

# ‘Our Own Way Back’: Spatial Memory in the Poetry of David Malouf

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If it is true that time is always memorialized not as flow,  
but as memories of experienced places and spaces,  
then history must indeed give way to poetry.  
David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (218)

Some years ago, while living in Brisbane, I went for the day to Noosa, a popular resort town on the Queensland Sunshine Coast. I was sitting at one of the beachside cafés after a swim when a woman at the next table, on holiday from Melbourne, started a conversation with me. She asked me where I was from, and when I said Brisbane, she gave a sort of sensuous moan and replied, ‘I love Brisbane. It’s so . . . *Maloufian*’.

What I mean to emphasise with this anecdote, as with this essay as a whole, is the way in which literature works to produce space, and the perceptions of that space in the minds of its inhabitants, visitors, and those who visit it only through the pages of a book. There can be no doubt that David Malouf has played a central role in the literary production of Brisbane and its surrounding spaces. Through his poetry and novels, Malouf has transformed Brisbane from ‘the most unliterary place in the universe’ (‘Personal Multicultural Biography’ 75) into ‘a place that . . . exist[s] powerfully in the lives of readers in the same way that Dickens’s London does, or Dostoevsky’s Petersburg. That is, as a place fully imagined’ (‘A Writing Life’ 701). This essay is an exploration of the process through which this vital act of imaginative creation has been carried out, a process I will refer to as ‘spatial memory’. ‘Spatial memory’, in Malouf’s work, implies more than the recalling of spaces and places of significance to the author. It is, rather, a process by which these spaces come to be ‘revised’, repeatedly re-inscribed with new meaning and value until they become mythologised spaces. In a published conversation with David Malouf, Paul Carter expresses in relation to Malouf’s writing of *12 Edmondstone Street* the process of what I am calling here ‘spatial memory’:

If I'm interpreting it properly, the process of recollecting what is there occurs precisely through the writing of a place. Only when one has that writing place has one got the autobiographical experience. The autobiographical experience isn't conjured up by going back, in a tourist way, to look at the verandah, the underpinnings of the house: it emerges in the writing of those places, their transformation into, literally, memory places. (143)

Both space and, to a lesser degree, memory, have been discerned by critics as among the major themes of Malouf's body of work thus far (see, for example Dever, Nettelbeck, West, Crouch, Dale and Gilbert, Hanson 76). Yet, the ways in which space and memory intersect with one another in Malouf's writing has been largely ignored. It is my aim to demonstrate that this intersection—the relationship between space and memory, or 'spatial memory'—is central to understanding Malouf's work. Although it may at first appear a purely autobiographical phenomenon, I propose that spatial memory is also revealed as operating on a broad social level in Malouf's work, as part of his longstanding project of redefining Australia as a significant cultural and literary centre to rival the colonial and neo-colonial centres of Britain, Europe and America.

The operation of spatial memory is evident in Malouf's writing in, for example, his exploration of his childhood home in *12 Edmondstone Street*; his memorialisation of the Brisbane of the 1930s, '40s and '50s in *Johnno*, his *Quarterly Essay*, and much of his poetry; and in his repeated revisitation of other specific memory-places throughout his poetry. However, I will primarily limit my focus here to Malouf's poetry, which, although it began his literary career, remains a critically neglected aspect of his work. My discussion of the intersection of space and memory in this poetry will centre on a particular group of poems, which focus on a place of significance to Malouf, and which demonstrate the operation of spatial memory within his writing and philosophy. This place is the region around Moreton Bay, North-East of Brisbane, and especially the area around the smaller Deception Bay, where Malouf spent many childhood holidays. Initially, though, it is necessary to further elucidate Malouf's unique and circularly-layered and interwoven notions of time and space, which forms the basis of the poems themselves.

#### TIME AND SPACE IN MALOUF'S POETRY

For Malouf, time is understood spatially, and space temporally. For this reason, discussions of only one of these dimensions in Malouf's work cannot hope to provide a full picture of his complex cosmology. Within the criticism devoted to themes of time and space in Malouf's work, some of the most perceptive

analyses of these dimensions have been carried out by Karin Hanson and Martin Leer. Hanson explores the twin themes of time and place in a chapter of her book *Sheer Edge: Aspects of Identity in David Malouf's Writing*, observing that 'notions of time and place tend to merge [in Malouf's work] so that time is presented as a spatial domain and vice versa' (73), and illustrating what she refers to as his 'preoccupation with a fusion of temporal and spatial dimensions' (75). Yet, for the majority of her discussion, Hanson neglects the full significance of her own observations here, discussing the recurrent motifs of the gap and the edge as occupying the spatial dimension only. Martin Leer offers a more sustained analysis of the interrelated nature of time and space in Malouf's writing in his relatively short essay, 'At the Edge: Geography and the Imagination in the Work of David Malouf', providing one of the most perceptive assessments of Malouf's work yet achieved. Leer, perhaps more than any other Malouf critic, treats time and space as essentially intertwining dimensions, as they are in Malouf's work, observing that 'Malouf is . . . trying to delineate the relationship between time and space under extreme, but by no means extraordinary conditions . . . [He] is concerned with what one might call the "space-time of the self"' (4).

The act of remembering, of looking back on the past, is for Malouf always a re-presentation of both time and space, as is the recording of this act of 'looking back' through writing, which he conceives of as 'just part, another form, of memory' (Williams, 'Interview' 85). The space-time of the past is understood as being revived within the present space-time, and layered palimpsestically onto it; in fact, Malouf sees the myriad space-times of the past as always already contained within the present space-time, and the act of memory is thus simply a focusing of one's attention and imagination on the present space-time's inevitably layered nature. Any 'single' place is conceived temporally as well as spatially in Malouf's poetry, as constituted by the sediment of past versions of itself. This is evident, for example, in the early poem 'Asphodel' (*Neighbours in a Thicket* 1-2):

Under this real estate—squared street on street  
of split-level houses  
with carport, garden swing—a chain  
of waterlily ponds, arm of sea  
that has long since receded,  
still sleeps under the still sleep of this suburb, showing itself  
in flashes after rain. (1)

This poem cannot be fully understood as describing either a single place or a single time, but rather speaks of a space-time in the present, which is layered with other space-times from the past. In this way, Malouf suggests that space

is partly constructed temporally, through the traces of the past within it. Similarly, memory is always spatial, always of *somewhere* as well as *sometime*.

There is also a sense that, for Malouf, experience in the present is not open to understanding in the same way as is experience from the past revived in the present through memory. Although the present may contain past and future within it, the only means of both understanding the present and of imagining the future is by re-inhabiting the past within the present through the process of memory. As Hanson observes, '[l]ike Proust, Malouf gives the reader the impression that the recreation of experience in retrospect through memory is in fact superior to the original experience' (77). The significance of experience is not available at the time at which it occurs, but only with a certain distance, with what Malouf refers to—in *Fly Away Peter*, and in numerous poems, including the series in his most recent poetry collection, *Typewriter Music*—as 'the long view' (*Fly Away Peter* 2, 117; *Typewriter Music* 36-42, 73). This 'distance' is often both spatial and temporal, further blurring the distinction between these dimensions, as the poem 'Reading Horace Outside Sydney, 1970' (*Neighbours in a Thicket* 50) makes clear: '[t]he distance is deceptive: Sydney glitters invisible/in its holocaust of air, just thirty miles away, in Rome/ two thousand years from here, a goosequill scrapes . . .'

Malouf has commented to interviewer Jim Davidson on the role of distance in his writing, saying:

in some ways it seems to me that I take about fifteen years to catch up with my own experience . . . When I was living in England, Australia did become much clearer to me . . . And I found that I could be a very long way away from the actual experiences—I mean, a long way in time, but often a long way in place as well—before I would work out what it all meant. (287-88)

This time-lag in Malouf's writing results in the layered effect common to much of his poetry, in which a space-time from the past is palimpsestically layered with the present space-time. It also results in a sense in which, after initially moving further from an understanding of, and identification with, a particular space-time in the years immediately following experience, the past paradoxically begins to move closer with subsequent increasing distance. This phenomenon is explored in the early poem 'From a Classroom in the Fifties' (*Bicycle* 6-7), in which the speaker begins to identify with a teacher from his childhood: 'now, at twelve years distance,/we're closer: time grows small/between us' (7). Here, as elsewhere in Malouf's poetry, time and space are understood in a relative manner, as they present themselves to direct perceptual experience. Two distinct times and spaces may be understood as

contiguous, the present looping back on a time and place in the past and forming a circle in which the previous and the present times and places meet at a point. Similarly, the poem 'Intimations' (*Neighbours in a Thicket* 10-11) describes the circular movement of distance and return on a generational level, observing that '[t]he past steps closer as we move/away in our occasions. Voices gather, each year rising/clearer, more familiar' (11). The enjambment of the line 'The past steps closer as we move/away in our occasions' suggests that it is movement itself, or what I have been referring to as 'distance', that is more important than its direction or the specifics of our 'occasions'.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, this process of growing closer to an understanding of the past with distance does not simply occur involuntarily at fifteen years (and some kilometres) remove from events. Rather, distance is merely the precondition for the practice of memory and imagination in which past space-time is actively re-inhabited and reinvented. Further, this process may be repeated any number of times, each time reinvesting a particular past space-time with new meaning and, ideally, achieving new understanding and closeness. The practice of memory, therefore, is an ongoing one, and is always provisional.

#### PLACES OF MEMORY

The ongoing and provisional nature of spatial memory is revealed most clearly when Malouf's 'Bay poems' are examined in sequence. Moreton Bay is the subject of poems over several of Malouf's collections, including 'Glasshouse Mountains' (15-16) and 'This Day Under my Hand' (40-41) in his first solo collection, *Bicycle*; 'At Deception Bay' (15) in *Neighbours in a Thicket*; the important long sequences 'Deception Bay' (16-23) and 'The Crab Feast' (28-37) in *First Things Last*; and the sequence 'Into the Blue' (78-81), which features as the penultimate poem in his most recent collection, *Typewriter Music*.<sup>2</sup> As Malouf ages, and as his work matures, he looks back on the past in an observably changing fashion. Read as a single body, these poems present a larger pattern, which is reproduced in microcosm in the time-loops of individual poems: that of slowly moving closer to an understanding of, and identification with, the space-time of one's past. They also reveal a unique depiction of time as simultaneously linear and circular, presenting the reader with a number of levels on which the workings of memory operate in relation to the space-time of the past. Firstly, there is the linear progression of time between each collection. Secondly, the repeated examination of events and places from approximately 10-15 years prior to the present time of each poem, when they are read in sequence, forms a second chain of linear time following at a distance behind the first, also creating a layering of spaces one upon

another. The third level is that of the recurrent circular loops in space-time, as past times and places first recede and then grow closer again in comprehension and identification with age and experience. Finally, these same events and places, the same loops in space-time, are revisited not only once, but again and again in subsequent collections, providing yet further layers in both the present of each poem and in Malouf's body of work as a whole, as well as creating a sense of retroactive revision as the present repeatedly throws new light and understanding on the same scenes from the past. Hanson writes of an 'intricate double time-perspective' in Malouf's work (71). However, I would characterise his time-perspective as multiple rather than simply double.

In keeping with the pattern established over Malouf's body of poetry as a whole, it is first necessary to achieve a certain distance from a particular space-time from the past before it begins to move closer towards imaginative understanding. The 'Bay poems' follow this pattern, beginning with the perspective of distance, both temporal and geographic, in the early poem 'This Day Under my Hand', and moving slowly towards complete imaginative re-inhabitation in 'The Crab Feast' and 'Into the Blue'. In 'This Day Under my Hand', the speaker writes from the distance of another continent, as he signs over his ownership of a family beach-house, purchased in his name, to his sister:

. . . Storm-lanterns. Tigermoths  
at the wire-screen door. Slow fan  
of the light at Cowan Cowan.  
The cold Pacific banging—  
an open gate. Australia  
hitched like a water-tank  
to the back veranda, all night  
tugging at our sleep. . .

A world away, and nothing  
to do with me: shearwater  
gulls, the sundrenched crevice  
where lobsters crawl, sharp salt  
stinging the flesh like bees,  
working its slow way into  
the cracks in iron, laying  
its white crust on the skin.

Now let it go, my foothold  
on a continent! . . . (40-41)

Although the relationship between the speaker and this remembered space, at the present moment of the poem, is one of distance, it appears to be on the point of turning. There is a sense of ambivalence in the speaker's feeling for

the remembered place: on the one hand, he seems to care little for what he has left behind and feels that he has moved ‘a world away’ psychologically as well as physically and temporally; on the other hand though, this indifference—‘nothing to do with me’—has a false air, as though he is trying somewhat vainly to convince himself of his lack of attachment to the remembered place. The exquisite detail with which he recalls this place belies his indifference, creating a sense of wistful, almost nostalgic contemplation of what has been let go. Nonetheless, the speaker signs his name, the act seeming to represent a symbolic relinquishment not only of this particular place, but of a sense of belonging to Australia as a whole. The ‘open gate’ of the Pacific has been the speaker’s escape-route from the hulking presence of ‘Australia’, which looms behind this edge space, and he seems determined to shut it now behind him. Yet we cannot quite believe that the presence of this remembered place will not continue to ‘tug’ at the speaker’s sleep.

Indeed, this suspicion is confirmed as, in his next collection *Neighbours in a Thicket*, in the poem ‘At Deception Bay’ (15), the speaker has begun the characteristic movement towards an imaginative re-inhabitation and poetic reappraisal of the significant place and its attendant memories:

. . . I come back here after twenty years, and no  
 particle of me  
 but has suffered change. I am  
 not the same – though nothing changes here: wood  
 rots in the softwood pier, cyclones carry  
 salt into foreshore gardens, into nail-holes and the nails  
 go brittle, blacken, snap. We are  
 renewed. On a whitewood door-frame pencil marks  
 measure inch by inch  
 how we grow away, but not by what sideways steps and indirections  
 we find our way back.

Here, although there is still a sense of not belonging, of having shed every cell of the child who once measured his growth against the door-frame, there is also a sense of renewed identification. The speaker, turning towards memories of the past and the place in which they are made physical, realises that he now understands the movement away, but not the more recent movement, by ‘sideways steps and indirections’, back. Whether this is a physical return to place—‘I come back’—or a figurative return through memory and writing, is of little consequence. The effect of the return is a recognition of the significance of this particular place and its shaping impact on the speaker’s imagination. The poem’s ending features a profusion of images associated with the Bay which recur throughout Malouf’s poetic oeuvre—mud crabs and stars; the

shift from the microscopic to the macrocosmic; deep time; circular and interconnective imagery—contributing to the sense of the profound influence of this poetic environment. This poem is also significant in its blurring of the distinction between the spatial and temporal. The record of the speaker's movement away, for example, is exhibited in physical form by the growth lines of the door-frame, representing a spatialised, slow accrual of time and memory like the strata of rock or the rings in a tree.

Malouf's further treatment of the Bay in *First Things Last* consists of two fairly long poem series; 'Deception Bay' (16-23) comprises eight short lyrics, and 'The Crab Feast' ten (28-37). Even within this one collection, there is an evident development in the use of past memories of this place. 'Deception Bay' explores, among many things, the process of forgetting that occurs after a great deal of time has passed:

## II

Out there . . .  
 . . . moonlit houses  
 unmoored, slip off into  
 fog, darkness drops  
 from the pines. It is night,  
 is it? that comes on,  
 or smoke, or forgetting.  
 . . . When I go  
 back, turning  
 a pine cone in my greatcoat  
 pocket, patches  
 of dark have grown all over  
 so much of it, so many  
 places can't be entered.  
 . . . as in  
 a room at the back  
 of my head coaldust settles  
 on furniture, on faces:  
*No. I don't know you.* (16-17)

Despite the fact that 'the house is no longer there' (16), and that the speaker is losing the ability to recall its details, 'Deception Bay' suggests that a remembered place may move through forgetting to be re-inhabited in a purely imaginative manner:

I go back  
 and the chairs now are set  
 on four sides of a table



that has long since been assumed  
 as smoke from a woodpile.  
 The chairs, just settling out  
 of their cloud, tilt a little,

the four legs not quite grounded  
 – yes now, as I bring them  
 down. It's a beginning  
 in the ashen rain. (17)

Ultimately, Malouf suggests, it does not matter that these times and places from childhood are gone, or their precise details forgotten. Their absence makes way for a new beginning, and a realisation that, in Malouf's words, 'places become real . . . not as embodiments of fact but through invention, as imaginary places that . . . if they are created with sufficient immediacy . . . will in the end replace the real one; or perhaps live as its more convincing double' ('A Writing Life' 702).

Malouf's next poem-series about the Bay, the exquisite 'The Crab Feast' (*FTL* 28-37), takes the process yet one step further, depicting what Thomas Shapcott describes as the 'erotically rich but strictly cerebral world' of Malouf's now complete imaginative inhabitation of the remembered place. As the poem tells us in its opening lines, 'there is no getting closer/than this' (28); the physical consumption of the crab—the symbol of the Bay common to each of the earlier poems—leads to a deep assimilation of the significant place within the speaker:

When the shell  
 cracked there was nothing  
 between us . . .  
 . . . I go down  
 under mangrove roots and berries, under the moon's  
 ashes; it is cool  
 down there. I always knew that there was more  
 to the Bay than its glitters,  
 knew if you existed  
 I could also  
 enter it; I'd caught so deeply all  
 your habits, knowing the ways  
 we differ I'd come to think we must be one. (28)

The place is no longer simply the Bay of Malouf's childhood holidays, but a mythologised space. It represents the point of meeting, the climax of a circular movement made repeatedly over many years, from childhood experience, through absence, revisitation, memory, forgetting, and recreation, towards

complete imaginative symbiosis and understanding. 'The Crab Feast' is written from the space of Malouf's mature and fully-realised poetic imagination, and remains one of his most significant works.

Yet, as suggested, the process of moving towards understanding and imaginative inhabitation of place through memory is always ongoing and provisional, and it is continued in Malouf's most recent collection, in the sequence 'Into the Blue' (*TM* 78-81):

Jangling in my head the blue night-music  
of the Bay. Our limbs  
emerged out of its salt.

When the moon blazed a track  
across it we were tempted. Only  
our breath, only our need  
for the next breath constrained us.

It was our other selves  
that tried it,  
in sleep. And arrived  
safely. And never did  
get back. (78)

The Bay here is the very source of imagination and poetry, which has 'emerged out of its salt'. It is not merely a space-time from the past that can be repeatedly revisited, but a mythical space-time in which some part of the poet always resides, never to 'get back'.

The Bay of 'Into the Blue' and 'The Crab Feast' has become, through its repeated reappraisals in Malouf's mind and poetry, a symbol for the circularity of time itself, the transcendence of a conventional understanding of time, space, memory, and the unfolding of the universe. It represents a space of belonging that is inhabited imaginatively, through memory and dreams, rather than physically, and thus it may be inhabited continuously, regardless of distance or movement. These poems demonstrate the centrality of memory in Malouf's poetics and the intricacy of his conception of memory's intersection with space. Read in this light, Malouf's 'Bay' poems also represent a documentation of the very *process* of spatial memory itself.

#### SPATIAL MEMORY AS SOCIAL MEMORY

I have so far been discussing the role of spatial memory in Malouf's poetry on an individual level. In conclusion, I would like to broaden the scope of this discussion somewhat, and to consider briefly the potential implications of examining these poems on the level of social, rather than individual memory.

Although the relationship between individual and collective memory is somewhat fraught territory,<sup>3</sup> it is my contention that Malouf sees himself quite distinctly as occupying a position, as a writer, in which the experiences he memorialises are representative of the experiences of a wider community, or a number of communities, which he identifies himself as belonging to. Thus (and this is perhaps the case for all writers who transform fragments of their own memories into artefacts that become part of the collective memory of the cultures and eras in which they have lived), his writing represents both individual and collective memory simultaneously. These multiple 'collective identities' may include a particular generation; the amorphous group of people designated as 'Australians', 'Queenslanders' or 'Brisbanites'; people descended from migrant heritage; temporary expatriates and travelers; or members of a post-settler-colonial society characterised by a certain ambivalent relationship to their country of birth, and by what Malouf perceives as a gap between the environment and the language imported into this environment. Malouf has stated that 'cultures and societies do finally have to come to terms with all their experience and one of the ways of coming to terms with that is through what's written about the experience' (Strauss, 'Interview' 130).

On this broader social level then, the poems already discussed may be read in terms not only of individual, but also of social memory. The evolving relationship with the Bay, for example, may be read as metonymic of the speaker's relationship with Australian space in general, and of the process of coming slowly to recognise what Malouf has called 'the exotic at home' ('Memoir: The Exotic at Home'). The same circular pattern, when read on this level, is indicative of what Malouf views as a characteristic movement of his generation: that of distance, return, and imaginative revision of 'Australia'. Malouf has expressed his sense that his own experience is broadly representative of a particular section of the Australian population, an 'Australian generation who went away and came back' (Tipping, 'Interview' 42). He explains, '[i]t was important for me that I should have gone away. It put me out of Australia long enough for me to feel that I had to go back and look at it anew' (Tipping, 'Interview' 42). However, this movement of expatriation and return is also possible on a psychological and emotional, as well as on a literal level, and the poems may thus be read as detailing simply the early rejection and later appreciation, based on increased understanding, of one's 'home place'.

When many of Malouf's early poems were written, some while he was living and traveling in England and Europe between 1959-69, they were a product of his focus on the perceived provinciality of Australia when compared with the 'culture' and 'history' everywhere evident in Europe, and the Australian spaces they explore are thus always held in tension with these 'other' spaces. These

poems, as Leigh Dale and Helen Gilbert have observed, represent a postcolonial project not so much of provincialising Europe, but of 'resisting imperial narratives . . . through the refiguring of metaphors of place, and the analyses of the relations between place, language and subjectivity' (85) or, in Malouf's words, of 'resisting the nostalgia for a life lived more fully elsewhere' ('Personal Multicultural Biography' 74-75). In the later 'Bay poems', after the journey through movement and memorial return, the speaker is no longer scornful of, or embarrassed by, this portion of the world he knows better than any other:

No I am not ashamed  
of our likeness, of what is in it that betrays me,  
a smell of salt  
backwaters, a native  
grasp on the gist  
of things, our local patch  
of not-quite-solid earth from which the vast swing of the sky  
is trackable. ('Crab Feast', *FTL* 36)

Here again, on a broader cultural level as well as on an individual level, the understanding of the former colony as a cultural centre in its own right, and as a worthy subject of literature, appears to be gained only with distance, through memory. Furthermore, in this process, writing itself is revealed as a form of memory, and the act of writing/remembering experience is in fact a means, as well as a result, of investing the remembered place with new authenticity and significance.

It is in his project of investing Australian space with a sense of literary and cultural value, when compared with the colonial and neo-colonial centres of Britain, Europe and America, that much of Malouf's strength as a postcolonial writer lies. Today, although the perception of England as the cultural centre where life is lived more fully may not be as marked as it was in Malouf's early years, it is arguable that his literary remapping of cosmopolitan centre and antipodean periphery remains pertinent in the context of Australia's current relationship with the neo-colonial power of the United States, which looms large as a dominant centre of literary, academic, and popular cultural production. Malouf's task now, as previously, 'is to persuade people here that their experience is authentic and valid without condition, and that writing about it is absolutely authentic too—it doesn't have to appeal to the Americans or the English, they don't have to put their stamp of approval on it' (Baker, 'Interview' 261).

For Malouf, one of the fundamental tasks of one's life, regardless of where one is born, is to deeply and imaginatively inhabit the places in which one

finds oneself— ‘to remap the world so that wherever you happen to be is the centre’ (‘A Writing Life’ 702)—while recognising that they, like all places, are essentially imagined. The sensuous, bodily experience of the Brisbane and Moreton Bay regions, with their particular qualities of light, geography, weather, architecture, and language, have occupied Malouf throughout his career, and continue to do so, and his exquisite poetry of the Deception Bay region offers us a blueprint for imaginative dwelling through the process of spatial memory. These poems gently encourage the reader to reconsider their own relationship to place, to cast their minds back and to recognise the uncharted, mythic potential in the places that, though they may seem provincial, have shaped our minds and imaginations, to come to more fully understand that ‘local patch/of not quite solid earth from which the vast swing of the sky/is trackable’ (‘Crab Feast’, *FTL* 36). It is out of this space that some of Malouf’s most important and most intricately beautiful poetry is written, and it is this place that his poetry invites us to inhabit with him.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Interestingly, a number of critics have pointed to the notion of ‘exile’ as important to Malouf’s work (See, in particular, the work of Samar Attar on Malouf, as well as West, Bishop, and Hanson 78-9). Malouf himself has commented that he does not identify with this casting of himself as ‘exiled’ (see Daniel n.p.), yet it is clearly a recurring theme in the extant criticism. Russell West, for example, argues that, for Malouf, ‘exile is the only possible mode of relationship to the places of the past’ (86), and Hanson asserts that ‘images of place and time are used to create a mythic universal geography in which “exile”, factual and/or symbolic, becomes a prerequisite for identity and insight’ (78-79). It is my contention that what these critics are enunciating may be similar to what I have been discussing above, namely that, in Malouf’s writing, experience can only be understood from a position of distance, both temporally and spatially. However, I would suggest that what I have been referring to as ‘distance’ may be a more appropriate way of conceptualising such patterns in Malouf’s work. ‘Distance’ does not bring with it the same connotations of lack of agency as does ‘exile’, and is able to account for the temporal as well as the spatial separation that seems indeed, as West observes, to be Malouf’s most common ‘mode of relationship to the places of the past’ (West 86).
- <sup>2</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Bicycle*; *NIT*; *FTL*; and *TM* respectively.
- <sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the problematic conflation of autobiographical and collective memory within the discipline of contemporary memory studies, see section II ‘Between Individual and Collective’, in Wulf Kansteiner’s seminal essay ‘Finding Meaning in Memory’.

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