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Edges of the Self: Topographies of the Body in the Writing of David Malouf

though words slide off, and hands
catching fail to hold,
here also may flower,
precarious as weed
or grey gull's nest, the moment
of touching, the poem.¹

One of the principal means of resisting imperial narratives and rewriting the self in the "new world" is through the refiguring of metaphors of place, and analyses of the relations between place, language and subjectivity have been central in criticism of post-colonial literatures. Since David Malouf is passionately concerned with "questions of geography," critics such as Martin Leer have rightly suggested that taking account of space and place is more important to readings of his work than is a search for linear development of any particular kind. The momentum of this type of reading has been increased by the circulation of Malouf's influential essay "A First Place: The Mapping of a World," in which he discusses the importance of a sense of place to his conception of personal and social identity. Elsewhere Malouf, who is perhaps one of the most astute critics and commentators on his own work, has suggested that he thinks of himself,

and almost all the writing--as beginning somehow with the body, in a sensual way, with a strong sense of where the body is, its compactness, and where it impinges on the world around it. I suppose that's why I get led so often into notions of mapping, of space, and of boundaries.... (qtd in Williams 84)

Our essay is concerned with precisely this exchange between place and body, the movement from each to each in the writing of experiences which are part of the self. Focusing mainly on his poetry and the play, *Blood Relations*, we suggest that Malouf's evocations of place are often

¹ "Sheer Edge." *Poems 1959-89*, by David Malouf (1992, 14).

highly eroticised, and that connections between self and landscape are explored in terms of a metaphorical disintegration of the post-colonial body, whereby boundaries between the self and the landscape are interrupted and broken down.

As Malouf himself has often pointed out, one of the most important and recurring metaphors in his work for representing discursive contestations and relationships between bodies and landscapes is that of centre and edge. The *Collins Dictionary* suggests that the "centre" is not simply "a point that is approximately at the middle," but also an orientation point, a site through which a specified force may be considered to act, such as "the centre of gravity." Likewise an edge is not only a "border or margin," but also "a line along which two faces or surfaces of a solid meet." Much of Malouf's writing moves towards this kind of (re-)definition of the concepts of centre and edge, breaking down the binary opposition through the constant movement of metaphor between self/language, self/body and self/place. One aspect of his interrogation of the centre/edge binary is a rewriting of the map of "Australia" itself to unsettle constructs of the "dead heart" or "empty centre" which has long been read as a metaphor for white culture/society. Malouf's Australia can be lush and dark, a place of celebration or repression, and a place where self, culture and landscape are written in terms of experience and exchange rather than the fundamental antagonism implicit in representations of human beings *against* the land. But Malouf is no literary nationalist; rather he insists on the constant "shiftingness" in metaphors of place, so that Florence might be as significant a "centre" of self as, say, Brisbane. And this shiftingness is not so much the "endless deferral" of post-structuralist fame, but rather a process of "endless referral" wherein the tropes of restrained imperial sexuality and the colonised landscape are re-visioned through the presentation of an intensely localised and often eroticised experience so that place and personal history become meaningful in terms of each other.² It is this constant self-referentiality that blurs the distinction between vehicle and tenor. The important technique for Malouf in this prismatic construction of narrative is the spatialising of self and language.

Post-colonialism, as a *reading* strategy, is important to this essay because it breaks down

² There are interesting connections perhaps with Aboriginal epistemologies of place, especially as they are developed by Bruce Chatwin in *The Songlines*.

conceptions of the individual as a single, independent and discrete identity. As Helen Tiffin has argued in her essay "Metaphor and Mortality," which examines the construction of malaria in colonialist writing, there is not ever a single colonised "body," but rather "an interplay between colonial and post-colonial *texts* and bodies" (2). The metaphorising of the body, as a habit of imperialist representation, is part of a larger military, medical and pedagogical administration of both imperial and colonised body. This conceptualisation of the body by post-colonial intellectuals exemplifies the argument that imperial government was in many ways a government of the self, so that *self-control* was a metonym for and the basis of control of the colony and its people. An effect of this mechanics of regulation, which Malouf directs attention to in his interview with Candida Baker, is that the political apparatus of a particular place can work to suppress its sensual potential. In the case of Brisbane, whose "lushness" Malouf's writing has done much to mythologise, the semi-tropical city is overhung by the shadow of imperial patriarchy:

It's a place that has always been extraordinarily repressive. It's also energetic and bursting out all over, full of exuberant new forms, because it's tropical and hot. But the social forms have always been conservative and the political forms have always been repressive.... It's always been rule of a paternalistic kind.... Queensland goes on believing that somehow it is still tied directly to London. (qtd in Baker 259)

In several poems Malouf satirises the "lie back and think of England" mentality, and while lamenting the effects it has upon sexual relations, he also examines the implication of such an ideology for coming to terms with the colonial (tropical) landscape. Poems like "Indoor Garden," a study of an English family and their less than daring foray into Eden (a cubic foot of earth in a painted trough), present a critique of restrained, predictable, boundaried and protected lifestyles:

But no storm shakes this cactus that the Blakes
tend like a favourite pet; the china beast
commit no nuisance, and the gay wax-plants
put forth each year one glossy scarlet bud. (1992, 6)

A compact and lacerating verse ridicules their desire for safety, and their distaste for tropical dissipation and "animal excess."

It is the transformation of this feared "dissipation" and "disintegration" so that *positive* connotations emerge that is a crucial part of Malouf's political representational agenda. His

metaphorisation of the body is not an imperial reduction of it but an attempt to convey that otherness which exceeds textual containment. Reworkings of "canonical images" in ways which break down traditional readings to extend and transform metaphorical association can be seen in poems such as "Gray's Anatomy," which uses the title of a well-known medical textbook. After describing "the thumb," the poem "examines" the appendix, reiterating and amplifying a metaphor between place and body in ways which accentuate the volatility of the body politic:

a little umbilicus
that tethers us still
to a lost continent whose creatures settle
their sharp claws in us. Neighbours,

heart and head, regard it
darkly. A disorderly republic,
it stinks and is consumed. Sleeping partners

go their own way, eye
involved with its perspectives, stomach dealing
with the fruits of the earth.

It dreams of a different body.... (1992, 140)

Read as the umbilicus tethering us to the "mother country," the diseased appendix is the site of greatest potential disorder; thus the fundamental rupture of the colonial bond foreshadows the prospect of a different body politic.

Imperialism produces an anatomised body always under threat, not only from disease, as Malouf's poem suggests (and as Tiffin has shown in her readings of other texts³) but also sexually. "Fraternisation" with native men and women could be blamed for the downfall of the Empire, and in such situations the body's sexual topography becomes a matter of crucial concern to the coloniser. *Blood Relations* addresses the overlapping discourses of imperialism, sexuality and geography quite directly, and it has been argued that, as a re-working of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the play constructs a sense of place dialogically to its Elizabethan prototype, using the "the edge" as a place of negotiation. The edge stands in firm contrast to Prospero's island, a place where clearly defined physical and political boundaries enable the

³ Helen Tiffin uses the example of Randolph Stow's *Visitants*, which she suggests "proposes the suicide of white authority" (14).

coloniser to maintain strict surveillance of his subjects' sexualities.⁴ But in Malouf's play, Willy, the patriarch, finds that his repeated attempts to keep a watchful eye over his family are continually frustrated by their inexplicable disappearances into a landscape/ dreamscape which seldom allows for uninterrupted lines of sight. The edge becomes a political space where sensuality is never innocent, and Prospero's dream of a "prosperous" island state, where the coloniser acts as "husbandman" to a bountiful new world, is thwarted. Willy is unable to read this landscape, or rather, to read himself in its terms, because he carries with him an imperial view of the world. The weight of this ideological baggage is represented by the crates of (mill)stones from his birthplace, an unnamed European island, which are a somewhat incongruous feature of the set for the play.

Blood Relations presents Willy as a symbol and manifestation of the restricted sexuality of imperial and patriarchal government: his name puns on male (im)potence by diminishing the seriousness of the phallic signifier. As well as distancing himself from the threat of most human contact, he refuses to embrace the lushness and sensuality of the tropics and constructs his hideaway as a fortress against the encroaching vegetation. His will to power--or perhaps his lust for power--is expressed not in erotic connection but through the brute force of sexual domination, a point which is emphasised by references to his rapes of the native women of the area. But the play shows a fundamental disruption of imperial power through a deregulation of sexuality which is emphasised not only by the presence of Willy's Aboriginal son Dinny, the fruit of his own miscegenation, but also by the pervasive influence of an erotics of place.

Despite Willy's efforts to colonise this landscape, nature in its various guises shapes the contours of the performance text so that Willy loses control of his carefully staged drama as the weird musical sounds of place and the vagaries of the weather (the tempest) intervene. The setting, a house on a narrow strip of tropical coastline in remote northwestern Western Australia between two seemingly infinite geographical voids--the desert and the sea--is specifically described as "a place without definition" (1988, 16), which is to say, a space in question, a site of negotiation, an edge. It evokes something of the Queensland sub-tropics

⁴See Gilbert (1992) for a discussion of this point and of other counter-discursive relationships between the two plays.

transposed onto an Aboriginal heartland and then distanced from any metropolitan centre. But the centre/edge binary which might be implied is broken down by frequent shadowy evocations of Sydney which Malouf has called an "antiplatonic place" that "may free us from destructive notions, like body and spirit being separate" (qtd in Baker 239). Such a heterotopic space, one composed of relocated places, fosters an exchange of views and the breaking down of orthodoxies.⁵ It is a place not only befitting the (mardi gras) "magic" of Kit, Willy's wayward son, but one which is essential to the resulting transformations and experimentations that his "fashion parades" and "fantasy nights" encourage in other characters. For those who recognise the relationships between landscapes and knowledges of the body, the disorienting effects of the setting allow relocations and new explorations of the sensual self. Edward, who feels a constant light-headedness from the moment of his arrival, experiences the edge as a place where he can constantly re-define desire, while Kathy, the Miranda figure, embraces the freedom of risk-taking when, listening to the sound her body gives off in response to the landscape, she begins to explore her latent sexuality.

The crisis of imperialism which results from a deregulated (sensual) body is intensified by shifting and elusive sexualities--specifically homosexuality--that further weaken the constraints of "self government" and intervene in the reproduction of the imperial self. Homosexuality is important in Malouf's work, although it is seldom mentioned by critics. This may be because the ambiguities of his writing make *reading over* the erotic, not to mention the homoerotic, not only possible but plausible (see Kirby). But Malouf's "dissident" writing is important because it refuses to assume any positions of moral and/or aesthetic finality: it refuses to resolve the question of final authority or final redemption.⁶ The interest is not in *the* search for final placement, but in the effects of displacement, often present in terms of sensual experience, and in the breaking down of borders between bodies and landscape.⁷ As Eve Kosofsky

⁵The stage itself is also a nomadic space, a heterotopia par excellence, characterised by a "removal *from* and extension *into* social space" (Loomba 134).

⁶ Within a Christian framework particularly, there has been a tendency "to resort to pain and suffering as the exemplary mode of self-realization" (Dollimore 7), an impulse which can be determined in the work of Australian writers as disparate as Marcus Clarke and Patrick White.

⁷ In his figuring of metaphor Malouf also hints at the necessity of breaking down the boundaries between species, as he hints at analogies between plant and animal (including human beings).

Sedgwick puts it, what purports to be simple descriptive terminology, such as "urbane" or "provincial" (centre/edge), is in fact a controlling gesture that "describes or creates a chain of perceptual angles" which subtly shape the reader's interpretation (97). In Malouf's work these angles are constantly changing.

As the narrator in *Johnno* suggests, for many people the "discovery" (dis-covering) of their homosexuality, a realisation made while swimming against the tide of mainstream representations of sexuality, involves a necessarily retrospective re-reading of the past. Towards the end of the novel, Dante (the name also crops up in various Malouf poems) finally recognises his desire for Johnno through the conjurings of memory:

I thought disquietingly of moments when the whole course of events as they stood between us quivered expectantly, and might have gone another way: an afternoon whose heat now returned so powerfully to my imagination that sweat started out all over my skin Remembering how all afternoon the occasion had refused to declare itself. ... And years later, in Athens, when I was struggling to get him home one night and we had come to rest for a moment in a dirty shopfront, his whole drunken weight against me, he had laughed suddenly, his mouth close to my ear, and said: "You know Dante, when we were at school, I used to think of you as the most *exotic* creature.... My mind had whirled, a whole past turning itself upside down, inside out, to reveal possibilities I could never myself have imagined. (1976, 153-54)

The Athenian setting contributes to the sensual evocation of the afternoon heat which, through the body, anchors the narrator's desire in the present, even while tracing it back to another time and place. The narrative illustrates that desire is often figured through what is unspoken, unsaid, unable to be said, and, as Dollimore suggests, the masking or disguise of homosexuality in literature (as in everyday life) is such that absence is as much a characteristic of its representation as is presence (31).

It is not surprising then that most reviewers of Malouf's (only) *Blood Relations*, chose to ignore the externalised homoeroticism of the fight and dance sequences, as well as the explicit references to Kit's "gay lib" lifestyle, and to focus on other issues entirely--although one reviewer did castigate Malouf for confining the emotional register of the performance to "camp posturings and a ballocky physicality" (Bramwell 30). What is overlooked/looked over in such responses is the suggestion that sexual orientation is central to artistic perspective, socio-political power, and above all, subjectivity. Malouf foregrounds homosexuality/homo-eroticism as an integral part of an alternative and "nomadic" (male) sexual topography in *Blood Relations*

by tracing the repressed and displaced desires and fears which inflect the friendships and rivalries between men. And it is Kit, the overtly gay artist and Ariel figure, who controls much of the dramatic action, even though he is not strictly speaking the central character. His arrival with his lover Edward for a family Christmas reunion is but the first of a series of deliberately engineered shocks that culminate in a carnivalesque "magic show" designed to unsettle Willy's family fictions *and* the fiction of "the family" as a microcosm of Australian society. As the "master of ceremonies" for the tension-riddled celebrations, Kit's art(ifice) functions to strip away illusions, free repressions, and challenge conventional conceptions of the sensual self.⁸

Kit's theatricality recalls that of Oscar Wilde, whose "transgressive desire leads to a relinquishing of the essential self" (Dollimore 13). But as Dollimore reminds us, this celebratory "non-centred or vagrant desire" (14) also cost Wilde his life, and any presentation of the homoerotic is infused with the tension of the political and the challenge of everyday life. In *Blood Relations* this challenge is to acknowledge our "familiar spirit," as Edward puts it--"a little black pig that loves mud, flesh, [and] shit" (1988, 75). Peter Stallybrass and Allon White draw our attention to the ways in which the pig has been represented as a figure of sensuality and bestiality, of desire and disgust, of infantilism and grotesquery, in their study of carnival and inversions (see 44-59 and *passim*). Edward's remark resonates within an English dramatic tradition wherein the pig personifies one who "moves out from the fair to enter and transform the space of official law and order the confounder of the closed, hierarchical and strictly individuated classical body" (Stallybrass and White 66). Carnivalesque representation is an important part of the play's exploration of sensual/sexual base of society and Malouf suggests that the fantasy and metaphor of performance may offer significant possibilities for transformation of the colonised body. The stage itself implies an "edge" and an outcrop, and at the same time a series of places from which to speak and perform difference--a place to pose.

And pose questions...

The play's re-reading of the family's past through the fantasy of the dream, which is

⁸By dint of a long history of enacting sexual transgression through such traditions as cross-dressing, dramatic performance always pre-supposes that the public faces of sexuality are simply masks, roles which are as changeable as those in the theatre.

induced by Kit's magic, raises a number of questions about Willy's sexual proclivities. Although it might be tempting to see his old mate Frank as simply the ghost who visits Willy's conscience, we contend that the relationship between these two is the locus of a desire which is in some respects more unsettling, because less easily labelled, than Kit's openly acknowledged homosexuality. The dream sequences of the play enable a re-playing of the gaps and silences which have been written over by a life-long process of self-mythologising designed to fortify Willy's faith in his (resolutely heterosexual) masculinity. As Willy re-plays the card game/contest that necessarily destroyed his friendship with Frank, his determination to go ahead with their ridiculous bet (winner takes all) is revealed as a strategy designed to dissolve the threat of a "mateship" which began to take itself too seriously. This history makes clearer the reason for Willy's aggressive homophobia toward Kit and Edward in the present: the two represent a "return of the repressed," a sexual possibility which is unthinkable to Willy, even if desired, and unnameable except through ellipses:

WILLY: [To KIT] ... We've had enough of your ... play-acting ... your ... interfering You and your disgusting ... Take that silly thing off your head. (1988, 69)

At the end of *Blood Relations* when Willy leaves his closeted existence to die outdoors in a violent storm (tempest), his movement towards some kind of sensual awareness of place/self is anticipated but never adequately realised. To map out his sexuality and discover the erotics of place, Willy must not only re-assess his relationship with Frank but also confront the terrible silence which is the record of his rape of the Aboriginal woman who is Dinny's mother.⁹ Dinny encourages him to stop shouting for a moment and listen to the voices of the silenced, but Willy remains largely unaware that "the isle is full of noises" and is equally oblivious to his own response because he is so well-practised in the art of not listening.

The obdurate Willy stands in contrast to the speaker of Malouf's poem sequence, "Inspirations," who suggests that for him in his childhood, "Not listening / was a way of overhearing / the further small voices" (1992, 154). As Malouf explains in relation to the houses of Brisbane, while the refusal to hear grows out of a habit of survival (in houses with

⁹O'Brien discusses, in some depth, the relationships between silence and colonialism in Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*. Her argument that silence represents a crisis of authority in imperial relations is applicable here.

wooden floors and walls), it can become self-defeating:

You learn in such houses to listen. You build up a map of the house in sound. You also learn what *not* to hear, what is not-to-be-heard, because it is a condition of such houses that everything *can* be heard. Strict conventions exist about what should be listened to and these soon become habits of not-listening, not-hearing. So too, habits grow up of not-seeing. (1985, 6)

Unlike the speaker of the poem, who uses not-hearing to explore ways of being beyond convention, the particular architecture of Willy's consciousness, with its Freudian trapdoors, cellars and attics,¹⁰ facilitates certain kinds of silence and/or blindness. Within the overall world of the play, however, the imperial imperatives to name and to speak are thwarted; those whose role it was to listen become those whose right it is to speak, while the habitual speakers are forced into silence. But there is not simply an inversion of roles: rather, the positive and negative associations of speech and silence are queried, and oppositions are broken down. It is important then that the writer seems to be more concerned with listening than with speaking, or as Robert Kroetsch puts it, with "unhiding the hidden."

This process, in which the un-named subject of imperial discourse is given a silence/space in which to speak for itself, is represented not only in Malouf's *An Imaginary Life* but also in his poetry. And it is perhaps in the poetry that he goes furthest in connecting place with erotic experience, and in doing so, breaks down the imperial versions of sexuality which are part of the fortification of myths of imperial (self-)control. The poems in the "Inspirations" sequence take up this issue of the relationship between sexuality, language and imperialism. The sequence is preceded by an epigraph that describes the attempts of human beings to apprehend God through naming, but the impulse to name and control is immediately undone in the epigraph itself. The epigraph notes that for any lovers "the most beautiful sight will be the actual lineaments of the beloved, but for remembrance sake they will be happy in the sight of a lyre... or anything in the world that awakens a memory of the beloved" (1992, 150). If the quotation warns against the inadequacy of representation by suggesting that naming and metonym are always partial, it also hints at the connective possibilities of metaphor. The epigraph stands as a rejection of the restrictive imagination represented by the imperialist Willy by acknowledging

¹⁰ See Malouf (1985, 9) for further discussion of the Freudian concept of the mind as a house.

both the limitations and the uses of language.

The poem is in one aspect an extended exploration of the relationships between breath, speech, and energy, and the way in which relationships or relations may be given substance by speech:

The hand slips or the tongue
 We stumble on their names and they are real
 Something of their substantial
 radiance is in
 the breath we draw (1992, 151)

Drawing on eastern ideas of breath as energy (ki or chi), the poem examines the way in which this energy can "light up / unknowable spaces in us" (1992, 151). This use of the breath metaphor implies that the movement to and from the inner and the outer worlds of the body is an exchange rather than a one-way process; hence the poem literally demonstrates how dialogue is an act of negotiation between different forms and energies. As it is presented in the poem, the process of exchange involves a metamorphosis of air into speech, and in this sense the metaphor does not so much direct us to analogies between breath and language as point to the necessity of reading the body and its physical world in each other's terms. The "unknowable spaces" which breath lights up may therefore be read as sensual rather than physical ones, and speech is the metonym--always partial, always powerful--through which those encounters are mapped by the written text.

This concern with discovery of the unknown and the unknowable is reiterated in the second poem of the sequence:

... as horizons
 roll out of that gaze into
 ours seeking horizons
 we did not know existed
 in us ... (1992, 153)

If the movement of the poem seems like an overtly hermeneutic one, then any effect of, or attempt at, closure is deferred in preference for a continued exchange which is at once sensual and transformative, following the movement of the epigraph. The emphasis is on exchange rather than on discovery, and on highlighting the wonderment of this metamorphosis of love/breath/language. The expression of a love which discovers places of speech and sensual

experience unknown to the speaker is reiterated throughout the poem, and other voices call to the speaker, drawing attention to an already consummated relationship with strangers: "*Hollows / in the cool grass at their side already hold / the imprint of your body*" (1992, 155). These possibilities of exchange/transformation/seeing only become possible when the speaker of the poem looks by "looking away." Any attempt to codify or capture these sensual moments in language is similarly thwarted, but it is from this very "uncapturability" that the experience derives its energy.

The fourth poem of the sequence is perhaps the most explicitly erotic, and continues to use the idea of breath--with its connotations of light, of life and energy--as lovers exchange words and air:

The drawing
of breath and the exchange of it
for speech seems the rarest of all gifts
in our brief possession... (1992, 156)

The profession of love through the words "I love you," a declaration which the first lines of the poem lead up to, is transformed by the breath metaphor which literally gives love energy. Light and darkness, self and lover, feeling and expression, edge and centre slide into each other so that the discrete outlines of the body, the day, and the nation blur, even though the place and the lifestyle which are evoked are remarkably specific:

Australia lyric love when what we mean
is the heart of the mouth of one man somewhere
at the day's edge thinking as night tumbles
in *Yes I love you Yes it may be*
love or the season their common heat or the tide
of music that takes
my body as you turn raise your glass
in sunlight with all Sunday the best of it
before us and afterwards since all things now have their
occasion
and rhythm in our lives
as we make it
love and the night (1992, 156)

The linkages between landscape, body and lifestyle are made more explicit in the ninth poem of the sequence, where "Blood thunders / through a labyrinth more intricate than all the streets / of Sydney" (1992, 163). This poem moves further towards an explosive deregulation of sexuality and language figured earlier, on a night when "Eros guides and on my left hand [is] the

Lord / of Conjunctions" (1992, 163). The exchange between the lovers becomes fiercer, again a transfer of breath and language:

Lips from sibilants plosives fricatives
 those chambers and their precincts caves of storm
 where air explodes Tongue taps
 on the toothridge and the teeth impelling syllables
 toward me (1992, 163)

The driving energy of language and breath becomes almost totally sexual, each feeding into the other, as the lovers entwine bodies and breath. But the question is always being posed as to whether the existence of the other body is due only to language, a "springing of your body into being on the first syllable / complete as out of darkness." The lover is there "so long as breath / lasts and the line keeps its connection" (1992, 164).

Throughout the entire poem the effect is one of "horizons" which continually open up new possibilities, reiterating the moments of retrospective discovery and re-vision described above in *Johnno*. Or as it is put in the fifth poem of the sequence, "There are so many things that need us to be looking / before they can appear / in our poems in our lives" (1992, 157). And it is the constant shifting between the landscape of the body and the body of the landscape which blurs the boundaries between place and self, as happens in *Blood Relations* where the quotidian (pigs and shit) is transformed into the erotic. In the poetry, though, the sensuality is much more delicate: the lovers are "conductors"--both arrangers of and conduits for--"an absolute music" which acts to illuminate "the plainest household facts" (1992, 160). The sensuality which Malouf explores in the "Inspirations" sequence is as fragile as it is passionate, though more explicitly expressed as "sexual dissidence"--the bolt of "chain lightning" which illuminates and electrifies the domestic space (1992, 160).

In each of the poems discussed above, and in the play *Blood Relations*, Malouf draws the reader's attention to the same kinds of questions of place and language that are dealt with in novels like *An Imaginary Life* and, in a different way, *Johnno*. And this raises the further question: how much is a reading of the erotics of place relevant to Malouf's other writing, to those novels which have become "standards" in high school and undergraduate curricula? Sexuality is not by any means the only significant or interesting aspect of these texts, but to

ignore it is to "read over" Malouf's representations of the body's topographies in ways which are politically problematical. Reading through rather than over the erotic may also prompt a re-evaluation of the artist figure in Malouf's oeuvre; in particular, his pairing of male characters (which has been read mainly in formal and aesthetic terms) might be seen not so much as a structural device as a sensual relation. The poem sequence "Inspirations," for example, is a series of passionate and delicate declarations of love, a celebration of "a dance for which / you are the music" (1992, 161). To end this essay then, with references to questions of love as well as to questions of criticism, is to return to Jonathan Dollimore, who "risks" ending his study (of) *Sexual Dissidence* "by speaking of love ... without apology and simply to acknowledge its inspiration" (356).

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