Tourmaline and Trauma: Spiritual Leadership, Salvation, and Disillusionment in Randolph Stow's Novel

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Introduction

Australian Literature is, at least internationally, understudied, and far more so than Australian visual arts. A unique, dedicated academic programme within the English department has existed at the University of Sydney since 1962; nevertheless Australian Literature still feels the effect of the cultural cringe associated with colonial countries.[1] Despite this, certain authors and texts inspire a relatively steady stream of scholarship. Randolph Stow is one of these. Stow's compelling, complex, often metaphysical style allows him to use literature to explore religious and spiritual life and its intersections with community. Stow's *Tourmaline* (1963) is part of the mid twentieth century post-apocalyptic movement most notably represented by Neville Shute's 1957 novel *On the Beach*.[2] In *Tourmaline* Randolph Stow mitigates the fraught relationship between perception and experiences, specifically those relating to the interplay of human responses to spirituality, social structure and character, essential forces in community construction. Stow's vibrant prose, layered plot, philosophical thematics, and a set of characters painfully human in their lack of holistic appeal absorb his reader. *Tourmaline* is concerned with a potential conflict between the active and inactive experiential religion dealing with the

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[1] The University of Sydney, 'Australian Literature Program: About Us', at http://sydney.edu.au/arts/australian_literature/about/index.shtml. Accessed 31/03/2015.

[2] Randolph Stow, *Tourmaline* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2012).

confusion of spiritual and religious leadership, disenchantment, pain, hope, salvation and myth.

***Tourmaline*: Plot Summary**

Randolph Stow weaves the tale of Tourmaline, a Western Australian desert town existing in a "comatose" state in the years after the gold rush has ended. The town is wrapped in isolation, not simply geographically but also in terms of communication both outside the town and within its boundaries between different people. There also exists a spiritual isolation within the characters. Religion and spirituality end up being the driving forces of the text. The core characters are: The Law, an elderly policeman nostalgic for the past who narrates; Kestrel, the town publican and a discontented bully; Deborah, Kestrel's eighteen-year-old part-Aboriginal wife; Tom Spring, the storekeeper influenced by Taoism and philosophy; and Michael Random, the stranger who takes on the messianic mantle in an attempt to live up to the town's desire for salvation.

One day, the sole link to the world beyond the town, the delivery driver, brings to Tourmaline a man on the verge of death from sunstroke and sunburn, and bearing the scars of numerous suicide attempts. After three days the townsfolk succeed in nursing him back to health, resurrecting him from his near-death. The man introduces himself by a false name, "Michael Random," and claims to be a water diviner. From this moment the town channels all its energy toward him: he becomes a communal focus for a resurrected sense of hope that had been absent from the town's passive psyche. Random begins to forge relationships with the townspeople, attracting everyone except for the jealous publican, Kestrel. Random gains credibility by discovering a reef of gold and uses his resulting social influence to establish and preside over a spiritual congregation motivated by desire and humiliation. During this time Kestrel leaves Tourmaline. Random's gold reawakens the colonial greed that lingers in the town, but when the time comes for him to prove his skills as a water diviner, he fails and is passively shunned. Kestrel returns bringing with him modern divining machinery, and picks up the abandoned reigns of Random. Kestrel exudes a worrying and dark sense of power, and in the wake of his return Tom Spring, the voice of hope, dies and Random flees maniacally into the desert to die.

The Messianic Paradigm: Resurrection and Salvation

This article focuses on the messianic paradigm (and related sub-foci of salvation and resurrection), and myth, in particular its influence on, and importance to social structure, and the significance of spirituality to communal unity. Consequently this article uses concepts of charismatic leadership as developed by Max Weber, myth as theorised by Eric Csapo, and also utilises the literary critical work of Helen Tiffin. Tiffin's work highlights: both human observation and the implementation of dominance and leadership; structural commonalities between *Tourmaline* and cargo cults; and Kenelm Burridge's concept of "myth dreams." Tiffin asserts that a messianic desire drives the text. Csapo's understanding of myth as a socially important ideology includes the useful formula that myth is thought to be true but not representative of the present, or everyday, world.[3] In *Tourmaline* the fictional space is not reality for the audience, but rather the post-apocalyptic vibe and isolated desert community is an alternative world in which the reader is immersed. Tourmaline, without media, technology or institutional power structures presents a world unlike contemporary Australia; however, the plot deals with recognisable human spiritual and religious issues and situations, and thus is not fantasy, and has the potential to be 'true'. Csapo also asserts that myth is shared by a collective and is a story made socially important as it is repeated or alluded to frequently in social discourse.[4]

Weber's model of leadership separates leaders into three categories; rational-legal, traditional and charismatic. This article focuses primarily on the latter.[5] The charismatic leader offers revelation, is unpredictable, personal and unstable.[6] These leaders are at the most pure in shamanic forms such as the healer/diviner who have obtained skills learning from their ancestry.[7] In *Tourmaline* Random is one of a succession of leaders who perpetuate the same issues and learn coercion from each

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[3] Eric Csapo, *Theories of Mythology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 3, 9.
[4] Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*, p. 9.
[5] See Paul Gifford, 'Religious Authority: Scripture, Tradition, Charisma', in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnells (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 388.
[6] Gifford, 'Religious Authority: Scripture, Tradition, Charisma', p. 388.
[7] The Law even links Michael to such a role: " 'I'm to have the real dominion'. A voice like an incantation, a shamans voice." See Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 157.

other.[8] Often charismatic leaders connect themselves with, for example, the rational-legal by creating explanation and laws or the traditional, connecting themselves to an authentic lineage of some sort.[9] Michael chooses to associate himself with the recognisable tradition of Christianity. Perversely, one of Michael's character traits which translates as most charismatic is the power of his own self-hatred, which the townsfolk regular identify not as hatred but as a fire, a burning within him. Michael engenders a series of strong and conflicting emotions, which awaken in Tourmaline a mirror of his own self-hatred and internal spiritual struggles. Michael seeks salvation through the town just as the town seeks salvation through him. Michael is not demonised, in fact *Tourmaline* emphasises the devil present in each character, a flaw, an inherent sin and the desert itself symbolises a purgatory, a landscape familiar and yet alien, a place of constant challenge, where the landscape around a settlement changes imperceptibly or labyrthinely as the wind shift the dunes.

Randolph Stow and Australian Literature

Stow is concerned with personal and spiritual exile, a thematic present in a number of his texts. Robyn Wallace pertinently asserts that his brilliance as a writer lies in his ability to evoke complex spiritual states through images that grow and evolve in meaning rather than defining.[10] Both Wallace and Bruce King liken Stow's treatment of landscape and spiritual matters to the work of T. S. Eliot in particular *The Waste Land.* Comparisons refer to the perceived death and desolation of the landscape, the presence of an elderly man who waits for rain as well as a general thematic link to Eliot's interest in the work of Fraser and other anthropologists who sought a universal mythology to identify the basis of religious ritual.[11] Thomas Kenneally posits that Australian writers struggle to divorce themselves from European beauty conventions.[12] This colours their artistic creations and responses to their environment. Kenneally is highlighting a dichotomy of opinion and experience, firstly that of an Australia which culturally was English

[8] Gifford, 'Religious Authority: Scripture, Tradition, Charisma', p. 389.
[9] Gifford, 'Religious Authority: Scripture, Tradition, Charisma', p. 389.
[10] Bruce King, 'Randolph Stow's Novels of Exile', *Antipodes*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1987), p. 75; Robyn Wallace, 'Messiahs and Millennia in Randolph Stow's Novels', *Kunapipi*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1981), pp. 46, 61.
[11] Wallace, 'Messiahs and Millennia in Randolph Stow's Novels', p. 61.
[12] Thomas Kenneally, 'The World's Worst End', *Antipodes*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1988), p. 5.

speaking and simultaneously an Australia which geographically is "Asian, alien, barbarous, splendid and unanswerably its own place."[13] Certainly Stow's novels deal with national themes in particular the imposition of Christianity on local people, the need of the white man to adapt to an alien environment, a lack of religious faith, the dangers of quietism or the negative way and the need to believe and to accept death.[14]

Much of *Tourmaline* focuses on the townspeople's experiences with faith with Stow investigating and creatively shaping these experiences and the spirituality that moulds the novel and the town as its subject. *Tourmaline* also incorporates formalised traditions; Christianity and Taoism, and even to an extent classical myth. This article will use the term "spirituality" with all its inherent vagueness and fluidity simply because it is the term that best fits with the fluid text. Gary Bouma, quoting statistics from the Australian 2001 census, notes a 51.9% growth rate between 1996 and 2001 in the categories of religious belief "not further defined" or "inadequately described."[15] In a perhaps reductive but logical manner, Bouma assigns those two categories within the definitional range of spirituality. Critically Bouma remarks that there is a notion that Australian religion is best characterised as "a shy hope in the heart."[16] This observation is poignantly recurrent in the plot of *Tourmaline* as Michael awakens hope in the townsfolk. Furthermore, The Law continually drifts back to an idea of the safety of ruin and desolation, this comfort of retiring attitudes could be compared to the unsure, shy hope buried within the individual that Bouma refers to as characteristic of the religious and spiritual psyche of Australia as a nation.

Communal Passivity

Stow's characters appear incapable of escaping a debilitating passivity that prevents them from successfully articulating and communicating their personal philosophies and religious or spiritual feeling with others. This dilemma is dramatized by a conversation between The Law and Tom Spring as Tom tries in vain to communicate his spirituality and

[13] Kenneally, 'The World's Worst End', p. 5.
[14] King, 'Randolph Stow's Novels of Exile', p. 75.
[15] Gary Bouma, *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 61-62.
[16] Bouma, *Australian Soul*, p. 63.

philosophies (which are heavily Taoist in nature); The Law remarks: "At moments I thought I glimpsed through the inept words, something of his vision of fullness... then it was hidden again obscured by his battles with the language."[17] The Law struggles to comprehend but relates what he hears in a section of beautiful musing prose:

> His God had names like the nameless, the sum of all, the ground of being. He spoke of the unity of opposites and of the overwhelming power of inaction. He talked of becoming a stream to carve out canyons without ceasing; always to yield; of being a tree to grow without thinking; of being a rock to be shaped by winds and tides. He said I must become empty in order to be filled, must unlearn everything, must accept the role of food. And with curious, fumbling passion he told me of a gate leading into darkness, which was both a valley and a woman, the source and sap of life, the temple of revelation.[18]

This excerpt is the most specific foray into Tom's personal philosophical understandings, he has cultivated the spiritual depth (Taoist inspired depth) to embrace the simplicity of life and an acceptance of the ways of nature and change while others all live in painful suspense struggling with the perceived pointlessness of existence in the barren, hostile landscape ("landscape is... a symbol of the human condition and a backdrop to human action").[19] Despite Stow's clear effort to communicate through Tom, the character still fails the diviner and town with his unclear philosophy and his failure to communicate it (which he only attempts at crisis point to give The Law). Perhaps deeming his philosophy of acceptance too private he fails to even attempt to save the town from succumbing to the myth dream. His acceptance and fluidity is seen here negatively.

Stow lurches into pages of philosophical dialogue using, primarily, the character of Tom Spring (injected with the philosophy of Taoism) as his authorial mouthpiece. These debates spring up like bookmarks disrupting the progression of plot while interpreting the preceding events. Stow alternates between portrayals of organised religion as the unification of communal hope and energy and as a dangerous experience that people choose over thought; Tom Spring warns the diviner, "It's not a substitute for thinking" and Dave Speed attacks The Law saying, "It's you that keeps

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[17] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 177.
[18] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 177.
[19] Charles David Harrington, *Landscape in Australian Fiction: The Rendering of a Human Environment*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1984), p. 249.

throwing words around... throw 'em away and think."[20] Tourmaline, lulling in inaction, waits for something, or someone, to mitigate change. They have subdued their desire out of a fear of failure (The Law narrates that "the love of ruin is insidious… there is ease in dereliction. Action becomes irrelevant"), but their outward acceptance masks inner dissatisfaction and accompanying spiritual discontent.[21] The weakening of the old order, namely the loss of any vestige of the colonial power structures of church and bureaucracy (leaving only the aged, ineffectual and unmotivated policeman) gives way for the possibility of a new leader who, Tiffin and Wallace remark, is anticipated as a Messiah and Saviour.[22]

Landscape and Water

The Australian's obituary of Randolph Stow noted that "Landscape in his work... is never just landscape but a site for metaphysical exploration, a means of exploring the purpose of human existence."[23] A number of scholars deal with *Tourmaline* from this ecological perspective focusing on the land and its influence over the characters. This perspective is pivotal for an understanding of the religious elements of the novel. The characters revolve around their flawed relationship with the environment and their varying embrace or rejection of organised religion and personal spirituality is a direct result of their attempts to alter that relationship and experience. Thomas Kenneally quotes a character from author D. H. Lawrence's Australian novel *Kangaroo* (1923) who, looking out the train window at the countryside, remarks, "It looks as if no man had ever loved it, as if no man had ever loved it for itself and made it a homeland and a motherland."[24] This quotation hearkens to the attitude of the residents of Tourmaline who fail to accept the land around them, instead wishing to change it from the natural desert into a lush utopia reminiscent of England and pre-drought times. The residents, with the exception of Tom Spring who desires to be

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[20] In this latter opinion Stow's text correlates to the work of David Hume and Immanuel Kant on the dangerous potential of religion. See Stow, *Tourmaline*, pp. 12, 143.
[21] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 193.
[22] Helen Tiffin, 'Melanesian Cargo Cults in *Tourmaline* and *Visitants*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1981), p. 110.
[23] The Australian. 'Solitary writer Randolph Stow chose silence', at http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/solitary-writer-randolph-stow-chose-silence/story-e6frg8n6-1225873725761. Accessed 30/03/2015.
[24] See Kenneally, 'The World's Worst End', p. 5.

fluid embodying the missing water and accepting the desert environment Dave Speed ("we've got to the bare bones of the country and I reckon we're getting to the bones of ourselves. If the water comes, it'll be when we've stopped needing it. We're coming true") and eventually The Law, do not love the land "for itself" they mine, exploit and curse it, seeking any alternative to acceptance.[25]

As an environment, water and the desert parallel each other. The dunes are fluid moulding to shapes and objects just as water fills a space, so does sand. Randolph Stow noted that *Tourmaline* was a name chosen from a bush ballad.[26] However, it is interesting to note the reference to the Tourmaline gemstone, which the mineralogist Karl Friedrich August Rammelsberg discovered contained chemically-bound water.[27] This gemstone can be interpreted as a metaphor for the town itself and its misplaced hope that an abundance of undiscovered water is trapped below the earth's surface requiring the right leadership and toolset to be uncovered. In the timeframe covered by *Tourmaline* it is the stranger, Michael, who the town decides has the appropriate skills to break the surface, reach the water and, in a parallel metaphor, break through the passivity and listless nature of the town to stir up passionate hope and unity through his spiritual practice.

Grace Ying May and and Hyunhye Junia Pokrifka-Joe note that in the Bible, wells provide water for communities, travellers and animals; they symbolise prosperity and abundance and provide a meeting point to give relief to emotionally and spiritually parched people.[28] The link to *Tourmaline* is clear, the town believes itself to be emotionally poor and their resurrection of faith and hope coincides in a belief that they may be able to resurrect a well, to resurrect the 'living water' from the ground. When set to the daunting challenge of digging a 150 foot well they work

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[25] This link between Tom and water is echoed in nomenclature: his surname, 'Spring'. See Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 80.

[26] Nicholas Jose, 'Visitants: Randolph Stow's End Time Novel', *Transnational Literature*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2011), p. 8.

[27] See Andreas Ertl, 'About the Nomenclature and the Type Locality of Elbaite: A Historical Review', *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Mineralogischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 154, no. 1 (2008), pp. 35-44.

[28] See the comments by Grace Ying May and Hyunhye Junia Pokrifka-Joe in *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, eds Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (Downers Grover, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 597-598.

obediently, however, the absence of any water at the projects culmination destabilises Michael's leadership. There are interesting parallels to be made between *Tourmaline* and its pre-text The Bible in regards to water. In particular there is a passage (John 4:1-42) where Jesus stops at a well in Samaria to drink and asks a woman to help him. He tells her God provides the living water and that once one has drunk of the Living Water they will never be thirsty again, it will "become in them a fountain of water which bubbles up to eternal life." A commentary by Nicholas King suggests Jesus' call for a drink is a thirsting for kindness and compassion.[29] This call is echoed in Michael Random's thirst for compassion from the world and from God.

As recognised by May and Pokrifka-Joe, in this passage Jesus identifies himself as source of living water and as Messiah; in doing so he draws spiritual thirst out of the woman. Comparison with *Tourmaline* is again possible: recall the scene in which Deborah is emotionally tormented and humiliated by Michael until she acquiesces to his faith.[30] This comparison is in regards to the charismatic leaders conversion of, and revelation to, individuals through discussion. The difference is intention; the false messiah, driven by self-hatred is destructive, whereas Jesus is respectful and trusting.

Myth

According to Robert Segal myth becomes a way of explaining the world religiously, not scientifically.[31] Carl Jung dismissed reading myths literally as symbols were then mistaken for the symbolised. This attitude fits in with that of Maureen Quilligan who theorises on the presence of multiple meanings in mythical allegory.[32] Kenneally has an interesting discussion of the attitude of Patrick White who, Kenneally writes, sees an Australia vacant of easily perceived human values, foreign to the soul and sight and needing a mythology of its own.[33] This is essentially a call for secular myths of nationalism and a dismissal or rejection of existing Aboriginal

[29] King, 'Randolph Stow's Novels of Exile', p. 213.
[30] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 147.
[31] Robert Segal, 'Myth and Ritual', in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnells (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 355.
[32] Maureen Quilligan, quoted in David Fonteyn, '*Tourmaline*: An Ecological Allegory', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 10 (2010), 2.
[33] Kenneally, 'The World's Worst End', p. 6.

stories of the land. Kenneally continues to suggest that Voss (White's explorer of the novel *Voss*) goes into the Australian void to give it significance through the Voss legend that will be then told about him (Voss himself says he is "compelled into this country").[34] Kenneally stipulates that the complicated myth symbols of White's *Voss* construct an Australia with a spiritual content accessible to Europeans not only the Aboriginal peoples; Voss brings meaning to an unreliable landscape.[35] It is possible to read *Tourmaline* as a text in the same tradition: Stow writes *Tourmaline* as a myth and his characters, as they develop through the narrative, become clear in their role as archetypes.

In addition to the structural composition and potential authorial purpose of *Tourmaline* there are various classical myths used as pre-texts for subplots within *Tourmaline.* The myth of Persephone who travels between hell and earth with the seasons is mirrored in Deborah. The adopted daughter of Tom and Mary Spring and wife of Kestrel, Deborah crosses the road (the physical border space) between the house of her parents and the house of her husband multiple times in the novel torn between her love for both parties, desirous to escape the gloom of Kestrel's pub and his abusive manner and yet constantly drawn back by her love for him. Kestrel's pub is the realm of hell and Tom and Mary's house and village store the site of earth and hope. When Kestrel leaves Tourmaline Deborah remarks "Kes is gone. Cast out of me like the devils in the Bible. He can't win again." This emphatic judgment is later disproved by his return and her pregnancy, rendering him literally within her and connected to her forever.[36]

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[34] Kenneally, 'The World's Worst End', p. 6.

[35] The work of Helen Tiffin incorporates a similar focus on the friction of colonial interpretations of land and she writes that the Australian writer's fascination with Eastern religions (and also non-dominant spiritualities) was a search for an alternative way to explore a landscape that had not been adequately comprehended through Christianity. See Tiffin, 'Melanesian Cargo Cults in *Tourmaline* and *Visitants*', p. 109.

[36] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 171.

Cargo Cults and the Myth Dream

Myth and ritual are frequently paired together, perhaps over-simplistically, but paired nonetheless by many scholars, since Jane Harrison and the early twentieth century Cambridge "Myth and Ritual School."[37] It can be argued that mass hysteria and delusion can be considered a ritual activity essential for the survival of certain religious structures. Furthermore, mass delusion is identified as a key element of the phenomenon of cargo cults, as explored by Charles Julius and Kenelm Burridge. Helen Tiffin showcases Stow's anthropological background suggesting an assumed knowledge of Melanesian millenarian cults from which he could draw a messianic paradigm and transplant it onto a narrative dealing with the colonial confusion that results from a desire for a past which the community believe is the root of salvation.[38] To further develop this line of enquiry Tiffin references the work of Julius on Cargo cults. The basic structure and pattern of cargo cult evolution is as follows; they originate with one individual who enforces certain behaviours and preparations on a community in order to prepare for the arrival of huge cargoes of European goods and, consequently, a better happier way of life, sometimes preparations involve the destruction of food gardens in a demonstration of faith.[39] This destruction destroys an established social structure and key to communal self-determination thereby creating a (now more powerful) necessity to faithfully follow the community's suddenly indispensible leader whose promise of wealth is now the major source of hope.

Tiffin refers to the work of anthropologist Kenelm Burridge on the myth dream citing this as the root of the establishment of cargo cults. Myth dream is a term coined by Burridge in *Mambo* (1995). The myth dream is comprised of a body of notions emerging from personal experience, conflict, desire, and conversation, which is expressed in the space of myths, dreams or popular stories.[40] The myth dream becomes an ideal, regarded as the key to a utopic existence. The myth dream becomes formal, even doctrinal as the issues that the myth dream may solve become more prominent in the community. Burridge succinctly identifies the myth dream

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[37] Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*, pp. 145-160.
[38] Tiffin, 'Melanesian Cargo Cults in *Tourmaline* and *Visitants*', p. 124.
[39] Tiffin, 'Melanesian Cargo Cults in *Tourmaline* and *Visitants*', p. 112.
[40] Tiffin, 'Melanesian Cargo Cults in *Tourmaline* and *Visitants*', p. 113.

as a community day-dream which, from time to time, is accessed by a charismatic figure who extracts "portions of the myth-dream and for a relatively short time, transforms and externalizes these portions of the myth dreams into the word."[41] Dreams and myths are usually opposed categories of experience; dreams are private and myths are public, fixed, a kind of literature.[42] There are indications however, especially in Australian Aboriginal culture, that dreams and myths are closely related.[43] Kracke argues that myth in its dramaturgic (not merely narrative) form and in its construction as a series of vivid images depends on inner visualisation for its communication and impact. Therefore myths are constituted into the spatial sensory modality of dreams.[44] In addition there are parallels in narrative style between communicating myth and dream, the events are known through sharing verbally, textually or in altered consciousness. In *Tourmaline* The Law narrates and Michael experiences God speaking to him moving through the church as in a trance, a space of altered consciousness similar to a dream.

In *Tourmaline* the myth dream, or 'cargo' to refer back to the cargo cult model, is focused on water, which, poised as the cure all will revitalise the town returning it to its former lush physical state while allegorically implying a return to a refreshed spiritual and religious state. Eric Csapo's understanding of myth as a socially important narrative is present in all the mythic examples in *Tourmaline* particularly the thesis that myth is thought true but not representative of the present world; The Law's tale of the lush past is so talked about it has become myth, thought to be true but not depicting the world they experience.[45] Paul Gifford writes that "all humans need authority to resolve major questions" and desire authority to enact social change.[46] Therefore the myth dream must be realised in a specific format: the structural example used by Burridge and Tiffin is the cargo cult

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[41] Kenelm Burridge, quoted in David A. Shank, *Prophet Harris: The " Black Elijah" of West Africa* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), p. 171.
[42] Waud Kracke, 'Myths in dreams, thought in images: an Amazonian contribution to the psychoanalytic theory of primary process', in *Dreaming: Anthropological and Psychological Interpretations*, ed. Barbara Tedlock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 31.
[43] Kracke, 'Myths in dreams, thought in images', p. 31.
[44] Kracke, 'Myths in dreams, thought in images', p. 32.
[45] Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*, pp. 3, 9.
[46] Gifford, 'Religious Authority: Scripture, Tradition, Charisma', p. 379.

and leader. If the myth dream is powerful enough the community will always attempt to realise it, their authority figure needs just enough charisma to become the hero, prophet and teacher (three appealing and powerful roles in community structure).[47] Stow's charismatic Michael attempts to embody these three roles.

Michael, though initially seen as a candidate for the role of cargo cult leader is actually a failed leader, the harbinger who triggers a powerful communal attempt to actively realise the myth dream. This activity commences with Michael's order to dig down 150 feet for a pocket of water that does not materialise and concludes, at least as far as the narrative takes us, with Kestrel returning to the town with powerful divining equipment. There is a vaguely Manichean characteristic of the demiurge shared between Kestrel and Michael. While Michael is an active force ("Inspired, sure. But not by God. By you, by Tourmaline"). Kestrel aids in triggering Michael's ascent by throwing a party to drain the town of its alcohol supply; in doing so Kestrel destroys an established social structure (similar to the food gardens of Melanesia) of drinking culture and sets the stage for the townsfolk's increased desperation for an addictive experience which they find in Michael's night time worship sessions.[48] These are complete with flickering firelight and hysterical singing, which The Law notes is conducive to an emotional response; "I began to weep for sheer love."[49] It could be suggested that Kestrel set the stage for Michael's ascension and failure in order to return as a resurrected, triumphant leader himself.

Essential to this use of the cargo cult as paradigm is that the myth dream takes precedent over the messianic figure. Consequently the figure is replaceable and therefore there exists a repetitive cycle which can be identified in the plot arc of *Tourmaline;* from saviour seeking, to ritual and activity, disappointment, disillusionment and then a period spent waiting for the next saviour. *Tourmaline* has three such leaders, in the past; The Law, then Michael, and finally Kestrel.

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[47] Tiffin, 'Melanesian Cargo Cults in *Tourmaline* and *Visitants*', p. 113.
[48] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 175.
[49] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 163.

Michael Random: Created Saviour, Messiah

The source of Michael's authority is the communal psyche of the town. Michael is a character *in extremis,* like the town itself. His charisma and prior knowledge of religious structures allow him to step into the messianic role, however, it is key to push the analysis that he is a leader of the town's creation. The Law identifies Michael as a "son for Tourmaline" the childless town.[50] In *Tourmaline,* the town, tired of inactivity, unwilling to accept the land around them, seeking a simple answer to their spiritual and social disconnect take it upon themselves to forge their own messiah. As Tom Spring angrily asserts, "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".[51] Terming Michael a 'son' suggests that Tourmaline as a whole is a group of men pretending to be God and emulating the biblical story; creating a son and eventually sacrificing him.

Tourmaline takes a broken figure, makes him their messiah, gives him purpose and when he fails they abandon and isolate him, they show no support although they are all aware of his fragility, mental distress, and history of self harm. When, finally, he walks into the desert only his most devoted follower tries to stop him, and therefore Tourmaline is complicit in his final sacrifice. But still, Michael's spiritual and personal exile awakens a communal consciousness of the exile of Tourmaline and The Law remarks of their faith; "on those nights (at the church)… I believed in him … we created him, dedicating him to the glory of God… he could not have been less his own."[52] Therefore Michael is a channel for their myth dream and eventually a channel for their faith and confidence in themselves. *Tourmaline* demonstrates the human desire for a powerful leader, a being such as those referred to by Hume. Although usually taking the form of a deity, the position can be intermediately filled by a human of certain, frequently destructive character. In *Tourmaline* these individuals are

[50] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 185.
[51] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 175.
[52] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 181.

represented by Kestrel and Michael who are compared constantly; "You've got like Kes... you've got like each other."[53] It is the town that lets loose the "wild beasts" (a recurrent phrase) through their support of Michael, and Stow hints at their role in his creation by introducing Michael as a weak and malleable figure; "more helpless than the smallest child in Kestrel's arms."[54]

Michael the self-proclaimed diviner is other, foreign to Tourmaline. His language is restrained, he lacks the openness of the town, and yet his otherness enables the community to mould him to their own desires through their language; "the diviner with a halo around his yellow hair", "he's the sort... that might know something."[55] The townspeople rely on the stranger, imbuing him with enough social mythology and capital to become a saviour and yet remaining critical of him highlighting that "he was the focus the awakener of all this feeling but not its source."[56] Michael also uses language, in particular to shape Tourmaline's spiritual experience incorporating the language of humiliation to gather followers. He shames Deborah calling her "harlot" and "animal." He scorns The Law; "You were empty... a poor shabby toy model of The Law," blaming his inaction for the degradation of Tourmaline.[57] This humiliation establishes a "new unity... replaces its earlier state of unrecognized grace".[58] Tom Spring remarks: "he was having a fight with God. Just the two of them. Now he's dragged the whole of Tourmaline into it." Michael engenders strong and conflicting emotions which awaken in Tourmaline a mirror of his own self-hatred and internal spiritual struggles.[59] Michael seeks salvation through the town just as they seek salvation through him. In awakening and highlighting the townsfolk's self-hatred Michael's actions realise the earlier observation of Tom Spring who, in a room full of people, turns to Michael and says: "this rooms full of wild beasts… that might be let

[53] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 146.
[54] Stow, *Tourmaline*, pp. 12, 39.
[55] Stow, *Tourmaline*, pp. 148, 153.
[56] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 165.
[57] Stow, *Tourmaline*, pp. 147-148, 157.
[58] Harrington, *Landscape in Australian Fiction*, p. 250.
[59] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 176.

loose at any moment. The question is what controls them?" The wild beasts are taken to mean people who hate themselves, these people are considered the greatest danger.[60]

Michael exists as a projection of the townspeople's hopes yet overturns the power balance shifting from a possession of the town ("we'll have him") to possessing them.[61] Random's existence is an extended metaphor for the misguided and failed attempts of the townspeople to create a sense of purpose in their lives. His night-time prayer sessions are termed by The Law as "barbaric séances", invoking mysticism and associating the darkness of the occult with this religious experience.[62] Michael's night-time fire lit worship mirrors his personal state, he is often identified as 'burning' inside indicating his mental hell and yet tragically The Law reinforces Michael's lack of import, noting of the congregation; "the diviner whom they praised was only a symbol; a symbol for what I believed in, the force and the fire, the reaching, unwavering spirit of man like a still flame." [63]

Kestrel: The Strategic Saviour

Tourmaline deals with resurrections of multiple characters and beliefs. Michael is resurrected from near death, the town is resurrected from passivity, hope (albeit misplaced) is found in the belief that water will resurrect the town's glory and Kestrel's influence is resurrected in his return to the town.[64] Kestrel, whose name tellingly connotes the bird of prey, feels usurped by the diviner and envious of the power Michael cultivates from spirituality. This was a power Kestrel previously possessed as publican and supplier of alcohol to the town. Michael's power is centred not on the pub but on the old church, repurposing a hub from which, The Law remarks,

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[60] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 177.
[61] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 13.
[62] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 179.
[63] Stow, *Tourmaline*, pp. 170, 185.
[64] This return proves that no one is actually trapped, but the communal psyche views freedom as part of the past, a force which imprisons their contemporary identities.

"you command the whole town."[65] Upon his return to Tourmaline, in a manner reminiscent of the Prodigal Son, Kestrel remarks to Tom, "that... power is worth having."[66] This acknowledgement of the worth of religiously-based power indicates a realisation that religion and spirituality can control in a manner more widely powerful and compelling than substance. In experiencing the outside world Kestrel has gained some of the knowledge and power that was inherent in the foreigner Michael. Kestrel is dangerous because he has observed the power wielded by Michael, while learning how to lead himself. He sees that through activity, and through an attempt to change the landscape of the town he can control the citizens of Tourmaline in a more lasting, and encompassing way than by offering a social space and providing the depressant substance, alcohol.

Conclusion

In *Tourmaline* Michael's failure to divine water results in a disenchantment with mythology, a social feature that is, in this case, passive and focussed on nature. Instead, Michael triggers a move to sudden modernity and a pillaging attitude toward nature heralded by Kestrel's introduction of divining and mining machinery into the town. *Tourmaline* is a novel of inconclusiveness. *Tourmaline* does not privilege the light or the dark: Michael's sacrifice is not technically a sacrifice but suicidal desire allowed to run its course; the fluid philosophical lifestyle of Tom Spring is simultaneously privileged and rendered ineffective; the final potential salvation heralded by the arrival of divining machinery is not a salvation but a destruction of the environment and Stow alternates between portrayals of organised religion as the unification of communal hope and energy, and as a dangerous experience that people choose over thought.

In exploring the religious elements previously ascribed by critics of Stow's *Tourmaline* and, as a result of further thinking,

[65] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 5.
[66] Stow, *Tourmaline*, p. 206.

identifying additional elements this article has demonstrated how a piece of literary art has the capacity to communicate a wide range of ideological views. In particular Stow's focuses on spiritual exile, the desire for a messianic figure and the danger of desperate faith, are expertly worked through a mythological structure and philosophical styling.