

# DAVID MALOUF AND THE POETICS OF POSSIBILITY

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In *The Great World* when Mr Warrender rises to make a speech at Vic and Ellie's wedding, he recites instead, to surprise and some consternation, a poem of his own. This event marks his own rite of passage from an incompetent businessman into the writer he was meant to be. But the poem also captures the place of poetry, and in a wider sense the function of all art and literature in the human imagination:

Beyond never-death into ever after, being  
In love with what is always out of reach:  
The all, the ever-immortal and undying  
Word beyond word that breathes through mortal speech. (236)

The line 'in love with what is always out of reach' describes the function of literature, but more specifically describes the central function of poetry in Malouf's work. By poetry I mean that created moment, either in narrative or verse, when image or word captures us, however fleetingly, and slows us down long enough to receive a vision of something beyond the boundaries of our lives. In Malouf these are the boundaries of our imagination, but they are also the boundaries of culture, the boundaries of language, the limits around our way of being in the world. The 'word beyond word' that breathes through mortal speech is the word that poetry is designed to speak. But in Malouf it is always a word that breathes possibility, the possibility of a different world.

This possibility is not always a matter of grand visionary reach, but, as the speaker at Mr Warrender's funeral explains, poetry captures

all those unique and repeatable events, the little sacraments of daily existence, movements of the heart and intimations of the close but inexpressible grandeur and terror of things, that is our *other* history, the one that goes on, in a quiet way, under the noise and chatter of events and is the major part of what happens each day in the life of the planet, and has been from the very beginning. (284)

The horizon of the possible, then, is not just a matter of perceiving what lies beyond our minds or imaginations, but of perceiving that which is hidden to them in the teeming ordinariness of life:

To find words for *that*; to make glow with significance what is usually unseen, and unspoken too—that, when it occurs, is what binds us all, since it speaks immediately out of the centre of each one of us; giving shape to what we too have experienced and did not till then have words for, though as soon as they are spoken we know them as our own. (284)

David Malouf's novels, while finding the words for 'the grandeur and terror of things' also explore the ways in which art and literature continually push the boundaries of our understanding, the limits of our ability to imagine a different world, whether it is a world of

the future, a world that might be possible, or the same world magically revealed—our *other* history. It is this constant attention to the permeability of boundaries that makes Malouf's writing utopian.

The term 'utopia' is bound to be misunderstood since the concept has become so identified with the vainly fanciful, with wishful thinking, and even, in the twentieth century, with totalitarian dystopias. Utopia is an illusion. And yet, in a sense illusion is exactly what literature strives to produce. For the most important utopian theorist of the twentieth century, Ernst Bloch, art and literature are inherently utopian because their *raison d'être* is the imaging of a different world. Literature 'is utopia in the very precise sense that its connection to this reality is like that of fulfillment to lack'; its temporal point of reference is the future, and for Bloch 'literary activity becomes a special form of dream work' (Ueding 7, 10, cited in Zipes xxxiii). Bloch argues that signs of the not-yet-conscious are found primarily in daydreams, where individuals have presentiments of what they lack, what they need, what they want, and what they hope to find. In the same way art and literature are the means through which human beings form themselves, conceive their questions about themselves, and portray the possibility of attaining their objectives. Daydreams by themselves remain unproductive. But art and literature that has anything to say to people, by denying ideology's hold over their imagination, is utopian.

In Bloch's theory the utopian quality of a work of art is determined by its *Vor-Schein* or anticipatory illumination. This 'anticipation' is not only in terms of time—an illumination of the future—but also of the possibility of different ways of being human. Bloch draws upon Kant and Hegel to conceptualise *Vor-Schein*. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant makes an important distinction between appearance and illusion: only appearance forms the object of knowledge because it is constituted, in part, of our forms of space and time. Illusion, on the other hand, arises from reason's endeavour to go beyond the given bounds of our experience. While illusion is self-deceiving it could point the way in which one might extend the bounds of experience. In poetry, this means, paradoxically, that the illusory might be an image of the possible, however impossible it may seem. For Hegel there is a dialectic between appearance and illusion: the essence of a being is not only illusory as it appears but is also illuminated through a shining (*Scheinen*) that allows the essence of being to appear. Thus 'Illusion is moved through anticipatory illumination to a realizable future that is reachable no matter how far away' (Schmidt 1986: 126-27, cited in Zipes xxxv).

*The Great World* tests the boundaries of reality by exploring the very extremity of existence, a point, reached by those in the POW camp, at which the body assumes a life of its own. The question the novel explores is: what lies beyond that extremity, what lies beyond the boundary of the body? The novel confirms the power of the human mind to imagine the future and of literature, specifically poetry, to apprehend it. But in this exploration the novel demonstrates powerfully just how literature can see beyond the boundary of the ordinary human condition, to perceive not simply the future but the imaginative potential, the spiritual excess of human life.

Even before the POW camp Digger senses this potentiality beyond his mother's reality, which is 'a hunger he had . . . for something that began where her reality, however clear and graspable it was, left off. Something he knew existed because he had already got glimpses of it . . .' (27-28). Digger is a dreamer, but he knows the power of language to grasp what appears ungraspable: 'Coming to the edge of some extraordinary possibility, he would let himself claim it, put it into words; if he didn't, the force of it, huge and expanding in his head,

might make him go flying off from the centre of himself' (30). By suggesting that one is able to claim such an extraordinary possibility, affirming that it is always within reach of human consciousness, that it can be put into words, the anticipatory function of literature is to produce hope in the Not-Yet. This doesn't mean, of course that literary works are inevitably optimistic or even hopeful, but that their orientation to the future gives shape to the possibilities conceived in the human imagination.

According to Bloch, it is decisive for a work of art to have an *Überschuss* or surplus for it to be truly utopian. Literally translated, *Überschuss* means overshoot. For Bloch, the artist tries to go beyond himself or herself in projecting subjective wishes and needs, and thus the creation contains not only what the artist means but more—the surplus that continues to hold meaning for us today because of its *Vor-Schein* (Zipes xxxvi). For poetry, *Überschuss* is equivalent to being 'in love with what is always out of reach.' What makes literature utopian is its capacity to allow that which is out of reach '*schein*' through the object of perception: it is the capacity to engage the mystery of things.

This is perhaps why so much of Malouf's writing is given from the viewpoint of youth because this is the time when the wonder and the mystery of the world are most evident. For literature, as for the young, the world is continually coming into being. Through the Child in *An Imaginary Life* and Gemmy in *Remembering Babylon*, youth is the agency for the coming into being of a totally different world. The connection between youth and the literary imagination is first found in *Child's Play*, in which a young terrorist planning the assassination of a writer immerses himself in the life's work of his object. It is because of 'the savage and beautiful intensity, the impersonal truthfulness, of a child at play, that I read and re-read the "Work in Progress"' (90). This 'beautiful intensity, the impersonal truthfulness, of a child at play' is the aim, perhaps, of all writing.

The world comes to the young as a succession of images, impressions, and above all stories. Youth manifests for Malouf, in the most direct way, the capacity of writing to illuminate the wonder and mystery of the world. But this isn't all, for everything lies in the future for the young. The young Malouf in 'The Kyogle Line' is eager to catch the train across the border to Sydney: 'What I was hungry for was some proof that the world was as varied as I wanted it to be; that somewhere, on the far side of what I knew, difference began, and that the point could be clearly recognised' (*12 Edmondstone Street* 127). In one sense literature sees the world from the standpoint of youth, sees it filled with wonder, pregnant with possibility, eager to push the boundaries. The stories we tell give shape to the world. For Malouf the literary imagination is always out ahead of the waking consciousness. And from this place it finds words for the wonder of the world.

In *An Imaginary Life*, Ovid sees the evolution of man as a process of inhabiting the imagination that goes out ahead of the progress of life. This is in part a process of creating the place that will contain our transformed selves (22-23). But Ovid's revelation is fundamentally the revelation of all that the imagination is capable of: 'But we are free after all. We are bound not by the laws of our nature but by the ways we can imagine ourselves breaking out of those laws without doing violence to our essential being. We are free to transcend ourselves. If we have the imagination for it' (62). Ovid's imagination leads him to a different way of being, through the language of the Child. We can transcend ourselves if we have the imagination for it.

The striking thing is that possibility is the very condition for creativity itself, even at a material level in the objects we use to create, as Frank Harland discovers when faced with a blank page:

Whiteness.

That alone was enough to take your breath away. It was the source of all possibility, an infinity of objects and occasions.

Unsteadily, but with a steady hand, he intervened, he acted; and with his eye on the real object he was about to capture, made a line—one clear stroke, slightly curved.

The page was transformed. (*Harland's* 29)

This captures the magical possibilities for transformation offered by art, beginning with a simple line on a white page. Frank's subsequent experience of the power of creation is as clear a vision of utopian possibility as anything in the literature.

The page and his mind could become one, and what they contained was the infinite plenitude of things that was Creation, in which all things were equal; their equality, and the possibility of their springing into immediate existence, guaranteed by his recognition of them and by the space he had prepared and would let them fill. (30)

### The Radiance of Objects

The almost infinite possibilities presented by the blank page reveal the challenge to the artist to capture the endless potentiality of objects themselves. Even the simplest objects are imbued with mystery, with an inner light. As an eleven-year-old Frank Harland discovers, 'The light was inside things. . . . It was as if he had got to the other side of things. It was the quality of his seeing that was changed. Every tree now started out of the earth as a separate object newly made; not a peach tree, one of a row, but *this* tree and no other . . . ' (14). For the artist it is the very *thisness* that is most mysterious. The role of the artist is both *Scheinen* and *Vor-Schein*—both to let the essence of things, the light that comes from inside them, shine out; and to anticipate through that shining the almost infinite possibilities of the tangible world. Malouf sees in Frank Harland and perhaps in all art the capacity to reveal the horizon of the world in simple objects. Certainly this is a characteristic of his own writing.

Malouf is fascinated by ordinary objects, first because they are luminous with possibility, and second because they disrupt our myth of the linearity of time. Objects lead us into the past as well as the future:

It is in a changed aspect of time that we recognise them, as if the substance of it—a denseness that prevented us from looking forward or too far back—had cleared at last. We see these objects and ourselves as co-existent, in the very moment of their first stepping out into their own being and in every instant now of their long pilgrimage towards us, in which they have gathered the fingerprints of their most casual users and the ghostly but still powerful presence of the lives they served. (*Antipodes* 124)

Tangible things, the mundane things that make up a place—whether it is a childhood home or the landscape—have a luminosity that connects past and future. In Malouf’s descriptions of his home in Edmondstone Street, in both *Johnno* and *12 Edmondstone Street*, ordinary objects are radiant with memory. But this doesn’t make them simply historical, they also radiate possibility, a possibility that is captured and embellished by the writer’s re-presentation of them.

This is perhaps why Malouf is fascinated with photography, because it appears to capture so effortlessly the presence that poetry seeks to reveal. In *Fly Away Peter*, Imogen Harcourt, mourning Jim Saddler’s death in the war, looks at a photo of a sandpiper and is reminded of the intensity of his presence as he had studied the photo:

It was that intense focus of his whole being, it’s *me*, Jim Saddler, that struck her with grief, but was also the thing – and not simply as an image either—that endured. That in itself. . . . That is what life meant, a unique presence, and it was essential in every creature . . . . A life wasn’t *for* anything. It simply was. (132)

It is this presence, a presence that exists beyond language, and indeed beyond interpretation, perhaps even beyond memory, that poetry seeks. When the writing captures those moments it leads us to what might be the ultimate goal of literature: knowledge beyond words—presence (Gumbrecht). Presence is the access to a form of ‘knowing beyond meaning,’ of knowing beyond interpretation (Ashcroft 2014).

In Malouf’s writing we get the sense that while poetry provides a supreme access to presence, it is available to all of us in our everyday lives, one of the dimensions of consciousness that poetry in its ‘love for what is out of reach’ makes more accessible. In *Remembering Babylon* Jock McIvor reaches a point at which he might have broken through to a form of knowing the country, a knowledge beyond words. Wading through the grass he sees there tips beaded with green, and he feels a surprising lightness of being ‘like a form of knowledge he had broken through to. It was unnameable, which disturbed him, but was also exhilarating; for a moment he was entirely happy’ (107).

Presence, whether of the word, the object, the human body or the photograph, is ultimately the way in which we seek a meaning beyond the merely hermeneutic. But it is also how we deal with the flow of time. Still in her grief for Jim, Imogen, in *Fly Away Peter*, sees a youth surfing, ‘riding on the water’:

It was new. So many things were new. Everything changed. The past would not hold and could not be held. One day soon, she might make a photograph of this new thing. To catch its moment, its brilliant balance up there, of movement and stillness, of tense energy and ease—that would be something. (133-34)

This image of flight and flow is the image of the new, of possibility. The photograph, in its capacity to catch the ‘brilliant balance’ between movement and stillness, captures the balance between past and future, a balance that is itself Presence.

### Language and Presence

The object or the moment has its most powerful presence in stillness and silence, so it is not surprising that language attracts so much attention in Malouf’s work. The ambivalence of

poetic language lies in its constant negotiation with silence, with presence. This in turn is the medium of its utopian potentiality. For French poet Yves Bonnefoy this aspiration towards presence is sacred, leading him to describe poetry as a ‘theology of the earth’:

Poetry is what attaches itself . . . to what cannot be designated by a word of language; and this because what is beyond designation is an intensity, a plenitude we need to remember. The One, Presence—poetry can ‘think’ of them in writing, . . . and thus open up something like a field for the unknown dwelling beyond. (Bonnefoy 198)

Despite Malouf’s avowed secularism, this aspiration towards the ‘intensity’ and ‘plenitude,’ the horizon of the possible, is a gesture towards the sacred.

The horizon of the possible is a feature of mundane life. In the story ‘Jacko’s Reach’ in *Dream Stuff*, Jacko’s is the last pocket of scrub in the speaker’s town that has been ‘won for progress’ (*Dream Stuff* 93), the last place to succumb to the tawdry benefits of development. But by being built on it ‘will enter at last into what a century and more has already prepared it for, the dimension of the symbolic’ (99). Jacko’s will remain

[a]s a code-word for something so intimate it can never be revealed, an area of experience, even if it is deeply forgotten, where we still move in groups together, and touch, and glow, and spring apart laughing at the electric spark. There has to be some place where that is possible.

If there is only one wild acre somewhere we will make that the place. If they take it away we will preserve it in our head. If there is no such place we will invent it. That’s the way we are. (99-100)

The name alone can secure a place in the imagination that remains protected from the destruction of its possibilities. It will be a ‘wild place’ not locked down by predictability, or ‘development.’

In the power of the name Malouf condenses poetry to its most basic elements. Paradoxically, the *name* signifies the horizon of the *unnamable*. This explains the impact on Phillip as he watches Frank Harland signing a painting. Watching the painstaking way in which Frank goes about it, his signature ‘marking so clearly the claim of self. I immediately accorded him, as an artist, my wholehearted belief’ (*Harland’s* 59). The name does more than ascribe provenance, it is impregnated with all that the painting suggests, and in this sense gestures to that presence that cannot be reduced to a simple meaning.

In *An Imaginary Life*, for Ovid a promise of freedom to enter his real self comes with his discovery of a poppy during his exile at the ends of the earth. An epiphany in the name itself: ‘Poppy.’ The poppy is nothing less than the beginning of his transformation. ‘All my life till now has been wasted. I had to enter the silence to find a password that would release me from my own life’ (26). The real magic of words, the real power of poetry is to assist us to enter the silence of presence, which radiates with the potentiality of language. By engaging presence we are able to free ourselves from our learned selves. And nothing surpasses poetry in this quest.

In entering the silence Ovid experiences the freedom to transcend himself, by opening himself to a different existence. He wants to free the Child ‘into some clearer body’ (71) by teaching him language. But despite teaching him Getae rather than Latin, his impulse is a paradoxical extension of the imperial control that has exiled him (Ashcroft 1994). Yet he discovers instead the language of the child, which is not just a different language but a different way of being in the world, and in so doing discovers that this is his true destination, the place he has been seeking: ‘I belong to this place now. I have made it mine. I am entering the dimensions of my self’ (90).

As Ovid learns the Child’s language, he sees him mimicking a bird, and ‘entering into the mysterious life of its language, becomes, for a moment, the creature itself, so that to my eyes he seems miraculously transformed’ (86). In *becoming* the animal he mimics, the Child is opening Ovid’s eyes to the magic of presence, to a way of being beyond referentiality. The real test of the utopian potential of literature is its capacity to induct the reader into a different way of seeing the world. However difficult, it is not impossible to imagine a world in which we think ‘I am thundering’ or ‘I am raining’—a world in which the activity of nature exists within our consciousness. The imagination is released by language but not circumscribed by it.

In this way poetry attaches itself to what cannot be designated by a word of language, to what cannot be pinned down by meaning. What Malouf is suggesting here is that presence, the horizon of silence that beckons to language, is the constant aspiration of poetry. But this aspiration is an expression of the frequent encounters with such fleeting moments by the human consciousness. The capacity to arrest us, slow us down long enough to enter these moments, to ponder their mystery and to recognise our access to an inexplicable presence—this is the essence of poetry.

### **Australian Futures**

For all the many times the future is mentioned in Malouf’s writing, it is not necessarily imbued with utopian potentiality. It is a phenomenon of considerable fascination in the novels but often for the simple fact that it exists. For instance, the very idea of a future in the POW camp in *The Great World* is itself a matter of wonder. Vic sees his future self come towards him and ‘He had no sooner realised this than the figure was on him and he felt his body open and let it through’ (144). Later in life he imagines himself back as a nine-year-old boy with his future before him.

The capacity to subvert time through objects or in moments of epiphany, the constant subversion of the linearity of time recurs in the writing, but one of the most fascinating aspects of Malouf’s disruption of time emerges from his fascination with Australia—the prophetic vision of *what might have been*. Malouf is fascinated with the allegory of settlement, of a society coming face to face with the strangeness and wonder of its own out-of-place-ness. But for all the fears, ambitions, hatreds, stupidities and blindness that characterise the business of colonial settlement, what might Australia have become? What might it have become if people had *seen* the place differently, if they had learned a different way of being in the world?

This didn’t happen because, by putting down roots in a place way across the other side of the world, people seek what Digger’s mother had sought—to find a place that you could name as your own. In this simple desire of a British orphan lie the deep issues of settlement: of

occupying, fencing, naming a place you could call your own, with no thought of the original owners. This absence is the ghostlike reality that haunts all Malouf's settlers. In a way they are all, like Digger's mother, orphans in search of a named place. When she arrives at *Keen's Crossing* she discovers that it isn't much, certainly not what you'd expect of a place named on the map, but its stillness at least gave you time to breathe (*Great World* 16). The important thing was that: 'They belonged here for all time now, it was marked with their name. They could see it on a map if they liked: a dotted line leading away from the highway; at the end of it a dot marking the store; beside that, in italics, *Keen's Crossing*' (20). Even Digger, who seems to be little affected by ownership, discovers a new meaning in the name when he returns from war. 'So there it was: his own name, Keen, making an appearance in the great world' (197-98).

The name of Frank Harland's ancestral land—Killarney—speaks volumes of the function of colonial naming. 'Harlands are brought up on the story of how they won and then lost the land' (3):

Possession was easy. One brief bloody encounter established the white man's power and it was soon made official with the white man's law. Subsequent occasions, if less glorious, are still recounted with Irish pride in the extravagance of their folly. Within a generation the Harlands had squandered most of what they owned and were reduced to day-labouring for others; or, like young Clem Harland, to grubbing a livelihood from odd patches of what was once a princely estate. (3)

Frank's mission is to retrieve the family lands, but to do so he must first free himself from the weight of his father's talk. 'Talk for Clem was its own reality' (5) and Frank's break away from his father Clem is a break away from the seductiveness of myth, of the particular kind of myth of self and place which his father constructs. In breaking away from the myth he discovers in himself a new way of conceiving place and he does so through his painting.

In Frank Harland's vision of Australia Malouf confirms the capacity of art to continually redefine the possibilities of cultural reality. The contest with nationalist mythology launches Frank into a struggle with language, an adoption of silence and a commitment to his own particular gift of seeing. This gift emerges quite early in Frank's painting, and while involved in the labour of recovering the lost family land through his art, he actually conceives a different land, a different Australia. This is first perceived by Knack, the immigrant second-hand dealer:

'I like this country you have painted, Frank. This *bit* of it. It is splendid. A place, I think, for whole men and women, or so I see it—for the full man, even if there are no inhabitants as yet. Perhaps it is there I should have migrated.'

He gave a dark chuckle. It was one of his jests.

'But it is *this* country,' Frank said.

'You think so?'

Knack looked.



‘No Frank, I don’t think it is. Not yet, anyway. It has not been discovered, this place. The people for it have not yet come into existence, I think, or seen they could go there—that there is space and light enough—in themselves. And darkness. Only you have been there. You are the first.’ (*Harland’s* 116)

This is an Australia as an anticipated country, a utopian country conceived on the white page, the source of all possibility, a country that does not yet exist. The Australia Frank has drawn is a place totally freed from the breath of his father’s mythology, freed from nation, from empire and ultimately, even from the Killarney his painting was intended to recover. Withdrawing to Stradbroke Island, Frank is able to recover his family’s land by reconceiving it, inventing a different Australia. The power of art to change the present reality comes as an epiphany for Phillip in the Harland retrospective: ‘*I was there. It was not like this. Now it is*’ (223).

The Scottish settlers in *Remembering Babylon* are terrified by the arrival of Gemmy Fairley, a person who came ‘flapping towards them out of a world over there, beyond the no-man’s-land of the swamp, that was the abode of everything savage and fearsome . . . and all that belonged to the Absolute Dark’ (2-3). ‘The country he had broken out of was all unknown to them. Even in full sunlight it was impenetrable dark’ (8). Not *impenetrably* dark but darkness itself. ‘Out here the very ground under their feet was strange. It had never been ploughed’ (9). ‘Most unnerving of all was the knowledge that, just three years back, the very patch of earth you were standing on had itself been on the other side of things, part of the unknown, and might still, for all your coming and going over it . . . ’(9-10).

This fear explains the resistance to any way of living in this place other than marking out property, fencing it and growing crops and raising animals with which they are familiar. *Remembering Babylon* is a brilliant allegory of settler society: of its refusal to countenance the unknown, its refusal to harvest the bounty the earth already provides, its unthinking importation of the familiar. The society that huddles behind fences protecting it from the Absolute Dark of the bush is a society in which possibility is diminished. The novel is a story of what might have been if the relentless imperial control of time and space, and the adamant belief in the mission of white culture had not so enveloped the colonising society.

But Gemmy, whose very existence breaches every boundary that makes the settlers’ world safe—race, place, civilisation, normality—is the means to a different way of inhabiting the country. For him,

There was no way of existing in this land, or of making your way through it, unless you took into yourself, discovered on your breath, the sounds that linked up all the various parts of it and made them one. Without that you were blind, you were deaf, as he had been, at first, in their world. (65)

What if the settlers had freed themselves into this way of knowing the land? This is the question the novel explores as Gemmy leads Mr Frazer through the land, *naming* its fruits and animals, avoiding its spirits and secrets. This is more than a tour, it is the very same experience Ovid had as the Child led him through the country around Tomis: ‘It is his consciousness that he leads me through on our walks’ (*Imaginary Life* 89). Gemmy leads Mr Frazer through *his* consciousness and it is precisely this different way of being that represents a possible future for Australia, one that perhaps only the literary narrative, having captured the ontological gap between these worlds, can open up as a real possibility.

‘We have been wrong’, says Mr Frazer, ‘to see this continent as hostile and infelicitous . . . It is habitable already’ (129). ‘This place too will one day, I believe, yield its fruits to us and to the great banquet at which we are guests, the common feast; as the Americas brought corn and tomatoes and sweet peppers, and rhubarb and the potato . . .’ (130). The long and lyrical entry into his diary from which this is taken is an account of the ecological blindness in settler societies and against which their literature and art have been in constant struggle. His vision is that by breaking out of this language the land might reveal its secrets ‘so that what spreads in us is an intimate understanding of what it truly is, with all that is unknowable in it made familiar within’ (131).

The novel concludes with Janet thinking about Gemmy, who had touched off in her and Lachlan something ‘they were still living, both, in their different ways’ (197), namely, the sense of the life that existed beyond the boundaries of the known world. This had motivated her vocation as a nun, and now looking at the bay in the growing dusk the land itself echoes her sense of the life beyond life, the Word beyond word, the horizon of the sacred:

Out beyond the flatlands the line of light pulses and swells. The sea, in sight now, ruffles, accelerates. Quickly now it is rising towards us, it approaches.

As we approach prayer. As we approach knowledge. As we approach one another.

It glows in fullness till the tide is high and the light almost, but not quite, unbearable, as the moon plucks at our world and all the waters of the earth ache towards it, and the light, running in fast now, reaches the edges of the shore, just so far in its order, and all the muddy margin of the bay is alive, and in a line of running fire all the outline of the vast continent appears, in touch now with its other life. (200)

This other life is one that will always exist just out of reach, a life that poetry aspires to, indeed is in love with as it is in love with all that is out of reach. Now in Janet’s vision the vast continent itself experiences presence, experiences the utopia of its renewed possibilities in the poetry of light, the luminous vision of the continent’s other life.

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