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“BEYOND GOD THE FATHER”:
The metaphysical in a physical world

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A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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School of Literary and Communication Studies

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I certify that the thesis entitled

"BEYOND GOD THE FATHER": The metaphysical in a physical world.

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MASTER OF ARTS

is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

I also certify that any material in the thesis which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any other university or institution is identified in the text.

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Date 19th November, 2003
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BIBLIOGRAPHY
As the West enters the third millennium of the Christian era, post 1788 Australian culture, which was founded loosely on the basis of what might be defined as Christian principles, has, along with the rest of the Western world, moved into a period where humanity has to acknowledge the mutability of all knowledge and belief systems.

Such mutability has, of course, been developed and discussed over many decades by philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche who has influenced poststructuralist theories of literary criticism. Such theories have, for many years, proposed that since all knowledge is dependent upon discursive formations, and therefore language, it is subject to multiple and infinite interpretations.

What the current era is experiencing is not a new phenomenon. As the eminent psychoanalyst Carl Jung said in his work published after his death in 1961:

> It is a common illusion to believe that what we know today is all we ever can know. Nothing is more vulnerable than scientific theory, which is an ephemeral attempt to explain facts and not an everlasting truth in itself. (1978: p. 82)

Because any theory, scientific or otherwise, involves language it is open to deconstruction. In different ways, for Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari social and political order are discursive constructs and have no ideal existence outside of language. This profound idea can be applied to all social constructs, such as families and religions, and political systems, for example capitalism and communism. The difficulty, from a feminist point of view, is related
to the question of the language of power and who is doing the defining of institutions and organizations whether religious, social or political. However, it is the theories of such writers which provide the theoretical background for the analysis of the literature under review for this thesis.

Literary critics, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan write:

...We are simply in the world we have always been in without knowing it, without being able to know it because we were preoccupied with one move (cognition in language) within that world and because the world somehow, even though we can describe it from within (the planetarium of knowledge), cannot be known (summed up in identitarian categories that stand outside, etc.). It can only be lived knowingly. (1998: p. 355)

The focus will be on the role literature plays in addressing issues pertaining to the metaphysical and/or transcendent and the relationship between these concepts and the material world. I intend to argue that it is not so much scientific "knowledge", as the poststructural theories, which throw into question the existence of God and the relevance of the metaphysical, that is, that which "cannot be known" or merely "lived knowingly. To do this I have selected for analysis a range of works by contemporary Australian writers, namely Tim Winton, Helen Garner and Venero Armanno, in which a strong 'lived' sense of the transcendent can be found. Terms such as "spiritual", "numinous" and "search for meaning" are all indicators of such concerns, particularly in the work of Winton and Garner.

Before proceeding I would like to clarify the two key terms upon which this thesis is posited -- metaphysics and transcendence. The Macquarie Dictionary describes them as follows:
Metaphysics: that branch of philosophy which treats of first principles, includes the sciences of being (ontology) and of the origin and structure of the universe (cosmology). It is always intimately connected with the theory of knowledge (epistemology).

Transcendent: 1. transcending; going beyond ordinary limits; surpassing or extraordinary. 2. superior or supreme. 3. Theol. Being beyond matter and having a continuing existence therefore outside the created world. 4. Philos. That which is beyond experience.

I intend to address all aspects of the above definitions in this thesis.

There are four major propositions underpinning this work:

1. That it is a demonstrable fact in man/woman across cultures and eras that they seek answers for “the meaning of their existence”.

2. That transcendence and the metaphysical can be related to and discussed in terms of not only the Being of God, but also other existential phenomena such as love, desire and death.

3. That examples of “non-theological” metaphysics can be found frequently throughout Australian literature, especially in that of the late 20th century.

4. That language is the major, but imperfect means of negotiating between the metaphysical and the material worlds.

Initially I shall examine some of the theories pertaining to the relationship between psychology, philosophy and textual studies and the search for meaning. In this first chapter I shall address the manner in which theories developed by literary critics shed light on the works of Winton, Armanno and Garner, and how the texts address issues such as the search for meaning in human existence.
“God is dead”

Nietzsche tells the story of a madman who proclaims: “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.” (1974: p. 181) ¹ This proposition poses a dilemma. For God to die God must have existed, at least as a thought or concept. Further, for God to have been killed by his/her creations makes humanity greater (or more powerful) than God. As an avowed atheist Nietzsche was probably referring to the concept of God as a creation of our imagination. But it must then be asked what purpose human beings creating a being named God serve? What lies within the human psyche which brings about the need to create such a being or beings?

Although Nietzsche is identified as an atheist he frequently proposes the need for God to achieve human and therefore societal stability. For example, Walter Kaufman, in his analysis of Nietzsche’s work, claims that the latter believed that

...to have lost God means madness; and when mankind will discover that it has lost God, universal madness will break out... We have destroyed our own faith in God. There remains only the void. We are falling. Our dignity is gone. Our values are lost. (1974: 97)

To “lose” God is to sink into anarchy in Kaufman’s terms. Thus for Nietzsche it is not so much the existence of God which is important to humans but what the concept of God represents. Paradoxically perhaps, Nietzsche contended that society needed the concept of a belief in a superior being otherwise it would collapse. There would be no purpose to life and human beings would have to face up to the fact that life had no meaning.

¹ The quotes from Nietzsche have been taken from *The Gay Science* which is based on the second edition of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, published in 1887.
I argue in this thesis that regardless of whether God exists the concepts attached to this Being have been circled around by writers such as Tim Winton, Helen Garner and Venero Armanno, all of which incorporate aspects of a search for answers to issues pertaining to birth, life and death. There has been a shift from belief in a superior Other who creates meaningful existence for the protagonists, to a belief that others within the context of families and communities might provide meaning. In other words the texts are focusing on a form of humanism in which the transcendent occurs within every day events.

As Nietzsche himself proposed

> After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown centuries later in a cave – tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead, but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown – And we-we still have to vanquish his shadow, too. (1974: p. 167)

It is the shadow of God that appears in the works of the writers under discussion, although the existence of a God who casts that shadow is frequently posited as a possibility in the texts. For Nietzsche the shadow which appears in the texts could be seen as the penultimate step to atheism, rather than (from a theistic point of view) a cloudy “negative theology”. One might question why Nietzsche feels a need to vanquish the shadow when he saw the death of God as leading to “universal madness”?

Linguistic theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray have, in diverse ways, addressed this question and have provided their own reasons for the necessity to
vanquish the *shadow* of God. For example the former claims, "The death of God will ensure our salvation because the death of God alone can re-awaken the divine". (Derrida, 1976, p. 88) Irigaray argues that concentration on a masculine God distracts from the celebration of divinity within human beings as sexual entities. As she says: "The passions have either been repressed, stifled and subdued, or else reserved for God." (Whitford, 1991: p. 73)

Such statements, are, of course, based on humanistic philosophy. Where Derrida and Irigaray see God's death as necessary for the full realisation of our potential as humans, Nietzsche sees it as leading inevitably to the downfall of mankind. Critics of the sacred, such as Mircea Eliade, Kevin Hart and David Tacey, on the other hand, regard belief in a supreme being as a necessary and fundamental aspect of our psyche without which we can never be truly human, which is essentially Nietzsche's argument

Hart claims that Derrida, and deconstruction, are not necessarily an attack on the existence of God, as many other critics maintain it is, but on the dangers inherent in attempting to transform a concept into a Being. Hart refers to "a non-metaphysical theology". (1989: p. xi) One could question whether it is possible to develop a non-theological metaphysics. Eliade would argue that a Christian who becomes an atheist must first reject that which he/she was taught and perhaps once believed in (as did Mary Daly and de Beauvoir to mention only two). Is it the concept of "God" that is being rejected by writers such as Daly or the language and ideologies underlying the language used in developing the concept? Much of Daly's argument was based on challenging the underlying ideologies upon which the idea of "God the Father" was based. Thus we find when *Beyond God the Father* was first published in 1973
Daly referring to an “ontological spiritual revolution” based in the women’s liberation movement. (1985: p.6) Originally it was the language which Daly criticised. However, she came to the conclusion that our reality and perceptions were so grounded in a patriarchal view and interpretation of the world, whether it is physical, spiritual or cultural, that it was pointless to continue the argument. Therefore “God”, or at least “God” as defined by man ceased to have meaning for woman. In her 1985 “Original Reintroduction” to her book Daly proposed that the concept of “God” be substituted with the verb “Be-ing” to express “an Other way of understanding ultimate/intimate reality”. (1985: p. xvii) In her own later review of her work Daly acknowledges that this “reality” was still related to a “God” from which she had attempted to remove patriarchal language, such as “Father”. It was only later that she rejected the concept totally applying the verb “Be-ing” to human2, particularly female, activity. (1993: pp 146-171) The transcendent, she argued, is achieved in the process of “Be-ing”.

Although Daly attempts to address the issue of the existence or non-existence of a being defined as “God” she ultimately arrives at the conclusion that it is language which not only creates such a concept but which in doing so also destroys it. A “God” defined in masculine terms is unknowable to woman. He becomes the unattainable Other. Like Derrida and Irigaray she sees the metaphysical as being achieved through our humanity. Yet for others such as Hart, Tacey and Eliade “God” is essential for our attaining our potential. Given that “God” is knowable as a concept only through language what is this “Being” we, including writers such as Armanno, Garner and Winton have created?

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2 In her 1993 work, *Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage* (first published in 1972) Mary Daly criticises her own use of the word “human” in *Beyond God the Father*. 
God, our created Other

The ultimate metaphysical and transcendent "being" is that which is known in the monotheistic religions as God in Christianity, Yahweh in Judaism and Allah in Islam. Of these three major religions it is perhaps Judaism which has identified the difficulty in defining God as, traditionally, it is a tenet of their religion to refrain from naming God. Once we attempt to discuss God we are trapped within the inadequacies of language. Do we refer to that which is beyond our knowledge as him/she/it?

Irigaray contends that merely altering the gender of God does not help in our understanding, which Daly found out through a painful writing process. We do not have the necessary words to describe that which is unknowable. Words such as "being", "Father", "Son" are merely results of our attempt to translate into language something which is beyond linguistic comprehension. Thus God/Yahweh/Allah become constructs of thoughts and desires.

In her analysis of Irigaray's discussions concerning the concept of God Grosz states:

If, on the one hand, God represents the supreme perfection of one's own self-image, on the other hand the concept also represents the most powerful and commanding of others. In this sense God stands for the other sex: God represents the possibility of an (ideal) relation to a radically different other. (Grosz, 1989: p. 181)

The inherent "danger" in transferring our attentions to a human other, or humanist sacred, is that we are drawn into dialogue with the other, who has his/her own expectations of the relationship. God, having no material/physical existence, can only be approached through our words, whereas the human "other" has an objective and subjective existence. We are faced with the fact that because we cannot
converse with this “Supreme Being”, should it exist, we translate it (and its expectations) into terms which we can understand. It is in discussions of such a Being that the inadequacy of language is highlighted. Inevitably language is influenced by cultural implications, which are acquired and are socially and arbitrarily constructed.

Is “God” necessary?

Australian literary critic David Tacey writes of “The desperate need in every society to ‘re-make’ the sacred”. (1997: p. 1) Tacey, in referring to the work of Eliade and Carl Jung, claims that societies need “a meaningful relation to the sacred” to sustain their health, a health which cannot be gained merely on the material level. (1971: p. 4) Eliade’s approach to the sacred is interesting in that it is based on the acceptance of religious man as the norm and the non-believer as a deviation from that norm.

The non-religious man, he argues, “has been formed by opposing his predecessor, by attempting to ‘empty’ himself of all religious human meaning.” (Eliade, 1959: p. 204) Eliade talks of “camouflaged religious behaviour” which involves joining movements amongst other things. (1959: p. 207) But equally one has to question whether Eliade’s “religious man” exists only because he has been created through language. Karl Marx for one would dispute Eliade’s proposition that human beings are innately religious, seeing religion as a means of social control. Jung, who leaves open the question of whether or not God exists, would not totally agree with Marx’s description of religion as the “opiate of the masses”, for he asks, when discussing the role of religious belief, “Why, then, should we deprive ourselves of views that would prove helpful in crises and would give meaning to our existence?” (Jung, 1964: p. 76) One might argue that Jung’s description could also apply to an
“opiate”. Within Jung’s statement can be seen a reflection of Nietzsche’s approach to God: there may be no God but a belief in a superior being might be necessary, or at least beneficial to humanity.

In this era of economic-rationalism and post-modernism we need, according to Abraham Maslow’s theory, to address our total needs as fully self-actualised human beings. Maslow claims that not only must our physical needs, such as being fed, sheltered and clothed, be met but also the metaphysical needs of being loved, feeling secure and so on. In Eliade’s words: “Every human being is made up at once of his conscious activity and his irrational experiences.” (1959: p. 209) The belief in a supreme being is only one way in which this can be achieved. Throughout history there have been examples of individuals and groups being caught up in a quest for something which is beyond their reach or out of sight. Gilgamesh was searching for answers to why he had to die; Jason was seeking the Golden Fleece. Both the Old and New Testaments contain examples of this quest. Humanity has always been caught up in the quest for answers as to the meaning of life, death, tragedy, illness, a questioning of that which might be said to constitute the human condition. Such searches for answers appear to be based on the premise that for every effect there is a cause, perhaps in a mistaken belief in human importance.

Jungian psychology, as Tacey points out

...constructs the sacred as a kind of autonomous complex in the modern psyche, and it finds or recovers the sacred first of all in psychopathology, in illness and neurosis, in the distortions and obsessions of our contemporary behaviour. (Tacey, 1997: pp. 2/3)
Jung, Nietzsche, Tacey and Eliade all appear to subscribe to the belief that the
metaphysical is inherent to human nature and essential to personal well-being and the
stability of society. However, there are differences in how each of these would
define this “presence”. Words such as “spirit” and “soul” are typical of attempts to
describe the metaphysical. It is not only through religious belief that individuals’
lives become meaningful. A humanist, for example, finds meaning through a belief
in his/her responsibility towards improving the lives of others. For many the answer
is found through creating a superior being who cares for each of us as an individual.
To what extent then does ‘God’ become humanity’s creation rather than mankind
“His”, created to enhance the meaning of human existence? With Nietzsche’s ‘death
of God’, the influence of “intellectual enlightenment, modernism and
postmodernism” and the concomitant phenomenon of secular humanism, we have,
Tacey claims, become:

...less than human, because a large part of being
human includes the needs and desires of that
which is other than human, that inside us which
is archetypal, nonrational, and religious.
(Tacey, 1997: pp. 2/3)

The question is whether “secular humanism” and “post-modernism” are compatible.
In this sense it is not the concept of a being which is known as God but more a sense
that there is “something” beyond what is seeable and knowable. Perhaps the closest
word to this is ‘hope’, a belief that there is some meaning to birth, life and death, even
a sense of purpose to human existence. While Marx referred to religion as “the
opiate of the masses”, it could be argued that if one does not have a belief in
something, other “opiates” are substituted – addictions to drugs, drink, excessive
acquisition of wealth and materialism, promiscuity. In his novel, *Firehead*, Armanno has described this phenomenon as follows:

...The lights, the lovelies, the free-flowing liquor.
It was a façade which said the world was a beautiful
and romantic place, and this was the easiest lie to
live when you believed in nothing higher. (Armanno,
1999: p. 97)

This theme appeared in one of Armanno’s earlier works, *My Beautiful Friend*, when the major protagonist, Aaron, talks of his rejection of a belief in God:

...And then my change came, just like that, because
I watched too much television and read too many
books and saw too many people’s lives full of
self-importance and vanity. The problem was that
I didn’t ever decide on something better to believe in,
except for love,... (Armanno, 1999: p. 33)

For Aaron belief in a god is replaced by a search for love, for another to fulfil the void of which Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jung and others speak.

**To believe or not to believe?**

Examples of the textual and existential dilemma posed in the shift from belief to non-belief in a God can be found throughout literature, including that which might be described as post-modernist. For example P.D. James, a crime fiction writer, writes in *Original Sin*:

...What is a Jew without his belief?...A Jew wasn’t even allowed his atheism. Burdened with guilt from childhood, he couldn’t reject his faith without feeling the need to apologize to the God he no longer believed in. (1993: p. 164)

Luke Davies has Isabelle, his major protagonist in *Isabelle the Navigator*, stating:
..."Please God, please God, let it snow today," I say.
Even though He quite possibly does not exist. He is my special friend whenever I am keen about things. (2000: p. 201).

In both these examples one can see the tension between belief and non-belief, both of which have their foundation in language. One might question the part superstition based on learned experiences plays in creating such tensions. Language is the means by which the individual is socialised into acceptance of definitions of his/her world. These definitions thus become so much part of the psyche it is difficult to discard them. When one has been introduced to the concept of God and his power it becomes the point from which one must start to define non-belief. Thus Eliade and Tacey's arguments become circular as their propositions are based on concepts which could be defined as indoctrination. Does their concept of the Supreme Being arise out of an unprovable actuality or is it their own belief-systems which have created such a Being?

It is also in Davies' book that we find the priest, when talking to Isabelle after the death of Matt, describing God:

God, however you choose to conceive of God, is in your heart, too. That's all that faith is, Isabelle. The knowledge that the greater thing is with you. That's all the faith you need. The knowledge that you are not the greater thing. (2000: p. 134)

The priest offers Isabelle an image of God as a concept created out of our own thoughts and needs translated into language, whilst leaving open the possibility of God's existence with the words "you are not the greater thing". God as created
through language is a linguistic construct but this does not preclude the literal possibility of a Supreme Being.

In the third story of Garner’s *Cosmo Cosmolino*, which shares the same title as the book, the narrator talks not of a god who has ceased to exist but of a forgotten god using words such as “Like a shrine in honour of a god whose name they had forgotten….” (1992a: 60) At the same time the narrator is scathing of the trappings of religiosity. For example, she/he talks of a cremation:

> They sat in a pew, dry-eyed and desolate, listening to the ideological ramblings of a contemporary with scum on his lips who knew of no comfort to offer, no blessing to call down, nothing useful or true to say. The gods had long ago been mocked and forgotten. Nobody prayed. (Blanchot, 1992: p. 56)

In Garner’s text, the human dilemma is fear of inadequacy and a need to find fulfilment through another who is not merely a mirror but represents that which is lacking. Blanchot describes this as “the principle of incompleteness” reiterating Bataille’s proposition that it is this incompleteness that drives us into “community” in all its senses. (Blanchot, 1988: p. xiii)

Armanno’s most recent work, *The Volcano*, also has the protagonist, Emilio, trying to come to terms with the concept of a God and concomitant concepts such as the devil and heaven and hell. Within his Sicilian peasant community he sees examples of cruelty towards both humans and beasts which fill him with revulsion. When he is kicked in the head by the donkey, Ciccio, and lies near to death in the hospital he

> …had looked upon Heaven and Hell, but the more time passed the more he took it all as a fantasy, the silly stirrings of nothing but a good kick in the head. When
people died they went into the ground where there were no angels or saints or devils, and the proof of this was in the piss and shit of the living. In the perfectly white bones they might exhume from the cemetery. In the everyday evil that kept everyone in line. (2001: p. 14)

Emilio argues that the ancient mythologies provide better answers than does the God who has been part of his enculturation. We are, according to Emilio, merely beasts capable of great cruelty to other humans and animals, with whom we are one. Not for Emilio is man created in God’s image, although woman may be. Etna becomes a metaphor for human beings. Emilio asks

Where are God and the Devil in the midst of these fables? When you rage at your children and strike down your wife and open the throats of your beasts, do you think God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Ghost has anything to do with you? Do you think the Virgin is on your right shoulder and Satan on your left? Don’t you see that these ancient tales tell you the real truth of where your heart’s barbarism is born? Look at the volcano and see yourselves, porca miseria! (2001: pp. 15/16)

Despite this apparent rejection of belief in God, throughout the text Emilio constantly calls upon “Him” for help. Perhaps this is an example of the shadow which Nietzsche claims humans cannot expunge from the subconscious.

The metaphysics of love and desire

The argument of this thesis is that each of the fiction writers is asking, in a secular environment: How does one satisfy the metaphysical yearnings of the human psyche which for many find their expression through religious belief; if one rejects the existence of God as other? Irigaray argues that for too long “The passions have either been repressed, stifled and subdued, or else reserved for God”, and that we should return “this feeling of wonder, surprise and astonishment in the face of the
unknowable...to its proper place: the realm of sexual difference”. (Irigaray, 1993: p. 5) This, it might be argued, is a romantic perception of the relationship between the sexes, which is fraught with danger, because of the inevitability of disappointment should one expect the other to be totally known. The male narrator in the previously mentioned work of Armano, My Beautiful Friend, says, “...I understood that marriage was truly the longest lesson in sharing the things that you really wanted to keep private”. This tension between the need to share and the need for privacy is most obvious in sexual relationships and perhaps less so in friendships or community groups. Blanchot identified this tension when he wrote:

...I am never on equal terms with the other, an inequality measured by this impressive thought: The other is always closer to God than I am (whatever meaning one gives that name that names the unnameable). (Blanchot, 1988: p. 40)

Levinas argues that it is the movement to the other through dialogue that leads one to God. Dialogue he describes as the “original mode” of transcendence. It is “a thinking of the unequal, a thought beyond the given...I think more than I can grasp...” (Blanchot, 1988: 151) This idea of the importance of relationships is obvious in another work of Levinas when he says that transcendence is “alive in the relation to the other man’, which appears analogous to Blanchot and Bataille’s proposition. (Emmanuel, 1988, p. 126)

Irigaray claims that we are essentially sexual beings searching for the “unknowable other”, the one who differs from me sexually. (1993: pp. 5-19) (One might contest the role of homosexual relationships in relation to such a description). Of course this relates to Jungian and Lacanian concepts focusing on that which is lacking and
therefore which humans look for in the “Other”. She further argues that frequently the manner in which humanity has dealt with “the passions” is by either repressing them or else transferring them to a Supreme Being, or God. There are obvious advantages in such transference as God can only be known as a concept and therefore, through language, become our creation, created in our image. Passion for a human “other” involves the physical and emotional actuality of at least two people interacting, individuals who have their own expectations of a relationship, who are unable to be moulded to the ideal of the lover, friend etc. In contrast, God cannot argue back or enter into discourse, for “His” words are human words. The reality is that for most of humanity the metaphysical is experienced through relationships. It is in literature that the tensions involved in relationships are expressed in their diversity. 

Aaron, in My Beautiful Friend, ceases to love Rebecca because she fails to conform to his expectations of her as the “other”. If only she would conform to his expectations his life would be better, happier, more focused and so on. Aaron fails to notice Rebecca’s own needs or, even worse, devalues them. He speaks scathingly of her desire to build an empire as a superior manicurist.

Aaron’s love for Rebecca accords with Maslow’s D-love, that is “deficiency love, love need, selfish love” rather than that which he labels B-love, “love for the Being of another person, unneeding love, unselfish love”. (1968: p. 42) Inevitably one must question how one can measure the mind of the B-lover and empirically decide that his/her motives are entirely altruistic. To what extent is Sam’s relationship to Gabriella in Firehead based on his own needs, whether those described by Maslow or the phallic based theories of Freudian psychologists? Maslow acknowledges the instability of relationships when he says that a person knows that “he is desperate for
love, and thinks he will be happy and content if he gets it. He does not know in advance that he will strive on after his gratification has come.” (Maslow, 1968: p. 153)

Despite what seems to be the probability of failure the drive to seek an other, or others, to achieve completeness is, theorists such as Maslow, Blanchot and Bataille argue, inherent to human nature. In the Translator’s Preface to Blanchot’s The Unavowable Community, Joris states that:

There can be no doubt that for Blanchot friendship is profoundly linked to the possibility of community. That death, disaster, absence are at the core of this possibility of community – making it always an impossible, absent community – is in effect, the central thrust of The Unavowable Community. (Blanchot, 1988: p. xiii)

Joris’s words reflect the major proposition upon which this thesis is based: is there within humanity a need to make life meaningful despite the fragility of existence? There is an inevitable tension between the need for “self-actualisation” and the “possibility of community”. These tensions are at the heart of the works under analysis, all of which involve “quests” which are frequently individual. Each of the works highlight the tenuous nature of community, whether they be lovers, family, extended families, friends. They all involve conflict between the outside society which often places the individual or individuals at a disadvantage. Quite often the family or community become the haven where the individual can close itself off from the world.

Blanchot argues that we are drawn together by the experiences of birth, death, illness, joy yet at the same time we cannot enter into the experiences of the other. Again we
find this sense of strangeness and otherness which has surfaced in the theories already discussed. We reach out to the other, but never totally connect because we cannot enter into the thoughts and experiences of the other. In discussing this phenomenon, which Blanchot describes as "the principle of incompleteness", he refers to Bataille's questioning of why do we have/need communities and gives Bataille's answer: "There exists a principle of insufficiency at the root of each being...." (Blanchot, 1988: p. 5) We seek to compensate for this insufficiency by searching for an other who will compensate for the lack we feel. That other may be God or a god or another human being. The failure of shared experiences to address the lack which human's experience, to which Blanchot refers, is the basis upon which Winton's, Armanno's and Garner's works are posited. It is within families and communities and the concomitant experiences these entail that the metaphysical and transcendent can be discovered in both their negative and positive orientations.

In discussing the human search for the Other Irigaray claims that man (sic) is "looking for himself on the most distant planets", while still being earthbound. This is exactly the contradiction which arises when one attempts to address the metaphysical or transcendent. Language, as a means of communicating and understanding, is "earthbound" and therefore inadequate to the task. Because this is an impossible task man, in Irigaray's words, replaces faith with a "third element such as: love, grace, jubilation in the flesh, and therefore their sharing in the word". (Irigaray, 1991: p. 149) It could be argued that there is as much danger in transferring belief in a Superior Being to an expectation that our needs will be met through an other, whether it be child, lover, friend or whatever, as there is in religious faith. Examples of this can be found throughout literature including the works under
discussion. In Armanno’s work, *My Beautiful Friend*, both the husband and wife become disillusioned with their relationship when the other fails to meet his/her expectations. It is within such relationships that the texts blend the material and metaphysical.

**Material/metaphysical**

Within the texts under discussion the metaphysical occurs, not as a separate entity but within a physical/material environment, defined frequently by place and inevitably within communities and/or relationships. In her reflection on Descartes Irigaray proposes this meeting of the material and metaphysical when she discusses the issue of “Wonder”, describing it as:

...the passion of the encounter between the most material and most metaphysical, of their possible conception and foundation one by the other. A third dimension. An intermediary. Neither the one nor the other. Which is not to say neutral or neuter. The forgotten ground of our condition between mortal and immortal, men and gods, creatures and creators. (Irigaray, 1993: p.82)

Within this definition lies the crux of the contradiction faced by humans: we are both physical and metaphysical entities. It is central to the arguments of the post-structural and post-modern theorists that it is impossible to assign immutable and pure meaning to things, whether physical or metaphysical. This includes political and other social systems and methods of categorisation. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan refer to Nietzsche’s ideal philosopher-artist who learns “to throw himself into the play of the world and dance with it” as an image of this coming together of the physical and metaphysical. (1998: p. 335)
That this meeting of the physical and metaphysical worlds is not without tension is the point of Julia Kristeva's discussion of the European Economic Community:

...the fundamental question that slows down such arrangements, which lawyers and politicians are presently working out under the changing constraints of national economic needs, belongs to a more psychological or even metaphysical realm. (Kristeva, 1991: p. 195)

She talks of "a saving religion" which will unify these diverse groups by addressing both the "economic" and "metaphysical" needs of the communities involved. Kristeva claims that unless both types of needs are met the project will struggle to exist. It is questionable whether this "saving religion" needs to relate to a belief in a Supreme Being but it does indicate a need for some shared beliefs and/or a common purpose. One of the difficulties which Kristeva's work highlights is the difficulty in identifying such a purpose out of disparate perceptions of the world emanating from such diverse cultures as can be found in France, England and Germany, for example. If there are problems in defining things and situations within a language, how much harder is it going to be to do so when meaning becomes lost through translation from one language to an other.

My argument is that although in the works of the three authors under discussion there is a constant search for the positive in human relationships ultimately, from the analyst's point of view, there is a sense of the fragility of these relationships underlying the narrative. Frequently it is in the translation of thought to dialogue that the breakdown occurs.
A metaphysical language

Derrida, acknowledges, as does Irigaray, the difficulties posed by language and refers to Paul de Man’s discussion of Heidegger’s famous formula – Die Sprache Spricht:

...language or speech promises, promises itself but also goes back on its word, becomes undone or unhinged, derails or becomes delirious, deteriorates, becomes corrupt just as immediately and just as essentially. It cannot not promise as soon as it speaks, it is promise, but it cannot fail to break its promise. (Derrida, 1989: pp. 93/4)

In *The Forgetting of Air*, Irigaray, addresses the inadequacy of language to the task of embracing the metaphysical. In this book she describes discourse as: “...the means by which man himself reproduces himself starting from the mystery of his begetting, about which he can say nothing”. (1991: p.166 ) Although Irigaray is addressing the issue of the masculine gender’s exclusion from that experience which gives him life, her proposition, it is argued, is equally applicable to those experiences which are beyond our comprehension. Air, she argues, is “neither absent nor present”, but we are dependent upon it for life. We accept its presence and importance even though we cannot see or touch it. Similarly this is the way in which we approach the metaphysical, which “always supposes, in some manner, a solid crust from which to raise a construction”. (Irigaray, 1999: p. 2) Again we are faced with the difficulty of language as our major tool for communication, as Irigaray posits in criticising the phallocentric nature of the language by which our worlds are defined:

Will man speak to himself, still and always, through a medium that is determined by him, through an other defined in him, through a god or divinity created or interpreted by him? (Irigaray, 1999: p. 142)
Are women, as Irigaray describes them, the sensible/corporeal, destined to be separate from the ideal/transcendent (or God) or is it language which creates an artificial barrier because the language used to define the transcendent is determined by “him”? As Margaret Whitford, translator and critic of Irigaray, sees it: “the realization of the divine is in language and ethics, i.e. it is firmly within the symbolic order, in its possibilities of becoming”. (Whitford, 1991: p. 144) The divine cannot be experienced physically but only through discourse therefore it will always remain beyond human experience. Julia Kristeva makes a similar claim when she refers to “the weakness of language as a symbolic barrier that, in the final analysis, structures the repressed” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 187) Kristeva’s argument is based on Freud’s thesis that the foreigner is within ourselves, that which we choose to repress, for example in our approach to death. We are, Kristeva proposes, governed by “fears of the other – the other of death, the other of gender, the other of uncontrollable drive”. (Kristeva, 1991: p. 191)

In his book, Trespass of the Sign, Kevin Hart introduces the first chapter entitled, “Confrontation” with this quote by Nicholas Malebranche: “I will not bring you into a strange country, but I will perhaps teach you that you are a stranger in your own country”. (Hart, 1989: p.) This sense of strangeness, linked with loneliness, and the way in which humans deal with it can be found frequently in literature and will be discussed in depth in later chapters of this thesis.

Irigaray constantly acknowledges the difficulties language creates in attempting to comprehend the “divine”. We shall, she claims, only achieve this if “we abandon all calculation. All language (langue) and all meaning already produced”. (Irigaray,
This is, of course, impossible, as we cannot erase from our minds all that we have learned both formally and informally. Even when one attempts to restructure language one does so upon a base which already exists. Monique Wittig attempted to restructure (or deconstruct) language in Les Guerillères, as did Mary Daly in Gyn-Ecology when attempting to subvert what they saw as a male constructed language. Even if one works from the negative one is still acknowledging the existence of that which one is attempting to overthrow. An atheist in claiming non-belief in the existence of God has already acknowledged the possible concept of "God", thus he/she is resorting to negative theology.

Again, Derrida, acknowledges, as does Irigaray, the difficulties posed by language and refers to Paul de Man's discussion of Heidegger's famous formula – Die Sprache Spricht:

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In his discussion of negative theology Kevin Hart cites Heidegger: "Being speaks always and everywhere throughout language". (Hart, 1989: p. 260) He refers to Thomas Aquinas' statement which is an acknowledgement that although "All discussion of God must be metaphysical" inevitably the language we must of necessity use is inadequate to the task: "But so far as the way of signifying these perfections is concerned the words are used inappropriately, for they have a way of signifying that is appropriate to creatures." In Hart's own words: "...one may hold
that there is a God but there is no concept of God to which one can appeal that can
ground one’s discourse about God or the world”. (Hart, 1989: p. 28) This difficulty,
I would argue, occurs also when one is addressing concepts such as love, desire, lust,
hate, anger, etc. We are, therefore, drawn inevitably to “deconstruction” as a method
with which to confront the dilemma faced when addressing metaphysical phenomena.
In Hart’s words “deconstruction acts as an originary supplément to metaphysics,
supplying it with what it lacks only to supplant it”. (1989: p. 260) It is through
analysing texts and endeavouring to decipher their meaning, while at the same time
acknowledging that there are infinite meanings contained therein, that one can gain
some understanding of the difficulties faced in interpreting the metaphysical.
Because there are no definitive “answers” one is operating within the realm of
multiple possibilities and interpretations. Discussions of concepts pertaining to God,
love, death, life, mortality, immortality, desire can only be metaphysical and
therefore, as will be argued in Chapter 4, will lie essentially within the problematic of
metaphorical and symbolic language.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined various theories related to the transcendent and
metaphysical as a foreground for my examination of the texts of Armanno, Garner
and Winton. This review has included the work of philosophers, especially
Nietzsche and psychologists, such as Jung. The linguistic theories of Derrida and
Irigaray and their relevance to the topic have also been discussed and will form the
basis for my thesis.
I shall be discussing in the following chapters how Winton, Armanno and Garner address the issue of the metaphysical and the transcendent within material existence and through the materiality of language, and the manner in which their protagonists search for answers to their reason for being. With Levinas I shall not be arguing the existence or non-existence of God but merely be conducting, through an examination of the fiction, “an investigation into the possibility – or even the fact – of understanding ‘God’ as a significant word”. (Levinas: 1998: p.xi)
Chapter 2

THE OTHER WHO IS NOT-I

"for I was over: I dropped off her like a split corset: there was no more I."
(Maxine in Cosmo Cosmolino)

Beyond all words.

Beyond all words, beyond all names
there waits immeasurable silence.
Beyond the pulse of sound exists
the wellspring, the invisible fountain
from which all notes and rhythms flow:

the not-I, the immortal Other,
the quietness where time itself
is nothing, all our untold years
of making, earning, journeying,
our birth and death, our bitter conflicts

are less than dream. The never-ending
quest for the self is done. We know
question and answer meaningless,
and them, beyond all symbols, peace:
the not-I. The eternal Other.
(Gwen Harwood, Night Thoughts).

Gwen Harwood’s short poem opens up a myriad of thoughts on the meaning of
Otherness or alterity. The Other is that which is “not-I”, that which is lacking and
through which the search for meaning for existence is driven. The Other is truly
metaphysical – beyond the physical - because it is that which is lacking, therefore
sought through or created in others, whether it be gods, lovers, friends, strangers or
our children. This poem also speaks of the otherness, the unknowability of death
and an after-life, a theme which occurs very strongly in Garner’s Cosmo Cosmolino.
The “not-I” can also be found in the subconscious self, for example in Armanno’s My
Beautiful Friend, and Aaron’s projection of the negative aspects of his own character
on to his mirror image, Marcello. In this chapter I shall discuss the way in which
Armanno’s, Winton’s and Garner’s texts seek to name or represent the unknowability of the “not-I”.

**Gods and strangers**

In both Greek mythology and the Bible can be found examples of attempts to realise the beyond understanding and therefore unnameability of God as Other. Frequently, in trying to come to identify what “god” represents, a stranger, god made human, is introduced into the text, whether written or oral. Jupiter takes Mercury, his son, to earth to gain an understanding of what it is to be human. They grant the couple who feed them one wish, which is that they both die together, which ultimately occurs. This myth represents an attempt on the part of the author to find an explanation for death. At the other end of the spectrum we find Abraham in the Old Testament offering hospitality to a stranger who promises him that his wife, Sarah, will give birth to a son within a year. The gods, as ultimate Others, are portrayed as those who have the power of life and death over humanity. Existence is not merely chance but controlled by a greater force. In psychological terms, along with a sense of belonging to a community, belief in a God, or other forms of spirituality, provides the believer with a sense of control and purpose. A belief that the individual is important enough to have a superior being interested in him/her makes some sense of existence. Birth, life and death are no longer pointless or meaningless.

**Cosmo Cosmolino (the “Not-I” as visitor)**

Throughout the texts under discussion the stranger figure frequently appears, to explain, interact with or provide a catalyst for the lives of the protagonists. In Garner’s *Cosmo Cosmolino* it is Maxine who enters the lives of Janet, Ray and Alby,
all of whom are seeking to find some meaning to their lives. Janet, who has been deserted by her husband, has become a sceptic, “All she believed in was the physical, the practical, the stoical.” (1992a: p. 52) Again one can read into this description the Lacanian image of the female not belonging to the symbolic order but grounded in the physical, the pre-intellectual.

In contrast Maxine, who “called herself a carpenter” and had “no worldly ambition”, “expected good of everything” upturns this concept by making the male (Ray) the object of her desire, which is not for sexual gratification but his phallus, or more literally his sperm, becomes the means by which she can fulfil her creativity. His participation in the reproductive act is merely as a tool to achieve her goals. Ray ceases to be a subject, when Maxine uses language to depersonalise him by seeing as an angelic visitor sent to enable her to achieve her ultimate desire, that is to reproduce. Once he has fulfilled that role he is of no more value to Maxine. (1992: p. 57) It is not until she rises from the roof of the shed that Maxine, herself realises her supernatural powers. The role of language in approaching the metaphysical is, unlike her other works such as Monkey Grip, very apparent in this work of Garner. Critic Jenna Mead finds Garner’s insurgence into the metaphysical uncomfortable although she admits that she has a “problem with the whole enterprise (that is the theme and language of the novel) because Mead is “not a Christian”. (Mead, 1992: p. 67) In so doing, Mead claims Garner has regressed to “the great tradition of realist novels of the nineteenth century” with its grounding in “humanism (which) has been central to the Western philosophical tradition”. Because of this, Mead’s review focuses on the language of Cosmo Cosmolino “not as theology but as the chronicler”
of "our world". (1992: pp. 66-9). Mead's criticism of Garner's work from this point of view will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

While Mead's materialist approach conflicts with Garner's movement into the numinous, not so for Philippa Kelly who approaches the work from a psychoanalytical, feminist stance, following the work of the French feminists, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous. For Kelly the text is totally consistent with a feminist reading (see Chapter 3) and this is the approach she takes in her analysis of Cosmo Cosmolino. She claims that "In celebrating constructions of femininity not just as they oppose the symbolic, but as they push through it, Cosmo Cosmolino touches a space beyond binary oppositions". (1995: p. 19) Kelly's analysis of Garner's approach to time and its relationship to the Symbolical order will also be examined as it applies not only to Garner's texts, but also to those of Winton and Armanno in Chapter 5 devoted to a discussion of "Time and Place".

Maxine in Cosmo Cosmolino, herself is misled in believing she has had a spiritual visitation when a stranger, Ray, seeking accommodation for himself and his brother, Alby, comes to her shed announcing, "I've been sent." (1992a: p. 61) The religious connotations of the language throughout this encounter, further confuse Maxine: "'Sent,' she said. 'Thank heavens.'" To which the stranger responds "'Hallelujah'". (1992a: p. 62) The language used borders frequently on parody, for example the stranger responding to Maxine's question as to where he is from with "'Quite a long way north.'" (1992a: p. 67) This use of language to parody the trappings of religion also appears in the sentence, "She shot back her cuffs and spread her hands in a gesture of wondering beatitude". (1992a: p. 90) This sentence is interesting in that
it depicts an image which is anomalous to the character of Maxine. The shooting
back of the cuffs in contrast to the usual manner of Maxine’s dress, suggests a
masculine saint or deity clothed in priestly garb. It is this type of religiosity which
one can relate more closely to Ray who has found comfort in structured religion, with
all its intellectual, physical and spiritual trappings.

Maxine, in her simplicity, decides that, shades of the Annunciation, she has been
visited by an angel who is there to impregnate her. There are elements of the Christ
and Mary figures of the New Testament in the character, Maxine. Christ was a
carpenter as is Maxine. The archangel Gabrielle, according to scriptural accounts,
announced to Mary that she was to bear Jesus, while Maxine believes that Ray is an
angel whose specific mission is to ensure that she becomes pregnant. Like Christ she
constantly subverts the norms of society. She steals Alby’s and Ray’s savings and
donates them to a more than dubious cause. There are frequent parodic indicators
throughout Cosmo Cosmolino of Maxine’s spiritual qualities. Words such as
“wondering beatitude”, “incarnation”, “angels”, “archangels” are scattered throughout
the text especially in relation to Maxine. (Further discussion of Garner’s use of
angelic presences to address the metaphysical will occur later in this chapter.) Janet,
Maxine and the two brothers are strangers whose encounter with each other alters the
direction of their lives.

In the following section of this chapter I shall discuss how Winton, in That Eye, The
Sky, also employs the device of introducing a “stranger” who has a profound
influence on the lives of his protagonists.
That Eye, The Sky (the “Not-I” as stranger)

In Winton’s That Eye, The Sky we find the Christ-like figure of a stranger entering the family which is under stress. The husband’s/father’s accident has left him physically and mentally incapacitated. (One can see a similarity between the characters Sam Flack in this novel and Fish in Cloudstreet in that both become like infants in their needs.) Ort hears unidentified sounds in the night, as does Quick in Cloudstreet, which he attributes to kangaroos but which are probably the stranger who is yet to be revealed to the family. The stranger does not show his face for some days but we are made aware of his presence in the background through Ort. The stranger makes his appearance finally at a time when Alice Flack is having to face the difficulties of caring for her husband at home. It is as if the stranger has seen their neediness and has come as a saviour-like figure to assist in Sam’s care. Yet we already know this man to be totally human and sexualised, watching the daughter, Tegwyn, nude bathing. That he is sexually aroused is reinforced by Ort’s awareness that the man is staring at his own erection, a scene which is re-enacted by Ort when he becomes emotionally distressed and flees the house to avoid his mother’s anger, “There it is, me old fella with its nine black hairs, sticking up just like that old man’s under the bridge. And here I am looking at it. Makes you sick”. (1986: pp. 40 & 41).

When he finally approaches the Flack family the stranger’s origins remain obscure, as do his reasons for helping the family. The stranger is “not from anywhere in particular” and, as Alice says, “I didn’t ask anyone to come”. (1986: p. 53) This uninvited stranger enters a family which is isolated from the wider world. More importantly, because of events surrounding Sam’s accident, the Flacks have become
isolated from their community. Henry Warburton acts as a catalyst, his presence mediating between the outside world and this isolated family.

Both Ort and Alice struggle to explain Henry Warburton's appearance as does Henry himself. In response to Alice's questioning he replies: "I don't really know why I'm here." And "Your husband is sick." The wording of one of Alice's questions is interesting for she asks not "Who are you?" but "What are you?", as if Henry is something other than human. He describes himself as "A man. A servant...Only a man. Like Sam here." (1986: p. 55) Yet his appearance at the time of the family's need and the obscurity of his past and the reason suggest, at least some level, some kind of divine or at least para-normal intervention.

Later in the novel the text relates the story of Henry's own conversion after he experiences what appears to be a complete breakdown. He believes that his recovery is due to God's intervention in his life. The power of language and its necessity is shown in the words "Warburton starts talking like it hurts him but he won't stop." To verbalise one's fears and feelings can be hurtful yet Warburton (Henry) needs to explain to the family and even to himself what is his purpose in life. As he says "It's time I stated my purpose. I haven't meant to be deceitful; God has sent me here." Henry Warburton had a "vision" which Ort likens to the light he alone sees hovering over the house. Henry explains "It's something you see that no one else sees. It's real, it's there, but only you see it." (1986: p. 87)

When Henry says that "God told me to come to you", Ort asks, "Who's God?" out of a real innocence of the concept of God. To him God is "...just a word. Like heck."
Is he someone? Mum?" Here a child is posing a question which has long challenged philosophers and others - the existence or otherwise of a superior being beyond human understanding and ability to describe. These exchanges epitomise the relationship between God and language, which is further emphasised by Ort's question of Henry “Did you get our names from God?” (1986: p. 88) This question can be seen almost as an inversion of the actuality: God is named by us through language, we are not named by a God, who can only be “known” as a concept. Therefore the concept of God becomes known to Ort through imperfect language.

Henry’s attempt to explain God centres on his simplistic interpretation of stories from the Old and New Testament. When Ort tries to place God in space “up there” with the stars he again asks if God is “a someone”? Henry’s response is that God is: “Everywhere, Ort. He’s in everything. The trees, the ground, the water. Everything stinks of God, reeks of him”. (1986: p.89) The use of the verbs “stinks” and “reeks” by Henry to describe God’s presence is interesting. Both of these verbs have a negative connotation, especially the latter. The Maquarie Dictionary’s definitions of the verb “to reek” are “to smell strongly and unpleasantly; to be strongly pervaded with something unpleasant or offensive, to be wet with sweat, blood etc.” This usage could be read as an explanation of God’s presence even in the dirt and grime of human existence, or perhaps an indication of Henry’s language limitations. He is describing an omniscient and omnipresent God who “sees everything” and who, in seeing the needs of his creatures, intervenes in their lives through others. As Henry explains it “God is a mystery. He plants his love in the path of all our plans.” (1986: p. 89/90) For the purposes of this thesis it is interesting to note that despite his lack of knowledge of the concept of “God” Ort still
has a metaphysical experience in that he sees a light, which gives him hope, hovering over the house.

This linking of God with the child occurs again in Winton’s most recent work, *Dirt Music*. When Lu reflects on his past he recalls conversations with his niece, Bird, who shortly before she is killed in the road accident which claimed the lives of all his close family, tells him: “I saw God today.” (2001: p. 109), a claim which is repeated three pages later. When Lu asks Bird to describe God she says:

“A dot. A dot in a circle, sort of. When I close me eye and pole it with me thumb he floats across the sky. Right into the sun, even. No one else can go in the sun, right?” (2001: p. 110)

Within the child’s description is encapsulated the concept of a superior being who can accomplish that which humans cannot, such as entering the sun. This is a marked contrast with the idea of a vengeful and judgemental God which Jim, in Winton’s more recent work, has:

Jim has the idea that his past is catching up with him and that the world or God, or whatever will keep taking revenge on him and his family if he doesn’t put things right. (2001: p. 429)

Jim’s version of God or fate demonstrates a sense of powerlessness and his personal responsibility for the “sins” of his forbears. His is not the wondrous God capable of activity outside the abilities of humans, but a God very much fashioned on a human model. It is a God who pays one back for one’s failures. It is not a God with which Henry identifies in *That Eye The Sky*. 

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Henry’s understanding of God has moved beyond formal religions and their practices and lacks Jim’s element of fearfulness. For him the “Church” is to be found within people. His understanding has arisen out of his experience on the road and living within a community for a year:

There we were, God was with us and in us, without us having to say the secret formula. We didn’t need to conjure God up with wafers and wine. He’s always been there only we never look. All you need to do is open your eyes. You see, and then you either want it or you don’t. If you believe, the Spirit helps you to believe more. Helps you to love more. (1986: p. 92)

Henry refers to himself on the same page as “a High Church agnostic”. It is inevitable that his metaphysical understanding arises out of his upbringing. In contrast, Ort and Bird who have had no such indoctrination still experience the metaphysical or supernatural. The text appears to support the proposition of Eliade that the spiritual is inherent in human nature and will surface irrespective of whether one has a knowledge, based on language, of the concept of something which exists beyond the human and human understanding.

One might query why it is the two males who have the mystical experiences while Tegwin and Alice are more pragmatic in their approach to the events occurring around them. The covert message of the text can be read as upholding the patriarchal attitude of philosophers and church fathers such as Aristotle and Aquinas that woman represents the corporal and man the spiritual/divine. As has been discussed in Chapter 1 Irigaray talks of woman being seen as the sensible/corporeal therefore separate from the ideal/transcendent (or God). (Whitford, 1991; p. 140) The masculine nature of the symbolic order of language separates woman from becoming
“God”, a construct of such language. Irigaray describes this as a “lack” for we have no “God in which to share, a word/language to share”. (Whitford: 1991: p. 144)

In the following section of this chapter it will be shown how Garner uses the corporality of the feminine as discussed by Irigaray to address metaphysical issues such as death and the need to belong.

Garner’s “Terrible Angels”

Who, if I shouted, among the hierarchy of angels would hear me? And supposing one of them took me suddenly to his heart, I would perish before his stronger existence for beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror we can just barely endure, and we admire it so because it calmly disdains to destroy us. Every angel is terrible.
(Rilke: The Duinese Eligies.)

Helen Garner uses the last sentence of this poem by Rilke as an introduction to her trilogy, Cosmo Cosmolino. In each of the three stories angels, in human form, appear and, especially in the first two, “The Recording Angel” and “A Vigil”, their appearances coincide with a frightening or “terrible” event. The angelic happenings in the last story, “Cosmo Cosmolino”, differ in that the so-called angels, Ray and Maxine, herald a creative event, the birth of a child.

One can see a reflection of Irigaray’s concept of angels as messengers and announcers in Garner’s Cosmo Cosmolino. The possibility of the existence of a non/meta-physical world which runs parallel to the physical provides the basis for

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3 The translation used here is taken from Veronica Brady’s, 1994, Discussion Notes on Helen Garner’s Cosmo Cosmolino, Council of Adult Education, Melbourne, Vic. Australia. In the translation by A. Poulia Jr., in Duino Eligies and The Sonnets to Orpheus, 1977, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, p. 5, the last line reads “Every angel’s terrifying”, which alters somewhat the meaning of the sentence.
much of Irigaray’s work, but especially so for *The Forgetting of Air*. (1999)

Elizabeth Grosz claims that Irigaray is “fascinated with exploring the possibility of an intermediate between” God and human. (Grosz, 1989: p. 161) In Irigaray’s words “the angel tells of a journey between the envelope of God and the world, the micro and the macrocosm”. (1984: p. 22) In “The Recording Angel” we find the “angel of mercy” who appears to the unnamed narrator (re-appearing in the third story as Janet) heralding the death of Patrick and with his death the freeing of Janet from the confinement imposed on her through his definitions.

Garner’s text differs from Grosz’s interpretation of Irigaray’s angels as being “usually disembodied, sexually neuter, intangible, incorporeal”. (1989: p. 161) The angels portrayed in *Cosmo Cosmolino* appear in human form, have a gender, (and are sexually active in the case of Raymond and Maxine), and are physically present. Perhaps the most ephemeral of Garner’s angels is the “angel of mercy”, yet the text could be interpreted to read him as a worker of some sort.

Yet in Garner’s text we have already been introduced to an angel who fits the model proposed by Irigaray. The dying Patrick has encountered in his dreams an angel who is “mighty. He was... in majesty”. (Garner, 1992: p. 11) Perhaps Patrick’s experience of an angelic presence reflects his closeness to death and thus the ultimate knowledge of its meaning. For those who remain, the angelic presences are in knowable human form, neither mighty nor majestic. It is as if it is only as one is about to leave this life that one can cope with the idea of the transcendent. For those who are to live on, the messengers must be identifiable and as close to human form as possible for their message to be received and at least in part understood. But is this
not how images of gods or superior beings are created, as replicas of those who create them as there is no other point of reference?

Claire Colebrook in her critique of Cosmo Cosmolino describes Garner’s angel as “radically exterior”, a being who “signifies a true otherness that would challenge and disrupt stable self-identity.” (1994: p. 57) Therefore we find Ray being forced by the “terrible angels” in the crematorium to view the disintegration of Kim’s body. In so doing he is forced to rethink his own values, which he does by turning to a type of fundamentalist faith. The angels could be seen as his conscience, therefore while being “exterior” they are also perhaps arising from his own sense of guilt at his treatment of Kim.

It is in solitude, “when one is deprived of the confirmation of love, Colebrook claims, that Garner’s angels, like Rilke’s, are most terrible. (1994: p. 58) Colebrook sees Garner’s angels acting “as a challenge to the postmodern reduction of experience to a network of signification”. (1994: p. 60) They are catalysts which highlight a move from individuation to community, even if those communities prove to be less than perfect. Again one can see reflected the work of Bataille and Blanchot with their emphasis on the need for community to establish one’s identity. Garner’s characters have a need to make contact with others, whether it be Ray seeking to meet up with his brother Alby, or the physical contact which occurs between Maxine and Janet, or the sexual encounter between Maxine and Ray and Ray and Kim. Interestingly it is only when Ray’s subconscious takes over during dreams that he is able to recognise the sense of loss he experiences after Kim’s death.
Brooks poses the question as to who is the “real” recording angel, Patrick or the narrator (Janet). It is from Janet that we learn the “gruesome details” of their shared experiences, not Patrick. (1994: p. 18) Although Patrick categorises people according to his own perception of their roles and characteristics it is Janet who recalls their past, their shared history.

A similarity to Garner’s angels can be seen in Wallace Stevens’ poem Angels

Surrounded by Paysans:

One of the countrymen:

There is
A welcome at the door to which no one comes?
The Angel:
I am the angel of reality,
Seen for a moment standing in the door.

I have neither ashen wing nor wear of ore
And live without a tepid aureole,

Or stars that follow me, not to attend,
But of my being and its knowing, part.

I am one of you and being one of you
Is being and knowing what I am and know.

Yet I am the necessary angel of earth,
Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,

Cleared of stiff and stubborn, man-locked set,
And, in my hearing, you hear its tragic drone

Rise liquidly in liquid lingerings,
Like watery words awash; like meanings said

By repetitions of half-meanings. Am I not,
Myself, only half of a figure of a sort,

A figure half seen for a moment, a man
Of the mind, an apparition appareled in

Apparels of such lightest look that a turn
Of my shoulder and quickly, too quickly, I am gone?
(1959: p. 153; 1952: pp192/3)
Stevens' linking of angels with "paysans" (peasants) imbues them with an earthiness. These are not numinous, other worldly beings, but are born out of one's own fears and experiences. Stevens and Garner's angels emanate from the same source - the psyche. They slip in and out of the lives of Garner's protagonists as do Stevens'. They are born in our imaginations as memories of something which is both within us and outside of us, merely glimpsed and then gone. For both Garner and Stevens they are reflections of the self of which we are unaware, giving glimpses of that which is beyond understanding. Poets such as Stevens and Rilke and novelists such as Garner, Winton and Armanno use words to explore this other world.

The stranger who is "I"

Frequently throughout the texts one finds not only strangers who are other to the protagonist but also indications that the individual's psyche/subconscious is a "stranger" to itself. Blanchot argues that the subjective, first person "I", through language, succumbs to the objective, third person "One". Frequently, in the texts under discussion, the self is projected onto the Other who is the subconscious self appearing as a stranger. They are the strangers of which Kristeva and Hart speak. In Winton's Cloudstreet, for example, whilst Quick is shooting kangaroos he hears movement in the bush and sees what he believes to be a lone kangaroo. He finds that the figure he sees in the dark is:

... a human, a man running raw and shirtless in the light. His face is tough with fear, there’s a sweat on him, and he runs right past and out of the light to the dark margins of bushland. Long after the runner is gone and the light turned out, Quick has the face burnt into his retina, because that face is his. It’s Quick Lamb barrelling by right before him. (1991: p. 204)
These sightings of his ghostly self occur frequently and Quick becomes fearful that he might shoot himself. This self-sighting appears to represent his running away from his family and life and that he has set himself on a path of self-destruction. It is his dream of Fish calling Quick to come home that precedes these episodes of self-confrontation, which finally lead him to return to Cloudstreet. The character, Fish, can be viewed as a Christ-like figure, a focus for the two families' redemption and reconciliation. In remaining as a child because of his brain-damage he retains a sense of wonder and awe possible only for Winton in the innocence of childhood. Winton himself referred to this idea in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel when discussing the value he gained from his religious upbringing:

...regardless of all the silliness of its theology, and its black-and-white aspect, it did respect that sense of wonder, that we have as children which is, I think systematically beaten out of us as we get older. It is almost a sign of adulthood to lose all your ideals, all your hopes, all your openness. You harden yourself to the reality of life. (1997: p. 66)

Winton also claimed that in middle age we attempt to “recover all the lovely things felt when you were a child.” (Wachtel, 1997: p. 66) Ort and Bird, as children, approach the concept of God and spirituality with a sense of wonder, as does Garner’s Maxine. The world-weary Jim Buckridge sees God or fate as bent on making his life miserable. For Winton anything is possible in this world, it is only the limits we place on our way of viewing the world which inhibit the possibility of pigs who talk. However, he angrily refutes labels such as “Magical Realism” being applied to his works, as he does other labels being applied to himself. For Winton, the writer, it is possible that Gods commune with humans and intervene in their lives, whether it be unlikely agents such as the flawed Henry (That Eye, The Sky) or the brain damaged
Fish (Cloud Street). Both texts can be seen as a challenge to the reader’s credulity and lack of openness to a sense of wonder.

In Armanno’s My Beautiful Friend it is Marcello Mansini who represents Aaron’s alter ego, that side of his nature which he has subdued. Rather than Winton’s “innocent” though, Marcello is the dark side of human nature. We know from the inscription on the tombstone and Rebecca’s words that Aaron and Marcello are approximately the same age. Frequently Marcello is viewed as a mirror image of Aaron. He is in looks what Aaron would like to be, that is, beautiful. Marcello is also that which Aaron dares not be, evil personified. Throughout the text the tension lays in the encounter between these two men or rather the two sides of the one man Aaron. The dynamic of the narrative is built around the question: Will Aaron follow his wife, Rebecca, and succumb to Marcello’s enticements and the dark side of his own nature, or will he resist the call to evil?

As soon as they arrive at the hotel on the edge of Geneva’s Lac Leman a marked change comes over both Rebecca and Aaron. To what extent the movement to a foreign location affects their behaviour and thoughts is questionable, but both begin to perceive each other differently, almost as if they are strangers to each other. The reader might explain Aaron’s sudden attraction to faithlessness as symptomatic of a marriage which is obviously under stress. As Aaron says:

Faithlessness had never been my sin, yet a disturbing voice inside me was saying Sorry, Rebecca, sorry. Things are changing, and somehow it just could be that I might want all women. (1999b: p. 42)
Aaron’s first encounter with the stranger, who is identified later as Marcello Mansini is through a vision:

A vision came into my mind then, a vision of the Montreux streets running with rain, of the surface of the lake being pounded, and of a man who walked out there in a wardrobe of new clothes, smiling as if the skies were raining pleasure. (1999b: p. 43)

This “vision” is described in terms which do not make sense. Streets do not run with rain, and water, lacking resistance cannot be “pounded”. The distorted image presented contrasts sharply with the remainder of the sentence where the reader can picture the man, smiling in his new clothes. We are then brought back to the impossible with skies “raining pleasure”. The long sentence containing both ordinary and impossible images reflects the content of the novel in which the everyday and the ghostly move side by side. Marcello, in his consummate faithlessness, comes to represent that which Aaron is drawn to but which he constantly struggles to subdue within himself. It is only in dreams that Aaron acts out his desires, but those dreams are for Aaron the other side of reality. The text throughout is very heavily reminiscent of Jung’s work on the relationship of the subconscious and dreams. Not only does he dream of seducing other women: he actually does make love to them, although he fails to recognise that what he sees as his dream actions have occurred in reality.

A gathering of gods and angels

One might question the relevance of the introduction of god like figures and angels in contemporary texts, including those of Armanno, Garner and Winton. David Brooks has claimed a “happening worldwide” in literature in which there are angelic appearances, referring to Peter Carey’s The Tax Inspector, published
only one year before Garner’s *Cosmo Cosmolino*. In Carey’s novel a young man “makes himself over in an angel’s image”. (Brooks, 1994: p. 19) In retrospect one of the possibilities he proposes is the almost superstitious and even non-conscious fear of events surrounding the entering of Western civilisation into the third millennium. There was a feeling of “cosmic concern” that something bordering on the supernatural would take place merely because of a change over into a new century. Because, in this scientific era, we are expected to be rational and not metaphysical in our approach to life, we could justify these “cosmic concerns” under the guise of what might happen when our computers succumbed to this phenomenon.

Don Anderson suggests that “Modern angels are…likely to signify the unlimited aspirations of poetry and human imagination…the desire for transcendence rather than any conviction of its having been achieved”. (1992: pp. 42-47) It is through the creative acts of writing and art that one can address and reflect on issues which might be described as numinous or metaphysical, whether as a writer or reader. For both writer and reader words are the means by which we are transported to another level of knowledge. Readers are being challenged to consider the possibility that not only does the world exist as a physical, scientifically explainable entity it also exists on a level which is beyond human understanding, that is the metaphysical or transcendent. Brooks describes this phenomenon in his discussion of the works of the *Symbolistes*:

*Words -- the Poem -- drew us from this existence to an existence or a plane beyond it. Inspiration -- the message from that other place -- is important to this kind of aesthetic, and so are the messengers, which its adherents were wont to figure as muses, or angels.* (1994: p. 23)
This world can only be known through language, a language which is inadequate to
the task. Yet as can be seen in the works of Armano, Garner and Winton the
poet/writer is constantly searching for the words to explain this non-physical aspect of
human experience.

In Angels: A Modern Myth, Michel Serres, as do Brooks and Irigaray, refers to angels
as messengers, but relates them more to the physical than the metaphysical worlds.
Serres’ book is based on a discussion between two protagonists, Pia and Pantope who
meet at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris after an absence during which letters,
faxes, e-mails, phone calls and postcards have been exchanged. Pia is a doctor based
at the airport, Pantope is a travelling inspector for Air France. Serres, in the notes
which run parallel to the main body of the text, refers to the “angels of the monotheist
tradition (Jewish, Christian and Muslim)” as being invisible but “capable of becoming
visible. They appear and then disappear.” (1995: p. 7) However, these notes extend
the concept of angels to the human and natural world, claiming that all human
interaction is angelic as it is passed on interchange of messages.

In the most ancient traditions, messenger-angels don’t necessarily take only human form, they may pass by in a
breeze or a ruffling of the water, or in the heat and light
of sun and stars – in short, in any of the elementary fluxes
and movement that make up our Earth. When angels
breathe out, by so doing they reveal their message twice:
what they produce, and what they are. (1995: p. 25)

Serres’ text goes even further as it is set in an airport and the planes become angels as
they convey people and messages across space. What follows is an interaction
between the two protagonists in which Pia attempts to explain metaphysical concepts
to Pantope who is resistant to her propositions. Gods, Pia claims, arise out of
glorification of our material existence and it will only be “if our will becomes
sufficiently good for us to make an agreement between us to accord glory only to a transcendent absent being” that “we will be able to live in peace”. (1995: p. 289)

Pia talks of the “machine for fabricating gods” and it is only when human beings cease to create gods that “The unique solution to the problem of evil thus leads not to a demonstration of the existence of God, but to the fact that it is necessary for him to exist, and to the refutation of polytheism, which is what dominates us today.” (1995: p. 290) One of the interesting aspects of the interchange between the two is that it is the female who introduces the metaphysical possibilities and who eventually leads the male to an understanding of these. “She came to meet him, as she often does, and saw him materialize out of the flow of passengers…” (1995: p. 7) The language used in the opening page sets the tone for the interchange which follows. Pantope “materializes out of the flow” as might the angels depicted in both the notes accompanying the text and the artwork with various artists’ impressions of angels. It is as if Pantope has appeared from nowhere, although he has obviously just disembarked from a plane.

Interspersed with the angelic images, which include those of Rembrandt, Botticelli and Botticini are photographs of planes, buildings, homeless and destitute individuals and natural phenomena. Each of these are depicted within the text as examples of things which convey messages, some evil, some good. The text suggests that the evil which occurs within the world can be attributed largely to humanity’s tendency towards polytheism, whether it be a machine, consumerism, materialism or even using the concept of a god. The difficulty is that not only different cultures, but also individuals claim their god to be the true god.
The gods and angels which appear in the works of Armanno, Garner and Winton tend to take on human forms. They are not the disembodied creatures of which Irigaray writes but are usually physical beings one would pass in the street and not notice. At other times they can be seen to represent aspects of the subconscious nature of the protagonists. For example, as has been discussed, Marcello Mansini (Armanno’s My Beautiful Friend) symbolises those negative aspects of Aaron’s character which lie hidden below the surface. Rilke’s terrible angels are not disembodied, paranormal beings but are our own subdued fears.

Angels and gods frequently represent the unconscious fears and desires of the humans with whom they interact, an attempt to explain that which is unexplainable and which cannot be measured. For example the angels who appear in Garner’s Cosmo Cosmolino fulfil different roles. In both the first and second stories of the trilogy the angels are very closely linked with the protagonists’ fear of death which is highlighted by the death or expected death of a friend or ex-lover. As the experience of one’s own death is unknowable it remains in the metaphysical realm and is therefore dependent upon images and metaphors. On another level it can be experienced vicariously through the death of close others. Critics Goldsworthy and Brady both see the dominant theme in Garner’s work as death. In Brady’s words:

In our culture, death is the final taboo. Having seen it, now Raymond cannot go home again, back to his old evanescent existence. But as the novel sees it, the ‘angels’ have not taken anything from him, they have shown him the truth of his humanity. True, this is too much for Raymond — ‘human kind cannot bear very much reality’ — and he takes refuge in religion, the pseudo religion which, far from bringing him in tune with the beauty and terror of existence, serves to cocoon him from it. Still, the reader has seen what he has seen and may be changed by it. (1994: p. 12)
I would agree with Brady that Raymond’s meeting with the angels at the crematorium was “not really supernatural. Rather they tell us more about ourselves”. (1994: p. 11) This is of course the point behind Wallace Stevens’ previously quoted poem, Angels Surrounded by Paysans. Does Kim’s disintegrating body in the fires of the crematorium move Raymond to pity for Kim or is he picturing his own bodily disintegration when he dies? Is the unnamed narrator (Janet) in the first story mourning Richard’s dying or is she fearful of the loss of her past history which he will take with him? Within both these examples one can see a certain degree of self-concern. They highlight not only the solitariness of death but also the fear associated with human mortality.

Similarly Winton’s Others are usually flawed humans not supernatural beings.

Perhaps the most outstanding examples are the brain-damaged Fish in Cloudstreet and Henry in That Eye, The Sky. However, in the case of Henry who claims to have been “sent” by God to help the family, the underlying message, as in The Riders too, is the importance of connectedness to the emotional survival of human beings. This search for completeness through others which appears in the texts can be read in terms of the ideas of Bataille and Blanchot (discussed in the opening chapter) with their emphasis on the importance of community. As they say when discussing the principle of incompleteness: “The lack of feeling, the lack of love, it is that then, which signifies death”. (Blanchot, 1988: p. 36) Throughout the texts under discussion the protagonists are searching for completeness through others. One outstanding example of what happens when connectedness fails to occur can be seen in the character, Ray in Cosmo Cosmolino who must experience “death” before he is “redeemed” through his meeting with Janet and Maxine.
None of the works discussed would fit the criteria set by Jenna Mead, as they are all open to her criticism directed towards Garner’s *Cosmo Cosmolino* that it is a regression to humanism. They all focus on non-scientific accounts of the human condition, and in most cases supplement the merely material. The material in the texts is presented in some cases as a source of evil, such as Rebecca’s drive towards creating an economic empire based on nail cosmetics in *My Beautiful Friend*. In the same novel Aaron is scathing of his wife’s drive towards financial security yet constantly measures their relationship in terms of materiality. It is only when Rose and Quick abandon their desire to build their own home and move back to their families that they achieve some sense of belonging. But, as Janet says in *Cosmo Cosmolino* “You can’t split matter and spirit.” (Garner, 1992a: p. 101) This is the underlying message of all the texts under discussion.

Not only are the “Angels Surrounded by Paysans”; the *paysans* (peasants) are the angels. In the works of Armanno, Garner and Winton discussed in this chapter angels and gods are less akin to those of Igriray or even Dante. Rather they can be seen as a linguistic construct used by the authors to address and measure, in a non-empirical way, the non-material issues faced in the journey from birth, through life, to death. The texts introduce us to terrible angels and gods who dwell both with us and within us. In the following chapter the relationship of gender and “otherness” as presented in the writers work will be discussed.
Chapter 3

THE GENDERED OTHER

“Our minds are not hopeful, thought Janet; but our nerves are made of optimistic stuff.” (Cosmo Cosmolino)

Human subjectivity seeks to satisfy lack through others, whether a god or another person. In gender terms, as Jung describes it, it is the “anima” (feminine) within man and the “animus” (masculine) within woman which must be hidden to maintain one’s identity and which is projected on to the opposite sex. Therefore both man and woman create another to compensate for that which he/she lacks or must keep hidden. Even the positivistic psychology of Maslow acknowledges these expectations as unrealistic and incapable of fulfilment. Despite this, the quest continues and the Other is called upon to participate in the quest.

Woman as “Other” in Cosmo Cosmolino

Elizabeth Grosz, in her analysis of the work of French feminist writers such as Kristeva, Irigaray and Le Doeuff, refers to a “general process of cultural and representational assimilation” which can be identified with the term phallocentrism, a term which arose out of the 1980’s feminist debates on sexual identity. (1989: p. 105) As Grosz defines this term:

Phallocentrism is the use of one model of subjectivity, the male, by which all others are positively or negatively defined. Others are constructed as variations of this singular type of subject. They are thus reduced to or defined only by terms chosen by and appropriate for masculinity. (1989: p. 105)

The representation of phallocentrism is most marked in the first story of Garner’s Cosmo Cosmolino, “Recording Angel”, although it can be identified, frequently
Subtly in the other works being analysed in this thesis. It needs to be remembered that, although the term “phallocentrism” might seem to be outdated in the year 2002, *Cosmo Cosmolino* was published in 1992 and was being written during the period when the term was being discussed by feminism. In the Garner text the female character who is the narrator of the story is never referred to by name either by Patrick or his wife, Natalie. The unnamed narrator speaks of the manner in which Patrick categorises people, especially the females he knows:

> He had mapped out the story of my life, and of the lives of everyone we knew, into a grid-like framework and nailed it down; and everything done, witnessed, dreamed, heard of or read he had lined up under cast-iron headings, those terrifyingly simple categories of his. (Garner, 1992: p. 6).

Underlying this passage is a female voice describing the tendency for individual female identity to be lost to the role performed. One becomes somebody’s mother, wife, daughter or lover and ceases to be known by one’s name, becoming a function not a person. As Grosz defines it in her examination of Luce Irigaray’s work, women are restricted “to a phallocentrically constrained maternity… For the mother, it implies the severe limitation on her possibilities of self-definition and autonomy, her subjection to the Law of the Father, her subsumption under the patronym, her renunciation of an identity as a woman and a sexual being.” (1989: p. 121) Once Patrick dies, either mentally or physically, the nameless narrator ceases to exist as a person as there is no longer anybody who can define her. It is the unnamed narrator who faces the “Recording Angel” at the end of the story and who, it can be argued, is about to be shot by him:
...just as I drew level with him he straightened his spine, raised his head, and extended his gun arm towards me in a slow, vertical arc. I saw then what he was: I recognised him. I stood still in front of him. I presented myself, for he was no longer playing. He was here on business, acting on orders. He was a small, serious, stone-eyed angel of mercy. (Garner, 1992: p. 22)

This ending is totally unexpected in that it occurs in the hospital where Patrick is a patient who has just had an operation for a life-threatening illness. The narrator asks Natalie, Patrick’s wife, “Have you ever... wished that someone you loved would die? So that the record of all your crimes and failures would be obliterated?” (Garner, 1992: p. 19) The narrator then goes on to express a fear that Patrick, if he survives, will forget everything and she will then have to remember her crimes from which he has rescued her in the past, including giving her money for an abortion and paying her bail when she was gaol. Therefore “Death”, in the form of a young boy, comes as the “angel of mercy”. The narrator (Janet) is now free to be herself as her “record” has been “obliterated” by Patrick’s death. Yet there is a contradiction within the text in that Janet remembers her past, it is not obliterated. With freedom comes responsibility and as the story progresses we find Janet reliving and regretting those “crimes” she could forget when Patrick was alive and retaining them for her.

The text suggests that there is security in having oneself categorised by an other as it removes the need to make decisions, or to be the repository of one’s own guilt. Although the narrator attacks Patrick’s tendency to categorise women she subconsciously condones it. Reading the text from a feminist viewpoint it is not only an indictment of the way in which men define women in instrumental terms but also of how some women succumb to and accept such definitions and categorisations.
Natalie, although married to Patrick, appears to have managed to retain her identity. On leaving the hospital Natalie is “going home”. Before meeting the “Recording Angel” the narrator had planned to “find myself a hotel”, emphasising the lack of groundedness in the latter woman. This lack is further supported by the fact that the narrator remains unnamed, having no identity other than as Patrick’s friend and according to his categorisation. She becomes almost an archetype of “woman” as “other” and a product of language. It is only after Patrick’s death that the narrator is identified and named, her name appearing first in the third story of the book.

Critic Jemma Mead, who has some difficulty with Cosmo Cosmolino overall, is critical especially of the scene in which Janet reacts to the image of the phallus:

This shimmering phallus reads like something monstrously vulgar from schlock horror rather than any unsayable truth Janet needs to experience in order to make real her own sense of need. There is nothing mysterious or wondrous here – at least in my world. The language of this scene, it seems to me, positions Janet squarely within, not the potential for truth offered by humanism, but the suppression of female sexuality that humanism depends upon. (1992: p. 68)

One can read in this passage a literal interpretation of the “phallocentricism’ of which Irigaray and Grosz wrote. It does appear that this phallic imagery dominates Janet’s perception of herself as being dependent upon the masculine for self-definition. But the text can also be read as an indictment of the manner in which women are socialised to define themselves in masculine terms, which is what Irigaray and Grosz argue. Janet has already accepted herself as a failure in that she has not had children. She epitomises the dilemma of feminism regarding the material: a constant debate between biological determinism and the recognition that succumbing to this impinges on one’s identity. Because I am approaching the texts from a feminist and
psychological viewpoint I have difficulty with Mead’s negative interpretation of the phallic imagery in the text. I believe the hovering phallus represents the dilemma of a woman who is struggling to find herself in a phallocentric society which accords with Kelly’s interpretation. It represents the struggle involved when one chooses to live outside boundaries defined by gender. Janet sees herself as a failure because she has not had children. She epitomises the dilemma of feminism regarding the material: a constant debate between biological determinism and the recognition that succumbing to this impinges on one’s identity. Mead advocates a particular brand of feminism which focuses on the material and ignores the influence of the subconscious on one’s thoughts. I believe the text can be read as arguing that despite what one might cognitively believe one has no control over a subconscious which has been formed through socialisation within a phallocentric society.

The gendered “Other”

There are marked contrasts in the manner in which Armanno, Winton and Garner address the issue of the gendered Other. With Armanno’s writing it is difficult not to see reflections of his experiences as the Australian born child of Sicilian immigrants living in the Brisbane of the eighties and nineties. As in his treatment of God, Armanno’s characterisation of women is very “Italian” in the stereotypes he portrays. It is hard to avoid seeing the Eve/Mary dichotomy in his female protagonists. Motherhood is good per se. Its antithesis, that is choosing to reject it, as does Rebecca in My Beautiful Friend, is represented as unnatural, even evil. In this text the materialistic Rebecca is contrasted with the free thinking Linda, who points out that her name means light. Yet at the same time one can see in Armanno’s writing an effort to break away from the stereotype of the pure, virginal woman epitomised in
Catholic culture by the Virgin Mary. Even Linda demonstrates weakness in her relationships, giving her love perhaps too freely to the wrong person. Yet she is redeemed through her pregnancy. From a feminist viewpoint Armanno’s women can be read as being there merely to retain order, to act as “God’s Police” or redeemers who will rescue the male from his uncontrollable urges. Therefore a woman such as Rebecca who not only refuses to fulfil such a role but also arouses the carnal in man must be “evil” personified. She is responsible for the sexual encounter with the American tourist merely because of the way she acts and looks. This is almost a contemporary re-enactment of the Garden of Eden story in which Eve is portrayed as the seductress and Adam suffers because of her “sin”. Rebecca, like Eve, must be responsible for the actions of the male.

As an ironical aside which highlights the arbitrary nature of language and its physical representation, the cover of the copy of My Beautiful Friend features an attractive naked woman reclining in a classic pose. Most of her form and face are shadowed, except for her right breast which is in full light and emphasised by her right arm stretched overhead. Her lower body is turned to the right with her right leg over her left thus hiding the lower part of her body. The irony lies in the fact that the “beautiful friend” referred to in the title is a male, Marcello Mansini, who represents a malign force throughout the text. One has to assume that the designer of the cover had not read the book, but it also says something about the way in which words are used; it is not usual to refer to men as “beautiful”, although in the context of the narrative it is very meaningful. Perhaps it also says something about the saleability of the nude female form.
Within Armanno's text there is an underlying sense of anger towards women demonstrated by the male characters, which is often exemplified by their violation or abuse, especially sexual. Gabriella is involved in incest with her grandfather (Firehead: 1999b), Linda and Chiara are both sexually used and psychologically abused by Marcello before he finally succumbs to death (My Beautiful Friend: 1999b), the two young women are used as prostitutes by the pimp who provides them with shelter (The Lonely Hunter: 1993). Yet at the same time Armanno's heroes stand outside this abuse and want to rescue those who are abused. Aaron fights with his ghostly nemesis for Chiara and Linda. Throughout the novels there is always an ideal image of woman being placed on a pedestal, especially as mother. Any deviation, as in the case of Rebecca, who does not want children and has failed to tell Aaron that she is pregnant, leads to self destruction.

There is an underlying message in the text of a reversal of archetypal gender roles. It is the Aaron who desires fatherhood and Rebecca who rejects motherhood. Rebecca's character can be read to represent the struggle for women caught within the confines of biological determinism. She wants to achieve in her chosen "profession" which will inevitably be affected negatively by her conceiving a child. But perhaps fatherhood for Aaron is another way of exerting power and control over Rebecca. As a mother she will lose the autonomy which appears to be part of her character.

One can see in the text elements of what Karen Horney's theory, amongst others, describes as the masculine fear of woman, especially of the womb as that which has been experienced yet remains the unknown and unknowable. As much as death
remains in the unknowable future the experience of birth lies in the forgotten past.

There is a dramatic scene in *My Beautiful Friend* which could be seen as an extended metaphor of birth and even the rebirth of Aaron. This is particularly so when Aaron becomes lost in the backstreets of the town:

The walls of those old buildings kept pushing closer, then the lane narrowed to just about nothing...All around it was black, and my feet slapped through shallow puddles. My shoulders bounced against the walls and I almost wanted to laugh. Those walls were still closing in. What if there was no exit...The walls became so tight that you couldn't have walked your bicycle through." (1999b:pp. 64/65)

The use of active verbs attributed to the walls – "kept pushing", "became so tight" – can be seen as analogous to the birth process and the narrow opening through which the infant must pass to be born. There is the hysterical response of Aaron – "I almost wanted to laugh." Aligned with his loss of freedom, "you couldn't", which can be read as a masculine fear of the unknown as epitomised by the womb.

In Armanno's more grounded work, *Firehead*, Gabriella is presented as a promiscuous fourteen year old (an Eve figure), prepared to trade her favours for sweets:

She used to sell her kisses for caramels; her lips went for long licks of licorice and her touch for tangerines and tutti-frutti. You could get her in the dark of your cardboard cubby-house or down into the cobwebby underworld of the dirt under her home, if you could find something sweet to offer her. (1999: p. 3)

Yet just a few pages later in the text Gabriella asks Sam: "Salvatore (Sam), you wouldn't want to make love if you weren't in love, would you?" These are not the words of a promiscuous young girl but appear to be almost a pleading that Sam will
not use her body, as some of the other boys have. Sam and Gabriella’s relationship is never consummated sexually as becomes clear later in the text. The nearest it comes to consummation is when he has sex with her sister who takes on the role of surrogate.

An inkling of what lies behind Gabriella’s acute sexual awareness is shown when her family, including her grandfather, visit Sam’s home. Bedlam arises when the grandfather exposes himself to Sam’s sister, Luisa, and says: “‘Mangia, signorina, mangia! Eat, little miss, eat!’” (1999b: p.23) Gabriella springs to her grandfather’s defence. Much later in the text the reader discovers that Gabriella is acting out the role of her late grandmother, Fortunata, and providing her grandfather, Enrico, who slides in and out of dementia with sexual satisfaction. As the text progresses the reader realises that this is not simply a predatory young woman but also a victim who is used, and allows herself to be used, to gratify male desire. Gabriella is depicted as powerless, a victim of her own beauty and of the men around her.

Armanno’s most recent work, The Volcano, present an even more stereotyped image of women. As Enrico nears the end of his life he returns to his village. He turns not to “That enclave for cardplayers and complainers” but “to the women’s hall that the voice at the end of my life calls me.” when he suffers what appears to be a heart attack. (2001: p. 669) He listens to the music and watches their dancing which “fills the air with memories and longings.” (2001: p. 670) He recalls his wasted life, which has included murder as a member of a gang in Australia, saying:

This is what draws me, this world of the feminine, the everlasting song, and the pain eating me up is the pain of men for life that we throw away, though we like to fool
ourselves we do our best to cherish it and keep it sacred.  
(2001: p. 67)

For Enrico women represent life and men the destruction of life. As he dies he feels an urge to return to the safety of the womb which the women epitomise.

Tim Winton can be seen as being even less friendly towards women in the manner in which he depicts his female characters. In fact he has been accused by some critics, especially those who interpret his work from a feminist viewpoint, as being misogynistic in his writing of his female characters. In The Riders Scully's wife and daughter always hover on the periphery as a catalyst for Scully. It is his wife's seeming betrayal which sets him on his quest to recover her as the "other" who will make him complete. The daughter finally fulfils the redemptive role. Again one can almost see in the comparison between the two female characters a re-enactment of the Eve/Mary stereotypes. One might question why Scully's daughter, instrumental in drawing him back to reality and thereby saving him from self-destruction, is given a boy's name, Billie? The woman who is instrumental in setting Scully up on his journey of self-discovery, his wife, never appears as a person, but is always "seen" through the eyes of others. Billie's voice is not heard until the end of the novel, despite the fact that she is dragged around Europe by a father who appears to care little for her needs, so caught up is he in self-pity. On the surface it could be claimed that the two female characters have no other role than to serve the needs of the male protagonist. However, the reality of the wife's disappearance is that she has refused to fulfil the expectations concomitant with the roles of wife and mother.
Jennifer Rutherford in her analysis of *The Riders* sees the characterisation of Scully's
wife, Jennifer, as "an agent of perverse desire; she desires the desire of the Other".
(2000b: p. 136) Her former art teacher, Alex, describes her as having "no artistic
instincts whatsoever", but he confesses to having kept her on as a pupil because of
"her most delectable pair of legs". (1995: p. 157) By contrast Scully, according to
Rutherford, is presented as "a contemporary version of everyman: the ordinary
Australian of the nationalist myth." (Rutherford, 2000b: p. 136) Alex She is a traitor
to Australian nationalism as she is drawn to European culture, unlike Scully who is
constantly recalling images of Australia: "one foot on the tarmac, one sniff of
eucalyptus and he'd be a goner." (Winton, 1995: p. 12) Yet eventually Scully also
rejects his homeland and chooses to settle in Ireland. It is not only in her attitude
towards Europe that Jennifer is drawn to *Otherness*. She has, the text suggests,
emasculated Scully in that she has failed to function according to normative
male/female roles. Scully looks after the children so that Jennifer can work and
write. She is, it appears, the breadwinner and the creator, both traditionally, within
Western culture, masculine pursuits. If one accepts Rutherford's analysis Winton's
work is strongly anti-feminist. The text could, on the other hand, be read as
challenging preconceived notions of gender specific roles. Why should not the father
take on the responsibility for the care of a child? Perhaps it was easier for the
woman to find a job and perhaps she did have a desire to be creative through her
writing.

Rutherford claims that the text depicts Scully as an ordinary Australian battler yet this
is not the impression I am left with after reading the book, not unless to be "an
ordinary Australian battler" entitles Scully to become lost in self-pity to the point that
he neglects his daughter's needs. However, the text is not always sympathetic to the character, Scully, as shall be discussed later in this chapter.

Whether or not it is because she is a female, Garner's female characters, it can be argued, are much more clearly defined. Frequently they have refused to conform to expectations of what is appropriate female behaviour and the texts demonstrate the effect this has on them. Janet, in Cosmo Cosmolino, is referred to as an "unwifely woman". (1992: p. 56) The paragraph which starts with these two words proceeds to present an image of Janet as a woman who has subverted the archetype of successful womanhood, a success which would have culminated in the ability to sustain a "good marriage". Within the text we are presented with a picture of a woman who has "no talent for intimacy" and who sees it as "knuckling under". In other words Janet was not prepared to become the "other" her husband expected her to be and she was left with the house, a physical reminder of her failed marriage. Like the previously mentioned female characters, Jennifer and Rebecca, Janet has refused to conform to the stereotypes or categories defined by others. It is this character who, perhaps most of all the women depicted in the texts under discussion, highlights the loneliness such a refusal entails. Because she has "failed" as a wife she has become alienated from others. With the breakdown of her marriage Janet had isolated herself from her friends and family. It was only when she allows others in the form of Maxine, Alby and Raymond to enter her life that she finds a new, if temporary, purpose for her existence - "Our minds are not hopeful, thought Janet; but our nerves are made of optimistic stuff." (1995: p. 221)
Whereas Armanno’s and Winton’s female characters, especially in *Cloudstreet*, achieve fulfilment by conforming to stereotypical roles, especially that of motherhood, Garner’s frequently challenge such archetypes, but not without cost. Perhaps the most notable exception is the female character, Athena, in *The Children’s Bach*, who returns to the marital home to resume her life with her husband. In his recent book, *On Belief*, Slavoj Žižek, discusses sacrifice as occurring “in order to dupe the Other, in order to convince him/it that the sacrificed one is still missing something, i.e. *jouissance*.” (2001: p. 73) He refers to “woman’s sacrifice” and asks if this does not also apply

For the woman adopting the role of remaining in shadow and sacrificing herself for her husband or family? Is this sacrifice not also false in the sense of serving to dupe the Other, of convincing it that, through the sacrifice, the woman is effectively desperately craving something that she lacks? (2001: p. 73)

One can read in the return of Athena to Dexter in *The Children’s Bach* elements of gratification involving the self-sacrifice of which Žižek writes. Athena returns not so much to satisfy her own needs but those of Dexter. One gains the impression that she is withholding part of herself from the relationship. Dexter is being *duped* into believing that Athena has sacrificed herself for him. She has subverted the power previously held by Dexter in their relationship.

This issue of alienation of the genders from each other is demonstrated in Janet’s reaction to Maxine’s request for an answer to “‘Can’t you tell me what I’m doing wrong?’” in her efforts to engage Raymond in her sexual fantasy. Janet replies: “‘You’re asking me for advice? About a man?’” she responds. Her solution highlights the difficulties the sexes have in communicating: “‘Don’t you read the
magnets? That’s where you find out what men are supposed to like?”

(Garner, 1992: pp. 163/4) Twice within the two pages Janet resorts to the use of
the written word to find solutions, the first being in the magazines and the second
when she asks Maxine to get the book which contains instructions on how to
massage. It is significant to note that in these same pages Janet refers to her life
as a hippy, given that reference has already been made to her difficulties in
dealing with intimacy.

In the second story of the trilogy of Cosmo Cosmolino, “A Vigil”, the fragility of
relationships is highlighted in the text, as is the ultimate isolation of the individual of
which Blanchot and Bataille and which has been discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis.
Again we have a woman who allows herself to be destroyed by her unfulfilled
expectations. Kim is waiting for her father and his non-appearance sees her drawn
into a vortex of self-destructive behaviour. One can see some similarity between the
characterisation of Kim, and of Scully in Winton’s The Riders. Both believe that in
finding the “other” for whom they wait or search, in Kim’s case, her father, and
Scully’s, his wife, they will be whole, but the waiting of the former and the searching
of the latter become self-destructive. Images have been created which have no
substance other than in their thoughts which are never verbalised or shared with
others. But both the discursive and the non-discursive are essential to the
understanding of metaphysical concepts such as love and desire. For both Kim and
Scully their needs are never verbalised but presented as thought patterns based on
idealised images and expectations of the “other”. Both believe the “other” to be
essential to their existence. The failure of her father to appear in Kim’s case, and his
wife to be encountered in Scully’s, is symbolic of the failure of language to define or
bring to reality the metaphysical. Despite the intensity of Kim’s and Scully’s needs and desires they are destined to be unrealised because they are obviously in conflict with the needs and desires of their “others”. Their sense of “incompleteness” remains. For Kim there is no daughter to rescue her. Not only has Raymond failed her but, perhaps more importantly, those who are traditionally expected to support her, her mother and father, have abandoned her.

**Garner’s writing of the male**

In an interview with Jennifer Ellison some six years prior to the publication of *Cosmo* *Cosmolino* Garner was questioned regarding the writing of her male characters. She claimed to be interested in developing her male characters and refers to “a very difficult relationship with my father” which she acknowledges would have been identified by “amateur psychologists” when reading her work. (Ellison, 1986: p. 142) Given Garner’s response to Ellison it would not be too presumptive to recognise this influence at work in the text in the relationship between Kim and her absent father. This difficulty with male figures, especially in the daughter’s relationship with the father, is also central to Garner’s story for film, *The Last Days of Chez Nous*. The major female protagonist embarks on a trip to try to establish a more positive relationship with her father. In her absence her husband and sister begin a sexual relationship. Throughout the text one can see images of Janet in that the Beth fails to act as the woman her husband seems to want. There is a reversal of stereotypical roles in that she is the one to advise her sister to have an abortion and it is her husband who would have loved the child (which is not his). It is JP, Beth’s French husband, who hovers over the bassinet of Sally and Angelo’s baby and who eventually cradles him to his chest and “murmurs to him in French”. That JP is
concerned about his image is shown within the instructions written into the play. Before picking him up: “He puts his face near the baby, sniffs at him, then with a glance behind him to make sure he’s not being observed.” (1992b: p. 54) This role reversal relating to parenthood is not unlike that portrayed in Armano’s *My Beautiful Friend.*

Raymond, in the second story of *Cosmo Cosmolino* is searching for an Other or a self, as personified in his brother, Alby, who he finally re-encounters in the final story of the trilogy. Alby is necessary to Raymond’s self-perception as he epitomises what it is he lacks. Unlike Scully, who fails to achieve his goal of rediscovering his wife, Raymond is successful. It is interesting to note that when they do meet it is not Raymond, but Alby who has the most need of brotherly support:

> ‘I’m broke,’ he said. ‘I haven’t got a brass razoo. The last cash I had went on hiring that truck. I’m throwing myself on Raymond’s mercy. He’s my brother — he’ll look out for me, even if he does secretly think I’m a ratbag and a hoon.’ (1992a: p. 205)

Within these words there is an expectation that family ties will overcome any feeling of negativity felt by Raymond towards Alby. The latter believes that by “throwing” himself on “Raymond’s mercy”, brother love will triumph as the use of the word “even” indicates. That Alby is transferring his own self-perception to his brother is shown by the word “secretly”. For it to be a secret means that Raymond has never voiced such an opinion and there is nothing in the text which might indicate that Raymond holds such an opinion. In fact it appears that Raymond is eagerly awaiting Alby’s arrival for, when asking Janet for use of a room, he tells her that: “Alby and I have got plans. Major plans.” It is Janet who remarks on Alby’s fecklessness ““
Alby, said Janet, 'was always big on plans. Don't hold your breath.'” Raymond said nothing but “looked offended.” (1992a: p. 74)

In the second part of Garner’s *Cosmo Cosmolino*, “The Vigil”, we again find a dysfunctional mother, Ursula. Yet it is not Ursula who is the ultimate cause of Kim’s self-destruction but the father for whom she waits fruitlessly. He was:

...supposed to come down from Queensland or wherever he lived to straighten her life out for her, give her some good advice, pay her uni fees and so on, or even take her back up there to live with him. (1992: p. 25)

We are told that he has set dates for his arrival but has constantly failed to arrive to “rescue” Kim. Her eventual reaction is to isolate herself from the world with Raymond being her only contact, and he is, we find later in the text, as unreliable as her father.

Garner’s texts, especially *The Children’s Bach, The Last Days of Chez Nous* and *Cosmo Cosmolino*, all seem to be predicated on gender based struggles in which neither sex ever fully understands the other. The males, whether Dexter, Richard or JP, can all be read as dangerous as they subvert the autonomy of the females in their lives. The main female protagonists all seem to be aware of the danger inherent in losing personal control in their relationships with males, whether they be friend, husband or father. Much of this loss of control is related to motherhood, the ultimate subjugation of self. Ultimately for Garner man remains the ultimate unknowable “Other”.

67
Winton’s women: A justifiable desertion?

We get an inkling of Scully’s relationship with his wife during his exchange with Marianne who he calls on for help when Billie contracts a fever. It appears that Marianne has befriended Jennifer and is protecting her from Scully. Whether it is real or not there is a suggestion that Scully is capable of violence. Marianne obviously believes that Scully is potentially violent as she makes frequent references to this during their interchange. Referring to the scarring on Billie’s face she asks “Have you done this to Billie?” To which he replies “Marianne, she was bitten by a dog - ” not finishing the sentence and refusing to explain where it happened. (1995: p. 279)

In the same scene he reinforces Marianne’s opinion of him:

He kicked a stool across the floor and watched it cartwheel into the wall, jolting shiny implements from their hooks in a horrible clatter. He saw the whiteness of his own fists and the way Marianne had edged into the corner and he thought of Mylie Doolan and the men who did this all the time. She was afraid and he felt the power.....Oh yes, he was capable of anything – he was no different. (1995: p. 281)

Marianne’s response is not unexpected:

‘I always believed you beat her, Scully,’ she said feebly and then with more defiance. ‘The working man out of his depth... the charming woman with ‘opos for something better. Did you beat her much, Scully? Were you rough in bed, were you ‘ard on her, Scully?’ ‘You are a basher, aren’t you, Scully? Tell me about your face, your very sad eye. It makes me think of beasts, you know.’ (1995: p. 281)

The reader is left wondering if Marianne’s impression is right or has been fed by input from Jennifer in an attempt to justify her desertion. Scully makes no attempt to
refute the accusations but verbally attacks Marianne's relationship with Jennifer claiming that Marianne used her for her own amusement: "...You played with her. You took her under your wing for fun, to see what would happen." To which Marianne replies with a confused metaphor "You were like a stone on 'er, Scully, an anchor on her neck, and now you blame me - " (1995: p. 281)

Whether or not Scully is capable of violence, his appearance gives that impression. That his potential for violence is not restricted to women has already been indicated earlier in the text when he goes to a mutual friend, Arthur, seeking to discover Jennifer’s whereabouts. Everybody, including Arthur, leaves the bar fearing that a fistfight is about to occur. Scully seems puzzled by the reactions of others to him: "It shocked Scully to see the fear come to people’s faces, their instant expectation that he would do them harm. He felt stupid, misunderstood." (1995: p. 136) One gains an inkling of possible reasons for Jennifer leaving Scully. Was she also fearful of his potential for or even actual violence? What is it about Jennifer which elicits so much loyalty that others appear to feel the need to protect her from Scully? For whatever reasons Scully’s impression of himself and others of him are dichotomous.

Critic Helen Parr, discussing Cloudstreet with Winton, proposes the possibility of a bias on Winton’s part towards women as they “are most often portrayed as failing in what is the ultimate emotional responsibility”. (1999: p. 38) It is perhaps wrong to assume that Winton, the author, holds the bias which appears in his texts. One can only claim that the texts appear to be less sympathetic towards his female characters than to his male protagonists. Again Winton has argued that in fact his female characters are much stronger than are the male, yet frequently the text can be read as representing this strength as negative, in that the women are dominating. In The
Riders, for example, Jennifer is depicted as abandoning her husband but more importantly, her child. Scully’s sin of neglect for the needs of his abandoned daughter because of his self-centredness is treated more sympathetically and he is redeemed in the closing chapters of the novel. As he stands watching and smelling the riders and their horses:

He recognised the blood and shit and fear of them, and he looked with them into the dead heart of the castle keep...He knew them now and he saw that they would be here every night seen and unseen, patient, dogged faithful in all weathers and all worlds, waiting for something promised, something that was plainly their due, but he knew that as surely as he felt Billie tugging on him, curling her fingers in his and pulling him easily away, that he would not be among them and must never be, in life or death. (1995: p. 377)

Scully has finally come to the realisation that not only is his search for Jennifer futile it has the potential to destroy him. The ghostly “Riders” represent the pointlessness of allowing the search for the unattainable to dominate one’s life. Jennifer is never allowed to achieve redemption if one reads her through Scully’s, or even Billie’s eyes. She remains the deserting wife and abandoning mother yet underlying the text is the impression that she is also on a quest to find some purpose to her life which excludes these roles.

The writing of mothers

When discussing the gendered other in the texts it is impossible to ignore the manner in which the gender specific role of the mother is written. Luce Irigaray, especially in This Sex Which Is Not One (1985), claims that the cult that has developed around motherhood has led to the negation of feminine desire. Woman as a desiring subject becomes secondary to woman as mother. Yet woman as mother is also to be feared
according to Freudian psychoanalytical theories. Freud's adherents focus on the castration complex of his form of psychoanalysis which has led inevitably to the mother being seen as negative, that which must be rejected or surpassed for the child to become a knowing subject. It is as if motherhood contradicts mature male sexuality, hence the concept of Mary, the Virgin mother is needed to counteract that of Eve the seductress.

It is particularly in Armanno's work that this becomes evident and a conflict thematically as well as ideologically in the text. His texts reflect stereotypical Italian attitudes towards women and children with the cult of the mother dominating. Both in Firehead and My Beautiful Friend the role of the mother takes on a spiritual dimension. To choose to reject this role, as does Rebecca in My Beautiful Friend becomes synonymous with evil. Where faith and belief in God have ceased to provide answers it is "hope", epitomised in children, which provides a sense of purpose in Aaron's life. As Aaron says "hope is the one true virtue we are blessed to possess" and it is in the child that hope rests. (1995/9: p. 323) Therefore to reject motherhood is to lose "hope". Rebecca fails to sublimate her own need to be a desiring subject to the role expected of her by Aaron, that is to fulfil the role of mother. It is left to Linda to perform the latter function.

Like Aaron, Sam (Firehead) experiences a period of despair during which his life lacks purpose. Again, as does Aaron, Sam finds his sense of purpose within his family, especially with his children. In Firehead Sam's disillusionment following his meeting with his lost love, Gabriella sees him stripped of hope. He returns to his deserted house and commences a frenetic clearing up of the mess left by his family
I started to clean and wipe down the counters, and wrap things in plastic for the refrigerator, and I wanted to lean with my hands against the wall and ask some spirit out of Heaven to come save me from the loneliness eating me alive. (1999: p. 398)

It as if he is cleansing his own psyche of the need for Gabriella and wrapping up and storing his past which has stunted his ability to truly relate to his wife and children. It is the sight of his daughter, Lara, and her delight in building a sandcastle on the edge of the water that restores his equanimity. Once he realises that the child he sees from a distance is his daughter his “heart lifted” and he felt pity for Gabriella:

She wanted belonging, or at least a road that might lead her to that particular corner of Heaven. It didn’t make me feel guilty that I’d found a way to beat her there.

I ran further down the windy beach to where the last sunlight of the day was still bright in the silver waves, cracking the beautiful black and gold heads of my wife and children into what they are, a multitude. (1999: p. 399/400)

Sam’s “Heaven” is achieved through his wife and children and his “belonging” to them and they to him. There is much of the patriarchal in this in that Sam is identifying his wife and especially his children as the “Other” who reflects and proliferates self.

Winton’s Cloudstreet approaches the issue of motherhood from a different, less idealised perspective than that of Armanno. In saving Fish’s life Oriel lost her son both emotionally and mentally, being left with the shell which is his physical body. She has to deal with his rejection of her, his mother, who he sees as pulling him back from that which he desires. Metaphorically Oriel’s refusal to let Fish go can be read as synonymous with the inevitability of a mother struggling to let go of her child once
he/she reaches adulthood. Oriel's need to isolate herself by moving out of the home into a tent reflects her biblical beliefs, a need to serve her penance for the "sin" of interfering in her son's life by denying him the death destined for him.

Oriel's resuscitation of Fish in Cloudstreet is depicted in a negative light and she is left to feel the guilt surrounding her natural reaction to save her child. That she questions her mothering is demonstrated in the scene when she and Quick go prawning together. As she talks with Quick she is recalling in her mind her childhood family and the tragedies they experienced. Inevitably this thought leads to recollections of Fish's drowning, "And she could feel Fish's chest under her fists as she beat life into him with the sky kiting over her, silent as death". (1991: p. 268) Immediately after this she asks Quick "Have I been a crook mother?" She tells Quick he is running away because he feels guilty that he is a "survivor" and that he thinks that it should have been him, not Fish, that it happened to. That Oriel believes that she brought Fish back from the dead is demonstrated by the words she addresses to Quick "You think it's your fault he died." (1991: p. 268) If Quick feels responsible for Fish's drowning Oriel feels as responsible for his rebirth as she was for his original birth. To find some meaning for what has happened to her family she must withdraw into the "desert" to seek her answers. Frequently through this interaction Quick acknowledges that Oriel is the strong one in the family who has all the answers. Like many strong people who are exposed to extreme stress she has to withdraw from its source, in Oriel's case, her family.

In her critical discussion of Garner's works Kerryn Goldsworthy says

...desire as a mode of female agency is on a direct collision course with the thing in which it so often results,
the family – an inescapable patriarchal institution (the very word patriarchy is grounded in the model of the family) – and when that collision comes a woman who values her autonomy has to choose, as Athena must in The Children’s Bach between two kinds of sadness. The other is that you cannot make a family without sex, but once you have made a family, sex is the thing most likely to break it up…(1996: pp. 28/9)

The underlying premise of the above is that female desire and the “sacredness” of the family are on a collision course. Therefore if one accepts this proposal it follows that female desire and motherhood are opponents in claiming sacredness.

In referring to the acceptance of the role of “housewife”, a role with direct links to motherhood, Daly argued in Beyond God the Father that: “Submerged in such a role, she cannot achieve a breakthrough to creativity” she argues. (1985: p. 23) One needs to remember that Daly first wrote her words in 1973 at the height of the women’s liberation movements and Goldsworthy wrote hers over twenty years later. There is a link, I submit, between creativity and sacredness.

When one examines the texts under discussion the loss of desirability is frequently hinted at. Rebecca (My Beautiful Friend) resists motherhood as she strives to establish a career, as does Jennifer (The Riders) as she follows her desire to become an artist. Ironically both women are trapped by biological determinism, become pregnant outside of their marriages.

Like Athena, Janet in Cosmo Cosmolino has made a choice between “two kinds of sadness” by choosing to have a tubal ligation in her thirties. To ensure her sexual
freedom Janet must deny herself the opportunity to give birth. Maxine is the more transgressive female character in that she separates her urge to procreate from the orthodox structure of the patriarchal family, using Raymond merely as the tool to satisfy her desire to give birth. The male, whether he is perceived to be an angelic visitation or merely human, is relegated to the role of provider of the means to achieve Maxine's ends.

Mothers must give, in Irigaray's words, the "gift of language", so that:

...to talk to one's mother as a woman presupposes giving up the idea of maternal omnipotence... To accept that one's mother is not all protective, the ultimate amorous recourse, the refuge against abandonment. Which then allows us to establish with her ties of reciprocity, where she could eventually, also feel herself to be my daughter.⁴

What the texts under discussion highlight is an inability to communicate both within and across genders. In Cloudstreet Oriel withdraws from her roles of wife and mother in order to rediscover herself. However, it is only when Rose becomes a mother that she seems to be destined to take over Oriel's role in holding the families together. In so doing she loses her identity as a desiring woman, her focus shifting to the maintenance of both the Pickle and Lamb families. Oriel and now Rose have become Irigaray's omnipotent mother.

Kim and her mother, Ursula, in "A Vigil", appear to have no strong relationship with each other, and it is from her father that Kim expects to have her emotional needs met. The substitute she chooses in his absence is almost as feckless as her father. One might question why she chooses such a person as Raymond and allows herself to

be used as an object for his sexual gratification. It is only after Kim’s death that
Ursula acts as might be expected of the stereotypical mother. (Garner, 1992)

Sam is drawn back to Irina in Firehead not so much to Irina as a sexual subject but to
Irina as the mother of his children. He has already experienced sexual satisfaction in
his fantasies and images of Gabriella and physically with her surrogate, her sister,
Sandy. After Sam and Sandy have intercourse and he questions her about her sister’s
whereabouts it is not to Irina, his wife, that Sandy refers but to the institution of
marriage and his children when she asks: “Aren’t you married? Don’t you have
three children?” (Armanno, 1999: p. 326) For Aaron, Irina, as an individual, has
become lost in her roles of wife and mother.

What Raymond fails to recognise in Kim’s words is that she is not only talking about
the children in the playground but about the hurt she is experiencing. Immediately
after this they have sex and as Raymond wakes and looks at the sleeping Kim he
ironically thinks: “She was only a small girl, with small bones, and her head too he
had always thought of as small.” (1992: p. 26) The patriarchal is reasserted here,
these thoughts depict her as childlike. It is in the same paragraph we find this
attitude shifting rapidly towards disgust. To Raymond she becomes an object,
merely a receptacle to satisfy his sexual needs and he becomes totally misogynistic is
his attitude not only towards Kim, but to women in general:

He saw there was nothing special about her, that he was
superior to her after all. She was damaged goods. The
pills were not to blame. The pills were doing him a
favour by reminding him of something he had always
known was in her, in any girl that age who would do what
she did with him, and you could tell by the moron face
they made when they were doing it, all vague and
grinning. (1992: pp27/8)
The mother, Ursula, supplies the pills which keep Kim in a somnambulistic state during which Raymond uses her sexually. He appears to disassociate himself from any responsibility for her downhill slide even to the point of resisting attending her funeral. It is Ursula who eventually forces him to attend the cremation where he ultimately has to face his own demons.

**The writing of gender in *Dirt Music***

Elizabeth Grosz claims that Lacan takes Freud’s interpretation of the unconscious and of sexuality and “reworks both through his understanding of the *symbolic order*”. *(Grosz, 1989, pp. 19-20)* Language as the ultimate symbol is the prerogative of the masculine in this theoretical context. This is very apparent in Winton’s most recent work, *Dirt Music* (2001) Luther Fox’s sexuality is written as ambivalent, even feminine. In contrast Jim does not wish to follow in his father’s footsteps and aims to be a better person yet he does so in archetypal male fashion. He will attempt to improve within the confines of a career which is that set up by his father, and he cannot move beyond this. Georgie describes Lu as “a man trying to live like a man, by force of will. But it was against his nature.” She compares her own need to maintain control which she sees as mainly but not “exclusively a male thing”, whereas she attributes feminine characteristics to Lu, who “was pure, hot feeling”, as he cries before they make love. The feminine aspect of his nature “had something to

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5 Lacan argued that “sexuality is produced and restrained by means of language” and that language is regulated by the *symbolic order*. He referred to the “Law of the Father” which he claimed controls language and focuses on the phallus as a *signifier*. Whilst Freud used the term *penis envy* Lacan’s work also depends heavily on woman’s lack of a penis, and, as Grosz describes it “becomes the (passive) object of male desire. She becomes the phallus, the object of his desire, by becoming desirable for him, confirming that he has what she lacks (and thus wants).” *(Grosz, 1989: pp. 20-21)* Therefore for Lacan, and Kristeva, the *symbolic order* (language) is inherently masculine. Kristeva’s use of these Lacanian concepts has been discussed in the chapter on Gender.
do with music”. The language used seems to contrast the emotionality of music with the “calculation” epitomised by males such as Jim Buckridge and Red. (2001: p. 415) We have already been told that “Jim was a stickler for hard work, for education and upright behaviour”. (2001: p. 38) The text seems to be saying that nature, whether it be animals or the physical environment, are more closely linked to the feminine than the masculine. When Fox suffers from a fever he sees Georgie in the trees, which even become her: “He touches her, breathes in her nutty odour, shudders as his hip brushes hers. He presses his brow against her bark and puts one clear eye against her”. (2001: p. 403)

The naming of the characters in Dirt Music highlights the ambivalent sexuality of Luther and Georgie. The former is referred to most often as “Lu” a name which could be either applied to a male or a female. The latter, of course, is androgynous. On the other hand “Jim Buckridge” leaves one in no doubt as to the protagonist’s gender.

Lu as Georgie’s “Other” appears to satisfy the need for difference in their sexual encounters. Georgie has grown up apparently uncomfortable with what she perceives as the stereotypical attributes of being female:

A bit of grit was useful. As a girl she’s had it in spades, hadn’t she? She despised her sisters’ girly meekness, the cunning, desperate way they strove for cuteness out of fear of losing favour. They were strategically pliable. (2001: p. 41)

The picture painted by Georgie’s description of her sisters is totally negative. The use of words such as “grit” and “spades” to describe her have a masculine, solid ring to them. She gets down to business. She gets her hands dirty. The use of words
such as “despised”, “meekness”, “cunning”, “desperate” on the other hand are
demigrating and indicate a large degree of passivity on the part of the women to whom
they are applied. The last line of the above quote would seem to contradict the image
of women as manipulative as demonstrated in the previous sentence. Use of the
word “pliable” implies that women are able to be manipulated and moulded as one
would a piece of clay.

On another level naming is significant in Winton’s work, especially the use of Fox as
a surname. Luther Fox’s actions throughout the story are like those of the animal
after which he is named. He acts, instinctually and not in the daylight, hiding from
others as does a fox from humans. His poaching of the fish is analogous to the
stealing of the farm animals such as hens by a fox. This animal imagery is reflected in
the final hunt for Fox, with words such as “howls” and “bellows” to describe Lu’s
attempts to attract the others’ attention as they fly away from the island after giving
up on their attempts to make contact with him. (2001: p. 456)

In the texts under discussion the quality of hope which religious belief can be seen to
offer and which focuses on an omnipresent and omniscient God has been replaced by
a gendered humanism. Without God the concept of an afterlife in which Heaven is
the reward ceases to have meaning, so that union with another human being becomes
the goal. As Enrico says in Armanno’s The Volcano:

When people died they went into the ground where there were no angels or saints or devils, and the proof of this
was in the piss and shit of the living. In the perfectly
white bones they might exhume from the cemetery. In
the everyday evil that kept everyone in line. (2001:p.14)
This bleak view of human nature contrasts with Enrico's efforts as he grows old to make retribution for the evil he performed by serving and helping others. One might question whether this reformation was, in part at least, a return to the religious superstitions of his childhood.

Winton, Garner and Armanno texts all emphasise the need for others, while also accepting the fragility of relationships. In all of the works, children, the products of union between the sexes, are portrayed as symbols of hope and are frequently salvific. On the other hand, gender alienation, and the failure of union, is often represented in these novelists' representation of the need for the Other. Although humanism – or a secularised view of the sacred - runs through each of the texts, it can be argued that it is a post-modern humanism which focuses on the radical isolation of the individual even within a family or community. There is an acknowledgement in the texts of the ephemeral nature of relationships and their frequent failure to satisfy the needs of the Other. But there is a sense that imperfect though relationships might be there is nothing else.
Chapter 4

FINDING A LANGUAGE

"Symbols awaken individual experience and transmute it into a spiritual act, into metaphysical comprehension of the world." (Eliade, 1959: p. 211)

In 1992, during a public interview between herself and Helen Garner, Kerryn Goldsworthy quotes Garner in reference to *Cosmo Cosmolino*:

> But if you’re wanting to talk about things like redemption, and the soul...you’ve got to find a new way to write. I mean, new to yourself...Things that made me feel awestruck when I thought about them, I had to find a language for them...” (Goldsworthy, 1996: p. 63)

This chapter takes up the issue of a “new” language and analyses ways in which not only Garner, but also Armanno and Winton “find a language” to convey those experiences which could be categorised as metaphysical, transcendent or numinous.

In approaching Winton’s, Garner’s and Armanno’s works I am doing so from a post-deconstructive, Derridean point of view and the post-Saussurean understanding of the arbitrary relationship which exists between signifiers and signifieds. In dealing with the metaphysical and transcendent I seek to be aware of the open-endedness of these concepts and the way in which the language used to describe such concepts is of necessity fluid. By this I mean it is ultimately shaped by the ideologies and the concomitant cultural experiences of both the author and the reader. For the purposes of this thesis I am using the term “cultural” in the context of socialisation, gender, race and belief. I am further arguing that whether one is a writer, critic or reader, one cannot escape one’s own cultural experiences and formation when approaching a text.

In fact, it is preferable to embrace such subjectivity, it can be argued.
Metaphor and symbol - a conduit to the metaphysical

Metaphorical language which employs symbols and images is, I am arguing, the way in which language always deals with the transcendent and metaphysical, as discourse is the only way in which thoughts of what is basically unknowable and unproveable (therefore at the same time, it could be argued, not capable of being disproved) can be communicated. The quote attributed to St. Irenaeus in Chapter 1, that "The glory of God is man fully alive", is a good example of metaphors at work. In deconstructing this statement a number of issues are raised. Firstly the use of the term "man" leads one to question the gendered nature of the statement. Secondly if one looks to the era in which this statement was made it is possible to see it as not applying to women, who were frequently seen as corporeal and therefore incapable of being likened to God. Therefore if the second point is what was intended by Irenaeus we are left with a definition of God as masculine and therefore as a being who man alone is capable of reflecting. Taking the argument even further, is there one type of man who would best reflect the image of God? In this metaphor we are faced with the arbitrariness of language. What the intent of the author's words was we shall never know, especially as they are distanced from us by the passage of time and shifts in cultures.

In addressing issues such as "God" or an otherness outside of human knowledge and understanding emotions such as love, desire, hate which may result in physical manifestations but which are intrinsically non-physical in nature, must be included. But metaphors, symbols and images are also the way in which language impossibly attempts to come to terms with "the human condition" and "meaning of life and death". Metaphorical language is, as Ricouer would say, language in action and therefore fundamental to human language. Nancy Partner, in analysing The Book of
Margery Kempe also makes a similar proposition regarding spiritual language when she writes "any language which claims an ultimate supernatural referent is metaphor by definition". (Partner, 1991, p.37) There is a difference, however, between Partner and Ricouer's attitude towards metaphor. The former sees metaphor as essential to reaching an understanding of the "supernatural" while the latter sees all language as essentially metaphorical even that which might be described as physical. Obviously when attempting to discourse about "God", or in Ricouer's words "the totally other", we are faced with the ultimate need to use human understanding and language as a tool "through which, by means of which, we express ourselves and express things". (Ricouer, 1978: p. 112). A deconstructively purist approach would of course deny that it is 'understanding' which is reached, but rather another set of signifiers, another step in the textual process. As stated in Chapter 1 it is this approach I am taking. Language is inadequate to achieving a real understanding of the numinous, transcendent and metaphysical. It is inevitably a construct of the society and cultural within which it has been/is developed and used. The texts which are under discussion highlight the arbitrary nature of language when dealing with the non-physical and that which cannot be scientifically measured.

Winton, Garner and Armanno, in their fictional texts are exploring possibilities using their language skills, not presenting facts or things which can be scientifically proven. In Winton's own words in an interview with Beth Watzke and quoted in Bennett:

What passed for realism denied me a whole wedge of material - the numinous. Surrealism faked it in order to escape restraint...I wanted to include both realms because I think this is true realism: the supernatural and the natural accepted as one thing, as inclusive. (Bennett: 1993: p. 63)
Obviously the three writers being discussed in this thesis are coming from a space in which possibilities beyond human understanding are posited. A sense of wonder emanates from their texts whether they are talking about pigs or women who fly off roofs. All of the texts focus on the immeasurables such as love, desire, community, families, hope, and frequently materialism is seen as destructive to these. On the other hand the physicality of the natural world, especially in Winton’s work, is very important. The need for possessions, whether they be Rose’s new house, Aaron’s financial security or the money saved by Alby and Raymond, must be put aside so that the metaphysical and transcendent might be experienced/premised within the physicality of families and/or communities.

In the context of writing God, both the Old and New Testaments are redolent with metaphors, symbols and images to describe humanity’s relationship with that God. The parables in the New Testament are examples of humans’ attempts to make understandable that which is beyond understanding through the use of metaphorical language. How then do these contemporary Australian authors write the metaphysical?

In the quote at the beginning of this chapter Garner is involved in non-materialist discourse, using terms such as “redemption” and “soul” as if such terms are viable. For critic Jenna Mead, who describes herself in her review of Garner as a non-Christian, such words hold no meaning, whereas they are central to the psychoanalytical and French feminist approach taken by another critic, Philippa Kelly. The difference between Kelly’s and Mead’s reactions to *Cosmo Cosmolino* is
an example of the dilemma referred to by Ricouer when he talks about "The
Language of Faith":

...we are in a cultural epoch when we meet people who
do not reject the faith by an explicit decision, but who do
not encounter the subject matter at all; who ask instead,
"what does it mean to me when one speaks of being lost
or being saved?" (1978: p. 223)

For Mead, it would appear, the basic ontological premise that there is a being which
has been named as God, or Allah, or Yahweh, is untrue, therefore for Garner (and
similarly Winton and Armanno) to attempt to write the spiritual is pointless. As
Mead says:

I have a problem with this whole enterprise. I am not a
Christian. I'm not able to make the leap of faith or to be
convinced by the trajectory of reason that this god exists.
This means that Garner's reading of the crisis of modern
life as a failure of belief does not persuade me. But I also
think that it's important not to dismiss a book because
you disagree with one of its premises. (1992: p. 67)

In acknowledging her difficulties with the theological/spiritual aspects of the novel
Mead moves into an arena in which she is more comfortable, one that is "looking at
the language of this book not as theology" but as a chronicle of "our world". (1992:
p. 67) I believe that in doing this Mead does not do justice to Garner's work, as the
author's manifest aim was to write about the "numinous" or spiritual aspects of life as
inseparable from material and physical existence. If one is writing about the oneness
of body and soul can the resultant work be criticised purely from either a physical or
spiritual viewpoint?

Kelly, on the other hand, may or may not believe in the existence of a superior being
which has been named God, but whereas Mead has approached the text from a
rationalist angle, the former’s psychoanalytical analysis at least leaves the options open. It should also be noted that Garner does not so much emphaesise the existence of “God” as explore the transcendent potential of the human individual.

Critics Kerryn Goldsworthy and Veronica Brady both make a rebuttal of Mead’s criticism of Helen Garner’s *Cosmo Cosmolino* and the author’s move into the metaphysical. Goldsworthy claims that perhaps “Garner has committed an act unpardonable to some, of writing to get and give pleasure”. (1996: p. 63) It is questionable to what extent “pleasure” and “the metaphysical” can be seen as linked in this text as it is difficult to relate the emphasis on death with “pleasure. Perhaps a better description is that it is a text which explores areas of life which lie beyond the physical and immediately visible. The “pleasure” lies more in the language Garner uses to describe the metaphysical. Angels appear, a woman floats off from a roof. The “some” in Goldsworthy’s quote is aimed directly at critics such as Mead. One might question whether it is the religious element in Garner’s work with which Mead finds difficulty or is she saying that all post-modern writing must focus on humanity as material, producing machines (Deleuze), completely discounting the relevance of immeasurable human emotions and needs such as love, sexuality, security and belonging which drive individuals to set up communities and families.

As most of the critics of her work, including Brady, point out, Garner deals frequently within her texts with the ultimate human experience, death. Even Blanchot, an avowed atheist, sees such needs as part of our humanity, when he talks of “the principle of incompleteness” and the relationship between death and “community” which has been discussed in Chapter 1. (1988: p. xiii) The problem is that such
communities, or as Blanchot describes it “the possibility of community”, can never meet what are essentially individualistic needs. The transitory nature of community can be found in Alby’s words to Ray “‘Look,’ said Alby. ‘Janet will give us a bed for a while – just till we scrape up some more dough.’” (1992: 218) At the end of the text we find Alby thinking “We’re not finished yet” and “Our minds are not hopeful, thought Janet; but our nerves are made of optimistic stuff.” (1992: p. 221) The use of the words “for a while” emphasises the transitory nature of the arrangement the three have entered into. The application of the word “nerves” by Janet to describe optimism, in other words hope, is unusual but indicates a distinction between the physical and metaphysical. Yet we know that “nerves” can be seen and be physically hurt or damaged. It is as if Janet is unable to identify her feeling, emotional self with a spiritual existence. A more spiritually, inclined protagonist might be more likely to use words such as soul or spirit.

The concept of “hope” as referred to by Janet is spoken about in a similar fashion by Tim Winton in an interview with Beth Watzke. Winton claimed: “My outlook is optimistic. I’m gloomy about people’s inherent nature but hopeful about their potential.” (1991: p. 98)

Veronica Brady, at the end of her notes, talks of Garner’s purchase of a New Testament after the end of her second marriage in 1985. She also attended sessions with a Jungian psychotherapist for the analysis of her dreams which she says she experienced freely. Brady also refers to Garner’s 1992 interview with Craig McGregor in which she claimed to have been visited on several occasions by a “terrible and mysterious Being...I felt it was a huge, quiet challenge”. One can see
the character of Alby in Garner’s response to McGregor’s question regarding her relationship with Christianity: “I don’t want to get stuck inside that Christian imagery either. But there’s got to be a way to write that numinous stuff”. (Brady, 1994)

Where is metaphysical woman?

Feminist writers such as Mary Daly (whose work inspired the title for this thesis) have long argued that language does affect our perceptions of the world and of the roles played out by the sexes. It is not merely the difference in genitalia that defines sexuality but also the roles and languages we ascribe on the basis of gender, which is the focus of my thesis. Not only do we use words to define biological differences but also to establish biology in the first place. But do words ultimately decide our fate? Unlike French which employs two quite distinct words to describe the two sexes, English does not. L’homme and la femme do not have any linguistic connection whereas woman/man and female/male do. The close interrelationship between the English words can be seen as reinforcing gender stereotypes which place the man/male in the superior position and the woman/female in the role of adjunct to the man/male. As one of the two Old Testament narratives describes Creation, God created Eve from Adam’s rib, almost as an afterthought, so that Adam would have a mate. Yet one cannot claim that, in practice, the French are any less or more sexist in their attitudes than are the English because the former use words which are not interdependent as descriptors.

There is irony in Ricouer’s words that, “In a certain way it is the destiny of man to dominate over all things and perhaps even over his life”. (1978: p. 226) In using
the generic term “man” Ricouer has highlighted the dilemma facing the writing of the female in metaphysical or ontological contexts. If, as Ricouer claims, language evolves through metaphor and language, described by Kristeva and Irigaray (as well as many others) as phallocentric, God, the ultimate other, must inevitably be metaphorically described in masculine terms. God therefore becomes “Father”, automatically relegating woman as inferior in a spiritual sense.

Garner’s *Cosmo Cosmolino* is transgressive in that her use of metaphors and images invert the traditional roles of woman in both a religious and physical sense. This is particularly so in the portrayal of Maxine. The role of mother is celebrated in the context of masculine pursuits. Maxine is the carpenter and the initiator of sex with Ray. She has power over him. In many senses Maxine is the most powerful and subversive character within the text as she operates outside of the norms of society without feeling any real sense of guilt. She operates purely through experiences with little thought for her material existence.

**Armanno and Winton’s “European” novels**

For Venero Armanno and Tim Winton two novels stand out because of the shift from their usual setting of Australia to that of Europe and for the effect this has on the language used. In so doing they have also employed a genre outside of that encountered in works such as *Cloudstreet* and *Firehead*. Armanno’s *My Beautiful Friend* and Winton’s *The Riders* are both set in Europe, the former in Geneva and the latter over various European countries, including Ireland, Greece, France and Holland. Works such as *Cloudstreet* and *Firehead* are situated within Australia and places with which both writers are familiar, the former in West Australia and the
latter in Brisbane. Both of these works could be described as domesticated, as they are focused on traditional images of families and family issues. It is interesting to note that both authors moved from a familiar to an unfamiliar setting to write what can be described as gothic novels which dwell heavily on the struggle between the negative and positive sides of the protagonists’ characters. In doing so both novels have a strong emphasis on psychology and the development of human nature. The shift in setting indicates the necessity to move outside of the familiar for both Winton and Aramanno to explore a genre which is not usual for either of them.

In his gothic novel, *My Beautiful Friend*, Aramanno uses the imagery of mirrors and glass to address the metaphysical. This novel picks up on Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, in that the image the major protagonist, Aaron, sees in the mirror is not his physical self but his alter-ego. His battle with the evil Mansini is as much a battle with his own inner self as with this other who personifies the negative aspects of his nature. It is as if Mansini has become the scapegoat for the negative side of Aaron’s nature. Mansini’s death symbolises the destruction of the negative aspects of Aaron’s personality, including his tendency to self-destruction on both a personal and interpersonal level.

It is in this same novel that the reader is caught up in Barthes’ concept of the “death of the author” and issues of socialisation and enculturation. The scene, already discussed in Chapter 3, in which the major protagonist moves through a funnel-like street, which brings him to the edge of panic before he emerges to the light and an unknown world can be read as a metaphor for birth and the need for Aaron to be reborn.
This labyrinth image is used also by Winton in *The Riders* when Scully and Billie visit Greece. As Mazer describes it “the half-deserted streets of the labyrinth-like coast town stand for his life”. (1999: p. 105) For both Scully and Aaron there is the fear of moving into the unseen, the unknown and both the protagonists and the readers are lead to expect that something negative is about to happen. The effect is not unlike the manner in which music is used in films to prepare the mind of the movie-goer for some catastrophe. For Aaron and Scully the labyrinth symbolises their fears that they are lost and have lost any sense of direction in their lives.

Armanno in fact uses music for a similar purpose. It becomes a seductive symbol for Aaron, constantly enticing him and leading him to succumb to that which he could be if he is prepared to “sell his soul” and follow Mansini in *My Beautiful Friend*. Music is also used by Armanno in *The Volcano* when Emilio is drawn by the singing and the “music, rhythmic music” which accompanies the dancing women. (2001: p. 670)

This whole passage appears to emphasise the rhythmic nature of birth, life and death to which women, according to Emilio, hold the key.

Armanno subverts the “ugly sister” syndrome frequently found in fairy tales in which the evil and ugliness become linked. Rebecca, Aaron’s wife, and Mansini are “beautiful” yet both are evil personified. *My Beautiful Friend* not only subverts such archetypes it also subverts religion, especially on an organised level, for it is Rebecca who wants to enter the Church and who still prays formally who is seduced by Mansini and who is responsible for the seduction and horrific murder of her American lover. Rebecca is also more materialistic than is Aaron; she comes from a
wealthy family and her aim is to set up her own business. We are, it would seem, being presented with a link between materialism and the preparedness to “sell” one’s soul.

This criticism of Rebecca and Mansini does not mean that Aaron remains blameless in *My Beautiful Friend*. One finds it difficult in the early chapters of the book to have much sympathy for him. His attitude towards his wife and others with whom he interacts is represented as appalling, driving the reader to feel some pity for these others. He wallows in self-pity, which makes him a very boring companion as is pointed out by Amy, the wife of the American who becomes Rebecca’s lover and eventually is murdered by her. Amy, who is apparently suffering from a form of dementia, calls him “a bitter young man” after his outburst over dinner. (1999: p. 54) It is only when he loses his material possessions and his wife and makes his solo journey that Aaron comes to a level of self-acceptance rather than the self-pity that has dictated his personality. Although there are others who provide him with support along the way ultimately he must make the journey alone. It is when he can put the needs of others such as Chiara and Linda before his own that he becomes “free” and his alter-ego, as represented by Mansini, is quashed.

In *The Riders* Winton, as does Armanno, uses ghostlike images to represent the negative side of his major protagonist’s nature. In the final chapter Billie recognises her father in “The Riders”:

He looked like one of them, she saw it now – it was like swallowing a stone to realise it. With his wild hair and arms, his big eyes streaming in the firelight turned up like theirs to the empty windows of the castle, he was almost one of them. Waiting, battered, disappointed. (1995: p. 377)
Scully also recognises himself in “The Riders”, who night after night wait for
“something promised, something that was plainly their due.” (1995: p. 377) It is at
this point that Scully finally realises that his search for Jennifer is not only pointless
but ultimately self-destructive.

There is an interesting contrast on the closing page where Scully and “The Riders”
look up at the desolation which is symbolised by the castle. The castle is depicted as
having “a dead heart” and being “bound east and west by snow-ghosted ash trees”.
The cold imagery of words such as “dead” and “snow ghosted” compares starkly with
the warmth portrayed by Billie “curling her fingers in his” and drawing him back “in
the shadow of their house”. Scully’s return to the world is signified by the fact that
his “feet began to hurt”. An acknowledgement on his part that to feel pain is part of

Because of their settings and the air of brooding which permeates both novels they
slot into the gothic genre. The reader is being exposed to dark forces which symbolise
the state of mind of Scully and Aaron. Like Armanno does with My Beautiful Friend
Winton has moved into foreign territory in setting his novel in Europe. For both
authors this movement becomes a symbol for the protagonists’ sense of isolation and
desolation. It is interesting to note that both authors moved out of their usual
Australian settings to write gothic fiction. Both works are very much rooted in
psychoanalytic approaches to the search for identity and meaning.
Symbols and metaphors and the “Australian” novels

As has been discussed in an earlier chapter the novels under discussion all emphasise the role of place and its relationship to the metaphysical. However, there is a marked contrast between what might be called Winton’s and Armanno’s “Australian” novels and those that have been designated earlier as their “European” novels. Whereas in the latter the settings in which the actions occur are frequently described as dark and forbidding, place in the former usually represents a haven, safety to which one must return to find the “meaning for existence”. Even the way in which Armanno uses water as a symbol is markedly different. In Geneva the lake is forbidding, something to be feared. In contrast his frequent reference to the sea in Firehead (as well as in his other novels) depicts the water as a place of cleansing and ultimate rebirth. For When Gabriella “walked naked back into the sea, her dream” she escapes the bitterness of her past, especially her sexual abuse by her grandfather. For Sam it is the symbol of hope which rests in his children frolicking in the water. Gabriella had, as Sam says, “wanted belonging, or at least a road that might lead her to that particular corner of Heaven. It didn’t make me feel guilty that I’d found a way to beat her there.” (1999: p. 399)

Winton’s treatment of water in Cloudstreet is also used metaphorically to symbolise the transcendent and the metaphysical. As has been said earlier in this chapter it is impossible to describe either without resorting to symbol and metaphor. There is no fear for Fish in sinking into this Australian water, it represents for him a return to that which he has experienced and desired since his mother resuscitates him when he drowns. Fish has faced the transcendent and found it welcoming, but he lacks the words to describe his experience to his family. Fish’s experience can be interpreted
as a metaphor for the problems we face, including authors, when trying to describe
the transcendent and metaphysical, in particular issues such as death. Like Fish we
do not have the words, but unlike Fish we also have not had the experience of
encountering the transcendent. It is left to Quick to come to some understanding
which is beyond language to realise what Fish wants and to let him go. For Fish the
water becomes a “mirror” in which he sees himself as perfect. (1991: p. 423)

Anthropomorphism

Armanno, Garner and Winton have all made use of anthropomorphism to write the
numinous, for example the mattress in Cosmo Cosmolino, the plane in Dirt Music and
Mount Etna in The Volcano.

The over-riding metaphor in Cloudstreet is, of course, the house itself. Winton
anthropomorphises it so that it is almost as much human as those who occupy it.
Even before the Pickles move into it we read “The house was boarded up, and it held
its breath.” (1991: p. 36) When the Lambs set up the shop the house is described as
“an old stroke survivor paralysed down one side.” (1991: p. 59) People and the
house are inextricably linked as we read towards the end of the novel: “The stove
roared and hissed from in the kitchen, and heat swelled the house and pressed the
families’ shadows into the wallpaper.” (1991: p. 412) This has not been the first
absorption by the house of the humans who inhabit it. With Wax Harry’s birth the
previous spirits have been exorcised:

The room goes quiet. The spirits on the wall are fading,
fading, finally being forced on their way to oblivion, free
of the house, freeing the house, leaving a warm, clean
sweet space among the living, among the good and
hopeful. The room sighs, the house breathes its first
painless breath in half a century… (1991: pp. 384/5)
The use of active verbs creates the image of the house as a living entity which “sighs”, and “breathes its first painless breath”. The use of the words “warm, sweet” to describe the house towards the end of the novel contrasts with the words used to describe Rose’s reaction to the room in which an earlier tragedy occurred: “…a hot nasty feeling came over her. Ugh. It smelt like an old meatsafe.” (1991: p. 38) Not only has the baby’s birth expunged the terrible deaths of the previous inhabitants of Cloudstreet it also releases Fish to return to the water for which he has yearned since rescued by his mother.

Winton has used anthropomorphism widely in his most recent work, *Dirt Music*, again mainly through the use of active verbs where passive verbs would usually have been employed: “Trees groan and lock horns above him…”, (2001: p. 103) “Fox gets the boat up of its haunches” (2001: p. 61) and later in the text:

> When the plane chokes and goes silent, Fox feels his gut fall. He’s killed it. With a shout, with that owl scream he’s killed them all….It turns back toward him losing altitude, chasing its shadow…The plane tips down at him…as though it’s searching him out.” (2001: p. 457)

Garner also employs anthropomorphism in her texts. In *Cosmo Cosmolino* the narrator’s camera is depicted as an extension of herself:

> I loved my own camera, its scratched black body, a certain inky tremor that winked on the sunken pool of its viewfinder as I raised it to my eye – my eye, this unofficial, peripheral eye of mine. (1992a: p. 10)
Yet again the narrator succumbs to Patrick's wishes and, at his insistence, uses his camera instead. Therefore it his eye through which the picture is to be taken not that of the narrator (Janet).

Like Winton's Cloudstreet Sweetpea Mansion also takes on a human dimension:

Now if a house can be bruised, this one was. Its height and depth were still imposing, but its windows propped open with lumps of wood, had to gasp for breath...The heart of the house was broken. (1992a: p. 64)

Later, as Janet shows Ray and Maxine into a room which was previously occupied by Chips, who overdosed, the mattress is described as a living entity.

She advanced into the room with her face screwed up, and without looking at the mattress sank her elegant shoe into its ribcage, its raised shoulder; she shoved and kicked at it until it peeled back off the lino and flopped its sagging spine against the skirting board. (1992a: p. 79)

That Chips and the mattress are one is demonstrated by Janet's words: "'Even in life,' said Janet, hands on hips, panting, 'he had no backbone.'" (1992: p. 79)

Later still the cradle takes on life and is affected by the argument between Ray and Janet who are trying to explain to each other what is meant by religious terms, especially relating to the devil and the spirit:

...it shuddered with such violence, posed on its fragile rockers, that the antagonists were shocked, and drew closer to the table, and stood by it with their fingers folded, until they were breathing steadily again and the air in the room had stabilised; and then the cradle too became calmer. It became serene, and its movements refined themselves into its customary gentle tremor, barely a quiver, merely a sign that there was life and breath in the room where it was standing. (1992a: p. 103)
Again we find an anthropomorphic language being used with active verbs such as “shuddered” being applied to the inanimate object, the cradle, and similarly “stabilised” in referring to the air in the room. There appears to be an interactive process occurring between the people, the room and the cradle, with the feelings and reactions of each affecting the others. The use of anthropomorphism facilitates the meshing of the material and metaphysical challenging the reader to look beyond the rational and physical world and to explore possibilities beyond human understanding.

The human and the material become involved in a deeper, perhaps sacred pact.

The limits of metaphor

Because metaphors inevitably arise out of one’s experiences they have their limitations, no more so than when endeavouring to deal with the sacred, metaphysical and/or transcendent. The obvious example of the dilemmas brought about by turning to metaphor is in how God is perceived. Perhaps this is most obvious in the non-verbal milieu of art where not only is God portrayed in a diversity of forms but also such portrayals are a reflection of the culture in which the artwork has been produced. We want God to be like us. Even more noticeable is the manner in which Christ is portrayed in such works. Here we have an historical reality who was part of a specific race and culture being depicted as a mirror image of the artists’ race and culture. In the verbalisation of “God” and the metaphysical the writer faces the same dilemma as does the artist. Both are dependent upon their own experiences and socialisation within a specific culture, therefore their texts will reflect or question these.
Winton, I believe, has developed within his texts a particularly Australian approach to the sacred, the metaphysical and God. This is most noticeable when Quick finally allows Fish to drown and the manner in which Fish’s dying is presented in the text: “Fish leans out and the water is beautiful. All that country below, the soft winy country with its shifts of colour, its dark marvellous call...”. At this point there is an interesting shift in the narrative from third to first person:

Fish goes out sighing, slow, slow to the water that smacks him kisses when he hits. Down he slopes into the long spiral, drinking, drinking his way into the tumble past the dim panic of muscle and nerve into a queer and bursting fullness. And a hesitation, a pause for a few moments. I’m a man for that long, I feel my manhood, I recognize myself whole and human, know my story for just that long....and then my walls are tipping and I burst into the moon, sun and starts of who I really am. Being Fish Lamb. Perfectly. Always. Everyplace. Me. (1991: pp. 423/4)

In falling into the water Fish is greeted with a “kiss”, as if he is falling in to the arms of a lover. Religious imagery is implicit within the above passage: the implication is that one is restored to perfection when one dies and that there is a world beyond this one. His drowning has restored him to perfection. Death for Fish is an experience beyond the discursive. His brain damage has left him with a child-like mind and without the language to verbalise his emotions and feelings, until the point when he returns to the water from which he was snatched by his mother many years ago.

Even Quick’s decision to allow Fish to die is an intuitive, irrational reaction, his immediate response being to save Fish: “The man (Quick) stops running before he even reaches the jetty. Quick makes himself stop and already he’s crying.” (1991: p. 423)
Much of the text in *Cloudstreet* can be seen as focusing on the semiotic rather than the symbolic order of Lacan and Kristeva. Because Fish has become mentally retarded as the result of his initial drowning he operates in the semiotic order both Lacan and Kristeva ascribe to children, both groups being identified as pre-language. Fish acts and reacts as does a child released from the constraints which direct the actions and reactions of an adult whose mental capacity has not been affected.

Even Quick's experiences are not so much discursive as experiential, especially through dreams. It is in a dream that he hears Fish calling him back to Cloudstreet after he leaves initially. It is as if in a dream that he is confronted by the black man who tells him to “Go home... This isn't your home. Go home to your home, mate.” after he and Rose set up house away from their families. (1991: p. 362) As has been discussed, Winton frequently resorts to metaphors involving nature, including the animal world. In *Cloudstreet* we find talking pigs and a kangaroo which Quick identifies as himself.

Armanno's *The Volcano* is an extended metaphor in which the seething violence of Etna becomes a metaphor of the violence inherent in man which Emilio is constantly attempting, usually unsuccessfully, to avoid in himself. A direct link between Emilio and the volcano is demonstrated by the words “The sounds of unrest rumbled from Emilio’s deep chest”. (2001: p. 23) In particular the world “rumbled” evokes the image of volcanic activity. Women appear to be excluded from this violence and it is this which draws Emilio to them as much as the sexual act which is depicted as a shared experience in which he delights in giving them pleasure as much as receiving it. In fact most of the sexual encounters are depicted in the text with a focus on the
sexuality of the women involved and their reactions. One might ask if this is merely a romantic fantasy on the part of Emilio (or even Armanno?) which justifies his taking of the women?

Conclusion

Armanno, Garner and Winton have made extensive use of a variety of linguistic techniques in their efforts to address the numinous and the transcendent within human existence. For Armanno and Winton in particular the natural world, animal or physical, has provided material for the metaphors employed. Whether a pig which speaks or a kangaroo which is human as in Cloudstreet, or a volcano which reflects the human as in The Volcano both writers have made effective use of metaphors and symbols, while also registering the limitations of language in reaching for the metaphysical. Garner's texts, often contain metaphors which lie in the domestic. For Garner the bizarre emanates from the mundane, so we have angels who are less than perfect humans, as in the case of the two men in the crematorium in Cosmo Cosmolino.

Finally the texts while highlighting the inadequacy of language to describe the numinous and the transcendent, at the same time demonstrate that any attempts at understanding are possible only through language arising out of individual experience. Yes, they are humanistic and domesticated but they are also, I would argue, post-modern in that they herald the death of metanarratives, the return of small narratives, ephemeral, domestic and experiential imageries, to the fictional search for metaphysical meanings. Questions of birth, life and death are being asked but ultimately no one answer is found, nor has to be found.
Chapter 5

PLACE AND DISPLACEMENT

“It is a grave offence to break a place”. (Tim Winton on Cloudstreet)

Issues of place and displacement are to the forefront in the works of Garner, Armanno and Winton. A variety of techniques are used to convey the relationship of the characters within the text to the settings in which they are placed, including a move into a different genre by Winton and Armanno to enhance the effect place has in establishing identity. Throughout the novels one can find instances where the landscape, identity and the divine are linked. As has been discussed in Chapter 1 the need to belong is inherent to human nature. Blanchot and Bataille talk of a desire for community, while the psychologist Maslow refers to the need to belong. Places frequently are used throughout the texts under discussion as symbols of alienation (displacement) or belonging (place). The way in which each of the three authors link the psychological need to belong and the physical environment will be discussed in this chapter. Further, the techniques used by the writers to establish the relationship between “place”, the transcendent and the divine within human experience will be explored.

Gothic settings

Both The Riders and My Beautiful Friend are Gothic in their settings, highlighted by the writers’ representation of the historical age of Europe. Although all the works of these two writers include a metaphysical and/or transcendental element there is a marked difference in the way in which these elements are written in the “European” novels compared with the “Australian”. There is a darkness in the “European” works
which appears to reflect the age of their settings. One can almost accept the concept of the ghostly Marcello Mansini (*My Beautiful Friend*) returning from the grave to create disorder for those he has left behind, including the impregnation of Linda, whom he did not even know in his previous existence. The ghostly riders who entice Scully to follow them belong to ancient mythology which a country with a European history of settlement of less than four hundred years does not share. As comparative newcomers to this country, non-indigenous Australians cannot claim ownership of the mythologies of the aboriginal culture. Perhaps it could be said that non-indigenous Australians and Australian writers such as Garner, Armanno and Winton have yet to formulate their own mythology.

There are, of course, ghostly figures appearing in the “Australian” novels of the three authors under analysis as has been discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis. One such example can be found in *Cloudstreet* where the house of this name is seen to contain remnants of a history of tragedy, which is finally exorcised with the birth of Wax Harry. Yet these ghosts are more to be pitied than feared like “The Riders” and Marcello Mansini.

**Displacement**

It is in Armanno’s *My Beautiful Friend* and Winton’s *The Riders* that the sense of people being displaced is most obvious. *The Riders* has been referred to by critics as Winton’s “European work”, and the same could apply to Armanno’s *My Beautiful Friend*. As has already been discussed in Chapter 4 both these writers have moved outside their home setting for these texts. Other works, such as Winton’s *Cloudstreet* and *That Eye The Sky*, and Armanno’s *Firehead*, *The Lonely Hunter*, *Romeo of the*
Underworld etc. are set in the familiar surrounds of the Australian countryside for Winton and the city of Brisbane for Armanno.

It is in Firehead that one is offered an insight into the migrant's struggle for a sense of self in a foreign environment. It is a social commentary on the period and the place, commencing with Gabriella's arrival, from Sicily, in the Brisbane suburb in 1975. The reader is exposed to issues of the political climate and the corruption in public office, especially the police force. The book identifies the different ways in which migrants adjust to the new environment. Sam, the hero, becomes Australianised and marries a non-Italian whilst Gabriella withdraws from contact with the broader culture and finds her security married to the corrupt Italian policeman and settling in an isolated environment. For both Sam and Gabriella there is a need to belong, to find their "bit of Heaven". (1999: p.399) For Sam his "Heaven" is not so much a physical place but more a sense of belonging to a family. In all of Armanno's works belonging is not dependent upon geography, even when the protagonist is displaced as is the Australian Aaron when he and his wife travel to Europe. The solution for Armanno's characters is always to find their answers within relationships not in places.

The following quote from an interview with Tim Winton reported by Robert Hefner in the Canberra Times, 21st April, 1991, p.23, entitled "Winton on cloud nine after reviews" appears in Bruce Bennett's "Nostalgia for Community: Tim Winton's Essay and Stories". (Haskell, pp. 60-73) In this interview Winton talks of the impact of his visit to Europe:
When I got to Europe I knew the moment I set foot down that I wasn’t European. I’d been brought up all my life to think that I was a European. I’m not even faintly European. I looked at the glories of Europe from behind a smoky glass. It was like this huge gulf; I admired but it wasn’t hugely connected with me. I felt torn, almost like torn out of the soil from home. Then when I came back I knew what was going on. I knew if I stayed away too long I’d be adrift, and I felt like I was going to wither up and die. I knew this is where I belong. I know my continent, I know my country, I certainly know my landscape as to what it means to me. No-one’s really going to be able to convince me that I don’t belong here. I’m connected to the land and the landscape and the sea, and the colour of the light, and the smell of the eucalypts, the whole thing. I wouldn’t say it’s a kind of new Aboriginality, I wouldn’t even feel that I had to even chase after the term, but it’s a feeling of belonging. (Bennett, 1994, p. 62)

In the above words one can read the romanticism and nostalgia which flows through Winton’s writing. The paragraph highlights his sense of belonging linked to the Australian “landscape and the sea” to which he feels “connected”. Although he does not see his emotions as “a new kind of Aboriginality” his words do bear some relationship to the identification with land which is part of Australian indigenous culture. There is a type of violence involved in his feeling of displacement when travelling through Europe – he feels “torn, almost like torn out of the soil from home”. His strong identification with those things seen as typically Australian – “the colour of the light and the smell of the eucalypts – are strongly evocative of “creation theology”, that is the belief in the sacredness of the natural world. This is of course very much part of the religious and cultural beliefs of indigenous Australians, but not necessarily unique to them. It is in the natural world that the transcendent and numinous are experienced.
Reading his novel, *The Riders* (first published in 1994), one can relate the displacement experienced by Scully as he journeys through Europe to that of Winton’s own European experience. Neither Winton, nor his character Scully “feel at home” in a European environment, yet while Winton returns to the familiarity of Australia, Scully chooses to settle in Ireland, from whence his ancestors came. “The Riders” who haunt Scully are more threatening than the strangers who appear in his Australian novels, such as *Cloudstreet* and *That Eye, The Sky*. In the latter the strangers either assist, as in the case of Henry in the latter text, or act as a sign of hope as does the black man in the former. Rossiter cites Winton’s words in describing the role of this black man in *Cloudstreet*,

...(he) serves as the conscience of the people, a ‘guardian angel’ who is rejected...the guy is saying: Learn to belong, don’t break community. Basically, he is saying, “It is a grave offence to break a place”. (1993: p. 13)\(^6\)

Winton’s view of the aborigines can be read as sentimentalised, but it also appears to reflect the current situation in which the indigenous Australians are attempting to reclaim land with which they identify, the Mabo legislation and the Hindmarsh Island situation being amongst the most important. Interestingly Winton’s identification with Australia as security showed up well before his European experience.

**Shaping identity**

There is in Winton’s works, including *The Riders*, a move for the characters to identify strongly with the land. Even in *The Riders* Scully remembers with nostalgia “One foot on the tarmac, one sniff of the eucalyptus and he’d be agoner”. (1995: p. 12) There is a sentimentalism in these words, as it is hard to imagine the scent of “the eucalyptus” being strong enough to block the odours

\(^6\) This interview appeared in *Sojourners*, 21, 8, 1992, pp. 18-21.
associated with airports and engine fuel. Winton’s novels all seem to reinforce the archetype of the Australian male as being taciturn and unable to communicate his feelings. Scully wanders through Europe on his fruitless search for his wife in comparative isolation, despite that, for most of the journey, he is accompanied by his daughter, Billie. Quick, in Cloudstreet, needs to withdraw from close human contact to rediscover himself. Henry, in That Eye, The Sky is perhaps the character most able to articulate his thoughts and feelings as can be seen in his conversations with Ort and Alice Flack, especially in his discussions about God.

Although discussing Winton’s earlier works Watzke’s analysis is equally applicable to those which followed. She refers to the two possible definitions of place as being both internal and external:

...how identity is shaped by place, and vice versa; how ‘place’ both calls forth and embodies or seems to reflect changes of identity; how language forms a map of the correspondence between place and identity...An exploration of place in Winton’s work also draws us into the protagonist’s point of view and personal dilemmas, as he shapes and is shaped by his environment. (1993: pp. 20/1)

This shaping of identity by environment is not unique to Winton’s writing. It very much underpins the changes experienced by Aaron in Armanno’s My Beautiful Friend, and by the inhabitants of Sweetpea Mansions in Garner’s Cosmo Cosmolino.

**Winton’s spiritual place**

In That Eye, The Sky, we find a family isolated in a “foreign” environment, strangers within their community, and as such the interdependence of the family’s individual members is highlighted. Both parents, we are told have been “hippies” and the
terrain which they now inhabit is alien to them. This isolation becomes most apparent after the father’s accident. Watzke claims that “It is in this book that Winton’s vision of a place becomes explicitly animate and spiritual.” (1993: p. 23) Ort sees, in his environment, things which are not visible to others or at least not their metaphysical potential; he even has difficulty in conveying to Henry Warburton the light he sees above his house. His experiences of what could be described as the transcendent or metaphysical are unique to Ort, which is perhaps what all such experiences are. Ort describes what could be called a spiritual experience, a belief in something other than the physical, a sign of hope in the midst of the disasters which surround his family:

There it is, that little cloud, small and fat like a woolly sheep, glowing bright. It looks like it’s in exactly the right place there just above the roof. It’s crazy, but inside me it feels like that shining cloud is the most normal thing in the world. And I bet no one else can see it. It just shines down at me and it makes me smile and I stand there until I feel tired enough to go inside to bed. (Winton, 1987: p. 51)

This description of the transcendent can be seen as having its foundation in creation theology. Not only are clouds part of the natural environment this particular “little cloud” is “small and fat like a woolly sheep, glowing bright.” Therefore the transcendent is linked with the known world of Ort, as he himself says it “is the most normal thing in the world.” Ort believes that he alone can see the cloud, yet it is probably obvious to everybody, but not everybody experiences it as metaphysical, that is as a “glowing bright” object. One is again reminded of Winton’s claim that adults lose the child’s sense of wonder where anything is possible.
Watzke claims that, in *That Eye, The Sky*:

Ultimately it is through the elements of nature, especially of light – which creates space and place, which some might say is the primary aspect of the Australian landscape – that the miracle begins to manifest itself. (1993: p. 25)

There is in Watzke’s reaction to Winton’s writing a romantic, landscape based attunement with Winton. Watzke’s response is almost a paraphrasing of the 1991 reporting of Winton’s words, discussed earlier in this chapter, when discussing his European experience. She makes a direct link between the spiritual/numinous and the nature when she uses the word “miracle” to describe Ort’s experiences described in *That Eye, The Sky*. Like Winton Watzke refers to the “light” of the environment. In the book to which she is referring Ort sees a light hovering over his house, a light which seems to offer him a sense of hope.

It is this element of light which is missing in both Winton’s and Armanno’s “European” novels, *The Riders* and *My Beautiful Friend* respectively. Rather it is replaced by a darkness which reflects the age of Europe. In both these novels there is a sense of decay permeating the text. At the same time there is a corresponding darkness within the minds of both Scully and Aaron.

Aaron’s reaction (*My Beautiful Friend*) to the graveyard can be read as a metaphor of a decaying, if not dead, society, as can the buildings and the streets through which he walks and finds himself lost. Here we find a lack of light and of clarity which is reflected in and is a reflection of Aaron’s state of mind.
I just had to find my way back to the lakeside, and there was the way, straight ahead, I was sure of it. Behind me, as I looked over my shoulder, the street lamps were dim and they shone weakly over the broken guttering and slanting rooftops of all those old stone houses. The brightest lamp reflected in a puddle in the middle of the lane, creating the illusion of a white fat moon shining out from beneath the world. I hesitated at the front of that black passageway, my eyes adjusting to its dark. Something could be seen after all, a far speck of light where the passage probably emerged into another street. So it was all right. Then a gust of strong wind came travelling up through the passageway and I knew it wasn’t all right at all; that wind made a whining sound and was redolent of the sour smells of urine and rotted garbage, but most of all, I thought, it carried the essence of the cold waters of Lac Leman. (1999: p. 64)

Although Aaron talks of a physical “way” this paragraph can be read as referring to his state of mind and psyche. He is not only physically lost he is also emotionally lost. The “sour smells of urine and rotted garbage” reflect the “darkness” which is festering in his mind as he struggles with his marital problems. Contrast this with the way in which Armanno writes the final scene of his Australian work, Firehead:

I left things where they were and stepped out onto the balcony. The air was cool and somehow raspy, as if it were a tactile force full of salt and sand. Our weekend rooms were at ground level and I climbed that balcony’s railing, heading across the well-tended apartment-block lawn and then over some dunes, and then down a slope where the warm silken sand massaged my feet. The breeze was stronger here and scented with only one thing – like Gabriella’s breath – the freshness of the sea. Few people were still out in this late afternoon before evening’s impending fall, though couples were walking hand in hand toward the grottoes where the rocks started, and a fisherman was casting a line deep into the surf. I ran further down the windy beach to where the last sunlight of the day was still bright in the silver waves, cracking the beautiful black and gold heads of my wife and children into what they are, a multitude. (2000: pp. 399/400)
The difference in the language used to describe these two scenes is striking. In the first the text is filled with words which depict what those who have only experienced Europe from a distance find strange. The history and antiquity which attracts many Australians is written as something which is foreboding. There is a lack of colour and a sense of being closed in; even the odours are repugnant, "urine and rotted garbage". On the other hand the second passage is filled with light and a sense of space which reflects the vastness of Australia. The colours depicted are bright and the smells attractive, and the entire scene is filled with light. It is only when Marcello Mansini’s remains finally buried that light is able to be discerned: "After the church the sunlight and blue skies of Montreux were dazzling, and Marcello Mansini was gone." (1999: p. 322) Montreux can be seen as reflective of and reflecting the mood of the major protagonist, Aaron.

Aaron’s state of mind is as bleak and foreboding as are the scenes he, as narrator describes. Even towards the end of the text he is filled with despair as these thoughts, which he experiences when he lies with Chiara, show:

Her breathing, all I had to do was listen to her breathing, not to my thoughts, not to my fears, not to anything else that came from the walls and the unknown. I could see snow falling past the windows. It was beautiful, and that was my thought as my own eyes closed, the beauty of the world, my God how I longed for it. (1999: p. 296)

To celebrate his final recognition of “the beauty of the world” Aaron purchases “two great bunches of tulips” and “two painted, porcelain pots with which to hold them”, which he places on Mansini’s grave. (1999: p. 32)
The flowers in their pots looked awfully gaudy. Against the gravestone and against the words inscribed into it they looked like an insult. I caught my breath but I wasn’t uncomfortable. I’d chosen those flowers well. (1999: p. 321)

The flowers represent not so much a tribute to Mansini but symbolise a shift in Aaron’s psyche to a more positive view of the world and a readiness to move on. In burying Mansini he has also buried the negative side of his personality.

In Winton’s *The Riders* we experience with Scully his odyssey across Europe as he retraces the journey he shared with his wife, Jennifer, in an attempt to be reunited with her. His physical displacement from his home in Western Australia correlates with his mental state as he moves from country to country in what is to be a fruitless search for Jennifer. His attempt to regain his past relationship is reflected in the story of the journey of many Australians such as Scully to recapture their European identity by returning to the homes of the forbears, only to discover that they cannot identify with a past outside their experiences as Australians. Yet, despite his dislike of most things European, especially what he sees as the decadence of Amsterdam and France, Scully elects to settle in Ireland, a country which, for many Australians, has a romantic appeal. Interestingly Scully’s attachment to Ireland mirrors Winton’s own interaction with that country after he finally undertook the obligatory European tour. During his visit to Europe he was offered the use of a cottage in Ireland where he worked on his novel *Cloudstreet*. His identification with that country is mimicked in the character Scully in *The Riders*. In his ‘Letter from Ireland’, reproduced in Hergenham and Petersson, Winton writes:
What I suspect has affected me, as I mentioned before, is the strength of the place, in its physical aspect, its weight of stories, the way it preoccupies people. Here where every field and some trees have names, where walls and cottages have names, where a cluster of houses has a collective name to distinguish it from the cluster five hundred yards down the valley, here place and region are serious proposition. This is where a Faulkner could borrow a complete world for his own ends. The Irish do not forget. (1994: p. 73)

For Winton, as for Faulkner before him, Ireland is a place for writers. Even the Irish people themselves have the necessary attributes of writers – they “do not forget”, they have a need to “name” natural and physical objects such as fields, trees, cottages and walls. Within this urge to name there appears to be an underlying need for control over such objects through categorising them. One is immediately drawn to a comparison with the relationship between Patrick and the narrator (Janet) in Garner’s Cosmo Cosmolino where the former has a need to categorise people. Winton also appears to have overlooked the fact that not forgetting also has a negative side which has led to lengthy periods of violence. There is in Winton’s discussions of his own experiences and of his writing a strong romantic thread which permeates his work, especially his earlier novels. This romanticism is more strongly connected with the environment and the landscape than it is to his human protagonists.

**Houses as place**

Within the early chapters of Cloudstreet the text relates the history of the house of that name and the deaths of the young aboriginal girl through suicide, and that of the “philanthropist” from what appears to be a suicide both of which occur in the library. As has been discussed in depth in the previous chapter the house is also referred to anthropomorphically: “The house was boarded up, and it held its breath.” (1991: p. 36) “Cloudstreet” is waiting for something to happen. It is with the arrival of the
Pickle’s family that events are set in train which will breathe new life into the house. This occurs with the birth of Rose’s and Quick’s child, Harry: “The house sighs, the house breathes its first painless breath in half a century….”. (1991: p. 385) Like people, the house absorbs and reacts to others. Flash Harry’s birth both exorcises the demons which have divided the family and releases the “ghosts” which have inhabited “Cloudstreet” for “half a century”. That these “ghosts” are there, especially in the library where the deaths occurred, is demonstrated by Rose’s reaction when she first enters the room:

She came to a door right in the centre of the house but when she opened it the air went from her lungs and a hot, nasty feeling came over her. Ugh. It smelled like an old meat safe…...She had to get out before she got any dizzier. (1991: p. 38)

Like the house in Winton’s Cloudstreet, Sweetpea Mansions, the major setting for the final chapter of Garner’s Cosmo Cosmolino, has an anthropomorphic quality: “Now if a house can be bruised, this one was. Its height and depth were still imposing, but its windows propped open with lumps of wood, had to gasp for breath.” (1992: p. 64) Other examples of the allocation of human tendencies to inanimate objects as well as to the house can be found within the text, for example to the camera, the mattress and the cradle in the first and last stories of the trilogy.

Garner’s characters do not make dramatic moves from one continent to another, but the importance of place and displacement in her texts arises for domestic and intimate settings. In her review of Garner’s Cosmo Cosmolino Kerryn Goldsworthy proposes that:
The domestic arena in which these stories of sex, love, families and family-substitutes unfold is often, in Garner’s writing, a presence in itself...while the way that domestic space is occupied, managed and negotiated is nearly always central to her work. (1966: p. 30)

After ten years absence from the house during which “he had kept a picture of the household folded in his mind, as an image of the way a life might be lived” Alby returns. (1992a: p. 184) The use of the word “household” is interesting as it indicates a return to people rather than merely to a place, yet somehow the house and the people in his past have become synonymous in his mind. He recalls a past in which he “didn’t match up. He wasn’t ready for it.” (1992a: p. 185) Like Raymond, and to keep his brother happy, he became involved in what appears to be a fundamentalist Christian group, even to the point of baptism, after which his views on life have undergone some change. Yet even in doing so Alby has participated more as an onlooker rather than becoming fully involved in the experience, which perhaps, linked with his earlier involvement at the house, indicates a tendency not to allow himself to become fully involved. One might question whether he is capable of ever being “ready” to give of himself.

Even now, though, years after he had been saved, the house still visited him in dreams; and while its layout would metamorphose in a multitude of ways,...it was always the same house: he knew it every time, and entered it with joy....But the house lived on in him, an oasis of deep and complex blossoming, all the while his spirit, as they cleaned it, was being cleaned and straightened and dried out to uniform beige. The house hung on, and he boasted to his brother about it and persuaded him to go on ahead as a kind of buffer: for in his heart he believed against all odds that he could go back, knowing what he knew now: he took the punt and believed that the warmth and music of it, if only it was still there, embodied what he was starved for, something to do not with religion and spirit, but with soul. (1992a: p.188)
The text appears to be condemning organised religion and its influences on the individual, in this case Alby. It is not being “saved” which has given him “joy”, rather it has reduced him to the nondescript – “a uniform beige” – but the house which is described in positive and life-affirming terms such as “oasis” and “blossoming”. There is an unusual combining of words in the last line of the paragraph – “spirit”, rather than “soul”, has been linked with the negative word “religion”. “Soul” is a term which is very much the language of traditional religions, whereas spirit (as opposed to Spirit) has a more open meaning when used to describe the numinous. Alby is recalling his past experiences and his sense of belonging hoping to re-experience them when he returns to the house. What he hopes for is that the house has absorbed his past experiences enabling him to relive the memories. However, his dreams are dashed because the house had been allowed to sink into decay, a decay which is reflected in the disillusionment both he and Janet have experienced as their lives have fallen into disarray.

There is a marked contrast in the return to the “house” by Quick and Rose in Cloudstreet, for example, and Alby, in Cosmo Cosmolino. Quick and Rose’s return to their home changes the house whereas Alby expects the house to meet his needs. There is no feeling that he is a contributor. He will use the house and Janet and Raymond as long as it suits him and until he finds something better. There is a self-centredness about Alby which could be unattractive, yet his presence, albeit unwittingly, offers some sort of hope to Janet and Raymond.
Winton’s nostalgic novel

Perhaps the answer to the question regarding Scully’s decision to settle in Ireland can be found in this letter, in the naming of objects thus personalising them one can regain one’s identity. One is accepted at face value and is not viewed as a “foreigner”. To what extent this relationship with Ireland and all things Irish is a romantic reflection of long held Australian attitudes towards the Irish as personified by Peter Lalor and Ned Kelly is open to question. There is, however, in the descriptions of the Irish and the Irish countryside a sense of space and rawness which is reminiscent of the Australia of Billie’s thoughts:

She thought of wide, eye-aching spaces of brown grass with wind running rashes through it and big puddles of sheep as big as the shadows of clouds creeping along toward lonely gum trees. (1995: p. 235)

Maver, in analysing the various European contexts of the novel, sees Winton’s move from his usual settings of Western Australia and especially the sea to tell the story of a “loser” is important:

By doing so, Winton deftly makes Europe a symbol of personal defeat, social decadence and spiritual and physical deterioration. It is significant that Europe and not Australia should represent “signs” of defeat, namely of Scully’s life going down in flames. (1999: p. 102)

I would question Maver’s emphasis on Europe as “a symbol of personal defeat, social decadence and spiritual and physical deterioration”. One can invert this emphasis and view the situation from Scully’s perspective. He is going through an unhappy period in his life needing to accept his wife’s desertion of himself and Billie. As he travels through Europe he is gaining disturbing information about himself and his relationship with Jennifer. It is highly unlikely that anybody in such an emotionally
charged frame of mind is open to positive experiences. The nostalgia Scully feels for Australia is also understandable in that there he had been unaware of his wife’s intention to desert him and Billie. Australia is the last site where he had a sense of “belonging” as a part of a family unit so it is not strange that he sees it in a more positive light. Rather than Europe symbolising Scully’s “personal defeat” it may be that the negativity within the text towards Europe is a reflection of Scully’s psychological state. Ultimately it needs to be remembered that despite his nostalgia for Australia Scully chooses to settle in Ireland.

The place of water

European settlement in Australia has largely occurred around the parameters of this island country, therefore water is of particular relevance to most, if not all Australians, including our indigenous population. Water, or the lack thereof in drought periods or in the deserts, is fundamental to our survival or otherwise. It is not surprising then that water in its various forms becomes important in the texts under discussion. Given the biblical nature of the texts and the manner in which water is referred to in both the Old and New Testament adds another dimension to its presentation, especially in the works of Armanno and Winton.

The Australian pre-occupation with water, especially the sea, is an important element in the works of Armanno and Winton. In many cases it is as if water has a mystical and frequently healing ability. Australia is an island continent with its major cities situated on its coast which, by contrast, frequently experiences drought conditions. It is not surprising therefore, that water, or the absence of, plays a major role in our lives and as such provides a focus for writers of Australian literature. In addition
when writing of things spiritual one finds constant references to water throughout
both the Old and New Testaments.

Ruth Watzke, in discussing the importance of “place” in Tim Winton’s early fiction,
cites extracts from an interview conducted with him in 1987, and proposed that: “It
is not then surprising that this relationship of his characters with the sea or water
appears consistently in his later work, Cloudstreet.” (Watzke, 1993: p. 15) It is as if
Cloudstreet has been written to explain Winton’s words. The sea is both that which
will bring about the death of Fish, yet it is also that for which he yearns and to which
he returns to recover his wholeness in death. As Winton says in the aforementioned
interview “…it kind of feels full of tension for me…”. This “tension” is very
obvious throughout this text and is exemplified by the family’s constant struggle to
keep Fish away from the water which he is always seeking. In the prologue to the
novel, which is also the end, the narrator, who, as shall be discovered, is Fish
describing, in the third person, his final drowning. That he is drawn to the water is
obvious with such words as: “He hears nothing but the water, and the sound of it has
been in his ears all his life.”, and also “he’s hungry for the water, he wants it more
than ever.” He makes reference to the family’s efforts to restrain him “No hand in
his trouser belt”. (1991: p. 2) In the closing chapters Fish describes the water as
“beautiful”, and in lover like terms “Fish goes out sighing, slow, slow to the water
that smacks him kisses when he hits.” Quick’s immediate reaction is to go to Fish’s
aid but he “makes himself stop and already he’s crying.” (1991: p. 423) It is not
death which is difficult but rather the struggle which is involved in living as the
closing lines of the prologue propose: “And you can’t help but worry for them, love
them, want for them – those who god on down the close, foetid galleries of time and
space without you.” (1991: p. 3) In the context of the text death is welcome as it releases one from the sadness the living will experience on the passing of a loved one. The use of negative words such as “close, foetid” which are used to describe life are in marked contrast to that of bursting “into the moon, sun and stars” which Fish, as the narrator uses to portray his own death. (1991: p. 424)

This dual aspect of water as on the one hand being life giving and on the other hand a threat to life demonstrated in Winton’s *Cloudstreet* can be found in the story of Moses’ crossing of the Red Sea which appears in the Old Testament. The water separated to save Moses and his people, only to close over and drown their pursuers.

As Winton says about the contradictory nature of water:

> For my generation I’m not a well-travelled person. I’ve only ever lived in two towns – Albany and Perth. But I guess towns are not what comes to mind when I think of Place. Somehow I’ll think of a beach before I think of a town or city... The sea has always been for me a kind of bearing mark. For many of my characters, the sight of the ocean is either reassuring or it’s a kind of confirmation of all your worst suspicions... it’s that longing which causes me to put fictional people back on those beaches... (Watzke, 1993, p. 15)\(^7\)

In *Cloudstreet* it is water which brings about Fish’s “deaths”, both in the introductory chapters when he is a young boy and later as a young man. But despite this destructive element water is, especially for Fish, a place of safety and security to which he wishes to return. It is his “heaven”, the place where he feels most at home. Even his name, Fish, indicates that he is displaced and not of this world but of that of the water creatures.

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\(^7\)This interview was reported in *Arts News*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Aug.-Nov. 1987, p. 10; also as “Place”, *Weekend Australian Literary Supplement*, June 6-7, 1987.
In Armano’s *My Beautiful Friend* we find a marked contrast in the relationship of Aaron as well as the other characters to the way in which water is written in his “Australian” novels. The water in this novel is in the form of a land-locked environment and is a lake, which is dark and foreboding. Marcello Mansini, who is evil personified, has drowned some years before the period about which the story is set, but his body has not been recovered and therefore has not been buried. His actions are those of the “wandering soul” who cannot find peace until he is finally laid to rest and in this the novel is a reflection of others which describe such individuals.

The eeriness of Lac Leman is heightened by

...a mist that floated just above the surface. I shivered at the sight and Rebecca and I cuddled some more. It was beautiful, what we’d come to Montreux to see, yet it added to a sense of claustrophobia that I couldn’t possibly have articulated. We approached an esplanade that seemed endless. It went right around the edge of the lake and disappeared into the mist, just as the lake did. Sometimes a jogger would appear out of it. We tried to see past the white haze and grey fog, but it swirled over the esplanade and the lake in the bitter to and fro of the wind. (1999: p. 27)

In what is a text based very much on the complexities of the psyche this passage employs language and the environment to symbolise the dilemma facing Aaron and Rebecca. They have come to Europe in an attempt to revitalise their deteriorating relationship. Their psychological loss of direction is reflected in their inability to find their way physically because of the mist and haze which encompasses them. The “claustrophobia” Aaron experiences and the bleakness of the scene, the reader discovers later in the text, are reflected in the couple’s marriage.
The reader discovers as the story progresses that the lake is notorious for claiming lives and that the bodies of those who have drowned are frequently unrecovered. Mansine acts as a Siren enticing others to join him in his watery grave and it is left to Aaron to challenge him and the elements to save Chiara and himself from succumbing to his enticements. It is as if Aaron must experience a baptism by immersion in order to save himself and to lay to rest that which is negative within him and which is represented through his alter-ego, Mansini.

Conclusion

In the texts under discussion “place” and “displacement” are important in not only providing a setting for the protagonists but also in influencing the protagonists perceptions of self. Scully, in The Riders on his journey through Europe sees himself as “The Wild Colonial Boy” in the eyes of the people he encounters, or is rather more to do with “cultural cringe” than any stereotyping on their part. It is not Scully who has changed but the change in his environment is bring about changes in his view of himself.

Water is important particularly in the works of Winton and Armanno, whether it be the dark, foreboding waters of Lac Léman in My Beautiful Friend, the water which beckons and eventually claims the life of Fish in Cloudstreet, or the sunny beaches of Queensland which appear constantly in Firehead.

Houses as place, frequently taking on anthropomorphic qualities are paramount in the “Australian” texts of both Armanno and Winton, but have less significance in their “European” novels. Garner’s texts generally are set within houses.
It is in such settings that the transcendent and metaphysical are usually experienced, whether it be the light which Ort sees above his house in *That Eye the Sky*, Maxine's flight from the shed roof in *Cosmo Cosmolino*. Throughout the texts under discussion the numinous and transcendent are experienced within and related to the material existence of the protagonists. Spiritual and metaphysical events are presented as natural outcomes of human existence. For Winton and Armanno in particular the natural environment is the site for divine experiences. On the other hand all three authors emphasise the importance of houses to the sense of belonging and the establishment of identity of their characters. That these sites of metaphysical experiences are frequently less than perfect is irrelevant.
Chapter 6

DEATH...AND THE FUTURE

"You can't split matter and spirit" (Janet in Cosmo Cosmolino)

How then do the texts deal with the future and the inevitability of mortality, that which can be seen as the ultimate metaphysical experience? Nietzsche proposed that life and death are the one experience: "Let us beware of saying that death is opposed to life. The living is merely a type of what is dead, and a very rare type." (1974: p. 168, Section 109) One interpretation of Nietzsche's words is that in being born one is already on the journey to death. Death has been described as the cessation of thought yet this proposition which might appear to be obvious is based on an interpretation of death, an event which lies beyond human understanding and experience and therefore unable to be defined scientifically.

In this final chapter I shall analyse the various ways in which the texts explore the ultimate metaphysical and transcendent experience, human mortality, especially when the authors move “Beyond God the Father”. I shall also look at how the possibility or otherwise of an after-life, which is concomitant with the concept of “God”, is addressed by Armando, Garner and Winton, within a climate of, if not non-belief in such a being, at least a questioning of its existence. In other words do the texts consider the possibility of life after death, especially one that does not include “God”?

Finally I shall discuss the role of children within the texts, especially as representing the hope of immortality for the adult protagonists. The adults inevitably must die
but they will live on through their children, which of course becomes a circular argument.

**A wondrous experience**

In *Cloudstreet* Winton appears to be exploring the possibility of an afterlife in the manner in which Fish’s experience of dying is written in the first person. Fish leaves his damaged physical mind behind and achieves a new clarity of perception. Death releases him. One can perceive in the text elements of religious teaching based on belief in an afterlife in which the human will shed his/her imperfect human form and become perfect, even Godlike.

> Fish will remember. All his life and all his next life he’ll remember this dark, cool plunge where sound and light and shape are gone, where something rushes him from afar, where, openmouthed, openfisted, he drinks in river, whales it in with complete surprise. (1991: p. 29)

This passage commences with a simple three word sentence, which is immediately followed by a longer, complex sentence extended by the repetitive use of “and” and “where”. The rushing, breathless tempo which this creates builds up the tension which will result as he is brought back to life by his mother. The repetition of the word “remember” in this early passage of the text acts as a preamble to the remainder of the novel which is written from the point of view of Fish’s “remembering”.

Unlike Vicki and Raymond in Garner’s *The Children’s Bach and Cosmo Cosmolino* respectively, who fear death and the thought of dying, for Fish death is a wondrous experience. The use of “surprise” conveys a positive image of what Fish is experiencing. It lacks any sense of fear. His mother has, in bringing him back from the dead, denied Fish that which he has seen as welcoming and not to be feared.
Through the brain damage he has sustained he has lost the ability to communicate the experience. For him the horror is not that he was dying or dead but rather that in being rescued by his mother he has been pulled back from what he has seen as positive, a succumbing to death:

Fish’s pain stops, and suddenly it’s all haste and the darkness melts into something warm. Hurrying toward a big friendly wound in the gloom…but then slowing, slowing. He comes to a stop. Worse, he’s slipping back and that gash in the grey recedes and darkness returns and pain and the most awful sick feeling is in him like his flesh has turned to pus and his heart to shit.
Shame.
Horror.
Fish begins to scream. (1991: p. 30)

Fish, has experienced the cessation of pain which is the result of dying, only to be drawn back to again experience pain. There is an unusual use of words in this section of the text, especially “wound” and “gash” both of which are applicable to pain. Death is represented by “gloom” and the colour “grey”. It is the unknown which lies beyond these that is drawing Fish, that “something warm”. Again the rhythm of this passage employs the technique of contrasting a short sentence with a much longer one. The reader can almost feel the rushing towards the unknown which is interrupted by the repetition of the word “slowing”, which plays with the flow of the text. The shortness of the next sentence leads one into a much longer one which reflects Fish’s rebirth. The use of two single words to convey Fish’s feelings on his rescue, as well as the feelings of the witnesses, heighten the effect.

Although Quick does not understand Fish’s need to return to the water which will ultimately claim him, he does recognise that need. For Fish, who has waited so long,
the anticipation and experience of his second drowning is even more beautiful than the first:

Ah, the water, the water, the water…
Fish leans out and the water is beautiful. All that country below, the soft winy country with its shifts of colour, its dark, marvellous call. Ah, yes…
Fish goes out sighing, slow, slow to the water that smacks him kisses when he hits. Down he slopes into the long spiral, drinking, drinking his way into the tumble past the dim panic of muscle and nerve into a queer and bursting fullness. And a hesitation, a pause for a few moments. I’m a man for that long. I feel my manhood, I recognize myself whole and human, know my story for just that long, long enough to see how we’ve come, how we’ve all battled in the same corridor that time makes for us, and I’m Fish Lamb for those seconds it takes to die, as long as it takes to drink the river, as long as it took to tell you all this, and then my walls are tipping and I burst into the moon, sun and stars of who I really am. Being Fish Lamb. Perfectly. Always. Everyplace. Me. (1991: pp. 423/4)

The manner and type of words employed create a soothing effect, particularly in the earlier section of the passage. The sighing sound of “Ah” followed by the double repetition of “the water” and the use of many words beginning with or including “s”, such as “sighing”, “slow” and “soft” contribute to this effect. This is interrupted by the sharpness of the single syllable words “smacks” and “hits”.

The sudden movement from third person narrator to the first person coincides with Fish’s death. It is Fish, we discover in these lines, who has been the omniscient narrator thus far in Cloudstreet. It is left to a third person narrator to describe the physical scene which comprises the closing paragraph of Cloudstreet. At the point of his death Fish has shed his physical being and has become pure spirit, a totally metaphysical entity. He ceases to be part of his family and community and has moved into a world which they cannot enter, thus becoming “T”, the ultimate subject.
**A fearsome experience**

By contrast to the beautiful imagery describing the possibility of an afterlife depicted in *Cloudstreet*, Garner in *Cosmo Cosmolino*, deals with the physical reality, horror and fear of death. This is especially true of the second story “The Vigil”. It is not the dead Kim but her sexual partner, Ray, upon whom the text focuses. There is no beauty in the experience within the crematorium as Ray is forced to watch the disintegration of her body, a disintegration which commenced before her death as Kim loses the will to live. The angels who force him to watch are neither beautiful nor welcoming but are “fearful” and “terrible”. Whereas Fish looks forward to his death, and openly embraces it, Garner’s characters are fearful, wanting to avoid even the experience of the funeral. All of the stories in Garner’s trilogy draw the reader into a relationship with death emphasising the difficulties faced in addressing mortality. As the narrator in the third story says: “We have not learnt the words with which to speak of death.” (1992a: p. 56) We resort, the narrator claims in the same passage, to euphemisms such as “overdose, or suicide, or falling asleep at the wheel.” (1992a: p. 56) None of which alters the fact that the outcome is the same; the individual is dead irrespective of the means.

Throughout this book the reader, like Raymond, is forced to face the inevitable ugliness of death despite attempts to prettify it with euphemistic and often crude language. Not only is death as the final event in life addressed but also the self-destruction which becomes a living death in which one operates as an automaton. Misery, depression and self-destruction drives others away as happens in the second story, “A Vigil”. Raymond cannot cope with Kim as she sinks into an abyss that will
inevitably lead to her ugly death. Not only has her father failed her, but also her mother and lover, Raymond. Her body becomes a shell which he uses for sexual gratification without making contact with her emotional needs. She becomes a human receptacle for Raymond’s sexual gratification. Raymond’s final punishment is to be forced to attend Kim’s funeral and to view the disintegration of her body when she is cremated, a scene hidden from those who are mourning, as it is usually shrouded in ceremony and its concomitant language. In participating in this final disintegration Raymond is forced to face his own mortality.

Grosz, in her discussion of the Kristevan concept of *abjection*, talks of “the near-universal horror of confronting the corpse.... The corpse is a concretisation of the subject’s inevitable future.” (1989: p. 75) For Kristeva the corpse,

...the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer ‘I’ who expel, ‘I’ is expelled. The border has become object...The corpse seen without God, and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. (1982: pp. 3/4)

Garner’s description of the scene in the crematorium in Cosmo Cosmolino reflects strongly this Kristevan image of the reality of the “corpse” stripped of religious belief and hope. Raymond in being forced to watch the disintegration of the corpse which was his lover, Kim, has been forced to face “abjection”. As Kristeva describes it “It is death infecting life.” His experience “infests” Raymond to the extent that he seeks God through religion, especially that based on the Bible. He has been forced to face up to his own “inevitable future” and is seeking solace, or perhaps answers in religion.
Although each of the texts analysed deals with the metaphysical and/or numinous, it is in Garner’s *Cosmo Cosmolino* that the reader encounters protagonists whose major preoccupation is with death. Veronica Brady, in her discussion of *Cosmo Cosmolino*, claims that the difference between this work and Garner’s others is that “Questions of death, of meaning and meaninglessness press heavily where in the past their presence has only been implicit.” (1994: p. 2). However, Garner’s characters in *The Children’s Bach* have already addressed such issues. Vicki and Athena openly talk of death and the former verbalises her fear of her own death and its relationship to sleep when she asks Dexter: “Don’t let me fall asleep. If I go to sleep I’ll die. I don’t want to, don’t want to.” (1984: pp. 86/87) The following morning Vicki explains to Dexter her reaction the previous night: “I get this thing, you know? Where I think I’m going to die if I fall asleep.” (1984: p. 93) Her reaction does not please Dexter who feels disappointed that he has been used merely as a means by which Vicki can escape her fears through using his body. This reaction on his part is ironical in that when he awakes during the night he is surprised to find “somebody else in the bed. It was not Athena.” (1984: p. 90) One might question who is making the most use of the other’s body, Dexter to assuage the loss of his wife’s presence in his life or Vicki to provide a presence to distract her from her morbid thoughts?

Not only does her sexual encounter with Dexter serve as a form of escapism for Vicki in her dreams she transfers her fear of her own death to that of Dexter in a scene which is almost comic in its underlying embarrassment and fear of self-exposure when she tells him: “I dreamed you died. And at the funeral I had on a black dress
without a petticoat and everyone could see my pants.” (1984: p. 91) As this is a
dream it could be seen to represent Vicki’s fear of the loss of control which death
involves.

For Ray, in *Cosmo Cosmolino*, Kim’s death not only reminds him of his relationship
with her and his contribution to her deterioration but also of the inevitability of his
own death. Part of Ray’s fearful reaction to the crematorium scene could be
attributed to his guilt that he had perhaps wished her death to happen. After having
sex with her and not realising that this is the last time he will see Kim alive he
considers what he will say to his “mates” about her: “Mate, she was... out of it. This
gig’s over. People who can’t get their shit together should just go and die.” That his
life is as directionless and meaningless seems to escape Ray, who scavenges around
the floor of the flat looking for “dropped coins, a screwed-up five dollar note, the
price of a coffee, anything he could use.” (1992a: p. 28) The word *use* in the
context of money is appropriate, for this, the novel suggests, is what he has done with
Kim’s body, *used* it for his own gratification.

The purposelessness of his life is demonstrated in the scene which occurs between his
last visit to Kim’s house and his return four days later to find her dead. The third
person narrator describes Raymond’s existence:

That world, drawn in square boxes and balloons of words,
he knew. The real one he was lost in, but so lost that he
didn’t know he was lost... He lived untouched inside a
grey casing through which he watched, dully, how other
people behaved, and sometimes tried to mimic them... He
saw what people ate, and he bought some. He saw that
they talked to make each other laugh, and he dropped his
mouth open to make the sound 'Ha. Ha.’... His whole life
was faking. He thought that was what people did.”
(1992a: p. 29)
For Ray (Raymond) it is with the written word that he is most comfortable. He does not know how to interact with others, especially Kim whom he uses as an object to satisfy his sexual instincts. It is only after his experience at the crematorium when he is forced to face up to the meaning of death and the disintegration of the body that he becomes a feeling person. This is shown by his contrasting reaction to having sex with Kim and his drawing away from using Janet in a similar fashion much later in the text:

- He heard the little voices gurgling and sniggering in his ear. Go on - go back. What are you waiting for?
- She’s been around. It’ll be fun. It won’t mean anything. She’s ready for it. What’s the matter with you? Go back. Appalled, he stumbled away towards the stairs.” (1992a: p. 140)

Prior to the encounter with the angels in the crematorium Raymond seems to have a desire to destroy women and to see them dead. He has already told the “clog girl” who lives in the same house as Kim “Oh, go away. Go away or I’ll shoot you. To put you out of your misery.” (1992a: p. 30) To Ray she is on the same level as an animal who might be “put to sleep” at the whim of its owner. That his view of women is not positive, to say the least, is obvious from his description of his family: “His father was dead, his mother was stupid, his sister had run away”. (1992a: p. 29)

The only stability in his life appears to be his brother Alby whom he finally meets up with in the final section of the novel.

The scene which follows his return to Kim’s room is filled with the reality and horror of death. Not for Garner the gentleness and beauty of both of Fish’s drownings in Cloudstreet, but a sordid scene depicting the horrible and lonely death of a pitiful
character. Kim’s body has already been invaded by insects after she has suffocated in her own vomit. This scene and the one which follows in the crematorium contain no beauty but reflect the deterioration of the body after death. The language is, as Mead and other critics such as John Nieuwhuizen describe it, vulgar, but this adds to the effect of the novel in that bodily functions including dying are represented with brutal realism. Garner’s text represents death as ugly and to be feared. But the text then moves, in the final section, to a different perspective of human existence closely tied to family and community. This is, as has been discussed in Chapter 1, very much aligned to Blanchot’s “principle of incompleteness”.

God and death

The search for an understanding of the meaning of death - and the role of God - is also demonstrated in Garner’s 1990 screen work, The Last Days of Chez Nous. Beth takes a trip with her father in an effort to repair their relationship. Towards the end of their journey she asks: “‘Hey Dad, do you believe in God?’”, to which he replies in the negative. He proceeds to recount an experience where, during his travels with his wife, he meets a Jew who has escaped from the Holocaust. As a result of this interchange he has reached the conclusion that “‘There is no God.’” The daughter’s next question is “‘And what about dying?...Are you afraid of it? Are you?’” The father does not reply until forced by Beth, when he responds “‘Fair go.’” (1992b: pp.81/3) Again Garner uses her texts to explore the metaphysical concepts of death and the existence or otherwise of God. That there is perceived to be a link between God and death is demonstrated in the text by the shift from a discussion of the possibility of a God to that of death. Both “God” and “death” inevitably remain

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8 This 1990 film play is based autobiographically on Garner’s own marriage and its eventual breakup.
in the realm of the metaphysical, and as such can only be described or discussed in terms of metaphor.

**A living death and wandering souls**

It is interesting to note that “God” has little direct reference within the texts under discussion in this thesis when the issue of “death” is being discussed. Even Garner, apart from the passage quoted above, concentrates more on the role of others in dealing with the death of a loved one. For example Janet, in *Cosmo Cosmolino*, is concerned about Patrick’s absence from her life which will be the result of his death. Oriel’s saving of Fish in *Cloudstreet*, has much to do with the sense of loss she will experience with his death.

In discussing death there is, within some of the texts under discussion, another dimension, that is the death of or change within a relationship. Perhaps this is portrayed most strongly in Winton’s *The Riders* and Armanno’s *My Beautiful Friend*. For Scully, in the former, his wife Jennifer is as if dead to him, but his entire journey across Europe is based on a desire to resurrect a relationship which is as final as a physical dying. Jennifer has withdrawn her physical presence and is as absent to him as she would be if dead. He must “bury” her to return to the reality of his life without her or be like “The Riders” wandering through time searching for what is unobtainable.

Aaron, in Armanno’s *My Beautiful Friend*, is also on a quest for meaning in his life. However, unlike the absent Jennifer, Rebecca is a presence in Aaron’s life one who
refuses to conform to his expectations of her. He is, again like Scully, expecting the elusive “Other” to satisfy his feelings of an absence in his life.

Armanno’s handling of death in My Beautiful Friend depends heavily on traditional stories of wandering souls, whose bodies have never been discovered and therefore have not been given a formal burial. The text has, like The Riders, the dead being given a living dimension. However, unlike “The Riders” who remain at a distance to Scully, Marcello the unburied interacts with the living, even to fathering a child. Yet is it Marcello’s child that Linda is carrying or is it Aaron’s? As discussed earlier in this thesis the text can be interpreted either as a gothic story with vampirish aspects to the character of Marcello or as a psychological exploration of the struggle between the good and bad nature of the main character, Aaron. Does Marcello represent the negative tendencies within Aaron which eventually triumph? Once Marcello is laid to rest Aaron becomes a better person.

Winton’s The Riders is also based on the myth of the wandering soul doomed to roam the earth because of some unfinished business during his or her lifetime. The “Riders”, as does Marcello, refuse to succumb to death and are a negative influence on the living as they roam the earth seeking closure of some sort. Again, as in My Beautiful Friend, one can read the text as an exploration of the psychology underlying the protagonist’s thoughts and influencing his actions, in this case those of Scully. The “Riders” are also alter egos, that part of Scully’s psyche which is negative and unaccepting of certain aspects of his life. It is through his daughter, Billie, that Scully achieves closure with the acknowledgement to himself that Jennifer is no longer part of his life.
Children, immortality and hope

So often at the other end of the spectrum to death, children play a vital role in the lives of the adult characters in all the works under discussion for this thesis. They are frequently depicted as unifying forces which provide a focus for warring families, most particularly in the birth of Rose and Quick’s baby in Cloudstreet. They are also often referred to as creating a meaning for life, as a way in which one achieves some degree of immortality.

The tentacular relationship between birth and death is a feature of all the texts being discussed. In Cosmo Cosmolino it is Maxine’s baby whose conception has parodied that of Christ’s which signifies hope, as does the sight of his children for Sam at the beach at the end of Firehead. In My Beautiful Friend Aaron’s desire for a child, finally realised through Linda’s impregnation by the ghostly Mansini (or perhaps Aaron himself if one accepts the concept of Mansini as Aaron’s alter ego) leaves him with a sense of acceptance and peace. It is only through the children that each of these protagonists can achieve any form of immortality.

In Winton’s CloudStreet, Garner’s Cosmo Cosmolino and in each of Armanno’s works, including those which are not being discussed in detail in this thesis, the birth or anticipated birth of a child becomes a metaphor for hope and offers some meaning to life, resulting in changes in the nature of the protagonists. Quick and Rose’s baby unites the two families (Cloud Street), Linda’s bearing of Mansini’s child provides Aaron with a purpose (My Beautiful Friend), Sam’s children playing on the beach
deflect him from his obsessive love for Gabriella (*Firehead*), and the anticipated birth of Maxine’s baby offers hope for the future (*Cosmo Cosmolino*).

It is the child, Billie, recognising that her father is potentially one of “The Riders”, who rescues him. Again the theme of self-sacrifice arises when Billie goes out to face the ghosts in order to save her father. She sees him “Waiting, battered, disappointed.” Even Scully recognises himself in them, for he, like them is “waiting for something promised, something that was plainly their due”. (1995: p. 377) It is when he recognises that his search for his wife, Jennifer, is not only fruitless, but also destructive, that Scully moves away from his self-absorption and focuses on his daughter.

Sam’s disillusionment following his meeting with Gabriella (*Firehead*) sees him stripped of hope. He returns to a deserted house and commences a frenetic clearing up of the mess left by his family

> I started to clean and wipe down the counters, and wrap things in plastic for the refrigerator, and I wanted to lean with my hands against the wall and ask some spirit out of Heaven to come save me from the loneliness eating me alive. (1999a: p. 398)

This passage can be read as symbolic of his need to rid himself of his past obsession with Gabriella. It as if he is cleansing his own psyche of the need for her and wrapping up and storing his past which has stunted his ability to truly relate to his wife and children. It is the sight of his daughter, Lara, and her delight in building a sandcastle on the edge of the water that restores his equanimity. Once he realises that the child he sees from a distance is his daughter his “heart lifted” and he felt pity for Gabriella:
She wanted belonging, or at least a road that might lead her to that particular corner of Heaven. It didn’t make me feel guilty that I’d found a way to beat her there. (1999a: p. 399)

Sam’s “Heaven” is achieved through his children. To be saved by family and the domestic world can be read as a highly traditionalist approach and which might be seen as stereotypically Italian. Yet this is not dissimilar to the outcome depicted by Winton in Cloudstreet. It is the birth of Quick and Rose’s child which draws the families together despite their differences. Both families come together in the shared purpose of Wax Harry’s delivery. The importance of this event to the house and the families in it is demonstrated in the following passage which concludes Part IX of the text:

The room sighs, the house breathes its first painless breath in half a century and outside the pig is going at it balls to the wall, giving it his all, like an angel in a pig’s body, like a bacon choir, like the voice of God Himself pouring up through the fruit trees, rattling the tin fence, shaking the old smells from the walls and the worry from the paintwork, till it spills out on the street where they’re already celebrating something else, something they’ve been waiting for in their beds all year. (1991: p. 385)

Harry’s birth has renewed the life of all those involved and has exorcised the demons which have lurked in the house with its tragic history of violence. Dolly’s “silent belch” metaphorically reflects this exorcism, a driving out of that which is unhealthy and discomforting. This passage, in its earthiness, speaks in terms of creation theology. “God”, or the sacred, appears and speaks through the physical and material world – a masturbating pig, fruit trees and a tin fence. It is in these everyday and visible phenomena that the transcendent is experienced.
It is significant that the arrest of the rapist referred to as "The Nedlands Monster" occurs just as Rose goes in to labour. Quick has had great difficulty coming to terms with the evil the rapist represents, but this is counteracted by the sense of hope which the child represents. That the murderer is the father of seven children makes it even harder for Quick to accept. Cloudstreet resounds with examples of tragedies which families face but which are dealt with through those involved finding some inner strength. For Oriel it is the Bible and her religious beliefs, especially those founded on 'love God, love your neighbour', which offer her some comfort. When Quick asks his father how she can still believe especially after Fish's tragedy Lester responds, that is, that it helps her deal with her life.

In saving Fish's life Oriel lost her son both emotionally and mentally, being left with the shell which is his physical body. She has to deal with his rejection of her, his mother who he sees as pulling him back from that which he desires. Metaphorically Oriel's refusal to let Fish go can be read as synonymous with the inevitability of a mother having to let go of her child once he/she reaches adulthood. Oriel's need to isolate herself by moving out of the home into a tent reflects her biblical beliefs, a need to serve her penance for the "sin" of interfering in her son's life by denying him the death he desires.

The child, Billie, in Winton's The Riders has a different role to that of Wax Harry. For most of the story Billie is secondary to Scully's search for his wife, Jennifer, who remains for the reader a figure outside of the text, only being seen through the eyes of others, especially those of Scully and sketchily of Billie. Even toward the end of Part 2 of the novel we find Scully still not accepting what is obvious to the reader, that his
wife is not intending to rejoin him. He attributes her non-appearance to a variety of potential disasters: she is “sick”, “confused”, “injured”, or the mail has not reached her. The final sentence in this section of the book is poignant in the way in which it summarises Scully’s relationship with his daughter, “Billie got resignedly to her feet.” (1995: p. 204) Billie has accepted the role of follower allocated to her by her father. It is not his daughter’s needs which concern him but his own compulsion to trace his elusive wife.

Billie is a child used to rejection, as the use of the word “resignedly” indicates. That the child is in a shocked state is indicated by her refusal to speak. She has already been made redundant by her mother who has sent her, alone, to meet her father. Even Scully in his self-centredness acknowledges this when he says “My wife has sent my child on alone. No message, no note, no warning.” (1995: p. 98) It is interesting to note his use of “my” rather than “our” when referring to Billie, as if subconsciously he has already accepted that he alone is responsible for his daughter. Yet Scully calls upon her to explain her mother’s absence when, she, a child, cannot understand it herself.

It is during their journey across Europe that Scully gradually becomes more aware of his daughter and her importance to him. The disastrous events which occur in Amsterdam, when faced with the possibility of losing her because of his poor parenting and the possibility of a jail sentence, draws him to the realisation of Billie’s needs. It is also at this time that Billie says, “He’s my father.”
Garner’s texts also highlight the importance of family or pseudo families to human identity and social order. Athena returns to Dexter in *The Children’s Bach*, Raymond, Alby and Janet establish some sort of community. Raymond perceives children to be “good” as shown by his response to Kim’s reaction to the noise emanating from the children in the neighbouring school playground:

> ‘Somebody must be hurting them,’ she whispered. ‘They’re hurting each other.’
> ‘You’re stupid,’ said Raymond irritably. ‘That’s a good sound. Aren’t kids supposed to be a good thing?’ You shouldn’t freak out over something that’s good. What’s the matter with you?’ (1992a: p. 26)

What Raymond fails to recognise in Kim’s words is that she is not only talking about the children in the playground but about the hurt she is experiencing.

**Conclusion**

Although Armanno’s, Garner’s and Winton’s texts frequently resort to biblical language and contexts, the isolatable existence of a God-figure is not central to the writings. There is however a strong thread of humanist philosophy and creation theology throughout the texts. Answers to questions surrounding the meaning of life and death are not found in the belief in some separate, superior being or “Other” but in the everyday experiences of families or their substitutes. Rather the texts reflect Tim Winton’s description of his own work as “true realism” in which “the supernatural and the natural (are) accepted as one thing, as inclusive.” (Watzke. 1991: pp. 98-99)

Protagonists might find themselves calling on God when facing a particular difficulty, as does Aaron in Armanno’s *My Beautiful Friend*, but such reactions are
usually explained as a reflexive response based on habit and enculturation. The transcendent and the metaphysical are found within human beings or, in the case of Winton, within the anthropomorphised animal kingdom – pigs speak, kangaroos display human qualities in *Cloudstreet*. The manner in which the characters deal with issues of life and death is either within families or within small communities which frequently mimic characteristics of family. Religious institutions are not depicted as offering answers to such questions. God is not so much dead in these texts but rather there is a strong sense that God is unknowable. There is a marked shift to experiencing the metaphysical not so much through the “Other” which is God, but through shared human experiences. Families and communities in a variety of forms become sites in which the transcendent can occur.

There is a questioning of the existence of a life beyond this but the possibilities are left open. Fish’s experience during the descriptions of both his drownings in Winton’s *Cloudstreet*, and Aaron’s experiences with Marcello in Armano’s *My Beautiful Friend* provide the reader with other possibilities. Garner does not attempt to delve into a life beyond death, the metaphysical in her texts occurring within the context of living. Her angels in *Cosmo Cosmolino* are very human constructs. The only indication in this work of something beyond this life might be seen in Maxine’s disappearance from the lives of Alby, Ray and Janet. Where she is going as she flies from the roof of the shed is left unknown in the text, which is exactly what the existence or non-existence of life after death is.

Throughout all of the texts there is an underlying acceptance that to define God is impossible and any attempts to achieve the transcendent must be through interactions
between humans. Venero Armanno, Helen Garner and Tim Winton have resorted to the human—the material, the relational, the sexual and familial—to explore the transcendent and the metaphysical.

The words of Gabriella to Sam at their final meeting in Armanno’s *Firehead* describe the role of the writer as exploring possibilities. When Sam asks Gabriella “‘Is there such a thing as an Aleph?’” she replies:

‘I used to have my own but then I lost it and I stopped believing it was real… But when I’m standing here I do see it again. When I’m writing at my desk I do. It’s the sense of being alone yet not being alone. Look.’ She stretched her body as if offering herself to the sun and wind. ‘And…’

‘And. Why is there always an and?... *And* that’s why I think I’m a writer, because I think such thoughts.’ (1999: p. 397)

Could Gabriella’s “Aleph” be likened to words such as “spirit” and “soul” and that which is metaphysical within human existence? Is it only writers who “think such thoughts” or do they have the ambivalent advantage of being able to translate their thoughts into words?

I would contend that whilst the works of Venero Armanno, Helen Garner and Tim Winton can be identified with the label “humanist” they also encompass a post-modern view of the world. Questions concerning human existence are being posed without any attempt to provide definitive answers. Hope, which once lay, at least for Christians, in a belief in a Supreme Being and Heaven, now lies within the context of families and communities which are depicted within the text as imperfect, but all there is. The inadequacy of language to the task of defining the metaphysical is

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9 The Aleph to which Sam refers occurred in stories Gabriella told to Sam in their teenage years.
highlighted as the authors appear to be experimenting linguistically and generically within the texts in an attempt to make sense of such concepts as birth, life, death, love and need.

The texts have moved "Beyond God the Father" into a realm where the metaphysical and physical are inseparable. As Janet says "You can't split matter and spirit".

(Cosmo Cosmolino: p. 101)
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