

Splendid Masculinity: The Wanderer in *Voss* and *To The Islands*

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Criticism of Patrick White's *Voss* (1957) and Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (1958) has usually contextualised the novels within national discourses on landscape, exploration, and race. This is not unexpected as these are woven through the narratives, nevertheless the search by the protagonists Voss and Heriot for transcendent experience in the Australian desert owes as much to the Wanderer tradition in Romantic literature as to the tradition of Australian narratives of exploration. The ambiguities of Australian experiences in the landscape are embodied in the Wanderer figure in *Voss* and *To the Islands*, shifting the reader's gaze from the landscape to Voss and Heriot. Establishing Voss and Heriot as Romantic Wanderer figures affords an opportunity to examine the aesthetics of melancholy, the sublime and genius embedded within the Wanderer tradition, and the effects these tropes have on gender in *Voss* and *To the Islands*.¹

Voss and Heriot are wandering males, in search of a knowledge or experience for which they have no name. They are sublime melancholics in possession of a misunderstood genius or learnedness that is not accessible to the men around them, lending an air of singular superiority to their activities. Their self-reflection and intense desire to unify the white Australian subject with the land they inhabit can be traced to European Romanticism, and in particular to the literary figure of the Wanderer, which dates back to the Wandering Jew; a man doomed to wander the earth with a burden of special knowledge.

The chronology of the Wandering Jew falls outside the scope of this essay; nevertheless, some understanding of the figure's history is necessary to appreciate the complexity of the Wanderer in literature. An excellent starting point is the fifteenth-century pamphlet, *Kurtze Beschreibung und Erzählung von einem Juden mit namen Ahasverus* published in 1602, which propelled the figure into European literature (Anderson 42). The pamphlet, 'A Brief Description of a Meeting with a Jew named Ahasuerus'² remains 'the most important single milestone in the progress of the Legend of the Wandering Jew' (Anderson 42). Cusack notes that as the figure 'undergoes successive reinterpretations, it accumulates potential significances, which become available to the next generation of authors,' providing 'the basis of a mobilizing myth for pioneers in the fields of early Romantic art and science' (7). He suggests too, that the connection of 'the figure with the discourse of education' in Goethe's *Young Werther* inspired the production of a new generation of 'literary wanderers' in European literature (7). Likewise, Anderson notes that Schubart's and Schiller's romantic visions of the Wanderer wielded a powerful influence upon the Romantic school, which in turn influenced nineteenth-century European concepts of Ahasuerus. For example Schubart's Ahasuerus was cast in 'a thoroughly Byronic posture' on Mount Carmel, despite being written 'a generation before Byron published work' (172-77). In this way, the Wanderer both influenced, and was influenced by the German and Romantic schools.

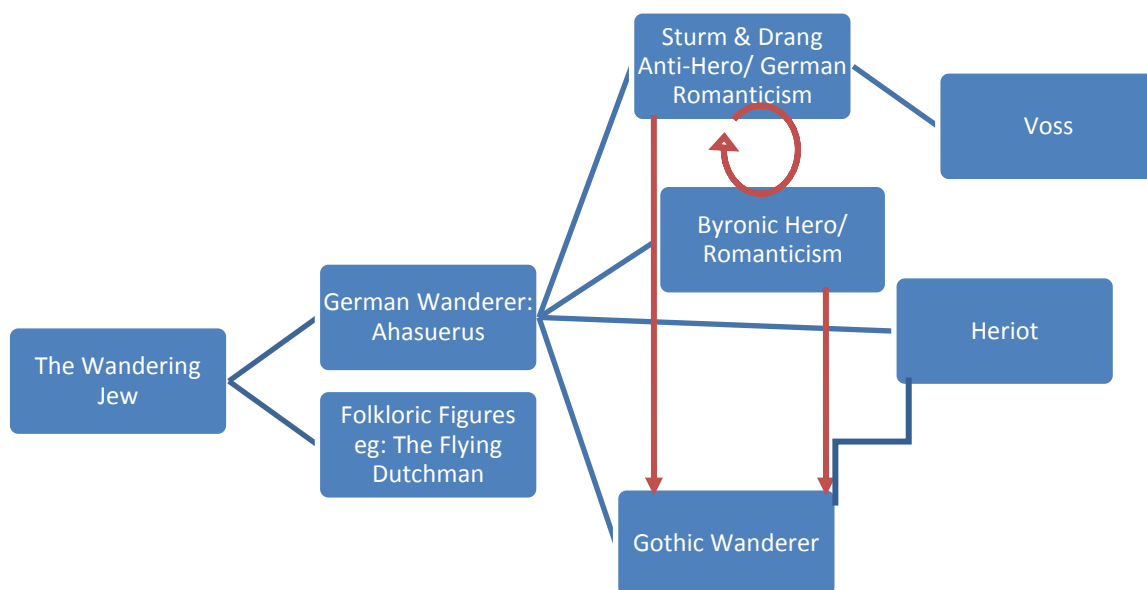
By 1890 the Wandering Jew was portrayed as the modern man, 'a representative of struggling humanity who can never die' (Anderson 243-74). In eighteenth and nineteenth century Germany the motif became prominent in texts questioning 'prevailing ideologies of their day' due to changes in material and intellectual conditions (Cusack 3-9). Both Cusack and Anderson's

observations suggest considering the Wanderer as a distinct aesthetic motif or figure. In doing so, a clearer picture of the intrinsic connection between melancholy, the sublime and genius, and the Romantic/Gothic versions of the Wanderer begins to emerge.

The early German Romantics, the *Sturm und Drang*, and later European Romantics added layer upon layer of masculine exclusivity to the figure of the Wanderer through the powerful connections they forged between masculinity, melancholy and the sublime, and the strengthening of the ‘racial and cultural links between “genius” and “maleness”’ (Battersby, *Gender and Genius* 167). The Romantic representation of the individual against Establishment in relation to ‘male social roles and male power,’ and the *Sturm und Drang* and Romantic belief that the typical genius was an atypical outsider encouraged the portrayal of the Romantic Wanderer as a man who could aspire to genius, make his own rules, and yet maintain his individual integrity (Battersby, *Gender and Genius* 18).

It is my contention that Patrick White’s Voss and Randolph Stow’s Heriot are Wanderers in the European Romantic mould. Both men are highly intelligent misanthropes in search of knowledge, and both use movement as a means of transcendence from the tedium and physicality of everyday life. Their failure to achieve Romantic unity, and their consequent transcendence at the moment of death, suggests White and Stow made full use of the Wanderer figure: one who, when confronted with real or imagined dangers, awakens to an ‘awareness of his moral autonomy’ and finds release from ideological blindness (Cusack 79).³

Voss and Heriot bear resemblances to the twentieth-century Wanderer, who evolved into ‘a vehicle’ for authorial ideals; ‘a figure critical of the . . . soulless materialism of the masses, yet concerned with humanity’s fate, rather than with God’ (Anderson 308–15). Nevertheless, Voss and Heriot are descended from different Romantic schools, and owe many of their attributes to differing Wanderer figures. White’s Voss is a product of German and English Romanticism, whereas Heriot has more in common with his ancient ancestor, The Wandering Jew. Their relation to the *Sturm und Drang* anti-hero, Byronic hero and the Gothic Wanderer may be considered thus:



Melancholy, the Sublime and Genius

Before embarking on an examination of the Wanderer in *Voss* and *To the Islands*, an examination of the tropes of melancholy, the sublime and genius, which are inextricably entwined with the figure, must be undertaken. The Wanderer is often seen as the perfect embodiment of melancholy, and Kierkegaard's statement that 'the strange grief of melancholy induces an inward, and often outward, restlessness; a perpetual . . . tormenting motion' only relieved 'by a proper use of the melancholic's gifts for spiritual revelation' offers grounds for a strong connection between melancholy and the aimless movement associated with the figure (Ferguson 12–13). What is harder to discern are the associations between the sublime and genius and a wandering male. Yet, if one contemplates the relationship of melancholy and the sublime in philosophical and aesthetic accounts, the incessant linking of genius with melancholic personalities and sublime experiences, and the masculine assumptions informing all three tropes, one appreciates why the Wanderer comfortably embodies melancholy, the sublime and genius.

The glorification of melancholy and its linking to male genius by Renaissance philosopher, Marsilio Ficino, elevated the melancholy *man*. He suffers, but his consolations are unique: sublime experience, genius and morality (Radden 13). Schiesari explains how Ficino's revision of the melancholic temperament translated depression 'into a virtue for the *men* of letters' [author's italics] wherein melancholia became 'an elite "illness" . . . a sign of spiritual greatness,' genius and creativity (7). Underlying the continually reinforced connections between melancholy, masculine genius, spiritual superiority, and creative madness was an 'identifiable pattern, beginning at least as early as medieval times' wherein 'women were considered . . . less susceptible to melancholy than men' (Radden 39). An interesting development, considering the history of melancholy: medieval renderings of melancholy were, for the most part, female. Medieval poets used the female figure of 'Tristesse' (sadness) to embody mental pain, and 'Tristesse' was later incorporated into the Renaissance figure, 'Dame Mérencolye' (Klibansky et al. 221). In Ficino's treatise, the femaleness attached to melancholy was purged through a re-establishment of the powerful connection between melancholy and the masculine tropes of the sublime and genius (Radden 15).

The linguistic manoeuvring required to masculinise melancholy was unnecessary for the sublime, for the sublime has always been a strictly male affair.⁴ The sublime may be loosely described as an apprehension of the 'limits of reason and expression together with a sense of what might lie beyond these limits' occurring 'whenever experience slips out of conventional understanding' (Shaw 2). Longinus posits the sublime as only possible for 'men of spirit' with naturally 'weighty thoughts' who are both virtuous and intelligent (145). In comparing Longinus to later accounts of the sublime from Kant and Burke, one notices the increasing importance of melancholy. Both link the sublime and sublime experience to melancholy in some fashion, and a similar relationship is established between masculinity, creativity, intellect and the sublime.

Kant endows 'the melancholy character . . . with the stamp of the sublime' and interprets 'every trait of melancholy as the expression of great moral consciousness' (Klibansky et al. 122). He concedes that the 'fair sex has just as much understanding as the male' but insists that men are capable of 'deep understanding' whereas women possess 'beautiful understanding' (Kant 78). Burke believes sublime virtues reside in 'the authority of the father, venerable and distant,' suggesting a masculine realm of unquestioned authority (Kramnick 96–97).

In short, Longinus looks to men for sublime rhetoric, Kant champions a melancholy male genius and suggests women are not feminine if they pursue sublime knowledge, and Burke employs the masculine 'language of sexual power' to discuss the 'psychological thrill that comes from the

sublime' (Battersby, *The Sublime* 7). The sublime remains a gendered trope, because 'the discourse on the sublime' has always been 'faced with a product of its own analysis . . . the sexed subject,' which theorists and philosophers have refused to confront, causing 'a number of extremely disturbing effects,' not least the reinforcement of normative social roles (de Bolla 56–57).

When the masculine trope of melancholy is blended with the sublime, and a 'strange knowledge' possessed by a handful of divinely inspired individuals added, the outline of the Wanderer emerges: a man who may, despite best authorial intentions, reinforce the normative gender roles and imperialist urges he was, perhaps, meant to question. The privileging of masculine melancholy, and the sublime as a masculine attainment, had a profound effect on the figure. His pain became immediate and personal, his journey universal. With his association to the infinite slowly glossed as sublime experience and his melancholia modernised the modern Wanderer evolved: a sublime, melancholic in possession of a 'strange knowledge' that the Romantics preferred to call genius.

The cult of genius emerged in the Roman countryside, where '*Genius* was . . . connected . . . with ownership, protection and cultivation of property and land by a family or clan' (Battersby, *Gender and Genius* 74). Nevertheless, *genius* did not favour household members equally—genius was the 'personification of patrilineal and patriarchal power' (Battersby, *Gender and Genius* 75–76, 89). The historical relationship genius and masculinity share is rarely questioned. Within that relationship are powerful associations to melancholy and the sublime. From Longinus's noble poet to the Renaissance melancholic, genius became a prerequisite for sublime thoughts, and an expected side-effect of a melancholy nature (Shaw 15).

Kant's vision of genius was the most influential on the *Sturm und Drang* group and the Romantics. Both groups championed superhuman geniuses who displayed a 'special spark of divinity,' and stressed that men who possessed genius were naturally few (Battersby, *Gender and Genius* 3). The 'logic of exclusion' at the heart of Romanticism turned the sensitive melancholic 'into a demi-god: the genius' who, in Romantic terms, was always male, because one could not search for transcendence, or imagine a selfhood into Being if one were female (Battersby, *Gender and Genius* 8–9).

The Wanderer in *Voss* and *To The Islands*

The main precursor for *Voss* is the nineteenth-century *Sturm und Drang* wanderer, the anti-hero suffering 'under the established order' (Bernofsky 87). *Voss*'s attributes are in keeping with the anti-hero: his need to transcend the everyday, his romantic attachment to death as the final illumination, his lack of social integration and empathy, and the 'storm and stress' which are his lot (Furst 33).⁵ *Voss*'s melancholy nature and arrogant superiority, his dislike of parochialism and desire to transcend human limitations through sublime experience make him a model *Sturm und Drang* anti-hero. He is a frail ascetic with a death wish who 'seeks isolation, in order to become his own master through self-denial' (Anderson 313–15). When his party takes shelter in a cave during the wet season, he refuses to enjoy the comfort of companionship and warm fires. Instead he reflects bitterly:

He was, after all, a man of great frailty, both physical and moral, and so, immediately upon entering the cave, he returned outside, preferring to keep company with the gusts of rain than to expose his weakness to human eyes. (White, *Voss* 285)

Voss carries a Romantic burden reserved for the few *male* individuals with enough sensitivity and intelligence to, as he tells Le Mesurier, ‘realise personal genius’ (White, *Voss* 35).

Heriot has most in common with the ancient Wandering Jew and the Gothic Wanderer. Stow’s opening description—‘[H]e was a tall man, stooping there under the overhanging thatch, a big man with his wild white hair, his face carved and calm. The lizards scattered from his path, the crows cried’ (2)—suggests attributes attached to the Wandering Jew: agedness, privation, antisocial, nonconformist behaviour and spiritual anguish (Anderson 49). When Heriot looks in the mirror he sees himself ‘as a great red cliff, rising from the rocks of his own ruin. I am an old man, an old man. *J’ai plus de souvenirs que si j’avais mille ans*. And this cursed Baudelaire whining in his head . . . preaching despair’ (Stow 3).⁶

Baudelaire’s poem suggests the longevity associated with the Wandering Jew, and the world-weary melancholy his life-span infers. Furthermore, after Heriot throws a stone at a young Indigenous man, Rex, he becomes convinced that he has killed him. As with the original Wandering Jew, Heriot’s guilt drives him from society, and he carries his perceived burden of sin throughout his quest for the islands (Stow 67). Heriot’s guilt-burden is one of privilege, which is considered to be a recurrent element in the construction of modern Wanderer figures (Lees i).⁷

Although Heriot appears to be journeying toward a destination, the islands do not exist; they are the place where the souls of the Aboriginal dead go to rest. Therefore, one could assume that, in seeking the ‘islands,’ Heriot seeks death. Yet to suggest he merely seeks death would be oversimplifying. Heriot is wandering in search of self-knowledge and a return to moral certainty. Torn between his loss of faith and commitment to the mission, he encapsulates the Romantic sense of being ‘caught between an aspiration toward the ideal and the standing defeat of that aspiration’ (Eldridge 32). Nonetheless, the journeys Voss and Heriot embark upon, and the burdens they carry are secondary to the main interest here: the masculinising influence of these particular Wanderer figures on the narratives of *Voss* and *To the Islands*.

The Wanderer and Gender in *Voss* and *To the Islands*

The use of the figure of the Wanderer in *Voss* to further the ideals of cultural and self-transcendence culminates in a continual re-investment of masculine values through melancholy, the sublime and genius. Voss has the power to wander at will, and to follow his will, whereas the women in the text are silenced and confined to domestic and urban spaces, reinforcing the Australian *status quo* of men ‘out there’ and women in the domestic sphere. Despite White’s use of details from Chisholm’s account of Leichhardt—the theft of greens when his companions lay ill; the kick in the stomach by a mule due to his own stupidity; the reports of irrational commands (all of which would have made it easy for White to make his protagonist ridiculous)—the *status quo* is strengthened by the God-like aura surrounding Voss, and by the failure of the women to transcend the self or attain autonomy.

The Romantics encouraged a metaphysical model based on Kant’s belief that a man might literally think himself into existence (Battersby, *Gender and Genius* 62). The gender-based implications of this metaphysic are twofold. The individual who can ‘think *himself* into existence’ is a superior creator who may attain a state of Being. The individual who cannot think *herself* into existence remains in a state of becoming. Therefore in the light of critical statements such as, ‘thematically, White challenged the natural and agreed “truths” about existence’ (Turner 135), and White’s own belief that there is ‘nothing anomalous’ in depicting strong women, one would expect more positive outcomes for his female protagonists (White, *Flaws in the Glass*

155). There is a greater gender imbalance in the novel than expected, an imbalance I believe stems from the masculine tropes connected to the figure of the Wanderer.⁸

The majority of criticism of the women in *Voss* focuses on Laura because she is often seen as the feminine counterpart for Voss. Bliss, for example, states:

Voss and Laura are doubles . . . mirror images of each other. . . . Voss and Laura reflect each other's arrogance and isolation: their presumed self-sufficiency, reliance on the intellect, distrust of emotion, and active aversion to its physical expression. (61)

Given that Voss and Laura are depicted as two parts of a whole, one can accept the validity of Bliss's statement; less palatable are the conclusions reached on the strength of the obvious binaries Voss and Laura evoke. Beatson states that Laura activates Voss's 'lower self,' making him uncomfortably aware of his feminine side (16). Natale believes

most characters [in *Voss*] are male in a *mateship* relationship . . . searching for a personal and human reconciliation with their selves and Australian geographical and historical complexities . . . to go beyond the 'Great Australian Emptiness' and become *one* with the land and their life' [author italics]. ('The Goddess' 255–56)

Women on the other hand, are needed for their nurturing, mothering role, and, in the case of Laura, to complete Voss. Despite insisting Laura is 'a true heroine,' Natale fails to see how her reading of Laura anchors her existence to a dependence on Voss and his vision ('The Goddess,' 255–56). Bliss too, believes Laura garners sympathy for Voss and becomes, finally, 'Voss translated, Voss made intelligible and, most of all, accessible' (64). Both readings erase the pre-Voss Laura in similar fashion to that hinted at in the text when Laura tells Voss she kept a diary but ceased to write, because the blank page appeared 'far more expressive' than her 'own emptiness' (White, *Voss* 91).

Laura becomes, like genius women in the Romantic tradition, no longer female. She remains in a state of semi-erasure after Voss's death, living a celibate lifestyle, 'detached' from society and in thrall of Voss (White, *Voss* 410). She appreciates that she sees 'more deeply and truthfully,' but she does not attain the melancholy and sublimity that are the rightful attributes of the genius. For example, Beston asks:

Could Laura have been humanized had she been less of an isolated intellectual in mid-nineteenth century Australia, less . . . confined to domestic activity, able to embark as a man upon an expedition like Voss? The answer is a clear negative. In the first place White makes it clear that Laura . . . uses her education to guard her apartness. Had she been a man, her strong sexual fears would have remained. . . . Voss, on the other hand, has at least the dream of himself and Laura joined at the waist. (215)

Where Voss's outsider status is accepted and celebrated by critics, the objection to Laura using her education to 'guard her apartness' is telling. Beston states that she 'holds class with people, in severe, preachy style,' and has 'stopped learning' whereas Voss ' . . . continues to learn human reactions, however reluctantly' (213–14). Beston mounts an argument based on alienation rather than gender, yet his bias toward Voss as the more rounded protagonist not only reads against the

grain of the character, but accepts in Voss traits that are unacceptable in Laura. Beston overlooks Voss's obvious antagonism, insisting he has none of Laura's bitterness or bitchiness, and is on his way to humanisation before his demise (213). Beston's message is clear: Laura cannot presume to transcend.

At first glance, Stow appears to remove Heriot from the presence of women, which may account for the lack of criticism of gender in *To the Islands*. Yet despite the apparent lack of female protagonists—or what some might see as a justifiable geographical reality—there are women present. The two living and one deceased white women are assigned Madonna roles or are invisible. The mission nurse, Helen, is nurturing and concerned, causing one of her co-workers, Gunn, to wonder if she is 'perhaps a fanatic of sorts, like a nun' (Stow 11). The reader can only wonder, because access to Helen's thoughts is not granted. She shows scant interest in her co-workers, and yet one finds her suddenly discussing 'getting hitched' to Terry Dixon (169). The interest her impending marriage arouses at the mission reinforces Coward's claim that the event of significance for heroines in fictional narratives of the nineteenth-century happens at 'moments of social and sexual decision' that lead ultimately to marriage (27–28). For the nurse Helen, and indeed for Laura in *Voss*, marriage (be it physical or spiritual) signals a change in their status. The other white woman is the invisible wife of Father Way, and the deceased white woman is Heriot's wife, who nursed children at the mission, and died a slow, agonising death from cancer (Stow 57). The depiction of Heriot's wife fits with Swann's explanation that in Romantic terms 'every ideal woman is also a deathly woman' (89).

While the white women are assigned traditional roles, Stow consistently aligns older Indigenous women with the beaks and claws of birds, and young Indigenous girls with snakes (4–5, 51, 63, 109). In contrast, Heriot is referred to as an 'old tiger,' and his companion, Justin, as having 'quiet dignity . . . homely wisdom, and strength, and pride' (33, 36). Stow's recurrent affiliation of women with either traditional ideals of nurture and purity, or uncontrolled or ugly nature, and males with nobility or the powerful and mysterious, fits within the Romantic conception of male selfhood, creating gender imbalances that appear to be a perfectly 'natural' rendering of the real world. Beatson's assessment of Voss: 'He wants to mortify and destroy his body, using the harsh landscape of the interior to scrape away his female nature, so that his upper self can be released' illustrates how the binaries male/upper : female/lower are taken as the 'natural' order (16). The recourse to 'masculine metaphors of power' means that

the Romantic desire to articulate visions that can speak for the whole . . . is betrayed by the . . . need to adopt a masculine posture in order to fulfil that desire, a posture made to seem natural and universal by suppressing its own vital relation to the politics of gender. (Ross 49)

In the case of *To the Islands*, the result is an erasure of the female position and voice. Women, both Indigenous and white, are denied Kant's 'self-generating, transcendent inner freedom' that enables an individual to re-create 'himself and a new reality through his own action' (Battersby, *Phenomenal Woman* 66). Heriot on the other hand, is endowed with a melancholy that is recognised and at times echoed, by his Indigenous and white male companions, yet appears to go unnoticed by the women. Justin tells his white companions the story of the Onmalmeri massacre with Gothic intensity; the women joke, flirt or play (Stow 9, 26, 38–40, 50–51). Women discuss marriage as the substance of life; Heriot curses the sky and Terry Dixon stands at the top of a cliff, thinking 'It'd be easy to . . . drop into the water. That'd be a death to die' (Stow 88–89).

The ideal of a sublime understanding revolving around the unity of nature and male selfhood is taken as a universal truth in *To the Islands*. At every turn, Heriot uses his greater knowledge to translate his experiences into personal epiphany (Stow 97). But even when mocking his own erudition, he flaunts his learning in the presence of other wandering males (Stow 130–31, 164–68). For these men understand, if not his literary allusions, the masculine sentiment behind his belief that ‘Nothing’s true until you feel it. That’s why we have poets’ (Stow 168).

Dewar claims that many Australian novels support ‘the notion of the bush as an escape for men from women’ (30). I do not suggest that the main aim of either *Voss* or *To the Islands* is escapism from women; nevertheless, by choosing the Wanderer for a male protagonist, the texts reinforce the received expectations and gender conventions of 1950s Australian society. Furthermore, if ‘constructions of national identity depend on fixed notions of gender difference’ then White and Stow cannot be expected to address the issue from a position other than their own (Einhorn 204). White’s Laura, for example, despite being an intelligent and sensitive woman, has the self-repression ‘in language, manners, and dress’ expected of an early nineteenth-century lady (Damousi 140). Her repression is a necessary side-effect of sustaining Voss’s myth, even if she does at times, slip and speaks her mind (White, *Voss* 440).

If Laura sometimes speaks her mind, the women in *To the Islands* do not appear to have much mind to speak of. When they do talk, it is about domestic events at the mission, or marriage. Therefore, where Voss has Laura as a supporting act in his own melodrama, Heriot keeps the idealised memory of his dead wife close while he ruminates on the great unknown. The Romantic project of transcending the self through imposed asceticism and continuous movement outweighs any considerations of women. Whatever the authorial intention, it is clear that the use of the Wanderer amplifies masculine values and effectively nullifies the female position.

Voss and *To the Islands* concentrate on the inner man and use the countryside in a traditional Romantic sense; that is, as the natural partner of the Romantic male in his search for unity. The figure of the Wanderer assists in a deep textual permeation of the masculine assumptions connected to the Romantic tradition through the tropes of melancholy, the sublime and genius. In both novels, other men accompany Voss and Heriot on their quests while the women wait at the home—whether in the domestic space of a house in Sydney, or in a mission station on the edge of the wilderness. This is not to say, however, that Voss and Heriot are typical journeymen encountered in earlier Australian literature. Conway, in her discussion on gender in Australia, explains how the ‘emerging rituals of the culture gave a man a social territory away from women and children,’ which was cemented by bush narratives in the 1880s and 1890s that celebrated ‘male friendship and loyalty,’ and excluded women from the ‘important emotional experiences of life’ (351). Conway cites *The Man from Snowy River* as a perfect example of the masculine narratives of ‘unfettered freedom’ used to perpetuate the myth of mates in the bush.

Voss and Heriot clearly do not fit the masculine moulds of popular Australian free-wheeling adventurers or intrepid explorers (351). Both men are on ‘temporal and spatial voyages’ that ‘are in essence spiritual ones’ (Colmer 34). Beatson suggests that ‘White’s novels explore the implications of the descent of the soul into matter, the plight of the incarnated soul separated from its source, and the return by Grace, at the end of the cycle, to God’ (10). Hassall sees the final vision of ‘Heriot high on his cliff, staring out into the sun, and searching for meaning in death’ as ‘one of the unforgettable images of the Australian experience’ because Heriot may be dying, ‘but he has escaped from the European cell of himself into the landscape, and hence into a spiritual freedom to travel towards, if not necessarily arrive at, a destination’ (51). Here then, are frank admissions that both Voss and Heriot are not of the same grain as the Man from Snowy

River, or his friend, Clancy of the Overflow.⁹ In the spirit of true Romantic Wanderers, Voss and Heriot are primarily concerned with selfhood as it relates to personal or spiritual growth. But unlike the women who surround them, Voss's and Heriot's inner lives are transmuted into grand 'quests' and given value through intimations of the sublime. The women in *Voss* and *To the Islands* must be content with the passive contemplation of an 'inner life,' or the pedestrian pursuit of a 'social life,' or risk the illness and social problems that beset Laura when she attempts to step outside socially acceptable boundaries.

Women in Romantic fiction are generally portrayed as superficial creatures whose only interests lie within the social or domestic realms, and whose 'real' life begins with marriage. The exceptions—those deep-thinking, over-educated females with no interest in marriage—are subjected to all manner of discomforts. In this respect, Laura is no exception. She is wracked by illness, beset by doubt, ostracised by her peers, loses her physical attractiveness, and is often portrayed as having little intellectual depth outside her contemplation of Voss's quest (White, *Voss* 349–58, 436). Laura stands in stark contrast to Stow's Helen, who, despite being well educated, remains quietly in the background as nurse and nurturer, and agrees to marry a man she appears to know little about, with the express purpose of staying on the mission to continue giving selflessly to others. Unlike Laura, Helen is not stripped of her femininity, which recalls Battersby's suggestion that women who aspire to any kind of genius will be 'made male' (*Phenomenal Woman* 10). Both White and Stow hold to the Romantic tradition of grandeur and freedom attached to genius, wherein a male with talent is transformed into a 'superior type of being who' follows a "sublime" path between "sanity" and "madness," between the "monstrous" and the "superhuman" (Battersby, *Gender and Genius* 149).

The women in *Voss* and *To the Islands* are denied access to the Romantic mix of melancholy, sublime and genius that is considered the birthright of the male Wanderer. Even Laura, who at first glance appears to break the confines of her gender, remains locked within the 'natural' social boundaries of the time. At the heart of the Wanderer's mission is a search for masculine transcendence, and an implied superiority attached to rising above the flesh and discovering the essential truth of spiritual being. Voss and Heriot carry out this mission, ensuring that the moments of melancholy understanding and sublime transcendence in *Voss* and *To the Islands* remain an entirely masculine experience.

NOTES

¹ One could apply the same framework to a study of racial relations in the novels.

² Loose translation.

³ Attributed to Kant and Schiller.

⁴ I am not suggesting that women are incapable of sublime experience. Rather the language and theories of the sublime have always carried an assumption of exclusive masculine experience.

⁵ The rebelliousness of the *Sturm und Drang* 'arose directly out of the proud conviction of the limitless rights and powers of divinely inspired genius' (Furst 33).

⁶ The line comes from Baudelaire's 'Spleen 2.' 'I have more memories than if I were a thousand years old.' The poem lists memories and then begins the next stanza with, 'Nothing's as long as the limping days when, under thick flakes of snowy years, ennui—fruit of bleak incuriosity—takes on immortal proportions.' Cf. Kerry Leves, 'Toxic Flowers: Randolph Stow's Unfused Horizons'. (Trans: Waldrop, 98). *JASAL* Vol 10, 2010: 7.

⁷ Lees reads the guilt of the Wanderer as being a replacement for the older religious guilt of the Wandering Jew: 'The burden of a social conscience is what made the Wanderer pertinent to an age with egalitarian aspirations. . . . [T]he figure was primarily a secular construction which . . . replaced the religious guilt of the older myth with the increasing social concerns of that revolutionary age.'

⁸ White, *Flaws in the Glass*: 'One English critic finds it a serious flaw in my novels that my women are stronger than my men. I see nothing anomalous in this imbalance; it arises from a lifetime of observing my fellow

Australians, in closest detail my own parents when I was young.’ White also states in *Flaws in the Glass* that his women are ‘flawed because they are also human beings, as I am . . .’ (252).

⁹ Both appear in poems by A. B. Paterson.

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