McQueen's smack-dealer Skinner, recently domiciled on the mainland, returning to pollute innocent Tasmanians.¹⁶¹ Altman's satire reveals what he believes to be are real sentiments in the Tasmanian community on the sense of splendid isolation and a desire to maintain Tasmanian purity. Godfrey, the chief advocate of Tasmanian independence in The Comfort of Men has fled to the island after experiencing Melbourne violence, to a place "...more human sized", where people can relate to each other as individuals.¹⁶² Although depersonalisation is possible in the smaller Tasmanian cities, such as for the sandwichman in McQueen's Launceston¹⁶³, the smaller scale does tend to produce a comfortable intimacy, which saves the life of Fegan, rescued by a mate who inevitably discovered his presence in the island.¹⁶⁴ The absence of the intimacy brings on panic attacks, as for Cullen in Koch's The Boys in the Island who feels alienated at a weekend Melbourne party, sensing that, "...he should not be there, a mistake had been made."¹⁶⁵ preferring the notion of returning home to the "...island's safe hill circle, in home's safe tight box."¹⁶⁶ This almost "tribal", "homy cohesion" in a society so small as to seem to have total recall of its personnel¹⁶⁷ is clearly comfortable to many.

However, whilst recognising the appeal of isolation, the great bulk of the attention of the post-war writers is directed towards an examination of the pains of isolation. Being extremely observant and for the most part

¹⁶¹ J. McQueen, Electric Beach, p.83.

¹⁶² D. Altman, op.cit., p.191.

¹⁶³ J. McQueen, Uphill Runner, ps.179-84.

¹⁶⁴ J. McQueen, Just Equinox, p.20.

¹⁶⁵ C. Koch, The Boys, p.226.

¹⁶⁶ ibid.

¹⁶⁷ P. Conrad, Down Home, p.114.

expatriates, or at the very least people who spend considerable periods away from the island, they are able to examine the social retardation and introversion brought about by isolation in considerable detail. The fact that their generation was the best travelled to that time is of some significance.

The painful impact of Tasmania's isolation is profound. Isolation has brought about a sense of being trapped, an inferiority complex, an introversion and an ignorance, combined with a strong degree of material poverty. In their view, the Tasmanian disease, if not fatal, is certainly debilitating.

Chapter Two has discussed the convict burden and the futility of attempts to wallpaper over such anguish. Not surprisingly, these writers feel the continuing weight of the burden and they frequently resort to penal analogies in order to describe the Tasmanian condition of isolation. They talk of imprisonment, escape, of Crusoe-like imposed isolation which gnarls and breaks the spirit. To Conrad, the annual "hysteria" of the Sydney-Hobart yacht race seems redolent of a population desirous of being rescued from their isolation. This isolation has been likened to the solitary confinement of the Model Prison by Martin Flanagan, with suggestions of a particularly cruel psychological fate.¹⁶⁸ To Richard Flanagan, this former perfection of cruelty has been transformed into a different but equally effective form of social control - a social torpor which pervades Tasmanian social life with an expectation of silence and an acceptance of guilt.¹⁶⁹ Equally to Conrad, Tasmania symbolises the state of isolation found in the solitary confinement cells of Port Arthur, where insanity was guaranteed.

"Every man is an island. The name of the place might be Tasmanoia."¹⁷⁰

Conrad analyses his own Tasmanian childhood as "penitential, ignominious", a penance for crimes committed in some previous incarnation, something

¹⁶⁸M.Flanagan, *op.cit.*, p.171.

¹⁶⁹R.Flanagan, *The Rest of the World*, p.205.

¹⁷⁰P.Conrad, *Down Home*, p.64.

from which to flee at the earliest opportunity.¹⁷¹ With amusement, he draws attention to his nickname of "Der Fliegende Van Diemen's Lander".¹⁷²

The Tasmanian society remembered by these writers seems to have reproduced the terrifying silences of the Model Prison. Koch's Cullen finds Basstown a very tedious city, "Nothing happens",¹⁷³ and he can only wait for everything to happen "beyond the blue barrier of the hills," beyond the prison walls. His rural girlfriend is described as living in "...a silent country which held her prisoner".¹⁷⁴ This silence is described elsewhere in the novel as the silence of a land "outside history, almost outside time".¹⁷⁵ The description of the country as being large is of some significance, for despite the recognition of Tasmania as some sort of Dwarfland, it is also acknowledged that this minute society has been allocated a piece of earth too large for it¹⁷⁶, giving rise in part to the anguish over the environment, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Francis Cullen learns early in childhood of the "silence" which is "always there"¹⁷⁷ and the island seems like a natural prison to him with its two "barriers against the world".¹⁷⁸ Public life equally reflects this sense of solitary confinement, with the streets deserted after a certain hour, leading to a certain doubt as to whether the outside world exists at all, as a prisoner may doubt the existence of life outside his cell.¹⁷⁹

Hodgman's description of Tasmania could as well apply to a place of imprisonment, being a,

"...silent place, damp and gloomy. A musty dead smell hung thick as mist...Just a small sadness and boredom".¹⁸⁰

Francis Cullen spends much of his childhood conversation on the topic of

¹⁷¹P.Conrad, Where I Fell, p.25.

¹⁷²P.Conrad, Quadrant, p.34.

¹⁷³C.Koch, The Boys, p.49

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p.116.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., p.15.

¹⁷⁶P.Conrad, Down Home, p.34.

¹⁷⁷C.Koch, The Boys, p.16.

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

¹⁷⁹P.Conrad, Down, Home, ps.80-1.

¹⁸⁰H.Hodgman, op.cit., p.90.

"escape" from the island, escape to the Otherland¹⁸¹, recognising that only a sense of "security" is preventing most people from escaping their island prison. Richard Miller too in his childhood fantasies dreams of some absolute "escape".¹⁸² To this generation, escape was a mandatory element of self-expression, to which the only alternative seemed atrophy. Some seemed to have realised the necessity of escape earlier than others, with Conrad claiming to have suffered from the desolation of isolation at the ages of 4 to 5.¹⁸³ Pybus' ancestors, comfortably ensconced in the Huon district for generations still find that a certain restlessness sets in, with cousins, "...anxious to get away from the narrow confines of the channel, of Tasmania." Her father found that the draw of the world outside "...this exquisite backwater he knew too well" was ultimately too strong.¹⁸⁴ Koch knows the feeling, in one of the most significant quotes on the matter, perhaps summarising the attitude of this generation;

"I'd fallen in love with the landscape of my native Tasmania, but it wasn't enough to hold me."¹⁸⁵

Altmann's gay perspective sees the island as having a pervading sense of worthlessness in a Fortress Tasmania, as Croome has termed it.¹⁸⁶ In the views of these writers, Tasmanians have acquitted themselves like their convict ancestors; the spirited have gone across the wall, whilst the passive majority have agreed to go quietly.¹⁸⁷ Resistance seems useless and those who remain have become subject to an "enthrallment" and remain in a "prolonged, perverse childhood from which some souls never escape."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸¹C.Koch, The Boys, ps.159-66.

¹⁸²C.Koch, Doubleman, p.24.

¹⁸³P.Conrad, Down Home, ps.7-9.

¹⁸⁴C.Pybus, Community, p.11.

¹⁸⁵C.Koch, Crossing, p.152.

¹⁸⁶R.Croome, The Rest of the World, p.107.

¹⁸⁷M.Flanagan, op.cit., p.162.

¹⁸⁸C.Koch, Doubleman, p.63.

The view from the prison walls is a peculiar and distorted one. Isolation produces "...an ache of self-doubt" and an outward pride concealing an inward defensiveness.¹⁸⁹ This is the Tasmanian inferiority complex which gives rise to a love/hate relationship with the rest of the world, an outlook which leads to a permanent sense of aggrievement, whilst recognising the spell-binding influence of the outside.

The mainland in particular has exercised a certain fascination, drawing the Tasmanian mind away from its occlusion to considerations of a wider world. Acceptance of the inferiority complex is an acceptance of the worthlessness of being Tasmanian, the sense of being second rate. This complex may lead to high expectations of the place to which an escape is contemplated. Koch's Cullen, for instance, anticipates his departure from school with,

"...a hoarded expectancy regarding certain incredible places...waiting in the limitless world beyond the island."¹⁹⁰ He looks forward to an "...illimitable adult world [and a] future beyond the island."¹⁹¹

His interest in the outside has already been stimulated by the northern city of Paterson, where the trams, so different from those of Basstown, have rails running "...to places beyond imagining."¹⁹² This was his first glimpse of a life outside Basstown and his dissatisfaction with the narrow confines of Tasmania grows with age. In his restless teenage years, his interest in outside vistas is stimulated by "...the oil-and-tar smell of ships at the docks."¹⁹³ This smell is that of the outside,

"...containing great areas beyond the island's rim, utterly unknown world!"¹⁹⁴ Cullen's dream of a better world in the Otherland is matched by Miller's of a better one in the Otherworld. Miller envies his more independent school friend Brian Brady, who fleeing their Catholic boarding school is,

¹⁸⁹P. Conrad, *Down Home*, p.110.
¹⁹⁰C. Koch, *The Boys*, p.48.

¹⁹¹*ibid.*
¹⁹²*ibid.*, p.24.
¹⁹³*ibid.*, p.62.
¹⁹⁴*ibid.*

"...already riding into territories beyond the island."¹⁹⁵ Brady's plans are well laid; he will save his money and escape to the mainland for the country music circuit.¹⁹⁶ Miller's first love, Deidre Dillon made him aware of the spiritual confines of his island and of the promise of Sydney,

"I know I just didn't grow until I got out of this bloody little island."¹⁹⁷

Like Oskar in The Tin Drum, the young Miller will continue to suffer from his paralysis and will never achieve his promise until he outgrows his physical and spiritual malady, in this instance by leaving the island. For remaining in Tasmania is seen as an extension of childhood. As Conrad puts it,

"Leaving Hobart for Melbourne you cross an invisible border into another age - Tasmania dwindles into the distance, lost like childhood."¹⁹⁸

He is more candid in his Quadrant interview, where he refers to his wretched childhood in terms which summarise Tasmania in his view,

"It is a prison term from which you long for release."¹⁹⁹

Those who choose to remain are voluntarily choosing to remain in childhood, accepting second best. Once in Sydney, Miller identifies with the European refugee, Katrin, who spent her childhood longing for "...another country out of sight", quoting Goethe on the longing for a land of promise.²⁰⁰

Other autobiographical fiction expresses similar sentiments. Altmann's Steven describes Susan, another daughter of European refugees, as being from a community which represented,

"...the window to a larger world outside Tasmania, otherwise only glimpsed through books."²⁰¹

This ennui is found too in Blue Skies, when the chief character has a strong sense of longing for the outside, staring from her kitchen window, bored,

¹⁹⁵C.Koch, Doubleman, p.70.

¹⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p.73.

¹⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p.85.

¹⁹⁸P.Conrad, Down Home, p.225.

¹⁹⁹P.Conrad, Quadrant, p.32.

²⁰⁰C.Koch, Doubleman, p.192.

²⁰¹D.Altman, *op.cit.*, p.21.

"It's the same the world over", she crooned, "...wondering if it really was."²⁰² Peter Conrad, the real dreamer, arranged a collage of foreign magazine clippings on his bedroom window, both to block his view of the Tasmanian reality and as a talisman of the outside world of promise - a collection of "overlapping Utopias." Of course, his uncomprehending and long-suffering mother forced him to remove them, to the delight of the plebs next door.²⁰³

Once this anticipation and longing has been transformed into reality, then generally these writers are satisfied that the new found vistas have been worth the effort. The Tasmanian sense of inferiority has been well founded in their view. The extreme is the Anglophile view of Conrad, who went into raptures over his discovery of England. He goes so far as to suggest that he was running on the spot for the twenty years of his life in Tasmania²⁰⁴ with flight always having been his ambition and motor.²⁰⁵ Having attained his dream, he feels that his life has begun on Waterloo Bridge.²⁰⁶ His Tasmanian childhood was a phase of "pre-existence", a period of "waiting in an antechamber."²⁰⁷ Again, a Tasmanian existence is equated with the inadequacies and immaturities of childhood. The influence of these childhood memories can be very long-standing, such as with Marilyn Lake, whose native eye sees emptiness and oppression and something sinister in Tasmanian rural vistas, whereas outside eyes see only "...peaceful, regenerative retreats."²⁰⁸

Lake longs to return to the city, a commonly encountered theme. Melbourne is seen as a place of refuge and freedom to Sean, the Hobart homosexual in Altman's novel²⁰⁹, even if there is a sensation that final escape is not always

²⁰²H.Hodgman, *Blue Skies*, p.12.

²⁰³P.Conrad, *Down Home*, p.184.

²⁰⁴P.Conrad, *Fell*, p.30.

²⁰⁵*ibid.*, p.24.

²⁰⁶*ibid.*, p.25.

²⁰⁷*ibid.*, p.26.

²⁰⁸M.Lake, "Peter Conrad's Tasmania", in the *Bulletin, Centre for Tas. Historical Studies*, *op.cit.*, p. 118.

²⁰⁹D.Altman, *op.cit.*, p.104.

possible.²¹⁰ Francis Cullen finds Melbourne life to be "tough, implacable and utterly indifferent", but he fails to exercise his suspicion that,

"...another city, a city of promise, lay locked just out of sight."²¹¹

He still has the notion of something unfound. Perhaps it will be Sydney, where Altman's characters delight in being in a "real city", a step towards the ultimate challenge of overseas,

"We had grown up, believing in, needing, the mirage of Overseas."²¹²

The Tasmanian inferiority complex is sustained by this contact with the mainland and mainlanders. The social circle of Blue Skies includes a journalist who makes the impressive claim of having written for mainland dailies; the subject of some awe.²¹³ Equally, even the relatively street-wise Lewie, expatriate of The Boys in the Island finds the mainlander Keeva intimidating and overwhelming,

"She was ahead of him, more wise to the city (she was a Mainland girl)..."²¹⁴

All visitors to the island attain a certain kudos in the eyes of the locals, whether they be the Pope, Dolly Parton or Olivier, according to Conrad,

"...because they waft in from the supernatural of interstate or overseas,"²¹⁵

and this kudos is extended to those in the island who have had some experience of the outside world themselves. The child Conrad was fascinated by the insights of his sole relative to travel overseas, even though these insights extended only to the banal view that everything in England was old and that everything in America was big.²¹⁶ Jonathan, the effeminate restaurateur of Blue Skies increases his social standing with some in the island by claiming friendships with some of the beautiful people who lived

²¹⁰Ibid., p.187.

²¹¹C.Koch, Boys, p.203.

²¹²D.Altman, op.cit., p.63.

²¹³H.Hodgman, Blue Skies, p.16.

²¹⁴C. Koch, The Boys, p.190.

²¹⁵P.Conrad, Down Home, p.139.

²¹⁶P.Conrad, Fell, p.34.

overseas, although that claim is hard to disprove because so few of them actually turn up in "Tiny Town."²¹⁷

Mention has already been made of the ennui which is an essential part of the Tasmanian condition in the view of these writers, an ennui which leads Carmel Bird's characters in Buttercup and Wendy to long for a change from their boring island of the 50's for ,

"oh, distant and foreign land of Australia where people eat ravioli."²¹⁸ Even the artist Fegan, who has drawn so much artistic inspiration from his native island begins to feel a bitter after-taste in Tasmania,

"...a sharp and sour reminder that it was a world to which he no longer belonged."²¹⁹

This is a feeling that he still needs the new challenges beyond the island.

For ultimately, these writers are conscious of the sensation of failure which the Tasmanian inferiority complex engenders. If failing to leave the island in the first place represents a continuation of childhood, then return is seen as a signal of failure and something which causes shame. Conrad admits that a substantial motivation for him has been this fear, fearing the temptations of being "too comfortable" in the corrupt, cosy flabbiness of middle age.²²⁰ Perhaps Conrad shares the nightmare of Francis Cullen's return from the promised land to Basstown, having failed to achieve anything of note in Melbourne. Back home now, Francis has returned to his childhood,

"...his whole body was infantile with a feebleness almost pleasant yet shameful."²²¹

He wakes each morning filled with an inescapable shame at being back from the Mainland. He now has a child's mind inside a grown body. Richard Miller in _____ also refers to the onset of "paralysis" on his return to the

²¹⁷H.Hodgman, Blue Skies, p.15.

²¹⁸C.Bird, op.cit., p.52.

²¹⁹J.McQueen, Just Equinox, p.90.

²²⁰P.Conrad, Fell, p.38.

²²¹C.Koch, The Boys, p.247.

island and he too equates return with being tantamount to a return to childhood.²²²

The distortions of isolation then have produced a society which is insulated against outside influences and which suffers accordingly. It has the child's wonder at the outside and the child's fear of the unknown, in addition to the child's petulance and defensiveness. The damage to Dwarfland as a result of this terrible isolation and diminutive social scale has been permanent. Tasmania has suffered the truly insular fate of becoming introverted and ignorant, wallowing and almost revelling in its lack of knowledge of the outside world. Thus, in extremis, Conrad's Tasmanians find the outside to be unknown, chilling and their island is an "...unattached, self-referring place."²²³ It is here that he finds the suitable breeding ground for the Gothic alien figure, revived in the 1980's by Conrad and Koch, according to Amanda Lohrey as an "abject figure of estrangement".²²⁴

This ignorance and introversion had led Conrad's family to believe that the death of the returning world-travelling uncle shortly after his return was a judgement for his presumption.²²⁵ His even more presumptuous nephew contrasts unfavourably the scrubbed and unimaginative environment of his childhood to the wonder he found in grubby London.²²⁶ Uncharacteristically, he confesses feelings of his "insignificance" at the antiquarianism of London.²²⁷ The ignorance of his Tasmanians prevents such humility. This minute and introverted community could not provide him with the full range of emotions which he found in the USA; from seedy hotels, to Disneyland, to near death in Death Valley, the Grand Canyon and the fascinating vice of New York, utterly unknown in his first small, timid world.²²⁸

²²²C.Koch, Doubleman, p.335.

Home, p.225.

²²⁴A.Lohrey, in The Rest of the p.91.

²²⁵P.Conrad, Fell, p.34.

p.40.

p.28.

., p.45 and p.42.

Koch's view is a similar one, if more sympathetic. Nonetheless, the mediocrity of the Tasmania of his youth has impressed him. Miller's childhood of "lifeless white bread" is contrasted unfavourably with the rich nourishment provided by the black Estonian bread of his adopted family in Sydney.²²⁹ His youth in introverted Tasmania was only a half-life. McQueen's view is similar, generally sympathetic, but cognisant of the inescapable reality that the Tasmanian condition is built around ignorance and introversion. His ex-serviceman of The Sergeant finds it difficult to adjust to the introverted life of his home town, gradually realising that he must fade back into,

"...the quietness of the river, the town, the hilly green country,"²³⁰

forgetting about the outside world and its experiences. In his view, Tasmanians are too inclined towards this introversion and he highlights the local ignorance of international interest in the Franklin at a time when Bob Brown was being interviewed by interested journalists from Chicago and Helsinki.²³¹

Hodgman, as an outsider is perhaps more aware of these qualities of introversion than most. Her Tasmanian characters are as dull as the environment in which they live. They are the teachers and policemen too ignorant to understand a quote from William Blake, spray painted onto the local school.²³² Her Tasmania is a second rate, conformist island of mediocrities, which stifles the imagination of her characters and persecutes those who are different, such as Jonothan the restaurateur, driven from Hobart by a petty sex scandal.²³³ A character of some sympathy, Ben, the painter is thought of as quite mad by the locals and persecuted by the law.²³⁴ Yet even he seems unable to escape the place, rejecting life in England for

²²⁹C.Koch, The

p.240.

²³⁰J.McQueen,

p.34.

²³¹J.McQueen in The Rest of the World, p.52.

op.cit., p.91.

p.54.

p.25.

its "rat-aspects and dirt."²³⁵ Rather he has returned to a city whose fringes, Hodgman drily notes are themselves singularly unattractive and scruffy.²³⁶ Hodgman's Tasmania is one of mind numbing dullness, where it is not surprising that the little Conrad found that being different, made him, "an object of suspicion and antagonism rather than of wonder."²³⁷

None of the writers has a greater intimacy with Hobart than does Amanda Lohrey, particularly as portrayed in The Morality of Gentlemen, her novel of the turbulent Hobart waterfront. As mentioned in Chapter One, her Hobart is a place of some sectarianism, a common symptom of an introverted society. It is also a place of conservative, peculiar, backward, retarded and anachronistic social relations, where the "utopianism" of her waterside-worker family will be severely tested. Lohrey's Hobart continues to suffer from the colonial curse of outside control, as the entire Moseley episode is portrayed as being manipulated and managed by certain mainland interests. Tasmania, being an isolated, naive island, is seen by these forces as being a suitable social laboratory. The shadowy figure of mainland origins, Brian Jents, acting on behalf of powerful people in the Movement, has made arrangements for the legal fees of the dissident waterside-worker Moseley to be paid.²³⁸ This case will be a test case for the wider nation and Tasmanians are again playing the role of pawns. The mainland controlled shipping companies also see this case as an opportunity to make a breakthrough in the use of non-union labour, seeking a return to the time when the workforce was more compliant.²³⁹ The "captains of industry" are portrayed in the novel as acting through Tasmanian "dangling puppets."²⁴⁰ Tasmania's own putative masters, the State politicians, are men of straw of the do-nothing, consensus variety, in particular the Labor Premier Artie Coughlan;

²³⁵ibid.

²³⁶ibid., p.23.

²³⁷P.Con ad in Quadrant, p.32.

²³⁸A.Lohrey, Morality, p.81.

²³⁹ibid., p.72.

²⁴⁰ibid., p.162.

"no more middle of the road leader."²⁴¹ The State Labor conference is held in the Methodist Hall under the psalm board declaring "...And the Meek Shall Inherit the Earth" and the Tasmanian working class is said to be showing signs of "...siege mentality and paranoid fatalism,"²⁴² Tasmania and Tasmanians in The Morality of Gentlemen are moribund; death and decay are constant themes for in this city,

"...there are small church graveyards on every hill."²⁴³

The place is a backwater, where the high and the low nurse mighty grievances; Archbishop Green does not yet feel as confident as the Archbishop of Sydney in attacking the WWF and the ALP;²⁴⁴ Alec Plunkett, the Communist organiser bears resentment towards his comrades for not fully recognising his talents and posting him to one of the larger cities.²⁴⁵ Hobart, in Lohrey's portrayal, is an introverted city where a "personal" contact can mean more than a supposed ideological opposition. Anti-unionist can approach unionist at a lodge meeting and appeal for an end to picketing;²⁴⁶ a union lawyer can feel completely at ease amongst the more established legal champions of the status quo, as the "perfect guest."²⁴⁷ It is all so very chummy and so deadly dull. More importantly, her Hobart is not a city where society could be said to be in any way advancing; it is a difficult place for utopians.

Isolated, introverted and ignorant Tasmania is capable of a utopian dream, or more accurately of a nightmare according to Altman's futuristic fictional account of an independent Tasmania. He clearly believes that the Tasmania of his youth had the potential to develop into something very nasty. This Tasmania was monochrome and dull, with Alena, one of Steven's many Jewish friends presenting,

²⁴¹Ibid., p.89.

²⁴²Ibid., ps. 89 & 114.

²⁴³Ibid., p.44.

²⁴⁴Ibid., ps.128-30.

²⁴⁵Ibid., p.54.

²⁴⁶Ibid., p.181.

²⁴⁷Ibid., p.238.

"...a sudden burst of colour in the monochrome of Hobart suburbia",²⁴⁸

with her red hair and bright clothing. This dull society develops into something belligerent and introverted, turning its back on the Australian mainland. The Independists prefer to pledge their loyalty to the distant Queen and to cut ties to Canberra, where they feel under-represented.²⁴⁹ This Tasmania is taking refuge in the past and rejecting Federation, for as Van Gelder, the Independentist leader puts it, the Federal government has undermined the traditional Tasmanian way of life by luring innocent Tasmanian youth across Bass Strait to the damnation of needle exchanges and abortion.²⁵⁰ Altman's Tasmania is ignorant in its reliance on anachronistic, fundamentalist values which identify the mainland as the source of corruption and it is introverted in its attempts to exclude the evils of the outside world.²⁵¹

The Independentist vision of a "purer" Tasmania seems like a joke on inbreeding gone mad.²⁵² Altman's ultimate insult to the place is to deny it the one thing on which it places the most pride; its own special identity. Hester refers to Van Gelder as having invented the idea of being Tasmanian in order to gain power for himself. The mainland has essentially been used as a bogey in a promise to restore a "traditional way of life".²⁵³ His Tasmania is the last bastion of the 1950's, when the entire nation suffered from a lesser degree of ignorance and introversion, brought to full perfection in this futuristic Tasmania. Conrad's description is appropriate; Tasmania, he said is,

"Australia raised to the power of something dreadful."²⁵⁴

Isolation is often closely related to poverty. Tasmania is no exception and one its most striking features to these post-war writers following their

²⁴⁸D. Altman, *op.cit.*, p.26.

²⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p.51.

²⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p.199.

²⁵¹*Ibid.*, ps.31 & 242-3.

²⁵²*Ibid.*, p.73.

²⁵³*Ibid.*, p.220.

²⁵⁴P. Conrad in *Quadrant* p.32.

exposure to the world is its material backwardness and deprivation. It is like having grown up in a respectably poor family quite unaware of the degree of deprivation being suffered until it is pointed out by an outsider. Fegan's family in A Just Equinox serves as a suitable type. The northern Tasmania of his youth is described as a place of "...strange prides and strange guilts"²⁵⁵, where life in his fatherless family is one of hard poverty and constant struggle. They were "...clean poor, respectable poor"²⁵⁶ like the island they lived in, in a way almost content with their lot and quite superior in their minds to several other families who were filthy and mendicant. To most of these people, the certain psychological security offered by the island was sufficient to prevent them escaping, or in any event, this degree of poverty made escape very difficult. Francis Cullen feels terribly trapped due to his relative poverty, as opposed to the freedom which money brings to his middle-class friend, Shane. This money will allow Shane to escape at will²⁵⁷, although ultimately he too will not prosper during his Melbourne episode.

Tasmania's poverty and state of perpetual recession has, in Richard Flanagan's view, led to the feelings of worthlessness which isolation brings and to a frustrated search for abundance and security.²⁵⁸ Thus the futility of Conrad's Electropolis,²⁵⁹ and the Hydro as the "provider of plenty" as Martin Flanagan describes it.²⁶⁰ Robson well documents the euphoria of hydro-industrialisation at a time when,

"...everyone cared about the HEC",²⁶¹

as an institution which seemed to hold some hope of banishing the spectre of poverty. The memory of this poverty irks Conrad, who has been able to contrast his Tasmanian childhood with his life in four places. It annoys him that Tasmania's poverty is so unpublicized, what he calls an "Appalachian"

²⁵⁵ J. McQueen, Just Equinox, ps. 45-6.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 47

²⁵⁷ C. Koch, The Boys, p. 166.

²⁵⁸ R. Flanagan, The Rest of the World, p. 113.

²⁵⁹ P. Conrad, Down Home, ps. 71-9.

²⁶⁰ M. Flanagan, Going Away, p. 162.

²⁶¹ L. Robson, History, V.2, p. 510.

poverty in the "slums" of Hobart and in rural areas. He likens the families trapped in such poverty to the American share-croppers of the 30's Dustbowls, including the "peasant farmers" of his own Huon family.²⁶²

So it is that the most distinctive feature of the Tasmanian condition to these post-war writers is the all-pervading sense of isolation with which it is very difficult to deal. Remaining in the island simply exacerbates the psychological and material aspects of this isolation. Departing will lead to the wistful longing and home-sickness of the exile.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Gothics and the Greens

The unique Tasmanian landscape and environment have had a profound impact on this generation of Tasmanian writers. Their artistic consciousness

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Gothics and the Greens

The unique Tasmanian landscape and environment have had a profound impact on this generation of Tasmanian writers. Their artistic consciousness

²⁶²P. Conrad in Quadrant, p.33

has been directed towards that problem faced by all Australian writers; how to come to terms with an alien environment. Koch quotes the Indian writer Chaudhuri on the Hindu sense of alienation from the sub-continent, torn from their Indo-European heritage and somewhat at a loss in a new dissident environment.²⁶³ Australian writers, he maintains, feel similar pangs of alienation. Yet this tension, this "pathos of absence" also serves an artistic purpose in that Australian literature has developed certain peculiar qualities in its attempt to come to terms with the new land..²⁶⁴ Tasmanians have a highly developed sense of this geographical tension. The Tasmanian tension is perhaps more exquisite than that of mainland writers because of the false temptations of the analogies to Little England or Ireland referred to in Chapter One. Ultimately, of course, they must come to terms with their own geography, despite the temptations of the European mirage and there is no doubt of the validity of Koch's view that,

"Geography is the great hidden shaper of history and character. The essence of the landscape and climate will always impose itself on the human spirit - this stormy island will continue to impose its own..."²⁶⁵

Earlier writers and artists did have difficulty in coping with the alien,²⁶⁶ being unable or unwilling to come to terms with the realities of the Tasmanian environment. It may be that the colonial mind found refuge in the maxim, "We are given art so that we shouldn't perish from the truth."²⁶⁷ The post-war mind, however, seems more prepared to face the truth and it is capable of seeing the Tasmanian landscape, warts and all and it has psychologically steeled itself to accept what it sees, in most cases. For Tasmanians have, as Reynolds notes, a strong sense of "island distinctiveness"²⁶⁸ as well as a love of their landscape.²⁶⁹ Love takes many

²⁶³C.Koch, Crossing, p.13.

²⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p.95.

²⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p.118.

²⁶⁶see P.Conrad, Down Home, p.180 for a discussion of Glover and Hurley.

²⁶⁷*Ibid.*

²⁶⁸H.Reynolds, in the Foreword to C.Pybus, Community, p.vii.

²⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p.viii.

forms and it is not infrequently complicated with self-loathing. So it is with the reactions of these writers towards the Tasmanian environment. There are lovers and self-loathers amongst them. Three strands of reaction may be identified; the gothic, the utopian and the romantic, with considerable overlapping. Amanda Lohrey cleverly identifies this tripartite method of analysis, suggesting that Tasmania has three existing narratives, namely the gothic and the utopian, with the Green movement reforming and integrating them into a third surpassing narrative, which could be titled romantic; or the New Romanticism.²⁷⁰ The gothic she defines as having a sense of being overwhelmed by an awesome nature, with feelings of doom and decay, nature being regarded as intractable, punitive and perverse.²⁷¹ The utopian, she defines as being the European vision of starting afresh in a new world, with an opportunity to create a better society.²⁷² Nature can here be marginalised, or seen as providing opportunities for social improvement. The romantic perspective views the Tasmanian environment as unique and worthy of love and acceptance on its own terms.

The Tasmanian gothic outlook has its own complications. It contains within its narrative a horror of the environment, a repugnance and an overwhelming sense of despair for some writers, whilst others are more accepting of the grim horror and have almost a grudging respect and awe for its special character. Conrad is undoubtedly the leader of the self-loathing gothics. The Tasmanian environment clearly repels him, with the west being mercilessly buffeted by surf from across the Indian Ocean, presenting a tragic face; a land where the horror of nature has been matched by the brutalisations of convict and miner.²⁷³ This is an appropriate setting for gothic writing, the antipodean equivalent perhaps to those wind-swept Yorkshire moors. Conrad describes the Hartz mountains as being part of a "Gothic element",

²⁷⁰A.Lohrey, * of the * p.89.

²⁷¹*ibid.*, ps.89-90.

²⁷²*ibid.*

²⁷³P.Conrad, *Down Home*, ps.47-9.

an imitation of an "imaginary north", "gnarled and skeletal" like those northern haunts of Goethe's Mephistopheles.²⁷⁴ In describing the history of the west, Conrad sees the environment of Macquarie Harbour as being,

"A landscape adapted to despair - its very emptiness qualifying it as a place of incarceration. Nature served as a prison -debarred from escape by the rain forest and tired mountains,...[on Grummet Island]...Weather constituted their prison."²⁷⁵

To Conrad, Tasmania certainly does seem like an environment suited to the damned or to those who seem to have come out the worst from some Faustian compact,

"Every horizon is crinkled, a blockade of dolerite; and the irregular crust begets morose clouds which look like angry thoughts."²⁷⁶

All is hostile and irregular and an apocalyptic element is present, with the Southern Ocean overwhelming the edge of the world, as a self-loathing Tasmania attempts "...to hurl itself under water."²⁷⁷ Being aboard Tasmania is likened by Conrad to being on a leaky lifeboat.²⁷⁸ Fortunate are those who have escaped the leaky lifeboat and found refuge elsewhere.

Mountains and forests have had great influence on the gothic mind, none more so than the mountains around Hobart, the birthplace of so many of these writers. "The" mountain, Mt. Wellington, that "...gothic mountain that loomed behind the town"²⁷⁹, in Hodgman's words, is all important and somewhat of an obsession with some, Conrad in particular. Using Edmund Burke's analysis of the natural world, Conrad sees paternal elements in Tasmania's brooding mountains and the crouching lion of Mt. Wellington dominated his childhood, along with its lesser companion, that "talismanic beast", Mt. Direction.²⁸⁰ Wellington he likens to a tribal elder amongst the

²⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p.205.

²⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p.48.

²⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p.30.

²⁷⁷*Ibid.*, ps.4 and 47.

²⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p.47.

²⁷⁹H.Hodgman, *op.cit.*, p.31.

²⁸⁰P.Conrad, ps.215 and 30.

"geological beasts" which "crenellate and fret the surface of the state."²⁸¹ This is a mountain which dominates Hobart's weather and its psychological condition, like some lowering beast.²⁸² It cannot and will not be tamed in his view, with the human efforts of road and antennae seeming ridiculously puny. Appropriately, the English fantasies of Georgian stone and English trees in upper Davey St. peter away into futility against the reality of this "craggy monolith."²⁸³ Conrad devotes an entire chapter of Down Home to his reminiscences of Mt. Wellington. He is capable of lightening the gothic theme with a romantic interlude, as when he notes that mountains can commute between the two meanings of being either natural deformations or places of serenity.²⁸⁴ He even admits to finding, on one occasion, the sight of Mt. Wellington to be a "cosy totem",²⁸⁵ but his gothic stream remains, with the mountain portrayed as a "faery world", appropriate to the Celtic fantasies of the duplicate world of Koch's The Doubleman; there are bowers, and glades and briefly glimpsed secret gardens. It is a reserve of magic, populated by the gnomes of his imagination, peopled with hitch-hiking wood nymphs with Californian accents.²⁸⁶ This mountain clearly contains Conrad's childhood fears and fantasies and it is very obviously still, after twenty years, an essential part of "...the landscape inside me" in his "...sleeping, imagining mind."²⁸⁷ Seen in adulthood, Wellington and Direction still seem to be the,

"...blunt giants who poised their clubs above the valley, and forebade escape."²⁸⁸

He, of course, had notoriously escaped, but perhaps he is recalling that early childhood angst when the sight of these two mountains reduced him to tears.

²⁸¹Ibid., p.30.

²⁸²Ibid.

²⁸³Ibid., p.31.

²⁸⁴Ibid., p.32.

²⁸⁵Ibid., ps.222-3.

²⁸⁶Ibid., ps.35-6.

²⁸⁷Ibid., p.232.

²⁸⁸Ibid., p.71.

In the amphitheatre between these two mountains, he claims to have sensed,

"...the closed circle of our world", and "The sky, overcast and opaque, stifled the scene as if beneath glass."²⁸⁹

The sensitive little Conrad, struck with the gothic horror of it all asked "Where am I?" and found the answer wholly unsatisfactory. He realised that he was to find no rest or solace in this particular antipodean heart of darkness.

Marilyn Lake analyses Conrad's gothic outlook with precision and accuracy. She understands it so well because she has also experienced it. She describes her childhood as having shared Conrad's "sense of abandonment and destitution" and she too perceived nature as foreboding and cruel, malignant and destructive.²⁹⁰

Altman represents another element of gothic self-loathing, although perhaps for quite different motives. The dominating mountain does possess beauty, he confesses, but in the words of his character Gerald,

"It's so beautiful. But it's the beauty of the dead."²⁹¹

The mortician's art is foremost in his mind. Altman carries a great deal of resentment over Tasmania's arrested social development into the world of nature. He does not accept the Burkean analysis of nature with stern paternal elements and gentle maternal ones, for he describes the mountain as looming, "...like a threatening step-mother."²⁹² The gothic influence of the Brothers Grimm is at work here. Altman's gothic turns undeniable natural beauty in on itself, as the very beauty of Hobart's natural setting makes it a claustrophobic city, a city turned in on itself with its only outlet towards the inhospitable south.²⁹³ The river running south is a constant reminder that there is nothing between Tasmania and Antarctica; a river flowing to oblivion.²⁹⁴ This refusal to accept and to accommodate to natural beauty is

²⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p.7.

²⁹⁰M.Lake, *op.cit.*, p.118.

²⁹¹D.Altman, *op.cit.*, p.49.

²⁹²*Ibid.*, p.229.

²⁹³*Ibid.*

²⁹⁴*Ibid.* p.51.

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²⁹²*Ibid.*, p.229.

²⁹³*Ibid.*

²⁹⁴*Ibid.* p. 51.

the triumph of psychology over the senses and it is typical of the gothic outlook, which seems determined to detect menace, storm and stress in the natural world. The gothic outlook is not restricted to the self-loathers. It is common too amongst the writers who also express their affection for the landscape. These writers sense the hardship and difficulties of the Tasmanian environment, but they are able to balance their outlook with brighter considerations. They have balanced the dark with the light, but nevertheless their sense of this darkness forms an important element in their analysis of the Tasmanian condition. Lohrey, in her analysis, recognises that the gothic perceives Mt. Wellington in the Conradian sense of "brooding" and as an impediment to the outside world.²⁹⁵ Koch, with his deep affections for the place is still able to concede that Tasmania's proximity to the Pole tends to render it,

...alien to the comforts and measurements of man."²⁹⁶

He shares in the gothic abhorrence of the west, signalled by Mt. Wellington. Beyond the mountain lies "unexplored wilderness"; "unexplored catacombs", with waves booming on empty beaches.

"The west was death."²⁹⁷

Quite so, but this view is matched by the life of the east and the utopian elements in his analysis, which tend to lighten the gothic gloom. In Koch's analysis Wellington might lack a "cool specialness, a musing air of marvel"²⁹⁸, but Direction does not. One western mountain might seem claustrophobic, but the other, the eastern, seems to open vistas. However, as with Conrad, mountains do seem to have a custodial air, with poor little Heather of Greendale locked behind her barrier of hills, ²⁹⁹ in a cruelly uncaring land. That cruel land includes the south-west wilderness,

²⁹⁵A.Lohrey, The Rest of the World, p.94.

²⁹⁶C.Koch, The Boys, p.15.

²⁹⁷C.Koch, Doubleman, p.138.

²⁹⁸ibid., p.47.

²⁹⁹C.Koch, The Boys, p.118.

"...where it rained and snowed eternally, where rivers ran underground and where men had walked in and never walked out."³⁰⁰

The southern coast, that ultimate border, is described as "Gothic" with its rock pillars. For Koch accepts that the Tasmanian environment possesses a "strangeness" which cannot be likened to the environment of the ancestral land. Coming to terms with this strangeness is an essential and time-consuming task; the task of a lifetime.

Martin Flanagan's character Astro, in his peregrinations spends a considerable period of his life attempting to come to terms with the gothic environment of his upbringing. His childhood memories include the "solemn blue" of Mt. Wellington and the picture of his brother Davey staring at it transfixed, as if before some atavistic totem.³⁰¹ The north-west and west also excite his gothic tendencies, with their inhospitable, pitiless and exacting forests, but he draws the characters of this region with sympathy, undaunted as they are by their alien environment.³⁰² Flanagan's "westies" are "battlers", not as passive as the "losers" of McQueen's Invitation, where the harshness of the west has produced despair and torpor.³⁰³ McQueen's view of the Tasmanian environment is influenced by his upbringing in the relatively tamed north-west. In this region, which Flanagan describes as being where "pastoral north met the wild west"³⁰⁴ lies McQueen's native Ulverstone, certainly very "tame". Hence his incomprehension of the west and his relatively unsympathetic portrayal of Hobart, where even the universally praised Derwent leaves him cold, describing it as he does at night as, "...wide and cold and blacker than the night sky."³⁰⁵

His view of the city is an unflattering one,

"Interlocking hills crouch beside the dull water on all sides."³⁰⁶

³⁰⁰C.Koch, Doubleman, p.33.

³⁰¹M.Flanagan, Going Away, p.74.

³⁰²Ibid., p.185.

³⁰³J.McQueen, p.113.

³⁰⁴M.Flanagan, op.cit., p.185.

³⁰⁵J.McQueen, Electric Beach, p.60.

³⁰⁶J.McQueen, Just Equinox, p.42.

Clearly he has undergone some gothic influence, although the discussion below will show that he is not a fully-fledged graduate of the gothic school.

These post-war writers illustrate well that despite two centuries of residence in the island, the European psyche still has some difficulty in coming to terms with the alien environment. The responses vary from a certain discomfort to a certain horror, but indifference to this environment is impossible.

It would be an error to think that the post-war writers have allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by a sense of gothic horror. Some light has been thrown onto the gothic darkness by a parallel utopian vision which most of them share. Tasmania is typical of the lands of European colonisation in that it did present Europeans with the opportunity to start afresh, to at least imagine that they were in a potential utopia where a new society could be created afresh. Despite its penal beginnings, this element was present in Tasmania. The Tasmanian environment, with a little imagination and a lot of back-breaking labour could sustain the role of an Eden. With its Little England analogies and its deportation of the aboriginal population, white Tasmanians could persuade themselves that nature was beneficent, at least in the settled areas.

Tasmanian utopianism has survived despite of, or perhaps because of, the wretched economic history of the place. This generation grew up at a time of great confidence that the island would be saved from economic misery by "progress and science."³⁰⁷ Science provides much of the foundation of this utopian vision, a vision which can marginalise, deform or even ignore the natural world. Lohrey's family of waterside-workers, great believers in the coming socialist utopia which would extend even to fringe Tasmania, were urban dwellers with little feel for nature,

"...landscape was never an issue."³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷A.Lohrey, The Rest of the World, p.92.

³⁰⁸Ibid., p.93.

The natural world plays no role in The Morality of Gentlemen. It was there to be harnessed and tamed in the interests of humanity, a view now utterly rejected by the green movement. To a large extent, Tasmanians are still in yoke to this view which marginalises nature, this utopian dream of "...revoking history and reinventing the world."³⁰⁹

The utopian vision sees the environment as a tabula rasa, with the opportunity for the new arrivals to reorder affairs. Not surprisingly in an island surrounded by stormy seas and with its craggy coasts, the beach has become something of a symbol of a clean environment waiting for the imprint of mankind. The beach at the end of the street in Hodgman's Skies is a symbol of peace and sanity, a refuge from the pressures and pettiness of an introverted society, that is until its pleasures are destroyed by the inanities of a gaggle of suburban mothers and their babies.³¹⁰ She has little faith that Tasmanians will be able to prevent themselves from destroying the natural beauty which they have inherited.

McQueen is a writer much more interested in the natural world and he shares her cynicism. The beach is always an important backdrop in his fiction, against which the drama of life is played. In The Electric Beach, this drama is a relationship and the course of a life; in Christmas with the White Lady it is the natural refuge of a social outcast. McQueen's native north-west coast, with its ubiquitous beaches and the dominance of Bass Strait, has influenced his utopian view of the "endless beach" in A Just Equinox, where the beach is used as a backdrop to the narrative of Fegan's first love, Sally, in his north-west home town.³¹¹ Later in the novel, the jaded, exhausted and artistically barren Fegan returns home from Sydney in search of artistic inspiration. Depressed and feeling that his life is empty, he looks out on the

³⁰⁹P. Conrad, p.226.

³¹⁰H. Hodgman, op.cit., p.9 and *passim*.

³¹¹J. McQueen, Equinox, p.70.

vista of a "deserted beach", which reflects his emptiness; but also presents him with the opportunity to start again.³¹²

Life reflects art here, as Conrad sojourns around Flinders Island with Derek Smith a man with a utopian streak spoiled by misanthropy, judging his island thus,

"It would be a good place if you could choose the people."³¹³

Smith does not, Conrad sardonically observes, want to civilise Tasmania, but quite the reverse, he wants to save it from civilisation. Tasmanian writers thus face that eternal problem of utopians of how to people their putative paradise, given what seems to be the failings of human nature. Tasmania may present a natural clean slate, but will that utopia ultimately be inhabited by the likes of Lohrey's Moseleys, or by Archbishop Green, or Hodgeman's suburban families, by McQueen's drunks or by Derek Smith's hostile, gun-toting arborophobes?

An essential part of the utopian vision is the picture of Tasmania as an Eden. Utopia requires the impossible dream of human perfectibility. Eden simply requires an imagination which allows one to see the natural world in a certain light. One man's vision of gothic horror could be another's of untouched nature, of Eden. Pybus has observed of the south-west wilderness that,

"Nowadays, the myth of the terrible land has given way to the myth of the pristine wilderness, a land of awesome beauty somehow untainted by human intervention."³¹⁴

Tasmanians are still able to "... play at being Adam in Eden."³¹⁵

They can still pretend that they are beginning anew in an untouched paradise, just as in the early days the naming process reflected this feeling of writing on a clean slate.³¹⁶ For despite the gothic, there is sufficient evidence

³¹²*ibid.*, p.135.

³¹³P.Conrad, *Home*, p.147.

³¹⁴C.Pybus, *Community*, p.79.

³¹⁵P.Conrad, *Down Home*, p.64.

³¹⁶*ibid.*, ps.130-1.

for even the sceptical to at least examine the possibility of a utopia. Even Conrad concedes that the face of Tasmania is Janus-like. The west contains the tragic, gothic face, but "...the east coast smiles"³¹⁷ with its more temperate sunny climate and here it is possible to feel that,

"...you're the first man on earth" in a land where emptiness is "Adam's pleasure, not Satan's penance".³¹⁸

Acceptance of the island's Eden-like qualities may not be immediate, as with Flanagan's *Astro*. Whilst, significantly, working with the Hydro, he fails to appreciate the beauties of Lake Pedder, with wilderness meaning very little to him,

"...those parts of the island were all the same to me; drab and green, silent and empty. There was nothing in them, or nothing that I could see."³¹⁹

After the return of the native, however, he rejoices in the untouched qualities of the land and air.³²⁰ For as Bob Brown observed, Cape Grim monitors the world's cleanest air and of all the rich peoples, Tasmanians are as close to the natural world as any.³²¹

This is the Beautiful Tasmania of the tourist pamphlets; the kind maternal element commented on by Conrad according to Burke's division of nature.³²² Koch's The Doubleman also reflects upon this division of natural Tasmania, as has been mentioned. Gothic Mt. Wellington is matched by Eden-like Mt. Direction and its eastern associations of "...life, mild settlement", representing "an amazing Beyond" of promise in the "mild, kindly east."³²³ The schizophrenic characterisations in this novel, with its duplicate Otherland beneath the surface seem to refer to Tasmania's schizophrenic environment, amongst other things; the Tasmanian microcosm containing both the gothic and utopian elements. An Eden to the east, with the wilderness waiting beyond in the west, a choice between good and evil. This is the opposite of

³¹⁷*Ibid.*, p.49.

³¹⁸*Ibid.*

³¹⁹M. Flanagan, *op.cit.*, p.78.

³²⁰*Ibid.*, p.161.

³²¹B. Brown, *The Rest of the World*, p.256.

³²²P. Conrad, , p.215.

³²³C. Koch, *The Doubleman*, ps.138-9, p.47, p.33.

the green view of Bob Burton who contrasts the untouched valleys of the west and the carnage of the developed east. His choice between good and evil is the reverse of that postulated by Koch and Conrad. They would choose the east; Burton would choose the west.³²⁴

The Tasmanian Eden contains within itself these tensions, this choice, with the knowledge that perdition is just beyond. This is not an Eden of innocence. In Blue Skies the Hobart Art Gallery contains pictures of innocents under blue skies,

"...edging their way cautiously through Eden to destruction...poor safe, white slugs in their alien country in the sunshine."³²⁵

Eden can be destroyed by the actions of Tasmanians as assuredly as Adam and Eve destroyed their paradise; as much by the indifference of Conrad's east coast locals, who when informed of the beauty of the view, replied,

"It'd wanner be!"³²⁶

as by acts of malevolence. Short-sightedness can tip Eden into a social equivalent of the gothic, as in The Comfort of Men when the new independent regime attempts to recreate its own perverted version of an idyllic Eden by outlawing certain practices such as drug-taking and abortion and the reading of unsuitable literature.³²⁷ Any interpretation of nature as kind does not therefore necessarily produce a kind society.

The most recent narrative to emerge in response to the Tasmanian environment is perhaps the most important in our time; the romantic narrative, or the New Romanticism. This is the response of the green movement, which absorbs elements of both the gothic and the utopian.³²⁸ Lohrey has summarised this narrative as being one which accepts the beauty of the landscape; an acceptance of the "specialness" of the Tasmanian environment.³²⁹ This new narrative has absorbed elements from

³²⁴B.Burton in The Rest of the World, p.84.

³²⁵H.Hodgman, op.cit., p.55.

³²⁶P.Conrad, Down Home, p.50.

³²⁷D.Altman, op.cit., ps.242-3.

³²⁸A. Lohrey, The Rest of the World, p.89.

³²⁹Ibid., p.96.

both of the earlier ones.³³⁰ Firstly, it takes the gothic fascination and obsession with the environment as an "...interventionist and even dominant force"³³¹, but stands it on its head, accepting its beauty rather than its darkness. She refers to the gothic view as being,

"The dark side of the Romantic movement."³³²

The romantic movement could thus be said to be inverse-gothic. Secondly, from the utopian narrative, the New Romanticism takes the idea of a good society and the greens have gained considerable success from their urging of the transfer of funds from development to projects of social improvement.³³³ The greens have thus refashioned the earlier notions of the utopian, which had often ignored or marginalised notions of the natural world, as Lohrey's family experiences had shown.³³⁴ Rather, the new refashioned utopianism of the green narrative will, "...use the social to sustain the wilderness and the social will be sustained by it."³³⁵

Thus the green narrative is not entirely "ecocentric", if one accepts that the term implies a divorcing of considerations of the natural world from its human use value. Rather than give the natural world privileges over the social, the New Romanticism is able to balance these two considerations, thus neatly complementing and integrating its two preceding narratives.³³⁶

It has been shown that the difficulty of coming to terms with the Tasmanian environment has exercised the minds of Tasmanians for generations and the green narrative is the contemporary attempt to find some comfort. Some writers, however, refuse to accept that the green narrative is in any way offering a new path. The gothic Conrad, cognisant of the futility of the English analogies, is equally contemptuous of the romantic response.³³⁷ He appears

³³⁰*ibid.*, ps.89-90.

³³¹*ibid.*

³³²*ibid.*, p.90.

³³³*ibid.*, ps.96-7.

³³⁴A.Lohrey, *Morality*, p.93.

³³⁵A.Lohrey, *The Rest of the World*, p.100.

³³⁶*ibid.*, p.96.

³³⁷P.Conrad, *Down Home*, p.144.

to be aware only of the nineteenth century version of romanticism of the style of Gustav Weindorfer, a man determined to live in his environment rather than try to shut it out. Weindorfer practiced "...the romantic cult of communion with nature"³³⁸ and Conrad finds something faintly ridiculous in his accommodation of wild animals in an attempt to recapture "...a peaceable kingdom of old where lion and lamb cohabited."³³⁹ This nineteenth century style romanticism, to Conrad, is an inappropriate cultural import, like the Franklin's temple and he believes that Weindorfer belongs more to the Europe of Caspar David Friedrich than to Tasmania. Conrad has little sympathy for the green response to the Tasmanian environment. His modern greenies are either reclusive misanthropes, like Derek Smith on Flinders Island³⁴⁰, the man who feels "...a prickly affinity with trees, because he has given up on people" or indigenous Crusoes wanting to live in a desert island of the mind, referring to green protestors on the Lemonthyme.³⁴¹ His absence from the island has coincided with the development of the modern green movement, which partially explains his failure to appreciate the dilemma of the recent battles between development and conservation.

The problem has been better understood by Tasmanian writers who have either maintained their residence, or at least maintained a more regular pattern of contact. None is closer to the environmental pulse than McQueen, with his quintessential green novel Hook's Mountain. McQueen has approvingly quoted Bob Brown on the infectious, selfish attitude towards development which most Tasmanians have, with its, "...male, aggressive, Judaeo-Christian, Old Testament" ideology.³⁴² Many Tasmanians, he gloomily concludes, are victims of a "subdue the earth" mentality, so selfish as to be unwilling to prevent the flooding of a unique river because not many

³³⁸ibid.

³³⁹ibid.

³⁴⁰ibid., ps.146-9.

³⁴¹ibid., p.112.

³⁴²J.McQueen in The Rest of the World, p.43.

of them would ever see it.³⁴³ Brown's thinking has obviously influenced him, being the man who had already in the 60's seen Tasmania as "...the world epitome of man's destructiveness."³⁴⁴ Hook has no difficulty in seeing the threat of the woodchippers to "his" mountain and he is determined to thwart it. He does indeed possess an affinity with his environment and his disgust at the replacement of the natural vegetation with the artificiality of pine plantations is the reverse of the gothic horror and fully in accord with the green narrative.³⁴⁵ Hook is Conrad's indigenous Crusoe, alone and content to keep the world at a distance, aside from one uncomfortable attempt at "normality". McQueen's conclusion to the novel is pessimistic, with Hook's demise an inevitable one against the much stronger forces of the developers and the authorities; a suicidal stand which may or may not serve to inspire resistance. Certainly the dramatic, if not unexpected conclusion to Hook's Mountain brings the issue of the Tasmanian environment into sharp focus.

Hook is able to see that "specialness" and uniqueness which others cannot or will not. This is a quality of the romantic narrative. Martin Flanagan's Astro now finds Mt. Wellington fully revealed to him, despite his earlier inability to see its majesty. Now he is able to see it as a,
"...giant creature that had just awoken from the earth. I had never seen it like that before."³⁴⁶

It is no longer the dead, looming, gothic creature of his youth. It now has its own special qualities, a life of its own. It is no longer described as "solemn blue" but as "patrician blue" and its qualities of,
"...liquid green eucalyptus, hazy golden light...knuckles of rock...orange stone columns,"³⁴⁷

now have an appeal to him.

"Whatever was on the mountain top had stood the test of time,"³⁴⁸

³⁴³ibid.

³⁴⁴L. Robson, History, v.2, p.551.

³⁴⁵J. McQueen, Hook's Mountain, p.34 and passim.

³⁴⁶M. Flanagan, op.cit., p.174.

³⁴⁷ibid., p.183.

³⁴⁸ibid., p.184.

indicates that he now finds the antiquity of the place appealing. The novel closes with a walk on Mt. Wellington and a detailed description of the bush on its slopes and of its vitality,

"The bush, I noticed, was a crowd."³⁴⁹

The gothic has been entirely inversed into a fascination and celebration of the environment and its uniqueness. We have passed from one extreme to another. Astro has come to a romantic self-realisation from his former state of,

"...seeing nothing, hearing nothing, knowing nothing, no story or explanation that bound together all the island's living things, past and present."³⁵⁰

He now realises that the island does have its own abiding presence rather than the "silence" he had formerly perceived. He now identifies strongly with his new perceptions.

"There was a whole, a presence that was particular and distinctive to this place but that also extended beyond it and far beyond my knowing."³⁵¹

His brother had earlier urged him to travel down the Franklin, confident that

such a talisman would be sufficient to awaken his consciousness.³⁵² The mountain has now done this. Nothing could be less gothic and more romantic than Astro's metamorphosis.

The sense of place of aboriginal Tasmanians has had some influence on the green narrative and on the European acceptance of the specialness of the Tasmanian environment. Pybus, walking over "her" area of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel and North Bruny can now feel her own "ancestral bonds" extending back to 1829. She even employs aboriginal terminology in describing the area,

"It is my place; the landscape of my dreaming."³⁵³

³⁴⁹*ibid.*, p.196.

³⁵⁰*ibid.*

³⁵¹*ibid.*, p.197.

³⁵²*ibid.*, p.173.

³⁵³C.Pybus, *Community*, p.4.

The old European alienation has been replaced through the green narrative by,

"...a profound and constant source of spiritual renewal."³⁵⁴

The stories contained in this landscape, both aboriginal and European, she states as being critical to her own "self-definition."³⁵⁵ The northern hemisphere is no longer needed to provide any sense of identity. The green narrative trumpets the end of the Conrads and the arrival of the era of the Pybus'; acceptance of the green narrative is the death knell of gothic alienation.

If the green narrative signals the death of association with the northern hemisphere and of Eurocentrism, the greens could still be accused of having swung the pendulum too much in the other direction of Tas-centrism or Tasmanian chauvinism. That former sense of cultural isolation, which so tortured the likes of Conrad and even Koch has passed away in the views of some greens. Lohrey rejects notions of cultural isolation as "colonialist" and the new ecological, green view denies the existence of any "centre" in the world and thus of any sense of "periphery".³⁵⁶ Richard Flanagan agrees, denying the existence of a centre except in the minds of journalists hostile to the green movement, who cannot accept that anything worthwhile can emerge from a periphery,

"God save the earth if it is from Tasmania that the saving will be done,"

was the comment of one of them.³⁵⁷

Marion Wescombe, a seventh generation Tasmanian, whilst not denying the actual existence of centre and periphery, discusses the unequal relationship which has developed between the two, a nexus which she believes the green narrative can break. For contrary to the perceived wisdom, she believes that it is from the peripheral societies that "radical

³⁵⁴Ibid.

³⁵⁵Ibid., p.15.

³⁵⁶A.Lohrey, the World, p.100.

³⁵⁷R.Flanagan, quoting in The Rest of the World, p.132.

discontinuity" and consequent new ideas can come.³⁵⁸ The integrated global economy has rendered redundant ideas of a creative centre and passive, receptive peripheries.³⁵⁹ Pybus, like Wescombe accepts that Tasmania is on a periphery, but that it has nevertheless spawned a revolutionary political vision; the "ecocentric."³⁶⁰ This is the periphery producing the "inevitable" challenge to the industrial state, in her view. "Someone, somewhere on the globe has to show the way,"³⁶¹ according to Richard Flanagan and he has been persuaded that Tasmanians are destined for once to lead. The history of the UTG in the 60's and 70's has led him, in his utopian vision, to see Tasmania as the author of a new kind of post-industrial society. After all, Tasmania, with its infant industries could surely find such a transformation easier than most societies in the western world. This was the green hope for twenty years, as the UTG developed into something altogether more monumental.

The Franklin episode, around which much of The Rest of the World is Watching is based, was a fleeting but instructive moment in Tasmanian history when Tasmanians appeared to be masters of their own destiny. The fact that the river was saved by outside, federal intervention does not damage the confidence of the green writers that the green narrative will lead Tasmania to a new age of self-determination and psychological stability.

Tasmanians who accept the green narrative need no longer suffer any inferiority complex, nor the sense of social retardation and the angst of isolation. They can wish it all away.

If it is accepted that the gothic and utopian visions have been subsumed into the new green narrative and that, at last, a considerable body of Tasmanian thought has come to terms with the Tasmanian environment, then perhaps

³⁵⁸M. Wescombe, in The Rest of the World, p.172.

³⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p.173.

³⁶⁰C. Pybus, in The Rest of the World, p.11.

³⁶¹R. Flanagan, The Rest of the World, p.204.

the Rev. John West's call to Tasmanians, referred to in the Introduction, is finally within sight of realisation.

It could be that Tasmanians are in the latter stages of the struggle to accept an alien environment, a struggle which began at Risdon in 1803.

However, Utopia has not yet arrived and the fiction of Altman and McQuinn serve as reminders that progress is not inevitable. The dawning of a new green narrative could be a false dawn. Altman's reactionary Tasmania is still not beyond the realms of possibility and the life-and-death struggle between Hook and the developers is far from concluded. At the conclusion of this struggle, this generation of writers will know whether their fellow Tasmanians are worthy of West's vision. Whilst the writers have accepted the necessity of coming to terms with Tasmania's uniqueness, the general population carries.

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