

# *Tourmaline: An Ecological Allegory*

DAVID FONTEYN  
University of New South Wales

In this paper, I read Randolph Stow's novel, *Tourmaline*, as an allegory. In doing so, I employ Maureen Quilligan's (1979) outline of allegorical structure and function.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, I utilise post-colonial theories of allegory and the notion of *interpolation*.<sup>2</sup> While post-colonial critics focus on the politics and power relations between coloniser and colonised in post-colonial allegory, I suggest that similar interpolative strategies occur in Stow's novel in which the natural environment of the Australian desert enters the text, personified in allegorical form. In a similar way in which the colonised subject interpolates the dominant discourses of the colonial culture in post-colonial allegory, I suggest this personified nature operates in Stow's novel. In this way, I coin the term 'ecological allegory' and argue that Stow's novel is an example.

Maureen Quilligan (1979) describes allegory as a literary mode in which characters enter an enchanted landscape on a quest for Truth and the Word, where trees and rocks offer wisdom and advice along the way, and where the narrator speaks directly to the reader, who, mirroring the protagonist, is also on a quest to decipher the hidden meaning of the narrative. As such, it is one of the few remaining forms in contemporary Western literature in which enchantment may be given expression. While enchanted lands remain in children's fairy tales and fantasy stories, modern adult Western literature has remained largely within an Enlightenment metaphysical worldview in which substance is devoid of subjectivity. Similarly, traditional folk tales, religious mythologies, and oral stories of indigenous peoples around the world, which contain stories of an enchanted land, are cast as outside reason.

Increasingly, however, contemporary philosophers and theorists have reconsidered the metaphysical assumptions of Enlightenment reason based on the new sciences of quantum mechanics and ecological systems theory. An ecological world-view, such as the Gaia Hypothesis, posits the world as a living entity with its own meaning and subjectivity. In these philosophies,<sup>3</sup> a poetic understanding of the world is perhaps re-emerging. Allegory is a literary form in which such an ecological metaphysics is able to be expressed. I define an ecological allegory as one which contains such a metaphysics and try to show that *Tourmaline* is one such allegory. First, I present an outline of the structure, form and function of allegory based on the combination of traditional allegorical theorists such as Northrop Frye, Maureen Quilligan and Edwin Honig, with post-colonial and poststructuralist theorists of allegory, including Frederic Jameson, Stephen Slemon and Bill Ashcroft. I then show that the novel conforms to this structure, form and function.

Moreover, I build on past scholarship that reads *Tourmaline* as based upon Taoist metaphysics.<sup>4</sup> While the Taoism that underlies the novel is predominantly passive in relation to nature,<sup>5</sup> I argue that there contains an equally strong active principle which emerges in the engagement between the townspeople and a living land. Here, the allegory suggests that by working with the forces

within the environment, something new can emerge. This active engagement is predicated on a worldview similar to what the eco-philosopher, Freya Mathews (2003), calls ‘panpsychism’.

As is typical of allegory, the novel has a didactic message: rather than the riches from the mining of gold, the real wealth in the land is found within the interaction with a living land. However, the allegory posits that it is only through confronting and accepting the death drive in nature that such a worldview is made possible. I argue, then, that the allegory can be read as an exploration of the significance of death. Through the allegorical techniques of personification, dramatisation, debate and narrative digression, the narrator, the Law, seeks to reveal an alternative significance to death than the one found in the Biblical pre-text to the allegory: the story of the Garden of Eden. Out of this alternative, a panpsychist worldview emerges.

### **Allegory: Structure, Form and Function**

It is common to understand allegory as a narrative with two ‘levels’ of signification. M.H. Abrams defines allegory as:

a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the ‘literal’, or primary, level of signification, and, at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of signification. (5)

While Abrams’ definition is the received one, I utilise Maureen Quilligan’s redefinition of this notion of ‘levels’ in which both levels of signification exist simultaneously:

What is radical about this redefinition is the slight, but fundamental shift in emphasis away from our traditional insistence on allegory’s distinction between word said and meaning meant, to the simultaneity of the process of signifying multiple meaning. (26)

This simultaneity of meaning that co-exists within allegory means that it allows for differing worldviews to co-exist. For example, an oral/Indigenous worldview may be located within a modern/written one. In such cases the oral worldview interpolates the modern one as the multiple layers of meaning are laid bare.

One of the significant differences between a text that is an actual allegory and *allegoresis*, the reading process by which any work of fiction may be read in an allegorical way, is that allegory contains its own commentary within its narrative structure, guiding the reader towards the intended meaning.<sup>6</sup> Although allegory functions like deconstruction to lay bare and explore polysemy, its techniques, such as narratorial commentary, debate amongst characters, narrative digressions and a ‘story within the story’, seek to close down the play of signification that the text initially lays bare in what Quilligan calls the ‘Threshold Scene’ and guide the reader toward the ‘hidden’ meaning within the narrative.

Furthermore, this ‘hidden’ meaning is didactic. Quilligan writes that an intention to ‘educate the reader’ is one of the defining features of allegory (241). The writer of the allegory seeks to bring the reader to a consciousness of the other that lies within the language of the text. As such, allegory is an ideal form for writers to engage in environmental politics.

It is the function of the Threshold Scene to present to the reader the problem of polysemy that the narrative subsequently explores. It is in the Threshold Scene that the reader moves from a realist narrative, where the language seemingly corresponds to an accepted understanding of the world and how it works, to the allegorical ‘world’ in which everything that was initially taken for granted is in question. In this ‘world’, words themselves become characters, and trees and lakes speak. The Threshold Scene opens the door onto an allegorical world and polysemy in language. Other important aspects of allegory include debate in which characters discuss the meaning of a word or a term; allegorical action, where ideas or meanings to a word are enacted in different ways so as to explore their multiplicity; and narrative digression, also used to explore the meaning of a word or an aspect of the narrative. However, I would like to finish this section on allegorical structure with the pivotal concept of the ‘pre-text’.

Traditionally, allegories re-enact, or comment on, previous stories or myths, which are significant to the culture. Quilligan describes such stories as the ‘pretext’<sup>7</sup> of an allegory (97-98). The pre-text lays bare the cultural and linguistic worldview that the allegory seeks to interrogate and open up to polysemy. The post-colonial critic Stephen Slemon explains further that:

allegory proceeds from identification between things and depends upon an act of reading that recognises events and characters to be analogous with specific points of reference in what Frederic Jameson calls a ‘master code’: something already given, inherent in the tradition, and capable of acting as a matrix for a shared typology between the allegorist and the reading community. (161)

That is, although the primary narrative is an original story, it is analogous with another story (or stories) commonly shared between the reading community and the writer. The reader, then, is required to be an active agent in making analogies between the narrative and the pre-text.

Typically, in Western allegories, the pre-text is the Bible, as it is in the case of *Tourmaline* (see discussion below). Often, the pre-text will be overtly signalled in the narrative. Through re-enactment, allegory allows for the pre-text to be resituated within a new paradigm. Post-colonial allegory utilises this function so as to interpolate the colonial pre-text. I define ecological allegory as that in which the pre-text is transformed through interpolation by either the primary narrative containing an ecological worldview, or an ecological pre-text co-existing within the narrative.

### **Panpsychism, Eros, and the Tao**

Panpsychism, an archaic term in philosophy, denotes the idea of material objects containing subjectivity, or, broadly speaking, the conjoining of mind and matter. However, Mathews’ resurrection of this term is based not on individual objects as centres of subjectivity, but on an idea that the universe as a whole is a centre of subjectivity: ‘a psychophysical unity’ (4).<sup>8</sup> Thus, all objects within the psychophysical universe ‘share the psychophysical nature of the whole but

are by no means necessarily subjects in their own right' (4). In this worldview, living entities within the universe are centres of subjectivity which are in relationship with other living entities forming larger units, or systems, themselves classed as centres of subjectivity. Even inanimate objects, while not centres of subjectivity, themselves have a function within the larger system, operating for example as habitat or nutrients. This is an ecological worldview.

Deploying Taoist terminology, Mathews describes the ecological cycle as the Way of the One and the Many<sup>9</sup> with the ecosystem as a whole as the One, and the organisms that make it up as the Many (9). The Way (Tao) of the system is that by the Many following their internal drives and desires (*conatus*), the One is maintained and perpetuated.<sup>10</sup>

While Mathews' philosophy is related to Taoism, she diverges from Taoism in her positing of an active principle of dialogical engagement between the Many and the One. That is, while the Way, the Tao, is the mechanism of ecological balance within the system, panpsychism suggests that if an organism reaches a level of consciousness so that it can free itself from the ecological order or the Way, such an organism may consciously enter a dialogical interaction with the One. It is this dialogical interaction that characterises Mathews' definition of eros. In Mathews' theory, eros involves not the losing of self to the greater unity of the One or the Tao (as in Taoism), but the increasing potentiation of self through the dialogical engagement with an animated world as other. I argue that eros in this sense emerges in the allegory. As such, her philosophy provides a significant framework for this re-reading of the novel.

### ***Tourmaline***

*Tourmaline* is an ecological allegory in which cultural revitalisation is posited due to an acceptance of, and engagement with, the natural environment despite the death drive that is contained within it. In the novel, the natural environment is figured as a living entity that is feared by the people in the town of Tourmaline. The narrator, the Law, writes of his fear of the landscape beyond Tourmaline: 'that danger of which I know nothing, but which drives me night and morning to prayer, and fills my sleep with images of wind and annihilation' (44). Malevolence and death are prominent features of this environment. Set in an arid region of north-west Western Australia, for many of the inhabitants, beyond the safety of the town lies certain death. Furthermore, the once prosperous gold mining town is now in decline as a result of the closing of the mine and the town's buildings are slowly decaying due to exposure to the elements, particularly the sun and wind. Within the terms of the narrative, the natural environment surrounding Tourmaline becomes an allegorical embodiment of the death drive in nature.

At one level, the allegory portrays the decline of a culture and society that are in opposition to its natural environment. Perpetuation of the decline is driven by a desire for control over the threatening environment through cultural and technological transformation based upon European colonial and abstract discourses of landscape and an extractive economy (mining). The allegory explores this colonial desire through the figure of a stranger who enters the town of Tourmaline. Out of the town's desire<sup>11</sup> for the rejuvenation of its past colonial power, the stranger accepts the role of a diviner, promising to find water and gold within the landscape.<sup>12</sup> As the narrator states, he awakens the soul of Tourmaline: 'The soul of Tourmaline, tingling and yearning; whispering:

A beginning' (174). However, as a number of critics have noted, the diviner is only role-playing in response to the desire of the town, and, as a result, he is unable to fulfil this promise.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the re-emergence of colonial desire in the town is negated from the start as false. On the day of the coming of the diviner, the day of the new 'birth' of the town, there occurs a death of an Aboriginal man. This death can be read as a synecdoche of the colonial destruction of the Indigenous people. While such destruction is part of the 'bitter heritage' mentioned at the beginning of the tale, the allegory presents an alternative meaning to this colonial heritage where its acknowledgement becomes the point from which a renewed dialogue between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and a shared future may be possible.

As an allegory, characters stand for different aspects or possibilities of the town, which is personified as a living entity. The narrator, the Law, personifies colonial law. The diviner personifies colonial discourses. Through the two characters of Tom Spring and Dave Speed and their embrace of their environment, the Tao is represented. Debate amongst the people of the town, as well as narrative recount and digression, are allegorical techniques used to explore the desire for transformation and control over the landscape symbolised by the promise of the diviner.

As is typical of allegory, the narrative has a cyclic structure in which the reader is sent back to the beginning in order to re-read for the allegory. This is signalled by the final lines being a repetition of the initial lines of the novel. However, in these final lines there is a transformation – they are written in verse. To understand the meaning of this transformation, the reader is sent back to re-read the novel. Here, I will argue that this transformation is an indexical sign to the allegorical meaning of the text: the relinquishment of the desire for control over the landscape and an acceptance of the landscape as it is. This involves an acceptance of death as a part of life. In this relinquishment, the deeper 'waters' of cultural renewal are located. It is this understanding that I suggest the narrator, the Law, has arrived at and wishes to tell in his allegorical narrative.

### **The Threshold Scene**

The opening chapter consists of a Threshold Scene in which the narrator signals to the reader that his tale is an allegory and presents the terms that are at stake in the tale. The tale of the coming of the diviner to Tourmaline and his effect upon the people is prefaced by a description of the town and its surrounding environment, as well as the day's events prior to his arrival. This last day before the major change to the town is described as a repetition of every other day during the current period of decline after the times of gold and material wealth.

The opening sentence, which is repeated again as the final sentence of the narrative, foregrounds a double aspect to the story (Taoist dichotomy): 'I say we have a bitter heritage, that is not to run it down' (7). The narrator, speaking directly to the reader, accepts both the difficulties of the town's history of living in the landscape, the 'bitter heritage', but asserts that within this bitterness there is also value. In the following sentence the narrator adds that this heritage is a kind of prison within which the town and its people are trapped: 'Tourmaline is the estate, and if I call it a heritage I do not mean that we are free in it' (7). Entrapment is a major theme explored throughout the narrative. While the coming of the diviner bestows hope to the people for

freedom, his promise is based on a lie. He is unable to divine water. The falsity of his abilities represents a false freedom as it is based upon the very desire in which they are trapped: a colonial desire for extracting wealth (symbolised by gold) from, and control over, the land. It is out of this desire that the 'bitter heritage' is repeated. However, the narrative also portrays an alternative freedom in which this desire is relinquished and it is towards this possibility that the allegory directs the reader.

Two sentences later the narrator emphasises his reference to the 'bitter heritage' as didactic: 'Even here there is something to be learned' (7). As the narrator signals a didactic intention, it can be inferred that within the novel's events what he means by the 'bitter heritage' will be presented as well as the lesson, the one being corollary of the other. In this way, the 'bitter heritage' is figured as more than a 'prison' to present and future action.

From the outset, the Law is revealed as irrelevant in the present conditions of the dying town. The Law has lost authority/authenticity in Tourmaline, and his narrative begins with an acknowledgement of that: 'There is no law in Tourmaline' (11). With the closing of the mine and the consequent loss of the additional water being trucked in, the colonial law loses its relevance. His ineffectualness is dramatized at one point in the novel when a riot erupts and he, the Law, is ignored:

'The Law! The Law!' they called. And there was laughter, too. I stopped, astonished.

Then Dicko hit Harry. And the fight was on.

[...] And Horse Carson said in my ear, quite gently: 'Why don't you go to bed, you silly old bugger?'

Then I knew that I was old, and I could have wept. (143)

In this passage, the Law is allegorised as 'old' and no longer of use to the current circumstances. The narrative he writes, his 'testament', contains an allegory of the possibility of the law becoming relevant again in this place where the colonial economy of the mine has closed down and the local arid ecology has come to dominate.

In the Threshold Scene, the Law presents an image of the way beyond the town's sense of entrapment. The gaol, which is connected to the Law's residence, is an open structure due to its decay from the sun, sand and wind of the desert. It is crumbling, in ruins, the 'cells are unroofed, the bars are gone' (11). The reality of Tourmaline, a reality that the Law and others can see but are unable to accept, is that their prison is unlocked and unbarred, their freedom available. All that is necessary is an embrace of the ruin of these structures. However, in doing so, they must give up the possibility of a return to the past, in which their identities are imprisoned. The Law writes his 'testament', from the gaol-tower, which is 'a squat, square tower open to the sky' (9). The narrative itself, in its cyclic structure, can be understood as describing the prison in which the Law is trapped, yet if it is the prison-tower depicted, then it is wide open, and, in this paradox, new possibilities lie.

## **Allegorical Debate and Narrative Action**

Through dramatisation, debate and narrative digression, the Law seeks to reveal an alternative significance to death that he has found in the experience of living in Tourmaline. The Law's message is that eros emerges out of an acceptance of death as being a force of nature, and ever-present to the people of Tourmaline in the harshness of the sun and the aridity of the landscape. The town's state of 'ruin' and despondency signifies a symbolic death as a result of the end of the gold rush economy. It is death that constitutes the 'bitter heritage' of Tourmaline, a dying town. However, this attitude of despondency is based on a dualist notion of death that underlies colonial discourse and it is this discourse that the allegory puts into question in order to find an alternative.

The dualist notion of death is itself based upon the Biblical foundational narrative of the Garden of Eden myth, and this myth is explicitly referred to in the narrative by way of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Other Biblical figures and narratives are also alluded to, such as Moses drawing water from the rock, which is an image used for the diviner, although, unlike Moses, he is unable to achieve the miracle (signifying his position as a false prophet). Similarly, the myth of Ophir, another Biblical story of Paradise, is used as an analogy for the now fabled days of Tourmaline's golden days when it was 'alive'. As a result of being 'trapped' within the images of these myths, many of the people of Tourmaline are unable to embrace their current situation, seeing their town only as degraded and abject.

A colonial version of the myth of Narcissus is alluded to where the people of Tourmaline are only able to see life and beauty in an image of a past wealthy town transformed by gold and water. They are unable to see the wealth that lies within their current town and the landscape around it and as such are unable to reach out to each other and the land that supports them. As in the original myth of Narcissus, being trapped in this image of Tourmaline results in an inability to love others, and ultimately in death. As with the Biblical myths, this colonial myth of Narcissus is described directly in the Law's recurring memory of a childhood fable and is a pre-text to the allegory.

These foundational myths are the basis of a metaphysics of dualism. However, in the course of the narrative, they become resituated within the panpsychist worldview that emerges in the narrative.

## **Biblical Pre-text**

The Christian Bible is specifically referred to in a number of passages throughout the narrative. These passages involve digressions from the Law which take the form of past memories as commentaries on the events being described. In describing Byrne's 'ugly' face, the Law is reminded of the Lucifer in the *Paradise Lost* that his grandfather used to read to him as a child:

I looked sideways at him as he strummed away. A ruined face, dark and scarred; a face that had been through fire. A memory stirred in me of my grandfather, on a Sunday

afternoon, reaching between the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress* for his father's battered copy of *Paradise Lost* and dutifully reading aloud... 'Why did God spoil the look of him,' granddad, 'if he was all that beautiful?' 'Because he was evil.' 'Then why did God make him, and why did he make him beautiful to start with? And will he get back to heaven in the end?'

'No.' Said my grandfather. 'Not in the foreseeable future.'

I grieved for Byrne as I grieved for Lucifer. Surely under that distinguished ugliness, the marred beauty still showed. (182-183)

Locating *Paradise Lost* between the medieval allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* and the Bible suggests that the Law's narrative is also located in the moral world created by these two texts. An analogy of two of its central protagonists, Byrne and the diviner, is made to Lucifer in *Paradise Lost*. Byrne is a double of the diviner, who is figured as a fallen Saviour.<sup>14</sup> Byrne, whose 'face had been through fire' (as has the diviner's while walking in the desert) can be seen as a personification of Tourmaline as the sun's rays have 'burnt' the town's buildings and the people's spirits. Within this discourse of a lost paradise, Byrne, like the diviner and Tourmaline itself, is 'cast out' from Paradise to live within the 'hell' of the fiery, deathly sun. Underlying all these narratives is the grief in the loss of a mythological paradise.

The theme of the possibility of a 'return' dominates. A 'return to heaven' is ruled out for Lucifer, hence the fate of the diviner and possibly too for Byrne and the people of Tourmaline. This impossibility of return is figured within the terms of these myths. However, the Law seems to be suggesting that despite the disfigurement from the fire/sun, the beauty remains in both Byrne and Tourmaline, if only the terms that define that beauty can be refigured. Byrne is the 'poet of Tourmaline' and in his poetry, beauty lies. Under a different set of terms and myths, beauty may yet be reclaimed.

### **Fertility, the Cycle of Death and Rebirth**

An ecological understanding of death as the basis of life and regeneration emerges in the novel and both the landscape and the ruins of Tourmaline become located within this new understanding of fertility. At the same time that the Law writes of his nostalgia and sense of despair in the ruins he lives amongst, he spends his days actively engaged in those ruins. Describing one of his daily visits to his ruined gaol, he tells the reader of its beauty as the walls shone in the morning sun and his pride in it:

Against the intense blue of the Tourmaline sky, the walls of the exercise yard, like a low square tower, glimmered with all the light and purity the sun could discover in their pale stonework; and I noticed with pride, the rough beauty of the round window set high in the front wall, the handsome curve of masonry above the gate. (50)

While the sun and the wind have 'ruined' Tourmaline's buildings, within those abject ruins lies a beauty that is revealed by the sun's rays. He says that he is 'half in love with ruin' (138). He is also in love with the landscape and the sky: those features in which death in the allegory are located:

I stepped out of my door to look once more at my garden. I have said before that the sky is the garden of Tourmaline.

The much-praised, the inexhaustible stars above me. Islands, ice-cold and burning. The burning ice-cold purity of God.

Love inexpressible, inexhaustible. My love for him, it, them. No matter if such love is not returned. In the contemplation of stars, in the remembrance of oceans and flowers, in the voice of a lone crow and the jacaranda-blue of far ranges, I have all I need of requital...I reach out with every nerve to the ultimate purity.

Lord, fill me with your sap and make me grow.

Make me tall as karri, broad as a Moreton Bay fig. Let me shelter all Tourmaline in my shade.

Birds in the air; sheep in the far green distance.

Love, love, love; like an ache, like an emptiness. (102)

Here, the Law writes of his sense of divinity in the entire world around him. While the sun may be a force of decay and destruction, the sky, with its stars, is the 'garden of Tourmaline', the place of beauty. This recognition of divinity in the world results in the emergence of eros (in Mathews' sense described above): a loving relationship with the world. Such a relationship is made explicit in the Law's utilisation of the word 'response', personifying this divine world that he is in love with. The Law realises that the response he may have been waiting for, in the form of discourse, is not the form that eros takes. Rather, it is simply by noticing and taking care of the world around him that 'requital' is given. Through that relationship he receives the 'sap' from the world, that is, the energy and beauty of the relationship between himself and the world. It is from this love and relationship that he desires to become part of the landscape: 'a karri...broad as a Moreton Bay fig'. In this way, may he again become relevant and able to 'shelter all of Tourmaline' in the 'shade' of his law.

The central symbol in the novel of this relationship of eros between humans and a divine world is the church ruins, which become the place of the town's awakening. The ruins symbolise the possibility of renewal of the town of Tourmaline through eros: love and care. Despite the ruin of the structure due to the elements, the church's beauty remains, especially, as the Law points out, due to Gloria's care of the oleander tree nearby. The church is kept by an old Aboriginal woman, Gloria, who spends her days caring for the church and the oleander tree outside it. It has been kept 'very clean. I was surprised' (71). Although the church was in ruins, it 'was beautiful' (71):

We stood on the beaten earth before the church, looking up. The stone cross rose sharp and pale against the sky. Sheets of iron had fallen from the roof; the glass was missing from most of the narrow windows, the wooden bell tower, a little removed from the door, was far gone in ruin. But it was beautiful: especially beautiful in the smell of flowers. I stood inhaling the fragrance of oleander. (70-71)

These images of the church as both ruin and beauty represent the possibility of a positive interaction between human and environment. Gloria's work in caring for the building counterbalances the destructive forces of sun and wind and dust. In her loving care for the building, the building itself responds as its beauty is made manifest. This beauty becomes a monument to the possibility of eros that it represents. Furthermore, it is a place of comfort amongst the harshness of the surrounds. In the midst of the heat and dust, it was inside a 'cool place, half shadow, half sunlight, roofed in part by the sky' (71). In this place, the harshness of the sun, which symbolises the death drive in nature, is tempered by the coolness of the shade. The openness of the building allows for an embrace of the outside forces of nature. In its very structure, it allegorises an interactive relationship between the colonisers' culture and the landscape in which it is now located.

On the altar Gloria has inscribed a dedication to God, Mary and Jesus and the Queen, signifying her Christianisation (that is, colonisation) that has become a place of a meeting of cultures. Gloria brings to the church her Aboriginal beliefs as much as any Christian beliefs that she may have: she has put on the altar 'two round black pebbles unnaturally smooth...rain stones' (95). She has maintained and renewed the building in her devotion for it and what it represents, a place for the celebration of the divine through an embrace of nature as well as a meeting place of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal beliefs.

The beauty that lies within Tourmaline and its landscape is made manifest during the diviner's rituals, which provide the people of the town with hope and life. While these rituals are a result of a false hope based on false premises, they demonstrate the potential to see the buildings and landscape under a new gaze, when they are cared for and loved anew. When the rituals begin in the church, the people of Tourmaline, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, all come and make it into a living building. The church itself is transformed through the work of the people in their devotion:

In front of the church a great bonfire was burning, lighting up the whole hill, so that the flowers of the oleander smouldered with it, and the stone of the church glowed peach-coloured and warm. The door was open, and all the interior bright with the blaze.[...] the altar [...] was bowered in green leaves, among which oleander flowers made occasional startling firebursts of scarlet. There was also (produced from God knows where) one of those statuettes of the Virgin in mouth-watering marzipan. The stone floor was clean swept. (170-1)

While fire in the novel is used as a symbol of destruction, making reference to Biblical fires in hell, here it is a symbol of rejuvenation, through which the building's beautiful stone colours are made manifest. As the fire kindles the people's sense of hope and life, so too does it renew the building in which that hope is expressed communally. The building's rejuvenation is from out of the existing structure, enhancing it, bringing out its existing beauty. Although the diviner is a false prophet, and the hope he inspires is of a return to a golden (imperial) age rather than an acceptance of the given, the people of Tourmaline are able to bring to life the town and its buildings.

During the period of the rituals of the diviner held at the church, not only is the church structure renewed through love and care, but the whole landscape comes alive with beauty and renewed meaning. On the morning after the first night of singing and prayer, the Law writes that '[t]here was never, since I was young, such a morning as followed; never a breeze so cool, hissing though the stiff leaves of myall, or earth of so tender a colour' (175). While the landscape hasn't changed in anyway, the Law's perception of it has. This change in perception and the new meanings attached to the landscape suggest that there is no need for the transformation of the landscape into a green pasture for it to be loved and accepted by the Law. The Law is filled with love on this morning, for Tourmaline and its landscape.

### **Poetry and Song: the Language of Eros**

While the Law presents the colonial language, its discourses and connotations within which he is trapped as one of the central problems that initiates his tale, he mentions another kind of language that exists concurrently in Tourmaline: that of poetry and song. Not only does the tale begin with a death of an Aboriginal man, but it begins with a song sung by Charlie Yandana, a young Aboriginal man marking the occasion. It is a song about death:

Death, oh death, oh  
you been going a long time now.  
When you gunna take a rest,  
oh death? (10)

While the ideation of the song marks the tragedy of death and the desire for an end to this tragedy, the Law's narrative suggests a rather different significance to this song beyond the words. Instead of mourning, the youth Yandana is simply enjoying the opportunity to sing: 'He was young, and not bereaved, but he liked to sing. [...] His voice, young and flippant, made me desolate' (9-10). Despite the ideation of the song, the act of singing by the Aboriginal man is one of joy and of a celebration of life.

Song and poetry are almost a constant in the town. Charlie Yandana is often singing in the street, as is Byrne, the town drunkard, who is also described as 'the poet of Tourmaline'. Furthermore, it is through song and poetry that the whole town celebrates its awakening to life and hope, led by their two musicians, Charlie and Byrne. In these celebrations towards the end of the narrative, song enables the people of Tourmaline to connect with each other and to share their love for each other and for the place. Song transforms the language and signifies new possibilities of communication. The failure of the diviner and the ending of the rituals do not result in the ending of song. Instead, it signifies the false premises upon which these rituals were based.

The Law's final song points toward the way out of their entrapment: that it is not necessary to change the landscape to fit their colonial desires for property, wealth and a European landscape. The real wealth lies in an acceptance of the land as it is. I suggest that the Law reaches this realisation and this is the reason for his writing his testament and for his joy at the end as he makes a song of his initial words.

Many critics have commented upon the cyclical nature of the narrative, where the final lines repeat the initial opening sentence. However, their rewriting as poetry signifies a realisation that has occurred in the course of the narrative. By transforming the opening line into verse, the Law is ‘singing up’ the land despite its ‘bitter heritage’, celebrating it for its dialogic possibilities:

I say we have a bitter heritage.

That is not to run it down. (221)

Ending in poetry, he is singing of his love for Tourmaline and what it has taught him: by embracing the landscape and its natural forces, the boon of eros emerges, which his ‘testament’ is passing on to the reader. The Law’s song, which can be read as the transformation of the narrative into song, signifies the celebration of the possibilities that are located within the difficulty where death prefigures birth, prosperity can be found in ruin, and fertility exists within aridity. With the embrace of the desert ecology, rejuvenation and renewal emerge.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that *Tourmaline* is an allegory in which eros, emerges out of a dialectic between opposing worldviews of land. This is not simply love of land, but an active interaction with a living land based on love and care. The dialectic is dramatised through the characters of the town and their engagement with the diviner, who kindles their desire for colonial wealth, transformation and control over the land. This colonial desire is pitted against the Taoist positions of acceptance and acquiescence to the land, personified by Tom Spring and Dave Speed. The tale is told by an allegorical narrator, the Law, who personifies colonial law and language in Australia. In the Threshold Scene, the narrator presented the problem from which the narrative emerges: the relationship and relevance of the law to this land. His narrative presents to the reader his attempt at a resolution to this problem through his dramatisation and tale of the coming of the diviner. However, this ‘resolution’ is veiled within the text and needs to be sought through re-readings. This is because of the difficult nature of the lesson. The rewriting of the opening sentence at the end of the narrative into poetry becomes a signifier that requires explanation, sending the reader back to the beginning to search for its significance within the tale. I have argued that buried within the structure of the narrative is an erotic relationship to land: an active engagement between the townspeople and the land. The philosophy of Freya Mathews and her theory of panpsychism, provided the terminology and framework from which this reading was made possible. Finally, as a panpsychist worldview emerges in the text, it interpolates the Biblical pre-text of the Eden myth and re-conceives the significance of the land, the death drive within it, the colonial-built environment, and the true wealth that lies within it. It is this change in significance, this interpolation, that is signalled by this transformation of the narrative into poetry.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A number of literary theorists such as Maureen Quilligan (1979), Northrop Frye (1967), Angus Fletcher (1964) and Rosemond Tuve (1966), have proposed that allegory underwent a revival in the twentieth century. They cite as evidence works by writers such as Franz Kafka (*The Trial*), Vladimir Nabakov (*Pale Fire*) and Thomas Pynchon

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(*The Crying of Lot 49*). More recently, Jean Petrolle (2008) has argued that allegory is noteworthy also in postmodern literature, as in the experimental feminist novels of Angela Carter (*Nights at the Circus*) and Marguerite Young (*Miss Macintosh, My Darling*) and post-colonial writing such as Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*. Bill Ashcroft (2001) and Stephen Slemon (1987, 1988), among others, have argued that allegory is a dominant mode in post-colonial writing as a result of the possibilities allegory provides for the *interpolation* of the colonial culture.

<sup>2</sup> Interpolation is a central concept in post-colonial theory. Bill Ashcroft explains that it is through interpolation that post-colonial transformation is made possible: 'the process of insertion, interruption, interjection, which is suggested by the act of interpolation, is the initial (and essential) movement in the process of post-colonial transformation' (48). In post-colonial theory, interpolation involves the use of a dominant discourse by a colonised subject in a way that alters the meanings made possible by that discourse. It allows the colonised subject to appropriate the colonial discourse without accepting its rules of signification, giving instead new meanings and connotations to the objects of that discourse. Ashcroft writes that: 'By operating inside the discourse of Orientalism, for instance, these intellectuals negate the Orientalist constructions that have been ascribed to them. It is through this process of negation that they are able to become selves as opposed to the identity of mere others that they inherit' (48). Interpolation is significant in that it involves an expression of an identity that may differ from the dominant discursive construction of that identity without asserting, as Ashcroft writes, 'a unified...or separate oppositional purity' (47).

<sup>3</sup> The Gaia Hypothesis, which posits that the Earth is a living organism, was developed by James Lovelock (1979). This theory can be seen as the basis of what came to be known as 'Deep Ecology'. The philosophical father of Deep Ecology, however, is Arne Naess, who set out the founding principles of Deep Ecology (1973). In Deep Ecology, intrinsic value is located within all of nature as a result of being a part of the wider living entity of Gaia. This philosophical school emerged out of systems theory. An early exponent of this theory to ecology was Eugene Odum (1983). While Gaia posits a living Earth, Deep Ecology seeks to explore humanity's relationship to such a living entity, resulting in what has come to be termed 'Ecopsychology': humanity's deep interrelationship with the ecosystem. Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1973) is an early text of Ecopsychology. Nineteenth century Romanticism prefigures much of Deep Ecology, as do the twentieth century philosophers who utilised Romantic concepts such as Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche. While Freya Mathews' work, which is used in this paper, can be located in relation to this field of Deep Ecology, it is not confined to this school. Mathews writes in the introduction to her work on panpsychism: 'Countercultures and spiritual movements of many kinds are beginning to anticipate the possibilities that I here describe as panpsychist. Deep ecology workshops, Gaian foundations, pagan festivals, shamanic courses, Councils of All Beings, earth-honouring rituals proliferate on the fringes of Western societies. Love of earth, if not world, is enjoined from many an alternative pulpit' (5). For more on Deep Ecology, see Pete Hay's *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought* (2002).

<sup>4</sup> Since the publication of Helen Tiffin's article identifying the importance of Taoism in Stow's work (Tiffin 1978), landscape in the novel has been largely read through the worldview of Taoism. A number of the themes that I analyse here as constitutive of the allegory have been discussed previously by other critics within the context of Taoism. The cycles of nature are discussed by Delrez (1991), McDougal (1990), Wallace (1981), Tiffin (1978) Leer (1991) and Carr (2004). The myth of a lost Eden is mentioned by Carr (2004) and Harris (1985). The theme of narcissism is discussed by Brennan (2004).

<sup>5</sup> Tiffin explains that 'the *Tao te ching*...expresses the philosophy of non-action, of silence, of quietude, of non-combat...asserting (silently) the virtues of acceptance of imperfect conditions, of inaction, dryness, and death, over an active life of progression and aggression, and the promise of Eden, of paradise regained...stress[ing] the necessity for harmony between man and the universe' (93).

<sup>6</sup> Such allegorical intention differs from Wimsatt and Beardsley's notion of the 'intentional fallacy' in that the intention is expressed within the text itself rather than located in the biography or psychology of the author.

<sup>7</sup> In order to dispel confusion, from here on this technical term will be hyphenated to 'pre-text'.

<sup>8</sup> This idea emerges out of the philosophical school of Deep Ecology following James Lovelock and the Gaia Hypothesis.

<sup>9</sup> Mathews writes in the Introduction to her theory on panpsychism: 'I [...] arrive at a view of the universe as a conative unity, a self-realizing system that counts as a locus of subjectivity in its own right. This universal system/subject (the One) realizes itself through its creation, via self-differentiation, of a manifold of conative subsystems that possess a relative unity of their own, and hence qualify as derivative subjects (the Many). By simply following their own conative desire, the unself-conscious Many simultaneously perpetuate the self-realization of the

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One. This is a basically ecological order, which may be described as the Way of the One and the Many (after the Chinese notion of the Tao, which the present Way closely resembles)' (9).

<sup>10</sup> It is also significant that Taoist yin/yang is an expression of such ecological processes. Miller comments upon chapter twenty-five of the *Tao Teh Ching* where it speaks of 'the nameless 'Dao' that 'departs', 'is far', and then 'returns': 'This suggests a journey that arrives back where it started, and this cyclical motion reflects the universal theme of the basic rhythm of life that arises from the ground, flourishes, decays and eventually returns to its point of origin. Daoism takes this pattern to be a foundational pattern for the way all life operates. The universe is dynamic and alive, but it dances to a clearly discernable pulse, a binary pulse or a cosmic heartbeat according to which everything around us is undergoing a process of expansion and contraction. Nothing in the world stays the same. Transformation is constant.[...] The name for this pattern in Daoism – and in all of Chinese culture – is yin and yang' (43-4).

<sup>11</sup> The name 'Tourmaline' is used in the novel to refer to both the town and the collective society of the town. Tourmaline is often personified in the narrative. For example: 'Tourmaline was agog' (17); 'The town was moved, certainly, even excited' (92); 'Tourmaline seems to have taken over him' (24); 'He was [...] the son of Tourmaline' (195-6). All references to the novel are from the original publication, Stow (1963).

<sup>12</sup> In the narrative it is suggested that it is the town's desire for water and gold that 'creates' the diviner out of the stranger who comes into their town. The stranger simply accepts the role and plays his part. For example, Tom Spring explains to the Law that the diviner is '[i]nspired [...]. By you, by Tourmaline.[...] You thought you needed him. You convinced him he was what was wanted. Well, good luck to you, Mr Frankenstein – it's a fine healthy boy' (184-5). Robyn Wallace explains further that 'When the diviner is brought to Tourmaline, he is burnt, terribly disfigured, deformed. The town, with its ritual washing, anointing, and keeping watch, creates out of this deformity a thing of beauty, and the diviner, seeing himself reflected in the pool of the town's eyes, comes to believe himself beautiful' (62).

<sup>13</sup> It is clear in the novel that the diviner is the creation of the town's own desire. At one point, Tom Spring says so to the Law: "'Good luck to you, Mr Frankenstein –it's a fine healthy boy'" (146). Robyn Wallace explains that 'When the diviner is brought to Tourmaline, he is burnt, terribly disfigured, deformed. The town, with its ritual washing, anointing, and keeping watch, creates out of this deformity a thing of beauty, and the diviner, seeing himself anointing, and keeping watch, creates out of this deformity a thing of beauty, and the diviner, seeing himself reflected in the pool of the town's eyes, comes to believe himself beautiful' (62). Antonella Riem, in discussing the significance of the diviner's name Random, writes that 'the diviner renames himself "Random", and this second name implies that anyone could have served the same purpose as he' (512). From the Taoist perspective, Helen Tiffin argues that 'in reaching for the carrot, for the pie in the sky, or water even, man is led into dissatisfaction, ambition, dependence, and aggression, all that ensues from Tourmaline's desire for water and its creation of a diviner to provide water' (102). Here, Tiffin is suggesting that within the context of her argument that the novel is a Taoist narrative, Tourmaline's creation, the diviner, must fail. This is echoed by Richard Carr: 'The narrative line [...] requires that the charlatan fail; coupled with his failure must come an awakening on the part of those he has duped.[...]Tourmaline has created Michael the prophet; they have projected their role of messiah onto him' (12).

<sup>14</sup> Wilson Harris makes the point of both Byrne and the diviner being Lucifer figures. However, Harris suggests that while the diviner stands for Lucifer in the narrative, Byrne carries the flame of Lucifer's fire in his poetry and song (336). McDougal comments upon Harris' article to add that 'Byrne is like Lucifer...the satanic aspect of Byrne is projected in his burning love for the false prophet Michael Random' (136-137). McDougall adds that the 'doubling of Byrne (as a subject of fire) so that he identifies with the Diviner (prophet of water) is dramatised first of all by the wordplay of his nomenclature' (137), explaining that the 'Byrne' is associated by sound to 'burn' and 'bourne', being a small stream or brook in Old English. 'Fire and water: each contains the trace of the other: as Byrne and the Diviner' (138).

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